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## DISSERTATION

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Adjusting to Change: The Jewish Community Center Movement in Postwar Urban America, 1945-1980  
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Presented by \_\_\_\_\_  
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Adjusting to Change:  
The Jewish Community Center Movement in Postwar Urban America, 1945-1980

by

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the College of the Marianna Brown Dietrich College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences of Carnegie Mellon University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## **Abstract**

In the decades following World War II, urban American JCCs became more committed to promoting and fostering their members' Jewish identity and, at the same time, opened up their spaces and their programs to Americans of all religions and races; they simultaneously became more particularistic and more universalistic. This bifurcation, I will show, resulted from pragmatic needs as much as from ideological principles. Structural changes like postwar deindustrialization and suburbanization caused urban depopulation, shrinking urban JCC's membership rolls and constraining their access to financial resources. Considerations about equal access and equal opportunity spurred by the Black Freedom Movement raised functional questions about the differences between being a member of an organization and being a participant in its programs. The economic and political instability of the 1970s, including the riots and financial collapse of large cities that characterized the urban crisis, had the combined effect of reducing JCC revenue and creating new federal antipoverty programs that JCCs could use to fund new services—thought it meant that the services, if not the agencies, had to implement non-sectarian enrollment procedures. In responding to all of these structural, functional, and financial changes, the JCC movement gradually opened up their agencies to non-Jews and, correspondingly, intensified their commitment to Jewish particularism.

## Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements are the one place where brevity is not a virtue, and I will take this opportunity to verbosely, extensively, excessively, profusely, and profoundly thank my family, friends, and the teachers (broadly interpreted) who have given generously of their time and knowledge.

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throughout my training, and it has been a pleasure to have Michal Friedman and Adam Shear at the University of Pittsburgh as local Jewish Studies colleagues. And without Natalie Taylor, Sue Cale, Gail Took, Tim Ruff, Jesse Wilson, Amy Hallas Wells, and Hikari Aday—the brains and brawn behind the History Department—I would have done far less research and conferencing, graded many more papers, and met with far fewer visiting scholars.

The success of any work of scholarship depends as much on librarians and archivists as it does on the researcher. Sue Collins at Carnegie Mellon University Libraries bought me books whenever I asked, and even found me books I didn't know to ask for. At the Center for Jewish History, Melanie Meyers and Zachary Loeb not only pulled box after box after box, they also shared in the joys and bewilderment of archival research. Susan Woodland has not only been a fantastic and helpful archivist, but also a generous colleague and an exemplar of how to practice engaging public history using primary source materials. At the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, I thank Dr. Gary Zola, Kevin Proffitt, Joe Weber, and Dana Herman for not only sponsoring my research but also being excellent colleagues. Shari Rabin, Dale Rosengarten, and Alyssa Neely at the College of Charleston's Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program and Jewish Heritage Collection warmly welcomed me to the city and introduced me to the complexity and nuances of researching the race relations of southern Jewry. I must also thank the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University, the American Academy for Jewish Research, and the Dietrich Presidential Fellowship program at Carnegie Mellon University for providing essential support to conduct this research.

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It's hard to remember that "before" period of my life, when I was writing a dissertation without my writing group. Max Baumgarten, Britt Tevis, Barry Goldberg, Ayelet Brinn, and Geraldine Gudefin, this dissertation is yours almost as much as it is mine—I carry your voices with me as I write.

I feel immensely fortunate to have had a committee that has pushed me to grow without my ever feeling their hands on my back. From the very beginning, Caroline Acker encouraged my interest in how local civic spaces affect the wellness of individuals and societies and pushed me to see how ideologies and intersecting identities, not just the built environment, contributed to the material and psychological wellness of a community. Moreover, Caroline has been a model of scholarly activism, stellar copyediting, and how to live a good life. Joe Trotter's calm but firm instruction always came at just the right moment; when I find myself lost in the proverbial woods of scholarship I follow his example, using a solid historiographical essay to find my way back to the path. Rachel Kranson arrived in Pittsburgh at the same moment that I found this project and provided me with the scholarly guidance I needed in order to pursue it. With her support over the past four years, I went from knowing nothing about Jewish history to becoming an expert in the history of postwar American Jewry—a testament to her incredible teaching and mentorship.

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this dissertation by her side. Kevin Brown always has an answer to my questions, and I treasure his keen editorial eye almost as much as his steadfastness. Amund Tallaksen and Drew Simpson, my academic big brothers, and Kaaz Naqvi, Andrew Ramey, Jay Roszman, Rachel Oppenheimer, Allissa Bellotti and Jonathan Stepp have all been there with a beer (or Diet Coke and Doritos) many times over the past six years, and have provided essential perspectives, badly needed reality checks, and a healthy escape from the stress of grad school. Navah Kogen's knowledge about Jews and Judaism was essential to this dissertation, her friendship has meant much more to me throughout the years. Ben Crouse has wiped the residue of academia from my eyes, allowing me to see the world clearly and with compassion.

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an academic. Maya and Eytan were my first students, which they still resent to this day, but from the experience I learned that you cannot force people to learn. I received so much support as well throughout the years from Neil and Joan Barkin, Karen and Tom Thibodeau, and my wonderful cousins and their children. Pinchas Oren and Hadassah Golan, Gil and Irit Oren, Nir and Maya Oren, and all of my cousins have been the best cheerleaders. Jeff, Judi, and Laura Seal are the third branch of my lineage. Their knowledge, values, and stories have shaped me just as much as my genes. This extends as well to Murray Seal, Ken Seal and Sarah Woods, Sharon Keys Seal and Jim Turoff, and Carey, Travis, and Jen Seal. And I also must thank the members of my family who are not related to me, but who have always been there for me like family: Richard Scher, Aida Hozic, and Becky Micha.

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**Table of Acronyms**

FJP	Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York
FDC	Federation Distribution Committee of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York
JCC	Jewish Community Center
JCD	Jewish Center Division of the Jewish Welfare Board
JWB	Jewish Welfare Board
JTA	Jewish Telegraphic Agency
NAJCW	National Association of Jewish Center Workers
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YMHA	Young Men's Hebrew Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association
YWHA	Young Women's Hebrew Association

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## Introduction

The lights went down in the auditorium of the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association (YM-YWHA) of Washington Heights and Inwood, a Jewish Community Center (JCC) in the northernmost neighborhoods of Manhattan, on a spring evening in 2010. A rustling of anticipation arose from the room, which was packed with community members there to see the premier of an experimental musical. Twenty teenagers walked out onto the stage and began to tell the story of 800 Jews saved from the Holocaust by the dictator of the Dominican Republic, General Rafael Trujillo, and resettled in the seaside farming village of Sosúa as part of a scheme to whiten the island's population. Ten Jewish teenagers and ten teenagers whose families had immigrated to New York from the Dominican Republic traded roles, with some Dominican teens playing the Holocaust refugees and some Jews playing residents of Sosúa.

Alex Cigale, a resident of Washington Heights and a Soviet Jewish refugee, attended the performance. In his laudatory review, Cigale wrote that, "Having myself come to the states at age 11, I was particularly touched by 'Stay.' The Spanish-speaking kids separate from the Jewish, Anglo kids and circle them, intoning something mysterious (or is it menacing) and then, once the song is repeated in English, the work and pleasure of learning from each other's cultures begins."<sup>1</sup> The words the Dominican characters sang, in a Caribbean rhythm, were:

Who are these people?  
Where are they coming from, how did they get here?  
What do they want of us?  
Are they running from trouble, look how poor and sad they are. They have come  
from                      very far.  
Should we help them or leave them alone? What if we were in the same boat?

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Cigale, "The Sosua Story," n.d. From the personal papers of Steve Offerman. In possession of the author.

Would we want to be in the same place, total strangers not knowing our fate? Then, singing to "reach out and give a little welcome," the Dominicans encircled the Jewish refugees and paired off, beginning a partnered dance.

The double meaning of these lyrics reflected the intention of "Sosúa: Dare to Dance Together." The musical presented an opportunity to bring together the Dominican and Jewish communities that lived in the vicinity of the YM-YWHA.<sup>2</sup> Whereas once Jews fled an oppressive regime, arriving in a new country poor and not speaking the language, Dominicans began migrating to the United States in the 1960s in search of economic opportunities and, for some, to escape political oppression.<sup>3</sup> The vast majority settled in New York City, in the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood, where three decades earlier a large population of German Jewish refugees from the Holocaust had put down roots.<sup>4</sup> Jews and Dominicans in Washington Heights lived amicably, but separately, in northern Manhattan.

Despite the cast members' geographic proximity to each other, most only knew and socialized with friends within their own communities. When asked why, many of the teens reflected a frank awareness of their alienation from the other group. "No matter how much people try to open up to different races and religions and cultures and colors," Naomi Neshet told an interviewer, "there's always going to be some sort of sense of familiarity with the people who are like you."<sup>5</sup> Her cast mate Hannah Krutiansky likewise

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Herschthal, "Building a Cultural Bridge in Washington Heights: Jewish and Dominican Teens Forming Bonds over the Sosúa Story," *The New York Jewish Week*, January 24, 2012, <http://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/building-a-cultural-bridge-in-washington-heights/>.

<sup>3</sup> Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Patricia R. Pessar, *A Visa for a Dream: Dominicans in the United States*, New Immigrant Series (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Steven M Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933-1983, Its Structure and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Miller, and Renee Silverman. *Sosúa: Make a Better World*. Willow Islands Film, 2012.

articulated that "So many times, people only perceive the differences." The story of Sosúa, however, provided the cast with a shared history, a point of contact where they could begin exploring what Dominicans and Jews had in common. "What most shocked me," said Krutiansky, "was that Trujillo, who took in the Jews, was just as bad as Hitler and did the same things to Haitians that was done to Jews." The lesson she took from the theater project was "that every culture has things in common with each other. ... There should be more mixing between Dominicans and Jews—because there's so much that can happen when we come together."<sup>6</sup> Jordan Hoepelman, who realized during his participation in the musical that his Dominican father was the son of German Jews, shared a similar sentiment: "Now I know more about how the Jewish people suffered, and how the Dominicans saved them. It's been the greatest project I've ever done. I'm learning new things, making great friends, and working with a great director."<sup>7</sup>

The questions in the fifth line of "Stay," "Should we help them or leave them alone? What if we were in the same boat?," also mirrored how the Washington Heights and Inwood Y approached its relationship with its surrounding communities. In the nearly 100 years between the Y's founding in 1917 and the premier of "Sosúa," the agency's emphasis had shifted from *Jewish Community Center* to *Jewish Community Center*. How did it come about that a JCC decided to "reach out a give a little welcome" to its non-Jewish, Dominican neighbors?

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<sup>6</sup> "Musical Theater Connects Dominicans and Jews," *UJA-Federation Stories*, March 11, 2010, <http://www.ujafedny.org/news/musical-theater-connects-dominicans-and-jews/>.

<sup>7</sup> Miriam Rinn, "Sosua," *Jewish Standard*, December 20, 2013, <http://jewishstandard.timesofisrael.com/sosua/>.

*Adjusting to Change* examines the postwar history of JCCs in the United States to demonstrate how these agencies at once sustained an identifiably Jewish mission while many JCCs also came to have a large contingent of non-Jews amongst their membership by the end of the twentieth century. This national study analyzes the decisions that local urban JCCs from New York to New Orleans made in response to the policy recommendations of the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB)—the umbrella organization that offered guidance to JCCs in the United States and Canada. Mining the organizational records of the JWB, *Adjusting to Change* traces how the JCC movement adapted to the shifts in how Jews viewed themselves and their relationship to American society between 1945 and 1980.

In the decades following World War II, urban American JCCs became more committed to promoting and fostering their members' Jewish identity and, at the same time, opened up their spaces and their programs to Americans of all religions and races; they simultaneously became more particularistic and more universalistic. This bifurcation, I will show, resulted from pragmatic needs as much as from ideological principles. Structural changes like postwar deindustrialization and suburbanization caused urban de-population, shrinking urban JCC's membership rolls and constraining their access to financial resources. Considerations about equal access and equal opportunity spurred by the Black Freedom Movement raised functional questions about the differences between being a member of an organization and being a participant in its programs. The economic and political instability of the 1970s, including the riots and financial collapse of large cities that characterized the urban crisis, had the combined effect of reducing JCC revenue and creating new federal antipoverty programs that JCCs

could use to fund new services—thought it meant that the services, if not the agencies, had to implement non-sectarian enrollment procedures. In responding to all of these structural, functional, and financial changes, the JCC movement gradually opened up their agencies to non-Jews and, correspondingly, intensified their commitment to Jewish particularism.

This study pivots between the JCC movement and local JCCs. Studying professional organizations like the Jewish Welfare Board and the National Association of Jewish Center Workers (NAJCW) reveals broader trends in American Jewish communal life, while examining the actions and attitudes of an individual agency's Jewish Center workers, Board of Directors, and membership demonstrates how local contingencies determined whether a community adopted or rejected national trends. Furthermore, JCC staff, lay leaders, and members represent a "Jewish grassroots," a wide range of Jews of varying political, class, and religious stripes. This grassroots perspective captures the reactions of families, professionals, and older adults to major changes in postwar American life, from the formation of the State of Israel to the daily, domestic experience of race relations. In this way, studying the JCC and the JCC movement provides a new prism into the study of postwar American Jewish identity, democratic pluralism, and the evolution of Jewish communal life.

JCCs were pluralistic institutions from their origination. I use pluralism in two ways throughout this dissertation. When speaking about American democratic pluralism, I refer to the ideal in the United States of including all minority groups in the body politic without demanding that they relinquish their independent cultures and identities. When



speaking solely about the Jewish community and intra-Jewish relations, my use of pluralism reflects an institution or perspective that welcomed all Jews regardless of their affiliation with a religious movement—such as Reform, Conservative, Orthodox—or their lack of affiliation or their secularism. The American Jewish communities that began establishing local Young Men's Hebrew Associations (YMHAs) in the late nineteenth century intended for the organization to serve a religiously unifying purpose, bringing together all of the area's Jews under one roof, regardless of the synagogue (Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox) to which their members belonged. As such the YMHA in the early twentieth century was almost exclusively Jewish in membership.<sup>8</sup>

The JCC model evolved from the roots of the YMHA and another institutional model, the synagogue-center. The synagogue (or *shul* in Yiddish) is the space where Jews gather to pray and participate in religious rituals, often with a rabbi's leadership. In the 1920s, attempts by rabbis, educators, and social workers to keep an increasingly Americanized population of Jews active in the Jewish community gave rise to the synagogue-center hybrid.<sup>9</sup> Any Jew could come to the synagogue-center and participate in religious services, utilize welfare services, gain a Jewish education, and socialize with other Jews all under one roof.<sup>10</sup> The Jewish Community Center originated in the split of this institutional hybrid. Despite the apparent benefits and convenience of the model, by the late 1930s rabbis and members began criticizing the formerly popular "shul with a

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<sup>8</sup> David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), chap. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Historically, the majority of JCC members have either been secular and unaffiliated, or have affiliated with Reform or Conservative Judaism; Orthodox Jews often felt the JCC was too assimilationist. Orthodox Jews follow traditional interpretations of Jewish law, or *halakha*. Conservative Jews also follows the *halakha*, but takes a more flexible interpretation. Most notably, the Conservative movement is egalitarian and both men and women participate in prayer and rituals. The Reform movement differs in that it does not consider *halakha* to be a binding set of laws; instead Reform Jews stress the importance of Jewish ethics.

<sup>10</sup> Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, chap. 7; Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), chap. 5.

pool." Rabbis especially became frustrated with how the social and recreational activities of the "center" half of the institution had a secularizing effect on the synagogue half.

The social-religious synthesis proved difficult to accomplish within a single organization, and by the late 1930s most new or expanding communities decided it was easier to maintain two separate spheres, each committed to the promotion of either a religious or "civil" Judaism. The hybrid dissolved and synagogues returned to primarily hosting worship, while Jewish social workers established Jewish Community Centers. JCCs proudly proclaimed themselves the pluralistic and unifying institution of their local Jewish community.<sup>11</sup> By focusing more on Jewish culture than on Judaism, the JCC invited Jews to come together socially regardless of synagogue affiliation or secularism. Jewish culture was a slippery concept that Jewish Center workers rarely defined—finding its generality useful when they were asked to justify how a program contributed to members' sense of Jewishness—but it encompassed a range of activities, from educational lectures and forums on the state of Israel to performances of Yiddish and Hebrew theatre, music, and dance. The JCC movement especially welcomed Jews that did not practice Judaism or belong to a congregation, believing that these secular members would become estranged from the Jewish community if the JCC did not exist to provide them with a non-religious way to affiliate.

In 1945, there were more than 300 Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States and Canada. Regardless of whether they called themselves a JCC or a YMHA, all of the agencies shared a mission to serve the social and recreational needs of all Jews within their communities, but no singular model existed for how a JCC should function, what programs it should offer, what facilities it should provide, or what policies

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<sup>11</sup> Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, chap. Epilogue.

it should uphold. Membership policy, for example, differed from agency to agency. While some strictly excluded non-Jews, many others included non-Jews within their umbrella of pluralism, allowing them to use their facilities, participate in some or all of their programs, or even join as full members. All of these decisions were contingent on the local needs, resources, population, and communal politics of each agency and its membership. These JCCs were autonomous agencies predominantly located in densely Jewish city neighborhoods, but they joined together as a movement by affiliating with the JWB.

Each JCC independently defined what role the JCC should play in its community and what programs it should offer. As a result, by the 1940s an immense, diverse, and contradictory Jewish Community Center movement had developed. In 1945, the JWB undertook a national survey of its internal organization and of its 301 affiliate members, with the goal of establishing a purpose around which the disorganized JCC movement could unify. Historian Oscar I. Janowsky was hired to conduct the JWB Survey, and in 1947 he recommended that the JWB adopt a Statement of Principles that said the JCC's purpose was to promote Jewish group identity by incorporating Jewish content into all of its programs. Many JWB leaders and Jewish Center workers disagreed with this emphasis on particularism because it seemed un-democratic. World War II and the fight against totalitarianism had encouraged Americans to embrace unity and patriotism, not division and ethnic nationalism.

World War II also changed American Jews' relationship with mainstream American society. Many Jews served in the military, and the close contact with non-Jews bred familiarity and created opportunities for Jews to expand economically, politically,

and geographically after the war.<sup>12</sup> The white Protestant American majority increasingly accepted Jews as white and as part of a shared Judeo-Christian tradition. Whereas before World War II, Protestant Americans had used restrictive covenants to ban Jews from the suburbs because they perceived Jews as not quite white, religiously very different, and "radical" members of the working class, Jews moved to the suburbs in greater numbers than any other ethnic group in the 1950s, as young Jewish men (and a few women) graduated college, entered white-collar professions, and attained the middle-class incomes to afford the new homes and cars that marked a suburban lifestyle.<sup>13</sup>

Jewish Center workers billed themselves as the professional experts that Jews needed to help individuals and communities balance their Jewish and American identity. Most Jewish Center workers had training in social work, and they claimed two distinct expertise that qualified them, and only them, to govern over the social functions of Jewish communal life. These two expertise were their mastery of group work technique—a social work methodology also used by their Protestant colleagues at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)—and their command of Jewish history and culture. Group work aimed for the "Jewish adjustment" of JCC members, the practice of fostering Jewish identity and assuring Jewish preservation without compromising American democratic identity. In the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists argued that to be American meant to belong to a group, and so Jewish Center workers facilitated small group activities with their young members

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 282.

with the goal of fostering individuals' Jewish identity.<sup>14</sup> They organized children into clubs so they learned how to collaborate and democratically make decisions, and they encouraged these clubs to organize Jewish activities like Israeli dancing or hosting a party for Hannukah. Group work and Jewish adjustment ideally prevented assimilation and contributed to the survival of American Jewry, but Jewish Center workers sociologically universalized Jewish distinctiveness through the practice of group work. In the decade after World War II, members encountered a functional form of Jewish identity in the JCC—an understanding of Jewishness as an "ethnic group" representing America's pluralism and tolerance.

Jewish Center workers' combination of social work and Jewish expertise, however, meant that social workers, rabbis, and Jewish educators perceived Jewish Center workers as outsiders rather than colleagues. To professional social workers they seemed insufficiently non-sectarian and universalistic, while co-religionists viewed them as in competition with synagogues for the attention of Jews. In the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish Center workers fended off accusations by rabbis and synagogues that they were not sufficiently sectarian because they privileged cultural Jewishness over the religious practice of Judaism. To preserve their professional authority and autonomy, then, Jewish Center workers would go to great lengths to defend the value that they (and the JCC) brought to Jewish communal life as well as to the social welfare of the community at large. By the mid-1960s, the pressure of the rabbinate and the rising acceptance of Jewish distinctiveness meant that there was more professional authority to be conferred on those who could contribute to Jewish preservation, not merely provide social and recreational

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<sup>14</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 94–95.

services to a Jewish membership. The JCC movement decided it needed to balance its group work activities with religious programming— if not religious observances, at least programs that viewed religious principles and the values of Judaism as an inherent part of Jewish identity.

If the JCC was intended to preserve American Jewry and American Jewish identity, would it have to exclude non-Jews from membership? This question became especially salient during the 1960s, as African American activists in the Modern Black Freedom Struggle fought against discrimination in public accommodations and civic institutions. Jewish Center workers, lay leaders, and members of JCCs in both northern and southern cities debated whether their agencies could exclude non-Jews without compromising Jews' deeply held belief that minorities deserved equal opportunity in American life. Buried in this debate was the question of whether racially integrating the JCC would affect Jews' position in the social hierarchies of their community and their white skin privilege.

The rise of the multicultural city also began in the 1960s, and white America's share of urban populations began to decline.<sup>15</sup> Black migrants from the American south and Latino migrants from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Mexico began moving into the apartments and homes vacated by the upwardly mobile white families who departed cities for newly constructed suburbs.<sup>16</sup> The Jews that remained behind increasingly found that they no longer lived in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. While residential segregation remained persistent, the areas that were majority white or

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<sup>15</sup> For an explanation of the multicultural city, see footnote 26 in this introduction.

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Jewish contracted as black and Hispanic areas expanded. Shared communal spaces like local public schools, recreation centers, parks, and organizations became sites of contention over which constituencies should have access, power, and control over resources. JCCs managed a precious urban resource—safe, supervised recreational space—and faced pressure from constituencies within and outside the Jewish community for the right to use it.

Ironically, as non-Jews made claims on Jewish space, JCCs began fighting to retain Jews' interest and investment. JCCs members had no obligation to devote their time and money to supporting the agency, and many chose to spend their leisure time elsewhere. JCC stakeholders increasingly had to convince Jews that the JCC provided them with something valuable and unique—a non-religious Jewish space—that they could not get elsewhere in the Jewish community or from a non-sectarian institution. Agencies had to decide whether the presence of non-Jews would compromise the Jewish purpose of the JCC and push Jewish members further away. Complicating matters, a wave of violent protests by frustrated, poor African Americans swept through American cities in the summers between 1964 and 1970, sometimes carrying black anger right to the doors of American Jews' homes and businesses. Many Jewish Americans had supported legal equality for African Americans, but now had to contend with the broader range of problems affecting people of color. Did the Jewish community, and by extension the JCC, have a responsibility to support, maintain, and invest in urban neighborhoods for the benefit of non-Jewish residents?

While Jews expressed reluctance to invest their private dollars in urban communities, the protests of the Black Freedom Movement and the rioting of the urban

crisis pressured Presidents Kennedy and then Johnson to invest in programs to combat urban poverty.<sup>17</sup> The increase in government funding made available to JCCs had significant implications for the agencies and for the communities they served. Public funding allowed Jewish Center workers to expand or add new services for poor Jews and for minority populations within their community. Publicly funded programs could not discriminate in whom they served. Although mostly Jewish clients used the social services offered at the JCC, out of familiarity with the institution, these services did attract new, non-Jewish clients to the JCC as well. In response, however, the Jewish philanthropists that provided a significant portion of JCCs' funding began to demand that their money be used exclusively to support sectarian and particularistic programs. The bifurcation of JCC programs into Jewish activities and recreational and social welfare services allowed agencies to include non-Jews amongst their membership without compromising their Jewish mission and orientation. The process of learning to work with new non-Jewish groups did not always proceed smoothly, but by the end of the 1970s it was clear to the JWB, Jewish Center workers, and local JCC lay leaders that pluralism was vital for sustaining the legacy of neighborhood JCCs.

JCCs were one of many civic institutions in American life to reexamine the meaning, value, and implications of pluralism during the postwar decades. Jews provide a model of community organizing unrivaled by most ethnoracial groups, providing scholars with a window into how post-immigrant generations of Jews navigated tensions between Americanization and sustaining a differentiated ethnoracial identity. The decisions made

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<sup>17</sup> President Nixon's New Federalism agenda also increased public spending on social welfare. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 252–54.



in the JCC movement and by local JCCs reflect how the desire to preserve a particular Jewish identity and ensure the survival of the Jewish group often conflicted with efforts to ethnically and racially integrate civic spaces. Additionally, examining a smaller community-based agency like the JCC provides new insight into how grassroots Americans—as opposed to politicians, intellectuals, or leaders of national social movements—navigated their rapidly changing perceptions of racial, ethnic, religious, class, and political differences. Local JCCs made decisions about who could become members, who to provide with social services, and how involved the agency should be in solving local issues such as declining housing stock and public safety. These decisions consequently determined the experiences that Jews would have with non-Jews, the wellness of individuals in their community, and the social and physical health of their urban environment. The history of the JCC also demonstrates how the changing relationship between the state and community-based voluntary agencies like the JCC affected the ways that Americans received social welfare benefits and services, and subsequently how these changes improved or hurt certain populations and neighborhoods.

Considering the broad lens that the Jewish Community Center provides into the religious, economic, and political life of their memberships, historians have not extensively studied JCCs. The JCC occasionally appears in community studies, but no book has been written exclusively about the history and contribution of this institution in either the context of American Jewish, urban, or social welfare history.<sup>18</sup> This dissertation

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<sup>18</sup> One example of this is how Lila Corwin Berman demonstrates the suburbanization of Detroit's Jewish community by tracing the movement of the city's JCCs further outward from the center of the city between WWII and the 1970s. Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*.

uses the JCC to bring together questions, ideas, and frameworks that rarely bridge these three historiographies.

First, *Adjusting to Change* attempts to answer the evergreen questions of American Jewish history—how are Jews at once American and distinctively Jewish? What is American Jewish identity? How have Jews and Judaism survived and thrived in America?—using frameworks of professionalization and expert authority more commonly used by scholars of Science, Technology, and Society (STS). Second, this study complicates the literature on the urban crisis by demonstrating how heterogeneous Jews' responses were to black protest and urban decline. The rhetoric and actions of locals JCCs and the JCC movement during the urban protests of the late 1960s and the fiscal crises experienced by American cities during the 1970s reveals how Jewish grassroots support for black allies depended heavily on committed communal leadership. Finally, by incorporating the JCC movement into the history of the U.S. government's support of social welfare programs, this study indicates that sectarian voluntary agencies were essential partners in federal efforts to shift from a provider of social services to a funder. At the same moment that the Johnson and Nixon administration sought to decentralize the state's role in social welfare, the urban crisis left JCCs financially vulnerable; urban JCCs and federal, state, and municipal governments mutually benefitted from the shift of funding and responsibility to sectarian voluntary agencies.

While American Jewish historians like Deborah Dash Moore and Etan Diamond have studied the formation of postwar Jewish communal institutions during the process of suburbanization, there exists no postwar social history of a specific sectarian institution

like the Jewish Community Center, especially not in an urban setting.<sup>19</sup> Moore, David Kaufman, and Jeffrey Gurock have all studied the JCC's precursor, the synagogue-center, as an example of how Jews balanced their expressions of religious and civic identity. Gurock's study is the only one that also extends into the early postwar period, and he examines the JCC as a site where rabbis and social workers contested Jews' participation in sports and recreation. By examining the professional and ideological differences between rabbis—who were invested in a Judaic conception of Jewish identity—and Jewish Center workers concerned with their members' social wellbeing, Gurock seeks to understand how Judaism was both challenged and reinforced by American Jews' infatuation with sports. He does not examine how the JCC's religious and ethnoracial pluralism had an influence beyond the Jewish community and Jewish communal life, affecting urban neighborhoods, race relations, and JCCs' relationship with the state.<sup>20</sup>

Questions of Americanization and identity have long preoccupied American Jewish historians, and scholars have made provocative and compelling arguments about how Jews understood and justified a collective identity.<sup>21</sup> Most, however, have relied on sources from prominent intellectuals, religious leaders, and organizations—or on cultural products like literature, journalism, radio, and television—that do not get at how

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<sup>19</sup> Moore, *To the Golden Cities*; Etan Diamond, *And I Will Dwell in Their Midst: Orthodox Jews in Suburbia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Margaret Spratt, "To Be Separate or One: The Issue of Race in the History of the Pittsburgh and Cleveland YWCAs, 1920-46," in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, ed. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 188–205; Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Moore, *At Home in America*, chap. 5; Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*; Jeffrey S Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter with American Sports* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Berman, *Speaking of Jews*; Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950-1970* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

grassroots Jews came into contact with these ideas or how the debate around Jewish identity affected most Jews' lives. Examining the multifarious interactions between JCC members, lay leaders, staff, and the lay leaders and staff of the Jewish Welfare Board reveals how polarizing the decisions about whether to privilege the preservation of an American Jewish identity (particularism) or the promotion of democratic pluralism (universalism) were for these constituents in the JCC movement. The history of the Jewish Community Center thus demonstrates that Jews became preoccupied with Jewish preservation decades before the 1964 publication of “The Vanishing American Jew” in *Look Magazine*.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, studying the JCC as a national movement reveals the ways that Jewish communal life in America converged after 1945.<sup>23</sup> Contingencies of geography—whether the JCC was located in the densely Jewish cities of the Northeast or Southwest, or in smaller communities in the Midwest or South—certainly affected the decisions made in each city about issues of membership, how to implement Jewish programming, and how to financially survive. The general coinciding trends of the JCC movement towards particularism and universalism, however, reflect more similarity than difference.

Urban historians also have neglected to examine Jewish Community Centers. Studies of ethnic, racial, and religious interaction and engagement, particularly between Jews and African Americans, have focused on activist groups and community relations institutions or on politics.<sup>24</sup> While a new generation of Catholic scholarship has emerged

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Morgan, “The Vanishing American Jew,” *Look*, May 5, 1964.

<sup>23</sup> Max D. Baumgarten, “Beyond the Binary: Los Angeles and a New York State of Mind,” *American Jewish History* 100, no. 2 (2016): 233–46, doi:10.1353/ajh.2016.0021.

<sup>24</sup> Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against*

that examines interracial engagement at the local level, from the diocese and parish to the athletic and social networks of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), the same has not been done for local Jewish communal organizations like the JCC.<sup>25</sup> Focusing on a subset of urban JCCs demonstrates how Jews reacted to the urban crisis and the rise of the multicultural city.<sup>26</sup>

The postwar evolution of the JCC movement also lends insight into how contemporary social service and communal networks developed and reoriented along with changes in labor and professional identity. The professionalization of social work justified the existence of a separate, competing institution within American Jewish communal life and justified the value of differentiated Jewish welfare agencies and community organizations to non-sectarian philanthropists. Moreover, it reveals the dialectic that existed between the evolution of voluntary, sectarian social welfare agencies like JCCs and federal, state, and municipal governments' social welfare programs. Just as historians of science, technology, and society have focused on the contributions of professionals and lay experts to state policy, historians of American Jewry, with few exceptions, have not considered the relationship between professional authority,

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*Prejudice*; Marc Dollinger, "The Other War: American Jews, Lyndon Johnson, and the Great Society," *American Jewish History* 89, no. 4 (2001): 437–61; Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Timothy B. Neary, *Crossing Parish Boundaries: Race, Sports, and Catholic Youth in Chicago, 1914–1954* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Matthew J. Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Cassie P. Miller, "The Changing Parish: Catholics and the Urban Crisis in Twentieth-Century Brooklyn" (Carnegie Mellon University, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> I draw on Scott Kurashige's argument, based on his case study of multiethnic Los Angeles, that the roots of the urban crisis and of the global city emerged at the same time, after World War II. This challenges the notion that there were two consecutive eras, one characterized by total racial exclusion followed by one characterized by tolerance, inclusion, and cosmopolitanism. Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=537691>.

legitimacy, and governance and the creation of communal policy.<sup>27</sup> This study of the JCC movement brings the theories of STS scholarship to bear on the questions of American Jewish history in an attempt to better understand why and how ethnoracial pluralism intensified in certain Jewish institutions and organizational life after World War II.

This process was far from smooth and even. The JCC provides a grassroots case study of Jewish actions, not just attitudes, in response to the Black Freedom Movement and black protest. When it came to inviting black families into the intimate communal space of the JCC, or to volunteering time and money to support neighboring black communities, JCC members and lay leaders often divided.<sup>28</sup> For many, this particularism was anathema considering Jews' experience with discrimination. Amongst those who opposed extending membership to black families, some genuinely desired to preserve the JCC as a distinctively Jewish space, and this ideal superseded their commitment to civil rights.<sup>29</sup> For others, particularly those less affluent Jews striving to maintain their middle-class status, Jewish preservation provided a convenient cover for racial discrimination. In both active and passive ways, they protected the privileges they gained from their whiteness. Jews had a complicated relationship to whiteness, however, and their ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> Brian Wynne, "May the Sheep Safely Graze? A Reflexive View of the Expert-Lay Knowledge Divide," in *Risk, Environment and Modernity: Towards a New Ecology*, ed. Scott Lash, Bronislaw Szerszynski, and Brian Wynne (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 44–83; Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Sheila S. Jasanoff, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisors as Policy Makers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Notable exceptions include: Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Rebecca Kobrin, "Beyond the Myths of Mobility and Altruism: Jewish Immigrant Professionals and Jewish Social Welfare Agencies in New York City, 1948-1954," in *A Jewish Feminine Mystique?: Jewish Women in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 105–25; Anna R Igra, *Wives without Husbands: Marriage, Desertion, & Welfare in New York, 1900-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> While agreeing with Cheryl Greenberg's thesis that there is "no single Jewish community" and thus there were multiple black-Jewish relations throughout the twentieth century, I argue that the protection of Jewish identity, and not solely of white skin privilege, fractured relations between Jews and African Americans. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*.

<sup>29</sup> Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*.

identity often supplanted their racial solidarity with white Anglo Americans. As Joshua Zeitz and Bruce Phillips have shown for New York and Los Angeles, respectively, even when Jews could afford to move anywhere they chose to reside in densely Jewish neighborhoods.<sup>30</sup> This particularism, not necessarily a commitment to whiteness, reinforced the desire of a broad contingent of Jews to keep JCCs exclusively Jewish spaces.

It was not until local agencies ran into financial challenges and began partnering with the government to provide social services that JCCs really had an imperative for serving the broader community. The stagnation and inflation that plagued the American economy in the 1970s pulled financially strapped voluntary agencies towards streams of income that could supplement the private or sectarian philanthropy on which they had long relied. With public money came the requirement to have nonsectarian intake into the programs the government funded. Historians of the postwar State, particularly the Great Society, have insufficiently focused on the social welfare work of sectarian voluntary institutions.<sup>31</sup> Challenges have been made to provide a more grassroots perspective, but nevertheless there is yet little historical scholarship on how sectarian institutions contributed to the state's outsourcing of social welfare programs to non-governmental agencies.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Joshua Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Bruce Phillips, "Not Quite White: The Emergence of Jewish 'Ethnoburbs' in Los Angeles, 1920-2010," *American Jewish History* 100, no. 1 (2016): 73–104.

<sup>31</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*; Frank Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty-- and How to Win It* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Lisa Gayle Hazirjian and Annelise Orleck, eds., *The War on Poverty a New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10498989>.

*Adjusting to Change* proceeds chronologically from the end of World War II in 1945, when the Jewish Welfare Board attempted to realign the JCC movement for the postwar era, until the late 1970s, when the lasting effects of the Black Freedom Movement, the urban crisis, and the rise of the cosmopolitan, multicultural city on the JCC became visible. The first chapter examines how the 1946 JWB Survey conducted by Professor Oscar Janowsky attempted to answer the question, "Why does the Jewish Center exist?" Janowsky's answer, that the JCC was devoted to the preservation of Jewish identity, established a new mission for the postwar Jewish Center movement. Janowsky's recommendation that "Jewish content" should have primacy in JCC programs proved controversial among Jewish Center workers, but ultimately the JWB adopted a Statement of Principles that committed them to promoting the "Jewish purpose" of American JCCs. The second chapter examines how the JWB defended Jewish Centers against accusations from the Conservative Rabbinate in the early 1960s that JCCs were not upholding their "Jewish purpose" and promoted secularism. The rabbis forced the JWB to consider what kind of Jewish identity they had committed to preserving: was their "Jewish content" Judaic or cultural? The JWB successfully argued that the JCC's pluralism justified its autonomy from the synagogue, but struggled to articulate how the JCC preserved a non-religious Jewish identity.

The third and fourth chapters more closely consider Jews' relationship to race. The third explores how, in the mid-1960s, the JWB re-debated its open membership policy. Could the JCC preserve Jewish identity without closing membership to non-Jews? In the context of the Civil Rights Movement, open membership also forced participants in the JCC movement to reevaluate the relationship between their Jewish identity and their



liberalism. Ultimately, the JWB upheld their open membership policy and reaffirmed the JCC's responsibility to care for all members of the community. Chapter 4 examines JCCs' responses to urban riots and Black Nationalism to demonstrate that there was no singular Jewish response to African American protests during the late 1960s. Organizations and individuals did not react along neat ideological or political lines. Although racial bias certainly deterred JCCs from becoming involved in urban anti-poverty efforts, the lay leaders and members of JCCs in neighborhoods affected by riots also argued that the JCC's involvement in urban crisis activities distracted the agency from its purpose of serving the Jewish community.

The final two chapters of *Adjusting to Change* return to the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood, using it as a case study to demonstrate how JCCs evolved in the 1970s. Chapter 5 traces how JCCs' priorities changed in the late 1960s and early 1970s as their funding increasingly came from federal, state, and municipal sources and they became less reliant on Jewish communal fundraising. The government mandate to serve the "total" community reinforced the JCC movement's open membership policy and pushed back against the preservationist trend in Jewish communal life. Finally, chapter 6 examines two populations that were growing in northern Manhattan during these years—orthodox Jews and immigrants from the Dominican Republic—and highlights how their divergent interests came into conflict in the space of the JCC. The bifurcation of the Y's programs into communally funded Jewish activities and publicly funded social services meant that the Y had a prerogative to serve the Orthodox community and meet their objectives, but not at the expense of losing their publicly

funded programs that mandated non-sectarian intake and enabled the growth of Dominican membership.

Like other JCCs in the United States, the Board of Directors, Executive Director, and staff of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood had to decide how to balance two Jewish imperatives: the preservation of American Jewry and *tikkun olam*. Literally meaning "repair the world," American Jews in the twentieth century understood *tikkun olam* as their responsibility to care for the welfare of society at large. Many Jews who worked in service of American JCCs—either as professional staff or lay leaders serving on an agency's Board—believed that caring for the wider community was an essential step in caring for local Jewry. At the same time, without an American Jewish community the JCC could not exist; Jewish Center workers and lay leaders also had an incentive to foster JCC members' Jewish identities and to keep them engaged in organized Jewish life. From 1945 until the 1980s, then, leaders of the Jewish Welfare Board and of local agencies debated the role of non-Jews within the JCC, their status as members, and the JCC's responsibility to neighboring non-Jewish communities.

## Chapter 1: The Janowsky Survey and the Debate Over Jewish Purpose

In 1976, thirty years after the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) hired him to conduct an ambitious survey of 301 American Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), Professor Oscar I. Janowsky published an essay reflecting on one of the most controversial episodes of his career. Janowsky's survey raised important questions about the future of the JCC movement, forcing everyone from the JWB's Board of Directors to the junior staff members at local JCCs to contemplate *who* the JCC should serve, *what* services they should provide, and *why* the institution should continue to exist. In his final report, Janowsky recommended that the purpose of the postwar JCC was to provide their Jewish members with programs and activities that fostered their Jewish identity. In doing so, he emphatically rejected the premise that a JCC could function as a nonsectarian agency.

This position, he posited in his 1976 essay, was what generated an immense controversy:

Most damaging was the [survey report's] challenge that the nonsectarian Jewish center was a contradiction in terms; that it could not be both Jewish and non-sectarian—if Jewish, it must have a Jewish purpose; if nonsectarian, it should be under nonsectarian auspices. [The professional Jewish Center workers] were outraged by my suggestion that a Jewish center had legitimacy only when dedicated to a primary Jewish purpose, but that a center bereft of such purpose constituted a "ghetto."<sup>1</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the suggestion that an institution should privilege Jewish ethnic identity above American identity cut directly against the democratic and pluralistic ethos of the era.<sup>2</sup> In attempting to chart a clear course for the future of the JCC movement, Janowsky inadvertently steered the movement into choppy waters.

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, "A Confrontation with Assimilationists: The Concept of a Nonsectarian Jewish Communal Institution (A Memoir)," in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, ed. Bertram Wallace Korn (New York: KTAV Press, 1976), 212.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin M Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*. (Oxford University Press, 2013).

By the mid-1970s, however, Janowsky's position had been vindicated. In "Is Dr. Janowsky Listening?," an unsigned 1974 editorial in *The Jewish Post*, the anonymous author reported,

The Messiah may not have come yet, but a glance at the program of the biennial convention of the [JWB] ... shows clearly enough that our national agencies, although belatedly, are finally overcoming the lag which kept them long past the time necessary wedded to concepts and attitudes which has almost destroyed their usefulness. Both culture and concentration on Jewish needs are the hallmark of this year's program of the national body of Jewish Community Centers which not too long ago and in some local communities still paraded athletic facilities as almost their only claim to existence.<sup>3</sup>

Although the immediate impulse may be to question how, in under 30 years, the movement reversed course and began to take this more particularistic approach, the more compelling question—and the one explored in this chapter—is how Janowsky came to such a counterintuitive argument in 1947 and how, despite opposition, he managed to convince the movement to approve his recommendations and commit itself to a "Jewish purpose." Janowsky foresaw the rise of identity politics—the practice, in a pluralistic democracy, of a minority group asserting that it has its own special interests and vulnerabilities and thus has the right to celebrate and protect its differences. By arguing that the JCC should have a Jewish purpose, Janowsky resisted a growing trend in American society towards universalism.<sup>4</sup> He proactively provided a rationale for communal agencies that served Jews, inoculating them against charges of clannishness and chauvinism. Problematically for Janowsky and his survey, however, many

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<sup>3</sup> "Is Dr. Janowsky Listening?," *The Jewish Post*, April 19, 1974, Janowsky Papers, American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) Box 32, Folder 8.

<sup>4</sup> James Loeffler, "Between Zionism and Liberalism: Oscar Janowsky and Diaspora Nationalism in America," *AJS Review* 34, no. 2 (November 2010): 306–8.

stakeholders in the JCC movement believed that the path to social harmony and the acceptance of Jews as full citizens lay in assimilation.<sup>5</sup>

The Jewish Welfare Board Survey of 1946-48 represented an attempt to chart the course of the JCC movement for the postwar decades.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of a new era in American life, no consensus existed amongst leaders in the JCC movement as to the purpose or function that defined the institution. Although many agencies included "Jewish Community Center" or "Young Men's/Women's Hebrew Association" (YM- or YWHA) in their names, these agencies could differ widely in their mission, approach, and services they provided to their members. In the years between World War I and World War II, the JWB—the umbrella organization charged with overseeing American military chaplaincy services and JCCs—found itself working with a wide range of institutions.<sup>7</sup> At one end of the spectrum were synagogues with robust social programs (synagogue-centers) and at the other end were social welfare agencies that were functionally non-sectarian and Jewish in name only. By the 1940s, however, the vast majority of member agencies had concentrated at the latter end of the spectrum, with few operating as explicitly religious spaces that taught, promoted, or engaged their members in the practices and ideas of Judaism. The JCC was an agency for middle-class Jews to send their children to nursery school, or to play basketball and swim, to attend concerts or lectures, and to socialize at dances or bridge games. JWB leaders wondered if it was it ghettoizing to separate Jews from non-Jews in leisure-time recreational agencies like

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<sup>5</sup> Janowsky's critics used assimilation to imply that Jews should not separate themselves from other Americans, either residually, institutionally or through the retention of distinctively Jewish or Judaic customs or practices.

<sup>6</sup> I alternate between "the JWB Survey," "the Survey," and "the Janowsky Survey" throughout the dissertation to denote the Jewish Welfare Board Survey of 1946-48.

<sup>7</sup> Although the full name of the organization is the National Jewish Welfare Board (NJWB), participants in the JCC movement and in Jewish communal life most often referred to it as the JWB—for this reason, I've chosen to use JWB throughout the dissertation.

YMHAs and Jewish Community Centers, or was it vital to the preservation of Jewish identity? They hoped an empirical study would identify and legitimate one of these approaches.

The Survey was the first attempt to determine JCC needs at a national level and the first scientifically based attempt to inform a national policy for the JWB. More than just an information-gathering exercise, the Survey would achieve several other goals. Superficially, it telegraphed the JWB's commitment to individual communities and their JCCs. The act of surveying each JCC in the country showed the JWB's desire to meet each agency's needs. The Survey also instigated a conversation about the meaning and purpose of the JCC and its program, while subtly positioning the JWB as the proper authority to determine the definition and direction of the movement. Finally, it provided the JWB with an opportunity to base its claims for separate, social, sectarian institutions in an empirically grounded, scientifically legitimate evidence. In sum, the Survey was an opportunity for the JWB to reassert its leadership of the JCC movement and to justify the *raison d'être* of Jewish Community Centers.

By attempting to impose a purpose and function upon the JCC, however, the Survey generated a controversy that highlighted the complex interests at work within Jewish communal life. In his final report, Janowsky suggested that the JWB adopt a Statement of Principles declaring that the JCC had an affirmative Jewish purpose. By this he meant that the JCC should promote Jewish identity through its myriad social and recreational programs. In making this recommendation, Janowsky reacted to the present as much as the past. The atrocities of the Holocaust and the ascension of American Jewry as the leading diaspora community intensified existing pressure to preserve Judaism,

Jewish culture, and Jewish communal life. Not everyone agreed with this imperative, however, and disagreement over Janowsky's recommendation erupted along ideological and communal fault lines, particularly between Jewish preservationists and those who advocated for a more assimilationist, nonsectarian Center.

A functional controversy also emerged between the JWB and its member agencies. For JCC executives and Jewish Center workers, the JCC was a workplace where they had autonomy from religious leadership and could cultivate professional authority through the implementation of social work practice. Jewish Center workers—as well as members of the Board of Directors of local JCCs—pushed back against the JWB's attempts to proscribe their autonomy and set policy for the whole movement. Declaring that the JCC had a primarily Jewish purpose, Jewish Center workers worried, would empower rabbis and religious leaders to assert their authority over the functioning of the JCC.

The JWB's National Council ultimately adopted a modified Statement of Principles, based on feedback and discussion amongst the differing constituencies in the JCC movement. The Statement upheld Janowsky's conception of the JCC as a sectarian and affirmatively Jewish agency, but at the insistence of Jewish Center workers the JWB edited the Statement to place equal weight on the promotion of American identity as on the promotion of Jewish identity. In doing so, they defended their legitimacy as social workers and won the commitment of the movement to universalistic principles of inclusion and democratic pluralism.

Janowsky's stance that the Center have a Jewish purpose eventually reached widespread acceptance amongst the JWB's member agencies because it served the

interests of its workers. The Statement of Principles ultimately bolstered Jewish social workers' justification for a sectarian agency separate from the synagogue and reinforced the authority of the Jewish Center worker and their expertise in group work. Moreover, Janowsky left key ideas like "Jewish content," "Jewish identity," and "Jewish culture" deliberately vague, which allowed Jewish Center workers to justify most activities as fulfilling the JCC's Jewish purpose. Janowsky made a political calculation to leave these concepts undefined in the hopes that its ambiguity would facilitate the adoption of the Statement by the JWB's National Council. Although the strategy proved successful, it created a lasting problem. The ambiguity of "Jewish content" would for decades leave the movement vulnerable to attacks by synagogues and the rabbinate that they were insufficiently Jewish.

### **Why a Survey?**

In the spring of 1945, the Chairman of the JWB's Committee on Public Information, Maurice Mermey, proposed a survey of the organization. Addressing the Board of Directors, he suggested that the JWB review its relationship with individual Centers and with America's Jewish communities. What was the organization's responsibility to those Centers, he wondered? Were JWB programs effective?<sup>8</sup> How would JCCs adapt in the ensuing decades to better serve their communities? And would the development of individual Jewish identity remain a JCC function? The Board of Directors concurred that the organization was due for an evaluation, and on March 18, 1945, the Executive Committee approved the survey under four conditions: that an independent commission oversee the process; that the Commission appoint an

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<sup>8</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: The Dial Press, 1948), v.



independent director; that the survey recommendations be adopted and followed, and not "pigeonholed"; and that the survey be published upon completion.<sup>9</sup>

Why was Mermey suddenly calling for this self-evaluation? Most obviously, he recognized that the JWB would resume its peacetime work with the end of the war, particularly its service to JCCs. The work, however, would be different than before. Major social changes had taken place within American Jewry, and communities no longer had the same needs as during the interwar decades. Jews were joining the middle class, had shed much of their association with foreignness and radicalism, and although anti-Semitism was still present the country's white Protestant majority accepted Jews as fellow Americans (if ethnic, hyphenated Jewish-Americans). Jewish soldiers would soon return to civilian life and would seek vocational guidance and venues within which to socialize. A baby boom was beginning, and there would be high demand on JCCs from young families with small children. American society was also experiencing a religious revival, and Jews demonstrated an increased interest in Jewish communal life. Mermey felt it wise for the JWB to get ahead of these changes. For the JWB to remain relevant, it had to map a course for JCCs to follow.

The Jewish Welfare Board was established in 1917 to provide support to Jewish military servicemen, whether they practiced Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist Judaism, or identified as secular Jews. World War I was the first time that American Jews entered the military in significant numbers. The U.S. military faced the problem of providing chaplaincy and welfare services to these new troops, because there was no Jewish equivalent to the Christian agencies that provided for the spiritual needs of Protestant and Catholic servicemen. The JWB thus arranged for furloughs on

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., v, xx.

Jewish holidays; for the sale of non-perishable kosher food in canteens and barracks; and for the distribution of prayer books, prayer shawls and phylacteries, *mezuzah* and Torah scrolls. It also coordinated chaplain services and "non-religious" programming to give Jewish servicemen the space to socialize and relax together.<sup>10</sup>

Although the war's end in the autumn of 1918 seemingly ended the mission of the JWB, throughout 1919 the agency actually continued to expand its role. Returning troops required entertainment and leisure programming on their voyage back to the United States. The JWB also took on administrative functions, recording Jewish participation in the war and registering Jewish servicemen's graves. The challenge of providing employment and "adjustment" services to Jewish veterans also loomed. With over two million dollars of donations remaining for the fulfillment of Jewish welfare services, the JWB found itself with a reduced, but still vital, mission and too much funding to justify its cessation.

The JWB began searching for supplementary functions that would extend its services to the Jewish communities of the United States. Leaders proposed the Jewish Community Center field, which shared the JWB's mission to provide welfare services to American Jews. The JWB was the obvious inheritor of the JCC movement because it too was founded to provide social and religious services to the diverse spectrum of Jews, and, more importantly, was an institution dominated by social workers and separate from the synagogue. The incredible overlap of Jewish leadership between the Board of Directors of the JWB and the Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindered Association—the precursor to the JWB—helped bring the Jewish Welfare Board and the JCC movement together. Wealthy Jewish philanthropists like Irving Lehman, Cyrus Adler, Israel

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47–61.

Unterberg, Louis Marshal, Jacob Schiff and Felix Warburg were on the Boards or heavily involved with both organizations, and were instrumental in orchestrating their merger in 1921.<sup>11</sup>

The JWB emerged from its reformation with a sterling reputation borne out of its wartime work, and during the interwar years the organization coasted on their former successes. The call for a self-evaluation in 1945 reflected years of an unmethodical and patchwork approach to governing the JWB. The organization's constitution during this period outlined that the social welfare function of the organization was "To promote the religious, intellectual, physical and social well being and development of Jewish young men and women." The final line of this mission statement referred to the reason for the Jewish Community Center's existence, "the development of Judaism and good citizenship."<sup>12</sup> What remained ambiguous was whether every agency that called itself a JCC or YMHA actually met this criterion. Problematically, the JWB Constitution guaranteed the autonomy and independent governance of each individual JCC, thereby preventing the JWB from implementing policies that would unite the disorderly movement. The incoherence of the JWB's membership contributed to an incoherence of the JWB's mission.

The professional staff of the JWB by necessity adopted a centrist approach to serving their ideologically and functionally diverse member agencies. Through various services the JWB translated its expertise in Jewish welfare work from the military setting to American Jewish communities.<sup>13</sup> They encouraged individual institutions to become "centers of communal activities" where local Jewish groups could meet and unite. By

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 62–67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 68–104.

heavily involving themselves in national staffing searches, the JWB set personnel standards that privileged Center workers with experience in social work *and* Jewish education. Finally, the JWB distributed publications to Center workers. Many of these periodicals provided information related to the day-to-day administration of the JCC, over half were about Jewish holidays, Jewish history, Jewish literature and music, and contemporary problems of interest to Jews. While agencies valued this aid they used it only sporadically, reflecting the myriad and often dissimilar needs of the JWB's diverse affiliates.

A survey by definition invited participation and, possibly, critique. The JWB accepted these potential liabilities and committed itself to surveying its member agencies for three reasons. First, policy decisions based on the empirical findings of surveys were conferred with the legitimacy and authority of science. Secondly, surveys were popular amongst the American public and within the occupational subculture of social work because they made visible what was "average" or "normal," an estimation that an individual person or agency could struggle to detect from their solitary vantage point. Historian Sarah Igo argues in *The Averaged American* that improved survey methods and statistical techniques expanded and improved the usefulness of mass surveys. In the early twentieth century surveys were widely used, but often resulted in prescriptive, reform-minded recommendations. The goal of these new surveys was to help a mass culture understand itself, to allow individuals to compare themselves to the norm. Social surveyors," Igo explains, "were among those who searched for a replacement, for new definitions of community, citizenship, and norms when the old moorings no longer

seemed to hold."<sup>14</sup> Finally, the group work practice that predominated in JWB member agencies used democratic principles to organize group activities and to teach members the vital skills of cooperation and collaboration necessary for citizenship and social harmony in a pluralistic society. The JWB thus ran according to democratic procedure and its leaders invited and welcomed discussion and debate of contesting ideas.

The conditions the Executive Committee placed on the JWB Survey recognized these circumstances—they required that the resultant recommendations be prescriptive and "democratically useful" to Jewish centers and community leaders interested in knowing the state of national Jewish centers. Because the Survey was the first attempt to determine JCC needs at a national level, the goal was to determine whether the JWB "ha[d] a national function and a national program over and above the many services that it renders directly to its constituent local Centers."<sup>15</sup>

To maintain the integrity of the undertaking and to ensure that its findings would not be undermined by accusations of self-interested propaganda, the members of the JWB's Board of Directors immediately formed a committee on the JWB Study and tasked it with establishing the independent commission and hiring a respected scholar to lead the study. The committee met on May 7, 1945 to review their tentative outline for the study.<sup>16</sup> They decided Survey Commission should have a membership of 23 to 30 individuals, headed by an appointed chairman.<sup>17</sup> With the structure of the Commission settled, all that

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7, 10–14.

<sup>15</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, xxi.

<sup>16</sup> The committee included Mermey, the JWB's president Frank L. Weil and Executive Director Louis Kraft, and four other members of the Board of Directors.

<sup>17</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Committee on JWB Study," May 7, 1945, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 6.

remained was to find and hire a research director. This would prove to be a pivotal decision in the history of the JWB.

### **Oscar I. Janowsky: A complicated character, a questionable choice**

The Steering Committee of the JWB Survey Commission hired Professor Oscar I. Janowsky to direct the JWB Survey on the basis of his research on Jewish minority rights. As a scholar, he was known for his support of a political theory known as Diaspora Nationalism. His 1933 book, *The Jews and National Minority Rights, 1898-1919*, argued that Jews constituted a national group and deserved, for their own protection, to autonomously govern themselves within the states of the Eastern European diaspora. Although the book garnered criticism from more conventional Zionists, who supported a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine, and from "assimilationists" who rejected Jewish nationalism, the book was popular enough to win Janowsky a faculty appointment at City College, then known as the "Harvard of the Proletariat." He was also sought after by Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, and Conference on Jewish Relations to research the political status and living conditions of Eastern European Jews, and spent 1935-36 in Europe gathering evidence for two publications. As the war began and Janowsky returned to New York, he continued writing scholarly articles and reports arguing for European recognition of minority groups' national and cultural autonomy.<sup>18</sup>

However, Janowsky had not been the committee's first choice for the directorship. The committee first approached Professor Louis Wirth, an esteemed sociologist at the University of Chicago, with the offer. Wirth, in his 1928 book *The Ghetto*, argued that

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<sup>18</sup> Loeffler, "Between Zionism and Liberalism," 294–300.

Jews, like all other minorities in America, struggled to shed their cultural affiliations and continued living close together to preserve the comfort of being insiders. Wirth believed that in spite of this self-ghettoization, assimilation was inevitable for Jews just as it was for all minorities, and he firmly eschewed notions of Jewish distinctiveness. While Wirth's emphatic rejection of Jewish distinctiveness and ethnocentrism did not harmonize with the mission articulated in the JWB's constitution, what probably appealed to the survey committee—in addition to his tenured professorship at an elite university and his social-scientific expertise—was how Wirth's universalism and social functionalism validated the social work practice of Jewish Center workers, a methodology called "social group work." Social group work posited that society would function best when groups interacted constructively and exhibited tolerance for one another, and individuals would only achieve the fullest development of their personality if they identified with and belonged to a social group. Jewish Center workers used this method to develop a strong sense of group belonging in each JCC member through regular interactions with Jews, Judaism, and Jewish culture. By identifying with the Jewish group, the member would then be able to assimilate with other ethnically identified Americans and participate in the American project of democratic pluralism.<sup>19</sup>

The survey committee did not get their first choice. Wirth expressed interest in the project, but after some consideration he respectfully turned down the directorship position because "his time did not permit his undertaking it this year." With that option

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<sup>19</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

off the table, the committee began to correspond with its alternate candidates, including City College historian Dr. Oscar I. Janowsky.<sup>20</sup>

Although Janowsky brought his expertise in Jewish affairs and his social science pedigree to bear on the Survey, he also brought along to the JWB his politics of Jewish identity and survivalism. His commitment to Diaspora Nationalism made him, and consequently his Survey and the JWB, vulnerable to charges of anti-liberalism. To refer to Jews as a nation deserving of autonomy was inherently inconsistent with American democracy and cultural pluralism. Janowsky evaded this contradiction, historian James Loeffler argues, by framing Diaspora Nationalism as a "long-distance program" that at once won rights for vulnerable minority Jews in Eastern Europe *and* united American Jews as a distinctive group bound together by their "enlightened advocacy." By the end of World War II, however, the case for Diaspora Nationalism was eroding—European Jewry was decimated, the establishment of a Jewish state seemed likely, and American Jewry ascended as the leading diaspora community. If Jews could be protected within American liberal society without identifying themselves as a nation, was nationality really what held Jews together as a group? "[T]he question of Jewish identity in America," according to Loeffler, "exposed the dilemma at the root of [Janowsky's] entire model of global Jewish nationhood." With support waning for a national conception of Jewish distinctiveness, Janowsky turned against assimilationists and focused on creating new arguments for Jewish ethnic solidarity and communal survival.<sup>21</sup> The Jewish Community Center, specifically the institution's emphasis on serving all Jewish members of a

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<sup>20</sup> The alternate candidates also included historians Dr. Joshua Starr and Dr. Koppel Pinson (Queens College), and economist Dr. Nathan Reich (Hunter College). All four scholars had conducted extensive research on Jewish subjects, were dedicated members and lay leaders of organizations within Jewish communal life, and three of the four were affiliated with the prestigious City Colleges of New York.

<sup>21</sup> Loeffler, "Between Zionism and Liberalism," 303–6.



community, presented Janowsky with a new case study to demonstrate the value of Jewish peoplehood.

The JWB Survey provided Janowsky with a mechanism and a platform he could use to explore Jewish differentiation within the context of American democracy. The JCC at once separated Jews from non-Jews *and* instilled the values of cultural pluralism. The question that vexed the Survey director was how the JCC could exist without being accused of segregation on the biologically determined basis of Jewish birth, yet still conduct the valuable work of impressing upon individual Jews the importance of their cultural heritage. Furthermore, without an unambiguously *Jewish* Community Center the JWB had no purpose—its mission was to provide for the welfare of American Jewry, not to oversee nonsectarian agencies. Janowsky thus approached the main question of the Survey—what was the JWB's relationship with and responsibility to its member agencies?—as a question of purpose. Could the JWB impose and enforce a purpose on the JCC that resolved this contradiction?

### **The Survey: Examining the JCC Movement from National to Local, East Coast to West**

Over the course of eight months, Janowsky and his staff interviewed approximately 3500 people, the majority of whom were lay leaders (community members who served on a local JCC's Board of Directors) or Jewish Center workers. In addition, 2420 people responded to the anonymous attitude questionnaires, with Board members making up the majority of respondents (42%). The Survey, Janowsky reported to JWB leadership, was stimulating local discussions about the purpose of the Jewish Center.

Although the intention of the field visits and the questionnaires was not to proselytize or educate on the mission of the JCC or the JWB, the process of disclosure naturally created a sense of curiosity and interest in the experiences of other agencies.<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Toubin, who assisted on the survey by conducting field visits at member agencies in Pennsylvania, reported to Janowsky that many JCC Board members "approached [him] after the meeting to tell [him] how exhilarated they were because the questions and the project had, for the first time, turned their minds to thoughts of what the Jewish Center is."

Janowsky, trained as a historian, fundamentally approached his study as an examination of purpose. Janowsky hired sociologist Werner J. Cahnman as his Deputy Director. Educated at the University of Munich, Cahnman escaped from Nazi Germany in 1940 and was invited to the University of Chicago as a "race and cultural specialist" by Dr. Robert E. Park.<sup>23</sup> Janowsky and Cahnman expended considerable effort in exploring the origins of the JWB and of the institutional model of the Jewish center. Before the war the JWB, through its rhetoric and its services, promoted "1) devotion to American democracy; 2) the survival of the Jew as a Jew; and 3) the preservation and exposition to the membership of Jewish cultural traditions" as the basis of the JCCs' purpose.<sup>24</sup> Was the JWB's purpose still relevant to the needs of affiliated JCCs and their communities and membership after WWII? The problem was that the JWB had for many years accepted affiliates for membership regardless of their commitment to these purposes, diluting the strength of the JWB's message and mission.

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Igo describes surveying as a dialectic of "confession and voyeurism." Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Werner J. Cahnman, *Jews and Gentiles: A Historical Sociology of Their Relations*, ed. Judith T. Marcus and Zoltan Tarr (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), vii-xv.

<sup>24</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 260.

Janowsky and Cahnman initially envisioned a two-pronged approach to studying the JWB's relationships with its member agencies. They would begin in New York by examining the operations of the national office, then they would sample "typical" Jewish Community Centers because ultimately "it is the local needs that will determine the effectiveness of JWB service." In late 1945, the pair began to develop two survey instruments for use in interviewing local JCC lay leaders and Jewish Center workers. The first would be a standardized set of questions to generate a group discussion at each visited JCC. The second was a confidential attitude questionnaire that each Jewish communal leader, JCC Board member, or Center worker was asked to complete individually and return to Janowsky and Cahnman. By April of 1946, the pair felt confident enough in the standardization of these instruments to begin conducting interviews and disseminating questionnaires.

It quickly became clear to the Survey directors that while their questions were standardized, their subjects were not. There was too much diversity amongst the JCCs; even if a critical mass of similar agencies were identified, the findings regarding their needs and their relationship to the JWB would not be widely applicable to the rest of the field.<sup>25</sup> As a result, Janowsky, Cahnman, and JWB Field Service staff surveyed *every* agency affiliated with the JWB, a total of 301 institutions, between April and November of 1946. 270 JCCs received a field visit from the Survey staff, who conducted personal and group interviews with the Board of Directors, Executive Director and staff, Rabbis, local leaders in the Jewish community, Center members, and local non-Jewish community leaders. Janowsky stressed the importance and value of these visits for

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<sup>25</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, "JWB Survey--Report of Progress," n.d., Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 6.

determining how the relationship between member agencies and the JWB should affect the future function of the organization.

While many JWB field staff assisted with these local visits, Janowsky conducted many of them himself. He traveled to the West Coast from June 10 to July 11, 1946, to administer questionnaires to Center workers at numerous agencies. The general procedure was to visit an agency, observe programs, and then conduct a group interview with club leaders or staff using the first survey instrument. Janowsky would then meet board members at separate gatherings, where they were asked to complete the individual attitude questionnaires, or if the visit were brief Janowsky left questionnaires behind for people to fill out and return at their convenience. In each community, Janowsky also met with Federations, Community Chests, Councils of Social Agencies, Administrative Councils, Rabbis, and prominent lay leaders. The director was trying to understand the entire Jewish community, not just the JCCs, and he selected interviewees accordingly. Likewise he tried to speak with non-Jewish social service leaders to understand the general landscape of agencies within each city.<sup>26</sup> Janowsky and Cahnman stressed that their conclusions were reliable because they had implemented and executed sound research techniques.<sup>27</sup>

In October of 1946, Janowsky presented a progress report to the JWB's Jewish Center Division (JCD) Committee. In a rambling address, Janowsky identified the problem at the crux of the Survey. To serve JCCs required understanding their functions, and to question Centers' functions inherently raised the question of what, exactly, made a

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<sup>26</sup> "Schedule of Dr. Janowsky -- Pacific Coast Tour," July 10, 1946, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 6.

<sup>27</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, "JWB Survey: Progress Report," October 1946, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 6.

Jewish Community Center *Jewish*. Without clearly defining *what* made an agency Jewish, he realized it was hard to justify a sectarian social institution, and without a Jewish Community Center the JWB had no purpose—its mission was to provide for the welfare of American Jewry, not to oversee nonsectarian agencies. Too few of the JWB's member agencies, Janowsky reported, could adequately explain what about their work was inherently Jewish.

To illustrate this point, he told the Committee the story of a visit to an agency in the South. The President of the Board was asked to describe what made the agency a JCC. He responded that the sign on the building said "Jewish Community Center." The exchange continued, and the Survey representative pushed him further, asking, "But suppose I arrived at night, when it was dark, and I could not see the sign? Or suppose some street urchins had torn the sign down?" With some hesitance, the Board's president replied, "We are Jews, and we meet here. Therefore, this is a Jewish Center." The story concluded with an instructive point:

The Survey representative persisted, "I am a Northerner," said he, "and I cannot recognize any difference between you and other Americans of the South. How, then, would I know that this is a Jewish Center?"  
The President appeared pleased by what he regarded as a flattering remark, and then commented, "Say, you've got me."

With this pithy anecdote, Janowsky explicitly demonstrated the absurdity of accepting such superficial justifications for calling an agency *Jewish*. Implicitly, the anecdote also reflected the JWB's own sins—they had accepted as members any agency that put out a sign. "[F]or whom," Janowsky asked, "was [the JWB] really intended?"<sup>28</sup>

The corollary question, of course, was *for what* was the JWB really intended? Janowsky argued to the Committee that the survey respondents could only provide two

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

reasons for the JCC's existence: Either it integrated Jewish content and cultivated "affirmative Jewish interests" through its programs, or it passively provided an exclusively Jewish space for Jews to socialize. Neither reason was particularly palatable. Janowsky emphasized that the latter reason was tantamount to segregation and ghettoization, yet JCCs pushed back against the former because members did not favor Jewish content. It was easier to put up a sign and invite Jews to meet, but Janowsky warned that "If being Jewish is not an 'affirmative interest' and the aim of the center is not necessarily to be an active force for the survival of the Jews as a group, then why a distinct and specialized Jewish center? Why not a non-sectarian community center?" With these questions floating in the air, Janowsky ended his address to the Jewish Center Division Committee by promising that his findings and recommendations would be forthcoming.<sup>29</sup>

By March of 1947, Janowsky had completed a draft of the report and disseminated it to the Survey Commission. After evaluating the survey results, Janowsky realized that the primary barrier to the JWB's leadership of a JCC movement was local JCC's divergent and contradictory conceptions of their purpose. Summarizing the findings of the field visit interviews and the attitude questionnaires, the director's report emphasized the heterogeneity and complexity of the 301 member agencies. 130 agencies were Y's or JCCs, and nearly that many (112) were synagogue-centers.<sup>30</sup> The full-time professional staff employed by agencies varied widely, in number and in kind. Over ten percent of agencies employed *no* full time workers, while the sole staff member of 34

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Of the remaining 59, 27 were settlements or neighborhood centers (which Janowsky deemed 'nonsectarian'), and 32 were a miscellany of institutions that did not fit the traditional Center model. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 162.

percent of agencies was a rabbi untrained in group work technique and preoccupied with ministering to a congregation. Jewish programming also proved inconsistent amongst the surveyed agencies. Although a majority of agencies claimed to promote affirmative Jewish activities, these reports were often based on festival celebrations (like Hanukah parties) or an isolated adult lecture program by a Jewish speaker on a Jewish topic. Janowsky relayed that, "242 (80.4%) [of JCCs] report some type of activity with Jewish content." "On the face of it, this appears impressive," he elaborated, "but a moment's reflection will reveal serious deficiencies in Jewish programming. ... the listing of an activity with Jewish content does not mean that the center's program is permeated with a Jewish spirit, or that all age groups are affected by a Jewish emphasis."<sup>31</sup>

The unsystematic actualization of Jewish programming baffled Janowsky, especially when he considered that when asked if "Jewish content" should be emphasized in the JCC, 1849 out of 2420 (76%) responded affirmatively. The percentage spiked up to 83.3% when Center staff were isolated.<sup>32</sup> With such strong support for this function and such weak adherence, Janowsky believed that the postwar objective of the JWB was to declare an affirmative Jewish purpose for the JCC and to help agencies implement and sustain Jewish programming.

Janowsky linked the JWB's purpose with JWB affiliation. The only way the organization could lead was to establish a purpose for the JCC that it could arbitrate and serve, and it could only establish a purpose if it could eliminate some of the diversity in its member agencies. The JWB, Janowsky emphasized, needed to step into a leadership role and improve the consistency of programming and the availability of facilities.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 267, Table A-15a in appendix.

This led Janowsky and Cahnman to dedicate five of their recommendations to "the definition of purpose" of the JCC and of the JWB. With the first two recommendations, they pushed the JWB to eschew nonsectarian and secular conceptions of the Jewish Community Center and to instead embrace agencies that demonstrated a "positive commitment" to the survival of Jewish civilization and heritage. The first recommendation, made up of four articles, encouraged the organization to adopt a Statement of Principles to guide Jewish center programming and to set standards for affiliation. The four articles spelled out the values Janowsky believed were essential to the JCCs' purpose: to promote Jewish group identity through Jewish content. The second recommendation put forth the idea that, "[A]s an agency of the Jewish group, [the JCC] should place the major emphasis upon Jewish issues."<sup>33</sup>

Janowsky understood that it was not enough to declare principles. Pragmatic mechanisms had to be put in place to enforce adherence to these values. "The JWB cannot dictate to the individual center as to what its purposes or program should be," he wrote, "But as a voluntary association on whose governing committee sit representatives of the affiliated centers, it is its proper function to determine the character of its constituency in the Jewish center field, to delimit the scope of its services and to define the purposes which motivate its activities."<sup>34</sup> Consequently, with his fourth and fifth recommendations Janowsky urged the JWB to set standards and objectives for the movement and to enforce them as conditions for affiliation.

The 1947 Annual Meeting of the Jewish Welfare Board, held at Pittsburgh's William Penn Hotel, was the first opportunity for most JWB affiliates to review

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4–25.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 5.



Janowsky's findings and his vision for the future of the Jewish Center and the JWB. On May 12<sup>th</sup>, having made only a handful of adjustments, the JWB's National Council—a large elected body of representatives from all areas of Jewish communal life—approved Janowsky's recommendation to adopt a Statement of Principles to guide the JWB and its constituent agencies.

With all of the recommendations approved, the JWB had to act. How would it fulfill its mandate that the Survey not molder, that it be made active? Louis Kraft, as the organization's Executive Director, decided that after the JWB's JCD Committee drafted an initial Statement of Principles, JWB field staff would venture out to JCCs across the country to facilitate discussions, provide "consultation and interpretation," and solicit written comments about the Statement. Only afterwards, at the 1948 Annual Meeting, would the National Council consider the feedback and take official action to revise or adopt the Statement of Principles.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Controversy: Janowsky's Jewish Purpose vs. Assimilation and Expert**

#### **Authority**

If the Survey functioned as a normalizing process and reflected the participating JCCs' ordinary and anomalous practices, the debates over Janowsky's proposed Statement of Principles functioned as a form of peer review. Rendering an incredibly diverse group of institutions and interests *knowable* and *understandable* required the identification of a norm to which others could compare themselves. Janowsky's interpretation of the survey findings put forth "Jewish purpose" as this norm and his recommendations pushed the

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<sup>35</sup> Louis Kraft, "The Meaning of the Action of the National Council in Relation to the JWB Survey," August 19, 1947, National Jewish Welfare Board Records (NJWB), AJHS Box 33, Folder 11.

movement to see nonsectarian and secular conceptions of the JCC as deviant. Inherent in this creation of a norm, however, was the absence of a prior standard and the existence of multitudinous opinions. Other experts moved in to contest the legitimacy of the Survey, replacing the perception of authority with an awareness of the Survey's ambiguity.

Challenges emerged on three fault lines. Ideologically, the stated principles pitted particularism and Jewish survivalism against assimilation and non-sectarianism. This debate particularly challenged JWB Board members, lay leaders of individual agencies, and Jewish Center workers. Amongst the lay leaders and Center workers at local JCCs, the basis for their disagreement was more functional than ideological. They bristled at the Statement because they believed it subverted local autonomy. The proposed principles also presented a philosophy on communal organization that pitted rabbis and congregations against Jewish social workers and JCCs. Fundamentally the controversy represented a retrenchment to the status quo—JCCs resisted changing the terms of their relationship to the JWB and struggled with the possibility of having to privilege Jewish continuity over their social work practice.

This became clear to the JWB's Jewish Center Division by the spring of 1948, when the 104 reports of discussions on the Statement were finally compiled into a summary report for review. Center Boards expressed diverse responses, from 30% that approved of the Statement as written to one Center that "suggested that everything but article IV be eliminated."<sup>36</sup> Center Boards also conveyed discomfort with the lack of definition of Jewish content, particularly if it was declared "primary." Survey Commission Chairman Dr. Salo Baron elicited a response to this effect in March when he

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<sup>36</sup> "Summary of Reports on Survey Discussions: Jewish Centers and Regional Sections," n.d., Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 33, Folder 1.

visited the YM and YWHA of St. Louis, where he found agreement amongst the agency's lay leaders and staff "that it is dangerous to define Jewish content strictly. It is better to leave it to each Center to implement Jewish content, while JWB clarifies it gradually in year to year developments."<sup>37</sup> These sentiments were repeated again and again, across the country, in the months leading up to the JWB's 1948 Annual Meeting.

The National Association of Jewish Center Workers (NAJCW) emerged as the first expert challenger to the survey. NAJCW members cited their expertise as JCC executives and employees to assert a credible challenge to the Janowsky Survey and the proposed Statement of Principles. They argued that the professional authority of group workers should mean that their experience carried more weight than the other constituencies surveyed by Janowsky's team. For them, the Survey was useful as a mechanism through which to reflect and "reconsider the meaning of the Jewish Center in the American Jewish scene," but by no means did it justify an expanded role for the JWB as the leader of a "movement."<sup>38</sup>

On April 9, 1948, just prior to the JWB's Annual Meeting, the leaders of the NAJCW held their National Executive Committee Meeting. A special committee on the Janowsky Survey rejected the JWB's encroachment into the programs of its constituent centers, preferring the antebellum status quo. The final article of the Statement of Principles, Article V, mandated that compliance with this principle would be required after 1950 if agencies wanted to maintain their affiliation with the JWB. The Chairman of the committee, William Pinsker, argued that a Statement of Principles "as a basis for

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<sup>37</sup> All reports can be found in Box 33, Folder 1 of Janowsky's Papers at the AJHS in New York. Herman Sainer, "Discussion Between Dr. Salo Baron and the YM and YWHA of St. Louis," March 15, 1948, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 33, Folder 1.

<sup>38</sup> "Report of the NAJCW Committee on the Janowsky Survey Presented at the National Executive Committee Meeting," April 9, 1948, 212, Louis Kraft Papers, AJHS.

affiliation with the JWB" and as the basis for a philosophical "movement" would constrict further growth of new JCCs by creating conflict with those adhering to other religious and socio-cultural ideologies.<sup>39</sup>

NAJCW members also took issue with the Statement's basic premise that Jews felt an inherent need for a space within which to express their Jewish identity. In particular, the special committee challenged the text in Article I which stated that American Jews *voluntarily* affiliated with the JCC, "to satisfy his specialized Jewish needs." In the experience of Jewish Center workers, most members affiliated with the Y to fulfill a *social* need. "Where the human being ends and the Jew begins is something that no one can define," they concluded, "but this article seems to imply that there is such a point."

The committee also condemned Article II for being too ambiguous about the definition of "Jewish content" and how it should predominate in the JCC. "Perhaps it is possible to permeate a basket ball game or a swimming meet or a dance with Jewishness," the committee ventured,

but the people who come to these activities come to them as Jews who seek their recreational pursuits in a place where they can share them with other Jews, for a variety of sociological reasons, but who do not seek these activities in order to enhance their Jewishness. And yet, they may serve the very purpose of strengthening a feeling of identification with, and loyalty for, the Jewish group.<sup>40</sup>

At the core of this critique was a defense of social workers' professional expertise.

Specifically the comment suggested that the only way to create social cohesion and reduce social ills was to address individuals' complex needs, only one of which was an

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<sup>39</sup> "Report of the NAJCW Committee on the Janowsky Survey Presented at the National Executive Committee Meeting."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

ethnic or religious belonging. As Jewish social workers they affirmed the importance of Jewish content in the JCC but drew the line at asserting its primacy.

Whereas Jewish Center workers viewed Janowsky's proposed Statement of Principles as a threat to their autonomy and their professional expertise, another group of dissenters were aggrieved by its emphasis on Jewish content and peoplehood. In early January 1948, a letter circulated within the ranks of Jewish communal leadership from a group identifying itself as the Sponsors of an Independent Study of the NJWB Survey Commission Report. This committee, consisting of several prominent Jewish philanthropists, intellectuals, and activists, asked for contributions from lay leaders to conduct an analysis of Janowsky's survey. This group felt the same commitment to the American Jewish community as their peers on the Survey Commission, but believed in Jewish assimilation and decried differentiation. Janowsky's emphasis on particularism and the survival of Jewish heritage was at odds with their liberalism, and they believed that the "general assumptions," the "method" and the "conclusions of the study regarding the role of the Jewish Center in American communities and American life generally" deserved reexamination by an impartial third party.

The sponsors, however, engaged two prominent academics that couldn't have been less impartial. Sociologist Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago and Historian Oscar Handlin of Harvard University were both scholars who argued in numerous publications that assimilation was inevitable. Their vision for the JCC was starkly opposed to that of Janowsky and Cahnman, as noted by an anonymous editorialist in the American Jewish Congress's weekly publication, *Congress Weekly*, who reminded readers of Wirth's past statements on Jewish culture. The editorialist recalled that at the

1946 Plenary Session of the National Community Relations Advisory Council, Wirth displayed "a wholly negative attitude towards Jewish culture, Jewish education, and Jewish training... in an address opposing the establishment of a Jewish University." It was no surprise, then, that when the Independent Study of the JWB Survey Commission finally released its report, Wirth and Handlin began by harshly criticizing Janowsky for impressing his "single specific ideology" upon the survey recommendations.<sup>41</sup>

The two camps conflicted ideologically, but their scholarly credentials and expertise were evenly matched. Wirth and Handlin attacked the foundations of Janowsky's conclusions by condemning the survey staff's methodology. Wirth and Handlin argued that Janowsky failed to respond to selection bias during the administration and evaluation of the attitude questionnaire. "Since respondents were self selective," they wrote in their report, "there is a bias of interest." They also leveled criticism at the vague and misleading language of the instrument's questions, particularly a question that asked the respondent to rank a list of JCC functions from most to least important. Wirth and Handlin protested that the function commonly ranked first, "to serve as a center of Jewish activities," could either be interpreted as "to serve as a center of activities for Jewish people" or "to serve as a center of activities which are solely Jewish in content." "The Report assumes without question," the scholars wrote, "that the latter interpretation is correct and thus is aided to arrive at the conclusion that the constituency wants more 'Jewish content.'"<sup>42</sup>

By accusing Janowsky of poor survey design and of failing to define his terms, Wirth and Handlin called into question the credibility of the JWB Survey and its

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<sup>41</sup> Louis Kraft, "Annotated Report by the Sponsors of an Independent Study of the NJWB Survey Commission Report," May 1, 1948, Louis Kraft Papers, AJHS Folder 2, Box 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

recommendations. In addition to attacking the credibility of Janowsky's scientific and statistical analysis, the Independent Study also leveled a historical critique. Wirth and Handlin charged Janowsky with failing to account for "the insistent fact that Jewish centers vary greatly and have different needs." According to his critics, in recommending a Statement of Principles and calling for minimum standards Janowsky failed to recognize that JCCs with diverse needs could not adhere to a consistent program. Ironically, Wirth and Handlin's report was ahistorical in its own right—it fundamentally misunderstood that the Survey was initiated to create coherence within the divergent field. They accused Janowsky of trying to use a scientific measurement to conclude what the purpose of the JCC should be, when a survey could only evaluate the present program and its affects on it members and community. Following this logic, Janowsky could only have based his recommendations on his own personal beliefs. Louis Kraft, who as Executive Director of the JWB had concerns with Janowsky's recommendations, nonetheless defended Janowsky when, on his copy of the Independent Study, he hand-wrote in the margin, "why can't [a survey] formulate a purpose[?]"<sup>43</sup>

Wirth and Handlin spent the majority of their report, however, arguing that Janowsky's conception of the JCC "as a creative agency for Jewish survival" limited the possible functions of these institutions and precluded more universalistic work. They defended nonsectarian JCCs and criticized the emphasis on Jewish content in the Statement of Principles on the basis that it would preclude Jewish and non-Jewish interaction. In Wirth and Handlin's estimation, the "true" American Jewish experience was this frictionless association between ethnic groups. It was retrograde, or even

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<sup>43</sup> Louis Kraft, "Annotated Report by the Sponsors of an Independent Study of the NJWB Survey Commission Report."

contradictory, to impose Jewish heritage via the JCC program—Jews in diaspora had always authentically related to non-Jews, and so as they saw it Jewish content inherently included these interethnic activities. Nonsectarian JCCs were an authentic American product, and they argued in the report that to try and impose a Jewish element meant segregating Jews from non-Jews and "emptying the past and present conception of Jewish activity of much of its vitality."<sup>44</sup> They warned that promoting Jewish identification might "create a set of conditions whereby non-Jews will feel that Jews are cut off from communicating with them in the set of understandings that are basic to a common American culture."<sup>45</sup> In all, Wirth and Handlin exposed a lack of consensus reflected in the survey results. Janowsky did not necessarily conscientiously misinterpret the survey results to support his own interests, but the scholars were able to identify several instances in which the survey findings did not conclusively support Janowsky's recommendations. Wirth and Handlin thus conducted a peer review of Janowsky and Cahnman's work.

As historian Sheila Jasanoff has demonstrated in case studies of governmental scientific advisory boards, the process of peer review in the realm of policy often ironically results in the weakening of scientific credibility.<sup>46</sup> The dueling interpretations of the Janowsky Survey and its critics undermined the credibility of all the expert evaluations of the JCC movement. Administrative and political considerations usurped the policy-making process as a result of this scrutiny. Had the Executive Committee of the JWB stepped in and mandated the adoption of Janowsky's recommendations rather

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 6, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>46</sup> Sheila S. Jasanoff, *The Fifth Branch: Science Advisors as Policy Makers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also: Sheila S. Jasanoff, "Contested Boundaries in Policy-Relevant Science," *Social Studies of Science* 17, no. 2 (May 1987): 195–230.



than leaving it to a democratic vote, they may have avoided a policy decision favoring the local interests of Jewish Center workers at the expense of the national field. Although the Survey did reaffirm the *value* and *expertise* of JWB services to JCCs, ultimately the contestation of the Survey's credibility undermined the legitimacy of the JWB as an organization trusted by its member agencies to guide a "movement." Instead, by opening the Survey up to revision and approval by agency representatives, the JWB affirmed its democratic principles at the expense of its authority.

Certainly the Independent Study was able to undercut any claim that the results represented a mandate. Hoping to influence the revision process of the Statement of Principles, the Sponsors of the Independent Study of the JWB Survey Commission Report circulated their conclusions amongst the small circle of JCD Committee members before their meeting in April. The wider field of JCC lay leaders and workers received a mailed copy in early May, just in time for the JWB's Annual Meeting in Chicago.

### **Achieving Closure, If Not Consensus, on the JCC's Jewish Purpose**

Three weeks before the Annual Meeting, the JCD Committee met to revise the Statement of Principles according to the feedback gathered from JCCs, the report of the NAJCW's Committee on the Janowsky Survey, and the Independent Survey. Prior to its discussion, the committee gave Janowsky the opportunity to refute the attacks made against him in the Independent Survey. While he repeatedly reminded the group that he had only been allowed to review their report in the moments before his extemporaneous rebuttal, Janowsky handily defended himself against Wirth by emphasizing that his recommendations were a guide to action for the JWB and were consistent with the

direction the organization had historically taken towards a more affirmatively Jewish purpose. He accused the dissenters of being disingenuous in calling out his "subjectivity" without admitting their own, and he countered their accusations of biased sampling and analysis by pointing out that he *had* acknowledged the contradictions in the survey findings within his report.<sup>47</sup> Although his comments may have alleviated some of the JCD Committee's doubts about the scientific credibility of the Survey, the committee ultimately based its decisions about the Statement on ideological and functional considerations and not on the Survey's empirical evidence.

The edits that the JCD Committee made to the Statement removed the most assertive expressions of Jewish differentiation and sectarianism and replaced them with text that supported a more universalistic and autonomous conception of the JCC. It refocused Article I on the American citizenship of Jewish individuals and portrayed their Jewish interests as a unique but not singular concern. By removing the second clause, "that the religious and cultural differentiation of the Jewish group, and other similar groups, is sanctioned by American democracy," the committee rejected particularism as a necessary and valuable aspect of cultural pluralism. It also pulled the text away from Janowsky's ideal of voluntary ethnic solidarity and brought it closer to the assimilationist perspective of the Sponsors of the Independent Study. The committee also changed the last sentence to reflect that the individual voluntarily affiliated with the JCC to satisfy *all*, not just "specialized Jewish," needs. The purpose of the Center, the revised article implied, was not group differentiation but rather the service of the total needs of Jewish

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<sup>47</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, "Address of Professor Oscar I. Janowsky in Response to the Report of the 'Independent Group' Presented by Professor Louis Wirth," April 17, 1948, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2.

individuals—a purpose much more in line with the perspective of group workers than with Janowsky's preservationist politics.

The committee made more significant changes to Article II. Originally the article, as written by Janowsky, had an active construction. It affirmatively declared that JCCs "should devote primary attention to Jewish content." The Committee not only revised the text to the passive voice, it also rejected the primacy of Jewish content. Instead of being the "greatest emphasis" of an agency's program, Jewish content was deemed "basic" and "essential" and one of the many resources Jewish Center workers should use to develop "human personality and group association." The changes to Article I and II removed the limitations placed on the professional expertise of Center group workers by Jewish content; it put social work methodology back into the scope of JCCs' purpose, particularly "informal education and leisure time" programming, and underscored professional autonomy by emphasizing the multiplicity of client needs and the authority of workers to decide on the best solutions.

The changes to the remaining articles were less profound, but still substantial. Rather than proscribing nonsectarian agencies from JWB membership, the committee rewrote Article III as a more affirmative declaration that advocated for JCCs to "fulfill its Jewish purpose" without rejecting non-Jewish participation. This represented a victory for the Sponsors of the Independent Study, who argued that nonsectarian agencies were an invaluable mechanism for and reflection of American ethnic synthesis. While Center workers did not express a strong consensus about nonsectarian membership in the JWB, this change by the JCD Committee reflected workers' concern about the incursion of

JWB authority. The positive re-framing of Article III pushed back against the JWB taking on the role of arbiter of the movement.

The group made the most radical changes to Article V. The committee eliminated the compliance clause and in its place included a suggestion that current member organizations "accept" the Statement. New members, "provisional" members (newly established agencies), and "associate" members (synagogue-centers) *would* still have to "conform" to the principles set forth in the Statement. This change effectively ended Janowsky's attempt to oust the nonsectarian agencies from the JWB, allowing them to grandfather in while assuring that, moving forward, the Statement of Principles would create coherence amongst its membership. In the end, the NAJCW committee report and the Independent Study had a profound influence on the outcome of the entire JWB Survey process.

At the 1948 Annual Meeting, the National Council of the JWB adopted the JCD Committee's revised Statement of Principles after making only a few changes of their own.<sup>48</sup> Just three weeks before the JWB Annual Meeting, then, the JCD Committee made meaningful changes to the Statement of Principles. The NAJCW and Jewish Center workers succeeded in re-shaping the JCC's purposes and the JWB's principles to suit their interests. In addition, they challenged the JWB's efforts to coordinate a JCC movement. The Sponsors of the Independent Study also succeeded in influencing the Statement to uphold a more universalistic purpose for the Jewish Community Center.

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<sup>48</sup> The first altered the structure of the Statement. Following intense discussions first as a group and then within committees, JWB officers amended Article I into a preamble. Article II became Article I and so forth, so that the final version consisted of a preamble and four articles. The only major change to the text was in Article I (formerly II). The National Council once again changed the valuation of Jewish content from "essential" to "fundamental," which after a year of debate was a distinction without much of a difference. The remainder of changes were revisions for clarity, and finally the last section of Article IV (formerly the hotly contested V) was made another "underlining general statement."

These changes did not come about, however, because the Independent Study invalidated Janowsky's methodology, findings, or analysis. Ultimately, despite the effort to discredit him, Janowsky and his report retained their credibility—the Jewish purpose of the JCC achieved consensus, even if the primacy of Jewish content did not. The Survey was published and disseminated widely, and Janowsky continued to receive invitations to contribute to surveys of the organized Jewish community in the decades to follow.

Instead the changes can be attributed the JWB's democratic approach to revising the Statement, particularly the opportunity it provided to Jewish Center workers to defend the boundaries of their profession. While Wirth and Janowsky attacked and undermined each other's authority and the validity of their knowledge, the NAJCW put forth a majority opinion that defended the social work principles of open membership and "total" personality development. In this way, they defended the boundaries of their profession by preserving both the autonomy and sectarianism of their workspaces; the JCC would remain a place where Jewish group workers had the complete authority to determine how individuals would achieve an American Jewish identity.

## **Conclusion**

While superficially the debate surrounding the Statement was about purpose, fundamentally it was an argument about segregation. Janowsky insisted that without a Jewish purpose the Jewish Community Center effectively engaged in the practice of segregation; the JCC pulled Jews together in cliquish social groups and excluded others on the basis of biological descent rather than affirmative, positive purpose. Wirth

meanwhile argued that nonsectarian agencies were the ideal of integration and that to impose Jewish content was to foolishly think that the American and the Jewish identities of any JCC member could be extricated and served separately; true democratic pluralism created American culture, the "product of the contribution of diverse ethnic strains."<sup>49</sup> Janowsky gave a reason for already separated people to stay separate, and placed a value on that separation. Wirth, on the other hand, justified Jews' regular involvement with non-Jews in all aspects of social and civic life, ascribing merit to ethnic integration.

Interestingly, even though it was Janowsky's ideology of Diaspora Nationalism that was losing popular favor among Jewish nationalists, it was his vision that ultimately won out in the 1950s. In a country struggling to define and understand civil rights on the basis of religion, ethnicity, and of course race, separation on the basis of a *religious* affiliation at least carried the imprimatur of voluntarism. For Jews this was not as simple as for Christians, whose religious and ethnic affiliations were independent. Secular Jews especially had to figure out a way to make ethnic affiliation, and separation, seem voluntary and reconcilable with democratic pluralism. Janowsky recognized that even though the fight was against separation, separation was the reality and the necessity in a multicultural society. An affirmative Jewish program in the JCC at once permitted Jews to integrate fully into American society and to explain why they wanted to maintain their own, powerful, communal organizations.

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<sup>49</sup> Louis Kraft, "Annotated Report by the Sponsors of an Independent Study of the NJWB Survey Commission Report," 12.

## Chapter 2: Synagogue-Center Relations and the Fight for Center Autonomy

In January of 1962, a synagogue-center in Los Angeles contacted Charles Ansell, a former Jewish Center worker, and asked him to participate in a public debate. The question would be: "Is the development of the Synagogue Center displacing the need for the Community Center?" Implicit in the question, Ansell noted, was the "complacent assumption" that indeed the synagogue-center *had* wrested the authority over leisure-time programming from the Jewish Community Center (JCC). Ansell had been involved with the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) for many years, and so he was asked to take the side of and defend the enduring value of the JCC movement. After agreeing to participate, he wrote a letter to his colleague Emanuel Berlatsky, the Director of Field Service at the JWB. Did the JWB, Ansell wondered, have materials that would help him argue this position?<sup>1</sup>

The debate over the continued relevance of the JCC was not limited to small local forums. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the expansion of both Jewish Community Centers and synagogues to new suburban communities across the United States brought rabbis and Jewish Center workers into conflict and competition. Spurred by a small but vocal group of rabbis, between 1961 and 1963 the Jewish Welfare Board and the Synagogue Council of America (SCA)—the national representative bodies of American JCCs and rabbis, respectively—escalated a longstanding argument over the value of the Jewish Community Center's continued existence. In nationally circulated periodicals like *The American Rabbi* and *Conservative Judaism*, rabbis published articles critiquing the JCC for running programs devoid of religiously or culturally Jewish content and,

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "Letter to Charles Ansell," January 19, 1962, National Jewish Welfare Board Records (NJWB), American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) Box 157, Folder 4.

consequently, for encouraging assimilation instead of promoting the continuity of American Jewry. Why should each community support two separate institutions, one religious and one social, when there could be one: the synagogue-center?

This critique reflected a broader shift in Americans' (and American Jews') understanding of identity, citizenship, and democracy during the 1940s and '50s. Over the span of a decade, Jews lost two fundamental explanations for their distinctiveness: their peoplehood (the Jewish race) and their radical class-based politics. World War II altered many of the divisions that had previously existed between Americans, by expanding "whiteness" to include formerly contested immigrant groups like Italians and Jews and by linking Catholics and Jews into a tri-faith brotherhood with Protestants. Americans now understood Jews to be their racial and religious equals, and this was especially important as the fight against fascism transitioned to the fight against "godless" communism and the country experienced a religious revival and a conservative backlash against radical class-based politics. Rabbis seized the opportunity afforded by this celebration of religion to assert their power in their communities. They benefitted from Americans' new understanding of Jews as a religious group. Amongst non-Jews, they touted the valuable role Judaism played in sustaining democratic pluralism. Within the Jewish community, however, rabbis still confronted many Jews who resisted the new imperative to express their association with the Jewish group identity through affiliation with a synagogue and the traditions of Judaism. It was these Jews who preferred to manifest their Jewish identity by affiliating with the JCC, where they socialized and exercised with other Jews and occasionally enjoyed culturally Jewish programs like folk dancing or a klezmer concert.



Empowered by Americans' embrace of religion and their esteem for religious leaders and institutions, opponents of the JCC attempted to use public opinion to force the Jewish Welfare Board to make policy changes that would favor the development of synagogue-centers. A synagogue-center merged the religious, the educational, and the social into one institution headed by a rabbi, whereas American JCCs focused more narrowly on the social needs of its members. Jewish Center workers, the social workers who organized and led the JCC program, provided their communities with access to quality childcare, organized sports leagues, classes in drama and music and art, and events ranging from concerts and lectures to community forums. Rabbis hoped that the JWB would instruct Jewish Center workers to provide these services *within* local synagogues—joining their social expertise with the religious and educational functions of the synagogue to create vibrant, flourishing synagogue-centers in communities across America. There was also a distinct financial incentive for rabbis who consolidated their community's religious and social activity under their authority. Congregations recognized that if they offered recreational and leisure-time programming they could attract new congregants *and* could convince their community to redirect philanthropic funds from the JCC into synagogue coffers.

Throughout the early 1960s, the JWB and prominent leaders in the JCC movement struggled to dispute the rabbis' central accusation: that JCCs were not incorporating "Jewish content" into their program, as they had committed to in the JWB Statement of Principles, and that as a result they were promoting Jewish assimilation rather than Jewish preservation. At a time in American history when religion was the only acceptable distinction between groups, and "Jew" was a religious identity, how could the

JCC argue that it fostered Jewish identity if it was not a synagogue? By extension, how could it challenge this very idea and argue for the possibility of a secular or cultural Jewish identity? The debates between rabbis and the Jewish Center movement between 1961 and 1963 reveal how difficult it was for the JCC to justify its existence as a committed sectarian but non-religious institution autonomous from the synagogue.

Jewish Center workers repeatedly defended themselves by arguing that they possessed unique expertise in "group work," a social work methodology that encouraged Jews to identify as part of the Jewish community. The JCC did not promote assimilation, they claimed, but rather it ensured the survival of the Jewish group. With this defense, the JCC movement successfully convinced their critics that its agencies attracted unaffiliated, secular Jews who used JCC membership as a way to identify with the Jewish group. The movement did *not* succeed, however, in challenging their detractors' implication that "Jewish content" should be "Judaic content." The JWB and Jewish Center workers struggled to articulate why it might benefit American Jewry to have a place where non-religious Jews could partake of culturally Jewish content, and that this—and not the integration of JCC activities into the synagogue—might better sustain American Jewry. They repeatedly fell back on their functional arguments for why the JCC remained relevant and why it should remain autonomous from the synagogue. They cited the JCC's pluralism, the social group work expertise of Jewish Center workers, and the increasing popularity of local agencies across the United States.

After two years of regular engagement with individual rabbis, the Rabbinical Assembly of the Conservative movement of Judaism, and the Synagogue Council of America, the JWB decided that the JCC's existence was secure. The SCA never

successfully demonstrated how the synagogue could replicate the JCC's religious pluralism and serve all Jews in the community, particularly secular Jews. Most rabbis lacked the expertise necessary to run successful social and recreational programs. The protracted debate also revealed that many rabbis and Jewish Center workers did see the benefits of joining together. In fact, collaboration was generally the reality on the ground, and in many areas JCCs consulted rabbis and synagogues with regularity. For example in Essex County, New Jersey, the community formed a Suburban Y Rabbinical Advisory Committee that brought together JCC staff and local rabbis to discuss the co-sponsorship of programs.<sup>2</sup> It was a small group who opposed the JCC, but their voices magnified across the United States. Their repeated attacks ultimately convinced the JWB that the JCC movement *did* need to do more to prove that they contributed to Jewish survival. By 1963, JWB leaders began strategizing how to augment the JCC's efforts to foster "positive" and "meaningful" Jewish identification *without* conflating Jewishness with Judaism *and* while protecting the "inclusive and diverse" pluralism that was the hallmark of the JCC. This debate mattered, then, because the rabbinate actually forced the JWB to revisit their Statement of Principles and to recommit the JCC to its Jewish purpose: the preservation of a vibrant, religiously pluralistic American Jewish community.

### **The Postwar Boom of Suburbs, Synagogues, and Jewish Community Centers**

Major demographic changes in American Jewish life spurred the confrontation between the JCC and the synagogue. Young Jewish families began moving to the suburbs

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<sup>2</sup> Suburban Y Rabbinical Advisory Committee, Essex County, NJ, "Minutes of Meeting," May 21, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 9; JCC of Essex County Suburban Service Department, "A Joint Program of Synagogues in North Essex and West Essex and the Jewish Community Center of Essex County," 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 9.

in the late 1940s, and by 1952 the trend was significant enough that the *American Jewish Year Book* took note.<sup>3</sup> Jews moved to the suburbs in greater numbers than any other ethnic group in the 1950s, as young Jewish men (and a few women) graduated college, entered white-collar professions, and attained the middle-class incomes to afford the new homes and cars that marked a suburban lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> Whereas before World War II, Protestant Americans had used restrictive covenants to ban Jews from the suburbs because they perceived Jews as not quite white, religiously very different, and "radical" members of the working class, the fight against fascism led Americans to view religious tolerance as a requirement for stable democracy. Protestant Americans accepted Jews as white co-religionists, their brothers and sisters in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Though Americans did not consider Jews "black" before WWII, their racial status was ambiguous.<sup>5</sup> By achieving whiteness, they moved closer in status to Protestants and Catholics of European heritage and away from African Americans, with whom they'd shared race and class solidarity in the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Whereas African Americans continued to experience discrimination despite the equality they demanded during the "Double V" campaign—which highlighted the double standard of African American soldiers fighting for freedom abroad when they encountered constant bigotry at home—as Jews entered the middle class and began buying homes in the suburbs they found little resistance to their presence.<sup>7</sup> The movement of Jews to new areas and

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<sup>3</sup> Morris Fine and Jacob Sloan, eds., *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 53 (New York: American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 1952), 157.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 282.

<sup>5</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), chap. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chaps. 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

exploding population growth in the suburbs (the result of the postwar baby boom) put constant pressure on Jewish communities to decide whether to build synagogues, synagogue-centers, Jewish Community Centers, or some combination of these institutions.

Suburbanization created demand not only for synagogues but also for spaces where Jewish families could spend their leisure time.<sup>8</sup> Between 1945 and 1958, the JWB oversaw a substantial expansion of JCCs. As of April of 1957, the JWB recorded statistics for 40 new JCC buildings and four building expansions that they had overseen or were in the process of shepherding to completion. Exactly half of these new facilities were constructed in areas with a Jewish population of fewer than 10,000 people.<sup>9</sup> These small Jewish communities were sometimes in less populous cities like Sioux City, Iowa, while others were located in newly developing suburbs at the periphery of large cities with large Jewish populations (for example, in the towns of Englewood and Plainfield in northern New Jersey).

The JCC building boom paralleled synagogue expansion. Arthur Hertzberg reported in the 1958 *American Jewish Year Book* that the Orthodox and Reform movements each added 20 new congregations between 1956 and 1957, while the Conservative movement added twice as many.<sup>10</sup> The staff of the JWB's Jewish Center Division began noticing in 1953 that as JCCs and synagogues expanded their

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin M Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise*. (Oxford University Press, 2013), chap. 4.

<sup>9</sup> National Jewish Welfare Board, "New Jewish Community Centers Since 1945," April 1, 1957, NJWB, AJHS Box 32, Folder 10.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Hertzberg, "Review of the Year (1958) in the United States: Religion," in *American Jewish Year Book* (American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 1959), 113–23; Jack Wertheimer, "The American Synagogue: Recent Issues and Trends," in *American Jewish Year Book* (American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 2005), 3–83; Abraham J. Karp, *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society*, Judaic Studies Series (University of Alabama Press, 1998), 38–42.

geography—to the American South and West, as well as to metropolitan suburbs—and built up their facilities, they also seemed compelled to expand their scope and function to "a broad, community-wide service."<sup>11</sup> The JWB staff reported that they were receiving requests from communities for advice about numerous scenarios, ranging from smaller communities where either a sole JCC or synagogue wanted to serve the community's Jewish needs, to larger metropolitan areas where suburban branches of urban JCCs were butting heads with newly formed synagogue-centers.<sup>12</sup> A 1956 survey of 102 JCCs from large and small communities across the U.S. revealed that 38 (37%) of these JCCs were running or supervising informal social and recreational programs in synagogues. Half of the 102 JCCs also responded that they provided synagogues with "program consultation and other services." Despite these high rates of engagement between the two institutions, "Most of the respondents referred to some type of problem of relationships with synagogues at this time." These respondents were JCC executives or staff and so, as might be expected, they attributed much of the problem to rabbis who they characterized as either misunderstanding of the function of the JCC or as feeling that the JCC competed with the synagogue, especially when agencies offered programs on the Sabbath.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Staff Committee on Synagogue-Center Relationships, "Minutes," November 3, 1953, NJWB, AJHS Box 23, Folder 4.

<sup>12</sup> In this way, the JWB recognized that city and suburb were inextricably linked. In many of the communities where synagogues or synagogue-centers were having conflicts with JCCs it was because suburban branches of urban JCCs were being built to fill in service gaps in new communities—it was an old urban confrontation carried by Jews to their new suburban neighborhoods. As historian Lila Corwin Berman demonstrates in the case of Detroit, communal leaders often perceived these issues as having a metropolitan scope. Whatever policies the JWB implemented to resolve tensions between the JCC and synagogues in the suburbs would in turn affect the numerous JCCs that remained in city neighborhoods. Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); Temporary Steering Committee of Commission on JCC Relationships with Synagogues, "Minutes," October 14, 1954, NJWB, AJHS Box 23, Folder 4.

<sup>13</sup> "Summary of the 1956 Survey of Jewish Community Center and Synagogue Relationships.pdf," May 1958, 19, NJWB, AJHS Box 23, Folder 4.

In the mid-1950s JWB leaders initiated a series of attempts to collaborate with representatives from the Synagogue Council of America. They sought to resolve these jurisdictional disputes and diplomatically negotiate ways for the synagogue and the Jewish Community Center to cooperate. A Joint Consultative Committee between the JWB and the SCA had been formed in 1945 to foster a partnership between the JCC movement and local synagogues.<sup>14</sup> That committee, despite meeting several times and drafting a tentative statement of recommendations in 1953, never successfully brought any policies to fruition.<sup>15</sup> It seemed that neither Jewish Center workers nor rabbis would ever agree to a policy that might force them to relinquish their autonomy. The JWB therefore established its own internal policymaking committees in 1955 to determine the movement's position on various aspects of the JCC's relationship to the synagogue and to Judaism. The JWB optimistically hoped that the formation of these internal committees would motivate the Joint Consultative Committee to take action.

The first of these internal committees was the JWB Commission on Jewish Community Center Relationships with Synagogues. In 1959 it ruled that synagogues should not, except in rare circumstances, be allowed to join the JWB as full members. Instead local JCCs were charged with serving their neighboring synagogues, working with rabbis to develop and collaborate on recreational and social activities for their congregants. This followed a 1958 decision by a second internal committee, the JWB

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<sup>14</sup> Sanford Solender, "Letter to Rabbi Uri Miller," October 2, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

<sup>15</sup> Temporary Steering Committee of Commission on JCC Relationships with Synagogues, "Minutes."

Committee on the Sabbath Policy of JCCs, that permitted agencies to open on Saturdays and holidays for activities deemed "consonant" with the sanctity of these days.<sup>16</sup>

By sidestepping the Joint Consultative Committee, however, these JWB committees failed to gain the support of the SCA. As a result, the policies they approved remained controversial. Rabbinical representatives served on both committees and participated in the policy-making process, but ultimately the JCC movement's decision to open on the Sabbath alienated rabbis, who were not happy that the JCC could compete with their Saturday-morning services. Likewise the SCA did not readily embrace the JWB's recommendation that synagogues solicit programming assistance from their local JCC.

With these policy decisions, the JWB and the JCC movement chose to prioritize the autonomy of their local agencies. Ultimately it favored guidelines that protected JCCs from rabbinical control, and that reinforced its own freedom from the desires of synagogues. In eliminating the possibility for synagogues to become constituent members, the JWB expressed that only Jewish Center workers had the expertise to host and sponsor recreational and leisure activities. Their Sabbath policy likewise granted Jewish Center workers the authority to meet members' demands for Saturday programming. Ironically, for an institution so devoted to the democratic process, the committees both managed—despite their best intentions—to act unilaterally in creating policies that affected synagogues and the rabbinate.

These decisions would have significant repercussions in the 1960s. For American rabbis critical of the JCC, these policies presented them with evidence that the JCC

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<sup>16</sup> The demographic, geographic, and socio-cultural changes driving the expansion of JCCs (and synagogues) also contributed to a growing demand on the part of Center members for leisure-time activity on the weekends.



movement was dismissive of Judaism, uninterested in synagogues, and thus was too secular and nonsectarian. A small but growing number of rabbis did not trust that the JCC was fulfilling its Jewish purpose and they felt especially bitter when they perceived that Jewish Center workers were undermining their authority to run leisure-time programming within their own synagogues.

### **“Jewish Leisurism”: A Threat to Jewish Identity?**

In 1961, a Conservative rabbi published an article in *The American Rabbi* leveling an argument that Jewish clergy had been making since the 1920s: that despite the fact that Jewish content was "ambiguous" or "absent" from the programs of most JCCs, these agencies received funds raised from the Jewish community. Jews donated money with the intention of supporting institutions that sustained the Jewish community. This included the promotion of health and wellness—and these funds often supported hospitals and family service agencies—but the ultimate goal was to ensure the survival of a distinct Jewish group. If the JCC program did not incorporate Jewish content (either related to Judaism or Jewish culture) then it was neither sustaining the Jewish identity of its members nor the continuity of the group. In "Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue," Rabbi Harold Schulweis argued that it was an opportune time for Conservative synagogues to reintegrate the informal social activities of the JCC, to marry the Judaism of the *shul* with the enjoyment of Jewish peoplehood that JCC members gained from their association with the Jewish Community Center.

In part, this argument reflected Rabbi Schulweis himself, a man who embodied the complicated spectrum of Jewish affiliation and identity and at various points in his

life occupied Jewish spaces ranging from secular to Modern Orthodox. He spent his childhood in a secular home; his father was a journalist and a socialist who insisted that the household be non-observant. His mother's father was a rabbi, however, and he prepared Schulweis for his Bar Mitzvah. Inspired by the experience, Schulweis attended a Jewish high school and then took his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Yeshiva University, a Modern Orthodox institution. He graduated in 1945 and instead of receiving his *smicha* (rabbinic ordination) from an Orthodox seminary, he enrolled at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary. In 1952 Schulweis assumed his first pulpit, at a Conservative synagogue in Oakland, California, and began implementing progressive reforms such as egalitarian services, bat mitzvahs for women, and participatory sermons where congregants could ask Schulweis questions about the Torah.<sup>17</sup> His *shul* was modern, a reflection of the society outside its walls.

Schulweis' argument also reflected changes in American society and in Jewish identity that empowered religious leaders and institutions. In the years following World War II, prominent scholars like Oscar Handlin and Nathan Glazer (who, not coincidentally, were both Jewish) began promoting a sociological "ethnic model" of group identity to explain how distinct populations of Americans could maintain their difference without compromising their Americanness. The ethnic thesis claimed Jews were at once American and ethnic, and that an American identity thus did not preclude a separate group allegiance. Social scientists defined ethnicity as commitment to a group and to American citizenship, not as an expression of distinctive values, ancestry, or race.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> Bruce Weber, "Harold M. Schulweis, Progressive Rabbi, Is Dead at 89," *The New York Times*, December 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/26/us/harold-m-schulweis-progressive-rabbi-is-dead-at-89.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, chap. 5.

exclusion of these markers, however, led to disagreements in the Jewish community about whether an individual's Jewish ethnic identity could only be expressed through affiliation with the synagogue or whether it could be expressed through affiliation with non-religious, culturally Jewish institutions or organizations.

Jews' understandings of ethnicity and identity were complicated by the religious revival that followed World War II. The Cold War threats of totalitarianism and "godless" communism in the 1940s and 1950s drew together American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in defense of democracy, religiosity, and tolerance. Theologians, clergy, and politicians alike espoused a shared "Judeo-Christian" tradition across the three faiths. Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism were brother religions, and so Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were brother Americans too. The appeal to "Judeo-Christian" tradition associated American national identity with religious identity. This association benefitted leaders of each of the three faiths because it inspired piety, combatted rising secularism, and contradicted secular liberalism by grounding democracy in a set of religious values.<sup>19</sup> Although the universalism of the tri-faith ideal benefitted Jews by welcoming them into American society to an extent that they never were before—including a new consensus of their whiteness—it came at a cost. The consequence of the Judeo-Christian consensus was that Judaism became the only distinguishing feature that was acceptable within American pluralism. In the 1940s and '50s, Jewish ethnicity came

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<sup>19</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*; Mark Silk, "Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1984): 65; Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish GIs and the Creation of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 8, no. 1 (January 1998): 31–53.

to be perceived by non-Jews as a religious identity—even if amongst Jews, there was still a strong desire for a secular or cultural Jewish identity.<sup>20</sup>

Schulweis' critique of the JCC's "absence of Jewish directives" reflected his understanding of Jewish identity as a religious identity; without incorporating Judaism, the JCC could not possibly be fulfilling the purpose laid out in the JWB Statement of Principles to serve "as an agency of Jewish identification."<sup>21</sup> He argued that it was disingenuous of JCCs to claim that by encouraging Jews to participate in recreation and leisure *with other Jews*, they encouraged their members to cultivate a sense of Jewish identification and thus made the Centers' activities an inherently Jewish program. In fact, Schulweis argued, the JCC program was one of "accommodation" because it allowed Jews who were constantly surrounded by the "dominant American secular civilization" to continue to elide religious and Hebrew instruction in favor of "massaging and slenderizing, seminars or contract bridge, charm clinics and photography, a lecture in how to invest in stocks and bonds, how to move on the dance floor...."<sup>22</sup> As Oscar Janowsky, the Director of the JWB Survey, had argued before him, Schulweis condemned Jews for segregating themselves in the JCC without a constructive purpose.<sup>23</sup> Although he placed some of the blame for this "de-culturation of Jewishness" in the JCCs' program on "Jewishly untrained" Center workers, Schulweis ultimately argued that it was part of a bigger process of Jewish assimilation—he named it "institutionalized collective assimilation." Jews did not seek JCC membership because they wanted to appreciate their

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<sup>20</sup> Laura Levitt, "Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism, and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 807–32.

<sup>21</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: The Dial Press, 1948).

<sup>22</sup> Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, "Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue," ed. Harry Essrig, *The American Rabbi* 1, no. 2 (1961).

<sup>23</sup> On the 1945–48 Jewish Welfare Board Survey, see Chapter 1.

Jewish identity, but rather because they wanted to appear the same as their Protestant neighbors who actively involved themselves in civic associations. To Schulweis, this meant that JCCs not only failed to expose their members to "Jewish civilization," they also enabled "purposeless ghettoism."<sup>24</sup>

Schulweis' critique did contain some kernels of truth. Two prominent JCC Executive Directors also spoke out in the early 1960s against the ambivalence they perceived toward Jewish content in the JCC movement. Both argued that Jewish Center workers relented too easily when faced with their members' indifference towards "programs that are characteristically Jewish," and as a result "the Jewish character of the Center tended to be chiefly symbolic and marginal in nature rather than basic in content."<sup>25</sup> These prominent leaders were pushing back against the status quo in the JCC movement, which developed out of the controversial JWB Survey. Jewish Center workers and a group of prominent Jewish communal leaders argued that Survey Director Oscar I. Janowsky's emphasis on the "Jewish purpose" of the JCC would impede Jews' ability to Americanize (and would make it seem that Jews were not committed to American democracy). Pressure from these groups led the JWB's National Council to adopt a Statement of Principles in 1948 that asserted that Jewish content was "fundamental" to the JCC program. It also listed JCC functions, however, that clearly preserved the universalistic ideals of the Jewish Center workers: first, that the JCC was a pluralistic agency that served the entire Jewish community of an area regardless of "doctrine or ritual," and second, that the JCC program "serve as an agency of personality

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<sup>24</sup> Schulweis, "Jewish Leisureism and the Synagogue."

<sup>25</sup> Carl Urbont, "The Dilemmas of Jewish Center Work," *Conservative Judaism* The Center and the Synagogue: A Symposium (Winter-Spring 1962): 26–34; Manual G. Batshaw, "Developments in American Jewish Life and Their Implications for Jewish Community Centers," 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 150, Folder 22.

development." This meant that although it was the Jewish Center workers' responsibility to facilitate their members' identification with the Jewish people and to instill in them a commitment to the Jewish group, they also had a responsibility to assist "in the integration of the individual Jew, as well as of the Jewish group, into the total American community." By the 1960s, this latter function did come to dominate the JCC program, leading critics like Rabbi Schulweis to accuse the institution of promoting assimilation instead of Jewish preservation.

Rabbi Schulweis recognized, however, that the JCC succeeded in one area that the synagogue failed: the pluralistic JCC attracted secular Jews, who avoided the synagogue, and provided a means for them to identify *culturally* as Jewish. Careful not to reduce his critique to a binary conflict of religion versus secularism, Schulweis proposed in "Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue" that instead of dismissing the JCC's cultural "Jewishness" as antagonistic to Judaism, synagogues should re-integrate Jewish culture. Why should the JCC and its non-sectarian program occupy a "position of economic priority" within Jewish communities? As a committed pluralist and progressive liberal, Schulweis carefully avoided calling for the elimination of the JCC. While agreeing that the JCC played an important function in unifying diverse Jewish communities, he argued that this function should be assumed by synagogues. Synagogues should overcome their denominationalism, adopt a policy of pluralism, and begin to undertake the JCC's "informal Jewish activities" but in a way that retained "the uniqueness of Judaism, which is found in the inextricable binding of people, culture, ritual and faith." Communal funds could then be siphoned away from JCCs towards synagogues.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, "Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue."

Capitalizing on a moment in which Jews' tolerance for Judaism was high, Schulweis challenged the JCC movement to explain how the JCC could protect Judaism and the Jewish people from assimilation better than the synagogue could. Although this was not a novel argument, in the 1950s the JCC movement struggled to respond.<sup>27</sup> If the only Jewish identity tolerated in Cold War America was a religious Jewish identity, and if the JCCs' commitment to pluralism meant that they were reluctant to provide religious programming for fear of alienating members who were secular or non-practicing (or, at the other extreme, who were more traditional), then what kind of Jewish identity *was* the JCC promoting? Under the pressure of rabbinical critique, the JCC movement failed to articulate the value of a Jewish identity based in shared culture or peoplehood.

Before World War II, socialism and working class politics had served as a secular ideology that united Jews into a group and served an alternative basis for Jewish identity. Whether or not Jews were involved in politics or were religiously observant, the Jewish public sphere was created and dominated by Yiddish and socialist newspapers and institutions. Newspapers, in particular, "encouraged new, often secular, identities, transformed the Yiddish vernacular into the primary language of intellectual discourse and literary creativity... and established new types of leaders (secular intellectuals and activists—men and women)."<sup>28</sup> For those who were raised in a milieu steeped in the secularist, universalist, and collectivist ideals of socialism, the Jewish Community Center reflected these values in its democratic, group-centered approach to social activity, in its

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of previous articulations of this argument, see: Jeffrey S Gurock, *Judaism's Encounter with American Sports* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Michels, "Socialism and the Writing of American Jewish History: World of Our Fathers Revisited," *American Jewish History* 88, no. 4 (2000): 521-46.

educational lectures and forums, and in its privileging of Yiddish and Jewish culture above Judaism and ritual.

World War II and the Cold War eroded this secular and cultural Jewish identity. Socialism and working class radicalism became increasingly suspect as the United States joined, and then came to lead, the global struggle against totalitarianism. Secularism was suspect, a sign of communist leanings, and Jews felt pressured by their Christian neighbors to downplay their politics, embrace the American Judeo-Christian tradition, and to express their Jewish ethnicity through their association with Judaism (even if they did not significantly change or adopt their religious practice).<sup>29</sup> Most Jews, who had already shifted towards the Democratic Party and the center-left of American politics during the New Deal, abandoned socialism en masse after the war and accepted this emphasis on religious identity.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the social and political pressure to affirm democracy and embrace religion, Jews also were moving into the middle class. Socialism and working class politics no longer resonated with third-generation, college-educated, suburban American Jews, even if they retained core liberal values. "Affluence came at a price," according to historian Tony Michels, for "It did not require that Jews disappear as a group, but it did require that they relinquish their most noble dreams and finest achievements, to surrender, over time, their yidishkeit." With their distinct political culture in decline, and relieved of their racial "otherness," Jews and non-Jews alike were persuaded that Judaism was what separated Jews from other Americans.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*.

<sup>30</sup> Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Michels, "Socialism and the Writing of American Jewish History," 546.



This new understanding of Jewish identity left JCCs scrambling to communicate a clear rationale for why their agencies should exist apart from the synagogue. Most Jewish Center workers and JWB staff understood Jewish identity in sociological terms: Jewish ethnicity was the product of identifying with the Jewish group.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the rabbis who opposed the JCC, JWB leaders and Jewish Center workers believed that that group could just as easily be a JCC membership as it could be a congregation.

This sociological orientation was a product of Jewish Center workers' professional training. Most of the Jewish Center executive directors and program staff employed in American JCCs in the 1950s and early 1960s had earned a degree in social work in the 1920s and '30s, in a period when the disciplines of social work and psychology increasingly came to believe that social problems and pathologies originated when individuals were "maladjusted" to a norm.<sup>33</sup> If the individuals in a group were "maladjusted" and did not exhibit "normal" middle-class behavior, that group would create social problems (like poverty, criminality, or violence) and democracy could not function. By the mid-1930s, social workers in settlements, YMCAs, and JCCs had popularized a methodology they called "social group work" that was predicated on this idea of individual adjustment. Social group workers posited that society would best function when groups interacted constructively and exhibited tolerance for one another, and individuals would only achieve the fullest development of their personality if they identified with and belonged to a social group. Through recreational and leisure time

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<sup>32</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 106–17.

<sup>33</sup> The explanatory constructs that social workers and psychologists developed mid-century emerged from the imperatives of wartime—that individual personalities affected the fitness of the social group, that the environment affected individual personalities, that individuals succumbed to the pressures of the crowd—because social workers and psychologists gained authority and legitimacy when they implemented practices that promoted and strengthened democracy. Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996).

activities like basketball or drama, these group workers taught their clients how to participate in, collaborate with, and accommodate their peers; in this way, each individual became "adjusted" and their personality "developed."

Jewish Center workers adapted group work to their own specific needs and began promoting "Jewish adjustment"—the practice of fostering Jewish identity and assuring Jewish preservation without compromising American democratic identity—as the goal of their group work practice. To outsiders, however, group work and Jewish adjustment appeared to be no more than well organized recreational activity, secular and indistinguishable from the offerings at the YMCA. Indeed, in 1960 the JWB's Director of National Program Services, Miriam Ephraim, lamented that although American Jews recognized the Center as a Jewish social and recreational agency, they did not completely grasp the "unique function" of the Center or the "significance of the use of the group work method." She felt that Centers needed to do a better job of communicating the value and benefits of the group work method and raised the concern that the increasingly pervasive perception of the JCC as a middle class leisure facility undermined the Center's purpose of fostering "citizen participation" and Jewish identification.<sup>34</sup>

For the JWB and many Jewish Center workers, Jewish identity was a function of voluntary association with a Jewish institution, and they were the institution that existed for Jews uninterested in association with a synagogue. What they failed to clearly articulate, however, was how a non-religious institution was Jewish at all, no less an "agency of Jewish identification." In part, they preferred to emphasize the group work method, which was their unique expertise and thus the basis of their professional

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<sup>34</sup> Jewish Center Division Committee, "JWB National Staff Conference Papers," February 1, 1960, NJWB, AJHS Box 28, Folder 10.

authority. More significantly, it was because many JCCs did not offer much by way of Jewish content in their programs—religious or cultural. In their frequent explanations of group work and the JCC program, JWB leaders and Jewish Center workers rarely argued that the JCC program provided a culturally Jewish alternative to the synagogue's religious offerings.

### **"Jewish Adjustment" and the JWB's Defense of the "the constructive use of leisure"**

The JWB's defense of the JCC overemphasized the value of group work. Following the publication of Schulweis' "Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue" article the Associate Executive Director of the JWB, Herbert Millman, contributed a response article to the following issue of *The American Rabbi*. In it, he drew parallels between the concerns stated by Schulweis in his article and those concerns of the JWB and its constituents. Millman concurred with Schulweis that the challenge of contemporary society, shared by all Jewish institutions, was materialism, indifference, distraction, and conformity with the gentile norm. The JCC was one facet of a wider effort to instill Judaism and Jewishness, alongside the synagogue and Hebrew schools, and he emphasized that since the JWB Survey the movement had committed itself to "enriching Jewish living." The JCC was an ally of the synagogue in this effort, one with a unique competence, and Millman rebuked Schulweis by staunchly dismissing the blame on the JCC as a perpetuating force of "collective assimilation"<sup>35</sup>

As experts in social group work, Millman explained, Jewish Center workers leveraged the "contactual Jewishness" disparaged by Schulweis to foster individual

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<sup>35</sup> Herbert Millman, "The Concerns of the Community Center," ed. Harry Essrig, *The American Rabbi* 1, no. 3 (November 1961); Herbert Millman, "A Commentary from Within the Jewish Community Center Movement on 'Jewish Leisurism and the Synagogue,'" October 26, 1961, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 2.

members' sense of fulfillment in their Jewish affiliation. Jewish Center workers "appl[y] the knowledge and methods of social work... to helping people toward self-realization as human beings, as Jews and as socially-responsible individuals and groups." As such, they, like Schulweis, were "not pleased that a relatively high proportion of Jewish individuals in the community are not affiliated or active in synagogue, or in other aspects of Jewish life...." Unlike Schulweis, however, Jewish Center workers did not perceive this state of affairs as an indictment of their methodology or as a mandate for the rabbinate to take over the guidance of Jewish communal life. Millman's response revealed that Jewish Center workers actually believed that disaffiliation reinforced the value of their practice, because the "groups which mean the most to individuals and with which they voluntarily affiliate have marked influence on behavior, attitudes, and outlook." If the JCC attracted formerly unaffiliated Jews, exposed them to "Jewish substance in the program (i.e., Jewish content)," and inspired them to participate in Jewish communal life, then the JCC's social group work program combatted rather than contributed to assimilation.<sup>36</sup>

Millman's corrective to Schulweis, then, was that the Center did not lead Jews to "abuse" their leisure time, but rather to help them "in the constructive use of leisure." As an example, he described how the Center movement was currently preoccupied with figuring out how to help single Jewish young adults (by which he meant those who had recently graduated from high school or were attending college) use their leisure time to develop careers, prepare for marriage, and become independent from their parents.<sup>37</sup> While this anecdote supported Millman's claim that the Center program was "constructive," it undermined his claim that the Center provided more than "contactual

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<sup>36</sup> Millman, "The Concerns of the Community Center."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Jewishness." The normal-abnormal binary he posed to prove the constructiveness of the center program did not identify normalcy with Jewish affiliation; instead he argued that "normal," adjusted young Jewish adults were married, in college, or enlisted in the military. As if to prove Schulweis' point, Millman ultimately showed more concern for the middle-class, conservative conformity of his members than for their identification with or participation in the Jewish community.

In doing so, Millman failed to address *how* exactly (and to what extent) the Center offered a positive Jewish program. What, beyond voluntary association, made the Center program Jewish? Instead of arguing that Jewish adjustment and group work were valuable methodologies because they fostered a non-religious "Jewishness" based in peoplehood and culture, Millman defended the value of these practices (the means) without articulating the value of the "Jewishness" they inspired (the ends). By not specifying that the JCC's role in Jewish communal life was to promote and protect a secular or cultural Jewish identity for those who did not want to identify with Judaism, Millman tacitly reinforced Schulweis' claim that the JCC was a secular institution and thus could not contribute to the preservation of American Jewish identity. He did not attempt to discredit Schulweis' argument that the synagogue could take on these responsibilities and function as a non-denominational and pluralistic religious space that sponsored informal activities and fostered "civilizational" Jewishness.

Instead, Millman defended the JCC's role in the marketplace of Jewish organizations and services and argued that the expertise of social workers in Jewish adjustment justified the existence of a separate institution. He exaggerated the extent to which Jewish Center workers were incorporating Jewish content and providing Jewish

programming, but he pointed to the JCC's religious pluralism to remind Schulweis that the institution's *modus operandi* had always been to unite observant Jews and secular Jews in one communal space—and not the secularization of which they were accused.<sup>38</sup> Social group work expertise nevertheless set forth an ideal, not a reality. Millman's article in *The American Rabbi* described the JCC program as if all of the JWB's constituent agencies were completely adhering to the Statement of Principles, and were achieving the optimal intended result of easing Jewish participation in American democracy and at the same time ensuring the continuity of the American Jewish group. Millman failed to show how the programs and interventions of Jewish Center workers prevented assimilation or nurtured a committed Jewish identity within their members. Even more problematically, he did not question or dispute Schulweis' conception of American Jewish identity as a religious identity, further undermining the JCC's value as a promoter and guardian of a secular or cultural Jewish identity.

### ***Conservative Judaism and the Escalation of the Synagogue-Center Debate***

Even if Millman had more resoundingly challenged Schulweis' claims in "Jewish Leisureism," the article was not an isolated critique and Schulweis was not the only rabbi who recognized what could be gained from the attack on JCCs. In April of 1962 the representative body of Conservative rabbis, the Rabbinical Assembly, published a special issue of its journal, *Conservative Judaism*, devoted to this debate. In doing so, this association of Conservative rabbis launched a rhetorical campaign to convince Jewish

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<sup>38</sup> Schulweis, "Jewish Leisureism and the Synagogue."

communal leaders across America that the JCC was a problem, a threat, and a competitor to "those who are laboring for a knowledgeable and committed Jewish community."<sup>39</sup>

It was not a coincidence that Conservative rabbis were at the forefront of the attack against the JCC. The Reform movement supported the modernization of Jewish institutions and emphasized the ethical and social values of Judaism—Reform rabbis generally valued the JCC's contribution to *klal yisrael*, the unity of the Jewish people, and their ethical commitment to serving the total community.<sup>40</sup> Orthodox rabbis rarely supported the JCC, and most Orthodox communities preferred to host leisure-time and recreational programs in their own synagogues and schools because they adhered more strictly Jewish laws and ritual observances. Conservative rabbis like Schulweis modernized rituals and traditions in their synagogues, but unlike the Reform movement they firmly maintained that Judaism rather than *klal yisrael* should be the foundation of the community and of Jewish group identity. The JCC's emphasis on pluralism and peoplehood did not do enough, in many rabbis estimation, to keep Jews interested and engaged in Judaism. Conservative rabbis also competed most directly with the JCC because the social offerings of their synagogues resembled the youth-focused social group activity of the JCC. Their objection to the JCC was thus both principled and pragmatic. Even so, only a small number of Conservative rabbis (and their rabbinical allies in other movements) involved themselves in this debate. Many Conservative rabbis had worked with the JWB in some capacity throughout their careers and continued to support the JCC.

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<sup>39</sup> The Rabbinical Assembly, "Letter Publicizing the Center-Synagogue Symposium Issue of Conservative Judaism," April 4, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

<sup>40</sup> David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999).

In "The Center and the Synagogue: A Symposium," *Conservative Judaism* reprinted Schulweis's essay from *The American Rabbi* along with five new articles.<sup>41</sup> Although the authors, all Conservative rabbis, wrote about a range of issues, the articles reiterated the same arguments leveled by Schulweis: because Jewish Center workers privileged their social work training and lacked Jewish knowledge, JCC programs were insufficiently Jewish and perpetuated the secularization of American Jewry, and because of this JCCs should not receive communal funds at the expense of the synagogue. The synagogue, they all agreed, should be the central institution of American Jewish lives.<sup>42</sup>

With the *Conservative Judaism* Symposium, the Rabbinical Assembly threw down the gauntlet and put the Jewish Welfare Board and its constituent agencies on the defensive. The postwar religious revival and the anti-communist celebration of the American Judeo-Christian tradition that arose in the 1950s had lent these Conservative rabbis the cultural authority to critique the "purposeless ghettoism" of the JCC's secular program. By 1962, however, the climate of religiosity in American life was beginning to wane. Jews who had enthusiastically contributed energy and funds to establish new suburban synagogues felt less obligated to attend weekly Shabbat services once they were built.<sup>43</sup> As such, the Symposium issue of *Conservative Judaism* also reflected the rabbinate's insecurity about their status and the survival of their synagogues.

Conservative rabbis saw the potential of the reconstructed synagogue-center to secure

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<sup>41</sup> The special issue of *Conservative Judaism*, although titled a Symposium, was not the printed record of papers given at a live meeting. The papers were requested for the Symposium issue by the editor of the publication, Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner. In addition to the five new papers contributed by Conservative rabbis, Dresner also requested to print a speech given by Carl Urbont, the Executive Director of the 92nd Y, which was critical of the JCC's lack of explicitly Jewish content. Urbont consented and submitted the text, but was not informed that it was to be used in this Symposium issue. Carl Urbont, "Letter to Dr. Samuel H. Dresner," May 2, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Conservative Judaism* 16, no. 2–3 (Winter-Spring 1962).

<sup>43</sup> Rachel Kranson, "Grappling with the Good Life: Jewish Anxieties over Affluence in Postwar America, 1945–1976" (Dissertation, New York University, 2012), chap. 2.



congregants by offering a full range of informal, recreational activity and cultural programming in addition to prayer services and the celebration of Jewish life-cycle events. Under the guise of uniting Jewish religion and culture, Conservative rabbis battled with Jewish Center workers for professional authority, autonomy, and communal resources in the form of members and funding. In the Symposium, the Rabbinical Assembly widely disseminated their argument that JCCs were not necessarily living up to their ideals. This threw the authority of the JWB and Jewish Center workers under scrutiny and threatened their professional and institutional autonomy.

In the months following the release of the Symposium issue in April, supporters of the JWB engaged in both public rhetorical debate and private dialogue to diplomatically defend the Jewish Community Center. In internal memos and speeches before their colleagues, leaders of the JWB and the National Association of Jewish Center Workers (NAJCW) pointed to the national increase in membership and the expansion of facilities to prove that JCCs were successful communal institutions that continued to be relevant in the post-immigration era.<sup>44</sup> On the editorial pages of the Jewish press from New York to Los Angeles, defenders of the JCC also made the case for the institution's lasting usefulness and resoundingly called the articles in the Symposium unnecessary and uncivil. They argued that the JCC provided a place for Jewish children to make friends and for Jewish teenage boys and girls to meet, and they pointed out that the Young Men's *Hebrew* Association was a better venue for this fraternizing than the alternative, the Young Men's *Christian* Association. The authors of these editorials admitted that JCCs

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<sup>44</sup> Sanford Solender, "Memo to Executive Directors of Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs," May 16, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 5; NAJCW Executive Committee, "Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee," November 18, 1962, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 2.

could incorporate more "Jewish content and attitude," but insisted that the synagogue "should abandon competition and concentrate on cooperation."<sup>45</sup> "Coveting attendance of the center," one editorialist advised, "doesn't bring social and communal services to the temple."<sup>46</sup> Another concluded, "The good Jew who is properly indoctrinated with the basic tenets of his faith does not have to be continuously attended by professional religionists."<sup>47</sup> Detractors of the JCC also made themselves heard in the Jewish press. In one editorial supporting the Rabbinical Assembly, the author dismissed the JCC's contemporary relevance by colorfully referring to it as "the most costly item" in "the growing collection of American Jewish fossils."<sup>48</sup>

The National Association of Jewish Center Workers also jumped in to defend the JCC and their professional work within them. NAJCW President Saul Rafel dispatched his own letter to the Rabbinical Assembly, condemning the Symposium for being a "propaganda campaign." Interestingly, he did not directly refute the argument that Jewish Center workers were poorly trained and Jewishly indifferent—a problem that the JWB and NAJCW had long been aware of and constantly struggled to alleviate with recruitment drives and training institutes.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Rafel asserted that Jewish Center workers were committed to Jewish "survival and enrichment;" the consistent funding that local JCCs received from "Jewish Federations, Welfare Funds and Councils" reflected the "daily evidence that thousands of our members are gaining increased identification with the Jewish people, our traditions and our values, through our Centers and YMHA's."

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<sup>45</sup> Editorial in the *American Examiner* (New York, NY), May 10, 1962. See Attachments to: Sanford Solender, "Memo to Executive Directors of Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs."

<sup>46</sup> Editorial in *Heritage* (Los Angeles, CA), May 3, 1962. See Attachments to: Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Editorial in the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* (Milwaukee, WI), May 11, 1962. See Attachments to: Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Editorial in the *Jewish Spectator*, May 1962. See Attachments to: Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, Louis Kraft, and Bernard Postal, *Change and Challenge: A History of 50 Years of JWB* (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1966), 74–75.

He concluded that Center workers "desire to work closely with all synagogues and with all other Jewish institutions in our joint striving to strengthen Judaism and the Jewish people."<sup>50</sup> For Jewish Center workers, it was best to elide the real deficit in trained Jewish social workers serving Centers and to instead focus on the ideal.

In an address before the Annual Conference of the NAJCW in early June, the Executive Vice President of the JWB, Sanford Solender, bolstered Rafel's claims with a barrage of statistical evidence. Solender framed the controversy as an ironic paradox: the rabbis blamed the JCC for creating problems that both institutions in fact faced, problems that JCCs were doing much more to address. Since the JWB Survey, JCCs had "applied themselves to kindling the interest, excitement and activity of Center members about Jewish concerns." Solender reported great success in expanding "enriching Jewish experience[s]" and particularly Jewish cultural programming in the Center. As evidence, he noted that of the almost three-quarters of JCCs that offered adult education classes, a third centered on "subjects of Jewish interest." Solender went further than Rafel to defend the Jewish Center workers who supervised such classes. The expansion of the JCC workforce "from 745 in 1945 to 1,550 in 1961," he argued, was accompanied by "dramatic rise" in training programs that brought together JCCs or Federations in collaboration with educational institutions like the University of Judaism in Los Angeles or the Jewish Education Committee in New York. This growth paralleled the growth of JCCs' membership, facilities, and budgets. Like Rafel, Solender emphasized how the doubling in capital value of JCC facilities from \$42 million to \$100 million and the tripling of JCC budgets from \$7 to \$23 million between 1945 and 1961 reflected the increasing value that communities placed on their agencies. These figures hammered

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<sup>50</sup> Sol Rafel, "Letter to Rabbi Edward Sandrow," May 7, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

back against the rabbis' accusations in the *Conservative Judaism* Symposium that the JCC was an assimilative vestige from the years of peak immigration, ill-suited for the post-war project of preserving American Jewry.

If Solender succeeded in demonstrating that JCCs were still heavily utilized sectarian agencies, his address less effectively conveyed how they promoted and protected the *religiously* based Jewish identity that the Rabbinical Assembly desired to preserve. As Millman had before him, Solender failed to explain exactly what the JCC did, aside from creating a pluralistic community, that was any different from the synagogue's social and educational programs. When it came to justifying the JCC's independence from the synagogue, Solender's defense was cripplingly tautological: the JCC program was defined by having its own facilities, and JCC facilities were defined by having a JCC program. If the JCC program was "rich" it was because it was autonomous, conducted under its own auspices in its own facility; consequently, it would be destroyed if it were to "function merely as a service body to synagogues."<sup>51</sup> With this logic, Solender reinforced the debate as a pragmatic one between sovereign professions and institutions, not a matter of conflicting visions for how to preserve American Jewry. Both Solender and Millman struggled to articulate the value of the cultural Jewish identity that the JCC nurtured *because* it was not a synagogue—nor did they validate their members' demand for agencies that fostered this form of Jewish identity.

Solender, Rafel, and the multitude of vocal supporters of the JCC nevertheless succeeded in redirecting the debate.<sup>52</sup> Their emphasis on the fiscal strength and expanding

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<sup>51</sup> Sanford Solender, "The Vital Future of the Jewish Community Center in America," June 3, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 5.

<sup>52</sup> Immediately after the Symposium's publication, Board members and executive staff of the JWB approached the Rabbinical Assembly demanding an explanation for the public excoriation of the Jewish

membership of the JCC movement did convince the leaders of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Synagogue Council of America (the umbrella organization representing rabbis and synagogues of all the Jewish movements) that their attempts to persuade communities to redirect JCC funds to the synagogue would probably not come to fruition. As the debate progressed the JCC's detractors progressively ceased their appeals for communal funding to establish their own synagogue-centers. By dropping their arguments for the primacy of the synagogue, the rabbinate abandoned the goal of the reconstructed synagogue-center and accepted the future of the JCC as an institution. Instead they honed in on what they perceived to be the JCC's vulnerability—its "Jewishness." If they could not eliminate the JCC, by reshaping it into a more religious institution they could at least gain power within the JCC. In addition to augmenting their communal authority, this would give them the opportunity to draw more Jews to their synagogues. Consequently, as the debate progressed throughout 1962 and 1963, representatives of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Synagogue Council of America increasingly focused on the JCC's "Jewishness."

On July 9, 1962 representatives from the Jewish Welfare Board and the Rabbinical Assembly finally met in person to discuss their grievances and make a plan for future cooperation.<sup>53</sup> Rabbi Edward T. Sandrow, the President of the Rabbinical

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Center. In a letter to Rabbi Edward T. Sandrow, the President of the Rabbinical Assembly, JWB President Solomon Litt admonished the Rabbinical Assembly for not pursuing internal discussion and collaboration. Litt also denounced *Conservative Judaism* and its editor, Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner, for failing to solicit an article featuring the perspective of the JWB (and instead misappropriating a speech given by Carl Urbont for an audience of Jewish Center workers). See: Solomon Litt, "Letter to Rabbi Edward Sandrow," n.d., NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 5; Rabbi Edward T. Sandrow, "Letter to Carl Urbont," May 9, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 5. These letter were later circulated to Center Executives to serve as discussion starters with staff and lay leadership. See Attachments to: Sanford Solender, "Memo to Executive Directors of Jewish Community Centers and YM-YWHAs."

<sup>53</sup> This meeting resulted from a recommendation adopted in May at the Rabbinical Assembly's annual convention, calling for such a meeting "for the purpose of discussing the goals and programs of the community centers.... to lead to a clarification of the responsibility of the Centers toward the promotion of

Assembly, and the editor of *Conservative Judaism*, Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner, represented the Rabbinical Assembly. Sanford Solender, Herbert Millman, and two other JWB associates spoke for the JWB. As an "essential prerequisite" for this meeting, the JWB requested that *Conservative Judaism* agree to desist with their attacks on the Center movement.<sup>54</sup> Although Dresner retained the editorship of the journal, Sandrow and the Assembly's Executive Committee insisted that the Editorial Board be "reorganized with a view to making the magazine both more representative of the Rabbinical Assembly," essentially recognizing that many Conservative rabbis supported the JCC, "and giving [the magazine] a more official character."<sup>55</sup> The tokenism of this reprimand became clear when Dresner announced to the group that the Synagogue Council of America was reviving the JWB-SCA Joint Consultative Committee, which had been inactive since the 1950s, and that he would serve as the chairman.<sup>56</sup> Notably, no one commented on his good intentions; someone did, however, question whether Dresner was "sufficiently objective" to chair this committee.

The skepticism was well founded. Dresner's behavior in the meeting underscored the JWB's belief that the Symposium was not a benign "thinkpiece" on the role of the synagogue but rather a coordinated effort to further a pro-synagogue agenda. Dresner proposed a six-point plan for how discussions of JCC-synagogue collaboration should

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the ideals of Judaism... and the establishment of a joint on-going body of Center and Rabbinic representatives for the establishment of closer understanding, liaison and cooperative undertakings between the Center and the Synagogue." Rabbinical Assembly, "Community Center and the Synagogue," May 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Millman, "Summary of Discussion with Representatives of the Rabbinical Assembly," July 9, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 4.

<sup>55</sup> Rabbi Edward T. Sandrow, "Letter to Rabbinical Assembly Members," July 11, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8. For more on Rabbi Samuel Dresner and his involvement with Conservative Judaism (both the movement and the journal) see: Pamela Susan Nadell, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (ABC-CLIO, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> Ostensibly, the transfer of the negotiations from the Rabbinical Assembly to the Synagogue Council of America, which represented the rabbinate of all of Judaism's movements, reflected a desire to include all synagogues in the resistance against the JCC.

proceed, which included topics such as "Avoidance of duplication of sponsorship of youth groups" and "How can Centers serve the youth programs of synagogues." Dresner clearly privileged the synagogue by implying that JCCs should consider assuming the responsibility of supporting synagogues' auxiliary leisure programs. The agenda items that entertained a possible future for the Center, such as "establish a committee of rabbis... which would deal with the question of Halachah and Jewish law relating to the Center," were predicated on allowances for synagogal or rabbinical influence.<sup>57</sup>

Despite Sandrow's attempts throughout the meeting to play the diplomatic "good cop" to Dresner's "bad cop," little headway was made on repairing the relationship between the JWB and the Rabbinical Assembly. *Conservative Judaism* did cease its attack on the JCC, but Dresner continued to irritate the JWB in his role as Chairman of the "joint" SCA-JWB committee. Even though they were now dealing with the Synagogue Council of America and not the Rabbinical Assembly, the JWB repeatedly resisted the "joint" committee as a strategy for collaboration and never committed to participating.

Two months after the meeting, the SCA's Committee on Jewish Community Centers (unsurprisingly also chaired by Dresner) again applied pressure on the JWB when it passed a resolution that called for the JWB to institute a "moratorium on Sabbath openings" of Centers and to immediately implement "recommendation 11 Section 1 and 2" of the JWB Survey report. These sections specified that the Jewish Center Division of the JWB appoint SCA rabbis to an advisory body to draft "a statement of policy governing religious practices" in the JCC.<sup>58</sup> Effectively, the Synagogue Council used

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<sup>57</sup> *Halachah* is the body of Jewish religious laws derived from the Torah.

<sup>58</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 33.

these recommendations to turn the JWB's *own* policy back around onto itself; it used the organization's self-identified weakness in "religious practices" to insinuate the rabbinate into the decision making process of the JCC movement.<sup>59</sup> With this resolution, the SCA demonstrated once more that it did not accept the policy adopted by the Committee on the Sabbath Policy of JCCs without their consultation in 1958.

In September of 1963, the new President of the SCA, Rabbi Uri Miller, wrote to Solender to notify him that the resolution had been adopted by the SCA.<sup>60</sup> He urged Solender and the JWB to consider joining with the Council to form a "permanent advisory agency" and concluded: "We trust that the Jewish Welfare Board will respect the feelings of the Jewish religious community of the United States regarding these matters."<sup>61</sup> Solender responded to Rabbi Miller with a reminder of the two organizations' shared history: the JWB's Sabbath policy had been set in March 1958, in consultation with rabbis and community members, and was in fact created *because* the Joint Consultative Committee of the JWB and SCA that existed from 1945 to 1957 had failed to come to an agreement. Furthermore, the Joint Consultative Committee *had* been formed in response to recommendation 11 of the Janowsky Survey. The JWB had not neglected to honor the mandates of its self-evaluation. Solender also reminded Rabbi Miller that because each Center was autonomous, there were limits to the JWB's enforcement of the policy. Solender expressed ambivalence about forming a *new* joint

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<sup>59</sup> Synagogue Council of America Committee on Jewish Community Centers, "Resolution on Jewish Community Centers," May 27, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

<sup>60</sup> Rabbi Uri Miller, "Letter to Sanford Solender," September 9, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 9.

<sup>61</sup> This was not the first attempt to commit the JWB to a joint committee. The president before Rabbi Miller, Rabbi Julius Mark, had asked Solender to join in April, warning that if not the SCA would continue unilaterally. Solender's response reflected his impatience with the SCA's actions and threats. Rabbi Julius Mark, "Letter to Sanford Solender," April 12, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8; Sanford Solender, "Letter to Rabbi Julius Mark," May 6, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.



committee and stuck to his conviction that ad hoc meetings would be more appropriate, unless "our future relationships indicate a need for a standing body."<sup>62</sup>

As a gesture of the JWB's willingness to discuss issues of mutual concern with the SCA, Solender agreed to a meeting between representatives of the two groups in December of 1963. Of the 17 attendees at the meeting, including Solender and Millman from the JWB and Miller and Dresner from the SCA, there were seven rabbis present; the JWB made sure to bring along two, Rabbis Philip Goodman and Morris Lieberman, to demonstrate that there were JCC supporters amongst the American rabbinate.<sup>63</sup> The encounter was contentious, and the very fact that the entire session devolved into a debate over what the agenda should be revealed the intractable divergence in approach between the two sides. Fundamentally, the SCA wanted the JWB to help them revive the Joint Consultative Committee in order to discuss the opening of Centers on the Sabbath, but the JWB recognized the futility of the engagement and stood by their extant Sabbath policy.<sup>64</sup>

It was Lieberman who reinforced Solender's demurral of Rabbi Miller's agenda. Lieberman opposed the formation of a joint committee on two counts. First, he articulated that the Synagogue Council did not view the JWB as an equal. Second, he challenged the consensus of the Council and questioned whether they could even fairly represent the opinions of their constituents. Council representative Herbert Berman, perhaps attempting to deny that the Council considered itself superior to the JWB, declared that it had "no intention to dictate policy to JWB but it is interested in JWB's

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<sup>62</sup> Sanford Solender, "Letter to Rabbi Uri Miller."

<sup>63</sup> Notably, Rabbi Lieberman affiliated with the Reform movement and Rabbi Goodman received his ordination from the Modern Orthodox Yeshiva University.

<sup>64</sup> "Meeting of Representatives of NJWB and Synagogue Council of America," December 11, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 8.

program." In his next breath he contradicted that sentiment, threatening that were the JWB not to cooperate in a joint committee the Council was "prepared to act on their own." In the midst of this back-and-forth, the Executive Vice President of the SCA left the meeting in protest. Rabbi Philip Goodman—the other rabbi representing the JWB—reminded the Council that the original joint committee had not succeeded in reaching a compromise on JCC policy: "during the twelve years of the Joint Consultative Committee from 1945-1956 there was actually no specific accomplishment. The Joint Committee never reached agreement on any one statement." This intervention finally prompted the group to move on from this point, but attempts to select a less contentious topic for discussion than Sabbath opening failed when Rabbi Miller insisted that it remain the central concern of the meeting. After another series of volleys between the two sides, the sole point of agreement was that there should be another meeting, to discuss a topic decided by a subcommittee. For the JWB, the meeting reaffirmed their position that the rabbinate was uninterested in compromise and sought only to impose their own views on the Center.<sup>65</sup>

Although the group did meet twice more, it made no progress.<sup>66</sup> Once the rabbinate dropped their arguments for synagogal primacy and ceased making claims on communal resources, the JWB recognized that they had the upper hand. Millman, in a report to the Board of the JWB on the topic, noted that "Synagogue Council is apparently in a period of seeking to broaden institutional goals, assume broader responsibility and

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Interoffice Memo Regarding March 24, 1964 Meeting between JWB and Synagogue Council of America," March 25, 1964, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 11.

authority, [and] obtain greater financial support."<sup>67</sup> In their engagements with the JWB, however, the SCA failed to demonstrate how rabbis and synagogue leaders would succeed where Jewish Center workers had not, namely in how to reconcile social and recreational activity with some form or aspect of Judaic content. Meanwhile, the JWB repeatedly highlighted the growth of their membership and facilities. No Jewish Federations or Welfare Funds threatened to pull their financial support from JCCs in favor of synagogue-centers. Although the accusations leveled in the *Conservative Judaism* Symposium articles forced the JWB to confront a real weakness in its self-conception, the JCC movement emerged relatively unscathed. To the contrary, JCCs continued to flourish in the early 1960s and the JWB increasingly approached engagements with synagogue-center boosters confident that the synagogues needed them more than Centers needed the synagogue.

After two years of entanglement with leadership at the Rabbinical Assembly and the Synagogue Council of America, Millman, Solender, and the Jewish Center Division staff deemed the Jewish Community Center, as an institution, safe from the encroachment of rabbinical authority. Despite their security, however, these JWB leaders also realized that the rabbinate had identified a very real vulnerability in their movement. Lacking clear evidence for how JCC programs fostered their members' Jewish identity and how the JCC thus contributed to the preservation of American Jewry, the JWB deflected with arguments about the JCC's popularity and the value of social group work methodology. Had the Rabbinical Assembly not gone on the offensive, creating the perception that the synagogue was the antagonist and the JCC an innocent victim, the JWB might have come

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<sup>67</sup> Herbert Millman, "Report to Board of Directors on Relationships with Synagogue Council of America," January 1964, NJWB, AJHS Box 157, Folder 11.

under more scrutiny and faced more pressure to prove how their programs contributed to communal goals.

### **The “Jewish Purpose” of the JCC Achieves Consensus and Closure**

By November of 1962, the JWB's Jewish Community Center Services staff began to consider the image of the JCC amongst American Jewry. As they reviewed a variety of surveys from large and small communities across the United States, the staff determined that members were attracted to JCCs for specific services, particularly nursery school, after school care, and teen sports programs. The "Jewish purpose of the Center," they noted, "is generally seen as the least important." How could they more clearly articulate the ways that the JCC program fostered Jewish identity without compromising their pluralism and alienating their secular members?<sup>68</sup>

The JCC Services staff were sophisticated readers of survey data, considering that surveys were one of the national field services they offered their member agencies. They recognized the interpretive challenge presented by the methodologies of questioning and sampling. Reviewing the survey responses, the staff noted that JCCs clearly articulated the goals and functions of childcare, recreational, and leisure services to their membership, whereas they delivered ambivalent messaging about the Jewish purpose of the JCC to a membership equally unsure of their interest and commitment to Jewish programming. Alfred Dobrof, who worked in the JWB Community Planning Services department, succinctly assessed the results, asking, "In our method of conducting interviews, is it possible that respondents will articulate those things they understand

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel D. Freeman, "Minutes of Jewish Community Center Services Staff Meeting," November 11, 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 25, Folder 8.

clearly and can verbalize easily?" Even without a firmly stated conviction that the Center should be an affirmatively Jewish institution, the staff discussed that there was nonetheless a paradox: "A further question...is why our national statistics show increased membership in the Jewish Community Center each year if the Jewish purposes appear less important than other responses in these samplings? Why don't Jews in greater numbers use other leisure time agencies?"<sup>69</sup>

The JCC Services staff asked, in effect, why Jews wanted a *Jewish* community center but not explicitly "Jewish" activities. They recognized that their members sought affiliation with the JCC in order to feel a connection to the Jewish community, and that for many this connection was based in shared culture and peoplehood and not in the traditions of Judaism. This is what Solender and Millman had struggled to articulate in their defense of the JCC following the *Conservative Judaism* Symposium. While they persuasively argued that the JCC's religious pluralism attracted secular or unaffiliated Jews who were otherwise lost to the organized Jewish community, and that this was why the organized Jewish community funded the JCC, they never articulated how the JCC was one of the only places left in postwar America for Jews to express a secular and cultural Jewish identity. Although Americans' embrace of religion and religious identity in the 1940s and 1950s empowered a group of rabbis to claim that JCCs' "non-sectarianism" threatened Jewish survival, American Jews' waning embrace of Judaism ultimately empowered the JWB. The JWB nonetheless recognized (as Janowsky had over a decade earlier) that most JCC workers and members were not even fully committed to the institution's *culturally Jewish* purpose—and if Schulweis and his colleagues

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

demonstrated nothing else, they certainly showed that the priorities of American Jews were shifting. How would this affect the JCC movement's priorities?

This question animated the discussions at a conference held in January of 1963, which JWB staff began planning after the Symposium controversy demonstrated just how little they had accomplished since the Janowsky Survey to combat the perceived nonsectarianism of the JCC. In cooperation with the NAJCW, the JWB invited Jewish educators, social scientists, Center workers, and (supportive) rabbis to Lakewood, New Jersey, for a four-day summit on "Future Directions of American Jewish Life and their Implications for Jewish Community Centers."<sup>70</sup> The stated outcome of the event was to determine how the JWB could help its affiliated JCCs "better serve" American Jewish communities, but underlying the proceedings was an existential angst about how the JCC could stake out or justify its role in communities. The planners deliberately structured the conference so that the first two days were spent in sessions conducted by experts that led discussions on trends in American Jewish communities. Only on the last day of the conference did the group finally evaluate the meaning of these changes to the JCC. To stimulate and invigorate the discussion beyond the usual conversations had in JCC Services Staff meetings, the JWB sent a third of its invitations to the conference to "persons who have no connection to the Jewish Community Center field, but are trained persons from the fields of Jewish scholarship, the rabbinate, Jewish education and Jewish community organization." Staff recognized that their predominantly social worker staff

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<sup>70</sup> "Future Directions of American Jewish Life and Their Implications for Jewish Community Centers: Proceedings of the Conference Sponsored by the National Association of Jewish Center Workers and the NJWB" (NJWB, January 6, 1963), Berman Jewish Policy Archive, [www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=18672](http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=18672).

had failed to implement any meaningful Jewish programs and that they needed the expertise of religiously trained or observant Jews to develop a plan of action.

After two days of presentations and discussion on the "Religious, Educational, and Cultural Prospects" of the JCC and on the "Socio-Economic Factors" and "Nature" of Jewish communal life, Bertram Gold, a veteran Center executive, summarized the Conference in the last session. The most significant change he identified was the trend since 1945 away from secularism and towards Jewish survival. He urged his colleagues to recognize that JCCs needed to embrace Judaism and stop solely engaging with Jewish culture. The conference sessions, he declared, had helped him to see that these were not binary opposites but rather "two sides of the same coin." The JCC needed to balance its commitment to Jewish adjustment and social work with religious programming— if not religious observances, at least programs that viewed religious principles and the values of Judaism as an inherent part of Jewish identity.

To execute this balance, Gold believed, would require the JWB to implement two new efforts. First, the JWB should more regularly evaluate its programs to identify how successful they were in fostering Jewish identity amongst members. The second initiative would be to develop new leadership, a new generation of Jewish communal workers who would strengthen the training of Jewish Center workers in social work *and* in Jewish culture and religion.

At the JWB's National Staff Conference later that year, Herbert Millman reflected on the outcomes from the Lakewood discussions. Similarly to Gold, in Millman's estimation the conference exposed how the JCC movement "must be more definitive about our Jewish commitment. We [JCCs] must not only assert our Jewish purpose, but

must gain and interpret greater clarification of what we stand for. This calls for deeper knowledge and greater skill by staff...."<sup>71</sup> The keynote lecture of the same conference, given by Manuel G. Batshaw, the Executive Director of the Jewish Community Centers of Essex County, New Jersey, likewise argued that the Center needed to invert its priorities and become a venue for promoting Jewish identification. Adopting the arguments of Jewish survivalism, Batshaw urged JWB staff to bear in mind that "The cause upon which [the JCC] is now embarked, and which it must express through quality and content of program, is Jewish distinctiveness within the context of American life."<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, this sentence would not have been out of place in Janowsky's survey report. What was different was that Janowsky had been fighting against consensus. In 1948 the country was deeply concerned with promoting democracy and opposing totalitarianism, and Janowsky's calls for Jewish distinctiveness seemed to threaten an ideal "unified" American society. Janowsky, as a result, had to argue against his critics that without "enrich[ing] the specialized Jewish spiritual-cultural way of life," the JCC would be an anti-democratic, segregated institution.<sup>73</sup> By the early 1960s, however, the only person making this argument was Rabbi Schulweis. Schulweis appealed to postwar Americans' zeal for religious pluralism by revising Janowsky's argument to advocate for more enrichment of a "Jewish spiritual" way of life. Yet religious pluralism in America was reaching its limits, and Americans increasingly recognized that limiting group distinctiveness to religious identity had failed to achieve national unity or equality and

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<sup>71</sup> Herbert Millman, "JWB Today- An Overview of Developments Since the Last National Staff Conference," 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 25, Folder 8.

<sup>72</sup> Manual G. Batshaw, "Developments in American Jewish Life and Their Implications for Jewish Community Centers."

<sup>73</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 8.



had instead forced groups to restrain other distinctive elements of their identity—most notably, it ignored racial difference and racial inequality.<sup>74</sup>

For Jews, this shift in American values meant that cultural "Jewishness" could once again explain why Jews had a separate group identity. The restoration of "Jewishness" reinforced the JCC's role as the pluralistic unifying agency of the Jewish community, but Americans' rising tolerance for distinctiveness did not eliminate the issue of "purposeless ghettoism." To justify separating Jews from non-Jews, the JCC still had to incorporate Jewish content into its program and demonstrate that it was not a non-sectarian agency. "Jewish content," however, could now be cultural in form, like Yiddish literature and music, and promote Jewishness rather than Judaism. By 1963, then, the vast majority of Jewish Center workers and JWB leaders who had accepted the "Jewish purpose" of the JCC but never implemented or enforced Jewish content in the JCC program finally committed to the JWB's Statement of Principles. The "Jewish purpose" of the JCC achieved closure.

The extent to which the JWB needed to change, however, remained open to debate amongst staff. Harold Arian, the JWB's consultant to the JCCs of Metropolitan New York, pointed out in response to Batshaw's keynote lecture that the goals of the JWB had not shifted since 1948, "but there is evidence that we are not achieving them." He wondered aloud whether JCC members would embrace new goals, considering that most JCCs had not successfully persuaded members to embrace their current priorities of Jewish identification and survival. His colleague, Al Dobrof, furthered this line of thought when he asked, "Has group work become an end in itself rather than a tool in

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<sup>74</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, chap. 8, Conclusion. Silk, "Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America," 16–17. Silk argues that ethnic particularism did not arise until the 1970s, but I argue that in JCC movement this acceptance of particularism occurred in the early 1960s.

achieving priorities?" These two JWB staffers believed that the issue did not lie not in the stated mission of the organization, but rather in the implementation of programs that actually succeeded in fostering Jewish identity amongst the membership.<sup>75</sup>

On February 10, 1964, a JWB Task Force met to establish the JCC's "Functions in Light of New Needs." Their assessment of "new needs" was based in the information brought to light at the Lakewood Conference. Many of the problems facing American Jewry revolved around how individuals developed a Jewish identity and found meaning in the community and in its institutions. In particular, Task Force members concerned themselves with how they could at once augment the JCC's efforts to foster "positive" and "meaningful" Jewish identification *without* conflating Jewishness with Judaism. They wanted to protect the "inclusive and diverse" pluralism that was the hallmark of the JCC as an institution, to continue to "suit individuals with different needs."

To further their work, the Task Force then set forth three guiding assumptions. First, they would focus on the needs of their membership rather than "accepting some old and current statement of Center function." Their second assumption stated that objectives and not method of work should guide the purpose of the Center. Finally, the Task Force emphasized that the Center "cannot and should not" attempt to address all of the needs and problems of American Jewry, but rather focus on those "in which its staff has greatest competence." The first two assumptions indicated that the authority of the old regime of adjustment and group work were being questioned. Whereas in 1948 the imperative of Jewish Center workers was to defend mainstream, secular social work practice against Janowsky's "affirmative Jewish purpose" in order to protect their professional authority,

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<sup>75</sup> "Minutes of Discussion of 'Developments in American Jewish Life and Their Implications for Jewish Community Center Work,' JWB National Staff Conference," March 6, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 25, Folder 8.

by the 1960s the pressure of the rabbinate and the rising acceptance of Jewish distinctiveness meant that there was more professional authority to be conferred on those who could contribute to Jewish preservation, not merely provide social and recreational services to a Jewish membership. The third assumption, however, acknowledged that Center workers did retain a measure of authority for their work. They continued to pride themselves on their "competence" in family case work and adolescent group work, the latter of which became the focus of the Task Force. They recommended that the JWB support JCCs by conducting effectiveness research and disseminating the results; their action plan called for the JWB to develop demonstration projects for teens *and* for staff, to empirically evaluate the effects of new activities (for teens) and new Jewish training programs (for staff).<sup>76</sup>

The research-intensive focus of the Task Force reflected the larger sentiment amongst JWB and JCC leadership that there should be more effectiveness research occurring within JCCs. Coincident with the Lakewood Conference, in January of 1963 the JWB established the Florence G. Heller Research Center in cooperation with the NAJCW.<sup>77</sup> In a prospectus describing the purpose and rationale for the new research center, the JWB argued that "The soundness of present group work methods and the effects of various programs on participants is yet to be tested and verified. *Center work*

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<sup>76</sup> JWB Task Force on JCC Functions in Light of New Needs, "Summary of Highlights and Decisions of First Meeting," February 10, 1964, NJWB, AJHS Box 33, Folder 12.

<sup>77</sup> The Florence G. Heller Research Center was actually the continuation of a Research Institute run by the NAJCW in various forms since 1956. The JWB agreed to take over as the funder and administrator of the Center after a 5-year experimental period of joint support between the two organizations. It was named in honor of Florence G. Heller following her death in 1966. See: Irving Canter, "Special Research Section: Research Institute For Group Work In Jewish Agencies," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 40, no. 2 (December 20, 1963): 141–42; Steering Committee on Research Center of JWB, "Minutes," January 28, 1963, NJWB, AJHS Box 31, Folder 2.

*now must advance to a more scientific and validated basis.*"<sup>78</sup> Although the JWB used this rhetoric strategically to gain support for their new venture, it simultaneously belied the defensive posture of Jewish Center workers. Increasingly insecure about the usefulness of their work, Center group workers turned to objective, scientific analysis to bolster their legitimacy and, ideally, to prove to the rabbinate that they possessed a distinct expertise.

The establishment of the Florence G. Heller Research Center represented the JWB's acceptance that its past strategy of repeatedly affirming its commitment to the ideal of a Jewish purpose was not sufficient to convince the Jewish community that it was a sectarian institution. Still, effectiveness research was not a particularly radical solution—its emphasis on empirical, objective science reflected the same values as the group work expertise formerly touted by Jewish Center workers to justify their professional authority and the autonomy of their JCCs. Rabbinical opposition, then, did not undermine the professional legitimacy of the Jewish Center worker or their programs, and rabbis did not wrest communal control or power from the sphere of the JCC. They did succeed, however, in getting the JWB and Jewish Center workers to really commit to the Jewish purpose of the JCC—finally, what had been so controversial in 1948 that it was almost struck from Janowsky's Statement of Principles achieved professional consensus in 1963.

## **Conclusion**

"Are there synagogue-centers that have really developed a program that has challenged the community center?" Emanuel Berlatsky posed this rhetorical question in

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<sup>78</sup> Emphasis in the original. "Prospectus for the JWB Research Center" (Jewish Welfare Board, n.d.), NJWB, AJHS Box 31, Folder 2.

his written response to Charles Ansell. In the opinion of JWB staff like Berlatsky, the synagogue-center had *not* displaced the need for the Jewish Community Center, and he encouraged Ansell to defend the enduring value of the JCC movement when he participated in the public debate in Los Angeles. Berlatsky acknowledged that the JCC had not kept pace with the needs of communities for Jewish programming, but he argued that the functions of the synagogue and the JCC were so different that there really was never the threat of either institution displacing the other. The "nature of a synagogue," he wrote, "was such that they could not function in the same manner as a community center; that they had different objectives and a different role in the community and that these factors caused them to develop a unique and distinct program but it is not a Jewish Community Center program."<sup>79</sup>

As an example Berlatsky described the situation in Forest Hills, Queens. Initially the Jews who moved to this new suburban area built a synagogue-center to serve the religious and social needs of the entire community. Within short order, newly formed Conservative and Orthodox congregations undermined the status of the original synagogue-center as the community's unifying institution. Responses to this decentralization emerged from within and without the local population. The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies "arrived at the conclusion that community centers would have to be established in areas where none ever existed." "In some instances," Berlatsky noted, "the call for the community center came at the insistence of congregational leadership who felt that ... the unifying balm of a community oriented institution such as the Center was needed in order to support the concept of Jewish communal life."<sup>80</sup> Berlatsky's point

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<sup>79</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "Letter to Charles Ansell."

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

to Ansell was that there was no real threat to the existence of JCCs because, despite the rabbinate's principled, ideological arguments for why the synagogue and center should merge, the two institutions functionally provided different (if complementary) services to American Jews.

The JWB's extended engagement with Conservative rabbis throughout the early 1960s demonstrated that the debate in which Charles Ansell had been invited to speak in favor of the JCC was not limited to a local dispute in Los Angeles; it was part of a larger and longer national conversation about the form that service to the Jewish community should take. A small but vocal minority of rabbis observed changes in the demographics and politics of American Jewry and felt empowered to ignite a jurisdictional turf war with the JCC for professional authority and autonomy. Berlatsky's letter to Ansell made clear that the JWB saw the relationship between synagogue and Center as a functional, not ideal or existential issue. This confrontation mattered, then, because the rabbinate actually forced the JWB to think about ideals—to recommit themselves to a Jewish purpose and to the preservation of the American Jewish community.

The repercussions of this debate were not limited to internal JWB policy, nor to the Jewish community. During the early 1960s, Jewish Community Centers also began grappling with questions of civil rights, segregation, and open membership. Intimately tied to the question of "why does the Center exist" was the question of "whom does the Center exist to serve." If the JCC was intended to preserve American Jewry and American Jewish identity, would it have to exclude non-Jews from membership? Could it do so without violating its democratic principles? If the JCC movement devoted the first half of

the 1960s to examining its relationships within the Jewish community, it would devote the remainder of the 1960s to examining its relationship to its non-Jewish neighbors.

### Chapter 3: Open Membership and Civil Rights within the Center Movement

On January 16, 1967, a stringer for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) newswire service filed an article from New Orleans about Label A. Katz, a prominent member of the city's Jewish community and the former international president of B'nai Brith.<sup>1</sup> That evening, the article reported, Katz had approached the executive committee of his local B'nai Brith Lodge to voice his opinion on an issue that had divided Jews in the Crescent City: whether or not the New Orleans Jewish Community Center (JCC) should accept non-Jews as members. He declared that he was siding with a group of 140 others who believed that the New Orleans JCC should adopt a "closed" membership policy that excluded non-Jews from joining, because this policy would assure that the agency would retain its "sectarian character" and would guarantee "the meaningful continuity of Jewish life in our community."<sup>2</sup>

The proposal put forth by Katz and his allies directly challenged the Jewish Welfare Board's (JWB) standing policy on membership, which encouraged JCCs to accept all applicants as full members of the Center regardless of "race, color or creed."<sup>3</sup> The presence of non-Jews, Katz believed, was a deterrent to an explicitly sectarian program and violated the New Orleans JCC's mission "to assist our Jewish citizens to develop a positive identification with Jewish life." In the following days, Jews across the United States would read in their local Jewish newspapers about this rift in the New

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<sup>1</sup> "Katz Says Jewish Centers Must Retain Sectarian Character," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 17, 1967, <http://www.jta.org/1967/01/17/archive/katz-says-jewish-centers-must-retain-sectarian-character>. Accessed November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> "Label Katz Denounces 'quota Membership Policy' of New Orleans Jewish Center," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 2, 1968, <http://www.jta.org/1968/04/02/archive/label-katz-denounces-quota-membership-policy-of-new-orleans-jewish-center>.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation 15 in Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey* (New York: The Dial Press, 1948), 38.



Orleans community between those who did not want to accept non-Jews into their JCC and those who did.<sup>4</sup>

At the center of this controversy was an issue that deeply concerned the Jewish Welfare Board, one that even Katz avoided discussing in the national press. One of the non-Jewish families who applied for membership in the New Orleans JCC was also a not white. At a moment in which African American civil rights activists were testing white commitment to the legal desegregation of public accommodations and civic spaces, the question raised by the controversy in New Orleans was whether the presence and participation of African Americans in Jewish Community Centers would diminish the distinctive Jewish purpose of the institution. For many American Jews, the potential integration of a local space like the JCC brought the abstract national fight for black inclusion in civil society directly into their lives. Studying JCCs' responses to integration adds to a growing body of scholarship demonstrating that despite the participation of a significant number of Jewish individuals and organizations in Civil Rights activism, "A less articulate but unknown number of Jews, to be sure, felt that racial integration did not comport with their interests."<sup>5</sup>

Although a member-agency of the JWB, the New Orleans JCC was not bound to adopt the organization's open membership policy. Many JCCs had struggled against this policy since the JWB's National Council approved it in 1950. However, no JCC had ever

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<sup>4</sup> "Label Katz Wants Issue Confronted: Non-Jews as Center Members Splits New Orleans Jewry," *Indiana Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 20, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

escalated their local struggle into a national controversy, nor used national attention to pressure the JWB to reverse the policy. Why did *this* particular case lead the JWB to establish the "Committee on Open Membership in the JCC?"

The high profile of the New Orleans case was partially attributable to Katz, who from his prominent position in national Jewish organizations drew attention to the situation. In doing so, he aimed the spotlight on a longer debate in the JCC movement about whether the JCC was as sectarian as it claimed itself to be. The JWB had long been adamant that the JCC should demonstrate its Jewish commitment through its programs and activities and not through an exclusively Jewish membership. The JWB justified the sectarian mission of the JCC on the basis of democratic pluralism, which tolerated separation for *affirmative* Jewish purposes: the teaching or sharing in Jewish heritage, cultural traditions, or Judaism. Separation on the basis of race, culture, or religion without this affirmative purpose was otherwise considered segregation—a case clearly set forth after the JWB Survey by its director, Oscar I. Janowsky. The New Orleans controversy showed that individual JCCs deviated from this ideal.

For Katz, however, it was insufficient for a JCC to simply ignore the JWB's recommendation—he argued that the policy should be reviewed. To a reporter at the Jewish Post and Opinion, Katz opined that the JWB "has to face up to this issue," which he believed they were evading.<sup>6</sup> The JWB quickly came to its own defense. On January 19th, the JTA reported that the JWB's Executive Vice President, Sanford Solender, had issued a statement in response to Katz's critique declaring it "inconceivable...that the center close its doors to non-Jews" and adding that, "As a people who have experienced

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<sup>6</sup> "Label Katz Wants Issue Confronted: Non-Jews as Center Members Splits New Orleans Jewry."

the pain of discrimination, we could hardly inflict this on others."<sup>7</sup> Despite this vehement defense, however, the JWB decided to form a committee to review its "open membership" policy.

From the conclusion of the JWB Survey in 1947-8 until the late 1960s, JCCs increasingly adopted open membership. Indeed, by 1967 the JWB counted only five agencies that prohibited non-Jews from becoming members. However, throughout these decades a number of JCCs did implement hybrid membership policies that allowed a limited number of non-Jews to join the JCC, placing a quota on this group so that Jews would remain the majority population within the agency. Whether a JCC had a totally open, limited open, or closed membership policy depended entirely on the priorities and desires of its lay leadership and executive director. No identifiable geographic or demographic pattern emerges, for the few JCCs with closed or limited open membership policies existed in both northern and southern states, and in cities with Jewish communities both small and large.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, examining the JCC reveals more similarities than differences in the racial politics of northern and southern Jewish communities.

The clear pattern, however, was that open membership did not generate controversy when only a small number of non-Jews joined a JCC, and especially when these members were white. Membership policy became more fraught when the proportion of non-Jews increased or when African Americans applied for membership. Many JCC lay leaders and Center workers relied on their Jewish membership to justify that their agency had a Jewish purpose, especially because JCCs commonly exaggerated

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<sup>7</sup> "Solender Defends Jewish Center Open Membership Policy," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 19, 1967, <http://www.jta.org/1967/01/19/archive/solender-defends-jewish-center-open-membership-policy>. Accessed February 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Asofsky, "Inter Office Memorandum to Emanuel Berlatsky," November 6, 1967, Janowsky Papers, American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) Box 33, Folder 4.

the extent of "Jewish content" in their programs. There had been accusations to this effect prior to Katz's, many of which had been more vocal and vehement, but none had prompted the JWB to reevaluate its membership policy. What, then, was unique about the situation in New Orleans?

The controversy generated by a black family's request to join the JCC reflected the insecurity that New Orleans' Jewish community felt about their racial status and their place in the city's social hierarchy. Although in southern cities like New Orleans Jews had to navigate the particular system of Jim Crow segregation, in the 1960s Jews throughout the United States shared a sense of uncertainty about their whiteness. It was not until World War II that Americans widely accepted Jews as racially white. Accepted into the American mainstream in ways they had never been before the 1940s, Jews delighted in their new privileges. However, historian Eric Goldstein has argued that this was not a universally positive nor uncomplicated development for Jewish identity, because although Jews did seek social acceptance they also resisted the way that whiteness flattened their ethnic and religious distinctiveness.<sup>9</sup>

It was this understanding of Jews' difference from the Protestant American mainstream, and their empathy for other forms of difference, that inspired the political liberalism of many Jews (even if their radicalism waned as they moved into the middle class). As white Americans increasingly adopted a conservative political ideology in the

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<sup>9</sup> Goldstein argues that this "acceptance" was as much an act of coercion as benevolence, because it benefitted the construct of whiteness to envelope Jews. This meant, however, that non-Jews wanted Jews to identify as a religion or denomination, not a race or ethnicity. Jews were ambivalent about relinquishing difference and unsatisfied with a religious-based notion of peoplehood, but also enjoyed the attendant privileges of whiteness and new freedom to advocate for African Americans. See chapter eight of Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

postwar period, liberalism continued to mark Jews as "other" despite their whiteness.<sup>10</sup> Jews' liberal ideal of social acceptance for *all* compromised their own social acceptance, which made them vulnerable to social pressures that affirmed the construct of whiteness and the black-white color line. In the years following the war Jews struggled, if ambivalently, to maintain the perception of their whiteness and its social and economic benefits.<sup>11</sup> As historian Lila Corwin Berman has demonstrated in the case of postwar Detroit, the rhetorical position of liberalism that Jews adopted did not compromise their privilege; they maintained free capitalist markets that systemically disadvantaged African Americans even as their progressive social agenda attempted to uphold "freedom and opportunity for all."<sup>12</sup>

The racial implications of open membership actually began to concern the JWB in the same period that Jews "became" white. In the 1940s, well before the Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and the early activism of the Civil Rights Movement initiated a national debate about integration, the migration of black southerners to northern cities caused many JCCs to consider the implications of accepting black members. As Jews increasingly suburbanized in the 1950s, this concern ebbed, and for a decade the JWB only discussed open membership policy in the context of white non-Jewish membership. In the 1960s, however, African American activists' campaigns to integrate civic spaces led the JWB to once again debate open membership in a racial context.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Rachel Kranson, "Grappling with the Good Life: Jewish Anxieties over Affluence in Postwar America, 1945--1976" (Dissertation, New York University, 2012),.

<sup>11</sup> Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*; Rachel Kranson, "Grappling with the Good Life."

<sup>12</sup> Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 10–11.

Label Katz, a staunch liberal, was not calling for closed membership to avoid integration. He was a member of the New Orleans Urban League and with B'nai Brith he worked for a variety of progressive social reforms.<sup>13</sup> Caught between racial discrimination and what he felt was the loss of a valuable minority institution in its own right, Katz represents the compromised position in which the JCC movement, and many of its Jewish members, found itself during the Civil Rights movement. Many JCC lay leaders, workers, and members were committed liberals who favored integration and racial equality. The policy of open membership, however, challenged the liberalism of many other Jews. The equality they had struggled to win now threatened Jewish identity in new ways, to a greater extent than ever before, and they mourned the loss of what had made them distinctive. Many Jews remained liberal, committed to the principles and ideals that had brought them so much success and that they hoped would bring success to other marginalized groups with whom they empathized, but many also began to struggle against the extension of liberalism into the intimate area of their lives where they hoped to maintain a distinct Jewish identity. The JCC was one of those spaces.

In this way, the JCC movement's debate about open membership policy reveals that local Jewish communal institutions were not immune to the sweeping changes in American liberalism that occurred in the 1960s. Just as larger national Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith and Anti-Defamation League spent these years grappling with how to protect Jewish difference without jeopardizing Jews' civic inclusion or social mobility, JCCs faced such challenges at a smaller geographic scale. Label Katz was not alone in calling for greater protections of the JCC's sectarian character; the pervasive anxiety about

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<sup>13</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 84.

nonsectarianism in the late 1960s reveals how Jews feared losing control over their own communities.<sup>14</sup>

From the Janowsky Survey controversy in 1947 until the New Orleans controversy in 1967, the JWB and its constituent JCCs struggled to define who could be a member, what the rights and responsibilities of membership should be, and what these decisions meant for the identity of the organization and for the identity of American Jewry more broadly. Although the Committee on Open Membership in the JCC decided in 1969 to uphold the JWB's original policy set in 1950, the JWB's failure to unambiguously assert that open membership and Jewish particularism were not mutually exclusive undermined Jewish liberalism in favor of Jewish preservation. Ironically, the JWB neither reassured preservationists like Label Katz that the JCC was sufficiently sectarian, nor convinced committed liberals that the JCC movement was as inclusive as it claimed.

### **The Origins of the JWB Open Membership Policy**

As with so many of the policies that sparked debate in the Jewish Center movement in the postwar decades, the "open membership" policy had its origins in the JWB Survey. Survey Director Oscar Janowsky remarked on open membership in two sections of his report. In Recommendation 1, which proposed the adoption of a JWB Statement of Principles and suggested its content, Janowsky insisted, "While participation in the Jewish Center should be open to all inhabitants of the local community, the establishment and/or maintenance of non-sectarian agencies is not the

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<sup>14</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*; Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*; Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*; Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

responsibility of the Jewish Center movement."<sup>15</sup> This was his rebuke to JCCs that justified their lack of Jewish programming with principles of inclusion. Inclusion, this article emphasized, was a separate issue from a commitment to a distinct Jewish program. Janowsky reaffirmed this tenet in Recommendation 15 of the Survey report, which suggested that "Membership and participation should be open to all inhabitants of the local community without distinction as to race, color or creed," while cautioning that "the presence of non-Jews must not divert the Center from its distinctive purpose." Consistent with the central thesis of the Survey, he concluded Recommendation 15 with the injunction that "To lessen the Jewish emphasis because of non-Jewish participation as members would be to impair the very reason for the existence of the institution as a Jewish agency."<sup>16</sup>

Like so many of Janowsky's recommendations, however, his vision for an open membership policy was undermined by the compromises the JWB made to facilitate the passage and adoption of the Statement of Principles. As described in Chapter 1, the Jewish Center Division Committee rewrote the aforementioned article of the Statement under pressure from the Sponsors of the Independent Study and their allies, who argued that nonsectarian agencies were an invaluable mechanism for and reflection of American ethnic synthesis. The Committee compromised by distinguishing between open participation and open membership, instead of banning nonsectarian Centers from JWB membership as Janowsky believed was necessary. The article was thus rewritten to encourage each JCC to "fulfill its Jewish purpose, although participation in the Jewish

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<sup>15</sup> I refer here to Article III of Janowsky's original draft of the Statement of Principles. As described in Chapter 1, Article III would become Article II in the final version of the Statement of Principles. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 8–9; Oscar I. Janowsky, *The Jewish Community Center: Two Essays on Basic Purpose* (New York: National Jewish Welfare Board, 1974), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 38.



Community Center is open to all inhabitants of the community." "Although" non-Jews could participate, the article implied that the priority of the JCC was to "fulfill its Jewish purpose" by serving Jewish *members*. "Participant" was an inclusive category, but "member" was to be exclusive in order to preserve the sectarian character of the JCC. The revised article created a contradiction for the JWB. Janowsky intended for the JCC to express its Jewish purpose through its program, not its membership. The revised Statement of Principles, however, allowed for a JCC to be only nominally Jewish in program, so long as it was considerably Jewish in its membership.

In an attempt to reconcile this contradiction, the JWB Executive Committee brought Recommendation 15 before the JWB National Council in 1950 for formal approval. The National Council's adoption of Recommendation 15 explicitly established that open *membership*, not just open *participation*, was the policy of the JWB and the JCC movement. This action should have eliminated the category of "participant," since the policy now stipulated that anyone could join the JCC and become a member. Problematically, the JWB never amended the Statement of Principles to reflect this new guideline. As a result they promoted two different and contradictory standards on open membership; one standard limited the rights of full membership to Jews so long as non-Jews were allowed to "participate" in the JCC, and the other standard encouraged JCCs to fully include non-Jews as members.

By formally adopting Recommendation 15 without revising the Statement of Principles, the JWB undermined itself in three key ways. First, open membership policy actually served the interests of nonsectarian Centers and did not incentivize these agencies to adopt more Jewish content and activity into their programs. More

significantly, by failing to rewrite the Statement of Principles to reinforce that Jewish content was essential to JCCs' Jewish purpose, individual agencies could continue to see *people* and not the *program* as the determinant of their sectarian identity. This undermined JCCs' adherence to the open membership policy, because if agencies lacked Jewish content in their program they could claim they were upholding their Jewish purpose because they served a predominantly Jewish membership. Finally, no enforcement mechanism was added to the Statement of Principles to ensure that JCCs complied with the open membership policy; without it, JCCs *could* deviate from a truly open admissions procedure without sacrificing their agency's affiliation with the Jewish Welfare Board. The JWB's failure to reconcile the contradictions between their membership policy and the Statement of Principles meant that the distinction between inclusive participation and inclusive membership remained open for debate.<sup>17</sup> Centers exploited the existence of two standards, preferring whichever best served their current interests.

### **Testing the Double Standard: Race and Jewish Purpose in the 1940s and '50s**

In August of 1946, JWB staff member Emanuel Berlatsky wrote to the executive directors of thirteen JCCs in large urban areas and asked them to report, under terms of confidentiality, whether their agency had a policy in writing or in practice "regarding participation of non-Jewish membership—white and negro." In the 1940s almost 1.5 million black Southerners migrated to northern cities to take advantage of employment

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<sup>17</sup> My conclusions were guided by Janowsky's 1974 essay, "Open Membership and Jewish Purpose: Dilemma of Jewish Community Center," in which he reflected on his JWB Survey as it related to the JWB's future actions on open membership policy. Oscar I. Janowsky, *The Jewish Community Center: Two Essays on Basic Purpose*.

opportunities in industrial manufacturing created by the war economy.<sup>18</sup> The JWB suspected that that these changing demographics were bringing African Americans into urban JCCs to a greater extent than before and would increasingly be an issue their constituent agencies would tackle.

Berlatsky's query revealed that two of the ten Centers that responded chose to "close" their membership to non-Jews in order to avoid confrontation with black families who applied for membership. The remainder were not operating in the spirit of open membership either. Berlatsky found that "8 of the 10 replies base their practice on an unwritten understanding or policy which, when analysed [sic], provides for limited acceptance of non-Jewish members (white) and unwritten restriction of Negro membership." Where few were comfortable with codifying a policy of segregation, many were uncomfortable with the prospect of including non-white non-Jews as members. In a letter from one of the two JCCs that explicitly closed their membership, the executive director admitted that the policy was instigated by "a specific incident involving the admission of a Negro boy as a scholarship student in our Art School" and that "were it not for the Negro aspects of the problem, the few white non-Jews who join from time to time could have continued to do so without effect upon the total stream of Center life." And yet, this executive director felt the need to conclude that his agency "does not exclude Negroes from participation in activity where membership is not involved." In practice, JCCs performed democratic inclusion while quietly agreeing, behind closed

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<sup>18</sup> James N. Gregory, "The Second Great Migration: A Historical Overview," in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, ed. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19–38.

doors, that African Americans should not be granted the same access and privileges of membership afforded to Jews.<sup>19</sup>

This double standard presented a problem for liberal Jews. They valued the principle of open membership because it gave everyone an equal right to participate in JCC programs and provided equal access to JCC facilities. At the same time, open membership made it difficult for Jews to use the JCC as a place where they could express their distinctive identity—it made the JCC just like public schools or any other civic institution. As JWB staff and individual Center Boards debated open membership, they questioned if Jews could maintain their own identities in their own private communal institutions, or if they were beholden to open these spaces just as they had asked for other white-only spaces to be opened up to them. Could integration and fairness be restricted to the public sphere, and segregation permitted in the private sphere for the preservation of their particular group identity? Was it enough to extend the benefits of participation to non-Jews, but reserve the rights of membership for Jews only?

The JWB Survey data collected in 1946 reflected this tension between universalism and particularism. When asked by Janowsky in the Attitude Questionnaire to whom membership should be open, although 932 (39%) of the 2420 JCC lay leaders, Jewish Center workers, and members interviewed selected "Jews only," the majority (1238, or 51%) responded that "all persons who apply for membership" should be accepted. This was in stark contrast to the 127 (5%) who believed that only *white* Jews and non-Jews should be extended the privilege. Notably, while Board members were evenly split between closed and fully open membership, members and staff

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<sup>19</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "Special Survey of Non-Jewish Membership," January 1947, Oscar Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2.

overwhelmingly preferred a full open membership policy.<sup>20</sup> This question gestured towards an ideal and did not have to account for pragmatic reality, but the responses indicated that racial prejudice was anathema to almost all respondents, and that generally members felt comfortable with a more liberal policy.<sup>21</sup> The reality, however, was that only 91 (35%) of the 256 JCCs that Janowsky questioned about non-Jewish membership in 1946 reported that a percentage of their membership was non-Jewish, and in the majority of these JCCs (58, or 19%) non-Jews accounted for only 1-5% of total membership.<sup>22</sup> For some, even this small percentage of non-Jewish members justified closing JCC membership to all but Jews, but these supporters of closed membership recognized that this justification could not be codified into official policy without making the Center vulnerable to accusations that their practices were un-democratic and hypocritical.

The ambiguity of JWB policy surrounding participation and membership allowed individual agencies to craft their own local membership policies that straddled the priorities of both universalism and particularism. The formal adoption of the open membership policy by the JWB National Council in 1950 attempted to resolve this problem, but JCCs cannily recognized that they could continue to operate under the stipulations of the Statement of Principles, which only dictated open participation. For JCC lay leaders and executives debating the merits of closing membership to non-Jews, the contradiction between the two standards provided convenient cover. It proved even

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<sup>20</sup> In response to the question of which "Groups to whom membership should be open," 44% of Board members answered "Jews Only," 7% answered "Jews and non-Jews, but white persons only," and 45% answered "all persons who apply for membership." 30%, 7%, and 58% of JCC members answered in these categories, respectively, and 23%, 3%, and 68% of Staff. The overwhelming preference of Center workers for full open membership (68% responded that they favored this policy) may have reflected their commitment to social work (which as a profession decried exclusion) or their lack of formal Jewish education. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*, 384-4.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 173-76.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 330-32.

more convenient for those debating closing their membership to non-white individuals. Although JCC leaders felt conflicted by the imperative to open the JCC to white non-Jews, they recognized that inviting in their Protestant neighbors presented some clear social benefits. American Jewry's relationship with African Americans was more fraught. Some JCC lay leaders and executives perceived that they would incur a social cost from the association with their black neighbors, and they recognized how a particularist argument could be used to protect privilege. American society in the 1960s was actively debating how to determine the point where the protection of one minority group's rights began eroding the rights of another minority group, and some JCC leaders used the uncertainty to their advantage to justify policies that would preserve Jews' racial and class status.

From the highest ranks of the JWB to the Executive Directors and Board members of individual agencies, JCC stakeholders across the United States worried that their members would not feel the JCC was particularly Jewish if it had African American members, but at the same time they worried that they would be accused of bigotry and discrimination—and hypocrisy, considering the Jewish community's tireless efforts to combat anti-Semitism—if they banned blacks from using their facilities or attending their programs. It was the crisis of liberalism come to the JCC. At what point was exclusion justified, if it meant preserving the distinctive character of the JCC and in turn preserving a distinctive American Jewish identity? Janowsky had argued that the institution's priority should be the inclusion of Jewish content in its program, and so long as this element was not diluted open membership was "desirable for the promotion of inter-

cultural understanding."<sup>23</sup> Individual agencies made different decisions. Many JCC members, workers, and Board members implemented a liberal intake process that affirmed the Jewish purpose of the JCC without discouraging non-Jews and non-white applicants to matriculate as members.<sup>24</sup> Others, however, approached the issue with more concern and conservatism, fearing for the survival of their Jewish communal institutions and of the American Jewish identity that these institutions were intended to foster.

Berlatsky, reflecting on the responses to his survey in 1947, observed that the ambiguity between participation and membership was leveraged by JCCs in both northern and southern cities; when African Americans tested the color line and Jews' purported liberalism, some JCCs chose to conveniently allow black participation and to reserve the category of membership for Jews only. The policy of inviting open participation without offering memberships to African Americans (or white non-Jews) created a "separate but equal" regime in which black and white, Jew and non-Jew, entered the same buildings and attended similar programs but were treated as separate categories when it came to ownership and decision making in the institution.

Berlatsky nonetheless believed that open participation represented a "progressive attitude" towards race relations. There was some merit to this perception. In the postwar racial order, *de facto* segregation was the norm. It was much more common to segregate the races into "separate but equal" agencies—even in the North, black YM- and YWCAs were established instead of integrating white associations.<sup>25</sup> Berlatsky in fact noted that:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>24</sup> Harry Schatz, "Re: Special Study Re: Negro Membership in the Jewish Community Center," September 9, 1953, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2.

<sup>25</sup> Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

In all cases where there are indications of limitations on non-Jewish membership, it is pointed out that non-Jews are permitted to participate in activities which are open to the public and that there are no restrictions made in that connection. Usually this means that all departments and phases in the Center program, which do not include membership as a pre-requisite, are open to all individuals without regard to color, creed, race or any other group identification.<sup>26</sup>

So although two of the agencies closed their membership in response to inquiries from black families, it was remarkable that two of the ten JCCs reported that they *had* accepted black members. Realistically, however, what most JCCs were doing was to establish a boundary between public, equal, and inclusive activity and private, exclusive, and distinctive activity. The boundary was membership, which conferred additional rights, privileges, and access unavailable to participants. Many Jews reached their limits when it came to integrating the private sphere of membership. The JCC may not have been the home, but it was a space devoted to family, community, and Jewish culture; it was a zone of social intimacy. If liberal Jews believed in racial equality in the public sphere, they were hesitant (if not resistant) to invite African Americans to play with their children, date their teenagers, share their locker rooms and swim in their pools.<sup>27</sup>

This status quo did not change with the implementation of the Statement of Principles nor with the National Council's approval of open membership in 1950. Throughout the early 1950s, JCC executives from both northern and southern cities wrote to the JWB seeking advice and information about how to handle requests for membership from African Americans. The JWB consistently responded with a contradiction: they cited the JWB Survey as the grounds for an open membership policy *and* reinforced the autonomy of the individual agency to make the best decision for themselves. They also

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<sup>26</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "Special Survey of Non-Jewish Membership."

<sup>27</sup> Thank you to Shira Kohn for this insight about the racial dynamics of public versus intimate or familial space.



consistently and contradictorily affirmed that open membership was democratic but then advocated that JCCs prepare to move to more densely Jewish neighborhoods. Most notably, the JWB recognized the potential fallout that could occur were these contradictions to be widely discovered and discussed—they stressed that little was "written down," and what was written down was clearly labeled "Not for Public Distribution."<sup>28</sup>

Within months of the National Council's decision to formally approve open membership, the Cincinnati and Detroit JCCs both received admission requests from black residents of their neighborhoods. This prompted their Boards to convene special committees to reevaluate their policies. Sanford Solender, the Executive Vice President of the JWB, responded at length to a inquiry from Charles Posner and the Cincinnati Jewish Community Council. JCCs in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, New York, and Seattle had all accepted non-white members, according to Solender, and their justification was "on the basis of democratic practices and inter-group relations." All of these examples were industrial cities that had experienced huge growth in their African American populations during the 1940s, and Solender underscored that Cincinnati's question was really indicative of a larger issue, which was urban demographic changes. While JCCs had to make decisions about membership policy, what they more urgently needed to decide was whether (and when) to move. In the interim, the situation imposed the responsibility to foster "inter-cultural relationships" on the local agency. Solender suggested that the Cincinnati JCC spearhead the formation of a Neighborhood Council to advocate for "more public recreational services in the area," which would have the added bonus of

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<sup>28</sup> Harry Schatz, "A Report on a Special Limited Study RE: Negro Membership in Fifteen Jewish Community Centers," October 23, 1953, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2.

"reliev[ing] the growing pressure on the Center." In effect, Solender advised the Cincinnati JCC to accept African Americans as members while simultaneously planning to transplant themselves to more Jewish, and by extension whiter, neighborhoods. The same advice was dispatched to Detroit.<sup>29</sup>

Although Cincinnati and Detroit ultimately chose to disregard Solender and implement a "closed" policy that limited African Americans to participation in the Center, other JCCs continued to grapple with opening their membership to African Americans. In 1953, Gilbert Harris of the St. Louis Jewish Community Centers Association asked the JWB for current information on "policy and practice concerning Negro membership." In response to his request, the JWB charged Field Secretary Harry Schatz with conducting a survey similar to the one made by Berlatsky in 1946. Schatz polled 19 JCCs, all of which had experience with the question of black membership.<sup>30</sup> In his final report, Schatz recorded that of the 15 agencies that responded, 11 had "an open door policy or no special policy regarding Negroes." Of the remaining four, three explicitly closed their membership to non-Jews and one had an unwritten policy that black neighbors could participate but not become members of their Center. Notably, only two of these four JCCs were in cities that geographically and culturally straddled the border between the Midwest and the South, Cincinnati and Kansas City (Missouri). The other two were Detroit and Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Just as in 1946, however, even these four "closed" Jewish Community Centers insisted that they allowed African Americans to participate. Schatz reported that, "Among

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<sup>29</sup> Sanford Solender, "Letter to Charles Posner," August 29, 1950, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2; Sanford Solender, "Letter to Herman Jacobs," November 20, 1950, Janowsky Papers, AJHS Box 32, Folder 2.

<sup>30</sup> Of the 15 Centers that responded, seven were located in the Northeast, two were in California, and the remaining six were spread across the Midwest.

the fifteen Centers which responded, there was not a single instance stated where Negroes were refused use of the Center's facilities as members of non-Center groups or where activities were open to the general public." The JCC was not a segregated space, in the North or South. If African Americans' participation was already common, however, why did these four agencies resist open membership? The distinction between member and participant served to emphasize that JCCs were unambiguously Jewish—black participants came and went, and did not compromise or disturb the JCC's Jewish character. As historian Lila Corwin Berman has argued about Jewish urban neighborhoods, Jews believed that their spaces could not be at once Jewish and black.<sup>31</sup> Distinguishing between non-white, non-Jewish *participants* and Jewish *members* reassured Jews that their agencies would remain stable, middle class spaces in which to enjoy their leisure time and would not become nonsectarian charitable agencies dedicated to the uplift of the black working class.

What these surveys demonstrated to the JWB and its constituent agencies was that JCCs found it convenient to perform openness but to implement closed membership (whether explicitly or as an unwritten policy). JCC lay leaders and staff could maintain the Jewish character of their agencies without contradicting their liberal values. By failing to reconcile the Statement of Principles with the 1950 policy on open membership, the JWB effectively undermined its authority to enforce open membership and by extension condoned JCCs who gestured towards, but never embodied, the ideal of open

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<sup>31</sup> Berman argues that Jews did develop attachments to space and institutions, but that race was a significant threat to this space. Jews moved to the suburbs to avoid racial confrontation, not because of a lack of institutional loyalty. The threat was not to Jewish whiteness but to a racialized notion of Jewish stability—a neighborhood could not be Jewish and black. Lila Corwin Berman, "Gendered Journeys: Jewish Migrations and the City in Postwar America," in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore and Marion Kaplan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

membership. So long as this contradiction was kept confidential and internal to the JWB, the practice was accepted and not questioned.

The JWB carefully guarded its surveys, correspondence, and policy decisions about African American membership by limiting the discussion to senior Jewish Center Division staff and JCC Executives; some memos and surveys were labeled "confidential" or "Not for Public Distribution."<sup>32</sup> Black membership was considered a sensitive topic and shielded from a wider audience, perhaps because the open membership policy was as already the subject of such widespread debate in the JCC movement (and the added element of racial integration could do no favors for the beleaguered policy). The prevalence of open membership in American JCCs figured centrally in rabbinical critiques of the JCC, as discussed in Chapter 2, particularly when rabbis framed the JCC as a nonsectarian community agency. Some rabbis believed that the presence of non-Jews in the Center diminished the Jewish purpose of the JCC—a belief that many Jewish Center workers and lay leaders in the JCC movement shared when they were not under attack. Open membership remained a point of vulnerability for the JWB as it continued to establish a consensus around the Jewish purpose of the JCC.

### **1964: Open Membership in the New Era of Civil Rights**

On October 23, 1964, several members of the JWB's Jewish Center Services Staff—including Herbert Millman, Emanuel Berlatsky, Manuel G. Batshaw, and Miriam Ephraim—met to discuss yet another round of attacks against the JCC. Millman, who

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<sup>32</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "CONFIDENTIAL: Characteristics Which Make the Non-Jewish Membership in Centers an Issue of Growing Concern," February 27, 1967, National Jewish Welfare Board (NJWB), AJHS Box 33, Folder 3; Harry Schatz, "Re: Special Study Re: Negro Membership in the Jewish Community Center."

chaired the meeting, pointed out that several new articles had been printed recently in the Anglo-Jewish press, "which refer to a seeming trend of 'growing non-sectarianism of Jewish Community Centers.'" The group lamented that these accusations were still cropping up, particularly since they observed that JCC executives, staff, and lay leaders had increased their emphasis on "the Jewish character of the Centers" following the publication of the special Symposium issue of *Conservative Judaism* in 1962 and the JWB's Lakewood Conference in 1963.

By the late 1950s, when open membership was raised as a concern it less frequently was in regards to African Americans seeking membership. This hardly had to do with declining interest or threat. Rather, JCC activities increasingly began taking place in homogeneously white suburbs. As Jews left cities, they also left behind neighborhoods that were becoming increasingly black.<sup>33</sup> Some communities, like Detroit, moved the JCC out to the suburbs along with them; by contrast, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York City began building JCCs in the suburban neighborhoods of Queens and throughout Long Island and Westchester County.<sup>34</sup> In their new suburban spaces, it was white non-Jewish membership that began to preoccupy agency executives and lay leaders. Jewish Center workers published and presented extensively on this topic in their professional journals and at their professional conferences. Non-Jewish suburbanites desired to use the new JCC health club facilities and to take advantage of JCCs' respected childcare programs. Leaders in the JCC movement worried that agencies were at risk of

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald H Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 71; "Let Us Build Us a City of Life" (Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, 1961).

becoming nonsectarian country clubs.<sup>35</sup> They maintained that although it was beneficial for their Jewish members to interpret Jewish customs and heritage to a small number of non-Jewish members, when non-Jewish membership reached a critical level it would threaten the Jewish purpose of the institution. This anxiety reflected the ambivalence felt by Jews about the suburbs—for its membership, JCCs recreated in miniature the urban communities they had left behind and for which there remained some nostalgia, and yet members yearned to integrate in with the American Protestant middle-class majority. By inviting non-Jews into the JCC, Jews sought recognition of their middle class status, their respectability, and the value they contributed to the community.<sup>36</sup>

The JWB's Jewish Center Services Staff decided to publish a rebuttal article, but realized that they would need evidence to "definitively" argue that the trend of nonsectarianism was actually in decline. The group agreed that the best way to gather this evidence would be to write to all of the JCC executives "seeking specific information on trends in non-Jewish membership and participation."<sup>37</sup> This impulse to survey was not new in the JCC movement, as we have seen, but in 1964 it did represent a new direction and a new urgency. It remained unclear whether non-Jewish membership would diminish the commitment to Jewish content in the JCC program. How was the JWB going to affirmatively demonstrate that they were actually committed to a Jewish purpose and that

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<sup>35</sup> Elias Picheny, "Tasks Ahead in the Jewish Center Field," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 33, no. 1 (September 1, 1956): 104–66; Solomon Greenfield, "The Impact of the Non-Jewish Member on Center Program," in *Conference Papers Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Center Workers*. (Annual Conference of the Association of Jewish Center Workers., Washington, D.C.: National Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1966).

<sup>36</sup> Riv-Ellen Prell, "Community and the Discourse of Elegy: The Post War Suburban Debate," in *Imagining the American Jewish Community*, ed. Jack A Wertheimer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2007), 67–90; Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*; Kranson, "Grappling with the Good Life."

<sup>37</sup> JCC Services Staff Steering Committee, "Meeting Minutes," October 23, 1964, NJWB, AJHS Box 150, Folder 5.

their programs contributed to the preservation of an American Jewish identity? Was non-Jewish participation or membership preventing the JCC from accomplishing its mission?

One of the first research projects to actually address these questions and to evaluate the effectiveness of JCCs to establish "distinctive" programs was conducted by Melvin B. Mogulof. As a doctoral student at Brandeis University's Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare, Mogulof noticed that "The record of polemics with regard to 'Jewish content' [in the Jewish Community Center] would seem to indicate that there are more experts with regard to its absence than its presence."<sup>38</sup> For his dissertation research, he decided to investigate how the environment and the communal circumstances of an individual center affected that Center's inclusion of Jewish content within its program. If an agency had a stronger relationship with the organized Jewish community, were they more likely to participate in practices that distinguished Jews from non-Jews—such as keeping kosher, celebrating Israel's day of independence, or asking members to wear a *kippah*?<sup>39</sup> To determine the statistical association between "situational variance" and the level of distinguishing practice in the institution, Moguloff mailed questionnaires to 102 JCCs across the United States and surveyed them about their leadership, funding, membership, program, and practices.

Mogulof's findings confirmed his hypothesis: there was a strong correlation between JCCs exhibiting low levels of distinguishing practice and Centers who shared leaders with and accepted funding from non-sectarian Community Chests or welfare boards. Surprisingly, however, the data contradicted Mogulof's assumption that agencies

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<sup>38</sup> Not to be confused with the JWB's Florence G. Heller Research Center, though collaboration often occurred between researchers associated with these units. Melvin B. Mogulof, "Toward the Measurement of Jewish Content in Jewish Community Center Practice," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 41, no. 1 (September 20, 1964): 101–13.

<sup>39</sup> *Kippah* is the head covering (skullcap) traditionally worn by Jewish men and women to symbolize deference to God.

with strong ties to Jewish communal life (i.e.: a Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, synagogal bodies, or other social welfare agencies) would correlate with a high level of distinguishing practice. The only "situational variance" that *did* correlate positively with high levels of distinctively Jewish practice was if Center membership consisted of largely foreign-born or first-generation Jewish-Americans. When it came to membership, then, high levels of non-Jewish membership correlated with low levels of distinguishing practice, but only the presence of distinctively Jewish members raised the likelihood that a JCC's program would be distinctively Jewish—and, as Mogulof noted, "the continuing disappearance of these generations is irreversible."<sup>40</sup>

The direction of Mogulof's research reflected the movement's concern that membership could not be depended upon to demand Jewish content within their Centers. By extension, membership would not uphold the Jewish purpose of the JCC and thus would not contribute to the justification for why Jews should have their own separate social and recreational agencies apart from the "general" nonsectarian social welfare infrastructure. Although Mogulof's findings could be used to argue that open membership was bad policy because it lowered Jewish distinctiveness, his research ultimately demonstrated that increasing the participation of Americanized Jews didn't necessarily increase the level of distinguishing practice. Open membership might not help the JCC, but neither could closed membership save it.

### **The New Orleans Controversy**

In April of 1966, the New Orleans Jewish Community Center opened its brand new building on St. Charles Avenue in the city's tony Uptown neighborhood. As the

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<sup>40</sup> Mogulof, "Toward the Measurement of Jewish Content in Jewish Community Center Practice."



building neared completion, non-Jewish New Orleanians expressed interest in the new facilities and began to inquire about joining the JCC. The agency's Board of Directors had anticipated this interest, and in the year leading up to the opening of the new building they decided on the membership policy they would enforce now that their capacity was greatly expanding.<sup>41</sup> They would continue their policy of open membership and accept non-Jewish applicants, but to ensure that the Jewish character of the agency would be preserved they implemented a cap of 20% (1,250 persons). Additionally, they decided to only recruit members from amongst the Jewish community, to advertise the Jewish purpose of the Center on their application, and to require that all applicants be approved by a Membership Committee.<sup>42</sup>

This remained the status quo from April until August, when the JCC received its first application from a prospective black member. The application forced the Membership Committee to admit to itself, and to the community it represented, that it was uncomfortable accepting non-Jews if they were also non-white.<sup>43</sup> The Committee approached the Board to suggest that the issue of non-Jewish membership necessitated further study, and they advised that until a study was completed the New Orleans JCC should accept no new non-Jewish members. The Vice-President of the Board would later recall that, "The committee admitted that the Negro application played a part in their

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<sup>41</sup> The JWB's Jewish Center Division staff had recognized that much of the rise in non-Jewish membership in American JCCs was due to the expansion of Centers and facilities, raising all membership, and the attraction of new facilities (particularly in Centers that already had a culture of accepting non-Jewish membership), and they circulated this information to their constituents. Emanuel Berlatsky, "CONFIDENTIAL: Characteristics Which Make the Non-Jewish Membership in Centers an Issue of Growing Concern"; "Open Membership in Centers—Implications for Policies and Program," in "Summary of Discussions at JWB Staff Conference" (National Jewish Welfare Board, December 4, 1966), NJWB, AJHS Box 151, Folder 4.

<sup>42</sup> Richard M. Weiss, Ernest G. Freudenthal, and Lawrence Konter, "Open Membership in Centers—Implications for Policies and Programs," April 1967, NJWB, AJHS Box 33, Folder 3.

<sup>43</sup> Two other black families also expressed interest, but never formally applied. Ibid.

recommendation, but pointed out that the need for such a study was overdue and sincerely was the reason for their recommendation."<sup>44</sup> Their recommendation, in essence, called for the agency to implement a closed membership policy in place of the limited open membership plan that had been approved by the Board before the new facility opened. This was not as radical a rejection of liberal inclusion as it seemed, however. Even before the Membership Committee blanched at accepting a black applicant, the 20% cap on non-Jews already compromised the principle of open membership because it privileged Jewish applicants and relied on a majority-Jewish membership as the means by which to maintain the agency's sectarian identity.

It was actually the practice of limited open membership that Label Katz found most objectionable, because it effectively set a quota on how many non-Jews could benefit from the JCC's services. Quotas had long been used to deny Jews access to educational and professional opportunities, and Katz recognized the hypocrisy of a Jewish agency using a mechanism they had long protested. Rather than calling for the abolishment of the 20% quota, which might radically increase the number of non-Jewish JCC members, Katz sent a petition to the JCC's Board of Directors demanding that the agency serve an exclusively Jewish population. The petition—which 140 members of the JCC signed—also demanded that the Board clarify a line in the JCC's charter that stated the agency should "develop an affirmative attitude towards Jewish life." The petitioners argued that this line should be interpreted as a mandate for the JCC to maintain an all-Jewish membership.

By opposing open membership rather than opposing the quota itself, Katz created an unlikely coalition of anti-integrationists, religious Jews who wanted to see the JCC

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

become more sectarian and less secular, and finally those liberals like Katz who believed quotas were anathema, undemocratic, and un-Jewish but who also believed in strong Jewish communal institutions.<sup>45</sup> These parties had a shared interest in promoting the Jewish commitment of the JCC at the expense of open membership. Katz had become an aggressive advocate for the protection and preservation of American Jewry over his 30 years of involvement with B'nai Brith and the Anti-Defamation League. Although he was also a liberal progressive on matters of race and had served as the Vice President of the New Orleans Urban League, Katz foregrounded discussion of the JCC's Jewish purpose at the expense of questioning Jews' racial prejudice.<sup>46</sup> The *Indiana Jewish Post and Opinion*, reporting on Katz and the controversy in New Orleans, wrote that "The issue [of non-Jewish membership] is a clear cut one. Negroes are hardly involved."<sup>47</sup> Black membership was clearly "involved" enough in the issue to merit mention—and to warrant a quick dismissal, lest suspicions arise that controversy might be racially motivated—but for Katz the more pressing concern was the potential loss of a distinctively Jewish institution.

Katz's agitation gained the attention of the top leaders at the JWB. Sanford Solender issued a statement in response to the New Orleans controversy on behalf of the JWB. Open membership, he wrote, was "the only tenable policy for a Jewish Community Center functioning in the open American society in which our goal is to live vitally as part of both the whole American community and as Jews." A democratic open

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<sup>45</sup> "Label Katz Wants Issue Confronted: Non-Jews as Center Members Splits New Orleans Jewry"; "Label A. Katz Reaffirms Stand That Jewish Centers Must Be Jewish," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, February 9, 1967, <http://www.jta.org/1967/02/09/archive/label-a-katz-reaffirms-stand-that-jewish-centers-must-be-jewish>. Accessed November 3, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> "Guide to the Label A. Katz Papers, 1910s-1969 (bulk 1953-1965)P-92," *Center for Jewish History*, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://findingaids.cjh.org/?pID=365117>."

<sup>47</sup> "Label Katz Wants Issue Confronted: Non-Jews as Center Members Splits New Orleans Jewry."

membership policy would not preclude the JCC from adhering to its Jewish purpose—not only did non-Jewish members *not* object to Jewish programming in the JCC, they also tended to concentrate in physical education facilities and public interest programming and thus did not interfere with the Jewish group work program. Furthermore, Solender reminded detractors of open membership that inclusiveness and unity were basic Jewish values and democratic pluralism was a fundamental value of the JCC. It would be hypocritical for Jewish Community Centers to exclude anyone from membership. Solender concluded, "It is possible to maintain an open membership policy in a Center which places primary emphasis on Jewish goals and programs without conflict with the Center's major purpose."<sup>48</sup>

Yet this reconciliation of open membership and Jewish purpose also did not address race. Why did Solender accept Katz's framing of the debate around open membership, especially considering that, unlike the Jewish press, he knew that the conflict actually stemmed from the New Orleans JCC's reluctance to integrate? Why did he emphasize the JCC's Jewish purpose instead of opposing racial discrimination? Just as the JWB had long struggled to refute accusations that the JCC was a nonsectarian agency, it had long avoided public discussions of race. In fact, race hardly figured into JWB discussions throughout the 1960s, even as boycotts, school integration, and sit-ins in southern states signaled the intensification of the movement for Civil Rights. Although many Jewish Centers were located in the American South, from Savannah to San Antonio, the Jewish Welfare Board was headquartered in New York. The Biennial meetings, Executive Committee, and National Council all drew representatives from across the United States, but the JWB's full time staff, consultants, and the majority of

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<sup>48</sup> Sanford Solender, "Statement by Sanford Solender," n.d., NJWB, AJHS, Box 33, Folder 3.

members on its special committees and commissions resided in the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Northerners watched the protests and confrontations against Jim Crow segregation as the networks broadcast coverage from southern cities. It was not until 1963, when northern activists began to protest the equally endemic and more covert discrimination of northern society and institutions, that Americans were forced to see the struggle for black freedom as a national problem.<sup>49</sup> The JWB did host a conference on Civil Rights in that year, and the consensus that emerged was that JCCs had a "mandate" to support the movement as part of its program. Civil Rights were deemed consistent with the JWB's 1948 Statement of Principles, which articulated that JCCs should serve their total community; the JWB subsequently published a position paper that argued JCCs should "apply Jewish values" when creating policies or programs "that impinged on civil rights."<sup>50</sup> This commitment would prove hollow in the debate over membership policy.

In January of 1967, with national attention on New Orleans, the JWB Board of Directors established a Committee on Open Membership in the JCC to reevaluate the policy set in 1950. Nowhere in the agenda materials or in the minutes from the first meeting of the Committee was there any mention of the racial implications of an open membership policy. The mandate of the Committee was to debate the difference between participation and membership and whether "there [is] a point at which the percentage of

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 9 in Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). Civil rights activism in the North far predated 1963, but activists' radicalism made them a target of McCarthyism and diminished the movement's power in the 1950s. See Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, Louis Kraft, and Bernard Postal, *Change and Challenge: A History of 50 Years of JWB* (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1966), 94.

non-Jewish participation in the Center negates the fulfillment of the Center's Jewish objective?"<sup>51</sup>

Despite this committee's inattention to the issue, the problem of integrating the JCC remained bubbling under the surface within the Jewish community of New Orleans, as well as amongst JWB professionals.<sup>52</sup> At the JWB's Annual Staff Conference in December 1966, Nathan Loshak, the JCC consultant for the Southern Region, told his colleagues on the Jewish Center Division staff that:

the number of non-Jewish applicants is the principal factor in creating anxieties.... Even where non-Jewish membership rose over 30%, the Center maintained it is a Jewish agency and was not concerned about the situation because Center purposes had not been subverted. However, the first application by a negro in the South triggers the question of non-Jewish membership of Center policy and anti-Center people in the community use this for their ends."<sup>53</sup>

These incidents, Loshak articulated, tested Southern JCCs' commitment to open membership. Although he reported that "All Centers which discussed open membership policy decided to maintain the open policy so that discrimination between non-Jewish whites and non-Jewish negroes was clearly impossible," only Houston and Nashville had any black members because JCCs felt it unwise to advertise their open membership policy in cities that remained very hostile to integration.<sup>54</sup> Race, thusly, was on the minds of policymakers and stakeholders. It just was overshadowed by the question of Jewish purpose, which was how the JCC movement had historically thought about and debated

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<sup>51</sup> "Memorandum of the Proceedings of the Meeting of the Committee on Open Membership in the Jewish Community Centers," May 15, 1967, NJWB, AJHS Box 33, Folder 3.

<sup>52</sup> Katz himself obliquely referred to the racial component in his address before B'nai Brith, the speech covered by the JTA, when he admitted that if the JCC should maintain its open membership policy it should be truly open and accept "all applications irrespective of race, color or creed, without limitation." At the same time that Katz and his allies submitted their petition, another group of members of the New Orleans JCC who shared this perspective petitioned the JCC to uphold a non-discriminatory open policy.

<sup>53</sup> "Summary of Discussions at JWB Staff Conference."

<sup>54</sup> Houston had 7 black families join as members, and Nashville had 1 black family.

the value of open membership. In addition, the story of racial exclusion in a southern JCC was a public relations liability that the JCC movement was reticent to engage.

It is notable that the discussion centered on the South. That JWB Staff discussed and wrote about open membership predominantly in the southern context in 1966 and 1967 reinforced the idea that racial segregation and discrimination was the United States' "Southern problem." Although Emanuel Berlatsky spoke up at the December Staff Conference to note, "The negro problem must be faced in metropolitan areas as the number of negroes increases along with their desire for the use of Center facilities," it was southern JCC's avoidance of African American membership that consistently brought the issue to the attention of JWB leadership. The situation in New Orleans forced the JWB to confront its own ambiguous and ill-defined opinion of the distinction between black participation and black membership, but ironically the perceived distance from or foreignness of the southern experience also allowed the predominantly northern JCC movement to continue to bury race within the broader debate of non-Jewish membership. This was most evident in the surveys they dredged up in late 1966, as the New Orleans situation blossomed into a public relations liability that the JWB was racing to address. They pulled out the survey they made in 1964 to address the accusations of nonsectarianism and a dearth of Jewish purpose—surveys that were not taken to deal with race nor to measure non-white membership. Clearly they were more concerned with showing that non-Jewish membership did not distill or negate the Jewish purpose of the Center than with defending the JCC as an inclusive and racially-sensitive institution.

To some extent, the JWB did not have to defend the inclusive reputation of the JCC. Many JCCs across the United States were integrated by the late 1960s and accepted

African Americans as members; some had been doing so since the 1940s.<sup>55</sup> Throughout all of the surveying conducted between the 1940s and 1960s, findings showed that local JCCs overwhelmingly upheld the 1950 open membership policy. Despite this consensus "on the ground," exceptions continued to emerge, and each time that the JWB was asked to intervene in these individual cases it became clear that the JWB's Jewish Center Division staff could not agree on what membership was or meant. They continued to conflate it with participation or made arbitrary distinctions about where the privileges of membership began and ended. Emanuel Berlatsky, also at the 1966 Staff Conference, even remarked: "The concept of membership... needs clarification, the manner of associating with the program and the license to participate in the agency." The consensus among JWB staff was that African Americans (and all non-Jews) should be allowed to participate in JCC activities, but disagreement remained about whether certain privileges and rights in the Center could and should be reserved for Jews.

Most profoundly, the JWB was uncomfortable with relinquishing policy-making to non-Jews or African Americans. As the JCC movement still struggled to explain what made the JCC program particularly Jewish, it continued to rely on local Jewish lay leaders to assure that their agency retained its sectarian character. Jewish communities valued these leadership positions on their JCC's Board of Directors for another reason as well. These lay leadership roles gave many middle class Jewish men (and a few women) the social capital and respectability within their communities that only the richest Jews could gain outside of Jewish communal life. There was a real fear that if Board, committee, and policy-making positions were opened to non-Jewish members, local Jews

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<sup>55</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "Special Survey of Non-Jewish Membership"; Harry Schatz, "A Report on a Special Limited Study RE: Negro Membership in Fifteen Jewish Community Centers."



would lose social capital in addition to weakening the community's Jewish identity. The politics of the 1960s amplified this feeling of insecurity. The Civil Rights movement had pushed for black representation and democratic participation in public institutions, not just access to accommodations. Although African Americans were seeking membership to access JCC facilities and not to co-opt JCC leadership, comments made by Solender, Herbert Millman, and Rabbi Philip Goodman at the 1966 Staff Conference indicated their perception of a slippery slope from open membership to the "gainsay [of] the sectarian nature of the agency."<sup>56</sup> Berlatsky concisely stated: "there is no role for non-Jews on the Center board."

In January 1967, the Board of the New Orleans JCC was forced to make a decision about its black applicant for membership when their 90-day tabling period expired. They chose to accept all 18 non-Jewish applicants as members but to then close non-Jewish applications pending a self-study of the agency's capacity to absorb non-Jewish membership without diminishing the Jewishness of its program. The result of the self-study was to reaffirm the quota on non-Jewish membership at 20%, though this time without the tacit racial discrimination. As Label Katz would emphasize when he withdrew his membership from the agency in the spring of 1968, this was *not* an open membership policy—which he would have supported if two-thirds of JCC members had supported it. As such, the New Orleans JCC continued to uphold an "un-Jewish, un-American and un-democratic" policy. He also denounced the JWB's complicity in upholding the policy, for facilitating the self-study, and warned the JWB that it "cannot

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, a parallel concern for the value of representation was simultaneously emerging in the Black Power movement, whose activists debated about the loss of autonomy in the process of integration and whether giving up private autonomous organizational life was worth the capital gains of joining the white power structure. "Summary of Discussions at JWB Staff Conference," 39.

dis-associate itself from this action."<sup>57</sup> Katz recognized the irony inherent in the JWB's sanctioning a discriminatory practice under the guise of high-minded democratic inclusion; in his estimation, the agency was left with a policy that was neither fully inclusive nor fully committed to its Jewish purpose.

Katz was correct. In 1967 the highest ranking JWB staff—Solender, Millman, Berlatsky, and Batshaw—circulated a confidential internal memo amongst themselves. The men wondered, "whether or not the presence of the Negro will keep Jews away from the Center; whether or not the Center can be of service to the Negro. In extreme instances the question is whether or not membership should be closed in order to keep the Negro out." No attempt was made to answer these questions, to propose policy, or to advocate a course of action. Instead the memo concluded: "The most profitable use of thought and energy would be to determine how the Center can best develop insights, attitudes, and behavior that help the Jew give expression to values and activities in support of the continuation and appropriate elaboration of Jewish life in the context of American culture."<sup>58</sup> While this reflected the post-Lakewood Conference consensus that the JCC had an affirmative Jewish purpose, and that this purpose was manifest in the JCC program and was not affected by the extent of Jewish or non-Jewish participation, it also reflected the JWB's continued inability or unwillingness to enforce a common standard and common practice around who could access membership and what the rights of membership entailed.

The Committee on Open Membership in the JCC also failed to clarify what the right of membership entailed, although they did resolve the ambiguity created between

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<sup>57</sup> "Label Katz Denounces 'quota Membership Policy' of New Orleans Jewish Center."

<sup>58</sup> Emanuel Berlatsky, "CONFIDENTIAL: Characteristics Which Make the Non-Jewish Membership in Centers an Issue of Growing Concern."

the JWB Statement of Principles and the open membership policy adopted in 1950. The report the Committee brought to the JWB Board of Directors in January, 1969, interpreted open participation (as used in the Statement of Principles) to mean open membership, and they recommended the "Center should be open to membership and participation by all persons who desire to avail themselves of the Center." Only in the most exceptional situation, they advised, should there be limitations placed on the number of non-Jewish members. Finally, the Committee recommended that JCC lay leadership be limited to Jews. The JWB Board of Directors decided not to consider the recommendation to limit lay leadership nor to vote on the recommendation to allow a quota in exceptional circumstances, but by a vote of 25 to 4 the Board approved the recommendation on open membership. In doing so, they solved the ambiguity between participation and membership and clarified that all applicants should be granted membership regardless of "race, color or creed." What they did not do was clarify whether membership was a right to access JCC facilities and programs, or a right to co-ownership and representation in the JCC. Did membership entitle an individual to the opportunity to serve as a leader and to help decide the agency's future? By not codifying rules about who should or should not serve as lay leaders, the JWB Board allowed for JCCs to decide for themselves whether this measure was necessary to protect their Jewish character.

The JWB Board's decision went uncontested by local JCCs, though that did not reflect tacit approval. In his evaluation of the policy in 1974, Oscar Janowsky would write that the reaction could be best described as "unenthusiastic acquiescence" and that the decision's impact was "minimal." Critics quietly grumbled that Jewish purpose was

being elevated above liberalism, or that open membership was compromising the JCCs' Jewish purpose. One particularly insightful observer even highlighted the evasion inherent in the report, noting that it "'most emphatically conceals the two real issues,'—the White non-Jewish teenager and the Black in the Jewish Community Center."<sup>59</sup> The decision certainly did not represent a mandate for forced integration. And yet, the stakes for Centers, JWB leaders, and the JCC movement were clearly perceived to be quite high when it came to racial and religious integration. As the Vice President of the Board of the New Orleans JCC, Richard M. Weiss, stated at the JWB's Southern Region Conference in April of 1967,

Many people don't reason on this issue. ... Either they just plain don't want Negroes in the Center and in the pool, or they just can't be a member of an institution that discriminates. Either they want Jewishness in their Center and program and "you just can't do it with Gentiles around," or they won't have anything to do with a "ghetto'ed" program.

Although Weiss characterized the two positions as polar opposites and the conflict as a tug of war between them, the conflict was really a negotiation of the terms of liberalism. What was the value of freedom and equality if you then could not maintain your own distinctive identity? Weiss continued:

The Center and those who are willing to bend to a middle ground are the losers and so is the Jewish Welfare Federation - and so is Judaism. With all the talk about Jewish content in the program, a few irascible souls around New Orleans have surely made a lot of vanishing Jews vanish further and faster.<sup>60</sup>

If the goal of the JCC movement was the preservation of American Jewish communities and of American cultural pluralism, the debate over open membership ended up being counterproductive on both fronts. The JWB's failure to unambiguously assert that open

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<sup>59</sup> Oscar I. Janowsky, *The Jewish Community Center: Two Essays on Basic Purpose*, 46–47.

<sup>60</sup> Richard M. Weiss, Ernest G. Freudenthal, and Lawrence Konter, "Open Membership in Centers—Implications for Policies and Programs."

membership and Jewish particularism were not mutually exclusive undermined Jewish liberalism in favor of Jewish preservation. Ironically, it was this very liberalism that had made the JCC a place of refuge for secular or unaffiliated Jews, a non-religious place where they could understand and assert their Jewish identity, and in tarnishing this liberalism the JCC alienated the very population that preservationists like Label Katz had hoped to retain.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

As Jews observed Civil Rights activists calling for equal access to social and civic institutions, and not just equal representation in government and equal protection under the law, they became increasingly defensive of their right to maintain their own particular institutions. Although liberal Jews championed municipal policies that protected equal opportunity in public services, governance, and in the free market, these policies reinforced their own security, social status, and self-determination in the private sphere of Jewish institutional life. The JWB's open membership policy at once honored the principles of equality and threatened Jews' sovereignty within the JCC. Although the Committee on Open Membership in the JCC reaffirmed the JWB's commitment to inclusion and to serving the "total" community, the debate surrounding the issue revealed that the Civil Rights movement tested the limits of Jewish liberalism.

Although Jews grew more accommodating of Jewish particularism and sectarianism throughout the 1960s, the JCC movement and local JCCs still could not explain what determined a "positive identification with Jewish life" and how to create it.

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<sup>61</sup> Indeed, of the 111 subjects interviewed by the JWB for the New Orleans membership study, 28 were unaffiliated with a synagogue.

Though since the 1963 Lakewood Conference the JCC movement had become more tolerant of promoting Judaism or a religiously-based Jewish identity, many JCCs still served as an alternative to the synagogue for secular or unaffiliated community members who eschewed Judaism but identified with the Jewish group based on shared culture, peoplehood, or liberal politics. The controversy in New Orleans, the JCC's ambivalent response to civil rights, and their indecision about open membership policy alienated many of these Jews who did not value their Jewish identity above their commitment to racial solidarity. This estrangement did allow the JCC to consolidate support around their sectarian character and Jewish purpose. Ironically, at the same time that the reevaluation of open membership policy seemed to reinforce sectarianism, the reaffirmation of the policy also had important implications for urban JCCs because it sustained their identity as neighborhood-based community agencies (an identity that stemmed from the legacy of the settlement house movement). Even though, in isolation, the Committee on Open Membership proved to be an uninspiring moment of policymaking, the reaffirmation of the principles of inclusion and community service validated urban JCCs that chose to support their neighboring black communities following the riots and protests of the urban crisis.

#### Chapter 4: The Jewish Community Center Movement and the Urban Crisis

"How does it hurt Jewish identity for Jews to be actively engaged in the present race crisis?" This was the question that Ann G. Wolfe, a Program Consultant for the American Jewish Committee, asked in a 1964 letter to Dr. Arthur Hertzberg, a prominent American rabbi.<sup>1</sup> Although Rabbi Hertzberg had marched with Martin Luther King in Washington in 1963, just a year later Wolfe heard him address the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service to argue that "Jews ... must certainly stand beside [the Negro]. But Jews are today also continuing to work at preserving and trying to define the meaning of their particular survival and identity.... Since this is a parochial concern of their own, they must here stand alone."<sup>2</sup> Wolfe and many of her Jewish social work colleagues rejected the argument made by (but in no way unique to) Hertzberg that their involvement in social action undermined and distracted from the project of sustaining American Jews' distinctive identity. It was this prioritization of particularism and Jewish preservation that led Wolfe to write her letter of protest to Hertzberg. "The Educational Alliance itself," she demurred, referring to a JCC in New York City, "has demonstrated that a Jewish agency can manage not to subvert its basic Jewish purpose, and yet be open to all, and active in the civil rights field."<sup>3</sup> Although not herself a Jewish Center worker, there were many executives and staff members working in the Jewish Center movement who shared Wolfe's views—and many who shared those of Rabbi Hertzberg.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann G. Wolfe, "Letter to Dr. Arthur Hertzberg," February 6, 1964, National Jewish Welfare Board Records (NJWB), American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) Box 27, Folder 25.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Arthur Hertzberg, "Major Address," in *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, vol. 41, 1964, 325–33.

<sup>3</sup> Ann G. Wolfe, "Letter to Dr. Arthur Hertzberg."

This tension reflected a critical transition in Jewish responses to the Black Freedom Movement. Although their support for minority rights led most Jews to champion efforts to outlaw racial discrimination and create equal opportunities for African Americans to participate in the housing and labor market, many Jews also believed that equal opportunity was enough to ensure equal outcomes. Their enthusiasm for the black struggle waned as poverty and class inequality moved to the forefront of the fight against injustice, which for many Jews threatened their economic interests and challenged their belief that the free market would take care of the deserving poor.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-1960s, American industrial cities entered into a period of "urban crisis," and many JCCs located in racially diverse metropolitan areas became preoccupied with deteriorating municipal conditions. Cities faced depopulation, deindustrialization, declining economies, and concentrating poverty, as the movement of industry and the middle class to suburban areas gutted urban tax bases and precluded the investment necessary to make improvements. Residents struggled with the legacy of urban renewal, slum clearance, and inadequate, segregated housing markets. Racial discrimination compounded these material and structural problems. Although by 1965 a combination of Supreme Court rulings and federal legislation had mandated school integration, extended voter rights, and outlawed segregation and discrimination in employment, these expansions of individual rights and protections did not combat poverty or invest in black communities. Federal policies and racist banking practices concentrated the urban poor in deteriorating housing in neighborhoods disconnected from capital, services, and quality education.

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<sup>4</sup> Lila Corwin Berman demonstrates this change in Jewish liberalism through her close case study of the Jewish community of Detroit. Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).



As a result, the non-violent electoral and legislative activism of the "classical" period of the Civil Rights Movement became increasingly unpopular, and frustrated African Americans more often engaged in community-based radical protest that reflected the black nationalist goals of racial dignity and self-reliance. This frustration sometimes boiled over into riots.<sup>5</sup> A wave of violent protests swept through American cities between 1964 and 1970, sometimes carrying black anger right to the doors of American Jews' homes and businesses. After almost a decade of summers during which black urbanites rioted against the government's discrimination against and disinvestment in their communities, commentators describing this phenomenon of "urban crisis" implied that it was a race crisis as much as a structural or material crisis.<sup>6</sup> Many Jewish Americans had supported legal equality for African Americans, but now had to contend with the broader range of problems affecting people of color.

For American Jews, riots revealed and then came to define their understanding of the urban crisis. Riots occurred in large and small cities across the United States, from Harlem in 1964 and Watts in 1965 to York, Pennsylvania, in 1969. A discriminatory incident or an act of police brutality usually precipitated these protests, which often lasted several days and involved looting, burning, and violence. Riots brought the Black Freedom Struggle into Jews' lives and forced them to contend with the reality of

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<sup>5</sup> I use the term riot throughout this chapter to be consistent with its usage by historical actors, while recognizing that it was a term used by white Americans to vilify and undermine black protest. I have done my best to use the term critically and to show how these protests reflect black agency.

<sup>6</sup> Wendell E. Pritchett, "Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race, and Urban Policy, 1960—1974," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 2 (January 1, 2008): 266–86.; Timothy Weaver, "Urban Crisis: The Genealogy of a Concept," *Urban Studies*, March 31, 2016, 1–17.; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

inequality and racial discrimination.<sup>7</sup> As black activists increasingly emphasized black nationalism and autonomy from the white power structure, Jews recognized that this argument implicated them in the structural racism that perpetuated black inequality. The riots and black power activism of the late 1960s succeeded in focusing the country's attention on how racism, discrimination, and economic exploitation operated at the local level, but it also put whites and Jews on the defensive.<sup>8</sup>

Examining the response of American JCCs to the urban crisis challenges neat historical categorization of Jews into camps of urban or suburban, liberal or conservative. Regardless of where Jews lived—be it the city, first-ring suburbs, or in new suburban developments far beyond city limits—the urban crisis spilled over into the suburbs by affecting Jews' businesses, investments, and communal institutions and infrastructure. And in some cases, the urban crisis quite literally spilled over into the suburbs, with riots occurring in low-density residential communities outside the city limits of major metropolises. That some JCCs became involved in projects to improve urban conditions and black communities despite being physically located at the fringes of urban areas reveals that the "urban" crisis was a metropolitan crisis, and that, as historian Lila Corwin Berman has argued, Jews did not always see a stark line between their new suburban communities and the old city neighborhoods that they left behind.

How JCC staff, lay leaders, and members addressed the urban crisis also demonstrates the ideological diversity within American Jewish communities and how this heterogeneity of political opinions could stymie action without the leadership of a strong-

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<sup>7</sup> Here I borrow the language and interpretation offered by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005): 1233–63.

<sup>8</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 231–34.

willed visionary. American Jewish historians such as Stuart Svonkin, Marc Dollinger, and Cheryl Greenberg have studied the Civil Rights movement and the urban crisis from the vantage of the centralized, elite Jewish human-relations agencies such as the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and Anti-Defamation League. These historians demonstrate how these groups negotiated (or rejected) American liberalism in order to promote Jewish interests and protect the right of Jews to maintain a particularist identity. Unlike these groups, the JCC was a community-based agency committed to caring for the physical, mental, and emotional health of Jews, not to caring for the political status or safety of American Jewry within the United States. JCCs inhabited a physical place and dealt with immediate needs and risks, not with national or ideological risks. As a result, stakeholders expressed greater concern about their local Jewish community's relationship to African Americans; some felt compelled to improve relations, while others advocated that both communities embrace particularism. JCC members, lay leaders, and workers espoused different ideological viewpoints on the crisis. This perspective made the pluralistic JCC different from the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and Anti-Defamation League, whose participants and stakeholders chose to affiliate with the organization whose agenda best represented their beliefs. For JCC stakeholders who wanted to involve JCC members in activities of urban improvement, this heterogeneity made it much more difficult to get anything done.

Some Jewish Center workers espoused a universalistic belief that they must serve all those in need; this reflected the Statement of Purpose of the National Association of Jewish Center Workers (NAJCW), which prioritized "assist[ing] in the development of a healthy, democratic Jewish and general community" above Jewish survival, unity, and

education.<sup>9</sup> Although many of these workers found supporters amongst their Board of Directors and their membership, others experienced pushback from members and lay leaders who believed that the amelioration of urban problems was not an appropriate function for the JCC. As a result, most of the urban JCCs that were affected by the riots of the urban crisis did not implement the programs or provide the services that would benefit and improve their neighboring black communities.

However, for JCC stakeholders committed to the welfare of the general community, or who saw the welfare of the Jewish community as highly dependent on that of the surrounding society, public affairs and social action committees were the venue through which they channeled their energy. After tracing the history of these committees within the Jewish Center movement, this chapter examines the JCCs of Cleveland and Detroit to argue that, in the aftermath of urban riots, Jewish Center executives and staff members struggled to engage their lay leaders and members in social action programs that improved the wellbeing of neighboring minority communities. Calls for particularism won out with membership, pressuring Jewish Center workers to offer more programming that promoted Jewish survival and less that attempted to serve the general community.

### **Public Affairs in the JCC Movement: What Affairs for What Public?**

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<sup>9</sup> Despite this, the NAJCW Statement of Purposes was more particularistic than the JWB Statement of Purposes created 20 years prior. NAJCW Commission on Jewish Center Purposes, "Statement of Jewish Community Center Purposes," May 7, 1964, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 4.

In his keynote address at the 1969 Conference on the Urban Crisis, William (Bill) Kahn, the Executive Director of the St. Louis Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA), declared that, "It is time that the Centers which don't have Public Affairs Committees form them if the Center is to mount programs dealing with the issues of the day." It was the role of a Center's Public Affairs Committee (PAC) to determine "avenues and ways" for the JCC to improve "community resources for inner city people who have little or no service." Why did Kahn propose that a PAC, a selected subset of Center Board members, be responsible for initiating this vital work? Moreover, what was the origin of Jewish Community Center PACs, and how did the PAC become the primary recommendation of one of the JCC movement's leading social activists?<sup>10</sup>

Although by the 1960s Bill Kahn viewed the PAC as a mechanism to engage in local change, the JWB's public affairs agenda was originally designed to be patently anodyne, avoiding debates that would compromise Jews' position in American society. Even so, the conformity and conservatism of Cold War politics ended all attempts at public engagement by the JCC movement, first by the JWB and later by the more radical National Association of Jewish Center Workers. In the 1960s, as the civil rights, anti-war, and women's social movements re-popularized grassroots, democratic political action, both the JWB and NAJCW revived their PACs and began passing resolutions that supported civil rights and social welfare legislation, called for an end to the war in Vietnam, and showed solidarity with Israel. The national political climate may have been more hospitable to popular support of social movements, but Jews involved with their local JCCs did not always share these commitments or interests. As a result, few JCCs

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<sup>10</sup> "Jewish Community Center Action on the Urban Crisis: Proceedings of a Conference Conducted by JWB," March 25, 1969, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 9.

formed their own PACs and fewer JCCs took action on the resolutions passed by the JWB and NAJCW.

The idea for a Committee on Public Affairs originated in the JWB Survey. After first recommending that the JWB adopt a Statement of Principles, the second recommendation made by the Survey Commission in 1947 regarded how JCCs should engage with "Controversial Public Issues." The Commission affirmed that JCCs could and should involve themselves in public debates. The JCC's involvement in public affairs was an expression of "'Al Tifrosh min Hatzibur' (Do not separate thyself from the community)," wrote Philip Schiff, the JWB's Washington Representative. If the "enrichment of Jewish community life in America and the development of democracy are among the objectives of Jewish Center programming," Schiff believed "the success of Center programming may be gauged by the degree to which individuals and groups are helped to relate themselves to Jewish and general community affairs."<sup>11</sup>

In order to implement this recommendation, in 1948 the Board of Directors of the JWB established a new Committee on Public Affairs. Those Board members serving on the JWB PAC were charged with deciding the issues on which the JWB and its constituent agencies should focus their attention. Although the Director of the JWB Survey, Dr. Oscar Janowsky, had advised that "Consideration of controversial issues has its proper place in the Jewish Center" and that the JCC "shall permit its groups to enter into study and action on such issues," he also indicated that "as an agency of the Jewish

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<sup>11</sup> This quote derives from *Pirkei Avot*, or Ethics of the Fathers, which compiles the ethical teachings of the rabbis of the Mishnaic period (200 BCE-200 CE). Philip Schiff, "Preliminary Statement on Public Affairs to Be Submitted for Consideration by the Members of the National Jewish Welfare Board's Public Affairs Committee," January 1950, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 7.

group, it should place its major emphasis upon *Jewish* issues."<sup>12</sup> Janowsky's implication was that priority should be given to discussions of Palestine or Displaced Persons, then to "Collateral matters," or issues that affected Jews along with other groups (such as fair employment practices and minority rights).<sup>13</sup> From the very outset, then, the JWB never envisioned its public affairs program as a mechanism through which the JCC movement would advocate domestic policy or foreign affairs positions (with the exception of Israel and the welfare of Jews abroad).

This tension between public engagement and conservatism became problematic almost immediately. By the autumn of 1949, with the rise of anticommunist sentiment in the United States, the JWB was forced to reinterpret what were "appropriate" issues for the JCC's to engage. JCCs increasingly turned to the JWB with questions about how to deal with "controversial" situations, such as when invited speakers, groups hosted by the JCC, or editorialists in JCC newsletters expressed pro-labor, pro-Soviet, or pro-communist or -socialist views. These JCCs feared that their association with these individuals and their views would marginalize them in their communities, disqualify them from funding from their Community Chest, and make them a target for governmental investigations into subversive activity.<sup>14</sup> Whether it was Center workers in Los Angeles "engaged in ideological and political matters," a lecture by Bartley Crum (the lawyer who defended Hollywood screenwriters and directors before the House Un-American Activities Committee) at the Indianapolis JCC, an organization on the Attorney General's subversive organizations list meeting at the Poughkeepsie JCC, or controversial

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<sup>12</sup> Emphasis mine. 4/7/2017 3:46:00 PM

<sup>13</sup> "'Proposed Statement of Purposes and Functions of the Public Affairs Committee of JWB," 1948, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 5.

<sup>14</sup> A Community Chest was a local community-based fundraising organization that distributed money to local charities. In the 1960s most Chests changed their name to the United Way.

editorials appearing in the Staten Island JCC's newsletter, JCCs called on the JWB for advice on how to avoid or mitigate public disagreement.<sup>15</sup> The JWB's PAC became more reactive than proactive, and it even counseled JCCs to avoid hosting "controversial speakers."<sup>16</sup> This inclined the JWB PAC to support issues of specific interest to Jews, causes that were uninterpretable as communist or leftist in any way.<sup>17</sup> As a result, they accomplished little by way of encouraging JCCs to establish their own PACs and public affairs programming.

The National Association of Jewish Center Workers—an organization which sought, like the JWB, to provide guidance and support to the JCC movement— was always more action-oriented than the JWB when it came to public affairs. Like the JWB's PAC, the NAJCW was interested in legislation pertinent to Jews, but Jewish Center workers' interest in social welfare more generally led them to promote the expansion of state control into employment, health care, and education as a means to achieve a more equitable (and prosperous) society. Whereas many of the stakeholders in the JWB were JCC lay leaders, the NAJCW's membership and leadership consisted of Jewish Center workers, most of whom were social workers by training. Many social workers in the JCC movement and in the profession more generally were New Deal liberals who supported the state expansion of social welfare programs. Social action was thus central to their professional practice and ideology. For example, when the NAJCW Board established a

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<sup>15</sup> Philip Schiff, "Report on Survey of Materials and Correspondence in JWB Files Re: Public Affairs," September 2, 1949, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 7.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Liebman, "The Ties That Bind: Jewish Support for the Left in the United States," in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 349.

<sup>17</sup> At this time, the JWB also created a PAC within its Jewish Center Division specifically to "to study the increasing requests for guidance coming from Centers in regard to various aspects of public affairs and agency policy issues growing out of these matters." Harry A. Takiff, "Jewish Center Division Public Affairs Committee Report to the JWB Executive Committee Re Controversial Speakers," November 4, 1951, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 7.



"Standing Committee on Social Legislation" in 1945, its first action was to recommend that the NAJCW Executive Committee send several letters to Congressional representatives encouraging them to support the passage of three upcoming bills that would expand opportunities for all Americans to enter into the middle class.<sup>18</sup> The Committee on Social Legislation also expressed the view that the NAJCW should advocate the strengthening of the G.I. Bill as well as the resettlement of "at least 100,000 Jewish displaced persons" in Palestine.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the JWB's more cautious reaction to American anticommunism, the NAJCW publicly spoke out against the government's infringement on civil liberties in the name of protecting democracy. Jewish Center work was fundamentally predicated on democratic pluralism and the democratic process; the basis of group work practice and Jewish adjustment was the reconciliation of Jewish identity with American identity and the integration of Jews into American society. This was consistent with the general social work ethos of assimilating minority groups by improving their labor, material, and environmental conditions. Throughout the 1940s, social workers regularly supported legislation and policies that, by strengthening the state and providing for the poor, were perceived by anti-communist crusaders as leftist—although a smaller (though not insignificant) number of social workers were actually "radicals" critical of capitalism or sympathetic to communism.<sup>20</sup> Social workers were easily targeted because they were a

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<sup>18</sup> These three pieces of legislation were a Fair Employment Practices Committee bill, the Full Employment Bill, and the Wagner-Murray-Dingell Bill to create a compulsory national health insurance program.

<sup>19</sup> Notably, two of these bills failed to pass and the third, the Full Employment Bill, was compromised by Conservative opposition and passed as but a shadow of its former self. The NAJCW was not advocating obviously successful legislation or uncontroversial policy. "Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting of the National Association of Jewish Center Workers," October 12, 1945, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch, "Social Work and Anti-Communism: A Historical Analysis of the McCarthy Era," *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 8, no. 2 (1997): 30.

unionized workforce that championed organized labor; because they advocated internationalism as a philosophy for social change; and because they were strong proponents of democracy and civil liberties.<sup>21</sup>

No records were kept of NAJCW members' political affiliations, so it is difficult to gauge how many of them were active in liberal, radical, or progressive politics or causes, but if the organization's reaction to the U.S. government's targeting of communists is any indication, there was a correlation between social workers and left-of-center politics.<sup>22</sup> At its National Conference in 1948, by which point the NAJCW's committee was called the "Social Action Committee," the NAJCW resolved to condemn the Thomas-Rankin Committee on Un-American Activities for its "undemocratic procedure," to "express its disapproval of the Mundt-Nixon Bill which in effect would introduce Fascist methods into our American society," and to "take immediate action to mobilize the resources of local communities against this Bill."<sup>23</sup> By 1952 the leadership of the NAJCW felt so strongly that anti-communist activities were infringing on constitutional freedoms that they drafted a statement entitled "This We Believe." Its contents reflected the NAJCW's perception that Cold War conservatives conflated social work with subversion and communism. "The doctrines of guilt by association or guilt by inference; where the social worker's competence is judged on the basis of political

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> There were also no records kept of NAJCW members' religious affiliations, and so it is unclear for how many of these social workers their imperative towards social welfare activism was guided by the social justice platform of Reform Judaism.

<sup>23</sup> Over the next two decades, the NAJCW would alternate the name of this committee, between "Social Action" and "Public Affairs." The first mention of an NAJCW Social Action Committee can be found in the 1948 NAJCW Annual Meeting proceedings. NAJCW NOTES "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting," 1948, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 12, Folder 3.

beliefs; social associations; literary interest; or union affiliation," the NAJCW declared, "is undemocratic."

Despite these protestations, the NAJCW's social action program, like that of the JWB, eventually succumbed to the Cold War chill in radical activism. This shift reflected the trend in social work and voluntary agencies more generally. The discipline of social work turned its focus inward, and spent the 1950s working towards greater professionalization of the field and away from controversial activism, a trend that lasted into the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the JWB's and NAJCW's Public Affairs Committees were defunct until the thawing of conformism and the intensification of egalitarian social movements (particularly the Black Freedom Movement) in the 1960s impelled the JWB and the NAJCW to revive them. Thus, although public affairs as a concept was not new in the 1960s, the committees reformed in an entirely new political and social context. The associations' PACs passed resolutions and made recommendations for how the JCC movement should respond to the pressing political issues of the 1960s—ranging from civil rights to church-state separation to Vietnam—and in doing so they identified which issues were of appropriate concern to the movement and how a JCC Board could and should practice activism.<sup>25</sup> Unlike in the 1940s, when the PACs were first formed, public affairs in the 1960s extended to issues beyond the Jewish community and Jewish communal interests. These resolutions espoused a more universal perspective that suggested that Jewish welfare was predicated on the health and safety of the total community.

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<sup>24</sup> Janice Andrews and Michael Reisch, "Social Work and Anti-Communism," 37, 40–43.

<sup>25</sup> For examples, see: JWB Public Affairs Committee, "Meeting Minutes," January 31, 1968, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 6; JWB Public Affairs Committee, "Minutes of Meeting," October 11, 1968, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 6; NAJCW Executive Committee, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of NAJCW," May 15, 1966, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 6.

Although both the JWB and NAJCW hoped to model for local Center Executives and Boards how they could establish their own PACs, few JCCs did so in the early 1960s. Those that did rarely took much action.<sup>26</sup> This was why Bill Kahn continued to agitate for more robust social action, via PACs, in 1969.

Kahn's efforts at the St. Louis JCCA demonstrate the *potential* that PACs had to involve American Jews in social justice and the vital role that local leadership played in implementing the public affairs recommendations of the JWB and NAJCW. Jewish Center executive directors and staff were the links between the aspirations set for the movement by the JWB and NAJCW and the members of a local JCC; without their stimulus and enthusiasm JCC members continued to view the JCC as a place for recreation and socializing *for* and *with* Jews, and not as a social institution devoted to the welfare of the broader local community. It was executive directors like Kahn who were necessary to turn resolutions and recommendations into action and thereby demonstrate to their community that the JCC was a place where politically active and engaged Jews would find kinship and support. Many Jews belonged to and were active in the the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress, which protected the interests of American Jews by working to improve domestic race relations. American Jewish Community Centers, however, had 16 times as many members and thus 16 times the potential to engage Jews in political and social activism.<sup>27</sup> Most JCC leaders,

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<sup>26</sup> Jewish Community Center Division Public Affairs Committee, "A Guide to Center Policy and Practice in Public Affairs," 1962, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 5; JWB Public Affairs Committee, "Meeting Minutes" Box 149, Folder 6.

<sup>27</sup> By the close of the 1960s, the JCC movement boasted over 750,000 members. The only statistics about Jewish membership in the communal relations agencies that I could find was that the American Jewish Committee had 23,000 affiliates by 1960. Assuming that their membership grew in the 1960s, and that the American Jewish Congress's membership was smaller, I have estimated their combined membership to be 45,000 by the end of the 1960s. Even if this is a wild underestimate, the JCC possessed far more members than the communal relations agencies. Morris Fine, Milton Himmelfarb, and Martha Jelenko, eds.,

however, did not work to integrate the public affairs and social action programming called for by the JWB and NAJCW. Indeed, Kahn and the St. Louis JCCA were anomalous.

Kahn arrived at the St. Louis JCC in 1955. He trained as a social worker in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was hired as the Executive Director of the St. Louis Jewish Community Center Association (JCCA) after ten years of being a group worker in settlement houses and JCCs around the country.<sup>28</sup> Kahn was deeply committed to the Civil Rights Movement. In 1960, he invited the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak as part of the JCCA's Liberal Forum. The topic of King's speech, "The Future of Integration," generated so much interest that the event was moved to the sanctuary of the United Hebrew Congregation, which could accommodate the crowd of over 2000 attendees. From this meeting, Kahn forged a bond with King. In 1963, he attended the March on Washington.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, although Kahn moved the JCCA from the city of St. Louis to a suburban campus in Creve Coeur (foreseeing the demographic trends of that decade), he insisted on integrating the facility.<sup>30</sup> In 1965, he joined King in Alabama and marched from Selma to Montgomery.<sup>31</sup>

Kahn did not limit his activism to his personal life, and worked tirelessly to infuse his values into the JCCA and the JCC movement. His earliest efforts focused on

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*American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 72 (New York: American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 1971); Spencer Blakeslee, *The Death of American Antisemitism* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2000), 71.

<sup>28</sup> Michael D. Sorkin, "William Kahn Dies at 87; Integrated Jewish Community Center in 1963," *Stltoday.com*, accessed May 25, 2016, [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/obituaries/william-kahn-dies-at-integrated-jewish-community-center-in/article\\_a85c6afc-388c-57f4-811d-0108072dfbbd.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/obituaries/william-kahn-dies-at-integrated-jewish-community-center-in/article_a85c6afc-388c-57f4-811d-0108072dfbbd.html).

<sup>29</sup> "State Honors Dr. King with Celebrations," *Southeast Missourian*, January 15, 1989, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1893&dat=19890115&id=jcofAAAAIBAJ&sjid=mdgEAAAAIBAJ&pg=1038,1517863&hl=en>.

<sup>30</sup> Sorkin, "William Kahn Dies at 87; Integrated Jewish Community Center in 1963."

<sup>31</sup> William Kahn, "Tuscaloosa, Alabama Was an NAJCW Address During the Summer of 1965," 1965, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 5; "Martin Luther King Had Strong Ties to St. Louis Jewish Community," *St. Louis Jewish Light*, accessed May 25, 2016, [http://www.stljewishlight.com/blogs/cohn/article\\_5d9caf88-3d30-11e1-97e2-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.stljewishlight.com/blogs/cohn/article_5d9caf88-3d30-11e1-97e2-0019bb2963f4.html).

involving Jewish Center workers in the struggle for racial equality. As the chairman of the NAJCW's Subcommittee on Civil Rights for most of the 1960s, Kahn instigated the involvement of NAJCW-affiliated Jewish Center workers in projects benefitting African Americans in the North and South. In the summer of 1965, Kahn coordinated the participation of the NAJCW in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's (SCLC) VISION Project in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. NAJCW members signed up for two-week volunteer shifts, during which they counseled high school students about how to prepare for, apply to, and succeed in college. The project was a qualified success: although the SCLC credited the NAJCW volunteers with making the Tuscaloosa VISION site the most effective of the ten operating across the state, Kahn admitted that, of the 750 NAJCW asked to volunteer, only twenty responded and *nine* committed to participating (although NAJCW members donated \$1300 to support the project).<sup>32</sup>

Kahn and the Subcommittee on Civil Rights decided that NAJCW members would have more buy-in for projects located within their communities and decided to shift their focus to working with the National Urban League to establish programs in both southern and northern cities for Jewish Center workers to volunteer in their neighboring black communities.<sup>33</sup> This geographic expansion to include the north reflected the broadening of the Black Freedom Movement as well as the transition to more working-class, grassroots forms of organizing within the black community for tangible, material improvements to urban living conditions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> William Kahn, "Reaction to NAJCW Executive Meeting and NAJCW Membership Meeting at Philadelphia Conference," June 11, 1965, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 5; William Kahn, "Tuscaloosa, Alabama Was an NAJCW Address During the Summer of 1965."

<sup>33</sup> NAJCW Civil Rights Committee, "Meeting Minutes," November 14, 1965, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 5, Folder 1.

<sup>34</sup> 4/7/2017 3:46:00 PM

Despite Kahn's best efforts, however, St. Louis was the only city where a program was implemented, for "Responses from the other cities indicated that the local Urban League people were not particularly responsive to NAJCW offers of help and in most cases, the local NAJCW member felt that there is a certain aspect of rebuff."<sup>35</sup> Staff members from the St. Louis JCCA, in consultation with the Coordinator of the Urban League Recreation Centers, volunteered their time to run sports, music, and social programs four days a week at the Wells-Goodfellow Center, located in a formerly Jewish neighborhood that by the end of the 1960s was overwhelmingly black. Within weeks, however, the program had diminished to two days a week, as the Wells-Goodfellow Center lacked equipment, supplies, and facilities, and the Jewish Center workers felt a lack of support from the Wells Center's staff.<sup>36</sup> Despite the limitations of both the VISION and Urban League initiatives, Kahn's visionary leadership did instill in the NAJCW a strong commitment to public affairs, and the NAJCW committee would indeed continue under the leadership of others throughout the 1970s.

Kahn's leadership was also vital to the creation of a strong public affairs program at the St. Louis JCCA. Kahn worked with his Board of Directors to reinvigorate the JCCA's Public Affairs Committee; their public affairs program would become one of the strongest of all the JWB's constituent agencies, and the JWB often sought out Kahn and his lay leaders to speak about its success. For example, on a chilly day in mid-December, 1967, seven JCC executive directors and lay leaders gathered in a conference room in Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The occasion was a day-long meeting of the Jewish Welfare

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<sup>35</sup> NAJCW Civil Rights Committee, "Report of Civil Rights Committee, National Conference, Atlantic City," May 11, 1967, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 1, Folder 7.

<sup>36</sup> Norman Flax, "St. Louis NAJCW Experience With the Urban League: Volunteer Staffing of the Wells-Goodfellow Center," May 1967, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 5, Folder 1.

Board's Midwest Region Public Affairs Council. This regional council was one of many attempts being made by the JWB to inform JCC lay leaders and executive directors of the benefits of establishing Public Affairs Committees within their Centers. Gabriel Meyer, who served on the Board of Directors of the St. Louis JCCA, was there to speak to his colleagues about how his Center had successfully revived its moribund public affairs programming.

"I'm sure most of you are familiar with what I'm about to describe," Meyer declared confidently. He continued, describing how the St. Louis JCCA's Public Affairs Committee (PAC) had previously functioned:

A group of us... would meet, thrash out and agree on a topic that might draw the best crowd to the next scheduled meeting, and "brainstorm" to come up with a gimmick to help turn out the audience we wanted to reach. This technique sometimes resulted in exhilarating, heady success; sometimes in frustrating, aching disappointment; but can generally be described as unsatisfactory to all discussion group committee chairman and members.

Indubitably, his colleagues nodded their heads knowingly. The traditional approach to engaging JCC members in public affairs and social action was not effective, despite the best intentions of Jewish Center workers and lay leaders.<sup>37</sup>

The St. Louis PAC, recognizing that its events were poorly attended, and discussions too superficial, began experimenting with its programming. The goal was to find a new format that would inspire the adult members of the JCCA to participate in activities where they learned about or worked to improve social problems. Committee members decided that instead of devoting each event to a new topic, they would "concentrate on fewer subjects, but ... cover them in greater depth." In particular, the

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<sup>37</sup> Jewish Welfare Board Midwest Region Public Affairs Council, "Meeting Minutes," December 15, 1967, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 6; Gabriel Meyer, "A Case Study of the Public Affairs Program of the St. Louis JCCA," December 15, 1967, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 6.



PAC began offering events for JCCA members interested in learning about "the potentially explosive problems associated with the rapidly developing Negro social revolution." Meyer reported that the St. Louis JCCA was "among the first community groups to provide the Negro a forum where his aspirations and goals could be heard by the white community." The PAC instructed staff and lay leaders that "civil rights and the relationship of Jewish values to the Negro struggle for equality" should be incorporated into all aspects of the JCCA's program.

This experimentation yielded the changes that Meyer and the Public Affairs Committee were seeking. The JCCA's Board of Directors decided to adopt a Resolution on Equal Opportunities, making an affirmative statement about equal rights for all citizens, and the JCCA followed up the resolution with concrete action; it publicly announced in the St. Louis press that the agency would only do business with companies that followed the JCCA's policy of non-discrimination in employment. Meyer reported that this measure had the intended effect, as "A communication to concerns doing business with JCCA ... resulted in literally hundreds of companies acknowledging their acceptance of and willingness to recruit, employ, and promote personnel without regard to race, creed or national origin." Under Kahn's leadership, the JCCA also established a one-year training program for black adults interested in careers at the JCCA; trainees shadowed workers in the JCCA's various programs while taking community college courses, with the ultimate goal of filling staff vacancies as they opened.<sup>38</sup>

An even more important measure of success in Meyer's eyes was that groups within the JCCA began to follow the example of their leadership. A number of teenagers

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<sup>38</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Projects to Aid Poor in Ghettos Told in St. Louis, New York," *The Detroit Jewish News*, May 10, 1968.

began to volunteer at a neighborhood development center, helping to run a recreation program on Sundays "for children living in this poverty pocket in the inner city." A group of adults began a tutoring program that eventually spread to four Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) Centers throughout the city. Even the older adult members of the JCCA began engaging in social action, making a trip to the Missouri State Capitol to lobby for the establishment of a state Division of Aging. The St. Louis JCCA's PAC had triumphed over the traditional approach to public affairs programming, successfully making "public affairs involvement a real and living experience for [JCCA] members."

Meyer ended his presentation with a final lesson. "Let me be crystal clear," he said to his colleagues, "that what can be accomplished depends in large part upon effective—no—inspired leadership by the executive director and those staff working with him." Without their leaders paving the way, few JCC members would go beyond the walls of the agency and work towards the alleviation of poverty and inequality and the improvement of their cities. That St. Louis was one of the few cities succeeding in involving its membership in public affairs programming underscored this point. It was leaders like Kahn and Meyer who catalyzed Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and the response to the urban crisis. Indeed, throughout the rest of the JCC movement most of the public affairs activity consisted solely of JWB and NAJCW resolutions passed at the annual meetings and never translated into meaningful protest, programming, or legislative action.

Why was this the case? The political context in the late 1960s had shifted once again, as a backlash emerged against the very social movements that had made public affairs such a compelling idea in the early 1960s. Although the JWB and NAJCW's

public affairs agenda called for expanding the interest of the JCC movement to national and global concerns, ultimately each JCC was a local agency with local interests. Local interests trumped national ideals, and although investing in the city seemed noble, most white middle-class Americans, including Jews, prioritized the protection of their property values, the quality of their schools, and their low tax rate. For those leaders in the JCC movement who were more idealistic, overcoming the apathy or resistance of most members, lay leaders, and staff required strong, sustained leadership—particularly after the Black Freedom Movement's transition from nonviolent activism to Black Power protest.

### **After the Riots: The JCC Movement's Divergent Responses to Black Protest**

On July 18, 1966, rioting began in Cleveland after the white owner of a bar in the overwhelmingly black Hough neighborhood refused to provide a glass of water to a black customer. Angry patrons and their friends gathered outside the establishment, prompting the proprietor to call the police. Tensions escalated, and the crowd began to move through the neighborhood, looting and setting fire to businesses. Confrontations between black Clevelanders, white vigilantes, the police force, and 2,200 National Guardsman lasted for six nights, leaving 4 dead and many more injured and arrested.<sup>39</sup> Exactly a year after the Cleveland riots ended, the Detroit police raided an unlicensed bar in the predominantly black 12<sup>th</sup> St. neighborhood, provoking the patrons and bystanders and eventually causing a riot that lasted five days, left 5,000 homeless, and totaled \$50 million in damages. 33 people were killed, over 300 were injured, and 3,800 were arrested in the

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<sup>39</sup> Marc E. Lackritz, "The Hough Riots of 1966" (Regional Church Planning Office, July 1968), <http://web.ulib.csuohio.edu/hough/HoughRiots.pdf>.

confrontations.<sup>40</sup> The Jewish community of Detroit was especially affected by the event, as Jews owned 10% of businesses in the area of most intense rioting, looting, and burning.

In 1969, there were over 300 JCCs located in cities and suburbs throughout the United States.<sup>41</sup> By the JWB's estimation, 100 JCCs were located in 70 cities with a history of (or the potential for) racial unrest. At least 48 of these JCCs were located in communities that experienced a significant black riot between 1960 and 1969.<sup>42</sup> "Urban," however, was a very loose category when it came to riots, as some occurred even in areas with suburban-style residential density, like Plainfield in Northern New Jersey and Mt. Vernon in Westchester County. The Jewish communities of other cities, such as Cleveland and Baltimore, were well-settled in first-ring suburbs by the early 1960s, but technically their JCC and many members still resided in city limits. In Detroit and St. Louis, for example, although the JCC had followed the Jewish community as it moved from urban to suburban neighborhoods, elderly members (and often members' businesses) remained behind in the city.

The comparison of the Cleveland and Detroit JCCs is useful because, following the riot that occurred in each city, the Cleveland JCC made more of an effort to take social action than the JCC in Detroit did. What contingencies led to this being the case?

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<sup>40</sup> Richard W. Thomas, "The Black Community Building Process in Post-Urban Disorder Detroit, 1967-1997," in *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present*, ed. Joe W. Trotter, Earl Lewis, and Tera Hunter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 209-40.

<sup>41</sup> These JCCs reported a total membership of approximately 766,000 in 1969. Although only 13% of the total American Jewish population, members were often Jews who affiliated with, and often were actively involved and invested in, organized Jewish communal life. Morris Fine, Milton Himmelfarb, and Martha Jelenko, eds., *American Jewish Year Book 1970*, vol. 71 (New York: American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 1970).

<sup>42</sup> These numbers were derived from the sample of the JWB's survey on the topic, as cross-checked against black urban riots. Irving Brodsky, "The Jewish Community Center and the Urban Crisis: A Survey Report for the National Jewish Welfare Board" (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1968), NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 7.

The two JCCs shared many similarities. Both were located in Midwestern cities and had approximately the same size Jewish community, though Jews in Cleveland made up a larger proportion of the city's total population (11.3%) than Detroit's (5.6%).<sup>43</sup> Both cities, by the 1960s, were in the midst of a process of deindustrialization and suburbanization that had much less of an effect on the professional class of Jews who had moved to neighborhoods like Shaker Heights in Cleveland and Oak Park in Detroit than it did on the black communities that consolidated in the Hough and Twelfth Street neighborhoods of each city, respectively.<sup>44</sup> Each JCC also had moved, along with suburbanizing Jews, to these affluent enclaves at the edge of city limits. With these variables held constant, I argue that the Cleveland JCC's more assertive response to the urban crisis was due to the universalistic conviction and strong leadership of its executive director and lay leaders.

Leaders in the American JCC movement had divergent opinions about how to engage with urban black communities following the summers of riots. They wondered: Was it the JCC's responsibility to fight against racial discrimination and support anti-poverty programs? Or should the JCC remain focused on its mission to function "as an agency of Jewish identification," as articulated in the JWB's Statement of Principles?<sup>45</sup> The Executive Directors and lay leaders of urban JCCs felt caught between the demands

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<sup>43</sup> The 1968 Jewish population estimate for Detroit was 84,500, and Cleveland was 85,000. I compared this against the total population estimate made by the U.S. Census in 1970. Detroit's population was 1,511,482 and Cleveland's was 750,903. Morris Fine, Milton Himmelfarb, and Martha Jelenko, *American Jewish Year Book 1970*; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States," Population Division Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005), <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*; David Stradling and Richard Stradling, "Perceptions of the Burning River: Deindustrialization and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River," *Environmental History* 13, no. 3 (July 2008): 515–35.

<sup>45</sup> Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*.

of local Black communities and the desire of many of their members for the JCC to limit its focus to Judaism, Zionism, and Jewish culture. Comparing the recommendations made by the Jewish Welfare Board to the initiatives that the JCCs implemented following the riots reveals that the local responses to the riots attempted by more liberal, universalistic JCC executives and staff made little impact on JCCs' neighboring black communities. Although some JCC leaders, like those in St. Louis and Cleveland, successfully implemented limited programs for black communities, the majority of JCCs struggled to convince their membership and lay leaders that the JCC's involvement in urban crisis activities did not distract the agency from its purpose of serving the Jewish community and promoting the survival of American Jewish identity.

In response to the intensity of the violent protests that occurred in the summer of 1967, the JWB's Public Affairs Committee decided to establish a "Subcommittee on Effects of Riots on Jewish Community Centers." At their second meeting, on January 7, 1968, subcommittee members invited executive directors and lay leaders of JCCs located in areas that had experienced rioting to attend and speak about their experiences. These representatives certainly recognized the structural conditions that were the root causes of the protests. JCC executives and lay leaders from JCCs in Cleveland, Detroit, Newark, Mt. Vernon (New York), and Plainfield (New Jersey) all described a common instigator of the past summer's urban unrest: the continued segregation (or more accurately, white resistance to integration) of housing and public schools.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Representatives from Coney Island (Brooklyn) and Philadelphia did not describe their JCC's response to riots, ostensibly because riots in these areas occurred before 1967, in 1966 and 1964, respectively.

Describing the context for the Cleveland riots to the subcommittee, Howard Robbins and Robert Meritt told the group that "crowded schools and slums triggered slum dwellers to riot" in the Hough neighborhood, which was an area of "hard core poverty." In this deeply segregated city, Jews and middle class African Americans had moved to the eastern suburbs of Cleveland, leaving the "central city" neighborhoods of Central, Fairfax, and Hough with a high concentration of poor black residents. Similarly, in Detroit, the perceived decline in the quality of public education following desegregation (of both the schools and of formerly all-white neighborhoods) motivated some Jews to move out to the suburbs—more than 50% lived in the suburbs by 1965.<sup>47</sup> Irwin Shaw, Executive Director of the Detroit JCC, acknowledged that although members of the Jewish community had formed community councils to welcome black homeowners to their neighborhoods, it was not enough to salvage the poor race relations between white and black residents of Detroit (although Shaw argued that "reactions [during the riot] might have been worse had we not made these gains").<sup>48</sup>

Shaw, Merritt, and Robbins were left—as were many other affected JCC executives, staff, and lay leaders—with questions about how to react and respond to the riots. How could they best implement programs that were perceived neither as paternalism nor as tokenism? How should they deal with remarks made by black nationalists that Jews perceived to be explicitly anti-Semitic, particularly accusations of Zionist neocolonialism, without reifying nationalists' arguments by continuing to ignore black conditions? Finally, could JCCs do any of this without alienating their members and their Board of Directors, who were angry about the destruction of Jewish businesses

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<sup>47</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 149.

<sup>48</sup> For more on Detroit's Midtown Neighborhood Council, see Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*. 2015.

during the riots, who resented black anti-Semitism, and who believed that the JCC should remain focused on programs that promoted the survival of the Jewish community and their children's Jewish identities?

Since the riots, the Cleveland JCC had gone much further than Detroit's in attempting to address the underlying causes of the urban crisis. In Detroit, "To date... not one single visible program has been developed to meet the situation." Nonetheless, Detroit's Jews should not feel guilty at "causing the situation," Shaw argued, because they had made efforts to improve the city's black communities. He lamented that the JCC's efforts to provide assistance to black residents of a formerly Jewish neighborhood had not been received gratefully. He told the group about how, when the JCC "gave up its branch in the Negro community and offered the building for one-fourth of its cost to the Department of Recreation of Detroit... the offer was turned down." Rather than taking advantage of the JCC's generosity, "a group of Negro doctors wanted and eventually got the building for a hospital. Thus, the Negroes, themselves, estopped conversion of this building to a recreational facility for Negroes." By Shaw's logic, because the JCC had tried to meet the needs of its black neighbors—and it was their desire to have vital healthcare facilities instead of a recreation center that curtailed their generosity—the JCC was absolved from responsibility.

Merritt and Robbins's report to the subcommittee reflected that the Cleveland JCC was taking a more engaged approach than in Detroit, though not without obstructions of their own. The Board of the Cleveland JCC was one of the few to establish a Public Affairs Committee, and initially the PAC attempted to educate JCC membership about urban conditions and their relation to the riot, "trying to get its



members to relate to the problem," and to foster interracial dialogue. In these efforts, Robbins noted, they felt stymied for two reasons:

- (1) There is a Jewish backlash because of the anti-Semitic feeling of the Negro, the destruction of Jewish business property and the criticism against Jewish property owners; (2) The isolation of the Jewish community from the city makes it difficult for the Jewish Community Center to relate to these problems.

As the JCC's leadership struggled to "to bring the problems of the inner city to Center members and to stop members from running away from them," they continued to try and improve conditions for black Clevelanders. In addition to accepting African American children into their summer camp program, they sent Jewish teenagers to tutor black high school students. Whether as a response to accusations of paternalism by black nationalists or as an attempt to justify the JCC's involvement in the program to the Jewish community, Merritt added, "The Center decided it would not promote even a tutoring program unless the Negro community joined in the effort. Our prime objective is to encourage the Negro to help other Negroes."

Cleveland was not alone in reporting concerns about black militancy. The representative from the Coney Island Y described how a "small, but active and vocal Negro group ... which expresses an anti-white and anti-Jewish sentiment" had proven difficult to work with, creating "fears among the middle income majority of the area - the Coney Island Community Council, the middle income housing projects, the Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, etc." Another attendee at the meeting described how, at the JCC in Plainfield, New Jersey, "there is interest to get things started but the movement is slow. The reason given is that 'you will frighten Jews by bringing them into contact with black radicals.'" The Plainfield JCC's Board of Directors worried that any action they

took would subject them to criticism, either from the Jewish community or from black militants, and so decided it was best to do nothing.<sup>49</sup>

The meeting revealed that local JCCs were responding in manifold ways, without coordination, and with varying levels of effectiveness. The subcommittee, however, was just the JWB's first attempt to address the role of the JCC in the urban crisis. At the JWB's national biennial convention in April, 1968, the attendees adopted a resolution on the urban crisis that laid out some basic principles for JCCs to follow (should they choose, as no JWB resolutions were ever binding). The resolution established that the Jewish community, and by extension the JCC, had to take responsibility for the social problems contributing to the urban crisis; JCCs thus had an obligation "fulfill their Judaic commitment to strive to eliminate social injustice and to ensure to all people the security and dignity to which they are rightfully entitled" and to "guide their members in translating their Jewish commitment into practical action for social progress." To that effect, the resolution encouraged agencies to plan cultural and educational programs that helped members better understand the root causes of the urban crisis and to explore their individually held attitudes about African Americans. Additionally, Centers should advocate legislative action on employment, housing, and welfare that would improve living conditions for low-income African Americans.<sup>50</sup>

A subsequent investigation made by JWB Consultant Irving Brodsky revealed that most JCCs had not adopted or acted on the biennial resolution, and the few JCCs that did take action did so to a more limited extent than called for in the resolution. After conducting a nationwide survey of JCCs located in cities with a history of (or the

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<sup>49</sup> JWB Public Affairs Committee, Subcommittee of Effects of Riots on Jewish Community Centers, "JWB Public Affairs Subcommittee Meeting," January 7, 1968, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 6.

<sup>50</sup> Appendix B Irving Brodsky, "The JCC and the Urban Crisis."

potential for) racial unrest, Brodsky published a report in December of 1968 that offered additional recommendations for JCC executives, lay leaders, and staff to consider.

Brodsky realized that the ideals of the biennial resolution needed to be grounded in concrete plans of action. Although he reinforced many of the recommendations in the resolution on the urban crisis, particularly those on member education and public affairs advocacy, Brodsky added a list of very specific services that JCCs could offer directly to low-income and non-white communities as part of their efforts to improve their urban neighborhoods and the race relations amongst citizens of the metropolis. These "Direct Services Operated or Supervised by Centers for Members of Disadvantaged Groups" included: "Headstart and Child Day Care Programs"; "Summer Recreation Programs Exclusively for the Disadvantaged"; "The Inclusion of Disadvantaged Minority Group Children in the Center's Day or Resident Camping Programs"; "Intergroup Programming"; "Tutoring Programs"; "Training Volunteers to Serve the Disadvantaged"; "The Provision of Center Facilities to Disadvantaged Groups"; "Work Training Opportunities"; "Cooperation with Other Communal Groups"; and the implementation of fair employment practices and equal opportunity hiring at each JCC.<sup>51</sup>

Both Cleveland and, eventually, Detroit had adopted some of these recommendations by the time Brodsky surveyed them late in the summer of 1968. Cleveland co-sponsored a drama program for elementary school students at a black settlement house, and one afternoon per week JCC staff ran a program for low-income youth (both black and white) bussed in from local public schools. For adults, they co-sponsored educational forums with the League of Women Voters and the Council on World Affairs. By contrast, the Detroit JCC implemented fewer direct service programs.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

The Detroit JCC staff consulted with a creative arts program run by and for African Americans and began a tutoring program—though it had to be discontinued when white volunteers "became afraid to go into a Negro neighborhood where there had been disorders."<sup>52</sup>

Direct services were expensive to implement and difficult to coordinate, especially considering the significant Jewish backlash against African Americans that followed the summers of rioting. JCC executives, lay leaders, and staff found it was easier to share their expertise with the wider community.<sup>53</sup> In Detroit, members of the JCC's Board of Directors also served on the Board of the United Community Services, "which is concerned with health and welfare services for the disadvantaged." The staff of the Cleveland JCC was even more active. The Executive Director served on the boards of the Mayor's Economic Opportunities Council and the Mayor's Committee on Youth Opportunities (on which he was the only white member). The director of the JCC's nursery school consulted on the development of Cleveland's Headstart program, while the Program Director organized a recreational program in an underserved neighborhood in partnership with the Police Athletic League. It was far easier to share knowledge amongst colleagues than to convince reticent—if not overtly racist—JCC members to volunteer their time and energy in pursuit of urban improvement and racial equality.<sup>54</sup>

The Cleveland and Detroit JCCs were not alone, however, in the unevenness of their response to the racial unrest in their cities. In 1969, JWB Consultant Irving Brodsky conducted a follow-up survey with the JCCs who had responded in 1968 (almost two-

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 27–32, 44.

<sup>53</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Growing Jewish 'Backlash' Reported from Many Cities," *The Detroit Jewish News*, March 29, 1968.

<sup>54</sup> Irving Brodsky, "The JCC and the Urban Crisis," 40.

thirds returned the second questionnaire). Most of the respondents claimed that, in the intervening year since the first survey, little or no significant changes had been made to the "extent or variety" of the services and facilities they provided to neighboring minority communities, and they reported similar patterns of collaboration "with other organizations in inner-city crisis-related activities." Almost half of these JCCs had initiated or intensified programming to educate their membership about the causes and conditions of the urban crisis. *More* than half, however, reported that their actions had been limited by three problems: conservative membership and/or board members who felt the JCC's involvement in urban crisis activities was beyond the scope of the agency and distracted from its purpose of serving the Jewish community; bias or backlash in response to black radicalism; and a lack of employee enthusiasm for the limited success of their (extra) work. Noting such barriers, the Detroit and Cleveland JCCs' focus on educational programs, expert consultation, and public service (rather than direct service) appears to have been their best choice—putting them squarely in the majority of their peer agencies.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond the JCC, American Jewish communities began to focus more on internal communal interests and less on urban politics; the welfare of the Jewish community and the city, until the late 1960s, had been conjoined and inextricable in Jews' minds, but the urban riots revealed that their interests now lay in the suburbs and in Israel. In Detroit, for example, the coordinating council of the city's Jewish community decided that instead of working with the city government of Detroit to improve public education, they would privately "disburse \$25,000 each year to the Higher Education Opportunities Committee,

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<sup>55</sup> Irving Brodsky, "The Jewish Community Center and the Urban Crisis, A Follow Up Survey" (National Jewish Welfare Board, 1970), 1–7, NJWB, AJHS Box 149, Folder 10.

a joint private-public fund" to send low-income minority students to college.<sup>56</sup> Rather than investing in the city, the community also worked to relocate elderly Jews from the 12<sup>th</sup> St. neighborhood to the suburban areas where most of Detroit's Jews now resided.<sup>57</sup>

JCCs struggled to respond to black protest and deteriorating urban conditions because both black nationalists and their Jewish constituencies distrusted one another and questioned the intentions of Jewish involvement in urban crisis activities. Despite the JWB's best efforts to outline progressive principles and provide recommendations for action, local JCC executives, staff, and supportive lay leaders found it was easier to volunteer their expertise than to implement direct service programs that could provide immediate benefits for black urbanites, especially as they found less support from a Jewish community swinging towards its own ethnic nationalism and private charitable interventions.

### **Jewish Survival over Urban Revival**

Although the issue of bias was certainly a deterrent, the effectiveness of the argument that the JCC's involvement in urban crisis activities distracted the agency from its purpose of serving the Jewish community cannot be underestimated. This was far from a new issue for the JCC, but in the wake of black nationalism and the 1967 Six-Day War it took on new valences.<sup>58</sup> Radical Zionists developed a movement "modeled on Black

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<sup>56</sup> Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 202.

<sup>57</sup> "UJC Community Foundaton Allocates \$110,000 to Aid Hebrew Studies and Scholarship Programs," *The Detroit Jewish News*, June 6, 1969.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapters 1-2 for the history of Jewish particularism in the JCC movement.

Power and conceived as parallel to it," and their activism pushed American Jewry towards a revival of Jewish identity and a public, unabashed emphasis on Jewish survival.<sup>59</sup> Since 1963 the JCC movement had been searching for a way to augment Centers' efforts to foster Jewish identification *without* conflating Jewishness with Judaism, and programs that educated members about Israeli culture and the Zionist struggle provided one such way to engage secular and religious Jews alike.<sup>60</sup> It also provided cover for JCCs that wanted to work on social improvement projects with the wider community without being accused of promoting nonsectarianism.

The St. Louis JCCA provided one example of this trend. At the meeting of the JWB's Midwest Region Public Affairs Council at O'Hare Airport in 1967, Gabriel Meyer made an interesting turn in his narrative after he finished describing the St. Louis JCCA's tutoring program and lobbying efforts. Without any segue or introduction, he began to describe the PAC's focus for 1967-68: "Israel and the American Jew." In doing so, Meyer cannily preempted the argument that public affairs programming distracted the St. Louis JCCA from promoting Jewish identity. He shared with his colleagues on the Midwest Region Public Affairs Council that as a result of the Six Day War, the St. Louis PAC had instructed all departments in the JCCA to increase their programming about Israel. The JCCA sponsored a mass rally in "support of Israel in its emergency" which attracted 5,000 people. They followed it with a Festival Judaica and "Art for Israel Show." Preschoolers began learning Israeli songs and dances, teenage members were encouraged to form student exchanges with Israeli students, and the JCCA helped its older adults plan

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<sup>59</sup> Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 200; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*, 229–30.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter 2, where I discuss the 1963 Lakewood Conference and the JWB's attempts to respond to the rabbinate's allegations that JCCs were nonsectarian.

a trip to Israel. Underscoring public affairs' complementary relationship with the Jewish purpose of the JCC, Meyer told the group that these activities "have served to help members further an 'understanding and appreciation of Jewish values and to encourage his participation in Jewish life.'" While the JCC movement's attempts to increase Jewish content in the JCC program began long before the 1967 Six Day War, American Jews' concern for Israel's survival and the intensification of their interest in Israeli culture *did* provide Jewish Center workers with a far easier way to incorporate non-Judaic, culturally Jewish content. Ironically, Meyer's and the PAC's attempt to interest their members in public affairs and social action by harnessing their interest in Israel put them at odds with many of their black allies who criticized what they perceived as Israeli Jews' colonialist occupation of Palestinian territories.

For the JCC movement, Zionism and Israeli culture provided a solution to the challenge of how to instill a secular or culturally based Jewish identity amongst its membership. American Jews took immense pride in Israel's victory in the Six-Day War and Israel's survival of the war affirmed two decades of arguments amongst leaders of American Jewish communal life in favor of particularism.<sup>61</sup> At the same JWB Biennial in 1968 that passed the resolution on the urban crisis, sociologist Manheim Shapiro declared before representatives from JCCs across the United States that "a major shift [has occurred] in the relationship of Jews to their Jewishness and, hence, to their institutions. ... Jews are no longer content only with the symbols of Jewishness and of Judaism."<sup>62</sup> To "offer aid and intensity to the experience of being a Jew," as Shapiro suggested, the JCC movement provided programs for its members to learn about Hebrew, Israeli culture, and

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<sup>61</sup> Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 128–32.

<sup>62</sup> "“Rabbi Warns JWB Parley of Danger from ‘Rampant Secularity,’” *Detroit Jewish News*, April 26, 1968.



how to support the state of Israel. JCCs did not reflexively turn to Israel-related programming after the war; rather, the war increased the pressure on Jewish Center workers to promote Jewish identity at the same time that Israel offered a thoroughly Jewish basis for programming.

## **Conclusion**

Examining the period of the urban crisis from the perspective of urban Jewish Community Centers and their diverse stakeholders demonstrates that there was no singular Jewish response to the events of the late 1960s. Organizations and individuals did not react along neat ideological or political lines. Bill Kahn, who marched on Washington with Dr. King, also marched the St. Louis JCCA out to the increasingly Jewish suburb of Creve Coeur to ensure that the agency continued to serve its intended community. Gabriel Meyer spoke to JCC representatives about how to establish a public affairs program that at once looked towards the "inner city" and towards Israel. In Cleveland, the JCC succeeded in providing help and services to black Clevelanders, but it failed to penetrate the apathy and antipathy that many of its members felt towards the African American community. Ultimately, the path of least resistance for most Jewish Center workers was to provide the programming that many of their members and lay leaders desired: programs that emphasized Jewish identity and pride in the State of Israel.

If the Civil Rights movement did not create a mandate in the Jewish Center movement for open membership, and if the urban crisis ultimately had a regressive effect on the JCC's universalism, how did urban JCCs ultimately become a center for the entire, total, general community? The urban crisis *was* fundamental to this process, but not

because black protest inspired JCC members, lay leaders, and workers to make a uniform ideological and political commitment to the city and to communities of color. Instead, it was the structural and material changes brought about by the urban crisis that would lead the JCC movement to accept government funding, and, consequently, to agree to serve all Americans in need.

## Chapter 5: Buying Priorities

### New York City and the Rise of Public Investment in Jewish Community Centers in the 1970s

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, Jewish Community Centers in the United States faced more than social and cultural changes brought about by the Black Freedom Movement and urban crisis. Transformations in the structure of the American economy and federal government also put pressure on organizations to evolve—and these material pressures sometimes competed with Jews' impulse to protect their ethnic and religious distinctiveness. As leaders in the JCC movement and in local JCCs balanced their values against their financial needs, they did not always provide consistent justifications for their decisions.

In the same 1964 letter that she wrote to Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg to criticize his argument that Jewish agencies' involvement in social action distracted them from their sectarian mission, Ann G. Wolfe also criticized the purity of Jews' commitment to their own particularist values. "If we are dealing with the purposes of Jewish agencies," she wrote, "I am afraid there is enough evidence that the purposes of some agencies are motivated by where the money comes from, and that the Jewish purposes can be somehow laid aside when government money becomes available, and must be used on a non-sectarian and/or interracial basis." Wolfe insightfully pointed out that "purpose" was an excuse used by Jewish communal leaders who felt that solving the urban crisis was not the responsibility of the Jewish community, and in fact was evidence of their hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ann G. Wolfe, "Letter to Dr. Arthur Hertzberg," February 6, 1964, National Jewish Welfare Board Records (NJWB), American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS Box 27), Folder 25.

Wolfe's critique illustrates how funders set the priorities of Jewish communal organizations. While Jews expressed reluctance to invest their private dollars in urban communities, the protests of the Black Freedom Movement and the rioting of the urban crisis pressured Presidents Kennedy and then Johnson to invest in programs to combat urban poverty.<sup>2</sup> The increase in government funding made available to private, voluntary (what we would today call private or non-profit agencies), and sectarian urban agencies would have significant implications both for these agencies and for the communities they served. For JCCs, public funding allowed Jewish Center workers with universalistic, liberal, or leftist inclinations to expand their services to poor and minority populations within their community. In response, however, the Jewish philanthropists who provided the bulk of most agencies' funding began to demand that their money be used exclusively to support sectarian and particularist programs.

Public funding thus led Jewish Center workers to bifurcate their JCCs' programming. Private philanthropy paid for Jewish programming for children and families, while the government paid for non-sectarian senior centers and day care classes for the older members and needier families of the community. For many workers and lay leaders in the JCC movement, this proved a satisfactory but fraught compromise: they could serve the total community and retain the social work purpose at the heart of the JCC so long as they retained a majority-Jewish membership and provided programs that encouraged members' identification with Judaism, Jewish culture, or the state of Israel.

Studying urban JCCs' interactions with the state underscores that small but significant numbers of Jews did not move to the suburbs in the postwar decades. Indeed,

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<sup>2</sup> President Nixon's New Federalism agenda also increased public spending on social welfare. Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 252–54.

mostly older adults, single parent families, and Orthodox families remained in cities and so urban Jews exhibited higher levels of financial and service needs than their more affluent suburban counterparts. Through their affiliation with Jewish communal organizations, including JCCs, these Jews benefitted from the general expansion of government funding of social welfare that began during President Johnson's War on Poverty. Examining the budgetary and accounting history of JCCs reveals that during the 1960s and 1970s, the government had a profound impact on both JCCs and urban American Jewish communities. Public money sustained the "legacy" agencies founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through a period of financial instability, for which Jewish communal leadership was very grateful, but the mandated non-sectarianism of government-funded programs also made JCC lay leaders, executives, and workers anxious about whether their agencies could sustain their "Jewish purpose."

The types of grants awarded to JCCs, particularly for the aged, demonstrates that historians have studied the War on Poverty too narrowly by focusing on the slate of initiatives administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity and the development policies of the Model Cities program. Scholars have ignored how funding from the Older Americans Act, Social Security Amendments, and National Institutes of Health radically reshaped how the government decreased its cash assistance to impoverished Americans and increasingly paid voluntary agencies like the JCC to provide services and benefits to the poor, the aged, and those with physical and mental disabilities. Historian Axel Schäfer uses the term "subsidiarity" to describe this phenomenon of "reducing the federal government from a direct provider to a funding agency."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Axel R. Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding: Evangelicals and the State in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 8.

If the rise of subsidiarity pushed public money towards private agencies, the stagnation and inflation that plagued the American economy in the 1970s pulled financially strapped voluntary agencies towards streams of income that could supplement the private or sectarian philanthropy on which they had long relied. Until the 1970s, metropolitan Jewish welfare funds (often called Federations) and non-sectarian community chests (like the United Way) provided the majority of American JCC's income as an annual allocation. These philanthropic organizations raised most of their money through small donations from local citizens. As urban citizens suffered the effects of stagflation, Jewish welfare funds and community chests failed to garner the donations necessary to support their beneficiary agencies. As the allocations that these philanthropies made to JCCs declined, JCCs had to do more with less; many struggled to meet local demand for programs and services, to pay employees' salaries, and to expand their work to new and needy constituencies.

A case study of several JCCs in New York City demonstrates these intertwining threads of social, demographic, and governmental change. New York is not representative of other American Jewish communities and seems incomparable in many ways, most notably because of its large Jewish population, but no less for the historical intensity of effort and attention paid to antipoverty work within the city. Nonetheless, because of the diversity amongst the city's neighborhoods and populations it is possible to examine them as if they were a multitude of little cities, with their own particular needs, interests, problems and agendas. Studying JCCs in New York City allows for a comparison of several agencies within one Federation system, demonstrating how a variety of

motivations and contingencies affected an agency's decision to accept government funding.

### **The Great Society Meets the Urban Crisis: Public Funding Stabilizes the JCC Movement**

Beginning in the 1960s, federal, state, and municipal governments increasingly granted funds to voluntary agencies that provided welfare services to poor and indigent Americans, whether in the form of health care, foster care, vocational guidance and training, or assistance for the elderly.<sup>4</sup> Jewish communal agencies, from large municipal hospitals to small neighborhood JCCs, viewed this trend as a double-edged sword: government funding allowed for the expansion and improvement of necessary services, but in a non-sectarian manner that threatened to compromise their Jewish character. Martha K. Selig, the Consultant on Family and Children's Services for the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York (FJP), noted in a 1959 report that although many Jewish communal organizations were accepting money, others hesitated out of a fear that "the essential character of our Jewish agencies will change the more we become involved with government financing." Selig argued that this was a legitimate but overblown concern. If the open-intake policy mandated by government financing caused the population of a JCC, for example, to change so dramatically that it was no longer predominantly Jewish, the issue was not open intake nor federal funding; rather, the situation "posed the question as to whether these Jewish community centers were appropriately located to perform their primary function of serving a predominantly

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<sup>4</sup> Much of this money came from state, as opposed to federal, government. Neil Gilbert, "The Transformation of Social Services," *Social Service Review* 51, no. 4 (December 1977): 624–41.

Jewish neighborhood." In fact, Selig argued, agencies should accept public funds in order to spend *more* money on Jewish-related programming. Public funding, she wrote, "has freed the philanthropic dollar for responsibilities unique to the voluntary sectarian agency. It has permitted us to retain the Jewish character of our agencies and has not intruded on their operation or autonomy."<sup>5</sup>

Selig's exhortation was prescient, because between 1962 and 1974 federal spending on social welfare grew at an unprecedented rate, from \$194 million to 2.5 billion.<sup>6</sup> At the center of this expansion was President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, but it was only one part of a larger growth in state-sponsored social welfare programs. The longer-lasting effect of the War on Poverty has been the way in which it reorganized how social services are paid for and provided—namely, the government began to enter into contractual relationships with local voluntary agencies wherein it paid for the services that the agency would provide rather than providing the service directly.

The increase was spurred, in part, by the activism and protests of the Civil Rights Movement and, later, by the rioting that brought visibility to the phenomenon of "urban crisis." Black Americans pointed to poverty as an intentional consequence of racism and called for social welfare policies that combatted racial discrimination and its economic effects. While some politicians and policy makers, including President Johnson, were attentive to these arguments, political factors were what spurred antipoverty legislation. By passing legislation and creating programs that invested in poor Americans, politicians

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<sup>5</sup> Martha K. Selig, "Implications of the Use of Public Funds in Jewish Communal Service" (National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Pittsburgh, PA, 1959), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Neil Gilbert, "The Transformation of Social Services."



could earn more white votes by restoring social order and could earn more black votes by improving their living conditions.<sup>7</sup>

President Johnson's War on Poverty, as such, was not conceived as a radical attack on American social and economic structures. It did not redistribute wealth to the poor, nor did it significantly address the ways that racial bias operated in the American economy. Instead, the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which implemented programs that sought to improve poor Americans' access to education, jobs, and services and thereby provide them with the same opportunity to succeed as enjoyed by (white) middle class Americans.<sup>8</sup>

Historians have focused on the OEO's Community Action component, which intended to solicit "maximum feasible participation" of poor and minority populations in low-income urban communities, as the most important (and unrealized) result of the War on Poverty.<sup>9</sup> The Community Action Program (CAP) was designed to allow for local decision making about how these contracts and services would be implemented. This was an approach that appealed to social workers and antipoverty activists, but not to the local politicians who saw it as a threat to their power and whose protests quickly led to the defunding of CAPs.<sup>10</sup> What remained was a transformed structure of social welfare in

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<sup>7</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 252–54.

<sup>8</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of why more radical approaches were not pursued, see Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*.

<sup>9</sup> This is largely the result of historians' effort to push back against William Julius Wilson's underclass thesis. Studies of the Community Action Programs have provided evidence of black agency and extensive coordination amongst poor African Americans. Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> This failure is more often attributed to a lack of funding than a lack of political support. Certainly the defunding of the OEO to pay for the war in Vietnam had a considerable effect on CAPs, but the federal government had begun to re-centralize control over spending as early as 1965. See: David Jardini, "Out of the Blue Yonder: The RAND Corporation's Diversification into Social Welfare Research, 1946-1968" (Dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 1996); Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 259. See also: Brent Cebul, *The American Way of Growth* (unpublished manuscript).

which the government effectively bought services for the poor rather than providing them directly.

Collaboration between "public" and "private" charity was not a new, postwar phenomenon but rather an intensification of a process that began during the New Deal. By the 1930s, there was already a coterie of established Jewish charities, casework services, and community centers in New York City, the country's largest Jewish community. The first Jewish Center in the city was the New York Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA), established in 1874 (now known at the 92<sup>nd</sup> St. Y). Fifteen years later, with the influx of Jewish immigrants to the Lower East Side, the Educational Alliance was founded as a hybrid YMHA and settlement house. With the dispersion of second-generation Jews throughout the city in the early twentieth century, new communities established their own neighborhood Centers. The Bronx YM-YWHA and Bronx House were founded in 1909 and 1911 to serve the growing Jewish population in the Claremont and Tremont neighborhoods of that borough, and by 1917 the number of Jews residing in Northern Manhattan had grown large enough that another YM-YWHA was formed in Washington Heights.<sup>11</sup> The Educational Alliance, Bronx Y, Bronx House and Y of Washington Heights share a history as neighborhood Jewish Centers founded before World War II, the baby boom, and suburbanization. The neighborhoods that they serve also share a history, as the residential populations of the Lower East Side, mid-Bronx, and Washington Heights became predominantly black and Hispanic by the middle decades of the twentieth century. Examining these four agencies allows for a study of

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<sup>11</sup> "AJHS | UJA Timeline," *AJHS*, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://www.ajhs.org/uja-timeline>. See also: David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999).

how agencies responded to the demographic and economic shifts that occurred in postwar urban America, and to compare and contrast a variety of reactions and responses.

These agencies also share a history of involvement with Jewish philanthropy. In 1917, the Alliance, Bronx Y, Bronx House, and Washington Heights Y all became beneficiary agencies of the newly established Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York.<sup>12</sup> With the founding of FJP, New York City Jewish Centers began receiving an annual disbursement to sustain their operations and assure their financial stability. Although JCCs were membership-based organizations and charged individuals or families a yearly fee to belong to the Center and participate in its various programs, these fees rarely were enough to cover the expense of maintaining a building and paying trained social work personnel. The Boards of Directors of JCCs thus had to make financial contributions to cover the deficit or raise the money from donors.

Jewish philanthropic societies, known as Federations, were established beginning in 1895 and proliferated across the United States in the first two decades of the twentieth century. On its face, the Federation model achieved a modicum of unity among diverse Jewish communities by expanding fundraising responsibilities for Jewish hospitals, orphanages, and voluntary organizations beyond the predominantly German-Jewish secular elite.<sup>13</sup> Federations took on the responsibility for communal fundraising and planning, with the intent of eliminating duplication of agencies, services, and donor

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<sup>12</sup> Although the YM-YWHA of Williamsburg was founded contemporaneously with these agencies and was also located in a neighborhood that underwent considerable demographic changes, the borough of Brooklyn had its own Federation (Brooklyn Federation of Jewish Charities) until it merged with FJP in 1944. "AJHS | UJA Timeline."

<sup>13</sup> Maurice B. Hexter, "Evolutionary Tendencies in the Jewish Federation Movement," *Proceedings of The National Conference of Jewish Social Service*, no. May 1926 (May 1, 1926): 9–29; Morris D. Waldman, "New Issues in Federation," in Morris and Freund, *Trends and Issues in Jewish Social Welfare*, 172–76.; Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 148–74.

solicitation. They created a more efficient system for soliciting donations, eschewing bazaars and raffles and galas for an annual campaign during which they collected pledges and cash donations from Jewish individuals throughout their metropolitan area.

Federation beneficiaries were prohibited from conducting their own fundraising campaigns and obligated to support the Federation's annual fundraising efforts. Most JCCs, for example, stipulated in their by-laws that members of their Board of Directors make an annual pledge to the Federation. Agencies and communities benefitted from this coordination and came to depend on an annual allocation to support their operations and overhead—particularly the maintenance of highly utilized buildings that experienced extensive wear and tear.

Although agencies were guaranteed an annual allocation, the amount allocated to each agency depended on several factors. Immediately, the success of the Federation's campaign determined how much money was available for distribution amongst its beneficiaries—although as its endowment grew through the mid-century FJP became less dependent on campaign fundraising totals (averaging 65% of its total income in the 1960s).<sup>14</sup> JCCs then competed not only against each other, but against the hospitals, case work agencies, orphanages, camps, and old age homes for these limited funds. Each year, every Federation beneficiary submitted a budget request to the Federation's Distribution Committee (FDC), which scrutinized the agency's spending from the prior year and

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<sup>14</sup> Calculated using the financial reports included within the meeting minutes of the Board of Directors of the Federation. All data in possession of the author.

evaluated its fiscal health and, more subjectively, how well the agency was serving the Jewish community.<sup>15</sup>

For Jewish centers in New York City, although their allocations from FJP generally increased from year to year, they did not always keep pace with inflation or an agency's expenditures. Group work programs were labor intensive, requiring multiple highly trained leaders working with small groups of youth who only paid a small annual membership fee to participate. If an agency added more case work services or other programs tailored to a needy or vulnerable population, it often did not collect enough income to cover the personnel costs of the program. As a result, many JCCs in New York ran a constant budget deficit that their Board members struggled to cover with their own private donations.

Agencies were not precluded from accepting other sources of funding, however, and many sought to expand their services (without running up a deficit) by applying for grants from private foundations to run specialized programs or make targeted improvements to their facilities.<sup>16</sup> In 1937, for example, the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights opened a preschool funded by a group of local women, the Helen Leah Society, seeking to benefit the welfare of children in the midst of the Depression. Indeed, the onset of the Depression motivated JCCs to begin to coordinate with city agencies, the Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration to provide

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<sup>15</sup> This was measured through a variety of membership statistics, qualitative interviews with staff and the Board of Directors, and the Distribution Committee's own perception member participation at several annual visits to each Center.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Solender, "Report of the Executive Director to the Board," October 29, 1936, Solender Family Collection, AJHS Box 3, Folder 2; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 3, 1937, Solender Family Collection, AJHS Box 3, Folder 3. Note that the Solender Papers have recently been re-catalogued, and box and folder numbers may have changed.

educational and work opportunities to community residents.<sup>17</sup> This trend continued through the 1940s and after World War II. With the passage of legislation like the National School Lunch Act in 1945, JCCs became eligible for government reimbursements for fresh milk for nursery students and summer campers. The Federal Housing Act of 1959 allocated funding for elderly housing and enabled the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide loans to voluntary agencies to build affordable housing projects in their neighborhoods and in 1964 the Educational Alliance used just such a loan to construct the David Podell House.<sup>18</sup> This was the case with all publicly funded programs. Educational Alliance also had a nursery class almost completely funded by the city's Department of Welfare and a community mental health service funded by New York State under the oversight of the city's Community Mental Health Board.<sup>19</sup> JCC leaders valued how these programs allowed urban Jews who needed financial, health, or housing assistance to access services at the JCC without having to ask for charity or without signaling their need to fellow community members.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, see the records of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights: Samuel Solender, "Report of the Executive Director to the Board," May 23, 1935 Box 3, Folder 1; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," February 20, 1936, Solender Family Collection, AJHS Box 3, Folder 2.

<sup>18</sup> When the David Podell House, a hybrid housing complex and community center, opened in 1966, the Educational Alliance received over 400 applications for apartments. Louis Berkowitz, the Executive Director, claimed 99% of the applicants were Jewish seniors—though "according to the requirements of the government loan, [EA] cannot make any distinctions or discriminate with respect to applicants for the housing." Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Minutes of the 1961-62 Budget Conference," April 18, 1961, United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York Collection (UJA-FJP), AJHS; Educational Alliance, "Answers to Questions Likely to Arise at Forthcoming Budget Conference," April 11, 1961, UJA-FJP, AJHS; Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Minutes of the 1965-66 Budget Conference," April 20, 1965, UJA-FJP, AJHS; "Our History," *Educational Alliance*, accessed October 27, 2016, [http://www.edalliance.org/our\\_history](http://www.edalliance.org/our_history).

<sup>19</sup> For a thorough overview of the history and structure of the Community Mental Health Board program, see: Bonita Weddle, "Mental Health in New York State, 1945-1998: An Historical Overview" (Albany, NY: New York State Archives, 1998), [http://www.archives.nysed.gov/common/archives/files/res\\_topics\\_health\\_mh\\_hist.pdf](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/common/archives/files/res_topics_health_mh_hist.pdf); Educational Alliance, "Answers to Questions Likely to Arise at Forthcoming Budget Conference"; Educational Alliance, "Budget for the Year 1961-62," January 20, 1961, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

JCCs became part of a trend of increased collaboration between government and voluntary agencies to serve the poor and to stabilize and revitalize American cities, but the transition was slow and uneven. The Educational Alliance, for example, had a long history of cooperation with municipal governmental agencies and quickly began to apply for grants and contracts from the city and federal government, so that by the end of the 1960s it held multiple contracts with the city's Human Resources Administration; ran anti-delinquency programs funded by the OEO and U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (USDHEW); operated a National Institute of Mental Health demonstration project in partnership with Hillside Hospital (another FJP beneficiary); and opened a Head Start preschool classroom in addition to its day care program funded by USDHEW. The Bronx Y and Bronx House, by contrast, received absolutely no funding from the city, state, or federal government in the 1960s. By the 1970s, all four agencies were accepting multiple governmental grants or contracts at a time to run demonstration projects or finance the provision of social services.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to the popular historical narrative of urban decline, the government did not uniformly decrease spending in the 1970s; certain constituencies, like older Americans and the agencies that served them, continued to benefit from governmental largesse.

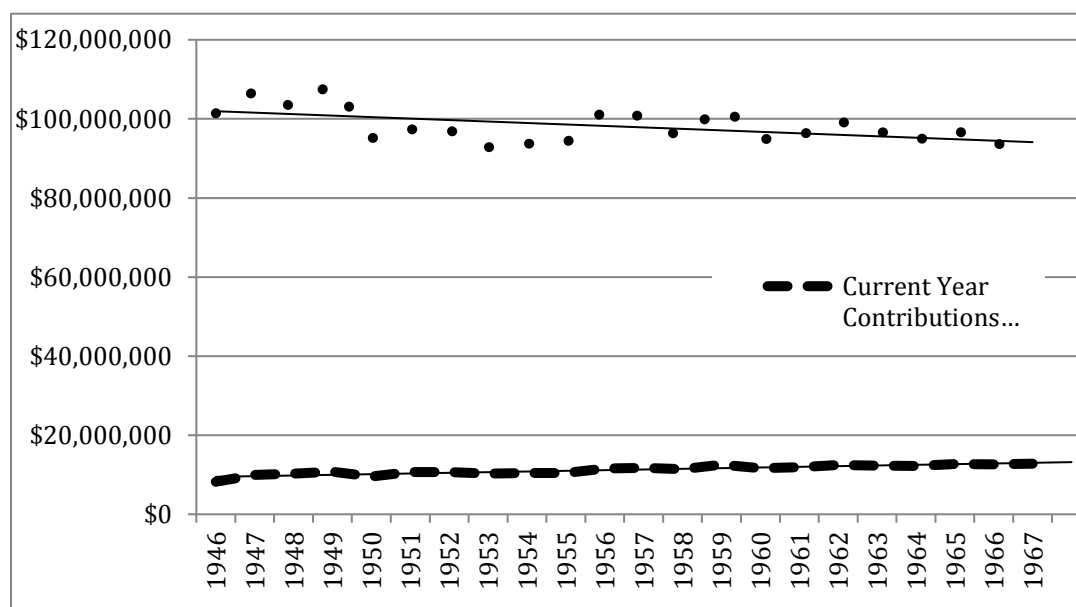
The intensification of these collaborations between public bureaucracies and private JCCs in the 1960s and 1970s was not only due to the availability of funding mechanisms from all levels of the government. During the same period, Jewish communal fundraising plateaued and inflation began to erode the purchasing power of the

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<sup>20</sup> Data gathered from a review of the Annual Agency Files of the Educational Alliance, Bronx House, YM-YWHA of the Bronx, and YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood. See Subgroup I, Series 2, Subseries B, Subsubseries i of the Records of the United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York, 1909-2004.

allocations that Federations disbursed to JCCs. Although the total dollar amount of contributions made to the FJP's annual fundraising campaign increased by four million dollars between 1946 and 1966, the value (purchasing power) of the money they raised steadily declined (see Graph 1). In 1963, FDC Chairman Leonard Block wrote to Federation beneficiaries that "The role of Fund Raising, of course, is completely outside the area of the Distribution Committee's responsibility. However, it is apparent to all the members of the Committee ... that the prime necessity must be to raise the entire level of giving to Federation by a substantial amount so that not only can current programs of service be continued unabated, but also that new and expanded service might be rendered to the community."

Graph 1: FJP Annual Campaign Contributions, Nominal Value versus Consumer Price Index (CPI) Adjustment to 2016 Dollars





The same devaluation occurred with the annual disbursements that each agency received from FJP to subsidize its facilities and programs—with a few exceptions, the annual allocation was raised by the Federation Distribution Committee from year to year, but not enough to keep up with inflation and the rapidly increasing costs of personnel (see Graph 2).<sup>21</sup> In 1971, the Board of the Bronx YM-YWHA reported to the FDC that although its current programming was stable, there was no room for future growth without increasing its income. "The major problem confronting us," it noted,

is how to maintain our present services with the expected increase in salaries and other items. We shall certainly need additional financial resources, either from Federation and/or an increase in our membership numbers, especially Health Club. Our program generally is still of good quality but we certainly cannot expand or experiment with new ideas unless they are income-producing.

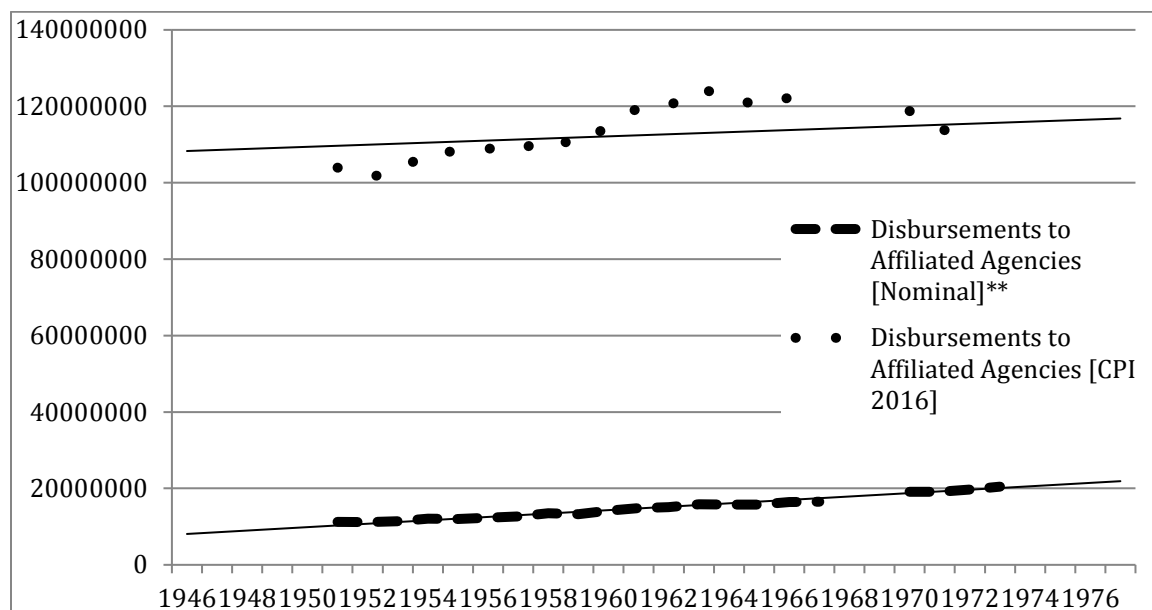
In the same year Dan Stein, the Executive Director of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood, reported to the FDC that one of his Y's major problems was "the financial squeeze on the agency's operation, resulting from inflationary pressures, including the forthcoming new Union contract, and the inability of Federation to increase its allocation to the agency correspondingly."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> New York City's JCCs employed a unionized workforce, and after a particular contentious contract renegotiation in 1968 the agencies' personnel costs far outpaced their ability to raise revenue. For the best history of social work unionization, see Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Dan Stein, "Reply To Questions From the Distribution Committee Subcommittee on Community Centers Re: 1971-72 Budget Presentation," March 1971, UJA-FJP, AJHS; "Answers To Questions Submitted By Federation Distribution Committee to Be Discussed at Meeting on Thursday, April 1, 1971," March 26, 1971, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

Graph 2: FJP Disbursement to Beneficiary Institutions, Nominal Value versus Consumer Price Index (CPI) Adjustment to 2016 Dollars



The decline of the urban middle class created an additional pressure that brought together the government and the JCC. Over a decade of suburbanization had significantly altered urban demographics: while middle-class white families populated the suburbs, the city retained large populations of single-parent families, minorities, and elderly individuals.<sup>23</sup> Manhattan hemorrhaged people in the two decades following WWII, losing 13.4% of its population between the 1950 and 1960 censuses and another 9.4% by 1970. Despite this population loss, the non-white population of the borough increased by 23,000 between 1960 and 1970 and the number of adults older than 65 increased by 8,000. The population of the Bronx remained more stable, but the non-white population

<sup>23</sup> Ann G. Wolfe, "The Invisible Jewish Poor," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 48, no. 1 (March 20, 1972): 260–65; Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum, eds., *Poor Jews: An American Awakening* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974).

of the borough more than doubled and the number of residents over the age of 65 swelled by 18,000.<sup>24</sup> In New York City as a whole, women were head of household for 21% of families in 1970.<sup>25</sup> Members of these groups often existed at the edge of poverty and needed more social services, particularly childcare and health services. As a result, the Federation asked New York City JCCs (and their peer agencies) to do more with less.

This combination of rising demand for and declining supply of Federation dollars created conflict between the FJP and its beneficiary agencies. The Federation Distribution Committee implored its JCCs to raise more income and argued that JCCs' per capita costs were too high, while the Board members representing their JCCs in these negotiations expressed concern that they would have to cut programs without additional financial assistance. A typical interaction occurred during the FDC's budget conference with the representatives of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood in 1970. "Mr. Bachmann," a member of the FDC, "stressed that in view of the rapidly rising cost of operation, up from \$90 to \$98 per capita and the low enrollment the agency faces a budgetary crisis. It must either reduce costs or rapidly increase enrollment and fees."<sup>26</sup> Agency representatives responded to these sorts of accusations in similar ways. The Executive Director of the Educational Alliance, Louis Berkowitz, pointed to the inability

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<sup>24</sup> The non-white population of Bronx County grew from 168,128 to 391,472 between 1960 and 1970. All figures derived by multiplying the percentages provided in the census tables by the total population of the county. Table 13, Summary of Population Characteristics, For the State, By Size of Place, and for Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Urbanized Areas, Urban Places, and Counties—1960. 1960 Census of the Population, Vol. I Characteristics of the Population, General Population Characteristics of New York State, p. 34-39. Table 16, Summary of General Characteristics 1970: The State, Size of Place, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Urbanized Areas, Places of 2500 or more, and Counties. 1970 Census of the Population, Vol. I Characteristics of the Population, General Population Characteristics of New York State, p. 34-72. <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>. Accessed October 31, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> This is the best, albeit imperfect, measure for single-parent families using census data. Table 25, Household Relationship and Type of Family by Race, by Areas and Places. 1970 Census of the Population, Vol. I Characteristics of the Population, General Population Characteristics of New York State, p. 34-115. <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>. Accessed October 31, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> "Minutes of the 1970-71 Budget Conference," April 2, 1970, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

of its members to pay as much as they previously could. When Bachmann "cited the decline in per capita membership income" at the Educational Alliance, "Mr. Berkowitz stated that the main reason for this was the reduction in the older adult fee, which was urged on the agency by the Older Adult Council."<sup>27</sup> Mr. Mayer, a representative from Bronx House, likewise argued that "the same problems confronting Federation will make it equally difficult for [Bronx House] to generate additional internal income from its Board or membership." Mayer urged that "the severe financial problems confronting both Federation and the agency" should not excuse the elimination of services to the Jewish community, and requested of the FDC that "every effort must be made to retain those programs that are most valuable and most important."<sup>28</sup>

The FDC resolved this tension in a myriad of ways. The rapid intensifying of Jewish flight from the central Bronx in the 1960s prompted the FDC to encourage the move of the Bronx Y from the Grand Concourse to Riverdale, a neighborhood in the west Bronx where the more affluent Jews relocated. The FDC also provided extra funding to Bronx House to begin an extension project in Co-op City, a newly developed housing cooperative in the northeast Bronx that attracted working-class Jews. By following Jews to their new urban outposts, the Bronx JCCs succeeded in stemming the decline in their enrollment and income. With more stable populations, the Educational Alliance and Y of Washington Heights and Inwood remained in their buildings and continued to serve the residents of the Lower East Side and northern Manhattan. To raise their incomes and fend off the FDC's criticism, these two agencies relied on government grants to fight poverty and provide services to vulnerable populations.

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<sup>27</sup> Educational Alliance, "Minutes of the 1970-71 Budget Conference," April 7, 1970, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

<sup>28</sup> Bronx House, "Minutes of the 1970-71 Budget Conference," April 7, 1970, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

The availability of government funding provided JCCs with increased autonomy from organized Jewish philanthropy and gave them the means to run programs and offer services whose benefits extended beyond the Jewish community. This was consistent with the philosophy of many JCC executives, workers, and lay leaders. "Jews cannot ethically escape from the problems of the communities in which they live," Louis Berkowitz wrote to the FDC in 1965. The Educational Alliance did not want to insulate its members in a solely Jewish milieu. Berkowitz nonetheless equated community engagement with Jewish morality, arguing that "If Jewish values are to have meaning to the American Jew, and if the community center is to help in making Jewish living significant, direct experiences with these problems... is desirable, if not essential. People learn from what their guides, teachers, and workers practice more than by what they preach."<sup>29</sup> Echoing this sentiment, the executive director of the Y of Washington Heights and Inwood declared to his Board of Directors that "The Biblical Injunction, 'Do not separate thyself from the community', is one we practice as well as preach." Although JCCs devoted themselves to serving the Jewish community first and foremost, they recognized that its welfare was predicated on the health of the total community.<sup>30</sup>

The agencies also recognized that public grants freed up FJP money for Jewish-related activities and programming. The FJP remained focused, however, on how government-funded programs brought more non-Jews into JCCs. In conversation with the FJP's Consultant on Jewish Community Centers, Graenum Berger, Berkowitz made this point when he "stressed that ... there will be even further increases in public funds" and argued that "It would be advisable for Federation to take the lead in tapping this source of

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<sup>29</sup> 4/7/2017 3:46:00 PM

<sup>30</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 17, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

funds for the group work agencies so they would have more funds to deploy for enrichment of program." Berger approached this income source with more caution. Arguing that the "use of public funds may require the agencies to change the character of the clientele they serve," he lamented that, "It is due to the fact that the Educational Alliance conducts a nursery school program with the support of the Department of Welfare, or its street corner program, supported by the O.E.O. and other projects, that 13% of its membership is non-Jewish."<sup>31</sup> Berger perceived that the threat of creeping nonsectarianism outweighed the benefits that public money afforded the Federation and its JCCs.

Combatting Berger's fear, JCC staff and lay leaders justified their new governmentally funded social service programs by pointing to the neediness of elderly Jews on a fixed income, single-parent Jewish families surviving on one income, and large Orthodox families with many children to support. In Washington Heights, the director of the Y "declared that in a declining Jewish community there is an even greater need to serve those remaining, mostly the elderly Jews and stranded Jewish families than there is in a community that is predominantly Jewish where the children can go to a playground or play in the street."<sup>32</sup> JCC leaders also argued that all Jewish families benefitted from the community stabilization effected through antipoverty programs. Berkowitz argued that "Community improvement or deterioration must be seen in its true light — a condition from which the welfare of all groups residing in the area will be enhanced or will suffer."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Educational Alliance, "Minutes of the 1967-68 Budget Conference," April 12, 1967, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

<sup>32</sup> Washington Heights, "Minutes of the 1970-71 Budget Conference."

<sup>33</sup> Educational Alliance, "Answers to Questions Re: 1970-71 Budget Presentation," March 31, 1970, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

Indeed, in the early 1970s Jewish communal leaders at the FJP, American Jewish Committee, and Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds became preoccupied with a group they named "the invisible Jewish poor." Ann G. Wolfe, a social welfare consultant to the American Jewish Committee, published an article on this topic in 1972 that attempted to disabuse American Jews of the notion that all Jews had entered the middle class. "We, and the country as a whole," she wrote, "became convinced of the affluence of the entire Jewish community." Wolfe implored her readers to ask: "Who are those in the Jewish community who have not made it, who are not making it, and who live their lives in quiet desperation, out of the mainstream of the Jewish community?" Although she offered no solutions, in her conclusion Wolfe suggested that more attention should be paid to the domestic needs of America's Jews.

Motivated by Wolfe's investigation, Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum of the American Jewish Congress edited a volume of articles and essays on *Poor Jews*.<sup>34</sup> Levine and Hochbaum criticized the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) and the EOA's Community Action Agencies for defining need in narrow geographic terms and for excluding Jews from local representation, factors which disadvantaged poor Jews who lived scattered throughout the city and who were not locally organized. Scholars have interpreted this critique as American Jews' rebuke of New Deal liberalism and their discomfort with the loss of their own distinct group status, but it is too simple to ascribe the focus on Jewish poverty to identity politics.<sup>35</sup> The concern for poor Jews also reflected anxiety about Jewish charities taking public funding. The Community Action Agencies were only one part of the government expansion of social welfare initiatives in

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<sup>34</sup> Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum, *Poor Jews: An American Awakening*.

<sup>35</sup> Marc Dollinger, "The Other War: American Jews, Lyndon Johnson, and the Great Society," *American Jewish History* 89, no. 4 (2001): 437–61.

the 1960s and 1970s, particularly after Nixon's decentralization efforts gave states the power to decide how to provide locally-appropriate social services.<sup>36</sup> Even Levine and Hochbaum admitted in their introduction that an overwhelming majority of Jewish charity was publicly financed.<sup>37</sup> The government hardly left Jewish agencies out of social welfare programs.

By making visible a population of Jewish poor, Wolfe, Levine, and Hochbaum justified the growing partnership between Jewish philanthropy and governmental social welfare agencies. Indeed, in New York City the FJP slowly began to re-prioritize work that would stabilize the Jewish middle class, as they recognized that the government adequately funded programs for the Jewish poor and aged. In the early 1970s, the FJP established a Metropolitan Coordinating Council on Jewish Poverty and hired new staff members "whose assignment would be to identify new and additional projects in the affiliated agencies which Foundations or Government might support ... with the objective of maximizing the support from those sources."<sup>38</sup> FJP also hired an Executive Director of Community Services to redirect its priorities towards funding programs that stabilized the middle class, supported Jewish life and engagement, and served the city's

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<sup>36</sup> Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 262. For a history of how Johnson's War on Poverty's evolved into Reagan's Community Services Block Grants, see Michael Givel, *The War on Poverty Revisited: The Community Services Block Grant Program in the Reagan Years* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> FJP's operating expenses were 90% financed by the U.S. government. New York has historically been one of the most generous states in regards to public spending on social welfare, and so it's doubtful that the FJP figure is representative. Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum, *Poor Jews: An American Awakening*, 3. Regardless, national figures show similar growth. A study conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Services in 1976 found 600% growth in government funds provided to Jewish agencies (excluding hospitals) between 1962 and 1973. See citation 3 in Stanley B. Horowitz, "Issues in Public Funding of Jewish Communal Services," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 54, no. 1 (September 1977): 13–17.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Federation, November 11, 1974



large Orthodox communities.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of voluntary agencies, the FJP argued, was to "serve the working poor and lower middle class as a particular class unserved by the public sector."

The experience of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood demonstrates how the competing pressures of FJP's declining financial power and its increasing demands to stabilize New York City's Jewish community led JCCs towards a bifurcated program. The Y of Washington Heights and Inwood turned to the state and federal government for sustaining grants for poorer Jews and devoted its allocation from FJP to addressing the needs of working class, middle class, and Orthodox Jews. The government awarded the Y funding to establish new senior services, which attracted new Jewish members to the Y. This influx of money and Jewish membership prevented the Washington Heights and Inwood Y from having to move and protected it from being cut off by the Federation Distribution Committee. As a result, the government subsidized the Y's Jewish work and helped this legacy social service agency survive the urban crisis.

### **The Senior Center Saves the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood**

In the autumn of 1970, the Program Committee of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood became preoccupied with the anemic attendance numbers in the Y's Older Adult division. The Y had served as a gathering place for the older Jews of the community since 1950, when a group of 40 older members had formed a Golden Age Club. Executive Director Samuel Solender reported to the Y's Board that 20 older adults attended each event, on average, which met weekly and offered general social activities

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<sup>39</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 11, 1977, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

like discussions or games. By December of 1950, the Supervisor of the Golden Age Club, Bess Weinberg, reported to the Board that the average attendance at the Club's Tuesday evening meetings was up to 25 individuals, and the average age of the Club's members was 64. These numbers steadily grew, and in 1957 the Y had 140 Golden Agers participating in Club activities.

In November of 1970, however, members of the renamed "Older Adult Division," approached the Program Committee and reported that their ranks had dwindled as middle-class seniors moved to the suburbs and the lower-income seniors who remained were siphoned off by Older Adult programs at other agencies or venues that were much cheaper than the Y's Older Adult program because they were subsidized by the city's Department of Welfare.<sup>40</sup> After discussing multiple strategies for increasing membership, the Program Committee decided to offer three months of membership for free as a "trial" for senior citizens. In January, 1971, a large kick-off program for the expanded Older Adult program attracted 300 individuals, 225 of whom were not members.<sup>41</sup>

This renewed attention to the Y's maturest members prompted the Y's Executive Director, Dan Stein, to seek government funding for the Y to expand (and subsidize) its services.<sup>42</sup> As adult life-span increased, more and more Americans were entering their "golden years" than ever before, and when they did they found that few services or resources existed to support their needs for social activity, medical care, and public

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<sup>40</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," November 17, 1970, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>41</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 28, 1971, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>42</sup> The New York State Office of the Aged was the state unit through which New York was to comply with and fund programs resulting from the 1965 Older Americans Act. The OAA created an Administration on Aging (AOA) within the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and Title III of the OAA provided for federal funding to be distributed to the states to administer their state units on aging and to makes grants to support local, community projects that served older adults. See: [http://www.aoa.gov/AOA\\_programs/OAA/resources/History.aspx](http://www.aoa.gov/AOA_programs/OAA/resources/History.aspx)

safety. The Older Americans Act (OAA), passed concurrently with the Medicare health insurance program, was the culmination of two decades of concern about the aging of the American population. A parent of a child in the Y's nursery who worked as "Assistant Regional Director for H.E.W.'s Office of the Aging for this area" suggested to Stein "the possibility of applying for a federal grant from the Health, Education, and Welfare, Model Cities' program, to support new services to the aged ... and has offered to explore the availability of funds and help us to apply for them."<sup>43</sup> Stein submitted an application and the New York State Office of the Aged (NYSOA) awarded the Y a \$50,000 Title III grant.<sup>44</sup>

The Washington Heights and Inwood Y was the first JCC in New York City to use public funds to provide a direct service to older adults. On July 6, 1971, Stein wrote to Martha Selig at Federation to notify her of the award, offering a short description of the program:

The funded proposal which is entitled, "A Decentralized Comprehensive Delivery System Approach In Providing Information, Counseling and Services" will be conducted by a staff of four, a community organization worker, two counselors and a secretary, under my general direction. In addition to providing individualized services, the project will seek to develop new ways of utilizing the services of Older Adult volunteers to provide needed services to the total Older Adult community.

Despite her exhortation in 1959 that Jewish agencies seek out government money, Selig reacted with hesitation to the Y's new program because it was too far outside the scope of its current work. She felt that JASA, the Jewish Association for Services to the Aged (also a Federation beneficiary), was the more appropriate agency for the contract and

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<sup>43</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," January 7, 1971, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>44</sup> This grant began in fiscal year 1971-72. "Minutes of Meeting of Committees on Budget and Personnel," July 12, 1971, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

deemed Stein and the Y too unprepared to manage referrals. Selig need not have worried, because within the first four months of the program's operation it served 410 older adults and made 288 referrals, over half of which were to resolve housing issues. The counselors, who were stationed at two different sites within the community, served a diverse clientele of northern Manhattanites: 55% Jewish, 10% black, 6% "Latin," and 29% "other," though undoubtedly the majority of this group were white non-Jews. The program had also developed a "Telephone Reassurance Service," training some twenty elderly volunteers to regularly check in on a group of their homebound peers.<sup>45</sup> Although the Y was the sponsor of the program, the effort to care for the area's older residents was shared by many organizations, including JASA, Jewish Family Services, "as well as with Self Help for Community Services, Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Dept. of Social Services, Medical Center, Jewish Memorial Hospital, and a number of Nursing Homes and homes for the aged."<sup>46</sup> By the end of the first year, over 800 clients had been served.

Indeed, the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood survived the urban crisis and New York City's fiscal crisis because of federal government support, particularly of its services for senior citizens. The agency's program, however, changed significantly as a result. Whereas it had once been a youth-focused institution, the Y came to feel much more like a space exclusively for seniors. The agency also began to offer more social services and social work to low-income populations, and less energy

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<sup>45</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 22, 1972, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>46</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 22, 1972, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

effecting the "Jewish adjustment" of middle-class teenagers. Despite the non-sectarian mandate for the Senior Center that the Y established in 1973, government funding did not have the effect of reducing the Jewish nature of the Y's program.<sup>47</sup> In fact, the high percentage of older Jews both living in the neighborhood and participating in the Y's program helped maintain the distinctly Jewish feel of the program. In addition, the public funding available for its older clients freed the Y to devote more of its Federation allocation to work with youth and adults and run programs with more Jewish content.

When the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Washington Heights was founded in 1917, the emphasis of its program was on the "Young," befitting the eventual abbreviation of the agency's mission to "the Y." By the 1950s, although the Y had come to serve women and adults, the Y still perceived its mission as "moulding the character of youth from nursery age to mature years—shaping their thoughts, refining their tastes, invigorating their bodies, uplifting their spirits, through an engaging diversified colorful program of recreational and educational activities from sports and athletics to arts and crafts, from individual guidance to clubs for democracy in action."<sup>48</sup> In the new building that the Y erected in 1956—on Nagle Avenue, a border between the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood—children could attend nursery school, socialize with friends after school as part of club groups supervised by experienced social workers, play basketball in the gym, or take special art, dance, and music classes. Adults could also make use of the Y's fitness center and gym, take advantage of performances and lectures, or seek help with parenting or family issues from experienced case workers from Jewish

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<sup>47</sup> Although agencies with a sectarian affiliation and mission could accept government funding, the programs on which that money was spent were required by the government to be non-sectarian. It did not matter if all the aged people served were Jewish, so long as no non-Jew was prevented from participating or was discriminated against.

<sup>48</sup> "Fundraising Booklet (Title Unknown)," n.d., Louis Rittenberg Papers, Yeshiva University.

Family Services who were stationed at the Y several days a week. A number of older adults also used the Y's club rooms during the day for socializing and special classes. It was a highly utilized communal space, unique in the neighborhood.

There was not another institution of its kind in northern Manhattan, Jewish or otherwise. For the large number of Catholic families living in Inwood, who made up 38% of the population in 1960, Good Shepherd parish and parochial schools provided similar services—but there was no YMCA located north of Harlem, nor any other comparable Protestant institution.<sup>49</sup> As a result, there was high demand in northern Manhattan for high quality childcare programs and safe recreational spaces.

The majority of the Y's members, however, were Jewish. The neighborhood was almost 30% Jewish in 1960, a substantial enough population to support a community center program without necessitating some non-Jewish membership.<sup>50</sup> Although there was a considerable Orthodox contingent in Washington Heights, most Orthodox families did not become members of the Y, preferring to send their children to learn and socialize with other Orthodox boys and girls under the strict observance of the rabbis who led the community's synagogues and yeshivot (religious day schools).<sup>51</sup> As a result, the members of the Y typically affiliated with the Conservative or Reform congregations in the neighborhood, if at all; the Y's program reflected this, and the group workers who led the after school programs generally eschewed Judaic content and instead engaged members in a more ethnocultural version of Jewishness that was more easily reconciled with

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<sup>49</sup> Total persons 21 and older, Jack Elinson and Regina Lowenstein, "Community Fact Book for Washington Heights, New York City, 1960-61" (New York: School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine, Columbia University, 1963). Helen Morick, interview with Avigail Oren, July 6, 2015, in possession of author.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Steven M Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933-1983, Its Structure and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

American pluralism. In 1961, for example, they instituted a Saturday program with Federation support (though opposed by the rabbis of the neighborhood) where participants enjoyed a cultural program in the morning and in the afternoon attended "forums for teen agers on urgent present day problems, which ... would relate to Jewish concepts and ethics." Y leadership hoped that "by guiding the discussions, we would impress upon the participants the relationship of these activities to some aspects of our heritage."<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, in the postwar decades, the Executive Directors, Center workers, and lay leaders of the Y constantly negotiated the tension between serving Jews and serving the total community. Although the Y's Board of Directors expressed ideologically and politically diverse views on issues of Jewish assimilation, racial integration, and free speech throughout the 1960s, the two Executive Directors who ran the Y in the 1960s and 1970s both held views more on the left of the political spectrum. Hans Epstein, who served as Executive from 1960-67, was a refugee from Nazi Germany, a Leftist and an experienced educator and psychologist. His wife Rosy Epstein, a trained social worker, was affiliated with the Y for over twenty years, first as a staff member and then as a Director on the Y Board. Rosy Epstein was very involved in the staff union, and many of the staff members of the Y staff were very devoted to the labor movement and the protections it afforded to workers. The Epsteins were also very involved in community affairs and leadership.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," April 27, 1961, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 1, 1962, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 29, 1962, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," June 28, 1962, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, November 7, 2014, in possession of the author. Hans Epstein, "Hans Epstein Collection 1920-1960," 1920, <http://digital.cjh.org/R/?func=search-advanced->

Along with Pearl Marcus, another social worker and long-time employee of the Y, the Epsteins were committed to improving the lives and welfare of the community in which they lived and worked. For them, this meant providing programs and services to children and families so that there always was a safe place to play, socialize, and learn in their leisure time. More importantly, the Y was to be a place where children learned to be good citizens, to participate in a democracy, and to promote pluralism and Jewish belonging in the American polity. As in the case of the Saturday program launched in 1961, they created programs that were not overtly political nor explicitly liberal, but that implicitly taught their values of universalism and public service. The Executive Director who succeeded Epstein, Daniel Stein, continued this tradition—he was active with the NAJCW Social Action Committee, whose meetings he often hosted at the Y in Washington Heights.<sup>54</sup> Hans and Rosy Epstein, Dan Stein, and Pearl Marcus, with support from several members of the Y's Board of Directors, directed the Y's outward reach into the community without compromising the organization's Jewish identity.<sup>55</sup>

The most effective interventions that the Y made in northern Manhattan in the 1960s were programs initiated with government funding to provide services or employment directly to low-income populations. During the summer of 1965, government antipoverty funds were used to hire thirteen teenagers to work as assistant leaders in the day camp. These teens were low-income youth, whether Y members or drawn from the community, because the program's purpose was "to inculcate good work

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<sup>54</sup> "Minutes of the Meeting of the AJCW Social Action Committee," June 25, 1971, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives Box 13, Folder 13.

<sup>55</sup> Judge David C. Lewis, Joseph Russell, and Milton and Ida Ruskin demonstrated more secular, leftist views in Board meetings throughout the 1960s and '70s.



habits and encourage them to go back to school."<sup>56</sup> The following year, the Y contracted with the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity to lead the Medicare Alert Program in Northern Manhattan, which hired senior citizens to go door to door enrolling their home-bound or isolated peers in the new national health insurance program.<sup>57</sup> This effort exceeded expectations by serving a larger catchment area than originally assigned for less funding than allocated. The program employed many senior citizens, and at the end of the program the local director, Ruth Klepper, advised the Board that many of these older adults were seeking additional employment, information and referral services, and a variety of casework, social, and leisure services. "[T]here is a great deal of government money around for various projects," Klepper noted, and she "suggested that the Y investigate and see what money might be available for some of the projects."<sup>58</sup> Agreeing with Klepper, Epstein declared that the Y would "try to get public funds for some of the necessary projects, such as a luncheon program, including 'luncheon on wheels,' home maker service, etc." Reflecting his more universalistic viewpoint, he added "that all these programs should serve the general as well as the Jewish community."

Despite this desire, the Y did not seek or receive public funding for these programs until the 1970s—nor did it use Federation funding to launch such projects. This could be attributed to the sudden death of Epstein in 1967, which may have disrupted any pending plans or applications, but the more likely explanation is that there was no funding available from either the government or from Federation to establish new

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<sup>56</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 25, 1965, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," September 20, 1965, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>57</sup> "When Medicare Launched, Nobody Had Any Clue Whether It Would Work," *Washington Post*, accessed September 20, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/05/17/when-medicare-launched-nobody-had-any-clue-whether-it-would-work/>.

<sup>58</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," May 26, 1966, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

programs for older adults. The War on Poverty had little effect on the Y, one of the oldest and largest providers of social welfare services in Northern Manhattan, and did not reshape its finances or program to the extent that later government programs would. After the Y hired Dan Stein to replace Epstein as Executive Director, the agency continued to focus its attention on its youth programs, maintaining the status quo until a pressing need for funding arose in the early 1970s.

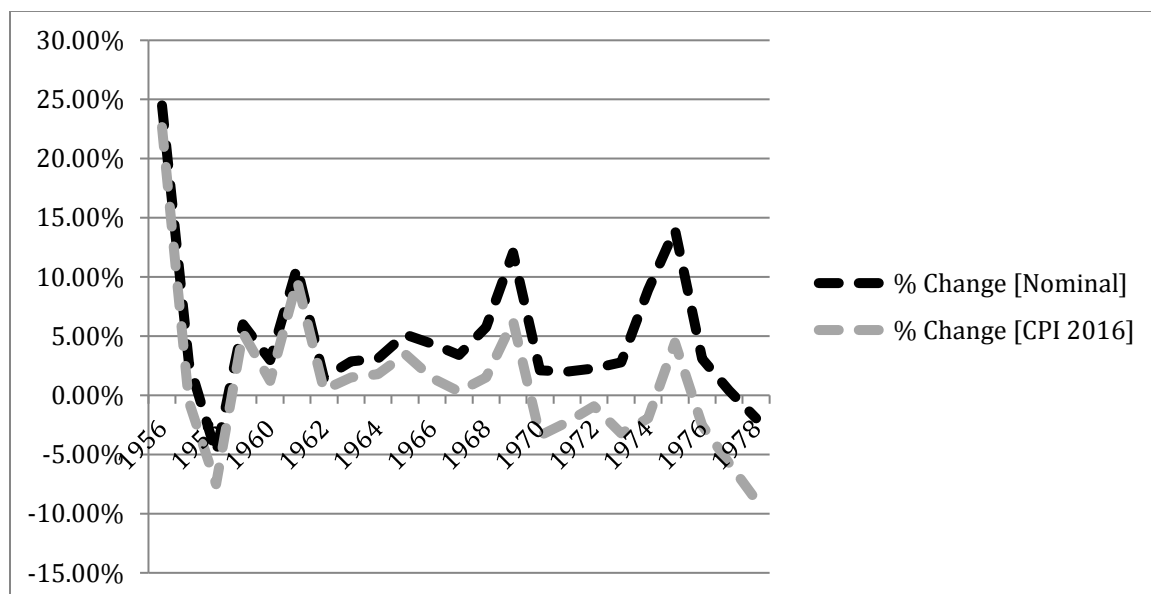
It was inflationary pressure, rising labor costs, and demand for expanded programs that made state, federal, and municipal funding attractive to the Y. Throughout the 1960s, the Y's finances were fairly stable and the agency's leadership felt no financial pressure to obtain additional funding from non-Federation sources such as the government or private foundations. Although they consistently ended the fiscal year in a deficit, at an amount averaging \$2500 between 1960-69, it was not because Federation reduced their annual allocation to the Washington Heights and Inwood Y. The FDC increased their allocation by \$70,000 over the course of the decade, and the Y's income from fees rose by \$32,000. The Y increased its expenditures commensurately, by \$100,000, but the cost of maintaining this pace was the sacrifice of salary lines and cuts to staff hours. From 1962 to 1971, although the Y's annual allocation from the FDC grew by an average of 4%, inflation eroded the value of the allocation's purchasing power (which averaged only 1% growth when adjusted into 2016 dollars). A combination of this inflation and a renegotiated union contract that raised minimum salaries for Jewish Center workers forced the Y to retrench staff members in 1968. One salary line was cut completely and three staff members had their weekly hours reduced.<sup>59</sup> The agency saved

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<sup>59</sup> Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Answers to Questions Re: 1969-70 Budget Presentation," April 1, 1969, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

a total of \$10,000, but Stein reported to the FDC that, "The effect of these economies—on the services of the agency and the morale of the staff—was substantial."

Graph 3: Annual Percent Change in Federation Distribution Committee Allocation to the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights-Inwood, 1956-1978



Stein reported that the Y had, however, begun to experiment with new income-generating programs. This was the agency's way of responding to a critique that the FDC had leveled against them over the past few budget cycles. The FDC reprimanded the Y for spending more per member than they made from that member in dues and fees. Although for a few years the Y responded that "there is also a need to avoid pricing the Y beyond the ability of the community to pay," by 1969 it was clear to the Y's Board that the Federation's financial difficulties would force them to depend less on their allocation.<sup>60</sup> The Y thus added a pre-K day camp, new fee-charging classes, and a

<sup>60</sup> Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Minutes of the 1967-68 Budget Conference," April 18, 1967, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

swimming program, among other activities, and indeed their revenue for the following fiscal year (1969-70) increased by 12%. Among the list of programs that they anticipated, but had not yet launched, Stein included a re-energized program for older adults. "High on our list of priorities," he wrote to the FDC,

is the strengthening of our services to older adults. We need more instructors and leaders, a self-run luncheon cafeteria on a daily basis, a case finding service to seek out the physically, or psychologically, homebound, more referrals to case work agencies, more social action by the elderly - in brief, more of everything.<sup>61</sup>

Although for years the Y had sought Federation support to increase their services to this group, it had never been forthcoming despite their argument that the investment would rebound in the form of donations to the annual campaign from the children of happy and well-served older adults.<sup>62</sup>

The success of the Title III information and referral program inspired Stein to pursue another government grant. In 1972, New York City began awarding money for the establishment of new multi-purpose Senior Citizen Centers.<sup>63</sup> In November, Stein announced to the Board that the Y had put in an application to the city for the Y to participate in the Title XVI program, requesting \$122,000 to provide services such as a hot lunch program, group activities, and outreach.<sup>64</sup> The program was immensely popular, and the Bronx Y and JASA also applied for (and were awarded) funding for senior centers. The Y also contemplated applying for additional funding from the U.S.

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<sup>61</sup> Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Answers to Questions Re: 1969-70 Budget Presentation."

<sup>62</sup> Y.M. and W.H.A. of Washington Heights, "Answers to Questions Likely to Arise at the Forthcoming Budget Presentation," April 8, 1963, UJA-FJP, AJHS.

<sup>63</sup> Although the Bronx Y and Y of Washington Heights-Inwood both refer to this as the Title XVI program, it is funded by New York City's Human Resources Administration through a variety of funding streams, including money from Title XVI of the Social Security Act. See New York City Proposal for the Expansion and Development of Services for the Aged, United Jewish Appeal-Federation of New York Collection, AJHS.

<sup>64</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," November 30, 1972, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare "to conduct a demonstration and research project to test the effectiveness of auxiliary services in deterring, or preventing, institutionalization of handicapped elderly persons."<sup>65</sup>

The Y Board supported the pursuit of government funding and the expansion of services to older adults, but not without concern. The Board feared that two of the Y's most distinctive elements—its Jewish mission and its teenage program—would diminish with the addition of a publicly-funded Senior Citizens Center. In a discussion with the Program Committee about how the Senior Center would function, should it be funded, Stein reassured Board members that despite the program's non-sectarian mandate, "We will definitely continue the Jewish character of our present program - celebration of Jewish Festivals, Jewish ethnic foods, etc. There will be no Christian observances. This, the city representatives have assured us is entirely permissible."<sup>66</sup> The Board also expressed concern that the senior center could come to dominate what was historically a youth-focused agency. "We will need to be careful that the size and extent of this Title XVI program does not result in less importance and attention being given to our other divisions," the Program Committee warned, because, "There is then a danger that we will become known in the community as an older adult center exclusively."<sup>67</sup>

Despite these concerns, Stein and Richard Gilder, the President of the Y Board, met with City officials on April 25, 1973 and signed a contract to operate a multi-purpose Senior Citizen Center at the Washington Heights and Inwood Y.<sup>68</sup> The City mandated that

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<sup>65</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 25, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>66</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," December 12, 1972, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Of the four Federation agencies awarded these contracts, the Washington Heights-Inwood Y was the first to sign their contract.

the Y accept all seniors, following an intake interview, into the program without charge. This would entitle older adults to the benefits of the Senior Center, the cornerstone of which was a weekday hot lunch program that the Y was contractually required to serve to a minimum of 150 persons per day, or 750 per week. The Senior Center would also take over the information and referral function that had previously been funded by the OAA Title III grant, which the government renewed for a third year in 1973. As a result, the Title III program transitioned to the Homebound Outreach for the Elderly (Project H.O.P.E.).<sup>69</sup>

Before the hot lunch program even launched, the Senior Center was an unmitigated success. Staff had registered over 1600 older adults and were forced to cap membership, yielding a waiting list that was already up to 150 people in December of 1973.<sup>70</sup> The degree of interest so eclipsed the Y's capacity that "A Committee was appointed to try to figure out how to serve 150 lunches to 1,372 people."<sup>71</sup> The re-launching of the Title III grant was equally successful, and within two months of its initiation, Project HOPE was serving 73 clients and had doubled to 20 workers.<sup>72</sup> Although the Y was surprised by the extent of this success, the demand reflected the changing demographics of the neighborhood; when the Y received the results of a new Federation demographic study of their area in late October, it revealed that the population

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<sup>69</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," May 24, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>70</sup> Due to an extensive renovation to expand and prepare the kitchen, the hot lunch program did not begin until March of 1974. "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," December 20, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," February 21, 1974, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>71</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 25, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>72</sup> Project HOPE launched on August 1, 1973. "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," November 29, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

of Jews aged 65 or older had increased by 3% since 1960. The cohort numbered 10,500, or 35% of the adults over 65 who lived in Washington Heights and Inwood.<sup>73</sup>

The programs' success was not limited to its enrollment numbers—by the decade's end, they also enabled a huge expansion in direct services to needy older adults. Project H.O.P.E. offered 225 homebound clients "such essential services as: shopping, check cashing, meals-on-wheels, escort, cleaning, visitation and telephone reassurance." This support greatly increased the quality of life for older adult clients like Mrs. Miller, "an 80 year old, arthritic woman who was extremely frightened of walking by herself since she was mugged." In his Annual Report to the Y's Board of Directors in 1974, Stein shared Mrs. Miller's story to show that Y programs significantly improved their community.

"After being referred to Project H.O.P.E. by Jewish Family Service," Stein related,

she was assigned an older woman who spent one morning a week accompanying her to shop and to the Y for activities. After a number of months she began to regain some of her confidence and requested escorts for longer trips and more frequent attendance at the Y. Eventually we were able to encourage her to travel with the WHIST minibus, and she now has become a regular participant at the Y Senior Center; H.O.P.E. continues to accompany this less isolated, more confident, person on her weekly shopping trips.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to helping Mrs. Miller accomplish the basic task of living, Project HOPE also provided clients with a bridge into the social life of the Y's older adult program.

The Senior Center likewise thrived. It served 250 lunches per day by 1979, and 4900 enrolled members could choose to participate in any of the 35 regular weekly activities, attend special events, or go on organized trips.<sup>75</sup> The Y also initiated an annual Health Fair in 1971; in partnership with Jewish Memorial Hospital, and later with

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<sup>73</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 25, 1973.

<sup>74</sup> Stein changed the names of clients before presenting this report. Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 20, 1974, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>75</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report, 1978-79," June 21, 1977, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital, the event provided over 1000 senior citizens each year with free check ups, cancer screenings, and flu shots.<sup>76</sup> Stein shared the story of a member named Mr. Zalman, who "joined the Senior Center when his wife died about a year and a half ago. Since then he has eaten a chicken leg for dinner everyday; it's the only thing he ever knew how to prepare for himself. He is now a regular patron of the lunch program, and is eating a balanced nourishing, diet for the first time in years."<sup>77</sup> Like Mrs. Miller, Mr. Zalman benefitted from governmental financing of programs that allowed him to live an independent but socially-enriched life.

These services had a significant impact on the whole Northern Manhattan community. Although Jews dominated the Senior Center, were non-Jews also participated.<sup>78</sup> Project HOPE had an even broader reach, as only 50% of its clients were Jewish.<sup>79</sup> There were three other Title III programs for the elderly in the neighborhood, one of which was also under Jewish auspices and served the area around Yeshiva University, but with its Title III program and the Senior Center, the Y was one of the largest providers of social services to the elderly in the neighborhood and fulfilled the largest proportion of the demand.<sup>80</sup>

The programs were good for the health of seniors in the Jewish and wider community of Northern Manhattan, but when it came to the overall health of the Y, government funding had a more mixed impact. While the money that the Y received from a mix of federal, state, and city grants for the aging made the Y less dependent on its

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<sup>76</sup> See records of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights-Inwood for 1971-79.

<sup>77</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 20, 1974.

<sup>78</sup> I have been unable to verify this with statistics particular to Senior Center enrollment, but the Y always had a small non-Jewish membership that I assume carried through to this population.

<sup>79</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 17, 1980, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>80</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," December 10, 1974, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.



annual allocation from Federation, the financial fickleness of government programs yielded its own intermittent instability. The expansion of programming for seniors also had a significant effect on the membership and the governance of the Y, as the size of the older age group diminished the visibility and power of programming for youth and adults.

The most problematic effect of the Senior Center's establishment was that it changed the community's perception of the agency's mission; the Y was no longer seen as a comfortable space for children and families. As a result of the explosive growth of the older adult division beginning in 1973 seniors dominated the membership rolls of the Y (see Graph 4).<sup>81</sup> They also began to dominate space that used to be devoted to children and to family programming. Staff began to report to the Board that "younger parents do not feel welcome, especially on the first floor," because the older adults complained "about noisy children in the Lobby" and expressed "an attitude of resentment toward anyone under 60 years of age who is on the first floor." Attendance at Y holiday celebrations, especially the annual Passover Seder, was also overwhelmed by the older adult membership, leaving few spaces for families wanting to share in the communal tradition.<sup>82</sup> The agency's staff began to worry that teenagers and young families were being crowded out of the Y, and for good reason—the membership numbers reflected that consequent to the increase in senior enrollment, membership declined in all other age groups (see Graph 5). Over the course of the 1970s, the Older Adult Division went from 10% to 75% of the Y's total membership, while the proportion of members younger than 20 years of age declined from 43% to 8% over the same period. Clearly, the shift in focus

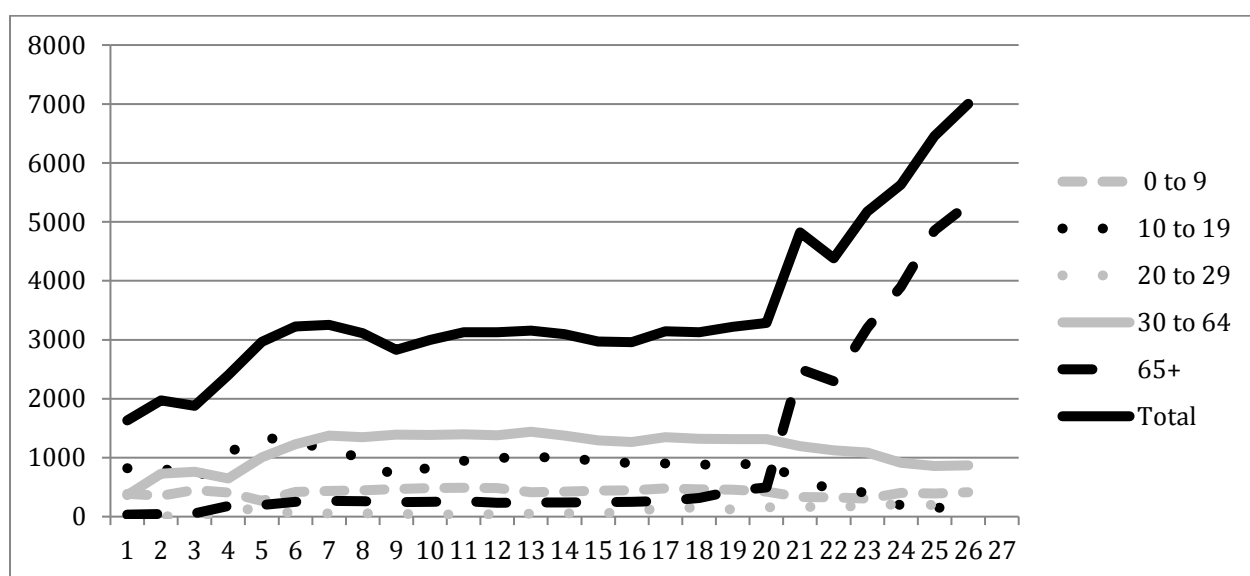
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<sup>81</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 22, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

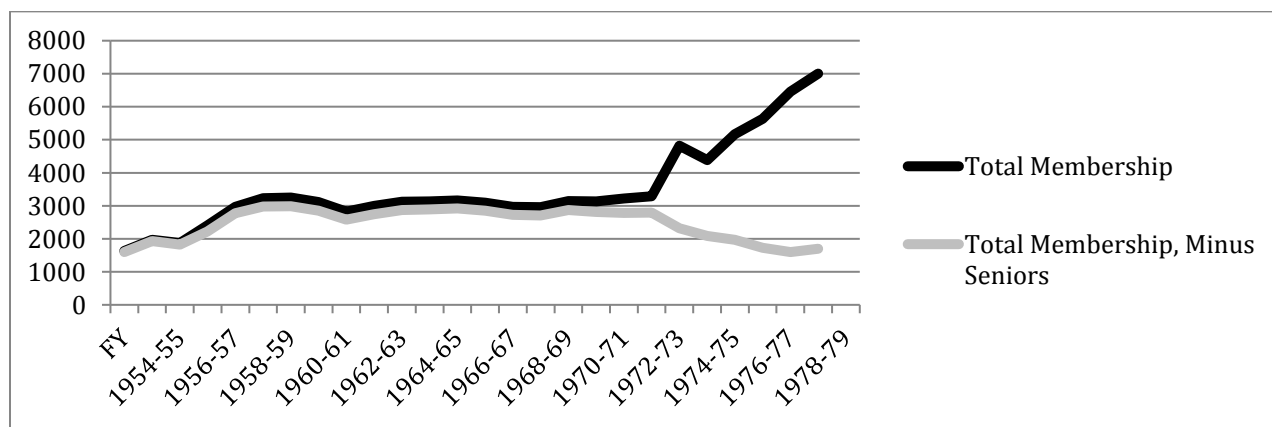
<sup>82</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," April 15, 1974, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

towards serving poor older adults had negative repercussions for poor and middle class families who also needed access to the scarce urban resource that the Y provided: a safe space for people to engage in structured, supervised, social and educational activities.

Graph 4: Annual Membership Totals By Age Group, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood, 1953-79



Graph 5: Comparison of Total Membership to Total Membership Younger than 65 Year of Age



Indeed, this decline in younger membership would have been even more precipitous were it not for a rise in non-Jewish membership. Between 1967 and 1972, before the Y began to run its non-sectarian government programs, non-Jewish membership rose from 5% to 13%.<sup>83</sup> With fewer Jewish families in the neighborhood, and more non-Jewish families in need of programming for their children, demographic pressures forced a shift in the ethnic makeup of the Y's membership. In 1973, 43 (27%) of the 159 participants in the Y's after-school program for elementary school students were not Jewish.<sup>84</sup> By the end of the decade, the teen program was reduced to less than one-third of its former size and the ratio of Jews to non-Jews had reversed—only 25% of the teens were Jewish.<sup>85</sup> Despite this, however, the Y remained strongly identified as a Jewish agency because such a high percentage of the older adults were Jewish. Although the Senior Center itself was non-sectarian, the older adults attended and supported the Y's celebrations of Jewish holidays and its annual Jewish Film Festival, which the Y began in the autumn of 1975. If the Senior Center had the effect of excluding youth, it did not manage to shift the Y towards a more secular orientation.

The programs paid for by Title III and Title XVI—which, in 1975, transitioned to Title XX—had a similarly mixed affect on the agency's financial situation as it did on its membership. The government grants benefitted the Y because they made the agency less financially vulnerable to fluctuations in their annual allocation from FJP. The Y survived

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<sup>83</sup> I was only able to find this data for the years between FY 1967-8 and FY 1971-72. Although no further statistics were available for total members, records show that non-Jewish enrollment in the Y's summer day camp rose slowly but continuously throughout the 1970s. See records of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights-Inwood for 1971-79.

<sup>84</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," January 16, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>85</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," November 1, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," February 2, 1979, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

the 1970s because its government contracts balanced out the risk of a possible decrease in their FJP allocations in any given year, but the contracts still could not protect the Y from the toxic market forces of hyperinflation, spiking energy prices, and New York City's fiscal crisis that led to cuts in both the agency's government funding and its FJP allocation in the mid-1970s.

In the short term, the Y's fiscal health improved after they received the Title III and Title XVI contracts. Immediately upon the signing of the Title XVI contract with the city in April of 1973, the Y was able to save six jobs that they otherwise would have been forced to cut in order to close a projected \$10,000 deficit. In the longer term, however, the contracts introduced another vulnerability to the Y's balance sheet. Accepting government funding did diversify the Y's income, but not sufficiently. On average, between 1973-79 one-third of the Y's total income depended on the government, one-third on FJP's allocation, and one-third on membership dues and fees.

Government money may have buffered the Y in years when their FJP allocation decreased, but it too was subject to fluctuations and possible cuts. In the early 1970s, New York City began sliding into a fiscal crisis. Two decades of deindustrialization and suburbanization gutted the city's tax base and drained away good jobs, leaving the city with a growing population of unemployed or retired individuals who needed services from an increasingly insolvent municipality. This was exacerbated by a national recession that began in 1974; in that year, the growth of the economy declined by 5% and the value held in the American stock market declined to half of what it was in 1972.<sup>86</sup> Although the administrations of Mayors John Lindsay and Abe Beame attempted to close the city's

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<sup>86</sup> Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 102.

deficits by selling bonds, it was not sufficient and in 1974 Mayor Beame began cutting down the city budget. Even that was not enough. In the last months of 1975, after President Ford refused to use federal funds to bail out the city, Beame was forced to seek financing from private banks. The fiscal crisis was averted, but the cost that the banks imposed on the city was an austerity budget that slashed the city's social services.<sup>87</sup>

The dialectic of austerity and neediness extended far beyond the municipal government—its consequences reverberated throughout the city. "In many respects," Stein noted, "the dilemmas confronting the Y today parallel those of our city itself. Rapidly escalating costs, in every aspect of our operation, defy our ability to keep pace by raising our income. At the same time, the need for our services, and the complexity and difficulty of the problems we are called on to deal with, increase with each passing year."<sup>88</sup> The Y's budgets bore out Stein's calculus. The agency's deficit increased from an average of \$2500 between 1960-69 to an average of \$9000 in between 1970-79. Although the Title XVI award prevented salary cuts in 1973, the Y could not avoid them in 1975. With a deficit of nearly \$16,000, Stein and the Board agreed to cut the hours and benefits of five staff members, and they laid off one secretary and one door porter.<sup>89</sup>

As the city's austerity measures began taking effect, the Commissioner of New York City's Office for the Aging notified institutions with government contracts that their funding would be slashed as of January 1, 1976. The Y's Senior Center transitioned in 1975 from a city-funded Title XVI grant to a grant funded by the federal, state, and city government under Title XX of the Social Security Amendments, and although they

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<sup>87</sup> Robert W. Snyder, *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 116–17.

<sup>88</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 20, 1974.

<sup>89</sup> For FY 1974-75. "Minutes of Joint Meeting of Program and Budget Committee," May 27, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

received the federal and state portion of their Title XX income the city did not pay its 15% share (\$2800).<sup>90</sup> While not a devastating cut, this reduction in income had the largest effect on staff, whose salaries were frozen, and on the cleanliness of the Y's facilities as the number of the maintenance and building staff were reduced.

Despite their financial strain, the Y never had to cancel or prune any of the Senior Center's programming. Many of the older adult members felt so devoted to the community they had built that they made voluntary contributions, mostly in form of 50-cent donations for their lunches, to support the ongoing work of the Senior Center.<sup>91</sup> Stein proudly reported to the Board that the seniors were using the money they raised to "prepare additional meals, employ additional staff, ... and supplement the [Title XX] budget in a variety of ways."<sup>92</sup> Although it was overwhelmingly beneficial to the elderly participants in the Senior Center program, this money would become a huge source of contention between Stein (supported by the Board of Directors) and the Dorrit Rosenstein, the Director of the Senior Center. Rosenstein, her staff, and the lay leadership she cultivated within the Senior Center used these contributions as leverage to agitate for autonomy and financial independence from the Y's Board. Stein struggled to exert his power over Rosenstein, who had a charismatic and forceful personality, particularly as she came to control more and more of the Y's financial resources.<sup>93</sup> This contest over the governance of the Y also contributed, in part, to the waning of resources devoted to the Y's younger members.

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<sup>90</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," December 9, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>91</sup> Joint Meeting of Senior Citizens Activities Committee and Executive Committee of Senior Center, May 3, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood

<sup>92</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 19, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>93</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," April 15, 1974.; "Minutes of Meeting of Senior Citizens Activities Committee," March 10, 1977.

The most important consequence of winning the Project H.O.P.E. and Senior Center contracts was that the Y successfully dodged the existential threat that waning membership numbers and declining income posed to the Bronx JCCs. In 1972, Stein received a letter from Graenum Berger, FJP's Consultant on Community Centers, questioning whether the declining Jewish population of Northern Manhattan meant the Y would soon cease to function as a Jewish agency. Berger implied that the Y of Washington Heights & Inwood might be an unsustainable investment for the Federation.<sup>94</sup> The Board of the Y was able to put off this conversation by requesting that Federation first conduct a demographic survey of the neighborhood, but within a year the success of the Title III and Title XVI/XX programs proved that a Jewish community remained in the area, that it was an especially needy population, and that there was immense demand for the Y to coordinate and provide social services.

Even if Berger and the Federation Distribution Committee had remained convinced that the Washington Heights-Inwood Y was undeserving of FJP support, Federation was not allowed to substantially reduce its allocations. The city's contract with the Y stipulated that Title XVI funds were for the development or expansion of programs for the aged, and could not be used to replace or subsidize funding for an extant program.<sup>95</sup> If FJP could not cut its allocation, then it could still use the money as leverage to push its agenda on the Y.

The FDC placed greater pressure on the Y to use its government grants to pay for their older adult activities and its Federation allocation to stabilize the population of

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<sup>94</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee," August 3, 1972, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>95</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Budget Committee," February 13, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

middle class Jews, serve Orthodox members of the community, and support Jewish life and engagement. In the spring of 1976, Joe Harris, who replaced Berger as the Consultant on Community Centers, visited the Y and made a presentation to the members of the Board about Federation's current priorities and pressures.<sup>96</sup> Harris reported that FJP was asking for its agencies to place more emphasis on how they cultivated "Jewish life" and "Jewish survival" in their communities. FJP was also requesting that beneficiary agencies seek as much external funding as possible. Indeed, contributions to the Federation annual campaign were down by 12% in 1976.<sup>97</sup> To some extent, these priorities were linked. FJP could not afford to maintain all of its agencies without public assistance, but it would not pay the price of abandoning its sectarian commitment to the Jewish community. In 1978, when the Federation Distribution Committee cut the Y's allocation by \$10,000, one Board member suspected that "[Federation] was 'squeezing' us to discontinue all programs that include any non-Jews at all, and concentrate on service to Jews only." Consistent with this, Stein expressed his belief that "more money is being given to suburban centers who serve increasing numbers of Jewish families."<sup>98</sup> Reaffirming these suspicions, after the Y protested the cut the FDC agreed to restore \$3500, "\$2500 for outreach to Jewish youth, and \$1000 for a program for orthodox adults."<sup>99</sup> Even with government contracts the Y could not survive without Federation support, and so it had to play by Federation's rules. If the agency was to accept public money to run non-sectarian programs for an elderly

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<sup>96</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 9, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>97</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 12, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>98</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee," June 28, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>99</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee," October 5, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.



population, then Federation would ensure that the Jewish community's money was spent to cultivate a new generation of Jewishly-identified New Yorkers.

It was the increase in public spending on social welfare that pushed JCCs to translate ideals into reality on a larger scale. Adopting an open membership policy did not prevent or diminish tacit discrimination against non-Jews, nor did it draw non-Jews to JCC programs and services. The government's mandated policy of non-sectarian intake into the programs it paid for forced financially dependent JCCs to serve the total community. Likewise, Federation's fear that their agencies would become non-sectarianism also forced JCCs to commit to their Jewish purpose and to create more programming to promote the survival of American Jewish identity.

## **Conclusion**

In his Annual Report to the Y's Board of Directors in 1973, Dan Stein drew a connection between changes at the Washington Heights and Inwood Y and changes in the broader JCC movement. "As Ys continue to move away from the concept of serving "members only" to serving "a community", and as we grapple with the problems of helping people face the challenges of living in today's world," Stein declared, "we need to look beyond our traditional patterns of service, and to consider some of the service delivery systems that have had their origins in such fields as community organization, consumerism, the anti-poverty movement, etc."<sup>100</sup> The service delivery systems that Stein praised all involved building a relationship between community-based organizations and the state, which could provide the resources and protections necessary to achieve local

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<sup>100</sup> Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report," June 21, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

goals. This new relationships of subsidiarity with the state that occurred in New York City's JCCs also occurred across the religious sector in general. The National Interfaith Coalition on Aging surveyed 118 national, regional, area, and local religious organizations in 1976 and found that 55% of all programs for older adults being conducted under religious auspices were founded after 1970.<sup>101</sup> As with JCCs, most of these programs received funding from several sources, but the federal or state government funded 15% of religiously-sponsored services to the aging.<sup>102</sup>

New partnerships between governments and private social welfare agencies stimulated the bifurcation of JCC programming into a Center that once served the whole community and redoubled its efforts to serve and preserve American Jewry. In the late 1970s, new immigrants to from the Dominican Republic settled in Washington Heights and increased the demand in northern Manhattan for the kinds of social services the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights-Inwood provided. During these same years, the Y would greatly expand its outreach to the Orthodox congregations in the area, although it generated conflict and negotiations over how the Y could remain a comfortable and welcoming space for Jews across the religious spectrum from Orthodox to secular. The Washington Heights-Inwood Y would face a tension common to other urban JCCs—how to achieve religious pluralism amongst their Jewish members, and social pluralism within their increasingly mixed Jewish and non-Jewish community.

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<sup>101</sup> Table 9, Thomas C. Cook, Jr., “Religious Sector Explores Its Mission i=In Aging: A Survey of Programs for the Aging Under Religious Auspices” (National Interfaith Coalition on Aging, Inc., December 1976), 68.

<sup>102</sup> Table 17, Ibid., 79. For details on how evangelical Protestant organizations engaged in subsidiarity, see Chapter Four of Schäfer, *Piety and Public Funding*.

**Chapter 6: Negotiating Ethno-cultural Pluralism in the Urban JCC**

**Orthodox Jews, Dominican Immigrants, and the Competition for Space and Services in Northern Manhattan**

On a cold evening in early December, 18 members of the Board of Directors of the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood gathered at the Y for their final meeting of 1974. Standing before the assembled, Board member Richard Gilder read a statement sent to him by longtime Board Member Judge David C. Lewis, who was elderly and bedridden:

'Judge Lewis notices and deplores, as an obsession of the Board and other agencies, service to Jews to the exclusion of everybody else. He recommends that we open our minds to the needs of the non-Jewish community. It is our duty to act accordingly as well as in our own interests. We need all the friends we can get - always.'

Judge Lewis's deathbed request urged the Board of Directors to pay attention to the needs of the Y's non-Jewish neighbors. Indeed, by 1974 so many immigrants from the Dominican Republic had settled in Washington Heights and Inwood that they approached nearly half of the neighborhoods' population. Jews and Irish Catholics no longer dominated the neighborhood as they had in the 1940s and '50s, but they still retained control over neighborhood institutions, politics, and space.<sup>387</sup> In a neighborhood growing more dense, especially with families with young children, safe space for education, recreation, and socializing was at a premium. Both Dominican and Jewish families sought out the Y for childcare, enrichment programs, and case work services.

The needs of these two groups did not always dovetail, however. Jews and Dominicans in Washington Heights differed by class, language, and race, and these

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<sup>387</sup> Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

differences frustrated efforts to build a relationship between the two groups; many Jews feared and resented the changes in property value and public safety that they perceived the Dominican immigrants had brought to the neighborhood. The Y Board succumbed to pressure from the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York (FJP) to support the survival of the Jewish middle class, and let city taxpayers take care of the newly arrived Dominicans. In particular, this meant that the Y had to accommodate the large population of Orthodox Jews living in Washington Heights.<sup>388</sup>

The bifurcation of the Y's programs into FJP-funded, Jewishly oriented activities and publicly funded social services meant that the Y had a financial prerogative to serve the Orthodox community and meet FJP's objectives, but the non-sectarian intake policy mandated by the publicly funded programs (and by the Y's own open membership policy) also enabled the growth of Dominican membership. The integration of these two populations into the Y's membership did not occur seamlessly, and challenged the Y's commitment to both religious and ethnoracial pluralism. The Y's Board of Directors believed the agency was the Jewish communal institution best suited to keep secular members involved in Jewish life, and they worried that by attracting Orthodox Jews, the agency would alienate secular or unaffiliated members. These members, who preferred the Y's ethno-culturally Jewish program to the religious programming of a synagogue, might perceive that the agency was becoming too religious. Conversely, representatives of the Orthodox community requested accommodations to the Y's program in order to

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<sup>388</sup> When referring to Orthodox Jews in this chapter, I am predominantly discussing Modern Orthodoxy—a movement that strictly adheres to the *halacha*, or Jewish law, and also encourages Jews' full membership in modern society. Although I discuss one separatist congregation—*K'hal Adath Jeshurun*—most Modern Orthodox Jews sought to engage in American society and provided their children with a secular education. This is in contrast to ultra-Orthodox, or *Haredi*, Judaism, which generally eschews modernity and non-Orthodox Jews. Modern Orthodoxy dominated amongst observant Jews in America until after World War II, when the arrival of refugees generated a boom of ultra-Orthodox communities in the United States. Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

isolate their children from the influence of non-Orthodox and non-Jewish members. The greater effort the Y made to attract the Orthodox community, the less comfortable and open the agency became to secular and non-Jewish members; the greater effort they made to attract secular and non-Jewish members, the more they alienated their Orthodox neighbors.

At the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood, as at many urban Jewish Community Centers across the U.S., the financial, structural, and demographic changes that reshaped JCCs in the 1970s contributed to the slow and consistent growth of non-Jewish membership. Judge Lewis's exhortation did not go unheeded, but neither would the Y Board and staff actively seek to accommodate Dominican immigrants. As a result of this passive approach, it would take many more years for the Y's membership to reflect the sizable Dominican population of the neighborhood.

### **The Great Mashgiach Debate: Orthodox Activism to Preserve Judaism and Promote Jewish Survival**

In the 1970s, it increasingly seemed to the leaders at the FJP that the survival of urban Jewry depended on a more religiously observant contingent of the community than ever before. As a result, many JCCs in New York City faced the question of how to accommodate traditional Judaism within their programs and facilities. Like the Y in Washington Heights and Inwood, the Jewish memberships of the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side, Riverdale Y in the West Bronx, East Flatbush Y in Brooklyn, and Gustave Hartman Y in Queens became proportionally more Orthodox throughout the 1960s and '70s. According to the Executive Director of the East Flatbush Y, Ruben

Goldstein, Hasidic Jews moved into the neighborhood "in considerable numbers" around 1971, "hastened by 'blockbusting' and a consequent dwindling of the number of Jewish members in the Y."<sup>389</sup> The Board of his Y decided that "to continue to be a viable Jewish agency, it must reach out and be prepared to serve these families," and so Goldstein "hired an ordained Orthodox rabbi with training and experience in group work" to run nursery school and weekend recreation programs for Hasidic children.<sup>390</sup> Although the Orthodox population in Washington Heights and Inwood was neither Hasidic nor grew as a result of blockbusting, the flight of non-Orthodox Jews from the city contributed to the growing prominence of more strictly observant Jews in northern Manhattan in a manner to similar to East Flatbush.

Historically, Orthodox Jews had not favored Jewish Centers. Rabbis criticized the precursor institution to the JCC, synagogue-centers, for privileging secular activities over religious ones. "A well planned and efficiently directed study group in the congregation will do infinitely more good" one Orthodox rabbi argued, "than all the prattling about Jewish culture, all the '*horas*,' and ... the imitation '*Oneg Shabbat*.'"<sup>391</sup> This suspicion only intensified after World War II, when Jewish Centers established separately from synagogues proliferated in communities throughout the United States.<sup>392</sup>

Amongst Orthodox Jewish families, the synagogue and the school (*yeshiva*) had primacy in life outside the home. According to historian Jenna Wiseman Joselit, over 100

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<sup>389</sup> For a thorough discussion of the practice of "blockbusting" by real estate agents within Jewish communities, see Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>390</sup> "Minutes of Committee on Service to the Jewish Community," April 22, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>391</sup> The hora is a Jewish folk dance. An Oneg Shabbat is a reception or gathering after a Sabbath prayer service, usually featuring refreshments. This rabbi implies that the JCC skips the rituals and prayers of Judaism and goes straight to the celebrations. Quoted in Jenna Weissman Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews: The Orthodox Community in the Interwar Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 47.

<sup>392</sup> See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

new Jewish day schools were established in the decade following 1942, "supplant[ing] the modernized synagogue in the Orthodox community's hierarchy of institutions."<sup>393</sup> For youth, the yeshiva or day school combined secular and Jewish learning in much the same way that, for kids that attended the neighborhood's public schools, the Jewish Community Center was the place where they could express both their Jewish and American identity.<sup>394</sup> For Orthodox children who attended yeshivas, the JCC was redundant because the school already served as a venue to express Jewish identity.

Most Orthodox Jews in New York City in the mid-twentieth century avoided the JCC, but in Washington Heights this became even more the case as the profile of the Orthodox community changed in the 1930s and '40s. Before the war the Jews of the neighborhood included a mix of secular, Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews from Central and Eastern Europe. The establishment of Yeshiva College in 1928 attracted Orthodox families to Washington Heights, swelling the population of traditional Jews in the area. The arrival of German Jewish refugees in the following decades furthered this trend. Although German Jews consisted of only 10% of the population of Washington Heights and did not make up the majority of the neighborhood's Jews, the majority did affiliate with Orthodox congregations.<sup>395</sup> Refugees founded 13 new synagogues between 1938 and 1950, 11 of which were Orthodox. These synagogues fell on the traditional end of the spectrum because their rabbis and congregants sought to conserve the liturgy, rituals, and culture of small-town German Jewry, a task that felt particularly urgent after the Holocaust. The refugees who settled in northern Manhattan established strong and

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<sup>393</sup> Joselit, *New York's Jewish Jews*, 145.

<sup>394</sup> For a thorough discussion of the educational synthesis attempted by Modern Orthodox leaders in the 20th century, see: Ibid., Chapter 5.; Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), Chapter 7.

<sup>395</sup> Steven M Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933-1983, Its Structure and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 66, 144.

highly visible institutions that amplified their power in communal politics, which they used to further a preservationist agenda.

One congregation, *K'hal Adath Jeshurun*—better known as the Breuer synagogue after the name of its rabbi—became especially influential in the neighborhood because it successfully created an entire communal religious infrastructure including the synagogue, yeshiva, ritual bath (*mikvah*), burial society, and network of kosher supervisors.

According to sociologist Steven Lowenstein, who studied this community in the 1980s, the Breuer synagogue was a "Separatist Orthodox" congregation that followed the teachings of the German Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. In the nineteenth century, Rabbi Hirsch led the Jews of Frankfurt to eschew reform and to recommit to "a much stricter text-oriented Judaism."<sup>396</sup> For this reason, members of *K'hal Adath Jeshurun* avoided non-Breuer Jewish institutions, including the Y, which they perceived as incompatible with their strict religious outlook.

By the 1970s, however, the Jewish demographics of the neighborhood had changed significantly. Whereas "the younger, more affluent, and non-Orthodox families" had left the neighborhood, "the relative size of the elderly, the poor, and the Orthodox in the Jewish population" grew as a proportion of Washington Heights Jewry.<sup>397</sup> The swelling importance of the Orthodox contingent of the community occurred at the same time as the city's fiscal crisis. The declining quality of the neighborhood's schools, public safety, and housing stock empowered the Breuer congregation to become more involved in communal affairs. The Breuer began to collaborate with other congregations in the neighborhood to protect and maintain Orthodox Judaism in northern Manhattan. The Y,

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<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>397</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 14, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.



which Orthodox rabbis had rejected in prior decades because it was too secular and its programs replicated services provided by local yeshivas, now offered something in short supply in the neighborhood and in high demand by Orthodox parents: a safe, affordable space for children to participate in recreation and athletics.

Desiring access to the Y as it never had before, the German-Jewish Orthodox rabbis of Washington Heights drew the Y into negotiations over the how strictly the agency would observe Judaic traditions and who would get to decide. The Y staff initially welcomed the opportunity to accommodate new Orthodox members, instituting special programs and making exceptions to their open membership policy. However, as efforts continued to deepen the relationship between the Y and the German-Jewish congregations, the staff, Executive Director Dan Stein, and many Y Board members bristled at some of the requests made by Orthodox leadership. Demands for the Y to separate Jews from non-Jews and to hire a ritual supervisor for their kosher kitchen compromised the Y's most fundamental principles of religious pluralism and agency autonomy. It would take many years of negotiation to strike a balance between accommodation and these Y principles.

During the 1967-68 school year, the Y began a recreation program on Sundays for Orthodox children who attended yeshivas during the week. The curriculum of the yeshivot in the neighborhood—Yeshiva Moses Soloveitchik and the Breuer-affiliated Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch—required a long school day, because Jewish subjects like Hebrew and bible were taught in the morning and secular studies saved for the afternoon.<sup>398</sup> Unlike the Jewish children enrolled in the neighborhood's public schools who came to the Y for the after school program once their school day ended, the students

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<sup>398</sup> Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, 122.

at local yeshivas could not participate in the recreational and social offering of the Y between Monday and Friday. Parents of yeshiva children, desiring their kids to also have the opportunity to play and socialize, asked the Y to expand their offerings to Sundays.<sup>399</sup>

Assistant Executive Director Pearl Marcus oversaw the development of the program and hired Eva Knoller, a social worker and one of the many refugees from Nazi Germany living in the neighborhood, to run it. Although the Y accommodated Orthodox parents and limited the program to Jewish children who attended yeshivas, over 90 children enrolled that first year—a boon for the Y because it motivated 62 new families to become members and pay Y dues.<sup>400</sup> In addition to the financial benefit, the program strengthened the Y's relationship with a group that the Y had historically struggled to serve.

By limiting enrollment to yeshiva students—meaning to Jewish, and particularly Orthodox, kids—Pearl Marcus and the Y's Board ensured that Orthodox families would buy in to the new program. One reason the relationship between the Y and the Orthodox community in Washington Heights and Inwood had foundered in the past was that Orthodox parents did not want their kids to socialize with non-observant, secular Jews at the religiously pluralistic Y. For this reason, the Y made an exception to its usual policy of open membership.

The yeshiva-only intake policy for the Sunday program suited the needs of Orthodox families, but it disquieted members of the Y's Board. The restriction violated the Y's commitment to open membership, but the program was clearly consistent with the

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<sup>399</sup> “Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors,” November 30, 1967, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>400</sup> “Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee,” February 19, 1968, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

agency's sectarian mission. Knoller reported to the Program Committee that, "if others are admitted to this program, there will be some Orthodox parents who will withdraw their children."<sup>401</sup> Although she never explicitly identified who these "others" would be, it is likely that Knoller meant non-Orthodox Jews; accepting non-Jews into the program would certainly have been a non-starter with these parents. Knoller and the Program Committee sought to expand the program to other Jewish children who attended Hebrew schools on weekday afternoons and, like the yeshiva students, could not participate in the Y's after school program. With the approval of 29 parents, the program expanded in its second year to accept non-Orthodox Jewish participants. While not truly open membership, the compromise more closely aligned with the Y's religiously pluralistic orientation.<sup>402</sup>

At the end of the Sunday program's third year, the Y decided to phase it out. Enrollment in the program had declined, and only 26 participants remained. At their monthly meeting, the Program Committee conducted a postmortem on the program, and attributed its decline to three causes: the novelty wearing off; attendance at one program a week not justifying the cost of the Y's family membership; and Orthodox families moving out of the neighborhood. Barrie Weiser, who replaced Eva Knoller as the supervisor of the program, told the Program Committee that "At least one-half of the students from Yeshiva Soloveichik (our chief source of Sunday children) no longer live in the community." Weiser and Pearl Marcus recommended transforming the Sunday program

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," May 2, 1968, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 24, 1968, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

into a gym program open to all youth, and to welcome yeshiva students to attend should they wish.<sup>403</sup>

The end of the yeshiva program also signaled the waning of the relationship between the Y and its Orthodox neighbors. For the next three years, the Y focused on growing its older adult program. Although Y programs occasionally drew the ire of Orthodox rabbis, between 1971-74 the Y had little engagement with that community.

That changed in March of 1974, when the Y's new Title XX Senior Citizens Center began its hot lunch program. The renovation to expand the Y's kitchen triggered debate over whether and how to observe the Judaic laws about food, a set of practices called *kashrut*. To observe these rules strictly, or "to keep kosher," meals could not include pork, shellfish or other non-kosher animals, had to keep meat and dairy foods separate, and had to use processed products whose labels bore a *hechsher* (a small symbol designating that the product had been certified kosher by a rabbinical supervisor). Following these practices would satisfy many Jews who desired to eat kosher meals at the Y, and would signal the Y's commitment to Judaism. Even so, the broad continuum of Judaism, from Reform to the strictest Orthodoxy, was mirrored in a broad continuum of kashrut observance. For the Orthodox community in Washington Heights, even if the Y prepared kosher meals in a kosher kitchen, it was not technically kosher unless supervised by a *mashgiach*, a Sabbath-observant Jew with expertise in the laws of kashrut. For several years after the Y initiated the hot lunch program, they faced a contentious debate with their Orthodox neighbors about how to accommodate the

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<sup>403</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," March 16, 1971, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

principles of strictly observant Jews without compromising their pragmatic needs as an institution.

Nested within this debate was the question of just how far the Y was willing to move towards compliance with traditional Judaism. In addition to requesting the hiring of a mashgiach, Orthodox rabbis protested that the Y operated programs on Friday evenings and Saturdays instead of observing *Shabbat*, the Sabbath, when Jews should cease all work. Concerned with rising rates of intermarriage and secularization, the rabbis also opposed that the Y's Singles Group included non-Jews and that the Y permitted newly arrived teenage refugees from the Soviet Union to participate in programs where they could socialize with non-Jews.<sup>404</sup> Although the Y Board desired to meet the religious (and recreational) needs of Orthodox Jews, Board members and Y staff resented being told how to run their programs. Between 1975 and 1977, the Y Board struggled to find the delicate balance between accommodation and autonomy. Judge Lewis, who by 1975 had served on the Board of Directors for nearly 50 years, expressed a view shared by many members of the Y's staff and Board when he said, "we must serve the perceived needs of all elements of the community, but if those of the Orthodox are such that they impede our service to others, that we must reject them."<sup>405</sup>

Despite opposition from some directors, in December of 1973 the Y's Board voted that meals served at the lunch program follow all the rules of kosher food preparation, even though it would cost more money.<sup>406</sup> The Y's Senior Citizen's Activity Committee had recommended to the Board that they pursue a ritually kosher meal program.

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<sup>404</sup> On the issue of Sabbath opening, the rabbi of a local Reform congregation, Hebrew Tabernacle, also protested the Y's policy.

<sup>405</sup> Emphasis original to the source. "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 14, 1975.

<sup>406</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," December 20, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

Committee representatives reported to the Board that "questionnaires were filled out by 624 Older Adults who attended program the week of December 3rd. Half of these indicated they would prefer a "kosher style" meal (meaning no pork products or shellfish and no mixing of meat and dairy at a meal). 25% indicated the preference that the meals be kosher."<sup>407</sup> After considering this recommendation, and taking into account the opinions voiced by Federation advisors and local Orthodox rabbis, the Board voted 7 to 3 to approve the kosher lunch program.

The vote initiated a protracted negotiation between the lay leaders of the Y and representatives of the Orthodox community of Washington Heights over who would bear the cost and responsibility for the Y to hire a mashgiach. The conflict began when the Orthodox rabbinate turned to Federation to voice their displeasure at the absence of a mashgiach's supervision of the kitchen. Federation consequently approached the Y's lay leadership to voice its own displeasure with the Y's position. Dr. Harry A. Schatz, a long-time employee of the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) who was serving temporarily as the FJP's Consultant to JCCs, attended a Y Board meeting in November of 1974 to discuss the Y's reluctance to compromise with its critics. Schatz asked the Board "what the basic reasons were for the reluctance of the Y Board to employ a mashgiach - particularly in light of Federation's assurance that there would be no financial impact upon the Y"? After all, the JWB had a longstanding policy of encouraging kosher meals "so that all elements of the Jewish community feel welcome at gatherings that are designed to serve the entire Jewish community."

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<sup>407</sup> "Report of Senior Citizen's Activities Committee," December 20, 1973, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

Members of the Y's Board gave several reasons they believed ritual supervision was unnecessary. On a practical level, the demand of Senior Center members for meals vastly exceeded the program's capacity, and Federation money would be better used to feed more members than to pay an expert to assure the meals were kosher—particularly since "A month ago, a program similar to ours that is 'glatt' kosher and sponsored by K'hal Adath Jeshurun ... was opened, only a few blocks away, and fully capable of meeting the needs of those strictly observant Jews for whom our program is not 'kosher enough.'" Many of the participants in the hot lunch program kept kosher in their homes, and Board members argued that because these participants ate at the Y without hesitation, the agency's level of observance of kosher laws was sufficient without supervision. As a matter of principle, Board members resented that "The request for a mashgiach did not come from the participants in the program, who are quite content ... Instead the request initiated with the local Orthodox Rabbinate."

Throughout the discussion, Board members also raised arguments in favor of hiring a mashgiach. Doing so would certainly demonstrate the Y's desire to continue building the relationship between the Y and Orthodox community. The proportion of Orthodox Jews in northern Manhattan had finally eclipsed all other segments of the Jewish community, and the Board recognized that the agency's survival depended on meeting the needs of their most observant members. Furthermore, "koshering" the Y would be consistent with the agency's sectarian mission and would respect "Jewish tradition and accepted practice in Jewish communal organizations." Schatz emphasized that the Board should discuss this issue thoroughly and arrive at a consensus, but should keep in mind how their decision would affect communal unity. He also emphasized that

the Y should not accommodate the Orthodox community without asking them to likewise make some kind of contribution to the unity and survival of the total Jewish community.<sup>408</sup>

Richard Weinreich, the president of the Board, deferred the decision to hire a *mashgiach* and instead established a committee on "Service to the Jewish Community" to "initiate a dialogue with various elements in the Jewish community, especially the Orthodox community, in order to explore how the Y might best serve their needs."<sup>409</sup> Although a year passed during which the Committee only held internal discussions on the issues, in January of 1976 a small group of Committee members represented the Y in a meeting with the Jewish Community Council of Washington Heights, led by two Orthodox rabbis and two committed lay leaders. Herman Cahn, a judge on New York City's Civil Court, and Elizabeth Wurtzberger, the executive director of the Jewish Community Council, both belonged to K'hal Adath Jeshurun and stridently defended the traditional Judaism of the Breuer community. Speaking for the delegation, Cahn "stated his belief that the Senior Citizens at the Y assume the Y has a mashgiach, since we claim our lunches are kosher." Cahn also expressed concern that the Y's "teenage program serves a group that is 1/3rd gentile, [where] Jewish youngsters may meet, date and marry non-Jews" and "the Singles group mixed Jews and gentiles." The Council thus requested that the Y hire a mashgiach, isolate the Russian teenagers from non-Jews, and curtail all programming on Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. Rabbi Neuhaus of Congregation Ohav Shalaum, located around the corner from the Y, "used the example of our Singles

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<sup>408</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," November 12, 1974, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>409</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 14, 1975.



group now meeting on Tuesday, instead of Friday, evenings to show that solutions can be found."<sup>410</sup>

Indeed, Board members and staff at the Y were open to solutions—though the Singles group had been moved because members found Tuesday more convenient, not to avoid the Sabbath.<sup>411</sup> They also agreed to two other concessions out of convenience. According to Executive Director Dan Stein, the arrival of summer break meant that, temporarily, the Y did not have to worry about isolating the Russian teenagers from non-Jews. Additionally, the past season of Friday night theater performances had been poorly attended and Stein and Marcus believed their discontinuation would not be a huge loss for the Y. In a more principled show of accommodation, Weinreich proposed that the Y revive the Sunday program for yeshiva students, much to the consternation of the Y's staff; Pearl Marcus, Fran Freedman, Evy Marcus, and other members of the group work staff felt it undermined the Y's philosophy to offer a recreation program to the yeshiva students without the participatory, collaborative club program that they felt was vital to teach youth democratic citizenship and boost individual self-esteem.<sup>412</sup>

Despite these overtures, many among the Y's Board and staff still strongly believed that the Y should be careful to remain a welcoming place for all Jews in the community, particularly secular Jews who chose not to express their Jewishness through joining a synagogue. Members of the Committee on Service to the Jewish Community argued repeatedly that because "there is a large percentage of our Jewish Community

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<sup>410</sup> "Minutes of Meeting Between Jewish Community Council of Washington Heights and Inwood and the YM & YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood," January 20, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>411</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," November 11, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>412</sup> "Meeting of Committee on Service to the Jewish Community with Representatives of Y Staff," December 28, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

which wishes to use the Y on Friday nights and Saturdays," the Y should not kowtow to the protestations of the Jewish Community Council and thus "alienate these people by refusing to program at these times." "The Y attracts those Jews who do not go to synagogue," another Committee member stated, "and would not go, even if the Y were closed on the Sabbath. We want to keep them as Jews."<sup>413</sup> This cost seemed high, particularly because Stein reminded the Committee that "the Breuer congregation... will participate not on the basis of what the Y does, or does not do." "They will use our facilities when convenient for them, and for no other reason," Stein argued, "And when they do the activity will be restricted to their use only."<sup>414</sup> Board member (and Orthodox Jew) Dr. Egon Mayer likewise reminded the Committee that the Jewish Community Council did not represent all Orthodox Jews in Washington Heights and Inwood—Cahn and Wurtzberger's forceful presences exaggerated the extent to which neighborhood Jews *outside* the Breuer congregation supported the Council.<sup>415</sup>

The arguments against the hiring of a mashgiach also centered around questions of the Y's autonomy from the FJP. In the wake of the New York City's fiscal crisis, the goals of FJP shifted towards service to the Jewish middle class and the large population of Orthodox Jews that remained in the city when the majority of Jews moved out to the suburbs. Joseph Harris, who replaced Schatz as the FJP's Consultant to JCCs, notified the Y Board of the FJP's new priorities:

More and more, Federation is asking its agencies not only how well do you serve individuals, but how well do you serve Jewish life and contribute to Jewish survival. ...A

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<sup>413</sup> "Minutes of Committee on Service to the Jewish Community," March 17, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>414</sup> "Minutes of Committee on Service to the Jewish Community," April 10, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>415</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," March 29, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.; Hon. Joseph Russell, interview with Avigail Oren, July 8, 2015, in possession of the author.

stabilizing factor in the five boroughs is the 300,000 Orthodox Jews - most of whom have never used YMHAs. We need to know how to relate to them if we are to maintain a Jewish community in the city.<sup>416</sup>

Committee members persistently expressed the sentiment that to hire a mashgiach would mean sacrificing the independence of the Y and its Board, restricting the Board's control over its program and privileging the stance of the rabbis. They resented Federation's intervention and mistrusted the FJP's desire to appease the Orthodox community in order to increase its fundraising potential—most felt that the Orthodox community still wouldn't contribute to the annual Federation campaign.<sup>417</sup> Even more so than the Board at large, the Committee on Service to the Jewish Community expressed its discontent with Federation pressure to pacify Orthodox rabbis. If they decided to hire a mashgiach, it would be because they feared losing support and funding from Federation.

Although the Committee eventually voted to hire a mashgiach, the decision did not reflect consensus or full acceptance. The Board added several provisions to the motion before the vote. They made the employment of the mashgiach contingent on "the assumption by Federation of the expense of his salary, and any related costs, (e.g. changes in kitchen equipment, etc.)," and required that the contract be for a one-year period and subject to the Board's reevaluation at that time. Even with these provisions, the Board did not unanimously approve the motion. Of the 19 votes recorded, 14

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<sup>416</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 9, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>417</sup> In 1974-75, the United Jewish Appeal and Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York merged their annual campaigns. While this decision minimized the overhead expenses of the campaign by \$2-3 million, the merger also signaled that Federation recognized that many Jews in New York felt concerned for Israel and its security and wanted to support both the local and Israeli Jewish communities. This new joint campaign made the FJP more dependent on Orthodox congregations. Charles S. Liebman, "Leadership and Decision-Making in a Jewish Federation: The New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies," in *American Jewish Year Book*, ed. Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb (New York and Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee, Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

approved the motion and 5 voted against it— three Board members also abstained. Votes were not cast lightly, and as newly-elected Board president Joe Russell remarked to Stein afterward, "in the heat of the controversy [I] had so concentrated on maintaining an orderly discussion that [I] neglected to vote, but wished to be recorded as favoring acceptance of these recommendations."<sup>418</sup> Indeed, the decision so polarized the Board that two longtime members, Milton and Ida Ruskin, resigned afterwards (though Stein did successfully persuade them to return a few months later).

After almost two years of discussion, the resistance to hiring a mashgiach reflected the deep discomfort many of the Y Board members felt with Orthodox Judaism. Although the Y always claimed to be a religiously pluralistic Jewish institution, in practice the emphasis that group work placed on Jewish adjustment and reconciling Jewish and American identity ran counter to the goals of Orthodox Jews to protect Judaism. One member of the Committee on Service to the Jewish Community made this clear when they argued, in opposition to hiring a mashgiach, that the Y "is a secular institution which can and should do only as much as is consistent with its secular role."<sup>419</sup> Although untrue—the Y regularly hosted holiday programs that included Judaic rituals and traditions, such as Passover Seders and menorah lightings at Hanukkah—the Y Board historically viewed the agency as the Jewish communal institution best suited to keep secular members involved in Jewish life, thus preventing them from entirely abandoning their Jewish identity. This perspective was consistent with the ideological and religious makeup of the Board. Orthodox Jews rarely served on the Y's Board, and so the majority

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<sup>418</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 12, 1976, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>419</sup> "Minutes of Committee on Service to the Jewish Community," May 20, 1975, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

of the lay leaders making decisions about the Y's priorities existed on a continuum from Conservative to secular Jews.

With the mashgiach question settled and the new program for yeshiva students underway, the Y yielded to the FJP's concern about Jewish survival and continuity. "Translating this to the local scene," Stein told the Y Board in 1977, "it is apparent that we are no longer in a situation where Jewish continuity might be taken for granted simply because there was a Jewish presence everywhere in Washington Heights. Increasingly, our ability to reach and serve the orthodox community will be a measure of our success in serving the total Jewish community."<sup>420</sup> By the middle of the year, Russell reported on the fruits of this work, noting that the Y "[has] had some modest success in building a new service relationship with the orthodox community.... Several hundred orthodox youngsters now participate in program activities at the Y, and we can fairly say that this is one result of the initiative we took in October." Ironically, the Y had not actually hired a mashgiach (nor would it ever). "By the way," Russell added, "we haven't yet found a mashgiach but the search continues."<sup>421</sup>

The issue was never so specifically about the mashgiach or the strictness of the Y's kashrut; for Orthodox rabbis it was a test of the agency's willingness, and by extension the willingness of FJP, to acknowledge that the survival of urban Jewry was linked to the survival of Judaism. In 1978, FJP cut the Y's budget for the following year by almost \$10,000. After meeting with the FJP Distribution Committee, Stein and Russell reported back to the Board that Federation cited the agency's low membership income as

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<sup>420</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 11, 1977, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>421</sup> Joseph Russell, "President's Message to the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting," June 14, 1977, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood; Dan Stein, "Executive Director's Annual Report, 1976-77," June 14, 1977, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

a reason for the cut. Stein added, however, that he suspected the real reason was that Federation was passing more money along to suburban centers that "serve increasing numbers of Jews" and to programs serving the Orthodox community.<sup>422</sup> To prove his point, the Distribution Committee later restored \$3,500 of the \$10,000 reduction to the Y's allocation, but stipulated that \$2,500 had to be used "for outreach to Jewish youth," and the rest on "a program for orthodox adults."<sup>423</sup> By the end of the decade, the incentive for New York City's JCCs to serve Orthodox Jews was so strong that the Metropolitan Chapter of the Association of Jewish Center Workers felt compelled to sponsor a full-morning program devoted to "The Jewish Center Worker Serving the Traditional Communities (Orthodox—Chasidic)."<sup>424</sup> Urban JCCs could no longer translate "pluralism" as "secular."

### **The New Arrivals: Translating Y Services to Immigrants from the Spanish Caribbean**

After 1965, the growth of the Spanish-speaking population in the neighborhood brought more Puerto Rican, Cuban, and especially Dominican families to the Y in search of social services and recreational or enrichment programs. The agency, however, never sought to accommodate this community in the same way it did for Orthodox Jews. The Y did not avoid, ignore, or discriminate against newly arrived Dominican migrants, but neither did staff make a concerted effort to organize programs for Dominicans. This was

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<sup>422</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee," June 28, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>423</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee," October 5, 1978, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>424</sup> Metropolitan Association of Jewish Center Workers, "Flyer, 'The Jewish Center Worker Serving the TRADITIONAL Communities,'" 1979, Association of Jewish Center Workers Records, American Jewish Archives, Box 5, Folder 8.

partially a reflection of the separation between Jews and Dominicans that existed in the neighborhood, as if Broadway were a canyon severing each enclave from the other; it also was a consequence of the financial distress and communal pressures that the Y faced throughout the 1970s. Dominicans did slowly find their way into the Y, and the agency did welcome them into their nursery school, day camp, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, Senior Center, and case work office. It took many years, however, for the Y's membership rolls to reflect the neighborhood's large Dominican population.

From the early twentieth century, the residents of Washington Heights and Inwood were ethnically, religiously, and racially diverse. Jews lived alongside Protestant, Irish Catholic, Greek Orthodox, African American, and West Indian families, and beginning in the 1930s migrants from the U.S. South, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and, later, the Dominican Republic, began settling in northern Manhattan. By the 1970s, residents of Washington Heights and Inwood reflected greater diversity of color, language, and culture than ever before.

The demographic changes that occurred in northern Manhattan resulted from American economic growth, changes in immigration policy, white suburbanization, and political upheaval in Latin America. When Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, limiting immigration from Europe and Asia, it created opportunities for new groups to enter into urban manufacturing jobs.<sup>425</sup> Black southerners initiated the Great Migration northward in search of factory work, upward mobility, and respite from the violence of Jim Crow.<sup>426</sup> Migrants from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic likewise

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<sup>425</sup> Virginia Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 31.

<sup>426</sup> Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (New York: Viking, 2010), Chapter 4.

sought to escape oppressive regimes, to take advantage of the colonial relationship between these islands and the United States, and to pursue economic opportunities in American industrial cities.<sup>427</sup> The restrictions imposed by the Johnson-Reed Act did not apply to Latin America, and a small but steady stream of migrants from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic arrived in New York between the 1930s and 1950s. Emigration skyrocketed in the 1960s, however, when in rapid succession the Cuban Revolution, U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic, and rising employment caused by Operation Bootstrap's industrialization of the Puerto Rican economy destabilized these islands' politics and economies. Puerto Ricans in New York City numbered over 800,000 in 1970, growing by 200,000 over the span of a decade, and 84,000 Cubans had settled in the city as well.<sup>428</sup>

Dominican migrants, however, made up the largest group of newcomers after 1965—not only of Latin Americans, but of all migrants to the United States. The complicated imperial relationship between the United States and the Dominican Republic drove this increase. Dominicans sought visas to the United States in order to flee from the U.S.-backed authoritarian regime of Joaquín Balaguer, but the new immigration act actually placed the first restrictions on immigrant visas from the Dominican Republic. American complicity in the country's political crisis pressured the U.S. Consulate in Santo Domingo, the republic's capital, to distribute an increasing number of tourist and

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<sup>427</sup> Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 21; Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*, 13–38.

<sup>428</sup> The Puerto Rican population of the five boroughs of New York City was 612,574 in 1960, and 811,843 in 1970. I found no population statistics for Cubans in New York from the 1960 census, but 84,179 were counted in the five boroughs in 1970. Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population and Housing*, Volume 1, Part 34, Section 1 New York, Table 119, Social Characteristics of Counties; Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population and Housing*, Final Report PC(2)-1D, Subject Reports Puerto Ricans in the United States: Social and Economic Data for Persons of Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage, Table 15, Persons of Puerto Rican Birth and Parentage, for States and Selected Urban Places and Counties.



student visas, which migrants routinely overstayed and effectively became undocumented immigrants.<sup>429</sup> Chain migration brought a majority of these immigrants to Washington Heights, quickly making it the largest Dominican settlement in the United States.<sup>430</sup> By 1980, the U.S. Census revealed that 54% of northern Manhattan's population was Hispanic, with the concentration in the Eastern portion rising to 60%; Dominicans made up over half of the Hispanic population.<sup>431</sup>

This wave of migrants from the Spanish Caribbean arrived at a pivotal moment for American cities. Just as the amenities of suburban life drew the urban middle class out of the city, the suburbs attracted urban manufacturers and factories seeking lower taxes and transportation costs. Depopulation and deindustrialization catalyzed a cycle of disinvestment. In New York, although space opened up in the housing and labor markets for new immigrants, the reduction in the city's tax base as a result of the loss of people and businesses meant that scarce public resources existed for the newest and neediest residents of the metropolis.<sup>432</sup>

The majority of Dominicans arriving in the United States after 1965 emigrated from rural areas, sometimes after a stint living in Santo Domingo, with little education, job training, or capital. As a result, a working class community developed in Washington

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<sup>429</sup> Historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskoff argues that the repeal of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1965 did not contribute to the increase in Dominican migration. Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 5–6, 68–96.

<sup>430</sup> Patricia R. Pessar, *A Visa for a Dream: Dominicans in the United States*, New Immigrant Series (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 21–22.; Pedro Hernandez, interview with Avigail Oren, July 28 2015, in possession of author.

<sup>431</sup> Eugenia Georges, “Dominican Self-Help Association in Washington Heights: Integration of a New Immigrant Population in a Multiethnic Neighborhood,” Working Paper, New Directions for Latino Public Policy Research (New York: Inter-University Program for Latino Research and the Social Science Research Council, 1988).

<sup>432</sup> Robert W. Snyder, *Crossing Broadway: Washington Heights and the Promise of New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 115–21.

Heights.<sup>433</sup> Unlike Puerto Ricans and Cubans, who entered the country as American citizens or with protected status, many migrants from the Dominican Republic arrived in the United States on tourist visas; once these expired, they remained in the country without documentation.<sup>434</sup> This undocumented status left many Dominican residents of Washington Heights vulnerable to exploitation, ineligible for government entitlements, and limited to work in the grey or black labor market where there was less security. Without the support for new migrants that the U.S. provided for Cubans, as established in the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, nor the home-state support that Puerto Rican migrants received from the Office of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States, Dominicans arrived in the U.S. relatively poor, speaking little or no English, and dependent on kinship ties or regional associations for help adjusting to the city, finding housing, and procuring work.<sup>435</sup>

Jews had a complicated relationship with their new neighbors. Persistent anti-Semitism at home, particularly from their Irish Catholic neighbors, and the shadow of the Holocaust in Europe did lead Jews to be more accepting of other minorities.<sup>436</sup> The limitation of this acceptance came when privilege was threatened—when the mutually reinforcing cycle of racial discrimination, disinvestment, and decline began to affect the quality of the neighborhood's public schools, housing, and public safety. When the racial status and foreign language of the growing Dominican community threatened the

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<sup>433</sup> Saskia Sassen-Koob, "Formal and Informal Associations: Dominicans and Columbians in New York," *International Migration Review* 13, no. 2 (1979): 322.

<sup>434</sup> After 1966, the Cuban Adjustment Act made Cubans who had been in the United States for at least one year eligible for permanent residency. On the policies and restrictions on Dominican migration in the 1960s and '70s, see Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 70–80.

<sup>435</sup> Eugenia Georges, "Dominican Self-Help Association in Washington Heights: Integration of a New Immigrant Population in a Multiethnic Neighborhood," 6–7.

<sup>436</sup> While the democratic ethos nurtured in the U.S. by World War II and the fight against fascism collapsed differences between Jews and other European immigrant groups and reinforced Jews' whiteness, in Washington Heights this did not erase decades of antagonism from their Irish Catholic neighbors.

whiteness of the neighborhood and contributed to the perception of its decline, Jews in the community did not monolithically support the interests of their new Dominican neighbors. On several occasions, particularly around issues of education, Jews split over how to allocate scarce neighborhood resources; some favored reinvesting in the perceived stability of the institutions of the white, middle class, while others favored investing in new programs and infrastructure to benefit the neighborhood's working class and poor residents.

Dominicans fought the neighborhoods' white ethnic power brokers for their share of the neighborhood's limited public resources. As researcher Eugenia Georges noted in 1988, "in Washington Heights [ethnic] conflict centers immediately on the 'built environment': housing, schools, public spaces, sanitation." Georges reported that the need of the Dominican community "to exact 'more' from the state—more services, more resources, more jobs," had created "a sense of emergent ethnicity" that helped political organizers mobilize Dominicans. Although intended to increase political participation, Georges saw that this new Dominican ethnicity impeded "coalition building efforts with others of similar socioeconomic status (even efforts at inter-Latino coalitions) and help[ed] obfuscate the fundamental causes of economic deterioration and discrimination." Competition and separation, more than cooperation and integration, came to characterize the politics and social life of the neighborhood, although amongst individuals and agencies exceptions emerged.

In Washington Heights, strikes and protests around issues of education and school integration became the fault lines dividing Puerto Ricans and Dominicans from the older white ethnic Irish, Jews, and Greeks. Although rioting did not occur in Washington

Heights or Inwood in the 1960s, there was no shortage of racial tension—particularly around who had access to and control over the public schools. As white middle class families left the city for newly developed suburban hamlets in Westchester, Bergen, and Nassau Counties, black and Puerto Rican families were able to escape the overcrowded housing market in Harlem and move into these recently vacated apartments in Washington Heights. Housing segregation nevertheless persisted, as whites who remained in the neighborhood clustered themselves in the more affluent enclaves of Castle Village and Park Terrace, along the western edge of Washington Heights and Inwood. School segregation mirrored housing segregation, and as historian Robert Snyder details in his postwar study of Washington Heights, by 1955 the neighborhood "had two of Manhattan's five minority-majority junior high schools and six of its twenty-three minority-majority elementary schools."<sup>437</sup>

In the autumn of 1968, school students in Washington Heights experienced disruptions when the United Federation of Teachers went on strike for almost two months in protest against the firing of teachers by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control demonstration district—but, notably, the political drama of the strike played out at the Brooklyn terminus of the A train line. The tensions that animated the strike nonetheless had a lasting effect on the neighborhood, and for the next few years students, parents, and school administrators regularly clashed over how to best integrate schools and empower black and Hispanic parents while maintaining the quality of education and the quantity of resources available to students.<sup>438</sup> This was not always a peaceful process, and in 1970 a

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<sup>437</sup> Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*, 75.

<sup>438</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these events, see *Ibid.*, Chapter 3.

Molotov cocktail was even thrown inside George Washington High School, the primary high school serving Northern Manhattan's teenagers.

While the Y remained insulated from much of the political wrangling that occurred around school decentralization, it had to grapple with the underlying symptoms of the problem: the decline in the Jewish population and the growth of the black and Hispanic population of the neighborhood; the deterioration of the housing stock; the growing proportion of older adults in the community; high youth unemployment; and a dearth of safe, supervised space for young and old alike to socialize and recreate. These issues became visible to the Jewish Center workers at the Y in the years preceding the strike, as the programs they ran meant that they had daily engagement with members of the community. In 1965, the Y's Board of Directors received a request from the director of the Y's nursery school that more money be designated for scholarships because they had two vacancies in their program. This had never happened before; usually there was a waiting list for spots. For the director of the nursery program, this indicated that local families were having trouble affording their program.<sup>439</sup> A few months later, Pearl Marcus, the Assistant Executive Director, reported to the Board "that there was a growing concern about deteriorating housing in our community, which is changing quite rapidly. One of the synagogues in the area found it expedient to have bazaar posters printed in Spanish as well as English."<sup>440</sup>

The Y of Washington Heights and Inwood attempted to address these issues through a mix of community leadership and direct service to needier populations in the

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<sup>439</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," October 28, 1965, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>440</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," March 24, 1966, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

neighborhood. In February of 1967, the Y took a more active role in community improvement when it hosted a Local Planning Board meeting to discuss Mental Health, Housing and Redevelopment, Public Safety, and Problems of Older Adults with 300 representatives of faith-based and civic organizations. By 1969, Y Staff was attending the meetings of the Urban Action Task Force of Washington Heights.<sup>441</sup>

Some of the Y's teenage members also contributed their time and energy towards community improvement. In 1970, teen member Roy Steinfeld attended a meeting of the Board's Program Committee to report on a new tutoring program that the teens had formed. Ten teens had partnered with ten Spanish-speaking second graders at P.S. 152, only a few blocks down Nagle Avenue from the Y, to help them with their reading skills. "[T]he parents are most enthusiastic about the program as is the school," Roy shared, and there existed "a waiting list of 20 children who cannot be accommodated."<sup>442</sup>

The Y also offered ESL classes for many years, and the majority of the students' native language was Spanish. A neighborhood resident, Arlene Stringer-Cuevas—who would later sit on the Y's Board, serve on the New York City Council, and whose son eventually rose through city politics to become the President of the Borough of Manhattan—established the class in the mid-1960s. The Community Center at the Dyckman Houses, built by the city's Housing Authority in 1951 to provide subsidized units to middle class families, initially hosted the class. Stringer-Cuevas moved the operation to the Y when the Housing Authority asked the City's Department of Education, the program's sponsor, to pay rent for using their space. With no money to spend on rent,

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<sup>441</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," April 19, 1967, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>442</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," January 15, 1970, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

the Department told Stringer-Cuevas that she would either have to find a free space or discontinue the class. Having sent her children to the Y for many years, Stringer-Cuevas approached Dan Stein with her dilemma.<sup>443</sup> For the next few years, the Y provided the classes with free space, allowing Stein to proudly report to the Y Board that, "As in the past, the Y provides space to community organisations for a variety of meetings."<sup>444</sup>

Stringer-Cuevas's students provided her with a lens into changes in the community. In her classes, she recalled, "suddenly instead of having 30 Cubans, one day I had 25 Cubans and five Puerto Ricans. And ... then I had 20 Cubans and nine Dominicans and one Puerto Rican. So I saw how it... flowed, how it changed." "Very few Puerto Ricans came and stayed," she noted, but Dominican and South American immigrants maintained (and then grew) the sizable Spanish-speaking population in the neighborhood.<sup>445</sup>

The Y began to see this change reflected in their employees, in their nursery school and day camp, and in their gym. In 1973, Dan Stein hired Pedro Hernandez to work as a porter and a driver of one the Y's new minibuses, which the agency used to pick up and bring young children and older adults to the Y for their programs. Stein promoted Hernandez to Maintenance Supervisor in 1978, and during his tenure in that role he hired many other Latin American maintenance workers. "Every time we had an opening," recalled Martin Englisher, who became the Executive Director in 1981 after many years on the agency's staff, "for low-skilled positions—kitchen, maintenance, home attendants—I started to see that ... 90% of the applicants were of Dominican

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<sup>443</sup> Arlene Stringer Cuevas, New York Public Library Community Oral History Project, September 8, 2015, <http://oralhistory.nysl.org/interviews/arlene-stringer-cuevas-zydu7m>.

<sup>444</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Program Committee," September 18, 1968, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>445</sup> Arlene Stringer Cuevas, New York Public Library Community Oral History Project.

heritage."<sup>446</sup> Additionally, Dominican parents increasingly approached the Y for child care so that they could go to work, and by the early 1980s non-Jewish children made up 45 percent of the Y's day camp.<sup>447</sup> Young adults also came to the Y to use the gym and play basketball.<sup>448</sup>

Beginning in 1979, "Hispanic families" also visited the Y to utilize the case work services of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCS). First established in 1967, before the Jewish Family Service's (JFS) merged with the Jewish Board of Guardians (JBG) to become the JBFCS, the JFS "outpost" at the Y initially ensured that members and community residents could access social workers to address family, behavioral, or relationship problems. Building on the success of the program, by the end of the 1970s the JBFCS also offered "a sex therapy clinic, a legal aid department, a housekeeping service, and a reconstituted couples department." Likely referred by other neighborhood organizations, Hispanic clients that received case work at the JBFCS's outpost became familiar with the Y building and its programs.<sup>449</sup>

For working class Dominican families that found their way to the Y, the attraction of the agency lay in the high-quality programs and services it provided. Englisher recalled that,

... the diversity of what we offered was always enough that it was like a one-stop kind of place. You could come in and you could say, "I have a kid, I need afterschool [child care]. I have another kid that needs to play basketball. And I have a grandmother who doesn't get out." And all those things together could be helped. We became a destination by our own pre-planned diversity of services.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, June 9, 2015, in possession of author.

<sup>447</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," September 17, 1981, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>448</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, December 18, 2014, in possession of author; Debbie Katznelson, interview with Avigail Oren, July 1, 2015, in possession of author.

<sup>449</sup> "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," May 17, 1979, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>450</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, June 9, 2015, in possession of author



This mix of programs set the Jewish Y apart from the Dominican associations that existed in the 1970s. The *Asociaciones Dominicanas* and the *Centro Educación Caribe* (CEDUCA), founded in 1974 and 1976 respectively, both focused on education and vocational guidance.<sup>451</sup> While CEDUCA offered ESL classes and prepared clients for High School equivalency exams, clients of the *Asociaciones Dominicanas* could receive referrals to educational programs or participate in the organization's job development and referral programs. In the 1980s, community leaders founded the *Alianza Dominicana*, *Asociación Communal de Dominicanos Progresistas* (ACDP), and Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrants Rights to provide more basic social services to the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community. The Y remained unique in the neighborhood for providing the kind of fee-for-service programs needed by working class families: childcare, athletics, and extracurricular enrichment.<sup>452</sup>

Despite the agency's openness, the small Dominican membership at the Y did not proportionately reflect the size of the Dominican community. The Y did not actively publicize itself to the Dominican community or recruit Dominicans into its programs, nor did Stein or Y staff create programs specifically for Spanish-speakers or immigrants in the way they created the Sunday program for Orthodox youth. This passivity likely stemmed from several causes. Financial troubles in the 1970s limited what the Y could offer to Jewish children, and certainly constrained the possibilities for expansion to

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<sup>451</sup> The earliest groups formed in the community devoted themselves to "expressive" social, cultural, and sporting activities that emphasized ethnic identity and helped immigrants adjust to life in their new country. Organizations established in the mid-'70s increasingly devoted themselves to combatting the problems of immigrants.

<sup>452</sup> Rudy Anthony Sainz, "'Dominican Ethnic Associations; Classification and Service: Delivery Roles in Washington Heights'" (D.S.W., Columbia University, 1990), 67–143.

Dominican youth.<sup>453</sup> The lack of outreach to the Dominican community also directly related to the Y's effort, under pressure from FJP, to reach out to Orthodox families. To accomplish this required assuaging Orthodox parents' concern that too many non-Jewish youth came to the Y, and inviting in more Dominican members would subvert this effort. Finally, all the Jewish Community Centers affiliated with Federation faced pressure to consolidate their efforts and serve more Jews for less money. To this effect, in the early 1980s FJP to began encouraging the Y of Washington Heights and Inwood to merge its operations with the new Y in Riverdale.<sup>454</sup> Consequently, the Y found itself financially reliant on the growth of its Jewish membership at the same time the Dominican community was growing and in need of more, diverse programs and services.

The Y of Washington Heights and Inwood's experience working with a expanding minority community in its neighborhood accorded with the experiences other JCCs in New York such as the Bronx Y, Bronx House, and Educational Alliance.<sup>455</sup> Each faced similar pressures from FJP to extend and intensify their work with the local Jewish community, although only the Bronx Y eventually agreed to follow the movement of Bronx Jews westward and to transfer its operations from the Grand Concourse to Riverdale. Of all the agencies, Bronx House seemed to have the least engagement with black or Hispanic community members and Educational Alliance the most—likely due to the strength of its social work department and its history in the settlement house movement. Each agency had an open membership policy and welcomed interest from the predominantly Puerto Rican and Dominican Hispanic families in the community, but with

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<sup>453</sup> See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>454</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, December 18, 2014, in possession of author; "Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors," January 18, 1981, YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>455</sup> For more background on these agencies, see chapter 5.

the exception of Educational Alliance their approach to incorporating new minority populations was more passive than proactive.

Indeed, in spite of the small interactions between Jews and Dominicans that occurred within the Y, in Washington Heights the Jewish and Dominican communities remained stubbornly separated. Neither group was monolithic or homogenous, however, and amongst the neighborhood's Jewish residents, a split existed between secular or politically progressive Jews and the more Orthodox and politically conservative Jewish Community Council. A controversy in the early 1980s over the construction of a new public school (P.S. 48) a block from the Breuer-dominated enclave of apartment buildings on Bennett Avenue brought these divisions to the foreground. Dominican parents, frustrated by years of overcrowding in the neighborhood's elementary schools, overwhelmingly supported the project; the Jewish Community Council opposed the project. As historian Robert Snyder has argued about the conflict, "The Breuer fears were a mix of insularity, real concerns about street crime, an inability to distinguish young students from threatening muggers, a lack of faith in the ability of the police to keep order, and memories of anti-Semitism." Their opposition particularly stung the Dominican (and African American) supporters of P.S. 48, who "had long known Bennett and Fort Washington avenues in the western Heights as places where people with dark-colored skin would have trouble getting an apartment."<sup>456</sup> Although many Jews *did* support the construction of P.S. 48, the controversy revealed that for certain Jews, their willingness to accommodate their new neighbors reached its limit when they perceived a threat to their property values, the quality of their schools, and the safety of their streets.

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<sup>456</sup> Snyder, *Crossing Broadway*, 149–50.

Open membership policy, the acceptance of public funding to provide social services, and the decisions made by ideologically leftist or liberal Jewish Center workers all contributed to the slow growth of non-Jewish and non-white membership in the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood and many other urban Jewish Community Centers throughout the United States. Local contingencies in northern Manhattan, such as the growing proportion of Orthodox Jews and New York City's fiscal crisis, nevertheless created opposing pressure for the Washington Heights and Inwood Y to increase the number of Jews it served.<sup>457</sup> These contingent pressures were not enough, however, to stop the trend towards cultural pluralism in urban American JCCs. Just as chain migration drew Dominican immigrants to Washington Heights, a process of "chain membership" began that brought more Dominicans to the Y who otherwise would have believed they were not welcome at a Jewish agency.

## Conclusion

In an interview in July 2015, Director of Facilities Pedro Hernandez reflected on his early days working at the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood in the late 1970s.

[Building Superintendent] Charlie MacIsaac told me one day we have to prepare the *sukkah*. I said, what's a sukkah? He was Irish, Charlie. What's a sukkah? Come with me, don't worry about it. He said go to the park and bring a lot of branches. [Laughter] I don't know. I went to ... the park, Department of Parks, they have branches, I put them on the bus [Laughter] .... They said we have to hang a couple of fruit here, [Laughter] I said what? Charlie told me, don't worry about it. He said hey ... that's a sukkah. I saw people go ... eat in there, they're singing, and that's a sukkah ... [Laughter].<sup>458</sup>

<sup>457</sup> See chapter 5 of this dissertation for an explanation of how New York City's fiscal crisis affected the operations of the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights and Inwood.

<sup>458</sup> A *sukkah* is a temporary hut that Jews construct for the holiday of *Sukkoth*, a celebration of the harvest. Pedro Hernandez, interview with Avigail Oren, July 28 2015, in possession of author.

After 35 years of working at the Y, however, Hernandez required no such instruction. When Y program staff give the annual reminders to "remember Sukkot, remember the Menorah," Hernandez said that, "I sa[y] okay, I know about the Menorah, I know about Sukkot, I know." His knowledge of Jewish culture had even extended beyond the structural, to ritual and liturgy:

**Hernandez:** I remember one day [during] the [Passover] Seder they sing and I sing, they [asked] me, you're Jewish? [Laughter] I said, no, they said but you were singing a Hebrew song. [Laughter] I tell you, you know why? I'm thirty-five years here [Laughter] now you know.

**Interviewer:** Right, this isn't my first time at the rodeo. [Laughter]

**Hernandez:** This is *Hevenu Shalom Alechem*! [Laughter]

**Interviewer:** Everyone knows this song.

**Hernandez:** Yeah, the guy said you sing it perfect, you're not Hebrew? I said I'm not no Hebrew--[Laughter]

**Interviewer:** I don't know what I'm saying.

**Hernandez:** I don't know what I'm saying but I'm singing. [Laughter]<sup>459</sup>

Hernandez's experience demonstrates that despite the Y's initial passivity in engaging with Dominicans, those who did enter its orbit contributed to the expansion of the agency's pluralism from merely religious—for all Jews, regardless of how they practiced Judaism—to ethno-cultural.

Indeed, although in the 1970s the Y put more attention and energy into serving Orthodox Jews, the programs never brought in the number of members needed to keep the Y financially solvent. The fee-for-service programs for children, which were open to all community members as per the Y's open membership policy, provided the Y with the bulk of its revenue. As Dominican families moved into the working- and middle classes, the Y enrolled children in care and enrichment programs and subscribed adults to gym memberships. By the century's end the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights, like many

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<sup>459</sup> Pedro Hernandez, interview with Avigail Oren, July 28 2015, in possession of author.

urban JCCs throughout the United States, could not rely solely on Jews to provide a sustainable amount of revenue. The bifurcation of JCC programs into Jewish activities and recreational and social welfare services allowed agencies to include non-Jews amongst their membership without compromising their Jewish mission and orientation. The process of learning to work with new non-Jewish groups did not always proceed smoothly, but it was vital for sustaining the legacy of neighborhood JCCs.

## Conclusion

The Jewish Community Center movement survived the economic and political upheavals of the 1970s by attracting new members and new revenue. Agencies, by bifurcating their programming into non-sectarian and Jewish components, made the JCC a space that welcomed non-Jews into their gym and athletics facilities, nursery and after school programs, day camp, senior centers, adult education opportunities, and social services. The division between sectarian and non-sectarian activity, however, was porous. The gym and athletic leagues often closed down on Jewish holidays, for example, and when JCCs ran private day care or day camp programs, teachers and counselors taught all children, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, songs in Hebrew and Jewish blessings over food. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, although most Americans could not identify the YMCA as a distinctively Protestant institution, JCCs remained strongly identified with the Jewish Community.

In 2017, however, the JCC's unique balance of particularism and pluralism has made it a target for white nationalists. Between January 1 and March 9, 80 JCCs received bomb threats. The 2016 presidential campaign brought the "alt-right" into mainstream consciousness, revealing that white nationalism remains a powerful American ideology. Viewing people of color, non-Christians, and immigrants as threats, white nationalists have singled out individuals, organizations, and institutions that promote American democratic pluralism, the belief that all minority groups may maintain their independent cultures and identities and still be included in the body politic. JCCs' openness and inclusion make them a target for white nationalists. JCCs are spaces where the Jewish community provides valuable services and programs not only to fellow Jews, but to non-

Jewish and non-white populations as well. They are the clearest representation of Jews' integration into the wider American populace. Attacking a JCC is an attack on pluralism, not just an anti-Semitic statement.

Unfortunately, the JCC movement faces another, internal and existential, threat. Although more than 300 JCCs belonged to the JWB at mid-century, only half that number currently belong to the re-named JCC Association (JCCA). In 2015, a new executive director stepped in following the retirement of his predecessor, who served in the role for two decades. *The Forward* reported that the JCCA had "struggled increasingly in recent years with high staff salaries and rolling defections among its membership," and indeed the pressure seemed insurmountable—the new executive director resigned after only a year in the job.<sup>460</sup>

As new sources of government and private foundation funding fueled the growth of agencies in the late twentieth century, JCCs had to develop new management systems to monitor their compliance and report their outcomes to funders. The leadership and strategic vision necessary to implement these programs and scale up agency growth did not always match up with the skill sets of trained social workers.<sup>461</sup> JCCs whose executive directors failed to respond to the increasing complexity of the funding environment for non-profits and service providers put their agencies in financial jeopardy, from which even the most dedicated Board of Directors could not prevent insolvency.<sup>462</sup> Contributing

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<sup>460</sup> Josh Nathan-Kazis, "Troubled JCC Association in Fresh Disarray with Surprise Departure of CEO," *The Forward*, March 18, 2016, <http://forward.com/news/336406/troubled-jcc-association-in-fresh-disarray-with-surprise-departure-of-ceo/>.

<sup>461</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, July 28 2016, in possession of author.

<sup>462</sup> "5 of 7 JCCs Closing, so L.A.s Community Is Stunned," *The Jewish News of Northern California*, December 14, 2001, <http://www.jweekly.com/2001/12/14/5-of-7-jccs-closing-so-l-a-s-community-is-stunned/>; Dan Pine, "Closed for Business: Demise of Contra Costa JCC Comes Suddenly, Painfully," *The Jewish News of Northern California*, December 23, 2011, <http://www.jweekly.com/2011/12/23/closed-for-business-demise-of-contra-costa-jcc-comes-suddenly-painfully/>.



to this complexity, the aging infrastructure of many JCCs brought additional financial burden. With the rise of new gym chains that either cost a fraction of what the JCC, with its many programs, charged, or provided a luxury experience unlike the more family-oriented JCC space, the JCC began competing for members. For most JCCs, fitness, childcare, and day camp—all facility-dependent activities—drove membership and provided the base of JCC revenue. Avoiding building maintenance to stanch deficits particularly exacerbated membership loss, as the fancy locker rooms and newer equipment at competing gyms lured away the large number of members that joined the JCC solely to use their fitness facilities.<sup>463</sup>

Despite these challenges, many JCCs are thriving. Moreover, some are more Jewish in orientation than ever before in their history. In Baltimore, for example, since 1997 the JCC has implemented a series of strategic plans aiming to "put the J back in JCC." Without compromising their open membership policy—15% of their members in 2010 were non-Jews—they cultivated stronger relationships with local synagogues and developed more religious programming. Their urban campus caters to the city's large Orthodox community, while the suburban campus opens the JCC on Saturdays so that non-religious Jews can spend their leisure time in a Jewish environment.<sup>464</sup>

At the YM-YWHA of Washington Heights, the relationship with neighborhood synagogues has greatly improved since the 1970s, and Orthodox Jews use the facilities more than ever. The Y regularly holds programs related to Judaism, such as community-wide Shabbat dinners and holiday observances; in 2014, when Thanksgiving and the first

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<sup>463</sup> Julie Edgar, "Saving JPM? Public Forum Elicits Ideas, Grassroots Support for JCC," *The Detroit Jewish News*, January 14, 2015, <https://thejewishnews.com/2015/01/14/saving-jpm/>.

<sup>464</sup> Faith and Organizations Project, "Maintaining Vital Connections Between Faith Communities and Their Nonprofits, Jewish Community Center (JCC History)" (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 2010), <http://www.faithandorganizations.umd.edu/pdfs/je-jcc.pdf>.

night of Hannukah coincided, the Y hosted a Thanksgivikuh program that attracted a "capacity crowd.... And it ranged from everybody to the most Orthodox to Dominicans."<sup>465</sup> When asked to explain the success of the Y, Executive Director Martin Englisher responded:

I think the greatness of an institution like this is that we allow people--because we make it comfortable for you to choose what you want to do, and we don't tell you what you should do. And we diversify what we offer so much so, that people really can be involved in choice. As a result, their relationship and their ultimate experience with being part of a community center is so positive that they carry that on for the rest of their life.<sup>466</sup>

If the pluralism and voluntarism achieved by the Jewish Community Center has been at the heart of its success in the postwar period, it remains a powerful institution for reinforcing a particularist Jewish vision of community.

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<sup>465</sup> Debbie Katznelson, interview with Avigail Oren, July 1 2015, in possession of author.

<sup>466</sup> Martin Englisher, interview with Avigail Oren, July 28 2016, in possession of author.