

### Jews and McCarthyism

The mid-twentieth century in America was a time of fear and uncertainty. Following the devastation of the Second World War, the United States quickly shifted its focus from the crumbled Nazi regime to the emerging threat of Communist Russia and its influence from outside and within America's borders. This period of time, which was effectively a "high water mark" for a fear that America was being overtaken by the Communist onslaught, is often referred to as the Red Scare given the red color of the communist flag. The longstanding stereotype of Jews as communist conspirators clashed with "the exigencies of anticommunist politics" that were casting a looming shadow over the American political landscape.<sup>1</sup> Efforts linking Jews to Communism were not uncommon; in the 1940s and 1950s, even congressional representatives and federal lawmakers would publicly invoke anti-Semitic tropes to further their own political agendas.<sup>2</sup> This period of time is also known as the "McCarthy Era," named after the notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy was a fervent anticommunist who shamefully used the power of his office to investigate and falsely accuse countless Americans of harboring Communist sympathies bent on subverting American society and democracy – all without regard for evidence.

At the same time, a number of high-profile incidents, such as the calamitous Senate confirmation hearings of Anna M. Rosenberg for the position of assistant secretary of defense in November 1950, led many American Jews to believe that the government was unfairly targeting them as Jews.<sup>3</sup> These baseless accusations often had serious ramifications despite any manner of recourse or due process mechanisms set in place for the accused.<sup>4</sup> As a result, Jewish advocacy

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 115–175.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

organizations worked, “to strike a balance between the need to demonstrate the anticommunist resolve of American Jewry, on the one hand, and their concerns about bias in [federal anticommunist programs]...on the other.”<sup>5</sup>

Jewish responses to McCarthyism were guided by a combination of American and Jewish values and calculated by the ways in which American Jews were perceived by their fellow gentile Americans. Evaluating correspondences as well as certain statements published by Jewish organizations during the McCarthy era yields insight into the ways in which Jewish Americans responded to the Communist threat to America and the tactics that were employed to counter its influence.

The American Jewish reaction to the tactics of McCarthyism in America was mixed. While on the whole, many Jews in America were patriotic and harbored no Communist sympathies, there was a level of ambivalence with regard to how they responded to the Communist threat and its association with Jews. On one hand, American Jews were as much concerned about Communism in America as were any other freedom-loving American citizens at the time. On the other hand, American Jews were disturbed by the methods that Congress and others took in response to the threat. Some of the responses were extreme, like the affairs of the House Un-American Activities Committee. The American Jewish response to McCarthyism was a delicate matter given the need to negotiate the tension between appearing sufficiently anticommunist while at the same time, condemning the slash-and-burn tactics adopted by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his followers in an effort to root out Communism.

Part of the reason for American Jews’ mixed reactions to McCarthyism was due to the fact that some American Jews actually did support the senator and condoned his efforts. Other

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<sup>5</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 125.

American Jews publicly supported McCarthy and his anticommunist agenda specifically so as to dispel the notion that Jews generally have Communist inclinations. The establishment of the American Jewish League Against Communism (AJLAC) demonstrates the desire of some American Jews at the time to actively dissociate the ill-conceived notion that Judaism predisposes itself to Communism. One of the goals of the organization was to send a message to the gentile population that Jews were equal partners – and not collaborators – in the fight against Communism in America.

In fact, the founder of the AJLAC was himself a rabbi – Rabbi Benjamin Schultz. Schultz was an outspoken anticommunist crusader who had served as rabbi of a Reform congregation in Yonkers, NY. His tenure there ended, however, after he penned a short series of articles on the influence of Communism in American religious life.<sup>6</sup> After his departure from there in November 1947, he took up the helm as the Executive Director of the AJLAC where he continued his inflammatory rhetoric.<sup>7</sup>

A flyer for the AJLAC stating its mission and principles puts the organization's political agenda into clear focus. The very layout and structure of the flyer itself carries a message to its target audience of Jewish and non-Jewish Americans alike. The opening heading on the first side of the flyer reads in bolded, capitalized letters, "For God and Country."<sup>8</sup> The juxtaposition of the words "God" and "Country" are intended to suggest an alignment of loyalty between those of the Jewish faith and the wellbeing of the United States of America. The choice of the word "God" might also be understood as an effort to suggest that Jews are followers of a *religion* as opposed

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<sup>6</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 175.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Flyer: American Jewish League Against Communism, Inc, 1951-1953, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

to being members of a distinct nation. This is a significant subtlety given the organization's mission to promote the idea that the loyalty of American Jews is first and foremost to *America* and not to any other nation, land, or political ideology.

The AJLAC's flyer continues to express this idea beyond that of its header with the introductory statements that immediately follow. The first one reads, "We Americans of Jewish faith and tradition have banded together to oppose the menace of Communism."<sup>9</sup> The very specification that is, "Americans of Jewish faith and tradition" belies a desire to portray American Jews as *Americans* whose faith is *incidentally* Jewish. To that end, the very next set of statements articulate the reason for American Jews' loyalty to America, to American values, and to its way of life: "We American Jews have been the most fortunate of all our brethren. The American Revolution set in motion the era of democracy and freedom – during which the emancipation of Jews everywhere was achieved. The Jews prospered and made signal progress wherever government by law, free enterprise, and civil liberties prevailed. We in the US have enjoyed opportunities of freedom, and have attained a standard of well-being, unmatched in our history." The AJLAC asserts that the American Jew has much for which to be thankful given the unique character of the United States that has enabled unparalleled Jewish success, insinuating an inherent Jewish loyalty to America as her homeland.

The organization takes this idea a step farther by crediting America with the tangential improvement of the welfare of Jews around the world by virtue of the fact that successful American Jews had the means to support global Jewry. The AJLAC flyer concludes its introduction by expressing such sentiments: "To the blessings of the American Republic, we owe not only our present welfare, but our ability to extend to millions of stricken Jews in the Old World the help

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<sup>9</sup> Flyer: American Jewish League Against Communism, Inc.

essential to their survival and to hundreds of thousands the means to start life anew. Furthermore, Communism, like Fascism and Nazism, is the enemy of Judaism, a religion stressing liberty and the sanctity of the individual.”<sup>10</sup> Counting Communism among the ranks of Jewish enemies along with the likes of Fascism and Nazism, conveys a double message – that is, not *only* is Judaism incompatible with Communism, but that the two are in fact enemies. This implication of Communism being Judaism’s enemy is that American Jews are willing and equal partners in the fight against a mutual American threat.

The official Aims and Purposes of the AJLAC reveal the thoughts and concerns of the American Jewish community at the time of the Red Scare. The very first of the aims listed on the flyer reflects a troubling trend recognized by the greater Jewish community as prevailing throughout some Jewish groups and even other faith-based associations. The first aim is, “to expose and resist...every Communist effort to bore from within Jewish, as well as all religious, life, in order to undermine the spiritual defenses of America.”<sup>11</sup> More specifically, the next aim calls attention to the Communist element that has already taken root in some Jewish groups in an attempt to subvert them, stating strongly its policy to, “educate the Jewish public on the extent and danger of Communist infiltration in Jewish organizations and institutions.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the group attempts to shed light on the Communists’ tactic of manipulating Jewish grievances for the purpose of advancing their own agenda without having any real regard for the issues voiced by the community. To accomplish this goal, the AJLAC sought to, “turn the spotlight of pitiless publicity

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<sup>10</sup> Flyer: American Jewish League Against Communism, Inc.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

on the attempts of Communist agitators to exploit Jewish grievances for sinister and disloyal ends.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the group’s last stated purpose is perhaps the most controversial among fellow Jewish institutions and figureheads nationwide. It is also the most descriptive in terms of the activity, goals, and overall philosophical mission of the organization. To wit, the group ultimately intended to, “act as a clearing-house in the fight for freedom and against Communism,” where this “clearing-house” would act, “...through the dissemination of literature, by means of public discussions, and in every way designed to educate Jews and Gentiles alike on the challenge which the dark forces of Communism present to our national security, to our democratic institutions and to civilization everywhere.”<sup>14</sup> This “clearing-house” imagery projects the notion of a unified Jewish response toward and against Communism in America; however, in reality, the group lacked communal buy-in as well as the financial support that was afforded to other mission-based Jewish organizations at the time. The group’s presumption that American Jews would approve of such a “clearing-house” on all of their behalf underlies a fundamental disagreement on the *approach* toward combatting Communism between the AJLAC and other mainstream Jewish groups.

While other Jewish organizations had their own worries about the Communist threat, they largely believed that the efforts of Rabbi Schultz and the AJLAC were counterproductive, if not outright damaging to the American Jewish community. The tipping point in relations between the AJLAC and the greater Jewish community came in 1950 when Schultz denounced two American dignitaries for what he claimed were pro-Communist tendencies. This prompted an outcry from mainstream Jewish organizations that resulted in a Joint Statement of the American Jewish

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Flyer: American Jewish League Against Communism, Inc.

Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress), and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith RE: Communism and Civil Liberties.<sup>15</sup> The joint statement was only disseminated internally among the three organizations, though it forebodes a future statement of condemnation from a wider audience of Jewish groups.

The statement begins on a note that reflects a similar sentiment to that of the AJLAC, noting that, “we know that Communism is intrinsically inimical to all that is fundamental in Judaism, as it is to everything basic in Americanism.”<sup>16</sup> The statement continues by highlighting its stance against Communism and its incompatibility with America’s political and religious values, indicating, “we know that, in its cynical and ruthless drive for totalitarian control of the world, Communism scoffs at the principle of the supreme worth of the individual in the sight of God and of the other spiritual values which are the core of Judaism as of all religions.”<sup>17</sup> The statement then breaks with the AJLAC in a series of veiled references to McCarthyism and Rabbi Schultz and his efforts expressing the groups of the joint statement’s disapproval. They delineate that, “we cannot, on these grounds, condone conviction without trial and without opportunity for defense of alleged Communists. This we regard as destructive of the democratic process and as a threat to the ultimate freedoms of our society.”<sup>18</sup> Such a statement refers to McCarthy and the unscrupulous tactics of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The statement then directs its ire toward the AJLAC in its next point with a reference to anticommunist efforts of non-governmental groups: “No voluntary agency should assume any of

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<sup>15</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum: Joint Statement of the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith RE: Communism and Civil Liberties, 26 December 1950, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the functions which belong to governmental agencies. Moreover, we believe that no racial or religious group can serve its own interests and that of the public by maintaining special anticommunist agencies.”<sup>19</sup> This latter point reflects the ambivalence of the greater American Jewish community toward the existence of any Jewish group whose *explicit* and primary goal is the rooting out of Communism in America. The implication is that such a group would detract from the impression that all of American Jewry is opposed to Communism – for, if one Jewish group exists for the purpose of exposing Communism, then there is a chance people might assume that other Jewish, pro-Communist groups also exist which are representative of the Jewish community. The final point of this statement makes clear such a concern; namely, that “we consider it regrettable that any group of Jews should set themselves apart from the well-established bodies of organized Jewry and give the impression that its members have a special interest in combatting Communism.”<sup>20</sup>

This joint statement reveals a troubling dilemma for the American Jewish community during the McCarthy era. On one hand, most Jewish organizations were eager to distance themselves from Communism. The prevailing stereotype of Jews as sympathetic to the Communist cause compelled major Jewish organizations to publish their own stances calling out the evils of Communism. On the other hand, the greater Jewish community was largely appalled by the notion of an independent agency that employed crooked tactics and methods to root out Communism in America all while billing itself as a Jewish organization.

A little more than one month after the publication of this internal joint statement, a second statement was published that was released to the public following another unfortunate incident

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<sup>19</sup> Memorandum: Joint Statement of the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, and Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith RE: Communism and Civil Liberties.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



concerning a speech given by Rabbi Schultz at the Women's Patriotic Conference at the Hotel Statler on January 27, 1951.<sup>21</sup> In his speech, Schultz railed against Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall and Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz; three days later, a joint statement was released explicitly condemning Rabbi Schultz and the AJLAC by name. The statement was published by the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC) and was signed by five other organizations: the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress), the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL); the Jewish Labor Committee, the Jewish War Veterans, and the UAHC (presently known as the URJ).<sup>22</sup>

The letter's opening statement underscores the greater Jewish community's opposition toward Schultz's efforts and the AJLAC's approach toward combatting Communism. It reads, "the undersigned Jewish organizations, representing through their affiliates the overwhelming majority of the organized Jewish community of the US, regard as infamous the attack by Rabbi Benjamin Schultz, Director of the American Jewish League Against Communism, on the patriotism and moral character of the two great Americans, Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall and Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz."<sup>23</sup> The statement continues by providing some context for Schultz's unwarranted attack, describing Schultz as "having referred to Secretary Marshall as a 'fall guy' in a plot to shield pro-Red activities; and to Admiral Nimitz, recently named chairman of the President's Commission on Internal Security and Individual Rights as having a 'bad' record on

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<sup>21</sup> "Jewish Groups Assail Rabbi for Attacks on Marshall and Nimitz," *The Sunday Star* (11 February 1951): A6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Resolution Jointly Adopted by American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, ADL of B'nai B'rith; Jewish Labor Committee, Jewish War Veterans, National Community Relations Advisory Council, and the UAHC, 30 January 1951, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

‘tolerance of pro-Communists’ and as a foil ‘in a deliberate attempt to whitewash an evil, pro-Communist situation’.”<sup>24</sup>

The statement concludes by describing why such an attack is problematic for American society and by casting Rabbi Schultz as a fringe element of American Jewish life and prevailing thought. The joint letter explains that “such irresponsible attacks impair the fight against Communism by creating confusion and distrust at home and by undermining overseas the high confidence earned by Nimitz and Marshall, two of the chief architects in the world-wide fight against Totalitarianism.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the signatories sought to create distance between themselves and Schultz, expressing in no uncertain terms that, “Rabbi Schultz in no way represents any section of the American Jewish community and the major Jewish organizations repudiate and condemn his repeated resort to vilification and slander of reputable Americans on the pretext of combatting Communism.”<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, this historical document reminds us of how Judaism and American politics intersect and can sometimes divide the Jewish community.

Again, one of the signatories of the joint statement published by the NCRAC was the Jewish War Veterans of the USA. This organization circulates a regular Headquarters Letter, and in one particular volume published a little over a decade after the NCRAC’s joint statement, the group maintains its rejection of the AJLAC’s policies. Part of the Headquarters Letter released in February 1962 reiterates the Jewish community’s reception of the AJLAC and its practices, noting that, “The American Jewish League Against Communism which at first accepted a charge based on alleged Communist infiltration into Jewish organizations – was slapped down by virtually every

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Resolution Jointly Adopted by American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, ADL of B’nai B’rith; Jewish Labor Committee, Jewish War Veterans, National Community Relations Advisory Council, and the UAHC.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Jewish group in the USA.”<sup>27</sup> The publication also reveals one of the prime motivations for the establishment of the AJLAC in the first place, claiming that its Chairman, George E. Sokolsky, “feels the league must continue to combat the notion held by many Christians that many Jews are Communists.”<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the periodical goes on to validate some of the principal aims and purposes outlined by the AJLAC, stating that the NCRAC has made attempts to fight back against this notion and has, “resisted every attempt on the part of Jewish Communist front organizations to chisel into any part of the organized structure of Jewish life.”<sup>29</sup>

The reference to Communists infecting organized Jewish groups in this publication illustrates how this maneuver was a recognized pattern of Communist behavior, and that, despite organized Jewish groups’ expressed disapproval of Schultz and the AJLAC, they acknowledge the relevancy and urgency of the threat at hand. In spite of these shared concerns, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA express their hope for, “the League to be dissolved in the near future” because, “anti-Communism should not be the standard for Jews or Christians as such. Both Judaism and Christianity abhor Communism. The fight is an American one.”<sup>30</sup>

Slightly over a year after this Headquarters Letter had been published, Joseph F. Barr – the National Executive Director of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA – received a handwritten letter in mid-April of 1963 from a Rabbi Allan H. Schwartzman of Temple Beth Israel in Mississippi. Rabbi Schwartzman wrote in response to an initial letter from Barr inquiring about the status of Rabbi Schultz and his anticommunist rhetoric. In 1962, Rabbi Schultz had moved to Clarksdale to become the spiritual leader of Temple Beth Israel while Schwartzman was serving as Chairman of

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<sup>27</sup> Jewish War Veterans of the USA Headquarters Letter, February 1962, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>28</sup> Jewish War Veterans of the USA Headquarters Letter, February 1962.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

the Mississippi Assembly of Jewish Congregations.<sup>31</sup> By this time in 1963, Schwartzman reveals that, “the united voice of the Reform Rabbinate in this state [of Mississippi] and the surrounding area has put a great deal of pressure on [Schultz] and his congregation, so that for the present he is relatively quiet.”<sup>32</sup> The fact that the head of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA sought to keep tabs on the anticommunist firebrand indicates a continued wariness on part of the greater Jewish community about the ramifications of Schultz’s anticommunist brand.

Judging from the responses of the major American Jewish organizations to the activities of the AJLAC, one might be led to believe that the majority of American Jews rejected its practices – practices that, in effect, mimicked those of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the Jewish sphere. However, after the *New York Times* ran a full-page ad in February 1962 that called for “the abolition of the House Committee on Un-American Activities” signed by a number of American Rabbis, both the AJLAC’s President, Roy M. Cohn, and Chairman (George Sokolsky) published a statement voicing support for the Committee’s efforts.<sup>33</sup> Roy M. Cohn also happened to serve as chief counsel for McCarthy’s Senate Investigations Subcommittee.<sup>34</sup> Their statement declared that, “to the unsophisticated reader, it might seem that the presence of names of rabbis in this statement indicates that the American-Jewish community – in large measure – opposed the purposes of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. This is an incorrect appraisal of the situation. Marxism is abhorrent to Jews because it is a negation of the thousands of years of

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<sup>31</sup> Morris Kaplan, “Rabbi Benjamin Schultz, Crusader Against Communist Infiltration,” *New York Times* (25 April 1978) Page 40.

<sup>32</sup> Rabbi Allan H. Schwartzman to Joseph F. Barr, 16 April 1963, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>33</sup> Statement on the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 28 February 1962, Schultz, Benjamin, Correspondence, newspaper clippings and miscellaneous material relation to the activities of Rabbi Schultz of Clarksdale, Miss. and the American Jewish League Against Communism, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>34</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 177.

religious traditions of the Jews.”<sup>35</sup> Cohn and Sokolsky continue defiantly, alleging that, “along with the overwhelming majority of Americans of all faiths and political parties, the American-Jewish community supports in principle the work of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the other duly constituted bodies which deal with the menace of Communism as it affects this Nation.”<sup>36</sup>

The most salient point in this rebuttal to the ad in the *New York Times* expresses even more so the reason for American Jews to want to take up the anticommunist cause, given that doing so is in their interest as Jews. The statement argues that, “the recent publicizing of the overt anti-Semitic nature of the Communist regime in Russia has emphasized the inherent dangers of Communist infiltration and subversion to American Jewry. The Jewish people – as all people who believe in God – are doubly threatened by Communism...”<sup>37</sup> Such a claim by Cohn and Sokolsky furthers the mission of the AJLAC by equating the threat of Communism toward American Jews with all other God-believing Americans of faith. Also, recognizing Communism as an inherent danger to American Jewry pushes back against the false idea that Jews harbor Communist sympathies.

The AJLAC’s stance toward McCarthyism and its approach to handling the Communist threat, as well as the American Jewish response to its approach, reveals insight as to the tensions among American Jews concerning the appropriate response to an ideology hijacking their own organizations so as to attempt to weaponize them against American democracy. Meanwhile, a 1954 letter sent by Rabbi Julius J. Nodel of Temple Beth Israel in Portland, OR to President Eisenhower beseeching him to confront Senator McCarthy’s immorality and trampling of

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<sup>35</sup> Statement on the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 28 February 1962.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

democratic norms had garnered widespread attention and was covered in the Oregon Journal.<sup>38</sup> Nodel's letter, which he presented to his congregation in lieu of a Friday night sermon, drew myriad responses that ranged from letters of support, to postcards of harsh – and at times, openly racist – criticism. While not all of the responses he received were from members of the Jewish community, the reaction of some gentiles toward Nodel's speech provide insight as to the nuanced and implicit tensions faced by American Jews with regard to their outward stance on Communism, as well as their willingness in working to purge it from American society.

In his letter to Eisenhower, Rabbi Nodel asked the president, “how long will you wait before the Constitution is also surrendered to McCarthy?”<sup>39</sup> – a question on which the central theme of his letter rested. This accusation provoked the anger of a Ms. H. Thornton who expressed as much in her postcard addressed to Nodel postmarked on March 1, 1954. Thornton slams the rabbi as “having disgraced yourself by panning our president for something you shouldn't. If you do not like our government, why do u [sic] stay in this country. We can very well do without your race here; they really have never helped us any. Maby [sic] you had better go back to your way of living in your own country. I am sure we would never miss you. So please go back to your way of living.”<sup>40</sup>

Such overtly anti-Semitic opinions must certainly have contributed to the ambivalence of American Jews toward condemning Communism and the methods employed by those charged to root it out, like Senator McCarthy. At the same time, the sentiments expressed by Ms. Thornton – namely, that “you had better go back to your way of living *in your own country*” – represent the

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<sup>38</sup> Newspaper Article: Rabbi Raps McCarthy, 27 February 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>39</sup> Rabbi Raps McCarthy Newspaper Article, 27 February 1954.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to Rabbi Nodel from Ms. H. Thornton, 1 March 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

very ideas that the AJLAC sought to counter in its language describing Judaism as merely the religion of Jewish Americans. The notion that American Jews even have a country to which to return implies a level of disloyalty on part of the American Jewish population to the United States.

Another postcard to Rabbi Nodel postmarked on the same date as Ms. Thornton's reflects a similar idea, written by a Ms. Grace Frances. Frances asks the rabbi incredulously, "do you want a Red national government in this country? If so – why?...This land has been good to your people – don't jeopardize us all."<sup>41</sup> The tone of Ms. Frances' response to R. Nodel's letter to Eisenhower unambiguously singles out Jews as a people that have benefitted from American society and should therefore be careful not to "bite the hand that feeds it." While the AJLAC's mission expresses a similar idea, the accusatory nature of Ms. Frances' letter is more menacing than encouraging, especially given the presumption that Ms. Frances is a gentile.

In a Letter to the Editor of the *Oregon Journal*, Rector Ebert D. Riddick of The Church of The Good Shepherd in Portland responded to Nodel's letter in harsh terms while also managing to incorporate a condemnation against the Jewish State of Israel. The Rector's response not only suggests that Nodel's letter was an instance of grandstanding, he also explicitly calls into question Rabbi Nodel's Americanism. He writes that, "concerning the tirade of Rabbi Nodel against the President of the US, it would seem that certain men would like to ride McCarthy's publicity train without paying the Fare."<sup>42</sup> The Rector continues by linking the rabbi's words to his own disdain toward the Jewish State, claiming that, "In view of the incorrigible attitude of Israel towards the United Nations; and its unconscionable slaughter in their sleep of Arabian women and children by

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<sup>41</sup> Grace Frances to Rabbi Nodel, 1 March 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in *Oregon Journal*, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>42</sup> Rector Ebert D. Riddick to Editor of the *Oregon Journal*, 28 February 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in *Oregon Journal*, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Israeli artillery, for which the United Nations officially censured it; the Rabbi, who zealously collects funds for Israel, ought not to complain of ‘revolution thru power’...”<sup>43</sup> The final words of the Rector suggest that the rabbi is incompetent and even a fraudulent American as he states that, “Possibly it would have been better for the Rabbi to have remembered a Mosaic precept he is supposed to teach: ‘Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people;’ granted that the Rabbi is the American he professes to be.”<sup>44</sup>

Responses like those of Ms. Thornton, Ms. Frances, and Rector Riddick are the reason why Jewish organizations that published condemnatory statements, such as the one released by the NCRAC in 1951, felt the need to tread lightly by condemning Communism *as a whole* while rejecting the tar-and-feather methods adopted by groups like the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Not all of the responses to Rabbi Nodel’s letter condemning Senator McCarthy were negative. As a matter of fact, some of the complimentary responses came straight from the offices of high-powered elected officials. Robert Y. Thornton, the Attorney General for the State of Oregon wrote his own letter to Rabbi Nodel expressing how impressed he was by the rabbi’s words. Thornton’s letter to Nodel was brief but powerful: “Your fine statement on the antics of congressional investigating committees should not pass without a compliment. I liked what you said, the way you said it and I admire your courage.”<sup>45</sup> A county judge in Portland also wrote to Nodel indicating appreciation for his letter to Eisenhower and thanking him, with the hope that,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Rector Ebert D. Riddick to Editor of the Oregon Journal, 28 February 1954.

<sup>45</sup> Attorney General Robert Y. Thonton to Rabbi Nodel, 1 March 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.



“the seed you have sown will bear bountiful fruit.”<sup>46</sup> The judge continues by commending Nodel for his words while privately intimating his equation of McCarthy to a high-ranking member of the Nazi party. The judge reveals that he has “long resented the rabble-rousing of McCarthy and consider him the Goebels of America” and believes that “that anyone supporting McCarthyism is giving aid and comfort to the enemies of Democracy.”<sup>47</sup>

The judge’s letter was not the only one that drew comparisons between Senator McCarthy and leading figures of Nazi Germany. A letter from Carl J. Engstrom hailing from Portland expressed appreciation that “someone of the Jewish faith speaks out against the rising Hitler of the USA.”<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the elite status of that of the Attorney General and the Judge, Engstrom makes an effort to note that while he and his wife live modestly on social security payments, they believe it important to support such efforts and included a small financial contribution along with their letter. The range of people who submitted positive feedback to Nodel on his letter indicates a broad and diverse coalition that abhors the unethical methods employed by McCarthy and his supporters. The eventual censure of Senator McCarthy by Congress that later marked his downfall reflects the power of such a wide-arrayed coalition.

The letters to Rabbi Nodel written in response to his letter condemning Senator McCarthy illustrate the challenging place in which the American Jew found himself at the time of the Red Scare. While it seems that many American Jews ultimately disapproved of Senator McCarthy and his actions, they were careful to make clear that their condemnation of him and his approach was *not* tacit support of the Communism he purported to crusade against. American Jewish

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<sup>46</sup> Judge Ray D. Shoemaker to Rabbi Nodel, 26 April 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>47</sup> Judge Ray D. Shoemaker to Rabbi Nodel, 26 April 1954.

<sup>48</sup> Carl J. Engstrom to Rabbi Nodel, 28 February 1954, Responses to Eisenhower letter RE: McCarthyism 1954 published in Oregon Journal, Portland, Oregon, MSS Col #125, box 17/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, Ohio.

organizations sought to avoid any conflation of the two. Meanwhile, the formation of the American Jewish League Against Communism indicated that a level of support for McCarthy's efforts existed within the American Jewish community. While mainstream Jewish organizations disowned the AJLAC, they recognized the danger that the group was designed to combat. The perception that all Jews were Communists, coupled with the real threat of Communists manipulating Jewish grievances and groups caused them to toe-the-line in condemning both Communism and the unprincipled process by which to remove it from American life.

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