



The Ruderman  
Program for  
American Jewish  
Studies



# The Jewish Vote: Political Power and Identity in US Elections

by **Gil Troy**

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**The Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies** is a unique and groundbreaking academic program established in 2013 at the University of Haifa. The Ruderman Program covers a wide range of issues pertaining to Jewish life in the United States, the American society and the long-lasting and important bond between the American Jewish community, the State of Israel and Israeli society. The main goal of the program is to strengthen the relationship between the Israeli society and American Jewry, by expanding current knowledge, distributing it, and creating a well-founded educated community to act in academia and the Israeli professional field. The Ruderman Program has two branches: *one* is a multidisciplinary and comprehensive MA studies program; and the *second* is promoting research on American Jewry, past and present, and creating a knowledge base for decision makers, opinion leaders, policy makers, professionals and for all those who take part in the public discourse in Israel.

The first research paper published by the Ruderman Program was written by Professor Gil Troy of McGill University in Canada. His research, ***The Jewish Vote: Political Power and Identity in US Elections***, chronologically traces the voting patterns of American Jews and seeks to understand the complexity of the term 'Jewish vote'. The paper examines from a historical and social perspective the American Jewry's influence on American elections: Is Jewish voting power marginal or central in presidential elections? Is the importance of Jewish influence on American politics exaggerated?

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## Gil Troy – Biography

Gil Troy is Professor of History at McGill University and is a Visiting Professor at the Ruderman Program for American Jewish Studies at the University of Haifa this fall. Last fall, he was a Visiting Scholar at the Brookings Institution. An American presidential historian and a Zionist activist, he is the author of eleven books, including the recently-released *The Age of Clinton: America in the 1990s*, which has been hailed as “the best book on the man and his times.” His previous book *Moynihan’s Moment: America’s Fight against Zionism as Racism* - was designated by Jewish Ideas Daily as one of the “best Jewish books” of 2012. He also wrote the bestselling *Why I Am a Zionist: Israel, Jewish Identity and the Challenges of Today*.

Troy has a weekly column in *The Daily Beast* on “Secret Lives,” uncovering compelling historical figures, and writes regularly for the *Jerusalem Post*, *the Jewish Week*, and the *Canadian Jewish News*. He has been an occasional contributor to the “Campaign Stops” section of the *New York Times* and has been widely published and quoted in the American and Canadian media. He won a 2015 Simon Rockower award for Excellence in Single Commentary from the American Jewish Press Association, for his essay defending Israel during the Gaza conflict, “Democracy, Judaism and War.”

Troy lives in Jerusalem with his wife Linda, an artist, and his four children. He lectures widely on the American presidency, Zionism, modern Jewish identity, American history, US-Israel relations, Diaspora-Israel relations and the fight against delegitimization. His next book will be an update of Arthur Hertzberg’s classic, *The Zionist Idea*.

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## Summary

- ❑ As the 2016 Presidential elections near this November, a wave of predictions and generalizations left and right are creating quite the hype surrounding ‘The Jewish Vote’.
- ❑ American Jewry make up approximately 2% of the American electorate, insignificant to tip the scales one way or another. No other constituency this size has candidates scrambling to woo them over - so why the disproportionate frenzy surrounding the Jewish vote?
- ❑ Since the 1930s American Jews have been woven into the fabric of the American political landscape. From civil rights to women's rights, Jews have been on the frontier of liberal political movements, spearheading social reforms and shaping American policies from within. Jews in America are disproportionately wealthy, charitable and politically engaged, making them critical donors standing out both among wealthy donors and among more modest mass donors. In the 2016 presidential race the Jewish financial vote remains disproportionately important – with estimates that Jewish donors contribute 50 percent of the funds to the Democratic Party and 25 percent to the Republican Party.
- ❑ Jews stand out politically because there are disproportionate numbers of Jewish officeholders and Jewish activists and because of the Electoral College’s “Megaphone Effect”: many key swing states that help determine elections have a high concentration of Jews. This effect was best reflected in 2000 when elderly Jews in Florida misreading the ballot voted for Pat Buchanan instead of Al Gore, creating the electoral deadlock that made George W. Bush president.
- ❑ Although the significance of the Jewish vote in American political outcomes is often overestimated; understanding the Jewish vote helps explain American Jewish identity. Since the elections in 1928, the majority of American Jews have voted Democratic - usually in the 70% range - and are proud liberals.
- ❑ The Jewish Vote is a story of the great, mutual, love affair between America and its Jews, rooted in American exceptionalism. Why Jews are liberal has been a great American Jewish mystery. Milton Himmelfarb identified this anomaly with his 1973 statement that, “Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans”.
- ❑ Scholars left and right have been puzzled by this bizarre phenomenon, offering explanations ranging from Jewish values of social justice to once-oppressed Jews’ fears of government power. This report offers a historical analysis, suggesting that voting Democratic and being liberal have had different motivations and meanings over the years – but throughout the generations, the leftwing political identity that American Jewish liberals have called essentially “Jewish,” is quintessentially “American” or “American Jewish,” it’s an adaptation of Judaism.
- ❑ Many American Jews see their liberalism as part of their Jewish inheritance, along with rags-to-riches stories of success, candlesticks from the Old Country, and grandma’s matzoh ball recipe.
- ❑ American Jews have also inherited the notion, from the Eastern European Jewish left, of “no enemies on the left,” which is why few leave the left even when the Far Left veers toward anti-Zionism.
- ❑ Starting in the 1880s, the first modern Jewish generation of Bourgeois Bolsheviks, the Eastern European immigrants and their kids, came with Socialist idealism and Labor unionist values, hoping to advance individually, familially, but still open to supporting the broader radical communal and national pitch from the Left. Franklin Roosevelt became the great liberal icon – and a figure worshipped by American Jews, bringing them into the Democratic Party.

- ❑ The second generation of “Yuppies with a Conscience,” remembered their parents’ struggles and were grateful to the New Deal for giving their families a new lease on life. They were also rainy day Jews, standing up for Israel and Soviet Jewry when attacked but happy to fit in as much as possible.
- ❑ Today’s third generation of open-spirited Freedom-fromers, pro-choice Jews are deeply, proudly American, although very decidedly Not-Christians. They have most inherited from their understanding of their past and absorbed from post-modern culture fears of restrictions, commitments, norms, imposed from the outside, especially governmentally or religiously. They want freedom *from* traditional inhibitions and legal restrictions against pre-marital sex, divorce, abortion, homosexuality – and often define that as their Jewish identity.
- ❑ Thus, despite repeated eulogies for the alliance, the liberal-Jewish-Democratic connection has strengthened not weakened since Ronald Reagan. Even though the Republican Party is more pro-Israel than ever, and sometimes more “pro-Israel,” (however you define that) than the Democratic Party, American Jewish liberalism has become a mentality, a sensibility, an ideology, a cultural identity.
- ❑ American Jews are perceived as voting for Jewish interests, especially regarding Israel, however American Jews are more pro-choice than pro-Israel when voting.
- ❑ This doesn’t make American Jews anti-Israel, on the contrary, they perceive the Democratic Party as taking a strong pro-Israel stance, proving that progressive Zionism is not an oxymoron. Thus we can say that American Jews are more pro-choice than pro-Israel in the voting booth, but pro-Israel nevertheless.
- ❑ Israelis will be amused to hear that American Jews define Judaism as liberal, and fascinated to learn that many American Jews consider America the Promised Land.
- ❑ Today, more than ever American Jews embrace their liberalism. United by the fear of Evangelicals, 'Trumps' and the Tea Party their liberalism is defined by freedom, liberation and autonomy.
- ❑ America’s pro-Israel consensus holds: Once again, in 2016, the Democratic and Republican nominees are squabbling over who is more “pro-Israel” and will better defend the Jewish State.

## The Jewish Vote: Political Power and Identity in US Elections

And they're off. As Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump battle it out in the American presidential election, politicians, pundits, and passersby are slinging all kinds of predictions and generalizations left and right – who will win, which tactics work, who is supporting whom. In this confusing election, when Jews are joking that each of the major party nominees has a Jewish son-in-law, while the first Jewish candidate ever to win a presidential primary, Bernie Sanders, has no Jewish grandchildren, all kinds of sweeping statements about Jews are swirling about. We are told that Jews will not vote for Hillary Clinton to punish Barack Obama for his Iran deal and his Bibi-bashing. We are told that Jews will vote for Hillary Clinton to thank her for her support for Israel, especially as a senator from New York, and to reward her husband's passion for the Jewish state. We are told that Jews will not vote for Donald Trump because he vowed to be "neutral" when negotiating an Israeli-Palestinian "deal" and because he tweeted out an anti-Semitic image, depicting a six-pointed star against a backdrop of dollar bills to illustrate his corruption charges against "crooked Hillary." And we are told that Jews will vote for Donald Trump because he wooed Jews at AIPAC – and, besides, as he keeps reminding Jewish audiences, he was the grand marshal of New York's 2004 Israeli Day Parade, which was, of course, the best parade EVAH.

Just as every modern American presidential election features caucuses and primaries, conventions and debates, it also features the usual speculation about "the Jewish vote." Article after article confirms the conventional wisdom that there is such a thing as "the Jewish vote," that winning that vote is essential to winning the election, and that, this election cycle, "the Jewish vote [is] at a turning point," with the usual prediction being that Jews are drifting Republican. The Jews do seem to be incredibly, surprisingly strong in the United States. One *Ha'aretz* headline in 2012 declared: "So few Jews, so much clout in U.S. Polls."<sup>1</sup> In a country where barely 50 percent go to the polls, Jewish voter turnout averages around 85 percent. In a political system addicted to funds and fundraising, Jews donate as much as 50 percent of the funds raised by Democrats and 25 percent of the funds raised by Republicans. In addition to the Jews and Jewish relatives in the 2016 presidential race, there are 10 Jewish senators, 19 Jewish members of the House of Representatives, and three Jewish justices on the Supreme Court. Moreover, in a presidential system that emphasizes the importance of key "swing states" that are closely split between Republicans and Democrats, like Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, Jews happen to have sizeable concentrations in southern Florida, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and suburban Detroit. And because the Jews – and Republicans – are associated with wealth, power, and prosperity, it makes sense to emphasize Jewish power and a Jewish turn towards conservatism.

In fact, despite the growing individualism among American Jews and an enthusiastically "pro-Israel" Republican platform, only the first assumption – that there is a phenomenon you can call "the Jewish vote" – appears to be true in 2016. Even though Jews vote individually and not every Jew votes in lockstep, there is enough community conformity to talk about "the Jewish vote." However, the chances of the Jewish vote, only two percent of the electorate, influencing the outcome are limited; nor does the Jewish vote seem to be turning, changing, or shifting right. In fact, non-Orthodox Jewish millennials are even more committed than their parents to a liberal cultural agenda and share many of their liberal or "Blue state" peers' fear of Republicans and Evangelical Christians. While the significance and capriciousness of the Jewish vote in American politics is often exaggerated; the relevance of the Jewish vote to understanding American Jewish identity should not be underestimated.

<sup>1</sup> Fischer, Yisrael, "So Few Jews, So Much Clout in U.S. Polls," *Haaretz*, November 5, 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/so-few-jews-so-much-clout-in-u-s-polls-1.475121>

Updating the old Jewish joke about the Jewish guy in the 1930s happily reading the Nazi propaganda rag *Der Stürmer*, because “it’s filled with good news – we control the banks, the media, everything,” American Jews and anti-Semites are the two groups most likely to overestimate the Jewish vote’s impact. But as the author of a book about American presidential election campaigns that never mentions “the Jewish vote,” and the editor of an encyclopedia on the history of American presidential elections that barely refers to Jews, I can state authoritatively that Jews have been marginal players in most electoral outcomes. The most significant Jewish vote, in fact, was the mass misstep in 2000, when as many 19,000 nearsighted, elderly Jewish voters in southern Florida, many of them New York “snowbirds,” marked their “butterfly ballots” for anti-Israel candidate Pat Buchanan rather than for pro-Israel Al Gore (or for both), creating the electoral deadlock that resulted in George W. Bush’s election (and deprived America of its first Jewish vice president, Joseph Lieberman). Less directly, in 1980, many Jews’ disgust with Jimmy Carter’s UN policies helped Ted Kennedy win the New York primary, which, by keeping the Massachusetts liberal in the race until the bitter end, weakened Carter against Ronald Reagan in the fall.

That such indirect impact even rates mentioning reflects the most relevant fact. Jews constitute about two percent of the American electorate. Even with a high Jewish voter turnout and the Jewish concentration in key battleground states and major media markets, there simply are not enough American Jews to sway American elections.

Beyond the Jews’ electoral marginality, even if it is obscured by a megaphone effect that exaggerates Jewish influence, the other defining fact of American Jewish politics is that, since the 1920s, most American Jews vote Democratic and are liberal or “blue” – the color associated with America’s left since 2000, when, for no good reason, maps on television showed states that went Democratic in blue and states that went Republican in red. The stubborn liberalism of these Blue Jews has confounded conservatives for decades – leading to repeated predictions of a rightward shift by Red-faced Republicans. And studies do show that in New York, the capital of Blue America and Jewish America, the greatest growth is in conservative-leaning Orthodox and Russian Jews. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of American Jews are proud liberals – as are their children. Just as most Americans after the Civil War defined themselves as Democrats or Republicans “becuz that’s how my daddy and granddaddy voted,” voting Democratic is often considered as central to the American Jewish inheritance as are an inspirational immigration story, silver candlesticks, and grandma’s matza ball recipe. George W. Bush’s press secretary Ari Fleischer has often said that when his “horrified” parents discovered that he had become a Republican activist in college, they told sympathetic neighbors in Westchester: “at least he’s not a drug addict.”<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, when it comes to voting, despite the perception that they vote Jewish interests, especially regarding Israel, it is quite clear that American Jews tend to be more pro-choice than pro-Israel in the voting booth – yet still so pro-Israel that they prove that liberalism and Zionism overlap easily, contrary to the claims of many critics. In fact, as the Far Left turns against Israel in the United States, as it has in Europe, Jewish Democrats have an important opportunity to show liberals how to be pro-Israel and progressive, explaining that, as the left-wing Zionist coalition Ameinu insists, “progressive Zionist is not an oxymoron.”<sup>3</sup>

2 Berdichevsky, Norman, "American Jews' Paradoxical Allegiance to the Democratic Party," *New England Review*, September, 2010. [http://www.newenglishreview.org/Norman\\_Berdichevsky/American\\_Jews'\\_Paradoxical\\_Allegiance\\_to\\_the\\_Democratic\\_Party/](http://www.newenglishreview.org/Norman_Berdichevsky/American_Jews'_Paradoxical_Allegiance_to_the_Democratic_Party/)

3 Ameinu, "Progressive Zionism". <http://www.ameinu.net/about-ameinu/progressive-zionism>



American Jewish liberals often see their liberalism as simply, naturally, obviously, “Jewish,” repudiating not only their conservative Jewish cousins in the United States but non-liberal Jews worldwide, including in Israel. In fact, American Jewish liberalism is quintessentially American. This tenacious American Jewish political identity reveals much about the American Jewish community and America itself. Ultimately, the story of the Jewish Vote is one of the great mutual love affair between America and its Jews, rooted in American exceptionalism, a phenomenon from which President Barack Obama benefited in the campaign but which he rejects ideologically. This American exceptionalism, emphasizing how unique America’s history is, especially compared to Europe’s, is reflected in the astonishing Jewish success in America – the many American celebrities, billionaires, intellectuals, and leaders who are Jewish, as well as the deep sense of comfort most Jews have in America.

This, then, is the story of the American Jewish vote – a story of contradictions and confusions, of frustration for the right and inspiration for the left, a story, ultimately, about cultural identity and shared fears more than political stands or personalities.

## Surprises for Israelis

Israelis – who have been ruled by more right-wing governments than left-wing governments since 1977 and increasingly feel burned by the Left, will be amused to hear that American Jews define Judaism as inherently liberal (So will American Orthodox and traditional Jews, who are increasingly conservative politically as well as religiously). They will be fascinated to learn that many American Jews consider the United States the Promised Land. They will be distressed to hear that American Jews rarely vote with Israel in mind and usually give primacy to American issues. But Israelis will be heartened to discover that despite that neglect on Election Day, and contrary to the many hysterical headlines, the overwhelming majority of American Jews are pro-Israel – with the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center at Brandeis University surveys showing twenty-to-thirty year olds tending to be even more pro-Israel than thirty-to-forty year olds.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, because most Americans and American politicians are not only champions of the idea of a Jewish state but ardent supporters of the Israelis over the Palestinians, voters have never had to choose between a “pro-Israel” or “anti-Israel candidate.” Some mainstream American politicians may be more critical of Israel or sympathetic to the Palestinians than others, but no major party presidential nominee has ever accepted the label “anti-Israel” or earned that dishonorable status by rejecting Israel’s right to exist. In fact, in most elections, as in 2016, the Democratic and Republican candidates squabble over who is more “pro-Israel” and will better defend the Jewish State.

## The American Jewish Mystery: Why are “we” liberal?

Why Jews are liberal has been one of the great American Jewish sociological, political, and ideological mysteries. Most people single out one cause – the Jewish value of social justice, appreciation of liberal regimes, once-oppressed Jews’ fears of government power, or the socialization process at elite universities. Most scholars have surrendered and linked two phenomena. The present analysis, offering a historical perspective, suggests that the same behaviors – voting Democratic, being liberal – have had different motivations and meanings

<sup>4</sup> Sasson, Theodore et al., “Still Connected: American Jewish Attitudes about Israel,” *Maurice & Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies* (CMJS), Brandeis University, August, 2010, p. 11. <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=5691>

over the years. America has changed. Liberalism has changed. And the Jewish community has changed. But, despite repeated eulogies for the alliance, the liberal-Jewish-Democratic connection has strengthened, not weakened. America's Jews are mostly blue. That doesn't make them un-American – only that the blue field of their Red, White, and Blue is the largest, strongest, and richest. Similarly, it doesn't make them against Israel, whose colors are Blue and White, but only more enthusiastic about some aspects of Israel than others.

The classic explanation of why Jews are liberals is that Judaism is liberal. In 1955, the Brandeis University immigration historian Lawrence Fuchs explained that most Jews were basically translating Jewish tenets such as *zedakah* (charity), righteousness, and social justice into American political positions (Fuchs, 1955). Nearly three decades later, in 1983, the demographer Steven M. Cohen wrote that “many American Jews were raised with the understanding that liberalism or political radicalism constituted the very essence of Judaism, that all the rest – the rituals, liturgy, communal organizations – were outdated, vestigial trappings for a religion with a great moral and political message embodied in liberalism” (Cohen, 1983, p.35).

More pointedly, the conservative commentator – and recovering Marxist – Norman Podhoretz argued that for most American Jews, liberalism has “become more than a political outlook. It has for all practical purposes superseded Judaism and become a religion in its own right. And to the dogmas and commandments of this religion they give the kind of steadfast devotion their forefathers gave to the religion of the Hebrew Bible. For many, moving to the right is invested with much the same horror their forefathers felt about conversion to Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> In 1988, the American Jewish liberal writer and editor Leonard Fein said it explicitly, “Politics is our religion; our preferred denomination is liberalism” (Fein, 1988, p.224). This proud Jewish righteousness explained the anomaly that Milton Himmelfarb identified with his classic statement in 1973 that “Jews earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans.”<sup>6</sup>

This explanation, while still popular, is not fully accurate. As the Jewish scholar and ethicist Byron Sherwin (Sherwin, 2000) noted, “The secular morality that many contemporary Jews identify with Judaism has little to do with the faith of their ancestors. It may be the ethics of groups of Jews but it is not the ethics of Judaism.” Many highly assimilated American Jews have abandoned Jewish tradition but not traditional Jewish liberalism. And, as historian Deborah Dash Moore observes, “When conflict occurs between historical Jewish responses and American values, [the liberal] Jewish civil religion tends to accommodate to the American” (Moore, 1990, p.105). Moreover, the most recent surveys show that the more religious and traditional you are, even moderately so, the less likely you are to embrace the full American Jewish liberal package.<sup>7</sup>

Podhoretz offered a more historically oriented explanation in 2009, asserting that Jews remain grateful for the liberal regimes in Europe that emancipated them and instinctively remember the right-wing, reactionary anti-Semitism that ultimately resulted in Nazism and the Holocaust (Podhoretz, 2009). The late Hebrew University historian Jonathan Frankel (Frankel, 1984) taught that while Eastern European Jewish politics often produced utopian and nationalistic mass movements grounded in systematic ideologies, some Western European

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5 Podhoretz, Norman, "Why Are Jews Liberals?" *The Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2009.  
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203440104574402591116901498>

6 Himmelfarb, Milton, "The Jewish Vote (Again)," *Commentary Magazine*, June 1, 1973.  
<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-jewish-vote-again/>

7 "A Portrait of American Orthodox Jews." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., August 26, 2015.  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/08/26/a-portrait-of-american-orthodox-jews/> ; "A Portrait of Jewish Americans." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013.  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

and most American Jewish politics were more “integrationist,” to add a label from Frankel’s colleague Ezra Mendelsohn (Mendelsohn , 1993), meaning pragmatic, assimilationist, individualistic, and rights-oriented. One could say that Eastern European politics was Leftist, American Jewish politics was liberal.

As young Americans Jews lose their historical memory, such nuances seem among the first to go. And American Jewish liberals have stubbornly refused to abandon the Left despite the Soviet oppression of three million Jews for decades and a harsh, often deadly anti-Semitic anti-Zionism embraced by the Left as part of the unlikely alliance today, in which radical leftists rationalize the violence radical Islamists and Palestinians direct against the Jews – and many other Westerners. Tevye’s radical children, Hodel and Perchik, died decades ago, but the Eastern European slogan “no enemies on the left” still lives.

The American Jewish historian Marc Dollinger, in *Quest for Inclusion*, insightfully connects American Jewish liberalism with the great American Jewish passion – succeeding in the *Goldene Medina*. He argues that

Jewish political influence grew from the community’s intense desire to secure the most elusive prize in all its history: social, economic, and political inclusion in the larger non-Jewish society. In each historical epoch and across a wide geographic expanse, American Jews waged some of the most impressive liberal reform campaigns in American political history. At times risking their own personal safety to pursue policies contrary to the prevailing national mood, American Jews pressed for reforms designed to create a more tolerant, pluralistic, and egalitarian nation. For Jews intent on rising above the limited means of their immigrant parents and grandparents, liberalism proved the most viable and meaningful electoral philosophy (Dollinger, 2000, p.4).

In this argument, the sheer American ambition driving the classic Jewish go-getter novel, Budd Schulberg’s *What Makes Sammy Run?*, is reinforced by the phenomenon of *What Makes Sammy Vote?* The Great American Jewish social and economic climb both facilitated and was facilitated by a shrewd use of American Jewish power to change America from a WASP-run closed shop to today’s multicultural open shop, especially because Jews went from being seen as members of another race to being “white folk” not even worthy of minority status in affirmative action assessments.

A related argument, cleverly emphasizing American Jewish dreams and peers, looks at the intense support both Jews and Asian-Americans give the Democratic Party. Tevi D. Troy and Lanhee J. Chen link three phenomena together: First, Asian-Americans and American Jews are deeply committed to education – and to going to America’s elite colleges in particular. Second, in “the U.S. population at large, possession of a college or postgraduate degree has been a predictor of Democratic Party affiliation.” And, third, “the liberal leanings of many professors at elite schools likely play an important role.” Jews – and their Asian peers – are being raised to worship at an American shrine that is by now inherently, instinctively, deeply liberal.<sup>8</sup>

Part of the reason why American Jews have succeeded so well, individually, educationally, and professionally, is the *E Pluribus Unum* (one out of many) universal welcome offered all immigrants. Reform Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan observes that “most American Jews understand Jewish tradition as cosmopolitan and universalistic. They see Judaism as pragmatic rather than ideological, utilitarian rather than theological,

8 Troy, Tevi D., & Chen, Lanhee J., “The Mystery of Jewish and Asian-American Democratic Loyalty: Progressive Proselytizing at Top Universities May Explain Why So Many Jews and Asians Are Liberals,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 2016.

and rational rather than mystical. ... These Jews see liberalism as applied Judaism, identifying Judaism with liberal social causes" (Kaplan, 2005, p.2). They also accept the Reform reading of Judaism and liberalism – which is why the conservative commentator Richard Brookhiser has snapped that the only difference between Reform Judaism and Democratic politics is the holidays (Shapiro, 2005, p.173).

Steven M. Cohen and the late Charles Liebman explained this cosmopolitanism as an expression of both Jews' "minority group interests" and their "religious modernism." This mix of motivations, they believed, helps explain the way modern Jews are liberal, with the emphasis on "church-state separation (school prayer), social codes (largely issues relating to sex), and domestic spending" (Cohen & Liebman, 1997, p.1).

## **GENERATIONS: Bourgeois Bolsheviks, Yuppies with a Conscience and Freedom From-ers**

These arguments are most helpful for understanding the first two generations of modern American Jews, if we start tracking American Jewish history in the 1880s, when the community really started growing (American Jewish history starts in the 1600s, but their number was small until the late nineteenth century). The first generation of what we could call Bourgeois Bolsheviks, the Eastern European immigrants and their children, came to the New World with much of the Old World baggage identified by various scholars. They also came with much of the socialist idealism and labor unionist values that were roiling Europe at the time. As they worked like dogs and dreamed of advancing their children thanks to the secret ingredient of American success – an education! – they instinctively looked left in their politics.

These first generation Jews were Bourgeois Bolsheviks, hoping to advance individually and as families, but still open to hearing and supporting the broader radical communal and national pitch. There was the politics of the ILGWU and the ACWU (the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union), of the AFL and the CIO (the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations). They were the ones who squabbled over European politics and Communist doctrine so intensely that in the 1980s there were housing co-op boards in New York that were still divided over who broke with Stalin too early or too late in the 1950s.

One of this generation's political heroes, Sidney Hillman, had a resonant if not fully representative story. Born in Lithuania in 1887, a superstar at his yeshiva, he arrived in America in 1907 and went to work. Eventually, he became a labor organizer and leader of the ACWA, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and helped found and lead the CIO. Evolving from his earlier political incarnation as a Russian revolutionary socialist – a Menshevik – he fought hard against the Communists who were trying to control his unions and helped establish the American Labor Party in 1936 to help recovering radicals vote for Franklin Roosevelt without turning Democrats. By 1944, he was such an integral part of the Democratic Party that Roosevelt famously told his aides to first "Clear it with Sidney" before tapping Harry Truman as his running mate.

For this generation, Franklin D. Roosevelt was not just saving others; he was their savior too. Most of these people were struggling, still living paycheck to paycheck, still identifying with what Roosevelt called the Forgotten Man because they were often forgotten too. By establishing a "New Deal," hundreds of government programs that launched an American welfare state, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt became the great liberal icon – and a figure worshipped by American Jews.

Many but not all of the children and grandchildren of these immigrant workers “made it.” Even if they didn’t become millionaires they were the first generation of American Jews to be so disproportionately well-educated, white collar, and well-off. These were the Jews who earned like Episcopalians but voted like Puerto Ricans. These “Yuppies with a Conscience” remembered their parents’ struggles, rather than the nuances of Old World politics, and were grateful to the New Deal for giving their families a new lease on life. Many of them were also rainy day Jews, happy to be men and women publicly on the streets and increasingly diluting their traditional practices privately at home; but when they or their people were under attack – they mobilized. They internalized the lessons, first of the Czarist oppression, and then of the atrocities of the Holocaust, that a society is only as free as its most downtrodden members, be they Jews, blacks, or the poor. American Jews developed a keen instinct for detecting the bully and bigot. Thus, in some ways, what looked like and was often framed as a quintessentially altruistic concern for others was also a form of self-defense, economically and politically.

Betty Friedan, one of the founders of modern feminism, is an exemplar of this generation. Her feminism grew out of a deep commitment to social justice and change and became part of a broader vision of change that went far beyond women’s rights and issues. At the same time, while she was clearly ethnically Jewish, her feminist activism was as an American or as a woman. The shock of anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism at the 1975 International Women’s Year conference in Mexico City made her appreciate America’s freedom and brought her back to her Jewish roots. She became more proudly identified as a Jew. She also called herself a Zionist and mobilized others against the UN’s “Zionism is Racism” resolution, which followed from the anti-Zionists’ initial successes in Mexico City.

Today, Friedan’s children and grandchildren are living contradictions. They live like Yuppies and vote like hipsters. While many have a social conscience they connect to their Judaism and label “tikun olam,” most are increasingly disconnected from both their immigrant past and Jewish tradition. The members of this third generation, no longer Bourgeois Bolsheviks, no longer Yuppies with a Conscience, are open-spirited Freedom-from-ers – deeply, proudly American, although very decidedly Not-Christians. Taking their cue from British Jewish philosopher Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between “freedom to” (positive freedoms to build, contribute, create) and “freedom from” (negative freedom from restrictions and constraints), they fear the “no” most and are open to different “yeses.” They have inherited from their understanding of their past and absorbed from post-modern culture a fear of restrictions, commitments, and norms imposed from the outside, especially by government or religion. They want freedom from traditional inhibitions and legal restrictions against pre-marital sex, divorce, abortion, homosexuality. They want as open a market in lifestyle as the Republicans demand in business. (They are also more open to gun control and higher taxes than their Republican peers, but their essential orientation is towards individual prerogative, not authority. They like Big Government – not Big Brother.) The test case and core issue of the last few decades has been a woman’s right to choose.

This hipster ‘Don’t Tread on Me’ gospel is best epitomized by what we could call the Church of Oprah. In America’s liquid age of change, fluidity, openness, and tolerance, the Queen of the Republic of Everything is the talk-show host and lifestyle trendsetter Oprah Winfrey. She has made the American cult of success be about her two favorite subjects, the self and the spirit. Viewers worshipping in the Church of Oprah adore her materialism, her redemptive narratives, her Hallmark Card chestnuts about self-esteem and spirituality, her materialism, and, most important, Oprah herself. Oprah is as anodyne, accessible, and all-American as Johnny Carson, the iconic host of *The Tonight Show* for three decades, whose soothing tones covered his snarky bite. She is as ideological and judgmental – in her own New Age way – as Rush Limbaugh, the right-wing talk radio host and chief American minister of bluff, bluster, and bullying. She is as cheesy and healing as Phil Donahue,

the left-wing, touchy-feely TV personality, who introduced New Age talk and therapy language to millions of American housewives. She is as populist and entertaining as Jerry Springer, the outrageous TV personality who loved to get audiences screaming, no matter how demagogic he had to be to get there. She is also as smooth as Frank Sinatra, as brassy as Barbra Streisand, as formidable as Katherine Hepburn, and as wired into American sensibilities as Walt Disney. She has tapped into the evangelical tradition of the great populist preachers Henry Ward Beecher and Aimee Semple McPherson, selling a gospel of goodness and niceness, laden with Americanism and laced with a late-twentieth-century twist, consumerism.

To understand this process, from Bolshevik to bourgeois, generation after generation, it is helpful to understand the fears that united American Jews, the scary glue that kept them together as what sociologists call a “negative reference group.” We need to ask not only what they loved but whom they hated. Originally it was the Czar. Then it was the Bosses. Today, it’s the Republicans: the Evangelicals and the Reaganites in the Eighties, the Bushies and the Tea Party more recently, and now Donald Trump. Beyond that, ever since the 1930s the shadow of Hitler and Nazism has united Jews, as shown by how quick they are to compare many far more innocuous threats to Nazism. With this unconscious communal defense mechanism implanted deep in their DNA, most Jews live freely like suburban Americans but fret like ghetto Jews.

Clearly, at the core of American Jewish identity, generation after generation, is the affirmation “I am not Christian.” That otherness expresses itself in the informal communal Christmas Eve and Christmas Day traditions of eating Chinese food, going to suddenly available SRO Broadway shows, and volunteering in understaffed hospitals. It expresses itself in a deep aversion to Jews for Jesus, even among highly assimilated Jews. And it expresses itself in a non-Christian, and today specifically non-Evangelical Christian, political agenda.

As far back as 1953, when many more American Jews were more devout and more steeped in Jewish culture, the National Community Relations Advisory Council’s Joint Program Plan declared: “Freedom of individual conscience is a basic tenet of American democracy. The right of a person to worship God in his own way is a keystone in one of the major arches of our national edifice of personal liberties. Government must protect this right by protecting each in the pursuit of his conscience and by otherwise remaining aloof from religious matters.”<sup>9</sup> As the American Jewish community becomes more polarized between a highly assimilated, often intermarried, majority and a deeply engaged, often personally (but not professionally) ghettoized minority, this American Jewish non-Christianism remains the essential communal glue. Many secular Jews reject Christianity even more vehemently than they reject Judaism, while traditional Jews of course have no truck with the majority faith.

Israelis should take particular interest in the glaring contrast between the world’s two largest Jewish communities: American Jews protect their Jewish selves by pushing the government to champion individualism and remain “aloof from religious matters,” while Israeli Jews affirm their Jewish selves when the government champions Jewish communalism and becomes enmeshed in “religious matters.”

A classic example showcasing these layered identities occurred recently, when journalist Dana Schwartz wrote an open letter to her boss Jared Kushner, the owner of the *New York Observer* and Donald Trump’s son-in-law.

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9 Joint Program Plan (JPP) 1953, pp. 3, 21.

Schwartz asked Kushner how he, as a Jew, could accept being used to mask the anti-Semitism of Trump and his supporters.<sup>10</sup> Kushner responded by declaring, “my father-in-law is not an anti-Semite.”<sup>11</sup> Kushner backed up the declaration – and his own Jewish street cred, his Jewish bona fides – by going into the heartbreaking stories of ghetto deportations, murder, and resistance in the woods with the Bielski brothers that constituted the Kushner family background. In short, Kushner said, I know how to worry about Hitler too – and that’s not a problem with Donald Trump. The escalation from debating about whether a tweet Trump sent in 2016, in the middle of an American presidential campaign, was insensitive to the Nazi annihilation of Novogradok’s Jews more than seven decades earlier shows how the shadow of the Holocaust continues to loom over American Jewry and America, even in the twenty-first century.

At the same time, the fact that both Dana Schwartz and Jared Kushner felt comfortable battling this out publicly as Jews reveals what Hebrew University political scientist Peter Y. Medding deemed “the New Jewish politics.” Since the 1960s, American Jews have become far more comfortable asserting themselves publicly and politically. Medding calls this a “Pluralistic Politics of Group Survival” (Medding, 1989). This openness about their identity and skill in wielding power reflects a deep commitment to “Never Again,” learning the lessons of the community’s passivity during the Holocaust and fighting for Soviet Jewry and the State of Israel. Ironically, this activism for Israel also reflects a profound debt to Israel, which helped teach Jews in the United States and elsewhere how to be proud, powerful, public, and politicized Jews.

## The Jewish Vote: A History

One of the miracles of the United States is how broadly Jews have enjoyed the right to vote – even before the Declaration of Independence only 4 colonies had religious tests barring Jews – 5 colonies barred Catholics. This nation founded on principles of liberty and equality, with a Constitution whose First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, has made voting by a Jew perfectly natural and not at all controversial. While Jews were often classified as “Jews” in Europe – different, foreign, threatening, even a separate race – they usually were classified as “white” in America, with blacks cast in the scapegoat role Jews often played in Europe.

More positively, the bond between America and American Jews is deep and enduring. Many of the values, attitudes, experiences, and political habits that made America exceptional overall also encouraged America’s exceptional welcome of Jews. The Pilgrims and Puritans who arrived in the New World in the 1620s saw themselves as New Jews creating a New Jerusalem. They studied their Bible and learned Hebrew. Many empathized with a religious minority persecuted by a majority. And while there has been some anti-Semitism in America, in the nearly four centuries since then the country has been remarkably welcoming and accepting. From the American Revolutionary slogan “Don’t Tread on Me” to Thomas Jefferson’s “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” from Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom from fear – to Ronald Reagan’s celebration of the sentiment “hello, freedom man,” the United States of America has been impressively biblical in its principles, open in their implementation, and a most congenial place for Jews to thrive economically, artistically, individually, and politically.

10 Schwartz, Dana, "An Open Letter to Jared Kushner, From One of Your Jewish Employees," *The New York Observer*, July 5, 2016. <http://observer.com/2016/07/an-open-letter-to-jared-kushner-from-one-of-your-jewish-employees/>

11 Kushner, Jared, "The Donald Trump I Know," *The New York Observer*, July 6, 2016. <http://observer.com/2016/07/jared-kushner-the-donald-trump-i-know/>

## The Earliest Aspiration: Jewish Political Neutrality

One popular explanation of American Jewish voting behavior is that American Jews still vote to preserve the remarkable freedoms and state neutrality they have enjoyed in the United States. A sermon preached in a New York synagogue in 1789 rejoiced that “we are ... made equal partners of the benefits of government by the constitution of these states” (Kramer, 2016, p.205). Understanding the uniqueness of the American experiment, this argument goes, American Jews reward liberal candidates and parties devoted to keeping America free and open. The argument, however, assumes a sense of history and insecurity that may have been true in previous generations but seems lacking today, for worse and for better.

Part of the notion of Jews voting freely in America is that Jews vote as Americans and not as Jews. Appropriately enough, it seems that the first use of the phrase “the Jewish vote” was an 1864 letter warning President Abraham Lincoln that there was no such thing. On October 26, 1864, a young New York lawyer and community leader, Myer Isaacs, wrote to the president, who was running for re-election, saying that “there is no ‘Jewish vote’” and “if there were, it could not be bought.” There were rumors that Lincoln had struck a deal with New York Jewish leaders who promised to deliver “the Jewish vote” to the Republican president. Myers felt obliged to tell the president, during the Civil War, that “the Israelites are not as a body, distinctly Union or democratic in their politics. ... The Jews as a body have no politics.” Lincoln’s private secretary John Hay hastened to respond, reassuring Myers that “No pledge of the Jewish vote was made by these gentlemen and no inducements or promises were extended to them by the President” (Karp, 1991).

This exchange, denying its existence, used the phrase “the Jewish vote” four times, suggesting that the deniers protested too much. But Myers was articulating the doctrine of what Prof. Naomi W. Cohen would call “Jewish political neutrality,” which would be championed most aggressively by the great Jewish lawyer and leader of the American Jewish Committee, Louis Marshall (Dalin, 1992). Marshall himself was a force in Republican politics, playing an influential role in every presidential campaign from 1896 through 1928 (he died shortly after that election). The notion of neutrality stemmed from an interesting combination of comfort and insecurity that characterized the wave of German Jewish immigrants who started arriving in the 1830s and 1840s and by the late nineteenth century were represented by a powerful elite that nevertheless wanted to reassure their fellow Americans that they were truly Americans and behaved like Americans, especially in politics. With many of these German Jews part of the Reform Jewish movement, which insisted that Judaism was merely a religion, with no connection to peoplehood, there was no ideological justification for acting collectively.

The historian David Dalin (Dalin, 1992) summarizes the guiding principles of Jewish political neutrality that Cohen articulated as follows: “(1) It was wrong for Jews to band together in separate political clubs. (2) Rabbis or lay leaders had no right to advise the community on how to vote. (3) Jewish agencies must not use their influence to promote Jewish aspirants to political office. (4) Jews should not support a candidate just because he happened to be Jewish.”

Dalin admits that Marshall often violated these guidelines. Nevertheless, the idea reflects the aspiration of the typical nineteenth-century Jew – and anticipates the conceit most modern American Jews have that they are merely voting as individuals, reinforced by the reality that most modern American Jews focus on the issues they consider most relevant to the United States rather than to the Jewish people or Israel.

If the 1864 election introduced “the Jewish Vote,” whose existence was denied so often that it was confirmed, the 1868 election introduced a different phenomenon that would recur from time to time. That year, the failure



of the “Jewish Vote” to stop the election of the Republican candidate, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, led some to question its very existence. During the Civil War, Grant had signed the anti-Semitic General Order No. 11, expelling “Jews as a class” from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi, due to a fear that Jewish peddlers might convey information to the Confederates. This order is considered “the most sweeping anti-Jewish regulation in all American history.” (Sarna, 2012, p.7). Jews sent letters and telegrams of protest to the White House. One of them, Cesar Kaskel of Paducah, Kentucky, accompanied Congressman John A. Gurley to Lincoln’s office. In a legendary exchange that emphasizes the shared biblical language and values uniting the New Jerusalemites and the original ones, Lincoln asked: “And so the Children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?” Playing the part of the traditional Jew brilliantly, Kaskel replied: “Yes, and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham’s bosom, asking protection.” Grandiosely but generously, the president responded: “And this protection they shall have at once” (Sarna & Mendelsohn, 2010, p.44).

Lincoln quickly rescinded the order. Grant subsequently apologized – and turned into a good friend of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, some Jews sought to punish Grant, with one pamphlet signed by “A Jew” vowing: “every Jew... will endeavor to defeat and with God’s blessing will defeat you.” The *Chicago Tribune*’s editor warned privately: “The Jews ... are numerous enough to defeat our ticket” (Sarna, 2012, pp. 62-63).

But a community of 75,000, with many minors and immigrants not eligible to vote, did not have much clout in an electorate of 5.7 million. Besides, the Jews were divided, with many Northern Jews nevertheless supporting Grant, the Civil War hero, and appalled by the racist Democrats. Historian Jonathan Sarna notes that some of these Republican supporters were reluctant, facing the classic dilemma: “Should they vote for a party they considered bad for the country just to avoid voting for a man who had been bad to the Jews?” (Sarna, 2012, p.68).

The 1868 campaign – which Grant won – was the rare moment in pre-1920s politics when Jewish issues were relevant in a campaign. More relevant for Jews during this period were their regional identities. The country devastated by war remained divided, despite the victory by the North and the start of Reconstruction. Pursuing their economic interests and expressing their community affiliation, most Southern Jews voted Democratic and most Northern Jews voted Republican. Note that in those years the Republican Party was the more progressive, having been founded on an anti-slavery platform. The Democrats were the conservative party of states’ rights, Southernism, and enduring post-emancipation bigotry. It would take the Great Wave of Eastern European immigration, the rise of the City Bosses, and, ultimately, Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal to complete America’s great political reversal, in which the Democrats became liberal and the Republicans, conservative – although even Ronald Reagan revered Thomas Jefferson and the original liberal notion of placing individual rights above government demands.

In 1900, the American Jewish population had doubled in a decade and reached one million, as Polish and Russian immigrants started flooding into the country. Nevertheless, the community was still small and politically insignificant in a country of 76 million. William Jennings Bryan, the populist Democratic nominee in 1896, had unnerved some Jews with his many Christian and messianic references in his famous “Cross of Gold” speech, and they were troubled by the rural-oriented anti-Semitism of some of his populist allies. Nevertheless, there clearly were not enough Jews to be relevant.

Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901 to 1909, had a special relationship with the Jewish community. It began when he was police commissioner in New York City and mocked an anti-Semitic German preacher who celebrated the joys of Aryanism by assigning him a security detail of blonde blue-eyed Jewish policemen. The

mischievous TR did not introduce the officers, with their obviously Jewish last names, until the end of the trip, embarrassing the anti-Semite.

As president, Roosevelt supported the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine and wrote a personal letter of protest to the Czar after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. Roosevelt also appointed the first Jewish cabinet secretary, Oscar Straus, a member of the prominent family that owned Macy's department store. A tale, perhaps apocryphal but nevertheless spot-on, has Roosevelt at a banquet celebrating his decision to appoint Straus because "he was the best man for the job," which was what the Jews wanted to hear. Unfortunately, the elderly banker Jacob Schiff, hard of hearing, followed the president and told the truth – that Roosevelt had decided it was time to appoint a Jew and had asked which "Jew was best for the job."

## The Great Jewish Migration Brings Radicals Jews to America

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, lacked TR's smoothness as a politician, resulting in a bumpy ride with Jews and others, despite Taft's similarity to Roosevelt on most policies. Another legendary American Jewish story has Taft hosting the first visit by a rabbinic delegation to the White House – which definitely did take place on June 12, 1912. Taft supposedly asked how to win the Jewish vote and Rabbi Eliezer Silver replied: "Be a Zionist." When Taft responded that Silver himself was an Orthodox non-Zionist, Silver is said to have explained: "That's internal Jewish business. You be a Zionist."<sup>12</sup>

Although Rabbi Silver offered sage political advice, much of the American Jewish community at that time was more Socialist than Zionist, especially on Election Day. Jews might vote Republican or Democrat, like other Americans, but they voted Socialist and Progressive far more enthusiastically than most. In one mostly Jewish precinct in Boston, the Socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs won 4.5 percent of the Jewish vote in 1908, 8 percent in 1912, and 24 percent in 1920 – and an estimated 38 percent of all Jewish voters that last year. Among all American voters, however, Debs attracted only 2.8 percent in 1904, 6 percent in 1912, and 3.4 percent in 1920. In many ways, then, the answer to the mystery of American Jews' perennial left-leaning tilt may be that they are voting neither Israeli nor American, but Russian.

Some theorists do believe that at the core of the American Jewish liberal identity is an alliance with the enlightened forces that emancipated the Jews in Europe. The liberal regimes that granted equal rights to Jews released them from the ghetto and helped create the modern American Jewish experience. But modern Jews are so distant from that collective immigrant experience that although the liberal identity has remained prominent, the explanation feels insufficient. Yes, many of the Jews who arrived in America arrived with Socialist ideals along with their accents and their Yiddish. But the American Jewish ideology that emerged from those roots had an American accent and was ultimately more about the New World's possibilities than the Old World's scars.

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12 Singer, Saul Jay, "President Taft and the Jews: A Remarkable Friendship," *The Jewish Press*, December 23, 2015. <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/front-page/president-taft-and-the-jews-a-remarkable-friendship/2015/12/23/>

## FDR and the Great American Jewish Realignment: When Jews go Democratic

The Great American Jewish Realignment in which American Jews became stalwart Democrats began in the 1920s and culminated in the 1930s with the New Deal. The trend started in 1924: some estimates (Maisel & Forman, 2003, p.153) are of a jump from 19 percent of Jews who voted for the Democrat James Cox in 1920 to 51 percent who voted for the Democrat John W. Davis in 1924 (with 22 percent voting for the Progressive Robert M. La Follette). By 1928, 72 percent voted for New York governor Al Smith, a tough-talking Irish Catholic ethnic who epitomized the reason for the shift: the Democrats were now the party of the immigrant outsiders while the Republicans were the party of the native insiders.

A most unlikely Democrat and hero to the Jews, the aristocratic, High Protestant Franklin D. Roosevelt cemented the Jewish-Democratic alliance. Despite sounding like the American grandees who always recoiled from Jews as beneath them, Roosevelt was the first president to denounce anti-Semitism formally. He hired many Jewish advisers – some estimate up to 15 percent of his appointees. And he made the Democratic Party the tribune of “the Forgotten Man” and woman.

The New Deal expanded government dramatically. Many Jews were happy to join up in various New Deal agencies, leaving what the historian Marc Dollinger calls “an unmistakable Jewish imprint on the national landscape” (Dollinger, 2000, p.20). Now Jews were helping to draft progressive public policies in Washington and implementing them throughout the country, especially in the cities. As a group, Jews became what Dollinger calls “white America's leading opponents of institutional discrimination and affirmed a tenet central to modern American Jewish liberalism: protection of individuals victimized by social factors beyond their control.” (Dollinger, 2000, p.21) This role as inside critics solidified the American Jewish liberal ideology, cemented the Jewish ties with the Democratic Party, and made Jews feel American. They used their particularities to integrate into this great national project of relief, recovery, and reform after economic devastation. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal helped this generation of American Jews achieve what they never achieved in Eastern Europe, a mixture of acceptance and respectability, thereby reinforcing the Jewish reverence for Roosevelt.

Nasty anti-Semites called the president Franklin D. “Rosenfeld,” the head of the “Jew Deal.” Judge Jonah J. Goldstein joked in Yiddish that the Jews now had three *velten* (worlds): *di velt*, this world; *yene velt*, the world to come, and Roosevelt. In 1940, when Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term, he won 90 percent of the Jewish vote, a feat he repeated four years later; only Lyndon B. Johnson has done so since, in 1964, against the arch-conservative Barry Goldwater.

During the 1944 campaign, when Franklin Roosevelt was about to choose Harry Truman as his running-mate and told his advisers, “Clear it with Sidney,” the Jewish community was transitioning. As an Eastern European-born labor leader and Roosevelt adviser, Sidney Hillman continued the tradition of the *shtadlan*, the intercessor, the Court Jew. Hillman worked Roosevelt and Roosevelt responded. At the same time, much of Hillman's standing came from his people power, the fact that he represented thousands of Jewish workers, who were acting politically in concert with millions of unionists across the country.

## 1948: Truman Solidifies the Jewish-Democratic Alliance

In May 1948, Harry Truman reinforced the Jewish-Democratic link by recognizing Israel just minutes after David Ben-Gurion declared its independence. It was a courageous move, especially because many Administration insiders, including Secretary of State George C. Marshall, were vehemently opposed to it. Marshall could not understand the point of allying with 600,000 Jews who were opposed by tens of millions of oil-rich Arabs. Jews love to credit Truman's peppery independence and the intervention of his old friend Eddie Jacobson, who brokered a meeting between Truman and the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, for his decision.

Often overlooked is the obvious fact that 1948 was an election year. The memorandum that ultimately engineered Truman's come-from-behind-victory, written by Truman's aide Clark Clifford, recognized the relevance of "the Palestine problem" to the Jews. In a subtle analysis that acknowledged the limits of Jewish power even while trying to mobilize it, the Clifford Memorandum, dated November 19, 1947, declared: "The Jewish vote, insofar as it can be thought of as a bloc, is important only in New York. But (except for Wilson in 1916) no candidate since 1876 has lost New York and won the Presidency, and its 47 [electoral] votes is [sic] naturally the first prize in any election." Clifford noted that the Jewish vote was "centered in New York City" and "normally Democratic and, if large enough ... sufficient to counteract the upstate vote and deliver the state to President Truman."<sup>13</sup>

A man of principle and a shrewd politico intimidated by the complexity of the issue, which triggered "dissension" over Zionism within the community, Clifford warned against deciding "some of the vexing questions which will arise in the months to come on the basis of political expediency." While Clifford subtly recommended, therefore, that "there is likely to be greater gain if the Palestine problem is approached on the basis of reaching decisions founded upon intrinsic merit," he was one of the most enthusiastic advocates for Israel in the Administration. Indeed, Truman recognized Israel, was hailed as its savior, and won 75 percent of the Jewish vote; his Republican opponent, Thomas Dewey, captured only 10 percent, while the radical former vice president, Henry Wallace, garnered 15 percent – despite (actually because of) his rumored Communist Party ties.

The Clifford memorandum zeroed in on the Electoral College distortion, which magnified the Jewish vote's importance. The Electoral College may be the most important non-existent and anachronistic institution in the world. When the Framers wrote the American Constitution, they feared dictatorship on the one hand and "mobocracy" – rule by popular emotions – on the other. They worried that giving every American a direct vote, today's popular vote, for the presidency, would weaken the system, making it susceptible to demagogues or dictators. Moreover, in that age of limited communications, when the individual states were more important in Americans' lives than the national government, the Framers could not imagine that many American candidates would be known by all the people, allowing the people to choose democratically and wisely. They decided that the president of the United States would be chosen by electors from each state, with every state assigned a number of electors based on its population. To avoid manipulations, each state presidential election would select electors who would gather in the nation's capital only once, to choose the president.

Over the years, America became more democratic. Most dramatically, whereas originally it was the state legislatures that selected the electors, now it is the citizens. Still, while election coverage today often emphasizes who is winning the national majority – meaning the majority of popular votes – the American election is essentially a series of state-by-state contests. Most states hold winner-take-all elections for their electoral votes, which

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13 Memo, "Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman," *Political File, Clifford Papers*. November 19, 1947.

increases the importance of winning the more populous states with more electoral votes. On the second Wednesday in December – December 19 this year – the electors in each state finally meet to cast votes for president and vice president, which is the Electoral College. The Congress then meets in joint session to count the electoral votes (on January 6, 2017 this election cycle).

That strange set up has helped amplify Jewish power – and perceptions of Jewish power. With Jews concentrated in electoral vote-rich states like New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, and California, winning the Jewish vote had added value, as Clark Clifford recognized.

In 1948, the perception of the Jews as one key to securing New York's 47 electoral votes made them a particularly prized constituency. As New York's importance faded, other electoral vote-rich states enjoyed surges in their Jewish populations, including Illinois, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, and Florida. In 2014, the religion editor of the *Atlantic*, noting that Jews constituted only two percent of the population, marveled: "Here are some of the other constituencies that make up 2 percent of the American electorate: customer-service representatives. People who participate in archery and bow hunting. AOL users. Residents of Indiana. So why all the attention" to the Jewish vote?<sup>14</sup> The disproportionate Jewish punch in the Electoral College that Clifford identified in 1948 remained strong more than six decades later.

What we could call the Virtual Megaphone effect helped too. Jewish donors are particularly important, amplifying the emphasis on Jewish issues, especially Israel, during the "Invisible Campaign" – the fundraising, friend-raising, and confidence-building frenzy that leads up to the actual voting in caucuses and primaries. The concentration of Jews in New York, Los Angeles, and Washington means that Jews make news, in all kinds of ways, including politics. In 1992, Hollywood Jews like David Geffen, Steven Spielberg, and Barbra Streisand supported Bill Clinton enthusiastically, donating money, raising funds, hosting fundraisers. In 2016, the next generation, led by the Jewish talent manager Scooter Braun and his wife Yael Cohen, joined the now-aging Hollywood Baby Boomers in hosting for Hillary.

The Roosevelt-cemented, New Deal-validated Jewish Democratic alliance has been deep, enduring, and multi-dimensional. It extended to Congressional races, where the Jewish vote was even more solidly Democratic than in presidential contests. In the 2006 midterm elections, 87 percent of Jews voted for the Democratic candidates for Congress. Even the drop to 66 percent in 2014 demonstrated remarkable unity for an increasingly diverse community. It extended to the disproportionate number of Jewish members of the House of Representatives and Senate, which, starting in the 1970s, has greatly exceeded the small Jewish demographic slice. Extending far beyond politics – but reinforcing the political act – the Jewish-Democratic alliance became a mentality, a sensibility, an ideology, a cultural identity. In the 1980s, the emergence of the Reagan Democrat phenomenon lured many Irish and Italian Democrats to vote Republican. But the Jewish-Democratic alliance held, almost as solid as the Black-Democratic alliance that became entrenched in the 1960s, after Lyndon Johnson made the Democrats the party of civil rights and the Great Society.

14 Green, Emma, "Are Democrats Losing the Jews?" *The Atlantic*, November 13, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/are-democrats-losing-the-jews/382665/>

## The American Jewish Liberal as Cultural Icon

The Jewish-Democratic alliance became a cultural given in America and the liberal Jew became an American Jewish given and a pop culture icon. In 1961, the crude and crusading Jewish comedian, Lenny Bruce, developed his famous routine contrasting what was “Jewish” with what was “goyish.” Bruce’s monologue became one of the most famous takes on American Jewry because it zeroed in on the central question of American Jewry and American Jewish history: do we belong? Israeli Jews know they belong in Israel; it’s the Jewish state in the Jewish homeland. As a people with immigrant roots and ties all over, as not just the Wandering Jews but also the long-oppressed Jews, Jews outside of Israel have long wondered, “Do we belong?” “Do we fit in?” “Are we accepted?” Only a decade and a half after the Holocaust, when many more American Jews than today had accents or were at best one generation off the boat from Russia or Poland, Lenny Bruce emphasized both how much American Jews were assimilating – and just how unassimilable they were. His notion of “Jewish” extended the American Jewish presence far beyond the Jewish ghetto of the Lower East Side, saluting American Jews’ magic-carpet ride from European outsiders to American insiders. But his notion of “Jewish,” emphasizing Jewish culture, Jewish ethnicity, and Jewish sensibility, also showed how different American Jews remained and how quixotic was the quest of many American Jews to disappear: they would, Bruce suggested, never be “goyish.”

“If you live in New York or any other big city,” Lenny Bruce riffed, “you are Jewish. It doesn’t matter even if you’re Catholic; if you live in New York, you’re Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you’re going to be goyish even if you’re Jewish. Kool-Aid is goyish. Evaporated milk is goyish even if the Jews invented it. Chocolate is Jewish and fudge is goyish.” Extending it, he could have added: the Fifties were goyish – a time of uptight dress codes and carefully choreographed relationships; the Sixties, Jewish – a time of the great rebellion, led by many Jews and perpetuating an edgy, *chutzpadik* Jewish creativity. And, Bruce could also have added, Republicans are goyish, Democrats are Jewish.

A decade and a half later, in 1977, the Oscar-winning Woody Allen movie *Annie Hall* offered its own confirmation, revitalization, and popularization of the liberal-Jewish alliance. When the balding, twitchy, horn-rimmed glasses-wearing Alvy Singer, played by Allen, meets the frizzy-haired woman who will become his first wife, Allison, played by Carol Kane, she says: “I’m in the midst of doing my thesis” on “political commitment in twentieth-century literature.” Singer riffs: “You, you, you’re like New York, Jewish, left-wing, liberal, intellectual, Central Park West, Brandeis University, the socialist summer camps and the, the father with the Ben Shahn drawings, right, and the really, y’ know, strike-oriented kind of, red diaper, stop me before I make a complete imbecile of myself.” “No, that was wonderful,” she replies, in one of the movie’s many oft-repeated lines. “I love being reduced to a cultural stereotype.” Singer ends it by saying: “Right, I’m a bigot, I know, but for the left.”

Thirty-five years later, in 2012, Lawrence Bush, the editor of the progressive magazine *Jewish Currents*, celebrated Bruce’s still-remembered routine as expressing “a Jewish consensus about American Jewish identity, a consensus that equates Jewishness with liberalism, authenticity, soul, universalism, urbanism, and atheism.” Adapting Judge Goldstein’s *velten* joke, Bush characterized this as “the world of Roosevelt – the world of a liberal Jewish consensus identity ... a land of cities, of ethnic mixing, of everyone-is-human humanism.”<sup>15</sup> In essence, then, Jewish liberalism was really American Jewish Fundamentalism, a core identity.

15 Bush, Lawrence, “O My America: Lenny Bruce and the Golden Age,” *Jewish Currents*, August 2, 2012. <http://jewish-currents.org/o-my-america-lenny-bruce-and-the-golden-age-11378>

## American Jewish Isaiahans and Israeli Davidians

At the same time, two historical shocks gave this American Jewish liberalism added dimensions. The trauma of the murder of six million Jews, combined with the exhilaration of Israel's birth, emboldened American Jews to plunge into American politics and fight passionately for Jewish survival. This renewed particularism, the New Jewish Politics, would result in an unapologetic Zionism, demanding support for Israel; starting in the 1960s, it also helped launch the movement for Soviet Jewry. At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, American Jews drew universalist and liberal lessons from the Holocaust about the importance of defending the civil rights of the most unfortunate, both because it was the right thing to do and because it was a self-protective move. Because they understood that they were only as strong as the weakest minority, even in America, many Jews came to support the black civil rights movement and many other movements to protect downtrodden minorities, out of a blurry mix of idealism and self-interest.

While this fierce sense of survivalism and Zionism bonded Israeli and American Jews, two very different politics developed in their respective countries. Ultimately, American Jews would be Isaiahans, most moved by the prophetic teachings, including the harsh critiques of power and the status quo. Israeli Jews would be Davidians, following the *realpolitik* of the kings, especially David, who was pious, poetic, and principled – but ready to use force when necessary. Lawrence Fuchs, the immigration scholar wrote about American Jewish political identity: “*Zedakeh, Torah*, and this-worldliness have, along with the insecurity of the group, all promoted political liberalism among Jews in our time. Their liberalism and internationalism have favorably disposed them to a Democratic choice in recent presidential elections and largely explain the resistance of Jews to class politics” (Fuchs, 1955, p.401). A scholar skeptical about this argument, Kenneth Wald, noted that “American Jews seem to have foregrounded only those aspects of the tradition that comport with liberal values, suggesting that theology is not the cause but a consequence of other factors peculiar to the American Jewish experience” (Wald, 2015, p.8).

In the 1930s and 1940s, Jews joined most other Americans in supporting winners like Franklin D. Roosevelt and his successor Harry Truman. Jews had many reasons for sticking with the majority. But in the 1950s, when Dwight Eisenhower, the hero of the Second World War, handily won two presidential campaigns, but not the Jewish vote, it became clear that the Democratic-Jewish alliance was firm. Eisenhower, a stolid, trim Kansan, was indeed goyish – as was his snarling partisan hatchet man vice president, Richard Nixon. At the same time, despite being another aristocrat, Adlai Stevenson, the articulate, brainy, idealistic High Protestant Democratic nominee in 1952 and 1956, was definitely culturally “Jewish” in Lenny Bruce’s term – as was John Kennedy in 1960 – for all that he was the first Catholic president and the son of a notorious anti-Semite, Joseph P. Kennedy.

Eisenhower treated Israel coolly, explaining to his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, “We conduct our policy as if there were not one Jew in the country. They don’t vote for us anyway.”<sup>16</sup> Eisenhower’s administration encouraged a regional defense organization without Israel, which the great Israeli diplomat Abba Eban called “unjust and inexpedient” refused to give a formal security guarantee to Israel, and forced Israel to withdraw from the Sinai Peninsula after the lightning 1956 Sinai campaign.<sup>17</sup> Eisenhower was particularly incensed by that move, which was coordinated with Great Britain and France but kept secret from the United States, and launched during Eisenhower’s campaign for re-election.

16 Chanes, Jerome, “For Israel, A Foreign Policy Camelot,” *The Jewish Week*, November 11, 2013. <http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/national-news/israel-foreign-policy-camelot>

17 Eban, Abba, to United States Section, ISA 40/18/B, January 29, 1954.

## LBJ Outdoes JFK as pro-Israel – but JFK remains more loved

By contrast, Kennedy, who visited Palestine in 1939 and the new state of Israel in 1951, was an Israel enthusiast. Recalling his second trip in a 1960 campaign speech, he said: “I left with the conviction that the United Nations may have conferred on Israel the credentials of nationhood; but its own idealism and courage, its own sacrifice and generosity, had earned the credentials of immortality.” He defined Israel as not just “a Jewish cause – any more than Irish independence was solely the concern of Americans of Irish descent.” Although he insisted that “friendship for Israel is not a partisan matter. It is a national commitment,” he also emphasized Democrats’ “special obligation.” Remembering the support for Zionism offered by Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman, Kennedy “pledge[d] to continue this Democratic tradition – and to be worthy of it.”<sup>18</sup>

Kennedy was beloved in Israel and by the Jewish community. He won 82 percent of the Jewish vote, appointed two Jews to his cabinet, and began formal American arms sales to Israel – starting cautiously with defensive anti-missile systems. When he was assassinated in November 1963, Jews and Israel joined the Western world in days of mourning. Israel planted a million trees in the Kennedy Forest outside Jerusalem. Composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein led the New York Philharmonic in a performance of a memorial piece on national television and dedicated his Kaddish Symphony to the slain leader. Three days after the president’s death, Bernstein addressed the United Jewish Appeal’s annual fundraising event and quoted Kennedy’s call for “America’s leadership” to be “guided by learning and reason.” Reflecting his own American Jewish liberalism, Bernstein defined “learning and reason” as “the two basic precepts of all Judaistic tradition, the twin sources from which every Jewish mind from Abraham and Moses to Freud and Einstein has drawn its living power.”<sup>19</sup>

Israel’s foreign minister at the time, Golda Meir, told her fellow cabinet members: “I believed him that he was a friend, regardless of people saying he needed Jewish support. Let’s assume [he] needed the support of Jews, but I did not doubt his friendship.” Noting an American Jewish insecurity easier for the former Goldie Meyerson of Milwaukee to see now that she was no longer living there, Meir was struck by how relieved Jews were when it became clear that the assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was not Jewish: “Why do you need to think that a Jew would murder Kennedy? I do not know, but they were relieved that he was not.”<sup>20</sup>

Still concentrated in the Northeast, anxious to break into Ivy League circles, charmed by an elegant New England–born ethnic, many Jews were naturally drawn to Kennedy – and instinctively wary of his crude, tough-talking, Texan successor, Lyndon Johnson. If Kennedy was Jewish, Johnson seemed goyish. Johnson seemed to be a man of the provinces where Jews fared worse than in the genteel haunts of the cosmopolitan Kennedy. But Johnson genuinely loved the Jewish people, had worked hard to save Jews from the Nazis, and ultimately cemented the alliance between the United States and Israel during the 1967 war. “You have lost a very great friend, but you have found a better one,” Johnson told Israeli diplomats shortly after becoming president. His wife, Lady Bird, later added: “Jews had been woven into the warp and woof of all [Lyndon’s] years.”<sup>21</sup>

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18 Kennedy, John F., “Speech by Senator John F. Kennedy, Zionists of America Convention, Statler Hilton Hotel, New York, NY.” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, August 26, 1960. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74217>

19 Bernstein, Leonard, “Tribute to John F. Kennedy,” *leonardbernstein.com*, Accessed September 11, 2016. [http://www.leonardbernstein.com/response\\_to\\_violence.htm](http://www.leonardbernstein.com/response_to_violence.htm)

20 Mandel, Roi, “Report: Golda Meir doubted motive behind JFK murder,” *Ynet*, November 19, 2013. <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4455473,00.html>

21 Ben-David, Lenny, “A friend in Deed,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 9, 2008 <http://www.jpost.com/Features/A-friend-in-deed>



Lyndon Johnson's great domestic project, the Great Society, seemed to emerge from the same Prophetic values American Jews defined as quintessentially Jewish. Johnson even enjoyed quoting Isaiah. In the great fault line that emerged during the tumultuous 1960s, the overwhelming majority of American Jews allied with the cosmopolitan and progressive values that Johnson surprisingly represented, along with the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the movement for sexual and cultural liberation. The 1960s provided Jews with liberal martyrs, especially the civil rights activists Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, who were murdered by Ku Klux Klansmen along with a young black man James Chaney in Neshoba County, Mississippi, in June 1964. The 1960s provided Jews with religious-secular saints like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who famously marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama, in March, 1965, and paralleled King by citing biblical values in his call for modern American political reform. The 1960s also provided Jews with the founding mothers of feminism, including Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Bella Abzug; Hippie subversives like Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Allen Ginsburg; literary giants like Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth; and singing sensations like Barbra Streisand, Bob Dylan, Carole King, and Paul Simon. These powerhouses – at home enough in America to demand that it change – became American icons who helped American Jews feel thoroughly and proudly American, while also serving as powerful embodiments of the liberal American Jewish sensibility and reinforcing a particular take on American and Jewish identity.

Given all these currents, a Republican presidential nominee whose half-Jewish father bequeathed him a Jewish last name and a proud retailing tradition attracted few Jewish voters. One of the central assumptions about the Jewish vote is that Jews always vote for their own and their own narrow interests. In fact, in 1964, the Jews did what they normally do: vote for the liberal candidate over the conservative candidate. Lyndon Baines Johnson won ninety percent of the Jewish vote against Barry Goldwater, because the grandson of the Jewish founder of the Arizona-based Goldwater's Department Stores was far too conservative. Jews – distancing themselves from the rightwinger and mocking the American mixed message about voting for the best man or the one most like you – joked that Republican rallies had posters that read "Goldwater – LBJ" – where LBJ stood not for Lyndon Baines Johnson but a "Little Bit Jewish."

Johnson was very close to a number of Jewish donors, especially the power couple of Arthur and Mathilde Krim. Arthur Krim was a New York lawyer and movie executive who was president of United Artists from 1959 until 1969, and then served as its chairman until 1978, when he founded Orion Pictures. Krim, who was also close to Kennedy, chaired the Democratic National Finance Committee from 1966 to 1968. Krim was following other generous Jewish Democrats, notably August Belmont, a Rothschild representative and banker who chaired the Democratic National Committee in the nineteenth century. "The Jewish vote" was often catered to as a delicate way of soliciting Jewish cash. Jews were disproportionately wealthy, charitable, Democratic, and politically engaged, making them critical donors, standing out both among wealthy donors and among more modest mass donors, especially at the start of election cycles.

## Jewish Donors as a Major Source of Jewish Power

Jewish donors have had an outsized impact on Democratic Party politics. For example, Hollywood mogul Haim Saban (through the Saban Capital Group) contributed \$9,280,000 of the \$162,062,084, the Democratic National Committee and its affiliates raised in the 2001–2005 election cycle. Jewish money deviates from the usual Jewish Vote script in two critical ways. First, wealthy Republican donors, especially Sheldon Adelson over the last decade or so, have been able to shape Republican politics too, feeding the repeated incorrect

predictions that “the Jews” – rather than “some Jews” – were veering right. Second, single-issue politics, especially support for Israel, often counts more during the fundraising sweepstakes than on Election Day. The pro-Israel lobby AIPAC, dozens of other Jewish political action committees (PACs), and individual Jewish donors like Saban the Democrat and Adelson the Republican earmark campaign funds for candidates who pass either explicit or implicit pro-Israel litmus tests.

Such targeted support is, of course, a legitimate democratic exercise, engaged in by most donors. But thanks to the growing toxicity of the Israel debate and traditional anti-Semitic tropes about Jews, money, and power, critics have been far quicker to denounce the Israel case. Academics like John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt led the charge against “the Israel Lobby” and it’s supposed undue influence on American foreign policy – even though the broad-based support for Israel over decades has been organic and natural, more grassroots than Astroturf. When they caught rival candidates in the act of appealing to Jews directly about Israel – rather than some other issue – opponents acted scandalized. Early in Democrat Michelle Nunn’s losing 2014 campaign for the U.S. Senate from Georgia, a fundraising memo her consultants wrote that targeted pro-Israel Jews and noted that “Michelle’s position on Israel will largely determine the level of support” in the “Jewish community” was leaked to *National Review*. More sophisticated observers, including a blogger on *Vox*, noted that “this is getting spun in certain circles as a damning indictment of Nunn or her staff, as if she is planning to tailor her entire foreign policy around fundraising concerns. ... But really, it’s just people doing their jobs.”<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the dollars and cents involved, which are particularly important in the “Invisible Primary” – the period before the actual primaries and caucuses – there is also symbolic value to gaining Jewish support. Benjamin Ginsberg, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University, explained that Jews “account for a huge share of the activist base of the Democratic Party and account for much of the money available to Democratic candidates. If you are a Republican strategist, it seems fairly obvious that if you can shift Jewish support even a little bit away from the Democrats, it makes the Democratic Party less competitive.”<sup>23</sup>

## The New Left Challenge to American Jewish Liberalism

During the volatile 1968 campaign, when many young Jews were incensed by the Vietnam War and the Democratic candidate, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the Jewish-Democratic alliance held. Of the 21 people who loaned the Humphrey campaign \$100,000 or more that year, 15 were Jews. Even many who doubted Humphrey detested his opponent Richard Nixon ever more intensely. The (then) left-leaning intellectual Irving Kristol wrote in *The New Republic*: “The prospect of electing Mr. Nixon depresses me. Suffice it to say that he appeals to the wrong majority to govern the United States in these times – a majority whose dominant temper will be sullenly resentful of the social changes we have been experiencing and impulsively reactionary toward the crises we shall inevitably be enduring.”<sup>24</sup> Kristol and 81 percent of the Jews who voted preferred Humphrey’s “liberal pragmatism” (Maisel & Forman, 2003, p.153).

22 Yglesias, Matthew, “One reason Congress is so pro-Israel? Fundraising,” *Vox*, July 28, 2014. <http://www.vox.com/2014/7/28/5945235/one-reason-congress-is-so-pro-israel-fundraising>

23 Green, Emma, “Are Democrats Losing the Jews?” *The Atlantic*. November 13, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/are-democrats-losing-the-jews/382665/>

24 Kristol, Irving, “Why I Am For Humphrey,” *The New Republic*, June 8, 1968. <https://newrepublic.com/article/69463/why-i-am-humphrey>

This continuing alliance led to Himmelfarb's quip, cited above, that Jews earn like the rich and vote with the poor. Despite centuries of being called greedy, Jews do not vote their pocketbooks. Of course, critics can still call them "clannish" and power-hungry. Moreover, there is a strange tendency, even among sympathetic observers and Jews themselves, to talk about "the Jews" as if they were a coherent mass acting in concert, partially because this voting pattern has been so persistent and the voting behavior so monolithic.

Nevertheless, the anger and confusion of the 1960s produced great fissures in the Black-Jewish alliance and the Jewish-Democratic coalition. The Arab world had always been hostile to Israel but the Jewish state's victory in the Six Day War triggered a major ideological and not just geopolitical shift. Israel-the-strong was a more popular target than Israel when thought weak and vulnerable. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, considered after the Holocaust to be right-wing and lower-class phenomena, appeared in the New Left and among some Western elites. The growing opposition to Israel and Zionism added a racial component, with opponents denouncing Zionism as racist while accusing Israel of practicing apartheid like the despised South African regime. The Soviet propagandists hit an ideological gusher. "It was these two ideas – the Israelis as Nazis and the Israelis as white imperialists – which were brought together with such brazen neatness in the identification of Zionism with racism," wrote Norman Podhoretz in *Commentary*.<sup>25</sup>

Princeton historian Bernard Lewis noted that by making Israel into a "fashionable enemy," the charge resonated with the times even as it deviated from the truth. After colonialism collapsed and America's civil-rights movement succeeded, the liberal intellectual Daniel Patrick Moynihan noted that "racism was the one offense international society universally condemned" (Moynihan, 1984, p.41). The Holocaust made the equation of Zionism with racism particularly perverse. After the Nazis used their Volkish Master Race ideology to murder six million Jews they deemed subhuman, most Jews recoiled from calling themselves a race. Still, the Zionism-racism charge stuck. Passed by the United Nations as Resolution 3379 in 1975, it outlasted its own repeal and the collapse of the Soviet Union, within weeks of each other, in 1991.

Israel's 1967 triumph and subsequent boom stirred its enemies in profound ways. The Palestinians emerged more galvanized – and more popular in a world increasingly sympathetic to the underdog, especially if the conflict could be cast as people of color under the yoke of Western whites. Disappointed by the Arab states' failures, disillusioned by Pan-Arabism as their hope for salvation, Palestinian leaders became more autonomous and more aggressive. They also became angrier. The number of Palestinians under Israeli rule had grown. The Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were in legal limbo, not citizens like their Israeli Arab cousins within the "Green Line" (the 1949 armistice borders). Israel did not annex the West Bank or Gaza Strip, although it did annex East Jerusalem and, eventually, the Golan Heights. "Israel became an occupying power," not "simply a Jewish state," the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said would note, and thus an easier target (Said, 1992, p.137).

Under the leadership of the charming and ruthless Yasser Arafat, the Palestinians hijacked, kidnapped, and bombed their way onto the world's agenda. In addition to terrorist attacks and diplomatic moves, Arafat and his allies fought an ideological war to shape world opinion. Exploiting the rise of a global mass media and what Said called the twentieth century's "generalizing tendency," the Palestinians framed their local narrative as part of a global struggle. They invested heavily in research centers, think tanks, and publishing houses to tell their story and link it to broader trends. As a result, Said noted in 1979, "the Palestinians since 1967 have tended to

25 Podhoretz, Norman, "The Abandonment of Israel," *Commentary*, July 1, 1976.  
<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-abandonment-of-israel/>

view their struggle in the same framework that includes Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, and black Africa,” joining “the universal political struggle against colonialism and imperialism” (Said, 1992, p.140).

Meanwhile, the Palestinian and Soviet strategy to woo the Arab world and the rest of the Third World found surprising resonance on the American Left. The 1967 war had transformed attitudes about Israel in the New Left and parts of the African American community. Black radicals took the lead, feeling the greatest sense of solidarity with the Third World, and with the Palestinians in particular. While most of the black leadership supported Israel in 1967, SNCC – the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, a leading black civil rights group – repudiated it.

A SNCC pamphlet circulated just weeks after the Six-Day War asked a series of “Do you know” questions, including: “Do you know” that “Israel was planted at the crossroads of Asia and Africa without the free approval of any Middle-Eastern, Asian, or African country?” The pamphlet – echoing a 1966 PLO diatribe – featured gruesome photos from the 1956 Suez war, which SNCC called the “Gaza massacres 1956.” The caption condemning “Zionist Jewish terrorists” read: “Zionists lined up Arab victims and shot them in the back in cold blood. This is the Gaza Strip, Palestine, not Dachau, Germany.” One cartoon depicted a hand marked with both a Jewish star and a dollar sign, tightening a rope around the necks of President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt and the controversial African American boxer Muhammad Ali. This caricature blurred anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, as greedy Jews replaced southern rednecks in the lynching of an iconic black figure and an iconic Arab leader. SNCC’s program director Ralph Featherstone insisted that the message was not anti-Semitic but was “only” targeting Jewish oppressors – both those in Israel and “those Jews in the little Jew shops in the [Negro] ghettos.” Featherstone celebrated this emerging “Third World alliance of oppressed people all over the world – Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”<sup>26</sup>

While developing a sense of Third World solidarity, black radicals used attacks on Zionism to test whether whites would let blacks “assume leadership.” A unique phenomenon was emerging. After the Holocaust, studies showed that anti-Semitism tended to be a lower-class phenomenon, most potent among the least educated and least well-off in society. The pattern was the same in Europe and the United States, even though American anti-Semitism was far less prevalent or poisonous. Now, starting in the African-American community, black Anti-Semitism became more common among the better educated and more politicized.

Meanwhile, anti-Semitic rhetoric, using “Zionist” to mean unappealing American Jew and calling Vietnam a “Zionist imperialist war,” escalated. The power struggles between whites and blacks – but particularly between black radicals and Jewish liberals – intensified. In 1968, during the teachers’ strike in New York City, angry blacks clashed with New York’s heavily Jewish teachers’ union, while black radicals wondered whether “the Middle East murderers of colored people” could teach young blacks effectively.<sup>27</sup> These radicals also denounced the Jewish union leader Albert Shanker and his mostly Jewish colleagues as “racist, ruthless, Zionist Bandits.” The Black Panthers’ weekly newspaper frequently called greedy Jewish slumlords “racist Zionists” and started linking tensions in the Middle East with tensions in American’s urban ghettos (Troy, 2013, p.81).

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26 Roberts, Gene, "S.N.C.C. charges Israel atrocities; Black Power Group Attacks Zionism as Conquering Arabs by 'Massacre,'" *New York Times*, August 15, 1967: p.1.

27 Kovach, Bill, "Racist and Anti-Semite Charges Strain Old Negro-Jewish Ties; Bitterness Is Now Straining Old Negro-Jewish Ties," *New York Times*, October 23, 1968: p. 32.

As New Leftists excused dictators' crimes and exaggerated democracies' mistakes, and as the US-Israel friendship warmed, American – and European – radicals soured on Israel. Bashing Israel became – according to the liberal Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz – “the litmus test” of ideological bona fides. It allowed authoritarian leftists – especially many radical Jews – to prove their ideological purity, as others like Dershowitz and Martin Peretz of the *New Republic* broke with the movement over the issue. Peretz recognized this growing link between radical anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. He also sensed the particular “biological” zeal that children of Communists and radical Jews brought to their Israel-bashing. Those raised to idolize Joseph Stalin or Fidel Castro had an easier time idolizing Yasser Arafat, just as those repudiating their Jewish heritage took special delight in denouncing Israel. With New Left posters claiming: “ZIONISM (KOSHER NATIONALISM) + IMPERIALISM = FASCISM,” the lynch-mob mentality against Zionists grew.

At the same time, the idea of affirmative action – granting preference to minorities in school admissions and hiring – began to spread. This issue became a wedge dividing the black and Jewish communities. Having been the victims of quotas in university admissions in the 1920s, and in hiring through the 1950s and even into the 1960s, most Jews detested quotas as un-American. They viewed the meritocracy as the key to Jewish success and the ultimate expression of American fairness and liberalism. Increasingly, however, blacks saw the racism they faced as so systemic, the legacy of slavery so devastating, that they considered a leg-up in admissions and hiring a minimal first step.

Finally, many Jews and black leaders began to tell clashing stories about crime, especially in urban areas. Terrified by the surge in muggings, robberies, rapes, and murders – all too often by blacks against whites – many Jews felt personally betrayed. The fact that this Great American Crime Wave occurred after the Great Society tried to solve the underlying social injustice seemed to repudiate the Jewish and liberal contribution to the civil rights movement. In contrast, even though African-Americans were and remain the greatest victims of African-American crime, and even though most blacks were furious about the crime surge, blacks were very sensitive to the white politicians who used “law and order” as code words to blame blacks and incite whites. Black leaders and intellectuals tended to ignore the misery caused by black-on-black crime. And, as always, the media could find radical blacks to politicize and sensationalize the crime story as a well-deserved payback punishing whites in general, and rich Jewish “slumlords” in particular.

The “Black is Beautiful” and Black Power movements that underlay this lashing out at Jews also inspired Jews – along with other ethnic groups. Michael Novak’s 1972 book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, showed how Irish pride, Polish pride, and Slovak pride, too, surged in the 1960s. Jews were empowered by the overall shift from an American “melting pot” to “salad bowl” vision, meaning from an obsession with fitting in ethnically and communally to a new comfort with standing out. At the same time, the challenge issued by author Elie Wiesel and others to free Soviet Jews, who should not be, in Wiesel’s pungent, Holocaust-evoking title, *The Jews of Silence*, along with the fear-to-exhilaration cycle experienced during the 1967 and 1973 wars, propelled Jews onto the American political stage. Vowing “Never Again,” Jews refused to let Soviet Jews be forgotten or Israel be destroyed. Symbols of this new openness ranged from huge Israel Independence Day parades down New York’s Fifth Avenue and Solidarity Sundays outside the UN to the rise of the organization that best epitomized Jewish power, AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobby, grew with the community. From a sleepy, behind-the-scenes, Washington DC “inside job,” in the 1950s and 1960s, the organization blossomed into a public, prominent, pro-Israel powerhouse. Today, AIPAC mobilizes financial and grassroots support for hundreds of members of the House and Senate, emphasizing the importance of “bipartisan support” for America’s “only democratic ally in the

Middle East.” In addition to its strong Washington presence, AIPAC has 100,000 members nationwide; its annual policy conference brings at least 15,000 pro-Israel activists to Washington every spring. AIPAC is often caricatured as the classic Jewish monolith, bullying America into supporting Israel; today it is often caricatured, especially by the leftwing upstart lobby J-Street, as conservative or “neo-con” (neo-conservative). In fact, AIPAC has many non-Jewish members and allies, is filled with domestic policy liberals because it reflects the American Jewish population, and is as effective as it is only because most Americans and their politicians are instinctively pro-Israel and anti-terrorism, without any pushing or peddling.

## The rise of Jewish neo-conservatives doesn't break the Jewish-Democratic bond

Reflecting this spirit of greater comfort and assertion, by 1972 Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, and other intellectual Jewish liberals had grown disillusioned with the New Left, the rising black radicalism, and, increasingly, liberalism itself. Kristol's famous aphorism, that a “conservative is a liberal who has been mugged” (Kristol, 1983, p.75) heralded the rise of an unapologetic cadre of former liberals who abandoned the Democratic Party and no longer felt constrained by the Black-Jewish alliance.

In the February 1972 issue of *Commentary*, the influential magazine he edited, Norman Podhoretz asked a traditional Diaspora question that had long been dismissed as outmoded, and unnecessary in American Jewish discourse: “Is it good for the Jews?”<sup>28</sup> For the first time in the American experience, Podhoretz was saying, the poisons of anti-Semitism were flowing so intensely that Jews had to be more self-protective. “If one made a simple numerical tally of references unfriendly to Jews in the public prints since, say, 1967 – the date of the Six-Day War when so many intellectuals of radical stripe or sympathy responded to the victory of Israel with an ‘anti-Zionism’ which was not always easy to distinguish from the anti-Semitism of old, and the date as well which marked the beginning of the terrible struggle over the New York schools,” he wrote, one would certainly find a spectacular increase in the volume of anti-Jewish utterance as compared with any period of similar length in the 50s or early 60s. He insisted that he was not “counseling the Jews to withdraw into a self-regarding parochialism.” But he advised that Jews start taking “the Jewish interest into account and “that they should bethink themselves long and hard before agreeing to see it compromised or altogether bargained away.”

Podhoretz was not alone. That year he and tens of thousands of other Jews chose not to vote for George McGovern, the Democratic candidate whose anti-Vietnam isolationism suggested a kind of hostility to Israel and whose sympathy for blacks in general and the quota issue in particular seemed to go against the “Jewish interest.” Nevertheless, the liberal Jewish leader and Zionist, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, boasted that “the Jews were still more than 60 percent for McGovern, and in a very bad year,” emerging as “the only white ‘have’ group voting for” McGovern amid Nixon's landslide. Jews “were willing to swallow even him,” Hertzberg wrote. “I see this as a continuing stability for the kind of Jewish politics I stand for” (Podhoretz, 2009, p.171).

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28 Podhoretz, Norman, "Is it good for the Jews?" *Commentary*, February 1, 1972.  
<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/is-it-good-for-the-jews/>

For Podhoretz, this kind of stubbornness – which he noticed among the “well-educated” and “middle-class suburbanites” rather than “more ethnic Jews” – was self-destructive. Years later he would lament that “identifying themselves as liberals had become so important to most American Jews that for the sake of it they were willing to swallow even ideas and politics that were virtually the opposite of the ones that had only yesterday been defined as liberal by the Democratic Party itself, and that had been as good for the Jews as they were for America” (Podhoretz, 2009, p.171).

## Richard Nixon’s Mixed Message – Regarding Jews, Too

President Richard Nixon confused American Jews – along with the rest of his fellow Americans. Many American Jews, their radar finely honed, sensed a Nixonian anti-Semitism that was eventually confirmed when his taping system exposed him. “No Jews. Is that clear?” he instructed an aide when discussing potential judicial appointments. “We’ve got enough Jews. Now if you find some Jew that I think is great, put him on there.” At the same time, Nixon appointed the first Jewish secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, and supported Israel throughout his presidency, including massive arms shipments to the country during the Yom Kippur War. And this snarling conservative made all kinds of classically “liberal” moves: It was Nixon who initiated détente with the Soviet Union and China, negotiated a truce in Vietnam, established the Environmental Protection Agency, and expanded affirmative action.

Moreover, the Israel ambassador in Washington, Yitzhak Rabin, indicated that he and his government favored Nixon’s re-election. When the *Washington Post* reported that unprecedented intervention on its front page, under the headline “Israeli Preference for Nixon Hinted,”<sup>29</sup> Rabin angrily denied it. Quoted as saying “while we appreciate support in the form of words we are getting from one camp, we must prefer support in the form of deeds from the other camp,” Rabin insisted he was “misquoted” and his words were taken “out of context.” Rabin’s indelicate two-step, followed by his backpedaling, revealed another essential, overlooked truth: Israelis and Americans frequently meddle in each other’s elections, always deny it, and critics often call the move “unprecedented.”

The fact that Nixon, despite his reassuring actions and George McGovern’s worrisome stands, won only a third of the Jewish vote demonstrated that, indeed, many Jewish voters were impervious to the particulars of the Republican or Democratic candidate. Political scientist Daniel Elazar subsequently estimated that “Nixon was thought to be better on Israel by about 64 percent of the Jewish voters, yet he received only 35 percent of their votes” (Elazar, 1981, p.338). Clearly, supporting Israel did not make Nixon a liberal, especially because conservatives were starting to appreciate Israel as a bulwark against the Soviets and a critical military, diplomatic, and ideological ally in a polarized and hostile world. Nixon, Kissinger, and Nixon’s successor in 1975, Gerald Ford all recognized this Jewish political pigheadedness, adding to their frustration about the intense Jewish politics around Israel as they tried negotiating a Middle East peace.

Still, while the Jewish vote was overwhelmingly liberal and Democratic, there were important Jewish Republicans, too. Max Fisher lived a classic American Jewish success story; this son of immigrants parlayed a string of gas stations and shrewd real estate investments into a fortune estimated at \$775 million. Starting with the Eisenhower Administration, Fisher, who was very generous with his time and money, was the living bridge between Republican presidents and Israel. Fisher understood that Jews had to donate to both parties

29 "Israeli Preference for Nixon Hinted," *Washington Post*, June 11, 1972: A1.

and to reward pro-Israel behavior, even among Republicans. As a typical American Jew, for all his interceding, he knew exactly where his loyalties lay: “My fundamental responsibility was as an American,” he was quoted as saying in his biography. “Then as an American Jewish leader. And finally, I had my love for Israel” (Golden, 1992, p.323).

## The Kissinger Conundrum

As an American official actively negotiating with Jews and Arabs, Henry Kissinger's loyalties were similar but his relationships were far more brittle. Kissinger's conflicted relationship with his own tradition resulted in a conflicted relationship with the Jewish community that intensified the clash between the Nixon Administration and the Jews. A Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who lost more than a dozen relatives in the Holocaust, towards the end of the Second World War he returned to Germany wearing an American army uniform and then worked his way through Harvard, where he became a world-renowned professor. Kissinger's was an extraordinary achievement. At his swearing in as secretary of state, to which his Orthodox Jewish parents walked because it occurred on a Saturday, Kissinger exulted “there is no country in the world where it is conceivable that a man of my origin could be standing here.” Jews and Israelis joked about his dual loyalties, with the popular joke having Kissinger tell Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir: “I'm first an American citizen, second secretary of state, and third a Jew.” Golda responds: “Don't worry, in Israel we read starting from the other direction.”<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, with an anti-Semitic boss who doubted Kissinger's objectivity when it came to the Middle East, Kissinger often bullied the Israelis – after Nixon bullied him. In all fairness, the Soviet-American military tensions during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Arab oil embargo afterwards terrified Kissinger. He feared international instability and economic fragility. As the price of oil quadrupled from \$3 a barrel to \$12 within a few months, the devastating American inflation of the 1970s began. Exxon chairman J. Kenneth Jamieson warned the secretary of state that the United States faced “the possible breakdown of the economy.” In one of his first briefings to Gerald Ford in August 1974, days after Nixon resigned in disgrace over the Watergate scandal, Kissinger warned: “The Middle East is the worst problem we face. The oil situation is the worst we face. We ... can't afford another embargo. If we are faced with that, we may have to take some oil fields.”<sup>31</sup>

To the extent that he had any ethnic solidarity, Kissinger felt Israel was acting foolishly and dangerously. At one point, he condemned Israel's leaders as “a sick bunch”; another time he called them “the world's worst shits,” for some of their backstage maneuvering to mobilize members of Congress and influential journalists against him (Troy, 2013, p.35). Moreover, as a proud American and an ambitious leader, he resented this small country's disdain for his own country's big-picture needs. Kissinger brooded over his failure in this arena in particular, when only months earlier, after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, he had been touted as the genius peacemaker, shuttling step-by-step towards the Middle East peace that eluded mere mortals.

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30 Richer, Stephen, “American Jew: A dilemma?” *The Daily Caller*, March 18, 2010.  
<http://dailycaller.com/2010/03/18/american-jew-a-dilemma/>

31 Ford, Gerald R., Kissinger, Henry A., and Scowcroft, Brent., 9:21 A.M.-9:54 A.M., p. 4, National Security Adviser's Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. March 24, 1975.



As both courtier and careerist, Kissinger absorbed the anti-Semitism around him and encouraged it, to prove his independence from his “co-religionists.” Mid-1970s America was far more welcoming to Jews than it had been thirty years earlier. Still, a WASPish distaste, which saw Jews as foreign and disloyal, lingered, even when they had Kissinger’s government credentials or lacked his heavy accent and exotic résumé.

The Arab oil embargo convinced some Americans that US interests now clashed with Israel’s needs and American Jews’ desires. In October 1974, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General George S. Brown, publicly speculated that another oil embargo might encourage Americans to “get tough-minded enough to set down the Jewish influence in this country and break that lobby.” Brown attributed American support for Israel – and Jewish power – to “where the Jewish money is,” saying, “They own, you know, the banks in this country, the newspapers” (Spiegel, 2014, p.221). President Ford reprimanded his top general but retained him.

A month after the media exposed Brown’s remarks, Kissinger echoed them while briefing the President aboard Air Force One. Speaking of American Jews, Kissinger said: “Their power in the United States derives from campaign financing. It is not easy to explain to the American people why we must oppose 115 million Arabs who possess all the world’s oil, permanently, on behalf of a nation of 3 million.”<sup>32</sup> Kissinger’s toadying, while contagious, did not inoculate the supplicant against similar treatment. In December 1975, Max Fisher offered Gerald Ford an explanation of Israelis’ feelings of skittishness, mistrust, and isolation after the UN passed the infamous “Zionism is Racism” resolution, telling the President of the United States in the Oval Office: “you know how they are – like Henry is as a person. It’s a national trait.”<sup>33</sup>

By March 1975, Kissinger had persuaded Ford to twist the Israelis’ arms by declaring a “reassessment” of bilateral relations. Ford reminded his advisers that his record on Israel during his long years in Congress was of being “so close” to Israel that he had a black reputation with the Arabs.<sup>34</sup> He instructed his cabinet members to “be business-like but arms-length and aloof” when dealing with Israeli officials. The President expected pushback. “I know they will hit us,” Ford told Kissinger, “but I kind of enjoy a fight when I know I am right.”<sup>35</sup> By September, the Israelis had caved in, leading to the interim agreement with Egypt that paved the way for the Camp David breakthrough in 1978.

During the 1976 presidential campaign, Ford tried to bury the friction and emphasize his support for Israel. The language he used to describe the United States celebrated the centrality of its Judeo-democratic liberalism as he called the “traditional Jewish concepts of justice, liberty, family, and citizenship ... part and parcel of the American heritage.” Celebrating America’s Judeo-Christian heritage, he said, “when America’s founders created this Republic 200 years ago, they saw it as a promised land. They were inspired by moral and ethical values of the Old Testament as well as by the teachings of Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

32 Ford, Gerald R, Kissinger Henry A., Scowcroft, Brent., et al., 9:00 A.M.-10:00 A.M., p. 3, National Security Adviser’s Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. December 17, 1974.

33 Ford, Gerald R, Scowcroft, Brent., and Fisher, Max., 7:00 P.M.-7:50 P.M., p. 2, National Security Adviser’s Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. December 12, 1975.

34 Minutes, National Security Council Meeting, 3:15 P.M.-6:15 P.M., pp. 2, 9, National Security Adviser’s Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. March 28, 1975.

35 Ford, Gerald R., Scowcroft, Brent, and Fisher, Max, 9:22 A.M.-10:18 A.M., p. 3, National Security Adviser’s Memoranda of Conversation Collection at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. March 26, 1975.

36 Ford, Gerald R., “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Jewish Committee,” *The American Presidency Project*, May 13, 1976. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=5992>

More pointedly, just weeks before the election, believing that the Jewish vote was in play, Ford spoke at the Yeshiva of Flatbush in Brooklyn. There he embraced the entire Jewish agenda. He opposed “terrorism in our own streets and neighborhoods,” saying “there have been too many muggings and too many murders.” He “totally opposed ... arbitrary quotas in hiring and in education” and wholeheartedly supported the “emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union.” And he stood “firm in my commitment to Israel,” boasting that “forty percent of the total American aid to Israel since 1948 was authorized during the Ford administration.”<sup>37</sup>

## Jimmy Carter’s Coolness

Seeking to ensure Jewish support for their candidate, a born-again Christian who had failed to woo many Jews during the primaries, Democrats encouraged Jimmy Carter to be equally enthusiastic in supporting Israel. Linking it to his Christian identity, Carter proclaimed: “I have an absolute, total commitment as a human being, as an American, as a religious person to Israel. ... Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.” The Democratic platform declared: “We recognize and support the established status of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, with free access to all its holy places provided to all faiths.” And echoing an innovation from the 1972 McGovern platform it proclaimed: “As a symbol of this stand, the U.S. Embassy should be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.” For many pro-Israel Jews this pledge, which the Republicans would add to their platform in 1996 – and every president since has ignored once in office – became a litmus test for their support. It is also an indicator of the glib vows that both parties make to woo Jews and other interest groups at election time, with no intention of keeping them.

Carter had to work hard to squelch rumors that his postures were hiding more hostile sentiments. Speechwriter Bob Shrum lasted only a few weeks on the Carter campaign because he doubted Carter’s credibility. Shrum also revealed that Carter, convinced that Senator Henry Jackson would win the Jewish vote in the 1976 Democratic primaries, had told his staff to focus elsewhere: “Jackson has all the Jews anyway,” Carter supposedly said, “We get the Christians.”<sup>38</sup>

The assault on liberalism by a small but influential cadre of Jewish intellectuals continued. By this time, the label that social democrat Michael Harrington had affixed to the liberal renegades in 1973, “neoconservatives,” had come to define the movement, which included Jews and non-Jews. Daniel Patrick Moynihan always bristled when called a neocon, understanding that the term was “coined in epithet.” Irving Kristol, by contrast, embraced it. Kristol insisted, however, that it was more a “tendency” or a “persuasion,” than a movement – and quite a varied one at that. All the same, in 1976 he identified five key neoconservative tenets: accepting the idea of a welfare state but not the “Great Society version”; respecting “the power of the market”; championing “traditional values and institutions”; believing in equality but not the rigid dehumanizing doctrine of “egalitarianism”; and fearing a new post-Vietnam isolationism or American defeatism in a dangerous world hostile to democracy (Troy, 2013, p.47). In the persistent “tension between liberty and equality,” Moynihan believed that he and his closest friends tended towards “liberty,” which is why he preferred to see himself as a Woodrow Wilson progressive, a Franklin Roosevelt liberal, a liberal asking “What happened to liberalism?” or, more simply, an

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37 Ford, Gerald R., “Remarks at Yeshiva of Flatbush High School in Brooklyn, New York,” *The American Presidency Project*, October 12, 1976. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6448>

38 Maoz, Jason, “Jimmy Carter’s Jewish Problem,” *The Jewish Press*, November 22, 2011. <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/media-monitor/jimmy-carters-jewish-problem/2006/11/22/0/?print>

American patriot. Still, as in 1972, despite many Jewish doubts about the born-again Carter and growing faith in the Republicans, Gerald Ford won only 31 percent of the Jewish vote, a two percentage point drop from Nixon four years earlier.

## Begin's Israeli Electoral Earthquake Rattles the Jewish-Democratic Alliance

Early in Carter's term, Israel experienced an electoral earthquake that would prove particularly unnerving to American Jewish liberals. The election of Menachem Begin and his right-wing Likud coalition – after 29 years mostly in opposition – upset a happy alliance between a left-leaning Israel and left-leaning American Jews (cheered on by left-leaning media). Many reporters condemned Begin as a “terrorist” who “blew up the King David Hotel,” ignoring the warnings Begin's Irgun issued before the bombing and the hotel's use as British military headquarters. Time infamously explained how to pronounce the new Israeli prime minister's name with the quip that Begin “rhymes with Fagin”. Fagin being Charles Dickens' stereotypically anti-Semitic character in *Oliver Twist*.

Some American Jews were willing to condemn Begin as “inflexible” or “intransigent,” but in general, the *New York Times* reported in a front-page news story, Begin's harder line on peace and his more conservative vibes left many American Jews “confused, uneasy, distressed, or even angry.”<sup>39</sup> The president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish organizations, Howard Squadron, acknowledged “considerable division of opinion” in the community – but tried to minimize it by saying that “the only thing two Jews agree on is how much a third Jew should give to charity.”

Begin's election, a year after Carter's, was the start of a long, slow lament by some that the Israeli and American Jewish communities were diverging over values. The earlier differences between Israel and America charmed Americans, who romanticized the Israeli pioneers, and overlooked complexities such as the military government to which Israeli Arabs were subject until 1966. Now, even as modernization, Westernization, prosperity, technology, and a turn to capitalism were making the two countries more similar, an increasingly critical media and community exaggerated whatever political, ideological, and moral differences emerged.

Carter's more aggressive stance towards Israel intensified the distress and confusion. “You are more stubborn than the Arabs, and you put obstacles on the path to peace,” Carter admonished Israel's legendary war hero and new foreign minister Moshe Dayan during their first White House meeting in July 1977. Dayan remembered the hour-long talk as “most unpleasant,” as Carter “launched charge after charge against Israel.”<sup>40</sup> On October 1, 1977, the Americans called for a Geneva Peace Conference in a joint statement with the Soviets – bringing them back into the process – and for the first time using the phrase the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.”

39 Charlton, Linda, “Jews in America Now Worried By Both U.S. and Israeli Policies; American Jews, No Longer Seeming Predictable and Cohesive, Assail U. S. and Israel,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1978.

40 Maoz, Jason, “Jimmy Carter's Jewish Problem,” *The Jewish Press*, November 22, 2011.  
<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/media-monitor/jimmy-carters-jewish-problem/2006/11/22/0/?print>

Even Ford's 1975 reassessment had not stirred the same kinds of concerns among rank and file Jews as did Carter's pressure on Israel and arms sales to Arabs, especially 60 F-15s warplanes to Saudi Arabia for \$2.5 billion and 50 F-5Es to Egypt for \$400 million. "If another presidential election were held today," *Newsweek* reported, "some experts report that disaffected Jews might turn the tide against Carter in crucial states such as New York, California, Illinois and Michigan" (Dalin & Kolatch, 2000). Some Jews called him "pro-Arab," as leaders admitted, more delicately, "there is certainly a feeling of disappointment." The editor of *Moment* magazine, Leonard Fein, wondered if believing that "both leaders are wrong" made it easier, because it "takes you off the psychological hook," particularly so that American Jews didn't feel disloyal to Israel. In fact, Begin's election and the resulting frictions did lead to an era of greater tension within the American Jewish community, and dissent – especially among radicals.

Even Jimmy Carter's heroic diplomatic efforts at Camp David failed to reassure many American Jews – or win him re-election. The Egypt-Israel peace treaty Carter helped negotiate represented a remarkable breakthrough. But even amid the euphoria and the ongoing negotiations, many Israelis and their supporters grumbled about the President's clear attraction to Egypt's Anwar Sadat and visceral dislike for Menachem Begin. Carter believed that Begin was the obstacle to progress and pressured him aggressively, repeatedly. "Mr. President, we shall sign only what we agree to, and we shall not sign anything to which we do not agree," Begin lectured the President shortly before the signing of the 1979 treaty. In his biography of Begin, Daniel Gordis reports that Jimmy Carter told his wife Rosalynn that the pedantic and intransigent Begin was a "psycho" (Gordis, 2014, p. 171).

The anger festered during the hard-fought 1980 campaign, as did Carter's "disgust" with the American Jewish community. Looking back, Carter felt frustrated by his efforts to win the Jewish vote: "I would have been better off if I had ignored them" (Carter, 2010, p.485). Before the election, New York Mayor Ed Koch explained to Carter's former secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, that many American Jews would not vote for Carter, fearing "that if he is reelected he will sell them out." Koch recalled: "Vance nodded and said, 'He will'" (Koch, 2011).

Tensions with the Carter administration often pivoted around the United Nations. In August 1979, Andrew Young's tenure as the US ambassador there ended abruptly when he violated American policy by meeting secretly with Zehdi Labib Terzi, the PLO's observer at the UN, and then lied about the encounter. Young's successor, Donald McHenry, was a soft-spoken career diplomat, not a firebrand, but both Young and McHenry wanted to woo the anti-Israel Third World. McHenry started abstaining on controversial Security Council resolutions denouncing Israel – at a UN that never even endorsed the Camp David accords.

In March 1980, two weeks before Carter faced Senator Ted Kennedy in the New York primary, McHenry actually voted *for* Security Council Resolution 465, condemning Israeli settlement as a "flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention." Because the Fourth Geneva Convention was passed in response to Nazi crimes, Ford's UN Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan complained that the language implicitly compared Israel's policies "to the Nazi practice of deporting or murdering vast numbers of persons in Western Poland – as at Auschwitz – and plans for settling the territory with Germans." The Israeli case differed in many ways, especially because Jewish rights to settle in this disputed territory remained in force from the British Mandate days. The false comparison, noted Moynihan, now a liberal democratic senator from New York, played "perfectly into the Soviet propagandist position that 'Zionism is present-day fascism.'"<sup>41</sup>

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41 Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, "Joining the Jackals: The U.S. at the UN 1977-1980," *Commentary* 71:2, February, 1981.

Fearing the political damage, Carter claimed a miscommunication and had McHenry veto the next anti-Israel resolution, on April 30. But it was too late, and Carter paid the price during the New York primary. Jews, in particular, were furious – even booing Vice President Walter Mondale at a banquet every time he mentioned the president's name. New York Jews voted for Massachusetts senator Ted Kennedy 4 to 1, helping Carter lose the state by 59 percent to 41 percent. When the New York state campaign chairman, Lieutenant Governor Mario Cuomo, called him to apologize for the loss, Carter waved him off. “No,” the president answered, knowing the Jews had abandoned him, “it was the United Nations vote.” New York helped Kennedy stay in race long enough to cripple Carter’s fall campaign. “New York was our chance to knock Kennedy out of the box early,” Carter’s national campaign chair Robert S. Strauss griped. “We blew it with that vote.”<sup>42</sup>

Unfortunately for Carter, his opponent, former California governor Ronald Reagan, had a long record of being pro-Jewish, pro-Israel, anti-Soviet, and willing to fight for Soviet Jewry. Reagan often recalled when he first saw newsreel footage of the concentration camps in 1946. “From then on,” he said, “I was concerned for the Jewish people.” The experience was so vivid – and Reagan’s imagination so real to him – that he would tell Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he had actually been to the camps (McCrisken, 2003, p.86).

As an actor in the 1940s and 1950s, Reagan had many Jewish friends and colleagues. “He just fell in love with the Jews,” explained Ozzie Goren, a real estate developer and community leader.<sup>43</sup> Reagan was one of the first non-Jewish actors to appear at an Israel Bonds dinner and he resigned from a country club that refused to accept Jews. Reagan’s intense anti-Communism and his criticism of Carter’s foreign policy as appeasement also meant that his support for Israel and Soviet Jewry fit naturally into a broader vision calling for a more assertive American foreign policy, in the Middle East, in favor of democracies like Israel, and against the Soviets. Reagan attacked the PLO as a terrorist organization, praised Israel as “a strategic asset,” and blasted the Carter administration’s abstention at the UN on a resolution condemning Israel’s proclamation of Jerusalem as its united capital. “Jerusalem is now, and should continue to be, undivided,” Reagan said. “An undivided city of Jerusalem means sovereignty of Israel over that city” (Slonim, 1998, p.249).

## A Growing Holocaust Consciousness

In addition to the growing tensions with liberals – and the general disaffection from liberalism that elected Ronald Reagan – American Jews were motivated by a growing Holocaust consciousness. For the first two decades after the Second World War, the mass murder of six million Jews hovered like the cloud of air pollution that blanketed many American cities but was mostly ignored, even as it started to affect individuals’ health. Elie Wiesel’s memoir *Night*, published in English in 1960, sold only 1,046 copies in the first eighteen months. Gradually, however, the conversation began. The first studies of American Jewish silence during the Holocaust encouraged mass communal guilt, while the growing movement to free Soviet Jewry offered a constructive alternative: Never Again! In 1978, the four-part television mini-series *The Holocaust*,

42 Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, “Joining the Jackals: The U.S. at the UN 1977-1980,” *Commentary* 71:2, February, 1981.

43 Finnigan, David, “Reagan Had Strong Ties to Jewish L.A.” *Jewish Journal*, June 10, 2004.  
[http://www.jewishjournal.com/politics/article/reagan\\_had\\_strong\\_ties\\_to\\_jewish\\_la\\_20040611](http://www.jewishjournal.com/politics/article/reagan_had_strong_ties_to_jewish_la_20040611)

fascinated – and informed – millions, despite concerns that it popularized and trivialized this sacred subject Holocaust consciousness would grow over the ensuing 3 decades, and with it the American Jewish paradox of fighting ardently for Israel as a response to the Holocaust while also embracing universalist liberal values. Israelis visiting Auschwitz would often wrap themselves in the Israeli flag, shouting “Never Again,” meaning “never should we be so weak and without an army to protect us that we would be led like lambs to the slaughter.” American Jews visiting Auschwitz would often eschew Israeli flags or any other nationalist displays, shouting “Never Again,” meaning “never should humans be so evil – or nationalism so intense – as to slaughter anyone like lambs.”

## Reagan’s Rise: And the Jewish Turn to the Right ... that Never Was

As a result of Reagan’s track record – and Carter’s – Reagan garnered an impressive 36 percent of the Jewish vote – the best Republican outcome since 1916; the urbane, soft-spoken third-party liberal John Anderson won 19 percent. But even with all the Jewish doubts about him, Carter still won a plurality of the Jewish vote, with 44 percent.

Reagan’s rise, and his appointment of many Jewish neoconservatives to senior positions, convinced many analysts that the Jews were ready to shift right. There was, after all, the phenomenon of the Reagan Democrat, the working-class urban ethnics who had belonged to unions in the 1930s and worshiped Franklin Roosevelt, but were now, after the 1960s and 1970s, abandoning the Democratic Party, and watching their more prosperous kids do the same thing. Many analysts predicted Jews would follow the trend, especially when Carter’s vice president, Walter Mondale, won the 1984 Democratic nomination.

But Jews perceived Mondale as Hubert Humphrey’s pro-Israel, classically liberal protégé more than as Jimmy Carter’s tough-on-Israel vice president. Moreover, during the first two years of the Reagan administration, relations between Reagan and Israel had turned surprisingly rocky. Israelis feared the sale of the sophisticated AWACS airborne early warning and control system to Saudi Arabia, and Reagan objected vehemently to Israel’s bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak, and Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Reagan, like many presidents, grew less critical and more appreciative of Israel while in office. He also was able to convey his longstanding, genuine affection for Israel and a commitment to Soviet Jewry that defused some of the tensions over specific flashpoints.

Nevertheless, most American Jews detested Reagan’s domestic policies and many of his supporters, especially the Evangelicals. American Jewish resistance to Reagan’s presidency from 1981 to 1989, and later George W. Bush’s presidency from 2001 to 2009, demonstrated that the American Jewish majority was more pro-choice than pro-Israel in the voting booth, with a deep cultural aversion to the overall domestic package of these two pro-Israel presidents.

Despite the initial tensions, Reagan’s presidency, on the heels of Carter’s realigned partisan political dynamics regarding Israel. Before the 1970s, the world was an easier place for the typical American Jewish voter and everything lined up neatly. Israel was semi-socialist and run by the Left. Most liberals were pro-Israel, the anti-Zionist Communist Left having been eclipsed by the Holocaust. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism were the province of the far Right. Fundamentalist Christians were not politically engaged and were perceived as anti-Semites who believed that the Jews had been “replaced” or “superseded” by the Christians and the original Biblical covenant broken, leaving the Jews in need of salvation.

By the 1980s, the world had changed and become much more confusing. Israel was increasingly capitalist and run by a right-leaning coalition. The Left was turning on Israel, buying the Palestinian propaganda line that Israel was a racist, colonialist, imperialist project oppressing the Palestinians. This made anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism more common on the radical Left than the Far Right. And thanks to preachers like Jerry Falwell and John Hagee, the Moral Majority, Ronald Reagan, and others, Fundamentalist Christians were not only politically active – they were passionately pro-Israel.

## The Jewish Question about Evangelical: To Trust or not to Trust

Fundamentalist Christians embraced Israel for many reasons. Most of all, their deep relationship with the Bible and the Promised Land forged an ideological bond with the Land of Israel and its people. Theologically, they saw Israel's establishment as an essential first step towards the fulfillment of the eschatological vision of the End of Days. Tactically, they viewed Israel as a reliable democratically for the United States and a bulwark against Soviet Communism. They liked the enemies Israel made, from radical Arab and Islamic regimes to the United Nations. They, unlike many American Jews, appreciated the more traditional and conservative bent of leaders like Menachem Begin, and, later, Benjamin Netanyahu.

This alliance was possible because, just as Catholics after the Second Vatican Council denounced anti-Semitism, most modern Evangelicals rejected the “supersessionism” of replacement theology. As David Brog, a former Senate staffer and the executive director of CUFI, Christians United for Israel, explained, “just because evangelicals believe that Judaism has been ‘perfected’ by the coming of Christ does not mean that they view the Jews as having been superseded or cast aside. Because most evangelicals reject replacement theology; they believe that the Jews are still in covenant in God and still have a central role to play in God's plan for humanity. The Jews are, in a sense, seen as allies of the Church in bringing about the salvation of humanity, and each has a distinctive role to play.”<sup>44</sup>

Just as the rise of the Moral Majority intensified the domestic American culture war, it changed the electoral dynamics around Israel. Millions of American non-Jews were pro-Israel, but the Evangelical support was more organized, orchestrated, and organic. The Republican Party became increasingly pro-Israel, not to woo the Jews but to keep 80 million politically active, deeply passionate, highly engaged, and enthusiastically pro-Israel Evangelical Christians happy.

Menachem Begin, seeing the rise of Christian influence, especially after their successful championing of Reagan in 1980, embraced the Christian Zionists. When asked about their religious agenda – expecting that at the Second Coming the Jews would be “saved” and accept Jesus – Begin sighed. He said they would figure it out when the Messiah came. Meanwhile, he appreciated the support.

Living 6000 miles away from Israel and its enemies, most American Jews had a different calculus. They viewed Evangelicals as a major threat, ideologically, politically, and culturally. Most Jews were on the opposite side of the political battles with Evangelicals about the church-state balance, Reagan's budget cuts, taxes, and the role of government in American life. Similarly, most Jews were on the opposite side of the Culture War with Evangelicals when it came to Hollywood, pop music, the changing family, women's roles, the sexual revolution, gays, and, most dramatically, whether America would be a center of lifestyle innovation or a bastion of tradition. Amid this lineup of potent issues, perhaps the most emotionally charged issue was abortion.

44 Q&A, "David Brog on Why Christians Support the Jewish State," *Haaretz*, May 7, 2006.  
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/david-brog-on-why-christians-support-the-jewish-state-1.186992>

## American Jews as more pro-choice than pro-Israel when voting

On many levels, the fight over abortion was more symbolic than real. In 1973, the Supreme Court settled the dispute, ruling, in *Roe v. Wade*, that the Constitution guaranteed a woman's right to have an abortion. By the 1990s there was a rough and often tacit American consensus: according to opinion polls, most Americans disliked abortion and considered it a form of homicide. But most Americans – even those living in the most conservative states – wanted it as an option if they, their wives, or their daughters needed an abortion – and frequently resorted to it.

Despite the court ruling and mass acceptance of the practice, a person's stand on abortion became – in some ways like the Jewish-liberal alliance itself – more a matter of one's core identity and political theology. As a result, the fight to restrict abortion has been prolonged and nasty.

To Evangelicals and their allies, it is simply about "life." A society with an average of a million abortions a year – a total of more than 50 million between 1974 and 2016 – is a sick society that kills infants when they are inconvenient. This logic views abortion just as slavery was seen two centuries ago – a barbaric practice that society must outgrow – and is burdened with ongoing shame about the lives destroyed until enlightenment arrives. The signs pro-lifers wave say it all: "Abortion Kills Babies," "Jesus is Pro-Life": "Abortion Does Not Make You 'Unpregnant'; It Makes You the Mother of a Dead Child."

To most Jews and their pro-choice allies, the abortion issue was, just as simply, a question of freedom. In the words of Sen. Bernie Sanders, it is a decision "for a woman and her doctor to make, not the government."<sup>45</sup> A society that robs women of the power to make the most basic decisions about their bodies, their health, and their future is not a free society. If a state – or a society – can impose an unwanted pregnancy on an unwilling mother, it can micromanage every other aspect as well. Katha Pollit of the *Village Voice* asked, "if you can't determine such a basic, life-transforming thing as when and if you bear a child, what freedom do you really have? At any moment you might have to drop out of school, leave your job, lose your income, be stuck in an abusive relationship, or be tied for the next two decades to a man who is totally wrong for you (and maybe for your child as well)."<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the feminist activist Sarah Seltzer noted, people cannot live up to their full human potential without control over their own reproduction, their own bodies, and their own fertility.<sup>47</sup> This logic views abortion as the keystone of the sexual revolution and the Bill of Rights itself. The pro-choice signs say it all: "Her Body, Her Choice"; "Get Your Laws Off My Body"; "My Uterus My Business"; and "Against Abortion? Don't Have One."

Over the decades, the pro-choice position came to be more broadly accepted in the American Jewish community and more central to American Jewish ideology. To Rabbi Jay Michaelson, a *Forward* columnist and gay activist, the pro-life position was rooted in the Christian interpretation of when life begins. Christians are free to follow that personally, but it is un-American for them to deploy the "apparatus of the state – crime and

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45 Moyer, Justin, "Clinton, Sanders asked about abortion at Fox News town hall – some say too late," *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/03/08/clinton-sanders-asked-about-abortion-at-fox-news-town-hall/>

46 Metal, Tara, "Pro: An Interview with Katha Pollitt," Blog: Jewesses with attitude, *Jewish Women's Archive*. October 12, 2014. <http://jwa.org/blog/interview-with-katha-pollitt>

47 Seltzer, Sarah, "On Being Jewish and Pro-Choice," *The Forward*, June 19, 2012. <http://forward.com/sisterhood/158015/on-being-jewish-and-pro-choice/>



punishment, prisons and guns – ... to enforce a point of Christian religious dogma.”<sup>48</sup> The fight for abortion rights – and against any state restrictions – is “a moral issue.” In 2012, a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, Lisa Brown, became a national leader of the pro-choice crusade by emphasizing Jewish law’s preference for the life of the mother rather than the fetus and challenging her colleagues: “I have not asked you to adopt and adhere to my religious beliefs. Why are you asking me to adopt yours?”<sup>49</sup>

After the 1980 elections, some pro-choice and pro-Israel activists established the Joint Action Committee for Political Affairs (JAC), essentially saying that you do not have to choose between being pro-Israel and pro-choice. JAC and its fundraising arm, JACPAC, saw themselves as upholding the “values of mainstream American Jewry,” defining their mission as being “committed to the US-Israel relationship as its core issue, while defending social policies consistent with the priorities of the American Jewish community, principally reproductive rights and separation of religion and state.”<sup>50</sup>

Even though Orthodox Jews drew closer to Evangelicals, they were far less anti-abortion than their Christian allies. The Jewish position that the mother’s life takes precedence over the fetus’s undercuts the clear Christian approach. As a result, abortion was not an inflammatory issue in Israel’s often-volatile political system, while some polls found that as many as 93 percent of American Jews accepted the legalization of abortion in some form.<sup>51</sup> Other polls found that 76 percent of Jews view abortion as “morally acceptable,” a much more passionate stance.<sup>52</sup> Only Americans with no religious preference matched American Jews in their approval of abortion. The pro-choice stance was part of a broader package of overwhelming American Jewish community support for gay rights, pre-marital sex, out-of-wedlock births, and physician-assisted suicide.

The abortion debate between liberal Jews and Evangelicals has grown so angry and alienating that many liberal Jews continue to believe that most Evangelicals still hold to Replacement Theology, as a way to avoid the cognitive dissonance that would otherwise stem from Evangelicals’ pro-Israel stance. Most Jews’ pro-choice political theology became the keystone to a broader political identity that emerged in the 1980s. If the “Greatest Generation” Jews were social justice-oriented Franklin Roosevelt liberals, Baby Boom and Millennial Jews were social justice-Oriented Cosmopolitan Howlers, the children of Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl,” Betty Friedan’s feminism, and Oprah Winfrey’s nonjudgmental “I’m Okay You’re Okay,” everything goes lifestyle.

As a result, despite the expectations in the 1980s and thereafter that Jews were now ready to veer right, they became even more solidly liberal. Many Jews returned to the Democratic Party in 1984, despite Reagan’s overall popularity and efforts to show that he was conservative but not anti-Semitic. This result was surprising – and disappointing to Republicans, who invested over \$2 million in phone banks alone to mobilize Jews to re-elect Reagan – especially because at their 1984 convention Walter Mondale and the Democrats warmly welcomed an increasingly powerful national figure, Jesse Jackson.

48 Michaelson, Jay, “It’s Time for Jews To Pray and Preach About Abortion – Like Christians Do,” *The Forward*, February 24, 2016.

<http://forward.com/opinion/333790/its-time-for-jews-to-pray-and-preach-about-abortion-like-christians-do/>

49 Peralta, Eyder, “Michigan State Rep Barred From Speaking After ‘Vagina’ Comments,” *NPR*, June 14, 2012.

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2012/06/14/155059849/michigan-state-rep-barred-from-speaking-after-vagina-comments>

50 Joint Action Committee for Political Affairs, “About JAC, History and Mission,”

<https://www.jacpac.org/about-jac>

51 Jones, Robert & Cox, Daniel, “Chosen for what? Jewish values in 2012,” *Public Religion Research Institute*. April 3, 2012. <http://www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Jewish-Values-Report.pdf>

52 Jones, Jeffrey, “U.S. Religious Groups Disagree on Five Key Moral Issues,” Gallup Poll, May 26, 2016.

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/191903/religious-groups-disagree-five-key-moral-issues.aspx>

During this first serious attempt by an African-American to win the presidency, Jackson had referred to New York as “Hymietown,” a clear anti-Semitic slur. Jackson insisted the remarks were off the record and apologized, but many Jews were offended. They also worried about Jackson’s friendship with the anti-Semitic demagogue Louis Farrakhan and Mondale’s unwillingness, in an attempt to mollify Jackson, to allow a plank condemning anti-Semitism to be included in the party platform. Jackson’s 3.2 million primary votes, his 466 delegates, and especially his eloquence and standing as a black leader made him a formidable force. He also imposed a more enthusiastic endorsement of affirmative action on the Democratic platform.

But whereas liberals Jews could not pardon Evangelicals for their supersessionism and saw the non-anti-Semitic Evangelical Jerry Falwell as an evil force, they could forgive Jesse Jackson and the Democrats. This inconsistency became easier to pull off with a Republican platform that opposed abortion and gay rights, endorsed school prayer, and supported tax benefits for private-school tuition. Hyman Bookbinder of the American Jewish Committee called this program Reagan’s attempt to “Christianize America” – despite Reagan’s denials. “I have rarely seen a development in public affairs that so moved, so electrified the Jewish community as this one,” Bookbinder told the *New York Times*.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Louis Bernstein, president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, endorsed Mondale, singling out the issues of “church-state and religious liberty. Decades of teaching American Jewish history reinforce my conviction that this is a major factor in the security of the American Jew.”

Before Election Day, “our upside potential was fantastic because of the anti-Semitism issue,” according to Reagan strategist Roger Stone. However, Stone confessed, “We lost the focus and the issue became the separation of church and state.”<sup>54</sup> Walter Mondale won 66 percent of the Jewish vote. Every Democratic candidate since has done at least as well. This Jewish-Democratic alliance, more solid post-Reagan than pre-Reagan, suggests that sexual, cultural, and lifestyle issues are more powerful than political issues and foreign policy.

In local and state elections, Jews sometimes voted Republican. The tension over race and crime play out more intensely in cities, and induced Jews to vote – although still less than others – for Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia, Sam Yorty in Los Angeles, and Ed Koch, Rudy Giuliani, and Michael Bloomberg in New York. But these leaders were rarely mainstream Republicans. Most, like Koch were Democrats. Others, like Giuliani and Bloomberg, were progressive on gays and abortion. Still, the laments were predictable. “This is the Reagan generation,” political scientist Alan M. Fisher would write, “a generation that knows not FDR or JFK. It is three generations removed from the ferment of the Jewish labor movement; for this generation, even the civil rights and students’ anti-Vietnam movements of the 1960s coincide with their birth and infancy but not with their political experience.”<sup>55</sup>

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53 Herbers, John, “Church-State Issue may hurt Reagan's effort to attract Jews,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 1984.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/18/us/church-state-issue-may-hurt-reagan-s-effort-to-attract-jews.html?pagewanted=all>

54 Clymer, Adam, “Religion and Politics mix poorly for Democrats,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 1984.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/11/25/weekinreview/religion-and-politics-mix-poorly-for-democrats.html>

55 Fisher, Alan M., “Where the Jewish Vote Is Going,” *Moment*, March, 1989.

## 1988: High anxiety about the Jesse Jackson influence

Going into the 1988 campaign, Jesse Jackson was even stronger than he had been in 1984 – and harder to take for many Jews. Besides his continuing refusal to distance himself from Farrakhan, his support for Palestinian rights disturbed many Jews – and anticipated a major ideological shift on the Democratic and academic Left that would occur in the future. Jackson tripled his white vote from 1984, but received only 7 percent of the Jewish vote in New York State (where he won 15 percent of the vote overall). Micah L. Sifry of *The Nation*, a progressive magazine, celebrated Jackson's role: "For the first time in many years, a candidate of the left – and one explicitly supporting Palestinian self-determination – was able to make a serious run for the presidency" (Sifry, 1988, p.4). In reaction to Jackson's positions, 1.2 million New York Jews voted for Michael Dukakis, a significant chunk of his 9.7 million votes in that state's primary.

Looking towards the general election, the *New York Times* continued to emphasize the importance of the Jewish vote, thanks to the Electoral College enhancer. It was striking that while Jewish voters constituted merely 3 percent of the 1984 presidential electorate, they attracted much more than 3 percent of the attention.

Facing Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush, Dukakis worried some Jewish organizations by being a little fuzzy on the question of a Palestinian state. Republicans knew that their chances of winning the Jewish vote were limited. But the Jewish Coalition for George Bush set up organizations in states with large Jewish populations, including New York, California, Massachusetts, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. Gordon Zacks, who headed the coalition, tried to distinguish between most Jews' cultural liberalism and this particular election. "I don't think we're trying to convert Jews to Republicanism," he admitted. "The key is to attract Democrats and independents and I think there is concern about Dukakis's positions on the Palestinian state, and very high anxiety about the Jackson influence on the Democratic Party."<sup>56</sup> On Election Day, predictably, 69 percent of Jews voters went for Dukakis, with only 30 percent supporting Bush.

This feeble Jewish support irked some of Bush's men. It would lead to Secretary of State James Baker's famous comment, when things grew tense with Israel later in the term, "Fuck the Jews, they didn't vote for us anyway."<sup>57</sup> Baker and Bush were far more willing at the start of Bush's term to be tough on Israel than Reagan had been at the end of his. By 1991, they were threatening to withhold loan guarantees to Israel to stop it from settling Russian Jews in the West Bank. Bush complained about being "one lonely little guy" facing "powerful forces" after 1,200 Israel activists lobbied Congress in support of the loan guarantees.<sup>58</sup> But Bush was not anti-Israel. In fact, Bush and Baker lobbied intensively to have the UN General Assembly rescind the 1975 Zionism is Racism resolution – and succeeded in December 1991.

56 Rosenthal, Andrew, "Bush and Dukakis Are Engaging in Early Battle Over the Jewish Vote," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1988. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/29/us/bush-and-dukakis-are-engaging-in-early-battle-over-the-jewish-vote.html>

57 Kornblut, Anne, "The Bushes and the Jews," *Slate*, April, 17, 2002. [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2002/04/the\\_bushes\\_and\\_the\\_jews.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2002/04/the_bushes_and_the_jews.html)

58 Apple, R.W., "Bush urges delay on aid for Israel; threatens a veto," *The New York Times*. September 13, 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/13/world/bush-urges-delay-on-aid-for-israel-threatens-a-veto.html?pagewanted=all>

## Bill Clinton: Jews' Favorite President since JFK

As a result of these clashes, and general dissatisfaction with Bush as the economy sputtered into a recession, Bush won only 16 percent of the Jewish vote in 1992. But the aging WASP Bush was outgunned by a charismatic Baby Boomer with close Jewish friends and a deep sense of mission to protect the Jewish State. Bill Clinton took 74 percent of the Jewish vote in 1992 and 78 percent in 1996. But more than that, Clinton was most Jews' favorite president since John Kennedy or even Franklin D. Roosevelt. Clinton plunged into Middle East peacemaking with the Oslo Process, investing much time and prestige. Although he occasionally clashed with Israel's leaders, Israelis loved him. Clinton understood Israelis' fears: "So long as Jews are murdered just because they are Jews or just because they are citizens of Israel, the plague of anti-Semitism lives and we must stand against it" (Rabinovich & Reinharz, 2008, p.499). He revered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, leading the world's mourning after Rabin's assassination with his powerful phrase, "shalom chaver," goodbye – and peace – my friend.

Visiting Israel in March 1996, after two suicide bus bombings, Clinton defied the Secret Service by visiting Bet Chinuch, a Jerusalem high school that had lost three students. The president phoned two recovering victims. Later that day, visibly moved, he told young Israelis: "We know your pain is unimaginable and to some extent unshareable, but America grieves with you." He called terrorists "destroyers" gripped by "that ancient fear that life can only be lived ... if you're hating someone else."<sup>59</sup> He backed up his words with \$100 million in anti-terrorism funding.

Israel's Prime Minister as of 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu, infuriated Clinton with his intransigence. After their first meeting, Clinton fumed to aides: "Who the fuck does he think he is? Who's the fucking superpower here?"<sup>60</sup> And during one tense exchange with Netanyahu, Clinton looked up at the Israeli and said that if he, the American president, ran for Bibi's job in Israel, he would win.

Ironically, tragically, Clinton's involvement with a young Jewish intern, Monica Lewinsky, derailed his administration – and made her possibly the most influential American Jew ever in American politics. The Lewinsky scandal distracted Clinton for more than a year and resulted in his impeachment. From the gift of a book of Jewish jokes she gave him, to her identity as a Beverly Hills Jew, with all that implied, Lewinsky's Jewishness added color and a Jewish accent to the sordid episode. The scandal showed just how mainstream Jews had become, while highlighting how limited Jewish power had been in shaping American politics through more standard, constructive, and democratic ways.

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59 National Archives and Records Administration. "Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton". 1997.

60 Eldar, Akiva, "Perfect English or Not, Netanyahu Shares No Common Language with Obama," *Haaretz*, February 10, 2009. <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/perfect-english-or-not-netanyahu-shares-no-common-language-with-obama-1.269819>

## The 2000 Campaign: Florida Jews mistakenly veto a Borscht Belter in chief

Similarly, the greatest impact Jews had on the 2000 campaign was through unintended mistakes rather than strategic muscle. The contest between Clinton's vice president, Al Gore, and Texas governor George W. Bush, the son of the incumbent Clinton defeated in 1992, seemed to be yet another post-Reagan set up between a Democrat who clicked with Jews culturally and a Republican who did not. For the first time in American history, a Jew appeared on a major presidential ticket. Gore's running mate, Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, was not merely Jewish by birth; he was an observant Jew passionately committed to Israel and Jewish causes.

Lieberman delighted in his Jewish identity. Appearing on Jon Stewart's influential political comedy show, Lieberman sounded more Catskills than Connecticut, more Borscht Belt than Beltway, when suggesting these campaign slogans: "No Bull, No Pork"; "With Malice Toward None and a Little Guilt for Everyone"; and "Lox and Load". More seriously, Lieberman emphasized the common biblical values and shared interests of all Americans, even its most religious Jews.

For all of Lieberman's obvious appeal to Jews, Gore chose Lieberman partially to reach out to more conservative swing voters. The thoughtful, ethical, Lieberman had denounced Clinton's conduct on moral grounds and had crusaded against Hollywood immorality. For Gore, selecting this Orthodox Jewish running mate was a way of distancing Democrats from Clinton's tainted legacy and reassuring traditional voters whose attitudes were far more old-fashioned than those of most American Jews.

Despite Lieberman's presence on the ticket, and Jewish wariness about the Bush family's attitudes, the Gore-Lieberman ticket won the same 78 percent of the Jewish vote the Clinton-Gore ticket had won four years earlier. On Election Day, however, thousands of Jewish voters in Florida who woke up intending to vote for Al Gore mistakenly voted for Pat Buchanan. A prickly and marginal conservative candidate, Buchanan was so hostile to Israel that the conservative columnist William F. Buckley wrote a 100-page essay denouncing Buchanan's anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Buchanan received more than 3000 votes in heavily Jewish Palm Beach County. Buchanan himself estimated that "95 to 98 percent" of the votes he received there were "for Gore." One comedian suggested that, without the confusion, Yasser Arafat himself "would have received more votes than Pat Buchanan" in Palm Beach.

The local supervisor of elections had enlarged the printed names of candidates on the Palm Beach ballot, to help the many elderly voters voting there see the names better. The added size caused the ballot to run over onto a second page. Buchanan's name on the second page – on the right side of the "butterfly ballot" – ended up close to Gore's on the left. In addition to the voting surge for Buchanan – 20 percent of his Florida total in that county alone – another 20,000 ballots had two holes punched for Gore and Buchanan, probably many people thinking they had to vote for Gore and Lieberman. The result was a narrow victory for Bush in Florida, which in turn gave him the presidency in the Electoral College, thanks to Florida's 25 electoral votes, even though he lost the popular vote nationwide.

## Republicans Start Positioning Themselves as the pro-Israel Party under W.

By 2004, American Jews knew that George W. Bush was far friendlier to Israel than his father had been. After the terrorist atrocity of September 11, 2001, he applied the “Bush Doctrine” to Israel: “Terror must be stopped. No nation can negotiate with terrorists.” Nevertheless, Bush’ opponent that year, John Kerry won 76 percent of the Jewish vote, because most Jews were more concerned by Bush’s rightwing domestic policies, values, and allies than impressed by his pro-Israel stance.

During Bush’s two terms, Republicans started positioning themselves as more ardently pro-Israel than Democrats, whose radical faction was increasingly critical of Israel. While the label “anti-Israel” rarely applied to any mainstream American politicians, more Democratic politicians were open to a “tough love” position, willing to squeeze Israel to force it to stop building settlements and consider withdrawing from the territories. More Republican politicians took an unconditional “love love” approach, and tried to turn support for Israel from a bipartisan tenet into a wedge issue.

## Obama: Far more Pro-Jewish than Pro-Israel

These nuanced differences had little impact on the Jewish vote in 2008. Despite the worries of pro-Israel advocates about Barack Obama’s own commitment to Israel and his long ties to his anti-Semitic, anti-Israel preacher Jeremiah Wright, prominent Jews, especially from Obama’s base in Chicago, vouched for him. Most Jews had soured on George W. Bush, long before the stock market crash that occurred just weeks before the election (perhaps the greatest domestic cataclysm so close to a presidential election in American history). The Republican nominee, Sen. John McCain, was a strong supporter of Israel. By any standards, McCain’s record of friendship for Israel was far deeper than Obama’s.

But the Jewish support for Obama was as much cultural as it was political. Comedian Sarah Silverman’s “The Great Schlep” video went viral, mocking old Jews who doubted Obama and encouraging their grandchildren to insist that Jews vote Democratic. “If Barack Obama doesn’t become the next president of the United States, I’m gonna blame the Jews ... I am,” Silverman said, in one of her less vulgar riffs. “And I know you’re saying like, ‘Oh my God, Sarah, I can’t believe you’re saying this. Jews are the most liberal, scrappy, civil rights-y people there are.’ Yes, that’s true. But you’re forgetting a whole large group of Jews that are not that way, and they go by several aliases. Nana, Papa, Zaide, Bubbe, plain old grandma and grandpa. These are the people who vote in Florida. And the Florida vote can make or break an election. If you don’t think that’s true, why don’t you think back to two elections ago when a little man named Al Gore got fucked by Florida.” The comedian Larry David emphasized the Jewish fear of Evangelicals, declaring at Dartmouth College: “Candidates who do not believe in evolution are not my cup of tea.” When Election Day came, 78 percent of the Jews voted for Obama.

The Republican campaign made some inroads in 2012. Television ads had Jews who voted for Obama in 2008 regretting their choice. Billboards in Jewish areas cried out “Obama: Oy vay!” Barack Obama’s share of the Jewish vote did drop nine percentage points, to 69 percent – after a term marked by frequent clashes with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It became clear that most Orthodox Jews were now Republicans and that the less Jewishly affiliated you were, the more liberal and Democratic you became. Once again, however, the great Jewish realignment did not occur. More and more Republicans, Jewish and otherwise,

marveled at the denunciations of Israel issuing from the Left, about Obama's willingness to reach out to Iran, at the tensions between blacks and Jews, and wondered, as Irving Kristol had in 1999, about "the political stupidity of the Jews."

Obama's poll ratings among Jews did drop further after the divisive debate over America's agreement with Iran about the latter's nuclear facilities. But then, as Obama's poll ratings improved overall, so did his standing with the Jews. Polls, of course, are far more volatile and far less consequential than the ballot box. Still, Obama's approval rating among Jews averaged 13 points higher than that among the population as a whole.

The Jews most supportive of Obama include the liberal, nonreligious, and highly educated. Jews continue to be nearly twice as liberal as most Americans – 41 percent versus 23 percent – and 85 percent of Jewish liberals approve of Obama. Half of all Jews define themselves as "not religious," but only 31 percent of the general population do so; 36 percent of Jews have done postgraduate work, nearly three times the rate for all Americans.

Obama's Jewish critics have been passionate. In 2014, the conservative columnist and blogger Ben Shapiro wrote a column condemning "the Jew-hating Obama Administration," charging "Jewish blood is cheap to this administration." During the heated debate over the Iran deal, others accused Obama of "dog whistling," singling out Jewish critics and emphasizing Israel's opposition as a way of tarring critics as self-involved Jews and Zionists. Brandeis University historian Jonathan Sarna speculated that Obama and some of his aides "have not been as sensitive as they should be to the ease with which a stray comment can give aid and comfort to those who believe in Jewish power, dual loyalty, and a whole variety of other anti-Semitic tropes."<sup>61</sup> But, unlike Shapiro and other critics, Sarna stopped there.

It was hard to accuse Obama of being anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, or anti-Zionist. Many Jewish supporters loved toasting him as "the first Jewish president." The Hollywood mogul Steven Spielberg said, "This president has a great Jewish soul." Obama denounced anti-Semitism by saying "I, too, am a Jew" to show solidarity. He hosted Passover seders at the White House. He was the first president to speak at Israel's embassy in Washington. He visited Buchenwald and Israel, making sure to honor Theodor Herzl as a way of legitimizing Zionism. And Obama spoke repeatedly about "the deep affinities that I feel for the Israeli people and for the Jewish people."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, being so pro-Jewish and beloved by Jews did not stop Obama from becoming a tough critic of the Israeli prime minister, many Israeli policies, and Israel's continuing presence in the West Bank. The result was an occasionally testy relationship with Israel and many Jews, even though the liberal Jewish majority remained loyal, especially because of Obama's support for gay marriage, abortion, national health care, and other liberal agenda items.

61 Wilner, Michael, "An ugly fight on Iran," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 13, 2015.  
<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Iran/Special-Report-An-ugly-fight-on-Iran-412059>

62 Friedman, Thomas, "Iran and the Obama Doctrine," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2015.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/06/opinion/thomas-friedman-the-obama-doctrine-and-iran-interview.html>

## Bernie Sanders: the Son of Polish immigrants as the first Jewish primary winner

In 2016, although Hillary Clinton had been Barack Obama's secretary of state, her rival for the Democratic nomination, Sen. Bernie Sanders, more closely echoed the President's approach to Israel. Like Obama, Sanders believed in the Jewish state. Sanders was a Brooklyn-born Jew who became the first Jewish candidate to win a state primary and amassed more votes than any Jewish presidential candidate in American history. (As Gore's running mate, Lieberman still holds the distinction of being the Jew who attracted the most votes in American history.) Having volunteered on a kibbutz when he was young and enjoyed success decades later with his call for "democratic socialism," Sanders looked the part of the typical left-leaning, wild-haired, heavily-accented Brooklyn Jew.

Sanders, however, has his identity ambivalences and baggage. Bizarrely, he called himself "the son of a Polish immigrant." When his father Eli Sanders emigrated from a village south of Krakow in 1921, most Poles didn't think of the elder Sanders as a Pole, nor did most Jews think of themselves as such. It seemed like a weak attempt at hiding his obvious Jewishness. Sanders cleverly moved beyond this fumble by appearing on *Saturday Night Live* with his fellow Brooklyn boy made good, Larry David. In an opening sketch on "the boat" taking immigrants to America, Sanders introduced himself as "Bernie Sanderswitsky." He then added: "We are going to change it when we get to America so it doesn't sound so Jewish." "Yeah, that will trick them," Larry David replied.

Like Obama, Sanders was careful to endorse Palestinian rights and criticize Benjamin Netanyahu. He kicked up a storm of Jewish protest by calling Israel's response to Hamas in Gaza "disproportionate." And the fiery candidate turned surprisingly mousy when he faced anti-Semitism on the campaign trail. When asked at a candidate forum about how "the Zionist Jews ... run the Federal Reserve ... Wall Street," Sanders blandly chided the questioner. He then implicitly justified the ugliness by quickly adding, "I also believe that we have got to pay attention to the needs of the Palestinian people." His response connected the dots between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism and reflected a fear that simply denouncing anti-Semitism risked progressive votes.

## The Three Hillary Clinton's Regarding Israel: Which one will serve?

By contrast, Hillary Clinton kept to a strong, classically pro-Israel position during the primary season. She denounced the boycott movement against Israel, charming media mogul Haim Saban and other pro-Israel Democratic donors. She condemned terrorism, Hamas, and Sanders' ambivalence. During their debates, her counterpunch balanced out Sanders' self-righteous sermonizing by offering context. Invoking "25 years" of experience with "Israeli officials," she said: "They do not invite the rockets raining down on their towns and villages." She blasted "a constant incitement by Hamas aided and abetted by Iran against Israel." She reminded Sanders and his young, twenty-something fans that "Israel left Gaza. ... They turned the keys over to the Palestinian people. ... And what happened? Hamas took over Gaza" creating "a terrorist haven." And, most boldly, rejecting the claims that Israel undermined the two-state solution, she added "if Yasser Arafat had



agreed with my husband at Camp David in the late 1990s to the offer then prime minister [Ehud] Barak put on the table, we would have had a Palestinian state for 15 years.”<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, some pro-Israel advocates worried, especially considering her email exchanges with Clinton consigliere Sidney Blumenthal. Secretary of State Clinton’s tolerance for the anti-Israel venom of Blumenthal and his son Max unsettled them. During her tenure at the State Department, she relied on the elder Blumenthal, a Clinton loyalist whose son wrote a mean-spirited, anti-Zionist screed, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*. The elder Blumenthal shared with Secretary Clinton articles that ultimately became part of Blumenthal junior’s 410-page rant against Israel’s alleged “colonialism” and “racism,” replete with the expected Holocaust analogies.

In fact, since the 1990s, three different Hillary Clintons have emerged regarding Israel. She is running now in her most pro-Israel incarnation, but some wonder which Hillary will govern if she wins.

When she was America’s polarizing first lady in the 1990s, Hillary Rodham Clinton was considered to be among the most skeptical of Clintonites regarding Israel and the most pro-Palestinian, far to her husband’s left. The doubts about her swelled in November 1999, when she palled around with Yasser Arafat’s wife, Suha, in the West Bank. During one speech, Suha Arafat accused “Israeli forces” of spraying “poison gas,” causing “an increase in cancer cases among Palestinian women and children.” Throughout the tirade, with Arafat’s words translated simultaneously, Clinton kept smiling. After the speech, Clinton kissed Arafat warmly on the cheek. Critics charged that the first lady had shown her true colors, implicitly endorsing this modern blood libel.

The next day Clinton called the remarks “inflammatory and outrageous.” She said that the translation she heard had been milder than Suha’s actual Arabic words. Later, while running for Senate in New York, Clinton dismissed critics, saying, that in the Middle East, “a kiss is a handshake.” In fairness, Hillary Clinton’s plastic smile and scripted kiss may have reflected a first lady on automatic pilot, not an Israel hater. But the story exploded because it reflected fears stemming from earlier, combustible, statements she had made about Palestinians. Many feared that she did not share her husband’s instinctive love for Israel.

As a senator, Hillary Clinton became Israel’s biggest fan. She decried Yasser Arafat’s war of terrorism against the Oslo peace process, in which Palestinians killed hundreds of Jews, including some New Yorkers. Most movingly, in February 2002, while visiting Israel, Senator Clinton met Yochai Porat, a 26-year-old paramedic. Days later, on March 3, a Palestinian sniper murdered Porat and nine others at an army roadblock on the Ramallah-Nablus road. Porat, characteristically, was tending to the wounded when shot. Three years later, visiting Israel again, Senator Clinton met Porat’s family, quietly consoling them. His family asked her to help Magen David Adom (MDA) in its quest for international recognition. To her credit – and contrary to the Clinton reputation for milking every honest sentiment – she launched an ultimately successful campaign to persuade the International Red Cross to admit MDA, without showboating her support for Porat’s grieving family.

As secretary of state, Clinton admitted that she was “often the designated yeller” in the administration’s many confrontations with Benjamin Netanyahu. She especially earned that title in 2010, when she berated Israel’s prime minister for 45 minutes, accusing him of “humiliating the United States of America” after a Jerusalem municipal official announced tenders to expand a Jerusalem residential neighborhood in “occupied territory”

63 Fisher, Max, “Here is Clinton and Sanders’s remarkable exchange on Israel-Palestine – and why it matters,” *Vox*, April 15, 2016. <http://www.vox.com/2016/4/15/11437602/clinton-sanders-israel-palestine-debate>

during Vice President Biden's visit to Israel. Subsequently, Secretary Clinton accused Israel of "lacking empathy for oppressed Palestinians." After leaving the State Department, she supported the deal with Iran that lifted the sanctions she helped impose while in office, in exchange for Iran's dismantling much of its nuclear capability for a period of 10 to 15 years.

The Sanders-Clinton clash in the Democratic primaries mapped out the contours of the Israel debate among mainstream Democrats in 2016. Sanders belongs to the Tough Love faction: pro-Israel in theory but fed up with "Netanyahu's Israel" in fact. These Blame Israel Firsters don't want to see the Jewish state destroyed but also don't want to see how their one-sided finger-pointing threatens the Jewish state. Taking a tough-love approach, they allege Israel is too quick to attack and too slow to make peace. They emphasize, as Sanders does, the destruction in Gaza, overlooking what triggered it – both immediate causes like Kassam rockets and the ultimate cause, Palestinian rejectionism, incitement, and terrorism.

Still, although some of Sanders' supporters were "anti-Israel," and the appointment of a pro-boycott activist like Prof. Cornell West to the Democratic platform committee was a hostile act, Sanders is not "anti-Israel." With so many people worldwide happily embracing the phrase, sophisticated supporters of Israel understand how inapplicable that label is to Sanders, let alone Barack Obama – and how foolish it is to recruit others for that cause by unnecessarily labeling them as such.

Obama talked the pro-Israel talk: "It would be a moral failing on my part if we did not stand up firmly, steadfastly not just on behalf of Israel's right to exist, but its right to thrive and prosper." He walked the walk, providing more than \$20.5 billion in military assistance to Israel while defending Israel most of the time in most international forums. Like Bill Clinton, Obama was so culturally comfortable with Jewish liberalism and so friendly with Jews that he challenged Prime Minister Netanyahu about what being "pro-Israel" means and what are the defining Jewish values. Echoing earlier remarks that he was pro-Israel but not pro-Likud, Obama justified his "tough love" on settlements and Iran, insisting that "to paper over difficult questions, particularly about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" is "not a true measure of friendship."<sup>64</sup>

More boldly, in 2015, speaking at Adas Israel, the Washington synagogue dedicated by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1876 – the first time a sitting president had attended a synagogue service – Obama declared himself "an honorary member of the tribe" and equated Judaism with liberalism. As "a community, American Jews have helped make our union more perfect." Obama said. "The story of Exodus inspired oppressed people around the world in their own struggles for civil rights. From the founding members of the NAACP to a freedom summer in Mississippi, from women's rights to gay rights to workers' rights, Jews took the heart of Biblical edict that we must not oppress a stranger, having been strangers once ourselves." Chemi Shalev of the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* wryly noted that the President of the United States "made no mention of the Israeli prime minister, but his essential message to American Jews was nonetheless stark: I represent your core values far better than the elected leader of Israel."<sup>65</sup>

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64 Obama, Barack, H., "Remarks by the President on Jewish American Heritage Month, at Adas Israel Congregation Washington, D.C.," May 22, 2015.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/22/remarks-president-jewish-american-heritage-month>

65 Shalev, Chemi, "Obama's Message: I Represent American Jewish Values Better Than Netanyahu," *Haaretz*, May 22, 2015. <http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/west-of-eden/.premium-1.657776>

By contrast, Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail has been embracing her husband's approach, which understands that Israelis respond better to love love than to tough love. Most Democrats envision the same two-state solution, following the (Bill) Clinton parameters, replicating the 1967 borders, with some land swaps. But these Two-Staters acknowledge that while Israel may err occasionally, the Palestinians have behaved abominably. Rather than being blindly "even handed" – which often means bashing Israel and excusing the Palestinians – they make moral distinctions. They respect Palestinians enough to hold them responsible for repeatedly sabotaging the chances for peace, especially while the Oslo process endured. Ultimately, the fight over Israel is a fight about foreign policy and America's role in the world. Anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism are overlapping phenomena. Despite Sanders' impressive string of Jewish "firsts" in campaigning, most polls indicated that Clinton won about two-thirds of the Jewish vote.

## Republicans Compete to Show How Much they Love Israel

The dynamic on the Republican side was different, with most candidates scrambling to prove just how pro-Israel, pro-Netanyahu, and anti-terrorism they could be. During one debate, the conservative commentator Ann Coulter tweeted: "How many f-ing Jews do these people think there are in the United States?" Coulter missed how important Israel's defense and the symbolism of standing with Israel had become to many Republican voters, especially Evangelical Christians, not just Jews.

Donald Trump, however, struck a slightly different note. On the one hand, this New York real-estate developer with many Jewish colleagues and rivals, with a Jewish son-in-law and a daughter who converted, emphasized that, quite literally, some of his best friends were Jewish. He enjoyed an intimacy with Jews in the business world that paralleled Obama's and the Clintons' intimacy with Jews in progressive and political circles. This comfort is what led him to joke publicly with the Republican Jewish Coalition audience about Jews being "good negotiators."

Lacking any political or foreign policy experience, Trump was reduced to proving his pro-Israel bona fides by boasting about his grand marshalship of the Israel Day parade and his friendship with Netanyahu. He also had no problem bashing Obama's churlishness towards Israel, raising the conundrum that was so bedeviling many Republicans: "The thing I don't understand is," Trump said, "in my opinion, Barack Obama has been tremendously disloyal to Israel. Tremendously. And yet my Jewish friends go out and have fundraisers for him."<sup>66</sup>

Trump's question was being answered not only by Jews but by Republican voters too. Surveys showed the continuing Jewish loyalty to liberal values and the Democratic Party. Surveys also showed that in 2012 only ten percent of Jewish voters put Israel as the first or second most important issue, while 32 percent prioritized health care. For those who cared about the Jewish state intensely, Israel was a compelling issue, but they remained a minority.

On the other hand, the Reagan Revolution in the Republican Party continued to make that party more "goyish." Evangelical Christians' support for the Republican Party jumped from 50 percent in 1982 to two-thirds in 1992 and nearly 80 percent in 2012. The Tea Party rebellion recruited Evangelicals and advanced a Christian agenda; 57 percent of Republicans favor establishing Christianity as America's religion and many of them

<sup>66</sup> Heilman, Uriel, "Trump Meets With Orthodox Jews and Reveals His Israel Advisers - His Jewish Lawyers," *Haaretz*, April 16, 2016. <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/u-s-election-2016/1.714675>

equate Christianity and Americanism.<sup>67</sup> Despite their support for Israel, Evangelical Christians are the most powerful negative reference group for Jews, with a domestic agenda seen as antithetical to Jewish concerns; many of them perceived as anti-Semites.

Jews in modern America, three and four generations away from the mass immigration, remain insecure. At an AIPAC meeting in November 2005, Republican National chairman Ken Mehlman touted the Republicans' strong stand against terrorism as reassuring to Israel and American Jews. His Democratic counterpart, (and fellow Jew) Howard Dean, won the day by saying that the Democrats "believe that Jews should feel comfortable in being American Jews without being constrained from practicing their faith or be[ing] compelled to convert to another religion." (Lichbach & Uslaner, 2009, p.1). This reassurance resonated even in his overwhelmingly non-religious audience of Jews. The legacy of oppression runs deep; it rarely runs away.

Trump's egotistical comments that he is the kind of honest broker who could impose "a deal" on the Israelis and Palestinians unnerved Israelis until he reassured them of his enthusiastic support. His two key Middle East aides were two of his Jewish lawyers, adding to the strangeness of it all. At the same time, his aggressive denunciation of terrorism and his sweeping calls to limit Muslim immigration until the United States could control its borders thrilled the most extreme right-wing Jews.

Those comments, in addition to many others, triggered a broader cultural and political distaste within the liberal Jewish community. Long before he tweeted out a hastily recycled attack on Hillary Clinton's supposed corruption, using a six-pointed star against a background of money, Trump's many Jewish detractors were convinced he was a closet anti-Semite stirring up the uncloseted ones. Most disturbing, some of his supporters in the blogosphere resorted to the crassest, ugliest anti-Semitic images and epithets to "flame" journalists and others with obvious Jewish last names who dared to criticize "The Donald," or his wife. Ironically, during the Republican primary fight, Sen. Ted Cruz had attacked Trump's "New York values," although Trump's values were not in line with those of most New Yorkers – or Jews, who, many believed, were the real target of Cruz's attack. As much as Trump's running mate, Gov. Mike Pence of Indiana, reassured Evangelicals, Pence alienated most American Jews. With all the tumult, Hillary Clinton began the fall enjoying a commanding lead among Jewish voters, and the post-Reagan Jewish cultural consensus for Democratic candidates held.

For both parties, the Jewish financial vote remained disproportionately important. One *Washington Post* analysis estimated that nearly half the Super PAC money of the 2016 primary season – \$249 million of \$607 million – came from 50 donors. J. J. Goldberg of *The Forward* then estimated that 20 of the 50 mega-donors were Jewish: 9 of the 36 Republicans and at least 11 of the 14 Jews. These figures predated the entry of Sheldon Adelson into the funding game, after the Las Vegas casino mogul and Republican benefactor, who set records in political gift-giving in 2012, sat out the confusing and surprising early rounds of 2016.

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67 "Walker takes the lead in GOP Race." Public Policy Polling, Raleigh, NC. February 24, 2015. [http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/PPP\\_Release\\_National\\_22415.pdf](http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/pdf/2015/PPP_Release_National_22415.pdf)

## The post-Covenantal American Jewish Community: What ties do bind?

The late Daniel Elazar taught that the Jews are a covenantal people, and that some see the covenant as forged through kinship, and others through consent. The notion of covenant emphasized creating “a partnership based on a morally grounded pact,” with elements of “negotiation and bargaining,” a back and forth. The kinship tie is the ethnic, the national, the historical, the tribal, the “sense of common ancestry.” The covenant through consent emphasizes the association’s voluntary nature. Elazar explained that beyond “family ties” there is “the personal commitment to being Jewish, to continuing the Jewish heritage as a Jew’s best expression of human values and pursuing a Jewish vision” (Elazar, 1981).

In Israel, the kinship covenant is strong. The intermarriage rate among Israeli Jews is even lower than that in Ultra-orthodox neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Israeli Jews sometimes take their Jewish identities for granted, but most feel connected and engaged in some way, which makes sense, given that they live in the Jewish state, follow the Jewish calendar, traverse Jewish space, and speak the Jewish national language, Hebrew.

Since the 1960s, the American Jewish community has been emphasizing the kinship ties less and less while valuing the consent dimension so much so that it no longer feels covenantal but conditional. More and more American Jews are what Arnie Eisen and Steven M. Cohen called “sovereign Jews” (Cohen & Eisen, 2000). They are the captains of their own particular Jewish voyage, the royals in a mostly solitary kingdom, deciding how they but no other subjects will behave. They don’t want to feel defined by kinship and obligation and instead emphasize consent and convenience. When and if their Jewish identities work for them, they do as much or as little as they wish, making themselves the arbiters. They feel less bound to tradition, authority, or community.

More and more American Jews don’t define themselves as Orthodox or Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist; they are “just Jewish.” These “none of the aboves” are individualistic, idiosyncratic, and highly independent. This shift is reflected most dramatically in non-Orthodox intermarriage rates that reach 70 percent in many places. The most effective Jewish identity intervention in response to this is named “Birthright,” emphasizing kinship; but its educational message is all about consent, about “your own Jewish journey,” promising wary Millennials that the generous gift of a free Israel trip comes with “no strings attached.”

With this shift in Jewish identity, liberalism has become more central to American Jewish identity, while American Jewish liberalism has become all about choice. In a joint interview, comedian Sarah Silverman and Rabbi Susan Silverman sisters raised in an assimilated household, were asked: “How did you discover you were Jewish?” Rabbi Susan – who now lives in Jerusalem -- answered: “I thought being Jewish was being a Democrat.”<sup>68</sup> According to the Pew Study, 69 percent of American Jews said “leading an ethical/moral life” was “an essential part of what being Jewish means to me”; another 54 percent said it was “working for justice/equality.” Only 15 percent said being Jewish was “mainly a matter of religion,” while 62 percent said it was “mainly a matter of ancestry and culture.”<sup>69</sup>

68 Seligson, Susan, “Sarah Silverman, Rabbi Sister Riff on “Jewy-ness”,” Boston University, <http://www.bu.edu/bostonia/web/silverman/>

69 “A Portrait of Jewish Americans,” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013. <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>

Majoritarian American Jewish politics defines Judaism, and not only American Judaism, and liberalism, and not only American Jewish liberalism, as being all about freedom, all about liberation, all about choice. For example, while the “pro-life” forces frame their discourse around the obligation to the unborn fetus, Jewish pro-choicers emphasize restrictions on abortion as an assault on a woman’s freedom, autonomy, and selfhood. Candidates who will expand the zone of individual freedom, of liberation, of choice, of selfhood and self-expression, will win Jewish votes, even if they are cooler to Israel than this pro-Israel majority would prefer. It is not a question of not liking Israel. But what they like more is their independence. Living 6000 miles away from the Middle East, they fear restrictions more than terrorism; they fear Republican, Evangelical, Tea Party assaults on their personhood more than they fear Palestinian attacks on their personal safety. The comedian in 2000 was not far off the mark: in the voting booth, Jews dread a Pat Buchanan more than a Yasser Arafat.

This phenomenon is rooted in earlier understandings and expressions of American Jewish identity, but it is unique and uniquely potent. It is the key to understanding most modern Jews, and to understanding the huge gap between the overwhelming majority that has gone beyond kinship and beyond covenant and now rate consent above all, and those who have not. These open-spirits express their openness when they marry, whether at the altar or under the canopy (or both), and also in the voting booth. They pride themselves on their tolerance of all but the intolerant; the only constraint they feel comfortable putting on others is “don’t constrain me.”

In his 2007 work, *The Boundaries of Judaism*, Rabbi Donniel Hartman examines the paradox of modern Jewish identity. “Judaism at its core is a collective enterprise, a religion invested in a people,” he writes (Hartman, 2007, p.1). But with the explosion of alternatives and the worship of choice, modern Judaism risks creating “a community without boundaries,” which “is a sociological anomaly.” Social identity is, by definition, always exclusionary. At the foundation of every social structure ... must lie some distinguishable characteristic or boundary by virtue of which its members can choose to belong to ‘this’ as distinct from ‘that’ social structure.” (Hartman, 2007, p.5). Hartman recognizes that modern Jews today “need our own answers to the question of what gives form and meaning to our collective enterprise,” which entails developing “an approach to boundaries that allow for a common ground in which all can participate despite our differences” (Hartman, 2007, p.10). For the overwhelming majority of American Jews, their deep-seated aversion to authority and boundaries and their political liberalism that is hostile to restrictions and celebrates individual expression form the basis of their Jewish identity. They are, in some ways, bonded by their allergy to traditional boundaries.

As a result, this new generation of American Jews is expressing its own unique identity. There is a Jewish vote – a solid, stable, liberal Democratic majority, usually in the 70-percent range in presidential elections. It rarely affects the national outcome but it does reflect the American Jewish mentality. In so many ways, the liberal Democratic Jews who constitute the Jewish vote are living and expressing the new Jewish consensus: ultimately, they are more pro-choice than pro-Israel, but they are pro-Israel nevertheless.

## Acknowledgments

A good friend of mine in Montreal, the late Arnie Isaacson, used to quiz non-Jews he met by asking them, “how many Jews are there in the world.” The answers he received usually started with 50 million or 100 million and escalated from there. The disproportionate perceptions of Jewish population size make sense because of the disproportionate amount of time and energy most Westerners, and especially most Americans, spend talking and wondering about the Jews.

This analysis of the Jewish vote ultimately rests on what we can think of as The Isaacson Principle: If the Copernican Principle taught that the Sun, not the Earth, is at the center of the Universe – and neither are -- the Isaacson Disproportion Principle teaches Jews and non-Jews that Jews are not at the center of the universe either. Applying the Isaacson Principle to American politics teaches that Jews are not as influential in presidential politics as most people think – and that the story of the Jewish vote is most illuminating as a story of American Jewish identity.

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Despite all this remarkable support, I take full responsibility for whatever mistakes might remain. I also take full responsibility for any opinions ventured, analyses offered, biases revealed. All this assistance came with no strings attached, no partisan pressure, simply a general request granting me full academic freedom to write a paper explaining the phenomenon of the American Jewish Vote in ways an Israeli audience might understand and find interesting. During a time of growing insanity in the American presidential campaign, I hope the discussions that ensue from this paper inject a little bit of sanity, a little bit of perspective, into an oft-misunderstood and misrepresented issue.

**Professor Gil Troy**

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