

# The 1940s as the Decade of the Anti-Antisemitism Novel

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There is an oft-repeated joke about the 1947 anti-antisemitism novel-turned-film *Gentleman's Agreement*, written by Laura Z. Hobson. Reportedly, a stagehand told screenwriter Moss Hart that he truly enjoyed working on the film. Although the stagehand normally played gin rummy during the shooting of movie scenes, he explained to Hart that *Gentleman's Agreement* "has such a wonderful moral I didn't want to miss it." Pleased, Hart asked the man, "What's the moral as you see it?" "Henceforth," replied the stagehand, "I'm always going to be good to Jewish people because you never can tell when they will turn out to be Gentiles."<sup>1</sup>

The joke captured what critics saw as the main flaw in Hobson's story about American antisemitism: It featured the experiences of a gentile and not a Jew.<sup>2</sup> In *Gentleman's Agreement*, a non-Jewish reporter, Phil Green, is assigned to write an article about antisemitism for a liberal magazine. Searching for a fresh angle for his story, Phil decides to go undercover as a Jew. In effect, he does what no Jew in the 1940s was likely to do: Phil announces, at nearly every opportunity, that he is Jewish in order to encounter the discrimination typically directed at Jews. One of the problems with this premise, according to critics, was that the experiences of actual Jews were marginalized. It was the emotional responses of gentiles—Phil, his girlfriend, and his son—that were prioritized in Hobson's telling. As a writer for the *Saturday Review* put it, "The inner anxieties of persecuted races cannot be explored by tourists. They are known only to those who dwell as natives among such slights, apprehensions, and shameful humiliations."<sup>3</sup> That discomfort with the plot of *Gentleman's Agreement* would continue. Fifty years after the novel and film appeared, film scholar George Custen reflected, "Having a lead character who is only pretending to be Jewish is not far from using blackface instead of black faces to mask white anxieties about the integration of American popular culture."<sup>4</sup> The

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problematic quality of Hobson's story of passing had only become more apparent over time.

The *Saturday Review* critic, and those who shared his perspective about the shortcomings of *Agreement*, had a point. But there was at least one good reason for Hobson to use a non-Jewish protagonist: She was able to show that antisemitism was a problem for all Americans, not just Jews.<sup>5</sup> This idea that responsibility for the persecution suffered by the discriminated minority lay with the majority American population, and not with the persecuted, themselves, would become familiar to 1940s Americans.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I examine the 1940s as the decade of American anti-antisemitism literature by focusing on several novels in this genre, which reinforced the shift in values that Hobson espoused, to varying degrees. *Gentleman's Agreement*, which went on to become an Academy Award-winning film starring Gregory Peck, was the most celebrated in this group of anti-antisemitism novels that included Saul Bellow's *The Victim* (1947), Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944), Margaret Halsey's *Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers* (1944), Arthur Miller's *Focus* (1946), and Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland* (1946). *Agreement's* power arose from the multiple formats in which it was presented to the public (magazine serial, bestselling novel, and film), and from Hobson's narrative strategies. Although changes in attitudes toward Jews and antisemitism were becoming apparent in American society, fiction proved an ideal vehicle precisely because antisemitism was still very much a fact of real life throughout the 1940s. Only in imaginary worlds could skilled writers construct situations in which antisemitism was singled out, among all the problems that wartime Americans faced, as deserving criticism and resolution. Novels gave writers and readers space to explore how to make postwar America safer for difference, building on attitudinal changes toward Jews acquired during and in the aftermath of World War II. As literary scholar Miriam Udel observes, "We use stories to create small worlds, more pliant and perfect, more compassionate and consoling, than the big world we all inhabit together."<sup>7</sup> Anti-antisemitism novels of the 1940s served a similar purpose. Since at least the nineteenth century, sentimental literature has been deemed a gender-appropriate sphere through which American woman writers channeled their anger at social injustice. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum writes, "According to Aristotle, anger is a response to significant damage to something or someone one cares about, and damage that the angry person believes to have been wrongfully inflicted. Aristotle adds that although anger is painful, it also contains within itself a pleasant hope for payback or retribution."<sup>8</sup> The two parts of anger are separable, Nussbaum

explains, because “we can feel outrage at the wrongfulness of an act, without wanting payback. There is a species of anger that is free of retributive wish: its entire content is ‘How outrageous that is. Something must be done about that.’” Nussbaum calls this “Transition Anger,” because it “expresses a protest, but faces forward: it gets to work finding solutions rather than dwelling on the infliction of retrospective pain.” This is the anger of the woman social protest novelist. It is a less dangerous direction for female anger to take, in part because it is the anger of parents. As Nussbaum writes, “Parents often feel that children have acted wrongfully, and they are outraged. They want to protest the wrong, and somehow to hold the child accountable. But they usually avoid retributive payback. . . . They choose strategies that are firm enough to get the child’s attention, and that express clearly that and how what the child did was wrong. And they give positive suggestions for the future, how to do things differently.” Anti-antisemitism literature similarly provided an outlet for anger at social injustice, as well as suggestions for how to resolve these conflicts, as characters worked through their prejudiced feelings.

The anti-antisemitism fiction of the 1940s thus guided public sentiment toward more progressive attitudes regarding Jews and antisemitism. These novels not only raised readers’ sensitivity to antisemitism, but, as fiction, they allowed writers to enter the thoughts and feelings of their characters, providing readers with access to the interior landscapes and personal stories surrounding antisemitism, with an emotional clarity that was difficult for nonfiction writers to achieve. Anti-antisemitism fiction thus furnished a kind of literary “confessional,” as main characters divulged their latent or former bigoted feelings—sometimes in conversation with another character, and sometimes within interior monologues—and then, through character development, overcame their former antisemitic attitudes to arrive at a position of *anti*-antisemitism. Through imaginative narrative strategies, skillful novelists showed readers that there were constructive ways of responding to bigotry, and to overcoming it within oneself.

As Hasia Diner, Leah Garrett, and Josh Lambert have shown, despite earlier scholarship arguing that it was not until later (the 1960s and 1970s, in particular) that popular culture featured the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, Americans *did* respond to the Holocaust in a range of cultural modes, including through the anti-antisemitism fiction of the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> This 1940s literary response to the Holocaust differed markedly from the kinds of literary treatments of the Holocaust that would characterize subsequent decades. Anti-antisemitism literature demonstrates that even before Americans

fully confronted and dealt with the wartime experiences of European Jews, American participation in the war and their self-understanding as liberators of the concentration camps led to a reconsideration of Americans' own problems with antisemitism. Anti-antisemitism novels thus constituted a muted literary response to the Holocaust. The novels' brief mentions of the Holocaust served as a motivator and point of comparison for understanding and improving American antisemitism. In these allusions to Nazi antisemitism, readers were reminded of the extreme versions of antisemitism, and the comforting fact that the American situation was on a far less violent scale. In one scene in *Gentleman's Agreement*, for example, Phil reflects on the exclusion of Jews from certain American hotels: "In a world where only yesterday human bones powdered to ash in blazing furnaces, the barred register of a chic hotel could scarcely be called a disaster."<sup>10</sup> The stark contrast between the image invoked of Nazi antisemitism and the upper-class antisemitism at the heart of *Gentleman's Agreement* is jarring to the twenty-first century reader, but was likely reassuring to both writer and reader in the 1940s. The discrimination described in these anti-antisemitism novels clearly did not rise to the horrific level of the Nazis.

More than two decades ago, historian Deborah Dash Moore called for a reconsideration of World War II as an "American Jewish War."<sup>11</sup> Moore invited investigation into how the war transformed American Jewish self-understanding.<sup>12</sup> In her own study of Jewish soldiers, Moore examined the implementation of the Judeo-Christian tradition during the 1940s and its transforming effect on American soldiers' attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. World War II was also an American Jewish war on the cultural front. These novels, and *Gentleman's Agreement* in particular, reflected more progressive attitudes toward Jews, minorities, and antisemitism, even as they demonstrated the limits of such change. I examine the anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s as a cultural arena for revising views about Jews, antisemitism, and good Americanism. To accomplish this, I look at the historical context of these novels, focusing on *Gentleman's Agreement* and its roots, and the connections between the 1940s anti-antisemitism literature and changes in American society.

### **Anti-Antisemitism Literature: Teaching Americans How to Respond to the Problem**

Through its Midwestern, gentile protagonist, *Gentleman's Agreement* achieved several of Hobson's goals: It asserted the essential sameness of Jews and Christians—an idea well-suited to the

Judeo-Christian era, yet offensive to those who valued the distinctions between Jews and Christians.<sup>13</sup> The novel enabled more readers to identify with and emulate Phil's heroic awakening, an awakening that was informed by a liberal Protestant ethos that grounded his secular worldview.<sup>14</sup> Hobson's knowledge of selling, acquired through her advertising background and as an employee at Time Inc., allowed her to aim her writing toward Main Street America.<sup>15</sup>

Given his background, Phil Green's appreciation of New York's pluralistic society is especially meaningful.<sup>16</sup> Surveying the room at a party hosted by a Manhattan colleague, Phil thinks, "Here was a world where a man's name, the shape of his nose, the religion he believed in or the religion he did not believe in—where none of it counted."<sup>17</sup> Phil perceives that his new milieu is not the kind where antisemitism is likely to drive a wedge between people. In his mind, Phil connects the cosmopolitan party scene before him—where "the faces in the room were various with many kinds of origin; the speech mingled the accents of Middle West, East, and West, of Europe and America"—with the best of American traditions: "Here was rugged individualism in its best sense, each man or woman a whole person, the sum of his worth and character left whole, no part subtracted by prejudice."<sup>18</sup> Hobson's fictional portrayal suggests that small towns form good citizens like Phil, but cities, and especially New York, were the spaces in which religious pluralism—and secularism—thrived: "This, the fluid easy coming together of a dozen worlds, was the bonus life set aside for the luckier ones in the metropolises of the earth. The small city, the town and village, could not offer it. To Phil, grown in small cities and towns, it was as stimulating as the champagne."<sup>19</sup> This secular, cosmopolitan Manhattan was Laura Z. Hobson's world. It was where she spent most of her life after graduating from Cornell in 1921 and, through her novel, it was a world offered up to American readers and moviegoers, in which religious pluralism, secularism, and *anti*-antisemitism flourished.<sup>20</sup>

Ironically, antisemitism during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly the 1920s through the early 1940s, was so ongoing and pervasive as to be naturalized as part of the American milieu, neither worthy of discussion nor a topic fit for polite conversation. Today, we talk about antisemitic *incidents*. But for the typical American Jew during the 1920s and 1930s, antisemitism affected every aspect of life: housing, college, profession, recreational activities, social clubs, and friends.<sup>21</sup> Antisemitism shaped an individual's aspirations and dreams, often determining what a young Jew believed was possible in life. It was part of the air Jews breathed—taken for granted; not just accepted, but expected as a fact

of life.<sup>22</sup> Historian Deborah Lipstadt recalls the way antisemitism permeated and organized her midcentury youth: "I had heard my friends' older siblings say, that despite their outstanding grades and academic records, they would not get into a particular Ivy League school because its Jewish quota was filled. Already in the eighth grade we knew not to consider certain colleges because it was exceptionally difficult for a Jewish student. . . to gain admittance. Rather than being shocked by this, we accepted it, I am embarrassed to say, as a fact of life. This was how things were."<sup>23</sup> That acceptance of antisemitism was also familiar to Arthur Miller, playwright and author of the 1946 anti-antisemitism novel *Focus*. In a 1947 speech, Miller explained that it had been difficult to write about antisemitism as a Jew, because it was so entangled with all of his experiences, and because the topic inevitably led to his own resentment and defensiveness.<sup>24</sup> Miller explained, "Instantly, therefore, and inevitably, when I confront the prospect of writing about Jewish life my mood is defensive, and combative. There is hardly a story or play I could write about which would not have to contain justification for behavior that in any other people need not be justified."<sup>25</sup> In *Agreement*, Phil similarly discovers how challenging it is for a Jew to respond to antisemitism after watching his childhood friend Dave Goldman react to an antisemitic comment. Phil reflects on the burden that falls on the Jew in such a moment: "The anti-semite offered the effrontery—and then the world was ready with harsh yardsticks to measure the self-control and dignity with which you met it. You were sensitive or too sensitive; you were too timid or too bellicose; they gave you at once the wound and the burden of proper behavior toward it."<sup>26</sup> It is a measure of Phil's empathy that he perceives this hidden, inner Jewish turmoil.

*Agreement* provided a model of non-Jewish understanding and sympathy for antisemitism through Phil. Thus, another justification for a gentile protagonist was that it allowed Hobson to showcase moral outrage as the proper American reaction to antisemitism. Phil is shocked and deeply disturbed by antisemitism, unlike most adult Jews in the 1940s, including Dave Goldman, whose "tough, muscular attitude" toward antisemitism had always impressed Phil.<sup>27</sup> "I'm in it up to my neck every way I can find," Dave confides to Phil about his own experience with antisemitism.<sup>28</sup> Dave's outrage has been dulled over time. Having become inured to such discrimination and bigotry, the Jews in *Gentleman's Agreement* have largely lost their sense of moral outrage at the injustice of antisemitism. Meanwhile, it is part of Phil's white, male, Christian privilege, as it might be described today, that he has been shielded from the harsh realities of Dave's life for so long. The positive side of

this privilege is that it allows Phil to evince, somewhat credibly, his moral indignation over the ubiquity of antisemitism, even in cosmopolitan New York.

### The 1940s: A Cultural Moment for Anti-Antisemitism

Despite the complicated feelings that antisemitic bigotry aroused, for both Jews and non-Jews, *anti*-antisemitism had a cultural moment in 1940s America.<sup>29</sup> Antisemitism was certainly not a new phenomenon at this point, but its presence as a topic of polite conversation, and its prominence as a theme in books and popular culture, marked a change.<sup>30</sup> The late 1940s, therefore, witnessed not only a decline in American antisemitism, but also saw an increase in discussion of antisemitism in mainstream media and in popular culture.<sup>31</sup> “After decades of only episodic public discussion of anti-Jewish quotas” in colleges and graduate schools, for instance, “magazine and newspaper articles of 1945–1947 exposed in detail the practice of excluding Jews,” David Hollinger notes.<sup>32</sup> As early as the summer of 1941, the *Atlantic Monthly* published a three-part series on the problems of Jews and antisemitism in America. In “The Jewish Problem in America,” Alfred Jay Nock’s June and July 1941 essays for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Nock categorized Jews as an Oriental people without hope of Occidentalization. Thus did Nock impose a race theory—“so warming to the heart of the Nazis,” according to James Marshall, the second author in the *Atlantic* series, who wrote in criticism of Nock’s essays that “there is no pure Jewish race.”<sup>33</sup> Unlike Nock, Marshall recognized that racial categories were dangerous for American democracy, for “[o]nly a Caste society can result if our problems are distributed into airtight sections of Jewish, Negro, Catholic, Isolationist, employer, employee, and the like.”<sup>34</sup> While Nock believed that Occidentals and Orientals were destined to remain forever suspicious of each other, Marshall understood it as the American way for individuals to try to understand each other, in spite of their differences.

The issue of antisemitism was thus already being aired at the start of the decade. A couple of months after the *Atlantic* series, the aviator and national hero Charles Lindbergh’s infamous Des Moines speech at an America First rally had singled out Jews as among the three groups attempting to push America into the European war—a charge that was roundly censured by politicians and newspaper editors around the country for its “race prejudice.” A pamphlet issued in the wake of the speech, “Is Lindbergh a Nazi?,” reflected the question that sparked a turn in public opinion against the

national hero. The speech and the backlash it provoked—"Stay Out of Texas, House Roars Out to Lindbergh"<sup>35</sup> ran a typical headline—caused an early, albeit limited, public reckoning with prewar antisemitism in America. Even the America First committee felt it necessary to issue a statement declaring that they "deplore the injection of the race issue into the discussion of war or peace."<sup>36</sup> This led the *New York Times* to editorialize, in passing, on the subject of Jews and race, a topic the *Times* likely would have avoided were it not for the need to criticize Lindbergh: "Passing over the question whether a religious group whose members come from almost every civilized country and speak almost every Western language can be called a 'race,' let us examine what Mr. Lindbergh actually said."<sup>37</sup> Not unlike the declarations coming from other newspapers, the *Times* firmly stated that "We do not believe that anti-Semitism will ever gain ground in this country so long as the masses of our people are true to the great tradition on which this Republic was founded and for which such a multitude of known and unknown heroes have labored, sacrificed and given their lives."<sup>38</sup> In suggesting that *real* Americans did not engage in anything resembling Nazi behavior, such statements made clear that Hitler had introduced a new standard for what counted as serious antisemitism.<sup>39</sup>

It was becoming clear, by the early 1940s, that the European situation had caused Americans to be more attentive to their own problems. Publication of important nonfiction books about antisemitism written by non-Jews, such as the American edition of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew* in 1948 and, in that same year, Carey McWilliams's *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America*, reflected the public's interest in the issue.<sup>40</sup> As the *New Republic* editor Bruce Bliven observed in 1948, in relation to recent anti-antisemitism books and movies, "Discrimination against minorities has suddenly become high priority news."<sup>41</sup>

Not everyone would agree that *minorities* had become a high priority, but Bliven's conflation of Jews and minorities was telling. At times, during the 1940s, talking about Jews and antisemitism became a stand-in for Americans' concern for all minorities.<sup>42</sup> In retrospect, it appears that talking about Jews was a harbinger of future change for other minority groups.<sup>43</sup> In the 1940s, Jews were the minority group du jour, attracting attention and consideration because of World War II and what would become known as the Holocaust, and as a result of the efforts of American Jewish defense organizations.<sup>44</sup> Confronting antisemitism through books and popular culture during the 1940s likely eased the conscience of many Americans, even as race relations in the United States continued to fester.<sup>45</sup> *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire*, another movie about American antisemitism,



received multiple nominations during the 1948 Academy Awards, with *Agreement* winning the award for Best Picture.<sup>46</sup> Its prominence as a theme at the 1948 Oscars was just one of several indications that anti-antisemitism had become central to the country's postwar liberal creed and part of America's global moral leadership.<sup>47</sup> This change in ideals is not to be confused with the disappearance of antisemitism; discrimination toward Jews in the form of university quotas, housing covenants, restricted country clubs, and hiring discrimination continued well past the 1940s.<sup>48</sup> As usual, everyday behavior, and especially that which occurred on the other side of closed doors, lagged behind national ideals.<sup>49</sup> But shifting national ideals were significant. They pointed to progressive aspirations and curtailed public bad behavior.

### Transforming the Story of American Antisemitism

Prior to the 1947 anti-antisemitism films, the anti-antisemitism novels of the 1940s demonstrated that at least a segment of American writers, readers, publishers, and editors were willing to explore attitudes toward Jews. Indeed, the success of anti-antisemitism fiction helped convince Hollywood to take on the issue of antisemitism. Despite the prominence of Jews in the film industry, executives had previously avoided the issue of antisemitism. As Saul Austerlitz observes, "In the years leading up to the American entry into World War II, American films had chosen not to talk about the tenuous status of European Jewry—even in films ostensibly about the Nazi menace. (The world 'Jew,' famously, never made an appearance in the 1940 anti-Nazi drama *The Mortal Storm*.)"<sup>50</sup> It would become part of the lore of *Gentleman's Agreement* that it had taken the courage of Darryl Zanuck, the only major non-Jewish studio head, to display the courage to produce the film. The novel's scenes about acceptable and unacceptable Jews, however, as well as the novel's several discussions about race, did not make it into the movie, suggesting that the novel was a popular culture arena of greater daring than film when it came to the relatively controversial topics of antisemitism and racism. The novels literally changed the story of antisemitism in America, transforming, as noted previously, what had been a problem for Jews into one requiring an American solution.<sup>51</sup> In *Gentleman's Agreement*, Phil Green's development as a character hinges on his awakening to this truth: "It was a nonsectarian problem. And because of the simple thing of majority, it was mostly a Christian problem. He'd always known that. But now he was a different sort of Christian. Now he was one of the

Christians able and ready to act. On whatever front the thing showed itself."<sup>52</sup> Readers picked up on this message and felt its urgency. A lawyer from New York wrote a typical response to Hobson:

I have just finished "Gentleman's Agreement" in one reading. I could not put it down, anymore than I now can refrain from writing you. I must tell you that I consider your novel a major achievement of our time. I have never seen the facets of anti-semitism so knowingly and nakedly revealed in any other writing. It is a study which is at once incisive and subtle, sweeping and precise, and terrifyingly urgent. In a word, it has "guts." But, above all this, it brings home the fact that anti-semitism is an American problem—and a world problem—which threatens to infect our social system beyond repair. I believe the message of your story and its manner of presentation should be read by every adult in America today. For myself, I intend to shout the plaudits of "Gentleman's Agreement" to everyone I meet.<sup>53</sup>

Although, as noted earlier, some Jewish reviewers criticized Hobson for focusing on the feelings and reactions of *non*-Jews in her novel, Hobson's approach allowed more Americans to identify themselves with both the problem and solution of antisemitism.

By the late 1940s, the proper American response to antisemitism was laden with wartime symbolism. Photos of Nazi atrocities, newsreels, and reporters' written and radio accounts of the Allied forces' liberation of Nazi concentration camps all likely led many Americans to feel that changes in their attitudes toward antisemitism were necessary.<sup>54</sup> Hearing trusted American authorities, such as Generals Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton, describe what they found at the camps was a shock to the collective American conscience in the spring and summer of 1945.<sup>55</sup> Reports of Nazi barbarity had trickled into the United States during the war, despite efforts by the U.S. State Department and the Office of War Information to suppress reports of Germany's extermination camps, but Americans had been unsure of what to believe.<sup>56</sup> And when news of Hitler's atrocities came from Jews, the alleged brutalities were all too easy to dismiss as "special pleading."<sup>57</sup> For the American public, the 1945 liberation of the camps was an encounter with the darkest parts of humanity.<sup>58</sup> For the American soldiers liberating the camps, the experience of witnessing the evidence was life altering.<sup>59</sup> CBS reporter Edward Murrow, the first reporter to enter the Buchenwald concentration camp, described the horrific scene of dead bodies that greeted him. Murrow implored his audience, "I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald.

I reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it, I have no words. If I have offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I'm not in the least sorry."<sup>60</sup> Murrow was hardly alone among reporters and Americans, shocked and disturbed by the sights and smells.<sup>61</sup> Through magazines, newspapers, movie theaters, radio, and photos taken by soldiers, many postwar Americans came face-to-face with an evil unlike anything they had ever seen.<sup>62</sup> To varying degrees, the encounter forced a self-reckoning.<sup>63</sup>

Did Americans suddenly become empathetic to Jews upon hearing and reading such reports? It seems unlikely.<sup>64</sup> It is not even clear that Americans in the immediate postwar years felt much guilt about not having done more to save Hitler's victims.<sup>65</sup> But Americans did come to understand the war after witnessing the extent of Nazi evil. In simplistic terms, it became clear that the war on the European front had been about American good triumphing over Nazi evil.<sup>66</sup> Anti-antisemitism fiction provided an arena for that battle against Nazi evil to continue on the home front even after the war, and for Americans to continue to draw meaning and a sense of national identity from the European war. Among the many readers who wrote to Hobson to thank her for writing a novel that illuminated the fight against Nazi evil, one put Hobson's contributions this way: "May I commend you on the superb job you have done, and tell you how glad I am to hear another 'voice crying in the wilderness' of intolerance and prejudice. The battle against the Nazi spirit is the battle of our century, and unless we can win it, it makes little difference what solution they find to the atom bomb problem."<sup>67</sup> That "Nazi spirit," the reader explained, could be found in the United States in "those unwarranted feelings of superiority among friends, and relatives" that were so disheartening to discover among other Americans. "Then someone like you, or Margaret Halsey speaks up—and it is good to discover another articulate intelligence on the side of decency."<sup>68</sup> Hobson replied that she had "read your letter to Margaret Halsey who happens to be a close friend of mine so you cheered two authors instead of just one."<sup>69</sup> Anti-antisemitism novels provided a forum for writers and readers to continue the fight against Hitlerism on the home front. They allowed readers, despite seeing parallels between Nazism and American bigotry, to believe, nevertheless, in America's more civilized behavior toward Jews, and provided guidance for how Americans might further improve.

Full appreciation of Nazi evil forced a reassessment of America's treatment of its own Jews. The realization that they had been fighting extreme evil during World War II destabilized American identity. Consider the change: In the early, eugenic-imbued decades

of the twentieth century, the country's mission was aptly encapsulated by President Calvin Coolidge's slogan to "Keep America American," by preserving its old white, colonial stock, as some described the preferred ancestry of American citizens.<sup>70</sup> Even in 1939, when news of the Nazis' persecution of Jews—if not its full scope—had reached the United States, a poll revealed that Americans persisted in their xenophobia. In that poll, two months after Kristallnacht, when asked if the United States should accept ten thousand Jewish children from Europe, 60 percent of Americans answered no.<sup>71</sup> It did not seem to matter to the vast majority of Americans that the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, by Jewish poet Emma Lazarus, expressed values contrary to their own: *Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.* These words may have been affixed to the statue's pedestal in 1903, but they were not in line with the ideas of much of the country's social and governing elite during the four decades prior to World War II. After the war and the revelations about the Nazis, Americans increasingly sought to change earlier racist, discriminatory policies and ideas—or at least those that applied to Jews.<sup>72</sup>

### Defining Acceptable Difference in Postwar America

Recognizing that homogenous Aryan racial purity, a cornerstone of Nazi ideology, was responsible for the worst evil of the twentieth century, many postwar Americans began a cultural project of attempting to distance the United States from such belief.<sup>73</sup> American democracy would be about keeping the United States safe for difference. Or, *certain kinds of difference*. Expanding the categories of once-marginalized groups that could be integrated into the American mainstream was a slow process. Jews were the first notable group in this series of marginalized groups to be integrated. And not all kinds of Jews were initially acceptable in the 1940s, as some authors of anti-antisemitism literature made clear. "Americans without Distinction" was the title of Diana Trilling's critical review of *Gentleman's Agreement*, because of what Trilling saw as Hobson's inability to allow significant differences into her liberal worldview. "If *Gentleman's Agreement* regards Jew and Gentile as but two profiles of the same face," Trilling observed, "it is because Mrs. Hobson recognizes no valid differences between them."<sup>74</sup> Where were the *religious* Jews in this novel? Trilling asked in her review. For that matter, Trilling also asked, where were the religious Christians?

In Hobson's fictional world, no religious, noisy, poor, or angry Jews need apply, Trilling explained.

Here was the lacuna in the supposed commitment of postwar America to protecting minorities: only certain kinds of minorities and certain kinds of difference were offered protection. In proclaiming the interchangeability of gentile and Jew, Phil expresses what David Hollinger has called the "extravagant universalism" of the mid-twentieth century, a time when Hobson and other writers emphasized the potential for unity in American society.<sup>75</sup> *The House I Live In*, an Academy Award-winning short film from 1945, exemplified this thinking. In the film, Frank Sinatra confronts a group of young boys bullying a Jewish boy. Sinatra teaches them not to hate others simply because of a difference of religion. "Religion made no difference except maybe to a Nazi or somebody as stupid," Sinatra tells the boys.<sup>76</sup> *Americans* don't hate based on religion, Sinatra explains. Although he was rewriting centuries of American religious history in this statement, Sinatra's sentiment was true to the postwar, *anti*-antisemitic vision for the country. In *Gentleman's Agreement*, when Phil decides that he and his Jewish childhood friend, Dave Goldman, are essentially the same kind of person, he articulates a version of Sinatra's lesson and communicates his resistance to recognizing significant differences in someone he finds acceptable.

Dave was like him in every essential, had the same boyhood patterns, the same freedom from either extreme of poverty or wealth, the same freedom from any creed-bound faith. They had both grown up in a generation when religion did not work itself very deep into life. Whatever Dave felt now—indifference? Outrage? Fear? Or contempt?—would be the feeling of Dave as a man, and not Dave as a Jew. Dave as citizen, as American, and not Dave as a religious being. That, Phil was sure of. And that was good.<sup>77</sup>

Phil's musings suggest that deep religiousness might even pose a threat to good American citizenship. Dave is as fully an American as Phil precisely because neither was the type to let "religion work itself very deep" into their lives. This desideratum of shallow religiosity is commonly associated with President Eisenhower's 1950s suburban America and with sociologist Robert Bellah's 1960s idea of an American civil religion.<sup>78</sup> Hobson's novel suggests that a superficial Judeo-Christianity or a "faith in faith" phenomenon might already have been at play in late 1940s settings that prioritized religious pluralism and anti-antisemitism. Thinking

about his childhood friend Dave allows Phil to contemplate what constitutes acceptable difference in the United States. Phil realizes, "It was more valid to think of someone like Dave, the kind of man he himself would be if he were a Jew. He could not 'think into' a deeply religious old Jew in a prayer shawl, or into the poor, ignorant Jewish peddler behind a pushcart on the East Side, or into the wealthy tycoon in business." Here, Hobson defines an acceptable Jew according to standards that resemble the good-bad religion polarities defined by religion scholars Robert Orsi and Tracy Fessenden.<sup>79</sup> In *Gentleman's Agreement*, as Phil makes clear, only religious identities that do not disturb enlightened democratic societies deserve tolerance. Phil realizes: "The deeply pious, the truly ignorant, the greatly powerful of any creed or religion were beyond his quick understanding."<sup>80</sup> Hobson could not have made it much clearer that Phil—a stand-in for 1940s liberals—was not the type with an interest in delving deeply into religious, socioeconomic, and cultural differences. For critics such as Trilling, this refusal of the "liberal ideal" to recognize true difference was its own kind of totalitarianism. The silver lining to this regimentation of the nation's psychic life, Trilling hoped, was that it might motivate some "to underscore rather than eliminate minority differences."<sup>81</sup> In the coming years and decades, Trilling's hope would be realized among Jewish writers striving to show what distinguished Jews and Judaism from other religions in a genre of "introduction to Judaism" books that flourished in the postwar years.

In fact, there are no examples of very religious Jewish protagonists in the anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s. And, given her secular worldview, it is likely that Laura Z. Hobson—like many secular Manhattan liberals of her day—did *not* mean to include Jews who wore *kippot* or other religious garb in public. Garish and uneducated Jews also presented a problem. Toward the end of *Agreement*, Phil's girlfriend, Kathy, encounters two young women on the slopes during a ski vacation. Kathy sees their "glittering costume jewelry . . . the frozen beads of mascara at their eyes, the gleam of eye shadow, the thick lipstick, congealed and cracked," and hears their coarse language. The reader understands that they are Jewish, as Kathy thinks to herself, "Why do they *do* it? She thought miserably. Why do they make themselves so noticeable? It's awful. It's just awful."<sup>82</sup> Kathy is an attractive, liberal Manhattanite; indeed, it was Kathy who had suggested the idea of an article about antisemitism to her uncle, Phil's editor. Kathy also undergoes the greatest character development in the novel as she comes to recognize her own latent antisemitism. But Kathy cannot abide the kind of garish Jews she meets in this scene. Miss Wales,

Phil's Jewish secretary who passes as a gentile in order to find employment, also expresses repugnance for loud, pushy Jews whom she calls "kikey" Jews, reminding readers that both gentiles and Jews are capable of antisemitic attitudes.<sup>83</sup>

While the ski scene illuminates Kathy's moral limitations at this stage of the novel, it also raises the specter of intolerance from those who, like Kathy, consider themselves "good liberals." Having spent her adult life among educated, liberal Manhattanites, most of whom were gentiles, Hobson's experience allowed her to send a message to her Jewish readers: Even the good Americans, like Kathy, might harbor negative feelings toward Jews. Even someone who *wanted* to be *anti*-antisemitic, like Kathy, whose desire to feel right about Jews is connected with her desire for Phil, faced challenges when confronted with Jews who did not conform to societal norms. Kathy risks losing Phil if she does not change her attitudes toward Jews and antisemitism. But Jews, Hobson's novel subtly teaches, risk losing the Kathys of the world if they do not change their offensive behavior. In *Gentleman's Agreement*, Hobson offered lessons for both Jews and non-Jews about right behavior and attitudes for postwar Americans. As much as the anti-antisemitism literature exposed the issue of antisemitism to Americans—making it a topic of discussion and consideration—it also provided a guide for how the normalization of Jews and Judaism might occur, and exactly which kinds of Jews were eligible for it.

In one of the most famous scenes from the novel and film, Phil models the normalization of Jews in postwar America by explaining that Jews are to be conceptualized as members of a *religion*. When Phil's young son, Tommy, asks him, "What *are* Jews anyhow?" Phil's reply anticipates Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955) argument, in which Herberg explained that there were now three ways to be American. Phil says, "You can be an American and a Catholic, or an American and a Protestant, or an American and a Jew."<sup>84</sup> So there's no confusion, Phil adds, "Or you could be French or German or Spanish or any nationality at the same time you're Catholic or a Protestant or a Jew."<sup>85</sup> Phil tells Tommy that one thing is your country,

But the other thing is religion if you have any, or you grandfather's religion, like Jewish or Catholic or Protestant religion. That hasn't anything to do with the country or the language. . . . Get it? . . . Don't ever get mixed up on that. Some people are mixed up.<sup>86</sup>

Religion, as Phil teaches his son, is something one might or might not have or inherit, and there appear to be but three choices:

Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. None of these religions should ever be equated with nationality, Phil explains.<sup>87</sup> When Tommy asks his father why some people *are* mixed up, Phil replies: "Oh, they talk about the Jewish race, but never about the Catholic race or the Protestant race."<sup>88</sup> When it comes to whether Jewishness is a matter of religion or nationality or race, there are still a lot of confused Americans, Phil informs Tommy, suggesting that it is a sign of enlightened and progressive American values to understand that Jewishness is now, post-Hitler, considered a matter of religion. This may be another "gentleman's agreement" in the novel (in addition to the term's meaning in relation to restrictive housing covenants): Good, postwar progressives accept Jews as members of an American religion, marking a dramatic shift from much of the first four decades of the twentieth century, when Jews were viewed as members of an inferior race.<sup>89</sup> In return for integration as members of one of the big three American religions, Jews were expected to fit themselves neatly into the religion category.<sup>90</sup> This postwar religionizing of American Jews marked a transition from earlier fictional portrayals of Jews. By the late 1940s and 1950s, the ragingly ambitious and abrasive protagonist Harry Bogen in Jerome Weidman's popular 1937 novel *I Can Get It for You Wholesale* and the unsavory Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg's 1941 novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* were no longer well-suited to American Jewry's new position as middle-class Americans. A sign of these shifting norms in the portrayal of Jews is evident when Weidman's novel was made into a film in 1950. The movie avoided depicting unattractive Jewish stereotypes by turning Harry Bogen into Harriet Bogen, a gentile woman "who apparently carries an adding machine where her heart should be," one reviewer noted of the dress designer who still shared some of Harry's crudity. Yet something had been lost in the de-Judaized remake, for a reviewer explained, "With less white-wash and more honesty, 'I Can Get It for You Wholesale' could have been an exciting, instead of just an average good, entertainment." The satisfying, if offensive, qualities from the old portrayals of urban Jewishness had diminished in the shift to just "average, good entertainment." It was in just this way that postwar popular culture mediated the transition of Jews, in the eyes of Americans, from persecuted race, to mainstream, middle-class religion. This postwar, middlebrow culture accommodated a certain amount of distinctiveness, especially those parts relating to religion, family life, and democratic values, so long as those aspects of Jewishness that might seem offensive or radical were shorn. On the other hand, this postwar era could not yet make room for the old negative stereotypes that, so soon after the Holocaust, had become newly charged and potent,



threatening the recent mainstream acceptance of Jews as members of an American religion.<sup>91</sup> It was a mid-twentieth century American Jewish experience of religionization that echoed the much earlier emancipation process of French Jews.<sup>92</sup> Like that earlier European experience, the process of making themselves acceptable to mainstream, postwar American society did not completely erase the racial or nationalistic conception of Jews.

Interestingly, Hobson does not clear up all confusion surrounding the appropriate classification of Jews in *Gentleman's Agreement*.<sup>93</sup> Jewishness retains its racial aspect in parts of the novel, even as characters argue against this outmoded conception.<sup>94</sup> As Matthew Jacobson observes of *Agreement*, "[T]he text is at war with itself in a way that wonderfully demonstrates the character of racial categorization itself as ideology deeply entrenched."<sup>95</sup> *Gentleman's Agreement* made the case for Judaism as an American religion, while allowing readers to hold on to what likely felt like a more emotionally satisfying way of thinking of Jews—as not quite, or not just, a religion.<sup>96</sup> Other anti-antisemitism literature similarly revealed both the persistence of race discourse, at the same time that the novels explicitly presented Jewishness as a matter of religion.<sup>97</sup> In one scene in *Agreement*, Hobson delivers a somewhat heavy-handed teachable moment about the proper categorization of Jews when Kathy demonstrates both common mistakes and lessons learned about discourse surrounding Jews:

That time after he'd gone to see Professor Lieberman and she'd said something perfectly casual about "the Jewish race." Phil had explained once or twice that the phrase was based on old misconceptions which were completely disproved by modern anthropologists. But she'd said it—it was just habit. She wasn't fighting the scientists when they said there was no such thing. She knew perfectly well that the three great divisions of mankind were the Caucasian Race, the Mongoloid, the Negroid. She remembered his finger pointing out a phrase in a pamphlet written by leading anthropologists "There is no Jewish 'Race.'"

That pamphlet—which is found among Hobson's papers at the Columbia University archives—was *The Races of Mankind*, written by two female anthropologists, Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish.<sup>98</sup> Published in 1943 by the nonprofit educational organization Public Affairs Committee, the pamphlet attacked Nazi racism.<sup>99</sup> *The Races of Mankind* explained how the war against the Nazis could be fought on the home front, as facts provided by science could be used to combat the dangerous untruths about race supplied by Hitler.

"Aryans, Jews, Italians are *not* races," wrote Benedict and Weltfish.<sup>100</sup> They were speaking Hobson's language. The pamphlet further explained that "Jews are people who acknowledge the Jewish religion. They are of all races, even Negro and Mongolian."

Hobson's inclusion of the anthropologists' pamphlet in her anti-antisemitism novel was one of the ways in which she enlisted science as a bulwark against antisemitism and Nazism.<sup>101</sup> The character of Professor Lieberman, the rational, secular Jewish scientist with whom Phil finds intellectual fellowship was another. In *Gentleman's Agreement*, scientists are portrayed as prophets of truth in a secular milieu. In *The Races of Mankind*, Benedict and Weltfish see their 1940s moment for the challenge it presents: "With America's great tradition of democracy, the United States should clean its own house and get ready for a better twenty-first century. Then it could stand unashamed before the Nazis and condemn, without confusion, their doctrines of a Master Race."<sup>102</sup> According to the scientists—and Hobson and Phil—accepting Jews as members of a religion is part of America's cleaning up of its own house as a result of its involvement in World War II. However, it is a rushed cleaning job: There is little grappling with the fact that Jewishness does not fit neatly within the religion category. That lack of examination of the relationship between Jewishness and religion makes sense when one remembers (1) the 1940s Judeo-Christian context mentioned earlier that prioritized commonalities between Jews and Christians, and (2) the genre and goals of these novels.

### Anti-Antisemitism Novels as Social Protest Literature

As fiction designed to fight injustice, the 1940s anti-antisemitism novels followed a tradition of social protest literature in America—a genre in which Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1859) is the paragon and Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) is a successor. Like earlier examples that exposed and protested social ills of the day, anti-antisemitism novels called out the bigotry endemic in American society. In imagining possible alternative attitudes toward Jews that better fit American ideals of equality and religious freedom, these 1940s anti-antisemitism novels presented a "reordering of the world" that is characteristic of nineteenth-century sentimental protest literature.<sup>103</sup> As nineteenth-century women authors sought to convince readers of the morality of their new visions of society, the authors of 1940s anti-antisemitism novels promoted a vision of a more tolerant American society.<sup>104</sup> The nonviolent antisemitism showcased in these novels included slurs, hiring and admission discrimination, friction over interfaith romances,

and restricted neighborhoods and country clubs. While these injustices paled beside the horrors experienced by European Jews, they nevertheless were common and uncomfortable reminders of America's failures to realize its ideals.

As a result of *Agreement* and other anti-antisemitism novels, the everyday, low-grade antisemitism that had been accepted as part of American culture was increasingly judged un-American. Middlebrow or popular fiction, reviewers opined, was an especially effective genre for communicating these shifting attitudes to a wider readership. A reviewer of Margaret Halsey's anti-antisemitism and antiracism book, *Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers* (1944), expressed hope that books like Halsey's indicated:

[t]hat spokesmen for decency in human relations are learning to be as clever in liberal indoctrination as reactionaries and Fascists have always been in selling their own line of thinking to the public—a word dropped here and there, without blowing of trumpets and waving of banners, but naturally and as part of a general theme. Too often in the past liberal education has been so obviously propagandized that the average citizen has rejected it.<sup>105</sup>

But not everybody minded the clear signs of propagandic literature. Reviewers of *Gentleman's Agreement* applauded Hobson's writerly methods of teaching her readers: "It is propaganda of the most artful kind," one reviewer observed.<sup>106</sup> "Women who wouldn't touch *The Nation* or *The New Republic* (or *Survey Graphic*) with a ten foot pole are going to read 'Gentleman's Agreement' as they sit under the dryer, and they're going to urge their husbands to read it." This midcentury gender logic suggested that sentimental literature was the kind of emotionally manipulative reading that appealed to women, who in turn would try to influence their husbands. Fan mail showed that there was truth to the idea that women shared news of good fiction. In March of 1947, Hobson told a reporter from the *New York Herald Tribune* about news of her novel traveling between female friends and acquaintances. Hobson had heard from a reader from Evanston, Illinois, who had been in a room of people "classed as liberals," when "someone said something about 'the chosen people.' One of the women there—it was she who wrote the letter—looked at another who also had just finished reading Mrs. Hobson's serial. 'Gentleman's Agreement,' she said cryptically. 'What do you mean?' the other wanted to know. Then the talk began about the theme of the book." Hobson was delighted if it turned out that she "[h]ad created a handy phrase that will be used significantly as 'Lost

Week End' has been used," referring to her friend Charles Jackson's recent novel. One San Francisco woman wrote Hobson that the only reason she had heard about *Agreement*, in its magazine serial form, was that a friend who subscribed to *Cosmopolitan* had sent her the issue with the first installment. "Frankly, I was really amazed to find a story on antisemitism in a Hearst magazine and particularly the way you handled it." She assured Hobson, "I and many others I have talked to about your story think the writing and content are excellent. We are writing the editor of the magazine." A woman who had just moved from Islip, Long Island, wrote to Hobson that if she had the money, "I would buy copies of your book and mail them to my acquaintances out there. They need to read it." Similarly, a Mrs. Liebeskind of Brooklyn wrote, "I have just finished my copy of your book and have already passed it on to my eager friends."<sup>107</sup> Whether it was a matter of "virtue signaling," as twenty-first-century observers might label it, or a sincere desire to share good fiction with friends, or some combination of the two, readers enjoyed telling their friends about a readable novel that attacked antisemitism. It seemed that it wasn't just that postwar Americans liked *Gentleman's Agreement*—they liked the fact that they liked *Gentleman's Agreement*. Being a fan of the novel said something about a reader's liberalism and values.

In the 1940s, reviewers seemed to recalibrate standards for these female-authored social message novels, suggesting that literary greatness was not the expectation so much as was effective pedagogy. In 1944, the *Saturday Review* assessment of Gwethalyn Graham's anti-antisemitism novel, *Earth and High Heaven*, opened,

One of the hardest tasks to do successfully is the thesis-novel. At some point the thesis is apt to get out of hand and then the novel ceases to be a novel and becomes a tract. It all turns into a message and trips the reader up as obviously as the word *Moral* tacked on at the end of a nineteenth century story. It is to Miss Graham's credit that she has accomplished this difficult task expertly.<sup>108</sup>

The desire to write a novel and *not* a tract was widely shared among social message authors such as Halsey and Hobson. As Hobson began writing what would become *Gentleman's Agreement*, she worried over how to avoid writing that sounded like propaganda. As she confessed in a September 1944 letter to her publisher, "one of the major issues in my mind now is a purely literary one—can I get enough story-line, emotional interest etc into it to save it from being a lecture or a tract?"<sup>109</sup> As Hobson explained

to her publisher, Richard Simon, she would have to write a few chapters to see if it were possible. In time, readers' letters affirmed that Hobson had been successful. The national director of the organization Friends of Democracy Inc. wrote to Hobson of his hope that *Agreement* might awaken more readers to its cause: "I wish it might be possible to require every Christian in the country to read 'Gentleman's Agreement.' It might jolt some of our benighted Christian brethren out of their complacency."<sup>110</sup> He explained that it "would do them good to read 'Gentleman's Agreement,' and besides, they would be interested and enlightened."<sup>111</sup> His further assessment, that "'Gentleman's Agreement' has that rare combination of being both a good novel and an enlightening document" is just one testament to Hobson's achievement of her literary goals.<sup>112</sup>

Readers agreed with Hobson's ideas about creating a culture of activism, even if they did not use that term. One male reader wrote to Hobson, explaining how exposing the problem of antisemitism in the armed services had led to surprisingly beneficial results:

Being in Special Services I had the chance to "M.C." an army show and found this chap in the audience. I introduced him to about 5,000 GIs as a Nazi and an anti-semite disguised as an American soldier. A group of militant Jews on our Post followed through and his life was miserable for the rest of his army career. The reason I mention this case is because, fresh air does clean dirty linen. This chap is now among my better and closer friends. He was made to think and thinking cleared his mind. This is an isolated case and is just a "chink" in the wall of hate—but your book attacks men of his ilk on a nation-wide scale—and I for one know that daylight treatment of this horrible problem does produce results—so may I see again.<sup>113</sup>

Hobson replied, "I guess you know from my book that I heartily agree with you that daylight treatment is the only way to meet the dark and secret poisons of prejudice. The fact that some nine million people will be exposed to 'Gentleman's Agreement' as a movie makes me hope that 'the treatment' may even get going on a national scale."<sup>114</sup>

Even those critical of *Agreement* as a novel conceded its usefulness in drawing attention to the issue. When the Reform rabbi and bestselling author Joshua Loth Liebman devoted one of his 1948 radio broadcasts to *Gentleman's Agreement*, he paid homage to the novel and film, "which have aroused so much national interest," praising its potential to change American understanding of

antisemitism and broaden possibilities for societal change.<sup>115</sup> In spite of the “inevitable shortcomings” of Mrs. Hobson’s novel, Liebman told his listeners, *Gentleman’s Agreement* holds value

[i]n that it can open the eyes of millions of Americans as to the difference between the true and the bogus American tradition; it can make many understand that it is certainly no act of a “gentleman” to warp and twist the emotions of a child, to make a Jewish war hero feel himself an outcast, or to make a creative segment of the American population feel itself unwanted and rejected.<sup>116</sup>

Maybe, Rabbi Liebman hoped, a novel like *Gentleman’s Agreement* could show readers that antisemitism was contrary to American values.

Hobson’s favorite fan letters may have been those from readers who had thought of themselves as “true liberals”—exactly the readers whom Hobson had hoped to reach. One such letter came from Faye Emerson Roosevelt, an actress and then-wife of President Franklin Roosevelt’s son, who wrote to praise “such an important book” that “points out the flabby morality with which most of us cushion our thinking. I was emotionally and mentally, deeply stirred by it.”<sup>117</sup> Hobson replied with appreciation, for

surely this is the real reward for writing something one believes in—to get letters like yours which tell me that you were deeply stirred by my book. My belief is that if people are emotionally stirred, things happen, juices generate, polite barriers crumble—and they find themselves lots more free to talk, argue, fight than when they have been appealed to on a purely intellectual level.<sup>118</sup>

Encouraged by another reader, she wrote back, “It is really so damn wonderful to see the way ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ is going—it implies, I think, that thousands of people are hungry for something that may help them fight prejudice. It sure makes my optimism mount for the future when all of us in our different ways keep finding signs of decent people’s hate of bigotry.”<sup>119</sup>

This was the power of middlebrow anti-antisemitism fiction: readers from all walks of life were emotionally moved by it, and they, in turn, talked to their friends and neighbors about the novels, the problems they portrayed, and solutions they proposed. Hobson had first discovered this consciousness-raising aspect of anti-antisemitism literature while she was in the early stages of writing *Gentleman’s Agreement*. Hearing about other women authors of anti-antisemitism

literature, back in the fall of 1944 when she was beginning to write *Gentleman's Agreement*, encouraged Hobson, allowing her to feel part of a movement that would eventually extend to her readers.

### **"Things like these pave the way for other books": Creating a Genre of Anti-Antisemitism Novels**

In early September 1944, Hobson wrote to her publisher, Richard Simon, of her excitement at seeing novelist Gwethalyn Graham's anti-antisemitism novel, *Earth and High Heaven*, serialized in *Collier's* magazine. There was even talk of a possible Hollywood movie adaptation of Graham's novel. "Have you read *Earth and High Heaven* in *Collier's*? Have you heard that Nunnally Johnson wants to make a picture of it? It's all so new a departure—both for magazines and for film, that it fascinates me. Did it do good or harm in *Collier's*—I don't imagine anyone can tell yet."<sup>120</sup> Hobson was not alone in her surprise that anti-antisemitism had become a viable theme for fiction and film. Arthur Miller would look back on the 1940s, when he was working on his own anti-antisemitism novel, *Focus*, and reflect, "As far as I knew at the time, anti-Semitism in America was a closed if not forbidden topic for fiction—certainly no novel had taken it as a main theme."<sup>121</sup> Shame among Jews over antisemitism had largely precluded its literary treatment until American attitudes began to shift in the mid-1940s.<sup>122</sup>

Hobson's uncertainty about the effect of popular culture that exposed viewers to American antisemitism was also typical for the era.<sup>123</sup> The question of whether fiction or films about antisemitism might unintentionally incite bigots was widespread. When *Agreement* became a movie, RKO's *Crossfire*, a film noir, had already premiered in the summer of 1947. Reviewers of *Crossfire*, including Elliot Cohen of *Commentary*, worried that the film might unintentionally catalyze bigots and "maladjusted veterans" to antisemitic acts.<sup>124</sup> Even the FBI expressed concern that *Crossfire* might aid Communist enemies by exposing American antisemitism.<sup>125</sup> But Hobson was not easily deterred. Discovering that Richard Simon and others hoped to dissuade her from writing a novel about antisemitism made Hobson all the more determined to find signs that her plan for what would become *Gentleman's Agreement* was viable. In one of her letters to Simon, in the fall of 1944, Hobson referred to her friend, Margaret Halsey, another anti-antisemitism author: "I'm eagerly waiting for Peg Halsey's book—no book store has it yet. I didn't know it dealt with this subject at all." Margaret, or "Peg," Halsey was the ex-wife of Richard Simon's brother, Henry, and had been a former

entry-level employee at Simon and Schuster, before marrying into the Simon family and becoming a writer. A winner of an early National Book Award for “Most Original Book of 1938,” for her humorous bestseller *With Malice Toward Some* (1938), Halsey’s writing continued to garner high praise. Her 1997 *New York Times* obituary recalled Halsey as “a witty writer with an acute social concern,” and compared her with Dorothy Parker and H. L. Mencken.<sup>126</sup>

The Halsey book that Hobson anticipated reading—*Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers*, published in 1944—focused on both black–white race relations and antisemitism. Halsey would continue these themes in *Color Blind: A White Woman Looks at the Negro* (1946). Drawing on her experiences as a volunteer at New York’s Stage Door Canteen, Halsey wrote *Some of My Best Friends* as an epistolary novel between Gretchen, a volunteer at a servicemen’s canteen, and her brother, Jeff, a soldier.<sup>127</sup> A reviewer for *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* commented that it was not the racist episodes in the novel that made *Some of My Best Friends* exceptional, “for they are, unfortunately, commonplace.”<sup>128</sup> It was Halsey’s humor and wit that made her race lessons so easily absorbed. In the meantime, Hobson informed Simon, “I got and read Peg Halsey’s book. Though I think it is too slight and at many points artificial (as ‘letters’ to a brother) I’m very much for it. I think it will do some good even, only a jot of good maybe, but a starter.”<sup>129</sup> As she noted in that same letter, Hobson had also recently read Gwethalyn Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven*, which was serialized in *Collier’s* magazine, and was making its way to Hollywood.<sup>130</sup> “I felt that about the *Collier’s* serial—and the fact that it is bought for movies by Sam Goldwyn for 100 grand knocks me over and makes me feel that maybe the conspiracy of silence *is* ending. Which I approve of. And selfishly perhaps, I feel that things like these pave the way for other books which will perhaps be deeper and truer in some ways at least.”<sup>131</sup> Not every anti-antisemitism novel had to be stellar, Hobson maintained. Some of these novels would enable others—hers, for instance—that might go “deeper and truer” on the subject.

Going deeper and truer was a difficult goal, not least because the lessons that these novelists sought to impart were often countercultural. In Halsey’s *Some of My Best Friends*, the main character, Gretchen, hears an antisemitic remark from a wealthy patron of the canteen that deeply offends Gretchen’s Jewish friend. The incident was based on one that Halsey had witnessed at the Stage Door Canteen that caused Halsey to reflect that “‘Jewboy’ was Standard English for many of the soldiers who came to the Canteen,” despite the fact that these American soldiers were at war, defending democracy.<sup>132</sup> Halsey later reflected in her autobiography,



"There seemed to be room for a restatement of what in those days we called 'tolerance' for minorities and if such a restatement could be sugar-coated with humor, it might persuade people who would never dream of reading a tract." In the novel, after the antisemitic episode, Gretchen thinks to herself, "'Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.' Only names do hurt people."<sup>133</sup> Names *do* hurt people was one of the main lessons that came from the anti-antisemitism novels. The old children's rhyme, which had been accepted wisdom and central to American childrearing for well over a century, was overturned in the anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s. Hurtful and discriminatory words mattered more than previous generations of Americans had recognized.

### The Great Jewish Book Corresponding to *Strange Fruit*

Margaret Halsey was one of several divorced or unmarried women who, along with Laura Z. Hobson, Gwethalyn Graham, and Jo Sinclair, wrote commercially successful social message novels in the 1940s. Lillian Smith, the white, southern, single, female author of the bestselling interracial romance *Strange Fruit* (1944), was another. The *New York Times Book Review* called Smith's novel "one of the most rewarding first novels to come out of the South in years," adding, "America's peculiar dilemma has waited a long time for understanding—and for a two-sided fictional treatment."<sup>134</sup> Despite being banned in Boston for obscenity, *Strange Fruit* sold a million hardcover copies, topping the bestseller list, and surprising the several publishers who had rejected it.<sup>135</sup> In the mind of Hobson's publisher, *Strange Fruit* provided a model for what an anti-antisemitism novel might become.<sup>136</sup>

What to make of the connection between divorced or unmarried women authors and popular social protest literature? Although Harriet Beecher Stowe, the nineteenth-century literary ancestor to this group of authors, was married, future generations of women social protest novelists would include a significant number of divorced and unmarried women authors, including Hobson; Gwethalyn Graham; Jo Sinclair; Margaret Halsey; and Harper Lee, the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel-turned-film *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960), which also starred Gregory Peck. Living outside societal expectations that a woman would be preoccupied with her wifely duties, and within American associations between women and morality, these authors demonstrated unusual freedom in criticizing society.<sup>137</sup> As noted earlier, social protest literature

marked a socially acceptable and beneficial outlet for female anger that often led to literary activism among writers and readers. Robin Bernstein's analysis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a "repertoire" that shaped readers' subjectivities is helpful here.<sup>138</sup> Social protest literature also gave women writers unusual potential to shape readers' attitudes and behavior. Literary historian David Reynolds writes of Stowe's influence, "No book in American history molded public opinion more powerfully than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."<sup>139</sup> The same cannot be said for *Gentleman's Agreement*—in part because antisemitism, unlike nineteenth-century slavery, was not the kind of problem that threatened to divide the country, and, in part, because when *Gentleman's Agreement* was published it competed with many more novels and forms of entertainment. Still, the comparison between Hobson and Stowe is fitting, particularly because readers noticed it, too.

"It may not be an 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' in the popular conception of propaganda literature but, to me and to those of my friends who have already read it, it seems about the most honest and perceptive as well as the most entertaining and interesting piece of a social-political nature in current literature," wrote Dorothy Fletcher of Ridgewood, New Jersey, to Laura Z. Hobson, in the spring of 1947.<sup>140</sup> One of hundreds of readers who penned admiring letters to Hobson, Fletcher explicitly linked Hobson's efforts to a U.S. tradition of social protest literature. And although Hobson's publisher, Richard Simon, did not, at first, approve of Hobson's plan to write a novel about antisemitism, he, too, looked to this literary tradition for hope that Hobson's novel might succeed. When Simon wrote to Hobson in late September of 1944, he expressed his view that novels about bigotry were not effective in combating antisemitism, but added: "By all this I do not mean that we're against publishing books about refugees or jews [sic] or Negroes or any of the other problems which so many people would rather not face or think about or hear about. But we do know that in order for those books to do any good they have to be extraordinarily well done and plausible."<sup>141</sup> Referring to Hobson's first book, Simon wrote: "'The Trespassers' did not achieve the hundred thousand or more which we had hoped for because not enough people found that—for whatever reason—it rang a bell in their hearts." Still, Simon looked to another social ill—racism—to see what an anti-antisemitism novel might achieve. "On the other hand, 'Strange Fruit' did ring that bell and so did 'Native Son' and so did 'Under Cover.' The great Jewish book corresponding to 'Strange Fruit' has yet to be written. Perhaps you are the one to do it."<sup>142</sup> Frustrating as it

was at the time, Simon's challenge eventually provided inspiration for Hobson.

The links between antisemitism and other forms of racism and bigotry remained relevant to Hobson. In October of 1944, Hobson's letters to Simon commented on the connections between antisemitism and other forms of discrimination. Hobson was temporarily living on the West Coast, while she wrote for the film studios. Her perspective and understanding of antisemitism had shifted accordingly: "I'm plenty frightened about what antisemitism and antinegroism is growing up into for the country," she wrote to Simon. Away from New York, where Jews were almost a quarter of the city's population by the early 1940s, and the city's largest ethnic group, Hobson likely experienced antisemitism in a new way.<sup>143</sup> As a Jewish woman on the West Coast, Hobson felt a heightened sense of her minority status. "Out here it seems more rampant to me than in the circles I knew at home, perhaps because the widespread and almost unargued Anti-Jap feeling here makes so sturdy a base for all other racisms to flourish on."<sup>144</sup> She appealed to Simon to take seriously the ways that popular fiction could fight intolerance:

How does one fight such things? Each in his own way—and any serious author who attempts the fight, might just be lucky enough to chip off a bit here and there from this growth, if it's only by opening the thing to table-talk and woman's club discussions, as I'm sure Peg Halsey's book and Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* are bound to do. Maybe six other authors are right this minute finishing novels on the same subject—maybe not one will do much by itself, but perhaps all together those authors could become a kind of force for ending the complacency of uncomfortable or scared silence which defaults to the rantings of the bigots, who don't practice that conspiracy of silence at all.<sup>145</sup>

In fact, more than six authors *were* working on anti-antisemitism novels during the 1940s. In hearing about the success of a few, Hobson had discovered that she was not alone and found new courage to write her own novel, even while her publisher remained skeptical. Here again was the power of midcentury, middlebrow Jewish culture: A group of novelists were writing commercial fiction that normalized Jews and anti-antisemitism, for readers of all walks of life and backgrounds. Together, this fiction helped to create a new reality of anti-antisemitism in the postwar United States.

## Conclusion: Rewriting American Religious Pluralism through Anti-Antisemitism Literature

In the past generation, scholars of American religious history have spilled a fair amount of ink showing that the United States of the past century was not nearly as tolerant as our national mythos of religious freedom would suggest.<sup>146</sup> Anti-Catholicism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia are just a few of the hatreds and bigotries puncturing holes in the ideal of American religious freedom. These three examples—hatred directed at Catholics, Jews, and Muslims—reveal a pattern of persecuted religious groups being racialized in the United States. However, the example of twentieth-century American Jews shows how the integration of once-persecuted groups may depend on moving in the opposite direction. Jews, a group typically conceived of as a race during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, were *religionized* as midcentury Judaism ascended to the unofficial status of one of the three major American religions.

During and immediately after World War II it became expedient to think of Jews as members of a religion—the easier to integrate them and affirm the nation's commitment to religious freedom.<sup>147</sup> Although the decade of the 1940s was not the first time American Jewish leaders and writers had presented Jews as members of a religion, earlier examples of this Jewish religion discourse had not received the support from the majority, non-Jewish American culture that came in the mid-twentieth century, largely as a result of the delegitimization of racial discourse in the wake of Hitler's atrocities. If racism, as Alexander Saxton and Matthew Jacobson have observed, is a theory of history that denotes "who belongs and who does not, of who deserves what and who is capable of what," then removing Jews, at least partially, from the discourse of race and racism during the 1940s was one way to integrate them more fully into American society.<sup>148</sup> This distancing of Jewishness from racial categorization relied on the discourse of religious freedom, which, as Tisa Wenger observes, "had the unintended consequence of redrawing and even solidifying American lines of racial difference."<sup>149</sup> Marginalized groups unable to leave behind their racial designations did not fare nearly as well as Jews.

Anti-antisemitism fiction of the 1940s was one of the popular culture arenas where this reconceptualization of Jews and antisemitism occurred. As this essay has shown, Hobson felt part of a movement of writers and readers cultivating anti-antisemitism. The hope was that this 1940s American Jewish book culture of anti-antisemitism might translate into new attitudes and behavior. Although Will

Herberg's 1955 book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* is frequently cited as the book that symbolized a "turning toward pluralism," shifting our gaze toward the anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s shows how this move toward pluralism began a decade earlier in the realm of popular fiction, much of it written by women writers.<sup>150</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John Mason Brown, "If You Prick Us," *Saturday Review*, December 6, 1947, 71. Similarly, in his reading of *Gentleman's Agreement*, Matthew Jacobson sees an underlying moral as, "Do unto others (who could pass for you) as you would have others do unto you (if you could pass for them)." Matthew Jacobson, "Becoming Caucasian: Vicissitudes of Whiteness in American Politics and Culture," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 8, no. 1 (2001): 96.

<sup>2</sup>Several of the anti-antisemitism novels feature important gentile characters. Notably, in Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland* (1946), it is the non-Jewish psychiatrist who helps Jake Braunowitz come to a more sympathetic understanding of his Jewishness.

<sup>3</sup>Brown, "If You Prick Us," 71.

<sup>4</sup>George Custen, "Over 50 Years, a Landmark Loses Some of Its Luster," *New York Times*, November 16, 1997, 20.

<sup>5</sup>The theme of antisemitism as an *American* problem appears in other anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s. In Arthur Miller's *Focus*, Mr. Finkelstein teaches the non-Jewish protagonist, Mr. Newman, that the country's ideals are at stake in the battle the antisemites are waging. Finkelstein tells Newman about the antisemites in their neighborhood: "They are a gang of devils and they want this country. And if you had any regard for this country you wouldn't tell me such a thing." Arthur Miller, *Focus* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 183. This sentiment, that it's not just the Jews who suffer from antisemitism, is echoed in *Gentleman's Agreement*, when Dave Goldman and Phil Green first talk about the problem of antisemitism, and Dave says, "'The hell with the Jews, as Jews. . . . It's the whole thing, not the poor, poor Jews.' He waved toward the windows, as if he were waving to the whole stretch of country beyond.'" Laura Z. Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 133. Lila Corwin Berman's discussion of the 1940s as a decade when rabbis made the

case for the public utility of Jewishness suggests a Jewish communal parallel to this literary framework of antisemitism as an *American* problem. Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup>This idea that responsibility for persecution lay with the persecutors and not the persecuted was central to one of the most comprehensive studies of race in the United States, commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation, the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1944). Myrdal explained that what Americans called the "Negro problem" was, in fact, an American problem, holding the United States back in a constant struggle to save its soul from hypocrisy in the face of its highest ideals of equality. *An American Dilemma* thus primed American readers, during the 1940s, to come to terms with the fact that racism was the responsibility of the discriminator and not the discriminated. Despite the fact that racism was the most serious problem in the United States, it was not the problem with which the nation grappled during the 1940s. For reasons that Myrdal illuminates, Jews and antisemitism were a more solvable problem for postwar Americans, whose new role as the liberators of concentration camps contributed to their sense of being on the right side of the issue of antisemitism, especially in comparison with their wartime enemies. Thus, World War II and Hitler, ironically, played a large role in improving the situation of Jews in the United States, and in convincing postwar Americans that the position of Jews in America—as members of a respected religion, and not as members of an inferior race—was vastly different from the position of Blacks. Myrdal also noted a contrast in relation to Jews and mobility: "A Jewish economist is not expected to be a specialist on Jewish labor," Myrdal observed of the possibilities available to Jews, in contrast to African-Americans. "A Jewish sociologist is not assumed to confine himself always to studying the Ghetto. A Jewish singer is not doomed eternally to perform Jewish folk songs. A Jew is not out of place either as a governor of a state or as a planner of world reconstruction. The Jew is discriminated against in America, but there is a quantitative difference between this and the discrimination against the Negro which is so great that it becomes qualitative." Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 28.

<sup>7</sup>Miriam Udel, "Stories, Anxiety, Our Children and Ourselves: Coronavirus Is a Teaching Moment about the Comfort and Challenge of Narrative," *New York Daily News*, March 17, 2020. <https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-coronavirus-your-kids-mo-willems->

[20200317-owce4qampffwljgzh23asjwocm-story.html?fbclid=IwAR0DVFD4yROQYyq6tRnk2hDkKptuh8tjN6SWYS5Dwtlkf96d8LIEF1LQVuU.](https://doi.org/10.1017/rac.2021.6)

<sup>8</sup>Martha Nussbaum, "Powerlessness and the Politics of Blame," Jefferson Lecture, July 12, 2017. <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/martha-c-nussbaums-jefferson-lecture-powerlessness-and-politics-blame>. This lecture contains material from Martha Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

<sup>9</sup>See Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), in particular, chapter 2, "Telling the World"; Leah Garrett, *Young Lions: How Jewish Authors Reinvented the American War Novel* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015); Josh Lambert, "Fictions of Anti-Semitism," *American Literature in Transition, 1940–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 44–58.

<sup>10</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 172.

<sup>11</sup>Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish GIs and the Creation of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Religion and American Culture* 8 (Winter 1998): 32–33.

<sup>12</sup>Scholars of other traditions have also heeded Moore's call. Rosemary Corbett's study of Muslim Americans asserting national belonging through community service is a good example. Rosemary Corbett, "For God and Country: Religious Minorities Striving for National Belonging through Community Service," *Journal of Religion and American Culture* 26, no. 17 (Summer 2016): 227–59. In providing community service, marginalized Jews and Christians demonstrated loyalty to the United States, Corbett argues, showing that after World War II, Muslims continued this trend and "sought to have their civic contributions recognized, as well, and helped make community service the proving grounds for claims that [the] United States could be an Abrahamic country, rather than just a 'Judeo-Christian' one." Corbett, "For God and Country," 229.

<sup>13</sup>Matthew Jacobson provides excellent analysis of the interchangeability of gentile and Jew in *Gentleman's Agreement* in Matthew Frye Jacobson, "Becoming Caucasian: Vicissitudes of Whiteness in American Politics and Culture," *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power* 8, no. 1 (2001): 83–104.

<sup>14</sup>Richard Wrightman Fox describes twentieth-century liberal Protestantism as "a potent social, political, and intellectual force because it was so accommodating." Fox writes of the way liberal Protestantism became a natural match for progressive social movements: "The ability of liberal Protestantism to convey a persuasive aura of spiritual coherence and cultural unity, while laying down a broad welcome mat to an array of secular and

religious forces, made it an indispensable ideological bulwark for a diverse and disjointed progressive movement." Richard Wrightman Fox, "The Culture of Liberal Protestant Progressivism, 1875–1925," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 640.

<sup>15</sup>Interestingly, much later in her novel-writing career, Hobson would make an important contribution to gay literature through her 1975 novel *Consenting Adult*, which she told from the perspective of the straight parents of a gay son. Hobson employed a similar strategy as she had in *Gentleman's Agreement*: By making the parents the protagonists, she provided heterosexual readers with a model for change. *Consenting Adult* described the parents' heroic coming to terms with their son's situation. As she had done in *Agreement*, in *Consenting Adult*, Hobson provided a tool for change for the majority culture.

<sup>16</sup>The religious pluralism of *Gentleman's Agreement's* 1940s New York is very similar to that described in J. Terry Todd's study of the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair, wherein the New York organizers of the Temple of Religion "hoped to present a prescriptive picture of religious harmony, a veritable exhibit of the future of American religious pluralism," that was made possible by excluding certain traditions. J. Terry Todd, "The Temple of Religion and the Politics of Religious Pluralism: Judeo-Christian America at the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair," in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, eds. Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 203.

<sup>17</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 122. The party is one of many examples of Hobson creating a scene that enacts pluralism, in line with Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen's idea of pluralism as "casting prescriptive norms of identity." Courtney Bender and Pamela Klassen, eds. "Introduction," in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>18</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 121–22.

<sup>19</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 121.

<sup>20</sup>J. Terry Todd describes 1930s and 1940s New York as a place "where Protestants (well-placed white Protestants, at least), shared power with influential Catholics and Jews—not always on equal footing, to be sure, but in culturally significant ways nonetheless. This new American reality had been dawning since the late nineteenth century in New York and in other major cities, but the pace of change had accelerated in the early twentieth century. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish elites increasingly met and mingled in Manhattan's marketplaces, if not in their respective social clubs. New York's elites shared a stake in maintaining a stable city, but



they sensed tensions that threatened to disrupt civic life and business affairs." Todd, "The Temple of Religion," 205.

<sup>21</sup>See Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Anti-antisemitism fiction was particularly good at showing the way antisemitism seeped into every facet of life, casting a pall over new beginnings for young people. For instance, Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* describes the effects of antisemitism on a new love affair between Marc Reiser and Erika Drake. Throughout the novel, Reiser reflects on how antisemitism has colored his experiences, including his starting university. Reiser had left home "full of hope and illusions," only to return to his parents' home dejected and somewhat depressed about the reality of attending university as a marginalized Jew on a big campus. Reiser's father suggests he try a small-town university: "Then when you're ready for law school, you'll be older and you'll have had a chance to get used to it gradually." Gwethalyn Graham, *Earth and High Heaven* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1944), 294.

<sup>22</sup>Historian Kirsten Fermaglich's study of American Jewish name-changing offers an excellent perspective on the corrosive and unofficial nature of twentieth-century antisemitism. Kirsten Fermaglich, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History of Jewish Name Changing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup>Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), xiv.

<sup>24</sup>Harold Ribalow, *This Land, These People* (New York: The Beechurst Press, 1950), 4.

<sup>25</sup>Ribalow, *This Land, These People*, 4.

<sup>26</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 139–40.

<sup>27</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 200.

<sup>28</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 201. On antisemitism limiting career and professional options during the 1920s through the 1940s, see Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 158–60. As Dinnerstein's book suggests, 1920 through the early 1940s was likely the worst part of the twentieth century for antisemitic discrimination.

<sup>29</sup>Leonard Dinnerstein describes an "avalanche of movies, studies, and critical assessments of antisemitism" that "both aroused and reflected national concern" during the 1940s. Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 153.

<sup>30</sup>Two 1947 films about antisemitism caused *Saturday Review* critic John Mason Brown to praise the films' daring "to speak publicly for the first time on a subject [of] which movie goers have long spoken privately." John Mason Brown, "If You Prick Us," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 30 (December 6, 1947): 69.

<sup>31</sup>See Naomi Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), "Overview: 1945–1965," 123–30. Salo Baron wrote, "Keen observers have indeed noted a marked decline in overt anti-Semitic propaganda in the United States and other lands. According to a well-informed Jewish leader, it no longer pays to be a professional anti-Semite in America." Salo Baron, "The Year in Retrospect," *American Jewish Year Book 1947–1948*, 108. Even the House Un-American Activities Committee, which targeted many Jews, and the Rosenberg trial in the early 1950s did not incite virulent antisemitism, although Jewish defense agency leaders feared they would. Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 164. As Stephen Norwood argues, antisemitism intensified between the 1924 immigration restriction act and 1944, declining in the postwar years. Stephen Norwood, "Marauding Youth and the Christian Front: Antisemitic Violence in Boston and New York during World War II," *Journal of American Jewish History* (June 2003): 233–67. The 1948–1949 *American Jewish Year Book* also noted a "striking literary trend toward increased concern with the problems of anti-Semitism and intermarriage." Shalom Kahn, "Cultural Activities," *American Jewish Year Book 1948–1949*, 180. David Hollinger observes, "Opinion polls showed that antisemitism declined sharply in 1947, having maintained prewar levels throughout the war itself. But this change in public attitudes, especially as it affected higher education, was directly stimulated by a campaign mounted by liberal journalists and politicians against 'un-American' discriminatory practices in the context of a victorious war against Hitler." David Hollinger, *Jews, Science, and Secular Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>32</sup>Hollinger, *Jews, Science, and Secular Culture*, 9.

<sup>33</sup>James Marshall, "The Anti-Semitic Problem in America," *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1941.

<sup>34</sup>Marshall, "The Anti-Semitic Problem in America."

<sup>35</sup>"Stay Out of Texas, House Roars Out to Lindbergh," *Austin Statesman*, September 18, 1941, 1. The reckoning with antisemitism that took place in the wake of Lindbergh's Des Moines speech differed from the public uproar after Kristallnacht, in 1938, because it focused on Americans and antisemitism. On the coding of Nazis as evil after Kristallnacht, see Jeffrey Alexander, "The Social Construction of Moral Universals," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 14–15. "Willkie Terms Lindbergh's Des Moines Talk Un-American," *The Sun*, September 14, 1941, 1; Dewey Assails Lindbergh for Des Moines Talk, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 15, 1941, 9.

<sup>36</sup>On America First's response to Lindbergh's speech, see Herman Klurfeld, *Winchell, His Life and Times* (New York: Praeger, 1976), 90. The America First comments were also reported on in the *New York Times*: "The Un-American Way" (editorial), *New York Times*, September 26, 1941, 22.

<sup>37</sup>"The Un-American Way," 22.

<sup>38</sup>"The Un-American Way," 22.

<sup>39</sup>"The Un-American Way," 22.

<sup>40</sup>The publication of two 1948 articles in the *Atlantic Monthly* about Jews changing or not changing their last names as a result of antisemitism similarly suggested the public's interest. See An Anonymous Jewish American, "I Changed My Name," *Atlantic Monthly* (February 1948); David L. Cohn, "I've Kept My Name," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1948).

<sup>41</sup>Bruce Bliven, "Discrimination—and Its Origin," *New York Times*, March 21, 1948, BR3.

<sup>42</sup>In his multipart expose of antisemitism for the *New Republic* in 1947, Bruce Bliven argued that "anti-Semitism is only one aspect, and in this country at this time, not even the most important, of the vicious doctrine of racial-religious hostility." Bliven explains, "I am writing about anti-Semitism because it offers a good 'case history' in this general field." Bruce Bliven, "U.S. Antisemitism Today," *New Republic*, December 3, 1947, 16.

<sup>43</sup>Judith Weisenfeld describes the connections that actors, directors, and producers of anti-antisemitism films felt about their work on films relating to Jews and antisemitism and approaches to addressing discrimination against African-Americans. Judith Weisenfeld, *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African-American Religion in American Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 208–209. Leonard Dinnerstein writes that "the decline in prejudicial remarks aimed at Jews was part of a general lessening in all American bigotry." Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 152. An example of the way popular culture's embrace of anti-antisemitism segued into its treatment of other minorities is evident in the 1949 film *Home of the Brave*, based on the 1945 play by Jewish playwright Arthur Laurents. The play had been about antisemitism and featured a Jewish protagonist, but when sold to Hollywood, the Jewish lead, Private First Class Peter Coen, was replaced with a black character because, Laurents was told, "Jews have been done." In April 1949, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, an African-American newspaper, reported that *Home of the Brave* producer Stanley Kramer had been interested in the play because of its antisemitism theme, but because of other anti-antisemitism films (*Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire*), he had been unable to get financial backing for another movie on that topic,

and so changed the main character from Jewish to African-American. "Home of the Brave Is First Film to Probe Anti-Negro Bitterness in United States," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 14, 1949, C5.

<sup>44</sup>Dinnerstein notes that "no ethnic group had defense agencies as well organized and as well financed as those of the Jews." Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 153.

<sup>45</sup>The fact that lynchings of African-Americans in the South continued into the 1940s, and that 120,000 Japanese-Americans had been sent to internment camps in the southern and western United States following Pearl Harbor, was not brought up in the anti-antisemitism literature of the 1940s, but awareness of these American atrocities may have been a source of distress for at least some readers.

<sup>46</sup>*Crossfire* was a 1947 film noir drama, directed by Edward Dmytryk, based on the 1945 novel *The Brick Foxhole* by Richard Brooks (Reuben Sax). It received five Oscar nominations.

<sup>47</sup>The principle of aiding refugees was written into American law, in the 1948 Displaced Persons Act and in later legislation. This is one example of how anti-antisemitism in the late 1940s became part of postwar America's global moral leadership.

<sup>48</sup>As Leonard Dinnerstein writes of the postwar decline in antisemitism, "Anti-semitism, of course, did not disappear between 1945 and 1969 but as a less socially acceptable aspect of American life it waned significantly." Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 150.

<sup>49</sup>Leonard Dinnerstein describes how, after World War II, "anti-Semitism had not been erased from people's hearts and minds. Anti-Semitism . . . had simply become unfashionable and unpopular, and had therefore gone underground." Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 165.

<sup>50</sup>Saul Austerlitz, "When Hollywood Was Scared to Depict Antisemitism, It Made 'Gentleman's Agreement,'" in *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate* (New York: Brill, 2016), 395.

<sup>51</sup>Earlier writers had also tried to make the case for antisemitism as a problem requiring an American solution. To take an earlier example, in his 1939 article "What Can the Jews Do?" for the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, reprinted in *Readers Digest*, Jewish writer Lewis Browne concluded: "We are hopelessly outnumbered. So why ask what we Jews are going to do about it? The proper question is: What do you Gentiles have in mind?" Lewis Browne, "What Can the Jews Do?" *Readers Digest* 34, no. 204 (April 1939): 77.

<sup>52</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 268.

<sup>53</sup>Howard W. Cosell to Laura Z. Hobson, March 4, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947. Laura Z. Hobson collection, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

<sup>54</sup>“It was unbearable,’ remembered Alfred Kazin of seeing the carnage of Belsen at a Piccadilly cinema. ‘People coughed in embarrassment, and in embarrassment many laughed.’” Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Oxford, 1985), x. When American Generals George Patton, Omar Bradley, and Dwight Eisenhower made their first discovery of a Nazi camp, in April 1945, their reactions included shock over what the Nazis had done and total repugnance. Eisenhower famously remarked: “We are told that the American soldier does not know what he was fighting for. Now at least he will know what is fighting against.”

<sup>55</sup>The August 1945 Harrison Report, which examined the plight of Holocaust survivors in displaced persons camps in postwar Europe, criticized camp conditions, and recommended allowing Jewish displaced persons to emigrate to the United States and Palestine, was one example of how 1945 news from Europe may have helped to change public opinion about European Jews toward a sympathetic response. The Harrison Report made front page news of the *New York Times* on September 30, 1945, with the headline, “President Orders Eisenhower to End New Abuse of Jews; He acts on Harrison Report, Which Likens Our Treatment to that of the Nazis.”

<sup>56</sup>“Between 1942 and 1944, the U.S. State Department and the Office of War Information suppressed reports of Germany’s genocidal campaign. Both agencies had worried that such stories would be perceived as wartime propaganda or would be focused too narrowly on Jewish victimization and the European fronts.” Lawrence Baron, “The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 64. Lawrence Baron writes, “What began as a trickle of information in 1942 became a torrent in 1945 when Allied troops liberated the remaining survivors in German concentration and death camps.” Baron, “The Holocaust,” 64. Adding to the American inability to fully understand what was happening to European Jews was the fact that news reports prior to 1942 had not always made it clear that Jews were Hitler’s primary victims. “The Nazi concentration camp was the most common symbol of the enemy regime, and its archetypal inmate was usually represented as a political oppositionist or member of the resistance.” Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 26.

<sup>57</sup>Henry Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 211–12; Richard Breitman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 33.

<sup>58</sup>Robert Abzug writes, “[T]he liberations made horrified believers out of the skeptics and brought a new and hideous sense of reality even to those who never doubted the worst.” Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart*, 19. Peter Novick observes that, throughout the war, few Americans were aware of the scale of the European Jewish catastrophe: “That the man in the street was ill-informed about the Holocaust, as about so much, is hardly shocking. But lack of awareness was common among the highly placed and generally knowledgeable as well: only at the very end of the war did ignorance dissipate.” Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 24.

<sup>59</sup>Historian John McManus writes of the American soldiers who liberated camps in the spring of 1945: “Most had no idea what they were about to see. The average soldier disliked the Nazi regime and, in theory, understood the tyranny Hitler and his followers had imposed upon Europe.” John McManus, *Hell before Their Eyes: American Soldiers Liberate the Concentration Camps in Germany, April 1945* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2015), 3. McManus writes that the Americans who saw the camps had a shocking and sickening experience. McManus, *Hell before Their Eyes*, 3–4.

<sup>60</sup>Edward R. Murrow, “They Died 900 a Day in ‘the Best’ Nazi Death Camp,” Old Time Radio, April 16, 1945. <http://www.otr.com/ra/450415%20CBS%20Edward%20Murrow%20On%20Buchenwald.mp3>.

<sup>61</sup>Mark Bradley writes of the journalists’ encounter with the Nazis’ atrocities: “Many journalists reported that the shock of what they were seeing was often difficult to fully capture in words. A Baltimore Sun correspondent wrote, ‘You had heard of such things in Nazi Germany. . . . But now that you were actually confronted with the horror of mass murder, you stared at the bodies and almost doubted your own eyes.’” Mark Bradley, *The World Reimagined: America and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 79.

<sup>62</sup>Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 80.

<sup>63</sup>Famously, Susan Sontag described the effect of seeing the photographs of the Nazi genocide as a child, in July 1945, as a “negative epiphany.” Sontag wrote, “Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, although it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. . . . When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror, I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.” Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Dell, 1979), 19–20. Carol Zemel

writes of the encounter with the photographic images of the Holocaust, "For many viewers, they invoke the limits of human endurance; they call for moral reflection on human nature and the capacity for evil; for some, they offer an opportunity to mourn." Carol Zemel, "Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Photographs," in *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, eds. Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 203.

<sup>64</sup>Americans had not necessarily been schooled in thinking of Nazi victims as Jews, because photographs of the concentration camp victims "were presented as images of unprecedented suffering without specific contextualization. They seldom appeared in such a way that viewers would know that vast numbers of victims were Jewish, murdered by the Nazis because they were Jews." Instead, the captions to these photographs described these victims as "political prisoners," "military prisoners," and "slave laborers." Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 77. Even the idea that America's restrictive immigration policy made the United States an accessory to Nazi crimes only emerged in the 1960s, according to Baron. Baron, "The Holocaust," 79.

<sup>65</sup>Historians sound a very skeptical note on the issue of Americans' guilt over what had happened to the Jews. Peter Novick argues that "for the overwhelming majority of Americans, throughout the war . . . what we now call the Holocaust was neither a distinct entity nor particularly salient. The murder of European Jewry, insofar as it was understood or acknowledged, was just one among the countless dimensions of a conflict that was consuming the lives of tens of millions around the globe." Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 29.

<sup>66</sup>On seeing the concentration camps in 1945 and the meaning that gave to the American contributions to World War II, see McManus, *Hell before Their Very Eyes*, 142, 146–47. At the June 1945 United Nations Conference in San Francisco, the comments of a U.S. diplomat revealed the kinds of connections Americans were making between Nazi evil and what American democracy needed to protect: "When you look at the atrocity pictures and read the story of what happened under Nazi and Fascist rule, you begin to see in concrete form that not only did you have the barbaric destruction of human life, but also the very deprivation of the most fundamental freedom." Bradley, *The World Reimagined*, 84.

<sup>67</sup>Mrs. Irma M. Gasser to Laura Z. Hobson, March 27, 1947. Box 20, folder GA correspondence. Laura Z. Hobson Collection, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscripts Library.

<sup>68</sup>Mrs. Irma M. Gasser to Laura Z. Hobson, March 27, 1947. Box 20, folder GA correspondence.

<sup>69</sup>Laura Z. Hobson to Mrs. Irma M. Gasser, April 10, 1947, Box 20, folder GA correspondence.

<sup>70</sup>Ibram Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 61.

<sup>71</sup>Ishaan Tharoor, "What Americans Thought of Jewish Refugees on the Eve of World War II," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2015.

<sup>72</sup>The post-World War II years were certainly not the first time that groups of Americans sought to counteract intolerance. Jessica Cooperman describes a more limited version of tri-faith America during World War I in *Making Judaism Safe for America: World War I and the Origins of Religious Pluralism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018). As Kevin Schultz has shown, the 1920s saw significant ecumenical efforts by clergy to fight intolerance across the country. Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Even before the end of World War II, groups such as the Council Against Intolerance worked to educate Americans about the threat that prejudice posed to national unity. One example is their 1940 diversity map of the United States, titled, "America—A Nation of One People from Many Countries," by Emma Bourne. "The Council Against Intolerance commissioned Bourne's work in an effort to remind Americans that the U.S. had always defined itself as a country of varied national origins and religious backgrounds." Lauren Young, "The Powerful 1940 Map That Depicts America as a Nation of Immigrants," *Atlas Obscura*, February 6, 2017. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/map-monday-america-a-nation-of-one-people-from-many-countries>. Daniel Okrent has shown that even eugenicists moved quickly to distance themselves from Nazism: "For many, each report of another Nazi law, another Hitler speech, was almost an accusation of complicity." Daniel Okrent, *The Guarded Gate* (New York: Scribner, 2019), 374–75.

<sup>73</sup>Dinnerstein writes of a postwar change in attitudes: "Many Americans resolved to do something about bigotry in America. Thousands of veterans had lived with intolerance in the armed forces and hoped to reform the prejudiced nation they had left behind." Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 151.

<sup>74</sup>Diana Trilling, "Americans without Distinction," *Commentary* (March 1947), 290.

<sup>75</sup>David Hollinger, *Post-Ethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 54. Hollinger describes a group of



midcentury books and cultural texts intended to express a universalism that could combat particularisms interpreted as evil.

<sup>76</sup>Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 77.

<sup>77</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 52.

<sup>78</sup>As Amy Hungerford writes, President Eisenhower was described as "a very fervent believer in a very vague religion," and the attitudes of 1950s Americans toward religion were often associated with a 1952 Eisenhower quotation: "Our government makes no sense, unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is." As Hungerford (and Mark Silk in his book *Spiritual Politics*) points out, what Eisenhower actually said was, "In other words, our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept but it must be a religion that all men are created equal." Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion Since 1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2. See also Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America since World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988). In 1955, Will Herberg explained this Eisenhower quotation as referring to the conviction, shared by many Americans of his time, that "at bottom the 'three great faiths' were really 'saying the same thing' in affirming the 'spiritual ideals' and 'moral values' of the American Way of Life." Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 84. Herberg also explains the 1950s "Faith in faith" phenomenon as an American belief in the value of religion, or a "cult of faith." Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 84, 89; Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1, 1–21.

<sup>79</sup>Orsi describes good religion as the "rational, word-centered, nonritualistic, middle-class, unemotional, compatible with democracy and the liberal state" that has been taught and endorsed in academic institutions. Robert Orsi, "On Not Talking to the Press," *Religious Studies News* 19, no. 3 (2004): 15. In her discussion of Orsi's framework, Fessenden adds that good religion is associated with freedom and enlightenment and is part of the progressive narrative of democracy. Traci Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2–3.

<sup>80</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 51–52.

<sup>81</sup>Trilling, "Americans without Distinction," 291–92.

<sup>82</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 242.

<sup>83</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 154.

<sup>84</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 34. In his 1955 book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, Herberg wrote, "Not to be—that is, not to identify oneself and be identified as—either a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew is somehow not to be an American. . . . Americanness today entails religious identification as Protestant, Catholic, or Jew in a way and to a degree quite unprecedented in our history. To be a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew are today the alternative ways of being an American." Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, 274. This teaching readers to think about Jews as one of three equal religious paths is also apparent in other anti-antisemitism novel—Gwethalyn Graham's *Earth and High Heaven* (1944), for example, in which the Jewish protagonist recalls his childhood in which "he was never singled out because he was Jewish. Protestants, Catholics, and Marc Reiser skated together in winter, playing baseball and went fishing in the spring, fished, swam, and played more baseball in the summer, and switched to football, rabbit hunting, hiking, and corn roasts in the autumn." Graham, *Earth and High Heaven*, 293.

<sup>85</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 34.

<sup>86</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 34.

<sup>87</sup>In the 1940s, Hobson was not a Zionist. Although she received an advance from a Jerusalem publishing house, *Gentleman's Agreement* was not published in Hebrew, and Hobson believed she knew why: In the novel, the secular, Jewish scientist Professor Lieberman, who befriends Phil, explains views similar to Hobson's, when he says to Phil about the possibility of a Jewish state, "I can't talk to a positive Zionist any more than to a confirmed Communist—there is no language." And later, Professor Lieberman says, "Don't let them pull the crisis over your eyes. You say you oppose all nationalism—then how can you fall for a religious nationalism? A rejoining of church and state after all these centuries? A kind of voluntary segregation?"

<sup>88</sup>Hobson, *Gentleman's Agreement*, 34.

<sup>89</sup>This dramatic shift is evident even within the 1940s: At the beginning of the decade, before the United States entered the war, isolationist Americans, with encouragement from Father Coughlin and Charles Lindbergh, tended to view Jews as members of a threatening race. Fermaglich, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name*, 47. This midcentury process of Jewish integration into the American mainstream shows parallels to the Jewish Emancipation process in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, even though the former was not a legal process of making Jews citizens. Wendy Brown writes that "to be brought into the nation, Jews had to be made to fit, and for that they needed to be transformed, cleaned up, and normalized, even as they were still marked as Jews. These triple forces of recognition, remaking, and marking—of emancipation,

assimilation, and subjection; of decorporatization as Jews." Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 53.

<sup>90</sup>On the pressures on twentieth-century Jews to comply with expectations to fit into American conceptions of religion, see Laura Levitt, "Impossible Assimilations, American Liberalism and Jewish Difference: Revisiting Jewish Secularism," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 807–32.

<sup>91</sup>On the postwar dismissal of Weidman and Schulberg, see J. L. Teller, "Everybody's Wasteland," *The Jewish Exponent*, February 22, 1946, 5; the movie review of *I Can Get It for You Wholesale*: Edward Barry, "One Handkerchief Formula Is Put to Good Use in Film: I Can Get It for You Wholesale," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 28, 1951, A4; a de-Judaized review: Bosley Crowther, "Fox Film, 'I Can Get It for You Wholesale, Opens at Roxy,'" *New York Times*, April 5, 1951, 34.

<sup>92</sup>David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Five Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 7. Wendy Brown writes of the emancipation process for French Jews that, in order to be brought into the nation, "Jews had to be made to fit, and for that they needed to be transformed, cleaned up, and normalized, even as they were still marked as Jews." Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 53.

<sup>93</sup>Neither did other authors of anti-antisemitism literature. Gwethalyn Graham, for instance, includes a Yom Kippur scene at the end of *Earth and High Heaven*, in which the Jewish character, Marc Reiser, wonders, "What is a Jew? . . . He realized that his sense of identity with the men and women around him was more of race, of race suffering and race achievement, than of religion, for his religious convictions involved only a very simple belief in one God, one God for everyone regardless of sect and regardless of the form or worship." A little later, Marc realizes, "Yet even the word 'race' was misleading, for even supposing there had been such a thing as a specifically Jewish race" (Graham, *Earth and High Heaven*, 289). In other anti-antisemitism novels, such as Saul Bellow's *The Victim* and Arthur Miller's *Focus*, the racial aspect of Jewishness remains more persistent throughout the story. In Jo Sinclair's *Wasteland*, both religious and racial conceptions of Jewishness are evident. In *Wasteland*, "Jewish blood" becomes a way to talk about Jewish race.

<sup>94</sup>The character of Professor Lieberman is portrayed as a secular Jew whose Jewishness is a matter of race and ethnicity. Lieberman's appearance is described as Jewish: "[T]he face of a Jew in a Nazi

cartoon, the beaked nose, the blue jowls. And the curling black hair” (Hobson, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, 122).

<sup>95</sup>Jacobson, “Becoming Caucasian,” 93.

<sup>96</sup>On the persistence of racial understandings of Jewishness, see Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4, chapter 8.

<sup>97</sup>In Gwethalyn Graham’s *Earth and High Heaven* (1944), the Protestant character Erika Drake falls in love with Marc Reiser, a Jewish lawyer, and struggles with how to think about his Jewishness. She realizes that in forming impressions of Jews, she had grown accustomed to starting with racial stereotypes. As Marc describes his brother, Dr. David Reiser, as “quite a good surgeon,” Erika realizes that she has been trying “to visualize David Reiser through a miasma of vague impressions associated with the word ‘Jewish’ even though his religion or his race or whatever it was that the adjective actually meant, happened to be entirely irrelevant.”<sup>97</sup> *Earth and High Heaven* displayed the confusion around defining Jewishness, but the racial thinking about Jews does not completely disappear. As Erika questions Marc about his Jewish background and the religiousness of his family, Marc’s reply presents Jewishness in a way that shows its resemblance to other religious identities—it constitutes one sliver of his identity. Marc explains his Jewish background to Erika as “more middle-class and small-town Ontario than particularly Jewish.”<sup>97</sup>

<sup>98</sup>Alice W. Campbell, “Influence and Controversy. *The Races of Mankind* and *The Brotherhood of Man*,” Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries Social Welfare History Project, 2018. <http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/wwii-1950s/influence-controversy-races-mankind-brotherhood-man/>.

<sup>99</sup>Campbell, “Influence and Controversy.” Viewed as “communistic” by Congress, the pamphlet was banned from the U.S. Army, which tried to order copies for servicemen. However, in 1945, the United Auto Workers hired the United Productions of America to adapt *The Races of Mankind* for the screen and it was made into a film, *The Brotherhood of Man*, as a training film to help with race relations in their integrated factories. “Brotherhood of Man (1945),” IMDb, 2021. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0162213/>. The film premiered at the Museum of Modern Art and was also criticized by anticommunists because of the involvement of leftists, such as Ring Lardner Jr. “Brotherhood of Man (1945),” National Film Preservation Foundation Association. <https://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved-films/screening-room/brotherhood-of-man-1947>.

<sup>100</sup>Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, 1943), 11.

<sup>101</sup> Gwethalyn Graham's use of science in her anti-antisemitism novel bears some similarities. In Graham's *Earth and High Heaven*, Marc Reiser's brother, David, is an even more secular Jew and a doctor, whose good relationship with a local priest is explained as a result of David's primary identity as a scientist. "He put out a few feelers when he first came," David Reiser says of the priest, "on the off chance of converting me, but I told him that my attitude toward religion in general, Judaism, Catholicism, or any other, was chiefly scientific, and after that he gave up. On the spiritual side, we have a strictly live and let live attitude toward each other." Graham, *Earth and High Heaven*, 308. That David's identity is more scientific than religious is what allows him to have a good relationship with the priest.

<sup>102</sup> Benedict and Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind*, 31.

<sup>103</sup> Zoe Trodd, *American Protest Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), xix.

<sup>104</sup> Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 141. Tompkins writes, "Rhetoric makes history by shaping reality to the dictates of its political design; it makes history by convincing the people of the world that its description of the world is the true one."

<sup>105</sup> Lester B. Granger, "New Books On Our Bookshelf," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 23, no. 1 (January–March 1945), 46.

<sup>106</sup> James Reid Parker, "Gentleman's Agreement," *Survey Graphic*, May 1947, 313.

<sup>107</sup> Parker, "Gentleman's Agreement," 313. Janice Radway's study, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) is especially insightful on this gendered dynamic of middlebrow fiction reading. Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Mrs. Hobson Deluged with Mail on Her Novel on Anti-Semitism," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 9, 1947; Amazed to see it in a Hearst magazine: Ruth Follman to Miss Hobson, March 9, 1946, Box 20; Islip: Mrs. Dana Kopper to Mrs. Hobson, March 15, 1947; Mrs. Liebeskind to Miss Hobson, March 31, 1947, Laura Z. Hobson Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>108</sup> Rosemary Carr Benet, "Drawing Room 'Abie's Irish Rose,'" *Saturday Review*, October 7, 1944, 9.

<sup>109</sup> Laura Z. Hobson to Richard Simon, September 24, 1944, Laura Z. Hobson collection, Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>110</sup> L. M. Birkhead to Laura Z. Hobson, February 21, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>111</sup>L. M. Birkhead to Laura Z. Hobson, February 21, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>112</sup>L. M. Birkhead to Laura Z. Hobson, February 21, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>113</sup>Robert Mazer to Laura Z. Hobson, March 19, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>114</sup>Laura Z. Hobson to Robert N. Mazer, April 12, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>115</sup>Joshua Loth Liebman, "Gentleman's Agreement," Addresses Broadcast by Stations WBZ and WBZA Sunday Morning, February 1 and February 15, 1948, from Temple Israel, Boston. Published and distributed by the Brotherhood of Temple Israel. Widener Library, Judaica collection.

<sup>116</sup>Liebman, "Gentleman's Agreement," Addresses Broadcast.

<sup>117</sup>Faye Emerson Roosevelt to Laura Z. Hobson, March 7, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>118</sup>Laura Z. Hobson to Mrs. Roosevelt, March 20, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>119</sup>Laura Z. Hobson to Miss Wess. April 10, 1947. Box 20, GA Correspondence, fan mail 1947.

<sup>120</sup>September 10, 1944, letter to Richard Simon from Laura Z. Hobson, Box 21, Scrapbook, Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>121</sup>Miller, *Focus*, vi.

<sup>122</sup>Kirsten Fermaglich's work on name-changing suggests that shame was a common reaction to antisemitism on the part of Jews during the 1920s and 1930s, writing that the fact that "[l]arge numbers of men and women with Jewish-sounding names used the vague terminology of 'foreign' or 'difficult to pronounce,' while Catholic men were much more willing to describe prejudice, suggests that Jews were uncomfortable talking about antisemitism and may have even been ashamed of their experience with discrimination." Fermaglich, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name*, 30.

<sup>123</sup>The American Jewish Committee's study of *Gentleman's Agreement* and *Crossfire* was one attempt to study this effectiveness. But even in late 1948, the film industry journal *Boxoffice* reported the uncertainty about the advisability of films about antisemitism: "American Jewry has been sharply divided in its opinion concerning the wisdom of Hollywood-made pictures designed to combat anti-Semitism through preachments for tolerance." Ivan Spear, "Spearheads," *Boxoffice*, October–December 1948, 50.

<sup>124</sup>Stuart Svonkin, *Jews against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 58.

<sup>125</sup>Sarah Imhoff, "Hoover's Judeo-Christians: Jews, Religion, and Communism," *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 2017), 125.

<sup>126</sup>Dinitia Smith, "Margaret Halsey, 86, a Writer Who Lampooned the English," *New York Times*, February 7, 1997.

<sup>127</sup>In her 1977 autobiography, *No Laughing Matter: The Autobiography of a Wasp*, Halsey remembered the Stage Door Canteen as "the entertainment industry's best-known contribution to the national emergency. Housed in a cramped, low-ceilinged basement on West 44th Street, just off Times Square, it was only for enlisted men. Officers were not admitted." Halsey, *No Laughing Matter*, 110. The 1943 film *Stage Door Canteen* added glamour to the canteen's image.

<sup>128</sup>Lester B. Granger, "New Books on Our Bookshelf," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 23 (January-March 1945): 46.

<sup>129</sup>Laura Z. Hobson to Richard Simon, September 24, 1944, Laura Z. Hobson collection, Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>130</sup>Rachel Gordan, "The Precursor to 'Gentleman's Agreement,'" *Moment*, November 11, 2014. <https://momentmag.com/precursor-gentlemans-agreement/>.

<sup>131</sup>Letter from Laura Z. Hobson to Dick Simon, September 24, 1944. Laura Z. Hobson collection, Columbia University.

<sup>132</sup>Halsey, *No Laughing Matter*, 113.

<sup>133</sup>Halsey, *Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 67.

<sup>134</sup>William Du Bois, "Searing Novel of the South," *New York Times*, March 5, 1944, 1.

<sup>135</sup>"Hub Head Cop Blackens City in Book Ban," *The Billboard* 56, no. 14 (April 1, 1944): 3; Judith Louise Stephens, *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 222; Elizabeth Diefendorf, *The New York Public Library's Books of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 58.

<sup>136</sup>On *Strange Fruit* as a model to publisher Richard Simon, see September 26, 1944, letter from Richard Simon to Laura Z. Hobson, Box 21, Scrapbook, Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>137</sup>American associations between women and morality were rooted in nineteenth-century, postindustrialization separate spheres for men and women. This was an association demonstrated by Harriet Beecher Stowe, who located herself within a Protestant tradition of rebellion against authority, independence, and critical voices for reform. David S. Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

<sup>138</sup>Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing Childhood and Race from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

<sup>139</sup>Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword*, xi. On the influence of Uncle Tom's Cabin, see also Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*.

<sup>140</sup>March 7, 1947, letter from Dorothy Fletcher to Laura Z. Hobson, Box 20, folder 5.

<sup>141</sup>September 26, 1944, letter from Richard Simon to Laura Z. Hobson, Box 21, Scrapbook. Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>142</sup>September 26, 1944, letter from Richard Simon to Laura Z. Hobson, Box 21, Scrapbook. Columbia University Rare Books.

<sup>143</sup>Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jewish in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), xii.

<sup>144</sup>October 18, 1944, letter from Laura Z. Hobson to Richard Simon, Box 21, Scrapbook.

<sup>145</sup>October 18, 1944, letter from Laura Z. Hobson to Richard Simon, Box 21, Scrapbook.

<sup>146</sup>Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and William Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003) are three of the studies of the past twenty years that have taken on the topic of American religious freedom broadly. However, studies of Catholics, Jews, and Muslims in America have also.

<sup>147</sup>Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, chapter 4. The post–World War II era was not the first time that Jews were categorized as an American religion; although this era did witness the most powerful case for this classification, the World War I era also witnessed a more limited case for Judaism as an American religion. See Jessica Cooperman, *Making Judaism Safe for America: World War I and the Origins of Religious Pluralism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

<sup>148</sup>Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>149</sup>Tisa Wenger, *American Religious Freedom*, 186–87.

<sup>150</sup>Martin Marty, *The Protestant Voice in American Pluralism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 5.



**ABSTRACT** *This article examines the anti-antisemitism novels of the 1940s as an indication of the decade's changing attitudes toward Jews, antisemitism, and religious pluralism, and so contributes to scholarly research on both social protest literature and mid-twentieth-century American religious culture. Recent scholarship has shown that American Jews responded to the Holocaust earlier than had previously been assumed. The anti-antisemitism novels of the 1940s were one of the popular culture arenas in which this response to the horrors of Nazi Germany occurred, as fiction proved an ideal genre for imagining and presenting possible solutions to the problem of antisemitism. These solutions often involved a change from a racial to a religious conception of Jews. Laura Z. Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) was the most culturally significant of this 1940s genre of anti-antisemitism novels (a subgenre of social protest literature), in part because of its foregrounding of non-Jewish responses to antisemitism. Archival research into the roots of Hobson's novel reveals that news of other female authors writing popular anti-antisemitism fiction encouraged Hobson, allowing Hobson to feel part of a movement of anti-antisemitism writers that would eventually extend to her readers, as demonstrated by readers' letters. Although Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (1955) is frequently cited as the midcentury book that heralded a postwar shift toward religious pluralism, the anti-antisemitism novels of the 1940s reveal signs of this shift a decade earlier.*