1 Be the Jew You Make: Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness in Postethnic America

Have ethnicities, the influx of which has formed the population of the great modern republic of North America, kept their particularities? No.

—Bruno Bauer, "La question juive"

What will become of the Jewish people?

—A. B. Yehoshua, lecture to the American Jewish Committee, 2006

The trajectory of the twentieth century has taken America from a theory of the melting pot focused on the erasure of distinct immigrant identities to a resurgence of cultural specificity in Horace Kallen's cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, and identity politics. Jews have been active participants in all of these cultural shifts, both as Americans and as Jews.[1]

The postwar reiteration of Horace Kallen's cultural pluralism in works such as John F. Kennedy's *Nation of Immigrants* (1958), Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), Michael Novak's *The Unmeltable Ethnics* (1971), Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* (1976), and Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) eventually produced a multiculturalism that enabled Jews (and other ethnic groups) to rediscover the religion and cultural distinctiveness of their grandparents that was largely hidden from view in the decades of assimilation.[2] Yet even as American Jews in the 1960s and 1970s became reacquainted with their tradition, or at least less afraid of expressing their Jewish identity, they largely remained secular and continued the forward motion of acculturation and assimilation. This tension is aptly expressed by Bernie Steinberg, the Jewish character in the early 1970s sitcom *Bridget Loves Bernie*, when he says to his family, "I don't believe this. I've lived with you people all my life. Now why is everyone all of a sudden being so Jewish?"[3] Intermarriage rates among American Jews continued to rise, and Jews' full participation in secular American life continued to thrive unabated.

In short, in postwar America Jews became more interested in their Jewishness, and even Judaism, albeit not always in a specifically religious way. Zionism and the impact of the Holocaust served as new anchors of identity for many Jews who wanted to be more "Jewish" but also wanted to remain secular. This arguably brought ethnicity back to the forefront of Jewish identity in postwar America.[4] White ethnic revival, especially after the Civil Rights movement, included the American Jewish search for its own roots as a part of the progressive political concerns of many American Jews.[5]

The connection between identity politics and the reclaiming of Jewish ethnic identity is duly noted by Eric Goldstein. "In the years that followed the emergence of black nationalism in the mid 1960s, young Jewish activists, many of whom had been active in the struggle for black civil rights, decided that the renewal of their own cultural traditions and the highlighting of their own ethnic distinctiveness was the only way to attain a sense of difference they desired."[6] This phenomenon is true of American society more generally. Will Herberg was simply mistaken when he wrote in 1960 that "the ethnic group [in America] had no future . . . ethnic pluralists were backward looking romantics."[7] In 1986 Werner Sollors, writing about the reception of Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* as ethnic literature, said, "This attitude is quite common in ethnic studies today. It is based on the assumption that experience is first and foremost ethnic. Critics should practice cultural relativism and stick to their own turfs (based, of course, on descent), since an unbridgeable gulf separates Americans of different ethnic backgrounds and most especially all White Anglo Saxon Protestants from all non-WASPS."[8]

Sollors's comment was written almost a generation ago. The residual effects of identity politics in America have largely morphed into a different set of political and social concerns, significantly influenced by globalization. While ethnicity remains a strong source of identity both in America and in other countries around the globe, we need to take seriously Arjun Appadurai's observation that ethnoscapes, the conjunction between an ethnos and territory, are no longer an ironclad anthropological object, in large part the result of the dissolution of historically unselfconscious or culturally homogenous societies.[9] Ultimately, Herberg may have been correct, albeit in a way he could not have imagined. Consider, for example, the trajectory from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), which inspired the Black Nationalist movement, to Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* (1995), which showed a young man who had been inspired by Malcolm X and came to terms with his mixed-race parentage: a Kenyan father he barely knew and a white mother and white grandparents he adored.[10]

America is steadily being transformed from a multiculturalist and ethnocentric society to a postethnic society, and this change undermines, or at least problematizes, the place of ethnicity in American identity that dominated the second part of the twentieth century. This does not suggest that ethnicity has disappeared, or will disappear, and that America will become a society divided purely by class. "Ethnicity," depending on how the term is defined, will survive but will become something other than purely a consequence of ascription or descent.[11] A multiethnic or polyethnic society will produce new ethnicities that are created by a combination of descent and consent, ascription and affiliation.

Disassimilation will often occur before ethnicities are totally reconstituted, because disassimilation is not a return to a pre-assimilated ethnic mode as much as a revision, taking into consideration the changes assimilation has invariably produced. Disassimilation among ethnic groups that have already lost a sense of "pure" ethnicity due to intermarriage and assimilation will generate new ethnicities and not erase ethnicity as a category of social identification. This type of assimilation is quite different from the "structural pluralism" Milton Gordon described in 1964.

> The acculturation process, thus, has drastically modified American Jewish life in the adaptation to American middle-class values, while it has not by any means "dissolved" the group in a structural sense. Communal life and ethnic self-identification flourish within the borders of a group defined as one of the "three major faiths" of America, while at the same time its members and, to a considerable degree, its institutions become indistinguishable, culturally, from the personnel and institutions of the American core society.[12]

While structurally Gordon's assessment may still be relevant, one could argue that the American Jewish community has moved beyond what he describes into a "post" phase outside this "acculturation without assimilation" model to something more complicated and less cohesive.[13]

Defining ethnicity is no easy task and has been the subject of many studies by social theorists.[14] For my limited purposes I have found Max Weber's definition suitable, albeit not perfect.

> We shall call ethnic groups those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In one sense ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.[15]

Weber's distinction between ethnicity and kinship, between real and imagined connectedness, between blood and custom and, I would add, between history and narrative, speaks to ethnicity as conceived throughout Jewish history. Anthony Smith's definition of "*ethnie*" adds some texture to Weber's definition above.

> An *ethnie* may be defined as a named human population with a shared myth of descent, shared memories and culture and a sense of attachment to a "homeland." . . . They may be seen as communities of culture and history based on a fictive kinship, summed up in a powerful myth of descent that binds and legitimates the community. . . . The "core" feature of such memories, myths and symbols is the point of reference in the past, in myths of origin and memories of liberation and a golden age.[16]

Many Jews in America identify as Jews primarily through the notion of a relatedness that speaks to Weber's and Smith's notion of cultural formation, religion being only one piece of that group identity. Of late, this primal identity has begun to waver, if not disappear.[17]

Following David Hollinger I suggest this shift from ethnic to postethnic and from identity as fixed to identity as performed merits a re-evaluation of the melting pot and Reform Judaism's claim that religion and not ethnicity should define American Jews.[18] This is not to suggest these theories can be resurrected. The conditions of twenty-first-century America make that impossible. It is to say, rather, that the underlying problematic of ethos (religion) verses ethnos (ethnicity) that informed these solutions over a century ago has not disappeared and, in fact, may have reappeared in new ways in postethnic America.[19] The contours of postethnic America provide different rubrics for what the melting pot *could* mean and how religion is increasingly a product of voluntarism and inventiveness as opposed to inherited tradition.[20] New formulations of these ideas could serve to construct new forms of identity in a postethnic civilization.

There is considerable fear in the contemporary American Jewish community that America's acceptance of Jews and Judaism—perhaps coupled with America's postethnic turn—could result in the disappearance of both. Books such as Alan Dershowitz's *The Vanishing American Jew* and Elliot Abram's *Faith or Fear,* and programs such as *Birthright Israel,* are three examples among many in which this fear is addressed and solutions are sought.[21] Others, like Jonathan Freedman in his recent *Klezmer America,* offer an alternative perspective. Commenting on Dershowitz and Abrams, Freedman writes,

> The anxiety they register, it seems to me, is not significant in and of itself—clearly those who identify with traditional Jewish identity politics of either a secular or a religious nature are going to want to stress their embattlement for strategic reasons—but it is an indicator of an impulse in Jewish intellectual and cultural life with which I am in profound disagreement, one that stressed the need for purity, consistency, essence, limits, boundaries in defining what is and what is not Jewish. This is of course one impulse in Judaism as a religious practice itself, one in which the delineation of the clean and unclean, the pure and corrupt, is central, definitional. But it's more powerfully, and more problematically, a repeated impulse in the critical response of American Jews in a multiracial, multicultural America—an impulse to (as it were) circle the wagons, to define Jewishness (itself a notoriously multiple religious practice and identity) in monolithic and essentializing terms.[22]

I am sympathetic to Freedman's intuitions here. In part, the fears he draws attention to may be the result of an old paradigm trying to force itself on a new situation that cannot meet its criteria. If postethnicity is indeed a grow-

ing reality, and if Jews in America are so integrated into their social structure that asking them to reject it would be tantamount to asking them to become an anomaly in order to "survive," might we think about how this postethnic turn can suggest new structures of Jewish identity? That is, how can "survival" be reformulated in a way that enables the entire notion of identity to be calibrated anew?

My point in this chapter is not to argue that our understanding of the future of Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness in America should be driven solely by the realities of the American cultural landscape (that is, that the "ought" should, by definition, be determined by the "is"). One could surely argue quite forcefully (and many have tried to) that the existence of a burgeoning postethnic America should compel Jews to create an even stronger ethnic anchor in order to prevent Jewishness and Judaism from becoming hopelessly buried in the multiethnic mix of American society. This is exactly what Dershowitz, Abrams, Steven Cohen, and Jack Wertheimer argue. In some way, the Orthodox *kiruv* (outreach) movement and contemporary Reform's return to ethnicity and tradition (first manifest in the 1937 Columbus Platform's advocating a return to the notion of Jews as a nation, and more recently in the Reform embrace of a new style of progressive "halakha") are implicitly making such a claim.[23] What I am suggesting, however, is that while the "is" of postethnicity poses certain challenges, it also poses certain potentially productive opportunities to rethink the very notion of the "ought."

Here I am compelled by Georg Simmel's notion that when cultural forms become spiritually empty and no longer embody the life of the society, they cease to serve to perfect the members of the society in question. Such a situation does not require new articulations of older ideas but new models of understanding the very categories in question. Put differently, the new reality is not simply one more obstacle to be overcome (the traditional argument) or one more dimension of modernity that Jews must creatively respond to in order to survive under traditional parameters of survival (the progressive argument).[24] Rather, postethnic America is, to borrow a term used by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi for different purposes, a "paradigm shift" that demands a totally new approach to the very notion of survival, to the very contours of what we mean by "Jewishness" and "Judaism" in contemporary America (that is, to rethink the very parameters of the "ought").[25] My point is only to begin with the premise that postethnicity is with us for the foreseeable future, and Jews must learn how to think within its boundaries and not simply deny its existence or remain wed to old-paradigm "oughts" in order to create models for survival, continuity, and renewal.[26]

The question as to whether the instability of identity and ethnicity is a phenomenon limited to the individual or whether it extends to the very fabric of the Jewish collective is pertinent. That the individual Jew is in a state of flux in America is not a new observation. The important question is with regard to the collective. The debate among sociologists, cultural theorists, and historians who study American Jewry is generally about the collective future of Jews and Judaism in America.[27] Much of it begins with the assumption that being Jewish in America is no longer a liability. In the words of Bethamie Horowitz, "The major change in contemporary America is that there is no longer a stigma attached to being Jewish."[28] For some this is the blessing under which hides a curse. While some argue that the Jewish collective has already collapsed, others argue that notwithstanding the danger posed to Jewish individuals, the community remains stable, intact, and thriving and continues its process of Americanization, managing the tension between tradition and acculturation.[29] I submit that the Jewish collective in America (as previously construed) *is* in a state of collapse, but unlike those who view this change in purely negative terms I suggest this collapse is largely dependent on the lens through which it is viewed, that is, how we understand the criterion of the "Jew" and the makeup of the Jewish collective.

The Jewish collective in America will survive; it will just look different than before. The normalization of intermarriage combined with a fairly new phenomenon of the intermarried Jew remaining part of a Jewish community and bringing his or her spouse and children *into* that community raises new issues about the very construction of a Jewish collective that includes non-Jews. The actual multiethnic and multiracial makeup of many American Jewish families should be examined considering Hollinger's thesis of postethnicity. This postethnic approach considers young men and women who own multiple narratives, family histories, and affiliations without a sense of disparity. It includes many who choose to live in multiple ethnic communities without seeing that choice as a contradiction. Here Horowitz's distinction between ethnicity and ethnic identity is helpful. She writes, "In contrast to ethnicity, *ethnic identity* refers to a *person's self-perception of being a member of an ethnic group.* In the bumpy ride from distinctiveness to assimilation and incorporation, the concrete ethnicity of old immigrant neighborhoods gave way over the course of time to what Herbert Gans has termed 'symbolic ethnicity' by which he means an individual idiosyncratic ethnic identity that has no institutional underpinning."[30] In my view, the age-old criterion of Jewishness as rooted almost exclusively in familial history and affinity cannot survive the multiethnic family that no longer requires one to choose ascribed allegiance. One can contest and/or lament the reality that is emerging, and even try to institute measures to prevent it, but one cannot turn a blind eye to the changing contours of Jewishness in contemporary America.

To further explore the meaning of postethnicity, we first need to distinguish it from pluralism, of which multiculturalism is one form.[31] In general, pluralism respects inherited boundaries, acknowledges different ethnoracial identities, and seeks to preserve those identities through tolerance and recognition of

the subaltern as a productive member of society whose voice needs to be heard independent of the dominant culture's influence.[32] This idea is not new; it has its roots in the early twentieth-century critiques of the melting-pot theory by Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne. Kallen's cultural pluralism, most succinctly articulated in his 1915 essay "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," argues for the retention of ethnic "inheritances" in the face of American "accommodation." Kallen believed that the very foundation of democracy is to promote and cultivate individual and collective self-realization that would necessitate cultural difference. More strongly, he argued that the project of Americanization underlying the melting pot is contrary to the nature of human civilization.[33] Old-style cultural pluralism is perhaps most succinctly described by Milton Gordon. Gordon suggests that "the presumed goals of the cultural pluralists are to maintain enough societal separation to guarantee the continuance of the ethnic cultural tradition and the existence of the group, without at the same time interfering with the carrying out of standard responsibilities to the general American civic life."[34]

Kallen's cultural pluralism summarized by Gordon was a response to a proposal of legislating the melting pot through, among other things, forced miscegenation. Kallen did not, perhaps could not, predict the extent to which "forced" miscegenation would not be required to undermine ethnicity in a society where ethnicity as the primary anchor of identity is voluntarily abandoned.[35] The intermarriage rate for Jews, Poles, and Italians in contemporary America, all around 50 percent, was achieved without legislating forced miscegenation. But it was part of the transition from pluralism (as merely tolerance) to multiculturalism, combined with the normalization of hybridity in which diversity is celebrated and not simply tolerated, and constructed ethnic identities are considered normative. Or, to quote Warren Beatty's half-crazed character Senator Bulworth in the film *Bulworth*, "All we need is a voluntary, free-spirited, open-ended program of procreative racial deconstruction."[36]

Today hybridity has largely become a badge of honor and not a sinful stain. This shift in perspective aligns with a postmodern sentiment suggesting that boundaries, that is, gender, sexual orientation, even ethnicity, are constructed rather than essential categories, hybridity serving as an alternative structure and not an occasion for the dissolution of essential communities. The celebration of hybridity in addition to diversity is one sign of the postethnic turn. This emerging postethnic social reality loosely corresponds to what Laurel Schneider refers to in her discussion about the political implications of theological multiplicity versus the "logic of the One." She calls "a world of porous exchange" a place where boundaries of sameness built on the foundations of Ernst Renan's theory of the nation as the "spirit" of a people dissolves into what Jacques Derrida calls "cosmopolitan centers." Multiculturalism as the celebration and not mere tolerance of diversity was the last phase before the very boundaries of otherness became porous and permeable enough to hemorrhage into new communal structures.[37]

Cosmopolitanism in America reaches back to the period when the melting pot was undergoing critical scrutiny (cosmopolitanism has a much longer history in the Kantian tradition in Western Europe).[38] Randolph Bourne was perhaps the most articulate voice distinguishing between the "100 percent Americanism" espoused by Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt and the cultural pluralism of Horace Kallen. David Hollinger offers a succinct definition of Bourne's cosmopolitanism worth citing in full:

> The "cosmopolitanism" to which I refer is the desire to transcend the limitations of any and all particularisms in order to achieve a more complete human experience and a more complete understanding of that experience. The ideal is decidedly counter to the eradication of cultural differences, but counter also to their preservation in parochial form. Rather, particular cultures and subcultures are viewed as repositories for insights and experiences that can be drawn upon in the interests of a more comprehensive outlook on the world.[39]

Bourne also acknowledged that descent—the foundation of Kallen's argument—must co-exist with consent in a free society where we choose our affiliations even as we may still adhere to inherited ones.[40] Bourne hoped that this admixture would produce a cross-fertilization whereby new alliances are formed in which each inherited "culture" will contribute to the progress of the larger society. Kallen was not averse to crossing lines, although he was wary of their erasure. Bourne was more optimistic and less worried about the loss of inheritance, perhaps realizing that the very contours of inheritance would undergo a transformation in this experiment.[41]

Contemporary cosmopolitanism and postethnicity acknowledge that ethnicity plays a role in individual and communal identity, but identity and community more generally are founded on voluntary and socially constructed affiliations. Postethnicity is wary of ethnoracial enclosures, knowing that the power they generate and the injustices they produce, largely through collective memory and nostalgia, can overshadow other dimensions of cultural identity. Postethnicity acknowledges and promotes multiple, not merely hyphenated, identities and the liminal character of group affiliation.[42] Anthony Appiah suggests that ethnicity may remain a part of the general script of one's identity but that script is rewritten by individuals and communities—often multiple times—according to values and principles not determined by ethnos.[43] Mitchell Cohen seems to concur when he concludes his essay "Rooted Cosmopolitanism" in *Dissent Magazine*, "I fear that too many votaries of multiculturalism have become unreflective celebrants of particularism."[44]

It is worth asking whether plural mono-culturalism is the best way to describe American society. Theorists and critics such as David Hollinger, Mitchell

Cohen, and most recently Anthony Appiah advocate what Cohen calls "rooted cosmopolitanism," which is more respectful of ethnicity in principle but stresses voluntarism and not birth as the root of individual and collective identity. This idea has its roots in Bourne's essay mentioned above. While present-day cosmopolitanism is universalist in nature, it differs from traditional models of universalism in that it respects the inevitability of diversity as part of its universalist vision and not as a problem to be overcome.[45] The failure of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and Marxism to eradicate ethnicity and nationalism as determining factors in human society is a given in most postethnic models discussed today.

Postethnicity appreciates ethnicity as a piece of one's identity. The "post" in postethnic seeks to bring ethnicity back into focus, but this new notion of ethnicity is already restructured and, in part, a consequence not only of voluntarism but also of invention.[46] On this, Hollinger notes, "A postethnic social order would encourage individuals to devote as much—or as little—of their energies as they wished to their community of descent, and would discourage public and private agencies from implicitly telling every citizen that the most important thing about them was their descent community. Hence to be postethnic is not to be anti-ethnic, or even color-blind, but to reject the idea that descent is destiny."[47] In addition, postethnicity supports the emergence of new ethnic configurations and new religious movements, a phenomenon so prevalent in the American religious landscape that there is a scholarly journal, *Nova Religio*, devoted exclusively to it.[48]

Even though postethnicity gestures to Durkheim's notion that human collectives seek subcultures as opposed to the more amorphous category of the human, it simultaneously undermines traditional categories of ethnic inheritance supported by cultural pluralism and multiculturalism in favor of invented groups, multiple identities, and the formation of new groups.[49] In other words, in today's world of multiple identities, the notion of primary and secondary affiliation is largely context-driven and not determined by inheritance or even non-contextual preference. As David Hollinger puts it, "A postethnic perspective challenges the right of one's grandfather to determine primary identity."[50] More explicitly, he writes, "Kallen used to say, 'you can't change your grandparents,' as if this was a knock-down argument against ethnoracial liberals. . . . You may not be able to change your grandparents, but you need not become cultural clones of them."[51] On this point Lila Corwin Berman's comment regarding an earlier period, from World War I to the Cold War and Civil Rights Era, supports Hollinger's critique. "The problem with cultural pluralism, however, was that it appeared inaccurate: it assumed that groups would maintain their differences in perpetuity, and it did not face the reality, pointed out by sociologists like [Julius] Drachsler, that the lines dividing groups were already shifting, through the marriages members made across nationality and even religion."[52]

That the Jewish experience in America is distinct from other areas of the Diaspora is not a twentieth-century observation. Historians such as Heinrich Graetz already remarked in the nineteenth century that American Judaism does not easily fit into established rubrics of Jews in the Diaspora. There were no expulsions or pogroms in America, and the Disestablishment Clause prevented the legal system from denying Jews the freedom to practice their religion. In short, the Jewish story of exile does not easily conform to the American Jewish experience. Hence Reform Judaism's Pittsburgh Platform in 1885 erased exile as a description of American Jewry.[53] This erasure of "exile" not only suggested recognition of the viability of Jewry in America. It opened the possibility of seeing the Diaspora as a model of identity that extends beyond the political realm. Jonathan Freedman calls it "queer diasporism . . . a vision of reality that rejects origin, nationhood, cultural reproduction in favor of a vision that embraces cultural syncretism, wandering, exile without any sense of a mortal imperative of returning to origins."[54] While this vision is surely not what American Jews had in mind in 1950, postethnicity opens up the possibility of hybridity (a notion Freedman borrows from Homi Bhabha's postcolonialist theory) not as a sad consequence of assimilation but as a constructive tool for a new paradigm of identity.[55]

The dialectic between liberation, a term Jews often used to describe their immigration to America from oppressive regimes, and the dogged attachment to minority status that was used as a call for solidarity and continuity, resulted in what David Biale calls American Jews' "double consciousness."[56] In America, Jews had to navigate between the desire to be integrated and the desire/need to remain separate. Biale's "double consciousness" may be a useful alternative to the more conventional dual allegiance that was also experienced in post-emancipated Europe.[57] European emancipation arguably never quite erased the barrier of separation enough for Jews to be threatened by assimilation in quite the same way they were in America. As Biale rightly notes, many of the alternatives of American identity in the twentieth century, such as socialism, liberalism, and the return to tradition, were spearheaded by Jews as a way to make sense of the double consciousness dilemma. Given the more recent postethnic turn, this dyad (integration-survival) is complicated by the removal of one of Judaism's most crucial components: ethnic distinctiveness.

There has often been a complex relationship between Jewishness and Judaism, if we set aside the myth that religion was always the glue that held Jews together before the Enlightenment and emancipation.[58] The vexing relationship between religion/culture and ethnicity as markers of identity is not unique to the American Jewish experience; it has existed in various forms for most of Jewish history. Martin Buber wrote that "Israel is a people like no other, for it is the only people in the world which, from its earliest beginning, has been both a nation and a religious community."[59] Such a depiction is often used to exemplify a paragon of Judaism's distinctiveness. But Buber's comment is both anachronistic

and simplistic. The claim of equivalency between religion and ethnicity (*cum* nation) is not corroborated by Jewish history. Examples of Jewish identities that were not both religious and ethnic are found at least as far back as late antiquity, with the ambiguous status of the "fearers of heaven" (*yirei shamayim*), Greek pagans who lived as Jews without becoming Jews, to the status of the converso in medieval Iberia and southern Europe—born a Jew, reared a Christian; or born a Christian, claiming to be descended from Jews. The debate in post-emancipated Europe and America about whether Jews are a people or a spiritual/religious community also acknowledges this historical complexity. As Will Herberg says in his *Protestant, Catholic, Jew,* "[for Jews] the religious community bore the same name as the old ethnic group and was virtually coterminous with it."[60] The context of Herberg's claim is significant. By the 1950s Herberg recognized the dissolution of Jewish ethnicity as a consequence of American integration. Coupled with the secularization of American Jewry, he argues that a new anchor of identity must be forged. His "triple melting pot" theory argues that Jews, like other religious communities, could find a new sense of identity in their *religious* heritage.[61] Herberg rightly observed that peoplehood was becoming less and less an operative category as integration and assimilation increased.

The question of the relationship between religion and ethnicity is still central to contemporary Jewish Americans. Deborah Dash Moore asks, "What did identity politics mean for American Jews? . . . Politics now extended into all reaches of society and culture, including Jewish life. What did it mean to be an American Jew? Was it a religious question? A question of ethnicity? Perhaps a political question? How did Jews understand themselves as individuals and as members of a group in the United States?"[62] In some ways, while these general questions may have been relevant to other Jewish communities throughout history, even today, the American context has enabled Jews to explore these issues more broadly, more freely, and more experimentally.

The attempt to divorce peoplehood from religion common in nineteenth-century Reform was countered by certain strains of Zionism that reversed the emphasis but maintained the essential structure of the equation. That is, Jews are first and foremost a people *qua* nation, religion serving as the dominant but not essential diasporic articulation of national consciousness that could, and should, be replaced by a secular form of nationalism realized in a nation-state and a revived secular Jewish culture.[63]

In Jewish America the fragile dichotomy of religion and peoplehood was framed in the Pittsburgh Platform in 1885, the first doctrinal formulation of identity of Reform Judaism in America.[64] The fifth principle reads as follows: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[65] While this statement may have been gesturing to the fledging Zionist movement's attempt to argue the opposite, it also intended to sever, or at least significantly weaken, the tie between ethos and ethnos in part to avoid any semblance of dual allegiance that threatened to undermine Reform's assimilatory project. Zionism was working in the opposite direction.[66] More broadly, Reform may have been trying in a somewhat radical fashion (albeit no less radical than Zionism) to once and for all resolve the complex relationship between religion and peoplehood that Jews struggled with for centuries. This was particularly problematic in America, where Jews were almost immediately expected to become full members of a foreign national collective.

As a result of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, ethnicity (Jewish nationalism was one expression of ethnicity in a secular Jewish society) became a more operative category in American Jewry.[67] This development was aided by the maturation of Horace Kallen's notion of cultural pluralism.[68] Among many other things, cultural pluralism, which morphed into multiculturalism by the 1980s, enabled assimilated and integrated Jews in America to retain their particularistic identity as part of a larger American project with little or no aid from religion. The fact that many Jews were prominent in promoting this ideology only speaks to the continued anxiety of marginality of a well-integrated minority, what Berel Lang calls the "anxiety of the hyphen."[69] Jews may now be described by what David Biale calls a "double marginality." They are well integrated into American society yet still desire in some ways to remain distinct from it. In America Jews are not, nor have they ever been, the most "othered" other. They struggle with the mixed blessing of successful integration.[70]

Both cultural pluralism and multiculturalism are attempts to normalize diversity—in the case of multiculturalism, to celebrate diversity—and both have been very productive for Jews and other minorities. But America is in the midst of a significant postethnic shift. Postethnic—as opposed to multicultural—America presents serious challenges to the continuity and survival of Jews and Judaism precisely because it undermines the very notion of ethnicity that served Jews as an anchor of identity for most of its history.[71] This is particularly true in America as opposed to Europe because, at least in principle, American civic society is not founded on ethnicity.[72] Even as ethnos remains a constitutive part of distinct communities in America, it is arguably no longer the center of national collective consciousness. Thus ethnicity, even when maintained, is often less generative than other identity markers; for example, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, and popular culture groups (Trekkies, Oprah fans, Deadheads, etc.) make up distinct and sovereign American subcultures that are multiethnic.[73]

Another way to view this shift away from the centrality of ethnicity is suggested by Herbert Gans in his "symbolic ethnicity" hypothesis. Gans argues that, as generations in America increase, "people are less and less interested in

their ethnic cultures and organizations. . . . For the third and later generations, ethnicity is often symbolic, free from affiliation with ethnic groups or ethnic cultures, and dominated instead by a consumption of symbols."[74] These "symbols" often manifest in artistic and aesthetic ways. For example, the plethora of fusion movements in contemporary American music speaks to a kind of symbolic ethnicity where ethnos is one tool in a larger toolbox that contributes to the creation of a new form of creative expression.[75] Jazz, often known as the quintessential "American music," is a classic example of a "Creole" hybrid and fusion phenomenon.[76] The Klezmer revival in the 1980s gave birth to Klezmer fusion, which has led to a broader radical Jewish artistic renaissance, helping to set the stage for the popular Matisyahu, who fuses reggae music styles with lyrics on Jewish religious themes and has made Hasidism "cool" for a non-Jewish audience.

This new form of integration is even stronger today when Jews as individuals have succeeded in becoming an integral part of American culture, politics, and commerce. Arthur Hertzberg argued that anti-Semitism no longer plays a significant and certainly not a threatening role in American Jewish identity.[77] Yet there is some perceived truth to Nahum Goldmann's aphorism, "When things are good for Jews, they are bad for Jewry."[78]

The diminishing of anti-Semitism and the successful integration/assimilation of American Jewry resulted in what the Israeli Bible scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann rightly feared more broadly was the inextricable link between emancipation and assimilation, or "the eradication of the most fundamental aspect of Jewish national existence, of its historical uniqueness (*yihudah ha-histori*) and of the unity of its national soul (*ahduta hanafshit ha-histori*)."[79] But while Kaufmann was speaking only of the Jews, and primarily about the Jews in Europe, in contemporary America where multiculturalism is succumbing to a more complex notion of ethnicity, this form of integration is in part the result of the sustained trajectory of interethnic and interracial marriage and the rise of other significant markers of identity. Thus Jews are simply part of a societal trajectory, living in a society that not only accepts them, but one that they play a significant role in constructing.[80]

Jewish intermarriage rates are obviously alarming to those concerned with what I take to be a somewhat reflexive jeremiad of Jewish "survival." In 1971 Marshall Sklare argued that intermarriage would be the quintessential challenge to American Jewry in subsequent decades.[81] He also noted that "it is precisely the 'healthy' modern intermarriages that raise the most troubling questions of all to the Jewish community."[82] Lila Corwin Berman's comment is even more prescient: "In reality, the true problem that Jews faced was explaining why they persisted in marrying only one another in a country that granted them the freedom to do otherwise."[83] Jewish exogamy rates are today on par or lower than other ethnic groups such as Irish and Polish Catholics, and Italians, and

slightly higher than Asian Americans.[84] About 25 percent of Hispanic marriages are intermarriages.[85] Only African American exogamy hovers slightly above 10 percent, and given that marriage between blacks and whites was illegal in some states until the Supreme Court declared the prohibition of interracial marriage unconstitutional in *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967, this is quite remarkable.[86] But considering that we now have an American president who is the child of interracial marriage, the stigma of such unions is likely to dissipate precipitously.[87]

More importantly, it is not only that Jews are intermarrying, but that their attitudes toward intermarriage have changed considerably in the past thirty years. For example, in a 2000 national survey of Jewish opinion in America, half of the Jews surveyed said that "it is racist to oppose Jewish-Gentile marriage," and more than half disagreed with the statement that "it would pain me if my child married a Gentile."[88] And yet at the same time Judaism in America is arguably experiencing a cultural and creative renaissance. So while Kaufmann may be correct in his assertion about ethnic nullification via assimilation, the lessons that can be drawn may be quite different for Jews living in a society in the process of its own de-ethnicization. Kaufmann's remarks were largely in response to European societies still founded on ethnicity. The "ethnic nullification" of the Jew meant, for him, merging with the ethnicity of the host culture either through assimilation or conversion.[89] In a postethnic society this is quite different.[90] Sklare's assumption about intermarriage is understandable in 1971. Even though intermarriage always existed, as did conversion to Judaism, until mid-twentieth-century America (perhaps excluding certain times and locals in late antiquity), those numbers were of little consequence for the Jewish people.

The nullification or at least weakening of ethnicity among American Jews through intermarriage and other cultural means is not anomalous but, in fact, an indication that Jews are behaving like the good Americans they have long sought to become. This sentiment was expressed as early as 1934 in Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*.[91] It was even truer by the late 1950s. On this period Lila Corwin Berman writes, "Jewishness, in order to continue serving as an ideology about the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, increasingly had to account for Jews who loved and pro-created with non-Jews, and non-Jews who became Jews."[92] In the heyday of cultural pluralism, Louis Brandeis said that "being a good Zionist was being a good American."[93] What equation would fit America's postethnic turn?[94] The question of survival—of Jews, of Judaism—is another matter, but in my view these important questions must be examined within and not external to the de-ethnicization of America more generally. The perennial tension between assimilation and distinctiveness has entered a new phase at the close of the twentieth century.

Can Jews and Judaism in America survive *without* ethnicity as its foundation? And, if so, how can they survive when identity is increasingly a performa-

tive act rather than an inherited state? This is neither a theoretical question nor one based solely on ideology. It is a question based on an emerging descriptive social reality.[95]

The oft-cited quip at the beginning of Nathan Glazer's and Daniel Moynihan's 1963 *Beyond the Melting Pot* that the most important thing to know about the melting pot is that "it never happened" may prove to be premature. It certainly did not happen the way some thought it would. But the de-ethnicization of America through intermarriage, coupled with the voluntaristic and inventive nature of both ethnic and religious affiliation, has arguably given us a different kind of melting pot. It is not the homogeneous Americanism that Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson anticipated but a society in which ethnic borders have become translucent, enabling the restructuring of those borders (as well as considerable movement within them), yielding new and invented ethnic combinations. What makes Americans the same is not that they are different—that would be a multicultural turn of phrase—but that they are becoming multiethnic and are free to explore new vistas of ethnic and communal affiliation. Jews are right in the middle of this postethnic turn and, given their integrated status, there is little reason to believe they will, or should, revive what would amount to an anomalous status that once simultaneously held them together and caused them considerable grief. In the words of Edgar Bronfman, "[In America] fear of assimilation and intermarriage should not replace fear of anti-Semitism."[96]

Postethnicity allows for a certain inventiveness of ethnicity and religion, or at least an ethnic and religious voluntarism that complicates the ostensible resolution of the dichotomy of Jewish peoplehood and religion through the erasure of peoplehood (Reform) or the erasure of religion as determining Jewishness (Zionism). Both classical Reform and Zionism still adhered to a traditional notion of ethnicity that I contend no longer dominates the American landscape. The transformation of America from a society founded on descent to one founded on consent, a distinction developed by Werner Sollors, in one sense speaks to the classical Reform platform as well as contemporary Reform's position on Jewishness.[97] For example, adopting both matrilineal and patrilineal descent, contemporary Reform considers a child of intermarriage Jewish only so long as he or she exhibits a "commitment to Judaism." This does not necessarily require exclusive identification with an ethnos but a commitment to an ethos. Stephen Sharot goes so far as to say, "According to the [Reform] movement's decision on patrilineal descent, the supposition of Jewishness conferred by birth must be authenticated by the individual's commitment to Judaism. Thus the born-Jew also becomes a Jew by choice."[98] In fact, the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) in a 1990 study showed that many children of intermarried couples in America who identify as Jews (and are therefore considered as such by the Reform movement, the largest denomination in America) *also* identify with the ethnicity of their Gentile parent. That is, they identify, for example, as part Irish-Catholic (which constitutes an ethnicity) and also Jewish.[99] As mentioned above, early in the century Horace Kallen advocated for cultural pluralism because "men may change their clothes, their politics, their wives [*sic*] . . . but they cannot change their grandfathers."[100] This was written in an era when the exogamy percentage rate among Jews was in the single digits. How would this statement fare at a time when far more than fifty percent of American Jews have both Jewish *and* Gentile grandparents, and choose to identify with both?

America now has entire networks, virtual and actual, that consist of these multiethnic Jews. One of the largest, www.half-jewish.net, is more than a support group. It is an advocacy organization that seeks to be a voice for the inclusion of multiethnic Jews in the Jewish community. On this website we read, "Some of us are contented Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists, but we'd like to learn more about our Jewish 'half' in ways that don't involve leaving our current faith or culture. Some of us are Jews who are curious about our 'other half.' A number of us want the Half-Jewish Network to help us speak up for ourselves the next time a Jewish organization releases a 'Who Is A Jew?' statement or report that is negative about us or harms our interests. We're tired of keeping silent."

Or consider Joey Kurtzman's response in a letter on Jewcy.com (an umbrella website for progressive Jewish culture, arts, and letters) to Jack Wertheimer:

> At *Jewcy* we've half-jokingly referred to ourselves as part of the first generation of Jewish-American mongrels, or Frankenjews. The majority of *Jewcy*'s staff is the product of intermarriage.
>
> To a one, we regard the traditional Jewish revulsion toward exogamy as an anachronistic holdover from premodern life. Needless to say, we are of dubious halakhic Jewishness. This will be truer of our children than it is of us.
>
> Our cultural influences are more polluted than our bloodlines, and that is the important part of our mongrelization. We're evolving new ideas and new forms of religious expression informed by non-Jewish traditions. This is not because we have poached from alien traditions, but because those traditions, too, are our patrimony. I believe that Conservative Jews say that tradition has a vote, not a veto [actually this was Mordecai Kaplan]. For most young Jewish-Americans, it would be truer to say that Jewishness has a vote, not a veto.[101]

When self-described "mongrel Jews," adopting queer theory as their method of identity, are running a popular Jewish website for young progressive Jews in America, the era when the intermarried Jew blended into the vast cultural landscape of American society is over. Multiethnic, mongrel, or "half-Jews" (a term that was merely a fiction a generation ago as there is no halakhic basis for a half-Jew) want a voice *as Jews*. The internet gives them a voice that circumvents any interference by institutional Judaism.[102]

Given their numbers and influence (a majority of Jews in America now have a relative who is non-Jewish, or who at least is a multiethnic Jew) it is hard to imagine that the American Jewish community can ignore these intermarried

Jews. How they will be integrated, and what role they will play in the Jewish community is in the process of being determined. What is clearer, however, is that conventional notions of Jewish "peoplehood," defined primarily by ethnicity, are quickly becoming obsolete.[103]

The embrace of multiethnicity is also increasingly important for many who convert to Judaism. The notion that conversion to Judaism requires abandoning one's ethnic origins cannot easily survive a society in which people often identify as multiethnic. This acceptance of multiethnicity may also be a subliminal by-product of classical Reform's severance of ethnicity from religion as the template of American Judaism. For some, to convert to Judaism is not to erase one ethnicity for another but to add another ethnicity to one's already complex identity.[104]

Increasingly, Gentiles who marry Jews in America feel less compelled to convert to Judaism because they feel able to participate in Jewish life and engage in Jewish practices without becoming "Jews," retaining affiliations with their own ethnic past. Kerry Olitzky's Jewish Outreach Institute and Edmund Case's InterfaithFamily.com are devoted to supporting non-Jewish spouses of Jews who are choosing to raise their children Jewish.[105] The Jewish Multi-Racial Network is devoted to the cultivation of Jewish identity for those who live in multiracial (Jewish) families.[106] Concomitantly, many Jews are beginning to see less and less of a contradiction in their choice to remain Jewishly active while being part of an interfaith relationship or marriage.[107] These phenomena exhibit the increasing dominance of voluntaristic and inventive constructions of identity and a comfort with multiethnicity as part of American Jewish identity indicative of a postethnic turn.

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright discovered some time around 1997 that she was "Jewish."[108] Her response was very telling. She acknowledged that she was of "Jewish background," but that did not extend, for her, to an acknowledgment that she was a Jew.[109] This was not because of other religious commitments but more a statement of ethnicity. She denied her Jewish ethnicity and, in so doing, chose not to affiliate as a Jew. In his essay "Jewish Identity, Assimilation, and Multiculturalism," David Hollinger understands Albright's choice as a distinction between ascription and affiliation.[110] Though Jewishness always contained both components, ascription continued to dominate for much of Jewish history. Hollinger's use of ascription may be likened to the sociological category "historical familism," coined by Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen to describe a sense of belonging that is not determined by behavior or belief.[111] One was a Jew because one was ascribed as such by the law, by tradition, by the community, or in the cases of the medieval church and later Nazism, by the enemy. One's internalization of that external ascription brought a sense of familial connectedness rooted largely in a historical narrative (real or imagined). And one was *not* a Jew by the same criterion.

The label "Jew" was sometimes defined and even preserved by an external authority. Affiliation was a second-tier concept; the subject was always free to identify with that ascription or not. But that generally did not affect the ascribed status. Jews were so ethnically tied that one's "Jewishness" was really beyond one's control. Even in the case of conversion to another religion, many medieval authorities argue that one need not "convert back" (the term itself is dissonant) to Judaism. Nonascription, in whatever way—ideological and apathetic—was largely an ineffectual act. In the case of Albright, affiliation was used as a first-tier concept that undermined ascription. Here she seems to have unknowingly subverted the entire trajectory of Jewish identity. While acknowledging the empirical fact that her mother's family was Jewish, thus halakhically and normatively making her a "Jew," she essentially erased that ascription by her refusal to affiliate; that is, by her refusal to extend her familial roots to her own identity.[112] Rejection of affiliation in spite of ascription determined her identity (does it matter if rabbis think she is a Jew if she denies it?). Hollinger concludes, "Affiliation is no less important to Jewish identity in America today than is ascription, and as long as American Jews are free to 'invent' their Jewishness, this will continue to be true."[113]

I extend Albright's ethnic inventiveness to Judaism as a religion. One of the fundamental elements of American religion is its creativity, the license it takes to revise and restructure existing modes and create new ones. This is not to deny the existence of structures of religious authority, social norms, customs, and the like. It is to say, rather, that these structures have become more liquid in American Jewish self-fashioning. For example, Jewish texts remain, but how they are used, read, revised, and even excised, is no longer determined solely by the hermeneutical lenses of the past. Undermining the heteronomy of tradition is an American religious past-time going back to Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and forward to New Age religion.[114] Jefferson's Bible is one example of the audacity of American religious textuality.[115] This tendency is even more overt in America's postethnic turn.

Susannah Heschel notes that postmodernism and intermarriage "[have] brought [Judaism] to ever-increasing swaths of the non-Jewish population. Consequently, traditional Jewish boundaries and rabbinic determinations of Jewish identity have become unwieldy and meaningless. Postmodern America has invented a uniquely multiform Judaism, and the openness of America's multicultural society has encouraged a mixture of identities. . . . The cultural boundaries in America have become so porous that Jewishness develops into a free-floating identity open to appropriation by anyone, including Jews."[116] Irving Howe described America as a place where "the new" was more than an American value; it was an ethos.[117] In such a society, even as tradition has a place, its place will always be refracted through the lens of the new. The "new" newness in our society has taken the form of a postethnicity that challenges Jews to revise their

notion of ethnos as a static and reliable way to define Jewishness. In some way, this is not the price of postmodernity but has a genealogy that extends back to the nineteenth century when Jews were formulating the contours of American Judaism. Whether this is a passing fad, we do not know. But we can only postulate from our station in history.

To return once more to classic Reform's severance of ethnicity from religion in 1885, it is obvious that what classic Reform meant by "religion" then was some essentialist notion of Judaism as "ethical monotheism" based on its claim that prophetic religion captured the true meaning of Judaism. Today Judaism has become, at best, Judaisms, and the growing expression of Jewishness is no longer exclusively an essentialized notion of religion or peoplehood. One could say that Jews (however defined) can, and are, inventing and reinventing new forms of religion, "new" Judaisms through religious syncretism, by using Judaism as a template for world ecological concerns, and by creating new rituals to mark communal, national, and global events that have nothing whatsoever to do with Jews, Jewish history, or the Jewish myth. These new practices are often not exclusive to "Jews" and have been increasingly integrated into other religions (church and ecumenical versions of the Passover Seder are one example).[118] Construing Judaism as something not exclusive to Jews is yet another illustration of the severance of ethnicity from religion in a very different form than what was originally intended, one that more closely adheres to the postethnicity under discussion. More nationalistic or traditional Jews may mock such activity, or lament it, but ultimately they have no power or authority to stop it or even define it for anyone outside their particular community. That, too, is part of the American experience.[119]

Determining whether something is truly "Jewish" or not has lost some ground to the inventive spirit which itself is an expression of affiliation *contra* ascription. The danger of relativism exists. That will always be the case when authorities lose control of defining boundaries. Those who maintain that Jewishness can only be determined by ascription, that is, by external criteria defined by particular communities, and that Judaism is meant solely for Jews, will never acquiesce to this seemingly anarchic and radical rethinking of Jewishness and Judaism in a postethnic era. Yet it is, in my mind, a worthwhile endeavor to explore this phenomenon for the simple reason that this is increasingly where American Judaism lives. While the "is" should not, by definition, determine the "ought," those who reflect on the "ought" certainly need to give it careful and serious consideration, especially in a Jewish society in which religious, political, and cultural hegemony is absent.

2 Ethnicity, America, and the Future of the Jews: Felix Adler, Mordecai Kaplan, and Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

"You're a Christian soul! By God, a better Christian never lived." Nathan replies. "And well for us! For what makes me for you a Christian, makes yourself for me a Jew."

—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Nathan the Wise"

I have been baptized but not converted.

—Henrich Heine

Introduction: Ethnicity and Thinking "Jewishly"

In the previous chapter I examined what I take to be the emerging postethnic nature of contemporary American society and explored how this development has posed distinct challenges to American Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness in this century. Of course, the question of Jewishness and ethnicity is not a contemporary issue but has been part of Jewish self-fashioning for a long time, particularly in the modern era when emancipation required Jews to construct an identity no longer determined by their exclusion from the social norm. While the term "ethnicity" to describe Jews and minorities in general only became popular in the postwar era, it reflects a situation that existed in different ways throughout much of modern Jewish history albeit couched in different terminology.[1] This chapter examines three thinkers, two of whom wrote before "ethnicity" was common parlance (Adler and Kaplan) and one who writes after it has ceased being the dominant marker of identity (Schachter-Shalomi). Hence I use the term somewhat loosely to define the broader phenomenon of what one could call "differentiated identity," that is, the ways in which Jews held fast to a notion of being a "community of descent" coupled with their desire to acculturate into American society. I avoid the term "race" that was more commonly used to define the Jew in the period when Adler and the early Kaplan wrote, but means something very different today. I also avoid the term "peoplehood," which is too ambiguous and diffuse to capture the nuances of what I am arguing.[2]