


8-25-2011

Our Jewish Pilgrim Fathers: Louis Brandeis, “Armchair Zionism,” and the Politics of Identity in American Jewry in the Early Zionist Period

Yannick LeJacq

Wesleyan University, ylejacq@wesleyan.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/ujss>

 Part of the [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

LeJacq, Yannick (2011) "Our Jewish Pilgrim Fathers: Louis Brandeis, “Armchair Zionism,” and the Politics of Identity in American Jewry in the Early Zionist Period," *The Undergraduate Journal of Social Studies*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 1.

Available at: <http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/ujss/vol1/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wesleyan Journals and Series at WesScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Undergraduate Journal of Social Studies by an authorized administrator of WesScholar. For more information, please contact dschnaidt@wesleyan.edu, ljohnson@wesleyan.edu.

Yannick LeJacq

Our Jewish Pilgrim Fathers

Louis Brandeis, “Armchair Zionism,” and the Politics of Identity in American Jewry in the Early Zionist Period

On April 29th, 1915, Louis Brandeis, the famous “people’s lawyer” of American progressive politics, stood before a crowd of Reform Rabbis and boldly proclaimed that “there is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry. [...] Indeed, loyalty to America demands rather that each American Jew become a Zionist.”¹ In doing so, he denounced the anti-Zionism of the Reform denomination—the most “respectable” form of Judaism in America—that had acculturated Jewish immigrants for nearly a century with the sentiment that “America is our Zion.”² His reconciliation of Americanism and Zionism, which would come to be known as the “Brandeisian synthesis,” was a decisive turning point for the movement. “More than any other single event,” Walter Laqueur notes, “it was the identification of Louis Brandeis with the movement [...] which made Zionism a political force [in America]. To be a Zionist suddenly became respectable.”³

Analyzing American Zionism through the lens of Louis Brandeis is particularly fruitful for the question of “national identity,” both because he transformed the movement by giving it unprecedented political power, but also because, in many ways, he embodied most dramatically the phenomenon that has variously been referred to as the “anxiety of identity” or “existential

¹ Louis Brandeis, “The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It,” *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg, p. 520.

² Jonathon D. Sarna, “Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement,” *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998), p. 189.

³ Laqueur, Walter, *A History of Zionism*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 160.

ideology” of American Jewry in the early Zionist period.⁴ Furthermore, his ultimate resolution of this anxiety, while not wholly original, emerged as the dominant character of American Jewish identity. By contextualizing Brandeis’s Zionist career within the changing character of American Jewry, we can begin to understand how, facing ethnic, religious, and ideological conflicts, it ultimately coalesced around a type of existential Jewish identity. Pejoratively referred to as “armchair Zionism” by some of its critics (most notably Golda Meir), the Brandeisian synthesis transformed American Jewish identity into a cohesive form of proto-Zionism.

By “proto-Zionism” I mean an incipient “proto-nationalism,” defined by Eric Hobsbawm as “variants of collective which already existed but could be mobilized to fit in with modern states.”⁵ Yet American Zionism is unique in such theoretical terms, for it would remain decidedly incipient due to the existential nature of American Jewish identity. As Melvin Urofsky states, the American Jewish identity (at least in terms of its relationship with Israel) is “the legacy of the Brandeis era. [...] It is far more philanthropic than ideological.” While Israel as a Jewish state “occupies a central place in the minds and hearts of American Jews, it does so as a cultural and emotional symbol” rather than a strictly nationalist one.⁶

Despite Brandeis’s emphatic endorsement of Zionism, he did not come easily to the movement. Inspired by the enthusiasm of progressive Reform Judaism in Germany, his parents had emigrated from Prague seeking economic advancement in the United States. Like the majority of Western-European Jewish immigrants in the 19th century, Brandeis’s family was devoted to achieving success on American terms. And while not necessarily eager to efface their

⁴ Berel Lang, “Hyphenated-Jews and the Anxiety of Identity,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 2005), p. 4. And Shiff, Ofer, *Survival Through Integration: American Reform Jewish Universalism and the Holocaust*, (Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 30.

⁵ Bruce Masters, “The Establishment of the Melkite Catholic *Millet* in 1848 and the Politics of Identity in Tanzimat Syria” in Peter Sluglett (ed.) *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule: Essays in Honour of Abdul-Karim Rafeq* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2010), p. 453.

⁶ Melvin Urofsky, “Zionism and American Politics,” *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 160.

Jewish identity, they were rather unconscious or ambivalent towards it.⁷ In 1905, he demonstrated this tendency to cover his Jewish identity in a speech commemorating New Amsterdam's first Sephardi settlements by echoing Theodore Roosevelt's indictment of "hyphenated Americanism." "Habits of living or thought which tend to keep alive difference of origin," he warned his Jewish audience, "are inconsistent with the American ideal of brotherhood, and are disloyal."⁸ His reticence to accept his Jewish identity due to a fear of "dual loyalties" indicates his enthusiasm for integration.⁹

This was not simply a sentiment of opportunism. The impetus for integration had a strong theological and ideological precedent in Reform Judaism. In the early 19th century, German Jews began immigrating to the United States, carrying with them this new theology which stressed Jewish regeneration through adaptation to the exterior contingencies of Diasporal life. As early

⁷ Halpern, Ben, A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizman, and American Zionism, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 66.

⁸ Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis," Jewish Social Studies, 37, No. 1 (Winter, 1975), p. 18.

⁹ The terminology here is deceptively complicated. "Assimilation," Michael Stanislawski points out, was originally an ideal goal for Jewish social existence in the Diaspora since it implied a degree of adaptability necessary for Jewish survival. However, historians and Jews alike began to realize that the term assumed "an eternal Jewish essence unperturbed by foreign admixtures [which] was precisely to misunderstand and profoundly to caricature Jewish life and culture." By the nineteenth century, it had become something of a "political epithet [for] it meant holding non-Zionist (or anti-Zionist) beliefs [...] defining Jews as members of a religious faith rather than of a nationalistically defined nation." Zionism's frequent argument was that "assimilation" was implicitly anti-Semitic in favoring a viewpoint that would, they believe, bring about the end of the Jewish people. Historians now tend to use "assimilationism," "acculturation" and "integration" somewhat interchangeably to describe those Jews "who were committed to the future of Jewish life and faith in the Diaspora but who rejected or dissented from the Zionist movement." I am inclined to use "integration" for two reasons. First, as Stanislawski notes, "'assimilationism' [...] is often used in a slipshod way, as synonymous with 'assimilation.'" "Acculturation," adopted from Milton Gordon's sociological taxonomy, "projects an ostensibly linear progression from acculturation to 'structural' assimilation, a teleology vastly overgeneralized from a stereotypical reading of American society in the 1950s and early 1960s. Integration is still imperfect given the complexity of the confluence of various factors of identity in Reform Jewish American life (the sheer number of qualifying terms here illustrates this alone), but is ideal given its relative neutrality compared to the alternative terminologies available. Stanislawski, Michael, Zionism and the Fin de Siecle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 7-9.

as 1825, German-Jewish congregations in America had revised their *siddur* (prayer books), purging them of their nationalist elements.¹⁰

Much like the Talmud, the *siddur* had clear proto-Zionist elements. Its standardization of Hebrew prayer offered Jews in Diaspora a vestige of solidarity which transcended their geopolitical distinctions. Most importantly, in this regard, it emphasized “Zion” as the only true Jewish homeland, and thus recognized Diasporal life as *galut* (exile). The prophesied messianic *kibbutz galuyot* (gathering of exiles) in *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel) was awaited with mourning for the loss of the second temple.

The “perpetual mourning” of Synagogue life, David Aberbach notes, saw the weekday as “exile, while on the holy days, the Jews are restored [symbolically] to the land of Israel. In such ways Jewish national identity could be maintained [...] in the fabric of Judaism.”¹¹ Reform Judaism, rooted in enlightenment optimism, had begun to see the departure from *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel) not as a tragic “exile,” but rather Jewry’s “dispersion among nations” in order to lead them “to the true knowledge and worship of God.”¹² In America, Reform’s “land of promise,” it found a religious environment uniquely amenable to this goal.¹³ Reform congregations rapidly adopted Protestant styles of worship, including organs, choirs, mixed-gender seating, vernacular prayers and Rabbinical sermons. Traditional Jewish elements, such as the vestment of the *tallis* and *yarmulke* and Hebraic chanting, were deemed obstinate “blind observance of the ceremonial law,” and thus discarded.¹⁴ Americanism was thus interwoven with Reform theology by the

¹⁰ Meyer, Michael A., *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 231.

¹¹ Aberbach, David, *Jewish Cultural Nationalism: Origins and Influences*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 77.

¹² Naomi W. Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948*, (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003), p. 43.

¹³ Meyer, Michael, *Response to Modernity*, p. 225.

¹⁴ Meyer, Michael, *Response to Modernity*, p. 29. And Silverstein, Alan, *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of American Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930*, (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994), p. 20.

middle of the 19th century.¹⁵ As Rabbi Solomon Freehoff explained nearly a century later, the “love of America among Reform Jews is [...] virtually part of their religion. [...] This Americanism is a living and integral part of the *religious* feeling of the average Reform layman.”¹⁶

Equally important, however, was Reform’s explicit renunciation of Zionism. The mixture of anti-Zionism and Americanism was shown most dramatically in cantor Gustav Poznanski’s famous 1841 address to his newly formed congregation: “This synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy land our Palestine.” In a spectacular “invention of tradition,” to borrow Hobsbawm’s term, he then interpreted Americanization as part of Judaism’s historical continuity: “as our fathers defended with their lives that temple, that city, and that land, so will their sons defend this city, this temple, this land.”¹⁷ Referring to congregations as “temples,” rather than “synagogues” solidified their renunciation of Judaism’s traditional proto-Zionist eschatology. The Jewish identity to which Brandeis was exposed disavowed any vestige of religiosity that appeared incompatible with one’s American identity.

Beginning in 1880, a massive wave of Eastern-European Jewish immigrants transformed the religious, ideological, and demographic character of American Jewry. Fleeing the political anti-Semitism of the pogroms, these Jews were inclined to identify with an ethno-cultural proto-nationalist identity that had previously defined their existence. It was at this time that *Hovevei Zion* (“the lovers of Zion”) and *Poale Zion* (“The Workers of Zion,” a more distinctly Marxist group), two Zionist organizations formed in Eastern Europe in the second half of the 19th century, took root amongst American Jewry. By 1890, *Hovevei Zion* had established centers in

¹⁵ Ellenson, David, *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Modern Jewish Religion and Identity*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), p. 183. And Meyer, Michael, *Response to Modernity*, p. 234.

¹⁶ Cohen, *The Americanization of Zionism*, p. 39.

¹⁷ Meyer, Michael, *Response to Modernity*, p. 234.

every major metropolitan area.¹⁸ Yiddish newspapers were founded and began diffusing Zionist messages amongst the new immigrants.¹⁹ The publication of *The Jewish State* and the subsequent formation of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) in 1896 gave these nascent movement a clear ideology and inspiration.²⁰ Two years later, nearly one hundred Zionist groups convened in New York City to form the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ).²¹ Seeing this new type of Jews as a threat to their integrated status, Reform Jews solidified their distinction in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which affirmed that Jews, at least to them, were “no longer a nation, but a religious community.”²²

By 1900, Thomas Kolsky observes, “American Jewry had clearly become bifurcated.” The two types of Jews defined themselves along approximate ethnic and socioeconomic terms concomitant with their respective ideologies: an acculturated and wealthy “German” Jewry who preferred Americanization, and a lower-class “Russian” one which, fearing the loss of their Judaism in the process of assimilation, remained proto-Zionist.²³ Zionism thus acquired its base

¹⁸ Raider, Mark *The Emergence of American Zionism*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁹ Shlomo Noble, “Pre-Herzlian Zionism in America as Reflected in the Yiddish Press,” *Early History of Zionism in America*, ed. Isidor S. Meyer, (New York: Arno Press, 1977), p. 39. And Hyman B. Grinstein, “Orthodox Judaism and Early Zionism in America,” *Early History of Zionism in America*, p. 224.

²⁰ Marcus, Jacob Rader, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Volume 4 (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 647.

²¹ Raider, Mark, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, p. 13.

²² There is some debate over whether the emergence of national Reform organizations, most notably the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1889 and the Union for American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) in 1873 were really an overt political statement against Zionism, or a religious affirmation of the essential character of Judaism. As Rabbi Kaufman Kohler stated in the keynote address to the Pittsburgh platform, Reform leaders sought to “declare to the world what Judaism is and what Reform means and aims at.” Meyer argues that the platform, though historical seen in light of Zionism as a “document of rejection,” was originally intended as a “positive self-definition.” In light of questions of national identity, however, even a self-affirmation implies, as Edward Said has noted, “the relationship between you and the other.” Reform’s crystallization into more distinctly political organizations and secular Jewish “centers” necessarily involved the “construction of opposites and ‘others,’” its main target understandably being Zionism as the primary opponent to its articulation of Jewish identity. Silverstein, Alan, *Alternatives to Assimilation*, p. 118. Meyer, Michael, *Response to Modernity*, p. 288. Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942-1948*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990), p. 22. And Khalidi, Rashid, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of a Modern National Consciousness*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

²³ Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism*, p. 23.

of support from the latter group by appealing equally to their ethnic politics and traditional theological proto-Zionism.²⁴

From its beginning, the movement knew it needed to convert the Americanized Jewish “elite” of the former group to acquire any political capital in the country. The *Maccabean*, a FAZ English language publication aimed at converting upper-middle class Jews, addressed this in a 1905 article: “if you see a Jew who is not a Zionist, hand him a pamphlet. If you haven’t one with you, hand him an argument.”²⁵ Brandeis, regarded by many Jews as the embodiment of Americanized success, was an understandable target. Herzl’s protégé, Jacob de Haas, immediately began courting Brandeis when he arrived in America in 1902 to head the FAZ. He frequently invited Brandeis to speak at Zionist events, and even sent a journalist from the newspaper he edited, *The Advocate*, to interview Brandeis, apparently only to glean a sympathetic statement for the movement.²⁶

The impetus of Brandeis’s “Zionist conversion” is the subject of great historical debate. For the purpose of this paper, it is more important to recognize that it delineated a profound restatement of Zionism ensconced in an American identity. While Brandeis was skeptical of “dual loyalties” in 1905, he had also begun to hold Eastern European Jewry in high esteem. He sent a copy of his speech that year to his father with a note stating “there is more to hope for in the Russian Jews than from [the] German. They have idealism and reverence.”²⁷ This was reaffirmed when he mediated union strike by Jewish working class immigrants in 1910 in New York’s garment district, noting later his admiration for their “great capacity for placing

²⁴ Raider, Mark, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, p. 14.

²⁵ Cohen, Naomi, *The Americanization of Zionism*, p. 16.

²⁶ Halpern, Ben, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann, and American Zionism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 98-100.

²⁷ Halpern, Ben, *A Clash of Heroes*, p. 95.

themselves in the other fellow's shoes."²⁸ Rather than regarding them as "hyphenated Americans," he began to see these Jews, rather than those of the integrated elite, as the embodiment of the progressive politics he hoped to implement in America. Zionist historians and de Haas himself see these moments as the decisive turning point in Brandeis's ideology, but his statements from this time continue to reflect a personal aversion to affiliating with the movement.²⁹ In 1914, the disorder of World War I led to the creation of the Provisional Executive Committee for Zionist Affairs (PZEC) to replace the disintegrating WZO (which was historically based in Europe), offered Brandeis a position as president, but he remained indecisive. His good friend Horace Kallen later noted that he still "believed that he could not be an American and a Zionist completely."³⁰

Kallen, however, had recently found Zionism as a way to vindicate his Jewish identity by reconciling it with his Americanism. Judaism, he believed, required a "political center" to sustain a "cultural center," without which it faced extinction.³¹ Here he echoed Ahad Ha'am's idea of a "spiritual center" for Judaism in Palestine. Like Solomon Schecter and a number of other recent "elite" converts, Kallen believed that Zionism alone could give Judaism a rightful place in the "symphony of nations," thereby adding both to the "harmony of civilization" and the "American symphony."³² Schecter said this more clearly in his 1906 essay "Zionism: A Statement," in which he described the movement as "the great bulwark against assimilation." He was clear to distinguish this from Americanization, though he warned that "defiance of all Jewish thought and [...] disloyalty to Israel's history and mission" would lead to this feared "loss of identity."³³ His

²⁸ Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis," p. 22.

²⁹ Halpern, Ben, A Clash of Heroes, p. 99.

³⁰ Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis Brandeis," p. 27.

³¹ Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis Brandies," p. 28.

³² Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis Brandeis," p. 27.

³³ Solomon Schecter, "Zionism: A Statement," The Zionist Idea, p. 506.

reference to “defiance” illustrates an emerging dissatisfaction with Reform’s alleged universalism, which Schecter had come to see as little more than “theological anti-Semitism.”³⁴ An increasing number of elite “Western” Jews in America were beginning to reevaluate Reform’s zealous Americanization as a dangerous form of assimilation that presaged the dissolution of their identity into the American “melting pot.”

Kallen and Schecter had thus come to embrace a new form of Americanism, predicated upon a pluralism that could mitigate integration’s effects on their identity. This idea would prove most influential to Brandeis. Shortly after meeting with Kallen to discuss his PZC nomination, Brandeis accepted the position, and began to echo his philosophy. In a July 4th speech in 1915 he adopted the idea of an “American symphony,” saying that “in differentiation, not in uniformity, lies the path to progress.”³⁵ In his famous address to the Reform rabbis, entitled “The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It,” he argued that Zionism, by preserving Jewish distinction, would ultimately empower them as *Americans*: “every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine [...] will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so.”³⁶ Interestingly, his wedding of Zionism with his progressive politics also legitimated Labor Zionism, which had previously been seen as the most radical branch of the movement due to its secularist and socialist leanings.³⁷ In doing so, he transformed the most marginalized (ideologically speaking) Zionist organization into its dominant American form.³⁸

Some have argued that Brandeis’s acceptance of Zionism was nothing more than political opportunism. Howard Taft, bitter about Brandeis’s nomination to the Supreme Court, said that he had “‘metaphorically’ recircumcised” himself to acquire a political following amongst American

³⁴ Cohen, Naomi, The Americanization of Zionism, p. 58.

³⁵ Sarah Schmidt, “The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis,” p. 29.

³⁶ Louis Brandeis, “The Jewish Problem, How To Solve It,” The Zionist Idea, p. 520.

³⁷ Cohen, Naomi, The Americanization of Zionism, pp. 57-61.

³⁸ Raider, Mark, The Emergence of American Zionism, p. 25.

Jewry.³⁹ Either way, positioned as it was within Americanism, however, this Zionism was understood in terms of American diversity, rather than a strictly nationalist identity.

Ideas of ethno-cultural affiliation, which lent themselves to nationalism, could nevertheless persist in such a model. Richard Gottheil, one of the first western elite Jews to accept the movement, had justified an American Zionism by invoking an primordial idea of Jewish “blood”: “there is not such thing as an anti-Zionist [...] how can anyone in whose veins flow Jewish blood oppose the movement?”⁴⁰ Such a statement suggests a return to the kind of diffuse proto-Zionism of traditional Diasporal Jewry.

Unlike that of traditional Diasporal life, however, this proto-Zionism had clear boundaries. While international Zionists were eager to cast Brandeis as their “new Herzl,” they would soon realize that, as an American Jew, he did not embody their values.⁴¹ Following the end of World War I and the Balfour declaration, the WZO was reconstituted in Britain and Brandeis’s commitment was, again, called into question.⁴²

The clash in Zionist leadership that ensued, Ben Halpern observes, concerned the question of “whether the political era of Zionism had ended.”⁴³ Brandeis proclaimed at the 1920 WZO conference in London that “the work of the great Herzl was completed at San Remo.” By legitimating the Jews’ rights as a sovereign political body, he believed that the world powers had “done all that they could do. The rest lies with us.”⁴⁴ For Brandeis, this meant deferring political autonomy to the *Yishuv* in Palestine, offering only necessary economic development. Holding faith in the world powers and “our Jewish pilgrim fathers” in the *Yishuv*, he felt that intervention

³⁹ Marcus, Jacob Rader, United States Jewry, p. 694.

⁴⁰ Cohen, The Americanization of Zionism, p. 37.

⁴¹ Halpern, Ben, A Clash of Heroes, p. 108.

⁴² Halpern, Ben, A Clash of Heroes, p. 108.

⁴³ Halpern, Ben, A Clash of Heroes, p. 233.

⁴⁴ Halpern, Ben, The Idea Of The Jewish State, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 184.

on the WZO's part would be little more than a "big business" corporate pattern of development, which would disgrace his progressive politics.⁴⁵ Supporters of Chaim Weizmann, the emerging European leader of the WZO, and his allies accused Brandeis of supporting "Zionism without Zion," and lacking a "Jewish heart."⁴⁶ To Weizmann, Brandeis's ideology was little more than glorified philanthropy, and was thus anathema to their political objectives.⁴⁷ Facing an impasse, Brandeis resigned from the movement after a 1921 conference in Cleveland, effectively ceding leadership to the Weizmann branch.⁴⁸

Scholars traditionally tend to view this moment as less of an ideological than a tactical or political rift. Halpern argues throughout his work, for example, that the debate concerned "specific organizational reforms," not a "fundamental change" in Zionism's mission.⁴⁹ In light of the question of American Jewish identity, however, this mutual antagonism, to borrow Urofsky's phrasing, "involved a struggle for the Jewish soul of Zionism."⁵⁰ In these critical years, two distinct forms of Jewish identity and nationalism crystallized—an existential proto-nationalism embedded in Americanism, and a devoutly Herzlian ideology eager to cast off the trappings of *galut*. As Jacob Marcus notes, the final confrontation in Cleveland was a reenactment of the ethnic conflicts that had divided American Jewry, and ultimately distinguished this Jewish identity from its European counterparts: "In a way that conflict was an ethnic one. Weizmann spoke as a Jew who had suffered under the Russians; Brandeis was first and last an 'American.'"⁵¹

⁴⁵ Marcus, Jacob, United States Jewry, pp. 692-693.

⁴⁶ Laqueur, Walter, A History of Zionism, p. 459.

⁴⁷ Melvin Urofsky, "Zionism in American Politics," The Americanization of the Jews, p. 156.

⁴⁸ Louis Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It," The Zionist Idea, p. 516.

⁴⁹ Halpern, Ben, The Idea Of The Jewish State, p. 185, and A Clash Of Heroes, p. 246.

⁵⁰ Melvin Urofsky, "Zionism in American Politics," The Americanization of the Jews, p. 156.

⁵¹ Marcus, Jacob, United States Jewry, p. 691.

The “Brandeis era” had the potential to turn America into the locus of world Zionism’s political power and organization. Recognizing this opportunity, Brandeis faced a choice between his two identities. For Weizmann, the choice was clear; he had already forsaken his professional career for the movement.⁵² For these Europeans, Laqueur notes, “Zionism was their whole life. For Brandeis [and the Americans] it was just one of several occupations, albeit an important one.”⁵³ At this point, Brandeis had been a Supreme Court Justice for nearly five years, and the political gains he had won for Zionism were largely through private negotiations and philanthropy rather than the kind of massive social movement the Weizmann group hoped to engender.⁵⁴ Like American Jewry more broadly, he did not see life in the United States as *galut*, and was thus reticent to jettison his civic identity.

In a telling example of the difference between American Jewish identity and that of more traditional political Zionism, Golda Meir, an immigrant from Eastern Europe with little exposure to mainstream American culture, was radicalized during this same time period.⁵⁵ Joining the *Poale Zion* branch in Milwaukee in 1915—the beginning of the “Brandeis era”—she was soon dissatisfied with America’s “parlor Zionists,” explaining to her family and fiancée that she saw “no future in American for the movement.” By 1917, she had decided to make *aliyah* to Palestine, much to her family’s dismay. Her sister wrote to her asking “don’t you think there is a middle ground for idealism here on the spot?” In 1918, she aborted a pregnancy, explaining to her sister that her “Zionist obligations simply did not leave room for a child.”⁵⁶ The year Brandeis defected from the WZO, choosing his life in America over the movement, she arrived

⁵² Halpern, Ben, *A Clash Of Heroes*, p. 244.

⁵³ Laqueur, Walter, p. 461.

⁵⁴ Halpern, Ben, *A Clash of Heroes*, p. 234.

⁵⁵ Michael Brown notes that “the America” to which Golda Meir was exposed “was immigrant Jewish America; and her American culture was a rather thin veneer.” Michael Brown, “The American Element in the Rise of Golda Meir 1906-1929,” *Jewish History*, 6, No. ½, (1992), p. 37.

⁵⁶ Burkett, Elinor, *Golda*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), pp. 36-42.

in Palestine, having surrendered her American passport with “no nostalgia, no regrets.”⁵⁷ Literally renouncing her family and civic identity in America, Meir’s example indicates the incompatibility of Zionism with Americanism as it emerged from its nascent proto-nationalism. Naomi Cohen argues that with the end of the “glorious days of Louis Brandeis, American Zionism remained little more than a comfortable Zionism” that presaged an emerging “Palestinianism” in the movement. This trend deradicalized Zionism for many Jews in the United States, and thus co-opted many of its non-Zionist and anti-Zionist opponents who remained spiritually attached to the *Yishuv*.⁵⁸ But in the context of Brandeis’s changing position in and attachment to the movement, the drift into “Palestinianism” might instead be seen as a continuation of his Americanization of the movement. By choosing the “middle ground” Meir held in such disdain, the majority of American Zionists preserved the movement as an uniquely existential proto-nationalism.

Brandeis, possibly anticipating a criticism like Weizmann’s, frequently emphasized that his Zionism was not philanthropy alone, arguing instead that a detached role as a “stockholder” actually allowed the *Yishuv* to develop more progressive political structures.⁵⁹ In large part, this idealism came from a wedding of the *halutz*, the *Yishuv*’s pioneers, with the classic myth of the American frontier. In his 1915 speech he invoked this myth of “our Jewish pilgrim fathers” bringing civilization to the frontier in Palestine, which had been rendered “treeless and sterile because of man’s misrule.” He went as far as to say “in the Jewish colonies of Palestine, there are no Jewish criminals,” separating the “civilized” Jewish pioneer from the “savage” Arab native.⁶⁰ Much of this excitement was a response to Labor Zionism’s tireless propaganda for

⁵⁷ Michael Brown, “The American Element in the Rise of Golda Meir 1906-1929,” p. 38.

⁵⁸ Cohen, Naomi, *The Americanization of Zionism*, pp. 7, 38.

⁵⁹ Sarah Schmidt, “The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis,” p. 24.

⁶⁰ Louis Brandeis, “The Jewish Problem: How To Solve It,” *The Zionist Idea*, p. 519.

precisely this frontier myth. Recognizing that American Jews would not renationalize to Palestine, Labor Zionism had moderated its platform to serve as a “proxy” for Palestinian development. “Palestinianism” was thus not an anomaly in American Jewish history, nor was it a departure from Brandeisian Zionism. It was rather a continuation of an “armchair Zionism,” whereby, Mark Raider notes, “the *haluzim* and the *yishuv*” could be viewed “through the prism of their Americanized identity.”⁶¹

Ofer Shiff has found in his work that philanthropy towards Palestine was, historically, a means to maintain Jewish solidarity in the Diaspora by compartmentalizing it.⁶² In America, where Jews suddenly appreciated integration, philanthropy was reinterpreted as a way to buttress their American identity.⁶³ While not entirely original, Brandeis’s synthesis between Americanism and Zionism turned this into the mainstream view of American Jewry. Despite his qualifications to the contrary, Zionism was accepted amongst American Jewry as a form of philanthropy. Zionism, for them, would remain an existential variation of proto-nationalism. Reform’s 1937 Columbus Platform illustrates this dilemma well when, discussing Israel, it announced, “Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body.” While it was widely read as a reacceptance of political Zionism, the platform retained an ambiguous connection between “Israel” and “Judaism,” refusing to mention Zionism by name in the statement.⁶⁴

However, this reference to a sense of “primordial” Jewish affiliation with Israel, similar to Gottheil’s idea of “Jewish blood,” retained an element of proto-nationalism in American Jewish identity, aptly shown by their continued and vested interest in the construction and survival of a Jewish state. Despite her personal judgment, Golda Meir eventually realized the

⁶¹ Raider, Mark, *The Emergence of American Zionism*, pp. 77-81.

⁶² Ofer Shiff, *Survival Through Integration*, p. 22.

⁶³ Ofer Shiff, “At the Crossroad between Traditionalism and Americanism: Nineteenth-Century Philanthropic Attitudes of American Jews toward Palestine,” *Jewish History*, 9, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): pp. 45-47.

⁶⁴ Greenstein, Howard R., *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism*, (Michigan: Edwards Brothers, 1981), p. 29.

necessity of this type of “armchair Zionism.” By 1928, she had devoted much of her time to fundraising campaigns amongst American Jewry, calling on the “genuine pioneers of America” for their support.⁶⁵ It is clear that these “genuine pioneers” envisioned their relationship to Israel differently than the *haluzim*. This type of “existential ideology” does not fit into standard theories of nationalism easily, yet history has shown it to be a persuasive form of an “imagined community.” The Brandeisian synthesis is thus demonstrative of the peculiar and adaptable nature of Jewish identity.

⁶⁵ Brown, Michael, *The Israeli-American Connection: Its Roots in the Yishuv, 1914-1945*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), p. 178.

WORKS CITED

BOOKS:

Aberbach, David, *Jewish Cultural Nationalism: Origins and Influences*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

Brown, Michael, *The Israeli-American Connection: Its Roots in the Yishuv, 1914-1945*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.

Cohen, Naomi W., *The Americanization of Zionism, 1897-1948*, Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003.

Ellenson, David, *Between Tradition and Culture: The Dialectics of Modern Jewish Religion and Identity*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994.

Greenstein, Howard R., *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism*, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, 1981.

Halpern, Ben, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizman, and American Zionism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Halpern, Ben, *The Idea of the Jewish State*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Hertzberg, Arthur, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997.

Khalidi, Rashid, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of a Modern National Consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Laqueur, Walter, *A History of Zionism*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972.

Thomas A. Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism: The American Council for Judaism, 1942-1948*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990.

Meyer, Isidor S., ed., *Early History of Zionism in America*, Ann Arbor: American Jewish Historical Society, 1958.

Marcus, Jacob Rader, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Vol. 4, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1989.

Meyer, Michael A., *Judaism within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion*, Detroit, Wayne State University, 2001.

Raider, Mark. *The Emergence of American Zionism*, New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Shiff, Ofer, *Survival Through Integration: American Reform Jewish Universalism and the Holocaust*, Boston: Brill, 2005.

Silverstein, Alan, *Alternatives to Assimilation: The Response of American Reform Judaism to American Culture, 1840-1930*, Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994.

Stanislawski, Michael, *Zionism and the Fin de Siecle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.

ARTICLES:

Berel Lang, "Hyphenated-Jews and the Anxiety of Identity," *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 2005): pp. 1-15

Bruce Masters, "The Establishment of the Melkite Catholic Millet in 1848 and the Politics of Identity in Tanzimat Syria" in Peter Sluglett (ed.) *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule: Essays in Honour of Abdul-Karim Rafeq* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2010): 453-71.

Sarah Schmidt, "The Zionist Conversion of Louis D. Brandeis," *Jewish Social Studies*, 37, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 18-34.

Jonathon D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, 188-205. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998.

Ofer Shiff, "At the Crossroad Between Traditionalism and Americanism: Nineteenth-Century Philanthropic Attitudes of American Jews Toward Palestine," *Jewish History*, 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 35-50.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:

Arthur Goren, "Spiritual Zionists and Jewish Sovereignty," *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, 165-192. New York: New York University Press, 1995.

Evyatar Friesel, "The Meaning of Zionism and Its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements," *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, 175-187. Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1998.

Meyer, Michael A., *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Sarna, Jonathn, *American Judaism: A History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Jonathon Sarna, "The Evolution of the American Synagogue," *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, 215-229. New York: New York University Press, 1995.