



PROJECT MUSE®

---

"The Fabulous Irishman": Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe's  
"Unusual Religious and National Combination" in Cold War  
America

Rachel Gordan

American Jewish History, Volume 102, Number 3, July 2018, pp. 401-421  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajh.2018.0036>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/700889>

# “The Fabulous Irishman”: Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe’s “Unusual Religious and National Combination” in Cold War America

RACHEL GORDAN

---

Little remembered today, but much discussed at the time was the visit of the Jewish Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe of Dublin to the United States in the spring of 1957. Stranger-than-fiction, but also typifying what Cold War Americans wanted to believe was possible among their own Jewish citizens, Mayor Briscoe embodied an unexpected combination of religious and national loyalties. “The Lord Mayor,” explained typical American newspaper coverage of Briscoe’s visit, “embodies the unusual combination of a devout orthodox Jew and a zealous Irish patriot.”<sup>1</sup> The irony was that Briscoe was not American, proving that the freedom of opportunity and religion that Cold War Americans viewed as fundamental to their own purported exceptionalism, actually occurred to varying degrees in other countries—although often without the fanfare typical in the US context. Still, Briscoe’s six-week American visit, the media’s attention to it, and the television drama that Briscoe inspired, provide a view into Cold War American fears and desires around Jews, religious fealty, citizenship, and the particular way in which midcentury American discourses around religious freedom found a primary example in Jews, such as Briscoe, and their religion.

At a time when a tri-faith image of postwar America as a country of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews was widely accepted, Briscoe’s presence and popularity in the U.S. helped to affirm America’s embrace of religious freedom—albeit a freedom constrained to just three religions, and even more crucially, although rarely made explicit, to those individuals understood as racially white. As Kevin Schultz’s study of “tri-faith America” explains of the era’s credo: “The ethnic, religious, and racial divisions that had been predominant in pre-World War II America no longer had a place in the defining traits of good Americanism. With enemies such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Hirohito, the ideal of tolerance was sacrosanct, and during the war years the kind of tolerance that was

---

1. “Dublin’s Jewish Mayor Pays Visit to Southland,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1957, 3.

lionized most was that between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.”<sup>2</sup> This tri-faith ideal had practical results, Schultz points out, challenging the nation to rethink the distribution of power and who was deserving of social, political, and cultural recognition. In line with this rethinking of American society, Robert Briscoe prodded American observers to reconsider their stereotypes of clannish Jews, and he affirmed postwar Jewish allegiance to religion as an ideological core of their identity. Although Briscoe was an “Irish import,” America’s reception of him during his spring 1957 tour symbolized the unusual role that Jews played in serving as evidentiary proof of midcentury America’s ideal of religious freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Briscoe would spend six weeks in North America. In that time, he became a celebrity, as newspapers around the country followed his tour and as a result of his television and radio appearances. In its coverage of Mayor Briscoe, the media all over the country broadcast an image of the Jewish mayor as embodying religious freedom—an American value freighted with political saliency during the Cold War, which according to President Eisenhower’s secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, was a battle between those who believed in the moral laws of the Judeo-Christian tradition and those who found value in materialist secularism. When quoted in the press, Briscoe’s messages were about *Ireland’s* religious freedom, but American embrace of Briscoe nonetheless symbolized America’s attachment to these values. “Briscoe Says He’s Live Evidence There ‘Absolutely Is No Bigotry in Ireland’” ran one typical headline in the *Los Angeles Times* that connected Briscoe’s celebrity with his embodiment of religious freedom.<sup>4</sup> As Leo Braudy, a scholar of American culture notes, fame in Western society has long been associated with the ideal of freedom, because fame can be understood as the “social version of a love that absolves the loved one of fault, restoring integrity and wholeness.” With fame, the celebrity is granted recognition and permission to be himself. “To be famous for yourself, for what you are without talent or premeditation, means you have come into your rightful inheritance,” Braudy theorizes.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Robert Briscoe, his “rightful inheritance” included the ability to openly embody the “unusual combination”—as the American media labeled it—of being a Jewish Irishman whose very existence became a symbol of religious freedom.

---

2. Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

3. On the idea that Jews in America served to hold the US accountable to the ideal of religious pluralism, see Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

4. “Dublin’s Jewish Mayor Pays Visit to Southland.”

5. Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7.

Briscoe was a Zionist—an identity on full display during his American tour—proving that the power of tri-faith religious pluralism in midcentury America was such as to make other identities permissible, if one was a member of one of the three major religions. Briscoe's embodiment of good citizenship that did not suffer because of his Zionism, offered Americans an example of Jewishness that was allowed to overflow the bounds of religion. As Tisa Wenger notes in her study of religious freedom in America, many American Jews "chafed at the model of religion that religious freedom seemed to impose."<sup>6</sup> The double-edged sword of religious freedom that Wenger explains as promising expanded rights for minorities also required that Jews reshape themselves and their traditions to fit mainstream—that is, Christian—conceptions of religion. Briscoe's celebrity as an Orthodox, Zionist, and Irish Jew, provided an alternative example of Jewishness.

Briscoe's mission in America was to promote good relations between Ireland and America, and to fundraise on behalf of Jewish refugees and the State of Israel. His was part of the postwar effort of American Jews on behalf of Holocaust survivors and the young State of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Following Israel's statehood, American Jewry turned its pageantry "to celebrating Israel as the survivors' haven," a message frequently deployed during appeals such as those in which Briscoe participated.<sup>8</sup> Through appearances on television game and news shows such as *What's My Line?* and *Meet the Press*, Briscoe reported, he had raised thirty million dollars over the course of his time in North America.<sup>9</sup> Before leaving the United States, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Briscoe told crowds in Chicago, "I came here to spread good will between Ireland and America, and to do what I could to help further assistance to Jewish refugees and Israel," explained Briscoe, a Jew."<sup>10</sup> In Briscoe's presentation, there was no conflict between these disparate allegiances.

6. Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, 145.

7. As historian Hasia Diner writes of these postwar fundraising efforts: "Addressing their desperate plight, the Jews in America orchestrated the largest nongovernmental philanthropic relief undertaking in human history, raising millions of dollars and collecting and shipping tons of foodstuffs and supplies to Europe." Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 150. Uniting, American Jews saw their charity as part of a sacred duty: "What funds flowed to the survivors—to feed, clothe, heal, and shelter them, let alone provide job training to face the future and resettle them away from the scenes of their suffering—came from American Jews as a cheerfully extracted self-taxation." Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 167.

8. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 184.

9. Kevin McCarthy, *Robert Briscoe: Sinn Féin Revolutionary, Fianna Fáil Nationalist and Revisionist Zionist* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 240.

10. "College Comes to Chicago to Honor Dublin's Mayor," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1957, 20.

But in a way that he likely did not entirely grasp, Briscoe was also helping *American Jews*. Through his example, Briscoe provided a counterweight to Cold War suspicions about disloyal Jews. In temperament, Briscoe resembled the sociable, “other-directed” Americans thought to be central to the 1950s American middle class.<sup>11</sup> And through Briscoe’s acceptance in a Catholic country, as well as his evident interfaith camaraderie during his US visit, he inspired hope in the ability of Jews to be part of a united front against atheistic communism.<sup>12</sup> The height of the Cold War was receding by the late 1950s (Senator Joseph McCarthy died in May of 1957), but “anti-Communism put Jews in an uncomfortable and compromised position.”<sup>13</sup> Americans still held memories of the time when the word Jew was thought to be synonymous with “Communist.”<sup>14</sup> These were years when it was not always clear whether Jewishness would be interpreted as a cause for respect (the Judeo-Christian tradition encouraged this view), or a cause for suspicion (a long history of Jewish association with left-wing causes made some McCarthyites suspicious of Jews, a priori). Jews’ liberal views—“support of the United Nations, federal aid to education, and efforts to take religion out of the public schools—a key issue for American Jews—set them apart from many, possibly most, Americans.”<sup>15</sup> Historian Hasia Diner points to a 1952 Gallup poll that asked Americans about their views of Senator McCarthy’s anti-Communist tactics. Fifty-six percent of Catholics and 45 percent of Protestants found McCarthy’s tactics acceptable, while 98 percent of Jews disapproved.<sup>16</sup> This poll offered a view into how differently Jews perceived the culture, and it revealed that a value as central to American ideals as “freedom” carried different associations for Jews. Shortly,

---

11. In *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale university Press, 1950), written with Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, sociologist David Riesman popularized the idea of tradition-directed, inner-directed, and other-directed individuals.

12. Jews often sought to send the message about their commitment to the American Way of Life implicitly, as in these words by historians Oscar and Mary Handlin, in the 1949 *American Jewish Year Book*: “While American Jews remain concerned about the fate of their distressed co-religionists elsewhere, they expect at the same time to continue to live where they are and to participate in the future, as they have in the past, in the development of the American way of life,” *American Jewish Year Book* 50 (1949), 1.

13. Hasia Diner, *Jews in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 277.

14. On Jews and communism, see Zosa Szajkowski’s two volume *Jews, War, and Communism* (New York: KTAV, 1972–1974); Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: Wiley, 1979); Jonathan Frankel, ed., *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005);

15. Diner, *Jews in the United States*, 277.

16. *Ibid.*

Jewish views like these would be closer to American, mainstream liberal views, but in the 1950s the difference was sometimes seen as troubling.

Enter Briscoe. Far from the negative stereotypes of Jews as unpatriotic, unsociable, lacking in character, and cowardly—all of which, decades earlier, had fed nativist sentiment, and had been rerouted by some toward anti-Semitic McCarthyite purposes—Briscoe's affable temperament and background demonstrated the opposite. The effect was reassuring. There had been dozens of Jews (Louis Brandeis, Albert Einstein, and Leonard Bernstein, to name a few), even in the first half of the twentieth century, who had earned Americans' esteem because of their talents, intellect, and contributions to society. As a result of his devotion to his religion and his country, Briscoe, too, enjoyed this kind of respect. But he also had something much more rare, for a Jew: likeability. During his brief visits in American cities, crowds fell for Briscoe. One Boston rabbi, in 1957, reflected on the good impression being made by Briscoe: "All the world knows the qualities of the fighting and witty Irish and the world is gradually also learning of the fighting spirit and the witty Jews... What an amazing combination we have in Robert Briscoe! Here is an Irishman and a Jew with the best qualities of heart and mind, guts and spirit of both people."<sup>17</sup> Briscoe's 1957 visit with Americans—and the national coverage that it received—offered a rare and dynamic display of the Jew as likeable, religious, patriotic citizen.

### Briscoe and the American Media

The Dublin lord mayor's name and his visit are not well remembered, but in its day, Briscoe's tour, which included a visit with President Eisenhower, meant a great deal to Americans entering an era of reduced anti-Semitism. The visit was widely covered in national newspapers and on television. Even before his 1957 visit, Briscoe's election as the first Jewish mayor of Dublin in 1956 attracted American attention because of the values ascribed to that victory. As an example, the African-American Chicago *Daily Defender* ran the headline, "Dublin's Jewish Mayor Fought For Irish Freedom," reminding readers that outsiders to the establishment culture could play an important role in defending national values. The *Defender* article noted that "Robert Briscoe is a unique man—the first Jewish mayor of Dublin and one of the few, if not the only man to be an active and ardent Sinn Feinner and a Zionist."<sup>18</sup>

---

17. "Hon. Robert Briscoe To Lead Good Will Tour of Ireland," *Boston Globe*, February 9, 1958, 47.

18. Peter E. Kilroy, "Dublin's Jewish Mayor Fought for Irish Freedom," *Daily Defender*, June 28, 1956, 7.

The article further noted that “Judaism is Briscoe’s religion, Irish his nationality.”<sup>19</sup> The newspaper’s readers might have drawn encouragement from the Jewish example as they read about the surprise election of Briscoe, who called his election a “magnificent gesture that justified confidence in the ‘absolute tolerance’ of the Irish capital.” Briscoe was quoted as saying that his election “proves that in Catholic Ireland a man of any faith has the good will of his fellow citizens if he deserve it and is prepared to give them service.”

Media coverage of Briscoe was particularly extensive in Boston, where a few Catholic newspapers and the *Boston Jewish Advocate* reported on Briscoe’s visit. The *Jewish Advocate*, the *Boston Catholic Free Press*, and the *Boston Pilot*, published parts of Boston Archbishop Richard J. Cushing’s address at a reception honoring Briscoe. Cushing affirmed that as “Patrick is the Abraham of the Irish, Abraham is the Patrick of the Old Law,” so Jews and Catholics could be brought together through cultural, national, and fraternal values.<sup>20</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM), published by Boston’s First Church of Christ, Scientist, reported on Briscoe’s Boston visit, focusing more on Briscoe’s communitarian ties, with the headline, “Dublin Mayor Turns to Aid Hub Jews.”<sup>21</sup> The CSM coverage was unusual in its focus on Briscoe’s Jewish ties, drawing attention to Briscoe “helping his fellow religionists, the Boston Jewish community” with a fundraising rally for the Jewish Appeal’s 100-million-dollar emergency fund. Calling Briscoe a “stalwart Irish patriot” and the “first member of the Jewish faith to become chief executive of Dublin,” the CSM explained that Briscoe’s itinerary included stops at Beth Israel Hospital and Hebrew Teachers College and the JCC in Brighton, and then a Combined Jewish Appeal reception for him. The CSM also noted the unusually enthusiastic reception Briscoe received from Bostonians, and the comment from Boston police Superintendent James F. Dale, who estimated that approximately 450,000 persons lined the parade route, “the biggest turnout I’ve even seen in Southie,” and Mayor Hynes’s comment that “it’s the most enthusiastic parade I’ve ever witnessed. There has been one continuous burst of enthusiasm. This is the warmest reception ever given any visitor to Boston.”<sup>22</sup> Mr. Hynes went on to comment that Mayor Briscoe’s presence here “is doing more for better understanding among people than anything you can think of.”

---

19. Ibid.

20. “The Irish and the Jews Are Spiritual Kinsmen,” *Catholic Free Press*, April 5, 1957, 23.

21. “Dublin Mayor Turns to Aid Hub Jews,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 19, 1957, 7.

22. Ibid.

During and immediately following his visit, the *New York Times* ran over thirty-five articles about Briscoe, and *The Washington Post* serialized his autobiography.<sup>23</sup> The American media relished the juxtapositions of

---

23. "Wagner Invites Briscoe: Sends St. Patrick's Day Bid to Jewish Mayor of Dublin," *The New York Times* (NYT), July 8, 1956, 7; "Dublin Mayor Due Here: Briscoe Will Attend the '57 St. Patrick's Day Parade," NYT, July 18, 1956, 2; "Jewish Mayor of Dublin Defers to Irish on Tour," NYT, March 2, 1957, 3; "Dublin Mayor Coming: Briscoe Due Thursday, Will Join in St. Patrick's Parade," NYT, March 10, 1957, 76; "Briscoe of Dublin is Due Here Today: Jewish Lord Mayor Faces a Busy Schedule During Four-Day Visit to City Absence of Bigotry Cited," NYT, March 14, 1957, 31; Robert Alden, "City Hails Dublin's Jewish Lord Mayor: Briscoe Will Review Parade Tomorrow—To Tour U.S. Mayor of Dublin Welcomed Here Promoting Visits to Ireland Bears Ton of Irish Products Gives Greetings in Gaelic," NYT, March 15, 1957, 1; "Dublin's Jewish Mayor: Robert Briscoe Was Born In Dublin Is A Business Leader," NYT, March 5, 1957, 14; Philip Benjamin, "Bob of New York Meets Dublin Bob: the Lord Mayor of Dublin Visits City Hall and a Synagogue Here," NYT, March 16, 1957, 1; Robert Alden, "5<sup>th</sup> Ave Sparkles in Green for Day: Sun Has a Smile for St. Patrick's Day Marchers, and Dublin's Lord Mayor Has Rosaries for a Cardinal," NYT, March 17, 1957, 1; Irving Spiegel, "Briscoe Attends Pre-Purim Rites: Lord Mayor Prays at Altar in Traditional Shawl—Pays Visit to Cardinal Wears Kelly Green Tie," NYT, March 17, 1957, 52; "Visitor From Dublin," NYT, March 17, 1957, 110; McCandlish Phillips, "Briscoe Warmed By City Greeting: Dubliner Has a Kosher Irish Brunch, Appears on TV, Discusses Rock 'n' Roll Weather No Surprise Saloons Open In Dublin," NYT, March 18, 1957, 9; "Briscoe at Concert Here," NYT, March 18, 1957, 31; "Briscoe Marches In Boston Parade," NYT, March 19, 1957, 34; "Briscoe at Fund Rally: Speaks In Boston on Behalf of United Jewish Appeal, March 20, 1957, 18; "Half of Briscoe's Talks in U.S. To be for Fees, Manager Says," NYT, March 22, 1957, 6; "Briscoe In Buffalo: Dublin Mayor Begins Visit By Shaking Rail Crew's Hands," NYT, March 24, 1957, 67; "Briscoe Talks on NATO: Says Ireland Will Not Join Until Partition Is Ended," NYT, March 25, 1957, 10; "Briscoe Serves Briefly As 'Mayor of London,'" NYT, March 26, 1957, 13; "Briscoe Brings Gifts to President," NYT, March 27, 1957, 33; "Briscoe A Grandfather: Daughter In Toronto Has Girl—Mayor Is In Detroit," NYT, March 29, 1957, 19; "Briscoe In Los Angeles: Lord Mayor Receives Warm Welcome at Airport," NYT, March 30, 1957, 6; "Briscoe Hailed Anew: San Francisco Turns Out for Mayor of Dublin," NYT, April 2, 1957, 33; "Briscoe to Appear In His TV Biography," NYT, April 3, 1957, 45; "Briscoe Gets Threat: Plane Is Held Up On Coast After Bomb Scare," NYT, April 4, 1957, 20; "Briscoe Is Honored At Methodist Fete," NYT, April 9, 1957, 36; "Briscoe in Refugee Plea: In Chicago, He Bids U.S. Help East European Jews," NYT, April 11, 1957, 13; "Briscoe Urges U.N. to Act on Partition," NYT, April 13, 1957, 9; "Dublin Mayor 'Turns Trade Show Into One Great Day for the Irish: Trade Show Goes Irish for a Day,'" NYT, April 16, 1957, 45; Peter Khiss, "Mayor Demands More Home Rule: At Citizens Union Dinner, He Cites 'Pressing Needs'—Felt Receives Award Mayor Reviews City's Needs," NYT, April 18, 1957, 23; "Briscoe Renews Bid to Jews Here for Aid to Israel," NYT, April 19, 1957, 5; "Briscoe Extends Stay: Lord Mayor to Seek U.N. Action on Ireland," NYT, April 23, 1957, 20; "Briscoe Gets Degree: Villanova Honors Dublin Mayor—Fete In Philadelphia," NYT, April 24, 1957, 27; "Briscoe Is 'Fall Guy': Circus Saints and Sinners Honor Mayor of Dublin," NYT, April 27, 1957, 17; "Briscoe Here Today: Mayor of Dublin Is Returning After 3rd Chicago Visit," NYT, May 7, 1957, 23; "Ancient Glass Vase Is Given to Briscoe," NYT, May 8, 1957, 39; "Briscoe Flies Home Laden With Gifts and Warm Memories of Visit to U.S.," NYT, May 16, 1957, 33; "Briscoe Returns to Dublin," NYT, May 18, 1957, 6.



religion, nationality, and contemporary American culture that Briscoe's visit made possible, and the commonalities in how Briscoe was covered across the nation are striking; there do not appear to be major regional differences. Instead, Briscoe was covered as though he embodied a national value of religious freedom, which was seen as acting as a safeguard against the inroads of communism. One of many typical *New York Times* headlines during Briscoe's tour portrayed the surprising combinations that Briscoe represented: "Dubliner has a Kosher Irish Brunch, Appears on TV, Discusses Rock 'n' Roll."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, reporters seemed to delight in noting that Briscoe had raised a glass of Irish whiskey and "offered the traditional Hebrew drinking toast, 'L'Chayim.'"<sup>25</sup>

How did newspapers across the country report on Briscoe's visit? They covered his welcome receptions, his meetings with leaders from civic, religious, and local Irish organizations, and the views that Briscoe expressed about Ireland, religious liberty, and world events. During the Chicago segment of Briscoe's tour, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on Briscoe's "desire to see the south and north of Ireland united...He also said the Irish people want to earn dollars thru sale of their products in the United States and that he welcomed American tourist trade."<sup>26</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* detailed Briscoe's activities, explaining that Briscoe "spoke at a luncheon of the Council on Foreign Relations in the Hilton hotel, was given a reception in the Sherman hotel, and was the guest at a dinner last night, in the home of a radio and television manufacturer. He also visited the Board of Trade, where he was given a rousing reception, and the Chicago Mercantile exchange."<sup>27</sup> At the Chicago Sherman hotel reception, Briscoe's positive attitude toward the American city was recorded: "Any Irishman needs to be in Chicago only three hours to feel at home," Briscoe said.<sup>28</sup> Two days earlier, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* portrayed Briscoe's ability to embody more than one loyalty, as Briscoe "appealed for funds for Israel and for American industries and tourist business for Ireland...His lilting Irish brogue carried his twofold message to more than 1,000 Chicagoans. In behalf of Israel, he said he hoped his visit to the United States would help America realize 'the immediate emergency of rescuing Jewish refugees from such countries as Poland and Hungary.'"<sup>29</sup>

24. Phillip, "Briscoe Warmed By City Greeting."

25. Alden, "City Hails Dublin's Jewish Lord Mayor."

26. "Dublin Mayor Tells Wish for United Ireland," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 13, 1957, 3.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Nancy McGill, "Jewish Irish Pleas Made by Dublin Mayor," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1957, 11.

At a press conference in Chicago, the lord mayor suggested that his country's economy would be given a boost and the United States would profit "if American industrialists would use Ireland as a workshop and set up some business there." To the American tourist, Briscoe said, "Come spend some of your dollars in Ireland—and try some of our Irish whisky."<sup>30</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* reported on Briscoe's personality and style, as a result of his "unusual combination": "There was evidence of the 'ould sod' and the Blarney stone in Briscoe's manner from the moment he stepped off a plane at Midway field, dressed in a black morning coat and striped pants. More cheers, plus an Irish jig played on bagpipes, came when Briscoe stepped off an elevator at the fifth floor and was met by another Irishman, Mayor Daley."<sup>31</sup> By his third visit to Chicago during his six-week tour of the US, Briscoe "declared his mission to the United States accomplished yesterday... 'I came here to spread good will between Ireland and America, and to do what I could to help further assistance to Jewish refugees and Israel,' explained Briscoe, a Jew. 'Now I'm ready to go home and give the body a rest.'"<sup>32</sup>

The *Chicago Tribune* further reported on the honorary degrees that Briscoe and other members of his family received from Quincy College, a Roman Catholic school operated by Franciscans, and reported that Briscoe addressed an audience of 1,200 at Shaare Tikvah congregation.<sup>33</sup> Promotional material for the United Jewish Appeal offers another view into the way Briscoe's image was deployed by the American media. The UJA presented Briscoe as an example of the way loyalties could be directed in multiple directions. "People have asked why I, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, should be so concerned with the United Jewish Appeal. Perhaps the fact that I am a Jew is enough to explain my interest in this life-saving work. But the fact that I have spent a good part of my life in the effort to gain freedom and independence for my own country, Ireland, also has a great deal to do with my feelings in the matter."<sup>34</sup> Briscoe reminded Americans that Jewishness did not determine all interests or loyalties of even religious Jews.

While he was in LA, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Briscoe's "unusual combination" of "a devout orthodox Jew and a zealous Irish patriot," and asked, rhetorically, how such a Jew could be elected Lord

---

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. "College Comes to Chicago to Honor Dublin's Mayor," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 7, 1957, 20.

33. Ibid.

34. *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1957, B9.

Mayor in his country's principal city.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the answer was that precisely in a country where Jews were scarce was antisemitism less of an issue than it was in the United States. However, in Briscoe's assessment, he was evidence that "there is absolutely no bigotry in Ireland," according to the *Los Angeles Times*. The article reported that while in LA, Briscoe attended religious services on Friday evening and then, "true to his religion which forbids use of conveyances on the Jewish Sabbath, walked the mile back to his hotel."<sup>36</sup> The article reported on the crowd who met Briscoe at the Los Angeles airport, including civic, religious, and local Irish leaders, and that during his LA airport greeting, a green-costumed bagpipe band played an Irish welcome. The *Los Angeles Times* also explained that Briscoe's US tour was sponsored by both the United Jewish Appeal and the Irish Societies of America.<sup>37</sup> Further *Los Angeles Times* coverage reported on Briscoe's views about Ireland's partition being a result of an original act of aggression by Great Britain and that Briscoe was interviewed on NBC's Meet the Press.

Back in Ireland, by the spring of 1958, Briscoe had received "a flow of letters during the past year from nearly every state of the Union, urging him to 'come back.'" (Briscoe did in fact return to the US in 1958, although that second trip is not covered in this article.<sup>38</sup>) More than a decade after the war, Americans were turning a corner in terms of what it meant to be Jewish in America.<sup>39</sup> Moving from members of a marginalized race to a mainstream religion, postwar American Jews experienced what we might call an upgrade in status with religious and cultural implications. In unexpected ways, Briscoe embodied these new possibilities. One editorialist at the time observed, "It is virtually unknown in history that a man who is a devout and traditional Jew should be able to rise to such great heights of trust and confidence, admiration and affection in the hearts of neighbors and friends who are of an utterly different race, religion, and historic development."<sup>40</sup> Although Briscoe was not an American, the fact that even in a Catholic country like Ireland, there was no conflict between his Judaism and his loyal patriotism and

---

35. "Dublin's Jewish Mayor Pays Visit to Southland."

36. Ibid.

37. "Dublin Mayor Honored at Jewish Fund Rally: Cited as Champion of Human Freedom," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1957, 23.

38. "Hon. Robert Briscoe To Lead Good Will Tour of Ireland," *The Boston Globe*, February 9, 1958, 47.

39. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 8.

40. Rabbi Joseph S. Shubow, "Tribute to Lord Mayor Briscoe," *The Boston Jewish Advocate*, April 11, 1957, 11-A.

love of country, impressed Americans and stretched their imaginations about what was possible for Jewish citizenship.

One manifestation of that good impression occurred as a result of Briscoe's visit to Los Angeles—not a city that was yet known for associations with Orthodox Jews. Yet, in his celebrity, Briscoe represented more than an "Orthodox Jew" to Americans. His story and personality drew interest. Newspapers reported that the television industry "had the good sense to waste no time in doing something about him."<sup>41</sup> A television drama about Briscoe's life, starring actor Art Carney and entitled "The Fabulous Irishman," was quickly scripted in time to ride the wave of excitement about the Jewish mayor. The drama aired in June 1957—"a splendid tribute to a colorful patriot devoted to his Irish birthright and his Jewish faith," a *New York Times* television reviewer observed.<sup>42</sup> The *Boston Globe* predicted, "When viewers see the TV drama of his life story, they will be still more astonished at the swashbuckling career which led this son of Erin to his present post."<sup>43</sup> Notably, the film featured a long Passover seder scene with Hebrew prayers and a round of the Passover song, Chad Gadya. Also central was the romance between Briscoe and his wife-to-be, Lillian Isaacs, in the midst of Briscoe's dangerous assignments for the Sinn Fein.

The *Times* reviewer judged it in good taste that the scriptwriter behind "The Fabulous Irishman" had not placed "undue emphasis on the unusual religious and national combination that Mr. Briscoe represents." Briscoe was a courageous man who *happened* to be Jewish. The reviewer suggested that to make something more of the mayor's unusual religious and ethnic background would be unseemly; Americans were more open-minded than to be overly concerned with religious background. But this was disingenuous. Whatever good taste in television actually meant in the 1950s, it rarely matched the way people felt and behaved. For, based on how the media and the public responded to him, Briscoe's "unusual religious and national combination," along with his good humor, was very much what made him appealing to Americans. Americans *did* care where a person came from and what kind of religion he practiced, even if they were busy pretending otherwise. But they were also gratified by examples that defied their expectations—by "combinations" that had once seemed like contradictions. An African-American opera singer; a housewife working as a riveter; a Jewish mayor of Dublin—these juxtapositions were unexpected, and once would have seemed impossible.

---

41. J.P.S., "Robert Briscoe, 'The Fabulous Irishman,'" *NYT*, June 28, 1957, 47.

42. *Ibid.*

43. "Art Carney as 'The Fabulous Irishman'? He'll Be Fabulous Indeed!" *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1957, A-60.

When they occurred and found acceptance in postwar American society, they helped transform societal norms, and were part of a process of liberalizing American culture.<sup>44</sup>

### Briscoe's Happy Resolution of Dual Loyalties

Briscoe also appealed to Cold War Americans, and to Jews in particular, because he embodied a happy resolution to what had once been called the problem of dual loyalties. The issue plagued Catholics, too.<sup>45</sup> In their case, it was ties to the Pope that troubled their fellow Americans. For Jews, it was loyalties to Jewish law and the Jewish people (or, the "Jewish nation")—as well as to one's native country—that had long seemed like a contradiction. Lodged in Jewish communal memory was the Enlightenment Jewish experience: in the nineteenth century, Napoleon famously dealt with the issue by convening an assembly of Jewish Notables in 1806. The French emperor had "viewed the bonds of solidarity among Jews as antithetical to their social participation as individual citizens of France."<sup>46</sup> Leora Batnitzky explains the multiple ways in which premodern Jews had been interconnected with their coreligionists: "It simply was not possible, in a premodern context to conceive of Jewish religion, nationality, and what we now call culture, as distinct from one another, because a Jew's religious life was defined by, though not limited to, Jewish law, which was simultaneously religious, political, and cultural in nature."<sup>47</sup> As "a nation within a nation," Jews seemed unfit for citizenship. By posing a set of questions about Jewish law to his carefully selected group of Jewish delegates, Napoleon's intention was that the group would affirm his goals of Jewish assimilation. In responding to Napoleon's questions, the Jewish assembly effectively "constituted a new definition of Jewish identity in the modern world."<sup>48</sup> In place of the pre-modern fusing of the religious and national aspects of Judaism, the delegates split the religious and ethnic elements of Jewish identity. According to the assembly's responses, Jewishness was no longer

---

44. Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014).

45. Jews and Catholics shared this loyalty issue, in part, because unlike Protestants, they "are linked more firmly with their coreligionists abroad." Egal Feldman, *Catholics and Jews in Twentieth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), xii.

46. Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 40.

47. Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 4.

48. Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*, 43.

a national identity. "By validating only the ritual aspects of Jewish law, they admitted their Jewishness to be partial and theoretically limited to voluntary membership in a religious community alone."<sup>49</sup> *Becoming a religion*, then, had been the path to citizenship for Jews of Western Europe. American Jews have always asserted a wide chasm between the quid-pro-quo experience of Jews in the European emancipation context and the American Jewish experience in which Jews were not merely granted "toleration" (their best hope in Western Europe), but were as entitled to exercise their rights to religious liberty as any other group.

Yet it was this appreciation of the similarities and contrasts between these two transitional moments (that is, European Emancipation and the post-WWII tri-faith era) that fueled and shaped the way Jews responded to current conditions. In the latter era, rabbis and Jewish leaders again found it useful to emphasize the religious component of Judaism (although not for legal purposes, as in the European, nineteenth-century example) in order to affirm their status as American citizens. But important differences pertain. Unlike in European emancipation, Will Herberg noted, where a Jew was enfranchised "at the price of his Jewishness and Jewish identity," in the postwar era, "the Jew can find his assured and equal status in American society not despite, but because of, his identification with the 'Jewish community.'"<sup>50</sup> Aside from the tiny American Council for Judaism, a national organization that defined Judaism as a religious and not a national group, most postwar mainstream Jews did not support the sundering of religious and national components of Judaism.<sup>51</sup> By the 1950s, Zionism was the norm among Jews of all movements.<sup>52</sup> In 1949, after the establishment of Israel, the *American Jewish Year Book* reported that the new state had:

---

49. Ibid.

50. Will Herberg, "Anti-Semitism Today," *Commonweal*, July 16, 1954, 362.

51. Founded in 1942 by Reform rabbis displeased with the new Zionist leanings of the Reform movement, the American Council for Judaism, which supported the idea that Zionism is incompatible with a strictly religious interpretation of Judaism, was also noteworthy, in spite of its small size, because its ranks included prestigious members, such as Lessing Rosenwald, heir to the Sears Roebuck fortune.

52. During much of the prewar period, Zionism was still a minority movement rejected by mainstream Jews of every stripe, but toward the mid-twentieth century, even Reform, which had in its 1885 Pittsburgh Platform that Jews are "not a nation but a religious community and therefore expect no return to Palestine," had been influenced by the more than two million Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the US between 1881 and 1920 and who understood their Jewishness in ethnic terms. Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, "Zionism and Judaism: The Path of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver," in *Abba Hillel Silver and American Zionism*, ed. Mark A. Raider, Jonathan Sarna, and Ronald Zweig (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997), 3-6.

already contributed to the strengthening of the Jewish morale, so profoundly shaken by the catastrophe the Jewish people suffered in the last war...In the United States, except for the small group organized in the American Council for Judaism, the issue of Israel brought together more of American Jewry than perhaps any other issue in recent years.<sup>53</sup>

It was no longer commitments to Zionism and Judaism that worried Americans about the Jews in their midst. By the late 1950s, Americans were in near consensus in their support for Israel, and a Zionist like Briscoe did not challenge, but rather affirmed American values.<sup>54</sup> A year before Briscoe's visit, Ben Halpern's study, *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis*, assessed the 1950s American Jewish experience as one where the recent destruction of European Jewry and Soviet totalitarianism gave American Jews particular reasons to celebrate democratic values, as would be the case in their embrace of Briscoe.<sup>55</sup> 1950s American Jews drew on Israeli culture, through their consumer power, to celebrate Jewish distinctiveness. Descriptions of Israeli pioneers as having values, ideologies, and histories in common with old-stock Americans highlighted commonalities between Americans and Israelis. "Israeli pioneers, forging a country out of the desert, were frequently noted, celebrated, and compared with American pioneers of years past."<sup>56</sup> With Americans on board with the Jewish state, Jewish Americans felt affirmed in their own support for Israel. During the Cold War, it was rather lingering associations of Jews and leftist causes that made Jews, along with anyone who seemed to stray from patriotic norms, suspect.<sup>57</sup> Jews were only one of

---

53. Nathan Reich, "The Year in Retrospect," *American Jewish Year Book* 50 (1949): 109.

54. Emily Alice Katz notes, "Pro-Israel sentiment was expressed in resolutions passed by state governments, rhetoric of members of Congress, political platforms, and speeches of leading politicians from both major parties." Emily Alice Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 6. Michelle Mart cites the early 1960s as the era when Americans reached consensus and "a remarkable realignment of American attitudes" toward Israel and Jews, given the anti-Semitism of previous decades. Michelle Mart, *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View the Jewish State as an Ally* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), ix.

55. Ben Halpern, *The American Jew: A Zionist Analysis* (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1956).

56. Mart, *Eye on Israel*, x.

57. Historian Tony Michels writes: "After the collapse of the 1905 revolution, thousands of Jewish revolutionaries came to the United States and transplanted new ideologies to their adopted home. Members of the Bund, Russia's first Jewish political party, founded in 1897, were the most numerous. The Bund's program combined Marxism with a form of Jewish nationalism demanding the right of Yiddish-speaking Jews to govern their cultural and educational affairs, or what the Bund called 'national cultural autonomy.'" Tony Michels, *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

many immigrant groups involved in American socialism, but they played a particularly significant role in socialist circles during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> That American Jews were the Red Army's greatest cheerleaders during the war, and often retained positive feelings about the Soviet Union long after other Americans had abandoned them, helped lay the groundwork for the renewal of these charges after 1945.<sup>59</sup> Peter Novick notes that in the postwar years, "Jewish organizations worked frantically to combat the Jew-Communist equation, but it was a difficult brief. They could insist, correctly, that only a small proportion of Jews were Communists, or even well disposed toward the Soviet Union. But it was also correct, and becoming manifest, that a great many—perhaps most—American Communists in these years were Jews." Writer Alfred Kazin recalled that he had been "a Socialist as so many Americans were 'Christians.' I had always lived in a Socialist atmosphere."<sup>60</sup> As literary critic Adam Kirsch has written, "From Mike Gold's proletarian novel *Jews Without Money* all the way down to Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, the literature and mythology of American Jewish radicalism has often appeared identical—to a certain audience—with Judaism itself."<sup>61</sup>

Much of this groundwork was laid well before the 1950s and American awareness of Robert Briscoe. By the time of Briscoe's visit, Judaism *as a religion* was replacing radical politics as a key signifier, or as historian Arthur Goren called it, a "doctrinal or ideological core" for American Jews.<sup>62</sup> These were years, as Goren and others have shown, when "Jewish communal leaders found so congenial the notion that a trifaith America—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, 'the religions of democracy'—formed the underpinning of the 'American Way of Life.'"<sup>63</sup>

---

58. According to Daniel Soyer, "For a short time in the late 1910s, the Socialist Party (SP) even became the dominant electoral force in the Jewish immigrant neighborhoods of New York." See, Daniel Soyer, "Making Peace with Capitalism? Jewish Socialism Enter the Mainstream, 1933–1944," in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed., Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 215.

59. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 92.

60. Beth Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 106.

61. Adam Kirsch, "The End of the Jewish Left," *Tablet: A New Read on Jewish Life*, May 16, 2012, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/99711/the-end-of-the-jewish-left>.

62. Arthur Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 192.

63. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews*, 193. Scholars and works that have documented this shift toward tri-faith America and its implications for American Jews include Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*; Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley:



Nonetheless, during the 1950s, anxiety and suspicion were part of all Americans' Cold War experience. It was a time when anyone suspected of sympathy with communism, or even of radical political views, could be investigated, arrested, fined, and fired from jobs. Americans were encouraged to report suspicions of "subversive" behavior of neighbors and friends. This was in addition to the fear of nuclear annihilation that was a constant presence in American life, as a result of school air raid drills, bomb shelters, and popular films.

For Jews, fears were often stronger. Education and the entertainment industry—two spheres in which Jews were prominent—were believed to be fertile ground for communist sympathizers. Earlier in the century, Hollywood Jews were attacked for defiling the morals of Americans through their indecent films.<sup>64</sup> The notion that Jews—whether in radical politics or entertainment—were up to unwholesome and disloyal activity was thus familiar to midcentury Americans. Just a decade prior to Briscoe's visit, some members of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), such as Mississippi Representative John Rankin, accused Hollywood of being full of Jewish communist sympathizers.<sup>65</sup>

By the 1950s, Rankin was not alone in believing that *Jew* was nearly synonymous with *communist*. No event in that decade did more to engender such associations than the 1950 arrest and 1953 execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. As an example, Arnold Forster, the general counsel of the Anti-Defamation League recalled this period as a time when American Jewish leaders "came to fear the establishment of a link between being a Jew and being a 'community traitor' in the popular mind."<sup>66</sup> The Rosenbergs denied that they were communist spies or that they had planned to pass classified data about the bomb to the Soviet Union, but the U.S. government indicted, tried, and found the couple guilty. As the trial unfolded, the organized Jewish community largely remained silent on the case, distancing themselves from the Rosenbergs

---

University of California Press, 2009); Noah Feldman, *Divided By God: America's Church-State Problem—and What We Should Do about It* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005); and Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

64. Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 192.

65. Erens, *The Jew In American Cinema*, 193. On Rankin's antisemitic suspicions of Jews as communists, see Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 23; Naomi W. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: the American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 348; Steven Alan Carr, *Hollywood and Anti-Semitism: A Cultural History up to World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 174.

66. Arthur Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews*, 201.

and their defenders.<sup>67</sup> Still, among their supporters, the propaganda that emerged around the case "emphasized the fact that the Rosenbergs were Jewish" in order to bring them under the nation's vaunted Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>68</sup> But compared to Robert Briscoe—who was not even American, but who seemed to embody American principles of religious liberty and patriotism—the Rosenbergs proved a far less assimilable case, because they were so difficult to bring into line with American values. Most American Jews were unwilling to see the Rosenbergs as their own, and even liberal Jewish intellectuals, including Robert Warshow and Leslie Fiedler criticized the couple, expressing skepticism of the sincerity of the Rosenbergs' purported beliefs.<sup>69</sup> "The Rosenbergs were quite incapable of saying in their last letters just what it was for which they thought they were dying," wrote Leslie Fiedler, suggesting that the couple was too skilled in the art of deception to be trusted. The critic Robert Warshow similarly wrote: "It is as if these two had no internal sense of their own being but could see themselves only from the outside, in whatever postures their 'case' seemed to demand," and "if something else had been needed, they [Julius and Ethel Rosenberg] could as easily have taken up the pose of Protestantism or Catholicism or Gandhism, and for any one of these roles they would have made use of the available platitudes."<sup>70</sup> The ability to bravely stand up for democratic and religious values had become central to citizenship, in the Cold War context, and the Rosenbergs received a failing grade on this test. For Jews, the trial became, in the words of one historian, a "definitional ceremony in which opposing versions of American Jewish identity competed for ascendancy."<sup>71</sup>

With Jews on all sides of the case (judge, defendants, defense attorneys, prosecutor, and witnesses), the trial seemed weighted by an underlying

67. Jeffrey S. Gurock notes that opposition to communism was considered "a criterion of Jewish communal membership" at a time when the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith willingly shared its documents on the Communists with the House Un-American Activities Committee." Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920–2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 113.

68. Robert Warshow, "The 'Idealism' of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg: 'The Kind of People We Are,'" *Commentary*, November 1, 1953. Also printed in Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), 39–51.

69. Leslie Fiedler, "A Postscript for the Rosenberg Case," *Encounter*, October 1953.

70. Warshow, "The 'Idealism' of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg: 'The Kind of People We Are,'" *The Immediate Experience*, 44, 49.

71. Deborah Dash Moore, "Reconsidering the Rosenbergs: Symbol and Substance in Second Generation American Jewish Consciousness," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 8, no. 1 (1988), 22.

question: “What was the right way to be a Jew in America?” Could a Jew’s sympathies lie with leftist causes or were they more properly with the business concerns that were making some Jews into middle-class Americans? Jews followed the case, thinking not only about their fellow Jews, but how Americans read the chain of events. Many reported feeling relief on the night of the Rosenbergs’ execution, as “they put aside the painful case that separated them from their neighbors’ and had threatened the good name of American Jewry.”<sup>72</sup> The Rosenberg case—coming not quite a decade after the end of war—reminds us that the era carried its own anxieties for American Jews, and that the 1950s were not quite so placid as they are sometimes misremembered. For many observers, this trial of a hitherto unknown couple, catapulted into global notoriety, only confirmed a feeling that to simply “fit in,” to the extent of going unnoticed, was an aspiration for many Jews.

Jewish desires to fit snugly into the mainstream did not preclude fears and anxieties about being left out—or worse yet, of being pushed out of the American mainstream as a result of being judged an outsider. These fears were particularly present during the Cold War, which, as historian Susan Glenn notes, “had both global and domestic manifestations” that affected American Jewish life. The “censure and isolation of Jewish communists” and “rejection of Stalinism and totalitarianism by liberal Jewish intellectuals triggered a complex debate about postwar pressures for Jewish group loyalty and conformity.”<sup>73</sup> The Cold War—with its suspicions and hysteria—was in fact an era rife with such anxieties. Among Jews, such fears were more poignant, coming as they did at a time that seemed to hold so much promise for peace—now that Hitler’s regime was over and Israel was a state. But as Glenn illustrates, “Although some writers have described the period after 1945 as a ‘time for healing’ and a ‘golden decade’ for Jews, characterized by ‘the emergence of a collective self-confidence and sense of well-being,’ the anxious—and frequently rancorous—Jewish public discourse of this period points to a more complicated way of understanding the postwar era.”<sup>74</sup> Even as they were being integrated into the American, middle-class mainstream, postwar Jews found that the Cold War introduced its own worries about whether and how Jews could be truly accepted as Americans.

---

72. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 113.

73. Susan A. Glenn, “The Jewish Cold War: Anxiety and Identity in the Aftermath of the Holocaust,” Belin Lecture Series 24, Frankel Center for Jewish Studies, University of Michigan, 2014, accessed May 3, 2018, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/belin/13469761.0024.001/-jewish-cold-war-anxiety-and-identity-in-the-aftermath?rgn=main;view=fulltext>.

74. *Ibid.*

How did an Irish mayor fit into this postwar American Jewish scene? Briscoe's success in politics—a sphere in which antisemitism traditionally limited Jewish participation—as an openly religious Jew, reinforced postwar American Jewish support of religion as an ideological core of Cold War citizenship. Thus, where Judaism had been a handicap in individual Jews' advancement, was now becoming an asset in the postwar environment. In describing this reversal in American Jewish leaders' vision of their country vis-à-vis Judaism, Susannah Heschel writes that where American Jewish leaders had once expressed a desire "to be liberated from the confines of European Judaism," postwar American Jews increasingly viewed European Judaism—where Briscoe, with his Eastern European ancestors, found his roots—as a source of inspiration "that would help them rescue American Judaism from its moribund state. Moreover, many argued, America needed Judaism to rescue it from sinking into moral and political lethargy."<sup>75</sup> American reception of Briscoe was an example of this revised understanding of Judaism's role in citizenship.

Jewish magazines of the era, such as *Commentary* and *Jewish Frontier*, did their part to provide reassurance. These organs broadcast the harmony between Jewish and American values, "and the mutual abhorrence of both for communism."<sup>76</sup> The American Jewish Committee mirrored these efforts through an educational program designed to show the incompatibility between Judaism and communism and committed to the "unmasking of any new communist fronts and communist-dominated organizations which attempt to work in the Jewish community."<sup>77</sup> Seeking to prove that Judaism and communism were incompatible, the AJC pointed to the prevalence and longstanding nature of communist antisemitism in Eastern Europe.<sup>78</sup> As historian Marc Dollinger observed: "Opposition to Communism not only placed American Jews within the larger political framework of Cold War liberalism, but it served as an important vehicle for Jewish social mobility."<sup>79</sup> By showing that they had moved beyond the leftist politics that were characteristic of eastern

---

75. Susannah Heschel, "The Myth of Europe in America's Judaism," in *American Jewry: Transcending the European Experience*, eds., Christian Wiese and Cornelia Wilhelm (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 36.

76. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 38.

77. Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 133.

78. In the 1954 American Jewish Year Book, the AJC reminded readers that in the 1952 "trial of Rudolph Slansky and thirteen other leading Czech Communists in Prague on November 20, 1952, the antisemitic implications of Communism became unequivocal." "American Reaction to Soviet Anti-Semitism," *American Jewish Year Book* 55 (1954): 146. [http://ajcarchives.org/AJC\\_DATA/Files/1954\\_5\\_USCommunal.pdf](http://ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1954_5_USCommunal.pdf)

79. Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*, 130.

European Jews at the turn of the century (even as late as the 1930s, the American Communist party counted a disproportionate number of Jews on its rolls), Jews hoped to establish their bona fides as middle-class Americans.<sup>80</sup> Only democracies allowed Jews to live freely as Jews, the anti-communist, liberal Jewish consensus explained, so naturally Jews were among the most committed to democracies.<sup>81</sup> *Commentary* writers increasingly analogized between Soviet communism and Nazi fascism, mirroring a tendency, in Jewish anti-communist circles, of establishing connections between communism and all forms of totalitarianism.<sup>82</sup> *Commentary*'s managing editor, Irving Kristol, argued that defending the civil liberties of communists was no different from defending the civil liberties of Nazis. Writing for *Commentary* in 1952, Lucy Dawidowicz described a communist campaign to "persuade the world at large that the American government is in the hands of an anti-Semitic conspiracy which is inexorably working up to the extermination of American Jewry, and that the conviction of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for espionage is a 1952 version of the Reichstag fire, prelude to an American version of Auschwitz."<sup>83</sup> The Holocaust was frequently invoked in explaining the kind of threat that communism posed to American values.

The presence of Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe in the United States was a balm to lingering American anxieties about the potential for Jews to be patriotic citizens and a harbinger of what was to come. Two months after Briscoe had arrived, another famous leader would visit New York. The evangelist Billy Graham held his first New York City crusade in Madison Square Garden in mid-May, 1957. Graham typified a very different kind of religious interaction with the city—one that played on fears and chastisement. While Briscoe gloried in the cultural combinations that New York City made possible, and which his own Jewish-Irish identity embodied, Graham told crowds that New York City, a hotbed of sin, was like "a poisoned man turning away an antidote," the antidote being Christ.<sup>84</sup> If Briscoe's patriotism and religious affiliation constituted a positive, albeit foreign, response to Cold War fears about the citizenship

---

80. *Ibid.*

81. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 38.

82. Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 38; Diner, *Jews in the United States*, 280.

83. Lucy Dawidowicz, "'Anti-Semitism' and the Rosenberg Case: The Latest Communist Propaganda Trap," *Commentary*, July 1, 1952. Communists, Dawidowicz argued, sought to show a connection between anti-communism and antisemitism (and anti-minorityism more generally) "to pick up sympathy and support from individual Jews who may be suckers for this particular bait." <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/anti-semitism-and-the-rosenberg-casethelatest-communist-propaganda-trap/>

84. "Graham Points to Sin," *NYT*, June 28, 1957, 47.

potential of those who seemed alien to the mainstream culture, Graham's fame and appeal seemed to derive from the Cold War's dread and anxiety. "A preacher became more publicized than any American other than the president because of the message that he delivered—mixing the fear of Armageddon with the assurance of redemption," one historian observes of Graham's ability to feed off of Cold War fears.<sup>85</sup> Unlike Graham, Briscoe's style was both religious and inclusive. He mixed easily with Christians and Jews, Americans and Europeans, and exemplified what seemed like an exciting new way of being Jewish that was frank without sounding notes of defensiveness. This still seemed unusual in the late 1950s. Outside of clergymen, American Jews rarely stepped out courageously and unapologetically into the public square *as* Jews. That same year, 1957, a rock 'n' roll duo in New York debuted as "Tom & Jerry." Not until the mid-1960s would the two Jewish singers record under the much more ethnic-sounding name of "Simon and Garfunkel." Antisemitism, although much diminished by the late 1950s, remained pervasive in American society. Its effect was to limit the casual display of Jewishness that seemed effortless to the Dublin mayor. He was not American, but Lord Mayor Robert Briscoe modeled ways of being a sociable, religious Jew that meshed with American values and which Cold War Americans were eager to claim as their own.

---

85. Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 78. Graham began denouncing communism. Like other evangelists, "Graham assumed that Christianity and capitalism are as inextricably connected as the spiritual conversion of souls and their worldly success as selves." Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 81.