

A Projection of Amercia as It Ought to Be: Zion in the Mind's Eye of American Jews

Jonathan D. Sarna

Let me begin with a bold thesis. The Israel of American Jews — the Zion that they imagined in their minds, dreamed about, and wrote about — was for centuries a mythical Zion, a Zion that reveals more about American Jewish ideals than about the realities of Eretz Israel. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, American Jews depicted Israel as a “holy” land, a land where desperately poor and scrupulously faithful Jews engaged in prayer and study; a land, in short, where the material life, values, and practices of Jews were precisely the reverse of American Jews’ own. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, alongside this traditional image, a new one arose: the image of the romantic pioneer, the hard-working agricultural colonist, the brawny Jewish farmer — the answer, in other words, to those who claimed that Jews were mere parasites, racially incapable of “productive” labor. Finally, in the second decade of the twentieth century, Zionists like Louis D. Brandeis added a further twist to this image: Zion became for them a utopian extension of the American dream, a Jewish refuge where freedom, liberty, and social justice would reign supreme, an “outpost of democracy” that American Jews could legitimately, proudly, and patriotically champion.

All of these images, whatever truth they may have contained, took on mythic proportions in America. They embodied American Jews’ yearnings and dreams, responded to their psychological, political, and emotional needs, and helped them to counter the malicious slurs of their enemies. The Zion of the American Jewish imagination, in

short, became something of a fantasy land: a seductive heaven-on-earth, where enemies were vanquished, guilt assuaged, hopes realized, and deeply felt longings satisfied.¹

This essay examines these historic American Jewish images of Zion in greater detail. It argues that such images developed from — and addressed — the needs of *American Jewry* and were, as a result, increasingly out of touch with reality back in Eretz Israel. Over time, this “Israel of American Jews” became more and more of an idealized dream world — no more realizable than the starry-eyed visions of a *goldene medina* that some Jewish immigrants to America brought with them when they sailed to Ellis Island. This in no way of course diminishes the significance of these dreams; for like all such dreams they reveal much about the mind of the dreamers — in our case American Jews. The dreams also took on a life of their own, influencing culture, philanthropy, and politics.

It is impossible in the space allotted to me to deal with all of these themes. I confine myself, therefore, to three little-known but I think revealing documents, each from a different century, that shed light on the image of Zion as it developed in America prior to 1948.

I

Let us turn first to a document from 1761. Early in that year, the leaders of New York’s Congregation Shearith Israel received an unusual letter in Spanish from “the very Reverent Haham Haim Mudahy [Modai].” Raised in the Holy City of Safed and later a member of the Jewish court (*bet din*) of Constantinople, Modai was a distinguished Sephardic scholar. He was also an experienced emissary of the Jews of Safed, having traveled to Europe in 1749 to collect funds for his impoverished community. Now he was again representing the Jews of Safed, for they had just experienced a devastating earthquake (30 October, 1759) and urgently needed money to rebuild.

In his letter Modai described “the great misfortune and calamity

¹ In these paragraphs, I have drawn upon my earlier remarks on this subject in *Commentary*, February 1988, 64–65.

which our brethren have suffered in the holy city of Zaphet [Safed] caused by the earthquake.” He reported that both the synagogues and the house of study had been damaged, that many houses were totally destroyed, their owners losing all they possessed, and that 160 people had perished in the ruins. He begged the “illustrious gentlemen” of the Jewish community of New York for “prompt and liberal relief to alleviate the disaster which brought such terrible misfortune and unspeakable distress, a calamity from which God may deliver us and never again permit to befall children of Israel.”

Haham Modai’s letter was one of numerous appeals sent to the congregation through the years on behalf of suffering Holy Land Jews, and it encapsulated in its language the central images that Jews in Early America already associated with their brethren in Zion: the idea that in this case, Safed, was a “poor Kehila [community],” a “holy and suffering Kehila,” and a “Kehila” whose leaders were deeply committed to “the continuous study of the Holy Law.” To assist such a worthy community, Modai reminded American Jews, was a “mitzvah,” and as such, contributions benefited donors no less than recipients. “I trust to Divine Grace,” he concluded, “...that by your acts, Omnipotent God may redeem us from our bitter and prolonged captivity, and that He may bless you, prosper and increase you.”²

The Land of Israel, in Haham Modai’s day and into the early decades of the nineteenth century, was sparsely settled. It held a population of about 300,000, not more than 5,000 of whom were Jews. Disease and poverty were rampant, violence was omnipresent, and as a modern historian puts it, “the country displayed all the characteristics of a neglected province of a disintegrating empire,” the Ottoman empire.³ Such was the real Israel, which to my knowledge not a single American Jew of those days had ever seen. The Israel in the mind of early American Jews, in contrast, was an imagined Israel — a land of troubles, to be sure, but still a holy land,

² *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27 (1920) 18–20; on Modai, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. s.v. I find no evidence to support the claim that Modai actually visited New York, as maintained by David de Sola Pool, “Early Relations between Palestine and American Jewry,” in *The Brandeis Avukah Annual of 1932*, ed. Joseph S. Shubow (Boston: Avukah, 1932), 537.

³ H. Z. Hirschberg, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. “Israel, Land of,” Col. 293.

a land where in the midst of suffering and poverty Jews studied and prayed, and a land to which, in God's good time, all Jews would be restored.

Emissaries (*meshulahim*) collecting funds for the Jews of the Holy Land visited America's shores every few years from 1759 onward, supplementing the appeals from scholars like Haham Modai that arrived by letter. Some, like Haham Hayim Carigal, who visited the American colonies in 1772–1773, developed a network of Jewish and Christian friends and won wide respect; others failed miserably.⁴ Whether successful or not, however, itinerants tended to reinforce the image of the Holy Land as radically other, altogether different from Jewish life as lived in the New World, and practically its antithesis. “You, protected by the liberal constitution of America, living in freedom, opulence and prosperity: turn your eyes to the horrible state of slavery and misery, under which our brethren are weeping in the Holy Land! and your compassionate hearts will be deeply affected,” a typical fundraising epistle read, in this case a letter of 1838 seeking funds from the Jews of Charleston.⁵ The American Jewish leader Mordecai Noah, in his 1825 address at the laying of the cornerstone of Ararat, his abortive Jewish colony near Grand Island, New York, underscored this same sharp distinction:

They are the great sentinels and guardians of the law and religion and amidst the severest privations and the most intense sufferings, they have for centuries kept their eye upon the ruined

- 4 Pool, “Palestine and American Jewry,” 536–548; Hyman B. Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654–1860* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), 440–465; Abraham Yaari, *Sheluhe Eretz Yisrael* (Emissaries from the Land of Israel) (Jerusalem, 1951); David de Sola Pool and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 396–405; and Salo W. Baron and Jeannette M. Baron, “Palestinian Messengers in America, 1849–79: A Record of Four Journeys,” reprinted in S. W. Baron, *Steeled by Adversity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), 158–266.
- 5 Letter of 24 Nissan 5598 (29 March 1838), quoted in Moshe Davis, *Igrot ha-Pekidim ve-ha-Amakalim me-Amsterdam* (The correspondence of the *Pekidim* and *Amakalim* from Amsterdam) in *Salo Baron Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1975), Hebrew section, 95. English version in Moshe Davis, *America and the Holy Land* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 107.

site of the temple and said, “the time will come — the day will be accomplished.”

Here... in this free and happy country, distinctions in religion are unknown; here we enjoy liberty without licentiousness and land without oppression.⁶

America and Israel, according to these exaggerated conceptions, were polar opposites. Where American Jews cultivated commerce, neglected Jewish learning, evinced considerable laxity in their religious behavior, and enjoyed liberty and freedom, the Jews of Eretz Israel wallowed in poverty, suffered brutal oppression, devoted themselves to Jewish learning, and remained completely scrupulous in their religious observances. America, in this binary scheme, represented modernity's lures and perils, while Israel symbolized tradition and suffering with the promise of redemption. Each nevertheless needed the other, and as a result the two communities (like the Diaspora and Israel generally) developed a genuine sense of interdependence: material sustenance flowed in one direction, spiritual sustenance in the other. Again, it was Mordecai Noah who best articulated this symbiotic relationship, this time in his address at Shearith Israel on Thanksgiving Day, 1848, on behalf of Rabbi Jechiel Ha-Cohen's mission⁷ seeking funds to enlarge a Jerusalem synagogue:

It has been said that the Jews at Jerusalem are indolent, are disinclined to labor, are only employed in studying the law, and devoting all their hours to prayer, and prefer leading a life of dependence and want to one of prosperous active industry. I thank them that they do so. Amid our worldly cares, [our] pursuits of gain, our limited knowledge of our holy faith, our surrender of many cardinal points — probably of necessity — I am thankful that there is a holy band of brotherhood at Zion, whose nights and days are devoted to our sublime laws, our

- 6 “Address of Mordecai M. Noah... Delivered at the Laying of the Corner Stone of the City of Ararat [25 September, 1825],” reprinted in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 21 (1913), 236, 244. On Noah, see Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981).
- 7 Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew*, 156–157; Pool, *Old Faith*, 401.

venerable institutions. I wish them to remain so; I think it our duty and our interest to share our means with them — to repay them with the bread of life, for aiding us with the bread of salvation.⁸

Noah understood that the cause he advocated faced opposition, for by 1848 some American Jews had come to resent the appeals made to them by the Jews of the Holy Land. Influenced by the Enlightenment and by ideas emanating from European Jewish philanthropists, they wanted the Jews of Palestine to become self-sufficient, to abandon if necessary their focus on prayer and study for “prosperous active industry.” But even if elements of the traditional relationship had come under attack, the central images developed over the previous century proved extremely resilient. The Holy Land during this period came to represent traditional religious values that American Jews paid homage to but never themselves expected to uphold. Contributions aimed at strengthening the Holy Land Jewish community compensated — consciously so in Noah’s case — for American Jewry’s own spiritual weaknesses, as if to bridge the chasm between modernity and tradition. American Jews gave no thought to emulating the behavior of Jews in the Holy Land, nor — barring supernatural intervention — did they imagine themselves returning there. Instead, Zion functioned for them as something of a counterlife: in conjuring it up, they caught a glimpse of a world that was practically the antithesis of their own, for better and for worse.

II

One hundred and twenty-eight years after Haham Modai’s appeal to Shearith Israel, an unusual volume was published in Philadelphia entitled *Migdal Zophim (The Watch Tower): The Jewish Problem and Agriculture as Its Solution* (1889). The volume’s author, Moses Klein (1857–1910), was an immigrant from Hungary described by his contemporaries as an “ardent worker in the cause of Jewish charity

8 Mordecai M. Noah, *Address Delivered at the Hebrew Synagogue in Crosby-Street, New York, on Thanksgiving Day to Aid in the Erection of the Temple at Jerusalem* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1849), 8.

and education.” In Philadelphia, he served as the first agent of the Association for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants and later as an inspector of immigration and a manager with the United Hebrew Charities.⁹ His real passion, however, lay in the movement to return Jews to the land through agricultural colonization. To his mind this was the only realistic solution to the problems of the Jewish people, and it was this message that *Migdal Zophim* sought to drive home:

Poor souls!... there is no brighter future for you in New York than in Wilna; and no more prospect at Philadelphia and Chicago than in Lemberg and Bucharest! *Farming* alone seems to me to be your future destiny in this blessed country, and *colonization* only can solve THE JEWISH PROBLEM forced upon us for solution by Eastern Europe and Asia.¹⁰

Notwithstanding his tribute to “this blessed country,” Klein devoted about a third of his book to a depiction of Jewish agricultural life in Palestine. First he translated from the original Hebrew a series of “descriptive sketches” of Palestine’s Jews written by Joshua Stampfer, one of the founders of the pioneering Palestine Jewish agricultural colony, Petach Tikvah. Stampfer (whose words Klein echoed) sought to refute “the charge of ‘idleness’ usually brought against Jews of Palestine,” emphasizing instead their many trades and occupations, and particularly their agricultural colonies (“which alone can solve THE JEWISH PROBLEM and secure to the ‘Wandering Jew’ the promised recreation”). Next Klein himself provided an elaborate description of Jaffa’s Mikveh Israel Agricultural School, founded to teach farming to young Jews in the Holy Land, in the hope of eventually “extending practical farming amongst all the Jews under the Sultan’s government.” In a concluding addendum,

9 Henry S. Morais, *The Jews, of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1894), 354; Maxwell Whiteman, “The Fiddlers Rejected: Jewish Immigrant Expression in Philadelphia,” in *Jewish Life in Philadelphia*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1983), 91; Jacob Zausmer, *Footprints of a Generation: Essays and Memoirs* (in Hebrew) (New York: Histadruth Ivrit of America, 1957), 214. See also Jacob Kabakoff *Halutze ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ba-Amerika* (Pioneers of American Hebrew Literature) (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1966), 167.

10 Moses Klein, *Migdal Zophim (The Watch Tower): The Jewish Problem and Agriculture as Its Solution* (Philadelphia, 1889), 62–63. (Emphasis in the original.)

he offered a personal defense of the Jewish colonies in Palestine to rebut critics who portrayed them as economically unviable, charity-dependent, and utter failures. "The Jewish colonists who till the soil of the Holy Land will advance onward and upward," he prophesied, insisting that

by pursuing agriculture as their calling, they will uplift themselves and incite many others of their brethren, in enlightened, as well as in benighted, countries, to emulate their example, and earn their livelihood by the "sweat of their brow." Such was the occupation of our patriarchs, of our prophets, of our sages; and that which afforded them sustenance, yea, delight — because it instilled within them the feeling of dependence upon God alone — ought surely to effect permanent good to their latest posterity. Joined to the pursuit of agriculture, the dissemination of the pure Hebrew as a language of intercourse will be attended with inestimable benefits.

We sincerely believe that the time will come when Jewish agricultural colonization will spread throughout the Orient, and that Palestine will be, as in ancient days, the centre of all such efforts.¹¹

Klein's vision of an agrarian Palestine, a land where Jewish pioneers, inspired by the patriarchs and prophets of old, worked productively, tilled the ancient soil, revived the pure Hebrew language, cast off the shackles of economic dependence, and served as an example to the Jews of the Diaspora, reflected an appealing new image of the Holy Land that in his day was beginning to take hold in American Jewish circles. Like the earlier image of the impoverished settler who prayed and studied all day long, this image too had some basis in reality. Immigration had swelled the Jewish population of Palestine to the point where charity dependence was no longer feasible. Within the *yishuv*, a tiny group of "rebels" resolved to strike out for independence from alms by tilling the ancestral soil "with their own hands" and reviving Hebrew as a spoken language. Youthful Eastern European immigrants brought with them similar ideals, ones shared by many Christians, some of whom were simultaneously involved

¹¹ Ibid., 20, 28, 31, 87–88.

in establishing agricultural colonies in Palestine.¹² What bound all of these populists together was their pronounced love for the land and their ideology of productivism, their fierce sense that the only honest professions were those that entailed the creation of goods, preferably through agriculture.¹³

News of the agricultural colonization of Jews in Palestine first reached the American Jewish community through its newspapers — potent sources both of Jewish information and for the shaping of community perceptions. Isaac Leeser, the foremost traditionalist Jewish religious leader of his day and editor of the important Jewish monthly *The Occident*, published a great deal of news about the Holy Land and its colonies and spoke out in favor of Jewish agriculture in Palestine as early as 1852. A year later he called on his fellow Jews to do "something useful for that land, to have an interest in its soil, and to try to elevate its inhabitants from the low degree of unlaboring idleness...to the rank of independent industrious freemen." In 1854, he even tried to organize a national conference in support of agricultural and vocational training in Palestine, but without success.¹⁴ His rival, the Reform Jewish leader Isaac Mayer Wise, editor of the *Israelite* (from 1874, *American Israelite*), likewise published a great deal of Holy Land news and was for much of his life no less sympathetic to the cause of agricultural colonization. He urged support for the Society to Colonize Palestine, wished success to the Moses Montefiore Agricultural Aid Association, and as late as 1893 praised the early Hovevei Zion for their efforts "to settle as many as possible of our brethren in agricultural colonies."¹⁵

¹² Moshe Davis, "The Holy Land Idea in American Spritual History," in *With Eyes toward Zion*, ed. Davis, (New York: Arno, 1977), 1: 16, cf. 43–44; Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Holy Land in American Life, 1800–1948* (New York: Arno, 1981), esp. 147ff.

¹³ On agricultural colonization in Palestine, see Alex Bein, *The Return to the Soil* (Jerusalem, 1952), 1–8; and Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, *The Rediscovery of the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (Jerusalem and Detroit: Magnes Press and Wayne State University Press, 1979), esp. 102–104.

¹⁴ *Occident* 10 (October 1852), 361, and 11 (December 1853), 432; *Asmonean* 9 (10 February, 1854), 133 — all as cited in Maxine S. Seller, "Isaac Leeser's Views on the Restoration of a Jewish Palestine," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 58 (September 1968): 118–135.

¹⁵ *American Israelite* 40 (3 August 1893), reprinted in James G. Heller, *Isaac M.*

Wise's support for agricultural colonization underscores the allure of the new romantic portrait of the Jew that was emerging from Palestine. The image of the young Jewish farmer, perhaps a refugee from Russia, once the victim of pogroms and now productively tilling the ancient Judean soil, had an irresistible quality about it; even those opposed to Zionism, like Rabbi Wise, found themselves entranced. ("This kind of Zionism," he wrote, "will recommend itself to every good man and all who can spare even a little should contribute to it.")¹⁶ The fact that such farmers remained few and far between — 5 percent of the country's Jewish population, according to Klein's figures¹⁷ — made no difference. In Palestine, as in America, it was the *symbol* of the Jewish farmer that proved all important, and understandably so. As Professor Robert Alan Goldberg explains in *Back to the Soil*:

Agriculture offered to "productivize" the Jew by removing him from the artificial and less worthy sectors of urban commerce and industry while providing him with a measure of dignity and self-worth. The Jew would claim the power of decision making and initiative along with the sense of fulfillment generated by hard work and land ownership while contributing in a real sense to the wellbeing of his fellow countrymen. Further, a return to the land promised an end to dependence...and the creation of a balanced economic structure, the absence of which had plagued the Jewish world in the Diaspora. No longer would anti-Semites be able to smear Jews as commercial parasites who fed upon the sweat of producing members of society. Jews, in turn, would be cleansed of the debilitating self-hatred produced when such slurs were internalized.¹⁸

Wise (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), 595, see also 589–596; Melvin Weinman, "The Attitude of Isaac Mayer Wise toward Zionism and Palestine," *American Jewish Archives* 3 (January 1951), reprinted in J. R. Marcus, *Critical Studies in American Jewish History* (Cincinnati and New York: American Jewish Archives/Ktav, 1971), 1: 256–259.

¹⁶ *American Israelite* 44 (23, June 1989), as quoted in Heller, *Wise*, 607.

¹⁷ Klein, *Migdal Zophim*, 28, 35.

¹⁸ Robert Alan Goldberg, *Back to the Soil* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), 38.

Agriculture, in short, became something of a Jewish panacea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jews considered it a sure remedy for anti-Semitism, for those aspects of Jewish life that (to their minds) fomented anti-Semitism, and for a wide variety of other Jewish group ailments as well. Most American Jews, despite these promised therapeutic benefits, eschewed the agricultural option for themselves and continued to live out their lives in crowded cities. But they rewarded with high praise (and with considerable economic assistance) those of their brethren who did return to the land, especially in Palestine, and they took vicarious pleasure in learning of their achievements — which, as a consequence, proponents greatly exaggerated. Again the Holy Land had come to symbolize to American Jews something of a counterlife. The new Jewish agricultural settlements — small in number, large in significance — pointed toward an alternative form of existence for American Jews: an idyllically pastoral Jewish life, built on values that they (and their non-Jewish neighbors) respected and supported, but did not practice, and a life that was very much the antithesis of their own.¹⁹

III

On 25 June, 1918, delegates to the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the Zionist Organizations of America, meeting in Pittsburgh's Soldiers Memorial Hall, unanimously approved a "Declaration of Principles" that came to be known as "The Pittsburgh Program." As finally published in the frontispiece of *The Maccabean*, the official organ of American Zionism, the document ("for the guidance of the Organization in its work of restoring Palestine") consisted of six idealistic planks:

¹⁹ Significantly, Jewish agricultural utopias in America sometimes bore Holy Land names, such as "Palestine" and "Bethlehem-Jehudah." Symbolically, these names distinguished the colonies from the Americanized East Coast Cities where most American Jews then resided. See Uri D. Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981).

FIRST We declare for political and civil equality irrespective of race, sex, or faith of all the inhabitants of the land.

SECOND To insure in the Jewish national home in Palestine equality of opportunity we favor a policy which, with due regard to existing rights, shall tend to establish the ownership and control by the whole people of the land, of all natural resources and of all public utilities.

THIRD All land, owned or controlled by the whole people, should be leased on such conditions as will insure the fullest opportunity for development and continuity of possession.

FOURTH The co-operative principle should be applied so far as feasible in the organization of all agricultural, industrial, commercial, and financial undertakings.

FIFTH The system of free public instruction which is to be established should embrace all grades and departments of education.

SIXTH Hebrew, the national language of the Jewish people, shall be the medium of public instruction.²⁰

The American Zionist movement was enjoying a period of tremendous wartime growth at this time, evidenced by a fourfold increase in membership since 1914. Delegates, amidst "a demonstration of unequalled fervor and earnestness," had just agreed to a massive reorganization of American Zionist activities, along the lines advocated by Louis Brandeis. Henceforward, American Zionism would be guided by a single national organization, the Zionist Organization of America, to which every Zionist would at least in theory belong. These developments, coupled with the November 1917 Balfour Declaration pledging British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, General Allenby's triumphal entry into Jerusalem promising "a new era of brotherhood and peace in the Holy Land," and Woodrow Wilson's fourteen-point list of American war aims made the Pittsburgh Program timely indeed.²¹

20 *The Maccabean* 31 (August 1918); 237. Many scholars cite other texts of the Pittsburgh Program, which vary from this one in significant ways (see note 22), but this text would seem to be authoritative.

21 *The Maccabean* 31 (August 1918); 237, 240, 254, 256; Jehuda Reinharz, "Zionism in the USA on the Eve of the Balfour Declaration," *Studies in*

Horace Kallen, the well-known exponent of cultural pluralism, then still an instructor of philosophy and psychology at the University of Wisconsin, drafted the platform approved at Pittsburgh, and the document in its final version embodied ideas that he and like-minded colleagues had been thrashing out for several years. Kallen reviewed his formulation with "eight or nine" members of a secret Zionist fraternity that he headed known as the Parushim, and the document was subsequently modified by American Zionist leaders, notably Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis.²²

Presumably at their insistence, one principle was deleted from the text at the last minute. Listed in Kallen's draft as principle five, it was the most radical plank in the document and echoed a refrain commonly heard in left-wing political circles of the day: "The fiscal policy [of Palestine] shall be framed so as to protect the people from the evils of land speculation and from every other form of financial oppression."²³

Why this language was dropped from the official text is unclear; perhaps Brandeis objected to its jarringly negative tone. Whatever the case, the plank continued to circulate unofficially and certainly harmonized with the goals that Brandeis and the American Zionist leadership of his day espoused.

Taken together, the ideals that did find expression in the Pittsburgh Program — equality, public ownership, the cooperative principle, free public education, and the rest — bespeak a utopian vision of Zion, one that went beyond the agrarian dreams of Moses Klein

Zionism 9 (1988): 131–145; Melvin I. Urofsky, *American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 237–241.

22 Sarah L. Schmidt, "Horace M. Kallen and the Americanization of Zionism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1973), 261–263; idem, "The Parushim: A Secret Episode in American Zionist History," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 65 (December 1975): 121–139; idem, "Toward the Pittsburgh Program: Horace M. Kallen, Philosopher of an American Zionism," *Herzl Year Book* 8 (1978): 18–36; Horace M. Kallen, *Zionism and World Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1921), 300–302. The frequently cited claim that Brandeis authored the Pittsburgh Program is shown by Schmidt to be erroneous.

23 Kallen, *Zionism and World Politics*, 302; see also Bernard A. Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism* (New York: Public Publishing, 1919), 10–11; and Naomi W. Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (New York: Ktav, 1975), 23.

to envisage not just agricultural settlements but a full-scale “social commonwealth.” This Zion, a vision that proved enormously appealing to American Jews, combined Progressive-era American designs and European Labor Zionist ideals, linked them to (selectively read) traditional Jewish sources, and then projected them onto the landscape of the so-called New Palestine, described as “a land of waste places with few inhabitants, not many vested interests, and its future all in the making.”²⁴ Social justice stood at the heart of this vision of Zion, and so did social engineering. The ultimate aim was to turn Palestine into what the Zionist leader Bernard Rosenblatt called “a laboratory for momentous experiments.”²⁵

Rosenblatt (1886-1969), born in Grodok (near Bialystok) and raised in the United States, was one of the youngest leaders in the American Zionist movement, and he brought to Zionism some of the new ideas that he had imbibed in the classroom of his “revered teacher,” the distinguished Columbia sociologist, Franklin H. Giddings. Several of the planks in the Pittsburgh Program drew on ideas that he had formulated in articles written beginning in 1910; and in 1919 he published *Social Zionism* to “serve as an introduction to the study of certain planks in the Pittsburgh Program and its implication.”²⁶

Significantly, Rosenblatt had devoted a previous book, *The Social Commonwealth (A Plan for Achieving Industrial Democracy)* (1914), to the cause of “achieving ‘social justice’” in the United States. That book won the approbation of Louis Brandeis, to whom it was dedicated, and put forward a variety of social, economic, and political proposals designed to bring nearer “that future day, when, instead of classes and masses, of the rich and the poor, we shall

24 Mary Fels, “The Pittsburgh Program,” *The Maccabean* 31 (August 1918): 240.

25 Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism*, 10. For a discussion of social engineering and Zionism, see Derek J. Pensler, *Zionism and Technocracy: The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

26 Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism*, 12. On Rosenblatt, see Evyatar Friesel, *Ha-Tenuah ha-Tziyonit be-Artzot ha-Brit, 1897-1914* (The Zionist movement in the United States 1897-1914) (Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1970), 155-157; and Rosenblatt’s autobiography, *Two Generations of Zionism* (New York: Shengold, 1967), esp. p. 41.

have one happy people, free in their industrial life as well as in their political life...the day when we shall reach the long sought port of pure Democracy.”²⁷

In the same year that the book appeared, Rosenblatt attempted to realize some of its most far-reaching proposals on a limited scale, across the ocean in Palestine. Many Jewish Progressives, following the lead of Louis D. Brandeis, came to believe at this time that Palestine, because of its relative desolation, could function as a testing ground for social experiments that proved impossible to implement in the United States. Rosenblatt followed suit, incorporating — at the age of twenty-eight — the Zion Commonwealth for Land Purchase and Development. Known later as the American Zion Commonwealth (AZIC), the corporation aimed to establish Jewish colonists in Palestine on the basis of the same “just land system” spelled out in *The Social Commonwealth* — one that emphasized “collective ownership of city land, industrial plots and sub-soil deposits.” Revealingly, the very first article of the corporation’s lofty constitution promised to make “social justice, in harmony with the ideals of the prophets of Israel...the cornerstone of the Jewish Commonwealth in Zion.” A subsequent article in the same document set up a “Board of Shoftim [Jewish judges]” to serve “as the general arbitration court for the members of the community.”²⁸

By the time he published *Social Zionism*, Rosenblatt, under the influence of the Pittsburgh Program, had extended his social vision to apply to the Zionist movement as a whole. His volume, illustrated on every page with romantic sketches of Holy Land scenes (real and imagined), advocated the creation of “a model state in the Holy Land — freed from the economic wrongs, the social injustices and the greed of modern-day industrialism.”²⁹ Cooperation formed the cornerstone of this plan, which envisaged the creation in Palestine of a “social-moral community of Jews — a true commonwealth.” The

27 Bernard A. Rosenblatt, *The Social Commonwealth* (New York: Lincoln Publishing, 1914), 12, 189.

28 Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism*, 138-139, 149; Rosenblatt, *Two Generations of Zionism*, 62-65; Nathan M. Kaganoff, ed., *Guide to America-Holy Land Studies* (New York: Arno, 1980), 9-13; Cf. Nili Fox, “Balfouriya: An American Zionist Failure or Secret Success?” *American Jewish History* 78 (June 1989): 497-512.

29 Rosenblatt, *Social Zionism*, 13.

book advocated common ownership of all land, a system of profit-sharing, a version of the "single tax" (on land) to generate revenue, and other cooperative endeavors — including, in one chapter, the suggestion that the commonwealth promote scientific eugenics. Its major aim, however, was, as before, to promote the creation of "a model community [in Palestine] based on Social Justice." "Can there be," Rosenblatt asked his readers, "a higher or nobler mission?"³⁰

In an appendix to *Social Zionism*, Rosenblatt reprinted from the *Menorah Journal* a syllabus he had prepared on Zionism's aims and objectives. In addition to supplying historical and explanatory information, the syllabus set forth many of the ideals that underlay both his own "model community" and the American Zionist movement as a whole in the wake of the Pittsburgh Program — ideals that continued to shape Zionist thought and the image of Israel in the United States for the next half century. To cite just a few examples, he wrote that "Judaism will be separate and distinct from the Jewish State in Palestine" and that "freedom of religion will be guaranteed." He promised "equal rights for all Palestinians" and "the principle of democratic rule and equal rights, as developed in America and England." Most important of all, he looked to the new state to provide "leadership in social and economic organization." Highlighting "Jewish co-operative efforts in Palestine," he reiterated that "Zionists are planning for the establishment of a model commonwealth" — a goal he defended not only on the basis of the Pittsburgh Program but on the basis of Theodor Herzl's writings as well.³¹

Reflecting back years later, Rosenblatt believed that these high-minded ideals stemmed from what he called "the period of youthful dreams about the kind of state that we would build in the land of Israel."³² Actually, not all of his fellow dreamers were young; some, like Justice Louis D. Brandeis, the undisputed leader of American Zionism at that time, had been social idealist for decades. What Rosenblatt, Kallen, Brandeis, and other idealistically minded American Zionist leaders of that era all shared in common was the desire

30 Ibid., esp. 10, 41, 55-57.

31 Ibid., *Social Zionism*, 144-151.

32 Rosenblatt, *Two Generations of Zionism*, 53.

to create not just a Jewish state in Palestine but a utopian Jewish state, one that drew on American experience, took advantage of the latest in social, economic and political thinking, and conformed to prophetic teachings as they understood them. Thus conceived, the Jewish "model state" represented American liberal intellectuals' fondest and most romantic visions of a better world, one that the Pittsburgh Program sought to realize in Palestine, as a harbinger of what might be accomplished in America as well.

IV

The image of the "model state" endured in the mind of American Jews for over half a century. This longevity was due, in part, to its extraordinary political value as a symbol. A "model state" cast in the image of America served not only to defuse the sensitive issue of dual loyalty, it actually worked to strengthen the position of America's Jews by permitting them both to bask in the reflected glory of those engaged in building the state and to boast of their own patriotic efforts to spread the American dream outward. Louis Brandeis understood this intuitively and therefore regularly linked the "Zionist cause" with "the American ideal of democracy, of social justice and of liberty."³³ On a popular level, this claim became something of a Zionist mantra, repeated catechistically, often with a suitable quotation from the mouth of Brandeis himself — recognized even in his lifetime as a prophetic figure. The credal statement, "We Believe," issued by the young women's Zionist organization, Junior Hadassah, for example, included among its various articles of faith the following:

We, the members of Junior Hadassah, believe in the democratic way of life. We believe in it as young Americans who are born to it and who live by its principles.

We believe it is our *obligation* to perpetuate the ideals of

33 Harris, "Zionist Speeches," 224, 246; See also Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Greatest Jew in the World since Jesus Christ: The Jewish Legacy of Louis D. Brandeis" *American Jewish History* 81 (3-4) (Spring-Summer 1994): 346-364.

American democracy. As young Jews we are guided by our Jewish heritage of justice, humanity and freedom.

We believe that America's first function as a world power is to assure freedom for all peoples. As Zionists we have shared in building a national community in Israel on the firm foundation of democratic experience and social justice, but we know that only in a free world can this new nation continue to exist...

We see no division of loyalty but rather a strengthening of loyalties in our work for Israel. Associate United States Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, a great American and ardent Zionist once declared: "There is no inconsistency between loyalty to America and loyalty to Jewry... Indeed, loyalty to America demands rather that each American Jew become a Zionist..."³⁴

As this creedal statement of "beliefs" suggests, the image of the "model state" cast in the American mold had also come to serve an important religious function for its adherents. It offered American Jews, many of whom had become disenchanted with the traditional beliefs, rituals, and practices of Judaism, a sacred "mission" that both linked them to other Jews and infused their own personal lives with meaning — the lofty satisfaction that comes from pursuing work of transcendent importance. The fact that this rhetoric of mission, so prominent both in American thought and in Reform Jewish thought, was appropriated for Zionist purposes underscores the movement's secular-religious underpinnings. It sought to tap precisely the same kind of religious energy that motivated those who embarked on other great American religious missions, from the Puritan "Errand into the Wilderness" to their descendants' "Errand to the World." Like these missions, Zionism conjured up a grand vision of ardent young men and women earnestly engaged in the selfless task of creating a new and better humanity. "Our aim is the Kingdom of Heaven," Louis Brandeis once exclaimed, and the declaration reveals much about the kind of Zion that he and his fellow missionaries envisaged: nothing less than a heaven-on-earth.³⁵

34 "We Believe: Our American Affairs Program," in undated (c. 1947) Junior Hadassah publication, Box 3, Junior Hadassah file, Miscellaneous Publications, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass.

35 On the "mission motif" in American Zionism, see especially Allon Gal, "The

This utopian vision of Zion, linked as it was both to the self-image of American Jews and to their highest religious aspirations, had less and less to do with the realities of the Middle East.³⁶ While American Jews dreamed on about a "model state" where democracy and social justice reigned,³⁷ the Jews in Eretz Israel focused, of necessity, on security, resistance, and the need for new settlements. But this disjunction, as we have seen, was nothing new. All of the historic American Jewish images of Israel — from the early image of poor Jews engaged in study and prayer, to the later image of agrarian pioneers, to the twentieth-century image of the "model state" — spoke to the needs of *American* Jews and reflected *their* ideals and fantasies rather than the contemporary realities of Jewish life in the land of Israel. In creating these images, American Jews projected onto the Holy Land their American vision of an ideal society — sometimes a counterimage of their own lives and sometimes a new and improved version, reflecting the latest in Progressive social engineering. In either case, they expected their "model state" to embody all of the values that they cherished most deeply, values that they associated with America as it ought to be and the Zion of their imagination.

Mission Motif in American Zionism (1898–1948)," *American Jewish History* 75 (June 1986): 363–385 [the Brandeis quote is on p. 370]; and idem, "Independence and Universal Mission in Modern Jewish Nationalism: A Comparative Analysis of European and American Zionism (1897–1948)" (with responses by A. Eisen, A. Goren, Y. Gorny, and E. Mendelsohn), *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 5 (1989): 242–274. For a different view of the rise of the mission motif in American Zionism, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. J. Reinhartz (forthcoming). William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), analyzes significant differences in the way that the missionary idea was understood, over time, by Americans. He begins (p. 1) with an arresting quote from Arnold Rose: "Don't apologize. All Americans are missionaries."

36 Cf. Anita Shapira, "Uri Zvi Greenberg—Apocalypse Now," *Zion* 56 (2) (1991): 173–192.

37 See, for example, Maurice Samuel, *Harvest in the Desert* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944), esp. p. 315, where Zionism is linked to "the forces on which the progress of mankind as a whole depends."

Orthodox American Jews, with the exception of certain ultra-Orthodox groups, are more likely to attribute more traditional religious meanings to Israel. However, we would expect that for the majority of Reform and Conservative as well as Reconstructionist Jews, Israel is not an important religious symbol. Israel symbolizes the survival of the Jewish people, and the Jewish people was the most focal element in Kaplan's philosophy; but Reconstructionist Jews, like most other American Jews, express themselves and act according to more conventional definitions of religion. In the context of modern discourse, in which Jewish ethnicity is differentiated from the Jewish religion and Jewishness from Judaism, Israel can be regarded principally as a symbol of Jewish ethnicity rather than as a symbol of the Jewish religion.

Israel is an important element in the ethnic identity of American Jews, but material support for Israel and identity with the Israeli Jewish population take second place to the specific concerns of American Jewry and identity with the United States. The indications are that there has been some decline in the importance of Israel among American Jews in recent years. This may be partly because the perceptions of Israel as a real place have somewhat damaged its symbolic qualities. The problem is felt most acutely by those liberal religious American Jews who take their religion seriously, such as the religious professionals and the seminary students in the Reconstructionist movement. Their liberal and dovish political views and their understanding of Judaism as a universalistic, personalistic religion of social justice lead them to take a highly critical stance toward religion in Israel and Israeli politics. We should be careful, however, not to exaggerate the effects of such criticisms on the symbolic value of Israel among American Jews. Even the most critical of our respondents continue to express an identity with and affection for Israel, and negotiations toward a peaceful settlement are likely to temper the criticisms with respect to political issues. It is, perhaps, still too early to speculate about the symbolic value for American Jews of an Israel that lives in peace with its Arab neighbors.

Israel in American Jewish Education

Walter Ackerman

I doubt that there is anyone of my generation of Americans who attended a Jewish school or was a member of a Jewish youth movement that did not see the film *A House in the Desert*.¹ A prototype of its genre, the movie tells the story of a group of *halutzim*, a mixture of handsome, confident sabras and wan-looking but determined "refugees" from the displaced persons camps in Europe, who joined together to establish a kibbutz in the Arava. Against all odds they produced their first crop and managed to secure a foothold in that "wild of sand."

It later became fashionable to make fun of these "UJA movies." Whatever their technical quality, they were offered as evidence by those who claimed that "propagandists" and other interested parties created an image of the *yishuv*, and later of the state itself, that was far removed from a less romantic reality and raised expectations beyond any possibility of realization. All that is probably true, but I have never forgotten the last frame of that movie — a fragile sliver of white bud bursting through the dry and dusty brown of desert waste.

* * *

What young people in the United States once learned about the *yishuv* in Palestine and know today about the State of Israel depends very much on the setting that is the source of their information. Those who were members of *halutzic* youth movements in the years immediately before World War II — largely the children of

¹ *A House in the Desert (Ba'it ba-Arava)*, produced by Norman Lurie and distributed by Keren Hayesod, 1948.