

# Soviet Jewish Emigration and Holocaust Collective Memory

## American Jewish Organizations' Independent Foreign Policy, 1966-1976

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From 1967 to 1990, more than a quarter of the Jews who lived in the Soviet Union emigrated, fleeing the Soviet government's policies of forced assimilation. Their journeys from the Soviet Union to Europe, the United States, and Israel became important and divisive political issues for Israel and the American Jewish community. American Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee (AJC), were essential to the world-wide Soviet Jewry advocacy movement. The Israeli government, through the covert Liaison Bureau, was instrumental in equipping American Jewish organizations with the resources and motivation to elevate the Soviet Jewry issue to the tops of their agendas in the 1960s. However, by the early 1970s, American Jewish organizations charted an independent course of action, both from Israeli directives and US foreign policy—a remarkable deviation from the established pattern of American Jewish deference to the objectives of the Israeli government. This divergence in American Jewish and Israeli strategic prioritization vis-à-vis Soviet Jews was due to the development of American Jewish Holocaust consciousness in the late 1960s, distinct from Holocaust memory in Israel.

Part I outlines American Jewish organizational advocacy and the gradual shift away from universalist interpretations of the “lessons” of the Holocaust in the early to mid-1960s. Part II discusses the Israeli involvement in American Jewish mobilization for Soviet Jewry through Israel's Liaison Bureau. Part III analyzes the emergence of distinct Holocaust collective memories in the US and Israel in the 1960s. Part IV argues that the development of American Jewish Holocaust consciousness in the late 1960s led American Jewish organizations to form independent foreign policy objectives to aid Soviet Jews.

### American Jewish Advocacy Pre-1967: From Universalism to Particularism

Immediately after World War II, American Jewish advocacy centered on solidarity with oppressed groups, extending to non-Jews the “lessons” derived from the Holocaust. In this article's analysis of American Jewish organizations, the central focus is on the AJC as the epitome of the American Jewish establishment and as a pertinent

case study of the ways in which shifts in Jewish identity resulted in concrete policy and organizational change. The AJC was founded in 1906 as a “paternalistic committee of sixty American Jews, horrified by the persecution of Jews in Russia” in the pogroms of 1905.<sup>1</sup> After World War II, the AJC committed to the battle against domestic prejudice, asserting an active role in “promoting the well-being of our society [...because] protecting and enhancing the rights of Jews required us to be involved with the rights of other groups as well.”<sup>2</sup> The AJC had an elite constituency and traditions of “controlling emotionalism” and quiet diplomacy with government officials.<sup>3</sup> The AJC also commissioned scholarly research and provided a forum for engagement with the central issues confronting Americans and Jews after World War II. The AJC's annual *American Jewish Year Book*, monthly *Commentary Magazine*, and hundreds of other publications

1 Jonathan D. Sarna, foreword to *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1945-2006*, by Marianne Rachel Sanua (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2007), ix.

2 Bertram H. Gold, “Critical Choices for AJC at Home and Abroad,” in American Jewish Committee, “The American Jewish Committee's Seventieth Anniversary Meeting Proceedings,” May 1976, 58. The universalist slant of the AJC is clear in their self-description as “this country's pioneer human relations organization [...] seek[ing] improved human relations for all men everywhere.” See “News from the Committee” (New York: American Jewish Committee, February 23, 1971), 2, AJC Digital Archives.

3 “Controlling emotionalism” was a goal for the American Jewish Committee since the end of World War II, when Jewish organizations were deliberating on the appropriate response to the Holocaust. In this vein, a 1951 Executive Committee Meeting concluded that, regarding German rearmament, the AJC “deplored the emotionalism evidenced by some Jewish groups on this subject, and deemed it advisable that we take leadership in educating the Jewish community to a more objective attitude on this subject.” “Problem of Germany,” AJC Executive Committee Minutes (New York: American Jewish Committee, May 6, 1951), 11, AJC Digital Archive. Emotional responses were deemed irrational and non-strategic, in addition to showing Jews as different, other, or alien through their connection to a history beyond American shores. Also see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 98, 305.

enabled the AJC to disseminate information and inform the public of certain debates and arguments.<sup>4</sup> In this way, these publications provide a window into the year-to-year change of organizational stances within the AJC.<sup>5</sup>

The organizational change in the AJC from solidarity with the civil rights movements to the international effort on behalf of Soviet Jews can be viewed—in terms of Holocaust collective memory scholarship—as a shift from universalist to particularist applications of the “lessons” of the Holocaust. After World War II, competing historical camps emerged with differing conceptions of the legacy of the Holocaust, its ownership, and its victims.<sup>6</sup> Particularism—championed by Saul Friedländer in “On the Possibility of the Holocaust: An Approach to a Historical Synthesis”—stressed the uniqueness of the Jewish experience of isolation in a hostile world, and the historical specificity of the circumstances surrounding the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> Given this understanding of the Holocaust,

described by Yehuda Bauer as an event that “happened to a particular people for particular reasons at a particular time,” particularists were motivated to fight for the establishment of an ethnic national state for the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, universalism—supported by Raul Hilberg’s “The Significance of the Holocaust”—viewed the Holocaust as a crime against humanity.<sup>9</sup> In the early Cold War era, universalists strove for civil rights and human rights guarantees.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, organizations such as the AJC focused on initiatives including Jewish-black solidarity and advocating for the inclusion of human rights clauses in the United Nations Charter. “Lessons” were drawn from the memory of Jewish suffering during World War II which mandated action and advocacy for the protection of rights in general, applying the memory of Jewish struggle to all those oppressed.

At the same time that a universalistic interpretation of Jewish suffering was pervasive, most American Jews focused on assimilating into US society; assimilation was well served by universalistic interpretations that elided ethnic and cultural difference. The post-war McCarthy-era presented a challenge to Jewish assimilation because of the powerful perception of Jewish association with Communism. The AJC was especially adroit at combatting the image of American Jewish “dual loyalty”—either loyal to leftist political affiliations or to the State of Israel, over loyalty to the US. In this effort, the AJC publicly offered to share its files—many compiled by Jewish historian Lucy Dawidowicz, working as the AJC anti-communism expert—with the House Un-American Activities Committee “so that only bona fide Jewish Communists would be called to testify.”<sup>11</sup> Dawidowicz also wrote extensively in Jewish publications denouncing communism as incompatible with Judaism. In this vein, Dawidowicz condemned Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, claiming that “one could in good conscience oppose the death penalty for the Rosenbergs only if one also opposed it for Hermann Göring,” a leading member of the Nazi Party.<sup>12</sup> By equating the Rosenbergs to Göring,

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4 The AJC also sponsored the major multi-author, seven-volume *Studies in Prejudice* in 1950. American social science was tasked with developing “antidotes” to the disease of prejudice. Produced through a partnership between Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s Institute for Social Research and UC Berkeley’s Public Opinion Study Group, *Studies in Prejudice* claimed that American social science was particularly capable of diagnosing and combating anti-Semitism, particularly through a social-psychological heuristic. Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 32.

5 The transformation of *Commentary* is especially noteworthy. Founded in 1945, *Commentary* “prided itself on publishing a range of left-liberal material germane to its primarily Jewish American intellectual readership.” In the 1960s, *Commentary* became “one of the primary publications where racial liberalism would gain a staunch neoconservative tenor. After the Six Day War in 1967, *Commentary* became a forum for pro-Israel neo-conservatism and drew the establishment line for the Soviet Jewry movement. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine*, 65. In 2007, *Commentary* became fully independent from the AJC. Nathan Abrams, *Norman Podhoretz and Commentary Magazine: The Rise and Fall of the Neocons* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 292-3.

6 Natan Sznajder, *Jewish Memory and The Cosmopolitan Order: Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Condition* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2011), 111.

7 Saul Friedländer, “On the Possibility of the Holocaust: An Approach to a Historical Synthesis,” in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*, ed. Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 1-21. Particularism can be divided into two sub-camps, between intentionalists and functionalists. Intentionalists argue that the intent of the Nazis to completely eliminate the Jews makes the Holocaust unique in history. For the intentionalist view, see Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 31; Functionalists view the uniqueness of the Holocaust in terms of the distinctive bureaucratic and technological methods of destruction

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employed by the Nazis. For the functionalist perspective, see Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 6-7, 22-35.

8 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 67.

9 Shaul Magid, *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 189-199. For the universalist perspective, see Raul Hilberg, “The Significance of the Holocaust” in *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy and Genocide*, ed. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1980) 95-102.

10 Sznajder, *Jewish Memory and The Cosmopolitan Order*, 111.

11 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 95.

12 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “The Rosenberg Case: ‘Hate-America’

Dawidowicz asserted that Communists were as much of an enemy to Jews as were the Nazis, and functionally aligned the AJC with US Cold War priorities, mitigating doubts about Jewish loyalty to the US.

Similarly, American Jewish Zionist inclinations were viewed as a sign of disloyalty to the US and a threat to assimilation. Upon Israel's independence, the AJC coolly reminded the Israeli government that the "citizens of the United States are Americans and citizens of Israel are Israelis," and that the AJC would be pleased to work with the new-born country on its "framework of national interests," in which "national" does not refer to the global Jewish nation.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, in Dawidowicz's defense of Zionism in the American Jewish community, she couched her arguments in invocations of American Jews' rights as Americans. She compared American Jewish Zionism to the way in which "Americans of Italian origin pressure the Government [...] to admit Italians to this country."<sup>14</sup> Dawidowicz clarified that sympathy among Italians "does not mean that Italian-Americans are acting as agents of Italy," nor does American Jewish interest in Israel trade-off with loyalty to the US.<sup>15</sup>

The Soviet Jewry campaign must be analyzed in the broader context of American Jewish activism in the 1960s and 1970s. American Jews had deep ties to the civil rights movement, a manifestation of the universalist interpretations of Jewish history and suffering. However, by the mid-1960s, assimilationism at times conflicted with Jewish solidarity with the black community. Black-Jewish solidarity reached its peak in Freedom Summer in 1964, when three civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney—two young Jews from New York and a black man from Mississippi—were kidnapped and murdered in Mississippi.<sup>16</sup>

The civil rights movement relocated to northern cities and suburbs in the mid-1960s—campaigning against *de facto* segregation in housing and education—which signaled the end to a decade of collaboration between Jews and blacks.<sup>17</sup> Sociologist Nathan Glazer argued in *Commentary* in 1964 that the civil rights movement's refocusing in northern urban centers encouraged "the Negro masses [to] become [...] more militant in their own interests," such that Jewish leaders were confronted "with demands from Negro organizations that [...] cannot serve as the basis of a common effort."<sup>18</sup> Glazer characterized this "Negro revolution" as threatening "subgroup solidarity," and the very existence of "American community as we have known it."<sup>19</sup> The period of cooperation highlighted by Freedom Summer was soon overshadowed by riots in northern cities, including New York, in which Jewish-owned stores were targets of burning and looting.<sup>20</sup> Glazer's analysis prophesied the end of the "golden age" of black-Jewish relations and the beginning of open hostility in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn.<sup>21</sup>

In the summer of 1967, New York City's central Board of Education experimented with local control of school boards, delegating to the largely African American Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn the opportunity to choose its own school leadership. The local school board claimed the right to hire and fire its teachers, many of whom were Jewish. The ensuing clash pitted the mostly white and majority-Jewish United Federation of Teachers (UFT) against the black school board.<sup>22</sup> Anonymous anti-Semitic leaflets were distributed at some schools, and in response, the UFT made a half-million copies of the leaflets to spread awareness

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Weapon," *New Leader* 35 (22 December 1952): 13.

- 13 Michael N. Barnett, *The Star and the Stripes: A History of the Foreign Policies of American Jews* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 147. In this vein, Dawidowicz insisted that "Israel [...] withdraw its gratuitous conferring of Israeli citizenship upon all Jews outside its borders." Israel's attempt to extend citizenship to every Jew in the world would have been the ultimate confirmation of Jewish American dual allegiance to Israel and to the US. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, "A Jew Attacks Zionism," review of *What Price Israel*, by Alfred M. Lilienthal, *New Leader*, January 4, 1954, 26.
- 14 Dawidowicz, "A Jew Attacks Zionism," 25.
- 15 Dawidowicz, "A Jew Attacks Zionism," 25-6. Dawidowicz defended Jewish Zionists as "exercis[ing] a privilege available to all citizens in a democracy like ours by expressing their views," but still described their support for Israel as "immoral," in so far as it mirrored the position of Communists—the true threat to American Jewish assimilation—and demanded "a more critical and objective appraisal of Israel's policies and actions."
- 16 Members of the local White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, the Neshoba County Sheriff's Office and the Philadelphia,

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Mississippi Police Department were involved in the incident. "Murder in Mississippi," *PBS*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/freedomssummer-murder/>.

- 17 Jack Salzman and Cornel West, *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 174.
- 18 Nathan Glazer, "Negroes and Jews: The New Challenge to Pluralism," *Commentary* 38, no. 6 (1964): 30.
- 19 Nathan Glazer, "Effects of Emerging Urban-Suburban and Anti-Segregation Developments on Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 41, no. 1 (September 20, 1964): 64.
- 20 Salzman and West, *Struggles in the Promised Land*, 111; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 173.
- 21 In July 1966, Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), issued a call for "Black Power." Many Jews understood this slogan to mean that *only* blacks could participate in the movement for black liberation. Chaim Isaac Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 106.
- 22 Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine*, 114-5.

and win support for its cause. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued a report announcing that anti-Semitism in the New York school system was at a “crisis level.”<sup>23</sup> For this reason, the departure of Jewish organizational support for the civil rights movement was intertwined with in fears of anti-Semitism.

A perceived resurgence of anti-Semitism in the late 1960s aided in the emergence of collective Holocaust memory; Jewish critiques of the civil rights movement and policy-driven structural interventions like affirmative action and welfare in the pages of *Commentary* were clothed in terms that “advance[ed] free market ideologies of individual meritocracy as the properly American alternative to policies figured as ‘reverse racism’ or ‘affirmative discrimination,’” and justified “by the Cold War challenge of Soviet tyranny and the specter of the Holocaust.”<sup>24</sup>

Reflecting on former Jewish-black solidarity at the AJC’s Seventieth Anniversary celebration in May 1976, Executive Vice President of the AJC, Bertram Gold, justified the split from the civil rights movement on the grounds that the AJC would fail to fulfil its leadership function “if we ignore the legitimate fears [...] of Jews who are victimized by violence and affected by the demands for greater power by the Negro community at the expense of hard-won gains made by many individual Jews.”<sup>25</sup> The AJC could no longer assume that what was good for blacks was automatically also good for Jews. As such, Gold “assume[d] that the big problem today has become largely the adequacy of resources, rather than the legal right to their possession regardless of race, religion or color,” and thus the AJC should target “new areas of concern,” independent of the civil rights movement.<sup>26</sup> Further, the Jewish break from the civil rights movement must also be considered in context of a widespread disillusionment with an idealized image of America, highlighted by the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 and the Vietnam War. Peter Novick’s *The Holocaust in American Life* described how Americans ceased imagining themselves as a nation. Instead, “‘we’ [...] was used to refer to smaller entities, or entities that crossed national boundaries: ‘we blacks,’ ‘we

women,’ ‘we gays,’ ‘we Jews.’”<sup>27</sup> In this way, Jewish activism earlier projected towards the civil rights movement was transferred to more Jewish-centric causes, such as the struggle for Soviet Jewish emigration.

### The Soviet Jewry Movement Before 1967: The Liaison Bureau and Israeli Influence

The Soviet Jewry movement is a vital lens through which to identify and analyze the American Jewish shift from universalist activism to particularist causes. A scholarly debate exists concerning the extent to which the Israeli government orchestrated the activities and efforts of the Soviet Jewry advocacy movement in the US. Some scholars, such as Daniel Elazar, argue that the Soviet Jewry movement was native to the US.<sup>28</sup> Others, such as historians Howard Morley Sachar and Yaacov Ro’i, argue that Israel was wholly instrumental to the success of the movement.<sup>29</sup> From the 1950s to early 1970s, the Israeli government, through the activities of the Liaison Bureau or *Lishkat Hakesher*—a clandestine Israeli-funded operation—was able to encourage and heavily influence American Jewish activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry. The Liaison Bureau persuaded American Jewish leaders of the importance of the Soviet Jewish cause in two ways. The first method involved demonstrating that the condition of Soviet Jewry was a particularistic Jewish concern, distinct from general oppression of minority groups in the Soviet Union. The second method included the Bureau linking the plight of the Soviet Jews to the memory of the Holocaust.

The Liaison Bureau’s first tactic was deployed through the dissemination of information beneficial to the Soviet Jewish cause. Information about the condition of life for Jews in the USSR was readily available throughout the 1950s.<sup>30</sup> The AJC published fact sheets, such as the

23 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 172; Henry Raymond, “Crisis-Level Anti-Semitism Found Here by B’nai B’rith,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1969, 1, 51.

24 Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine*, 117. See Norman Podhoretz, “Now, Instant Zionism,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1974; Norman Podhoretz, “My Negro Problem--And Ours,” *Commentary* 35, no. 2 (1963): 93-101; Nathan Glazer, “The Exposed American Jew,” *Commentary* 59, no. 6 (1975): 25-30.

25 Bertram Gold, “Report of AJC Executive VP,” AJC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes (New York: American Jewish Committee, October 25, 1968), 2, AJC Digital Archive; See also Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 186-7.

26 Gold, “Critical Choices for AJC at Home and Abroad,” 58.

27 Novick considers Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in the context of the inward-shift of the American Jewish political consciousness in the late 1960s. Novick clarifies that cross-national identifications are not new, but rather “the balance shifted sharply in the direction of particular identities, as opposed to ‘all-American’ identity.” Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 188-9. See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

28 Daniel Judah Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), 111.

29 Howard Morley Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 906-909; Yaacov Ro’i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1948-1967* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 343.

30 Information regarding Soviet Jewish life was received mainly through the Israeli Foreign Minister. Simon Segal, “The Situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union: An Overview,”

1953 “What is Behind the Kremlin’s Latest March of Crime,” but the American Jewish establishment had not yet seriously considered how to create change for Soviet Jews.<sup>31</sup> Mainstream American Jewish organizations were still mostly concerned with effecting change domestically. Moreover, American Jewish organizations, including the AJC, were “unconvinced of the special nature of anti-Jewish discrimination in the USSR.”<sup>32</sup> These organizations considered Soviet anti-Semitism to be “an important facet of the Soviet challenge to democracy” and a unifying trait of the “anti-American bloc,” rather than “conventional Jew-hatred.”<sup>33</sup>

Contrastingly, the Israeli government was acutely concerned with Soviet Jewry. An AJC briefing memorandum in 1963 recognized that “[i]n addition to normal diplomatic channels, the Israelis have a personal interest in their co-religionists and, when possible, communicate with the Jews directly.”<sup>34</sup> To act on this ‘personal interest,’ the Israeli government established the organization first known as the “Office without a Name,” later called the Liaison Bureau, in the early 1950s.<sup>35</sup> According to Nehemiah Levanon, who led the Bureau from the late 1960s to 1980s, the Bureau’s strategy was to “alert the West to the plight of the Jews in the USSR, and to encourage pressure on Soviet leadership to change Soviet treatment of the Jewish minority.”<sup>36</sup> Given the strict Soviet emigration policy in the 1950s, the Bureau’s first objective was to increase contact with Soviet Jews in order to foster Jewish identity and connection to Israel so that, if emigration policy were to change, Soviet Jews would look to Israel as a haven.<sup>37</sup> The Liaison Bureau created a

second branch, code-named Bar, in 1955 that operated in Western countries, with the mission of persuading Western governments of the importance of the Soviet Jewish issue. Bar emphasized to American Jews the extent of Soviet mistreatment of Jews, and that unlike other people and groups, Jews were being denied individual and collective rights guaranteed under the Soviet Constitution.<sup>38</sup> This strategy enabled American Jews to view Soviet anti-Semitism beyond an abstract “Soviet challenge to democracy” and as a real force impacting lives of Jews and the survival of the Jewish people.<sup>39</sup>

The Liaison Bureau understood that tapping into the advocacy power of American Jewish organizations was vital to achieving their goals, given the connection of American Jews to the US government, and the US government’s leverage over the Soviet Union. The AJC was perhaps the most cooperative American Jewish organization, particularly in facilitating quiet diplomacy between the Bureau and the US government.<sup>40</sup> In motivating American Jewish organizational advocacy, the Liaison Bureau kept Israel’s involvement secret. Beginning in the 1960s, the Bureau sent emissaries to several US cities, who worked to recruit American Jewish leaders to Bar.<sup>41</sup> These American Jewish recruits, such as Moshe Decter, were key actors in the American Jewish movement on behalf of Soviet Jews, but did not publically acknowledge their ties to the Bureau or to Israel.<sup>42</sup> Levanon recalled that Decter wrote and published brochures and organized conferences, but on account of his covert status, Decter “was invulnerable to any attempts by the Soviets to discredit him” for his ties to Israel.<sup>43</sup>

An important act of persuasion came in the form of Moshe Decter’s “The Status of Jews in the Soviet Union.” Decter’s article, which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1963, tied together the strands of information necessary to convince organized American Jewry of the specific Jewish discrimination in the USSR. Decter discussed the extent of anti-Semitism in the USSR, the prevalence of anti-Semitic writings in the Soviet press, and cultural and religious

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Foreign Affairs Department (New York: American Jewish Committee, November 1963), 4, AJC Digital Archive.

- 31 “What is Behind the Kremlin’s Latest March of Crime: A Fact Sheet” (New York: American Jewish Committee, February 1953), AJC Digital Archives; Paul S. Appelbaum, “The Soviet Jewish Movement in the United States,” in *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations*, ed. Michael N. Dobkowski (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 614.
- 32 Jerry Goodman, “American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies,” *American Jewish Year Book* 66 (1965): 312; Frederick A. Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005), 28.
- 33 Naomi Wiener Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 499.
- 34 Segal, “The Situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union,” 4.
- 35 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 36.
- 36 Nehemiah Levanon, “Israel’s Role in the Campaign,” in *A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews*, eds. Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 72.
- 37 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 24.

38 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 26.

39 Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 499.

40 Henry L. Feingold, “*Silent No More*”: *Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967-1989* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 63.

41 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 26.

42 Decter’s ties to the Liaison Bureau were less problematic for collaborating with the AJC than his public work for the American Jewish Congress. The AJC’s memorandum on Soviet Jewry in 1963 mentions Decter for his expertise on Soviet Jewry, but mentions that his “work is paid for by the Jewish Agency--American Section through the American Jewish Congress, a matter we are loath to publicize.” Segal, “The Situation of the Jews in the Soviet Union,” 5.

43 Levanon, “Israel’s Role in the Campaign,” 75.

discrimination Jews faced as compared to other minority groups.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Decter worked with Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel and Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg to launch the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry (AJCSJ). The Conference struggled in its first years, functioning without a budget, full-time staff, or permanent headquarters.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of the AJCSJ's limitations, American Jewish leaders were now 'on the record,' committing to intervene on behalf of Soviet Jews.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, the Liaison Bureau had accomplished its first task: convincing the American Jewish elite of the importance of the Soviet Jewish issue.

To stimulate American Jewish empathy with the plight of Soviet Jews, the Liaison Bureau arranged for American Jews to visit the Soviet Union as tourists. Decter and the Bureau convinced Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and author, to visit the USSR for the Jewish holidays of fall 1965 and 1966.<sup>47</sup> Wiesel interacted with local Jews and "witness[ed] the fear and suspicion as well as the pride in being Jewish, the indomitable desire to preserve whatever remnants of Jewish communal existence had managed to survive" in the USSR.<sup>48</sup> Wiesel published a series of articles for the Israeli newspaper *Yedi'ot aharonot*, which were then translated into English by Bureau operative Neal Kozodoy.<sup>49</sup> In 1966, the AJC commissioned the publication of the articles as a book, *The Jews of Silence*.<sup>50</sup>

Wiesel's travel to the Soviet Union and subsequent writing led to a turning point for the Soviet Jewry movement through the deployment of the Liaison Bureau's second tactic; *The Jews of Silence* functioned to link the plight of Soviet Jews

to the memory of the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup> This linkage was aided by Wiesel's position as the "emblematic survivor," as historian Peter Novick described, "[h]is gaunt face, with its anguished expression, seemed to freeze time—to be staring out from a 1945 photograph of the liberation of the camps."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Wiesel was instrumental in creating and maintaining an inherently ahistorical Holocaust consciousness. He insisted that "any survivor has more to say than all the historians combined about what happened" and encouraged Jews to view the Holocaust as a "mystery religion," with Wiesel himself serving as the prime "interpreter of the Holocaust" and "Christ figure."<sup>53</sup> Most importantly, Wiesel reminded American Jews of the US's failure to aid Holocaust victims. The double meaning of his book's title is clear: American Jews, not Soviet Jews, may have been the true Jews of Silence.<sup>54</sup> However, the Liaison Bureau's tactic of linking the memory of American Jewish inadequate action during the Holocaust only succeeded in energizing the American Soviet Jewry movement on account of a contemporaneous phenomenon: the rise of American Jewish Holocaust consciousness.

### The Six Day War and the Rise of American Jewish Holocaust Consciousness

Holocaust consciousness, or collective memory, is distinct from the historical account of Nazi crimes. Rather, collective memory is a social reality: a political, cultural product that takes shape within the system of social and political variables, as well as community interests. According to French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a foundational figure in the field of collective memory studies, collective memory is transmitted and inculcated within distinct social groups, and is subject to mutations due to political, social, and structural change.<sup>55</sup> This section explores how political, social, and structural changes gave rise to a distinct American

44 Moshe Decter, "The Status of the Jews in the Soviet Union," *Foreign Affairs* 41, no. 2 (1963): 420–30; Appelbaum, "The Soviet Jewish Movement in the United States," 615.

45 Appelbaum, "The Soviet Jewish Movement in the United States," 617.

46 Extensive organizational efforts aimed at bring attention to the anti-Semitism faced by Soviet Jews are outlined in Jerry Goodman, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," *American Jewish Year Book* 66 (1965): 312–19.

47 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 64. Wiesel maintained that he would have gone to visit the Soviet Union regardless of the Liaison Bureau's encouragement. Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 242.

48 Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 242.

49 Kozodoy also wrote a "Historical Afterward on Soviet Jewry" which appears in *Jews of Silence* and includes Kozodoy's gratitude to Decter, "for sharing generously with me the results of [Decter's] own extensive research into the problems of the Jews in the Soviet Union." Ro'i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 243; Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 64.

50 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 64.

51 Wiesel did not compare the suffering of Soviet Jews to that of Holocaust victims, but stated "from a subjective and emotional point of view it is impossible to escape the impression that the two communities have something in common—a sense of total isolation." Elie Wiesel, *The Jews of Silence: A Personal Report on Soviet Jewry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 41.

52 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 273.

53 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 201, 274.

54 Wiesel, *The Jews of Silence*, 127.

55 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23–24; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 95.

Jewish Holocaust collective memory.

Following World War II, nearly 100,000 survivors of the Holocaust arrived in the US.<sup>56</sup> Most survivors prioritized assimilation into American society, and public Jewish organizational reference to Nazi crimes against Jews was thought to only further delineate differences between Jews and the rest of the American population. Instead, the universal “lessons” of Nazi crimes—the importance of civil and human rights—were expressed through American Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, rather than a particularistic concern with “Jewish issues.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Cold War rhetoric complicated any potential commemoration of the Holocaust; Germany, the old enemy, became an ally, and the Soviet Union, the old ally, became the new enemy.<sup>58</sup>

An Israeli trial in 1961 brought the Holocaust to American minds. Israeli agents in Argentina arrested Adolf Eichmann, one of Hitler’s high-ranking officers, and placed him on trial in the District Court of Jerusalem for his role in the “final solution of the Jewish question.”<sup>59</sup> The trial, the first session of which was broadcast live on national radio, solidified the Holocaust as an essential part of the national Israeli narrative, an inheritance of all Israelis.<sup>60</sup> However, the view from New York differed. American Jewish organizations were hesitant to alter their established universalist rhetoric concerning the Nazi holocaust. Instead, the AJC questioned the legality of Eichmann’s capture, challenged the assumption of Israel’s jurisdiction, and raised moral questions about the trial itself.<sup>61</sup> The AJC, along with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), presented the Eichmann case to the American public as a universalist event.<sup>62</sup> AJC leader John Slawson, in a meeting with radio and television executives, asserted that the object of the trial was to confront “hatred and totalitarianism

[...] and their continued presence in the world today.”<sup>63</sup> A 1961 ADL Bulletin claimed that the Israeli government’s intention with the trial was “to alert the conscience of the world to the fearful consequences of totalitarianism.”<sup>64</sup> Instead of a case of particularistic concern for Jews, the Bulletin asserted that the Eichmann trial served as a reminder that “[w]hat happened to the Jews of Europe [...] can very well happen to other peoples oppressed by totalitarianism.”<sup>65</sup>

The Eichmann trial was *not* a turning point for Holocaust consciousness in the US as it was in Israel, perhaps on account of the fact that American audiences understood the trial as “not only [concerning] German genocide, but also [...] questions of morality and politics—obedience to unjust laws and superior orders.”<sup>66</sup> In *Commentary*’s April 1961 symposium on “Jewishness” featuring thirty-one Jewish intellectuals—published at the beginning of the Eichmann trial—few contributors mentioned the Holocaust, and only two regarded the Holocaust as significant to their Jewish identities.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, the August 1966 issue of *Commentary* included a one-hundred-page symposium on the “State of Jewish Belief,” surveying American Jewish religious, secular, and political leaders on their connection to Judaism.<sup>68</sup> The respondents did not mention any significant connection to Israel or the Holocaust when discussing their Jewish identities, and the Holocaust was referenced mainly through brief, vague invocations of “Auschwitz” and “the crematoria.”<sup>69</sup>

Instead, American Jewish Holocaust consciousness was mobilized later, in response to the Six Day War in Israel in June 1967. Lucy Dawidowicz summarized the opinion of American Jews during the Six Day War, asserting that “American Jews, like Jews elsewhere in the world outside Israel, experienced a trauma, perhaps best diagnosed as a reliving of the Holocaust.”<sup>70</sup> Perceiving Israel’s existence as

56 Levy and Sznajder, “Memory Unbound,” 95.

57 Levy and Sznajder, “Memory Unbound,” 95.

58 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 64; Levy and Sznajder, “Memory Unbound,” 95.

59 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 2.

60 Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, 92. According to Israeli historian Orna Kenan, the Eichmann trial was a turning point in the formation of Israeli Holocaust collective memory on account of the fact that the “trial had a ‘deeply cathartic effect’ and served as a first opportunity for many Israelis to face the past.” Orna Kenan, *Between Memory and History: The Evolution of Israeli Historiography of the Holocaust, 1945-1961* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 78.

61 “The Eichmann Case: Moral Questions and Legal Arguments” (New York: American Jewish Committee, April 1961), AJC Digital Archive. See also “The Eichmann Case in the American Press” (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1962), AJC Digital Archive.

62 Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 132.

63 “AJC Radio & TV On and Off the Air,” (New York: American Jewish Committee, September 12, 1962), 1, AJC Digital Archive.

64 Arnold Forster, “The Eichmann Case,” ADL Bulletin, March 1961, 1-2, quoted in Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 132.

65 Forster, “The Eichmann Case,” 1-2, quoted in Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 132.

66 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” *American Jewish Year Book* 69 (1968): 204. For more on how the Eichmann trial served as a critical moment in the formation of Israeli Holocaust collective memory, see Hanna Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

67 “Jewishness and Younger Intellectuals,” *Commentary* 31, no. 4 (1961): 306–59; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 106.

68 “The State of Jewish Belief: A Symposium” 42 *Commentary* no. 2 (August 1966): 71–160.

69 “The State of Jewish Belief.”

70 Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” 203.

threatened, “[i]mages of a second Holocaust electrified the American Jewish public.”<sup>71</sup> Fear motivated American Jews to act. One measure of American Jewish reaction, reported by Dawidowicz, was the \$100 million raised in the month after the war.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, the recurring reminder of American and American Jewish inaction during World War II contributed to the rise of particularistic Holocaust consciousness in the US. Accounting for the different reactions to the Six Day War of “American Jews [and] Jews elsewhere in the world outside Israel” as compared to Israelis, Dawidowicz explained a vital divergence in American Jewish and Israeli Holocaust collective memory.<sup>73</sup> American Jews, in contrast to Israelis, “have been afflicted with a deep sense of guilt,” “tormented” by “their failure to rescue more than a miniscule number of European Jews.”<sup>74</sup> Holocaust memory for American Jews is inextricable from guilt. “[E]lectrified” by Holocaust consciousness after the Six Day War, American Jews now stood in solidarity with Israel.<sup>75</sup> Referring to American Jewish fear for Israel’s survival in 1967, Dawidowicz prophesied future Jewish action on behalf of Soviet Jews, stating that “[f]or the second time in a quarter of a century, the Jewish people was [sic] facing annihilation. But this time, somehow, things would be different. There would be no passivity, no timidity.”<sup>76</sup>

The rise of American Jewish Holocaust consciousness was thus essential for the efficacy of the Liaison Bureau’s tactic of linking the Soviet Jewish issue to Holocaust memory. The Bureau, and by extension the Israeli government, succeeded in energizing the American Jewish movement on behalf of Soviet Jewry by connecting the American Jewish sense of guilt or regret about US failures during the Holocaust, solidarity with the threat to Jewish survival in Israel, and the opportunity to aid Soviet Jews.<sup>77</sup> This time, American Jews would not be the “Jews of Silence.” Paul Appelbaum’s 1976 article “Soviet Jewry: Growth of a Movement,” explained the sense that the Soviet Jewry movement was redemptive:

With that moral burden, the guilt of their parents, on

their shoulders, the Soviet Jewry issue was something from which [American Jews] could not turn away. The haunting metaphor was always before them: it is happening again. Once more millions of Jews will be lost, though most through forced assimilation rather than incineration. [...] It was and is inconceivable that those who scourge themselves with the guilt of the last generation of American Jewry will not continue to fight.<sup>78</sup>

With Wiesel as spokesman, the Liaison Bureau encouraged American Jews to conceptualize the Soviet Jewish movement as redeeming past inaction. For instance, supporters of Soviet Jews were united by the rallying cry, “Let My People Go,” a reference to the Jewish holiday of Passover and the freeing of Israelite slaves from Egypt.<sup>79</sup> After the rise of Holocaust consciousness, anti-establishment and grassroots activists had a second slogan, “Never Again,” which they wielded against American Jewish organizations and the US government as a reminder of the abandonment of Jews during the Holocaust, in order to provoke governmental action on behalf of Soviet Jews.<sup>80</sup>

However, the Liaison Bureau’s strategy to link Soviet Jewry to feelings of guilt may have worked *too well* and perhaps counterproductively for Israeli objectives. Israelis did not and could not share in American Jews’ collective guilt. Israel was a state-in-the-making during World War II; saving a substantial number of Jews was implausible. Rather, Israel’s response to the Holocaust was the willingness to fight and die to preserve a Jewish state. Israel’s survival functioned as the national realization of the same slogan used by activists in the US: “Never Again!”<sup>81</sup> For this reason, ruptures in American Jewish and Israeli cooperation were linked to this distinction in Holocaust memory; American Jewish motivation to redeem previous inaction motivated the American Soviet Jewry movement’s independent policy orientation, diverging from Israeli priorities.

Paradoxically, Holocaust consciousness post-1967 coincided with increased Jewish comfort in American society. Jews were rapidly entering the middle and upper middle classes in American society, accompanied by the increasing sense that Jews were becoming white, rather than a non-white

71 Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 370.

72 Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” 206. \$432 million was raised from the American Jewish community in 1967, compared to \$140 million in 1966. Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 178.

73 Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” 203.

74 Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” 203

75 Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 370.

76 Dawidowicz, “American Public Opinion,” 204.

77 Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

78 Paul S. Appelbaum, “Soviet Jewry: Growth of a Movement,” *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review* 10, no. 23 (January 1, 1976): 124.

79 M.H. Naftalin, “The Activist Movement,” in *A Second Exodus*, 225.

80 M.H. Naftalin, “The Activist Movement,” in *A Second Exodus*, 225.

81 Peter Golden, *O Powerful Western Star!: American Jews, Russian Jews, and the Final Battle of the Cold War* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House Ltd, 2012), 246.

ethnic minority.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the dwindling solidarity between Jewish activism and black activism showcased the growing particularism of American Jewish political involvement. An important implication of this process is that American Jews gained self-confidence; it was no longer “disloyal” to advocate for Jewish-specific interests.<sup>83</sup> For this reason, Holocaust consciousness facilitated a new interpretation of the “lessons” of Nazi crimes: rather than focus on the universalist civil and human rights, the late-1960s memory of the Holocaust reminded American Jews of the need for advocacy and action on particularistic Jewish issues. Holocaust consciousness served to stimulate firm American Jewish opposition to all domestic instances of anti-Semitism. For instance, the recitation over local New York city radio of a poem by a black fifteen-year old, decrying Jewish “suffering in Germany [...] and] the Jews’ hatred for black Arabs,” not only sparked American Jewish condemnation, but also further entrenched acrimony between the Jewish and black communities.<sup>84</sup> In this way, the Six Day War solidified Jewish-black divisions on the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including denigration of Israel as colonialist, and Jews collectively as oppressors. In terms of American Jewish activism and policy, the Six Day War and resultant rise of particularistic Holocaust consciousness was a watershed event. Before 1967, universalism served Jewish interests in assimilation as American Jewish organizations “tried to persuade themselves, as well as Gentiles, that they were just like everybody else, only more so.”<sup>85</sup> After 1967, particularistic Holocaust collective memory heralded an era in which American Jews “acknowledged, even celebrated, their distinctiveness.”<sup>86</sup>

In addition to the social and political influences on Holocaust memory, the AJC experienced structural institutional change in the aftermath of the Six Day War. Bertram Gold assumed office as the AJC’s Executive Vice President on August 1, 1967. To orient Gold and prepare him to fulfill this mandate to bring the AJC into the American Jewish mainstream, a “Scope Committee”—including Jacob Neusner, Daniel J. Elazar, and Rabbi Ben Zion Gold—was established to determine the priorities of the AJC for the

coming years.<sup>87</sup> This committee designed background papers and memoranda describing specific ways to increase the “Jewish identity” of the organization. Significantly, before Gold’s tenure, members of the AJC staff considered changing the organization’s name to the “Institute for Human Rights,” a trend that Gold immediately put to rest.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, as one staffer described, under Gold, “the AJC began to remember that its middle name was ‘Jewish.’”<sup>89</sup> Accordingly, the August 1967 issue of *Commentary* reflected this increased “Jewish identity” and sense of belonging to a global Jewish nation, opening with four articles on Israel.<sup>90</sup>

One year following the Six Day War, *Commentary* published “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust” by theologian Emil Fackenheim, which connected the Six Day War to the Holocaust to produce a new, quasi-religious Holocaust consciousness.<sup>91</sup> Fackenheim argued that Jews now have a duty to observe a “614th Commandment:” “Jews are forbidden to grant posthumous victories to Hitler.”<sup>92</sup> This meant that Jews “are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish.”<sup>93</sup> Until 1967, Israel and the Holocaust possessed no special significance for American Jewish thought, whether religious or secular. After the Six Day War and the rise of particularistic Holocaust consciousness—epitomized by Fackenheim’s response in *Commentary*—the Holocaust and Israel became central Jewish identity and immeasurably influenced American Jewish politics.<sup>94</sup>

### **Independent Foreign Policy and Particularism** *The End of Quiet Diplomacy*

From the perspective of the AJC’s *American Jewish Year Book*, the American campaign for Soviet Jewry was the most significant Jewish movement of the 1970s.<sup>95</sup> The movement

82 Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 25-52.

83 William W. Orbach, *The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 125.

84 Deborah Dash Moore, Howard B. Rock, Annie Polland, and Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 139.

85 Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), 201.

86 Silberman, *A Certain People*, 201.

87 Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 151.

88 Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 148-9.

89 Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong*, 148.

90 Abrams, *Norman Podhoretz and Commentary Magazine*, 72.

91 Emil Fackenheim, “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust: A Fragment,” *Commentary* 46, no. 2 (1968): 30-36.

92 Jewish law and tradition dictates that there are 613 commandments divinely given to the Jewish people. Fackenheim, “Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,” 32.

93 Abrams credits Fackenheim’s article for making the Holocaust a basic element of Jewish theological reflection. Nathan Abrams, *Norman Podhoretz and Commentary Magazine*, 73.

94 Abrams, *Norman Podhoretz and Commentary Magazine*, 73.

95 Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the AJC’s *American Jewish Year Book* series largely ignored anti-establishment contributions to the Soviet Jewish cause, portraying the movement as entirely one driven by elite Jewish organizations, “directed by recognized leaders who operated through regular organizational channels (closely linked, we now know, to the *Lishka* [...]) in order to bring diplomatic pressure to bear on

was the only one allotted full-length coverage every year of the decade, and the only one the AJC actively participated in.<sup>96</sup> At the same time that the AJC was becoming comfortable in a leadership role in the Soviet Jewry movement, Israel's *modus operandi* changed from back-door quiet diplomacy through the Liaison Bureau to broadcasting objectives at the Israeli Knesset and the UN.

In August 1969, eighteen Jewish families in Soviet Georgia addressed a letter to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and sent it to the Dutch embassy with a note addressed to "A friend of Anna Frank," requesting that the letter be forwarded to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir.<sup>97</sup> The letter was eventually transported to Jerusalem.<sup>98</sup> Over a year later, Meir's attempts at quietly pleading for emigration for Georgian Jews proved unsuccessful. Meir decided to alter her strategy, opting for a public and formal display of support for Georgian Jews; she read the Georgian letter in the Knesset on November 19, 1969, and later had the letter circulated to all members of the United Nations.<sup>99</sup> In April 1971, those who signed the Georgian letter, as well as many other Georgian Jews, received exit visas.<sup>100</sup> In accordance with Meir's change of strategy, Bureau agents "were given explicit orders to make as much noise as possible."<sup>101</sup>

Soviet Jews were also taking public action. Although Elie Wiesel described Soviet Jewry as "the Jews of silence," Jerry Goodman, the European Affairs Specialist for the AJC, noted in 1971 that "[t]he term no longer pertains [...as] thousands of Soviet Jews have joined a campaign of defiance."<sup>102</sup> After decades of Soviet forced assimilation policies, Abraham J. Bayer—the National Community Relations Advisory Council's international affairs specialist who led the AJCSJ in the mid-1960—described waves of demonstrations and protests throughout the USSR, representative of Soviet Jewry's "awakening."<sup>103</sup> Soviet anti-Zionist policies and propaganda

increased after the Six Day War, inadvertently convincing many Soviet Jews that emigration was the only option for Jews to live a Jewish life. In 1970, sixteen Soviet *refuseniks*<sup>104</sup> attempted to hijack an airplane at Leningrad's Smolny airport.<sup>105</sup> The failed attempt led to the arrests and trials of 34 persons in December 1971, resulting in death sentences for two of the hijackers, Mark Dymshits and Eduard Kuznetsov.<sup>106</sup> In the 1973 *American Jewish Year Book*, Bayer detailed how the upsurge of public action by Soviet Jews inspired American Jews, who responded with an "outpouring of concern and support not seen since the six day war."<sup>107</sup> The newly-inspired movement in the US was, however, still tied closely to the Liaison Bureau, which developed its own list of priorities.

### The Brussels Conference and Israeli-American Jewish Tensions

In 1971, the Liaison Bureau orchestrated a three-day World Conference on Soviet Jewry in Brussels with over 400 Jewish leaders from over 50 countries.<sup>108</sup> The establishment of a World Presidium for Soviet Jewry at the Conference was a major success for the Bureau, as Nehemiah Levanon touted: "I'm not ashamed to say we managed to maneuver the international Jewish organizations into going along with what became a new coordinating body to deal with the campaign on a worldwide basis."<sup>109</sup> Stark disagreements among delegates at the Conference were eventually resolved by the adoption of the Liaison Bureau's demands in the final Brussels Declaration. For this reason, observers criticized the Conference's inability to reach a compromise that incorporated non-Israeli perspectives. According to the Editorial Staff of the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Jewish newspaper, *genesis 2*, the Conference "stank of opportunism, organizational self-aggrandizement, bureaucratic buck-

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the problem. Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan J. Golden, "The Twentieth Century Through American Jewish Eyes: A History of the 'American Jewish Year Book', 1899-1999," *American Jewish Year Book* 100 (2000): 89.

96 Sarna and Golden, "The Twentieth Century Through American Jewish Eyes," 88.

97 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 31.

98 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 36.

99 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 37.

100 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 37.

101 Buwalda, *They Did Not Dwell Alone*, 37.

102 Jerry Goodman, foreword to *Jews in the Soviet Union: An Annotated Bibliography 1967-1971* by Louise Renée Rosenberg (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1971), 3.

103 Soviet assimilation policies forced Jews to become culturally Russian but remain Jewish legally and socially. See Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 32. Bayer discussed Soviet Jewish protest as "a long-delayed reaction to Soviet antisemitism and systematic strangulation of Jewish

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institutions, spurred by Israel's victory in the six-day war of June 1967." Abraham J. Bayer, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," *American Jewish Year Book* 74 (1973): 210; J.J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 166. 104 *Refuseniks* are those who were denied permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Bayer, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," 222.

105 Albert D. Chernin, "Making Soviet Jews an Issue: A History," in *A Second Exodus*, 57.

Bayer, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," 222.

106 Albert D. Chernin, "Making Soviet Jews an Issue: A History," in *A Second Exodus*, 57.

Bayer, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," 222.

107 Bayer, "American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies," 211.

108 "News from the Committee" (New York: American Jewish Committee, February 23, 1971), 1, AJC Digital Archives.

109 Levanon, "Israel's Role in the Campaign," 81.

passing, cowardice and cynicism,” demonstrating “that same penchant for disunity that paralyzed world Jewry while six million died.”<sup>110</sup> Similarly, Micah H. Naftalin, National Director of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, described the Conference as “the most telling evidence of the moral bankruptcy of world Jewish leadership since the Holocaust.”<sup>111</sup> Differences between the AJC’s priorities and the Israeli government’s objectives were highlighted by the AJC’s Press Release on the Conference, “News from the Committee,” which subtly and importantly diverged from the Brussels Declaration.<sup>112</sup>

Emigration was the initial point of contention. The prime Israeli objective in the Soviet Jewry movement was to force Soviet policy change such that Soviet Jews could emigrate to Israel, and *only* to Israel. Israeli interest in Soviet emigration can be traced to the early 1950s with the founding of the Liaison Bureau, which aimed to foster Soviet Jewish identity and encourage connection to Israel as the homeland for potential Soviet émigrés. The stance of restricting the final destination for emigrants also reflected Israeli Holocaust collective memory, highlighting the tragic results of an arduous Jewish diaspora and presenting Israel as both the solution and “the antithesis of the Holocaust catastrophe.”<sup>113</sup> Therefore, “Jewish immigrant absorption” was “a central premise of Israeli statehood itself” and a moral imperative of Israeli Holocaust memory.<sup>114</sup> American Jews, in contrast, could not help but remember how the US closed its doors to European Jews during the Holocaust. Thus, the American delegates at the Conference advocated for Soviet Jews to be given a choice of destinations for emigration, including the US. The Israelis argued with the American delegates that advocating emigration to a homeland would be more ideologically digestible to the Soviets than proposing open exits.<sup>115</sup> American Jews ultimately accepted the Brussels Declaration, asserting Soviet Jewry’s “inalienable right to return to their historic homeland, the land of Israel,” and only to Israel. However, the AJC’s 1971 Press Release of the Conference revealed the true American Jewish position, affirming the rights of Soviet Jews “to be given the opportunity to choose between several alternatives [...] to emigrate to Israel or other countries.”<sup>116</sup>

The second point of conflict in Israel-American Jewish coordination was the relative indifference of the Israeli government to the conditions of life for Soviet Jews who remained in the USSR. The only solution to the Soviet Jewry problem, the Liaison Bureau reasoned, was emigration to Israel.<sup>117</sup> Israeli Holocaust memory connoted pride in Jewish suffering if undergone “for the sake of the nation” as the “sublime act of humanity,” which justified the selective focus on those who fought for the right to preserve Jewish traditions and to emigrate.<sup>118</sup> Israeli Holocaust consciousness identified resistance during the Holocaust—such as the Warsaw Uprising—as the precursor for Israeli independence and ignored accounts of “passive” Jewish suffering.<sup>119</sup> For this reason, Israelis were proud of those who defied the Soviet government and attempted to emigrate, while seeing those uninterested in emigrating as passively accepting Soviet forced assimilation, like Jews in the Holocaust who went to their deaths “like sheep to the slaughter.”<sup>120</sup> Additionally, the Bureau was concerned with the perception that the Brussels Conference was anti-Soviet, not wishing to complicate Israeli-USSR relations. Ironically, this translated into the Liaison Bureau—which had spent most of the previous decade disseminating information in the US confirming the existence of Soviet anti-Semitism—carefully avoiding characterizing Soviet treatment of Jews as anti-Semitic. Instead, the treatment of Soviet Jews was described as “defamation of the Jewish people and of Zionism, reminiscent of the evil anti-Semitism which has caused so much suffering.”<sup>121</sup> In contrast, American Jewish organizations recognized the implausibility that all Soviet Jews emigrate to Israel. As long as some Jews remained in the Soviet Union, Soviet anti-Semitism concerned American Jews. Accordingly, the AJC’s Press Release broke from the Brussels Declaration by advocating for “a Soviet campaign against internal anti-Semitism,” to end the “besmirch[ing of] the Jews everywhere.”<sup>122</sup>

110 “Editorial: Leadership Bankrupt at Brussels,” *genesis* 2 2, no. 8 (March 25, 1971): 2; Naftalin, “The Activist Movement,” 231.

111 Naftalin, “The Activist Movement,” 231.

112 “News from the Committee” (New York: American Jewish Committee, February 23, 1971), 1-2, AJC Digital Archives.

113 Ro’i, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration*, 339.

114 Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 303.

115 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 35.

116 “Brussels Declaration by the World Conference of Jewish

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Communities on Soviet Jewry,” *American Jewish Year Book* 74 (1973): 224; “News from the Committee,” 2.

117 “Brussels Declaration by the World Conference of Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry,” 224.

118 Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* (New York: Verso, 2014), 166.

119 Israeli Holocaust memory includes ranking of types of suffering during the Holocaust, such that “death without resistance was questionable” and “[d]eath in rebellion [...] was commendable.” Pappé, *The Idea of Israel*, 166. The Warsaw Uprising and similar events of Jewish resistance underwent a process of “Zionization” to firmly establish the link between the fate of European Jewry and the need for the Jewish State. Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, 27-28, 32.

120 Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, 30.

121 “Brussels Declaration by the World Conference of Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry,” 224.

122 “News from the Committee,” 2.

Cleavages in the Israeli-American Jewish relationship formed around these two issues—destinations for emigration and anti-Semitism—spurring American Jewish organizations to consider independent paths for action. At the AJC's Annual Meeting in May 1972, Bertram Gold spoke frankly about “strains in Israel-Diaspora relationships.”<sup>123</sup> Though recognizing that “Israel is such a significant symbol for American Jews,” Gold clarified that Israel’s “special authoritative role in Jewish life” was perhaps unfounded.<sup>124</sup> In the Israeli government’s perspective, Gold claimed, “what Israel wants becomes what the American Jewish community *should* want.”<sup>125</sup> For this reason, Gold boldly accused the Israelis of muffling dissent on matters of policy. In his speech titled, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” Gold challenged Israel’s ability to “speak for” American and Soviet Jews. Answering his own question, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” Gold cited Wiesel’s *Souls on Fire*—implicitly invoking American Jewish Holocaust consciousness—to stress that the AJC aimed to represent Jews in a world which has, in Wiesel’s words, “[n]ever before [...] known such anguish.”<sup>126</sup>

This reserved critique from the AJC did not translate, however, into lack of support for Israel. Following the 1973 Yom Kippur War—a surprise attack on Israel by a coalition of Arab states—and the United Nations General Assembly’s 1975 resolution characterizing Zionism as racism, Israel appeared isolated and in need of support by the Diaspora community. In this context, it is all the more surprising that American Jewish organizations diverged from Israeli leadership during this period.

American Jewish independence also extended to US presidential foreign policy objectives. On August 3, 1972, the Soviets imposed a diploma tax on Soviet Jews, requiring every emigrant to repay the expenses for his or her education.<sup>127</sup> On August 15, Jewish Soviet activists held

a press conference, warning that the diploma tax created “a new category of human beings—the slaves of the 20th century.”<sup>128</sup> American Jews, as expressed by Bayer’s article in *American Jewish Year Book*, interpreted the tax as an attempt to place “‘a price tag on human beings,’ an act reminiscent of the Nazi holocaust.”<sup>129</sup> After the tax was announced, American Jews partnered with Senator Henry M. Jackson to link trade privileges sought by the Soviet Union with an easing of emigration restrictions through the Jackson-Vanik Amendment.<sup>130</sup> The Amendment, passed by the Senate with a vote of 77 to 4 in December 1974, jeopardized US President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger’s carefully balanced policy of détente with the Soviet Union. Detailed by Liaison Bureau recruit William Korey in the *American Jewish Year Book* in 1975 and 1976, the American Jewish community faced significant opposition in the Nixon administration.<sup>131</sup> Undoubtedly, the comparison American Jews drew between the diploma tax and the Holocaust contributed to the American Jewish establishment’s willingness to challenge President Nixon’s foreign policy.<sup>132</sup>

123 Bertram Gold, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” Speech at the American Jewish Committee’s Annual Meeting (New York: American Jewish Committee, May 4, 1972), 4, AJC Digital Archives.

124 Gold, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” 12-13.

125 Gold, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” 13. Gold supported Nahum Goldmann after Israel uninvited him to address the World Zionist Congress after he dared suggest that Jews who intended to stay in the USSR deserved as much concern as those who wished to emigrate.

126 Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (New York: Random House, 1972), 256, quoted in Gold, “Who Speaks for the Jews,” 17.

127 Increases in emigration were viewed by Arab countries as the Soviet Union supplying Israel with educated manpower, to be used offensively against Arab countries. The diploma tax, therefore, served to dissuade Arab leaders that the USSR was not aiding Israel’s war power, by discouraging educated Soviet Jews from emigrating. Further, the hard currency earned from

the tax was then be used to pay for wheat imports from the US.

128 William Korey, “Jackson-Vanik: A ‘Policy of Principle,’” in *A Second Exodus*, 98. See also “Soviet Exit Fees – The Ransom of Jews,” Correspondence to Participants in the National Interreligious Consultation on Soviet Jewry, (New York: National Conference on Soviet Jewry, October 20, 1972), 1-2, AJC Digital Archives.

129 Bayer, “American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies,” 222.

130 The Amendment established that “no country would be eligible for [Most Favored Nation status] [...] unless that country permits its citizens the opportunity to emigrate to the country of their choice.” Henry M. Jackson, “Speech on the Senate Floor, September 27, 1972: The Jackson Amendment on Freedom and Emigration,” in *Henry M. Jackson and the Struggle for Human Rights*, ed. Lara Iglitzin (Seattle: Henry M. Jackson Foundation, 1995), 45.

131 William D. Korey, “The Struggle Over Jackson-Mills-Vanik,” *American Jewish Year Book* 75 (1974): 199–234; William Korey, “The Struggle Over the Jackson Amendment,” *American Jewish Year Book* 76 (1976): 160–70.

132 In the early 1970s, American Jewish opinion was not unified regarding Jackson-Vanik. Hoping to strengthen American Jewish support for the Amendment, Soviet Jewish activists sent American Jewish leaders an appeal, using language “designed to remind American Jewry of the Holocaust,” urging American Jews to consider the “irreparable tragic results” of their “smallest hesitation.” Korey, “Jackson-Vanik: A ‘Policy of Principle,’” 103. By 1976, the American Jewish community “fully backed the Jackson amendment’s rationale.” Bayer, “American Response to Soviet Anti-Jewish Policies,” 222.

## Dropouts and the Freedom of Choice

As a consequence of the lack of direct flights between the Soviet Union and Israel, most Jews leaving the USSR on Israeli visas first stopped in Vienna. Upon arriving in Vienna, the emigrants were met by Jewish Agency representatives, who arranged their temporary accommodations before placing them on planes to Israel. By 1973, many Soviet Jews, on their stop-over in Vienna, requested continuing to other destination, including the US, rather than to Israel. These emigrants were referred to as “dropouts” or *noshrim*. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) provided lodging for the *noshrim* as well as transportation to Rome where they would apply for visas to their desired destination.<sup>133</sup> In September 1973, a Palestinian terrorist attack on a passenger train carrying Jews from the USSR to a transit camp in Austria—from which the Jews were supposed to be transported to Israel—complicated the dropout issue from the Israeli perspective.<sup>134</sup> The attack reaffirmed the link in Israeli public consciousness between Nazi atrocities and the necessity to bring Soviet Jews to Israel to fulfill the Zionist mission, whether they wanted to go to Israel or not.<sup>135</sup>

In the mid-1970s, the Liaison Bureau proposed ending aid for *noshrim* in order to encourage Soviet Jews resettlement exclusively in Israel. In the American Jewish perspective, Israel attempted to deny Soviet Jews “freedom of choice” as to where to resettle, as well as forcing American Jews to relive the mistake of closing their doors to persecuted Jews, a choice that haunted American Jewish collective memory. While favoring the idea that Soviet Jews should emigrate to Israel, the AJC and other American Jewish organizations took a stand to support those who chose to live in the US by funding initiatives to aid emigrants obtain visas, travel to the destination of choice, and resettle. Nehemiah Levanon, head of the Bureau, recalled the conflict between American Jews and the Bureau as “one of the saddest periods in the struggle for Soviet Jews.”<sup>136</sup> The Israeli government worried that *noshrim* would “undermine the validity of Israeli visas issued in Moscow, weaken political support for the public campaign on behalf of Soviet Jews [...and] erode the morale of the activists within the Soviet Union.”<sup>137</sup> Moreover, in

Levanon’s view, Soviet Jews became dropouts because the Soviet press “ceaselessly painted Israel as a poor, terrible country whose very existence was endangered,” and American Jewish organizations legitimized this portrayal by supporting immigration to the US on Israeli visas.<sup>138</sup>

When the dropout rate reached over fifty percent in March 1976, the Israeli government established a Committee of Eight—composed of four Israelis and four American Jewish officials, headed by Levanon—to deal with the issue. The Committee declared that American Jewish organizations should *only* aid Soviet émigrés who intend to resettle in the destination specified on their visas.<sup>139</sup> The AJC opposed the decision of the Committee of Eight, advocating for the principle of freedom of choice and the continuation of aid to *noshrim*.<sup>140</sup> Even Moshe Decter—by then no longer working for the Liaison Bureau—expressed his discontent at the Committee for bending to Israeli political pressure, suggesting that if the Israeli government were so concerned with Jews emigrating to Israel, they could “run after the 250,000 Israeli citizens who are living in the U.S.” rather than “a few wretched refugees” in the USSR.<sup>141</sup> The prolonged delay tactics by the HIAS and JDC functioned as a *de facto* rejection of the Committee of Eight’s policy and “an American Jewish Declaration of Independence” from Israel.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, not only were American Jewish organizations transparent in their disregard for the Israeli preference for Soviet émigrés’ destination, but also—as affirmed by AJC President Elmer L. Winter—they advocated for issues broader than just emigration, such as promoting Jewish “cultural and religious rights” in the USSR for Jews “who cannot leave or do not want to.”<sup>143</sup>

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Digital Archives.

138 A dropout “who believes his choice is between going to a paradise [the US] or to a country where his son will be shot in the Israeli army does not really have a choice.” Levanon, “Israel’s Role in the Campaign,” 82.

139 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 108.

140 Windmueller, “The ‘Noshrim’ War,” 170-171.

141 “Soviet Jews: Israel Wants Them All,” *Time* 108, no. 21 (November 22, 1976): 49; Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), 361.

142 Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 108. In December 1976, the AJC reported that the “HIAS and JDC are continuing their services as heretofore.” See “Soviet Jewish Emigration: Questions and Answers,” 5; Orbach, *The American Movement to Aid Soviet Jews*, 76; Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 108.

143 Elmer L. Winter, “Report of the Year’s Activities, May 1974-May 1975” (New York: American Jewish Committee, May 1975), 14, AJC Digital Archives. Although American Jewish leaders were not entirely unified in their support for freedom of choice, those who invoked the memory of the Holocaust—

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133 Steven F. Windmueller, “The ‘Noshrim’ War: Dropping Out,” in *A Second Exodus*, 164; Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics*, 10.

134 Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) 393.

135 Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 393.

136 Levanon, “Israel’s Role in the Campaign,” 81.

137 “Soviet Jewish Emigration: Questions and Answers” (New York: American Jewish Committee, December 1976), 3, AJC

## Conclusion

The direct contravention of the Committee of Eight's directions by American Jewish organizations—motivated by the need to aid Soviet Jews, including *noshrim*—was unthinkable in the early 1960s when the Soviet Jewish movement was a relatively low priority for American Jews. The shift from advocacy for universalistic causes, such as the civil rights movement, to Jewish-centric causes can be explained by the rise of Holocaust consciousness in the late 1960s. As a result of a confluence of political, social, and structural changes in the late 1960s, including the American responses to the Six Day War in 1967, American Jewish organizations reoriented their policy to firmly support Israel and advocate for Soviet Jewish emigration. Though originally used as a tactic by the Liaison Bureau to mobilize American Jews, emphasis on the comparison between the Holocaust and the plight of Soviet Jews ultimately resulted in a divergence of the strategic goals of American Jewish organizations and the Israeli government by the early 1970s. In this way, Israeli control over the American Soviet Jewry movement waned as the strength of American Jewish Holocaust memory increased. The contrasts between American Jewish and Israeli objectives regarding Soviet Jewry delineates the differences in these populations' respective Holocaust collective memories. For American Jews, the Soviet Jewry movement was redemptive of past guilt for inaction to save persecuted European Jews. The moment that compliance with Israeli directives conflicted with the American Jewish fulfillment of the command of "Never Again," the American Jewish establishment's choice was clear.

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and guilt associated with US refusal of entry to Jewish refugees fleeing persecution and genocide—were successful in consolidating support.