

## INTRODUCTION

David N. Myers

It was some seventy years ago, in 1928, that Salo Wittmayer Baron, then a young Jewish historian, published a provocative essay, "Ghetto and Emancipation," whose echoes continue to reverberate powerfully to this day. This early essay contains in concentrated form many of the important themes that would mark Baron's thought throughout his extraordinary career.<sup>1</sup> The urgent desire to abandon an excessively gloomy view of Jewish history, which Baron designated the "lachrymose conception" of Jewish history, makes its first appearance in the concluding line of "Ghetto and Emancipation."<sup>2</sup> Baron was especially intent on overturning the "traditional view" alluded to in the article's subtitle—the ubiquitous distinction made by Jewish historians between "the black of the Jewish Middle Ages and the white of the post-Emancipation period . . ."<sup>3</sup> According to Baron, this historiographical tendency, born in the formative generations of Jewish historiography in nineteenth-century Germany, was woefully misleading. The Jewish Middle Ages were not a source of unending misery. Not only did medieval Jews possess "more rights than the great bulk of the population," but the Jewish community "enjoyed full internal autonomy."<sup>4</sup> This latter privilege issued naturally from the corporatist order of medieval feudalism. Conversely, it stood in direct conflict with modern theories of governance in which the State demanded a direct relationship with the individual subject-citizen. Ironically, Baron couples his retreat from the lachrymose conception of the Jewish Middle Ages with a decidedly lachrymose view of Jewish modernity. Indeed, he takes fierce exception to those Jewish historians who celebrate the advent of Jewish political emancipation as "the dawn of a new day after a nightmare of the deepest horror."<sup>5</sup>

Baron's strictures in "Ghetto and Emancipation" point to the disturbing and disabling effects of the emancipatory process: the loss of

communal autonomy, the assumption of new and onerous obligations imposed by the state, the evisceration of the national component of Jewish identity, and the recasting of Judaism into a narrow confessional mold. Hovering above Baron's essay is the spirit of Count Clermont-Tonnere, a delegate to the French National Assembly, who declared in 1789 that "the Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals." This statement epitomizes Baron's sense of the deep structural flaws of Jewish modernity—specifically, the imperative to surrender all but the most meager vestiges of communal identity in return for individual political rights.<sup>6</sup>

Of course, Baron was hardly the first thinker in modern times to call attention to the hazards of emancipation. Reticence about a new transformative politics surfaced in the midst of the very Enlightenment movements that agitated for it. Such diverse eighteenth-century figures as Rousseau, Burke, and Hamann shared a concern over the loss of tradition, community, and a secure sense of the past, which was seemingly mandated by the new liberal creed. For some, such as the German Counter-Enlightenment thinker Johann David Michaelis, it was the emancipation of the Jews itself that signaled the corrupting influence of liberalism on German group integrity.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding these conservative critiques, the tenets of political liberalism not only were validated by the French Revolution, but served more broadly as pillars for a sweeping process of *embourgeoisement* in nineteenth-century Europe. And yet, voices of dissent were never stifled. In fact, Carl Schorske notes the irony that in Austria in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, "the program which the liberals had devised against the upper classes occasioned the explosion of the lower."<sup>8</sup> The resulting radicalization led to a dizzying proliferation of new anti-liberal ideologies—socialism, ultra-nationalism, anti-Semitism—all of which were sounded in a shriller and "sharper key" than previous political expressions.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that no group had invested more faith and goodwill in the Enlightenment project than the Jews, the resulting "failure of liberalism left the Jew a victim."<sup>10</sup> One of the most noteworthy Jewish "victims" was Theodor Herzl, whose grandiose vision of cultural ecumenism between Jews and Europeans was shattered by the Dreyfus Affair in 1894. For Herzl, the Jewish response to the anti-Dreyfusards—and the unfortunate but inevitable response to Count Clermont-Tonnere—was to affirm precisely that which had been discarded one hundred years earlier: Jewish national identity. The

Zionist program announced a blueprint for a reconstruction of the political form of the Jewish European state, Herzl's vision in Europe, and thus signaled the end of the Jews.

Salo Baron knew of Theodor Herzl's illustrious university, where he earned the city's longstanding independence election of Karl Lueger, and of the ironic effects of assimilation. Yet, he followed the footsteps. Nor did he see Jewish entry into modernity and Emancipation" in the environment of Central Jewish environment. It possessed its own, marked by the absence of a deeply rooted intensified the appeal of the imperative of assimilation in the melting pot, that religious loyalties of modern of the 1920s was a quiet assimilation, if not the

Baron's concerns were a series of trenchant arguments against the "melting pot" model, like Horace M. Kallen, who argued to surrender the potential of a model of a "symphony of races" that liberal "democracy" could create the average type of man upon this foundation of the cultural pluralists. He shared their fears about the benevolent processes of assimilation in a brief historical essay that those against which he

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Zionist program announced in Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* of 1896 was thus a blueprint for a reconstituted Jewish national community. Even though the political form of this community was to resemble a bourgeois Central European state, Herzl's Zionism demanded the end of Jewish existence in Europe, and thus signaled the loss of a certain liberal innocence for the Jews.

Salo Baron knew well the formative Viennese environment in which Theodor Herzl's illusions were fostered. Baron studied at the city's university, where he earned three doctorates. He was well aware of the city's longstanding infatuation with anti-Semitism, epitomized by the election of Karl Lueger as mayor in 1895. No doubt, he was also aware of the ironic effects of anti-Semitism in reversing the Jewish march to assimilation. Yet, he did not choose to follow in Herzl's Zionist footsteps. Nor did he give voice to the negative consequences of the Jewish entry into modernity while in Vienna. Rather, he wrote “Ghetto and Emancipation” in New York, far from the highly charged environment of Central Europe. America clearly offered a more stable Jewish environment than Europe to him and many others. But it possessed its own, more subtle dangers. Indeed, it was precisely the absence of a deeply rooted anti-Semitic political culture in America that intensified the appeal of social integration for Jews.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, it was the imperative of assimilation, as reflected in the pervasive metaphor of the melting pot, that threatened the strong communal, ethnic, and religious loyalties of new Americans. From this perspective, New York of the 1920s was a quite logical venue in which to confront the perils of assimilation, if not the larger triumphalist myth of Jewish modernity.

Baron's concerns were not expressed in a conceptual vacuum. A series of trenchant American critics had expressed dissatisfaction with the “melting pot” model for at least a decade. Indeed, cultural pluralists like Horace M. Kallen, Randolph Bourne, and Judah L. Magnes refused to surrender the potential benefit of group rights. They preferred the model of a “symphony” of nationalities over the “melting pot,” cognizant that liberal “democracy has the tendency to level all distinctions, to create the average type, almost to demand uniformity.”<sup>12</sup> Baron stood upon this foundation of criticism in “Ghetto and Emancipation.” Unlike the cultural pluralists, he offered no political prescriptions. But he did share their fears about the insidious consequences of apparently benevolent processes of social amelioration. He exhibited these fears in a brief historical essay with judgments as sweeping and reductionist as those against which he inveighed. Indeed, while challenging the sharp



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A related though distinct perspective advocates "a consistent and principled approach to minority rights" within a liberal democratic order.<sup>18</sup> These various political conceptions reflect an ongoing struggle at the end of the twentieth century to address a question posed two centuries earlier: how can a group seeking to preserve a measure of collective identity survive within a liberal society that values individual rights and obligations above all else? It is this question that Salo Baron so starkly formulated regarding the Jewish community in his "Ghetto and Emancipation." And it is this question to which the current volume offers a response, or series of fruitfully diverse responses.

## II

The origins of this volume are perhaps more mystifying than the central problem which it engages. One would not necessarily expect that the grand issues of modern Jewish identity would win a hearing at a Jesuit university in a small American city whose Jewish community numbers between three and four thousand souls. And yet, it was at the University of Scranton that a conference entitled "From Ghetto to Emancipation: Historical and Contemporary Reconsiderations of the Jewish Community" was held in March 1995. The conference attracted a distinguished roster of scholars in various fields of Jewish studies from across the United States, as well as interested faculty from the host University of Scranton.

The impetus for a major conference in the field of Jewish studies at the University of Scranton came from Rabbi Dr. David Geffen. Since moving to Scranton to assume a pulpit there some five years ago, Rabbi Geffen has infused a new spirit and intellectual vitality into the local Jewish community. Several years ago, he seized upon the idea of an important scholarly event to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation. After a series of discussions, he entrusted the task of carrying the plan forward to me, a native of Scranton and a product of its Jewish community.

Rabbi Geffen's idea presented me with an opportunity not only to return to my hometown, but to revisit the predicament of the Jewish community in the modern age. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I remember Jewish Scranton as a community of tight-knit social and family relations, of well-established institutions, and of a clearly defined sense of group distinctiveness. In visits back over the past decade and a half, I have encountered a shadow of the community's former self.

This is particularly true for the once-dominant non-Orthodox segment—though much less so for the Orthodox segment which is currently experiencing a demographic renaissance. However, most members of the age cohort with whom I grew up have chosen to leave the embracing confines of the Scranton community for a wider world, lured by new educational and professional prospects. The result has been a “graying” of large sectors of the community, prompting its leaders to ponder the prospects for continued existence. Their concerns are hardly unique. On the contrary, they mirror the concerns of the broader American Jewish community for which assimilation appears as the chief social ill.

When thinking back upon my childhood in Scranton, I do not conjure up romantic images of a seamlessly holistic community. Instead, what I recall is the pervasive tension that defined me as a member of a group whose boundaries were both readily identifiable and yet permeable. Social relations between Jews and non-Jews, indeed, between Jews and Jesuits, were so normal as to merit no special attention. This was the norm for at least three generations, extending back to my grandparents. And yet, each of the generations possessed an unmistakable sense of membership in the “community,” affirmed not only by the defining institutions of synagogue, community center, and charitable organization, but also by the conscious acknowledgment of the wider non-Jewish world with which we regularly interacted.

The Scranton experience suggests an important qualification to Salo Baron’s sharp dichotomy between ghetto and emancipation. Perhaps the two phenomena, ghetto and emancipation, need not be seen in opposition. Perhaps the process of political emancipation, and the very project of modernity itself, were not solely a matter of surrender to the leveling force of liberalism. Perhaps these processes had a far more ambiguous character, leading to a multiplicity of outcomes other than the inexorable demise of group identities. In this regard, one recalls Jürgen Habermas, whose defense of the project of modernity is “a plea for the maintenance of its dialectical tensions, rather than for their overcoming in a perfectly Enlightened form of life.”<sup>19</sup>

The essays in this volume investigate these tensions from a variety of illuminating perspectives. David B. Ruderman commences his evocative paper on “The Cultural Significance of the Ghetto in Jewish History” by questioning whether the shift from ghetto to emancipation meant moving “from an inherently bad condition . . . to a good one . . .”<sup>20</sup> Ruderman then proceeds with a brief history of the ghetto idea in Jewish

thought and history. The historian of Italian Jewry, Salo Baron, in his internalist approach to the creative power of the ghetto afforded “a sense of group solidarity and a feeling of group solidarity also the arena for a dialogue with the outside world.”

This important theme in modern Jewish history is explored in volume, “The Blessing of the Ghetto,” which draws its inspiration from Salo Baron’s 1966 work. Cohen in 1966 in what was an unavoidable and even inevitable. Rather than dismiss the idea, Cohen, and I in his work as an important source to explore this idea in the fact that a similar uncultural studies discourse. This paper aims to induce a multilayered notion of

Though not directly, L. Morgan focuses on Central European Jewish Reflections on Some wide-ranging essay, which the themes of productive tension. important currents in the pervasive concern renowned *Gemeinschaft* forms of messianic, as intellectuals gave voice such figures as George Kafka, Morgan notes “culture” through the

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thought and historiography, culminating with a critique of the gifted historian of Italian Jewry, Robert Bonfil. Ruderman eschews Bonfil's internalist approach with its emphasis on the immanent allure and creative power of the ghetto environment. He does not dispute that the ghetto afforded "a sense of Jewish space where Jews retained a vital feeling of group solidarity and cultural autonomy." But the ghetto was also the arena for "a constant and intense cultural negotiation and dialogue with the outside world."<sup>21</sup>

This important thematic thread in Ruderman's discussion of early modern Jewish history is picked up in my own contribution to this volume, "'The Blessing of Assimilation' Reconsidered." My paper draws its inspiration from a largely forgotten lecture delivered by Gerson Cohen in 1966 in which the eminent scholar called attention to the unavoidable and even salutary effects of assimilation in Jewish history. Rather than dismiss the assimilatory process as an unmitigated evil, Cohen, and I in his wake, suggest that assimilation can and must be seen as an important source of cultural exchange and, hence, vitality. I explore this idea in the context of modern Jewish history, mindful of the fact that a similar understanding of assimilation prevails in the current cultural studies discourse of diaspora and transnational identities. My paper aims to induce a dialogue across fields revolving around the multilayered notion of assimilation.

Though not directly interrogating the idea of assimilation, Michael L. Morgan focuses upon a group of highly influential and assimilated Central European Jewish thinkers in "Redemption and Community: Reflections on Some European Jewish Intellectuals, 1900–1940." In this wide-ranging essay, Morgan attempts to trace a discursive tradition in which the themes of community and redemption stand in constant and productive tension. This tradition is located at the juncture of two important currents in early twentieth-century Central European history: the pervasive concern with community that followed Ferdinand Tönnies' renowned *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* of 1887; and the bold new forms of messianic, and often apocalyptic, expressions to which leading intellectuals gave voice.<sup>22</sup> While exposing the divergent perspectives of such figures as Georg Simmel, Martin Buber, Georg Lukacs, and Franz Kafka, Morgan notes their shared desire to confront the "crisis of modern culture" through the categories of community and redemption.

William V. Rowe's "Difficult Freedom: The Basis of Community in Emmanuel Levinas" is an interesting sequel to Morgan's presentation. Similarly concerned with the link between redemption and community,

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Rowe's inquiry into Levinas marks a passage from German to French thought, and thereby retraces Levinas' own role in introducing important German philosophers (i.e., Husserl and Heidegger) into France. Rowe carefully excavates three layers of connotations of "ghetto" in Levinas' thought: the first (and most traditional) signifies the largely autonomous *pre-modern* Jewish community; the second alludes to the *modern* ghetto of alienation created by the emancipatory process; and the third refers to the "reactionary and anti-semitic ghetto that is based on the failure of emancipation." Taking a cue from Salo Baron, Rowe concentrates on the second ghetto which "represented the effective isolation not of Jews, but of their Judaism, from Western life and even from the lives of emancipated Jews themselves." He analyzes Levinas' diagnosis of and prescription for this ghetto predicament. Rowe suggests that for Levinas, a meaningful community, based on "true sociality," must embody "the infinity of responsibility for the Other." Indeed, it is in this responsibility that the possibility for a new, nontotalitarian universality—antidote to the ghetto of modernity—inheres.

Nomi M. Stolzenberg shifts the focus from post-Holocaust French intellectual discourse to contemporary American legal thought in "The Puzzling Persistence of Community: The Cases of Airmont and Kiryas Joel." Her concern is the fate of communal aspirations within the constitutional order of the United States; the prism through which she contemplates this fate is the case of Kiryas Joel, a Satmar Hasidic Jewish community in upstate New York, whose residents appealed to the state to support the incorporation of a public school for its disabled children. While tracing the legal battle over such support all the way to the Supreme Court, Stolzenberg juxtaposes the case of Kiryas Joel to that of Airmont, another New York community which sought to prevent Orthodox Jews from establishing informal prayer assemblies in their homes. At the heart of this juxtaposition is Stolzenberg's interest in the very nature of liberalism, whose core principles of neutrality and tolerance seem antithetical to the continued existence of insular, perhaps even intolerant, communities. Her analysis suggests that "liberalism is a rich and variegated tradition" which, contrary to conventional understanding, allows for the possibility of homogeneous communities "exercis(ing) political power for their own ends."

Stolzenberg's presentation of the struggle to preserve communal integrity in the face of social and legal obstacles is an excellent theoretical complement to Arthur A. Goren's rich historical essay, "The Rites of Community, The Public Culture of American Jews." Delivered

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as the 1995 Morris B. Gelb Memorial Lecture, Goren's paper examines the way in which Jewish immigrants to the United States sought to invent new forms of communal identity in their transplanted homeland. In particular, he focuses on the rituals of mourning and celebration which American Jews, primarily in the early twentieth century, developed in order to foster a stronger sense of communal self-worth. Pervading Goren's analysis is a sense of the loss of textured bonds of group identity which immigration to the United States entailed for millions of Jews. In their absence, American Jews fashioned their own distinct forms of commemoration as a way of validating their communal existence. In the process, a Jewish public culture, "fragile and fluid," was created which served as "an important arena for self-definition."

The final paper in this volume is a doubly fitting conclusion to a volume on the predicament of the modern Jewish community. Michael Brown's "Towards a History of Scranton Jewry" sheds light on the patterns and tensions shaping a small Jewish community in the alternately alluring and threatening American environment. That the focus is upon Scranton—and, moreover, that Professor Brown is a former Scrantonian—seem especially appropriate. Though not a participant in the 1995 conference at the University of Scranton, Professor Brown graciously agreed to include his paper on the history of Scranton's Jewish community in this book. His paper skillfully mixes primary research, oral history, and conceptual rigor, and thereby serves as an excellent model for local history. Further, it provides an arena in which to explore in concrete fashion the larger abstract problems addressed in this volume's diverse and illuminating meditations on Baron's "Ghetto and Emancipation."

### III

The final task of this introduction is to thank those who made the conference, and especially this volume, not merely possible but an enormously stimulating and enjoyable pursuit. As I have already indicated, the original inspiration came from Rabbi David Geffen to whom I remain deeply indebted. At early stages of planning, vital assistance in conceiving and organizing the conference came from Sondra Myers. The Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation and its executive director, Seymour Brotman, were enthusiastic proponents of the conference throughout the entire process. In addition, the conference and volume won the unstinting support of the University of Scranton's

administration, particularly the President, Rev. J. A. Panuska, S. J., Provost Richard H. Passon, and Dean Paul F. Fahey. It is both a pleasure and a privilege to thank Robert J. Sylvester, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, and Alan Mazzei, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, for their indefatigable efforts. Alan, in particular, labored above and beyond the call of duty to assure the success of this undertaking. On the whole, the University of Scranton's commitment to the conference idea, and to Jewish studies more generally, reflects the genuinely catholic interests of these fine individuals and the institution they serve so well.

Among the conference's participants, it is necessary to single out Professors Elisheva Carlebach and Rela Geffen, both of whom offered important intellectual contributions to the proceedings. The conference was also graced by the presence of Shoshana Cardin, distinguished national Jewish leader, whose insights proved stimulating to all in attendance. Mention must also be made of Professor Alan Mittleman of Muhlenberg College for his trenchant critique of my and Professor Stolzenberg's papers. I would also like to thank Professors Harold Baillie and David Friedrichs of the University of Scranton for agreeing to chair two of the conference's sessions.

Vital financial support for the conference and volume has come from many individuals and institutions. Among those who kindly offered assistance were Irwin E. Alperin, Myer M. Alperin, Arley Wholesale, Inc., Herbert Barton, Richard S. Bishop, Kathy and Seymour Brotman, Janice and Harris Cutler, David M. Epstein, Rabbi David Geffen, Mae S. Gelb, The Golub Foundation, The Grossman Family Foundation, Beverly and Jerome Klein, Bertram M. Linder, Ann and I. Leo Moskovitz, Libbye Myers, Sondra and Morey Myers, Paul Rosenberg, Dr. Stephen I. Rosenthal, The Robert Saligman Charitable Foundation, Lewis B. Sare, The Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation, Margaret and Douglas Sheldon, Reva and Harold Sprung, The Samuel Tabas Family Foundation, G. Weinberger Company, and The Isaac Ziegler Charitable Trust.

The University of Scranton Press and its director, Father Richard W. Rousseau, S. J., have provided a most hospitable and professional home for this volume. But the volume would not have seen the light of day were it not for Stephanie Chasin. With her keen editorial eye and astounding efficiency, she helped transform a series of conference papers into essays that stand on their own intellectual and stylistic merit. Penultimately, Bill Rowe has proved to be a wonderful collaborator and

conversation partner in discussions.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to the University of Scranton whose generous support brings to life the fascinating Jewish community in modern America.

1. Salo Baron, "Ghetto and View?," *The Menorah*.
2. Baron refers to "Ghetto and Emancipation," 526. See *Wittmayer Baron: A Biography*.
3. Baron, "Ghetto and View?."
4. Baron, "Ghetto and View?."
5. Baron, "Ghetto and View?."
6. Baron, "Ghetto and View?."
7. See Michaelis, "Ghetto and View?," *Ueber die Juden in Deutschland* and Jehuda Reinharz, "Ghetto and View?," 36-38.
8. Carl E. Schorske, "Ghetto and View?," 117.
9. Schorske defines "Ghetto and View?" as more abrasive, more deliberative style of "Ghetto and View?."
10. *Ibid.*, 118.
11. This is not to say that "Ghetto and View?" is a powerful doses, in the sense of *Antisemitism in America*. "Ghetto and View?" was not a "Ghetto and View?" in America as it was in the centuries.
12. See Judah L. M. Reinharz, *The Jew in America*.
13. "Ghetto and View?."
14. Max Horkheimer, "Ghetto and View?," translated by John C.

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conversation partner, even in the midst of rather mundane editorial discussions.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to the Jewish community of Scranton whose generosity far exceeds its numbers and whose history brings to life the fascinating and tension-filled predicament of the Jewish community in modern times.

NOTES

1. Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?," *The Menorah Journal* 14 (June 1928), 515-526.
2. Baron refers to the "lachrymose theory" in this final line. "Ghetto and Emancipation," 526. See the analysis of Robert Liberles in his biography, *Salo Wittmayer Baron: Architect of Jewish History* (New York, 1995), 40-45, 340.
3. Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 517.
4. Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 518, 520.
5. Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 517.
6. Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," 524.
7. See Michaelis' response to the pro-emancipatory pamphlet of C. W. Dohm, *Ueber die buergerliche Verbesserung der Juden* in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York, 1980), 36-38.
8. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980), 117.
9. Schorske defines this new key as "a mode of political behaviour at once more abrasive, more creative, and more satisfying to the life of feeling than the deliberative style of the liberal." *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 119.
10. *Ibid.*, 118.
11. This is not to suggest that anti-Semitism did not exist, and at times in powerful doses, in the United States. See, for instance, Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York, 1994). It is rather to suggest that anti-Semitism was not an ingrained part of the social and political landscape of America as it was in Central Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
12. See Judah L. Magnes, "A Republic of Nationalities," in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 390.
13. "Ghetto and Emancipation," 524.
14. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cummings (New York, 1972), 13.

15. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984), xxiv.
16. *Ibid.*, xxiv.
17. See, for example, Amitai Etzioni, *A Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (New York, 1993).
18. See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford, 1995), 195.
19. See Martin Jay's review of Habermas' *The Philosophical Defense of Modernity in History and Theory*, 28 (1989), 95.
20. See Ruderman, "The Cultural Significance of the Ghetto in Jewish History," 1.
21. Ruderman, 13.
22. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1935). On the neo-messianic expression, see Michael Löwy, *Redemption et utopie: Le judaïsme libertaire en Europe centrale* (Paris, 1988).

## THE CULTURE OF THE

Surely one would expect a conference, "The Culture of the Ghetto," to lead in some way.<sup>2</sup> One might expect it should lead from a "ghetto," to a good trajectory follows the experience: Jews "emancipated" in the wake of their liberation from the ghettos of their liberation. The ghettos of the cultures—virulent and alienated existence—was surely a boon for modern Jews, the ghettos of the ghettos. Such expectations. Such expectations. "ghetto Jew," "outcast Jew," a throwback to an era when their culture was the result of their sequence of even more general ghettoization of members of minority groups. Americans, who are not Jews, because of socioec

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“THE BLESSING OF  
ASSIMILATION” RECONSIDERED:  
AN INQUIRY INTO  
JEWISH CULTURAL STUDIES

David N. Myers

*I: Rivers of Culture*

**A**n eighth-century midrashic source relates that “all rivers are good and blessed and sweet and bring benefit to the world when they flow over land; but when they enter the sea, they are evil and cursed and bitter, and bring no benefit to the world.”<sup>1</sup> The point of recalling this legend is hardly to condemn the pleasures of the sea much less to commence a discussion of Jewish oceanography. Rather, it is to provide an historical backdrop to one of the most vexing statements uttered by a Jew in modern times. Consistent with the ancient sages’ charge, I have turned this statement over and over, and yet never gained more than a fleeting grasp of its meaning. And so again I submit for consideration the enigmatic words of Eduard Gans, a brilliant young German-Jewish legal historian, from 1822. Commenting on the drive of Jews in his day to break free from the shackles of insularity and particularism, Gans observed in tones strikingly reminiscent of his mentor, Hegel:

This is the consoling lesson of history properly understood: that everything passes without perishing, and yet persists, although it has long been consigned to the past. That is why neither the Jews will perish nor Judaism dissolve; in the larger movement of the whole they will seem to have disappeared, *and yet they will live on as the river lives on in the ocean.*<sup>2</sup>

Separated by a vast temporal and conceptual expanse, the eighteenth-century midrashist and the nineteenth-century legal historian are both drawn to the metaphorical relationship between the river and the sea. For the former, the entry of the river into the ocean spells not the *disappearance* of its distinct properties but their dramatic transformation, an ontological sea change, if you will—from good to evil, sweet to bitter, indeed, from a blessing to a curse. By contrast, for Gans, the entry of the river into the sea—or more explicitly, the river of Jewish culture into the sea of European civilization—is both necessary and salutary.

But in summoning up all of our combined historical and marine biological prowess, we must ask: How precisely does a “river live on in the ocean?” Or to frame the question more generally, how do Jews avoid disappearance as a discrete group while becoming an inseparable part of a larger culture and society? This question, rife with internal tensions and contradictions, has intrigued and haunted Jews for centuries. Indeed, it has hovered above their encounter with new cultural milieus, from ancient Babylon to modern Berlin.<sup>3</sup> For Eduard Gans and other German-Jewish intellectuals of his day, this question consumed their daily thoughts. To a great extent, it was the same question that their parents’ generation, the first generation of *Maskilim*, Jewish Enlightenment figures in Europe, had posed. And yet, the mood in the younger generation was more despairing and *Angst*-ridden over the prospect of Judaism’s survival.

As children of the Enlightenment, Gans and his friends had absorbed the aspirations for emancipation and social integration that excited the passions of Moses Mendelssohn and his circle of disciples in the late eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Far more than their elders, the younger generation of intellectuals had benefitted from admission to and study at German universities, a palpable sign of progress. At university they entered a new cultural world, one in which they quickly became mesmerized by the powerful force of *Wissenschaft*—a term that conveyed, in this period, both a sense of scientific rigor and of intellectual and disciplinary unity. But the expectations of this generation, bolstered by its own experience of rapid educational advance, were abruptly and rudely challenged midway through the second decade of the nineteenth century. A powerful anti-Enlightenment sentiment swept Germany after the defeat of Napoleon, accompanied by a new wave of reaction that included anti-Jewish violence. The optimistic, at times, ebullient, spirit of the previous generation began to

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fade. Gans and a select circle of German-Jewish intellectuals convened in this somber atmosphere to reflect on their fate, to meditate not only on the path of Enlightenment but on their very future as Jews. This stark moment of self-reflection gave birth to the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (Society for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jews) in Berlin in 1819.<sup>5</sup> Critical historical study, members of this group hoped, could both clarify the Jewish past and illumine the course of the Jewish future.

In outlining this mission, Eduard Gans, the group's president, offered his enigmatic prescription for Jewish survival. To survive, the river of Jewish culture would have to live on in the sea of European culture. Not surprisingly, this ambiguous charge was interpreted variously. Leopold Zunz, a founding member of the *Verein*, became one of the most important Jewish scholars of the nineteenth century. Throughout his long life, Zunz never surrendered his conviction that the only appropriate institutional home for Jewish studies was the German university. Consequently, he refused to accept a professorial appointment in the modern rabbinical seminaries that arose in Germany in the latter half of the century. However, Zunz was never permitted full entry into the ocean of European culture either; despite repeated entreaties, he failed to receive a position in a German university.

If Zunz marks the failure, at least in part, of Gans' vision of the river in the ocean, then Gans himself represents an ironic success. Gans too desired an appointment in a German university, though this avenue was foreclosed to him because of his Judaism. In a desperate mood, he left Germany and traveled around Europe in search of professional fulfillment.<sup>6</sup> After months of wandering, Gans decided to violate the first and cardinal requirement of members in the short-lived society of Jewish scholars in Berlin: in Paris in late 1825, he converted to Christianity, hopeful that this act would provide him with a "ticket of admission" to European society, as his fellow Society member, Heinrich Heine, once described his own conversion. Conversion did have the desired professional effect, earning Gans a full-time academic appointment at the University of Berlin in 1826, where he taught and wrote in the field of legal history (especially Roman law). And yet, Gans' legacy, certainly to Jewish history, is that of a *Taufjude*, literally a baptized Jew. Perhaps Gans was prognosticating his own future in his 1822 address to fellow Jewish scholars. For if anyone continued to live on as a river in a sea, it was surely the *Taufjuden*. Converted Jews in Germany tended to associate with other converted Jews or with friends

Jewish River  
 Ocean of European  
 Culture

and family who did not convert; moreover, despite their formal affiliation with Christianity, converted Jews often perceived themselves and were perceived by others as Jews by social and cultural affinity.<sup>7</sup>

The tale of Eduard Gans is interesting and powerful in its own right. But it is the larger predicament, indeed the tremulous tension, embodied in his river-sea metaphor, that extends our interest beyond the example of one German-Jewish intellectual. Gans' metaphor has often been read as an epitaph for German-Jewish culture, but I would suggest that we regard it here as an epigraph, an opening statement, for a renewed consideration of Jewish assimilation in the modern age. The term assimilation often conjures up frightful images for Jews and other minority groups, signaling the loss of collective identity to a hegemonic majority culture. But before accepting this image without comment, it might be worthwhile to revisit the career of this idea in Jewish history, particularly during the modern period. Time does not permit an exhaustive history of Jewish assimilation. However, I would like to point out the multivalence and historical complexity of the term by making recourse to a number of interesting sources drawn from Jewish history. This effort seems especially appropriate in light of recent intellectual and political trends in the United States that pose challenges to what we may call, in evocation of Salo Baron, the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish assimilation.<sup>8</sup> New insights drawn from the ever-malleable field of cultural studies, particularly those focused on diaspora and transnational communities, offer both novel and fertile grounds for rethinking the phenomenon of assimilation. Toward the end of this paper, we shall turn our attention to some of these new insights, taking note of their relationship to the Jewish case of diaspora identity.

But to return for a final time to Eduard Gans. If we accept that Gans captured the complexity of assimilation in his own day, we should be mindful of the fact that circumstances similar to those in which he offered his enigmatic charge have accompanied Jews in the West ever since. Indeed, nearly a century after Gans' speech, another German-Jewish intellectual pondered the prospect of Judaism's survival or, more intimately, the viability of his own existence as a Jew. This German Jew saw a number of his closest friends march to the baptismal font—not so much to advance their professional interests à la Gans, as to achieve harmony between their religious beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and between their inner spiritual world and the surrounding environment, on the other. This young intellectual, Franz Rosenzweig, found the logic of his friends compelling, and he prepared to convert to

Christianity in 1911. He had to attend a Kol Nidre service with his founders," that is, a service to whom he had converted; his mother and his authorities expel him from the synagogue in Berlin. He, the now legendary scholar, and the solemnity of the occasion, plans to convert to Christianity, a new passion. Over the years, he has written little on Jewish history, theological principles. These writings, and his conversion, as one of the seminaries.

Rosenzweig is a consummate that was. Nor is it even his idea of a certain metaphorical volume of collected works published in 1926. Curiously, there is very little in his work that appears as a guide to *Zweistromland* synagogue that provided a rich destruction of the Temple of Mesopotamia, read Rosenzweig's work of Persian, Greek, and their own."<sup>12</sup> By Europe, and particularly integrating non-Jews, observes the prevalence and writing—first (Germanness and Rosenzweig, "to Jewish."<sup>13</sup> What reformulation no

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Christianity in 1913. Rosenzweig's last act before conversion was to attend a Kol Nidre service so that he could "enter Christianity as did its founders," that is, as a Jew and not as a pagan.<sup>9</sup> Rosenzweig's parents, to whom he had confided his intentions, refused to attend services with him; his mother insisted that she would demand that synagogue authorities expel him as an apostate. Consequently, he found a small synagogue in Berlin populated by Eastern European immigrants.<sup>10</sup> As the now legendary story goes, Rosenzweig was so awed by the intensity and solemnity of the Kol Nidre service that he decided to abandon his plans to convert to Christianity and committed himself to Judaism with new passion. Over the next decade and a half, Rosenzweig, who had written little on Jewish themes prior to this time, set out to develop new theological principles to sustain Jewish identity in the modern age. These writings, and particularly his book *The Star of Redemption*, stand as one of the seminal achievements in modern Jewish thought.

Rosenzweig is interesting to us not only because he failed to consummate that which Eduard Gans had a century earlier: conversion. Nor is it even his iconoclastic *teshuvah* or return to Judaism. It is rather a certain metaphorical affinity with Gans. The title of Rosenzweig's first volume of collected essays on religious and philosophical matters, published in 1926, was *Zweistromland*, the land of two streams.<sup>11</sup> Curiously, there is no explicit discussion of the title in the book itself, and very little in secondary sources. But again the stream or river appears as a guiding metaphor. For Rosenzweig, the two streams in *Zweistromland* symbolized the Tigris and Euphrates, the rivers that formed the "cradle of civilization," and more germane to our concerns, that provided a rich cultural environment for the Jewish people after the destruction of the First Temple. As one interpreter, Philip Bohlman, has read Rosenzweig's title, "the Jews used the years in the *Zweistromland* of Mesopotamia (i.e., Babylonia) to enrich their culture, to absorb Persian, Greek, and Parthian influences and yet to assimilate these as their own."<sup>12</sup> By historical analogy, the Jews used their centuries in Europe, and particularly in Germany, to enrich their culture by integrating non-Jewish cultural sources into their own. Bohlman observes the prevalence of apparent opposites in Rosenzweig's thought and writing—first and foremost, *Deutschtum and Judentum* (Germanness and Jewishness)—and yet notes correctly that for Rosenzweig, "to be German did not negate the possibility of being Jewish."<sup>13</sup> What was at work was a subtle process of adaptation and reformulation not unlike the process of exegetical innovation that

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Ahad Ha'am pointed to the example of Jews in Egypt who "used their Greek knowledge to reveal the unique spirit of Judaism, to expose its riches to the whole world, and to diminish the genius of Greek wisdom." Gerson Cohen's own approach owes much to this conception of cultural mimesis. It was in this form of assimilation, Cohen argues, that "Ahad Ha'am detected the signs of health and vigor rather than of attrition and decadence." Likewise, it was in this sense of the word that Cohen concluded that "assimilation properly channeled and exploited can . . . become a kind of blessing."<sup>23</sup>

## II: Jewishness as Hybridity

What has been offered to this point is the genealogy of a resonant idea in Jewish history, an idea that strikes one simultaneously as banal and counter-intuitive. In its long and checkered career, assimilation has not merely had a deleterious effect; it has also vitalized Jewish culture through a ceaseless process of engagement with proximate cultures. While ensuring dynamism, it has prevented in turn the emergence of a "normative Judaism," a static, unchanging essence. Therefore, assertions of a pure and pristine Judaism should be taken with a grain of salt. This applies not only to the examples of ancient Alexandria or Muslim Spain, renowned for the high degree of cultural exchange between Jews and others. It applies as well to the supposedly insular bastion of medieval Ashkenaz, where Jews and Christians, despite their mutual hostility to the point of demonization, exchanged goods, ideas, and even ritual practices with one another.<sup>24</sup> Jewish culture, even in this context, was not shaped in splendid isolation; it was manifestly permeable to non-Jewish influences.

The idea that emerges then is of Jewish identity as a hybrid creation, comprised of different strands of influence. Though evident in pre-modern times, this hybrid quality is especially visible in the modern period, as the river metaphors of Eduard Gans and Franz Rosenzweig illustrate. Perhaps the most emblematic figure of such hybridity was Moses Mendelssohn, the great eighteenth-century savant of Berlin, whose commitments to full ritual observance of Jewish law, to a non-coercive religious tradition, and to wide-ranging philosophical study inspired a generation of Jews hungry for cultural and intellectual sustenance. Mendelssohn's example seemed to demonstrate the Enlightenment's tolerance of a new Jewish type, at once observant and enlightened, Jewish and German. And yet, few in Mendelssohn's circle

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of followers (least of all his children) proved capable of holding together  
the balance that their master had so delicately forged. Part of the reason  
for this was that the very tolerance promised by the Enlightenment had  
produced a substantially different result than Mendelssohn had hoped  
for. It beckoned to the Jew to enter mainstream society, while  
simultaneously communicating the need to constrict one's Jewishness.  
Thus, rather than yielding a seamless fusion of Jewish and European  
cultures, the Enlightenment, with its ambiguous double gesture, created  
a bifurcated personality, divided into national and religious, public and  
private, spheres.<sup>25</sup>

In this respect, the Enlightenment acted on the Jew in paradoxical  
fashion. Its terrifying "totalizing" force, so roundly condemned by a  
long line of thinkers from Nietzsche to Horkheimer and Adorno to  
Levinas to Derrida, did not produce a single, essential Jewish identity.  
Rather, it broke it down, fragmented it, leading at times to what Karl  
Marx called in his (in)famous essay "On the Jewish Question" the  
"decomposition of man."<sup>26</sup> Stated otherwise, the Enlightenment  
mandated the radical hybridity that marks the modern Jewish condition.  
Or perhaps more accurately, in a phenomenally ironic twist, we can say  
that it now prescribed the very fluidity that had naturally and  
unremarkably accompanied Jewish assimilation in previous ages.

**III: Diaspora Identities**

The impetus to undertake this reconsideration of the idea of  
assimilation in Jewish history does not come only from Gerson Cohen's  
largely forgotten lecture of 1966. Nor is it merely a function of Salo  
Baron's compelling argument in 1928 that political emancipation did not  
necessarily inaugurate a new era of resplendent progress in Jewish  
history.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it emerges in the midst of similar concerns expressed  
by late-twentieth-century thinkers who operate within the overlapping  
rubrics of cultural studies, postcolonial discourse, and postmodernism.  
Characteristic of this new and evolving "tradition" of writers is the  
exploration, and at times celebration, of hybridity as an existential  
condition.<sup>28</sup> The contributors to this new discourse include novelists  
such as Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison, as well as a wide range of  
scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, and Homi  
Bhabha. Despite their diverse intellectual missions, these writers share  
a common interest in the interstitial, the space that exists between (and  
renders problematic) fixed cultural boundaries. Whether their primary

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focus be on the Chinese, Indians, Africans, or Caribbeans, these writers share a common language; they speak of the process of cultural formation in terms of diaspora or transnational communities.<sup>29</sup> Here the idea of diaspora, conveying both a sense of a native culture and of displacement from it, describes the struggle of cultural groups to stake out a position in the midst of a fast-moving current. This struggle is a political one, for dispersion invariably exposes the dispersed to the corrosive agents of hegemony and oppression. The interrelationship between dispersion and oppression, however, need not result in total submission or paralysis. In the first instance, it provides impetus to seek social and political empowerment. Moreover, it has encouraged postcolonial thinkers to examine the constructive possibilities of cultural identities that are neither native nor foreign, but dwell in "in-between" spaces," forever resisting the stasis of a fixed identity.<sup>30</sup>

The connection of this new thinking about diaspora identities to the earlier discussion of Jewish assimilation should be clear by now; in the Jewish diaspora experience, assimilation has produced many varieties of hybrid identity. What is less self-evident is the reason why the Jewish case has been largely excluded from this body of writing. I would like to offer a number of brief explanations for the relative neglect of the Jewish diaspora experience, and then conclude with a number of instructive counterexamples. First, the Jewish diaspora experience has not become part of this new discourse because scholars of Jewish studies and other interested parties have been reticent to venture beyond their own intellectual province. For similar reasons, Jewish studies has not been widely integrated into the confusing and energizing debate over multiculturalism and canonicity in the American university.

But there are factors other than the disinclination of Jewish studies scholars. Perhaps more determinative is the widespread impression of scholars outside of Jewish studies that the Jewish historical and cultural experience is part and parcel of a white Eurocentric majority culture. To many, the Jews neither look different nor, in most cases, speak a different language from the majority culture. Further, both in Central and Western Europe prior to World War II and in the contemporary United States, Jews achieved a level of affluence that qualified them to be counted among the most economically privileged members of society. Consequently, they are viewed as not sufficiently different from, or oppressed by, the mainstream to warrant inclusion as a diaspora or transnational group, which becomes in the postcolonial lexicon an unmistakably political designation. There may be other reasons for this

neglect, including the hand, and with race within the confines of these points. Nor is the association of Jews with the task of completion would rank quite high.

It seems more in tendency to exclude of the most interesting discourse of diaspora. Needless to say, intellectual are absent. Cornell West and Henry public intellectual in to the Jewish history well as a sincere blacks and Jews in Kwame Anthony (Afrocentric) current in this country and *Father's House*, African racial purification segregation; he promotes cultural exchange to African continent cultural identity.<sup>33</sup>

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Caribbeans, these writers of the process of cultural communities.<sup>29</sup> Here the of a native culture and of of cultural groups to stake current. This struggle is a poses the dispersed to the ion. The interrelationship er, need not result in total it provides impetus to seek eover, it has encouraged tive possibilities of cultural but dwell in "in-between" d identity.<sup>30</sup> ut diaspora identities to the ould be clear by now; in the produced many varieties of the reason why the Jewish dy of writing. I would like the relative neglect of the nclude with a number of ish diaspora experience has se scholars of Jewish studies ent to venture beyond their sons, Jewish studies has not and energizing debate over erican university. nclination of Jewish studies ie widespread impression of ewish historical and cultural ecentric majority culture. To or, in most cases, speak a re. Further, both in Central II and in the contemporary uence that qualified them to ivileged members of society. fficiently different from, or : inclusion as a diaspora or the postcolonial lexicon an may be other reasons for this

neglect, including the equation of Zionism with Jewishness, on one hand, and with racist imperialism, on the other.<sup>31</sup> It is not possible within the confines of this essay to offer a fully satisfactory analysis of these points. Nor is there sufficient time to disentangle the problematic association of Jews with the white majority culture. Even less appealing is the task of compiling a table of victimology in which the Jews, alas, would rank quite high.

It seems more important to note interesting counterexamples to the tendency to exclude or devalue the Jewish experience of diaspora. One of the most interesting sites of this countertendency, and of the new discourse of diaspora generally, is in recent black cultural criticism. Needless to say, reports of the decline of the African-American intellectual are absurdly premature.<sup>32</sup> Not only have figures such as Cornell West and Henry Louis Gates reinvigorated the tradition of the public intellectual in America. They have shown uncommon sensitivity to the Jewish historical experience in its creativity and in its tragedy, as well as a sincere commitment to repair fractured relations between blacks and Jews in this country. Along with their Harvard colleague, Kwame Anthony Appiah, they have questioned the essentialist (e.g., Afrocentric) currents flowing within certain academic and social circles in this country and abroad. For instance, in his important book *In My Father's House*, Appiah meticulously dissects the notion of black African racial purity, often used in support of political action and social segregation; he presents instead a detailed analysis of the dynamic cultural exchange that obtained between oppressor and oppressed on the African continent, and that yielded a dynamic and evolving African cultural identity.<sup>33</sup>

The affinities between this kind of model and Jewish models of cultural formation are intriguing and, in fact, have been made quite explicit in Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Gilroy's book is a sustained polemic against essentialist understandings of black racial or cultural identity. A recurrent motif throughout the book is Gilroy's reliance on the homonym roots/routes to express his own clear-cut proclivities: "root" connotes a search for ultimate origins and fixed identity. By contrast, "route" conveys a sense of passage, of ceaseless and agitated movement, of dynamic creativity.<sup>34</sup> In celebrating the latter routes of passage, Gilroy draws direct inspiration both from the Jewish experience of diaspora and from the historical movement of Zionism. He urges a more deliberate recognition of the parallels in historical experience between blacks and Jews, both in their

diaspora passages and in their respective oppressions. He also calls for acknowledgment of actual historical influences (e.g., of Zionism on early black nationalist thought).<sup>35</sup>

In an intriguing chapter on the great African-American leader, W. E. B. Dubois, Gilroy makes use of a familiar metaphor to summarize a central theme in one of Dubois' novelistic forays. He observes that in the conclusion of Dubois' *Dark Princess*, the union between a man and woman of different skin colors "is constructed so that the integrity of both its tributaries remains uncompromised by their confluence."<sup>36</sup> Although Gilroy does not relate this river-like metaphor to the writings of earlier Jewish thinkers, the predicament that it describes clearly has parallels. Indeed, it represents an idealized version of the phenomenon of "double consciousness"—a term which appears in the subtitle of Gilroy's book and which he borrows from the work of earlier black thinkers, especially Dubois.<sup>37</sup> Double consciousness, according to Gilroy, is the condition of women and men of African origin who act within and upon Western societies. Their experience does not entail the wholesale abandonment of a native tradition to modernity, but rather its constant and creative reformulation.<sup>38</sup>

What is especially commendable about Gilroy's book is the appreciation that he was not the first to articulate such an idea. Indeed, much of his book is a study of and testimony to past African-American thinkers, especially Dubois, who presciently comprehended the complicated, hybrid nature of black identity. This recognition distinguishes Gilroy from many others in the field of cultural studies, who often give the impression that they are inventing the wheel for the first time. Gilroy pushes hard to affirm the apt remark of Jean-François Lyotard that the postmodern—whatever it may be—is "undoubtedly a part of the modern."<sup>39</sup>

Gilroy's example is germane to our subject in two regards. First, he calls attention to a process of black cultural formation that is analogous to the process of Jewish assimilation described throughout this paper; moreover, he makes explicit the virtues of comparing the historical experiences of Jews and blacks. Such a comparative perspective can produce, as it does in Gilroy's book, a genuinely humanizing effect. Second, Gilroy chooses to position himself within a broad tradition of African diaspora history, and thereby adds an important measure of historical richness and depth to his meditations.<sup>40</sup>

In contemporary considerations of the Jewish community (whose leaders frequently inveigh against the evils of assimilation), it would be

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advisable to follow Gilroy's lead in incorporating both comparative and historical dimensions: that is, to remember first that groups other than Jews have faced similar challenges in preserving communal integrity; and second, that a measure of historical perspective can provide nuance to our understanding of assimilation. Recognizing that the problematic of assimilation is neither unique to the Jews nor unique within Jewish history is a first and important step toward comprehending the predicament of the Jewish community in the United States and throughout the world. This recognition can temper the impulse to overreact—to adopt positions that are fundamentalist, chauvinist, or in some way dismissive of the benefits of intergroup cultural exchange.

Various efforts have been made recently to articulate a vision of Jewish culture that celebrates the vitalizing potential of assimilation. The first, rather comic vision emanates from a man impersonating a writer named Philip Roth in the novel *Operation Shylock* by the author of the same name. The fictional *faux* Roth is the ideological father of a movement called "Diasporism" that "seeks to promote the dispersion of the Jews" from Israel "to those very lands (i.e., Europe) where everything once flourished."<sup>41</sup> A bit more serious, though not without its comic features, is the vision of an extraterritorial Jewish religious culture offered by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin in a 1993 article in *Critical Inquiry*.<sup>42</sup> The Boyarins' call for a deterritorialized Judaism culminates with a curious evocation of Neturei Karta, the ultra-Orthodox and anti-Zionist sect based in Jerusalem. Far from illuminating the sort of dynamic identity-formation that the authors favor, Neturei Karta holds to a thoroughly essentialist view of Jewish identity, indeed, a kind of religious Canaanism severed both from Zionism and more conventional Jewish orthodoxy.

Both the fictional Philip Roth and the Boyarins present their respective diasporic visions *ex nihilo*, removed from the tortuous historical path of modern Jewish culture. And here, I would like to make a final point that bespeaks my own disciplinary grounding as an historian. The current cultural climate in which anxiety over group identities is expressed, be they African-American, Latino, or Jewish, has interesting historical precedents. Similar debates have occurred, for instance, in France over the course of the last thirty years, with a particularly interesting Jewish coloring.<sup>43</sup> In this country, attempts to balance the assimilatory impulse and the instinct to preserve group integrity long preceded the 1990s. In the second decade of this century, a group of intellectuals sought to lay the framework for a "cultural

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Jewish community (whose of assimilation), it would be

pluralism" that encouraged the free flow of ideas, customs, and habits in American society without entailing the loss of distinct group traits. Centered around the philosopher Horace Kallen, this largely Jewish circle quite naturally focused on the trials and tribulations of American Jews. Even the non-Jews in the circle, such as the writer Randolph Bourne, shared this emphasis.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it was Bourne who asserted that the idea of "transnationalism," of a complex of identities that did not reside only in citizenship, was "a Jewish idea."<sup>45</sup> Bourne lived in an age and milieu in which the rapid currents of immigration rendered problematic "the old tight geographical groupings of nationality."<sup>46</sup> Navigating these currents without disappearing was an all-consuming challenge. Bourne's own instinct was to embrace "the so-called hyphenate"—the very essence of a hybrid cultural identity—for it "has actually been our salvation."<sup>47</sup>

It is useful to remember Bourne's discussion today, eighty years after it was published. His awareness of the tension-filled path of groups in a liberal political order anticipated both the sentiment and language of observers in our own day. At the same time, Bourne's gaze was fixed on the Jews, whose experience he believed emblematic of a much larger cultural phenomenon. Recalling Randolph Bourne can and should encourage the integration of the Jewish experience into the unfolding narrative of multicultural identity formation in the United States. In the same vein, recalling Bourne's essay, and especially the illuminating lecture by Gerson Cohen from 1966, provides the requisite historical perspective on a condition, namely assimilation, that has defined Jewish history since its inception, and will continue to vitalize and haunt Jewish communal existence well into the future.

#### NOTES

1. The midrash from *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* is included in the monumental Bialik-Ravnitski compilation, *Sefer ha-Agadah*, revised edition (Tel Aviv, 1961), 604.
2. See Gans' second presidential address to the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden of April 28, 1822 in S. Rubaschoff, "Erstlinge der Entjudung. Drei Reden von Eduard Gans in 'Kulturverein,'" *Der jüdische Wille* 2 (1919). I have consulted here the English translation in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World* (New York, 1980), 192. Interestingly, though not surprisingly, the Hebrew version of Gans' speech excludes the sentence "to merge does not mean to perish." Cf.

- S. Rubaschoff, "Erstlinge der Entjudung," in S. Rubaschoff (later Zalman)
3. Simon Rawidowicz, "The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective," companion of Jews throughout the world," in *The Jewish Question*, which did not consider the Jewish question as a problem of the Jewish people. "Israel: The Ever-dying People," (Philadelphia, 1974), 21.
4. In his important article "The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective," "children of assimilation," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Wissenschaft des Judentums im deutschen Reich, 1919, 1-10.
5. See Ucko, *passim*, in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, 33 (1988), 3-28.
6. See Hans Günther, "The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective," (Tübingen, 1965), 113.
7. A curious model for the Jewish question is found in Friedländer, the Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective, Teller in which the form of the Jewish question is the performance of the Jewish people. The performance of the Jewish people performs the ceremonial of the Jewish people, the dogmas of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people is excerpted in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World*, 192.
8. The irony stems from the fact that the Jewish people's "Erstlinge der Entjudung" that the Jewish people's problems into the Jewish people's problems, the dissolution of tradition, the Jewish people's desire to assimilate. On the Jewish people's desire to assimilate, which Baron first used to describe the Jewish people's Semitism, is thus described in the Jewish people's assimilation possesses the Jewish people's Semitism. See Baron, "Ghetto and Assimilation," *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 515-526.
9. The story is related in the Jewish people's Glatzer, in "Franz Rosenzweig: A Jewish Perspective," in *Jewish Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1968), 1-10.
10. See S. H. Bergson, "The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective," in Rosenzweig's essays, *The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective*, 1-10.
11. Franz Rosenzweig, "The Jewish Question: A Jewish Perspective," *Philosophie* (Berlin, 1924), 1-10.

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5. Rubaschoff, "Erstlinge der Entjudung," 112, to the Hebrew translation by  
 Rubaschoff (later Zalman Shazar) in *Ore dorot* (Jerusalem, 1971), 367.

3. Simon Rawidowicz observes that fears of extinction have been a constant  
 companion of Jews throughout the ages: "He who studies Jewish history will  
 readily discover that there was hardly a generation in the Diaspora period  
 which did not consider itself the final link in Israel's chain." Rawidowicz,  
 "Israel: The Ever-dying People," Idem., *Studies in Jewish Thought*  
 (Philadelphia, 1974), 211.

4. In his important article on the Verein, Sinai Ucko refers to its members as  
 "children of assimilation." Sinai Ucko, "Geistesgeschichtliche Grundlagen der  
 Wissenschaft des Judentums," in Kurt Wilhelm, ed. *Wissenschaft des*  
*Judentums im deutschen Sprachbereich*, vol. 1 (Tübingen, 1967), 320.

5. See Ucko, *passim*, and Ismar Schorsch, "Breakthrough into the Past: The  
*Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden*," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*  
 33 (1988), 3-28.

6. See Hans Günther Reissner, *Eduard Gans: Ein Leben in Vormärz*  
 (Tübingen, 1965), 113.

7. A curious model for this status surfaces in the 1799 proposal from David  
 Friedländer, the Jewish Enlightenment figure, to Pastor Wilhelm Abraham  
 Teller in which the former volunteered to convert to Christianity provided that  
 the performance of Christian rituals not be seen as "a sign that he who  
 performs the ceremonies is tacitly acknowledging that he accepts out of faith  
 the dogmas of the Church." Teller rejected Friedländer's request. This letter  
 is excerpted in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 99.

8. The irony stems from Baron's important claim in "Ghetto and  
 Emancipation" that the advent of modernity introduced new and vexing  
 problems into the Jewish condition. Among the ills which Baron diagnosed is  
 the dissolution of traditional communal bonds and, by implication, a fervent  
 desire to assimilate. Our appropriation of the term "lachrymose conception,"  
 which Baron first used to describe the historiographical infatuation with anti-  
 Semitism, is thus directed against the implication in Baron's essay that  
 assimilation possesses but one connotation: a process leading to self-denial.  
 See Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," *The Menorah Journal* (June 1928),  
 515-526.

9. The story is related by Rosenzweig's student and close friend, Nahum N.  
 Glatzer, in "Franz Rosenzweig: The Story of a Conversion," in Idem., *Essays*  
*in Jewish Thought* (University, Alabama, 1978), 232.

10. See S. H. Bergmann's introduction to the Hebrew translation of  
 Rosenzweig's essays, *Naharayim* (Jerusalem, 1960), x.

11. Franz Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland: Kleinere Schriften zur Religion und*  
*Philosophie* (Berlin, 1926).

12. Philip V. Bohlman, *"The Land Where Two Streams Flow": Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989), xi.
13. *Ibid.*, xii.
14. Gershom Scholem, "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," in *Idem.*, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 282–303. Though this process can be characterized as dialectical, in that each culture assumes part of the other in producing a new version of itself, it is important to note that Rosenzweig had abandoned his earlier prewar interest in Hegel. While studying with Friedrich Meinecke at Freiburg, Rosenzweig produced a dissertation on Hegel and the state (published only in 1920). Following the war, however, Rosenzweig had moved away from his study of German idealism to the project of "das neue Denken," a new Jewish way of thinking. See Richard A. Cohen, *Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago, 1994), 68.
15. Michael André Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History* (Berkeley, 1994). This method allows the historical observer to imagine a number of possible occurrences or outcomes in the past rather than submit to the probability of a single occurrence that appears consistent with the trajectory of later historical events.
16. For an excellent analysis of the range of cultural possibilities, see Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven, 1996).
17. This is not to diminish the importance of the forces of "dissimilation," as Shulamit Volkov has formulated it, in German-Jewish culture during and after the First World War. Clearly, figures such as Rosenzweig were in retreat from the ideal of assimilation as a form of self-denial. Their search to recover a meaningful Jewish tradition reflected rejection of the older ideal, as symbolized by the *Taufjude*. For a discussion of this quest for Jewish meaning, see Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, Wisc., 1982), or David N. Myers, "'Distant Relatives Happening onto the Same Inn': The Meeting of East and West as Literary Theme and Cultural Ideal," *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1995), 75–100. Notwithstanding this quest, Rosenzweig was—by temperament, culture, and aspirations—an unmistakable product of the German cultural world.
18. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, prior to 1965, Jews married non-Jews in 9% of the cases; in 1985, the rate of marriage between Jews and non-Jews was 52%. See Barry A. Kosmin, et. al., *Highlights of the 1990 CJF National Jewish Population Survey* (New York, 1991), 14.
19. Gerson Cohen, *The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History*, Commencement Address/June 1966, Hebrew Teachers College, Brookline, Mass., 5–6.

20. *Ibid.*, 5. The phenomenon is a fascinating contrast of Hebrew into Greek, by the language of Western discourse, one, born of an age in which Jewish thought. See Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Discourses*. Rowe for calling Levinas into context.
21. Cohen, *The Blessing of Assimilation*, point in discussing two aspects of ancient Jewish history. His intent on adopting a more incremental and uncoerced path absorbed into Second Temple Judaism, the Hasmoneans," *Modern Jewish Assimilation, A History* (1992), 1–12.
22. See Ahad Ha'am, *Ha-derakhim*, vol. 1 (1900).
23. Cohen, *The Blessing of Assimilation*.
24. The entire quest for Jewish meaning in medieval Europe has been discussed in an article of Yisrael Yuvatzky, "The Quest for Jewish Meaning in Medieval Europe," may have been absorbed into the mainstream, suggesting that the late medieval quest for Jewish meaning, "Ha-nakam veka-kedusha," *Zion* 58 (1993).
25. Jews profoundly influenced the culture, reflected in the famous phrase, "The Jew is at home." See Michael Brenner, "The Jew at Home," by Y. L. Gordon in *History of the Russian Jewry* (New York, 1991).
26. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," Robert C. Tucker, 33.
27. See Baron, "The Jewish Question," volume 1.
28. See, for instance, Gerson Cohen, Williams and Laura Williams, *The Jewish Question in Jewish History* (New York, 1991).

*Streams Flow*": Music in the  
and Chicago, 1989), xi.

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*urvey* (New York, 1991), 14.

*imilation in Jewish History*,  
Teachers College, Brookline,

20. Ibid., 5. The phenomenon of rabbis' studying and expounding in Greek is a fascinating contrast to Emmanuel Levinas' longstanding aim of translating Hebrew into Greek, by which he means Jewish thought into the universalist language of Western discourse. Levinas' ambition is a highly self-conscious one, born of an age in which Jews themselves were more familiar with "Greek" than Jewish thought. See Annette Aronowicz's introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington, IN, 1990), ix-xi. I thank Bill Rowe for calling Levinas' famous "translation" project to my attention in this context.

21. Cohen, *The Blessing of Assimilation*, 7. Uriel Rappaport makes a similar point in discussing two ways of understanding the term "Hellenization" in ancient Jewish history. The first refers to a self-conscious political movement intent on adopting a "Greek way of life"; the second refers to a more incremental and unconscious process by which Hellenistic culture was absorbed into Second Temple Judaism. See Rappaport, "The Hellenization of the Hasmoneans," Menachem Mor, ed., *Studies in Jewish Civilization 2: Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation* (Lanham, Maryland, 1992), 1-12.

22. See Ahad Ha'am's classic essay, "Hikui ve-hitbolelut," in *Al parashat ha-derakhim*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1921), 169-177.

23. Cohen, *The Blessing of Assimilation*, 9.

24. The entire question of interaction between Jews and Christians in medieval Europe has received new attention following the controversial 1993 article of Yisrael Yuval in which he argued that Jewish martyrological motifs may have been absorbed into Christian blood libels against Jews, thereby suggesting that the latter were not simply Christian inventions. See Yuval, "Ha-nakam veva-kelalah, ha-dam veva-'alilah: mi-'alilot kedoshim le-'alilot dam," *Zion* 58 (1993), 33-90.

25. Jews profoundly internalized the demand to divide their identities, as reflected in the famous Haskalah charge to be "a man in the street and a Jew at home." See Michael Stanislawski's interpretation of this line from a poem by Y. L. Gordon in *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York, 1988), 51.

26. Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 33-34.

27. See Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," and the introduction to this volume.

28. See, for instance, Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* (New York, 1994), 402.

29. For a helpful survey of recent shifts in the use of the term "diaspora," see Michel Bruneau, "Espaces et territoires de diasporas," in Idem., *Diasporas* (Monpellier, 1995), 5–23. See also Gabriel Sheffer, ed., *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (New York, 1986).
30. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 1. See also Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 190.
31. Stuart Hall, for instance, explicitly rejects the notion of diaspora that refers to "those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland. . . . This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity.' We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora—and the complicity of the West with it." Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 401.
32. See the March 6, 1995 edition of *The New Republic* devoted to "The Decline of the Black Intellectual," and especially Leon Wieseltier's attack on Cornell West, 31–36. Ironically, in the same month that Wieseltier's piece appeared, Robert S. Boynton devoted a long article to the reemergence of the American public intellectual in the form of African-American thinkers, noting the interesting parallels with the Jewish intellectuals of New York from a previous generation. See Boynton, "The New Intellectuals," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1995), 53–70.
33. K. A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London, 1992).
34. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19.
35. Ibid., 205–217.
36. According to Gilroy, the conclusion "offers an image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestions that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution." Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 144.
37. For Dubois, double consciousness meant that "one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." This passage from Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk* is quoted in Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 126.
38. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 187–191.
39. Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Post-modernism?," in *Modernism/Postmodernism*, ed. Peter Brooker (London, 1992), 148. But cf. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 42.
40. Gilroy fails to mention in this regard the sociologist, Orlando Patterson whose 1977 book *Ethnic Chauvinism* offers interesting insights into the historical path and social status of the Jews. Patterson identifies them as a

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45. Randolph S. B  
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46. Bourne, "The Je  
47. Ibid., 278.

of the term "diaspora," see "Diasporas," in Idem., *Diasporas* (London, 1994), 1. See also *and Double Consciousness*

the notion of diaspora that can only be secured in relation to the imperialising, the fate of the people of diaspora—and Cultural Identity and Diaspora,"

in *Republic* devoted to "The Myth of Leon Wieseltier's attack on diaspora that Wieseltier's piece alludes to the reemergence of the trans-American thinkers, noting the actuals of New York from a Jewish Intellectuals," *The Atlantic* in *the Philosophy of Culture*

offers an image of hybridity and diaspora it gives no ground to the loss, corruption, or dilution."

argument that "one never feels his two thoughts, two unreconciled whose dogged strength alone emerge from Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, 126.

the Question: What Is Post-diaspora? ed. Peter Brooker (London, 1994), 42.

sociologist, Orlando Patterson offers interesting insights into the diaspora. Patterson identifies them as a

classic "symbiotic ethnic group," who possess highly developed skills in adapting to and surviving in alien societies. Groups such as the Jews thus inhabit a "transsovereign" plane of existence, an idea that resembles the idea of transnationalism mentioned at the end of this paper. See Orlando Patterson, *Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse* (New York, 1977), 63.

41. Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (New York, 1993), 44.

42. See Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993), 693ff.

43. French-Jewish thinkers from Emmanuel Levinas to his student, Alain Finkielkraut, have generated interesting insights into the formation of Jewish identity in the Diaspora over the past half-century. Especially interesting is the attempt by Richard Marienstras and the Cercle du Gaston Crémieux to gain minority rights status for French Jews, a position that harks back to the turn-of-the-century Bundists and autonomists. See Richard Marienstras, *Être un juif en diaspora* (Paris, 1975), 191–204. See also Judith Friedlander, *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France since 1968* (New Haven, 1990), 14–19.

44. The social ideal toward which this group hoped to move was that of a cultural "symphony," which stood in direct contrast to the guiding metaphor of the "melting pot" that so colored the immigrant experience in the United States in this period. For a fine treatment of these competing metaphors, see Moses Rischin, "The Jews and Pluralism: Toward an American Freedom Symphony," in Gladys Rosen, ed., *Jewish Life in America: Historical Perspectives* (New York, 1978).

45. Randolph S. Bourne, "The Jew and Trans-National America," *The Menorah Journal* 2 (December 1916), 280.

46. Bourne, "The Jew and Trans-National America," 279.

47. Ibid., 278.