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JEWISH HISTORY BEYOND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

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Abstract: *This article proposes a new set of critical historical practices, with the aim of constructing Jewishness into an interpretive historical mode. Jewish history is most commonly understood as the history of the Jewish people and its territories. In setting this as the foundation of Jewish history, scholars have allowed empirical evaluation of the Jewishness of a person or place to precede analysis. Two basic approaches, clearly foundational and tied to personalist and nationalist conceptions of Jewishness, have guided the field of Jewish history: the conjunctive and contingent. A third method—termed here a critical constructive approach—offers a nonfoundational vision for freeing Jewishness and Jewish history from tests of individual, group, or nationalist verifiability and, instead, reconceiving Jewishness as a structuring mode that can affect how a broad range of subjects have operated within history.*

We scholars rarely start our essays by divulging our mistakes, unless we can repurpose a blunder for an argument. So, reader, beware.

MISTAKE I: A TIME I MISTOOK A NON-JEW FOR A JEW

In the spring of 2011, I received conditional acceptance from a journal for an article entitled "Jewish Urban Politics in the City and Beyond."[1] The article's central claim was that even as Jews moved away from cities after World War II, they continued to organize their political lives around fundamentally urban concerns. I had delivered sections of the article, which was the seed of a book project, as conference papers and talks over the past few years. One of the characters I discussed—really, a rather pivotal one—was a man named George Schermer.

I first encountered Schermer in the Jewish Community Council of Detroit archives. He had moved to Detroit from Chicago in the mid-1940s, settling in the second-settlement Jewish neighborhood there, and became director of the city's Interracial Committee. Then, in the early 1950s, the city's mayor, empowered by white conservative interests, went on the attack against Schermer and the

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This article started as a seminar paper for a session entitled "Critical Jewish Studies: In Theory and Practice" held at the 2016 Association for Jewish Studies conference. I am grateful to Ben Schreier for organizing the seminar, Laurence Roth for commenting on my paper, and all of the participants for excellent discussions throughout. Catherine Rottenberg pointed me toward Joan Scott's essay and in several other significant ways improved this article. Jodi Eichler-Levine, Jessica Cooperman, and Jessica Carr invited me to a workshop at Lehigh University called "Situating American Jewish Studies." The group they assembled and conversation they stimulated provided valuable fodder for this piece. Finally, I thank the editors of *AJS Review* and its two readers.

[1] Lila Corwin Berman, "Jewish Urban Politics in the City and Beyond," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (September 2012): 492–519.

Interracial Committee. He accused Schermer of turning the city's office into a front for communist sympathizers, damning allegations as Detroit prepared to host the House Un-American Activities Committee for a round of hearings. Schermer denied the charge, but nonetheless felt compelled to resign, leaving the mayor with a final report excoriating city officials for turning a blind eye to the rampant racism in its housing market. Schermer relocated to Philadelphia, where he continued his interracial and housing work. There, much as he had in Detroit, Schermer moved into a recognizably Jewish and liberal neighborhood, Mount Airy.[2]

When I wrote about Schermer in the article, I described him as Jewish. He chose to live in Jewish spaces, traveled in Jewish circles, corresponded frequently with Jewish leaders, and worked closely with Jewish organizations. Even more important for my purposes, his midcentury political trajectory followed an arc similar to that of other politically involved Jewish urban dwellers in my research. He was not a communist, though a non-Jewish conservative mayor could plausibly suggest he was. Rather he was a liberal who perceived some of the fundamental contradictions in advocating for civil rights without simultaneously confronting how the system of private property stratified society.

The conditions for the article's acceptance were straightforward and included instructions that I pay more attention to describing the individuals whose names appeared throughout the article. Reviewing the manuscript with this in mind, I paused when I landed on Schermer, whom I had summarily described as Jewish. As I contemplated what else I might say about him as an individual, I had to consider a different, more elemental question: How did I know he was actually Jewish, beyond the assumptions I had drawn from archival material? I quickly found his obituary in the *New York Times* and scanned it in vain for the smoking gun I needed.[3] As doubt crept into my mind, I recalled having read somewhere that he was born in Iowa. (As it turned out, this was not the case.) I started to worry. I found a second obituary and learned that one of his daughters, Judith (her name tilted the balance slightly—perhaps he was Jewish?), lived in Philadelphia, and with that information, I was able to find her email address and send her the following message:

> Dear Ms. Schermer,
> I'm on faculty at Temple University in the History Department. I'm writing … about Jewish urban flight from Detroit and have come across your father's name in the context of his work with the Mayor's Interracial Committee. I hope this is not awkward for me to ask, but I'm curious if your father was Jewish.

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[2] Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 89–96; and Abigail Perkiss, *Making Good Neighbors: Civil Rights, Liberalism, and Integration in Postwar Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[3] "George Schermer, Rights Expert, Dies at 78," *New York Times*, June 6, 1989.

A month later, I received this reply:

> To answer your main question—no, our family is not Jewish although my Dad worked with many Jewish organizations in his job as Executive Director of the Phila. Commission on Human Relations and also as one of the founders of the W. Mt. Airy Neighbors. He was not born in Iowa but in Minnesota where he grew up on a farm. This won't help your research on Jewish leaders, I'm afraid. His ancestry was Dutch, and Schermer is both a Dutch and a Jewish name.[4]

There I had it plainly: George Schermer was not Jewish. Now what? Schermer suddenly stood beyond the Jewish framework I had set for my historical study. Still, I could not shake the feeling that in my effort to pursue a verifiable truth—testimony straight from his kin—I had chosen an interpretively empty path. When I had allowed myself to name Schermer as a Jewish man, I had crafted a meaningful analytical framework about Jewish liberalism—how it parted company with leftist economic thought and provided succor for a new vision grounded in fairness and negative rights, not justice or equality.

A small part of me wondered if I might still employ Jewishness not as a personal descriptor for Schermer or as a way to claim his membership within an entire people, but rather as a mode of historical analysis. As such, I would place Schermer within Jewish history, regardless of his Dutch, Minnesota, agrarian, non-Jewish roots. Setting that thought aside, I dutifully minimized the once-central role he had played in the article and finessed the argument so it worked without calling him Jewish. I sent the revisions back to the editor, and, with them, I returned Schermer to his non-Jewish status.

MISTAKE II: A TIME I MISTOOK A JEW FOR A JEW

In the fall of 2015, I wrote a scholarly article about the historical development of donor-advised funds. The article served to fill a gap in the history of philanthropy by explaining how the formation of a new financial housing for philanthropic funds in the late 1960s and early 1970s mapped onto larger shifts in private and public governance in midcentury America. In my research, I had discovered that a man named Norman Sugarman was one of the central architects of the donor-advised fund. He was a tax lawyer who had spent his early career working for the Bureau of Internal Revenue (renamed the Internal Revenue Service in 1953) in Washington, DC, until he returned to his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. There, he joined a private firm, where he built his practice around charitable tax law. Among his clients were the Jewish Federation of Cleveland and, eventually, the national Council of Jewish Federations. Sugarman was Jewish.[5]

An editor at the *Forward* saw the scholarly piece and invited me to write a condensed and accessible version of it for the paper. The *Forward* is one of the few newspapers with a serious philanthropy beat, and I was eager to give its readers an overview of the history of donor-advised funds and, also, some sense of why I thought that history mattered. I wrote the article, though I did not write the headline: "How Norman Sugarman Became the $50B Godfather of Charitable Funds." Headlines are often clickbait; the article was far less flashy. I led with the 1969 Tax Reform Act, and then explained in the second paragraph: "More than $50 billion in charitable assets now course through our country's economy via Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) as a result of changes wrought by the act, its interpretation, and its application. In no small part due to the acumen and persistence of a mid-century Jewish tax lawyer, those dollars function quite differently from other charitable resources."[6] The rest of the article explained how Sugarman interpreted various lacunae in the law to support his creation of charitable funds that retained many of the features of private foundations, yet received the favorable tax treatment and other benefits afforded to public charities.

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[4] Email exchange with author, May 13, 2011 and June 15, 2011.

[5] Lila Corwin Berman, "Donor Advised Funds in Historical Perspective," *Boston College Law Forum on Philanthropy and the Public Good* 1 (October 2015): 5–27.

On a Friday afternoon, when the article appeared in press, I received an email from the senior tax policy counsel for the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA, a successor of the Council of Jewish Federations). I had spoken to him twice before and met him once, very briefly, in person. The email's subject was "Forward Piece," and its content was brief: "Where do I begin? Can we talk?" I sent him my cell phone number, and he called almost immediately. He began by saying he disagreed with my perspective on donor-advised funds and felt I failed to recognize how crucial they were to philanthropic work within and beyond the Jewish federation system. His measured criticism quickly gave way to fury. As his voice rose, he told me that only an antisemite would scrutinize a financial maneuver while highlighting the specifically Jewish historical context in which it occurred. The article had been published on the eve of the General Assembly, a large annual meeting hosted by the JFNA, and he said Jewish leaders would soundly condemn me for turning my critique of the aggregation of philanthropic capital in public charitable funds into a discussion of Jewish capital practices. I tried to persuade the tax attorney that Sugarman's Jewishness mattered to his social location and helped explain his motivation to protect private capital and endow it with state sanction and subsidy. I made little headway with my defense and finally extricated myself from the call, shaken by the experience.

Still, the conversation got me thinking: Could I have told the story of Sugarman and the critical role he played in shifting the practices of philanthropy without analyzing it through a Jewish frame? And, alternatively, if Sugarman had not been Jewish, but had worked on crafting this same financial structure that rested between the state and the private realm, would it still have been analytically meaningful to consider him within a Jewish framework?

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6. Lila Corwin Berman, "How Norman Sugarman Became the $50B Godfather of Charitable Funds," *Jewish Daily Forward*, November 14, 2015, http://forward.com/news/324259/how-norman-sugarman-became-50b-godfather-of-charitable-funds/. The most recent calculations now estimate the total assets in DAFs to have grown to $85 billion. See National Philanthropic Trust, "2017 Donor-Advised Fund Report," at https://www.nptrust.org/daf-report/.

THE PRACTICES OF JEWISH HISTORY

I have thought often about these experiences over the last few years, as I have continued my own research and writing in Jewish history. Like most Jewish historians, I was trained to understand Jewish history as the history of the Jewish people and its movement through space. Thus, whether explicit or not, the first act of Jewish history is that of identification: of an individual, a group, a text, an object, an idea, or a piece of land. The foundational question, in other words, is not historical, but rather, categorical: Who, at any point in time and space in the world, is a Jew, and, thus, what words, ideas, spaces, or things are Jewish ones?

To be certain, scholars of modern Jewry have contemplated the question of who is Jewish as a historical subject matter, asking how Jews at various points in time self-identified, determined boundary lines, and were identified by others, and how all of these pursuits changed over time. The most recent contribution to this genre is Cynthia Baker's *Jew*, a suggestive and broad study of the word "Jew" that resembles the negative formulation of a similar mode of inquiry in David Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism*. Both scholars share an interest in how the idea of the Jew or Judaism, throughout much of history, reflected non-Jewish "labor," as Nirenberg writes, and was not "owned," in Baker's parlance, by Jews themselves, but instead assigned and elaborated by non-Jews. Moving across wide swaths of time and experience, they advance Jews or Judaism as thought modes that structured the rise of Christianity and Western thought.[7]

The insights of Baker, Nirenberg, and a handful of other scholars who share their interests have helped organize and systemize the small body of historical research on the changing identification of Jewishness. Shaye Cohen's *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, and, closer to my own period of study, Susan Glenn's article "In the Blood? Consent, Descent, and the Ironies of Jewish Identity" alert scholars to how Jews and non-Jews participated in identifying the boundary between Jewish and not, and what work that boundary did at different moments in time, not only for Jewish group definition but also for broad social, political, and economic structures.[8] In a similar vein, a new textbook entitled *Judaisms: A*

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[7] Cynthia Baker, *Jew* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017); and David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013). Along somewhat similar lines, for efforts to theorize Judaism as a structuring mode of thought, see Chad Goldberg, *Modernity and the Jews in Western Social Thought* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017); and Michael Steinberg, *Judaism Musical and Unmusical* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Finally, Daniel Boyarin is writing a new book in Rutgers University Press's Key Words in Jewish Studies series about "Judaism," which will build on his scholarship on language, categories of religion, ethnicity, race, and sexuality in rabbinic literature. He previews this work here: Daniel Boyarin, "Yeah Jew!," *Marginalia Review of Books*, June 19, 2017, http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/yeah-jew/. Boyarin contributed to a rich forum on Baker's book, convened by Shaul Magid and Annette Yoshiko Reed. For the full forum, see http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/introduction-forum-on-cynthia-baker-jew/.

[8] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Susan Glenn, "In the Blood? Consent, Descent, and the Ironies of Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2/3 (2002): 139–52.

Twenty-First-Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities sets its task explicitly to understand the process of Jewish identification, explaining, “One of the best ways to approach the question that lies at the core of this book—what does it mean to be a Jew?—is to look at the ways Jews express their Jewishness,” as well as “in relation to expressions of Judaism that precede the present day.”[9] Baker and Nirenberg would add that Jewish identification does not hinge only on how Jews express their Jewishness, but also on how outsiders name it. When read in light of Baker and Nirenberg, scholarship seeking to explore the historical process of Jewish identification must grapple with the interrelationship between the idea of the Jew or Judaism and the lived experiences of Jews or Judaisms. That is, even if we accept that much of the meaning of Jews or Judaism has been launched from the outside world, to paraphrase Naomi Seidman’s critical response to Baker’s book, we still orient our historical practice toward documenting the gap between the real Jew or Judaism and the outside contortion of it, and, thus, continue to pursue a categorical question.[10]

Jewish history may do more or different or better work if it sets aside the categorical impulse and instead turns toward a methodological one: How do we determine whom and what we study as the subjects of Jewish history? To answer this question, those of us within the profession must reflect on our historical practices and think systematically about the kinds of claims we make and those we wish to make when we assign Jewishness to our subjects. My hope, however, is that we will do more than reflect. Rather, as I argue below, by decentering the Jewish people and its places or productions as the subjects of Jewish history, we can transform Jewishness from a personalist or territorial claim that guides historical analysis to an interpretive mode of historical analysis able to travel across peoples and spaces (used here in the broadest sense to include physical places, material objects, texts, and ideas) to illuminate networks, relationships, behaviors, and materiality.

To approach Jewishness as an interpretive mode is to meet persistent concerns about the overessentializing impulse in Jewish history by explicitly constructing Jewishness beyond the Jewish people. The historian’s attention could move from identifying the bodies, objects, and territories of the Jewish people to interpreting the ideas, politics, and material resources that structured bodies, objects, and territories as operating in Jewish frames. The creative task of the historian would be to define Jewish frames, not Jewish people, as modes of thinking, exercising power, or interacting with materiality.

Efforts to advance the field of Jewish history to embrace a diversity of Jewish bodies, objects, and territories, and to account for their dynamism, are valuable starting points for reconceiving Jewishness as an interpretive mode. Already, the burgeoning body of literature on the “new Jewish studies” has pledged itself to upending the field's earlier "excessive reliance on normative categories" in favor of an approach that values variety and heterogeneity.[11] Similarly, a growing field of Jewish cultural studies has worked to trace the "fast moving shape and dynamics of contemporary Jewish cultures as they are produced by people in real time within specific material locations and while enmeshed by the fluctuating, interconnected influences of human social and political relations."[12] But these efforts still direct their attention to those bodies, objects, and territories that one might claim as verifiably Jewish.

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[9] Aaron Hahn-Tapper, *Judaisms: A Twenty-First-Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 7.

[10] Naomi Seidman, “Jewish Identity as a Psychic Wound?,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, June 19, 2017, http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jewish-identity-psychic-wound/.

My aim is to highlight the interpretative limitations of using personalist and nationalist identity-based claims (Jewish people, Jewish land) as the anchor point for Jewishness as it tends to be deployed in Jewish history. By cataloguing the practices of Jewish historians, especially those in my own field, American Jewish history, I try to bring to the surface of discussion the regnant methodologies—practices—of employing Jewishness in Jewish history and the stubborn contradictions between these methods and the historical project of marking change over time. I draw on Joan Scott's essay "The Evidence of Experience" to sketch a new method for deploying Jewishness as an interpretive mode of historical analysis, what I call a "critically constructive" mode, freed from the tests of individual, group, or nationalist verifiability on which the practice of Jewish history has relied.

With Scott's framework in mind, Jewishness could be reconceived as a structuring mode to help us understand not the "fact" of Jewishness but rather how it "is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world." Such an approach would be "nonfoundational," to use Scott's formulation, because instead of being built on a preliminary act of identification, Jewishness would serve as a constructive tool capable of crafting historical contexts and sets of relationships and would be informed by, but not limited to, our ability to account for Jewish people and spaces. In other words, Jewishness could be one heuristic, among many, to help us critically and constructively make new sense of the past.[13]

My vantage point, as the introductory anecdotes reveal, is that of an American Jewish historian. To be certain, particular concerns, politics, and subject matters differentiate American Jewish history from other fields within modern Jewish history. For one, it is a young subfield within Jewish history, both because of the relative newness of a numerically significant Jewish presence in the United States, and also because it is a latecomer—if included at all—to university history departments. Furthermore, American Jewish history, more so than other fields of Jewish history at American universities, has dual status as a subject of academic inquiry and as a site of communal heritage. Finally, a critical pivot point of American Jewish history has been its own exceptionalism as a manifestation of American exceptionalism as well as within the span of Jewish history; American Jewish historians have delimited our field, in part, by explaining that the Jews we study have been more active in naming themselves and defying the boundaries between the Jew and the Other than Jews in other places and other time periods. While American Jewish history also participates in many of the same trends and practices as other fields within Jewish history, its particular composition of youth (and sometimes marginality), multiple audiences with claims to it, and self-proclaimed exceptionalism may position it as more porous to the experimentation I am suggesting but also more resistant and fearful to cede precious ground.[14]

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[11] Raʿanan Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow, eds., *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2.

[12] Laurence Roth and Nadia Valman, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Jewish Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9. For other examples of this critical thrust, see Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); David Biale, ed., *Cultures of the Jews* (New York: Schocken, 2002); Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, eds., *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Andrew Bush, *Jewish Studies: A Theoretical Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

[13] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 5 (Summer 1991): 777.

I write this essay as a proposal, provisional and, thus, an invitation to debate, reframe, and revise. At present, a shortcoming of the proposal may be my inability to identify clearly what we will better understand, if not "the Jews," or Judaism(s), should we pursue the historical practice I am suggesting. In the end, readers may decide this is a damning deficiency. After all, I have failed to advance the clear measurable outcome, the standard of assessment to which most of our professional institutions hold us accountable. However, the imprecision of the object of interrogation (capitalism? community activism? urbanism?), if not the Achilles' heel of the proposal, could be its strength. When Jewishness becomes an interpretive mode, we must release ourselves from the privilege and responsibility of owning its object of interrogation, and instead learn to rest easily—even happily—in watching its journey to places and peoples beyond our current imaginations.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY

Historian David Hollinger offers a starting point to reflect on the historical practices that have characterized American Jewish history. In the early 2000s, Hollinger, whose first book was an intellectual biography of philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen, issued a call for American Jewish historians to broaden their subjects of inquiry beyond what he called "communalist" Jews to include what he called "dispersionist" Jews. He wrote, "By 'dispersionist,' I mean a more expanded compass that takes fuller account of the lives in any and all domains of persons with an ancestry in the Jewish diaspora, regardless of their degree of involvement with communal Jewry and no matter what their extent of declared or ascribed Jewishness. To dispersionist history, the concept of 'the Jewish people' means little."[15]

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[14] For perspectives on the position of American Jewish history within Jewish history, see Paula Hyman, "The Normalization of American Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 91, nos. 3–4 (2003): 353–59; and David Ruderman, "Reflecting on American Jewish History," *American Jewish History* 91, nos. 3–4 (2003): 371–78. On the ties between American Jewish history and heritage, see Beth Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). And on exceptionalism, see Tony Michels, "Is America Different? A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism," *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (2010): 201–24; and David Sorkin, "Is American Jewry Exceptional? Comparing Jewish Emancipation in Europe and America," *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (2010): 175–200.

Hollinger calls American Jewish historians to task for writing only about communalist or, more colloquially (in my words, not Hollinger's), "Jew-y" Jews and, as a result, neglecting the far broader role that men and women with Jewish "ancestry" have had in shaping the world. Those few historians who pursue dispersionist Jewish history, according to Hollinger, "confront the challenge of dealing with historical actors who were obviously shaped by the conditions of the Jewish diaspora in Europe yet affiliated only nominally or not at all with any Jewish community and/or were only rarely treated by gentiles in any special way on account of their Jewish history."[16]

Using his own historical practices as an example, Hollinger reveals that when he was working on his dissertation, his "Jewish then-fiancée" drew his attention to the fact that Morris Cohen was Jewish and set him on a path toward understanding how Cohen's philosophical work reflected his Jewishness, even as Cohen was not operating in a specifically Jewish space.[17] In other words, Hollinger did not set out to study Jews; rather, Jews presented themselves as crucial figures in almost every major twentieth-century intellectual movement, so to write American intellectual history, Hollinger by necessity wrote about Jews.

For Hollinger, the vector of inquiry into Jews is significant. If one starts by looking for places where Jewishness is visible and stated, then one will write about Jew-y Jews. To move only in this direction, according to Hollinger, limits the possibilities of Jewish history to communalist history, which, he implies, tends toward an inevitable narrowness or parochialism. In an article entitled "Rich, Powerful, and Smart: Jewish Overrepresentation Should Be Explained instead of Avoided or Mystified," he champions his historical practice as producing better and more significant historical scholarship than communalist American Jewish history. He argues, "The role in history played by people who were shaped by the conditions of the Jewish diaspora is a much broader site for inquiry than the history of communal Jewry."[18] Where Jewish historians may feel their area of study is marginal to broader American history, for example, Hollinger would have us understand that we must take some responsibility for our methods as instruments of ghettoization. If we cannot see Madeline Albright, Walter Lippmann, or Ayn Rand as much our subjects as Stephen Wise, Mordecai Kaplan, or Sally Preisand, then we have built our own wall.

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[15] David Hollinger, "Communalist and Dispersionist Approaches to American Jewish History in an Increasingly Post-Jewish Era," *American Jewish History* 95, no. 1 (2009): 4.

[16] Ibid. Also, see David Hollinger, *Morris R. Cohen and the Scientific Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

[17] Hollinger, "Communalist and Dispersionist Approaches," 6. Of course, Hollinger also would have realized this when he came across Morris Raphael Cohen, *Reflections of a Wandering Jew* (New York: Free Press, 1950).

[18] David Hollinger, "Rich, Powerful, and Smart: Jewish Overrepresentation Should Be Explained instead of Avoided or Mystified," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94, no. 4 (2004): 601. For an excellent framing of Hollinger's essay that distills these points, see Tony Michels, "Communalist History and Beyond: What Is the Potential of American Jewish History?," *American Jewish History* 95, no. 1 (2009): 61–71.

While Hollinger clearly intends to widen the scope of Jewish history, his recommendations hinge on expanding the field, not changing the discipline's practices. The fact that he happened upon Morris Cohen's Jewishness—at the suggestion of his explicitly noted Jewish fiancée—may indicate he traveled a different path toward his subject's Jewishness from the one Jeffrey Rosen, for example, took in his recent biography of Louis Brandeis as part of Yale University Press's Jewish Lives series. Rosen approaches Brandeis as a Jewish man, suitable for a biographical series defined by the verifiable Jewishness of its subjects, while Hollinger approaches Cohen first as a thinker, significant enough for a dissertation, and only later as a Jewish man. Nonetheless, in both formulations, the measure of an individual's fitness to serve as a subject of Jewish history remains his or her self-identification as Jewish, or the historian's ability to identify him or her as Jewish.

Hollinger presses Jewish historians to see that Jew-y Jews are not the only appropriate subjects of inquiry. He creates a tension between communalist and dispersionist historians, in part to argue that dispersionist historians and their subjects deserve inclusion in the canon because they will improve it. Even as outsiders to American Jewish history, dispersionists operate in special and less marginalized ways than communalists—echoing Hollinger's implied sense that dispersionist historians, likewise, engage in fewer practices of self-marginalization than communalist historians. Yet his mild polemic aside, Hollinger's measure of Jewishness is still an individual's "ancestry in the Jewish diaspora," making his distinction between the two realms substantively negligible. In both cases, communalist and dispersionist Jews will meet his threshold. They are both Jewish people, and this, more than any other reason, is why they are both appropriate subjects of Jewish history.

The practice of using the word "Jewish" as the adjectival modifier in an appositive phrase made equivalent to an individual, group, or space remains the standard of Jewish historical practice. Thus we learn about Norman Sugarman, a Jewish man, born in Cleveland, a tax attorney, and so on; or the Twelfth Street neighborhood in Detroit, a Jewish neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century, where George Schermer settled, and so on. On the other hand, should I suggest that I am writing about George Schermer, born in Minnesota, and a housing-rights activist, as a Jewish man, I would be making a false claim. Schermer was neither a communalist nor a dispersionist Jew, neither a Jew-y Jew nor just a Jew. Yet, what if my explanation of Schermer's political and economic activism—and of the Jewish political economy of midcentury liberalism—were more analytically profound and interpretatively incisive by writing about Schermer through the lens of Jewishness? Indeed, is it possible that I can gain as much historical depth in describing Schermer through the frame of Jewishness as I can from ascribing Jewishness to Sugarman, no matter that one of these men could trace his ancestry to the Jewish Diaspora and the other could not?

THE AHISTORICAL SUBJECTS OF JEWISH HISTORY

As Jewish historians, we face a perplexity: accounting for Jews, whether as a people or a nation, within history, while relying on ahistorical categories to designate them. Historians can write about the formation of nations or the formation of individual modes of expression, but when we reify something that is already formed as the subject of our inquiry, we limit our ability to use historical methods. The "Jewish people" may stand for a collective or a nation, and also—or sometimes instead—"Jewish people" is shorthand for the Jewish individual and the varieties of individuals who can all be tagged as Jewish and as producing and consuming Jewish objects and ideas. As historian Noam Pianko has argued, the term "peoplehood" "provided a bridge between the denationalized connotations of people in the American context and trends in European nationalism and Zionism that influenced American Jewish perspectives on collectivity."[19] His excavations into the coining and formation of American Jewish peoplehood illustrate the interpenetration of Jewish bodies (people) and Jewish collectivities (the nation) as central to how American Jews and their historians have named individuals, groups, and spaces as Jewish. While Pianko's scholarship traces the process of naming, Jewish historians tend to use the name and its variations—Jews, Jewish, Jewishness, Jewish people(hood)—as an ahistorical foundation for historical questions.

The problem may be made less abstract if we consider the difference between talking about race and talking about racism or racial ideologies. Racism or racial ideologies are processes, with histories; race is a formed ideology, and should we chase it across time or space, we are allowing its ideology to dictate our inquiry. As Ta-Nehisi Coates explains, "Americans believe in the reality of 'race' as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism … inevitably follows from this inalterable condition. In this way, racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature…. But race is the child of racism, not the father…. [T]he belief in the preeminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible—this is the new idea."[20] Similarly, literary scholar Benjamin Schreier argues that writing about Jewish literature as necessarily tied to "The Jews as a population" assumes that the process—in this case, the literature—emerged from a stable, empirical reality of the Jew, when, really, the process is what creates the conditions of belief in that reality.[21]

Jewish historians have been vital participants in moving the insights of literary deconstruction, which pull apart the existence of any stable subjects or texts, into historical inquiry. We study how Jews construct their Jewishness at different moments and in different places—as a function of mobility, of transnational relationships, of scarcity or abundance, of urbanism, and more. In American Jewish history, one can easily observe the ubiquity of Jewish adaptation as a central scholarly theme, perhaps *the* central scholarly theme of the field. Indeed, from the earliest to the most recent scholarship, adaptation emerges as a thread of continuity to explain how Jewish life worked in the New World. For example, in her now-classic 1981 study of second-generation New York Jews, Deborah Dash Moore wrote, "Out of the second generation's encounter with the city emerged a new American Jew, one whose Jewishness was shaped by the city's peculiar dynamic." Likewise, Shari Rabin's recently published monograph on nineteenth-century American Jewish practices asserts, "And yet for most Jews, the relationship between Judaism and American mobility was a fraught one that occasioned debate and inspired adaptations."[22]

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[19] Noam Pianko, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 8.

[20] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 7. For a similar genealogy of racism and race, mapped onto the shift from anti-Judaism to antisemitism, see George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[21] Benjamin Schreier, *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 1.

Intellectual and cultural historian David Biale, in the introduction to his 2002 anthology, *Cultures of the Jews*, meditates on the question of how one can write "*a* Jewish history" given Jewish historians' discovery of persistent adaptation and change in their subjects' experiences. He resolves that, in fact, a Jewish history can be written as "a dialectic between, on one hand, the *idea* of one Jewish people and of a unified Jewish culture, and, on the other, the history of multiple communities and cultures."[23] Similarly, in a more recent anthology, *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History*, the editors conclude that big analytical categories, such as Diaspora or tradition, should be employed in Jewish history "in a manner that not only makes room for Jewish heterogeneity, but that also accounts for hegemony in determining the scope and substance of what has historically been incorporated into the Jewish traditions."[24] Thus, in one volume they collect historical and anthropological scholarship as a way of grappling with the challenge of melding phenomenological inquiry (the method of anthropology) with historical inquiry. The editors ask, "How can we describe Jewishness?," a phenomenological question, alongside the historical, "How has it changed?" In vexing the boundaries of Jewish history and anthropology, they magnify the tension that Biale describes within the very attempt to write Jewish history.

In both cases, Jewish studies scholars suggest a dual-pronged approach of accepting the variety and changing nature of Jewish forms while, nonetheless, asserting a less historically flexible and more hegemonic Jewish category. Doing so makes possible the task of writing Jewish history. In the past, especially before the turn toward social history, historians often relied on a corpus of great Jewish texts to define the parameters of the varieties of Jewishness, still presupposing that an ahistorical category—Jewish text—delimited the boundaries of a canon. More recently, Jewish historians appear to turn toward phenomenological disciplines, ritual studies or anthropology especially, to help them define the coherence of their ever-adapting historical subjects. I interpret these scholarly moves as efforts to fuse the rhythm of historical scholarship, with its fixation on charting change and adaptation, to the rich classificatory and descriptive categories that have emerged within anthropology and religious studies.[25]

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[22] See Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 4; and Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 5.

[23] Biale, *Cultures of the Jews*, xxiv.

[24] Boustan, Kosansky, and Rustow, *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History*, 3.

If Jewish history is predicated on identifying the Jewish subject, then I agree we must acknowledge, even inhabit, the tension between categorical ways of naming a phenomenon and historical methods of marking change over time. The Jewish subject is only knowable through its descriptor as being Jewish. This calculable subject may serve an important role in providing models for how individuals can organize their lives around being Jewish, or how a Jewish state can exist, or, even, how individuals or groups can hate Jews as a people or an idea, but the Jewish subject possesses no intrinsic value as a historical tool to help with our practice. By this, I mean it does not help historians do our work of understanding how, when, and why formations of Jewishness have intersected with formations of power or meaning.[26]

If we orient our study toward understanding how Jewishness is an interpretive mode that can help us better apprehend facets of our world, whether or not the subjects of analysis are necessarily and verifiably Jewish, then we free ourselves from ahistorical foundations. Instead, we use Jewishness as a tool for interpreting modes of exchange, forms of power, methods of resistance, and spaces at specific moments in time.

THE HISTORICAL PRACTICES OF JEWISHNESS: CONJUNCTIVE, CONTINGENT, AND CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVE PATHS

I am agitating for a more precise set of historical practices that will enable historians to employ Jewishness in broadly interpretive ways. In order to make my case, I offer a typology of three practices of Jewish history. The first two—which I call conjunctive and contingent—represent my effort to classify the practices that currently guide the field, while the third—critical constructive—I render as a prescription and aspiration. I suggest this practice, which orients aspects of some historical scholarship already and can draw vitality from other fields that follow critical constructive approaches, holds promise for expanding Jewishness beyond its foundational and ahistorical uses in Jewish history.

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[25] See, for example, Rachel Gross, “Objects of Affection: The Material Religion of American Jewish Nostalgia” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2014); Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); and Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier.* Conversely, a recent crop of anthropology dissertations examines American Jewish life, similarly melding historical approaches (especially as the context for their discussions) with phenomenological ones. See, for example, Joshua Friedman, “Yiddish Returns: Language, Intergenerational Gifts, and Jewish Devotions” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015); and Moshe Kornfeld, “The Chosen Universalists: Jewish Philanthropy and Youth Activism in Post-Katrina New Orleans” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2015).

[26] For an excellent meditation on Jews as calculable subjects, see Michal Kravel-Tovi, “Counting in Jewish,” in *Taking Stock: Cultures of Enumeration in Contemporary Jewish Life*, ed. Michal Kravel-Tovi and Deborah Dash Moore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

Jewish historians, hoping to resist essentialist claims about Jewish people and spaces, often rely on a conjunctive historical practice. We write about the Jew or Jewish people *and* another topic: Jews and cities; Jews and business; Jews and Hollywood; Jews and African Americans. The conjunction serves to prove a gap between the Jew and whatever the topic of study; Jews are not Hollywood, but they can be studied alongside it, just as they are not defined entirely by cities or businesses, but a subset of them can be studied in those frames. Ironically, in hoping to avoid essentializing Jewishness, historians who rely on conjunctive claims premise them on an implicit essentialism—of the verifiable Jewish subject. This practice of Jewish history aligns well with dispersionist Jewish history. It can make Eli Broad or the Toll Brothers (Robert and Bruce) the subjects of Jewish history just as easily as the researcher can come up with proof that they are Jewish. Thus, we write about Jews and real estate by writing about how Eli Broad, a Jewish man, developed his real estate holdings and home-building enterprise, first in postwar Detroit and then in Los Angeles.[27]

The conjunctive mode, alone, empties Jewishness of any interpretive meaning. Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller explain in the introduction to a volume of essays about Jewish economic history that Jewish historians often merely note a correspondence between an economic industry and the preponderance of Jews in it "sometimes to the point of denying any significance to the Jewishness of the subjects under discussion."[28] The same could be said about Jewish political, cultural, and social history, all fields rife with conjunctive scholarship.

More often than not, however, historians explain the conjunction of Jews or Jewish spaces and some other variable, say, midcentury American tax law, through a practice of contingency, the second in my typology of historical practices.

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[27] The chokehold of conjunctive claims, even when they have little interpretive value, can be witnessed in stark relief in a recent *Tablet* article about the *New York Times*'s failure to note in obituaries when the deceased was Jewish. The author argues that the omission "subtly erases what Jews have accomplished in this country." See Gabriela Geselowitz, "Does the *New York Times'* Obituary Section Have a Jewish Problem?," *Tablet*, July 10, 2017, http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/240254/does-the-new-york-times-obituary-section-have-a-jewish-problem. I saw firsthand the shortcomings of the conjunctive mode when I organized a conference entitled "Jews and the American City" in November 2011 through Temple University's Feinstein Center for American Jewish History. A lineup of some of the most important urban historians did their best to talk about the connection between Jews and city planning and development, but each found the task of moving from asserting the connection to analyzing it amorphous and somewhat meaningless, even as they gave it a good shot. For the program, see http://www.cla.temple.edu/feinsteincenter/files/2014/03/051_1011_feinstein_self_mailer_102610.pdf, and for a video of the conference see https://vimeo.com/channels/feinstein/. For a compelling theory about Jews and American urbanism, see Deborah Dash Moore, *The Urban Origins of American Judaism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014). The book focuses on American Judaism as a product of urbanism and is not primarily concerned with how or whether American urbanism itself can be better understood through a Jewish analysis.

[28] Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller, introduction to *Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 17.

Contingency tends to be bidirectional. In my own scholarship, I am struck by how often I write that Jews "shaped and were shaped by" something or another—social-scientific language, or urban politics, for example.[29] An argument of historical contingency would assert that tax law and Jewishness were in some measure dependent on one another. So the fact that Norman Sugarman was a Jewish tax lawyer is not just a matter of a conjunction; rather it also provides a way of understanding Jewishness, midcentury tax law, or both.

Historical arguments of contingency still hinge on the historian's ability to define a subject as Jewish, but they allow for explication of the connectivity between Jewishness and another variable. For example, in her recent dissertation, Britt Tevis writes powerfully about the history of American Jewish lawyers and American law through this mode. We learn more about Jews and the legal profession by examining their contingency on one another than we would by studying each alone, all the while seemingly avoiding the pitfall of essentializing our subjects.[30]

Contingent arguments also lend themselves to comparative claims about why Jews were positioned differently from other groups in their relationship with a particular industry, pattern, commodity, or form of expression. For example, Susan Glenn's seminal study of immigrant women and the garment industry explains that Jewish women gravitated toward union politics more than their Italian immigrant counterparts because of the "structures and politics" and "cultural boundaries" of each immigrant community.[31] Likewise, in his book about Jewish and Catholic responses to postwar urban transformations, Gerald Gamm argues that Jews left urban neighborhoods with greater alacrity than Catholic residents because of the striking differences in their institutional structures. He writes, "Ancient rules binding churches and synagogues have shaped the twentieth-century urban battle of race and housing," and he attempts to show how disparities in these rules accounted for varied residential patterns.[32] Glenn and Gamm, through their comparative analyses, depict specific and contingent relationships between Jews and the garment industry or Jews and postwar urban politics. They illustrate just how much Jewishness mattered to that relationship by holding constant one subject of their study—the garment industry or postwar urban politics—and shifting the group variable. Given that Italian women or urban Catholics had a vastly different relationship with labor politics or urban politics, each scholar concludes that Jewishness is interpretively significant to understanding American Jewish experience and broader trends in American history.

Communalist Jews are better suited to contingent history than dispersionist Jews, because contingent history aims to show how and why actual, verifiable, lived Jewishness made a difference. If writing about a Jew for whom being Jewish made little difference, the historian is more likely to note that person's Jewishness as a conjunctive factor (she was Jewish and a judge) than as a contingent factor, which would demand some explanation of why Jewishness mattered or, at least, how it was altered in the course of a dynamic relationship between it and something else. What Michael Walzer describes as the "imaginary Jews" of Nirenberg's book on anti-Judaism are poor subjects of contingent history until Nirenberg discusses how real Jews felt the effects of anti-Judaism in the rise of antisemitism. The shift from imaginary to real subjects (or victims) enables the contingent mode to spring into action. A non-Jewish figure, such as George Schermer, is a similar puzzle for the contingent mode. He may have shaped the world of urban politics in which Jews operated, so he can certainly take the position of one of those contingent factors that shaped (and was shaped by) Jewishness, but before he can be considered through contingent Jewish history, he must meet the threshold of having affected actual Jewish bodies and spaces or having been affected by them.[33] In other words, a contingent approach to Jewish history is only equipped to make analytically important claims about non-Jewish bodies and spaces in relation to verifiable Jewish bodies and spaces.

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[29] See Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*; and *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

[30] Britt Tevis, "May It Displease the Court: Jewish Lawyers and the Democratization of American Law" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2016).

[31] Susan Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 199.

[32] Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 17.

In its many varieties, only superficially observed here, contingent history is the standard of professional, university-based Jewish history. As we write Jewish history through a mode of contingency, we Jewish historians enact our own contingency: we position ourselves as contributing to and participating in other fields of study, such as labor history or urban history. We present our work as capable of shaping and being shaped by broader trends in the field and, thus, make the case for its valuation outside of Jewish history. And we reproduce this mode by training graduate students to approach their research as staking claims in multiple fields by showing the contingency of Jewish history and something else. The more facility they have in making convincing contingent claims, the more their work will be appreciated outside of Jewish history, a necessity—no matter how elusive the feeling of being appreciated adequately by those outside of one's specialty—when it comes to making oneself competitive in the job market. Yet however the historian pitches his or her central claim, contingent history remains beholden to foundational conceptions of Jewishness.[34]

The preliminary task of determining the Jewish subject is no different in contingent history than it is in conjunctive history. That determination serves as a foundation—or in Joan Scott's terms, "a foundationalist discourse" that is "considered permanent and transcendent." The foundation, thus, is beyond historical scrutiny, and yet historical scholarship relies on it. Scott, however, advocates intense scrutiny by asking, "[W]hether history can exist without foundations and what it might look like if it did?"[35] I refine her question here to ask: What would Jewish history look like without the foundation of verifiable Jewish people or spaces?

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[33] Michael Walzer, "Imaginary Jews," *New York Review of Books*, March 20, 2014, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/03/20/imaginary-jews/?insrc=toc.

[34] For a highly disapproving assessment of Jewish studies and its practices in relationship to Jewish community imperatives, see Aaron Hughes, *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013). For a more varied and less polemical assessment, see "The Questionnaire," *AJS Perspectives* (Fall 2012): 60–63; the question asked was: "As a professor of Jewish Studies, how do you perceive your responsibility to the Jewish community?"

My proposal—and the third and prescriptive piece of my typology—is that only if it embraced a critical constructive practice of marking its subject could Jewish history untether itself from the foundations of naming Jewish people or spaces. To do so would mean releasing Jewishness from the claims of specific bodies and spaces. As a critical practice, this different mode of employing Jewishness would upend empiricism, whereby Jews could be counted and classified, and instead force historians to construct why and how and in what situations we interpret a body or space as Jewish.[36]

The interpretative strength of the historian's critical construction of Jewishness and not the empirical verifiability of Jewishness would become the ever-shifting grounds on which historical scholarship would be evaluated. In a sense, this is already the case—"good" history hinges on persuasive interpretation—but I am suggesting we dismantle the foundationalist discourse of Jewishness and repurpose it, as a molding here, a piece of scaffolding there, a roof beam there, without boxing ourselves into the entirety of the structure. Jewishness may help us interpret a person, a place, an idea, a text, an object, or a relationship without first having to meet any preexisting condition of being Jewish. Indeed, Jewishness might be approached as a formation, potentially just as vital in bodies or spaces identified as not Jewish as those identified as Jewish. Nirenberg's anti-Judaism provides a suggestion of what this could look like, but his confinement to the history of thought and the history of a negation or "othering" may blinker our ability to perceive the extents of the critical constructive practice I am envisioning.

The fields of queer studies and critical race theory are instructive in helping us imagine how such a historical practice could operate. In each, the subject of study is avowedly not true or real queer people or "raced" people, whatever that would mean. Rather each uses queerness or racial thought to dismantle the reification of socially constructed categories. Queer theory puts the reality of fixed categories into "crisis," as Judith Butler writes.[37] Man, woman, straight, gay, white, black, and so on all might be imagined to serve as the foundational discourse for particular fields of historical studies. But queer theory, operating often in tandem with critical race theory, demands we see each of these categories as

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35. Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 780–81.

36. In his exploration of Jewish philosophy, Josef Stern makes a similar argument about the "constructive pursuit" of philosophy and, thus, the necessity of delineating Jewish philosophy not by a foundational claim about Judaism, but rather by the scholarly act of constructing a plausible chain of "shared discourse" or tradition, permeable and ever-changing as scholars identify new and different networks. Josef Stern, "What a Jewish Philosophy Might Be (If It Exists): A View from the Middle Ages," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (July 2017): 228, 243–44.

37. Judith Butler, preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xviii.

formations. A history of gay male urban spaces may help us learn something about people who identified themselves and who historians see as gay men, but it should also advance an understanding of what how gayness and masculinity operated at a specific time, regardless of whether the subjects were verifiably gay or male.[38] Likewise, in her article on lesbianism and transvestitism in Nazi Germany, Laurie Marhoefer sets queer theory into motion by showing that nonnormative expressions of gender and sexuality were only visible in certain moments and by certain people within the Nazi state. She explains, "Perceived gender nonconformity put some women and some transvestites at risk, but not all women who had affairs with women transgressed gender norms."[39] Her precise and microhistorical analysis illustrates the ways that different witnesses constructed each of these categories at various moments and the ways in which Nazi state apparatus classified the same mode of behavior as normal or abnormal depending on the priorities of the state at a particular moment. Finally, in her essay documenting the perils of analogizing Jewishness and queerness, Janet Jakobsen suggests that the interpretive meaning of personalist categories, such as Jews or queers, can differ profoundly from the empirical gesture of defining membership, such that we might talk about "whether we can queer queers."[40]

Critical race theory as a tool for historical scholarship pivots on a similar antifoundational logic, while also emphasizing the consequences that real people and real spaces experience because of their assignation to racial categories. Indeed, critical race theorists and historians engaging in its practices have studied legal and property structures, in particular, to show how racial classification carried material risk for real people.[41] By understanding queerness or racial formation or Jewishness as critical and constructed categories, the historian, in other words, need not—indeed, cannot—shed the responsibility of studying material consequences of the legal, cultural, or political reification of each category. The challenge is to do so without replicating that reification. In her response to whiteness studies, historian Barbara Fields castigates "well-meaning scholars" for being "more apt to speak of *race* than of *racism*," and, thus, for dodging the question of how race was formed in the service of racism. She writes, "With identity and agency displacing questions of political, economic, and social power, whiteness offers us endless variations on the theme of race that, reproducing their assumptions as conclusions, invariably end where they started."[42]

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[38] For example, see Clayton Howard, "Building a 'Family-Friendly' Metropolis: Sexuality, the State, and Postwar Housing Policy," *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 5 (September 2013): 933–55. His discussion of the "metropolitan dimensions of the closet" illuminates how state policies defined space as "straight," and builds on Margot Canaday's work on state military practices that similarly worked to define queerness and straightness as policy categories. See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[39] Laurie Marhoefer, "Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (October 2016): 1169.

[40] Janet Jakobsen, "Queers Are Like Jews, Aren't They? Analogy and Alliance Politics," in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, ed. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 86.

[41] Derrick Bell, "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?," *University of Illinois Law Review* 893 (1995): 893–910.

In similar fashion, Jewishness as a process and an interpretive tool would not necessarily reflect back on Jewish people or Jewish spaces in the way that Jewishness as an ahistorical assignation of actual identity always gestures toward the Jewish people or Jewish spaces, even in their endless variations. While queer theory and critical race theory have influenced Jewish history, neither has fueled similar interpretative modes about Jewishness, in part because the project of Jewish history has been defined by the goal of saying something about actual Jewish people and spaces. Yet all too often the most that historians can say is that there are many different types of Jews and many different types of Jewish spaces, even as each can still be—or, in some historians' views, must be—characterized as Jewish. Variety here operates to obscure the essentialism of a foundationalist discourse.

For American Jewish historians, variety has become the touchstone of the modern Jewish experience, yet I fear it serves as only a shallow evasion of essentialism built on a profound embrace of it. As my colleague Tony Michels has observed, American Jewish historians are notable among US historians for our lack of field-defining debates. At least one reason for the equanimity within our field is our almost wholehearted acceptance of pluralism or variety as the signature of the American Jewish experience and as the exceptional feature of Americanism.[43] Eli Lederhendler, in his recent synthetic history *American Jewry* sets himself the task of moving American Jewish history "beyond diversity" and the endless iterations of multiple American Jewish self-inventions. He builds on his earlier criticism of American Jewish historians' overreliance on ethnicity to explain how American Jews uniquely balanced being American and Jewish. One of his aims is to connect American Jewish history more clearly with global Jewish patterns, a goal that hinges on a calculable Jewish subject.[44] Still, he compels us to confront the fact that variety is only variety in relation to something else; that is, American Jewish historians have tethered variety to a stable center, and for most of us, the liberal promises of the United States and the blurred nationalist and personalist dimensions of Jewishness (recall Pianko's discussion of Jewish peoplehood) anchor variety and account for the relative harmony within the field.

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[42] Barbara Fields, "Whiteness, Racism, and Identity," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (Fall 2001): 48, 54.

[43] Michels offers an interpretation of this state of affairs, related to the fact that Jewish studies, unlike other ethnic studies programs, did not emerge as a result of protest or debate. See Michels, "Communalist History and Beyond," 68–69.

[44] Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xix. Lederhendler's criticism of American Jewish historians' overly eager embrace of ethnicity is visible in much of his scholarship, but see in particular, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950–1970* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001); and "Domestic Virtues: Deborah Dash Moore's *At Home in America* and Its Historiographical Context," *American Jewish History* 100, no. 2 (April 2016): 205–19.

The tendency to lean into a stable center of verifiable Jews in order, then, to document its variety may not be unique to American Jewish history. As Adam Sutcliffe writes in a recent essay about Werner Sombart (the author of *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* [1911]), "Jewish history has become a field particularly averse to 'grand theory.'" He explains that the "heavy over-determination" of Jewishness in the hands of Christians and antisemites accounts for this aversion and has created a historiography tilted toward diffuse narratives of Jewish experience and resistant to theorization.[45] It is no accident that a historian writing about a controversial economic treatise explaining the deep relationship between capitalist development and Jews, as individuals, and Jewishness, as a mode of modern economic relationships, notes his field's timidity when it comes to advancing theory. As Jerry Muller explains in his book *Capitalism and the Jews*, "For a variety of intellectuals in modern Europe, Jews served as a kind of metaphor-turned-flesh for capitalism."[46] Yet in replicating the assumption that characterizations of Jewish modes must directly correspond to real "flesh" Jews, Jewish historians make it impossible to use Jewishness as a critical constructive mode of interpretation.

Three intellectual shifts are the necessary preconditions should we wish to experiment with a critical constructive approach to Jewish history. To varying degrees, I see each of these shifts as already in process. First, a critical constructive practice will demand we decouple Jewish history from the work of defending liberal nationalism, and, especially, the modern Zionist project, not because Jewish history somehow proves the wrongheadedness of those experiments, but rather because Jewishness as an interpretive process is not oriented toward providing empirical answers or redemptive claims about particular groups of people. Rather, as a tool for interpretation, the practice of using Jewishness may equip us, for example, to write with precision about non-Ashkenazic peoples or spaces as more than simple variations—objects for tolerance—on a stable Jewish center but rather as broadening the interpretive possibilities of Jewishness. Or the practice may allow us to propose that Israel, as a modern nation-state, does not in all ways manifest Jewishness. For example, we could ask when charitable contributions made to entities operating within the State of Israel are best interpreted through Jewishness and when they are not, instead of simply assuming that any donation made by a Jewish person to Israel should be classified as Jewish philanthropy, but those made by, perhaps, evangelical Christians should not. In other words, the interpretive claims of Jewishness, detached from verifiable Jews as subject, may not fit each and every person or space claiming Jewishness. The test will be how we critically construct it, not who or what land mass or text or object claims the right to occupy it.[47]

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[45] Adam Sutcliffe, "Anxieties of Distinctiveness," in Kobrin and Teller, *Purchasing Power*, 255.

[46] Jerry Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15.

[47] From scholars particularly attuned to language and literature of Israel/Palestine, I have gained new perspective on the ways that Jewishness could be understood as working against nation-building aspirations, even as it also endorsed those same aspirations in other contexts. See, for

Second, a critical constructive practice will ask us to emancipate Jewishness from Jewish history and obligate historians from other fields to grapple with it. A recent book about New York City politics in the 1970s, for example, cursorily cites Irving Howe's 1976 *World of Our Fathers* in a very brief description of Mayor Abraham Beame's Jewish and socialist heritage. This superficial treatment makes sense, though the author might have found a wider and more current literature to cite, because the author's claim is only the most modest of conjunctive Jewish history: Beame was mayor of New York and Jewish. She verifies his Jewishness, gestures toward why it might matter to the person he became, and then moves on. But when Jewishness is approached as a critical constructive practice, even historians who do not set out to write about Jewish bodies or places will be compelled to deploy Jewishness as part of their interpretive apparatus. In this case, the author might explore how the austerity politics and privatization she so insightfully traces are related to historical processes that include Jewishness. This is not because Jews called the shots in the city—sometimes they did and sometimes they did not. Rather this is, perhaps, because Jewishness helps us understand how power moves between state and nonstate entities.[48] Although conference panels and a few special issues of journals have started to experiment with new ways to join conversations about Jewishness to other historical inquiries, I am not aware of sustained efforts to move Jewishness beyond Jewish history in this fashion.[49]

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example, Liora Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); and Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Recent historical and literary studies of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews have also moved the field to see Jewishness beyond Ashkenazic Jews' experiences with modernity, empire, or citizenship. For example, see Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Devin Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016). For a compelling discussion of the regulating power of tolerance and how multiculturalism and its focus on variation is a political discourse and practice of governmentality, see Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). The basic assumption that whenever American Jews donate money to Israel, they are engaging in a Jewish act guides most historical and sociological studies of Jewish philanthropy. Most recently, see Jack Wertheimer, *Giving Jewish: How Big Funders Have Transformed American Jewish Philanthropy* (New York: The Avi Chai Foundation, March 2018), 21–25, http://avichai.org/knowledge_base/giving-jewish-how-big-funders-have-transformed-american-jewish-philanthropy/.

48. Kim Phillips-Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), 47.

49. The American Jewish Historical Society's Biennial Conference on American Jewish History has often included a plenary session that invites a US historian to enter into conversation with the theme of the conference. For example, in 2014, the conference organizers invited Gary Gerstle to talk about his work on immigration and Americanization and its connection to American Jewish history, and Tom Sugrue to discuss US urban history and American Jewish history. In a somewhat similar vein, when

Third, a critical constructive approach will only be as critical and constructive as our vigilance against creating new foundations. That is, we must constantly reimagine the "nonfoundational" demands of our practice, since each attempt will challenge us with the temptation to settle, again, into a foundation. For this reason, as much as I admire the sweep of Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism* or Yuri Slezkine's *The Jewish Century*, both books that a reader may think fully achieve what I am suggesting, I worry that each refutes a particular foundation by, in fact, creating a new one: that all of Western thought is oriented around imaginations of Jews and Judaism; or that all of the twentieth century is Jewish. These are provocative theses, good to think with, but if fully embraced, they become their own foundations, in need of unsettling.[50]

The animating question of a critical constructive approach is: How does Jewishness help us explain a subject of interrogation? This is to take seriously Scott's admonishment that historical tools should be "neither self-evident nor straightforward" but "always contested."[51] Our goal is not to refine and sharpen Jewishness, in the hopes of one day knowing what it is. Rather, the goal is to blur it, such that, in motion, its shape loses the solidity of a foundation and, instead, gains the flexibility of a process that moves through bodies, ideas, objects, and spaces.

A Litany of Misgivings

I submit this plea to think about Jewish history beyond the Jewish people and its spaces with some trepidation. I worry this proposal may seem feisty or tendentious. My typology of historical practices is meant neither to discredit how Jewish history has been done nor to orient it entirely toward a new practice, though I recognize how the blunt instrument of a typology might be perceived as bombastic and ungenerous. Still, in intellectual circles, quietism is not a value. We do not praise consensus; rather we are suspicious of it. In this spirit, I feel some excitement about the possibility of inciting new debate about why and how we study Jewish history, even if the direction of debate rejects elements of how I have defined a critical constructive historical practice. Should anyone write about urbanism without invoking Jewishness? Should anyone study capitalism or philanthropy without wrestling with Jewishness? And what about liberalism and neoliberalism? This is not to expand Jewishness into absurdity, but rather to untether it from its center and allow it range and depth.

Although I have tried to be precise in my critique and my constructive claims, I recognize that this essay skims the surface of specifics, yet another

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Tony Michels and I edited a special issue of *American Jewish History* marking the thirty-fifth anniversary of Deborah Dash Moore's *At Home in America*, we invited Jon Butler, a historian of American religion, and Lily Geismer, a US political historian, to contribute. See Jon Butler, "At Home, Indeed: Deborah Dash Moore and the Religious Modernity of New York City's Second Generation Jews" and Lily Geismer, "At Home in America: Through the Lens of Metropolitan and Political History," *American Jewish History* 100, no. 2 (April 2016): 191–204 and 247–59.

[50] Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[51] Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 797.

potential slight to the scholarly labor that fuels our field. Readers have witnessed my effort to read more widely—within and beyond the field of Jewish history and from theoretical literatures—than has been my practice. To be perfectly candid, I felt intellectually promiscuous as I read for this essay, and my sense of propriety almost compelled me to expunge discussions of texts and ideas far from my own field—or at least preface discussions of them with disclaimers about my expertise. (And, indeed, I could not stop myself from doing just this at several points.) Yet as exposed as I feel when discussing topics from ancient or medieval Jewish history or from certain theoretical perspectives, doing so is a necessary element of the historical practice I am envisioning.

To write Jewish history beyond foundational claims about Jewish people and spaces, we will need to find ways to avoid the shackles of our own expertise. This means being generous with one another, not only in showing patience when someone who may lack certain linguistic and scholarly credentials attempts to speak about our field but also in sharing our knowledge in more accessible forms to allow others to do their own promiscuous reading. Some may see this practice as threatening our proprietary claims over our work. This is exactly the case: a critical constructive approach to Jewishness calls into question how scholars and others possess Jewish history.

The historical scholarship I am envisioning would be no more the property of the historian of the Jews, or Jewish studies, or the Jewish people, than the possession of any other group. This could cause discomfort on multiple levels. Those of us who work at universities well know the pressures to define our turf, as we compete for scarce resources allocated according to our ability to prove our value. The more value I—or my field or program—possess, the more I stand to gain. And if our value proposition is control over a discrete field of knowledge, then we lose value according to my approach. Furthermore, among those of us who raise money to sustain the programs we run, we often rely on the fact that a particular community feels claim over—and, thus, will invest in—the work we do and recognizes our singular ability to do that work. We may, then, need to develop a new case to explain to the communities that fund and support us that Jewishness as shared property can be as durable and grounding as Jewish history as private property. And, beyond this, we might explain how our intellectual work demands nothing less than an ability to use the tools we have to the full extent of their ability to help us, all of us, live in this world. The languages we know, the texts we can read, and the archives we have studied: all of this could help us share knowledge more than compete for it.[52]

In my present state of mind, about my country and our world, I glare cynically at my above words about shared property and the ways we might rely on intellectual work, about Jewishness of all things, to help illuminate our world today. Is it possible to think of Jewishness as anything other than real Jewish bodies and spaces, when some of our leaders at home and abroad are intent on drawing stark, historically familiar, and violent lines of division based on these very categories, alongside those of race, sexuality, and gender? Indeed, my cynicism about my proposal here is not too far from the plain and simple fear I feel.

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[52] My understanding of competition as a facet of neoliberalism is informed by Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), especially chapter 2.

Near the conclusion of her essay, Scott writes that the quest for nonfoundational history is “always therefore political.”[53] When we write Jewish history beyond its foundational claims—the Jewish people or a Jewish space—we must announce that these claims are neither inevitable nor eternal. Rather, they are historical constructions and processes that can be explanatory for a broad range of people and spaces. Ultimately, to employ a critical constructive process and aspire toward nonfoundational historical scholarship, we must refute the depoliticization of history and, instead, assert its political nature. This does not mean our historical scholarship on Jewishness must instruct political debate today, though it could, but a critical constructive approach will not sanction efforts to claim the past as the spoils of one people or space. And this is political today, as we hear the clamor of identity politics, nationalism, and the deserving and undeserving recipients of resources, land, and water, couched in the language of historical right.

We Jewish historians have far more to contribute to scholarship and our world than we have allowed ourselves. The day presses us to think broadly and to share what we know about power, oppression, liminality, space, capital, politics, movement, hatred, and so much more, and not allow fear to stand in our way. In motion, our historical work makes it impossible to assert a single narrative, a single theory, and a single ideology to explain the world, but it also allows us—indeed, requires us—to share the tools we have as widely as we can.

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[53] Scott, “Evidence of Experience,” 797.