"We long for a home": American discourses on Jewishness after the Second World War (1945-49)

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“We Long For a Home”: American Discourses on Jewishness After the Second World War (1945-49)

Samantha M. Bryant

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

History

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To my late grandfather whose love for history and higher education continues to inspire my work. Despite having never entered a college classroom, he was, and continues to be, the greatest professor I ever had.
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The seeds of this project were sown in the form of a term paper for an undergraduate course on the history and politics of the Middle East at Lynchburg College with Brian Crim. His never-ending mentorship and friendship have shaped my research interests and helped prepare me for the trials and tribulations of graduate school. In moments of doubt, he continues to provide counsel and reassurance, reminding me that a teacher’s job is never finished.

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Abstract

In 1939, the United States government denied the entry of German Jewish refugees traveling aboard the MS *St. Louis* into the country. Less than ten years later, President Harry S. Truman declared his support for the creation of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, legitimizing his position based on war atrocities, genocide, and Jews’ right to self-determination. This project poses questions that seek to understand how U.S. foreign policy-shifts impacted American culture and postwar discourses on Jewishness in the age of Jim Crow between the years 1945 and 1949. This study illustrates the geopolitical forces impacting domestic social and political culture through an examination of the multiple layers of discourses on Jewishness after the Second World War: the mainstream domestic and international media’s collection and circulation of information on the Holocaust to the U.S. public and beyond; the postwar language and attitudes of U.S. politicians towards the displaced persons issue and the creation of an Jewish nation-state; and the display of some Americans’ racialized attitudes towards Jews and Jewish immigrants in the semi-private spheres of the neighborhood and the workplace after the war.

The key themes of this research center on first, how American public discourses changed between the years 1945 and 1949 to accommodate post-Holocaust rhetoric on memorialization and humanitarianism and second, how the American people’s reception of these discourses remained determinant upon space and place. Oral histories, State and Defense Department records, newspaper articles, public opinion polls, and personal and public presidential papers serve as the backbone of this study in order to outline the struggles between prewar and postwar discourses in the public sphere. While
antisemitism did not end after World War II, geopolitical events complicated American thought and public discourses that simultaneously emphasized the U.S.’s postwar position on aiding Holocaust survivors, support for the creation of Israel, and the existence of a national socioeconomic hierarchy based on racial and ethnic identity.
INTRODUCTION

“We long for a home./Where can we find such a place?/We long for a home./Every road is closed to us./We must keep on hoping./We can’t do otherwise./That beauty, charm, and promise/Will come back to our lives.”

Growing up Jewish in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century, Harpo Marx recalled his brief tenure in public education. It ended in the second grade, by being “thrown out of [a] window” by a small group of burly Irish kids. The only Jewish student in his class, not to mention being small of stature and having a high pitched voice, Marx remained a target. He said, “One sunny day when [my teacher] left the room and I was promptly heaved into the street, I picked myself up, turned my back on P.S. 86 and walked straight home, and that was the end of my formal education.” Marx and his brothers became hits on vaudeville prior to the development of the motion picture industry. Despite an ill-fated attempt at silent film, the Marx Brothers’ raucous and wit-driven comedy style translated well to the talkie era, prospering until after the Second World War. At the height of their film popularity, 1929 to 1949, the Marx Brothers signed to four different film studios: Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Radio-Keith-Orpheum Pictures (RKO), and finally United Artists (UA). Although the Nazi government sought to persuade American film studios to fire German-Jewish staff members in 1933, major American film studios continued to do business with the fascist

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1 Adrienne Cooper and Zalmen Mlotek, “We Long for a Home,” by Henry Baigelman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Conference, Digital Recording, 2000


3 Harpo Marx and Rowland Barber, Harpo Speaks! 19.
nation among them MGM which employed the Marx Brothers at that time. Most American film studio heads placed significance on financial profits during the 1930s and maintaining friendly diplomatic relations than taking a position on the Nazi government’s antisemitic policies despite hiring numerous successful Jewish acts.

War and geopolitics incite crises which in turn accelerate sociocultural change domestically. Apathy and indifference to the sociopolitical plight of Jews, domestically and abroad, became frowned upon after the Holocaust. The Holocaust initiated changes in American public discourses concerning Jewishness. However, this change in public discourses did not end antisemitism in the private and semi-private spheres, the latter consisting of neighborhoods and the workplace. The Holocaust provided constraints on the ability of Americans to freely express and articulate antisemitic language and attitudes. The Holocaust and World War II did not end prejudice and bigotry towards Jewish persons, but limited the acceptability of racist behavior and rhetoric in the public sphere. This thesis seeks to grapple with such change by analyzing the multiple layers of postwar discourses on Jewishness in the United States between 1945 and 1949.

The story of antisemitism in the United States is a strange one. Public conceptions of Jewishness between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries categorized Jews as neither black nor ethnically white, despite being able to pass in white society – not Catholic but certainly not Protestant. The American public’s understanding of Jewishness remained complicated, wrought with contradictions in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and class. Such complications were fueled by two major world wars, genocide, and the

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creation of a new nation-state in the Promised Land in the mid-twentieth century. Prewar public discourses in the U.S. concerning Jewishness ranged from xenophobia to ardent antisemitism to general indifference to the group’s sociopolitical needs.

Throughout the United States in the Early Republic, Jews, regardless of nationality, were viewed collectively as a group of foreigners, or “others,” much like Africans or Native Americans. Commenting on the Jewish population in the U.S., Swiss painter Rudolph Friedrich Kurz argued against the popular theories that Native Americans were distant relations to the Jews, describing Jews as a distinctly different group of people. He wrote: “Of the Jewish propensity to bargain and to haggle I find no trace at all in the expression of the Indian; that is to say, acquisition is not the principal end and aim of his existence. On the contrary, the redskin is by nature heedless as to money matters and a reckless spendthrift, the direct opposite of the thrifty, calculating Jew… How different are the Jews!” Racialized language served as the primary means in deciphering between the two groups. Kurz utilized racialized myths in his explanation of the two groups’ differences, such as Jewish thriftiness, as universal truths. One soldier stationed at a post in the American Frontier utilized similar language to describe Jewish merchants in the Western territory: “Now and then some of the Jews from town pay me a visit, all of whom are very friendly, probably because they realize that I know better than anyone else what the soldiers might be likely to buy, whether they will shortly be paid,


where or not they will remain long near town, and the like.”

The soldier’s words parallel the racialized language and attitudes of the period, understanding bigoted myths as universal truths and determining Jews as “others.”

Racialized attitudes targeting American Jews continued through the antebellum period and into the American Civil War. Nativist attitudes manifested in racial bigotry and prejudice towards groups deemed non-whites. Jews in the United States faced the considerable impact of nativism from the American public as well as public figures. In response to nativism and its connection to public attitudes towards African Americans, Frederick Douglass acknowledged: “For, with the single exception of the Jews, under the whole heavens, there is not to be found a people pursued with a more relentless prejudice and persecution, than are the Free Colored people of the United States.”

During the course of the Civil War, Major General Ulysses S. Grant issued a general order expelling Jewish citizens from parts of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi in December 1862. The order stated:

“I. The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also Department orders, are hereby expelled from the Department.

II. Within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order by Post Commanders, they will see that all of this class of people are furnished with passes and required to leave, and any one returning after such notification, will be arrested and held in confinement until an opportunity occurs of sending them out as prisoners unless furnished with permits from these Head Quarters.

III. No permits will be given these people to visit Head Quarters for the Purpose of making personal application for trade permits.”

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Grant equated Jews to war profiteers, in a letter to U.S. Assistant Secretary of War Christopher Wolcott, referring to the Jews as “a privileged class.”

While repealed by President Abraham Lincoln shortly after its passing, there remains a question as to Grant’s motivations in writing General Orders No. 11. However, Grant’s isolation of the Jewish people in his order demonstrates the scale of public antisemitism in the nineteenth century, especially its exhibition by prominent public figures.

The post-Civil War period saw the emergence of Jewish civil rights societies in major U.S. cities like New York City that raised national awareness of antisemitism. The relationship between Jews and other groups categorized as non-white like African Americans remained complicated. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois described the types of men controlling the New South: “Those men who have come to take charge of the industrial exploitation of the New South, - the sons of poor whites fired with a new thirst for wealth and power, thrifty and avaricious Yankees, shrewd and unscrupulous Jews.” To DuBois, Jews contributed to the social and economic problems faced by young African American men in the South. However, some African Americans migrating from the South to Northern cities actually converted to Judaism, connecting the historic persecution of the Jewish people by numerous nations to the plight of African Americans in the U.S. The 1915 case of Leo Frank and his subsequent lynching by a

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10 Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 7, 56.


mob raised national attention to the issue of antisemitism in the United States by Jewish civil rights organizations.\footnote{14} An article from \textit{The Literary Digest} stated: “America seems to be having its \textit{cause célébre} of anti-Semitism in the case of Leo M. Frank, of Atlanta… we read that Jews in all parts of the world have come to the aid of Frank with published protests and funds contributed for his defense.”\footnote{15} Antisemitism during the Gilded Age and the early part of the twentieth century gained more recognition due to the Leo Frank case and the interaction between Jews and migrating African Americans to major U.S. cities in the North.

Postwar immigration in the United States following World War I fueled congressional nativism with laws that stemmed the tide of immigrants entering the country, as well as the renaissance of the Ku Klux Klan, and targeted ethnic communities throughout the South.\footnote{16} The Great Depression signified the unofficial ending of the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan during the interwar period. While membership nosedived, racism did not. The 1933 election of Adolf Hitler as German chancellor ignited concerns not so much due to his antisemitic platform, but his fascist political affiliation.\footnote{17} American Jewish societies and selected public figures called for immediate action to be taken by the U.S. government towards the Nazi government’s persecution of the Jews. However, as this thesis points out, the U.S. government remained largely

\footnotetext{14}{Leo Frank, a superintendent of a pencil factory, was accused of murdering one of his young employees, Mary Phagan. For more information on the Leo Frank case, see Leonard Dinnerstein, \textit{The Leo Frank Case}, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008 and Robert Seitz Frey and Nancy C. Thompson, \textit{The Silent and the Damned: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank}, Lanham, MD: Cooper Square Press, 2002 .}

\footnotetext{15}{“Anti-Semitism and the Frank Case,” \textit{The Literary Digest}, January 16, 1915, 85.}


\footnotetext{17}{Kennedy, \textit{Freedom From Fear}, 410.}
apathetic towards the issue due in part to institutionalized racism and the American public’s ignorance of the scale of the Nazi government’s policies.

The project utilizes a wide variety of source materials in order to deconstruct the multiple layers of discourse surrounding Jewishness and American antisemitism. Oral histories, displaced person and Holocaust survivor testimonies, and published memoirs are used to reconstruct the experiences of some Jewish displaced persons in the U.S. immediately after the war. Despite issues surrounding the volatility of memory and the role of the editing process in the publication of memoirs, these materials provide a people’s perspective to larger geopolitical issues such as immigration, the postwar reconstruction of Europe, and the Cold War. Newspaper and magazine articles, propaganda films, newsreels, museum exhibitions, and archived and published photographs provide a means of understanding the immediate construction of Holocaust memory in the United States following the discovery of the concentration camps. An examination of the public rhetoric of authority figures like the domestic and international intelligentsia, government officials, and politicians and their influence on the media and the national public is conducted through the use of published academic studies, archived government documents, and public and private presidential papers.

Histories of Jewishness in the U.S. during the postwar period began to increase during the late 1980s and early 1990s. A notable increase in American-distributed documentaries and films on the Holocaust came in the 1980s with the making of the television film The Diary of Anne Frank (1980) and documentary Shoah (1985). Film interpretations of the Holocaust in the 1980s and 1990s centered on individual
memorialization. Many depicted individual tales of survival, perseverance, and loss, a contrast to the films from the late 1940s to the 1970s which focused on the mass scale of human loss. Literature on postwar Jewishness and the Holocaust sought to give Jewish persons agency in the fight for civil rights, American culture and identity, and the creation of Israel. In examining the historiography of American Jewish history, Jonathan D. Sarna described the postwar nature of the field as dominated by works discussing the creation of the Israeli nation-state, gender, immigration, religion, the role of Jews in American culture and politics, and “the decline of anti-Semitism.”¹⁸ Cultural approaches to postwar racial and American Jewish histories have focused on issues of acculturation and assimilation. Stephen J. Whitefield’s *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau: Jews in American Life and Thought* and *The Chosen People in America* by Arnold Eisen examine the intellectual life of major urban centers like New York City in order to grapple with questions of how American Jews acculturated to the white, Protestant discourse of the U.S.¹⁹ *The Jews of the West: The Metropolitan Years* by Moses Rischin and Samuel Proctor, and Louis Schmier’s edited volume of essays, *Jews of the South*, serve as examples of regional studies on Jewishness. These regional studies focus more on the social constructions of race and ethnicity in those regions than the physical environment or geographic space.²⁰ Literature on Jewishness in the U.S. after World War II has slowly evolved towards more cultural and social perspectives and memory studies.

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Recent studies of Jewishness in the United States have adopted analytical perspectives popularized in whiteness studies, a subfield that emerged in the 1990s and offers an interdisciplinary approach in understanding the social construction of race in America. Such studies as Eric Goldstein’s *The Price of Whiteness* emphasize a connection between light skin color, socioeconomic status, and social mobility. Goldstein suggests Jews’ assimilation into “the white mainstream” in the middle to late twentieth century remained evident in all regions in American society.\(^1\) This thesis questions this contention by stressing the role of space, place, and region to non-Jews’ understanding of Jewishness in the postwar period. However, evidence presented in this project supports Goldstein’s argument emphasizing the actual fluidity of the Jewish race in the institutionalized black-white dichotomy of Jim Crow America. War and the Holocaust posed additional complications to the American discourses not only on Jewishness, but on race and ethnicity as a whole.

Structurally, each chapter discusses how the domestic and international media, the U.S. government, and the American people processed, diffused, and understood the dramatic shift in popular and public discourse on Jewishness. The first chapter explores the role of the domestic and international media in diffusing the post-Holocaust rhetoric to authority figures and the American public. The popular, non-radical media helped influence the tide of popular discourse by exemplifying “appropriate” postwar language about and attitudes toward Jewishness. The second chapter investigates the public language employed by U.S. politicians and government officials on the displaced persons issue and the creation of Israel. The domestic and international media’s distribution of

Holocaust material helped shape the type of language employed in the public sphere by U.S. politicians. A considerable contradiction to the Jim Crow rhetoric that legally and culturally dominated American society for approximately ninety years, political apathy and indifference to the Jewish plight faced marked public scrutiny in the national media after the war. The U.S. government became increasingly receptive to the discussion of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine between the years 1945-1948 due to domestic immigration politics, the displaced persons issue in Europe, and early Cold War attitudes. The final chapter examines how some Americans processed the immediate post-Holocaust discourse on Jewishness. Some Americans, more comfortable expressing their true feelings in the semi-private sphere, continued to voice antisemitic language and attitudes in their neighborhoods and workplaces. Space, place, and geopolitics had a considerable impact on the language utilized by the domestic and international media, the U.S. government, and the American public.

The language and attitudes expressed by the U.S. government and the American public towards Jewishness remained conflicted after the Holocaust. Publicly, U.S. politicians and government officials steered away from prewar apathy towards Israel and the Jewish population, domestic and international. The domestic and international popular media diffused information on the war and the Holocaust, emphasized accountability for public servants, and aided in spreading the new American discourse on Jewishness to U.S. political figures and the American public. In this thesis, I stress that antisemitism did not disappear after World War II. Instead, war and genocide complicated the American conception of Jewishness in relation to space and place.
Geopolitics ignited immediate change to the public discourses on Jewishness, testing American ideas of race and ethnic identity during the age of segregation.
CHAPTER 1: The Media

“Walk up to the average man today and ask him what he thinks ails the country. Nine out of ten such men are beginning to answer: ‘Too many Jews running things!’ To use a slange [sic] phrase: they don’t know the half of it.” *Hidden Empire: The Complete Story of Jewish World Control*, Pelley Publishers, 1938.

In a postwar world, the popular American discourses on Jewishness, simultaneously bigoted and indifferent to the problems faced by the Jewish population, became sidelined in favor of memorializing the Holocaust and humanitarian language towards American and European Jews. The once popular public discourses on Jewishness came to be equated with right wing extremism after the war. How did the domestic and international media contribute in shaping new discourses after the Allied forces’ discovery of the concentration and death camps in Europe? Antisemitic sensibilities did not evaporate at the war’s conclusion, but instead underwent a shift in presentation and public acceptance following the Second World War. The mainstream media collected information on the Holocaust and presented it as an exemplification of fascism’s evils, rhetoric then adopted by American public and political figures.

Media, in the form of radio broadcasting, print, and publications by the international intelligentsia, consisting of academics and freelance writers, operated in the public sphere. An examination of articles on displaced persons and the Holocaust in

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2 For the purposes of this chapter, I will label discourses either popular or unpopular in order to highlight the shift in the discourses’ public acceptance before or after the Second World War.

3 In this project, mainstream media is identified as media distributed by large companies and representative of the rhetoric and attitudes exhibited by a majority of the contemporary media that the domestic and international public would encounter in their day-to-day lives.

4 In this chapter, the term “media” will be used to describe the oral and non-oral declarations of ideology and position in the public sphere. The “media” remain in the public sphere due to the fixation of
national newspapers like *The New York Times*, international newspaper articles, radio broadcasts, museum exhibitions, and domestic and international academic studies are utilized in order to analyze how the media came to terms with World War II atrocities. The rhetoric of the international intelligentsia also remains fundamental in understanding how U.S. political and public figures and American society interpreted the messages of the media in the public sphere of publication. The domestic and international media served as a diffuser of information as well as an actor in shaping postwar discourses on Jewishness. This chapter will examine how the language and imagery employed by mainstream media outlets helped influence the tide of popular discourse by illustrating appropriate postwar language and attitudes surrounding Jewish identity.

Prior to World War II, public racialization of nonwhite and/or non-Protestant groups dominated the domestic and international popular discourse. The public acceptance of racialized rhetoric remained evident particularly in the readership of independent publishers like William Dudley Pelley and industrial titans such as Henry Ford. Henry Ford’s publication, *The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem* said ideologies to a particular organization or author in a public environment (i.e. publication, broadcasting).

5 Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfield’s study *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* pointed out how the influence of media on a particular populace and discourse remains heavily shaped by person-to-person communication. In essence, an individual reads a magazine or newspaper then relays what he or she has read to another person, thus developing stances amongst themselves. The media provokes change; it does not cause it, much like a match flame to a forest fire.

6 In his 1948 study *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America*, Carey McWilliams analyzed the tides of antisemitism in the United States. He referenced William Dudley Pelley and his antisemitic publications. In July 1938, “Pelley mailed approximately three and a half tons of anti-Semitic propaganda from his headquarters” and on December 1938, “the New York Daily News… devot[ed] one half of its second page and pages 4 and 38” to a Pelley advertisement (44-45).
vilified the global Jewish population. Ford’s position as an international leader in industry and mass production techniques increased large-scale interest for his antisemitic articles on the national and international stages. The book argued that Jews posed a threat to U.S. national security, utilizing mythologized racial arguments such as Jewish nomadism, Jewish infiltration in American politics and business, and Jews’ imperialistic aims. *The International Jew* stated:

> Through this ability of [Jews] to “go to headquarters” it is possible to account for the stronghold they got upon various governments and nations. Added to this ability was, of course, the ability to produce what the governments wanted. If a government wanted a loan, the Jew at court could arrange it through Jews at other financial centers and political capitals... The first time an army was ever fed in the modern commissary way, it was done by a Jew – he had the capital and he had the system; moreover he had the delight of having a nation for his customer.  

Ford’s work, like many other antisemitic publications, relied on a forged Russian document entitled *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*. *Protocols* proliferated the myth of a Jewish plan for world domination, a fixture in antisemitic imagery and rhetoric. One such image appeared on the cover of the pamphlet *Hidden Empires*, printed by Pelley Publishers, which featured a red, beastlike, clawed hand of a Jew reaching out of the black to grab hold of an industrialized city. In 1941, essayist Alfred Jay Nock published

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9 The *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion* consisted of a supposed plan by Jewish elders for global domination through the control of the world’s media, political systems, and economies.

10 *Hidden Empires*, Asheville: Pelley Publishers, 1938. Pelley Publishers was the successor to Galahad Press, Inc. which fell into bankruptcy in 1934.
a series of antisemitic articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, utilizing racialized myths to differentiate the Jewish-American population from the American populace as a whole.\textsuperscript{11} Antisemitic publications portrayed Jews as less-than-human “others” bent on controlling the media and the political and economic systems built by enterprising Americans.

Several fascist and racist organizations formed throughout the United States during the interwar period. *Time* reported on the emergence of “unpatriotic” organizations such as the Silver Legion, the American Fascisti or the Order of the Black Shirts, and the Friends of the New Germany. The membership of each organization ranged from 20,000 to roughly 100,000 members.\textsuperscript{12} The author of the *Time* article declared: “[A] decade ago, the No. 1 business in race prejudice in the U.S. was the Ku Klux Klan which passed its heyday... New organizations sprang up in which Klan philosophy, Fascist ideas and economic nostrums were crossbred to appeal to a Depression-sick country. Today there are no less than six colors of shirts operating in the U.S.”\textsuperscript{13} The *Time* article carefully distinguished the right-wing group, the Crusaders, from a hardworking “young men’s organization” by the same name.\textsuperscript{14} As a mainstream newsmagazine, *Time* and its authors remained cautious of appearing polarizing. By describing the non-right wing Crusaders as hardworking and well meaning, the article characterized the right wingers as lazy and malicious in their platforms and language. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} “Shirt Business,” *Time*, May 7, 1934. A dubious statistic as the organizations’ leaders may have simple sought to inflate membership statistics to the press to appear greater and more significant than they really were.
\item \textsuperscript{13} “Shirt Business,” *Time*.
\item \textsuperscript{14} “Shirt Business,” *Time*.
\end{itemize}
describing the organization Friends of the New Germany, *Time* reported: “Though they do not admit it, they are virtually the Nazi organization in the U.S… They support the Hitler doctrines of ‘leadership’ and ‘order’; that is, dictatorship.”

The mainstream acceptance of such organizations in reputable media outlets faltered once these organizations aligned themselves with Hitler and the Nazis, declared an allegiance to fascism, and ridiculed the position of Franklin D. Roosevelt as U.S. president.

Mainstream media outlets remained more focused on the fact that such organizations were fascist in nature, overlooking the organizations’ racist policies and platforms.

The mainstream American media publicized its lack of support for right-wing organizations and publications prior to U.S. entry in the war. American newsmagazines’ criticism of organizations like the Silver Legion and the Friends of the New Germany revolved around the groups’ direct association with fascism and negative portrayal of the American democratic system, not groups’ public displays of antisemitism and racism. Racism and antisemitism served as asides to a greater problem: the groups’ flirtation with European fascism. Prior to the discovery of the Holocaust, attitudes and language proliferated in American mainstream media focused on the preservation of democratic ideals, revealing indifference to the fascist groups’ policies towards Jewish persons.

Technology dramatically altered how the domestic and international news outlets portrayed antisemitism, particularly evident after the discovery of the concentration and

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15 “Shirt Business,” *Time*.

16 The Silver Legion, founded and operated by William Dudley Pelley of Pelley Publishers and the ill-fated Galahad Press, Inc. “referred to Franklin D. Roosevelt as ‘President Rosenfeld’” according to the 1934 *Time* article.
death camps in Europe. As a global news service during the 1940s, the British Broadcasting Company and its reports reached millions of households worldwide. Established in Canada, the North American service brought BBC radio to the U.S. with approximately 15 million American listeners per week at the start of 1945. News bulletins from BBC News and other news outlets frequented the daily radio program schedules in the U.S. Journalists carefully constructed descriptions of wartime events. Douglas Ritchie, Director of the European News Department at the BBC, described how BBC journalists must report on the concentration and death camp discoveries:

There has never been a greater opportunity than there is now to reveal to the world the essential truth about Nazism… The whole frightful business has been uncovered by the advance of the Americans and the British… It is vitally important that the European Service gives the facts and gives them in such a way that their meaning is understood… This is only the beginning. It is necessary to repeat these things and to show that this is not something isolated, the work of a few sadistic prison governors which we may denounce and forget; it is not even to be compared with the atrocious cruelties practised by the Germans on people in the countries they occupied. This is the basis of Nazism itself… This is not a brutality brought about by the war; it has been going on since 1933; it is what the war is about.

The Holocaust remained a sensitive subject for wartime journalists from both domestic and international media outlets. Edward R. Murrow’s descriptions of the Buchenwald camp for CBS Radio maintained similar reporting techniques as emphasized by Ritchie. He recounted: “I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald… Dead men are plentiful in war, but the living dead, more than twenty thousand of them [are] in one

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camp.”¹⁹ The reporting of the atrocities by services like the BBC and CBS stressed that the Holocaust exemplified the evils of fascism not only on democratic states but on humanity as a whole.

Photography and newsreels as well as radio technology circulated worldwide the atrocities in Europe and the concentration camps, serving as tools in shaping new American discourses on Jewishness. Imagery of the camps effectively linked to the anti-fascist, humanitarian rhetoric of international radio broadcasts. Wartime photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White shot numerous images of the liberation of the concentration camps by American and British troops. The publication of her photographs in newsmagazines like Life brought a sense of reality and authenticity to the radio news reports of the devastating conditions of the concentration camps to the American public. Bourke-White’s published photographs consisted of skeletal victims, individuals deformed by malnutrition, experimentation, and putrid living conditions.²⁰ In her 1946 memoir, Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly, Bourke-White wrote of her work during the time of liberation: “I kept telling myself that I would believe the indescribably horrible sight in the courtyard before me only when I had a chance to look at my own photographs. Using the camera was almost a relief; it interposed a slight barrier between myself and the white horror in front of me.”²¹ Another war photographer Walter Rosenblum maintained similar feelings: “We came to the camp and broke the gates down... It was turmoil. It was quite a

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²¹ Margaret Bourke-White, Dear Fatherland, Rest Quietly: A Report on the Collapse of Hitler’s Thousand Years, Whitefish, MT: Literary Licensing, LLC, 1946.
scene with the Americans coming in, with these camp prisoners running around crying, going crazy. The photographer always has a front-row seat. You might get hurt in the process, but you’re privileged. You’re a participant and an eyewitness.”

Through the medium of photography, professional photographers collected visual evidence of the Holocaust, diffusing the evidence to U.S. political figures and the domestic and international public.

In a photo-essay published in the May 7, 1945 issue of Life entitled “Atrocities,” work by photographers such as Bourke-White, John Florea, and George Rodger captured the mass scale of destruction and loss of human life. The article included a subtitle filled with charged and emotional language: “Capture of the German Concentration Camps Piles Up Evidence of Barbarism that Reaches the Low Point of Human Degradation.” As a public warning, the article stated: “[These photographs] are printed for the reason stated seven years ago when, in publishing early pictures of war’s death and destruction in Spain and China, LIFE stated, ‘Dead men will have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.’” The photographs in the issue captured the atrocities committed in Buchenwald, Gardelegen, Nordhausen, and Belsen, all camps in Germany. The object of the photographs centered on the depth and massive scale of loss in human life in the concentration camps as opposed to the individual experience of a particularly victim, family, or group. The magazine identified all the victims of Nazism as political

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23 “Atrocities,” Life.

24 “Atrocities,” Life.

prisoners, stressing they “were of many nationalities,” versus specifically citing the scale of Jewish persecution. Magazines and newspapers portrayed the Holocaust as an evil committed on mankind rather than emphasizing individual accounts of suffering.

Newsreels provided an additional outlet for the Allied media to utilize in order to publicize the Final Solution to a global audience. The United States Army Signal Corps, U.S. Air Force, and Army Pictorial Service documented the liberation of concentration camps such as Dachau, Leipzig, and Hanover Harlen. Newsreel companies made public the film collected by the divisions, editing the images, providing narration, and showing the reels in movie theaters. The newsreels revealed camp victims to an American audience, describing them as “virtually walking skeletons.” Footage from the warfront captured piles of naked corpses, heaps of victims’ hair and stolen clothing, reunions between friends and family, and the intermingling between male and female prisoners. These films depicted death, destruction, and the heroism of the Allied forces in the face of fascism’s evils. The accessibility of disturbing wartime images to the American public in theatres and on newsstands points to the role of technology in shaping postwar public discourses. Technology made the Final Solution a reality to the American public at home.

At the start of the 1940s, information trickled slowly into the U.S. from Europe on the atrocities committed by the Nazi government, due largely to the U.S. government’s

26 “Atrocities,” Life.


censorship of wartime intelligence.\textsuperscript{30} However, citizens from the United States and abroad had already begun memorializing and constructing the meaning of the Holocaust. In 1943, an exhibit entitled “This is Our War” graced the urban bustle of Rockefeller Plaza in the heart of New York City. One work “Concentration Camps,” captioned by a quote from \textit{Mein Kampf}, depicted the concentration camps as work camps or slave camps. The work included the statues of four men, not identified as any specific race or ethnicity, confined by a series of barbed wire posts.\textsuperscript{31} A 1944 anti-Nazi exhibit in London, entitled “Germany – the Evidence,” showcased examples of Nazism’s evils with a series of panels filled with images and quotations regarding the Nazis’ genocidal campaign. One photograph from the exhibit captured three particular panels: “Race ‘Research’ To Identity the True Nordic [Race],” “What Will Be Exterminated Is All That Was Called [A] Jew,” and “Rounding Up Jews in Poland.”\textsuperscript{32} In comparison to the 1943 New York exhibit, the London exhibit explicitly connected the concentration camps to antisemitism. Finally, another exhibit called “Lest We Forget” featured to-scale photomurals of the devastation as witnessed by Allied liberators of the concentration and death camps.\textsuperscript{33} The exhibit traveled to different American cities, including Boston and Washington, DC during the summer of 1945. The public nature of the exhibits in terms of mobility and location exposed the Holocaust to thousands. In the case of the New York and London exhibits, the messages and images spread to passersby and commuters, not


\textsuperscript{31} See Figure 5 and 6. The quote from \textit{Mein Kampf} is as follows: “The greatest of spirits can be liquidated if its bearer is beaten to death with a rubber truncheon.”

\textsuperscript{32} See Figure 4.

\textsuperscript{33} See Figure 2 and 3.
just the conscious museum enthusiasts or the curious. The domestic and international media exposed countless peoples to a redefinition of antisemitic attitudes and a continuous evolution of the meaning of the Holocaust and World War II.

In addition to photography, newsreels, and exhibits, feature films and documentaries also helped diffuse information from the warfront to the American people, documenting the changing tides of public discourse from the interwar years to the end of World War II. The short film *The House I Live In*, released in November 1945 and starring Frank Sinatra relayed the message of religious tolerance in the wake of the Allies’ discovery of the Nazi concentration and death camps.³⁴ In the film, Sinatra broke up a fight between a schoolboy and a gang of youths while on a cigarette break at a recording studio. The iconic actor and singer compared the gang to the “Nazi werewolves” he had read about after they revealed their plan to ostracize the boy from their neighborhood and school due to the boy’s religion.³⁵ After a heart-to-heart discussion on the Allied forces’ purpose in fighting World War II, complete with a song “The House I Live In” written by singer-songwriter Earl Robinson, Sinatra taught the youths about the evils of antisemitism, connecting religious tolerance to American patriotism. Sinatra sang: “The house I live in, a plot of earth, a street/The grocer and the butcher, and the people that I meet/The children in the playground, the faces that I see/All races and religions, that’s America to me.”³⁶ Robinson’s words signified a shift in how

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³⁴ The film was released in November 1945 in the United States, approximately a year and a half after the first discovery of a Nazi concentration camp by the Soviets in July 1944 and roughly eight months after the U.S.’s first discovery of a camp in April 1945.


³⁶ Sinatra, *The House I Live In*. 
the media handled difficult issues, particularly the mainstream media’s linkage of antisemitism to the Allied nations’ conception of fascism. Antisemitism as a theme in feature film was tackled again in 1947 with Elia Kazan’s *Gentleman’s Agreement* and the low budget film *Crossfire*. 37 *The House I Live In* received an honorary Academy Award in 1945 for the short film’s tackling of the subject of persecution, evidence of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ appreciation of the material. Such a public award suggested the increasing reception of antisemitism as an issue of sociopolitical interest, at least among the American intellectual and artistic community.

The post-Holocaust period shifted mainstream public discourse due to domestic and international media outlets’ open discussion of previously ignored subjects. The largely white-dominated business of Hollywood began to tackle questions of race and ethnicity following the U.S. entry into World War II against Nazi Germany and even more so after the discovery of the concentration camps. The war effort bolstered the production of propaganda films in the 1940s, their message centering on anti-fascism without direct discussion of Jewish persecution in Europe. The Motion Pictures Production Code of 1930, largely enforced beginning in 1934 significantly limited creative approaches to depicting the Jewish persecution occurring in Nazi Germany. In addition, the 1934 amendment to the code required film ideas and scripts to be approved by an ethics committee, the Production Code Administration, prior to filming. 38 Anti-

37 *Gentleman’s Agreement* was nominated for eight Academy awards, ultimately winning three. *Crossfire* also received five Academy award nominations that same year. An argument may be presented concerning the reception and overall popularity of Charlie Chaplin’s 1940 satire *The Great Dictator* and its discussion of antisemitism. However, there remains a crucial factor that differentiates Chaplin’s film and understanding of Nazi antisemitism from postwar depictions of antisemitism: time. The photographic evidence of the Final Solution was quite limited in 1940.

Nazi films were far and in between until the late 1930s and the 1940s despite efforts made by the defiant Warner Brothers, who sought to produce one such film after the 1933 election of Adolf Hitler to chancellor. The subjects of anti-Nazism and antisemitism remained extremely sensitive in light of the code as well as major American film studios’ economic interests abroad.  

However, the discovery of the Holocaust led to a fresh message: Jewish persecution served as another example of fascism’s wrongs. Orson Welles’ 1946 film *The Stranger* told the story of Mr. Wilson, an investigator from the Allied Commission for the Punishment of War Criminals seeking to bring an escaped SS officer to justice. In a scene in which the investigator interrogated the Nazi’s wife, Mr. Wilson played a reel of unedited footage from the concentration camps at the time of Allied liberation. He provided details on several of the Nazi government’s chosen means of execution such as the gas chambers. The scene emphasized the wife’s horror at the images, her ignorance as to her husband’s SS past, and revealed the hypnotic nature of the horrors on a civilian audience. After several minutes of being otherwise hypnotized by the footage and Wilson’s narration, the wife cried, “Why do you want me to look at these horrors?” Postwar documentaries such as *Death Mills* (1945), *Nazi Concentration Camps* (1945), *The Nazi Plan* (1945), and *Seeds of Destiny* (1946) directly equated fascism with antisemitism as opposed to prewar films. Directed by Billy Wilder and produced by the U.S. Army Signal Corps, *Death Mills* became one of the first American propaganda films

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39 Robert A. Rosenbaum, *Waking to Danger: Americans and Nazi Germany, 1933-1941*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010, 168. Rosenbaum emphasized studio heads’ economic interests as a reason for ignoring the issue of antisemitism in Nazi Germany as well as the studio heads’ immigrant status and desire to be perceived as isolationist Americans.

to showcase footage of the concentration camps to a wider audience.\textsuperscript{41} Described as “the worst mass murder in human history,” Wilder’s film provided a sweeping portrait of the Holocaust as experienced by the victims of Nazism.\textsuperscript{42} The film stressed the mass scale of murder, comparing the extent of the deaths to the populations of American cities as a reference point. Geopolitical events created a loophole in terms of the Motion Pictures Production Code and its amendments. War altered the conception and acceptability of graphic imagery in the media. Fascism became publicly tied to antisemitism and the Holocaust, particularly in Hollywood feature films and documentaries after the Allies’ discovery of the concentration camps and during the time of the Nuremberg Trials.

Following World War II, the displaced persons issue became a dominating feature in national and international headlines. Images printed in national newspapers, such as the \textit{New York Times}, featured displaced persons sailing on the “Ship to Freedom” from Bremerhaven, Germany, to the U.S. and museum exhibits revealing the “ingenuity” of displaced persons “in saving [clothing, shoes, and] material.”\textsuperscript{43} One newspaper article evoked the language of Frederick Jackson Turner’s \textit{The Significance of the Frontier in American History} and American exceptionalism. An American program, the Jewish Agricultural Society provided loans to Jewish farmers, specifically displaced persons and ex-service men. The program emphasized its goal in allowing these groups to “rediscover

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Death Mills}, directed by Billy Wilder, (Washington: United States Department of War, 1945). The documentary short was initially released by the U.S. State Department in Allied occupied Germany and then translated into English from German to be viewed to the American public in accordance with the approval of the War Department.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Death Mills}.

the satisfaction of life on the soil.”44 A spokesperson for the society stated: “Jewish farmers have acquired for themselves new reserves of self-reliance and self-respect.”45 The supposed Americanization of displaced Jewish persons through farming embodied the complicated postwar language and attitudes of Jewishness. Through hard work, displaced Jewish persons could become American. On the one hand, the national media sought to utilize the language of the shifting popular discourse and focus on humanitarian attitudes towards victims of the Holocaust. A January 1948 public opinion poll determined an association by Americans between the terms “displaced person” and poor, homeless Jews.46 On the other, the national media continued to run stories that pushed for displaced persons’ assimilation to American culture and used the Holocaust to further solidify the U.S.’s position as one of the world’s superpowers, and stress the evils of the former Nazi government.

Some African American-run and targeted news-media such as The Chicago Defender approached the displaced persons issue and the Holocaust from the position that the European Jews and African American shared a common experience: racial prejudice. Articles published in The Chicago Defender appealed to this commonality, finding parallels between the black and Jewish experience such as the fight for equal opportunity. The American Jewish Congress built an alliance with the NAACP in order to combat “any doctrine or principle which imputes inferiority to the members of any religious, 

racial or ethnic solely," emphasizing the Americanness of the Jewish experience.\textsuperscript{47} Many of the newspapers’ headlines stressed an alliance between blacks and Jews against an oppressive white majority: “Plot to Deport Negroes, Jews,” “Jews, Christians Cite Truman For Brotherhood,” and “Blame Indifference Of Chicago Cops For Mob Attacks On Negroes, Jews.”\textsuperscript{48} An article published by Robert Durr in \textit{The Chicago Defender} urged black political and religious organizations to aid displaced persons in Europe. Durr wrote: “Colored persons, who know what it is to suffer as those Jews suffer, know how their hearts must be overwhelmed with anxiety as trials and tribulations beyond the poor power of words to describe beset them on every side. We must count it a great effort for the alleviation of suffering of the great Jewish people of Europe.”\textsuperscript{49} Another essayist, Willard Townsend wrote in an article for \textit{The Chicago Defender}: “There seems to be a general indifference to the problems of the surviving Jews of Europe… This is unfortunate… We should never permit the strangeness of a culture, language or religion to blind us to the fact that there is a common identity of interests among the peoples of the globe.”\textsuperscript{50} Townsend and Durr made the displaced persons issue an African American issue, comparing the experience of the Holocaust to the centuries of political, legal, and social disenfranchisement of blacks in the United States.

\textsuperscript{47} “Jews Fight Against Restrictive Covenants,” \textit{The Chicago Defender}, May 25, 1946.


The American media also remained notably critical of the U.S. government’s response to the displaced persons issue. Mainstream newspapers and magazines critiqued the American government’s slow response to the victims of the Holocaust. Reacting to the Stratton Bill and the prospect of a quota system in 1947, a *New York Times* article stated: “If there was no ‘national origins’ idea in the system, immigrants could come into the country because they are members of the human race, and not because they are natives of certain favored countries. It is this barrier of snobbery which prevents the United States from taking real action on the DP problem.”51 The article placed Jews under the umbrella of the greater “human race,” evoking images of collectivity and suggesting a quota system would disrupt the aura of camaraderie between the United States and other nations. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Carolyn Bourke, the chairman of the New York League of Women Voters, wrote: “The greatest and most popular objection [to the Stratton Bill] seems to be based on the fear that these people will enter the United States unable to work and will become financial charges of the taxpayers.”52 After a brief history of immigration in the U.S. since 1929, Bourke concluded on the behalf of the League: “In most cases, [a displaced person] would be coming to the homes of relatives and friends…These people would be supported by their friends or relatives from the time they arrived until they could find work. Today we, the taxpayers of the United States, are supporting them in the camps in which they are confined. In the light of these facts it seems difficult to believe that there are real

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51 “Congress and the DPs,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 1947. The Stratton Bill planned to allow “400,000 DPs over a four-year period” to enter the United States.

objections to the Stratton bill.”53 Another letter to the newspaper from Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein suggested that even if the U.S. “liberalize[d] its immigration laws, about 25 per cent would choose to come here, chiefly to join their relatives” with 75% choosing to immigrate to a Jewish nation-state in Palestine.54 The mainstream media publicized and criticized the Eightieth Congress and President Harry S. Truman’s handling of the displaced persons issue.

Academic publications, both domestic and international, also contributed to the shaping of postwar discourses on Jewishness. Academics in fields ranging from the humanities to the sciences helped facilitate the change in the acceptability of antisemitic language and attitudes in the public sphere. The intelligentsia keenly took part in this discourse shift due to their publication activity as well as their unique position as professionalized authorities in their chosen fields of study. The intelligentsia’s role in various media outlets, whether mainstream or extremist, aided in shaping how the media as a diffuser of information interpreted World War II atrocities and the position of Jews in American society. The amalgamation of mainstream and non-mainstream brands of discourse in the public sphere emphasized the postwar ideological conflict concerning antisemitism and how intellectuals came to terms with the Holocaust and prewar conceptions of Jewishness.

The publication of pro-Israeli and Jewish pride literature by international intellectuals fit the language and attitudes towards Jewishness contemporary of a post-


Holocaust world. Edmond Fleg’s work *Why I Am a Jew*, a half memoir and half propaganda piece, found an international audience with its new edition, English translation, and forward by renowned Zionist Stephen S. Wise in 1945 – sixteen years after its original publication. Jacob Gartenhaus, founder of the International Board of Jewish Missions, wrote in his 1948 *What of the Jews?* about the Jewish plight of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He declared: “Everyone knows how the Jews have been despised, derided, hunted down, and tortured. They have been harassed, cruelly massacred, and pitilessly pillaged. But these persecuting nations [i.e. Russia and Germany] likewise have failed.” Gartenhaus concluded Germany remained “slow to learn the teachings of God’s Word.” Jean-Paul Sartre’s study *Anti-Semite and Jew* also discussed the issue of antisemitism throughout history. In response to the mainstream prewar belief that antisemitism was a matter of opinion, Sartre declared: “This word opinion makes us stop and think… It suggests that all points of view are equal; it reassures us, for it gives an inoffensive appearance to ideas by reducing them to the level of tastes. All tastes are natural; all opinions are permitted.” He continued: “But I refuse to characterize as opinion a doctrine that is aimed directly at particular persons and that seeks to suppress their rights or to exterminate them.” The popularity of such literature

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55 The text was originally written in French.


in the realm of academia revolved around the immediate postwar construction of the Holocaust and Jewishness.

Despite evidence of a declining acceptability of public displays of antisemitism, some public figures did, however, continue to voice antisemitic sentiments. In his 1945 article “The Field of Clinical Psychology: Past, Present, and Future,” psychologist and editor of the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Frederick C. Thorne suggested the institutionalization of a Jewish acceptance quota by the American Psychiatric Association for professional school applications in clinical psychology. Before introducing his quota proposal, he described the ideal clinical psychology student as possessing a “mature, healthy personality.”\(^{60}\) He wrote: “A further practical problem of importance in the selection of students involves the avoidance of undue representation of any one racial group among those accepted for training. Perhaps because of long racial experience with suffering and personality problems, certain groups of students show an unusual interest and propensity for psychological science which has both favorable and disadvantageous aspects.”\(^{61}\) According to Thorne, Jews’ “unhealthy personality motivation” made prospective Jewish students unhealthy and unable to maintain the high degree of academic and psychological rigor required to succeed in the field.\(^{62}\) He continued: “While disclaiming racial intolerance, it nevertheless seems unwise to allow any one group to dominate or take over any clinical specialty as has occurred in several instances. The importance of clinical psychology is so great for the total population that the

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profession should not be exploited in the interests of any one group… that the public
acceptance of the whole program is jeopardized." The language utilized by Thorne
remained reminiscent of psychologists’ and psychiatrists’ analysis of the supposed
peculiarity of the “Jewish personality,” a peculiarity largely reasoned as a result of
history and environment. Prior to World War II, specialists categorized Jews as nervous
and anxious due to religious laws and historical persecution. Literature in the 1940s and
1950s described Jews as innately neurotic and “self-hating,” traits emphasized in later
examples of postwar Jewish comedy and American popular culture. The existence of
too many students from one non-white racial or ethnic group, according to Thorne,
threatened the dominance of “white” persons in the field of clinical psychology. Such
language alluded to prewar attitudes on Jewishness and race and exhibited the struggle
between the new mainstream discourses on Jewishness after the war and the
institutionalization of Jim Crow rhetoric and attitudes in American society.

Thorne’s quota proposal for Jewish students maintained prewar notions of race
and ethnicity. Medical schools in the United States, particularly after World War I, placed
strict quotas on Jewish applicants “from 20% to 40% to as low as 5%” for some
institutions. In his essay “Discrimination in Medical Colleges,” former Methodist

64 Susan A. Glenn, “The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II America,” Jewish
Social Sciences 12, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 2006), 97.
65 Glenn, “The Vogue of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II America,” 98.
66 Ben Harris, “Jewish Quotas in Clinical Psychology?: The Journal of Clinical Psychology and
the Scandal of 1945,” Review of General Psychology 13, no. 3 (2009), 252. For more information on
antisemitism in American medicine, see Edward C. Halperin, “The Jewish Problem in U.S. Medical
and Alfred L. Shapiro, “Racial Discrimination in Medicine,” Jewish Social Studies 10, no. 2 (April 1948):
103-134.
minister and intellectual Frank Kingdon wrote: “The evidence of anti-Jewish discrimination is overwhelming. Although the annual application for entrance by Jewish American has not declined, the number of Jewish students in medical school has been reduced by roughly 50 per cent in the last twenty years.” 67 Writing in October 1945, Kingdon researched the application and acceptance rates of College of the City of New York (CCNY) graduates to medical schools such as Johns Hopkins and Harvard. In 1925, 190 CCNY graduates applied to medical school and 58.4% were admitted. In 1943, 139 CCNY students applied and only 15% were admitted to their respective programs of study. 68 Kingdon conducted a similar case study of other New York colleges, such as “Brooklyn College, Queens College, and other institutions that have a large percentage of Jewish… students.” 69 Kingdon’s study stressed the discord between changing postwar public discourses on Jewishness and the continuation of antisemitic practices in the academic community in the semi-private and private spheres. Kingdon argued: “Out of a total of 6500 enrolled annually, only between 500 and 600 are now Jews. Even that figure is likely to be cut sharply if public opinion does not intervene quickly.” 70 His study pointed to the systematic flaws evident in American institutions and stressed the importance of democratic practices in education and politics.

67 Frank Kingdon, Discrimination in Medical Colleges,” *The American Mercury* 61, no. 262 (October 1945), 392.

68 Kingdon, “Discrimination in Medical Colleges,” 394. These numbers merely reflect a series of small case studies. In addition, the case studies did not distinguish individual acceptance rates of CCNY students based on the schools in which the students applied.

69 Kingdon, “Discrimination in Medical Colleges,” 395.

70 Kingdon, “Discrimination in Medical Colleges,” 392.
Media in the form of oral and written news outlets, both domestic and international, played a considerable role in shaping postwar public discourses and language on Jewishness after the Second World War. The media did not create change, but instead aided in that change by collecting wartime footage and diffusing interpretations of the Holocaust which in turn helped shape constructions of Holocaust meaning and memory by U.S. politicians and the American public. The post-Holocaust mainstream discourses on antisemitism shifted towards a more humanitarian and accepting view of Jewishness. The displaced persons and Palestine issues after the war became frequently portrayed as the U.S. government and American publics’ moral responsibilities. Media coverage depicted the Palestine problem after the war as one of extreme urgency, evoking the recent collective memory of the Final Solution and the imagery of countless wandering Jews of Europe. Media outlets served as tools for both mainstream and right-wing extremist streams of thought from the interwar through the postwar periods. The conflicting language and attitudes displayed in media outlets, domestically and internationally, reflects the power of geopolitics in abruptly changing the tide of popular, public discourses.
CHAPTER 2: The Government

The Holocaust had an immediate impact on how politicians and public figures approached Jewishness, the displaced persons issue, and the creation of an Israeli nation-state. Hurried, new public discourses emerged between 1945 and 1949 that preached the supposed American tradition of racial and religious equality and called for a new age of global humanitarianism spearheaded by the U.S. and the Allied Powers. The postwar vision of the West stood as a definitive contrast to American conceptions of the German and Soviet governments as illustrated by the domestic and international media. These new discourses brought to light the underlying conflict in the U.S. between institutional racism and postwar sense of morality. War and the fight for the diplomatic recognition of Israel complicated the racialized tradition of American political culture. In the United States, the discovery of the concentration camps complicated the acceptability of prewar antisemitic attitudes in the public sphere.

After the Allied troops’ discovery of the Holocaust, U.S. politicians like President Harry S. Truman openly employed humanitarian language in discussing the Jewish plight, a considerable contradiction to the Jim Crow rhetoric that dominated the U.S. culturally and legally. In a public statement to “a Delegation from the United Jewish Appeal,” Truman passionately spoke about bringing to justice Nazi “war criminals at Nuremberg.” He stated: “There are left in Europe 1,500,000 Jews, men, women and children, whom the ordeal has left homeless, hungry, sick, and without assistance. These, too, are victims of the crime for which retribution will be visited upon the guilty. But

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neither the dictates of justice nor that love of our fellowman which we are bidden to practice will be satisfied until the needs of these sufferers are met.”

Truman stressed the universality of the survivors’ suffering and the significance of the Nuremberg Trials in Jews’ memory and meaning of the Holocaust. This chapter’s employment of private and public presidential papers, speeches and addresses, government studies, and personal correspondence serves to exemplify the types of language utilized by U.S. politicians and government officials towards the displaced persons and Palestine problems. How did politicians manipulate their language to justify their political platforms and maintain a publicly humanitarian position on Jewish victims? U.S. politicians and officials in the State and Defense Departments became increasingly more receptive to the prospect of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine between the years 1945 and 1949 due to immigration politics relating to the displaced persons situation in Europe and early Cold War attitudes.

The memory of the recent war and contemporary geopolitical concerns had a direct and significant impact on public discussions on Jewishness by government figures and policymakers.

Immigration politics dominated domestic and international government agendas after the war and had a significant impact on how the United States government approached the problem of Israel. Countries like Britain, Brazil, South Africa, France, and Canada willingly offered employment to displaced persons who met certain criteria,

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3 Many proposals for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine had been put forth since World War I such as the 1937 Peel Commission. The commission was established as a response to the Arab revolt in Palestine (1936-39). The recommendation consisted of the creation of a small Jewish state with the remainder of the mandate territory under the control of the British.
among them skillset, marital status, and gender. The Soviet Union banned displaced persons in their specific zones, categorizing such persons as “war criminals.” In Britain, displaced persons of German descent faced considerable discrimination in seeking employment after the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 and 1946. The British military declared in February 1947 that approximately 70,000 displaced persons in Germany had to find employment immediately or leave the British occupation zone, an action opposed by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The British military and government sought to find an immediate solution to the immigration and displaced persons work issue. American efforts revolved around European economic and political reconstruction. The U.S. military and government had a great task to confront in the Allied occupation zones because “first it [had] about 50 per cent more displaced persons than the British zone; second, the percentage of Jews [was] far higher and employability [was] less easy because of German anti-Semitism, and third, the American zone [had] a large-scale unemployment problem.” The constant movement of displaced persons in Europe, specifically illegal immigration into Britain, contributed notably to Allied support for Jewish immigration into Palestine.

Displaced persons flooded survivor camps throughout Europe in the Allied occupation zones. In September 1945, Earl G. Harrison, the head of the

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8 For more information on the refugee problem after the war, see Gerard Daniel Cohen, In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012; Jay
Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, submitted a report to Truman evaluating the postwar conditions of stateless persons in Europe, particularly in Austria and Germany. The Harrison Report stated: “[The treatment is similar] except we do not exterminate them. They are in concentration camps in large numbers under our military guard instead of S.S. troops. One is led to wonder whether the German people, seeing this, are not supposing that we are following or at least condoning Nazi policy.” The language utilized by Harrison in the report invoked memory of the Third Reich and drew on the perceived similarities found in Allied policies on displaced persons in Germany and Austria occupied by SHAEF to the Nazi government’s policies. In a letter to General Dwight Eisenhower, Truman responded to the Harrison Report by calling for the need of heightened “field visitation[s] by appropriate Army Group Headquarters” in order to monitor conditions in the European displaced persons camps. The Harrison Report contributed notably to the White House’s position on the recognition of the Israeli state in 1948. The issues surrounding postwar persecution and repatriation played important roles


9 Earl G. Harrison to Harry S. Truman, 29 September 1945, in The American Presidency Project, University of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.


11 Harry Truman to Dwight Eisenhower, 29 September 1945, in The American Presidency Project, University of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.
in President Truman’s political language and the White House’s position on the Palestine question.

Earl G. Harrison described in detail the subpar conditions of displaced persons camps in the Allied occupation zones. One survivor testimony by David Burdowski depicted the displaced persons camps in the American occupation zones as transitional facilities between freedom and imprisonment. He stated: “We didn’t care what camp is it, we didn’t want to go.”12 Another survivor Samuel Biegun emphasized that not all displaced persons camps had similar conditions. In comparison to the displaced persons camp in Berlin, the conditions of the camp in Frankfurt “were very good.”13 Biegun said, “We had… in Berlin we had the barracks, you know, like – but [in Frankfurt] we had houses, so it was better conditions.”14 Responding to the Harrison Report, Dwight Eisenhower suggested to President Truman that it did not address the day-to-day problems faced by the American army such as population fluctuations and health problems of Jewish survivors.15 The Harrison Report did not serve as a universal testimony to all displaced persons’ experiences with the camps in the American occupation zones.

Previous studies such as Mark Wyman’s monograph *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* concentrated on displaced persons in Western Europe; however, a majority of the displaced persons in the Allied camps migrated from Eastern European

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12 David Burdowski, interview by Unknown, Transcript, May 13, 1982, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI.


14 Biegun, interview.

countries. A 1948 U.S. Congressional report documented the movement of displaced persons in Germany and Austria and throughout Europe after the war. According to the report, the group with the greatest numbers appearing in Germany and Austria were “the Jewish refugees from Poland, Romania, and Hungary.” Of the camps within the U.S. occupation zones in Germany, 113,962 out of 329,243 total displaced persons were Jews receiving aid from PCIRO. The heightened movement of persons throughout Europe and the threat of a mass Jewish exodus into the United States aided in shaping Truman’s stance on Palestine. In Europe, Jews experienced increased violence, especially in Poland with the 1946 riots in Kielee that claimed the lives of approximately thirty-five Jews after a surge of Jewish movement in the region. In 1947, many Jewish survivors in the Austrian countryside experienced threats of pogroms by small towns “hard hit by the failure of … harvest” the year before. The 1948 U.S. Congressional report when paired with the Harrison Report on survivor camp conditions illustrated the general disconnect between shifting public discourses on Jewishness in the late 1930s and 1940s and Jewish immigration.

With the reception of the Harrison Report, the U.S. and British governments sought to temporarily handle the situation of illegal immigration by Jews and repatriation in Europe by encouraging the deportation of willing persons to Palestine. A proposal on

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the formation of “a joint Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry” placed its chief attentions on the circumstances in Europe.\textsuperscript{21} According to Truman, the committee focused on the amalgamation of social, political, and economic factors resulting from the voluntary immigration of non-repatriating European Jews to Palestine.\textsuperscript{22} Commenting on the formation of the committee, Truman stated: “This Government was happy to [join the committee] in the hope that [U.S.] participation would help to alleviate the situation of the displaced Jews in Europe and would assist in finding a solution for the difficult and complex problem of Palestine itself.”\textsuperscript{23} Truman’s proposal centered on the Jewish plight, not the long term future of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Arab states. His language incorporated imagery of a war-torn Europe and perceived the U.S. as having a patriotic duty as the de facto hegemonic Allied power to protect non-repatriated Jews through voluntary immigration to Palestine. The increasing pressure on the U.S. government concerning the status of repatriation, illegal immigration, and the details outlined in the Harrison Report markedly influenced the attitudes expressed by President Truman on the recognition of Israel.

The impact of the Harrison Report reflected the unremitting pressure experienced by President Truman from the Jewish community in Europe and the U.S. In a public statement, Truman declared: “The granting of an additional 100,000 certificates for the

\textsuperscript{21} Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President on the Problem of Jewish Refugees in Europe,” 13 November 1945, in President’s Secretary’s Files: Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.

\textsuperscript{22} Truman, “Statement by the President on the Problem of Jewish Refugees in Europe,” 13 November 1945.

immigration of Jews into Palestine would alleviate the situation.”

The Harrison Report’s evocation of recent memory of the Holocaust pushed Truman to actively remove his administration from comparisons to the horrors committed by the Nazi government, particularly at the time of the Nuremberg Trials between November 1945 and October 1946. In a private letter to Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Truman wrote: “I concur in the belief that no other single matter is so important for those who have known the horrors of concentration camps for over a decade as is the future of immigration possibilities in Palestine.”

The language of the Harrison Report placed increased pressure domestically and internationally on the U.S.’s foreign policy concerning Palestine.

Pressure mounted in Washington over the accounts relayed in the Harrison Report. Earl Harrison’s findings as well as national newspapers’ publication of camp conditions in the American occupation zone encouraged an immediate response from the U.S. government. The language used in the Harrison Report paralleled the visual evidence of the Holocaust found in American newsmagazines like Life. During the session of the 80th Congress, held between the years 1947 and 1948, approximately “300 bills were introduced” on “immigration and nationality matters.”

This estimate excluded 1,140 private bills that called for aid to new immigrants and displaced persons.


25 Harry S. Truman to Clement Attlee, 13 November 1945, in The American Presidency Project, University of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.


arriving on American shores.²⁸ One article printed in *The New York Times* placed the 80th Congress’ unfavorable reception of the Stratton Bill, a bill that proposed “to admit 400,000 DP’s over a four-year period,” on trial.²⁹ The article declared: “Why this strange blindness to the needs of individuals when our responsibility for the needs of nations is freely admitted? What national neurosis are we suffering from that denies our historic tradition of giving sanctuary to the persecuted?”³⁰ Another article in *The New York Times* publicized the U.S. Senate’s voting patterns on the Displaced Persons Bill and revealed a disconnect between Truman’s rhetoric and his party’s platform.³¹ Jay Walz of *The New York Times* critiqued arguments presented by U.S. politicians who remained unsupportive to any changes to the U.S. immigration system such as staunch segregationist Senator Richard B. Russell (D. GA).³² Walz pointed out Russell’s claims of the “dangerous precedent” set by increasing the displaced persons quotas was not particularly evident to American citizens living in major East Coast cities as argued in Washington.³³ Walz wrote: “Many citizens probably do not know, displaced persons have been coming to this country right along, and hundreds more could have come, under present quotas, than

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actually have arrived.” Organizations like the American Jewish Council also called into question the United States’ immigration laws and the lack of legal action concerning the passage of legislation criminalizing antisemitism, pointing out the Soviet government, vilified in the U.S., had passed a criminal law against antisemitism in 1931. A post-Holocaust world called into question the U.S. government’s prewar political and legal indifference to civil rights and immigration issues by critical domestic media and community organizations.

President Truman’s stance on Palestine centered on quickly resolving the displaced persons situation after the war. The prospect of Jewish immigration to the United States inspired domestic public opinion. Over a majority of an April 1948 poll’s participants disapproved of “letting 200,000 of displaced persons come during the next two years to live in” the United States. In a September 1948 poll, 44% of 2,506 respondents supported the admittance of a small number of displaced persons into the U.S. under the condition that “other countries do the same.” By supporting the immigration of Jews into Palestine, the American government hoped to alleviate the displaced persons issue in Europe and the U.S. and demonstrate the humanitarian platform outlined by politicians’ rhetoric. In a public statement explaining alternate plans to resolve the Palestine issue, Truman stated: “In the light of the terrible ordeal which the Jewish people of Europe endured during the recent war and the crisis now existing, I


cannot believe that a program of immediate action along the lines suggested above could not be worked out with the cooperation of all people concerned.”\textsuperscript{38} The language used by Truman emphasized the hardships faced by European Jews under the Nazi government’s regime. The memory of the Holocaust played a significant role in justifying Truman’s position on Palestine. His use of emotionalized language served to portray the U.S. and Allied governments as global protectors of democracy and humanitarianism during the postwar period.

Patriotic language utilized after the war incited images of the Nazis’ genocidal campaign and played on the recent memory of the Holocaust. Senator Robert Wagner (D. NY), on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Relations, submitted a resolution in December 1945 on the committee’s stance on Palestine. Wagner stated: “Passage of this resolution will also furnish the occasion for the Congress to express itself forthrightly on the horrible plight of the Jews in Europe, 5,700,000 of whom were victims of Hitler and his madmen.”\textsuperscript{39} The language of the resolution emphasized Nazi war crimes against the Jewish people, inciting powerful imagery of the Holocaust’s mass scale and describing Hitler and his followers as insane persons. Like Truman’s public rhetoric, Wagner identified the Jewish plight over Palestine with the democratic right to self-determination. He declared: “The war is over and the need for a Jewish homeland, where the Jewish survivors of these persecutions can live and breathe as free men and women, and where they can establish… a free and democratic commonwealth is greater than ever.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Truman, “Immigration into Palestine,” 4 October 1946, 817. One of the plans known as Morrison plan centered on a two-state solution to appease both Arabs and Jews in the region.

\textsuperscript{39} Restoration of Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 1945, S. Rpt. 855, 2.
Wagner also appealed to history by referencing President Woodrow Wilson’s support of Jewish migration to Palestine at the end of the World War I. In shaping Congress’ views on the Palestine problem, he incorporated recent powerful, public figures and their legacies, particularly Wilson and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Wagner utilized history as a tool in appealing for bipartisanship on the committee’s stance on Palestine at the 1944 Democratic and Republican national conventions in Chicago.

American politicians’ language addressed the evolving sociocultural climate in the U.S. towards civil rights, an issue that deeply impacted the national dialogue on Palestine and how the U.S. public understood Jewishness. In his 1948 speech at the Democratic National Convention, Hubert Humphrey stressed Democratic Party members’ need to address the issue of race in the public sphere. Like Senator Wagner, Humphrey appealed to American history and referenced Kentucky senator and keynote speaker Alben Barkley’s own speech. Humphrey declared: “Thomas Jefferson… ‘did not proclaim that all white, or black, or red, or yellow men are equal; that all Christian or Jewish men are equal… What he declared was, that all men are equal.’ … Our demands for democratic practices in other lands will be no more effective than the guarantees of those practiced in our own country.”

As mayor of Minneapolis, a city notorious for its openly antisemitic and racist employment practices, the speech reverberated in the land of Jim Crow with its historically anti-immigration and segregationist policies.

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The Holocaust initiated an evolution surrounding the acceptability of antisemitic language and attitudes in the public sphere. On February 8, 1945, Jewish Congressman Emanuel Celler (D. NY) questioned the American Dental Association’s new requirement for religious tests prior to “entrance into dental colleges,” ultimately concluding the requirement “un-American.”

John E. Rankin (D. MS) declared: “I am getting tired of the gentleman from New York raising the Jewish question in the House and then jumping on every man who says anything about it. Why attack the American Dental Association? That organization has done what it had the right to do… Remember that the white Gentiles of this country also have some rights.”

Organizations such as the Veterans League of America publicly criticized Rankin, an open supporter of the Ku Klux Klan, for being “anti-Semitic and anti-Negro.” The League stated: “[Rankin’s remarks] makes it apparent that he cannot legislate fairly with regard to the more than 200,000 veterans of the Jewish faith.”

Criticism also emerged regarding Rankin and the Congressional Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities’ targeting of Jewish persons in their postwar communist witch hunt. Charles D. Potter, the chairman of the Committee for the Defense of Civil and Religious Liberty, wrote in a public letter to *The Washington Post*:

“Spokesmen for the Un-Americans have verbally assailed Jews and Jewish organizations… This looks like the very essence of old world religio-political persecution. If Thomas Jefferson were alive today, he would certainly fight to abolish the

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Wood-Rankin Committee. Modern statesmen, take notice!”⁴⁶ In contrast to prewar American political culture, the Holocaust called into question both political apathy and overt racism demonstrated by U.S. political figures.

President Truman faced pressure from the Jewish community in the United States because of the wave of immigration of displaced persons into major American cities such as New York and Detroit, as well as Holocaust memorialization in the postwar period. Imagery alluding to the Holocaust and the marginalization of the displaced Eastern European Jews ignited American public support for the creation of Israel.⁴⁷ American Zionists called for the immediate recognition of a Jewish state in Palestine, providing additional pressure on the administration domestically.⁴⁸ War and genocide fueled the emotions of the Jewish community in the U.S. Many American religious and community organizations joined together to lend aid to displaced Jews entering the United States, such as the American Red Cross, Catholic Youth Organization, Anti-Defamation League, Campfire Girls, Boy Scouts, and the Salvation Army.⁴⁹ In a personal letter to Secretary of State George C. Marshall, President Truman wrote: “The American people, as a whole, firmly believe that immigration into Palestine should not be closed and that a reasonable number of Europe’s persecuted Jews should, in accordance with their wishes, be permitted to resettle there.”⁵⁰ The White House evoked language based on the recent

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⁴⁹ “36 Groups to Aid Jews in Relations Institute,” The Chicago Defender, April 10, 1948.
memory of the Nuremberg Trials in order to justify its support for the partition of Palestine. Such rhetoric’s link between U.S. support for the creation of Israel and world peace played on postwar anxieties in order to alleviate the immigration issue and the possibility of armed conflict, allowing European states to rebuild structurally and politically.

Although President Truman had defended the Zionist cause even during his term as senator, his support for the cause as president centered on short term resolutions to the immigration and displaced persons problems in Europe. Privately, Truman expressed his frustration with the domestic and international Zionist lobby: “The main difficulty with our friends, the Jews in this country, is that they are very emotional – they, the Irish and the Latin-Americans have something in common along that line.”51 His private language reflected prewar racial attitudes, characterizing Jews with the Irish and Latin Americans as overly emotional. In a personal diary entry, President Truman wrote: “The Jews, I find are very very selfish. They care not how many Estonians… Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get… mistreated as [a displaced person] as long as the Jews get special treatment… Put an underdog on top and it makes no difference whether his name is Russian, Jewish, Negro… he goes haywire.”52 The language utilized by President Truman signaled the racialized attitudes engrained in society towards immigrants and non-white ethnic groups. He continued: “Yet when [Jews] have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler

50 Harry S. Truman to Clement Attlee, 13 November 1945, in The American Presidency Project, University of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.

51 Harry Truman to Dean Alfange, 18 May 1948, in Secretary’s Files: Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.

52 Harry S. Truman, Diary Entry, 21 July 1947, in President’s Secretary’s Files: Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.
nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the underdog.”  

His statement strongly contrasted his public rhetoric on Israel and the Jewish people in the U.S. and Europe. Space and place complicated the expression of prewar attitudes towards race and ethnicity in the public sphere.

In appealing to the U.S. for support, the pro-Zionist leaders and organizations financially aided political candidates that retained similar ideological positions on Palestine. The pro-Israel platform served as a political strategy in appeasing the American Jewish population and for candidates believing that the Israeli lobby would secure votes in states with a high Jewish population like New York and California. At the Gridiron Dinner in December 1947, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal recalled a conversation he had had with New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey on the possibility of reaching a bipartisan solution to the Palestine problem. Forrestal recounted, “The Governor [Dewey] said… it was a difficult matter… because of the intemperate attitude of the Jewish people who had taken Palestine as the emotional symbol, because the Democratic Party would not be willing to relinquish the advantages of the Jewish vote.”

The Palestine problem had evolved into another political battlefield. Dewey had endorsed the United Jewish Appeal’s fundraiser for displaced persons in Europe along with “twenty-two other Governors,” to provide displaced “Jews... an opportunity for rehabilitation and resettlement in Palestine,” the U.S., and European nations.” On Yom Kippur in 1948, the Jewish Day of Atonement, Truman announced his support for the

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53 Truman, Diary Entry, 21 July 1947.
creation of a Jewish nation-state, seeking to secure the Jewish vote for the Democratic Party.\(^{56}\) Civil rights issues gained new significance in light of the presidential election. In response to a proposed congressional plan to allow African Americans “to practice at Gallinger Hospital” in Washington, DC, Congressman Rankin declared: “It is about time members of Congress and the President get off this scheme of playing politics in order to get a few votes in Harlem and in other portions of New York City.”\(^{57}\) Presidential candidates’ public declarations in support for civil rights concerns harbored new meaning after World War II.

The threat of losing the Jewish vote posed a significant yet imagined hurdle in the campaigns of both the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. Dean Alfange, a prominent New York politician, wrote: “Frankly, the President could not carry the State of New York in the present circumstances. The Jewish vote against him would be overwhelming. Only a dramatic move on the President’s part that would electrify the Jewish people could change the situation.”\(^{58}\) In order to secure his election, Truman sought to appeal to a specific base during his campaign in New York: the Jewish population and sympathizers to the Jewish plight in the U.S. Alfange remarked: “Such a move might well be the recognition of the Jewish State which will come into being on May 16, and the nomination of an American Minister to the new States.”\(^{59}\)

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\(^{58}\) Dean Alfange to Harry Vaughan, 5 May 1948, in *Secretary’s Files: Truman Papers*, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.

\(^{59}\) Alfange to Harry Vaughan, 5 May 1948.
announcement made by President Truman on Yom Kippur served as a symbol of the Democratic Party’s position supporting the recognition of the Jewish nation-state. To the Truman campaign, the Yom Kippur announcement also centered on securing funds from leading Israeli lobbyists to the Democratic Party. The reception of financial contributions from Israeli lobbyists to Truman’s campaign, coupled with the mythologized Jewish vote, played important roles in the White House’s decision to publicly support the recognition of Israel.

Although Truman’s design centered on winning the Jewish vote in New York by appealing to Jews and Zionist supporters, Dewey won the state during the 1948 election. In relation to party strength and general voting demographics, voter strength in New York for the Democratic Party regardless of race was between 20.1% and 40%.60 The voting demographics in Manhattan remained strongly Republican in both the 1944 and 1948 elections despite its large concentration of Jewish persons. After all, Dewey was the state’s governor. The Truman campaign’s idea of winning the Jewish vote in New York fell short in the 1948 presidential election; however, it did not cost Truman the election.61 Truman’s public language emphasizing an openly pro-Zionist platform centered on the belief that there existed a powerful Jewish vote, strong enough to secure a Democratic victory in New York. Political tactics took precedent over political realities. The presidential election campaign and the rhetoric utilized by U.S. public officials pushed

60 Voting America: United States Politics, 1840-2008, “Individual Elections: 1948,” Digital Scholarship Lab, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA. Despite the loss of the state, the Democratic Party won an extra three additional counties in 1948 (i.e. Oneida County, Monroe County, and Erie County) as opposed to 1944’s single Democratic win of Albany County.

61 John Snetsinger’s Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel proliferates the myth of the Jewish vote. However, the African American vote proved the greater base to woo in terms of numbers. In light of European reconstruction and the domestic economy, the displaced persons issue did not resonate as powerfully with the larger election base.
the idea of the Jewish vote. This idea facilitated pressure on the campaign by pro-Zionists and their supporters in the U.S. War and the recent memory of the Holocaust inspired a greater reception by U.S. politicians to discussing the plausibility of creating an Israeli nation-state as witnessed in the 1948 presidential election campaign.

Early Cold War politics played a marked role in how the U.S. government responded to the creation of the Israeli nation-state after World War II. By seeking to contain communism and maintain an American ally in Israel, the White House concluded that the U.S. would still retain access to the region’s oil supplies. This remains fundamental in securing U.S. economic influence in the Middle East as well as combating communism, all under the veil of pro-Zionism.62 Recalling a private conversation with B. Brewster Jennings, the president of the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, Secretary of Defense Forrestal wrote: “I told Jennings I was deeply concerned about the future supply of oil for this country, not merely for the possible use in war but for the needs of peace. I expressed it as my opinion that unless we had access to Middle East oil, American motorcar companies would have to design a four-cylinder motorcar sometime within the next five years.”63 The United States from the 1920s to the immediate post-World War II period ranked directly behind the Soviet Union as the world’s leading exporter of oil. The question of oil and American foreign policy revolved less on need and more on the desire to expand the U.S.’s access to natural resources at the start of a national economic boom defined by new appliances, machinery, and a growing


63 Forrestal, *The Forrestal Diaries*, 357.
automobile-based culture.\textsuperscript{64} The editor of \textit{The Nation}, a weekly U.S. publication, Freda Kirchwey argued in a letter to President Truman: “A report submitted by Mr. [James Terry] Duce to the head of the Arabian American Oil company…has become the Bible of our State and Defense Departments despite the very clear indication that oil concessions are not in jeopardy.”\textsuperscript{65} The White House’s approach to foreign relations differed notably from the ambiguous language exhibited by officials in the State and Defense Departments.

President Truman faced a marked divide within the U.S. government in relation to the Palestine partition’s impact on diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Arab states. U.S. government officials in the departments stressed the long term implications of American support for Israel, briefing the White House frequently on matters of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East maintained during the Roosevelt administration. In a letter to the king of Saudi Arabia, Franklin D. Roosevelt emphasized that “no steps be taken with respect to the basic situation [in Palestine]… without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews.”\textsuperscript{66} Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew wrote in a letter to President Truman: “I thought that you would like to know that although President Roosevelt at times gave expression to views sympathetic to certain Zionist aims, he also gave certain assurances to the Arabs which they regard as definite commitments on our

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Kirchwey} Freda Kirchwey to Harry S. Truman, 19 June 1948, in \textit{Subject File: Weizmann Archives Records}, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.
\bibitem{Roosevelt} Franklin D. Roosevelt to King Ibn Saud, 5 April 1945, in \textit{The Avalon Project at Yale University: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy}, Yale University, New Haven, CT.
\end{thebibliography}
The U.S. State Department under the direction of Roosevelt and Truman desired to maintain stability in the region, specifically to ease the tension between Arabs and Jews. Grew continued: “[Roosevelt] authorized the [State] Department to assure the heads of the different Near Eastern Governments in his behalf that in the view of this Government there should be no decision altering the basic situation in Palestine without full consultation with both Arabs and Jews.”

According to the Acting Secretary, Arab states viewed the Truman administration as united supporter of Roosevelt’s measures on U.S. involvement in Palestine. A violation in Rooseveltian policy towards the Middle East by the Truman administration increased the likelihood that Arab states would sever friendly diplomatic ties with the United States according to officials in the State and Defense Departments.

Although the political platform of the White House tied democratic symbolism and idealism to its support for a Jewish state, the State and Defense Departments remained adamantly opposed to such support, citing national security and economic factors. A 1947 CIA report, written as a collaborative effort between the agency and the “Departments of State, Army, Navy, and Air Forces” declared: “[Palestine’s] significance stems not only from its location at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, its proximity to the Suez Canal and the fact that it is an outlet for the oil of the Middle East, but also from the psychological problem posed by irreconcilable claims of Arabs and Jews for hegemony over the country.”

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67 Joseph C. Grew to Harry S. Truman, “Memorandum for the President: Palestine,” 1 May 1945, in President’s Secretary’s Files: Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum.


Palestine and the preservation of regional stability remained rudimentary concerns in terms of U.S. national security.\(^{70}\) The State Department emphasized the role of the British government in Palestine and its subsequent military occupation of Palestine. Department officials sought to reduce the United States’ role as supreme actor in the Palestine partition.\(^{71}\) Such language acknowledged the fragility of the Palestine issue with respect to U.S. ties to Arab states and the long term implications of the White House’s full-scale support of Israeli recognition.

The language used by officials in the departments designated the solution of the Palestine problem as a United Nations issue. One report outlining the U.S. delegation’s position on the UN partition plan stated: “The plan for Palestine ultimately recommended by the General Assembly should be a United Nations solution and not a United States solution… the final recommendation of the General Assembly cannot be labeled ‘the American plan.’”\(^{72}\) U.S. government officials confined the United States as a supporting player in the Palestine partition, distancing the nation from the possible diplomatic fallout of recognition among the Arab states. The former report argued: “The U.S. may then be compelled, because of aroused sympathy on the part of the U.S. public, to take a hurried stand in favor of the Zionists. Such a stand would force even the more moderate Arabs into strong opposition to the U.S. U.S. prestige in the Moslem World, already seriously threatened, would be lost, and U.S. strategic interests would be endangered by the

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instability in the whole area.”

Another CIA report stated: “Armed hostilities between Jew and Arabs will break out if the United Nations General Assembly accepts the plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab States as recommended by the UN Special Committee on Palestine.”

According to the above report, U.S. government departments and agencies held a marked interest in maintaining long term regional stability between Jewish and Arab factions. While the government departments and agencies focused on the impact of U.S. support for the Palestine partition on U.S. and Arab diplomatic relations, the White House pushed for short term domestic political concerns like immigration. The White House assessed its support for Israel on immigration politics and the installation of an American puppet state in the Middle East during the early years of the Cold War.

In advocating Palestine’s partition, according to U.S. government departments and agencies, the United States would experience security and economic setbacks due to the increased violence in the region and the Arab states’ diminishing regard for U.S. policy in the Middle East. Upon further review, the CIA declared: “The US, by supporting partition, has already lost much of its prestige in the Near East. In the event that partition is imposed on Palestine, the resulting conflict will seriously disturb the social, economic, and political stability of the Arab world, and US commercial and strategic interests will be dangerously jeopardized.”

The CIA, in conjunction with the State and Defense Departments, stressed the inherent dangers of Arab nationalism to U.S.

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economic interests. U.S. pipelines and troops remained largely in the hands of selected rebel groups according the State and Defense Department reports. Department reports discussed the risk “that the responsible governments [would] refuse to sign pipeline conventions, oil concessions, civil air agreements, and trade pacts.” Lack of open access to the Suez Canal and petroleum resources in Palestine would impose a high level of tension between the U.S. and Arab states. A State Department report declared: “If the UN recommends partition, it will be morally bound to take steps to enforce partition, with the major powers acting as the instruments of enforcement. The dangerous potentialities of such a development to US-Arab and US-USSR relations need no emphasis.” In serving as the primary enforcer of the Palestine partition, the State Department feared that the U.S. would fully alienate any future for diplomatic relations with Arab states and jeopardize long term economic influence in the Middle East.

During the early years of the Cold War, from 1945 to 1949, the U.S. government aimed to reduce Soviet influence in the Middle East all while still maintaining friendly diplomatic relations with Arab states and regional stability. The United States sought to contain states influenced politically by the communist policies of the USSR. President Truman approached containment from the lens of resolving short term political issues, stating: “The greatest threat to the security of the United States and to international peace is the USSR and its aggressive program of Communist expansion.” The Palestine issue


posed, for the White House, an ideal situation to exemplify the dangers of “Communist expansion” to the American public and to evaluate the situation of U.S. and USSR national interests in Palestine.\textsuperscript{79} However, the State Department pointed to long term diplomatic and economic implications concerning Soviet influence in Palestine, arguing: “The United States cannot afford to allow the USSR to gain a lodgment in the Eastern Mediterranean…It may be assumed that in supporting partition and in any subsequent action within the UN, the intent of the USSR is to exploit the situation in Palestine to its advantage.”\textsuperscript{80} The State Policy Planning Staff assessed that Soviet interests in Palestine revolved around instilling long term “Soviet or Soviet-controlled forces under the guise of some UN action, or by infiltration of a considerable number of Communist operatives.”\textsuperscript{81} The possibility of the USSR establishing interests in the Middle East posed an additional division between the White House’s and the U.S. State and Defense Departments’ positions on Palestine, both shaped by postwar geopolitical trends and recent memory of the war.

The State and Defense Departments stressed complex national security and economic issues, a sharp contrast to the White House which presented the Palestine issue through the Zionist lens of self-determination. Delineation from Rooseveltian policy left the U.S. without a seat of influence in the region in the minds of American government officials. A State Department report declared: “A friendly and at least neutral attitude by the Arab peoples toward the US and its interests is requisite to the procurement of

\textsuperscript{79} Truman, “Draft of ‘The Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine,’” 17 February 1948.

\textsuperscript{80} Truman, “Draft of ‘The Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine,’” 17 February 1948.

\textsuperscript{81} Truman, “Draft of ‘The Position of the United States with Respect to Palestine,’” 17 February 1948.
adequate quantities of oil for the purposes as stated and to the utilization of strategic areas without prohibitive cost in the event of war.”82 By recognizing Israel, the United States would “antagonize the Arab people to an unprecedented degree.”83 Increased violence in the region surrounding “U.S. leadership” in Palestine served as additional evidence for the State Department to be concerned about the White House’s public support for Israel and its long term impact on U.S. and Arab diplomatic relations.84

Responding to the State Department’s aim in maintaining amiable diplomatic relations with Arab states, President Truman continued to justify the White House’s support of the recognition of Israel. In a memorandum to Secretary Marshall, Truman stated: “[The United States] are engaged now in extending economic aid and moral support to the nations of Western Europe, in order to stem the spread of Communism. I consider it necessary, at this time, to lend our same support and extend economic aid to Israel for the same reason.”85 The White House interpreted the data collected by the State and Defense Departments as evidence of the need for immediate recognition of Israel. Recent memory of the war and contemporary geopolitical concerns dominated the White House’s position on Palestine. According to Truman, national support for Israel placed the United States at an advantage, instituting a seat of American national interest in the Middle East. The White House concluded that the U.S. could continue to maintain access

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to the region’s oil supplies, perpetuating economic influence in the region and combating communism.\textsuperscript{86} The partition of Palestine ignited a maelstrom of decisive disparate positions concerning the consequences of U.S. support for Israel. These consequences ranged from the government departments’ focus on the long term impact of an alliance with Israel to a president’s focus on short term effects of an American ally in the Middle East.

Despite the significant divide between the White House and the U.S. Departments of State and Defense on Palestine, President Truman approved the United States’ recognition of Israel in 1948.\textsuperscript{87} The State and Defense Departments viewed the president’s recognition for the new state of Israel as a poor diplomatic strategy in the already volatile U.S. and Arab relationship.\textsuperscript{88} Bartley Crum, the National Chairman of the Lawyers Committee for Justice in Palestine, argued in a letter to President Truman: “In the very act of acceptance of the truce proposal, the Arab states committed a further threat to the peace by coupling their acceptance with a specific refusal to respect the independence and integrity of Israel.”\textsuperscript{89} Response from Arab states reflected the numerous reports presented by the U.S. State and Defense Departments throughout the postwar period. The drastic shift in policy from the Roosevelt administration to the Truman administration raised questions within the State and Defense Departments as to


\textsuperscript{88} Otolenghi, “Harry S. Truman’s Recognition of Israel,” in \textit{The Historical Journal} 47, no. 4 (Dec. 2004), 971.

\textsuperscript{89} Bartley Crum to Harry S. Truman, 10 June 1948, in \textit{Subject File, Clifford Papers}, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum, Independence, MO.
the president’s concern for the future safety of the United States in light of early Cold
War politics. President Truman’s recognition and support for the formation of a Jewish
state in Palestine reflected the significant impact geopolitics and recent wartime memory
had on U.S. foreign policy after World War II.

President Harry S. Truman’s public support for the creation of Israel immediately
after the war remained fueled by immigration politics, the displaced persons issue in
Europe, and early Cold War rhetoric. The creation of Israel dissuaded the immigration of
displaced persons to the U.S., especially Eastern European Jews. Racialized attitudes
exhibited by American political figures in combination with sentiments expressed by the
general public influenced the government’s approach towards Israel. Despite the State
and Defense Department’s arguments on the long term diplomatic and economic
implications of U.S. support for Israel, Truman directly addressed the issue of Israel
between 1945 and 1949, formally recognizing the nation-state in May 1948. President
Truman’s postwar platform on Palestine revealed the significance of war and the
Holocaust on language and attitudes on immigration politics, the displace persons issues,
and the recognition of Israel.

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“Q: Did you encounter any anti-Semitism in this country? A: Yes, plenty of it. Yes, a bit. Yes. I, I was very aware of it from the very beginning. Not the kind that I came in contact [with] in Poland but uh, yes I did. Definitely.” Tora Gilbert, Holocaust survivor, July 25, 1983

Space and place serve as crucial factors in deconstructing postwar discourses on Jewishness in the United States. Familiarity and intimacy with one’s place, or social environment, and space, or geographic environment, determines the guardedness of one’s language at a particular moment in time. The increase in familiarity with one’s place, space, and heightened intimacy among others equates a significantly less guarded approach towards language and behavior. A decrease in the former leads to a more conscious awareness of one’s language and behavior, and subsequently a feeling of guardedness. In his article “The Public/Private Distinction,” social theorist Gerald Turkel defined the necessity of differentiating between the public and private spheres in social, legal, and historical studies: “The [public/private] dichotomy… tends to legitimate and mystify patterns of inequality and structures of power through which individual autonomy, social institutions, and legal action are accomplished.”1 While public in setting, places like the workplace and the neighborhood offer a level of intimacy and familiarity with one’s environment, physically and socially. The sense of “comfort” in employing language and behavior, otherwise condemned and thwarted in the public sphere, is increased in the semi-private sphere. Semi-private environments facilitate an imagined state of privacy, leading to increased expressions of bigotry. Thus, the existence of semi-private environments complicates the public/private dichotomy in many

historical studies in Jewish history.² This chapter will discuss the relationship between space and place on American peoples’ understanding of the immediate postwar discourses on Jewishness.³

Prewar antisemitic stereotypes continued in the semi-private sphere of the neighborhood and the workplace, influenced as well by the language and attitudes of early Cold War culture. Language of the semi-private sphere depicted Jews as aligned with the civil rights agenda of African Americans. In addition, portrayals of Jewishness revolved around communism, greed, and foreignness. Language utilized by some Americans even threatened murder and genocide. Such language came from both black and white Americans, identifying Jewish immigrants in the immediate postwar period as unwelcome “others” and personal socioeconomic competition. The shifting geopolitical and domestic political cultures on race and ethnicity remained fueled by the discovery of the concentration camps and the Cold War. Post-Holocaust and Cold War contexts significantly impacted language in the semi-private and private spheres as well as how Jewish targets of antisemitism interpreted the language and attitudes. In addition, there remained regional differences in how the American North and the American South viewed Jewish displaced persons arriving in the U.S. after the war, particularly in light of Jim Crow politics. Despite the public discourse immediately after the war that preached a tolerance for the Jewish people, some Americans experienced a heightened sense of


³ The term “American people” will be extended to include non-citizens permanently residing in the United States as well as native-born citizenry.
“comfort” in the semi-private sphere as demonstrated in neighborhoods and the workplace that encouraged an increased display of antisemitic sensibilities.

Neighborhoods offered Americans a comfortable place in which to exhibit a higher degree of freedom in language and behavior not found in the public sphere. These neighborhoods maintained a great sense of intimacy for persons both in terms of relationships and environment. Individuals remained tied to the social place. Neighbors formed bonds based on common subcultures, common experiences, and common people. Despite the postwar discourse on Jewishness, there existed in semi-private environments a proliferation of prewar racialized characterizations of Jews, continued in language and social behavior as revealed in personal testimonies, newspaper articles, and government-created public opinion polls.

Prewar antisemitic sensibilities continued in the immediate post-World War II period in neighborhoods and communities. Anne Eisenberg, a Holocaust survivor and displaced person from Czechoslovakia, recalled in an oral testimony the utilization of antisemitic language in the communal setting against her son. She commented: “The first shock my son had [in America], my younger son when he was playing ball and he was called a dirty Jew.” Antisemitic attitudes continued in urban places largely in the North and Midwest after the war. The shock experienced by Eisenberg’s son in a children’s ball game demonstrated the persistence of racialized language as a means of heightening difference. Eisenberg’s son was a new arrival to the neighborhood; he did not share a common bond with the other boys besides that of gender. In his memoir *Displaced Persons*, displaced person Joseph Berger described the ethnic separateness of urban

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4 Anne Eisenberg, interview by Charlene Green, Transcript, Oak Park, MI, May 11, 1982, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI.
neighborhoods: “Every group must have handed down a similar clannish outlook because even in our freewheeling neighborhood, where children played on the streets long after nightfall, Irish kids tended to play with other Irish kids, Puerto Ricans with Puerto Ricans, and refugee Jews with refugee Jews.” The existence of common ethnicity bred community. The boys’ use of language, particularly the phrase “dirty Jew” placed the son in a category of “otherness,” isolating him from the community.

In the U.S., antisemitic attitudes did not disappear after World War II. When asked about his experiences with antisemitism in Detroit after the war, Benjamin Fisk exclaimed: “Well, you show me someone that likes a Jew. I worked with the guys, you know, some of them, you know, I know how it is. The guys they talked to you nice because we worked together, we eat together, drink together but when we’re not around they don’t like us. Nobody likes a Jew.” Fisk’s experience with antisemitism and environment suggests the freedom to display antisemitic attitudes remained confined among non-Jews. Although his encounters differed, they still suggest a comfort among non-Jews in openly presenting their antisemitic views: “Some of [the non-Jews] speak out, you know.” He recalled the high level of comfort exhibited by the Polish “superintendent on the [construction] job.”

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6 Eisenberg, interview.

7 Benjamin Fisk, interview by Donna Miller, Transcript, Oak Park, MI, November 8, 1982, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI.

8 Fisk, interview.

9 Fisk, interview.
claimed, “You tell they’re Jewish, you know, you can smell Jew a mile away.”

The man utilized fictive sensors to detect Jewishness. These fictive sensors served as a means in isolating Jews based on stereotypes existing before World War II.

Neighborhoods maintained their own distinct subculture, which in turn fostered community. The need to preserve a neighborhood’s culture functioned as a tool in isolating marginalized groups. In July 1945, white neighbors at Cahuenga Park, in Los Angeles, CA formed a neighborhood improvement committee. The goal of the committee centered on banning Jewish families from residing in the neighborhood and thus, “improv[ing] the district ‘physically and culturally.’” The language utilized by the committee nurtured the development of a native-born, Protestant community, ostracizing others who would potentially threaten their culture. The committee even utilized the language of the U.S. politicians and government officials by citing elements of early Cold War culture. The association between Jewishness and communist proclivities painted the group as un-American, isolating the group politically. A newspaper article declared: “Members of the Cahuenga Park Improvement association… have convinced each other that Jewish communist forces here are attempting to spot Negro families in certain areas.

10 Fisk, interview.


as an opening wedge for unlimited resources by Jewish families.”13 Similar incidents against Jewish persons occurred in cities like Detroit. The Detroit Real Estate Board banned “blacks and Jews… from membership” due to white fears of blockbusting and the corruption of neighborhood cultures by minority real estate agents.14 The language suggested Truman’s early concepts of containment as well as Mississippi Congressman John Rankin, who argued the West Coast remained in danger of communist infiltration through the use of racialized rhetoric. In an effort to curb possible organization building and the corruption of their communal culture, the white residents of Cahuenga Park excluded Jewish families from living in the neighborhood, utilizing language that linked Jews to communism. Thus, Jews remained not quite American. They were others and threats to the nation.

Racialized attitudes and language towards Jewishness existed unguarded in the semi-private sphere. Anne Eisenberg continued describing her experience with antisemitism in the United States: “I do recount a many a times [sic], ‘You Jews got it, you are, Jews are rich. Even if you’re not rich, you Jews are rich.’”15 Prewar mythology that described Jews as materialistic and greedy continued to alienate Jews from the experiences of other immigrants within the neighborhood. Despite the fact that Eisenberg’s husband worked in a meat plant in Detroit, a job offered to him by her father who owned the meat plant, the Eisenbergs were categorized as others. When asked in an

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13 “Use Negro Issue to Bar Jewish Residents,” *The Chicago Defender.*


15 Eisenberg, interview.
interview if she ever experienced antisemitism in the U.S., she responded “No.” Yet, she continued by relaying stories of antisemitic comments made by neighbors and neighborhood children. Due to the nature of the semi-private sphere, neighbors utilized a less guarded form of antisemitism after World War II that revolved around bigotry. Jews from Eastern European were perceived as racial and ideological threats in the nation at the start of the Cold War.

Immigrants, perceived in the media as downtrodden and destitute, fell outside the image of Americanness and instead remained “others.” Immigrant status played a large role in determining the social interaction between Jewish immigrants and Jewish Americans. One Holocaust survivor, Lisa Derman stated: “Some survivors have told me that – that the neighbors and Jewish neighbors, not Christians, Jewish neighbors, would not let their children play with this survivor’s children. And ah – they felt very bad about it, very bad about it. They were not accepted.”

Mala Weintraub Dorfman, a Jewish displaced person from Poland, recalled the distinct separation between Jewish Americans and postwar immigrants: “We couldn’t… make friends there [i.e. the Jewish neighborhoods of Topeka, Kansas] because they were all assimilated Jews.” Despite the connectivity between immigrants and Jewish Americans based on religion, the two groups harbored different cultures, different experiences, and different histories. “When

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16 Eisenberg, interview.
17 Eisenberg, interview.
19 Mala Weintraub Dorfman, interview, Transcript, September 15, 2005, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI. The Dorfmans were placed with a sponsor family in Topeka, KS.
we came to America, it was rough. You know, we went to Topeka, Kansas. No one spoke our language,” stated Mala Dorfman. Language and experiences remained a crucial isolator between immigrants and native-born Americans.

Language served as a badge of differentness. When asked about the number of assimilated Jews in Fairmont, WV, Michael Weiss, a displaced Jew from Czechoslovakia explained: “Again a small community. About sixty families. And it was very interesting, I didn’t speak English naturally… They told me they have services Friday night. So I figured at least with the rabbi I’d be able to talk, I mean over there we had a few older Jewish families who came from Europe. They could speak Yiddish but the youngsters couldn’t, so I didn’t have really people.” Fluency in Yiddish marked a stark distinction between first-generation immigrants and second and third-generation immigrant-Americans. Yiddish presented a link to the Old World, not assimilation to the cultural ways of the United States which for many functioned as a foster nation.

Residing in a Jewish community in Kansas, Mala Weintraub Dorfman and her husband experienced isolation. Her husband Henry commented: “[My wife and I] were… well dressed. I had beautiful luggage… because we tried to upgrade our life… I look at them [i.e. Kansan Jews], they were just like mad at us. What do you mean you are refugees? They didn’t say that, but I could see it in their faces.” The America media depicted Jewish displaced persons as primitive, downtrodden Europeans. Henry Dorfman

20 Mala Dorfman, interview.

21 Michael Weiss, interview by Sidney Bolkosky, Transcript, Detroit, MI, October 7, 1994, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI.

replied, “All the Jews there mostly were Russian... which they came, I don’t know, fifty years ago. And [the media] probably described, you’re going to see some refugees coming down here probably, bent down, probably with…. walking, pots and pans.”

Displaced persons, such as Jews from Eastern Europe, were categorized in the American public’s mind as outsiders. “Otherness” distanced displaced persons from what it meant to be American which centered on economic stability and contribution to the consumerist Cold War culture. The Dorfmans and their Jewish American neighbors maintained disparate life experiences that contributed significantly to the sense of isolation the Dorfmans felt in Kansas. “The understanding of the treatment from those people was nil. I do not think that they understood. I don’t think if they understand life today… They were wealthy probably brought up and I don’t know who the heck was what. They had big homes, beautiful homes. But understanding from life? Oh, heck no,” argued Henry Dorfman. He emphasized the isolation experienced by the Dorfmans, rooted in differences based on culture, language, and experience. These differences decreased the level of comfort afforded by the neighbors towards the Dorfmans and vice versa.

Neighborhoods and communal spaces served as breeding grounds for antisemitism, particularly towards Jewish refugees. Hungarian Jew, Holocaust survivor, and displaced person, Peri Berki recollected a story told by her late husband as he was purchasing groceries in their New York neighborhood. Berki said: “There was an old woman, the neighbor who was an old Jewish woman, and picking out [an] onion… one of the salesmen in the store came to my husband and he said, ‘You see what the Jewish

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23 Henry Dorfman, interview.

24 Henry Dorfman, interview.
refugees do? They just pick up every piece, they’re not satisfied.”

The elderly Jewish woman fit the grocer’s idea of a refugee as well as the antisemitic stereotype of the greedy Jew. The woman appeared poor and lower class and “unfortunate” due to her age and, in turn, exuded a sense of foreignness. Berki described her husband as a man who “didn’t look Jewish.” Berki’s husband did not fit the profile of a Jewish refugee, according to the grocer, and appeared as a comrade. Despite the public setting, the grocer assumed he had a common bond with Berki’s husband based on his non-immigrant appearance. This apparent commonality bred a sense of comfort that led to the open expression of his antisemitic sensibilities. The grocer’s one-on-one series of remarks to Berki’s husband created a semi-private sphere out of a public setting. The grocer held a high degree of familiarity with the shop, his workplace, and intimacy with his non-immigrant customers. Through perceived commonalities and the isolated interaction, the grocer forged an imagined common bond with Berki’s husband as non-Jews and bred a somewhat guarded exhibition of antisemitic language and attitudes.

Postwar antisemitism in the U.S. manifested itself largely in language as opposed to physical violence during the prewar period. Noam Chomsky recalled 1930s Philadelphia, PA: “The anti-Semitism was very real. There were certain paths I could take to walk to the store without getting beaten up. It was the late 1930s and the area was openly pro-Nazi. I remember beer parties when Paris fell and things like that. It’s not like living under Hitler, but it’s a very unpleasant thing. There was a really rabid anti-

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26 Berki, interview.
Semitism in that neighborhood where I grew up as a kid and it continued.”27 Antisemitic attitudes were not eradicated immediately after World War II. War had a marked power in delegitimizing antisemitism in the public sphere. Political figures such as President Harry S. Truman and Hubert Humphrey preached humanitarian treatment to the Jewish victims of the Final Solution on the behalf of the U.S. government. Shifting public discourses, however, did not eradicate antisemitic attitudes on the local level.

Antisemitic attitudes were exhibited in semi-private settings due largely to the increased level of perceived intimacy and commonality with one’s environment and/or acquaintances. Joseph Birnholtz, a Polish Jew and postwar immigrant to the U.S., remembered an occasion of antisemitism while attending singing lessons in Detroit. He said: “[A Polish acquaintance] saw a whole bunch of Jewish people standing waiting for minyan to go into services Friday night, and he said, ‘You see those Jewish people? Too bad that the Germans didn’t kill them all out’... To my uncle, I came home crying and I said this is what I went through and I came here to a free country and here’s the same antisemitism like it was in Poland and Germany.”28 Birnholtz developed a comradeship with the Polish man prior to the interaction at the bus stop. The two shared a common language and, for all intents and purposes, a common culture and history in Poland. The acquaintance remained unaware of Birnholtz’s Jewish identity and assumed him to be a non-Jewish Pole. Immigration status, combined with a common language, forged an aura of community between the two men. Thus, the acquaintance exhibited an increased sense of community.


28 Joseph Birnholtz, interview by Lawrence Berkove, Transcript, Southfield, MI, July 28, 1982, Voices/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Dearborn, MI. Minyan is a collection of at least ten Jewish persons in silent prayer prior to religious service.
of unguardedness in language and attitudes with Birnholtz whom he saw as a fellow Pole. While the bus stop remained a public environment, Birnholtz’s commonality with the Polish man bred a more private sense of unguardedness in terms of revealing antisemitic language and attitudes.

Community facilitated comfort. This sense of community extended to race and region. Simon Kalmas, a displaced Polish Jew, emigrated from Buchenwald to Nashville, Tennessee in April 1949. Kalmas explained that in the American South, skin color fueled community. He was categorized as white in public spaces by those unfamiliar with his European culture or personal history. Race in the South served as an artificial sense of community. Whites in the South remained more inclined to view Jews as belonging to the white side of the color line in contrast to the North and the West. Kalmas described the racial atmosphere in the American South:

I just couldn’t stand the signs that says ‘For Colored’ or ‘Colored’ on the buses ‘For Colored to the rear’… I said, ‘Damn it, I just got out of that shit in Europe.’ ‘For Juden Verboten,’ here I came into the same shit house…I got slapped in the face by coming into Nashville. If I would have come into New York, Detroit, Cleveland, you know, Chicago, it would be a different story. But if you come into New Orleans and you see what’s going on there, that this, this is for blacks – the segregation, okay the same thing that – ghetto!29

Kalmas’ recollection of his experiences with race in the Jim Crow South demonstrated the role of racial identity in constructing community. He later recalled being asked to sit in the front of the bus, an honorary member of the Southern white community.30 Initial appearances, specifically his skin color, did not place Kalmas in the category of a


30 Kalmas, interview.
foreigner. In the American South, his skin color placed him higher on the social hierarchy than African Americans.

An interview, published in an article in the African American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, although guarded in terms of language, revealed a perspective maintained by the African American population towards Jews. In the newspaper interview, an unnamed African American man argued: “Well, if you can get a Southern Jew off to the side and talk with him, he’ll see he’s in a ticklish spot too.”

The division between African Americans and Jews remained based on class-race tensions, particularly in the South. Their white skin placed Jews in the category of whiteness in public environments such as buses, stores, and the workplace. The man in the interview suggested the impact of Jewish assimilation into “whitehood” in the public sphere and how such assimilation diluted Jews’ sense of commonality with the plight of African Americans. In isolating Jews from a public sphere that rewards whiteness, he concluded Jews would recognize their “ticklish spot.”

Therefore, color and class bred community in the public sphere, particularly in the Jim Crow South.

The workplace, like neighborhoods and communal places, nurtured a sphere that did not call for such a protected approach to language and attitudes as experienced in

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32 Conrad, “Yesterday And Today: The ‘Tension Area,’” *The Chicago Defender*.

public spheres. Government propaganda preached the creation of a workplace dedicated to ensuring future generations experience “the highest standard of living ever known to Man.”

The working class’s toil produced this standard of living which the government and public officials utilized to differentiate the American experience from that of the Soviet Union in an age of early Cold War geopolitics. When asked about his experience in the American factory after the war, Jewish Holocaust survivor Aron Derman stated: Workers would “say, ‘Why are you here? Why didn’t you go to Palestine?’ And then all different kinds of remarks, make fun of it, make fun of the gas chambers… You couldn’t start up a fight. You were the only one Jew in the whole job!... I had a hard time to cope with that. And I didn’t stay there long. I stayed – about six weeks I worked. I said, I didn’t come to America to live antisemitism.” Workplaces such as General Motors functioned as a stage for racial and class tensions bred in a production-based economic system.

In the September and October of 1947, General Motors held a contest entitled “My Job and Why I Like It.” Workers, “all hourly rate employees and some salaried employees,” discussed their experiences at the company and winners were selected based on “sincerity, originality, and subject matter.” The contest, generated by the General Motor’s Department of Public Relations, sought to bolster the company’s image in the

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36 *The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It*, Detroit: General Motors, 1948. The top forty winners of the contest received automobiles as prizes and had their entries published by General Motors in the book *The Worker Speaks* (1948).

37 *The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It*. 
public sphere, connecting American patriotism to mass production and consumerism. In his entry, employee Anthony Alubowicz, “a plant protection officer for the Detroit Transmission Division,” described his experience as a Polish immigrant working for the company.  

Alubowicz wrote:

There are so many good points about my job, and so numerous to mention… I work 8hrs. daily from 6 in the morning to 2 in the afternoon 5 days a week… I can take my meals in our modern cafeteria… The plant furnishes, cleans and presses my uniform every two weeks. It even worries about my health, putting up posters to remind me of colds in the winter time and accidents which may occur as well as reminding me to visit the doctor for advice when I’m not feeling well.

He referred to the General Motors as a second family, a community which took care of the needs of its own. Despite his immigrant status, his needs were taken care of by the company. He even voiced patriotic attitudes and language that linked him to his new homeland. Alubowicz stated: “I understand that constant production and steady employment will keep our country on the highest basis of living and help the European and other countries to live and adopt our ideas and system of living.”

He tied production and wage labor to American patriotism. His essay painted the General Motors company as accommodating to the immigrant experience.

The winners of the General Motors contest utilized guarded language as the essays entered into the public sphere. Danish immigrant, Henry N.S. Bierre, a die maker for the Buick Motor Division, wrote in his essay:

Walking down the streets in those towns, looking with awe and horror at the terrifying destruction, the totalitarian Nations had wrought upon its homes, factories, churches and schools and its inhabitants, it gave me great satisfaction to know that the corporation you were employed to, through its immense war

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38 *The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It*, 21.
39 *The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It*, 23.
40 *The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It*, 23.
material production had been a prominent factor in stopping this inhuman slaughter and destruction.\textsuperscript{41}

Bierre’s essay, like Alubowicz’s, did not discuss prejudice experienced at the company due to their immigrant status and perceived foreignness. Instead, Bierre preached the virtues of American capitalism and the joys of employment. The contest was a public venue. Thus, language, attitudes, and experiences voiced by the winners were reserved.

However, these workplace experiences did not represent all immigrant or Jewish experiences, particularly given the purpose of the contest and its presentation in the public sphere. Journalist Carey McWilliams wrote in his 1946 essay “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin” published in the social justice journal \textit{Common Ground}: “In milling, lumbering, transportation, private utilities, banking, insurance, and, even to a degree in the field of department-store merchandising, Jews do not figure as an important element. Despite the fact that a sizable Jewish community has existed in Minneapolis for many years, Jews have not acquired an economic position comparable to that which they occupy in other cities of approximately the same size.”\textsuperscript{42} McWilliams, in his postwar travels through America, described the state as an “iron curtain” for Jewish rights, utilizing Cold War language to characterize the Jewish plight.\textsuperscript{43} He remarked: “Here, then, is something like an explanation: a community in which a limited number of large-scale industries constitute the backbone of the economic life of the area; early monopolization of these industries by a single tightly affiliated element in the population; and the use, by this element, of social, economic, and… political anti-Semitism as a

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{The Worker Speaks: My Job and Why I Like It}, 42.

\textsuperscript{42} Carey McWilliams, “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin,” \textit{Common Ground}, no. 7 (1946), 62.

\textsuperscript{43} McWilliams, “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin,” 62.
means of opposing any threat to [white Protestants’] status, more particularly for the purpose of retaining a preferred social position." In turn, historian Hyman Berman’s article “Political Antisemitism in Minnesota during the Great Depression” points to the use of political campaigns, “social discrimination and economic exclusion” as the sources for this “iron curtain” of social injustice. Jewish immigrants during the immediate postwar period continued to face antisemitic attitudes in neighborhoods, communal places, and the workplaces despite the dramatic shift in U.S. national discourse on the issue.

The job availability for Eastern European Jews remained fairly limited due to prejudice as well as language barriers. Michael Weiss explained the reasoning for his move from rural West Virginia to Detroit: “I went to a dry cleaner [in Fairmont, WV], and I was pressing. Because I did learned a few months I was by a tailor. But in a few months we did not learn much… There is no, no opportunities for nothing, and things, so we decided to move [to Detroit].” Weiss recounted the lack of skilled employment for immigrants in rural areas as opposed to urban areas. Franka Charlupski, a displaced Polish Jew, detailed a similar struggle for work: “It was Ellis Island first and then we went to Tulsa, Oklahoma. From Tulsa, Oklahoma to Topeka, Kansas to St. Paul, Minnesota and then Detroit and… there was more possibilities [in Detroit] of making a living than in all of these little towns… My husband worked very hard at all hours a day.

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44 McWilliams, “Minneapolis: The Curious Twin,” 64.

45 Hyman Berman, “Political Antisemitism in Minnesota during the Great Depression,” Jewish Social Studies 38, no. ¾ (Summer-Autumn 1976), 247.

46 Weiss, interview.
and hard labor. Chrysler, tool and die.” Immigrants moved from place to place in order to find work, largely concentrating themselves in urban places as opposed to rural America.

The workplace offered occasions that nurtured a semi-private environment. A Jewish survivor from Poland and displaced person, Michael Opas commented on the presence of antisemitic sensibilities in the workplace in the U.S. His experiences differed tremendously from the rhetoric and attitudes displayed by the immigrant winners in the 1947 General Motors contest. Opas recalled his time working at General Motors: “I found out that black people [were] more antisemitic than the white people…. I found it very, very hostile people. Blacks. Very hostile. Especially to foreigners… Maybe not because I’m a Jew, maybe because I’m a foreigner, I don’t know. Something was wrong.” Opas’ recollection depicted the role of racial consciousness over class consciousness in the workplace. He described the division between race and class as exclusively instigated by African Americans not whites. As a foreigner, Opas’ sense of familiarity with the workplace environment and its people left him an outsider of the work community. Although the workplace remained a public setting, it cultivated a sense of private freedom in terms of language and attitudes due to the intimacy developed between coworkers and the familiarity of the space: the lines, the hallways, the locker rooms, the cafeteria, the conference room.

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The increase of Eastern European Jews in dominantly African American neighborhoods and spaces heightened tensions between the two communities. The establishment of Jewish businesses in these neighborhoods flirted with other conflicts like disparate community cultures and the existence of a race-based socioeconomic hierarchy. In a series called “Adventures in Race Relations” in *The Chicago Defender*, one article posed a fictive scenario impacting a Jewish shop owner who expressed uncertainty of whose needs to serve – those of a white customer or the African American customer. The owner explained: “You know, I don’t know what to do. When I’m nice to colored customers, the white customers in this mixed neighborhood stay away and go to the chain stores. The problem is the white customers have more money to spend, but I can’t afford to lose my colored customers.”

The fictive proprietor discusses economic issues posed in approaching race relations. The anonymous author argued: “We don’t believe [the Jewish shop owner] is mistaken about the white customers spending more money on food. Personal research has convinced us that the predominantly white-collar worker colored shoppers in Washington deny themselves nothing in line of food, be it staple or delicacy.” Jews are presented as developing a sense of loyalty based on skin color. To African Americans, Jews remained threats to their economic stability and access to postwar consumerism.

The relationships formed in the workplace, much like a neighborhood, were based on commonalities of experience, language, and culture. Michael Opas commented on his feelings of difference: “I felt so lost. I’m a grown man and I’m lost. In a strange land, no

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50 “Adventures in Race Relations,” *The Chicago Defender*. 
language. And people come – from all the people they came to me to ask me – what I’m going to do. You know, I was in tears. And I didn’t know what to do.”

Another survivor Norman Salisitz stated: “I fell down so drastically to America that I was nothing! What do you mean, nothing! I didn’t know the language. I didn’t know the people. I didn’t have a trade. I didn’t have a job. This… You became, you became worthless.”

Language and culture were isolators and inhibited unity between African Americans and Jews, particularly Jews of immigrant standing.

Jews, especially recent immigrants, posed a socioeconomic threat to other marginalized persons in the U.S. according to some African American-targeted media outlets. An op-ed piece by Earl Conrad, a Jewish journalist for The Chicago Defender, sought to encourage unity between African Americans and Jews. In the article, entitled “Yesterday And Today: The ‘Tension Area,’” he wrote: “I think the greatest area for common understanding between Jew and Negro lies in the struggle of both groups for full integration into the trade union movement.”

Conrad saw tensions between Jews and African Americans as a product of a rigid socioeconomic hierarchy based on skin color. To African Americans, Jews and other immigrants served as a threat to their livelihoods and status in the race-based socioeconomic hierarchy of the workplace.

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51 Opas, interview.


Conrad also discussed the nature of immigration as serving as a source of tension between the two groups. He argued: “The Jew came to this country voluntarily, bringing with him his ancient tradition and desirous of perpetuating it. The Negro was brought to this country forcibly. His prescribed condition was forced upon him and he is desirous of escaping the tradition of separate living.” In the minds of the African American working class, Conrad contested Jews maintained autonomy in their immigration. This sense of voluntarism on the part of Jews and other immigrant groups placed them at odds with African Americans, a group who came to the United States against their will only to occupy the bottom rung of the socioeconomic hierarchy. The workplace as part of the semi-private sphere functioned as a stage in which these tensions played out.

Everyday Americans remained less comfortable in displaying their position on Israel and antisemitism in the immediate postwar period. In a brief editorial in The Chicago Defender, William Hart Osbourne responded to Joe Louis’ wife Marva Louis’ antisemitic rhetoric. Hart wrote: “Marva Louis states ‘Only the Jewish women have expensive clothes and furs in Great Britain.’… As a non-Negro, … I know all Negroes are not this and that all Negroes are not that. It is as stupid for Marva Louis to make her statement… as it is for the Rankins to make their generalizations all inclusive, misleading.

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and untrue. In general statements I’ll not go concerning any one as it touches white, black, Jew, gentile, native or foreign born.”

The Chicago Defender served as an example of the public sphere. In vast contrast to the rhetoric displayed in the semi-private and private spheres, Hart’s language remained defensive and guarded.

War and the Holocaust had a unique impact on antisemitic attitudes. The semi-private sphere as exhibited in neighborhoods and the workplace offered the American public an imagined sense of privacy in a public space. Antisemitism did not disappear after the war. A country that in 1942 overwhelming defeated the “immigration of Jewish refugees” to the U.S. did not simply eradicate its anti-immigration and antisemitic sensibilities immediately following the unconditional surrender of Germany on May 7, 1945. Instead, this chapter reveals the conflicted discourses experienced by the American public surrounding the Holocaust, Jewishness, immigration, and the Cold War. Thus, antisemitism evolved between the years 1945 to 1949 with some Americans maintaining prewar racialized myths that proliferated in language and attitudes in a post-Holocaust world.


CONCLUSION

In his published memoir, Joseph Berger wrote about his experiences growing up in New York City, a son of displaced Jewish persons and Holocaust survivors. He stated, “All the survivors, most of them arriving in this country in their late twenties or early thirties, had to make up for lost time… With no time for schooling or training, they had to take the low-skill, low-wage careers in dressmaking, upholstery, and shoe manufacturing, trails that American Jews had blazed a generation or two earlier.”

Following World War II, displaced Jewish persons who chose to immigrate to the United States rather than Israel encountered varying degrees of hardships. War and genocide facilitated public discourses on Jewishness that revolved around memorialization and humanitarianism. Space and place influenced some Americans’ expression of prewar antisemitic language and attitudes. In examining the multiple layers of discourse, this project has sought to accomplish two goals: to emphasize the role of shifting geopolitical trends on domestic culture and racial and ethnic identity in the age of Jim Crow between the years 1945 and 1949 and secondly, to determine the relationship between place, space, and language during the same period.

The “publicization” of the Holocaust altered how the American government approached the war in Europe. During the late 1930s and the early 1940s, U.S. distributed propaganda films and articles from mainstream domestic newspaper and magazines condemned fascism as the antithesis of democratic principles and ideology. The Allied forces’ discovery of the concentration camps served as an example of fascism’s evils as illustrated in later U.S. produced and distributed documentaries and films, such as Death.

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Association between the war and the mass systematic slaughter of the Holocaust became evident immediately upon the Allied forces’ initial contact with the concentration camps in the form of propaganda films, international museum exhibits, and the language utilized by U.S. politicians after the war. The evolution of postwar American discourses on Jewishness sought to directly connect genocide to the war and outline the potentiality for large scale evil by non-democratic governments. War and genocide initiated an evolution in public discourses relating to Jewishness and U.S. foreign policy concerning a Jewish state in Palestine.

While U.S. politicians utilized rhetoric echoed by public discourse on Jewishness, some Americans continued to express antisemitic language and attitudes evident in the semi-private spheres of neighborhoods and the workplace. Some Americans maintained prewar racialized attitudes towards Jews; others found the immigration of Jewish displaced persons a threat to their personal economy as in the relationship between blacks and Jews after the war. Contemporary tensions between the black and Jewish communities remained fueled by the dualistic rhetoric of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement: on one hand, the national media’s connection between the two groups for sociopolitical uplift and the second, the position of Israel in facilitating interracial community and racial progressivism. Cornel West pointed out in a 1997 essay “Tensions with Jewish Friends and Foes”: “I was never a Zionist… I strongly believe that Jewish survival depends on statehood for security. But I also believe that in the long run only a secular democratic state – with no special Jewish character – can secure Jewish survival.”  

As outlined in the third chapter of this project, a historic disconnect exists

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between the two groups, centering on racial and ethnic self-identification. Racial identity significantly impacted the perception of community between blacks and Jews in postwar America.

Literature on Jewishness in the U.S. in the postwar period stresses the contributions of American Jews and Jewish Holocaust survivors to American political and intellectual culture. Recent discussions of the role of urbanization and space in racial politics, as illustrated in Lila Corwin Berman’s article “Jewish Urban Politics in the City and Beyond,” offer new ways in analyzing the postwar period. As Berman contested in her piece, in order to understand Jewish politicization and agency “from World War II through the 1960s,” historians must “rethink the correlations they have drawn between space, identity, and politics.” In addition, the postwar period remains labeled as an era marked by a significant decline in antisemitism in America. By incorporating diplomatic, cultural, and spatial perspectives, this historical study has countered previous historiographical trends that leave little discussion of antisemitism’s evolution in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Instead, this thesis has presented the complicated nature of antisemitism after World War II in relation to spatial politics. A study of the evolution of American public discourses on Jewishness highlights the existence of conflicting ideologies and language in the postwar period. The expression of antisemitism in relation to space and place changed after the war; however, public change did not equate the abolition of antisemitic attitudes in neighborhoods, workplaces, and the private sphere.

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4 Berman, “Jewish Urban Politics in the City and Beyond,” 493.
This thesis emphasizes the relationship between space, place, and language. Language and attitudes towards Jewishness in the United States notably changed in accordance with recent war and genocide. Conflicting discourses surrounding race, ethnicity, and the Cold War between the years 1945 and 1949 complicated the acceptability of prewar antisemitic attitudes in the public sphere after World War II. Future historical research incorporating diplomatic, cultural, and spatial perspectives will continue to illustrate the direct connections between geopolitical events and sociocultural change in the late twentieth century. By applying this logic to future projects, historians in the field may better understand the postwar reconstruction of language, its meaning, and the American public’s conceptions of racial and ethnic identity.
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