

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Interreligious Dialogue, and the Ironies of Liberal Zionism in America, 1967–1980

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After the June 1967 Middle East war, liberal Zionism in the United States was transformed from an assumption into an embattled claim. From the 1940s to the 1960s, most Americans had assumed that liberalism and Zionism went together naturally. Only under pressure of criticism did liberal Zionists emerge as a self-aware faction within American Zionism. Starting in 1967, among the first to question the assumption of liberal Zionism were progressive Protestants, and fissures around Zionism among American progressives appeared in interreligious dialogue between Reform Jews and liberal white Protestants. Rabbi Balfour Brickner, a leading liberal Reform rabbi and a key interlocutor for such Protestants, stood in the thick of this dialogue, and his negotiation of liberal Zionism's passage from assumption to claim reveals that transformation vividly.

What is liberal Zionism, and what does it matter? In US political life this category has evolved, since the Middle East war of June 1967, from an assumed identity (between liberal, center-left politics and Zionism) to an embattled claim (that American progressives who believe in peace and antiracism ought to be Zionists as well). Americans have debated liberal Zionism with great intensity since the 2010 publication of an essay by the writer Peter Beinart, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment.” By this he meant the “failure” of that “establishment” to uphold liberal values – moral universalism, civic equality, opposition to ethnocentrism, and restraints on militarism – while also maintaining its familiar, fervently pro-Israel stance.¹

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¹ Peter Beinart, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment,” *New York Review of Books*, 10 June 2010. Beinart subsequently published a book, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Times Books, 2012). Among the ensuing statements were the following: Jacob Heilbrunn, “Can Peter Beinart Save Liberal Zionism?” *The Atlantic*, 9 March 2012, at www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/can-peter-beinart-save-liberal-zionism/254256; Mark LeVine, “Peter Beinart’s Liberal Zionist Fantasy,” *Al Jazeera*, 28 March 2012, at www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/03/201232611482224476.html; Jason

Participants in this debate in the USA have deployed a specifically North American meaning of liberalism, one that descends from the New Deal and Great Society eras of US political and cultural history. Different understandings of liberal politics and ideology have prevailed elsewhere. In Israel, liberal Zionism has been, historically, a minority tendency describing a preference for free-market economic policy – rather different from the state-regulatory stance typically clustered in “modern” US liberalism with the socially inclusive commitments noted above. In some places and times, particularly those shadowed by state tyrannies, liberalism has simply betokened basic commitments to political and intellectual freedom. Here I focus on the ordinary political meanings of liberalism in the middle and late twentieth-century USA and the acceleration of controversy around efforts to maintain the established American linkage of liberalism in this sense with Zionism. Some polemics against Zionism have argued that liberal ideology, with its accent on universalism, is incompatible with nationalism of any brand. Such claims form part of the discursive field I interpret, as do liberal nationalist counterclaims. I see the crises negotiated by liberal Zionists in post-1967 America issuing from the intersection of an intrinsic ideological tension between liberalism and Zionism – not an ineluctable conflict – with historically specific events, including wars in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the movement against white supremacy in the United States, the broader rise of a global left, and the conservative backlash against the left, a backlash that damaged the political center left along with socialist or radical movements.²

Zengerle, “The Israeli Desert,” *New York*, 3 June 2012, at <https://nymag.com/news/features/peter-beinart-2012-6>; David Lloyd, “The Nightmare Hidden within Liberal Zionism,” *Electronic Intifada*, 21 Dec. 2013, at <https://electronicintifada.net/content/nightmare-hidden-within-liberal-zionism/13029>; Jonathan Freedland, “The Liberal Zionists,” *New York Review of Books*, 14 Aug. 2014, at www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/08/14/liberal-zionists; Bernard Avishai, “Is Liberal Zionism Impossible?” *New Yorker*, 5 Sept. 2014, at www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/liberal-zionist; Ran Greenstein, “The Perennial Dilemma of Liberal Zionism,” *+972 Magazine*, 28 Sept. 2014, at <https://972mag.com/the-perennial-dilemma-of-liberal-zionism/97076>; and Omri Boehm, “Liberal Zionism in the Age of Trump,” *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2016, at www.nytimes.com/2016/12/20/opinion/liberal-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump.html?partner=bloomberg. To survey recent debate within the field of American studies see Alex Lubin, “American Studies, the Middle East, and the Question of Palestine,” *American Quarterly*, 68, 1 (March 2016), 1–21; as well as the articles collected in a special issue of *American Quarterly*, *Shifting Geographies of Knowledge and Power: Palestine and American Studies*, 67, 4 (Dec. 2015), ed. Rabab Abdulhadi and Dana M. Olwan.

² See Noam Sheizaf, “An Essential Sense of Urgency: On Peter Beinart’s ‘The Crisis of Zionism,’” *+972 Magazine*, 29 Nov. 2017, at <https://972mag.com/an-essential-sense-of-urgency-on-peter-beinarts-the-crisis-of-zionism/42620>; and Bernard Avishai, “A Tale of Two Zionisms: On Peter Beinart,” *The Nation*, 26 Sept. 2012, at www.thenation.com/article/archive/tale-two-zionisms-peter-beinart, on the specially American character of

Today, arguments for and against liberal Zionism receive much attention in the United States for several reasons, including the centrality of the Middle East to recent foreign embroilments of the USA and the potential for differences over Israel and Palestine to disrupt progressive coalitions in which American Jews long have played key roles. Historical investigation of the emergence of liberal Zionism as an express political claim helps to explain how Zionism, starting in 1967 – when Israel conquered and then occupied large new territories in a brief and transformative war against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan – became a problem for American liberals, and reveals a number of ironies, two in particular.³

The first irony is that the conscious idea of a liberal Zionism, in the American meaning, has ascended sharply in recent years, precisely because the earlier strength of the concept in the USA had made it implicit. Before 2010, the term appeared in print only intermittently. Yet from the 1940s through the 1960s, within the American political mainstream, the center-left creed that went by the name of liberalism had correlated almost perfectly with pro-Israel sympathies. The liberal element in the Democratic Party had been the site of warm ties between Jews and others who had shared a conviction that Israel embodied labor-led social democracy, the empowerment of an

liberal Zionism. Liberal Zionism in Israel has been associated at times with the category of General Zionism. See Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 121–24; and see Mira Katzburg-Yungman, *Hadassah: American Women Zionists and the Rebirth of Israel*, trans. Tammy Berkowitz (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 149–54; as well as Zohar Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel after Statehood: From Involved Partners to Outside Supporters,” *American Jewish History*, 93, 3 (Sept. 2007), 277–302, on the complexities of US Zionists grappling with Israeli politics after 1948 with specific reference to Israeli liberal Zionism. Walter Laqueur, “Zionism and Its Liberal Critics, 1896–1948,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6, 4 (1971), 161–82, like those whose writings it surveys, assumes a conflict between Zionism and vaguely universalist liberal ideals. Daryl Glaser, “Partiality to Conationals or Solidarity with the Oppressed? Or, What Liberal Zionism Can Tell Us about the Limitations of ‘Liberal Nationalism,’” *Ethnicities*, 5, 4 (2005), 487–509, makes the same assumption but takes the other side of the argument. Malachi Haim Hacohen, “‘The Strange Fact That the State of Israel Exists’: The Cold War Liberals between Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism,” *Jewish Social Studies*, new series, 15, 2 (Winter 2009), 37–81, examines a set of prominent Jewish European liberal pluralists as they negotiated the tension between Zionism and political pluralism. Arie M. Dubnov, *Isaiah Berlin: The Journey of a Jewish Liberal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) expands greatly on Hacohen’s consideration of one influential figure. See Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), on the way in which “contradictions” may arise out of long-standing ideological tensions.

³ On Jews and American liberalism see Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

oppressed people, and the reclamation of a Levantine waste from its supposedly backward former custodians. Leading Cold War liberals like Hubert Humphrey and Eleanor Roosevelt had been among Israel's best friends in Washington; US trade unions typically had seen Israel's cause as their own. A right-wing "Revisionist" tendency existed in Zionism everywhere, but Revisionism had been overshadowed in the United States by the pervasive equation of Zionism with liberalism. In pre-1967 America, liberal Zionism had been not a creed that dared not speak its name, but rather a creed with no need to speak its name.⁴

The second, and related, irony of liberal Zionism's explicit emergence is that its magnification in American life reflected its post-1967 decline. The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s witnessed successive waves of American Jewish progressive organizing – through groups like Breira, Americans for Peace Now, New Jewish Agenda (NJA), the New Israel Fund, and J Street – in which Jews, while asserting their own Zionism, challenged Israeli state policies and sought to work within center-left coalitions. Yet this new liberal Zionism fought a rearguard battle and had scant impact on US policy toward the Middle East or on established American Jewish power structures. Meanwhile, the milieu of progressive movement politics in the United States grew increasingly inhospitable for Zionists. The revival of the US political left starting in the 1960s, linked to the expansion of the youthful global left, afforded space for severe judgment of Israel on anticolonial grounds. Pro-Palestine sentiment waxed over time on the left – as it did among Gentile liberals influenced by the left – along with discomfort over Israel's history, conduct, and even its constitution as an ethnic-religious

⁴ See Adam M. Howard, *Sewing the Fabric of Statehood: Garment Unions, American Labor, and the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926–1948* (Tuscaloosa: University Press of Alabama, 2002); Michelle Mart, "Eleanor Roosevelt, Liberalism, and Israel," *Shofar*, 24, 3 (Spring 2006), 58–89; and Olivia Sohns, "The Future Foretold: Lyndon Baines Johnson's Congressional Support for Israel," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 28, 1 (March 2017), 57–84. Pre-2010 expressions of disillusionment with the notion of liberal Zionism (unlike Beinart's anguish that its potential was betrayed) can be found in Jonathan Boyarin, *Palestine and Jewish History: Criticism at the Borders of Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage, 2001); Joel Beinin, "No More Tears: Benny Morris and the Road Back from Liberal Zionism," *Middle East Report*, 230 (Spring 2004), 38–45; and Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Ruth R. Wisse, *If I Am Not for Myself ...: The Liberal Betrayal of the Jews* (New York: Free Press, 1992), chooses Zionism over liberalism. Ze'ev Sternhell, "In Defence of Liberal Zionism," *New Left Review*, 62 (March–April 2010), 99–114, stands by the old formula's integrity. None of these authors carries over their definition of liberalism.

state. Liberal Zionists, whose stance had made sense to so many in the USA between 1948 and 1967, now were beset by critics on their right and their left.⁵

For their part, ethnically particular US Jewish radical groups begun after 1967 took various stances toward Zionism. Some displayed a refreshed Zionist commitment. American Jewish activists in this era never organized to advocate anti-Zionism during the remainder of the twentieth century, in contrast to the Israeli group Matzpen, which did so shortly after 1967. Arthur Waskow's effort to form a Jewish left sympathetic to Palestinians while not forsaking Zionism, which described the limit of American Jewish politics in this era, found it nearly impossible to gain a political foothold. Jewish groups newly critical of Israel that brought liberals and leftists together, particularly Breira and NJA, found their external portside relationships problematic. Interreligious dialogue epitomized these new political dynamics. Increasingly, pro-Israel Christian voices stood on the right.⁶

BALFOUR BRICKNER, THE COMPLEAT LIBERAL ZIONIST

The origins of these ironies are brightly visible in the career of Balfour Brickner, a prominent liberal rabbi who worked in the thick of interreligious dialogue in the 1960s and 1970s. In later days Brickner achieved a bit of notoriety when *New York* magazine included him on its list of “the 50 sexiest

⁵ Steven T. Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences? The Waning of the American Jewish Love Affair with Israel* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001); Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Ezra Berkley Nepon, *Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: A History of the New Jewish Agenda* (Philadelphia: Thread Makes Blanket Press, 2012); Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Michael R. Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019); Fischbach, *The Movement and the Middle East: How the Arab–Israeli Conflict Divided the American Left* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

⁶ James A. Sleeper and Alan L. Mintz, eds., *The New Jews* (New York: Vintage, 1971); Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier, eds., *Jewish Radicalism: A Selected Anthology* (New York: Grove Press, 1973); Lutz Fiedler, *Matzpen: A History of Israeli Dissidence*, trans. Jake Schneider (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Doug Rossinow, “[?]The 1900-Year Crisis: Arthur Waskow, The Question of Israel/Palestine, and the Effort to Form a Jewish Religious Left in America, 1967–1974,” in Leilah Danielson, Marian Mollin, and Doug Rossinow, eds., *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 237–38; Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); Daniel G. Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.–Israeli Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

New Yorkers” in 2003, attributing to him “the looks of a rake (wavy silver mane, chiseled jaw) and the soul of a mensch.” He professed to dislike such superficial plaudits, having disdained an earlier comparison to Hollywood star Rock Hudson. He preferred to be known as a crusading liberal activist. Not a generative thinker or a sparkling writer, Brickner was, instead, a believer in political action and in many ways an exemplar of liberal Zionism in its heyday. He had had a long career as a Jewish liberal par excellence: arrested protesting for civil rights with the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth in St. Augustine in 1964; prominent in Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, the main clerical group in the Vietnam-era peace movement; leading the original left-wing “Freedom Seder” in Washington, DC, in 1969; serving as a board member of the National Abortion Rights Action League; and lambasting the leadership of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. This progressive rabbi’s other great political passion was for the State of Israel, to which he had been devoted, in a sense, since his birth in 1926 in Cleveland, when his parents had named him for Arthur Balfour, who, as British foreign minister in 1917, had committed his government to the cause of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. Israel caused Brickner both pride and anguish – the latter only after the 1967 war. To him, Zionism and liberalism were inseparable.⁷

In 1990, Brickner would recall candidly, “Once upon a long time ago, I made a career out of Israel and Israel gave me a career.” After wartime service in the US Navy in the 1940s, he had pursued his rabbinical education and, in 1952 – one year before his father had assumed the presidency of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the US Reform clergy association – had secured his own pulpit, in a small but well-placed congregation in Washington, which boasted among its members liberal Democrats like labor lawyer Arthur Goldberg, later a US Supreme Court justice and US ambassador to the United Nations (UN). After that, Brickner became codirector of the National Commission on Social Action (CSA) of Reform Judaism, serving from 1961 to 1978. He moved at the center of exciting precincts in a liberal coalition, wherein a Jewish agenda of domestic reform and international Zionism fit snugly. As Brickner recounted, the capital’s “principled Jewish principals, many of whom operated deep in Washington’s political throat” – note the casual pornographic allusion, one in which an ascendant American

⁷ Jo-ann Price, “Balfour Brickner: ‘When a Church Starts to Do Its Job ... People Dislike It,’” *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 Oct. 1967, 2; “Why We Went” (letter), *Christian Century*, 26 Aug. 1964, 1061–62; Mitchell K. Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). On the Balfour Declaration see Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab–Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 10th edn (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2021), 63–69.

Jewish power network took the male role, reflecting the implicitly macho political world that Brickner inhabited –

were both courted and heeded by the non-Jewish Capitol Hill world. To be close to them was to be closer to some seats of power than one might otherwise have expected to be, and the way to get close was to be a staunch “defender of the faith” of Israel: not too difficult.⁸

However, Brickner’s role as a favored Jewish interlocutor for liberal, white Protestants would complicate and frustrate his Zionist commitment. The branch of Judaism most involved in dialogue with such progressive Christians was Reform, which had been largely hostile to Zionism before the 1930s – it had perceived Zionism as antithetical to the universalist ethics that Reform had asserted was essential to Judaism, and as contrary to the Reform doctrine that Jewishness was a faith only and not a nationality. Reform Judaism then had become a fervent convert to Zionism, spurred first by an influx of Zionist-tending Jews of East European descent and by alarm at the persecution of German Jews under Nazi rule, and then by horror at the mass murder of Europe’s Jews in the Shoah, awful events that underwrote the idea of a special refuge for oppressed Jews in a land where they might be sovereign. Religious justifications for Zionism also ascended in Reform, but these moved into a political space expanded by demographics and genocide. By the 1960s, the rabbis most heavily involved in that era’s progressive movements were Reform Jews who wore their Zionism proudly. Among Reform figures, Brickner was the central player in Jewish–Christian dialogues, heading the Commission for Interreligious Affairs of Reform Judaism during the 1960s and 1970s.⁹

Starting in the late 1960s, Brickner labored to maintain his dual commitments to antiwar, pro-civil rights liberalism and to Zionism, even as his

⁸ Balfour Brickner, “My Zionist Dilemmas, Twenty Years Later,” *Sh’ma*, 13 April 1990, 89; Brickner, “The Emerging Pattern of the Jewish Community,” delivered at Union of American Hebrew Congregations staff meeting, 16 June 1966, 3, nearprint box, Balfour Brickner Papers (hereafter BBP) (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati). On the gendered quality of conservative Jewish intellectual and political life in this era see, for context, Ronnie A. Grinberg, “Neither ‘Sissy’ Boy nor Patrician Man: New York Intellectuals and the Construction of American Jewish Masculinity,” *American Jewish History*, 98, 3 (July 2014), 127–51; as well as Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁹ Hummel’s work superbly chronicles the divergent work of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum to forge pro-Israel connections with Christian conservatives in this period. Hummel, chapters 4, 6. On the Reform context see David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976); Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Christian colleagues started loosening the ties binding that political package. In the 1970s, he wrote plaintively of his “zionist dilemmas” and began to call himself a “dove Zionist,” offering support for territorial compromise following Israel’s 1967 victories and criticizing the very American Jewish “establishment” in which he had long been prominent. He would conclude, sadly, “Israel has probably poisoned the well of American Christian Jewish relations.” Brickner’s own rise in the elite Reform world would stall. As liberal Zionism became a more self-aware and organized presence in American life, its political limitations became clear.¹⁰

JEWISH–CHRISTIAN DISPUTES OVER ISRAEL AFTER JUNE 1967

Progressive white Protestants had a long, complex record on the issues of Israel and Palestine. The top journals of opinion among liberal American Protestants were the *Christian Century* (CC), based in Chicago since 1884, and *Christianity and Crisis* (C&C), begun in 1941 by Reinhold Niebuhr and others who had wished to provide a Protestant alternative to the entrenched church pacifism of the CC. Many Protestant liberals had questioned the legitimacy of Zionism up through the 1940s. C&C had balanced staunch Zionist voices like that of Niebuhr – who had been a leading sponsor of the American Christian Palestine Committee, which had advocated the creation of a Jewish state during the 1940s – with views like those of Henry Sloane Coffin, who in 1949 had criticized what he termed the “fanatical” Zionism of “partially Americanized” Jews. However, Jewish–Protestant relations had warmed during the 1950s and 1960s, based on widely shared liberal political and cultural values, including increasingly broad liberal support for Israel.¹¹

The eruption of war in the Middle East in the late spring of 1967 tested those ties, as liberal American Jews fulsomely supported Israel amid threats

¹⁰ Balfour Brickner, “My Zionist Dilemmas: Two Recent Cases,” *Sh’ma*, 9 Nov. 1970, 3–5; Brickner, “Credo of a Dove Zionist,” *Worldview*, July–Aug. 1976, 4–8; “Issues confronting Jews Today: an outline of material geared specifically for a Christian audience,” 3 Dec. 1974, Folder 2, Box 7, BBP.

¹¹ Henry Sloane Coffin, “Perils to America in the New Jewish State,” *C&C*, 21 Feb. 1949, 9–10; “What Is Israel?” (editorial), *CC*, 30 Aug. 1967, 1091. On the arguments over Coffin’s article and on C&C’s stance see Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941–1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 85–86. For background see Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: NYU Press, 2012); Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), chapter 5; and Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

of war and conflict itself, at a moment when progressive Jews and Christians both were growing vocally opposed to the deepening US war in Vietnam. Starting in 1965, as US President Lyndon B. Johnson expanded his war in Vietnam, Reform leaders and liberal Protestant clergy quickly spoke out as “doves” who favored de-escalation. While some liberals stuck with Johnson, believing that their liberal values dictated unrelenting, militant anticommunism, the doves were swayed by humanitarian repulsion from imperial violence, seeing this as the more truly liberal response. In their shared peace effort, Jewish and Christian progressive clergy grew closer. In 1967, as Egypt’s leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, rhetorically threatened Israel with extinction and as he and other Arab leaders moved military forces closer to Israel, war seemed imminent, and American Jews mobilized to rally their countrymen in support of the Jewish state. Starting on 5 June, in a “Six Day War,” Israel attacked Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces and seized control of the Old City of East Jerusalem and the entire West Bank (from Jordan), the Sinai peninsula and the Gaza Strip (from Egypt), and the Golan Heights (from Syria).¹²

American Jewish liberals dialed their own rhetoric in support of Israel to maximum intensity at this moment. Americans generally accepted Israel’s view that it had struck preemptively. Yet American Jewish leaders did not concede that Israel had struck first at all, and ignored earlier aggressive actions by Israel. Rabbi Joachim Prinz, head of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and a refugee from midcentury Europe – of such impeccable liberal credentials that he had been the speaker immediately preceding Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the famous March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 – argued that the war had started many years before, manifest in “Arab aggression – an aggression which for 20 years has threatened to destroy the State of Israel.” The threat of a second Shoah became a standard refrain in American Jewish conversation about the war. Rabbi David Polish, a leading Reform Zionist thinker, in a “position paper” that he composed at the request of Jacob Weinstein, president of the CCAR, and which Weinstein distributed on 8 June, stated Arab leaders had pursued a “clearly and openly

¹² On Vietnam see Hall; and Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988). The roots of the 1967 war went back as far as 1956, when Israel’s attack on Egypt resulted in the stationing of a UN force in Sinai, effectively qualifying Egyptian sovereignty. See Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Wm Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The 1967 Arab–Israeli War: Causes and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Guy Laron, *The Six Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

proclaimed campaign of genocide against the Jewish people” that would have been “phase two of Auschwitz and Buchenwald.”¹³

Reform rabbis urged their Christian colleagues to publicly express support for Israel, with mixed results. Liberal Protestant reservations pertained less to Israeli motivations in the war itself than to the land issues that the war’s outcome transformed. On 1 June, four days before hostilities commenced, the leaders of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations – Reform Judaism’s nationwide synagogue association – advised all Reform notables that “it is imperative to interpret to Christian religious leaders ... that Israel is already the victim of an act of aggression and that Arab threats to destroy her cannot be countenanced by the nations of the world and the conscience of mankind,” and distributed a suggested “Declaration of Conscience” that Christian friends might sign or use. It stated, “As Christians bidden to pursue peace and to fight evil, we cannot remain silent in the face of threats by Arab leaders to destroy the people of the State of Israel,” and closed, in a clear reference to the passive responsibility for the Shoah that many imputed to the churches, “Before God, let us not *again* be guilty of silence” (emphasis added). In October, Brickner would itemize the diverse responses from Protestant and Catholic clergy in the United States, finding evidence of pro-Israel statements in localities around the country but a lack of enthusiasm for Israeli actions among national Christian leaders. He noted unhappily that the executive committee of the National Council of Churches (NCC), the headquarters of mainline Protestant ecumenism in the United States, on 7 July adopted a resolution that simultaneously defended Israel’s legitimacy and spoke of Israel’s obligations toward Palestinian refugees. Most troublesome to Brickner, the NCC statement objected to Israel’s “unilateral retention of lands she has occupied since June 5.”¹⁴

¹³ “Statement by Dr. Joachim Prinz, Chairman, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations,” 6 June 1967, press release, Conference of Presidents; David Polish, “Position Paper on the Mid-East Crisis,” sent by Jacob J. Weinstein, CCAR president, “Dear Colleague,” 8 June 1967. Both in Folder 6, Box 21, Alexander M. Schindler Papers (American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati). On American Jewish responses to the war more generally see Joshua Michael Zeitz, “‘If I Am Not for Myself ...’: The American Jewish Establishment in the Aftermath of the Six-Day War,” *American Jewish History*, 88, 2 (June 2000), 253–86; Lawrence Grossman, “Transformation through Crisis: The American Jewish Committee and the Six-Day War,” *American Jewish History*, 86, 1 (March 1998), 27–54; Menachem Kaufman, “From Philanthropy to Commitment: The Six Day War and the United Jewish Appeal,” *Journal of Israeli History*, 15, 2 (1994), 161–91; and Sara Yael Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath and Irving Jay Fain, for UAHC and CSA, to Congregation Presidents et al., 1 June 1967, and “Declaration of Conscience,” both in packet of materials for Conference of Presidents, National Emergency Leadership Conference, Washington,

In the *CC* and *C&C*, Brickner, Polish, and other pro-Israel voices mingled with a range of cautions directed at Israel. Niebuhr wrote in *C&C* in late June that “little Israel” remained “David” to the “Goliath” of the massive Arab world. John Bennett, the journal’s chairman, opened his contribution in the same issue by noting, “The fact that many of those most opposed to the war in Vietnam have favored American action to defend Israel has elicited considerable comment.” Bennett saw the two situations differently, stating, “Two weeks ago it seemed that Israel was threatened with extermination. No one threatens the extermination of South Vietnam, though we are destroying a large part of it.” Bennett and Niebuhr, along with King and other leading Protestants, had placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* on 4 June taking Israel’s side as the Middle East teetered on the edge of war. In late July, the *CC* editorial embraced the Israeli narrative of 1967, deriding efforts “to rewrite the historical facts and brand Israel the aggressor,” while also accusing the Arab powers of trying “to execute a ruthless war of extermination against Israel.” However, it then insisted on returning to a longer timeframe:

the history of this conflict is more than three months old and includes something more than Arab threats against Israel. The longer history includes the usurpation of lands that belonged to Arabs, the flight of those uprooted and terrorized Arabs, the years in which they languished in refugee camps. This, too, was a gross injustice ... the Jewish argument that the Arab states could have done something about the sufferings of the refugees, that they used them instead as political pawns, that Israel was preoccupied with absorption of Jewish refugees is immaterial. These arguments all have their merit but they do not rectify the original injustice.

In 1967, such statements about the founding of the State of Israel were totally unacceptable to Zionists, liberal or otherwise.¹⁵

The articles in the *CC* described a wide gap in opinion, with some writers questioning the Israeli stance on newly conquered territories and Jerusalem in particular, and others accusing critics of Israel of willingness to abet a new Shoah. Willard Oxtoby of Yale University’s religious studies faculty argued that Christians who had blanched at Jewish calls “to assert ... that the Israeli attack was not aggression but legitimate self-defense” had not comprehended the religious significance of Israel to American Jews. Jewish “peoplehood” was central to Judaism, he explained, and this peoplehood was tied firmly to the existence of the State of Israel. However, Oxtoby lamented

DC, 7–8 June 1967, nearprint, BBP; Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Commission on Interfaith Activities, “Here and There #9,” Oct. 1967, Folder 16, Box 15, BBP.

¹⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, “David and Goliath,” *C&C*, 26 June 1967, 141–42; John C. Bennett, “Further Thoughts on the Middle East,” *C&C*, 26 June 1967, 142; “Wise Men in the Middle East” (editorial), *CC*, 26 July 1967, 955. On the complexity of King’s views on Israel/Palestine see Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*, chapter 4.

“that anything short of total commitment to the rightness of Israel’s cause is interpreted as anti-Semitism.” J. A. Sanders of Union Theological Seminary shared his complaint, writing, “We are being given the alternatives of supporting Israel or of being called anti-Semitic.” He contended “that successful military venturing is not to be rewarded by territorial gain.” Sanders seemed sympathetic to comparisons between South Vietnam and Israel, suggesting that both had been created through US power and that neither could boast democratic origins. “The U.S. could not support a plebiscite in 1948 in Palestine for the same reason that it could not support a plebiscite in Vietnam in 1956,” he wrote – “neither Israel nor ‘South Vietnam’ would have come into existence had the plebiscite been held.” Polish also emphasized the centrality of peoplehood to Jewish religion, writing that “theological conversation outside the reality of a living Jewish people is meaningless. Dialogue that does not assume the right to live of a Jewish community in Israel and in the world is mischievous and subversive,” and he implicitly equated this “right to live ... in Israel” with Jewish statehood, one whose physical boundaries appeared subject to expansion.¹⁶

Brickner, even more clearly than Polish, tied Israel’s new lands to the question of Israel’s existence per se. In a September 1967 article in *CC&C* titled “No Ease in Zion for Us,” Brickner criticized Christian reservations about Israel’s recent actions and argued that possession of the biblical Land of Israel – all of it – was essential to Jewish identity. “Talk to Christians about the June, 1967, war or the status of Jerusalem or the future of the Arab refugees and one is likely to hear the statement: ‘Well, you know, I am not sure modern Israel should have existed in the first place,’” he wrote. He linked questions about any of Israel’s territorial possessions to reservations about Israel’s right to exist as a state. Further, he argued that Christian questions about Israel’s existence cut to the heart of Jewish identity. “Remove a man’s ego and you destroy him as a man,” he said. “Rob a person of his identity and you destroy his ego, his ability to say to himself and others: ‘This is what and who I am.’” Brickner then argued that disagreements over the war “revealed the different emphasis Jews and Christians place on the theological notions of universalism and particularism.” These two impulses were balanced in Jewish tradition. The ethnic state and the soil of Israel were inseparable from Jewish identity and religion. Christians, whose religious traditions were not similarly place-bound, found this hard to understand, he contended. Thus Brickner rebuked Christian

¹⁶ Willard G. Oxtoby, “Christians and the Mideast Crisis,” *CC*, 26 July 1967, 961, 962, 963, 964; J. A. Sanders, “Urbis and Orbis: Jerusalem Today,” *CC*, 26 July 1967, 967, 969; David Polish, “Why American Jews Are Disillusioned,” *CC*, 26 July 1967, 965, 966, 967. See Noam Pianko, *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

opposition to Israeli possession of East Jerusalem, which Sanders had called “annexation.” He wrote in sorrow, “Few indeed have been the Christian voices supporting the view that Jerusalem has been reunified and not annexed.” Two years later, Brickner would lament that a further NCC statement “remains essentially a neutralist document,” and he would highlight for his Jewish correspondents a line from that statement “which should be of particular interest to Jews, prone as we are indissolubly to link place, faith and people: ‘Christian theology holds that no particular place ... nation, people, ideology, philosophy, theology or institution ... is absolute, but all are relative to God’s universal mercy and judgment.’” He would observe, “This short paragraph sharply dramatizes the differences between us.”¹⁷

Bennett wrote a “response” to “No Ease in Zion for Us,” accompanying it in print, in which he rejected Brickner’s effort to tar all critics of Israel with the brush of anti-Zionism. “Christians should not pronounce on what is essential to what Mr. Brickner calls ‘Jewish peoplehood.’ Whether occupation of a particular territory is essential to ‘Jewish peoplehood’ is for Jews to say.” Perhaps “the occupation of Jerusalem as a whole” was part of that essence as Jews saw it. However, Bennett’s bottom line was this: “We cannot proceed as though Israel as a modern nation has a biblical deed to Jerusalem as so much territory.” He was “baffled” that a liberal like Brickner could assert that the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem was not “annexation,” writing, “I can see no difference in terms of justice between the annexation of the Old City and other territorial gains resulting from Israel’s victory.” Bennett found Brickner “too partisan and too grudging” in his attitude toward the Palestinian refugees and concluded that even pro-Israel Christians simply “cannot be as uncritical of the policies of a victorious Israel as Mr. Brickner seems to be.” Bennett embraced the role of universalist that Brickner had assigned to Christians in this dialogue. At this point Bennett was little removed from the editors of the *CC*, who stated in August, “If Israel is a state, then it is bound by the same standards applicable to other states.” They acknowledged the history of Christian oppression toward Jews but could not turn this admission into a moral blank check for Israel. “Christians ... owe to Israel – the faith, the heritage, the community – a debt they can never fully discharge,” they said, “but history has not made the State of Israel the collector of that debt.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Balfour Brickner, “No Ease in Zion for Us,” *C&C*, 18 Sept. 1967, 201, 202; Brickner, “Here and There #10,” Dec. 1969, 4, Folder 16, Box 15, BBP, 3.

¹⁸ John C. Bennett, “A Response to Rabbi Brickner,” *C&C*, 18 Sept. 1967, 204, 205; “What Is Israel?”

PEOPLEHOOD AND PARTICULARISM

Brickner persistently hammered the themes of Jewish peoplehood, particularism, and sacred ground when addressing Christian audiences in the coming years. In May 1968, at a conference organized, in part, by the Philadelphia Region of the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), he reiterated the religious importance of Israel for American Jews. “I will admit ... that a Jew can live a Judaism without finding any religious meaning in the land of Israel,” he stated,

though I do not believe that a Jew can either live or feel a complete Judaism with his faith so truncated. A Jew who tries to express Judaism with the complex of land and people excised [excised?] from that Judaism is living, in my judgment, as a Jewish and a Judaic cripple.

Israel was “the place where the faith was laminated to the people through the Covenant.” He said that American Jews were newly “aware of some of your own personal and theological ‘hang-ups’ about Israel. You have them and I know you have them.” He meant that some Christians had a “problem ... fitting Israel into Christianity’s scheme of things.” (Clearly, he was not addressing those evangelical Protestants who continued to see a divine force working in the contemporary Middle East.) Brickner then returned to his theme of peoplehood, saying, “We are not a race; neither are we a religion. We are, at core, an amalgam of ethnicity formed in large part by the long history we carry on our backs,” and concluded, “You cannot say the word ‘Jew’ without using the word ‘history’ in some way, and that history begins and flowers in a land which is integral to it.”¹⁹

Brickner lamented what he saw as excessive Protestant sympathy for Israel’s Arab enemies. In 1969, speaking before the NCCJ, he recalled that, not long before, “the new openness in Christian–Jewish relations had been touted by interreligious leaders as the eve of the dawn of a new day,” but he now thought that was all gone, and “American Jewry is depressed.” He was willing to criticize Israel, he explained.

American Jews are not Israeli nationals. Certainly if I can – as I do – reject the philosophy of “my country, right or wrong, my country” when it applies to Vietnam, I cannot refrain from criticizing Israel when I feel she is in error. I live in the diaspora, not in an exile. Most American Jews feel this way.

¹⁹ Balfour Brickner, “A Biblical Basis for the Modern State of Israel,” for symposium on Palestine Today, New York Theological Seminary, 16 April 1968; Brickner, “The Religious Meaning of the Land of Israel: A Jewish View,” *The Dialogue: A Project of the National Conference of Christians & Jews*, 37 (Oct. 1968), 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. Both in Folder 1, Box 7, BBP.

However, he saw liberal Protestant leaders as biased against Israel. “‘Why,’ I ask myself, ‘does the Christian conscience seem so clouded on this issue?’” Brickner warned his fellow Reform Jews that the status of Jerusalem looked to be a point of sharp disagreement between Christians and Jews in the years to come.²⁰

Trying to understand the Protestant establishment’s criticisms of Israel, Brickner saw three causes, only one of them new. First, “Protestantism is overwhelmingly supportive of the United Nations and has invested much in an international posture.” The UN chastised Israel with increasing frequency, and for many Protestants, defying the UN was painful. Second, “In the eyes of most Protestants, Israel has wrong[ed] the Arab refugees and refuses to right that wrong.” This was a matter on which Brickner did not linger. Third, “The Urban crisis has become ‘Christianity’s Zionism.’ It has their top priority. This means that they might be unwilling to take pro Israel stances if such support further risks alienating the black community.” He saw African Americans becoming more radical, more critical of Israel, and more sympathetic to the Arabs. The 1967 statement by the left-wing National Conference for New Politics, at the behest of its Black Caucus, that Israel had just waged an “imperialistic” war against its neighbors had received wide recognition. Black activists in the late 1960s expressed hostility toward Israel with increased frequency. One leading figure, Stokely Carmichael, went so far as to say in 1968, “We have begun to see the evil of Zionism and we will fight to wipe it out wherever it exists.” This emerging tendency, combined with mounting conflicts between Black activists, increasingly concerned with African American autonomy and ethnic power, and Jews (particularly teachers), persuaded many Jewish liberals like Brickner that an anti-Jewish mood in general was waxing among African Americans. He concluded that this was an additional factor influencing white Protestant alienation from Israel.²¹

Brickner deepened his interventions in the dynamics of Zionist pride and black power, in complex and ambivalent ways. In 1969 he defended Israel’s hold on Jerusalem and also officiated at the Freedom Seder as a liberal tentatively embracing leftist militancy in the name of Judaism. The “Liberation

²⁰ Rabbi Balfour Brickner, “The Impact of the Current Middle East Situation on American Christian–Jewish Relations,” National Conference of Christians and Jews, 27 Jan. 1969, Folder 18, Box 15, BBP; Brickner for Commission on Interfaith Activities (CIA), “Here and There #11, Featuring: An Interpretation of the Jerusalem Issue as a Possible Cause of Future Christian–Jewish Tension,” Sept. 1971, Folder 15, Box 15, BBP.

²¹ Brickner, “Here and There #10,” 5; Simon Hall, *Peace and Freedom: The Civil Rights and Antiwar Movements of the 1960s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 114; Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2018), 160.

Haggadah” that the Jewish radical Arthur Waskow wrote for the occasion celebrated not only Mohandas Gandhi and King, but also John Brown and Eldridge Cleaver. In his reflections on that Passover event, Brickner expressed reservations over the endorsement of revolutionary violence on the left, noting Waskow’s percipience in suggesting in the Haggadah that Jews should “inquire what our ... fathers Moses and Joshua intended to do to our brothers the Canaanites.” Brickner, however, along with many younger Jewish Americans, used black power as a new justification for Jewish power in Israel/Palestine. Young Jewish militants combined leftist social critique with specifically Jewish ethnic and religious content. Known alternatively as “new Jews” and radical Jews, they attacked the Jewish communal “establishment” as affluent, well-placed assimilationists. Brickner followed some of the young militants in seeing the affirmation of ethnic pride as a new reason for Jews to be Zionists. “Jewish young people,” he said in November 1969, “are beginning to learn that if: ‘Black is Beautiful,’ Jewish (and that means Israel) is too.”²²

However, he disputed the growing leftist chorus, undergirded by racial politics, chanting that Israel was an “‘an Imperialist nation’ or at least ‘a lackey of the Imperialist west.’” Brickner feared that too many of the Jewish young would fall prey to the “ideological trap” that put Israel on the wrong side of world politics. He defined imperialism in a way that excluded Israel, writing, “An Imperialist nation is one that exploits another nation for economic, political and/or social advantage.” He saw Israel exploiting neither Palestinians nor other Arab peoples. Of colonialism he said nothing. He acknowledged, “Some American Blacks feel they share with the Arabs their poverty and a sense of disenfranchisement. Thus there grows the supposition that to be a Black means to be pro-Arab and anti-Israel.” Brickner recommended that Jewish educators teach students about “the tragic history of Arab–Black relationships, particularly in Africa.” He spoke of Arab enslavement of Africans and of Muslim violence against black Africans in southern Sudan, and he urged the teachers to make that history known, in order to disrupt the easy alignment of people of color with the Arab cause.²³

²² Balfour Brickner, “Notes on a Freedom Seder,” *Reconstructionist*, 13 June 1969, reprinted in Michael E. Staub, ed., *The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook* (Waltham, MA: University Press of New England, 2004), 276–81, 277, 281; Brickner, “Helping Our Children Identify with Israel,” paper read before Teachers Institute, Baltimore, Maryland, Nov. 1969, BBP; both in Box 7, Folder 4, 1. See Rossinow, “The 1900-Year Crisis”; Sleeper and Mintz, *The New Jews*; Porter and Dreier, *Jewish Radicalism*; Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics*; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black–Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black–Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

²³ Brickner, “Helping Our Children Identify with Israel,” 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9.

“ZIONIST DILEMMAS” IN THE 1970S

In 1970, a skirmish within organized American Jewry triggered a lasting change in Brickner’s orientation to the Middle East. The pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), seeking to develop programming concerning the region, arranged a US speaking tour for Uri Avnery, a maverick figure in Israel’s public life. As a teenager in Palestine in the late 1930s, Avnery had joined the rightist Irgun Zvai Leumi militia, and starting in the early 1940s he had carved an idiosyncratic path as a journalist and activist, fighting for Israel while displaying “Canaanite” sympathies, denoting a small Israeli tendency that discerned in the new state a reborn “Hebrew” nation, rather than the political focus for a worldwide Jewish nation. By the late 1960s, Avnery had become a leading light of the Israeli left; his book *Israel without Zionists*, released in 1968, would become a foundational text of “post-Zionism.” He argued for the creation of a Palestinian entity of some kind in the West Bank and Gaza and looked toward an ultimate Israeli–Palestinian federation. Most of the thirty stops on his American itinerary were planned for universities, where campus Hillel centers would host him during the fall. Brickner, who had FOR connections, planned to coordinate public events for Avnery in Washington.²⁴

The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith (ADL) – Hillel’s parent organization – learned of Avnery’s upcoming tour, and circulated a memorandum stating that Avnery “advocates the abolition of Zionist ideology in Israel, its institutions and traditional Jewish aspirations,” and counseling “that Jewish organizations not sponsor or co-sponsor his appearance and not engage in public debate with him.” Avnery later recounted, “When I arrived in New York, I was informed that 29 of the lectures had been cancelled. The sole rabbi who did not cancel, Balfour Brickner, showed me a secret communication of the ‘Anti-Defamation League’ that proscribed my lectures.”²⁵

²⁴ Uri Avnery, *Israel without Zionists: A Plea for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1968). For a later key text see Boas Evron, *Jewish State or Israeli Nation?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Also see Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Hanan Harif, “The Radical Israeli Intellectual You’ve Never Heard About,” *Tel Aviv Review of Books*, Spring 2019, at www.tarb.co.il/boas-evron-the-maverick-israeli-intellectual-youve-never-heard-about; and Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge* (London: Verso, 2014).

²⁵ Uri Avnery, “Two Knights and a Dragon,” *Antiwar.com*, 6 Oct. 2007, at <https://original.antiwar.com/avnery/2007/10/06/two-knights-and-a-dragon>. Abraham J. Foxman, Anti-Defamation League, memorandum to ADL regional offices, 18 Sept. 1970, attached to Allan Brick, Fellowship of Reconciliation, to Board of Directors, Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, 23 Oct. 1970, in Box 11, Arthur Ocean Waskow Papers (American Jewish Historical Society, Center for Jewish History, New York).

Brickner would never contemplate embracing Avnery's post-Zionism, but he clearly thought it worth exposing American Jews to critical Israeli thinkers, and he took up this contretemps in his article "My Zionist Dilemmas," in November 1970's premiere issue of *Sh'ma*, the creation of Eugene Borowitz, a distinguished Reform theologian. *Sh'ma* offered a platform for left-liberal religious Jewish thinkers at a moment when *Commentary* magazine, created in the 1940s by the American Jewish Committee and long the prestige journal for Jewish (secular) liberals, was turning toward neoconservatism. "Years ago things were simple," Brickner began. "I could love God, serve the United States and be a Zionist all at the same time. Today nothing integrates easily."²⁶

Brickner wrote, "I love the State of Israel but I cannot stand some of the tactics of its supporters." He called the ADL's initiative against Avnery "a particularly disgusting example of the kind of 'adhere-to-the-party-line' approach which has become standard in the American Jewish community." He did not criticize Israel. His thinking about the Middle East was showing signs of flux, yet he said nothing about the 1967 war or the Occupied Territories, displacing all his discontent onto the distasteful tactics of the pro-Israel American Jewish establishment (of which he remained a member). Efforts to police or limit free discussion among Jews appeared as his true grievance. While it is easy to imagine that this rankled him, it seems out of proportion with his profound statements of alienation. He wrote of his "suffering" and concluded, "mostly I feel very lonely." He did, however, repeat his refrain that American Jews should not fall into line behind Israeli government positions, asking, "Are conditions ... still so tenuous for Jews ... that the counsel of prudent silence is the best wisdom that can be offered?" Another factor feeding Brickner's new anguish was the increasingly close alignment of Israel with the USA under the leadership of Republican President Richard Nixon, who had taken office in 1969 and continued America's war in Vietnam, welcoming expressions of support in that misadventure from Israeli leaders. Brickner bewailed what he perceived as the reluctance of

²⁶ Brickner, "My Zionist Dilemmas: Two Recent Cases," 3. See Justin Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Benjamin Balint, *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine That Transformed the Jewish Left into the Neoconservative Right* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010); John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1994* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); and Mark Gerson, *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1996).

American Jews to denounce this entente, and he mused in 1971, "I think I know why ... the establishment types didn't want to upset Mr. Nixon. After all, 'He's the best thing Israel has right now.'"²⁷

Accentuating his new critique of the Jewish establishment in the United States, Brickner soon began brusquely preaching a revival of universalism to American Jewish organizations, even as he continued to rebuke Christians for failing to respect Jewish particularism. In the summer of 1972, he traveled to Los Angeles for a role as a featured speaker at the plenary session of the meeting of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC). The theme of this plenary was "Particularism vs. Universalism in American Jewish Life Today." Brickner accused Israelis of stoking an American Jewish preoccupation with "particularistic internal Jewish survival matters." He reasserted his long-standing liberal indictment of the "plague ... of poverty, illiteracy, injustice, drugs, dehumanization experienced every day" by too many urbanites. Yet he stressed his criticism of the anti-universalistic force he now saw in the pull of pro-Israel politics. In critical tones he asserted that "we have made Israel the number one item on our agenda." He asked, "What are we? Psychologically displaced Israelis, living in American exile, or are we secure American Jews, able to keep a foot of allegiance to Israel in that part of the world, even as we keep the other foot of independence and loyalty securely planted here?" As of 1972, he concluded that it was "a mistake to make Hebrew or Israel the center and core of Jewish religious education." Reflecting on the meaning of Israel in his own life, Brickner mused, "We who are over 25 carved from the holocaust a highly particularized nationalism. We called it Zionism. It changed our lives." Now he worried over the damage that Zionism might have done to Jewish ethics and social commitment.²⁸

Brickner's ties to an interreligious peace movement furnished him with new collaborators on the Middle East, the most important of whom was Allan Solomonow, who ran the Jewish Peace Fellowship. Solomonow secured modest grants from the American Friends Service Committee to fund the Committee on New Alternatives in the Middle East (CONAME), a group of intellectuals, most of whom were Jewish, including Noam Chomsky,

²⁷ Brickner, "My Zionist Dilemmas: Two Recent Cases," 5, 4; Balfour Brickner, "American Jews, Israel and Public Policy," *Worldview*, Jan. 1972, 5; Brickner, "On Calley ... and Silence," *American Report*, 28 May 1971, 5. See Noam Kochavi, *Nixon and Israel: Forging a Conservative Partnership* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009); and Natan Aridan, *Advocating for Israel: Diplomats and Lobbyists from Truman to Nixon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), chapter 9.

²⁸ Rabbi Balfour Brickner, presentation, "'If I Am Not for Myself ...': Particularism vs. Universalism in American Jewish Life Today," papers from the plenary session of National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, 28 June–2 July 1972, Los Angeles, 11, 13, 14, 15, Folder 2, Box 15, BBP.

Irene Gendzier, and Robert Jay Lifton, although CONAME was not officially a Jewish (or pacifist) organization. CONAME did not take a position on the fate of the Occupied Territories and it was neither a Zionist nor an anti-Zionist organization. Solomonow, however, expressed his perspective in a specifically Jewish key, stating that “the Middle East is that arena of the world wherein Jews shall make it known what it means to be a Jew.”²⁹

Such new efforts reflected growing ferment and impatience over Israel’s stance toward the Palestinians and American Jewish communal leadership’s fidelity toward Israeli policy. That ferment was centered among young people whose formative experiences had occurred in the antiwar, anti-imperialist environment of the Vietnam era, but had spread to some older figures like Brickner. The most significant Jewish institutional outgrowth of this environment was Breira, a political group formed in 1973 with Robert Loeb, previously Solomonow’s assistant in staffing CONAME, as executive secretary. Many well-known Reform figures joined, including Brickner, Borowitz, and Prinz. The radical left held no allure for such individuals as these rabbis, who merely sought common cause with more ideologically venturesome Jewish youth. *Breira* was Hebrew for “alternative” or “choice” – “Breira means alternative,” read many of the group’s documents – and played on the Israeli saying *Ein breira*, meaning “There is no alternative,” traditionally used to justify aggressive security or military measures.³⁰

Brickner, representing the older, liberal element in Breira, intensified his two-sided course in the 1970s, joining in criticism of American Jewish leadership while still summoning Christians to support Israel. On 6 October 1973, Egypt attacked Israel, seeking to reassert its own military credibility and to regain territory it had lost in 1967. This date was the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur, which earned this conflict the name of the Yom Kippur War among Jews. Israel, caught unawares, was rocked badly, but ultimately turned the military tide with a huge infusion of material aid from the United States. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Brickner surveyed “Christian Reactions to the Middle East Situation” and pronounced them far better than those of six years earlier. Protestant and Catholic leaders across the United States now spoke out in support of Israel and against Egypt’s actions. Soon he would ask in the *CC*, “does it make a moral difference

²⁹ Allan Solomonow to Kivie Kaplan, 14 April 1971; Solomonow, “The Jewish Peace Fellowship: Alternatives in the Middle East Packet: An Introduction,” n.d., both in Box 13, Kivie Kaplan Papers (hereafter KKP) (American Jewish Archive, Cincinnati).

³⁰ See Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Staub, *Torn at the Roots*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

who starts a war? If the Arabs aggress, as they did in the Yom Kippur war, and Israel resists and pushes them back, does Israel then have a moral obligation after the war to tip its hat, apologize and withdraw?" Yet immediately before this rhetorical query about the grave significance of military aggression, he had appeared to dismiss concerns over such actions, writing, "Christians can stop reciting the hypocritical cant about the terrible evil of retaining territories gained by conquest in war." He might consider supporting an Israeli cession, for pragmatic reasons or to secure justice for the Palestinians, of some of the territories Israel had seized in 1967, but he was not willing to say that Israel had no right to keep its 1967 conquests. He certainly did not wish to hear this from Christians. Indeed, for the *CC*'s Protestant readers, Brickner offered a narrow reading of the more pro-Israel response by Christians to the 1973 war, as against that of 1967. "Only Israel's stubborn refusal to die," he wrote, "and the obvious record of Arab intransigence, terror and ... blackmail, have driven Christians to a reevaluation." He showed little trust in current Christian expressions of solidarity with Israel.³¹

ATTACKS FROM THE CHRISTIAN LEFT AND THE JEWISH RIGHT

Even as the 1973 war raged, an intervention in public debate from within the Christian left hastened Brickner's disaffection from Jewish-Christian dialogue around the Middle East. This was a caustic speech that Father Daniel Berrigan, the radical pacifist Catholic priest, delivered to the meeting of the Association of Arab American University Graduates on 19 October, in Washington. Berrigan thundered against Israel in the terms of the anti-imperialist left, calling it a "settler state" like South Africa and the United States and alleging that, as such, it characteristically sought "a biblical justification for crimes against humanity." He stated that while Christians "had known criminal Christian communities" many times in the past, before Israel began a program of what he considered organized ethnic violence against Palestinians, "we had never known a criminal Jewish community." Berrigan recalled, "The Jews arose from the holocaust, a cause of universal joy; but" – he lamented – "the Jews arose like warriors, armed to the teeth ... Then, they flexed their muscles, like the goyim, the idolators ... like Babylon and Egypt and Assyria." Israel "has not passed from a [dispossessed] people to a democratic state, as

³¹ Rabbi Balfour Brickner for the CIA, "Christian Reactions to the Middle East Situation," Nov. 1973, 31; Brickner, "What Christians Should Be Saying to the Arab World," *CC*, 16 Jan. 1974, rpt. by Commission on Interfaith Activities, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, nearprint, BBP.

she would claim,” he charged; “she has passed from a dispossessed people to an imperial entity.” He asserted that Israel would be “the repository, and finally the tomb, of the Jewish soul.” He identified with the Jewish tradition of prophets outcast. “In America,” he said, “in my church, I am a Jew.”³²

Jews, including liberals and radicals, reacted with disgust, and focused on what they saw as Berrigan’s obtuseness regarding Jewishness. Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, president of the American Jewish Congress and a widely read author on Zionism and American Jewish politics, called Berrigan an anti-Semite. Bad Jewish leaders, Berrigan seemed to say, had alienated Jews from their people’s legacy of collective homelessness, which Berrigan romanticized. “Daniel Berrigan,” he said, “has no patience with the Jewish community, and judges it to be horribly sinful for living with some semblance of normalcy in the world.” Hertzberg went on, “Peace will be made in the Middle East when neither party to the conflict believes that all right is on its side.” June Stillman, a former student of Berrigan’s, wrote, “I think ... that the biggest problem in your speech, Dan, comes from your close attachment to the wandering Jew,” and asked him to understand, “*To be Jewish is not an equation leading to the condition of suffering*, although humanity has often placed us in such circumstances.”³³

Brickner, while rehearsing well-used arguments that Israel was not an imperialist state, also took this occasion to express disillusionment over his previous hopes for interreligious peace work. He revealed that when he had gotten involved on the Vietnam issue, “many of our friends in the Jewish community warned us that those with whom we were about to associate were neither true allies nor friends.” His Protestant and Catholic comrades were driven by “Christian pacifism, reinforced by strong universalistic ideologies.” Of the antiwar Jews, said Brickner, “Most of us were not pacifists and if the truth be told, large portions of particularistic-type thinking were to be found intermixed with our universalist dreams. Most of us were either long-time Zionists or strongly pro-Israel.” Those who had cautioned him had predicted, “The

³² Father Daniel Berrigan, “The Middle East: Sane Conduct?”, *American Report*, 29 Oct. 1973, reprinted in *The Great Berrigan Debate* (Nyack, NY: CONAME, 1974), 1–8, 3, 4, 5, 6. *American Report* was the publication of CALCAV, which by this time had shortened its name to CALC, to indicate its intention to work on issues beyond Vietnam. On Arab American activism around the Palestine issue at this time see Pamela Penneck, *The Rise of the Arab American Left: Activists, Allies, and Their Fight against Imperialism and Racism, 1960s–1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.–Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

³³ Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, “Response to Dan Berrigan,” *American Report*, Nov. 12, 1973, reprinted in *Great Berrigan Debate*, 9–12, 10, 12; June Stillman, *American Report*, 10 Dec. 1973, reprinted in *Great Berrigan Debate*, 19–20, 20, original emphasis.

time would come” when the Christian left would turn on Israel. Now that time had arrived. Zionist hawks would easily link Jewish doves, Brickner implied, to Christian radicals like Berrigan, and that would place the doves in a predicament. “If advocating the ‘dove’ position within the ranks of American Jewry was hard before the war, and before Dan Berrigan, it is now infinitely more difficult – maybe for a while, impossible.” Solomonow reproved Brickner for, in effect, issuing “a precondition of the Jewish community for ecumenical coalition; namely, silence on the Middle East” – silence from Christians, that is. In notes to himself in December 1974, Brickner again ventilated his intermittent regret over the Jewish particularism that he usually affirmed to Christians. He concluded, “Maybe we are the spreaders of the poison of separatism (of course, in the name of pluralism) and divisiveness (of course, in the [the name] of self survival).”³⁴

Brickner’s estrangement from the American Jewish establishment inched onward, as he struggled to walk a line between criticism of Israel and leftist refrains that he could not abide. He shrank from rejecting Israel’s territorial gains of June 1967, even as he came to see 1967 as a turning point toward Israel’s declension. In 1975 he wrote to Rabbi Joseph Glazer of the CCAR, a critic of Breira from its right, “I DO NOT approve all of Breira’s statements ... but I do support the thrust of Breira – which is to bring some alternative thinking to the Jewish establishment line.” Deploying a favorite theme, Brickner added, “The openness that exists in Israel ought to exist equally in the ranks of American Jewish life.” He conveyed to Robert Loeb some exceptions that he took to a recent statement by Breira, writing, “I cannot and do not agree” that Israel should, as the statement had demanded, “give up the territories occupied in the 1967 war” if this included the whole Golan Heights, some of which Brickner thought Israel had a right to retain in order to guard against Syrian attack. He also questioned the document’s endorsement of a Palestinian state on the condition that this future state “undertake to” establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel. “Those two words stick in my throat,” said Brickner. “Why the qualification? Why not insist in your call that the Palestinian state indeed recognize, without the ‘loophole’ language?”³⁵

³⁴ Rabbi Balfour Brickner, “‘With Friends Like These ...’,” *American Report*, 10 Dec. 1973, reprinted in *Great Berrigan Debate*, 13–16, 13, 15, 16; Allan Solomonow, “Loving Dan and Israel,” in *Great Berrigan Debate*, 30–35, 33; Brickner, “Issues Confronting Jews Today.” Solomonow noted that some in attendance at Berrigan’s speech had walked out, evidently unhappy that he also had criticized Arab violence.

³⁵ Brickner to Rabbi Joseph [Glazer], 20 May 1975; Balfour Brickner to Bob [Loeb], 5 May 1975, both in Folder 11, Box 1, Trude Weiss-Rosmarin Papers (American Jewish Archive, Cincinnati).

Perhaps further influencing Brickner to restrain his movement leftward was the uproar over the UN General Assembly's Resolution 3379, adopted on 10 November 1975, which concluded "that zionism," like the apartheid system then prevailing in South Africa, "is a form of racism and racial discrimination." Arriving at a moment when American Jews were torn over the question of communal unity regarding Israel, the resolution worked to hold them together and to place the Jewish left on the defensive. Americans generally found the equation of Zionism with racism hard to understand. The US ambassador to the UN, Daniel Moynihan, lacerated what he considered a hypocritical Third World majority of member states who had little moral standing from which to berate the cause of Zionism. Israel's ambassador at the UN, Chaim Herzog, advanced the refrain that Zionism was a "national liberation movement," much like those that had resulted in the independence of the postcolonial states who had indicted his country. Pro-Israel stalwarts found in this controversy an excellent organizing opportunity and seized the opening to reassemble, at least momentarily, the old Jewish-Christian base of support for Israel. Jewish groups organized pro-Israel gatherings around the United States. Brickner, echoing Herzog's formula, authored a handbook on Zionism that the NCCJ published.³⁶

Following this juncture, Breira found itself under attack from more conservative Jewish voices. Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America – traditionally a ubiquitous organization in Jewish life and one to avoid such controversy – fired the first salvo against the dissidents. It ran an item in its *Update* deriding Breira's "defeatism" and linking it to the old anti-Zionist group the American Council for Judaism. This prompted a letter of rebuke from Prinz on Breira's behalf. More noticed was the long critique, *Breira: Counsel for Judaism*, written by the young political scientist Rael Jean Isaac and widely distributed in 1977 as a pamphlet by a previously obscure group, Americans for a Safe Israel. Close on its heels came another treatment, by Joseph Shattan, in *Commentary*. Isaac and Shattan charged that Breira was a tool, witting or not, of Palestinian radicals hostile to Israel's survival. Isaac

³⁶ UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, "On Eliminating All Forms of Racial Discrimination," 10 Nov. 1975, link available at the website of the Economic Cooperation Foundation, <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/1320>; Balfour Brickner, *Zionism, Judaism, and Racism: A Study Guide* (New York: National Conference of Christian and Jews, n.d. [1976]). See Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gil Troy, *Moynihan's Moment: America's Fight against Zionism as Racism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Marjorie N. Feld, *Nations Divided: American Jews and the Struggle over Apartheid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*; and Fischbach, *Movement and the Middle East*.

recounted a chain of associations linking Breira to CONAME and various leftist circles in tones of shocking revelation.³⁷

Now Jewish publications became briefly gripped with debates over Breira's intentions, effects, and legitimacy, and Jewish liberals took sides; conservatives had little to feel conflicted about and shunned the group. Prinz left, although Brickner induced him temporarily to refrain from doing so. Alexander Schindler, the liberal Reform rabbi who in 1977 became chair of the Conference of Presidents, urged toleration of Breira in the name of Jewish unity. He called the campaign against Breira a "witch hunt," and he favored keeping the critics of Israel's stance on the Occupied Territories inside the communal tent, even though this meant legitimizing dissent. Albert Vorspan, Brickner's longtime collaborator in Reform's Social Action apparatus, rejected both Brickner's position and, by implication, Schindler's with a public explanation of "Why I Have Not Joined Breira." Vorspan called himself a "dove" and a "liberal" who nonetheless blamed the Arabs for continued conflict with Israel. He concluded that Breira, too hard on Israel and too easy on its foes, was "more a part of the problem than it is its solution."³⁸

Within Breira, money troubles, disputes over structure and internal processes, and divisions over the group's purpose became hopelessly entangled with nearly all-consuming efforts to rebut cascading accusations that the group was doing the work of Israel's enemies. Loeb, the main staffer, compounded Breira's difficulties when he disseminated a detailed account from Mennonite church personnel of "Israeli violation of human rights in the West Bank." Most pro-Israel activists would have viewed such "witness" by Christians as unwarranted interference in Jewish affairs. In this context, interreligious work could be politically lethal inside the organized Jewish community. Gaining more public notice was the involvement of Loeb and other Breira activists in contacts between Jews – Americans and Israelis – and Arab leaders, including Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) members, in 1977. The dominant Jewish groups uniformly considered the PLO an off-limits terrorist group. Brickner's CSA had circulated a sheet of talking points in 1974 headed "The PLO Is Not a National Liberation Movement." Breira found itself rebuffed by umbrella Jewish organizations like the Jewish Community Council of Washington and NJCRAC. It could not pursue simultaneous ambitions to become the pro-partition wing of

³⁷ "Cheerleaders for Defeatism," *Update: News & Analysis*, 17 May 1976, 1–2; Rabbi Joachim Prinz to Mrs. Rose [Matzkin], 11 June 1976, Folder 7, Box 12, BBP; "Factual and Other Errors in 'Why Breira' by Joseph Shattan, 'Commentary' April 1977" (Breira document), n.d., Folder 11, Box 12, BBP.

³⁸ Bob [Loeb] to Joachim [Prinz], 12 Aug. 1976, Folder 7, Box 12, BBP; Albert Vorspan, "Why I Have Not Joined Breira," *Reform Judaism*, Feb. 1977, 1.

organized Jewish life and the Jewish wing of an interreligious movement for peace in the Middle East.³⁹

Brickner's accounts of his time in Breira registered his own political passages, and not a little instability. In 1976, he published "Credo of a Dove Zionist," warming to his familiar theme that the American Jewish establishment's efforts to repress dissent over specific Israeli policies were fatuous. Here, in a new departure, he derided what he called the "outrageous belief that Jews have some divine right to a Greater Israel." As usual, he demanded for American Jews the same latitude of opinion that, he said, patriotic Jewish Israelis enjoyed. By 1978, Breira was on its last legs and Brickner, in a quirky move, formally resigned from the nearly collapsed organization. He consistently avowed that he remained a proud Zionist throughout and that those who insinuated otherwise about Breira were fools or knaves. At one point he brandished his credentials as a lifelong Zionist and complained, saltily, that Rabbi Glazer, his more conservative foil, was a johnny-come-lately who "doesn't know Zionism from diddly shit." In 1979 he told *Sh'ma* readers, "I cry every day for lost Jewish liberalism," not specifying whether he referred to domestic politics or international affairs. He added, "I find a hell of a lot more support from some of my activist Christian friends" than from fellow Jews.⁴⁰

By the early 1980s Brickner might have felt freer to speak frankly, as in 1980 he left the national leadership of Reform Judaism for a more independent, even oppositional, position. He parted ways with the CSA and with his responsibility for Reform's interreligious work to become a synagogue leader for the first time in almost twenty years, at the helm of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Israel had taken a conservative turn politically in 1977, with the Likud coalition's elevation to government for the first time, and in 1980 the United States followed a similar path as Reagan, a conservative Republican, won the presidency along with strong conservative gains in the US Congress. American Jewish liberals felt doubly besieged by these events. Brickner would remain a noted figure. Yet

³⁹ UAHC Commission on Social Action, "The PLO Is Not a National Liberation Movement," Nov. 1974, Folder 8, Box 16, KKP; Bob [Loeb], "Dear Breira Leader," 26 Aug. 1976, Folder 8, Box 12, BBP; "Statements by JCC of Greater Washington and NJCRAC: 'Patently False and Slanderous,'" Breira press release, 2 Feb. 1977 (last two both in Folder 1, Box 12, BPP).

⁴⁰ Balfour Brickner, "Credo of a Dove Zionist," *Worldview*, July–Aug. 1976, 6; Brickner, "Enough!" (draft), March 1977, Folder 3, Box 12, BBP; Balfour Brickner to Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, 14 March 1977, Folder 3, Box 12, BBP; Balfour Brickner to Arnold Jacob Wolf, 24 Feb. 1978, Folder 1, Box 12, BBP; Balfour Brickner interview notes, 11 Feb. 1981, Folder 1, Box 2, Paul M. Foer Breira Collection (American Jewish Archive, Cincinnati); Balfour Brickner, "What We Learned from the 1970's, II," *Sh'ma*, 11 Jan. 1979, 36.

he exiled himself from the precincts of Jewish power where he once had been groomed for a top spot.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The stage was set for new departures for American Jewish criticism of Israel in the 1980s. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the first Palestinian intifada of 1987–88 would spark new formations like NJA, which would populate a liberal Zionism now defined as one faction within American Zionism, and which would embrace the idea of a Palestinian state in territories occupied by Israel since 1967.⁴²

Yet the weakness of this liberal Zionism, its problems and “dilemmas,” were clear from its early struggle to recognize and name itself in the context of an established American Zionist politics where support for Israel ultimately trumped liberalism. Brickner epitomized these “dilemmas.” He tended to speak differently about Israel/Palestine to Jews and to Christians. His criticisms of Israel had sharp limits and he often slid tangentially into more pungent jibes at American Jewish leadership. He showed little tolerance for any critique of Israeli behavior toward Palestinians, implying that Israel had been rather blameless until 1967. “Until 1967 things went magnificently,” he wrote in 1974. While he referred here specifically to the earlier strength of liberal Christian support for Israel, he seemed also to suggest that Israel's history before the 1967 war had existed on a higher moral plane. His insistence on that point made it hard for him to meet the more trenchant progressive critiques of Israel and Zionism, which unearthed deeper histories of colonialism and dispossession.⁴³

⁴¹ See Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 6; Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012), chapter 17; Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); and Doug Rossinow, *The Reagan Era: A History of the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), chapter 1.

⁴² Rosenthal, *Irreconcilable Differences?; Nepon, Justice; Dov Waxman, Trouble in the Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict over Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Amy Kaplan, *Our American Israel: The Story of an Entangled Alliance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), chapter 4; Shaul Mitelpunkt, *Israel in the American Mind: The Cultural Politics of US–Israeli Relations, 1958–1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 296–310, 320–29; Samih K. Farsoun and Naseer H. Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians: A Social and Political History*, 2nd edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), chapter 7; Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2020), chapter 5.

⁴³ Brickner, “Issues Confronting Jews Today.” For early excavations (in different veins) see William R. Polk, *Backdrop to Tragedy: The Struggle for Palestine* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957); Fayege A. Sayegh, *Zionist Colonialism in Palestine* (Beirut: Research Centre

Politically, the half measures offered by someone like Brickner proved less pragmatic successes than comforts for an increasingly self-aware but frustrated political circle. For many years an important insider within organized American Jewish communal life, Brickner pressed at the limits of the Zionism that that organized community found acceptable. Those limits were narrow, which explains why some critics of Israel today would find his “dove Zionism” overly cautious and defensive, even though he damaged valuable relationships and risked his privileged position within American Jewry by going as far as he did. Liberal Zionists like Brickner sought to stand on familiar liberal ground precisely when liberalism was losing its purchase – in both Israel and the United States, as politics in both countries found a new, rightward center of gravity. A combination of inherent ideological tensions, contingent political and cultural dynamics, and events on the ground in the Middle East curtailed the scope for liberal Zionism in the USA. The story of liberal Zionism’s shift in status in the United States between 1967 and 1980, from assumption to embattled claim, reflects the changing transnational political winds of this era and the partial erosion – as well as the continuing political and cultural force – of traditionally compartmentalized ethnic and religious boundaries for discussion of an issue with the potential to break long-standing alignments in American politics.⁴⁴

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of Palestine Liberation Organization, 1965); Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (New York: Monad, 1973; originally published in France in 1967); and *Search for Peace in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1970). Also see Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

⁴⁴ Edward Said in the year 2000 called the Israel–Palestine question “America’s last taboo.” The field of tension surrounding this issue is undeniably potent. Edward Said, “America’s Last Taboo,” *New Left Review*, 6 (Nov.–Dec. 2000), 45–53, quoted in Feldman, 229. On the transnational rightward direction of politics in the 1970s see Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974–1980* (New York, 2010); Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and Shaul Magid, *Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American Jewish Radical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

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