

Nathan Glazer's *American Judaism*: Evaluating Post–World War II American Jewish Religion

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IN 1957, THE SOCIOLOGIST Nathan Glazer's book *American Judaism* was published in the University of Chicago's History of American Civilization series, setting it alongside studies of American Protestantism and American Catholicism. The inclusion of the book reflected a shift in American perceptions of Judaism, and Glazer reacted with surprise to this offer of a seat at the table of American postwar religions. As he wrote in the introduction, he found it incredible that "the Jewish group, which through most of the history of the United States has formed an insignificant percentage of the American people, has come to be granted the status of a 'most favored religion.'"¹ He identified a central paradox of the cultural moment in which he was writing—that Judaism had rather suddenly gained popularity as a *religion*, even though according to him it fit awkwardly within that category. Unlike other religions, Glazer wrote, "Judaism is tied up organically with a specific people, indeed a nation."² So strong was this association, he noted, that "the word 'Jew' in common usage refers ambiguously both to an adherent of the religion of Judaism and to a member of the Jewish people."³ Glazer's study probed the implications of the midcentury shift from the idea of Jews as a "race" (with its strong associations with "people" and "nation") to a "religion."

Glazer's frank expression of wonder at the rapid change in status of American Judaism was echoed in his unwillingness to repeat the pieties about postwar Jewish success that were so often expressed by apologetic commentators of his era. The 1954 tercentennial celebration of Jewish life in America had occasioned the publication of a number of triumphant

1. Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago, 1957), 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 3.

3. *Ibid.*

histories,⁴ and Glazer wanted no part of these celebratory studies. Instead, his monograph maintained a conspicuous academic distance between author and subject, signaled by cautionary lines such as “many things will be said that may hurt Jews”⁵—warning readers that his goal was not to shore up the confidence of postwar Jews. Instead he sought to move studies of American Jews beyond apologetics.

As part of his resistance to Judaism’s envelopment into the categories of the majority culture, Glazer emphasized the difference between Jews and Christians, underscoring the ethnic dimension of Judaism.⁶ Ethnicity became a way for Glazer to rescue Jewishness from his generally bleak assessment of the prospects for Jewish religion in America, a pervasive motif in *American Judaism*. In his study, Glazer offers an essentialist conception of religion, contrasted to a secularized vision of modernity in which religion cannot thrive. Jewish ethnicity, in contrast, emerges mostly unscathed from the modernization process, providing a promising mode of Jewish affiliation for the future. While the immediate prompt for Glazer’s study was the importance of religion in postwar America and a desire to locate Judaism within that religious landscape, *American Judaism* suggests that what in the end truly defined American Jews was their retention of an ethnic identity. Ironically, the more Judaism was accepted in postwar America, the greater was Glazer’s insistence on Jewish difference.

Glazer’s outlook on contemporary Judaism was informed by his awareness of recent socioeconomic changes among American Jews, as significant numbers entered the middle class. Born in 1923, Glazer had witnessed this socioeconomic transformation in his own lifetime, and it would be difficult to overstate the extent to which it captured the imagination of Jewish writers during the 1950s. Two years after the publication of *American Judaism*, Philip Roth published *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). Its title novella took place between the homes of the characters Neil Klugman in Newark, New Jersey, and Brenda Patimkin in Short Hills, New Jersey. Praising the twenty-six-year-old Roth in the pages of *Commentary*, Saul Bellow noted that the real subject matter of *Goodbye, Columbus* was not the love affair between Brenda and Neil but the incredible change that had overtaken America’s Jews in the postwar years, driving them

4. These histories included Lee M. Friedman, *Pilgrims in a New Land* (Philadelphia, 1948); Anita L. Lebeson, *Pilgrim People* (New York, 1950); Jacob R. Marcus, *Early American Jewry* (Philadelphia, 1951); and Oscar Handlin, *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (New York, 1954).

5. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 131.

6. *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

from the country's Newarks to its Short Hillses. Bellow wrote: "To what can we compare this change? Nothing like it has ever hit the world; nothing in history has so quickly and radically transformed any group of Jews."⁷

Bellow's disquiet about this economic change channels older cultural voices: "My mother used to say of people who had had a lucky break, in the old Yiddish metaphor, 'They've fallen into a *shfaltz-grub*'—a pit of fat."⁸ Bellow worried that "love, duty, principle, thought, significance, everything is being sucked into a fatty and nerveless state of 'wellbeing.'"⁹ It was likely not simply the fate of "love and duty" that concerned Bellow but the quality of individuals' thought and writing as a result of increasing embourgeoisement. As the literary scholar Michael Kramer has written, postwar Jewish historians, sociologists, and novelists shared an "anxious exhilaration" at the great strides made by American Jews in the postwar years.¹⁰ Among novelists of Roth's ilk, Kramer identifies a creative tension between "heartfelt demands of tradition and peoplehood on one hand and the often pugnacious resistance to those demands on the other."¹¹ That resistance amounted to novelists having "no interest in feeling at home—or, at least, not wholly at home" as American Jews.¹² Resembling the "young Jewish intellectuals" and novelists of the 1950s who regularly contributed to *Commentary* magazine (where Glazer was on staff), Glazer preserved tension in his study—between Judaism and other American religions, and between contemporary and earlier forms of American Judaism. In the face of what seemed like complacent, middle-class conventionality, Glazer called attention to the uncomfortable location of Judaism in the American religious landscape.

This essay will examine how the roles of religion, secularism, modernity, and ethnicity fit into Glazer's schema of American Judaism. I begin with an overview of Glazer's methodology and the "introduction to Judaism" genre of which *American Judaism* was an example. I then provide an analysis of the role that genealogy performed in Glazer's study, arguing

7. Saul Bellow, "The Swamp of Prosperity," review of *Goodbye, Columbus* by Philip Roth, *Commentary*, July 1959, 79.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Michael P. Kramer, "Acts of Assimilation: The Invention of Jewish American Literary History," *JQR* 103.4 (2013): 562; Rachel Kranson, *Grappling with the Good Life: Jewish Anxieties over Affluence in Postwar America, 1945–1976* (New York, 2012).

11. Kramer, "Acts of Assimilation," 562.

12. *Ibid.*, 563.

that Glazer valued historical interpretation not because he was primarily interested in exploring the category of religion but because he found history useful in explaining Judaism's increasing secularization and the triumph of an ethnic Jewish identity. Accepting a more or less essentialized definition of the category "religion," *American Judaism* then argued that Judaism was a poor fit within the category of religion. With an understanding of modernity as grounded in secularism, Glazer saw religion in his rearview mirror, receding in the distance. Insofar as it became a "religion"—in a Protestant mode—contemporary Judaism was diminished. In Glazer's view, ethnic Jewish identity held the key to redeeming a future for American Judaism.

THE MAKING AND METHODOLOGY OF *AMERICAN JUDAISM*

Surprisingly few books have borne the title *American Judaism*. In 2004, Jonathan Sarna's history by that name essentially replaced Glazer's 1957 work.¹³ Its placement in a prestigious series made Glazer's *American Judaism* unique among a large genre of postwar "introduction to Judaism" texts, for its academic authority (the book was based on Glazer's 1955 Walgreen Lectures on American Judaism at the University of Chicago) and its far-reaching impact. For nearly forty years, the book was widely used for the week or two spent on "Jews in America" in college classes on American religion, the sociology of religion, and America's ethnic groups, thereby shaping perceptions regarding Judaism among educated Americans.¹⁴ Indeed, as if to prove the thesis of Herberg's *Protestant—Catholic—Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, the Chicago History of American Civilization series included a book about each of the three "American religions,"¹⁵ newly designated as such by Herberg. These

13. An earlier work, Joseph Leiser's *American Judaism: The Religion and Religious Institutions of the Jewish People in the United States* (New York, 1925), focused on Reform or "Liberal Judaism." For Leiser, the term "American Judaism" had only geographical significance.

14. In 1987, thirty years after *American Judaism* was published, the journal *American Jewish History* included *American Judaism* in the journal's "great books" series. In the introduction, the editors wrote: "Since its appearance in 1957, *American Judaism* has been arguably the best known and most-used introduction to the study of the Jewish religion in the United States." *American Jewish History* 77.2 (1987): 207.

15. Although the idea of America as a tri-faith nation had its origins in the 1910s and 1920s, the idea was "triumphant" in the 1940s and 1950s "when many if not most Americans conceived of their nation as being predominantly made up of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews." Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York, 2011), 7.

books occupied a preeminent position in the academic and popular study of religion. The University of Chicago scholar of religion Martin Marty, who has taught American religious history since the early 1960s, calls Glazer's book "the most 'used' semi-popular book on American Judaism in its time."¹⁶ In 1987, the historian Edwin S. Gaustad, who taught at a liberal arts college at the time of *American Judaism's* publication, recalled welcoming the publication of Glazer's book and "placing it immediately alongside John Tracy Ellis' *American Catholicism*, which had appeared the year before."¹⁷ (The third volume in the series, Winthrop S. Hudson's *American Protestantism*, appeared in 1961.) The Yale historian Jon Butler observes that Glazer's later association with Harvard added to the book's prominence. "I think for many it was hard to separate Glazer and Harvard. Harvard gave both subject and author an imprimatur not easily missed, especially in the not distant shadow of academic anti-Semitism."¹⁸

Long before Glazer was a Harvard sociology professor, however, he was a graduate student figuring out his research technique and working as an editor at *Commentary* and then at Anchor Books while he completed his dissertation. "Still working on PhD," Glazer wrote on his University of Chicago Press "Author Questionnaire" for a book originally titled "Judaism in America."¹⁹ By the time he wrote *American Judaism*, in his early thirties, Glazer had begun writing for *Commentary* and had collaborated on two books with the sociologist David Riesman: *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), and *Faces in the Crowd: Individual Studies in Character and Politics* (1952), both out of Yale University Press. Although Glazer and Riesman conducted interviews for *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman wrote in the preface that "these researches contributed very little in any direct way to the building, let alone the testing" of Riesman's thesis about American social character and the relationship thereto of inner- and other-directed individuals.²⁰ In the 1960 edition of *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman elaborated on his research methods:

These interviews—plainly not intended to be representative of the enormous diversity of America, but rather to be a source of illustrative

16. Martin Marty to the author, email, January 26, 2011.

17. Edwin S. Gaustad, "In the Classroom," *American Jewish History* 77.2 (1987): 208.

18. Jon Butler to the author, email, January 24, 2011.

19. Undated "Author Questionnaire," University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, University of Chicago Library Special Collections, box 194, folder 5.

20. David Riesman, Reuel Denney, and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Culture* (New Haven, Conn., 1950), vii. Also instru-

data—were drawn on only to a slight extent for the writing of *The Lonely Crowd*. Indeed, it should be emphasized that this book is based on our experiences of living in America—the people we have met, the jobs we have held, the books we have read, the movies we have seen, and the landscape.²¹

Riesman and Glazer had at least partially rejected the sociological method in favor of an impressionistic portrait, or cultural study, based on a range of sources. Fifty years later, Todd Gitlin appraised this methodology: “The popularity of *The Lonely Crowd* must also have owed something to the supple way it ranged far and wide for its evidence, trotting through novels, children’s books, movies, and anthropology.”²² In 2012, Nathan Glazer explained the interview and survey method used in *The Lonely Crowd* as contingent on his surroundings: “They were not random and hardly up to contemporary not to say today’s standards, they were surveys of opportunity—school classes, people living around Brattleboro Vermont, and the like.”²³ Sociology as the study of human relationships and behavior interested Glazer, but he did not feel restricted to the methods and theories of the discipline, preferring to forge his own: “As a sociologist I have been more interested in specific issues than in the discipline of sociology itself, more in empirical subject matter than in theory, more in substance than in methodology,” he later wrote in an autobiographical essay.²⁴

Glazer carried his methodology over to *American Judaism*, where he described his approach as one in which his own impressions were central. “I can point to no decisive evidence for most of my assertions—I can only refer to those bits of behavior that suggest to me the real structure of American Jewish religious belief,” he wrote in *American Judaism*.²⁵ Given his training in sociology and the ascendancy of the social scientific method among postwar scholars of Jews, it is noteworthy that Glazer judged empirical social science a limited analytic tool for understanding

mental to Glazer’s work was his interest in exploring leisure time pursuits as a way of understanding character and culture

21. Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd*, lxxi.

22. Todd Gitlin, “Foreword,” in Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd*, xiv.

23. Nathan Glazer to the author, email, August 22, 2012.

24. Nathan Glazer, “From Socialism to Sociology,” in *Authors of Their Own Lives: Intellectual Autobiographies by Twenty American Sociologists*, ed. B. M. Berger (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), 207.

25. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 131.

American Jewish religion, or even American religion.²⁶ “We can collect statistics on how many children attend religious schools, how many adults join synagogues . . . But what really goes on in the minds of people?” Glazer asked rhetorically.²⁷ Surveys and studies seemed of such limited value to Glazer in reaching an understanding of religious belief that he openly declared that they were not his primary sources, although he did in fact use them.

What occasioned Glazer’s frustration with the survey method? Certainly, the 1950s were years when Americans regularly read Gallup polls announcing that theirs was a god-fearing and religious country.²⁸ Two years before the publication of Glazer’s book, Herberg’s *Protestant—Catholic—Jew* had relied heavily on polls to determine what Americans thought about religion. In eschewing this data-driven method, Glazer acknowledged a difference in how Jews discussed and understood religion: Christians were accustomed to speaking about their beliefs and professing faiths, but Jews were different (similar observations appeared in the wake of the 2013 Pew Survey of American Jews, as commentators lamented the Protestant bias of questions about religion). Glazer: “Most American Jews are incapable of giving a coherent statement of the main beliefs of the Jewish religion and tend to call ‘Judaism’ whatever views they happen to hold today.”²⁹ This made it futile to ask Jews about their beliefs, for, he wrote, “were we to limit ourselves to what American Jews say about their religion, or to what they carry on the surface of their minds, how confused and banal a picture we would carry away!”³⁰ In part, Glazer was registering his own frustration and disdain for middle-class American Jewish life and thought, which he saw as muddled and superficial. But these comments also reveal his impatience with Jewish divergence from the mainstream Christian way of speaking about faith. The Jewish distance from this belief-centered notion of religion was evidence for Glazer of how far Jews had moved away from religion and toward secularization.

In 2012, when I asked Glazer about his research methods in *American*

26. “By the World War II era, sociological Jewishness had become the central framework through which Jews translated themselves to the United States,” Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley, Calif., 2009), 3.

27. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 129.

28. Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007).

29. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 132.

30. *Ibid.*, 131.

Judaism, he explained that the book, like *The Lonely Crowd*, was based on a range of experiences and observations: "I read whatever literature I could find, spent some time at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, visited a synagogue in Nashville, Tennessee, had occasion to visit other synagogues, got statistics of major organizations of synagogues, studied the annual write-ups in the *American Jewish Year Books*, observed matters from my post as an editor of *Commentary*, and kept up with whatever sociological reports on American Jewry I could find, etc. How to characterize this style? I couldn't say—maybe advanced, sophisticated journalism."³¹ Glazer's retrospective interpretation of his style suggests his desire to write compellingly about contemporary Judaism for an audience that extended beyond academia.

Still, as a sociologist writing history, Glazer was concerned with demographics, socioeconomic changes, and immigration patterns in a way that contrasted with the two other volumes in the series. *American Catholicism*, authored by Monsignor John Tracy Ellis, and *American Protestantism*, by the Colgate Rochester Divinity School professor Winthrop S. Hudson, offered more philosophical and theological explanations of their respective traditions, although their emphases, too, were on the histories of these religions. As a result, these books evinced a tenor of advocacy and, in the case of *American Catholicism* in particular, apologetics, in contrast with Glazer's critical perspective.

A POSTWAR LITERATURE EXPLAINING JUDAISM

The archives of the University of Chicago Press reveal a writer confident that the public needed his book. In response to the press's form question "How does it differ from others in its field?" Glazer replied: "There are none."³² Reviewers of Glazer's manuscript concurred³³ that the book filled a void in scholarship and would attract public interest. "From the standpoint of sales," Columbia professor Salo Baron wrote to the press's editor, Alexander Morin, in 1956, "I have no doubt it will appeal to a fairly large audience, Jewish and non-Jewish. There has been considerable interest in religious revival and the new religious quests within the younger generation, and there really is no satisfactory literature available in the field."³⁵ Nor did Glazer's academic and liberal approach to Judaism prevent his book from being used in more religious settings. A professor at

31. Nathan Glazer to the author, email, August 22, 2012.

32. Undated "Author Questionnaire," University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, University of Chicago Library Special Collections, box 194, folder 5.

33. Salo Baron to Alexander J. Morin, May 28, 1956, University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 4.

Yeshiva University wrote a letter of thanks to the University of Chicago Press in 1958: "I have experimented with its use in the last month of our course in Jewish sociology at Yeshiva University and find it very helpful. I hope to incorporate it into our required reading for the spring term of 1959."³⁴

If part of the motivation for *American Judaism* was market-driven, another factor was cultural change. Public perception of Judaism underwent dramatic transformation after World War II as Americans shifted from seeing Judaism as a tribal, Old Testament religion, to a contemporary American one that was part of the postwar Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁵ This post–World War II inclusion of Judaism within the rubric of American religion heralded a surge of investigation into the nature of Judaism. So long as Jews were categorized as a dehumanized minority group—an irritant to mainstream society, as in "the Jewish problem/Jewish question"—the nature of Judaism as an "American religion" was not in play. The postwar embrace of Judaism and the new American idea of "Judeo-Christianity" fostered an atmosphere of curiosity and investigation, and Jews reciprocated this interest by proclaiming their status as a religion. Leaders of all branches of American Judaism worked to counter the belief that Judaism was a "fossil," obsolete in the modern world, as the noted historian Arnold Toynbee had famously asserted in his magnum opus, *A Study of History*.³⁶ This cultural process in postwar America may be seen as parallel to the one that accompanied the eighteenth-century emancipation of Western European Jews, usually taken as the moment at which Judaism was redefined as a religion.³⁷

Still, explaining that Judaism was a "living faith," like Protestantism or Catholicism, proved a challenge when so many Americans were uncertain about whether Judaism was even still practiced.³⁸ That such ignorance

34. Dr. Gilbert Klaperman to University of Chicago, June 23, 1958, University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 5.

35. Schultz argues that the 1940s and 1950s marked a period of "widespread acceptance of a new tri-faith image of America, a national image that was, for the first time, inclusive of both Catholics and Jews in what only recently had been widely referred to as a 'Protestant country.' . . . Even if the image [of tri-faith America] was always something of a sociological myth, it produced very substantive results." Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 7.

36. Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1934–61). Twelve volumes in all, its first volume included comments about Judaism's status as an extinct society.

37. Zvi Gitelman, *Religion or Ethnicity? Jewish Identities in Evolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2009), 1.

38. "Judaism has merely archeological interest," rabbi and author Louis Finkelstein was told by a marketing group while editing his 1949 volume *The Jews*:

about Judaism became manifest at the same time that acceptance of Judaism was growing in the United States was not coincidental. American governmental and religious leaders' public espousal of a Judeo-Christian tradition put Judaism on the map of American religions, but it also called attention to widespread ignorance about the "Judeo-" half of this tradition. The chasm between the ideal of Judaism's acceptance and the reality that it was so little known created the market for Jewish authors to write what amounted to postwar primers about Judaism.³⁹ Non-Jews turned to books like Glazer's in order to learn about an American religious group that had been shrouded in mystery. That Jews also read these books suggests the truth of one of Glazer's observations: suburban adult Jews sought education in the basics of Judaism, the better to answer their children's questions—often posed by their children's non-Jewish friends—about what it meant to be a Jew.⁴⁰ As Glazer's book explained, suburban Jews began to rediscover Judaism's religious core through the process of comparing and explaining their religion to their middle-class neighbors.

GLAZER'S HISTORICAL APPROACH

Glazer's book was unique among introductions to Judaism because of its esteemed position as an academic study and its critical evaluation of Judaism as a religion, which the author set forth by providing a history of Jews in America and by portraying them as moving toward seculariza-

Their History, Culture, and Religion—a scholarly work intended to lead readers out of the dark when it came to Judaism and to "give the individual Jew a better understanding of his faith." Finkelstein was informed by the same group that in contrast to Judaism's obsolescence, Jews were a contemporary phenomenon, and "of perennial interest." Finkelstein, *The Jews*, xxiii.

39. *American Judaism* is related to the genre of postwar literature that I call "introduction to Judaism" books. Glazer's book differs, however, in that it was not authored by a rabbi or religious Jew (such as those "introduction to Judaism" books written by Milton Steinberg, Philip S. Bernstein, Herman Wouk, Ferdinand Isserman, and Morris Kertzer), and it was more academic than most of the middlebrow books in this genre.

40. Glazer explains that the parents knew no answers to these questions, either because they had had no Jewish education or because their Jewish education consisted of a certain degree of traditional observance and some Hebrew and Bible (perhaps even a great deal), which did not serve to answer questions. A new form of Jewish education thus became necessary, and the modern Sunday school and weekday school, designed to adjust children and teach them why they were Jews was gratefully accepted. It took over from the parents a task they were incapable of handling. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 119.

tion.⁴¹ In Glazer's telling, the history of Judaism revealed that normative, traditional Judaism (to Glazer, this was simply "Judaism") was an uneasy fit with modernity. In contemporary times, "Jews" and "Judaism" in America were directed toward divergent futures, as a result of a rupture between Jews and Judaism, begun in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and giving rise to the twin phenomena of religion and secularism. Pre-Enlightenment Jews were not conditioned to think of Judaism as a religion but rather as the totality of life. After the Enlightenment, Western European Jews reconstructed Judaism to fit a Western conception of religion. Of the assembly of Jewish notables that Napoleon convened in 1806, Glazer noted that they were not "strongly devoted to the Jewish law," so they "were able to give Napoleon satisfactory answers" to his questions about the nature of Judaism.⁴² Trading the authority of their religion for the rights and social acceptance of citizenship came easily to those who did not feel obliged by law, in Glazer's telling. Thus did the needs and politics of the state shape new iterations of Judaism.

Largely as a result of this Enlightenment disjunction, "Religion has lost in the modern world the major position it has held throughout history," Glazer explained, while science replaced religion's authority.⁴³ Glazer's schema showed Judaism moving toward modernity and secularization and away from religion. In positing a historical progression from religion to science, Glazer expressed an idea of historicity in line with Talal Asad's notion of the future as "moral magnet."⁴⁴ For defenders of Western modernity, the future "represents something that can be anticipated and should be desired, and . . . at least *the direction* of that desirable future is known," Asad wrote.⁴⁵ While modernity implied forward movement, in Glazer's schema, religion resisted modernity, "for science, whatever the

41. Will Herberg's *Protestant—Catholic—Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, N.Y., 1955) was similarly esteemed as a scholarly work about contemporary and historical American Jews. *American Judaism* provides a more focused treatment of Judaism but has received substantially less scholarly attention than Herberg's book, probably because it has remained on academic syllabi until recently. This both detracted from its status as a historical document and contributed to its impact in shaping young Americans' conceptions of Judaism.

42. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 26.

43. *Ibid.*, 10.

44. Saba Mahmood, "Interview: Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions," *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* 5.1 (1996): 3.

45. *Ibid.*

disclaimers of distinguished scientists, explains the world, which is what religion once did, and its explanation does not have any place for the notion of a nonearthly reality guiding man's course on earth."⁴⁶ Retaining a religious posture in the modern world became a reactionary stance, in Glazer's portrayal.

In America, the process of reforming Judaism was similarly influenced by social and historical circumstances. In Glazer's telling, a combination of shame and social aspiration propelled German Jews into a new movement: "Reform Judaism began as a movement of Jews of high social status who wished to dignify Jewish religious services and make them decorous."⁴⁷ In time, reformers' focus on the public face of Judaism shifted to the theoretical content of traditional religion. "If young Christian intellectuals turned against traditional religion in Germany during the second, third, and fourth decades of the nineteenth century," Glazer posited, "how much more might we expect young Jewish intellectuals to attack revealed religion?"⁴⁸ Jews were attracted to—and proponents of—Western modernity, Glazer argued, because the Enlightenment had been so vital to their liberation from "medieval restrictions."⁴⁹ In Glazer's teleology, Jewish Emancipation-era liberation from religious authority had a long-lasting influence on the future direction of Jewish religion.

Reform's progress in America was further evidence of the instrumental nature of American Judaism and traditional Judaism's ill fit with modernity. Lacking Europe's communal structure of Jewish life, America proved even more open to radical reform and Western modernity. According to the Reform movement's 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, Judaism was "a progressive religion, ever striving to be in accordance with the postulates of reason and capable of changing its form in accordance with the advance of knowledge."⁵⁰ Yet despite the strong influence of nineteenth-century rationalism on reformers, Glazer noted the retention of ethnic solidarity (a "simple, unreflecting attachment to the Jewish people, a subconscious insistence that the Jews be maintained as a people"⁵¹) among Jews and its effect on Jewish life: "It was only this feeling that could have led to the retention of circumcision and to weak rationalizations of the traditional ban on intermarriage, which had indeed been so effective in maintaining the separateness of the Jewish people for eigh-

46. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 10.

47. *Ibid.*, 27.

48. *Ibid.*, 29.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*, 42.

51. *Ibid.*, 55.

teen hundred years."⁵² Glazer did not call the sentiment "tribalism," but the implication was that beneath the American Jewish commitment to reason there was an even stronger commitment to the Jewish people.

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS JEWISH IDENTITY
IN AMERICAN JUDAISM

In Glazer's presentation of American Judaism, class remained an operative force and one of the standards by which Jews judged each other. Class also factored into Glazer's theoretical treatment of Jewish religion, which he found in its authentic form among the poorer and more urban segments of American Jews—a fact that was connected to his own socialist background. As Jews modernized and became more affluent, they followed a trajectory that led them away from religion and toward secularism. As a scholar and writer, Glazer sought a means to observe American Jews that aligned with his values. Thus, he described his attraction to the discipline of sociology: "For a long time it was necessary to explain that sociology was not social work and not socialism. But for some of us who were involved with socialism, and who would never abandon concern with the practical issues of society that social work represented, sociology offered a spacious home."⁵³ In a sense then, sociology—with its loose associations with the Jewish socialism of Glazer's upbringing—was a "Jewish, secular space" in which Glazer could observe the modernizing process in which Jewish religion and ethnicity diverged.

Sociology was also the discipline from which Glazer could observe the nexus of social, religious, and economic interests that characterized the postwar transformation of American Jews. The postwar urban exodus of Jews to the suburbs was being hailed as a golden age in the very years when Glazer wrote *American Judaism*.⁵⁴ Yet in the midst of this triumph, Glazer documented the happy bygone days of urban Jewish life—an era that he now perceived as having laid the groundwork for Jews' later "phenomenal advance in social position." Writing nostalgically of early twentieth-century American Jewish urban life, Glazer observed: "Never were teachers in slum schools happier than when they had Jewish pupils;

52. *Ibid.*

53. Glazer, "From Socialism to Sociology," in *Authors of Their Own Lives*, 209.

54. Lucy Dawidowicz labeled the postwar years a "golden decade" in her history of American Jews, *On Equal Terms: Jews in America, 1881–1981* (New York, 1982). See also Murray Friedman, "The Golden Age of American Jewry (1945–1965)," in *Utopian Dilemma: New Political Directions for American Jews* (Washington, D.C., 1985), and Arthur Goren, "The 'Golden Decade': 1945–1955," in *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999).

never were settlement-house workers more delighted with the results of their work than when the Jews filled the slums of the large cities."⁵⁵ Jews were an exemplary lower class, in Glazer's portrayal: "The Jewish working class had a broader horizon than the working classes of other groups," Glazer assessed, explaining that Jews were more effective in ensuring that the next generation surpassed their working-class parents.⁵⁶ The move from the cities to the suburbs signaled new values among American Jews, and a new instrumental need for religion. Glazer wrote of the 1940s and 1950s: "Jewishness was everywhere in retreat, and Judaism showed a remarkable, if ambiguous, strength among American Jews."⁵⁷

Glazer's book showed the costs attendant on American Jews' shifting status. Issuing a uniquely Jewish form of the jeremiad, *American Judaism* argued that a rich American Jewish culture—what Glazer called Jewishness, in contrast with Jewish religion—was endangered, so long as Cold War America's increasing engagement with religion continued.⁵⁸ Nor was Glazer able to envision a truly meaningful Jewish religious life among non-Orthodox Jews. In fact, Glazer was at his harshest in noting that American Jews did not live up to the religious standards of their country. "One might have expected that the acculturation of Jews to American ways in so many spheres of life and thought would be accompanied by a degree of religious acculturation and that the personal religious experience which is so striking a part of American religious life would begin to appear in Jewish life too," he observed ruefully.⁵⁹ Instead, he found little of what could be called "true religious feeling" among American Jews. Still, he observed that Judaism as a religion survived in postwar America, because it was necessary for Jewish integration into American culture. Echoing the theses of Will Herberg and C. B. Sherman, Glazer argued in 1957 that with the theory of cultural pluralism in the United States now "obviously dead," the only way for ethnic communities like the Jews to survive was in the form of religion—"for America did recognize reli-

55. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 80.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 105.

58. This foreboding about the waning of Jewish culture was not unique to Glazer's book but characterized the work of several postwar Jewish intellectuals who feared the effects of conformity and middle-class identity on an increasingly integrated American Jewish population. Lila Corwin Berman writes insightfully about this trend in "American Jews and the Ambivalence of Middle-Classness," *American Jewish History* 93.4 (2007): 409–34.

59. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 134.

gions.”⁶⁰ Glazer’s death notice for cultural pluralism and minority rights was premature, but he was correct in noting the postwar resurgence of interest in religious identity.

The resulting portrait that Glazer painted was of a postwar American Judaism informed by the values of the middle class—“values that may be included under the general heading of ‘respectability.’”⁶¹ In this context, behavior associated with the lower classes (crime, radical politics, delayed marriage) met with disapproval, while those associated with the middle and upper classes were adopted. Glazer both observes a shift and mourns a loss. In the larger American society, “the great increase in church membership and church attendance, the decline of all extremist political movements, whether left or right,” had both positive and negative consequences.⁶² But in Glazer’s view of Judaism, this shift from urban to suburban life, from multiple modes of Jewishness to a one-stop, synagogue-centered Jewish identity, from unconscious Jewishness to purposeful, intentional Judaism, represented a loss. Fitting into mid-twentieth-century American middle-class life, Glazer implied, came at a price, although it appeared to be one that mainstream American Jews were willing to pay. At a time when the landscape of American Judaism was dramatically shifting to suburban frontiers, Glazer appeared tied to an urban ethos of American Judaism that he presented as largely disappearing.

A SOCIOLOGIST LOOKS AT JEWS AND RELIGION

Among *American Judaism’s* most notable contributions was its analysis of Jewish participation in the postwar American religious revival. Instead of the Holocaust and Israel—oft-repeated explanations for growing postwar American Jewish interest in Judaism—Glazer concluded that it was socioeconomic change that had led to the “great movement away from the areas of second settlement” and thereafter transformed American Jewish life.⁶³ Moving to the suburbs meant that occupations historically linked to the lower class tended to be replaced by occupations linked to the middle class.⁶⁴ Material life, behavior, and sensibility thus became constitutive of religious life.⁶⁵ This socioeconomic shift occasioned new values and modes of behavior as the “pattern of middle-class respectability,

60. *Ibid.*, 128.

61. *Ibid.*, 116.

62. *Ibid.*, 117.

63. *Ibid.*, 116.

64. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

65. Cf. Talal Asad, “Reading A Modern Classic,” 218.

which included greater religious affiliation, became in the 1950s the pattern that all Americans wished to follow.”⁶⁶ Religious affiliation was also integral to the relationships between adults and children, and between Jews and non-Jews, in their new suburban milieu.

Where Jews had lived in predominantly Jewish urban enclaves, one found “strongholds of Jewish irreligion and of Jewishness.”⁶⁷ Absent esteemed non-Jews—and with a plethora of potential Jewish friends and neighbors—Jews could “have only Jewish friends, eat Jewish foods, follow Jewish mores and culture patterns, and yet have little consciousness of being a Jew.”⁶⁸ Once in the suburbs, Jewish behavior was shaped by relationships with Christians who were “of the same or higher social status and very likely Protestant rather than Roman Catholic.”⁶⁹ Outside the cities, the religious behavior of Protestant neighbors “began to impinge on the consciousness and conduct of the Jewish suburbanite.”⁷⁰ As has always been the case in Jewish history, non-Jewish neighbors affected Jewish religious life. In this frame, children, while central to Glazer’s explanation of the formation of postwar suburban Judaism, were only part of the story. Figuring out “how to raise the children, how to educate them, where to live so that they would have suitable playmates, and so on, made up a good part of middle-class conversation,” Glazer wrote, but these concerns extended beyond children to how adults positioned themselves within a newly pluralistic society.⁷¹

In effect, webs of relationships between adults and children and their non-Jewish suburban neighbors helped Jews learn a new way of understanding themselves within a social milieu that valued religious affiliation as well as the ability to answer the question “What are you?” in an acceptable (read: Christian or Jewish) way. Rabbis were seen as particularly useful in interactions between Jews and non-Jews, but Glazer portrayed this work of the suburban rabbi in a manner that called into question the spiritual content of his work. “We need you as our representative among the non-Jews to mingle with them, to speak in their churches, to make a good impression,” one rabbi had been told by his community. “We do not need you for ourselves. Well, for the old people, perhaps, and for the children, yes, once a week, but for the Gentiles most

66. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 117.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, 118.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 122.

of all!"⁷² The value of clergy was in translating Jewishness into a middle-class American idiom.

As mentioned earlier, Glazer's comparison of Judaism with an essentialized notion of Protestant religion revealed his skepticism that American Jews held any distinct beliefs (unlike Protestants). "We would find only a small minority," says Glazer, "who, asked about the nature of their religious beliefs, would respond with a declaration of faith in the authority of the law, the providence of God, Israel's election, and the coming of the Messiah."⁷³ Conceding that theological belief was not as central to Judaism as it was to Christianity, Glazer nonetheless argued that its absence among American Jews was evidence of their instrumental—as opposed to spiritual—approach to religion. "Were William James writing his *Varieties of Religious Experience* today," Glazer imagined, "he would have to supplement his examples with many new personal accounts, but none of them I think would be Jewish—except perhaps for a few Jews who have been converted to Christianity."⁷⁴ Assessing Judaism by the standards of Christianity, Glazer found it lacking in the realm of faith and religious experience—a trend that he associated with American Jews' overly assimilatory tendencies. The exception, for Glazer, was among the ultra-Orthodox in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where, against expectations, future generations remained Orthodox. Glazer bolstered Hasidic legitimacy by comparing them with a Christian group: "We have here, for the first time, something that might become a Jewish equivalent of the Mennonites but with a stronger potential appeal to other Jews than the Mennonites have for other Protestants."⁷⁵ But even among the Hasidim, it was the religious community—and not God's grace or personal faith—that proved inviting for American Jews. So long as Jews continued to seek out holy communities, as Glazer observed among post-war Hasidic Jews, then American Judaism could become "more alive and meaningful" than what was happening in "the bland religious life of middle-class American Jews."⁷⁶ Still, in Glazer's 1957 study, Hasidim were the exception that proved the rule.

On the whole, Glazer took a declensional view of Judaism and lamented the damage wrought by moderns: "The pattern of life envisaged by traditional Judaism, which in fact was the way of life of almost all

72. *Ibid.*, 127.

73. *Ibid.*, 132.

74. *Ibid.*, 134.

75. *Ibid.*, 147.

76. *Ibid.*, 144.

Jews down to the nineteenth century, is now the way of life of only a very small minority of American Jews."⁷⁷ No longer did Jews practice the "complete pattern of life" of daily prayers, rituals, and Sabbath and holiday observances that Glazer labeled as true Judaism. True, or traditional, Judaism, was static and unchanging. Only the ultra-Orthodox lived this traditional Jewish life in America. In Glazer's assessment:

This creates a more serious break in the continuity of Jewish history than the murder of six million Jews. Jewish history has known, and Jewish history has been prepared for, massacre; Jewish history has not known, nor is Judaism prepared for, the abandonment of the law.⁷⁸

It is startling, considering Glazer's harsh assessment of Jewish life in America and his use of Protestant and, at times, Orthodox Jewish yardsticks to assess contemporary Judaism, that *American Judaism* enjoyed such critical acclaim at the time of its publication and in subsequent decades. Glazer's pessimistic view of contemporary Jewish practice, his inability to judge Judaism by its own standards rather than those of Christianity, and his espousal of Orthodox Judaism as normative Judaism would seem to render it unpalatable to a broad audience. The popularity of *American Judaism*, however, stems from this same source: the author's resistance to joining the chorus of postwar writers championing Judaism made the book seem more detached, objective, and academic. Glazer's pessimism was frequently interpreted, as one reviewer put it, as a willingness to offer a "frank assessment of the superficiality of much of Jewish thinking today."⁷⁹ In this way, Glazer's criticism of the "bland religious life of middle-class American Jews" matched the hollowness that Orthodox and traditional observers found in Reform and Conservative Judaism.⁸⁰ As noted earlier, Glazer's criticism of suburban middle-class life also found its counterpart among young Jewish novelists.

It is helpful here to consider a response, six years after *American Judaism* was published, to another monumental work of American Jewish history, Moses Rischin's *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914*. In his journal in 1963, Alfred Kazin reflected on his astonishment at such an objective study of American Jews:

77. *Ibid.*, 133.

78. *Ibid.*, 134.

79. *Mississippi Valley Historical Society Review* (unsigned clipping), June 1958. University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 6.

80. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 144.

Why is it so surprising to see a book like *The Promised City*? Because Jews have had so little perspective on their own history. Because Jewish history has been so internalized that the insidedness of it, not to say the compactness and remarkably unchanged character of it, has permitted so little perspective. To write the history of one's own "people" or country, one must be able to see it in some larger perspective. Jews, on the whole, have not had access to this perspective. Either because they have seen their history as sacred, or because they have been too close to it and defensive about it, the kind of objectivity, which in its initial interest, sets the writing of history in motion, has been a recent development for them.⁸¹

An objective study of Jewish history—lacking in apologetics and lists of Jewish contributions—was still a novelty to American readers in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁸² Thus was Glazer praised for avoiding a chauvinistic posture toward Judaism. Instead, Glazer "gently corrects those who proclaim Judaism as the ideal religion for modern man, who no longer lives for salvation but for life on this earth," a reviewer for the *Catholic Historical Review* wrote.⁸³ Nothing seemed to prove Glazer's appropriately detached and academic perspective more than his willingness to point out the shortcomings of Judaism as a religion and its future prospects in America. That Glazer was not prepared to theorize a more capacious, non-Protestant conception of religion to better accommodate distinctly Jewish modes of identity suggests the degree to which "religion" remained a Christian concept, even as it was a category being reimagined to encompass both Christianity and Judaism in Cold War America.

Despite his failure or refusal to reconceptualize religion, Glazer's work was nonetheless perceived as making room for Judaism in the study of religion. Thirty years after *American Judaism* first appeared, when the journal *American Jewish History* dedicated an issue to a retrospective reconsideration of the book, reviewers were laudatory—commenting, as the historian Edwin Gaustad put it, on Glazer's ability to highlight "the religious dimension of Jewish life in America in a way that had not been

81. Richard M. Cook, *Alfred Kazin's Journals* (New Haven, Conn., 2011), 302.

82. To be sure, Louis Wirth's sociological study *The Ghetto* had been published in 1928 and Hutchins Hapgood's *The Spirit of the Ghetto* was published in 1902, but these two isolated examples reveal the scarcity of scholarship about American Jews until the latter half of the twentieth century.

83. October 1958 unsigned review of *American Judaism* in *Catholic Historical Review*, University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 6.

done before.”⁸⁴ Critics from both eras hailed Glazer’s attention to Judaism’s unique status as a “people-religion” and considered his chief success to be his academic perspective at a time when most books about Jews seemed defensive in tone or amateurish. The historian Benny Kraut observed: “In the 1950s, the critical study of American Jewry and Judaism was still in its infancy; many works by Jews and about Jews remained apologetic or filiopietistic renderings intended to shore up Jewish identity and the sentiment of American Jewish belongingness in America.”⁸⁵ In contrast, Glazer’s willingness to point out Judaism’s shortcomings was interpreted as a sign of unbiased opinion. That the other books (about Protestantism and Catholicism) in the University of Chicago series were authored by clergymen suggests that academic accounts of Judaism required a more detached perspective in order to achieve credibility.

Indeed, there are many similarities between the points made by the reviewers of 1987 and those of 1957, although the later *American Jewish History* reviews are even more appreciative as they locate *American Judaism* within scholarship about the sociology of religion: “Glazer’s approach . . . both typified and contributed to the new wave of sociological studies of ethnicity and ethnic religion that was just coming into its own,” Kraut wrote, in 1987.⁸⁶ He also found merit in Glazer’s emphasis on the distinction between Jewishness and Judaism, observing that “Glazer was decidedly right and perceptive to have stressed the polarity of Jewishness/Judaism in his exposition.”⁸⁷ This point befuddled some of Glazer’s 1950s reviewers, but it seemed profoundly true in the 1980s.

UNDERSTANDING POSTWAR TRANSFORMATION

The rupture in Jewish life that Glazer observed in postwar Jewry’s failure to practice Orthodox Judaism might also have been interpreted as a sign of the creation of a new, postwar American Judaism, not entirely dissimilar to Mordecai Kaplan’s Reconstructionism; during the first decades of the twentieth century, changing social conditions led Rabbi Kaplan to opine in 1920 that parts of the traditional liturgy “have been made entirely obsolete by changes in social conditions.”⁸⁸ So, too, had

84. Edwin S. Gaustad, “In the Classroom,” *American Jewish History* 77.2 (1987): 208.

85. Benny Kraut, “American Judaism: An Appreciative Critical Appraisal,” *American Jewish History* 77.2 (1987): 213.

86. *Ibid.*, 212.

87. *Ibid.*, 219.

88. Mordecai Kaplan, “A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism,” *Menorah Journal* 6.4 (1920): 195.

social conditions changed in postwar suburban Jewish communities. As the most affluent and integrated Jewish population in history, 1950s American Jewry encountered radically different cultural and socio-economic circumstances in which to practice Judaism. To be sure, some American Jews had self-identified as a religious minority (instead of a race or ethnic minority) in the past, but the extent to which they were perceived this way by other Americans often correlated with their affiliation with Reform Judaism. It was in the late 1940s and 1950s that Jewish individuals and denominations reconstructed Judaism as an American religion, in a context of wider societal acceptance. In other words, an observer might have interpreted the same changes that Glazer lamented as the positive signs of the creation of a new American Judaism.

Yet Glazer seemed unwilling to see this era as a period of creation and reconstruction of Judaism, on either material or spiritual levels, even as middle-class American Jews found new ways to live meaningful Jewish lives in the suburbs. Instead, Glazer saw only signs of stagnation or decay (“Perhaps . . . all that remains for Jews is to act as the custodians of a religion”).⁸⁹ He was hardly alone in voicing this despondency, but his growing distinction as a scholar and that of the series to which he contributed made his book uniquely influential. In 2012, Glazer reflected on his postwar perspective and prognosis: “In the lectures and the book, I adopted and believed in the standard sociological expectation of continued secularization and the decline of religion. Clearly that was at best premature, and future developments, including among Jews and in Judaism, showed an increase demographically of the Orthodox, with mixed developments among the rest.”⁹⁰ Glazer has continued to see secularism as a likely endpoint even while admitting that signs of its dominance are scarce: “I find it hard to believe that ultimately secularization will not prevail, but we are almost sixty years on and there is no strong evidence for it, in the US generally and among Jews.”⁹¹

Glazer’s 1957 view of American Judaism included not only the prediction of its erosion into secularism but also an indictment of Reform as the movement that had historically led to the “weakening of Judaism as a religion.”⁹² In Glazer’s narrative, nineteenth-century Reform’s “thoroughgoing rationalism” had “attacked and eliminated every ceremony, every ritual, every prayer that did not immediately and in a rather simple-

89. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 144.

90. Glazer to the author, email, August 27, 2012.

91. *Ibid.*

92. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 50.

mind ed way conform to their view of the truth (as defined by nineteenth-century scholarship).⁹³ The distinction between traditional and Reform Judaism as that between true and watered-down Judaism was not exclusive to Glazer, but *American Judaism* crystalized feelings and biases prevalent among its readers, particularly American Jews, and placed them in a sociological perspective. This had a powerful effect on readers. In 1987, Hebrew Union College professor Norman Mirsky recalled reading *American Judaism* and feeling “spellbound” at a work “so concise, historically analytic, and at the same time sociologically descriptive and predictive.”⁹⁴ This review from an academic based at a Reform seminary is surprising given Glazer’s unfavorable view of Reform, and his suspicion that Reform was stripping Judaism of its religious elements. These views were expressed a few years before *American Judaism* was published, in a *Commentary* article about Boston’s Reform Temple Israel, in which Glazer had reacted to the history of that synagogue’s rabbis: “Judaism is a religion, not a compendium of sound ideas.”⁹⁵ Although he was describing late nineteenth-century America when he wrote that “Reform Jews, to the masses of the Orthodox immigrants, were scarcely better than Gentiles; to the masses of politically radical and secular-minded immigrants, Reform Jews, whatever their formal position on social justice, were simply bourgeois hypocrites and exploiters,” Glazer was also expressing an enduring view within American Judaism about the Reform movement.⁹⁶ Despite his personal secular orientation, Glazer’s profession as a sociologist of religion imparted a sense of loss over what he viewed as the decline of “authentically religious” Jewish life.

On the flip side of Glazer’s bias against Reform was his seeming overvaluation of Hasidism, which he saw in an optimistic light, as being “successful in attracting the interest and even allegiance of young, American-born Jews.”⁹⁷ Glazer’s editors disagreed with his decision to showcase the Williamsburg Hasidim in his chapter on contemporary American Jewish religion, and their resistance signifies the countercultural nature of Glazer’s perspective on Hasidism in the 1950s—an era when scholars were unanimous in their agreement about the waning influence of ultra-Orthodoxy. “There is only one point that worries me at all, and that is

93. *Ibid.*

94. Norman Mirsky, “A Reform Opinion,” *American Jewish History* 77.2 (1987): 234.

95. Nathan Glazer, “Four Rabbis in Search of American Judaism,” *Commentary*, February 1955, 154.

96. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 66.

97. *Ibid.*, 148.

your use of the Williamsburg neo-chassidim [*sic*] in your last chapter,” University of Chicago Press managing editor Alexander Morin wrote to Glazer, in 1956. “It seems to me that the length and emphasis you give this episode is entirely inconsistent with your thesis as advanced in the introduction, and that distortion which results will cause confusion among your readers. I confess that I don’t see its relevance, myself.”⁹⁸ Correspondence between editors and author reveals the persistence of attempts to persuade Glazer to omit his section on Hasidism. But Glazer held firm: “I am convinced that it is right to bring in the Hasidic story at the length which I do—but I see my explanations for doing so, and my demonstrations of its relevancy, have to be better.”⁹⁹

It was not, Glazer explained, that he believed that the Hasidim influenced the rest of American Jewry, but that they shed light on a “central pattern of Jewish religious life,” wherein the holy community brought people back to the faith, in a manner similar to that of God’s grace in Christianity. For Jews, returning to faith occurred through a return to the community. Glazer’s conviction on the matter centered on his observation that it was not in any “abstract demand to seek faith, to find God,” that Judaism impacted American Jews but in the concrete examples of Jewish living that Jews felt called back to Judaism. In the Hasidic example of “one of the most exotic, and on the surface least significant, manifestations of Jewish religious life,” Glazer found hope for an American Judaism “more alive and meaningful” than what he found in Reform and Conservative suburban communities.¹⁰⁰ That Glazer was quite certain that the majority of American Jews was not headed in the direction of the Hasidim made them the exception that proved the rule of secularization.

CONCLUSION

For a scholar like Glazer, who assessed Judaism against an essentialized standard of religion, the problem of American Judaism was that it was not Hasidism. Hasidic Jews were “guided by tradition, and by leaders whose word is law.”¹⁰¹ The majority of American Jews, however, had no such guide. History had done away with the authority of such religious guides. Individuals forged their own paths, grappling with the question of how to live a Jewish life in America. Judging that process of explora-

98. Alexander J. Morin to Nathan Glazer, November 29, 1956, University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 4.

99. Nathan Glazer to Alexander J. Morin, December 5, 1956, University of Chicago Press Records, 1892–1965, box 194, folder 4.

100. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 144.

101. *Ibid.*, 150.

tion by what he observed on the midcentury Jewish frontiers of the suburbs, Glazer was not heartened about future prospects for American Jewish life. Instead, ethnicity appeared to be the de facto form of Jewish identification, even if most American Jews would not have consciously selected that category. But while ethnicity fit the reality of American Jewish identification, American Jews continued to struggle to fit into an American religious framework. Glazer described that struggle in a mostly laudatory review of Marshall Sklare's *Conservative Judaism*, wherein he criticized Sklare for his lack of attention to Jewish tradition in American Conservative Judaism. "We always see Judaism, in this book, adapting itself to the social situation," Glazer wrote, adding that any "resistance of those who hold to the tradition in fuller form—is, in Mr. Sklare's presentation, a kind of pointless effort to stem and reverse an inevitable tide."¹⁰² This critique illuminates Glazer's challenges in studying American Judaism. "I am not taxing Mr. Sklare, priggishly, with failing to take 'spiritual forces' into account. My point is that sociological analysis must take *all* forces into account, and the existence of a religious tradition that makes strong demands, and is still accepted by many thousands of people, is one such force."¹⁰³ Glazer did not feel the demands of this religious tradition himself, but as a sociologist and scholar observing Jews, he was an exemplar of the mid-twentieth-century Jewish intellectual searching for signs that such Jews still existed—and intrigued, baffled, and humbled to find them still extant.

Although lauded for a detached and academic tone, *American Judaism* in fact contained the traces of Glazer's bias for urban Jewishness. In the face of what he perceived to be the homogenizing force of the suburbs, Glazer's study showed his desire to keep the tension between Jewish religious life and mainstream (Christian) American religious life alive. "Something is still left," Glazer wrote of the present situation of American Judaism, but its quality was uncertain: "What is left is a relation to a tradition in which, from all one can tell, the echo once sounded, and there was a readiness to listen. What can still come of it I do not know."¹⁰⁴ During an era of socioeconomic triumph for American Jews, Glazer's note of loss is jarring. The sense of mourning that pervades *American Judaism* may have been, in part, an emotional response to the Holocaust—an event that receives but slight mention in Glazer's study—

102. Nathan Glazer, "A Middle Way," *Commentary*, September 1955, 278.

103. *Ibid.*

104. Glazer, *American Judaism*, 149.

but it was also rooted in Glazer's low regard for the contemporary Jewish religious life that he observed. Glazer's sociological and historical study of Judaism in America revealed a split between religious and ethnic Judaism and the weight that Protestant conceptions of religion continued to hold, even during this inaugural era of a tri-faith nation.