

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?: The Jewishness of Commentary Magazine

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Until a detailed study of the foremost journal of Jewish thought, opinion, and culture in postwar America is undertaken, the picture of contemporary Jewish and American intellectual life cannot be considered complete. Launched by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1945, *Commentary* magazine became one of America's most celebrated periodicals. As a monthly journal on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues, it was not intended to be an in-house organ. *Commentary* was distinctive for being an institutionally sponsored magazine whose editor was given, in theory at least, complete editorial freedom. Unlike its counterpart, *Partisan Review*, it was an explicitly Jewish magazine, openly funded by a Jewish communal organization.

Under the editorship of Elliot E. Cohen (1899–1959) and later Norman Podhoretz (b. 1930), *Commentary Magazine* developed into the premier postwar journal of Jewish affairs, attracting a broad, if small, readership (at its peak its subscription was only 60,000), far wider than its Jewish community of origin. Doubleday editor Barbara Zimmerman noted that, although the magazine dealt “with Jewish affairs, it is primarily a magazine of general interest” with an “excellent reputation in this country among the general and not strictly Jewish market.”¹ Historian Milton S. Katz added that many Americans “agreed with *Commentary*'s positions ...its articles elicited a heavy and emotional response from various segments of society ...[and] ...its influence clearly extended beyond that of many larger publications.”² Various administrations, high-level staff, and politicians regularly perused the journal, reprinted its articles, and broadcast them across the world. Successive presidents, in particular Ronald Reagan, often consulted with *Commentary*'s second editor, Norman Podhoretz. As the literary scholar Ruth R. Wisse has put it: “*Commentary* became the first Jewish magazine in history that speaks to power in the polity at large, while protecting maximally the interests of the Jews.”³

Commentary provided the vehicle and voice through which many

American Jewish Archives Journal

young, alienated Jewish intellectuals would move back into the Jewish community after World War II. A whole new generation of writers, thinkers, and poets including such figures as Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Delmore Schwartz, Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Irving Howe, and Leslie Fiedler—gained an entry into American intellectual life via the pages of the magazine. These intellectuals formed the core of a group subsequently labelled the “New York Jewish Intellectuals.” As one of the group’s central organs, *Commentary* soon assumed a leading position in American intellectual life from the mid-1940s onwards and later *Commentary* nurtured a second generation of intellectuals who would complement the first, including Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Norman Mailer, Susan Sontag, Philip Roth, and Theodore Solotaroff. *Commentary* has had a profound impact on American intellectual history. According to a 1974 study, “How and Where to Find the Intellectual Elite in the United States,” *Commentary* has had more influence on the thinking of U.S. intellectuals than all but the *New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker*.⁴

Commentary, however, was far more than just a journal of intellectuals for intellectuals. While its community of writers was broad, embracing academics, professionals, intellectuals, writers, journalists, poets, artists, critics, and politicians, its community of readers was even broader. Thus, it can only be said to be an intellectual journal in the widest sense which, suggested Antonio Gramsci, went beyond the “traditional and vulgarised type of intellectual,” such as “the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist,” to include every individual engaged in “some form of intellectual activity.”⁵ As Edward Said has put it, “Everyone who works in any field connected either with the production or distribution of knowledge.”⁶ Those who wrote for *Commentary* were public intellectuals in the manner that Russell Jacoby described: “writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience. Obviously, this excludes intellectuals whose works are too technical or difficult to engage a public.”⁷

Commentary’s influence has always extended beyond its circulation. In a survey of three thousand “prominent Americans” conducted by the polling firm of Erdos and Morgan, *Commentary* was named third among “most influential” media, print, and electronic, behind the *New England Journal of Medicine and Foreign Affairs*, but ahead of the *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall*

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

Street Journal.⁸ As a mark of this, *Commentary* also provided a platform for launching many political careers: Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Elliot Abrams, and Carl Gershman were appointed to various positions following influential articles in the magazine. *Commentary* has thus played a significant role in domestic and international Jewish politics, as well as domestic American politics, and still continues to do so today. As William Novak, then editor of *Response* magazine, wrote in 1973:

A great deal could be learned by the study of the magazine since its inception twenty-eight years ago ... But such an effort would be, to say the least, an illuminating approach to the history both of American Jewry and American culture in general in the third quarter of the twentieth century.⁹

To this can be added the words of Mark Shechner: "There is no more precise barometer of the state of American Jewry these days than *Commentary* magazine ..."¹⁰

Strangely, however, *Commentary* has been overlooked by historians studying American intellectual history. While it has been widely read and distributed in no less than sixty-six countries, and has informed many histories of post-World War II Jewish life, there has not been a single monograph on it.¹¹ The scholarship surrounding *Commentary* magazine is still surprisingly and inexplicably thin. Naomi W. Cohen's history of the AJC, for example, only mentions *Commentary* on a handful of pages and these references are scattered and vague.¹² Many articles may have been written about the magazine, but these tend to be either journalistic (with a political axe to grind) or memoir, with a few scholarly exceptions.¹³ Although a great deal has been written about the New York Jewish intellectuals and their publications, most studies have tended to focus overwhelmingly on the magazine *Partisan Review*, which has been detrimental to the study of other, no-less-important journals.¹⁴ But even journals such as *Dissent*, *Encounter*, *The New Leader*, and *politics* have recently become the subjects of academic studies.¹⁵ Historians of the New York intellectuals examine the magazine briefly, but do so as part of wider intellectual movements, without focusing on the magazine in the depth it deserves.¹⁶ The same can be said for the historians of neoconservatism. As a consequence, important cultural and Jewish

American Jewish Archives Journal

dimensions of the magazine are often overlooked.¹⁷ Overall, *Commentary* has not been examined in enough detail and hence the scope and impact of the magazine have not been fully considered. This article will begin to redress this gap by examining how *Commentary* was a significant journal of Jewish opinion in its early years

EDITORIAL FREEDOM

Unique for a journal sponsored by a Jewish organization at that time, *Commentary* was allowed to operate with editorial freedom. In every issue of *Commentary*, the American Jewish Committee printed the following "Statement of Aims":

In sponsoring *Commentary*, the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. Its pages will be hospitable to diverse points of view and belief, and it hopes to encourage original creative endeavor in the various fields of culture.

The opinions and views expressed by *Commentary's* contributors and editors are their own, and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. The sponsorship of *Commentary* by the Committee is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.

"With a perspicacity rare in voluntary organizations, Jewish or otherwise," wrote Norman Podhoretz (who would replace Cohen as editor in 1960), "the AJC understood that unless the editor of the new magazine were given a free hand and protected from any pressures to conform to the Committee's own line, the result would be a pretentious house organ and nothing more." And, one that no one would read. The AJC had no intention of "doing anything that would parochialize the journal," or limit its appeal, so it granted full editorial freedom to *Commentary's* editor and staff. Likewise, it never explicitly intended the magazine to function as a public relations journal or as a

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

forum for its philosophies. This provided the mandate for Cohen, as well as the framework within which he could operate. According to Podhoretz, the AJC wanted a journal “that would be nonpartisan with regard to the often bitter politics of the Jewish community,” envisaging “a kind of Jewish *Harper’s*, only more scholarly,” or as *Time* magazine later put it, “a magazine that would exemplify the intellectual dignity of Judaism.”¹⁸

For Podhoretz, this editorial independence “consisted simply in this: no person except the editor or anyone he might voluntarily wish to consult could read articles in advance of publication or could dictate what should or should not appear in the magazine.” This meant that the AJC concerned itself only with *Commentary’s* budget, but did not interfere with the content of the magazine. It did so via a Publications Committee that oversaw *Commentary*, which was largely responsible for the magazine’s business affairs, and responsible to the Budget and Evaluation Committee. The Publications Committee supposedly acted in a purely advisory capacity. Composed of lay members who met as little as once a year, it had no policy-making role, and concerned itself largely with the business and budgetary matters of the magazine. *Commentary* represented a significant proportion of expenditure and many executive committee members did not unhesitatingly accept it, questioning that spending. It was thus the role of the Publications Committee to defend the magazine at budget hearings, and to ensure that the AJC’s money was well spent. The journal has been seen as a unique enterprise in this respect: no other organization has so generously sponsored a publication and then left it to operate independently.¹⁹

The AJC’s somewhat broad mandate to Cohen to produce a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues did not require “a *Jewish* journal” nor one of “contemporary *Jewish* issues.”²⁰ Likewise, the definition of “significant” was vague. In his first editorial, Cohen provided his own interpretation of what this term meant:

In the search for light on the basic issues of peace and freedom and human destiny which challenge all mankind, *Commentary* hopes to be of service. It goes without saying that the best magazine in the world will not solve our problems. But we have faith that a good magazine can help—by fairness,

American Jewish Archives Journal

by searching out the truth, by encouraging fresh and free-ranging thinking, by bringing to bear upon our problems the resources of science philosophy, religion, and the arts, by seeking out authentic voices and giving them open-house in which to be heard.

In this spirit, and with these aims, to publish the best magazine we know how to, hospitable to the broadest range of worth-while opinion—this is the sole mandate the editors have from *Commentary's* sponsor, the American Jewish Committee. Few projects have a charter so free, so generous-minded, so full of faith in the value of thinking and decent writing.²¹

Cohen's greatest promise, to his sponsor, to his readers, and mostly to himself, was that the magazine would be excellent. "Significant" for Cohen meant striving for *Commentary* to be the best magazine in the world.

COHEN AND JEWISH CULTURE

Cohen took advantage of these omissions to produce the type of journal that he—and not necessarily the Committee or the wider Jewish community—wanted to see. In some ways, Cohen had a distinctly unusual upbringing. Although he grew up in a traditional Jewish family, it was in Mobile, Alabama, where his father ran a small dry-goods store, on the borderland between black and white districts. The family lived above the store, and all the children helped out in it, selling textiles, clothes, and shoes to a mixed clientele of blacks, poor whites, Jews, hillbillies, and townspeople.

Judaism was important in the Cohen household: Elliot's father had been a Talmud scholar in Lithuania, and he stood out in Mobile as a man of Jewish knowledge, committed to secular and ethnic Judaism, as well as Zionism. Books were also important in the Cohen family²² and Elliot was a child prodigy; by the time he was two or three he could already read the newspaper headlines. He wanted to be a writer from the age of six and he would pursue his passion at Yale at the age of fifteen (the youngest freshman in the college's history), spending four years as an undergraduate. Although he graduated with

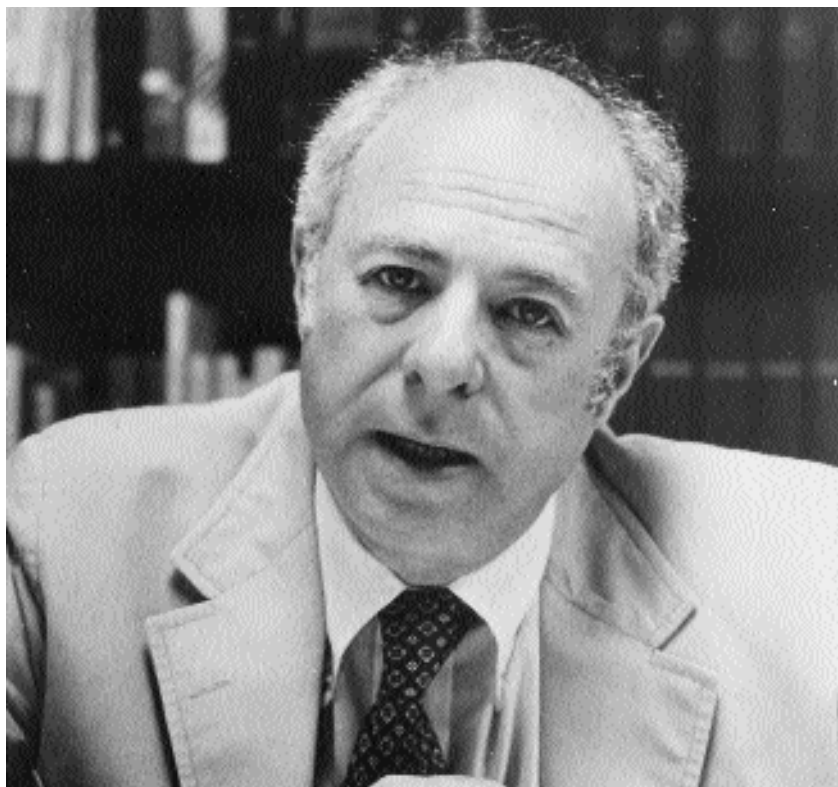
A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

a brilliant record, Cohen felt that academic opportunities would be closed to him, and after five years at Yale's graduate school, he began to look in other directions for a career, eventually turning to literary journalism.

In April 1924, *The Menorah Journal* in New York City hired him as an assistant editor. Cohen's early career at the *Journal* was meteoric; by November had become associate editor and by June of the following year, managing editor, a position he held until he left in 1931. Cohen transformed what was then, some would argue, a parochial college magazine into a highly respected intellectual publication. Cohen left the *Menorah* in 1931 after falling out with its editor Henry Hurwitz. He wrote freelance for a while, and headed several left-wing, fellow-traveling organizations, but after becoming disillusioned with communism, Cohen took up a position as the director of public information of the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in 1935, a job he hated.²³

The blueprint for *Commentary* had already been drawn up while Cohen was at the *Menorah Journal*; indeed the new magazine's title had been taken from one of its departments. As a young writer, Cohen painted a dark picture of American Jewry, which, despite its charities, its new temples, its countless organizations, was unsound at its roots, built on sham, pretense, and oratory. "Our ceaseless round of Jewish activities," wrote Cohen, "is but an impressive glitter beneath which there shows everywhere the disquieting glint of a baser and more unenduring metal; our vaunted culture is thin gold plate on an indubitable foundation of brass."

The remedy for this "Age of Brass" was a Jewish publication that would emphasize literature, criticism, and the arts. Such a publication would encourage its readers to perceive themselves as both Jews and citizens of the modern world. In doing so, Cohen called for nothing less than a "complete rehabilitation of the Jewish tradition and the most thoroughgoing reconstruction of Jewish intellectual values."²⁴ "This vibrant new outlook," according to historian Lauren B. Strauss, "was part of Elliot Cohen's attempt to weave a universal intellectual community—including both Jews and gentiles—that would entertain almost any discipline or subject matter that seemed worthy of attention."²⁵ So, when he was offered the chance to edit his own magazine, Cohen willingly took a pay cut, and joined *Commentary* in 1945.

American Jewish Archives Journal

Norman Podhoretz
(courtesy American Jewish Archives)

Cohen exhibited a fierce identification with America. He believed that Jewish writers needed to become more involved in American culture. In 1923, Cohen had argued for an approach that did not treat the Jew as a separate entity but as an inextricable element in the matrix of socioeconomic and psychological forces that also influenced others.²⁶ Again, in 1947, he stated:

We Jews in America will live very deeply immersed in the culture of our general American society. This is not only unavoidable—it is eminently desirable. For Western culture, as we know it,—whatever its failures, and they are great—in its potential the finest human culture that mankind has yet produced.²⁷

This belief was transmitted onto the pages of *Commentary*. According to Neil Jumonville, “More than any theme other than persistent

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

anticommunism, Cohen's advice about the interaction with American culture characterized the tradition of *Commentary*.²⁸ According to Norman Podhoretz, this represented Cohen's "Grand Design to lead the [New York intellectual] family out of the desert of alienation in which it had been wandering for so long and into the promised land of democracy, pluralistic, prosperous America where it would live as blessedly in its Jewishness as in its Americanness, safe and sound and forevermore, amen."²⁹

Born in the shadow of the Holocaust, *Commentary* was to be a creative, revitalizing force. In the wake of the devastation of much of European Jewish life, Cohen felt a great responsibility for continuing the common Jewish culture and spiritual heritage. He realized earlier than most that the burden of the Jewish people was upon American Jewry in many ways and he pledged that *Commentary* would do its share in carrying forward the Jewish heritage. Cohen personally believed in the potential America held for its Jews, that America offered the best opportunity for a harmonious relationship between Jewish culture and the world. He felt America would witness a new Golden Age, paralleling that of medieval Spain, because American Jews had enjoyed an unprecedented freedom there. America was the *goldene medinah*—the land of opportunity, security, and prosperity. America had solved the problems of anti-Semitism and exclusion. Thus, he trusted that America would become the center and focus of Diaspora Judaism to which all thinking Jews would turn. America would become a New Jerusalem; and just as every Jew faced the Temple Mount, now they could countenance the City on the Hill. While Cohen stressed his "act of faith" in the "possibilities in America," he also evoked ancient Jewish tradition and the past: "we remain the people of the Book. We believe in the Word." The old covenant had not been forgotten or replaced; rather it had been revived and renewed in the present. Like its now-defunct predecessor the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, *Commentary* would "reach back for the riches of the past" to become a "record, a history, a memoir." It would memorialize through words. But unlike the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, *Commentary*, as its name change implied, would also strive to achieve more than merely to record; it would explain, criticize, and create.³⁰

Cohen envisaged the conception of a new and indigenous Jewish-American culture. He outlined his blueprint: "It will be similar; it will

be different. It will be old, it will be new. It will be real, and it have a fresh identity never seen before." Cohen called for the creation of a Jewish culture in America that, without confining itself to the traditional bounds of nationalism or sectarianism, would speak to Jews and the rest of the world with the same pertinence as the highest culture of the West. This new culture would be fed by Jewish tradition, and a sense of a common Jewish experience, past and present. Cohen also wanted to immerse himself deeply into the culture of American society because, whatever its failures, it was "the finest human culture that mankind has yet produced." This new culture would not be distinctive nor separate, a civilization within a civilization, but rather interconnected, a subculture within the larger culture. It would not be assimilative, imitative, or derivative. It would be vibrant. His test was not if something was Jewish, but whether it was good, equal to the best in and highest standards of intellectual and artistic American culture. Cohen sought to marry the best from both cultures. He believed that Jews could fully participate in all aspects of American life as Jews, but this must be based upon a series of negotiations and between Jewish and American culture. With a sense of imagination, Cohen undermined the distinctions and blurred the boundaries between what was and what wasn't previously considered Jewish.

The extermination of European Jewry, the possibility of a Jewish state in Palestine, the emergence of the United States as a superpower, and the mass relocation of urban Jews to suburbia, bringing them for the first time into close proximity to Christian neighbors, had thrown these categories into disarray and their definitions were up for grabs. American Jews were increasingly defined purely as a religious denomination rather than a separate national group. "We can have good Jewish music that will not sound Jewish," predicted Cohen.³¹

Commentary took a leading role in this redefinition of Jewishness. Cohen did not want a culture born of apologetics, separatism, or mediocrity. He wanted one "that we respect and that enhances our self-respect." He rejected defensiveness and victim-status. Thus, his *Commentary* radiated Jewish self-confidence, calling for a positive approach to Jewish history. *Commentary* became more than just a magazine of contemporary Jewish affairs and current concerns, as Cohen sought nothing less than to produce a new American Jew and American Jewish culture. *Commentary* prepared the terrain for this culture by announcing that American Jews should be ready for

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

permanence. For Cohen, Jewish culture was necessary in order to provide Jews with a proper sense of adjustment. Jews should feel comfortable in America, as America was no longer to be regarded as exile because “we—and our children and our children’s children—are here to stay... *this is home!*”³²

Cohen’s dual identification with both America and Jewishness was most clearly demonstrated in the department, “From the American Scene,” one of Cohen’s major innovations. It was devoted to informal and amateur sociological reportage of persons, institutions, places, and events in the American scene, as well as the impact of American society on the Jewish family, its cultural patterns, and its various members—and vice versa. The idea for this department was conceived, although never implemented, while Cohen was at *The Menorah Journal*, and he carried it with him ever since.

Cohen saw this department as a response to what he perceived to be the general vagueness in current American Jewish thought and social criticism and the lack of expert and precise knowledge of the Jewish scene in its concrete reality. He wanted to redress such abstract theorizing and generalizations by providing concrete details of the daily life of the average Jew and the average Jewish community. The short articles would describe the “true” flavor of American Jewish life, capturing episodes and personalities which could never be reflected in documents or histories. Often, the selections would take the form of reminiscences, frequently from childhood, and almost always dealt with the immigrant experience at a time when it was not yet fashionable to do so. More than any other part of the magazine, it stressed the differences between Jews and other Americans, but not in terms of superiority or weakness. Cohen attempted to maintain a balance between showing the Jewish contribution to American culture without resorting to chauvinism, something he despised and fought at every opportunity. In an introduction to a collection of articles culled from the department and published in 1953, Cohen wrote:

They are written by Jews about Jews. Inescapably, one might think, they would be anxious, defensive, aggrieved, purposeful. Paradoxically, they are not. They aim neither to prove anything, to solve anything, nor to make a contribution to the time or the ages. They are written for enjoyment, and with enjoyment, we guess—and need no introduction.³³

American Jewish Archives Journal

As he admitted in the same introduction, the department was close to Cohen's heart, and, from its very inception, even closer to the magazine's purpose. At times, though, despite the surface resemblance to a continuation of nostalgic myths, the articles revealed truths that could not be exposed elsewhere and, as we shall see, often caused great consternation within the American Jewish community.

Cohen operated on two assumptions, both of which turned out to be controversial. First, according to Podhoretz, "He felt it was time to abandon the tradition which had become pretty well solidified in Anglo-Jewish journalism, of self-[con]gratulation and the spirit of public relations that seemed to govern all discourse that Jews were carrying out among themselves, among each other, in English." Cohen strove to return to what he felt was a more authentic Jewish tradition of frank self-criticism. His second assumption was "the notion that Jewishness was not to be considered—conceived of as a constrictive, or ghettoizing principle; rather that it was to be conceived of as a broadening principle, as a wedge into the world—into the world outside—as a de-ghettoizing principle."³⁴ Cohen used his editorial freedom to interpret the AJC's mandate freely and enthusiastically, as a *carte blanche* to go searching for articles beyond the confines of the organized Jewish community.

Cohen envisioned a new Jewish American culture, distinct from that of the Old World of European Jewry, and hence provided a forum for intellectuals to explore new, untested, and sometimes shocking visions of secular, Jewish identity. Cohen gave a high profile in his magazine to young Jewish intellectuals, as his *Commentary* was an attempt to build a bridge between Jewish intellectuals and their community, to overcome their differences and sense of mutual distrust, to lessen the distance between them. It was Cohen's dream to arrange a reconciliation between the intellectuals and the Jewish community. He succeeded in attracting Jewish intellectuals who had earlier completely dissociated themselves from the organized Jewish community and whom had never previously thought of discussing Jewish subject matter in an impartial, forthright, and serious fashion. *Commentary* provided a forum in which they could express their Jewishness. As a result, Jewishness became intellectually and culturally respectable within the intellectual community. As Podhoretz put it, many learned to "shake hands in public with their own Jewishness for the first time in their lives."³⁵

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

At times, however, Cohen's vision of what a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues should look like irritated both the AJC and other elements within American Jewry. The young Jewish intellectuals who wrote for *Commentary* often scorned what they perceived as the middle class, liberal, bourgeois institutions of the Jewish community. Historian Stephen Zipperstein has noted how *Commentary* "was suspicious, even contemptuous of any aspects of Jewish life that had in the past appeared to guarantee the culture's viability; and it substituted an uncertain, Jewishly ambiguous diet of Western or Westernized masters (Kafka, Babel, Freud, perhaps also Buber or Ahad Ha'am)."³⁶ The result was that *Commentary* often discussed Jewish affairs with a tone of detachment, disdain, and contempt. This tone helped to make *Commentary* unpopular within organized American Jewry, repelling those "public-relations-minded Jewish readers who were used to something more hortatory and self-congratulatory."³⁷

CONTROVERSIES

The first hint of trouble between *Commentary* and the AJC came at the Committee's meeting of the Administrative Council on April 1, 1947. Judge Joseph Proskauer expressed to his colleagues some reservations about several items in recent issues, which had been widely criticized in the Jewish community, "and have caused some embarrassment to the organization." Two of the offending pieces were book reviews of *Gentleman's Agreement* and *The Plotters* in the March issue. Diana Trilling had reviewed Laura Z. Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) negatively: despite its "highly commendable purpose," she found it "poor—dull, non-dimensional, without atmosphere... peculiarly empty" and clichéd.³⁸ Likewise, William Petersen found John Roy Carlson's *The Plotters* (1946) to be an inaccurate, badly written, and sensationalistic book on fascism that should have been based on more than fervor.³⁹ The problem with both reviews was that they had taken positions inconsistent with the activities and positions of the other departments of the AJC. So, although the Committee had granted *Commentary* full editorial freedom, when Cohen exercised it, the Committee grew concerned. Proskauer may have stressed that he had no intention of limiting the editorial freedom of the magazine, he and the Committee, did not

American Jewish Archives Journal

want to have to deal with such items of business in the future.⁴⁰

A far more controversial essay was Louis Berg's "The Americanism of Adolph S. Ochs: A Guest in the House," which appeared in the January 1947 issue. Berg attempted to destroy what he perceived to be the myth of *New York Times* editor Ochs. Although Ochs had made the *Times* respectable and a financial success, Berg regarded him as neither a giant nor a hero, but a conservative, meek man, whose qualities were not innovation but honesty, industry, and common sense administration. On its own, this iconoclastic piece would have caused problems, but when Berg launched into Ochs's Jewishness and Americanism, things got worse. Berg charged that Ochs had made of his Jewishness, "a dynamism of recoil, a positive of the negative, and affirmation in denial." Typical of the upper-class German Jews, Ochs was part of the gentry, totally assimilated, part of a community for whom "intermarriage with a Polish or Lithuanian Jew would almost have been miscegenation." With few exceptions, he did not even have a philanthropic interest in the Jewish community, and tried to be more American than the Americans. For, while it was understood that every minority and ethnic group would naturally try to further its own interests, Ochs did virtually nothing to further the cause of the Jews. Calling him a "Court Jew," Berg went on to criticize the present owners of the *Times*, Arthur Hays Sulzberger and Julius Ochs, whose loyalty:

...to their Americanism does not permit them—with or without reservations—to contribute to the United Jewish Appeal, devoted to overseas and refugee aid, and the upbuilding of Palestine. To be sure, the UJA has the support of the chief editorial writer of the *Times* — but he is not a Jew.

The Jewish heads of the *Times* had a right to be non-Zionist and even non-Jewish, Berg conceded, but they did not have to be so very anti-Zionist, nor ought they have proposed against Felix Frankfurter's appointment to the Supreme Court on the grounds that it would provoke anti-Semitism. Berg concluded:

Being cautious Jews, they cannot be bold Americans. No household could ask for more proper guests, no lord for better standards. They make excellent public servants, obeying all the rules, leaning backwards to exonerate themselves from the

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

charge of originality or pathfinding. But, by the same token, they cannot lead.⁴¹

Not only did the article run counter to the prevailing notions of Jewish public self-congratulation, but Berg had also indirectly attacked the Committee itself, which was the creation in large part of the very German-Jewish "Court Jews" Ochs had excoriated.

In response, Proskauer sent a long and angry letter to Cohen, which was published in the February issue. It was a mistake, he claimed, to have published such an ironic, caricaturing, iconoclastic, and innuendo-laden article. Ochs had "brought glory to the Jewish people," he had built up a great journal, and had lived a life of integrity and goodness. Berg, on the other hand, was "a Communist," whose "method is that of the party line, which seeks by this kind of half-truth to make qualities which in their proper setting are virtues, appear, by throwing them out of focus, to be grave and vicious defects of character." Proskauer personally "deeply deplored" the publication of the article, but found its provocation of "grave dissent and concern" within the Committee and the wider Jewish community even worse (New York Rabbi Nathan Perilman had also described the piece as "a vicious and abusive and personalized attack," the only justification for its appearance in *Commentary* being "that it is a comment which represents the thinking of some of our fellows Jews who find themselves not completely at home").

Controversially, Proskauer reminded Cohen of his proper place within the Committee and just exactly what was meant by the term "editorial freedom":

I repeat my conviction that *Commentary* has established itself under your editorship as a dignified, useful, and potent magazine. It is, moreover, my belief that the authority of the editor must not be trammled by ukase of the publisher. You carry every month the legend: "The opinions and views expressed by *Commentary's* contributors and editors are their own and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position." Yet there are certain limitations which I think the editor should impose upon himself consistent with the fundamentals of free discussion.⁴²

American Jewish Archives Journal

The real problem—articulated by Proskauer in private but not in public—however, was that prospective large contributors to the New York United Jewish Appeal (UJA), from which the Committee's and hence *Commentary's* funding was derived, threatened to withhold their contributions in protest.⁴³ Cohen had been issued his first public warning that a certain amount of censorship was necessary to keep the Committee and the chief Jewish philanthropists happy.

Cohen, in turn, felt it necessary to defend his magazine, as well as to justify his decision to print the article. He printed a response from Berg, suggesting his article had been misread and misunderstood, followed by his own explanation:

The editors of *Commentary* printed Mr. Berg's article ...because in their judgment it was a significant discussion of a theory of Jewish adjustment, as the article's writer saw it exemplified in a friendly biography of an important public figure in Jewish life ...Our readers understand that we allow our writers latitude of opinion, and that in turn these columns are wide open for the expression of protest, differing opinion, and sharp and violent dissent with the views of any writer. We are glad that Rabbi Perilman and Judge Proskauer have availed themselves of this opportunity. Our faith is that truth and understanding result from this interplay of honest opinion (though obviously there are pitfalls and difficulties in the process); and it is to help truth and create understanding that *Commentary* exists.⁴⁴

In answering, Cohen had lost this round, and besides, it was too late, as the damage had already been done. He was not, however, completely defeated, as he still had powerful supporters within the Committee. At the next meeting of the Administrative Committee on June 3rd, vice president Ralph Samuel rose to defend the magazine. It was not, he reminded his fellow members of the executive board, a house organ, but was "designed to be an intellectual stimulant and to provoke discussion on a high level of matters of Jewish concern." Samuel then pointed to the magazine's general and widespread acceptance in Jewish circles and elsewhere, especially within the Committee's own chapters. Pleading passionately against censorship, Samuel proposed two possible solutions: the removal of the line on the cover "published by the American Jewish Committee," or a

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

disclaimer by the Committee. A spirited discussion of the matter occurred, initiated by Samuel's observation that the exact nature of the agreement between the organization and the magazine had never really been spelled out. The meeting ended with no plan for formal action and, despite Proskauer's angry letter, there was general agreement that "whereas certain errors of judgment may have been committed, they were not of sufficient seriousness to justify censorship."⁴⁵ Cohen emerged to fight another day.

The Berg controversy, however, was minor in comparison to that created by an article penned by Isaac Rosenfeld in October 1949. Cohen should have been forewarned by the Berg episode in general, and Rosenfeld's review of Nathan Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore* in October 1948, in particular. Rosenfeld somehow managed to slip in a paragraph about how food in Jewish culture "is surrounded with rituals and taboos," in particular *kreplach*:

And the Devil is a common element, because *kreplach* is devil's food. This follows from the symbolism of *kreplach*, which is anal. First, the word itself. The *kr* and *ch* sounds in Yiddish are deeply guttural, produced with a sound of phlegm, and the whole word, even without its component Anglo-Saxon pun, is plainly faecal in character. So also is the chopped meat, particularly when the *kreplach* are done. Now faeces, as any child knows, is devil's food (and adults have given the name of devil's food to a heavy, moist cake made of darkest chocolate).⁴⁶

This joke passed by unnoticed by everyone (at least no one commented on it), because Rosenfeld had killed the punch line by explaining it. Nonetheless, he had introduced a kind of speculative, half-humorous inquiry typical of alienated yet interested Jews (and in which Philip Roth would specialize to great consternation more than a decade later), which would spawn a furor the following year. His subsequent piece, "Adam and Eve on Delancey Street," was a Freudian rendition of the laws of Kashrut. The advent of kosher bacon (Kosher Fry Beef), the slicing of which drew crowds standing at the window, according to Rosenfeld, "oblivious of the burden of parcels, of errands and of business; no comments are made, they stand in silence, not to

American Jewish Archives Journal

interfere with one another's contemplation, as they followed the course of the slices, from the blade to the box." How to explain the allure of the spectacle? Rosenfeld argued that the mostly Jewish crowd was actually peeping into the "whole world of forbidden sexuality, the sexuality of the goyim." He suggested that food taboos were actually sex taboos:

Milchigs, having to do with milk, is feminine; *fleshigs*, meat, is masculine. Their junction in one meal, or within one vessel, is forbidden, for their union is the sexual act. (The Jewish joke about the man with cancer of the penis bears this out. He is advised by the doctor to soak his penis in hot water. His wife, finding him so engaged, cries out, "Cancer shmancer. *Dos iz a milchig tepple!* —who cares about cancer? You're using a *milchig* pot."

He concluded that the dietary laws were thus injunctions against forbidden sexual practices; the careful circumscription of food mirrored Jewish sexual repression.⁴⁷

OBSCENITY, PORNOGRAPHY, AND SMUT

Unsurprisingly, this offended many within the American Jewish community. The title itself hinted at an intellectual snob looking down upon lower-class Jews, while its use of language was shocking, salacious, and very risqué for 1949. Nathan Ziprin described Rosenfeld's article as "revolting nonsense" and "as nauseating and perverse a piece as was ever written."⁴⁸ *The Congress Weekly* found it "nauseating," "literary trash" that would gladden the heart of the most rabid anti-Semite. Ironically, the organ of the American Jewish Congress pointed out:

Had that piece appeared in any other publication, the American Jewish Committee would not doubt be busily engaged in devising measures of a nature described as "anti-defamation" and probably investigating whether the magazine could be barred from the mails because of obscenity.⁴⁹

Jewish columnist Carl Alpert took the criticism one step further: "If Paul Joseph Goebbels or any other arch-anti-Semite propagandist had

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

been engaged by the American Jewish Committee to write an article for its monthly journal, *Commentary*, he could have penned no more defamatory or insulting an article" Alpert "literally gagg[ed] at the smut" of "this revolting instance of pure imagination," and "disgusting filth" which constituted:

...the grossest kind of slander on the entire Jewish people ...This is obscenity ...pornographic ...It is impossible to maintain any kind of respect for a Jewish periodical which prints this filthy drivel. Nor can any self-respecting Jewish permit his name to be connected in any way with such a journal. Other authors in the same pages are contaminated by association ...Is there a self- respecting Orthodox Jew who can remain silent in the face of this outrage? And if I know Reform Jews, many of them, too, will be nauseated and horrified by this appalling and disgraceful spectacle...this blatant and vulgar attack on Jews in a responsible magazine.⁵⁰

Alpert did not see the article as a solitary instance, but typical of an editorial policy that "degrades the Jew and uses filth as a means of insulting Jewish respectability." Alpert was so disgusted that he began a public probing of *Commentary* in the *National Jewish Post* from October 7, 1949 onwards.⁵¹

Another individual also felt that Rosenfeld's article "was not an exceptional occurrence but rather an extreme incident in a settled policy" of "publishing articles unsympathetic to Jewish religious values":

Unfortunately, many such have appeared in your magazine, written by bright, formally educated, but Jewishly immature individuals who have apparently found in *Commentary* a sort of phychiatrist [*sic*] couch to work off their complexes and their Jewish self-hatred. One has but to peruse the issues of *Commentary* during the last few years to find this to be a continuing pattern containing many deviations from good taste ...depicting offensively sordid and vulgar backgrounds ...containing cynical and unsavory references.

"The periodic reappearance of such articles," he concluded, "tend to

American Jewish Archives Journal

form a distorted and unfavorable picture of Jewish life which is both unrealistic and unjust...That your editor has permitted this sort of thing for so long a time, culminating in the Rosenfeld piece, is surely evidence of an insensitivity which is almost unbelievable."⁵²

Louis Finkelstein, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, received many letters about Rosenfeld's article. "As you may imagine, it gave me anything but pleasure. I do not understand how Elliot ever permitted such an article to be printed nor how any Jew could bring himself to write it."⁵³ One such letter was from Henry Hurwitz, erstwhile editor of *The Menorah Journal* and previously Cohen's employer. "Have you read the stories in *Commentary* which have been pouring ridicule and contempt on the rituals of the Judaism and on *Rabbonim*?" He called the article a "*chillul hashem*."⁵⁴ Hurwitz had fallen out with Cohen in the 1930s when Cohen was still editing *The Menorah Journal*. Since then their relationship had been cool at best. It further declined when the AJC cut its subsidy to *The Menorah Journal* soon after *Commentary* had been launched, and Hurwitz was sure that the Committee was deliberately trying to destroy his magazine.⁵⁵ Probably attempting to get even, Hurwitz wrote to Rabbi Milton Steinberg of Park Avenue Synagogue, New York City:

Have you by any chance seen the current [October] issue of *Commentary*? Page 387 is the most utterly appalling page I have ever seen in any Jewish magazine, or in any general magazine.

The whole article... reeks with obscenity and insult to Judaism. But lines 18–24 of the second column on page 387 (which I can't quote out to a stenographer) are the *ne plus ultra*. It recalls the vilest libels of Hitler and Streicher and Goebbels; and were such anti-Jewish filth to appear in a general paper in this country the Anti-Defamation League, and I suppose the American Jewish Committee itself, would be up in arms. Instead it appears in the Committee's own magazine!⁵⁶

Steinberg agreed: "And it is everything which you say, as wanton and calloused an assault on decency and the Jewish tradition as I have come upon."⁵⁷

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

NEGATIVE JEWS

Steinberg's fury, in turn, led him to deliver a long sermon before his Friday night congregation. He asked whether *Commentary* was a benefit or detriment to American Judaism. Although he stressed that *Commentary* had developed very considerable strengths, it had also "come to display very considerable weaknesses also, negative and destructive traits which tend to neutralize the virtues and to bring into question whether, on the balance, it is more a benefit or detriment to American Judaism." He then sermonized about this "darker side" of the magazine, which had aroused bitterness and hostility in broad sectors of American Jewry, especially among informed and committed Jews. *Commentary* has "disclosed itself as deficient in that ultimate love of Judaism without which no Jewish enterprise can be other than morally bankrupt." He complained that the magazine had studiously ignored some of the most significant elements in Jewish life; that it had consistently given distorted presentation to certain others, no less crucial; and, finally, that all too frequently it takes on an air of condescension and superciliousness towards Jewish matters, including historical Jewish sanctities, and offended Jewish sensibilities. He said that there was an "air of dilettantism and literary dandyism which hovers over *Commentary*" and which "fails so generally to concern itself with the issues of Jewish life." Thus, "to persons who take Judaism and Jewish life seriously" *Commentary* appeared "ivory-towerish," "irresponsible," and "even trivial."⁵⁸

Furthermore, many Jews of positive orientation towards Judaism have never been invited to write for *Commentary*, instead what he called "negative Jews" appeared in its pages, fostering a "Jewish negativism within American Jewry, indeed a nihilism" whereby "escapist Jews are encouraged in their escapism and loyalist Jews disheartened." *Commentary* had become, in his words, a "paradox"—a Jewish magazine, but "broadly negative to Jewish interests and values." This situation, he observed, was the fault of "the rootless Jewish intellectual; the Jew alienated from yet drawn to the Jewish faith, tradition and people; ambivalent toward them, that is to say, loving and hating them at the same time; indeed simultaneously approving and despising his own personality for its irretrievable Jewishness." He concluded with a call to arms:

American Jewish Archives Journal

Should *Commentary* persist in its course to the present, slighting positive elements in Jewish life, or distorting them, or sneering at them, and this despite the mounting chorus of protest, in which this sermon is but one voice, then we shall have no alternative except to assume that the hate is incorrigible, that the publication therefore is regrettably the enemy of our souls as Jews. We shall then have no choice except to do it battle with all the force at our disposal.⁵⁹

Podhoretz described Steinberg's speech as an attempt to "kill *Commentary*," by issuing a "decree of excommunication" from his throne in his cathedral on Park Avenue. Steinberg also circulated what Podhoretz called "a pastoral letter throughout the diocese," urging his "parishioners" and those related to them, not to give any money to the AJC because it was supporting such a "horrendous enterprise."⁶⁰ Steinberg's ire may have been aroused by the fact that some years before he launched his anti-*Commentary* campaign, his book *A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem*, was described in the magazine as being marked by "a deficiency of rigorous thought" and a "somewhat facile philosophy" that was committed to print before it was properly thought through.⁶¹ As Podhoretz put it: "Hell hath no fury like an author unfavorably reviewed...."⁶²

FALLOUT AND FALLING OUT

Cohen felt the need to apologize publicly and it was the only article for which he wrote an apology in the magazine. In his apology Cohen admitted to "a lapse in editorial watchfulness," which he deeply regretted.⁶³ In a private letter to M. L. Isaacs, Dean of Yeshiva College, Cohen wrote: "There are always limits to which editors can go in editing writers, especially those of Mr. Rosenfeld's seriousness and conviction; we try in *Commentary* to give the widest possible latitude for the expression of authors' opinions, whether or not we agree with them." He accepted that some passages may have been misunderstood and "should have been recast" and "certainly there is one anecdote that was both gross and pointless and should have been eliminated. The editor slipped, and he is sorry for the offense."⁶⁴ This was a surprising response from Cohen as he fiercely and jealously guarded his editorial freedom, often losing his short and fiery temper

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

doing so. As if to compound the insult, AJC President Jacob Blaustein wrote a formal complaint that Cohen published in the magazine. Blaustein was personally incensed by the article and furious that *Commentary* had offended so many Jewish sensibilities. He openly rapped Cohen over the knuckles, and clearly warned that such behavior was never to be repeated: "I feel certain that your [publication] committee will repudiate this article as not at all representing the aims of *Commentary*, and that it will take steps to insure that there will be no repetition of this unfortunate episode."⁶⁵

In response, Cohen's friends within the New York Jewish intellectual community initiated a letter-writing campaign against the Committee. Dwight Macdonald wrote that Blaustein's letter was a "tasteless" example of "the power of the purse to give a public spanking to an editorial board," serving "notice that henceforth the editors have, under duress, agreed not to print articles" that might offend the AJC's sensibilities. Mary McCarthy suggested Blaustein's pressure was akin to "the ukase of a warden in a house of correction," warning "There can be no editorial freedom for *Commentary* in the future if Mr. Blaustein and his co-officials are not, in their turn, subjected to public censure for this excess of administrative ardor."

Irving Howe called it "subvention" and was "disturbed," as he could see no reason for an apology. Even former *Record* editor, Philip Rahv, termed it "medieval."⁶⁶ This reprimand from the AJC had been so severe that Cohen felt cowed into submission, and he extinguished any public discussion of the matter. He distanced himself from the protests of his friends, refusing to publish any of them, meekly stating: "After a good deal of discussion here, we have decided that little constructive good would be served by reopening the controversy at this point."⁶⁷ Rosenfeld's article had created probably the biggest problem between the AJC and *Commentary*, almost leading to Cohen's dismissal. Thereafter, he seemed to have heeded Blaustein's warning, on Jewish affairs at least. Although *Commentary* did print other articles at odds with AJC sensibilities, after the controversy caused by Rosenfeld's article both the Committee and Cohen were far more cautious and circumspect.

CONCLUSION

In 1931, Henry Hurwitz wrote to his former employee, Elliot

American Jewish Archives Journal

Cohen, advising him that “responsible editorship” of a journal like the *Menorah Journal* required:

A certain immersion in Jewish studies, besides a sympathy with Jewish life far deeper than a critical interest in the contemporary Jewish scene. Hence, unless you are prepared to devote far more time to Jewish studies, your own life’s vocation would seem to lie elsewhere.

Although Cohen’s vocation returned to an editorship of a Jewish magazine, he evidently ignored Hurwitz’s advice, which might have saved him a great deal of trouble later on in life. In the same letter, Hurwitz asking Cohen: “What would you like Jewish life to be?”⁶⁸ Perhaps, some eighteen years later, he was finally answered. The publication of various articles, culminating in Rosenfeld’s piece and its aftermath, tell us that Cohen’s, and thus *Commentary’s*, attitude towards Jewishness and Judaism was unconventional, intellectual, often disdainful, definitely insensitive, contemptuous of organized Jewry, and hence unafraid to push boundaries or dissent from communal norms.

Why did Cohen print such articles and did he consider the potential aftermath before hand? It is clear that Cohen tested the extent to which he could go, pushing boundaries to their limits, seeing how far he could promote new and untried visions of Judaism. Or, perhaps, being well schooled in internal Jewish politics, Cohen knew what the reactions would be and he was deliberating antagonizing the Jewish establishment, whom he despised from his fifteen years spent in the wilderness as the publicity director of the New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropists.

Finally, perhaps he used such items as a gesture of defiance and autonomy, to establish *Commentary’s* editorial independence from the AJC, knowing precisely that no Jewish agency would allow this sort of thing to be printed in a “house” magazine. To answer the question posed in the title: *Commentary* was a Jewish journal inasmuch as Jews sponsored it, Jews wrote articles in it about Jews, and Jews read and complained about it, but its relationship to Jewishness and the Jewish community was far more complex than that.

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A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

magazine The author would like to thank Daniel Greene, Richard King, Fred Krome, Lisa Magloff, Bill Novak, and Hugh Wilford, for their useful help, comments, and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Research for this article was made possible in part by the Marguerite R. Jacobs Memorial Fellowship at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

NOTES

1. Barbara Zimmerman, quoted in Ralph Melnick, *The Stolen Legacy of Anne Frank: Meyer Levin, Lillian Hellman, and the Staging of the Diary* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 15.

2. Milton S. Katz, "Commentary and the American Jewish Intellectual Experience," *Journal of American Culture* 3: 1 (Spring 1980), 158.

3. Ruth R. Wisse, remarks made to the friends and supporters of the magazine gathered to celebrate its Editor-in-Chief Norman Podhoretz upon the occasion of his retirement, May 2, 1995. See also her "The Maturing of *Commentary* and of the Jewish Intellectual," *Jewish Social Studies* 3: 2 (Winter 1997): 29–41.

4. Charles Kadushin, Julie Hover, and Monique Tichy, "How and Where to Find Intellectual Elite in the United States," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 35: 1 (Spring 1974): 1–18.

5. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 9.

6. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994), 7.

7. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 5.

8. David Twersky, "Left Right, Left Right: After Half a Century, *Commentary* Remains Defiantly Out of Step," *Moment* 20: 3 (June 1995), 41.

9. William Novak, "Commentary and the Jewish Community: The Record Since 1960," *Response* 7: 3 (Fall 1973), 66.

10. Mark Shechner, *After the Revolution: Studies in Contemporary Jewish-American Imagination* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 20.

11. Incidentally, the most scholarship on *Commentary* I have found in one place is at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter cited as AJA), where, since 1963, students at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion have addressed the question of whether *Commentary* is actually a significant journal of Jewish opinion: George D Gittleman, "An Analysis of *Commentary*: Ideas, Trends and Attitudes Toward Jews and Judaism for the Year 1990," (unpublished term paper, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, OH, 1994); Mel Hecht, "The Image of American Jewish Life in *Commentary* Magazine Under the Editorship of Elliot Cohen," (unpublished term paper, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, OH, 1969); Steven Leder, "Commentary Magazine, Its Form and Content," (unpublished term paper, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, OH, 1985); and Thomas P. Liebschutz, "How Jewish is *Commentary*: A Study of the Jewish Articles in *Commentary* Magazine," (unpublished term paper, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, OH, 1963).

12. Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: A History of the American Jewish Committee 1906–1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972).

13. Most of the studies of *Commentary* have tended to be of article length: Bernard Avishai, "Breaking Faith: *Commentary* and the American Jews," *Dissent* 28: 2

American Jewish Archives Journal

(Spring 1981); John Erhman, "Commentary, the Public Interest, and the Problem of American Jewish Conservatism," *American Jewish History* 87: 2 and 3 (June and September 1999): 159–81; Allen Graubard, "From Commentary to Tikkun: The Past and Future of 'Progressive Jewish Intellectuals,'" *Middle East Report* (May–June 1989): 17–23; Ernst Pawel, "Smugness in Eden, Is it Good for the Jews? Commentary on the Jewish Scene," *Response* 7: 3 (Fall 1973): 39–49; Norman Podhoretz, "Ideas, Influence and American Politics: The Case of Commentary," *Survey* 29: 3 (Autumn 1985): 20–26; Steven S. Schwarzschild, "The Commentary-Monat Axis," *Menorah Journal* 41 (1953): 87–105; David Singer, "Reflections on Commentary: Foreword," *Jewish Social Studies* 3: 2 (Winter 1997): 17; Milton Steinberg, "Commentary Magazine," in *A Believing Jew: The Selected Writing of Milton Steinberg* (New York, 1951), 136–65; Ruth R. Wisse, "The Making of Commentary and of the Jewish Intellectual," *Jewish Social Studies* 3: 2 (Winter 1997): 29–41; Michael Wyschogrod, "My Commentary Problem— And Ours," *Judaism* 17: 2 (Spring 1968): 148–61; Steven J. Zipperstein, "Commentary and American Jewish Culture in the 1940s and 1950s," *Jewish Social Studies* 3: 2 (Winter 1997): 18–28.

14. See, for example, Harvey Teres, *Renewing the Left: Politics, Imagination, and the New York Intellectuals* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Terry Cooney, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals: Partisan Review and its Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); and James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York and London: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1968).

15. See Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); and Gregory D. Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996).

16. Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in the Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985); and Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

17. Mark Gerson *The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1997); Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945–1994* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); and J. David Hoeveler, Jr. *Watch on the Right: Conservative Intellectuals in the Reagan Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

18. Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1968), 128, 133; *Time*, January 29, 1951.

19. Podhoretz, *Making It*, 299, and quoted in Philip Ben, "Commentary: An American Monthly with Jewish Roots," draft article for *Maariv* (January 27, 1978), American Jewish Committee Records, Record Group 347, GEN-12 and GEN 10, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York (hereafter cited as AJC, YIVO).

20. I am grateful to Steven Leder for pointing this out in his "Commentary Magazine, Its Form and Content," AJA.

A Significant Journal of Jewish Opinion?

21. Elliot E. Cohen, "An Act of Affirmation" (editorial statement), *Commentary* 1: 1 (1945): 1-3.
22. Cohen was named after George Eliot, probably for her sympathetic representation of Jews in *Daniel Deronda*. Later in life he would change his name to Elliot.
23. This biographical material has been collated from Elinor Grumet, "Elliot Cohen: The Vocation of a Jewish Literary Mentor," *Studies in the American Jewish Experience* 1, ed. Jacob R. Marcus and Abraham J. Peck (Cincinnati, Ohio: American Jewish Archives, 1981): 8-25 and the Nearprint File "Elliot E. Cohen," AJA.
24. Elliot E. Cohen, "The Age of Brass," *The Menorah Journal* 11: 5 (October 1925): 447.
25. Lauren B. Straus, "Staying Afloat in the Melting Pot: Constructing an American Jewish Identity in the *Menorah Journal* of the 1920s," *American Jewish History* 84 (December 1996): 325.
26. Elliot Cohen, "The Menorah Summer School," *Menorah Journal* 9 (1923): 339-45.
27. Elliot E. Cohen, "Jewish Culture in America," *Commentary* 3: 5 (May 1947): 416.
28. Jumonville, *Critical Crossings*, 64; see also 61-63.
29. Podhoretz, *Making It*, 130, 134-35.
30. Cohen, "An Act of Affirmation," 1, 2, 3.
31. Cohen, "Jewish Culture in America," 412-20 and "Can the Jewish Community Afford Culture?" Address to the General Assembly, National Council of Federations and Welfare Funds, 1947.
32. Cohen, "Jewish Culture in America," 412-420; Oscar Handlin, "Our Unknown American Ancestors," *Commentary* 5: 2 (February 1948): 104-10; Israel Knox, "Is America Exile or Home?" *Commentary* 2: 5 (November 1946): 401-08. For more detail on this please see my "America is home: Commentary Magazine and the Refocusing of the Community of Memory, 1945-1960," *Jewish Culture and History* 3: 1 (Summer 2000): 45-74; "Struggling for Freedom: Arthur Miller, the *Commentary* Community, and the Cultural Cold War," (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1998); and Zipperstein, "Commentary and American Jewish Culture," 18-28.
33. Elliot E. Cohen, "Introduction," in *Commentary on the American Scene*, ed. Elliot E. Cohen (New York: Knopf, 1953), xix; Elliot E. Cohen, "Menorah Overmatter," nd., MS. COLL. # 2, Henry Hurwitz/ Menorah Association Collection (hereafter cited as HHMA), AJA.
34. Norman Podhoretz, Speech given in Chicago, (1968), Norman Podhoretz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
35. Podhoretz, *Making It*, 133; see also Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, 263-64.
36. Zipperstein, "Commentary and American Jewish Culture," 19.
37. Podhoretz, *Making It*, 134.
38. Laura Z. Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement: A Novel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947); Diana Trilling, "Americans Without Distinction," *Commentary* 3: 3 (March 1947): 291.
39. John Roy Carlson, *The Plotters* (New York: Dutton, 1946); William Petersen, "The Native Fascist Threat," *Commentary* 3: 3 (March 1947): 294-97.
40. Minutes of the Administrative Council, April 1, 1947, AJC, YIVO.

American Jewish Archives Journal

41. Louis Berg, "The Americanism of Adolph S. Ochs: A Guest in the House," *Commentary* 3: 1 (January 1947): 69, 71.
42. Joseph Proskauer, "Letter to the Editor," *Commentary* 3: 2 (February 1947): 187, 189; Rabbi Nathan A. Perilman, "Letter to the Editor," *ibid.*, 189.
43. Minutes of the Administrative Council, April 1, 1947, AJC, YIVO.
44. Elliot E. Cohen, Editorial Note, *Commentary* 3: 2 (February 1947): 190. See also Louis Berg, "Letter to the Editor," *Commentary* 3: 2 (February 1947): 189–90.
45. Minutes of the Administrative Committee, June 3, 1947, AJC, YIVO.
46. Isaac Rosenfeld, "Kreplach," *Commentary* 6: 5 (October 1948): 487–88.
47. Isaac Rosenfeld, "Adam and Eve on Delancey Street," *Commentary* 8: 4 (October 1949): 385–87. For more on Rosenfeld in general and on this episode in particular see Stephen Zipperstein, "Isaac Rosenfeld's *Dybbuk* and Rethinking Literary Biography," *Partisan Review* 69: 1 (2002): 102–17; "The First Loves of Isaac Rosenfeld," *Jewish Social Studies* 5: 1 (1998): 3–24 and "Commentary and American Jewish Culture," 21–26 respectively.
48. Nathan Ziprin, "Magazine is Excoriated for 'Revolting Nonsense,'" *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* (November 3, 1949), 3.
49. "Something 'Treif' in *Commentary*," *Congress Weekly* 16: 26 (October 24, 1949), 3.
50. Carl Alpert, "Commentary Article on Kashrut and Sex Assailed as Smutty," *The National Jewish Post* (October 14, 1949), 2.
51. Carl Alpert to Members of the American Jewish Committee, October 24, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
52. M. Rotenberg to John Slawson, November 10, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
53. Louis Finkelstein to Henry Hurwitz, November 3, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
54. Henry Hurwitz to Louis Finkelstein, November 12, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
55. See Lewis Fried, "The Menorah Journal: Yavneh in America, 1945–1950," *The American Jewish Archives Journal* 50: 1&2 (1998): 76–108.
56. Henry Hurwitz to Rabbi Milton Steinberg, October 20, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
57. Rabbi Milton Steinberg to Henry Hurwitz, October 23, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
58. Milton Steinberg, "Commentary Magazine—Benefit or Detriment to American Judaism?" A lecture delivered before the Park Avenue Synagogue, NYC, November 18, 1949, AJA. Reprinted in *A Believing Jew*, 136–65.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Podhoretz, Speech in Chicago (1968).
61. Theodor H. Gaster, "Programmatic Jewishness," *Commentary* 2: 5 (November 1946): 490–91.
62. Podhoretz, Speech in Chicago (1968).
63. Elliot Cohen, "Editorial Note," *Commentary* 8: 5 (November 1949): 501.
64. Elliot Cohen to M.L. Isaacs, October 18, 1949, HHMA, AJA.
65. Jacob Blaustein, "Letter to the Editor," *Commentary* 8: 6 (December 1949): 594.
66. Dwight Macdonald to the Editors of *Commentary*, December 13, 1949; Mary McCarthy to Elliot Cohen, December 14, 1949; Irving Howe to Elliot Cohen, December 18, 1949; Philip Rahv to the Editors of *Commentary*, December 19, 1949, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Sterling Library, Yale University.
67. Elliot Cohen to Dwight Macdonald, February 16, 1950, Dwight Macdonald Papers.
68. Henry Hurwitz to Elliot Cohen, November 2, 1931, HHMA, AJA.