

The Gifts of the Jews: Ideology and Material Culture in the American Synagogue Gift Shop

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“For Jewish occasions, let there be Jewish gifts,” declared sisterhood member Althea Silverman in the pages of *Women’s League Outlook* magazine in 1936.¹ What constituted a Jewish gift in 1936? Silverman suggested an engraved *kiddush* cup for the bar mitzvah boy, a silver *mezuzah* for a housewarming, and a “Palestinian olive wood matzah holder” for the “Master of the House” to “proudly use and cherish as he conducts the seder service for his children and grandchildren.”²

Silverman’s Jewish gift suggestions are notable in that they contain a series of messages regarding American Jewish culture during this period. Her specification that the *mezuzah* should be silver and the *kiddush* cup engraved mark the gifts as decidedly middleclass and thus appealing to the upwardly mobile American Jewish community. Her inclusion of an object from British-mandate Palestine indicates a commitment to the Yishuv. And, finally, the link that she makes between the gifting of the matzah holder and the continued practice of Judaism over the next two generations conveys the equation on which she and countless other pioneering gift shop gurus based their program of synagogue shopping: namely, attractive, middle-class Jewish ritual item in the form of “gift” + educated Jewish recipient = increased Jewish practice in the home. Increased Jewish practice in the home leads to more committed Jews, who, in turn, support the healthy future of American Jewish life.

This article considers synagogue shops in their formative years, between 1947 and 1965, as religious landscapes ripe with visual culture that embody aspects of postwar American Jewish ideology and culture.³ Just as Silverman’s gift suggestions from the 1930s can be read as texts of the interwar American Jewish community, so too can the objects for sale in the shops serve as legitimate, articulate sources for understanding features of postwar American Jewish life. Specifically, this article examines the contents of synagogue shops in the postwar period as sources for understanding (1) American Jewish denominationalism; (2) the intersection between American consumerism and an emerging American Jewish aesthetic; and (3) the evolving relationship between American Jews and the state of Israel.⁴

Setting the Stage for Synagogue Shopping

While synagogue gift shops would not become commonplace until more than a decade after Silverman’s 1936 article, her arguments place the genesis of

American Jewish gift shopping in a dynamic period of American Jewish history, the 1930s and 1940s. Faced with a spiritual depression that mirrored the national economic condition, American Jewish leaders rallied their creative spirits to think “outside the box” for solutions to spiritual stagnation during this period. The results—pioneering programs in adult education, youth education, Jewish camping, and Jewish publishing—reflected the faith that American Jewish leaders put in the education of their laity as a means of religious regeneration.⁵

While myriad conditions, both ideological and pragmatic, led to the creation of day schools, summer camps, and adult education institutes during this period, two specific thoughts that influenced these developments also directly influenced the establishment of synagogue gift shops. First was the idea that American Jewish parents, in particular mothers, could rally a ritual renaissance through their own education and example of Jewish practice in the home. Second was the belief that child-centered activities and, above all, the education of Jewish children were the key to a vital Jewish future. Jewish leaders’ and educators’ attempts to affect a ritual resurgence in America served as a catalyst for the creation of synagogue shops. The idea that mothers should lead this renaissance placed the impetus for fashioning the required tools squarely in the hearts and minds of synagogue sisterhoods.

While the seeds for the synagogue shops were planted during the 1930s and 1940s, they only blossomed in the suburbs of the 1940s and 1950s. During World War II, the focus and resources of the American Jewish community, generally, and American synagogue sisterhoods, specifically, were directed toward a foreign rather than a domestic Jewish agenda. However, after the war, the famous postwar American religious revival provided new energy, new resources, and a newly engaged population to fuel many of the Jewish programs proposed before the war, including the gift shops.

In 1948, the task of organizing and promoting a sisterhood gift shop was made part of the national agenda of both the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) and the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism (Women’s League).⁶ Prior to 1948, there was one known synagogue gift shop in operation—a Reform sisterhood shop at congregation B’nai Israel in Augusta, Georgia.⁷ Less than a decade later, the Women’s League counted 530 shops among its affiliates; 85 percent of American Conservative synagogues supported gift shops by 1956.⁸ The NFTS declared that the Judaica shop had become “a sisterhood institution” in Reform congregations by the end of the 1950s.⁹

The Women’s Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations also committed itself to assisting affiliates in establishing gift shops, albeit at a later date and to a lesser extent.¹⁰ The 1962 booklet, *Women’s Branch: Background, History, and Glimpse Into the Future*, indicates that the group assisted individual sisterhoods in establishing gift shops as both a source of revenue and an educational venture. However, the Women’s Branch supported neither

national nor local gift shop committees, and very few records of national or local correspondence regarding the shops exist.¹¹ Thus, in this article, the bulk of primary source data and corresponding discussion of gifts and their meaning focuses on objects for sale in Reform and Conservative shops.

For Conservative and Reform sisterhoods, the establishment of gift shops was part of their campaign to make American Jewish households more ritually observant. Sisterhoods had spent the first half of the twentieth century trying to “Americanize” their Jewish immigrant members; now they were faced with the children of these immigrants, well versed in Americanism but mostly ignorant as to the form and content of Judaism. While the 1930s and 1940s provided sisterhood leaders with the time to contemplate new ritual education strategies, the postwar period became a testing ground for these strategies, including the gift shops.

To this end, both the NFTS and Women’s League situated the gift shop, in their organizational hierarchies, under the rubric of education. The original NFTS statement on the shops recognized the founding theme and continuing *zeitgeist* of the shops: to establish a commercial classroom. “The purpose of the Book and Gift Shop is twofold: to supply the demand for gifts of Jewish content and to promote the sale of Jewish art and ceremonial objects for the home, the school and individuals on significant occasions.”¹² Esther Fink, chair of the Women’s League Gift Shop Committee, expanded on this thought in a May 1949 *Outlook* magazine column:

Why should sisterhood be concerned with the gift shop?... Aside from helping the Hebrew School and the congregation and leading various drives and community projects through fundraising, the important objective of Sisterhood is to educate our women, and through them, our children, for Jewish living, and one way is through the gift shop.¹³

Clearly, both the Women’s League and the NFTS saw the synagogue shops as part of their postwar educational program, meant to stimulate ritual and religion on the home front.

While the roots of the gift shop lay in the ceremonial revival of the 1930s, and the late 1940s saw their institutionalization as part of sisterhood educational programming, postwar demographics provided the impetus for the popularity and rapid spread of the shops in Reform and Conservative congregations. Suburbanization shaped synagogue shopping by creating room for the shops and their wares in newly constructed Jewish institutional and domestic space. The literal and ideological reconstruction of Judaism during this period, spurred by geographic mobility (to the suburbs, but also to Sunbelt cities such as Miami and Los Angeles), made space for the gift shop in American Jewish life.

Historian Lance Sussman estimates that of the approximately 4200 operational synagogues in the country today, most were built during the postwar

period or remodeled in the postwar style.¹⁴ The suburban synagogue-building boom meant the establishment of thousands of new synagogues. The “new” synagogue embodied suburban values, orienting itself architecturally and programmatically toward a youth-oriented, recreationally directed, automobile society. To this end, these congregations boasted architectural innovations such as a separate religious school building, a social hall that was larger than the sanctuary, a central office, and a gift shop.¹⁵ The suburban synagogue needed to mimic the functions of the former ethnic, urban neighborhood, providing community and services on one dynamic campus. Architectural guides and blueprints from the period attest to the place of the gift shop in these new synagogues.¹⁶

In addition to new institutional space, the postwar period saw the baby boom and suburban housing boom lead to the creation of new Jewish families and homes. Sisterhood leaders saw their new, young members as a direct link to the American Jewish home and future. Women’s League gift shop chair Esther Fink confirmed this connection in a 1952 article:

Our affiliated groups are attracting more young women today than ever before, mothers anxious to learn the Jewish way of life, so as to be able to impart it to their children. Through the gift shop and meetings programmed around it, young mothers are encouraged to buy and use the necessary ceremonial objects for Sabbath and festival observance, thus making their home more beautiful Jewishly and helping the children to accept and appreciate their Jewish heritage in day to day living.¹⁷

These young mothers were a bridge over which Jewish knowledge and tools could pass from the synagogue into the home.

Finally, we cannot ignore another feature of postwar American Jewish life that contributed to the emergence and popularity of synagogue shops: financial success. Urban and suburban, American Jews experienced an increase in material wealth during this period.¹⁸ The economic expansion contributed to the sense of conspicuous consumption and display that fueled synagogue shopping.

Sisterhood gift shops emerged at a time of physical and ideological change in American Jewish history. As stated previously, the roots of the shops can be found in the American Jewish educational renaissance that first emerged in the 1930s; their institutionalization resulted from Conservative and Reform sisterhoods adopting aspects of this educational revival in the late 1940s; and the rapid growth of the shops can be attributed to postwar American Jewish demographics. Once in operation, the shops provide us with further historical evidence to mine. The shops themselves and the gifts that they sold were physical manifestations of ideological goals. An examination of merchandise reveals attitudes and agendas of American Jews at mid-century regarding denominationalism, American Jewish aesthetics, and the state of Israel.

Selling Denominationalism

“Material objects matter,” explains scholar Ann Smart Martin, “because they are complex, symbolic bundles of social, cultural, and individual meanings fused into something we can touch, see, and own.”¹⁹ The objects sold in the synagogue shops functioned as such symbolic bundles. The decision to stock—even to manufacture—a specific object often reflects a particular stance regarding the practice of American Judaism. In other words, Reform temple shops made it a practice to sell items that facilitated the practice of home and temple rituals deemed important by Reform Jews, while Conservative synagogue shops sold items that reflected their ideology.

Reform Objects and Objectives

The NFTS’ 1953 guide to gift shop operation, titled, *Your Sisterhood Judaica Shop*, illustrates the process by which gift shops reflected Reform ideology.²⁰ The cover of the guide features a young sisterhood member, quite possibly a mother, gesturing toward a shelving unit containing Judaica, attractively arranged. The Judaica, from bottom to top, left to right, includes:

Shelf 1:

NFTS calendar

Series of books enclosed by bookends (no titles visible)

Candelabra (holds two candles, probably meant for Shabbat)

Passover Plate

Shelf 2:

“Portfolio of Remembrances” book

Wine decanter

Spice box

Plaque featuring the Ten Commandments

Pair of candlesticks

Pair of candleholders

Shelf 3:

Etrog box²¹

Gragger (Purim noisemaker)

Hanukkah lamp

NFTS Uniongram²²

Gragger

Shelf 4:

Series of books encased by bookends (One title visible: “RHR”)

Framed photo of a young man, presumably a confirmand

“Certificate”

Shelf 5:

Set of candlesticks and holders

Three *kiddush* cups

Hanukkah lamp

First, consider the overall effect of the image. The two people pictured in the image are: (1) the sisterhood member—a young, fashionably dressed woman, quite possibly a mother, and (2) the young man, wearing a suit and a serious expression, probably a confirmand or a bar mitzvah.²³ In fact, the suited, somber boy is the visual center of the illustration. This young man is surrounded by Jewish books and ritual objects. By placing his image in such a context, the illustrator suggests a direct link between family ritual practice and the future of Judaism. The message here is that the purchase and use of Jewish objects can have a personal impact on your family, by allowing you the *nachas* (pleasure mixed with pride) of celebrating the bar mitzvah or confirmation of your son. Moreover, the bar mitzvah or confirmation is a significant step on the way to becoming a practicing Jewish adult. The image of mother and child on the front of the gift shop guide suggests that it is possible to revitalize Judaism by reintroducing festive and modern home ritual to the American Jewish family.

The individual ritual objects pictured on the cover also prove revealing. These objects supported rituals endorsed by the Reform movement at the time. The very first object on display, the NFTS calendar, not only provided a direct source of revenue to the sisterhood, it also served to organize the lives of Reform Jews according to Jewish time. The calendar supported an organized Jewish existence. A sisterhood member could make note of family, religious, and general community commitments. In addition, she could learn something about Jewish art or history, depending on the illustrations chosen for that particular year.²⁴

The ceremonies and observances advocated by the Reform movement of the 1950s included the High Holidays, Shabbat, Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover. Reform gift shops carried items necessary to celebrate these occasions. The Reform movement's Joint Committee on Ceremonies, which included representatives from the rabbinic and congregational arms of the movement, launched a Shabbat appreciation campaign in the 1950s, which included publication of a new *kiddush* ceremony for the synagogue on Shabbat eve and the production, by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC),²⁵ of a *kiddush* cup for the home.²⁶ Thus, it is not surprising to see that the "model" gift shop included *kiddush* cups and several sets of candlesticks, encouraging customers to bring the light and joy of Shabbat into their homes. Similarly, the Hanukkah lamps pictured promoted the movement's relish of home ceremonials for the holiday that had become a December gift-giving tradition in the 1950s. The top-selling leaflet, "*Megillah* Ritual," produced by the Joint Committee on Ceremonials in the late 1940s, was supported by the presence of *graggers* in the display.

Although the books pictured in the gift shop do not have titles, it is clear from gift shop memos and guides that UAHC publications were an important part of shop stock. According to the Reform gift shop guide:

Books and records of Jewish interest not only belong in a Judaica Shop but should be an important feature of the Judaica Shop. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations makes available, at an extraordinarily good discount, a display package of its most attractive books.²⁷

Union prayer books were among the suggested stock for Shabbat and the High Holidays.²⁸ The 1960 gift shop guide even suggested a special March display in honor of the birthday of Isaac Mayer Wise and the founding of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion. A list of appropriate items for such a display included party favors, Jewish historical dolls, and publications relating to Reform Judaism.²⁹ In all of these cases, material culture mirrored the movement. Objects reinforced the explicitly stated goals of Reform Judaism regarding holiday celebration.

Though none of the objects pictured on the guide's cover are specified as being Israeli in origin, a quick glance inside the guide at the list of suppliers for the objects pictured reveals a dedication to supporting Israel. The Reform movement's 1937 Columbus Platform affirmed the obligation of all Jews to aid in the building of Israel as a Jewish homeland. Objects for sale in the shops supported this position. Gift shop buyers are referred to the Israeli Gift Shop Service, Israel Coin Jewelry, and the Israel Music Foundation for Israeli imports to stock the shelves.³⁰

The model gift shop reflected the Reform movement's embracing certain life cycle rituals as well. The Joint Committee on Ceremonials designed and distributed ten life cycle certificates in the early 1950s, including marriage, religious school, conversion, *berit milah* (ritual circumcision), naming of a daughter, bar mitzvah (but *not* bat mitzvah), cradle roll, confirmation, consecration (the ceremony honoring the beginning of a child's formal religious training), and burial.³¹ These certificates' place in the movement was indicated by their location in the model gift shop display—on shelf four, the “life cycle shelf.” The picture of the young man stands at the center of the shelf. Located just beside the picture of the bar mitzvah/confirmand, the certificate pictured most likely referred to one of the ten certificates from the Joint Committee on Ceremonials. On the other side of the young man stand several books that sisterhood leaders suggested as suitable gifts for a confirmand. Recommended titles included *Isaac Mayer Wise: Pioneer of American Judaism*, the story of the “founder” of Reform Judaism in America; *Justice and Judaism*, an introduction to social action, one of the fundamental principals of Reform Judaism; and *Remember the Days*, an album for photos and certificates.³² Clearly, Reform Jewish gift shops sold ritual objects that encouraged ceremonies and events, even ideologies, promoted by the Reform movement. The aforementioned book titles informed readers of the founding principals of Reform Judaism and suggested social action as a Jewish value. The confirmation certificate indicates the significance of the confirmation ceremony for the movement. Finally, the emphasis on holiday and

life cycle events in the Reform gift shop reflected the movement's emphasis on these practices as core elements of Judaism in America.

Conservative Objects and Objectives

During this same postwar period, from 1947 to 1965, one was not likely to find references to purchasing or selling yarmulkes, *tallitot*, or *tefilin* in publications or shops associated with the Reform movement. These objects were, however, keystones in the Conservative shops. Conservative synagogue shops sold objects that encouraged the practice of rituals, holidays, and life cycle events endorsed by the Conservative movement.

A comparison between the Reform gift shop guides and the Conservative guides reveals several differences in recommended stock.³³ The checklist for basic stock listed in the Women's League guide differed from its Reform counterpart in its inclusion of ritual garb, including *tallitot*, *tallit* bags, yarmulkes, lace mantillas or "chapel caps" (head coverings for women), *tefilin*, and *tefilin* bags. The Conservative gift shop guides also suggested shops stock Conservative movement publications, including prayer books, children's books, and kosher cookbooks.

An examination of movement publications and individual shop records from this period demonstrates that the suppliers and gift shop buyers paid attention to ideological differences in marketing and purchasing stock.³⁴ They were, in fact, guided by Conservative ideology. The NFTS section of the Reform movement periodical, *American Judaism* magazine, did not contain one of the *tallit* ads that were a ubiquitous fixture in *Women's League Outlook*, the Conservative women's magazine. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, *Outlook* featured a shopping section that catered to gift shops and individual buyers, offering products as varied as herring and Hanukkah lamps. Pervasive throughout this section were advertisements for *tallitot*: "Attention gift shop chairmen! Have you seen the new 'form fitting' bar mitzvah tallis?" read an ad from ZionTalis in 1961.³⁵ A 1962 ad featured the phrase "ZionTalis means quality" superimposed over a listing of Conservative synagogues that ordered the product.³⁶ The *tallit*, an essential element in Conservative religious practice in the postwar period, was marketed to Conservative shops in a Conservative publication.

Inspection of individual shop records confirms this difference in stock. Among the shops studied, only Conservative stores advertised yarmulkes before 1965.³⁷ Photos reveal that Conservative shops also followed national guidelines by making *tallitot* and *tallit* bags available to their customers.³⁸ The fact that Conservative shops stocked *tallitot* and yarmulkes reflects an ideological goal (but not necessarily a reality) of the movement—the donning of this ritual garb by Conservative Jewish men.

Similarly, the inclusion of advertisements for kosher cookbooks in Conservative publications and the stocking of said books, as well as a few care-

fully chosen kosher accouterments, in Conservative shops reflects Conservative Judaism's goal of promoting the dietary laws among its congregants. The Women's League promoted its own publications, of course. Advertisements for *Kosher Cookery Unlimited* and, later, its "glamorous" sister publication *Kosher Parties Unlimited*, frequently appeared on the shopping pages of *Women's League Outlook*.³⁹ The shops also carried dishtowels with a cross-stitch design and the letters "M" for *milchig* and "F" for *fleischig*.⁴⁰ The Women's League gift shop guides suggested, and gift shop records attest to the fact, that Conservative shops stocked their bookshelves with other Conservative publications as well, including *The Three Pillars: Thought, Worship and Practice for the Jewish Woman* and *The Jewish Home Beautiful*.⁴¹ These guidebooks instructed the Jewish homemaker on Conservative views regarding Jewish ceremony and ritual in the home, including dietary laws, festivals, and life cycle observances.

Conservative Judaism saw ritual garb and adherence to the dietary laws as essential to Jewish life, and this belief was reflected in the stock of their gift shops. Reform shops, like Reform Judaism, emphasized the cycle of the Jewish year, marketing objects for holidays and Shabbat. Such differences in stock are telling. These venues were not simply about selling any Jewish merchandise, but rather transmitting a message, an ideology created by the movement they represented.

Selling American Judaism

Striking similarities in the shops' stock also merit attention, because such similarities can potentially reveal larger American Jewish attitudes at midcentury. Herein, context proves as important as the contents of the shops when analyzing the messages that accompanied the material. By constructing the shops inside synagogues, naming them "gift" stores, and promoting a specific "American-Jewish" message via advertising and display, Reform and Conservative sisterhoods created a middle-class marketplace for an emerging American Jewish aesthetic.

Synagogue shops changed the nature of religious shopping for Jews in America. The very existence of the shops took the sale of home-based Jewish ritual items out of their traditional context, the urban Jewish bookshop, and placed them in a new arena—the synagogue, often the sparkling new suburban variety. This basic change in context signals a change in the meaning and purpose of the objects. Jewish bookstores operated in ethnic Jewish neighborhoods in America's major cities, where they catered to a traditionally religious crowd, selling mostly prayer books and commentaries, *tallitot* and *tefilin*. The mission of these stores was to provide traditional religious articles to traditionally religious people. Gift shops, however, served a different purpose. The sisterhood, via the gift shop, aimed to sell Judaica to a community that they hoped would revive Jewish observance in their homes. Gift shops were not marketing their

objects to traditionally religious Jews; rather, they wanted to sell their wares to young Jewish families who were interested in (re)connecting to a Conservative or Reform Jewish community through synagogue membership.

Young Jewish mothers were much more likely to visit their suburban synagogue than to visit an urban Jewish bookstore. They were also much more likely to have read the latest edition of *Good Housekeeping* or *Life* magazine than to have read a compendium of Jewish law. Thus, a key part of marketing the shops and their stock was couching them in the familiar context of American consumerism. Gift shops may have sold some of the exact same objects found in traditional Jewish bookstores, but in the context of the synagogue shop, these objects acquired a different meaning. In the synagogue gift shop, electric menorahs and chocolate seder plates were about creating a modern American Jewish identity—an identity that had as much to do with American middle-class notions of holiday celebration and home decoration as Jewish history and tradition.

The choice by both the Reform and Conservative sisterhood boards at the national level to name these shops “gift shops” reinforces the idea that the shops were meant to be new, middle class, and American-Jewish marketplaces. The American middle class at midcentury was “gaga” for gifts. *Good Housekeeping* consumer columnist Charlotte Montgomery wrote in 1956, “Everyday is somebody’s birthday. True. It is also the day that someone has a baby, that others marry or ‘warm’ a new house or sail away on ship. We shop for gifts the year round.”⁴² Middle-class American women spent mental and physical energies on the process of gift giving. Why? As organizers of ritual events and holidays that occasioned presents, women became linked with gift buying and gift giving. Gift giving was also a way of maintaining social relations with friends and colleagues.

“Gift” shops, as understood by midcentury marketplace, were intended as a smaller shop inside a larger store that contained a “pre-selection of attractive merchandise that’s tasteful, timesaving, and convenient.”⁴³ Synagogue shops were organized along this model, as small shops within the synagogues where attractive Judaica could be found and purchased conveniently, for oneself and to give as gifts. Silverman’s statement at the beginning of this article includes an interwar call for Jewish gifts that will echo and expand in the postwar period. General upward social and economic mobility led to increasingly opulent life cycle celebrations, and geographic mobility led to the creation of millions of new Jewish homes among American Jews. Consequently, the demand for store-bought Jewish gifts to honor these occasions increased.

At the most basic level, synagogue shops conveniently satisfied the demand for Jewish gifts. On a more complex plain, the shops staged contracts between shopper and recipient with both religious and social consequences. Naming them “gift” shops references the social and religious contract that a shopper enters

when buying a gift in the synagogue. The gift is meant to enrich Jewish life. When purchasing items in the synagogue “gift” shop for themselves and others, American Jewish women honored their responsibility for maintaining Jewish life by introducing a Jewish object into a home. Thus, the recipient received not just an object but also a message about the possibility of Jewish living. Gift theory asserts that within the tradition of gift giving there is an inherent sense of reciprocity felt by the receiver toward the giver. In this case, the recipient of a Jewish ceremonial object—a Star of David necklace, Hanukkah lamp, or a K’tonton children’s book—is meant to feel obligated to use that object to live Jewishly in America. The “gift” in the gift shop is the acknowledgement of a present that reflected access to American consumer culture and encouraged a continued commitment to Jewish living.

Jewish women shopping in their synagogues expected to find merchandise that they could give or display with pride. American Jewish women were charged with the sensitive task of maintaining tradition while encouraging acculturation in their households. They sought from their synagogues practices and purchases that allowed them to navigate such identity issues. Purchases like a *mizrach* (decorated plaque hung on an eastern wall to indicate the direction of Jerusalem) designed by acclaimed artist Lea Halperin or the UAHC *kiddush* cup, noted for its modern design, seemed to offer the perfect synthesis, for they simultaneously promised to strengthen Judaism even as they signified the attainment of a comfortable American middle-class status. Gift shops often emphasized the modern, even futuristic, characteristics of the Jewish goods that they sold. For example, one of the most popular items sold by the shops in December was the plastic, electric window menorah.⁴⁴ This invention was delightful in the eyes of consumers, in part, because it was composed of that thoroughly modern material—plastic. Its electrical power source (as opposed to candlelight) was another up-to-date, attractive quality. Also, the electric menorah fit into the American Christmas season tradition of twinkling lights. Through the gift shop, Jewish women could embrace middle-class consumerism *and* Judaism; they could simultaneously be a part of the December holiday season (by lighting the lights) and stand apart from it (by displaying the menorah).

Finally, similar styles of promotion and display in the Reform and Conservative shops reveal the synthesis of American and Jewish life that sisterhoods were championing during this period. Through the shops, sisterhood leaders hoped to educate Jewish women about the unique beauty of their religious observance, while at the same time, reassuring them that such observances were as festive, as culturally significant, and as doable as any other American, Christian holiday. American synagogue shops emphasized the congruence of American and Jewish life through skillful use of context and content.

In this endeavor, the shops were unquestionably influenced by the reigning American Jewish religio-domestic guide at midcentury, *The Jewish Home*

Beautiful.⁴⁵ *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, published in 1941 by the Women's League, provided a script for Jewish home observance.⁴⁶ The script was presented in the form of a pageant in which Jewish mothers and wives were the principal actors, and a cycle of tables set with festivity and tradition for each Jewish holiday were the props. The authors recognized that Jewish mothers had a zeal for pageantry, which had too long sought inspiration from American Christian sources: "The attractive settings offered by our large department stores and women's magazines on Valentines Day, Halloween, Christmas, and other non-festive Jewish days have captured the hearts of many of our women who either through lack of knowledge or imagination have failed to explore the possibilities of our own traditions."⁴⁷ The authors and publisher of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* sought to inspire American Jewish women with knowledge and imagination, thus fashioning a class of American Jewish home decorators.

American Jewish women—especially young mothers, new to their roles as home decorators, religious educators, and social directors—eagerly consumed this script for American-Jewish life. They literally bought *The Jewish Home Beautiful* concept and book.⁴⁸ The synagogue gift shop made both readily available.

Both *The Jewish Home Beautiful* ideology and the synagogue gift shop promoted the repackaging of Jewish holidays in an American consumer context. The most striking example of this was with the holiday of Hanukkah. While neither *The Jewish Home Beautiful* nor the gift shops invented "Hanukkah, American style," they certainly expanded and capitalized on the trend.⁴⁹ The Hanukkah shopping season was touted as the busiest time of year in the American synagogue gift shop, as shoppers took advantage of longer store hours to purchase Hanukkah gift-wrap, decorations, tableware, candles, menorahs, and, of course, presents. December synagogue bulletins throughout the 1950s were filled with gift shop advertisements attesting to the popularity of the holiday in the synagogue gift shop.⁵⁰ "Are you a smart shopper?" asked the Valley Jewish Community Center Bulletin in December 1957. "This year all the smart shoppers we know don't spend valuable time riding the May Company escalator from pre-teens to toys and back up to linens. No siree! They found they can stop and shop at the Gift Shop."⁵¹ The ad continued with suggestions for everyone on your "Hanukkah shopping list": an apron for Grandma, a Hanukkah card for Grandpa, personalized stationary for your teenager, books, dreidels, games, and *gelt* for the *kinder*, and a beautiful seder plate, menorah, or lovely Israeli import for Mom and Dad.⁵²

This advertisement is a fascinating example of how American Jews both appropriated Christmas traditions and created December gift-giving traditions of their own. Including grandparents and parents on the present list was an act inspired by the American Christmas tradition of family gift exchange. Hanukkah traditionally involved the giving of small gifts, usually money, to

children. Jewish children did not historically reciprocate by giving presents to parents and grandparents. American Jews expanded the Hanukkah celebration to include the exchange of gifts among family members. American synagogue gift shops hoped to influence the nature of these gifts. By encouraging the purchase of *Jewish* gifts for Hanukkah, the gift shop sales staff differentiated Hanukkah from Christmas. Christian children did not generally receive religious gifts for Christmas; they received secular gifts in Christmas-themed wrap. By suggesting dreidels and Jewish-themed games as Hanukkah presents, the gift shop staff was carrying out its mission to supply Jewish objects for the Jewish home. Clearly, the gift shop adopted and adapted American Christmas sales techniques—the creation of a list of presents, the countdown of shopping days until the holiday, the extended holiday hours—in an effort to appeal to American Jewish families surrounded by December holiday hype.

Similarly, through display and advertising in the shops, sisterhoods encouraged Jewish women to give and use Jewish ceremonial objects in nonreligious, American contexts. In this way, they Americanized Judaica. For example, both Reform and Conservative shops advocated special gift shop installations in honor of American holidays. Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, and Father's Day were causes for the creation of special displays. For Thanksgiving, advised the Reform gift shop guide, display all manner of hostess gifts. Bring an ashtray from Israel or a bottle of kosher wine to your Thanksgiving table. Books dealing with great American personalities from the American Revolution, Jewish and non-Jewish, were deemed appropriate to highlight in a display for the presidents' birthdays.⁵³

While these holidays were not part of the Jewish year, they were important milestones in the American experience. *The Jewish Home Beautiful* advocated the celebration of these American holidays, and the gift shops, in turn, created displays of books and gifts to promote them. These displays domesticated Judaica by changing its intended context, while at the same time reminding consumers that these two identities—American and Jewish—were compatibly linked. Jews fought alongside non-Jews in the American Revolution, and the kosher wine can sit next to the non-kosher variety on the Thanksgiving table.

Finally, perhaps the most striking and significant sales similarity between Reform and Conservative shops was their promotion of objects from Israel. The efforts of the shops to fit Israeli merchandise into an American context permit a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between ideology and object in the synagogue shops.

Selling Israel

The American synagogue gift shop introduced countless American Jews to Israeli culture and life. By making Bezalel—the premier school of Israeli art and design—as accessible as Bloomingdales, the American synagogue gift shop provided an opportunity for American Jews to encounter the Holy Land without



Left: *National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) art calendar for the Hebrew year 5716 (1955–56)*. Right: *Let's Talk Shop, 1960*.

(Courtesy Women of Reform Judasim collection, American Jewish Archives)

Sisterhood members in the Judaica Shop, Temple Sinai Sisterhood, Oakland, CA. The saleswomen are, left to right: Mrs. Leon Bloomberg, Chairwoman, Mrs. George Kantor, and Mrs. Werfel, Sisterhood President. Customers are Mrs. Alfred Gross and daughter, Goldie. American Judaism VI, n. 2 (Chanuko, 1956): 30.



Below: A photo illustration of an "ideal" American Jewish Hanukkah celebration. American Judaism VI, n. 2 (Chanuko, 1956): cover.

Right: Vogue of Israel advertisement. American Judaism XI, n. 2 (Winter, 1961): 46.



An advertisement for a coin purse. At the top left is a photograph of a light-colored, circular coin purse with a dark, circular embroidered design in the center. To the right of the image, the text reads: 'ISRAELI COIN PURSE with YEMENITE EMBROIDERY'. Below this, it says: 'Mellowette coin purse to retail \$2.50. Other items include clutch purses, evening bags, dolls.' At the bottom, it says: 'Attention Gift Shops write to VOGUE OF ISRAEL 505 Howard Street San Francisco'.

leaving home.⁵⁴ Almost without exception, Reform and Conservative synagogue gift shops counted Israeli patina menorahs and *mezuzot*, olivewood ashtrays, letter openers, and coins fashioned into key chains and jewelry as part of their inventory in the 1950s and 1960s. These objects and the context in which they were sold reveal a multiplicity of messages about the postwar American Jewish home and the then-newly established Jewish homeland.

The American synagogue gift shop introduced an unprecedented venue for the sale of Israeli objects.⁵⁵ Even as technology made travel easier, only a relatively small subset of American Jews could go to Israel to purchase a plaque from Bezalel, a bottle of Shemen olive oil, or a postcard depicting a holy site. In contrast, the synagogue gift shop was a much cheaper, safer, more frequently visited destination for American Jews. By consistently stocking and promoting the sale of Israeli objects, the gift shop took the Holy Land souvenir out of the realm of the extraordinary—available only to those with the resources, spiritual and physical, to travel to Israel—and into the realm of the ordinary American Jewish synagogue. By changing the context in which the items were sold, the shops transformed the cultural consequences of the Holy Land souvenir. Moving an olivewood *mezuzah* from a *shuk* (outdoor marketplace) in Jerusalem to a shelf in a synagogue gift shop in Cleveland meant more than a transfer of location. While the *mezuzah* continued to represent the materials of the land of the Bible and the industry of the new state, its position in the American synagogue gift shop also says something about American Jewish life and the American Jewish home.

Historians Beth Wenger and Jeffrey Shandler note that, “the most frequent and intimate encounters with the Holy Land took place in family homes. Ritual and decorative objects from Palestine domesticated the exotic and spiritually charged Holy Land, making it a familiar presence in daily life.”⁵⁶ The synagogue gift shop served as the primary outlet for the sale of these objects to American Jews. More Israeli objects traveled from the Middle East to the American Jewish living room via the American synagogue gift shop than any other route during the 1950s and 1960s. Author Linda Mack Schloff remembers the pervasive presence and cultural consequences of Israeli objects in Midwestern sisterhood shops:

A panoply of brass and copper Israeli products began being imported and sold in synagogue gift shops during the 1950s/60s. Jewish families could, by buying these and other items, express their pride in and identify with those Jews who were re-building the ancient homeland. The message is that one can be both Jewish and modern, both ethnic and American, upper middle class and somehow an Israeli pioneer.⁵⁷

The synagogue gift shop created an unprecedented marketplace for the sale of Israeli objects to American Jews. This outlet provided a safe, familiar, easily

accessible venue in which American Jews could discover and support the new Jewish state. In addition, by creating space on their shelves for these products, the gift shop also hoped to forge a place for an Israeli presence in the living rooms of American Jews.

As suppliers of Jewish ceremonial objects, gift shops reflected the ideology of the movement they represented. Given these circumstances, one might have expected to discover more fervently Zionist objects—political or military memorabilia, for example—in Conservative shops, and to see in Reform shops a selection of more secular stock—for example, an olivewood ashtray. Thus it is surprising that the evidence demonstrates strong support of Israeli craft by both the NFTS and the Women’s League as early as the 1920s. In fact, the gift shops are not notable for their differences in selection or marketing of Israeli objects, but rather for the striking similarity in the objects sold and the marketing message used to promote their sale. This similarity results from the fact that the display and promotion of Israeli objects in the American synagogue gift shops of the 1950s and 1960s had as much to do with the establishment of a Jewish home in suburban America as it had to do with the establishment of a Jewish home in the Middle East. Synagogue sisterhoods and later gift shops did not promote or sell Zionist propaganda, they sold decorative and ceremonial objects from Israel. Gift shop organizers packaged both general merchandise and Israeli objects in a way that promoted the congruence of American middle-class and Jewish values. By marketing Israeli objects as part of the “American Jewish Home Beautiful,” the American synagogue gift shop forged a place for Israel in the American Jewish home.

The earliest efforts of American sisterhood leaders to acquire goods from Israel reflected both a desire to support the Israeli economy and a wish that this support should encourage and enrich American Jewish domestic space. At its Seventh Assembly in 1927, the NFTS resolved that it should encourage its constituents to take an interest in the work of the Bezalel Academy, “Not merely for the encouragement of the work of Jewish artists, but in order that appreciation of the beautiful symbols of our faith may become more widespread.”⁵⁸ Support for Bezalel was not only an endorsement of Jewish artists working in Palestine, but also an opportunity to infuse the American community with Jewish art appreciation. The correspondence of Stella Freiberg, president of the NFTS, further supports this early commitment on the part of the sisterhood leadership to support Bezalel as a catalyst for the creation of a modern American Jewish Home Beautiful. Freiberg wrote to her affiliate presidents in 1927 that she hoped by the end of the year that every sisterhood member would be a proud possessor of an object made at the Bezalel Academy.⁵⁹ In Freiberg’s words, “Bezalel’s task is to introduce beauty and to develop a taste for things beautiful among our people in hope that the best and most intelligent of our people and those who can afford will join as members of Bezalel.”⁶⁰ Freiberg encouraged

support of Bezalel as a means of developing a taste for beautiful Jewish belongings among her constituents. She did not introduce Bezalel as Zionist art but rather as bourgeois Jewish art, art that emanated from the only *professional* academy dedicated to the production of Jewish art. As such, it belonged in an elegant Jewish home. Freiberg's support of Bezalel was not based on a desire to build a Jewish national state but rather to build a fine art collection in the homes of American Jews. Resolutions were passed and letters were circulated to constituents across the nation under the signatures of Freiberg and Bezalel founder Boris Shatz that promoted Bezalel as a means of introducing Jewish art and culture into the American home.

Both the gift shop movement and the state of Israel were founded in the late 1940s. With the establishment of the state, supply and demands for affordable Israeli goods increased. Freiberg's idea of a Bezalel piece in every home—only the best and the brightest of Jewish artisans in *The Jewish Home Beautiful*—wavered as mass-produced Israeli objects became commonplace. Wall clocks depicting the twelve tribes or the Hebrew alphabet, pitchers featuring the sands of Eilat, and replicas of ancient coins fashioned into jewelry and key chains became common items for sale in synagogue shops. Just as the NFTS leaders promoted the sale of Bezalel as enriching the American Jewish residence, Reform and Conservative gift shop leaders promoted the sale of these new Israeli objects as a means of enriching both the Israeli economy and the American Jewish home. The bourgeois, middle-class home in the expanding suburbs of the 1950s required these mass-produced objects. It simply was not possible, from a production standpoint, to advocate an expensive, limited edition Bezalel piece for every home. The suburbs were not about the best and the brightest, but rather about attaining a certain sameness of middle-class life. Bezalel began to produce prints and plaques in large quantities, making the Bezalel name accessible to greater numbers of people. *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, according to Reform and Conservative sisterhood leaders, required that something from Israel grace its shelves, but it did not have to be something as outstanding as an original Bezalel piece.

"There should definitely be an Israeli corner," wrote gift shop guru Esther Fink in a March 1953 *Women's League Outlook* article.⁶¹ "It is urgent that we aid the struggling state by buying its exports. All things from Israel have artistic beauty," she wrote.⁶² Fink's attitude is certainly more democratic than Freiberg's just a few decades earlier. Such tolerance for the decorating potential of a wide range of Israeli goods was not without critics. Art critic Alfred Werner, for example, decried this development and waged a back-to-Bezalel campaign in the pages of *American Judaism* magazine. Werner authored a piece titled, "What is Good Jewish Art?" in which he advised the reader that "tact, taste, and tenacity" were required to add Jewish flavor to one's home.⁶³ "We must learn to avoid the saccharine that often passes for Jewish art—bearded

patriarchs, 'cute' genre scenes depicting life in the shtetl and vistas of the Holy Land that are little more than enlarged color photographs," he admonished.⁶⁴ What, according to Werner, was worthy art for the Jewish home? He named a few individual artists working in America, but his highest accolades were reserved for Shatz's school.

Bezalel arts and crafts were professional, beautiful, and a tasteful addition to any Jewish home.⁶⁵ However, sisterhood gift shop leaders paid little attention to critics like Werner. They sold brass menorahs and candlesticks, olivewood ashtrays and letter openers, because these decorative objects were widely available. They were also affordable and familiar to the American consumer. They mirrored other sorts of decorative objects for sale in larger consumer markets. Just as *House Beautiful* advocated the purchase of one sort of ashtray or pitcher as a hostess gift, the synagogue shop could offer a Jewish or even an Israeli version of the same.

The Women's League's gift shop bible, *Guide for the Judaica Shop Committee* (c.1950), confirms the sales strategy of selling Israeli objects for every American Jewish occasion: "Ceremonial Objects and Gift Shop should help to support the economy of Israel by promoting the sale of Israeli articles for use in the home or as gifts for bar and bat mitzvahs, showers, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, family occasions, or as hostess gifts," reads the guide.⁶⁶ There was not an American occasion for which an Israeli object could not serve as an appropriate gift. *Across the Threshold*, a guide for the Jewish homemaker published by the Women's League in 1959, offered specific suggestions for gift giving. The published gift suggestions at the end of each holiday segment in this book confirmed that the American synagogue sisterhoods promoted Israeli objects as an appropriate choice for almost any American celebration. Looking for a baby gift? Purchase an Israel bond. Rosh Hashanah treat? Israeli candy. Bar/bat mitzvah gift? Israeli stamps or Israeli anniversary coins made into medallions or paperweights make perfect gifts.⁶⁷

The gift shops were not trying to market *objets d'art* to an exclusive audience; they sought to bring Jewish objects into the typical American Jewish home. In this manner, Israeli objects became part of the overall *zeitgeist* of the shops to provide Jewish families with the ritual and decorative objects necessary for a rich Jewish life. They supported a burgeoning Israeli economy, enhanced the American Jewish life cycle and holiday celebrations, and, they hoped, whet the appetites of American Jews for a more definitive American Jewish aesthetic. Women's League president Sarah Kopelman summed up this message in her May 1949 president's address:

Eventually we hope that this infiltration of tourist arts will affect the decor of our Jewish homes, and lovely Bezalel plaques and silver menorahs will take the place of the Meissen and the Minton.⁶⁸ But more than that we dare

to dream that here in America our people, relieved of the terrific pressure of fighting for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth might now turn their strength and capability inward and concern itself with developing and fostering a Jewish culture that shall be in many ways a distinctly American Jewish culture.⁶⁹

Clearly the early efforts of Reform and Conservative sisterhoods to make Israeli goods available to the American Jewish public involved fostering the creation of a vibrant Jewish state as well as fostering the creation of a vibrant American Jewish home.

Recognizing the important link between sales and American Jewry, the firms that manufactured and supplied Israeli goods promoted their stock in such a way that connected Israeli souvenirs and American style. For example, at the 1948 biennial of the NFTS, Mrs. Miriam Jackson, president of the Palestine Galleries for Arts and Crafts, made a presentation to the assembled women, urging them to buy items made in Israel to sell in their gift shops. In her presentation, Jackson appealed both to the educational goals of the shops and the middle-class marketing message mentioned above: "Without the gift shops our program will never go forward. You will also introduce Jewish culture to the average home where today the type of ceremonial article in use is one hidden after serving its purpose."⁷⁰ With this remark, Jackson appealed to the didactic goals of the shops by suggesting that Israeli objects could serve as a vehicle for moving Jewish culture into the American Jewish home. Jackson then went on to compare the types of Israeli objects available from her company to items from high-end furniture and design firms like Jensens or Plummers: "The colors, the glazes employed on the ceramics, the Tiffany green finish on the bronzes are outstanding," she related.⁷¹ Jackson concluded with a shameless name-dropping serenade in which she stated that *Mademoiselle*, *The American Home*, *Glamour*, *Vogue* and *House Beautiful* had all been contacted to advertise stories and pictures of available merchandise from her company.⁷² Israeli exports belong in chic magazines and stylish shops, according to Jackson. Menorahs, ashtrays, and letter openers were up to date *and* Jewish, spiritual *and* stylish.

Advertisements from American Jewish newspapers and magazines from the 1950s and 1960s further supported the effort on the part of Israeli goods suppliers to market Israeli objects to gift shops as both an investment in Israel's economy and the American Jewish domestic economy. The Israel Trade Commission, for example, consistently marketed Israeli gladiolus bulbs to sisterhood gift shop buyers in the pages of *Outlook* and *American Judaism*.⁷³ Gladioli are not native plants of Israel; they are, however, bulbs that gladden the American garden. Many sisterhoods, particularly in the South, made a bulb sale their major fundraiser of the year. By marketing gladiolus bulbs to the synagogue gift shop, the Israel Trade Commission created an Israeli product to please the American Jewish consumer. The flower fit right into the American front yard,

with the perennial potential for providing its owner with a feeling of pride in her American garden and the new Jewish state. Another Israeli goods supplier was Vogue of Israel sought to appeal to Americans by employing a name that is synonymous with the height of western fashion and by providing a product for formal occasions. Vogue of Israel offered a variety of evening bags for purchase in *American Judaism*.⁷⁴

The above evidence attests to the efforts of suppliers and buyers to place Israeli products in American Jewish homes. While these firms and shops used American popular culture references such as Tiffany's and Plummers and Vogue, they were careful not to completely empty the objects of their foreign flavor. The Israeli souvenir had to maintain a degree of the exotic; if it became too familiar, too American, why purchase it? Why not just buy an American evening bag, menorah, or ashtray? In her study of the souvenir, Susan Stewart argues that the souvenir is scandalous. It possesses the romance of contraband because it is removed from its "natural" location.⁷⁵

A close analysis of a popular object sold in the shops during this period—a brass patina menorah manufactured in Israel—demonstrates the delicate balance between exotic and familiar that made Israeli objects so appealing to the consumer. A 1949 patina menorah from Israel references both the biblical significance of the Holy Land and the creation of culture in a new Jewish state. Literally, patina is the fine green rust that appears on copper or bronze as a result of oxidation. Patina also implies a weathered surface, generally considered to be of aesthetic value. Ancient metals—coins, vessels, and jewelry—often sport a patina, which alludes to authenticity and mystery. In the American Jewish lexicon of the postwar period, however, patina takes on a whole new meaning, namely anything green that comes from Israel. The promotion of patina was very common in the synagogue gift shop. "The gift shop has patina bronze menorahs from Israel," advertised the Wilshire Boulevard Temple bulletin. "Letter openers in brass and patina have arrived," announced the Temple Emanu-El chronicle. "Green patina is available for purchase," declared the Adath Israel Sisterhood yearbook.⁷⁶ Despite the fact that these objects were products of a brand new state, the gift shop marketed them to American Jews as patina, a word that suggested the ancient bond of the Jewish people with the Holy Land. At the same time, the purchase of an Israeli menorah made in 1949 was a celebration of a burgeoning creative economy in Israel. Buying Israeli objects, such as the patina menorah, meant supporting the Israeli economy and thus ensuring an Israeli future.

The context in which the patina menorah was sold—the American synagogue gift shop in the postwar period—also contributes to its meaning and impact. As part of the inventory of the shops, a 1949 Israeli patina menorah became an acceptable decoration in the American Jewish Home Beautiful. The gift shop of the 1950s and 1960s was concerned with educating Jewish women

on the creation of a modern Jewish home that was not only spiritually enlightened but also solidly middle class. What sort of educational potential does the menorah deliver in such a context? A patina menorah from Israel comes packed with potential for encouraging the celebration of Hanukkah and for establishing private attachments to the new Jewish state. Israeli objects in the American synagogue gift shop did not represent a fervent Zionist platform; they suggested a different, but important, more palatable and potentially more far-reaching message, namely that the enlightened American Jewish suburban home should include objects from the state of Israel. In this manner, the American synagogue gift shop suggested a space in which American Jews could incorporate the Jewish state into their lives, without compromising their Americanness.

Conclusion

Between 1947 and 1965, a sector of American Jewish sisterhoods channeled prewar consumer habits and the goals of the domestic Judaism movement into a postwar effort to modernize and energize Judaism. This effort, fueled by the educational renaissance of the early twentieth century, the increasing responsibility of Jewish women for the healthy future of Judaism, the complex processes of suburbanization, and the agency of material goods, resulted in the creation of a new venue, the American synagogue gift shop.

The synagogue gift shop movement represents the efforts of Jewish women, in this case sisterhood leaders, to bridge the gap between synagogue and home, America and Judaism. They hoped to do this by providing a place wherein the elements that composed all of these locales and identities could combine and emerge as an American Jewish style that American Jewish women could purchase and adopt with pride. Thus, these seemingly mundane shops around the corner from the synagogue sanctuary actually illustrate themes central to American Jewish life. Studying synagogue shopping can reveal elements of gender, class, and ritual among postwar American Jews.

Consideration of the objects that synagogue gift shops offered to American Jews gives shape to specific issues of American Jewish identity and community in the postwar period. Calendars, yarmulkes, and patina menorahs suggested strategies for maintaining American Judaism. When placed in context of the shops, they can reveal specific denominational, community, and cultural goals.

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Notes

¹Althea O. Silverman, "Jewish Gifts for Jewish Occasions," *Women's League Outlook* 6, n. 3 (March, 1936): 7.

²Ibid., 7.

³Silverman's program of "Jewish giving," while formulated in the interwar period, would not see fruition until the American Jewish community refocused its energies on domestic concerns after World War II. While research has yet to reveal the first synagogue shop, the earliest known American synagogue gift shop was in operation as of 1947 in congregation B'nai Israel (Reform) in Augusta, Georgia.

⁴For a full historical account of the American synagogue gift shop, see Joellyn Wallen Zollman, "Shopping For a Future: A History of the American Synagogue Gift Shop," doctoral dissertation (Brandeis University, 2002).

⁵For a summary of educational and synagogue innovations during this period, see Beth Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise* (New Haven: Yale, 1996), 166–196; and Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 243–255 and 267–271.

⁶The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) was founded in 1913 as the national organization for Reform sisterhoods. The Women's League for Conservative Judaism (WL) was founded in 1918 as the national organization of Conservative sisterhoods.

⁷"Bright Ideas," *Topics and Trends* (March–April, 1947): 2; Women of Reform Judaism Papers 73/69/IV, The American Jewish Archives (AJA), Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁸Mrs. Max (Esther) Fink, "Ceremonial and Gift Shop Committee Report," *Proceedings of the Biennial Convention of the National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America* (Kiamensha, New York, 11–14 November 1956): 19.

⁹Report of the Department of Religion and Education, 14 April 1959, 73/43/Series E, Circular Files, Department of Religion and Education Records, 1956–1961, AJA.

¹⁰The Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (WB) was founded in 1926 as the national organization of Orthodox sisterhoods.

¹¹This lack of centralized organization regarding the shops could be due to a number of factors, including: (1) the general decentralization of the Orthodox community during this period; (2) the reliance upon traditional Jewish bookstores among the Orthodox community for its ceremonial needs; (3) the fact that this denomination takes the most strict stance regarding observance, thus the Orthodox may have been more likely to already possess ritual objects (in contrast to Reform and Conservative sisterhoods, who were interested in reintroducing ceremony into the lives of Jewish families).

¹²Stella H. Freiberg, "Report of the National Committee on Jewish Ceremonials and Art," *Proceedings of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods*, 36th Annual Report (Cincinnati, Ohio: 31 October 1948), 164, 73/11/V, AJA.

¹³Esther Fink, "The Sisterhood Gift Shop," *Women's League Outlook* 19, n. 4 (May, 1949): 15.

¹⁴Lance Sussman, "The Suburbanization of American Judaism as Reflected in Synagogue Building and Architecture, 1945–75," *American Jewish History* 75 (September, 1985): 32 and fn3.

¹⁵Ibid., 31, 32, 42.

¹⁶See, for example, Peter Blake, ed., *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guidebook to Synagogue Design and Construction* (New York: UAHC, 1954), 289–301.

¹⁷Mrs. Max Fink, "Is Your Gift Shop Succeeding?" *Women's League Outlook* 23, n. 1 (September, 1952): 27.

¹⁸Edward Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 155–157.

¹⁹Ann Smart Martin, “Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework,” *Winterthur Portfolio: Journal of American Material Culture* 28, n. 3 (Summer/Autumn, 1993): 141.

²⁰Carolene Wachenheimer, *Your Sisterhood Judaica Shop* (Cincinnati: NFTS, 1953), cover.

²¹We can be fairly certain that this is an *etrog* (citrus) container and not a *tzedakah* (charity) box as, interestingly, neither the Reform nor the Conservative gift shop guides published before 1970 mention *tzedakah* boxes as an item to stock. Thus, it follows that the practice of giving a *tzedakah* box as a gift for occasions such as bar/bat mitzvahs or weddings is a more recent custom.

²²Uniongrams are, according to the Women of Reform Judaism (WRJ, formerly NFTS) website, “the perfect Jewish message bearer for all occasions.” Synagogue gift shops sell these cards locally, and through the WRJ national offices, as a means to raise funds for the WRJ Youth, Education, and Special Projects committee. For a useful history of the uniongram, see <http://www.womenofreformjudaism.org/Yes-fund/uniongrams/>.accessed (accessed on 1 November 2007).

²³While the Reform movement’s fondness for confirmation would suggest that this young man is most likely a confirmand, his gender and the time period allow for the possibility of a bar mitzvah, as bar mitzvah ceremonies had become commonplace in the American Reform community by the 1950s.

²⁴While an exhaustive analysis of the iconography of the NFTS art calendar is not within the scope of this study, it has been my observation that the calendar made regular use of Reform-friendly themes, especially the congruence of American life and Jewish values. For example, the 1950 calendar featured significant American Reform Jews and tourist attractions; the 1951 calendar featured photographs of recently constructed American Jewish synagogues; the 1952 calendar featured photographs of the Reform movement’s House of Living Judaism in New York; and the 1954 calendar celebrated the American Jewish tercentenary. Generally speaking, when working with themes outside of the obviously “American,” the calendar’s staff privileged art that reflected ceremonials endorsed by the movement and/or biblical themes.

²⁵The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) is the national umbrella organization for Reform congregations in America.

²⁶See Louis Witt, “Report of the Joint Committee on Ceremonies,” in *Central Conference of American Rabbis: Fifty-Eighth Annual Convention: June 24–June 28, 1947*, ed. Isaac Marcuson (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, 1948), 204.

²⁷Gertrude Rom, *Let’s Talk Shop: Your Sisterhood Judaica Shop* (Cincinnati: NFTS, 1960), 73/36/1, AJA. While the Reform guides always recommended the UAHC’s publications, they did not do so to the exclusion of other publishers. However, in the 1953 guide, the author urged the gift shop committee to discuss non-UAHC book titles with the rabbi or educational director before ordering. With this caveat, the guide included contact information for Bloch Publishing; The Jewish Publication Society; Behrman House; Farrar, Straus and Young; KTAV Publishing; and Universal Jewish Encyclopedia. See Wachenheimer, 4–5.

²⁸Rom, 7 and Wachenheimer, 7.

²⁹Rom, 16.

³⁰Wachenheimer, 4–6.

³¹Max Reichler, “Report of the Joint Committee on Ceremonies,” in *Central Conference of American Rabbis: Sixty-Second Annual Convention, June 19–June 24 1951*, New London, Connecticut (Philadelphia: Maurice Jacobs, 1952), 139. There was not a marriage certificate as the committee also produced a *ketubbah*, or marriage contract, separately.

³²National Office to Local and District Sisterhood Presidents, “Gifts for the Confirmand,” 20 May 1959, 73/42/Series E, Circular Files, Department of Religion and Education Records, AJA.

³³Women's League, *Guide for the Judaica Shop Committee* (New York: Women's League, before 1960), 8. Women's League Archives, New York, New York.

³⁴While there are not enough extant records from Orthodox congregations to make an accurate comparison of Orthodox gift shops to those shops supported by Conservative and Reform sisterhoods, examination of advertisements in *Orthodox Jewish Life* magazine reveals several ceremonial objects not seen in the pages of *American Judaism* or *Women's League Outlook*, including the "Intermatic Shabbath [sic] Clock" that turns lights and appliances on and off without human intervention, the "only" prefabricated packaged sukkah, and beautiful, "authentic and approved" wigs and hairpieces. See *Orthodox Jewish Life* XXV, n. 5 (June, 1958): 2; *Orthodox Jewish Life* XXIII, n. 5 (July–August, 1956): 5; and *Orthodox Jewish Life* XVII, n. 4 (April, 1950): 86.

³⁵ZionTalis advertisement, *Women's League Outlook* 32, n. 2 (Winter, 1961): 28.

³⁶ZionTalis advertisement, *Women's League Outlook* 32, n. 3 (March, 1962): 29.

³⁷See, *West Oaks Lane JCC Bulletin* 8, n. 8 (April, 1959), West Oaks Lane Papers, Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; *Germantown Jewish Centre Bulletin* (May 10, 1958), Germantown Jewish Centre Papers, Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; *Valley Jewish Community Center (VJCC) Bulletin* 10, n. 2 (October, 1953), Adat Ari El Papers, Congregation Adat Ari El, North Hollywood, California.

³⁸As the photographs are often reproductions, it is more difficult to make out smaller, less recognizable objects, such as *mizrachim*. For examples of *tallitot* on display in individual gift shops, see the following photographic sources: "Photo: Gift Shop of Sisterhood Temple Beth El Rockaway Park," *Women's League Outlook* (May, 1952): 18; "Portrait of Gift Shop, Har Zion Temple, Philadelphia," *Women's League Outlook* 23, n. 3 (March, 1952): 11; "Mrs. Harry Fox, Mrs. Charles Newman and Mrs. Max Tapper," Photo of Valley Jewish Community Center Gift Shop, *VJCC Yearbook* (1951): 38, Adat Ari El Papers, Congregation Adat Ari El, North Hollywood, California; and "Photo: Gift Shop," Germantown Jewish Centre Papers, Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

³⁹Cookbook advertisement, *Women's League Outlook* 32, n. 2 (Winter, 1961): 29; Cookbook advertisement. *Women's League Outlook* 35, n. 4 (Summer, 1965): inside back cover.

⁴⁰Mrs. Baruch I. Treiger, "We Come Bearing Gifts," *Women's League Outlook* 21, n. 4 (May, 1951): 13.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 21.

⁴²Charlotte Montgomery, "Time: The Present, Subject: The Presents," *Good Housekeeping* (December, 1956): 13.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁴For illustrations of the electric menorahs sold by the shops, see Holiday Bell Corporation advertisement, *American Judaism* IX, n. 2 (Hanukkah, 1959): 14; North American Electric Lamp Company advertisement, *American Judaism* IX, n. 2 (December, 1959): 34; KTAV Publishing House advertisement, *Women's League Outlook* 33, n.1 (September, 1962): 31. For an example of an electric *yahrzeit* light, see Aerolux Light Corporation advertisement, *American Judaism* XIII, n. 1 (Fall, 1963): 39.

⁴⁵For a more complete analysis of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* home decorating philosophy, see Jenna Weissman Joselit, "The Jewish Home Beautiful," in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan Sarna (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1997), 236–244; Zollman, "Shopping For a Future," 112–161.

⁴⁶The range of influence of this guidebook extended beyond the Conservative movement. The fact that the book required seven additional printings attests to its widespread success. In addition, note that the phrase "Jewish Home Beautiful" appears frequently in both Reform and Orthodox sisterhood literature from the early 1940s through the 1960s. Book sales, pageant performances, and holiday workshops dedicated to home ceremonials had cross-denominational appeal. See, for example, "Report of the National Committee on Jewish Ceremonials and Art,"

NFTS Executive Committee Meeting, 15 January 1942. MS-73/1, AJA; "Jewish Ceremonials Dramatized," *Topics and Trends* (January–February, 1946): 2. MS-73, AJA; "Chanukah Holiday Publication," photocopy of flyer, Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations Papers, American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), New York, New York.

⁴⁷Betty D. Greenberg and Althea O. Silverman, *The Jewish Home Beautiful*, 7th ed. (New York: Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, 1953), 14.

⁴⁸Unfortunately, we cannot know exactly how many women bought the book, as the Women's League did not keep records of orders or sales for *The Jewish Home Beautiful*.

⁴⁹For a historical review of the American Jewish Hanukkah observance, see Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Merry Chanukah: The Changing Holiday Practices of American Jews, 1880–1950," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1992), 303–325.

⁵⁰For example, "Shop open daily through Hanukkah" reads the bulletin for Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco, *The Temple Chronicle of Temple Emanu-El XXXV*, n. 5 (December, 1954), Temple Emanu-El Papers, Temple Emanu El, San Francisco, California; Temple Israel in New Rochelle, New York, reminded congregants that there were only twenty shopping days until Hanukkah in "20 More Days," *Temple Topics XXVI*, n. 2 (November 12, 1953), Center for Jewish Periodicals, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio.

⁵¹"Are You a Smart Shopper?" *VJCC Bulletin* 14, n.16 (20 December 1957), Adat Ari El Papers, Congregation Adat Ari El, North Hollywood, California.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Rom, 16.

⁵⁴The Bezalel Academy, and its accompanying museum, founded in 1906 by Boris Shatz, was created as a center for Zionist art. Accepting the premise that art was a basic attribute of modern peoples, Shatz and his students collected botanical, zoological, and archeological objects indigenous to Palestine, as well as crafts from the Diaspora, in an effort to model a new Zionist aesthetic.

⁵⁵See Beth Wenger and Jeffrey Shandler, "The Site of Paradise: The Holy Land in Jewish Imagination," in *Encounters With the Holy Land: Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Wenger and Shandler (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 1997), 26.

⁵⁶Ibid., 26.

⁵⁷Linda Mack Schloff, *And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996), 170.

⁵⁸Mrs. J. Walter Freiberg to NFTS Affiliate Presidents, 14 February 1927, 73/26/Series E, Circular Files, AJA.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Freiberg to Sisterhood Delegates and Presidents, 31 January 1927, 73/26/Series E, Circular Files, AJA.

⁶¹Mrs. Max Fink, "What Articles Do You Sell in Your Sisterhood Shop?" *Women's League Outlook* 23 n. 3 (March, 1953): 11.

⁶²Ibid., 11.

⁶³Alfred Werner, "What is Good Jewish Art?" *American Judaism* 4 (Passover, 1956): 8.

⁶⁴Ibid., 8.

⁶⁵Ibid., 9.

⁶⁶*Guide for the Judaica Shop Committee*, 4.

⁶⁷Shonie B. Levi and Sylvia R. Kaplan, *Across the Threshold: A Guide for the Jewish Homemaker*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1965), 7–8.

⁶⁸Meissen and Minton are both types of fine European china.

⁶⁹Sarah Kopelman, “President’s Page,” *Women’s League Outlook* 19, n. 4 (1949): 3. While Kopelman’s statement included the rhetoric of replacement, the idea of replacing objects of assimilation with Jewish objects was not characteristic of either the Reform or Conservative sisterhoods. In fact, the rhetoric of replacement was antithetical to the Jewish Home Beautiful movement, which, for example, consistently sought to hang a Haifa seascape *next to* a Maine seascape. Mrs. Max Fink, chair of the Women’s League gift shop committee, summarized the pluralistic nature of Jewish American decorating as follows: “In many Jewish homes you will find beautiful artistic statuary, pictures, ceramics and silver of French, Dutch, Chinese and Greek origin, but will you find any item of Jewish tradition or origin? The child must know that these things are not only for museums and special occasions *but can be displayed anytime alongside other cultural objects.*” Viva Meissin and Minton! indicated Fink, as long as a menorah or mezuzah received equal display time. See Mrs. Max Fink, “A New Year for the Gift Shop,” *Women’s League Outlook* 2, n.1 (September, 1953): 15.

⁷⁰Full Text Transcript of the Biennial Assembly Meeting: Seventeenth Biennial Assembly, 1948: 214, MS-73/1, AJA.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 214.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 214.

⁷³See, for example, gladiolus advertisement in *Women’s League Outlook* 32, n. 3 (March, 1962): 26.

⁷⁴Vogue of Israel advertisement. *American Judaism* XI, n. 1 (September, 1961): 48.

⁷⁵Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.

⁷⁶See *Wilshire Boulevard Temple Bulletin* 49, n. 12 (5 November 1962), Adat Ari El Papers, Congregation Adat Ari El, North Hollywood, California; *The Temple Chronicle of Temple Emanu-El* 29, n. 7 (April, 1951), Temple Emanu-El Papers, Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco, California; *Adath Israel Sisterhood Yearbook* 53 (1966–7), Klau Library Collection, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Richard Katz *The Gift of the Jews*, like Mr. Cahill's other two books, offers more information and insight than can be absorbed through a single reading. Like the Bible from which he draws so much of his material, serious readers are encouraged to refer to his source materials (e.g., Fox's translation of the Five Books of Moses) for a more complete understanding. While I don't agree with everything the author has to say, all of it deserves careful thought and reflection. Some readers may feel that -- by providing academic, popular, alternative descriptions of issues central to ou