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Hyman Judah Schachtel,
Congregation Beth Israel, and
the American Council for Judaism

by

Kyle Stanton*

Hyman Judah Schachtel returned to Cincinnati and his alma mater, Hebrew Union College (HUC), in 1943 as one of the most divisive figures in American Reform Judaism. The Reform seminary invited Schachtel to explain his congregation's opposition to Zionism, a view that had grown widely unpopular among American Jews. After addressing the student body and faculty, Schachtel attended an informal dinner in the cafeteria with a group of rabbinical students. When the students began singing Zionist songs, Schachtel rose from his chair and shouted over them that the only difference between them and Orthodox Jews was skullcaps.¹

As previous historians have shown, Congregation Beth Israel in Houston, Texas, where Schachtel served as senior rabbi, deepened divisions among American Jews when the members published their Basic Principles, a set of guidelines for admitting new congregants, earlier that year. The Basic Principles created a schism over the question of Zionism within the congregation that became a hotly contested issue nationally in Reform circles and among American Jews generally. The Basic Principles barred Zionists, as well as those who kept kosher, from becoming full voting members of the congregation. Additionally, the document affirmed that the race of Jews in Houston was Caucasian.² This was an unprecedented move for a Reform congregation. Because of the desire during World War II to establish unity of American Jews in the face of the

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Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel.
(Oil painting, courtesy of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, TX.)

European crisis, many other congregations preferred neutrality on the divisive issue of Zionism.³ A sizable minority of Beth Israel members (more than 140 families out of a membership of about 800) eventually left the congregation as a result of the Basic Principles.⁴ These defectors formed a distinctly Zionist Reform congregation named Emanu El.

Many accounts of the Basic Principles exist in other works, and it is not my intention in this article to provide a new interpretation of the document. Historians generally agree that the crafters of the document attempted to revive a version of Classical Reform Judaism in alignment with their conception of the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885.⁵ In most analyses, the demographics of the congregation factor heavily in the schism. For instance, historians frame the schism as a split between older, more assimilated Jews of central European origin and newer eastern European Jewish immigrants who harbored more traditional religious tendencies and supported Zionism. These histories note the negative national and local responses to the Basic Principles.⁶

Little has been written, however, about the congregation in the years following the crisis, which took place in 1942 and 1943. Prior accounts typically end with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and Schachtel's eventual acceptance of the Jewish state. Some histories mention that Congregation Beth Israel rescinded its Basic Principles in 1968 after the Six-Day War and the emergence of mass support for Israel. In this essay I shed light on an additional event at Congregation Beth Israel that led to the establishment of another Reform congregation in Houston in the late 1950s and go beyond previous research in the aforementioned areas as well.

Several basic new themes will emerge. The case of Congregation Beth Israel shows that southern Jews were not provincial, nor were their communities isolated backwaters. Rather the Beth Israel experience demonstrates that southern Jews were integrated into various networks across the United States. Congregants of Beth Israel provided a model to other Jewish groups both inside and outside the South for challenging what they thought to be the emerging hegemony of Zionism within official Reform bodies. Southern Jews also filled the ranks of the controversial American Council for Judaism (ACJ) as leaders and lay members, and this article examines the ACJ's influence on Congregation Beth Israel and surveys similar congregations with ACJ partisans during the 1950s. For the

ACJ, Houston represented an important model for other congregations to emulate across the United States. Some did so, if less dramatically than what transpired in Houston.

Historical Context

Beth Israel's leadership invited Schachtel to become their rabbi after forcing long-time rabbi Henry Barnston into retirement in 1943. They hoped to give themselves a chance to replace Barnston with someone similar in view rather than letting the position fall to the congregation's associate rabbi, Robert Kahn, whom many viewed as too traditional in his religious outlook.⁷ Both Schachtel and Barnston were members of the ACJ, the controversial anti-Zionist organization, and it is necessary to explain briefly the ACJ's background, because Houston became a major flashpoint in the controversy between Zionists and anti-Zionists in the Reform movement almost simultaneously with the creation of the ACJ.

The ACJ formed during one of the most trying years for American Jews. Just one day after the ACJ announced its formation on November 23, 1942, the U.S. State Department confirmed the worst possible news: Nazis were exterminating European Jewry on a massive scale. The organization began in earnest when ninety Reform rabbis signed a public statement affirming that Jews were only a religious group in the United States, as opposed to a race or nationality. From its first meeting in the summer of that year, the ACJ received calls for its disbandment from both inside and outside the Reform movement. ACJ members faced ire from many American Jews because the organization opposed the idea that Jews could also constitute a national group. This limited perspective of Jewish identity led ACJ members to oppose the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The ACJ's position had its origins in early nineteenth-century Europe, the Haskalah, and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.⁸ From the onset of Reform in the United States, adherents likewise generally rejected Jewish nationalism because they viewed Judaism primarily as a religion and America as their Zion. Although never formally adopted, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 attempted to codify opposition to Jewish nationalism and stood as a guiding document for most Reform temples for over fifty years. This stood in stark contrast to Theodor Herzl's concept of political Zionism—the idea that Jews were a national group that required a homeland

*Program for event honoring
 Congregation Beth Israel's outgoing
 and incoming rabbis, 1943.
 (Courtesy of Congregation Beth
 Israel, Houston, TX.)*

in order to normalize itself in the world community. Herzl initiated a global Zionist movement as chair of the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897.

With the emigration of eastern European Jews to the United States in large numbers after 1881, the Reform movement and later the Pittsburgh Platform faced significant challenges. Most historians tend to frame the challenges to the Pittsburgh Platform in terms of demographics: Jews of central European origin generally supported it, while Jews of eastern European origin disapproved of its positions on Zionism and traditional religious practices.⁹

With the rise of Adolf Hitler and the establishment of his antisemitic policies, however, Reform leaders began to rethink their position on Zionism. The movement's Columbus Platform of 1938 reflects this softening stance by acknowledging Jews' historical connections to Palestine and expressing hope that it might become a center of spiritual and cultural life as well as a haven for oppressed Jews. While amending Reform's position

to effective neutrality pleased some, a sizable portion of Reform rabbis felt the new platform abandoned foundational principles.¹⁰ The conflict within Reform circles reached a crescendo in 1942 when the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), Reform's rabbinical organization, endorsed the creation of a multinational, multilingual Jewish army.¹¹ Although most American Jewish organizations endorsed political Zionism during the Biltmore Conference in May 1942, which issued an explicit declaration of Zionist goals to establish a "commonwealth"/state, the CCAR endorsement served as a breaking point for some Reform rabbis. After about a year of painful deliberation, anti-Zionist rabbis including Louis Wolsey, Elmer Berger, William Fineshriber, Henry Barnston, and Hyman Schachtel formed the ACJ, which then contributed to further rifts within the Reform movement.

Congregation Beth Israel and the Basic Principles

Established in 1854, Beth Israel was the first Jewish congregation in Texas. Its membership was mostly central European in origin, and although the congregation began with Orthodox practices, it affiliated with the Reform movement in 1874 like so many similar congregations.¹² A modest influx of Jews from eastern Europe began to appear in Houston in the early twentieth century, but the city's Reform community in the 1940s remained largely central European and Classical Reform. Other Texas cities had Jewish communities with similar demographics and histories of anti-Zionism. For instance, rabbis David Lefkowitz of Dallas and Henry Cohen of Galveston were also ACJ members who led sizable congregations. However, Hitler's antisemitic policies influenced the majority of Texas congregations to support political Zionism by the time of America's entry into World War II.¹³

Opposite page: *Brochure enumerating the
Basic Principles of Congregation Beth Israel, 1943.
(Courtesy of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, TX.)*

Beth Israel members claimed that the influx of eastern European immigrants impelled them to adopt the Basic Principles so their congregation would not become co-opted by Zionists and their traditional practices.¹⁴ The majority of Beth Israel congregants opposed Zionism because they believed that it could raise questions about the local Jewish community's racial status and allegiance to the United States. With the principles drafted, congregational leaders extended the invitation to fill their pulpit to Schachtel, a rabbi supportive of their principles.

From the outset, questions surrounded the circumstances of Schachtel's appointment. At the time of his selection, Beth Israel's associate rabbi, Robert Kahn, was stationed in Papua New Guinea as an American military chaplain. Congregants generally liked Kahn, but many worried that his liberal views on civil rights and his support for Zionism could raise issues with the larger non-Jewish Houston community.¹⁵ During World War I, Houston had been the scene of riots against African American soldiers. Congregants such as Beth Israel board members Israel Friedlander and Leopold Meyer surely remembered heightened racial tensions during that era.¹⁶ When Beth Israel offered its senior rabbi position to Schachtel, Kahn, while still stationed in Papua New Guinea, resigned and accepted the position of senior rabbi of Congregation Emanu El. Since its creation by members who had left Beth Israel, Emanu El defined itself in opposition to the older congregation. Its founding charter stated that the

*Announcement of special service
in honor of Rabbi Robert Kahn's
enlistment as an Army chaplain,
1942. (Courtesy of Congregation
Beth Israel, Houston, TX.)*

congregation adhered to democratic principles, and Kahn stated that it was largely the antidemocratic manner in which Congregation Beth Israel drafted the Basic Principles that impelled him to resign.¹⁷ A fundamental principle of Reform from the outset had been the individual's freedom to choose what to believe and which practices to follow.¹⁸ Thus ironically Beth Israel's actions flew in the face of the historical Reform it claimed to want to preserve.

Schachtel's outspoken anti-Zionism previously had cost him a chance at career advancement. Prior to his appointment at Beth Israel, Schachtel served as associate rabbi of the West End Synagogue in New York City. Schachtel expected that he would be named president of the New York Board of Jewish Ministers in 1942. However, he failed to win election because of interference from Stephen S. Wise, a leading Zionist Reform rabbi, who offered numerous nasty comments about Schachtel. Another influential rabbi urged that "quislings" and "traitors" like Schachtel be rooted out of all important positions. Shortly after this episode, Schachtel accepted Beth Israel's invitation to become its senior rabbi.¹⁹

An interesting episode followed Schachtel's appointment at Beth Israel. The Reform movement's policies regarding the chaplaincy during World War II came under greater scrutiny as a result of the Houston ordeal. Solomon Freehof, a prolific writer of Reform *responsa*, attempted to mediate between Schachtel and critics of his appointment in Houston because Freehof was tasked with arranging Reform chaplaincy assignments during the war. Freehof unsuccessfully sought compromise between the Zionist and anti-Zionist rabbis.²⁰ From the organization's inception, ACJ members like Schachtel complained that Zionist Reform rabbis did not serve in the chaplaincy in as high numbers as non-Zionists and anti-Zionists did, a claim that cast doubt on Zionists' allegiance to the United States. Critics of the ACJ attempted to capitalize on Schachtel's appointment by demanding that he submit to a medical examination by a military doctor to officially rule him unfit for the chaplaincy.²¹ Schachtel claimed that his personal doctor in New York City examined him and declared him unfit for the chaplaincy because of his family history of hypertension.²² Over several months, Schachtel corresponded with Freehof and resisted a medical examination by military doctors. As a result of the Schachtel-Kahn episode, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC),

the national association of Reform congregations, prohibited its members from naming new rabbis if their current rabbis were serving in the chaplaincy.²³

Critics of Beth Israel's actions argued that the congregation did not learn lessons from events in Europe. Usually the congregants faced accusations of arrogance, self-hatred, or authoritarianism. Critics also negatively compared the ACJ and Beth Israel to the notorious *Judenrat*, Jewish ghetto leadership in Nazi-occupied eastern Europe. For instance, one critic of the congregation stated that "in the early days of Hitler Germany the Jewish community also had its 'little foxes'."²⁴

Critics of the Basic Principles believed that they threatened unity among Houstonian and American Jews. For instance, one open letter to the congregation stated that the ACJ created the controversy because it was made up of Jewish isolationists who sought to threaten the unity of the Houston Jewish community.²⁵ The basis for this criticism was Lessing Rosenwald, the first president of the ACJ and a participant in the America First Committee prior to American entry into World War II. (Rosenwald resigned from this organization when reportedly he discovered that many members were antisemitic.) Rosenwald perhaps received more scorn than any other ACJ member because he was a layperson, not a rabbi, even though many of his anti-Zionist formulations derived from the work of Rabbi Elmer Berger.

The majority of support for Beth Israel came from ACJ partisans. One group in Nebraska even threatened to copy the Basic Principles and form its own anti-Zionist congregation in Lincoln, even though its rabbi nominally supported the ACJ. Their proposed name was "American Reform Congregation."²⁶ Like Houston, a decades-long rift existed in Lincoln between Jews of central and eastern European origins. Eventually the Reform community of Lincoln resolved the cleavages with the appointment of an ACJ rabbi to its pulpit. The issue of Zionism was only one of a myriad of conflicts between the two groups. The Basic Principles inspired a number of similar congregational crises around the country.²⁷

Even after the controversy in Houston had calmed somewhat, a similar situation in Cleveland, Ohio, developed with less national attention. In 1948, some congregants from two separate Cleveland Reform synagogues believed that neither congregation represented their ambivalent stance on political Zionism and Israel. These congregants felt that the two

Cleveland Reform congregations did not tolerate non-Zionism or anti-Zionism because nationally prominent Zionist rabbis filled their pulpits and led them. The schismatic congregants formed Suburban Temple-Kol Ami with a limit on new membership and a charter that was comparable to the Basic Principles in its stance opposing political Zionism.²⁸

With the British Mandate for Palestine drawing close to ending, Beth Israel hosted a lecture by Kermit Roosevelt, the son of former president Theodore Roosevelt, in 1947. Roosevelt's stop in Houston was part of a speaking tour supported by the ACJ.²⁹ His Houston lecture highlighted the need for reconciliation among Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Some Houston rabbis protested the lecture, arguing that a speaker should also be present to argue from a Zionist perspective.³⁰ The same night that Roosevelt spoke, national and local Jewish organizations and Congregation Emanu El, the newly established Reform Zionist congregation, organized a concert by Menahem Pressler, a classically trained pianist and Holocaust survivor. That same year, Emanu El cancelled a Thanksgiving dinner with Beth Israel meant to symbolize reconciliation between the two congregations. Emanu El congregants felt that they could not engage with Beth Israel congregants because the majority still supported the ACJ's philosophy.

*The Establishment of the Houston Congregation
for Reform Judaism*

A forgotten aspect of the ACJ's activities during the 1950s is its religious education program, which is important for understanding some of the controversies surrounding the organization after its early years. The aims of the program were to create a curriculum in line with Classical Reform Judaism because its members felt that current educational texts emphasized Jewish nationalism above Judaism. A couple of examples of texts in the ACJ curriculum were Allan Tarshish's *Not by Power: The Story of the Growth of Reform Judaism* and *Judaism for Today* by Abraham Cronbach, two rabbis who were also members of the organization.³¹ Notably, the ACJ curriculum also did not include Hebrew. The organization's religious education program was perhaps its most effective and innovative activity. Here again it provided a national model and leadership, since a number of sizable Reform congregations and even some Conservative institutions adopted its curriculum throughout the 1950s.³²

Beth Israel again became the site of conflict among its congregants partially as a result of this curriculum. However this time the conflict did not reverberate outside of Houston's Reform community. ACJ partisans within Beth Israel continued to press for vigorous adherence to Classical Reform principles during the 1950s, and they wanted to adopt the ACJ's curriculum for their congregation's religious school. This group included many of the same congregants who had crafted the Basic Principles fourteen years previously and had been responsible for inviting Schachtel to become senior rabbi.³³

Tensions erupted again at Beth Israel during the Suez Crisis in 1956, a military action in which Israel, the United Kingdom, and France conducted a tripartite intervention in order to overthrow Egypt's government and open the Suez Canal to international trade. The Eisenhower administration and the Soviets forced an end to the action with strong condemnations of Israel and her two allies. ACJ members felt vindicated because the claim the organization had made for almost fifteen years—that American Jewish support for Israel would not always align with American interests—seemed proven correct. Israel had acted directly against the wishes of the American government. At Beth Israel, conflict arose between ACJ partisans, who wanted to call American Jewish Zionist loyalties into question locally as the national organization did, and the rest of the congregation including, in this case, Rabbi Schachtel, who no longer had the will to be the center of controversy.³⁴ When Schachtel resisted the ACJ partisans' demands, many left the congregation.

The Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism (HCRJ) was formed the following year as a congregation committed to Classical Reform principles and immediately affiliated its religious school with the ACJ. Shortly after the HCRJ formed, the ACJ held its annual conference in Houston and commended the HCRJ's religious school for its progress, noting Houston's longer legacy and experiences with Classical Reform Judaism compared to another religious school that recently opened in Los Angeles.³⁵ In its early years, ACJ stalwart I. E. Naman strictly monitored the HCRJ's religious school. Naman, along with other former Beth Israel congregants, relieved rabbis and religious school teachers of their duties if they were deemed pro-Zionist.³⁶ The HCRJ eventually named Wolfgang Hamburger, a member of the ACJ who had served briefly as its president, as its senior rabbi.

*Original synagogue building of the Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism, c. 1962.
(Courtesy of the Houston Congregation for Reform Judaism, Houston, TX.)*

*The Council Down South and Elsewhere in the United States:
Other Chapters During the 1950s*

Many of the most influential chapters of the ACJ were found outside of the South. Sizable chapters were located in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Seattle, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and Chicago. These chapters formed for various reasons. Most often, members were from the oldest Reform congregation of a city, such as Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia, where William Fineshriber, an ACJ rabbi who had previously served Memphis's Temple Israel, helped found the Philadelphia ACJ chapter. Congregations associated with the ACJ chapter were often among the wealthiest in their city, as was the case with the Temple de Hirsch of Seattle. ACJ chapters usually existed in areas where there were sizable numbers of Jews of central European origin, such as San Francisco, whose chapter was the most financially influential in the organization during the mid-twentieth century. This chapter included the well-entrenched Jewish aristocracy of the city, families that were among the founders of San Francisco and contributed substantially to the city's welfare, especially after the great fire. Irving

Reichert was a key rabbi in the community until 1948.³⁷ In some cases, ACJ chapters were established in cities with acute histories of antisemitism. Members believed that charges of dual loyalty fostered such prejudice. This was certainly true in Michigan, the home state of vocal antisemites such as Father Charles Coughlin and Henry Ford. ACJ lay membership also tended to be older in age. A study commissioned by the ACJ during the mid-1950s found that the average ACJ layperson was around the age of fifty-five and noted that about half of its membership was also affiliated with B'nai B'rith or the American Jewish Committee (AJCommittee). Jews of central European origin had founded these organizations, and the AJCommittee had historically opposed the creation of a Jewish state.³⁸ Although about half of the ACJ's members were also members of prestigious national Jewish organizations and leaders in their respective communities, their identities as Jews were often tenuous.³⁹

In the South, ACJ chapters existed in cities including Norfolk, Richmond, New Orleans, Shreveport, St. Louis, Birmingham, Little Rock, and Charleston. During the 1950s, some of these chapters were at the center of controversies that shed light on disagreements about American Jewish identity. The Norfolk chapter worried that the UAHC's support for Israel and the African American civil rights movement would jeopardize its members' racial status. The city of Norfolk closed its public schools in defiance of court-ordered desegregation. During spring 1957, with the threat of public schools being shuttered, the Norfolk ACJ chapter brought a resolution to the UAHC's biennial conference stating that the UAHC should refrain from commenting on ongoing political matters. The Norfolk chapter's intent was to restrain the UAHC's leadership, namely director Maurice Eisendrath, from making public statements supporting desegregation. However, as an affiliated chapter of an ostensibly single-issue, anti-Zionist organization, Norfolk chapter members claimed that they were concerned with the UAHC's support for Israel during the Suez Crisis of the previous year. Whereas Zionism raised the specter of dual national loyalty, outspoken integration statements brought into question southern Jewish allegiance to the Solid South.

Although Norfolk's leading rabbi, Malcolm H. Stern, supported adherence to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and many congregants quietly accepted gradual desegregation, such strong and outward support for integration—as with the issue of dual loyalty—

placed their social and economic positions in jeopardy. The chapter's proposed resolution failed to pass during the conference.⁴⁰

Stern held the pulpit at Norfolk's Ohef Sholom during the battle over school integration.⁴¹ In addition to being a luminary of American Jewish genealogy, Stern was associated with the ACJ. His relationship to the organization can be characterized as supportive, yet he was not nearly as outspoken as other ACJ rabbis. Stern continued to support the ACJ after 1948, presumably for personal reasons. Stern had served as associate rabbi at Keneseth Israel in Philadelphia under William Fineshriber, a more vocal member of the ACJ, prior to his appointment at Ohef Sholom. As will be discussed below, Fineshriber and Morris Lazaron were at the center of a

*Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern.
(Courtesy of the Jacob
Rader Marcus Center
of the American Jewish
Archives, Cincinnati.)*

controversy with HUC over whether they would receive honorary degrees because of their roles in the ACJ. Stern presumably felt a connection to Fineshriber and remained in the organization that Fineshriber helped found. Another reason for Stern's continued association with the ACJ was that Michael Lazaron was an influential member at Ohef Sholom and the son of Morris Lazaron, the second most important rabbi of the ACJ from its founding until his death in 1979.⁴²

In New Orleans, ACJ members of Temple Sinai attempted to introduce ACJ curriculum to the congregation's religious school in 1955, as HCRJ did a few years later. However, opponents of the curriculum complained about its condescension to Orthodox Jews and its denial that Jews

constituted a national group. Julian Feibelman, Temple Sinai's senior rabbi and an ACJ member, expressed support for the curriculum, although he also attempted to appear neutral.⁴³ Some Temple Sinai congregants resigned as a result of the implementation of the new curriculum.⁴⁴ Feibelman had previously been the center of a controversy during World War II when he criticized Stephen Wise for publicly announcing to Americans that European Jews were being killed en masse rather than having the State Department make the announcement. Feibelman argued that it was not a rabbi's place to confirm news of this kind to the non-Jewish public. Louis Newman, a Reform rabbi and fierce advocate of Zionism, criticized Feibelman for taking this public stance. Repeatedly, ACJ members demonstrated consistency in their opposition to stands that might bring into question American Jewish loyalty to the United States and what they perceived as American mores.

Another ACJ partisan of Temple Sinai, Henry S. Jacobs, attempted to raise funds for a Reform summer camp for Jewish children in the Deep South.⁴⁵ Ironically, Jacobs found little financial support for his plan until after the Six-Day War and American Jews' increased identification with Israel. When the Henry S. Jacobs Camp for Reform Judaism opened in 1970, it did not espouse the anti-Zionist views of the largely fractured and declining ACJ.

Hyman Schachtel After the ACJ

After Israel's establishment in 1948, Schachtel ended his criticism of Zionism and claimed to do everything within his power to work for the Jewish state.⁴⁶ He formally dropped out of the ACJ, an organization of which he had been a charter member. Like some other charter members, Schachtel began to feel unimportant to the organization's activities. For instance, after World War II, with the question of displaced persons looming large for American Jewish organizations, the rabbi offered the ACJ twenty-five thousand acres of land in Mexico to settle five thousand European Jewish displaced persons as an alternative to their emigration to Palestine. However, the ACJ did not take any action on his offer.⁴⁷

Schachtel spoke on behalf of the Jewish National Fund and B'nai B'rith. Illustrative of his change on the question of Zionism was his visit to Israel shortly before the Six-Day War began in 1967. Schachtel had a

close relationship with Lyndon B. Johnson and gave a prayer at the president's inauguration in 1965. Schachtel reportedly asked Israeli diplomats if they needed him to carry messages back to the president. By the 1970s, Schachtel was emphasizing how often he had asked President Johnson to support Israel. Like many other former anti-Zionists, he preferred to forget the past.⁴⁸

In 1975, at the twilight of his rabbinical career, Schachtel gave an interview to Beth Israel researchers in which he attempted to explain his position on Zionism during the 1940s. In the interview, Schachtel stated that he arranged for weapons to be smuggled out of Galveston, Texas, for the Haganah's use during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.⁴⁹ Whether this claim is truthful or not, Schachtel appeared as a changed man. Unlike their failed Thanksgiving dinner over thirty years earlier, Beth Israel and Emanu El congregants finally held a symbolic dinner to honor Hyman Schachtel and Robert Kahn, their respective rabbis at the center of the controversies three decades earlier. Schachtel also received a Humanitarian Award from B'nai B'rith and a Human Relations Award from the AJCommittee in 1975.⁵⁰ In 1982, Hebrew Union College established a Kahn/Schachtel scholarship

*President Lyndon B. Johnson in the Oval Office
with Rabbi Schachtel and his wife, Barbara, January 1965.
(Courtesy of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, TX.)*

for Christian scholars to pursue advanced degrees in Judaism. It is unlikely that these awards would have been bestowed on Schachtel if he continued to speak publicly against Zionism and later Israeli policies.

Other rabbis of Schachtel's former cohort faced marginalization from Reform bodies for their continued support of the ACJ. Morris Lazaron and William Fineshriber remained ardent ACJ members after the establishment of Israel. Both Fineshriber and Lazaron began their rabbinical careers as nominal cultural Zionists, but they both grew concerned with the Zionist movement's tactics, which they believed attempted to scare American Jews into immigrating to Palestine. This led them to oppose the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.⁵¹ Lazaron was forced to resign from his congregation in Baltimore after World War II because of his ACJ activities. HUC resisted conferring honorary degrees on Lazaron and Fineshriber in the early 1950s. Lazaron remained an ACJ partisan until his death in 1979, as did Fineshriber. Other rabbis, like Ira Sanders of Little Rock, avoided criticism by leaving the organization at the end of World War II and downplaying their participation.⁵² Still other older rabbis such as Solomon Foster of Newark and Henry Cohen of Galveston did not face as stern criticisms as Fineshriber or Lazaron, possibly because they were soon to retire from the pulpit. Schachtel's wife, Barbara, assumed that he received so much scorn in his early days in Houston because he was a young, eloquent speaker who some critics perceived as a threat to the cause of political Zionism. Barbara Schachtel and her second husband, Louis Green, also suggested that many more Reform figures agreed with Rabbi Schachtel and the ACJ in 1942 and 1943 but remained silent due to fears of facing attacks. Schachtel and Green cited Solomon Freehof as one of those who silently agreed with Hyman Schachtel's stand.⁵³

Perhaps the greatest threat posed by the Basic Principles and the ACJ at its onset was that a new, distinctly anti-Zionist denomination of American Judaism would form.⁵⁴ Congregation Beth Israel might have served as a model for this new anti-Zionist denomination had the congregation not taken such a combative tone with Reform bodies. Another reason this did not happen was that the row in Congregation Beth Israel heightened national and local tensions during a period of extreme stress and conflict. Also, many of those who supported the congregation's actions were too hewed to official Reform bodies to consider leaving the denomination. Reform leadership successfully steered the movement through the crisis

Rabbi Morris S. Lazaron.
 (Courtesy of the Jacob Rader Marcus
 Center of the American Jewish
 Archives, Cincinnati, OH.)

Rabbi William Fineshriber,
drawing by Harry S. Moskovitz.
 (Courtesy of Reform Congregation
 Keneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA.)

with its policy of individual choice on the question of Zionism. This policy helped limit the dissension in the movement by allowing for multiple interpretations of Reform. This resulted in the formation of some new congregations such as HCRJ and Emanu El. The HCRJ became the heir apparent of the Basic Principles after 1957. Houston during the mid-twentieth century displayed the fissures that the issue had caused in Reform. Three Reform congregations existed after 1957: Zionist Emanu El, anti-Zionist HCRJ, and ambivalent Beth Israel.

Many Beth Israel congregants of the late 1950s likely held ambivalent feelings toward Israel, taking note of Reform bodies' official statements lauding Israel's achievements yet still privately harboring concerns that Israel and America's interests would not always align and that this could raise questions about their race and loyalties to the United States.⁵⁵ The Suez Crisis likely alleviated fears of many Beth Israel congregants because the episode did not elicit public antisemitic sentiments even though the Eisenhower administration disapproved of Israel's military actions. Many

Americans came to see Israel as an important Cold War ally that shared American values.⁵⁶ By the late 1950s, American Jews were also more accepted as a white ethnic group, a trend that helps explain why many Jews who did not do so previously now expressed their Jewish identity and support for Israel publicly.⁵⁷ Consequently, the ACJ and its supporters in Houston saw a steeper, further decline in their position during the 1950s. American Jewish support for Israel was no longer problematic.

The distinctions between Beth Israel and Emanu El greatly diminished well before Beth Israel officially rescinded its Basic Principles in 1968. The differences between these congregations and HCRJ became blurred as time elapsed, and Reform became more homogenous in its support of Israel. I would also hazard the guess that today, many HCRJ congregants are unaware of their congregation's anti-Zionist founding. Today Jews in the United States divide over Israeli policies. Again, Jewish organizations and individuals oppose each other's positions. Although conditions are different from the 1940s and 1950s, Jews in the South continue to follow and lead these national trends.

NOTES

¹ Hyman Schachtel to Louis Wolsey, December 9, 1943, Louis Wolsey Papers, box 4, folder 7, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati (hereafter cited as Wolsey Papers and AJA). Schachtel described this episode to Wolsey, one of the intellectual leaders of the American Council for Judaism, when discussing the substantial support for Zionism the seminary students harbored.

² "The Basic Principles of Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas," in Israel Friedlander, *The History of the Official Adoption of "The Basic Principles" by Congregation Beth Israel* (Houston, TX, 1944), 1:234–36, Congregation Beth Israel Archival Materials, link "The Basic Principles," accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.beth-israel.org/lifelong-learning/library/archival-materials>. See also Anne Nathan Cohen, *The Centenary History: Congregation Beth Israel of Houston, Texas, 1854–1954* (Houston, TX, 1954), 56–57.

³ Solomon Freehof to Leopold Meyer, n.d., Solomon Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4, AJA (hereafter cited as Freehof Papers).

⁴ Cohen, *Centenary History*, 53, 58.

⁵ See, for example, Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2010), 148–49; Stuart Rockoff, "Deep in the Heart of Palestine: Zionism in Early Texas," in *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas*, ed. Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman (Waltham, MA, 2007), 103–7.

⁶ Jim Kessler, "A Study of the Split in Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas 1942-44" (1971), AJA Small Collections SC-5249.

⁷ Solomon Freehof to Barnett Brickner, September 13, 1943, Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4. Some congregants may also have been concerned that attendance at services was diminishing and that Barnston, at seventy-four, had grown too old, was in poor health, and appeared shaky when he delivered his sermons. Such concerns could have contributed to the desire to remove him. See Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station, Tex., 1999): 184.

⁸ Dana Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2003), 1-13.

⁹ See, for example, Moses Rischin, "Germans vs. Russians," in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (New York, 1997), 136-50; Gur Alroey, *Zionism Without Zion: The Jewish Territorial Organization and Its Conflict with the Zionist Organization* (Detroit, 2016), 197-204.

¹⁰ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit, 1995), 295. A further factor was that children of east European Jewish immigrants, more traditional and Zionist in inclination, were graduating from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, occupying the pulpits of Reform temples, and filling the ranks of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in sufficient numbers to influence policy.

¹¹ Howard Greenstein, *Turning Point: Zionism and Reform Judaism* (Chico, CA, 1981), 58.

¹² Cohen, *Centenary History*, 23.

¹³ Harriet Rochlin and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West* (Bloomington, IN, 2014), 85-89.

¹⁴ Cohen, *Centenary History*, 53.

¹⁵ "Lack of Negro Training Called Defense Handicap," *Houston Post*, February 9, 1942, cited in Friedlander, *History of the Official Adoption*, 2:84, Congregation Beth Israel Archival Materials, link "Basic Principles 2," accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.beth-israel.org/lifelong-learning/library/archival-materials>; I. Friedlander to Committee for a Jewish Army, February 9, 1942, in Friedlander, *History of the Official Adoption*, 2:85. In this article, Kahn urged that African Americans be trained in jobs to aid America's war efforts. In another article he was quoted comparing the plight of African Americans to Jews persecuted in Egypt during Biblical times. "Negro Wants Normal Life, Meeting Told," *Houston Chronicle*, February 9, 1942, in Friedlander, *History of the Official Adoption*, 2:84.

¹⁶ Mark Grossberg, interview conducted by Gay Block and Linda May, January 8, 1978, Congregation Beth Israel Library, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.beth-israel.org/lifelong-learning/library>. Grossberg recounts a story about how his grandmother was attacked by Ku Klux Klan members in a town near Houston. Grossberg's grandmother hit one of the men with a skillet, rendering him unconscious. She later went to court because of this episode but was acquitted. This narrative highlights the precarious racial position in which Beth Israel congregants found themselves during the early twentieth century.

¹⁷ Robert I. Kahn, "Oral Memoirs," May 30, 1977, AJA. See also, Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas*, 198-99.

¹⁸ Mark K. Bauman, "Demographics, Anti-Rabbanism, and Freedom of Choice: The Origins and Principles of Reform at Baltimore's Har Sinai Verein," in *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa, 2019), 177–200.

¹⁹ Thomas Kolsky, *Jews Against Zionism* (Philadelphia, 1992), 62.

²⁰ Solomon Freehof to Barnett Brickner, September 13, 1943, Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4.

²¹ Barnett Brickner to Solomon Freehof, August 24, 1943, Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4.

²² Hyman Schachtel to Solomon Freehof, August 28, 1943, Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4. Beth Israel board president Leopold Meyer also had a long correspondence with Freehof in which the two discussed the principles of Reform Judaism. Hyman Schachtel's father died of hypertension following a stroke. See Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas*, 186.

²³ Minutes of CCAR Meeting on Chaplaincy, June 22, 1944, Freehof Papers, box 1, folder 4.

²⁴ Israel Goldstein, "Pathological Jews," *New Palestine*, December 12, 1943, text in Friedlander, *History of the Official Adoption*, 1:147–48. The lay criticisms of Beth Israel and the ACJ were similar to that of Louis Newman, an influential Reform rabbi. Newman also compared ACJ members to German Jews who were excessively assimilated. See Howard Greenstein, *Turning Point*, 111–22.

²⁵ Members of Congregation Beth Israel opposed to the proposed "Basic Principles" of the Board, "To the Members of Congregation Beth Israel," n.d., in Friedlander, *History of the Official Adoption*, 1:211.

²⁶ Jack Ross, *Rabbi Outcast: Elmer Berger and American Jewish Anti-Zionism* (Lincoln, NE, 2011), 64. One of the most outspoken supporters of the Basic Principles was Rabbi David Goldberg of Sioux City, Iowa.

²⁷ David Mayer Gradwohl and Hannah Rosenberg Gradwohl, "That is the Pillar of Rachel's Grave Unto This Day: An Ethnoarchaeological Comparison of Two Jewish Cemeteries in Lincoln, Nebraska," in *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience*, ed. Walter P. Zenner (Albany, NY, 1988), 223–59. The Gradwohls' essay details religious and cultural conflicts between the two Lincoln congregations, one Reform and one Conservative, over decades. David Mayer Gradwohl is the son of Bernard Gradwohl, an ACJ partisan who led the efforts to establish the American Reform Congregation in Lincoln.

²⁸ See Ellen Deutsch, "The Founders of Suburban Temple-Kol Ami" (master's thesis, Siegal College of Jewish Studies, 2002).

²⁹ Roosevelt was an American intelligence officer who later helped overthrow Iran's democratically elected government in 1953. He helped establish American Friends of the Middle East, an organization secretly funded by American intelligence agencies and oil tycoons. Geoffrey P. Levin, "Arab Students, American Jewish Insecurities, and the End of Pro-Arab Politics in Mainstream America, 1952–1973," *Arab Studies Journal* 25 (May 2017): 32.

³⁰ See, for example, Israel Levinthal to Robert Gordis, March 3, 1949, ACJ Collection, box 1, folder 7, Center for Jewish History at YIVO, New York. Levinthal and Gordis were active in the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), whose purpose was to counter antisemitism as they saw it. One of their frequent targets was the ACJ and, in this

case, Beth Israel. The body was founded by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.

³¹ Julian Feibelman to Label Katz, January 6, 1956, Julian B. Feibelman Papers, box 6, Folder 6, AJA (hereafter cited as Feibelman Papers). See also Bernard Gradwohl and Bert Reuler, Report of the ACJ's Religious Education Department for the Fourteenth Annual ACJ Conference, March 13–16, 1958, ACJ Collection, box 6, folder 6.

³² Ben Gallob, "Council for Judaism School Program Making Progress" *National Jewish Post*, September 10, 1954.

³³ Current ACJ president Stephen Naman, interview conducted by Kyle Stanton, October 9, 2018. Naman grew up in Houston during the 1950s. His family ardently supported the ACJ and were founders of the HCRJ. Stephen's father, I. E. Naman, supervised the new religious school's activities while Stephen was a student.

³⁴ Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 90, 100–101.

³⁵ Gradwohl and Reuler, Report of the ACJ's Religious Education Department.

³⁶ Naman interview.

³⁷ Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 49.

³⁸ See Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966* (Philadelphia, 1972); Marianne R. Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1946–2006* (Waltham, MA, 2007).

³⁹ William Catton to Elmer Berger, October 10, 1958, ACJ Collection, box 7, folder 4. Catton directed Project Concord, a three-year sociological study of the ACJ conducted by the University of Washington's sociology department.

⁴⁰ "Jewish Group Asks Convention to Muzzle Eisendrath," *National Jewish Post*, April 26, 1957.

⁴¹ See Malcolm Stern, "The Year They Closed the Schools: The Norfolk Story," in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa, 1997), 286–310. A chapter on Stern's time in Norfolk during the school integration crisis, including a transcribed 1966 interview with Stern, appears in P. Allan Krause, *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2017), 165–186.

⁴² Malcolm Stern Papers, box 4, folder 28, AJA. See also Leonard Sussman's address to the Thirteenth Annual ACJ Conference and Leonard Sussman to the Religious Education Department of the ACJ, May 14, 1957, in ACJ Collection, box 6, folder 7.

⁴³ Julian Feibelman to Louis Newman, December 28, 1948, Feibelman Papers, box 9, folder 5. See also Julian B. Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi* (Burlington, VT, 1980).

⁴⁴ Minutes of Temple Sinai's Brotherhood Board Meeting, October 18, 1955, ACJ Collection. See also Label Katz to Richard Schornstein, December 28, 1955, Feibelman Papers, box 23, folder 1.

⁴⁵ Henry S. Jacobs, "A Practical Look at a Religious School Program," report to the Eleventh Annual ACJ Conference, March 18, 1955, ACJ Collection, box 23, folder 1.

⁴⁶ Hyman Schachtel, interview conducted by Gay Block and Linda May, October 27, 1975, Congregation Beth Israel Library, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://www.beth-israel.org/life-long-learning/library>.

⁴⁷ Hyman Schachtel to Louis Wolsey, December 15, 1946, Wolsey Papers, box 4, folder 7. Louis Wolsey was in a position similar to Schachtel in the ACJ although he was one of the ideological leaders of the organization from its inception. By the end of World War II, Wolsey's role in the organization was greatly diminished, and he eventually resigned from it.

⁴⁸ Schachtel interview.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Barbara Schachtel and Louis Green, interview conducted by Hollace Ava Weiner, March 7, 1997, AJA.

⁵¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement," in *Zionism and Religion*, ed. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira (Hanover, NH, 1997), 195.

⁵² James L. Moses, *Just and Righteous Causes: Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Fight for Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1926–1963* (Fayetteville, AR, 2018), 87–110. Other congregants in Sanders's congregation, like Noland Blass, Sr., and Betsy Blass, remained ACJ partisans after Sanders left the organization.

⁵³ Schachtel and Green interview.

⁵⁴ Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 64.

⁵⁵ Leopold Meyer, interview conducted by Gay Block and Linda May, August 19, 1975, Congregation Beth Israel Library, accessed June 28, 2019, <https://www.beth-israel.org/life-long-learning/library>. Meyer served as the president of Congregation Beth Israel during the Schachtel/Kahn episode. He explained his position on Israel and Zionism with ambivalence and also included a short diatribe about David Ben-Gurion.

⁵⁶ See Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany, NY, 2007).

⁵⁷ See Barry Trachtenberg, *The United States and the Nazi Holocaust: Race, Refuge, and Remembrance* (New York, 2018).