INTRODUCTION

Israel's women, like women of other faiths, are interested in all causes that tend to bring people closer together in every movement affecting the welfare of mankind.
—Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, 1894

Sinai Temple, E. G. Hirsch Scholarship, Hadassah Home Club for Working Women, Ruth Home for Working Girls, Scholarship Association, Council of Jewish Women, United Jewish Drive, Lincoln Center Camp, Chicago Heart Association, Service Council, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Blind Service Committee, Civic Music Association, Jewish Consumptive Relief Society, League of Religious Fellowship, Chicago Woman's Aid, Woman's City Club, Red Cross, Mothers' Aid to the Lying In Hospital, Lincoln Center, Chicago Woman's Club, Art Institute.
—List of Jennie Franklin Purvin's charitable contributions, 1926

The summer of her seventeenth birthday found Jennie Franklin enjoying a merry whirlwind of social activities with her circle of friends in Chicago. But on August 23, 1890, Jennie marked the day itself by solemnly writing in her diary, “It is high time for me to definitely shape my career and awaken to the duties of a woman.” Some of the “duties of a woman” seemed obvious to a middle-class adolescent Jewish girl at the turn of the twentieth century, and Jennie dutifully fulfilled them. She graduated from high school, helped out in the faltering family business, frequented public lectures, read a great deal to keep up her education, and in 1899 married the businessman Moses L. Purvin and subsequently had two daughters. Even as an adolescent Jennie had been both a model young American woman and a model young Jewish woman, attending synagogue services, being confirmed, participating in Chicago's Hebrew Literary Society, socializing with other young Jews like her future husband, and consulting with her congregational rabbi for advice on starting out on “the road I wish to travel.” Neither Jennie nor anyone else in her milieu saw any contradiction between Jewish and female identity. Of all the Hebrew Literary Society events she wrote about

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in her diary, she relished most the debates on such subjects as racism and woman suffrage, secular topics given serious attention in an explicitly Jewish setting. Once married, she not only focused on her private life at home with her husband and children but over the decades also expanded her civic activities. Within the Jewish community, Jennie took on leadership roles in her synagogue sisterhood, the Chicago section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), and the Chicago Woman's Aid, a middle-class Jewish women's benevolent group.

Participation in Jewish women's organizations neither confined Jennie to a strictly Jewish public life nor precluded her steadily expanding commitment to the large American women's social movements of the day. Interested in suffrage from her adolescence, as an adult she immersed herself in the cause still further as she, like other American women during the Progressive Era, realized that disenfranchisement limited their power to achieve meaningful social reform. Members of a Jewish women's organization that she served as president wrote a poem in her honor that reflected her commitment to suffrage:

Jennie has the habit of being President,
On the next election her thoughts are now intent;
Looking to the future, to Nineteen Sixteen
What “Votes for Women” count for plainly can be seen.

The following decade, Jennie encouraged the Chicago Woman's Aid to become involved with the burgeoning birth control movement by sponsoring the clinics that the Illinois Birth Control League set up during the 1920s. The league recognized the importance of local women's organizations in its work. Its 1926 annual report approvingly singled out the Jewish women's group for regularly sending a delegate to its meetings and providing volunteer personnel to the clinics. Additionally, from the earliest years of the 1900s, Jennie devoted herself to a variety of women's peace organizations, especially the Chicago branches of NCJW and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). She attended the 1923 National Council of Women biennial meeting as an NCJW delegate with a special interest in the parts of the program devoted to peace activism. To each of these secular movements she brought a Jewish sensibility, often carrying out her activism through Jewish women's organizations. The contemplative, aspiring Jewish girl she had been had now become a thoughtful, active Jewish woman who believed in her responsibility and power to make a difference not only to her own Jewish family and community but also to the wider world.
Jennie Franklin Purvin symbolizes Jewish women throughout the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who developed a distinctive activist identity that drew on both their gender and their religious or ethnic identities. At various moments they foregrounded each of these. American Jewish women who wanted to be both good Jews and good women found themselves negotiating sometimes competing, sometimes complementary demands, and they daily made complex choices as their understandings of their American, Jewish, and female identities fluctuated. Participating in major American women's social movements gave them the opportunity to make those choices. Significantly, Jewish women, who could, at least theoretically, hide their ethnic, religious, and cultural differences rarely chose to do so. They generally opted to sustain an open Jewish identity of some kind while participating in American women's movements, discovering convergences in values shaped by gender, class, national, and religious or ethnic identity. They drew on these common values when becoming involved with social movements, whether their paths to engagement led them to activism as individuals, as members of Jewish organizations, or as members of women's groups.

Judaism and Jewishness signified different things to different people. Jews could be Jewish without attending synagogues or speaking a particular language or subscribing to ideals of either particularism or universalism. The problem of what being Jewish meant—and the nature of the religious, cultural, and social responsibilities that Jewish identity entailed—figured prominently in the ways that American Jewish women saw their own activism. The complexity of Jewishness in the United States intersected with women's movements at the point of American Jewish women's early feminist activism.

The confluence of identity and activism was never static for these women. Changes in gender roles during the first half of the twentieth century affected religious and ethnic women and women's organizations, including Jewish women's groups. Class and religious differences shaped American Jewish women's social and political activism as well. So, too, did the exponential growth of American Jewry that resulted from mass migration at the turn of the century and the concomitant struggle to find a stance that balanced traditional culture with a rapidly modernizing American society. Various permutations of anti-Semitism played a role in both limiting and directing Jewish women's social and political activism and sometimes shaped their relationships with their non-Jewish activist counterparts. Jewishness mattered to them, especially a communal tradition of caring and support and a sense of social justice. All these factors promoted Jewish women's important involvement in early twentieth-century feminist movements.
The turn of the twentieth century ushered in a prolonged moment of great reform energy in the United States. Women used the language of municipal housekeeping to justify an expansion of their roles outward from their private homes into the public sphere. They also summoned the rhetoric of maternalism, a term that signifies a collective belief in gender differences based on motherhood as the foundation for reform. Municipal housekeeping and maternalism opened many doors for women’s activism and to a limited extent enabled cross-class alliances founded on essential ideas about womanhood and motherhood.

For Jewish women, the ferment of reform offered possibilities for acculturating into American society as well. As Jews and as women, they grappled with becoming modern American citizens. However, not all women’s movements invited their participation. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, for instance, organized on the basis of religious identity, welcomed few Jewish women. Some Jewish women preferred to direct their public activities toward explicitly Jewish causes like Zionism or to work in the heavily Jewish milieu of the labor movement, both forms of activism that have received considerable scholarly attention. But a significant number of Jewish women, who have been virtually ignored by historians, chose instead or in addition to focus their energies on the great women’s social movements of the first part of the twentieth century: suffrage, birth control, and peace.

Not as radical as socialism or communism, not as Jewish as Zionism, the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements nonetheless offered Jewish women exciting opportunities to be swept up in gendered activism without abandoning Jewish meaning. All three causes emerged from the larger nineteenth century woman’s movement, always about more than voting rights, and from working-class women’s traditions of labor activism. Women’s claims to equality, justice, and authority extended beyond suffrage, yielding equally feminist movements such as birth control and peace, both fundamentally concerned with structural social and political change, and both insisting on the collapse of the gendered divide between public and private. For Jewish women, radicalism in these social causes also emerged from Jewish traditions of taking care of the community that found expression in the labor movement and in American feminism.

These movements overlapped with one another chronologically and together formed a cluster of feminist activity. The suffrage movement, revitalized in 1890 by the merger of two competing groups into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), attracted growing numbers of supporters and finally began to achieve notable successes in state campaigns during the 1910s that culminated in the passage of the Nineteenth
Amendment in 1920. Meanwhile, though contraception was hardly a new phenomenon, the birth control movement as such began during the mid-1910s. By the 1920s and 1930s, the establishment of birth control clinics and repeated attempts to change legal restrictions on contraception transformed it into an increasingly popular cause. The peace movement similarly boasted a long history, stretching back at least to the early nineteenth century in the United States, but the proliferation of women's peace groups during and after World War I closely linked peace activism to feminism for the first time.

For all three social movements, World War I proved a turning point. Women's ability during the war to fill roles and jobs traditionally held by men impressed many Americans favorably. Mainstream suffrage leaders struck something of a bargain with President Woodrow Wilson, offering women's cooperation in war work in exchange for his support for a constitutional amendment enfranchising women. The devastations of World War I energized the peace movement, which worldwide attracted millions of people determined never again to allow such a catastrophe. Because many social critics pointed to a link between overpopulation and war, World War I also provided the impetus for some activists to adopt birth control as another method of ensuring world peace, the wealth of nations, and the health and happiness of citizens everywhere. Following the success of the suffrage movement after the war, both the birth control and peace movements grew in strength, number, and activity during the 1920s and 1930s as some former suffragists, along with many new activists, turned their attention to them.

From this perspective, the “doldrums” decades between suffrage victory and the so-called second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s did not exist in the United States. These decades of meaningful women's activism reshaped many gendered relations of power, albeit not conclusively enough to satisfy later generations of women. The birth control and peace movements exemplify this obscured feminist history. They were not alone; working-class industrial feminism and middle-class Equal Rights Amendment activism also flourished during this period. That not all the women involved in social movements during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s would have claimed the term “feminist” changed neither the significance of their activism nor their achievements. No understanding of twentieth-century U.S. history, let alone American women's history, is possible without full consideration of these social movements.

Furthermore, no understanding of these movements is possible without Jewish women. Exploring American Jewish women's activism inspires rethinking of ethnicity and gender roles during the first decades of the twentieth century, especially in reference to the meaning of community
membership, citizenship, and women in public life. This is not just a question of “contribution history.” Middle-class Jewish women may not typically have been leaders of the suffrage movement, but they were heavily involved in ways that other suffrage scholars have overlooked, and working-class Jewish women who were labor leaders played key roles in suffrage campaigns. Jewish women’s leadership and grassroots activism, from within and outside Jewish communal organizations, actively shaped birth control and peace by encouraging these movements to encompass a greater diversity of interests while still underscoring gender as the most powerful identity factor underlying feminist activism. No history of either birth control or peace in the United States, which is to say, virtually no previous history of those movements, is complete without analyzing the impact of Jewish women’s presence. Similarly, the history of American Jews is incomplete without considering the importance of women’s activism in shaping the American Jewish community during the period of its greatest consolidation. American Jewish women brought awareness of feminist issues to the American Jewish community, particularly through the extensive American Jewish press coverage of suffrage, birth control, and peace. They challenged the social, political, and cultural constraints on women at every turn. In so doing, they established organizations among the most active women’s groups in the United States, expanded their causes internationally to include Jews and women in other places, and experimented with reconciling their multiple identities as women, Jews, and Americans.

American Jewish women were a diverse lot, and even a study of just a brief period, let alone one that spans several generations, needs to reflect that diversity. Complicated divides in religious observance and affiliation, class status, national origin and citizenship, cultural and ethnic heritage, political persuasion, geographic location, and attitudes toward Americanization provided any number of axes along which Jewish women in America expressed their diversity. Neither was the American Jewish population writ large the same in 1940 as it had been in 1880. Yet none of these undeniable differences mean that the very term “American Jewish women” is only a historical convention. Historical actors wrote, spoke, and thought of themselves as American Jewish women, an identity category they both chose and were sometimes relegated to by others for whom none of the internal fissures within American Jewry mattered as much as the Jewishness, however defined, of that community. During the early twentieth century, when anti-Semitism appeared all too frequently even within apparently progressive political movements, American Jewish women managed to reconcile their many differences to fight against prejudice and discrimination.
Many of the most salient changes experienced by Jews in America during this period stemmed from the mass migration that brought their numbers from approximately 250,000 in 1880 to nearly 5 million in 1940, with the children and grandchildren of immigrants contributing to this number despite the immigration restrictions of the mid-1920s. A revival of Jewish tradition and practice preceded mass migration among an influential cadre of urban, well-educated, American-born Jewish sons and daughters during the 1870s and 1880s, yielding a host of new institutions whose very names proclaimed the promise of a synthesized identity, such as the American Hebrew newspaper (1879) and the American Jewish Historical Society (1893). But the arrival of nearly 2 million mostly eastern European immigrants between 1880 and 1925 transformed virtually every facet of American Jewry.

Orthodox and Conservative Judaism joined Reform Judaism as formal religious denominations, with groups like Young Israel advocating an Americanized form of Orthodoxy and a newly reorganized Jewish Theological Seminary combining in the Conservative movement traditional Jewish law with modernization. Each denomination was thus by definition progressive in its own way, though many of the most prominent social reformers affiliated with Reform Judaism. Motivated by a potent combination of genuine concern for the new immigrants and a not unrealistic fear of increased anti-Semitism, the established American Jewish community engaged in philanthropic endeavors across the United States that offered tremendous resources to newcomers but generally insisted on rapid acculturation as the price of entry. Many immigrant Jews responded with a mixture of alacrity, gratitude, and suspicion; few wished to reject Americanization altogether, yet most wanted to make choices on their own terms about what and how fast to change. By the 1920s, immigrants and children of immigrants had often moved into positions of leadership in Jewish social service agencies, which became models in their fields.

In the cities where most new immigrants clustered, an ethnic economy not just of commerce but also of culture and politics flourished, with Yiddish, at least for first-generation immigrants, as a critical identity marker. Like their western European predecessors, some of whom came to the United States as political refugees following the European upheavals of 1848, some eastern European Jewish immigrants arrived with radical convictions that many native-born Americans viewed with dread. Already attracted in large number to the “isms” that had penetrated every corner of European Jewry—socialism, Bundism, Zionism—the new arrivals and their children after them utterly transformed the political character of American Jewry.
And where were Jewish women in this welter of religious affiliations, class identities, geographic locations, political movements, degrees of Americanization? Everywhere. The same municipal housekeeping rhetoric and gendered notions of the moral high ground that paved the way toward an expansion of American women’s public role enabled women to occupy prominent positions in Jewish communal life. The same feminization of religion that transformed women into central religious figures in Protestant churches occurred in the liberal denominations of American Judaism, especially within Reform Jewish congregations. Changes in traditional Jewish ideas about and limitations on women became central to the modernization of Judaism within both synagogues and the larger community. As mothers, immigrant Jewish women were seen as key to the success of future generations of American Jews, and there was widespread consensus within the community that middle-class Jewish women were best equipped to help them. Working-class and immigrant Jewish women often resented middle-class Jews’ attitude that they must change in order to succeed, but that did not stop them from taking advantage of resources offered by the wider Jewish community or even from hoping that their children would have very different lives than their own.

A brief introduction to the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), featured prominently throughout this book, provides a case study of changes within the American Jewish community and both differences and similarities among American Jewish women, on the one hand, and between Jewish and non-Jewish women in the United States on the other. Founded in 1893 as a result of the World’s Parliament of Religions at the Chicago World’s Fair, NCJW was the first independent national Jewish women’s group. Led by Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, who had been the first Jewish woman invited to join the Chicago Woman’s Club, it quickly became the major Jewish women’s organization in an era of American women’s large-scale organizing. The NCJW originated with an explicitly religious and philanthropic mission but soon, like other turn-of-the-century American women’s groups, turned toward a program of progressive reform. Deeply concerned about Jewish immigration to the United States, the mostly American-born, middle-class NCJW members wanted to ease immigrants’ transition to life in America. Although their activities were at times tinged with an element of social control, NCJW became a major innovator in all kinds of social reform. Its commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of young Jewish women traveling alone set a new standard in the deployment of a national philanthropic network as well as the cooperation of voluntary and government agencies.
The NCJW’s Americanization, citizenship, and religious education efforts during the first decades of the twentieth century are relatively well known. Much less well known is the kind of political activism that played an increasingly central role in NCJW programs during the interwar years. During those decades, NCJW supported birth control and peace. These commitments located NCJW, still mostly middle class in composition although now with a significant membership of second- and third-generation American Jewish women, far to the left on the political spectrum of American women’s organizations. Though it was certainly the case that secular activism facilitated their insistence on greater equity in Jewish communal affairs, Jewish women harbored feminist goals outside their own religious communities as well.

NCJW members found a consonance of values in mainstream and Jewish thinking about women and saw no contradiction in expanding their activism as Jewish women to encompass an array of causes. As its former national president Marion Misch explained, NCJW was primarily a Jewish organization for a number of reasons. It honored famous and inspiring Jewish women in history and held them up as role models; followed Jewish injunctions to be charitable and serve the needy in the community; offered religious as well as social or service programming; and maintained constant awareness of the important lessons of Judaism. However, none of these commitments precluded taking those role models or injunctions or programming or lessons into other fields of endeavor. When NCJW became involved in causes outside the Jewish community, the organization did not leave Jewishness behind but took its religious and cultural identity along to enhance and facilitate its work. Misch herself exemplified this pattern, as she had served on the executive board of the International Council of Women while occupying leadership positions in NCJW. External observers also noticed the ability of NCJW to expand its activities while retaining Jewish identity. In her 1934 history of American women, Inez Haynes Irwin wrote of NCJW, “No other of the sectarian organizations has done so much work apart from sanctuary or temple.”

During the interwar years, NCJW, along with other Jewish women’s organizations, carved out a new role in the public sphere for women eager to see Judaism and Jewishness as sources of activism. Middle-class Jewish women in particular used American women’s associational life to demonstrate their acculturation. Working-class Jewish women, especially political radicals, were more likely to cast a jaundiced eye on the promise of universal sisterhood, but they nonetheless joined national and transnational organizations both inside and outside the Jewish community. All these women worked
with men, often closely, to support their causes, particularly when trying to help persecuted Jews worldwide. But they also flocked to women’s organizations and feminist movements in ways that illustrated the primary importance of their gender identities.29

Interactions of gender, religion, politics, and class lay behind every manifestation of American Jewish women’s activism before World War II. Jewish women of all class backgrounds and political stripes, middle-class matrons as well as working-class leftists, committed themselves to suffrage, birth control, and peace. On the surface they seemed to be focusing their energies on secular movements, but they often saw their activism as an extension of their religious or culturally traditional roles rather than as a rejection of Judaism or Jewishness. During the early twentieth century, American Judaism experienced profound transformations, including serious reconsideration of women’s roles. At the same time, much of American society committed to progressive reform and reevaluated women’s status more generally. At the nexus of all these changes, American Jewish women found in women’s social movements causes that bridged the sacred and the secular.

American Jewish women believed that their activism could alter relations of power. Activists influenced definitions of citizenship through the suffrage movement, reproductive rights through the birth control movement, and international relations through the peace movement. Gendered activism brought Jewish women into political spaces where their perspectives as women and Jews generated a unique sensibility. Because Jewish women were so prominent in these causes, especially birth control and peace, where they held positions of leadership and provided significant numbers at the grassroots level, their activism illustrates the intensely personal nature of women’s politics during the first decades of the twentieth century. “The personal is political” is a mantra most often associated with feminists of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet the insight that public and private structures of power are inextricably linked and constitutive of each other applies to earlier periods as well. Feminist activists of the first half of the twentieth century were not likely to chant about “personal politics,” but their activism nonetheless expressed the deep connections between the personal and the political, between private and public.

Of the three movements, suffrage was the most traditionally political because women pressed for their right to vote as an expression of power in the public sphere. Activists argued that modernity required an expansion of private responsibility outward from the family to the neighborhood to the community to the municipality to the state to the national government. Suffrage campaigns brought Jewish women into previously male-dominated spaces of
political life. Jewish women also gradually began to claim an expanded public role in their synagogues and religious communities, imbuing their gendered, supposedly private religious spheres with political significance.

Like suffrage, birth control also embodied personal politics. Women contended that they should exert private control over their own fertility rather than delegating public power over their bodies to the state. As part of their process of acculturation, Jewish women wanted the freedom to choose upward mobility over large families and to take both health and economic reasons into account when deciding how many children to have. Jewish women also mounted religious and ethical arguments, made possible by the space Jewish law provided for family planning. Based on their own experiences, an important cadre of activist Jewish women doctors believed that women could make more valuable contributions to public life, as professionals and political beings, if they could shape their personal lives themselves.

Peace activism encompassed personal politics as well. A women's peace movement based on ideas about universal motherhood appealed to Jewish women, who often appreciated the traditional Jewish valorization of mothers and thus found in maternalism a bridge between American women's political and social interests and their own. The collective action and politicized motherhood involved in peace work transformed Jewish women's groups, already linked by family, community, and history to Jews overseas. Jewish women in the peace movement eventually faced special challenges when the specific, existential threat that Hitler and Nazism posed to Jews and Judaism threatened their universalist commitment to ideals of peace.

All these connections provided the basis for a group defined by the supposedly private matter of religion to bring multiple Jewish sensibilities to public issues and political concerns. Jewish identity also brought a distinctive sense of internationalism to activists seeking change in relations of power across borders as well as within nations. New forms of mobilization and assertiveness emerged at the same time for women and Jews in open Western societies, a phenomenon of timing that encouraged Jewish women to develop a politics of activism. Like Jews in most countries at the turn of the century, women developed alternative political strategies to compensate for their absence from the arena of electoral politics. Their activism used the mechanics and tools of informal politics to encompass meaningful social reform.

A consistent feature of many Jewish women's lives across borders of class and national origins, activism contributed to shared experiences that belie a historiographic tradition pitting established American Jews against newcomers. If anything, immigrant Jewish women, often with greater previous exposure to radicalism, found expansion of their public activity to be a natural
extension of their legacy of public roles and may have set the standard of activism. By the 1920s and 1930s, with American Jewish women now encompassing new immigrants, daughters and granddaughters of immigrants, and women whose families had been in the United States for generations, activism in women's movements simultaneously offered Jewish women a chance to acculturate based on shared gender norms and an opportunity to claim Jewish identity as something of value for American society overall.

Due in part to women's activism, American Jewry became heavily associated with liberalism and progressivism, which both encompassed and, to some degree, moderated the radicalism that some eastern European Jewish immigrants had brought with them to the United States. Organizations such as NCJW, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), or the Workmen's Circle Ladies Auxiliary, which many women used as vehicles for their activism, simultaneously established Jewish communal autonomy and forged connections to other American political constituencies that viewed activism as a critical instrument of expression and dissent within sovereign states. The American Jewish community debated suffrage, birth control, and peace from religious, political, social, and cultural perspectives and generally provided a supportive environment to women and their causes. Exploring American Jewish women's activism as individuals and as members of both Jewish and nonsectarian organizations helps reconstruct, understand, and analyze modern Jewish political identity.

Jewish women in the United States and Europe achieved recognition during their own time as major players in the suffrage and especially the birth control and peace movements, yet standard accounts of women's activism barely mention them. The historiography on American Jewish women refers only minimally to any pre–World War II political activism outside of socialism, the labor movement, or Zionism, yet many Jewish women found their activist homes in gendered social movements less obviously connected to Jewishness. The lacuna results in part from a more general absence of Jewish women from narratives of American women's history. The neglect may be due in part to a historiographic perception of Jews as “just” white that does not reflect a more complicated historical reality; during the period covered in this book, Jewish women were not always perceived or accepted as white, though their participation in women's movements contributed to their acculturation. The connections among Jewish women's religious and cultural convictions, their ethnic and class backgrounds, and their political activism has been lost by scholars of both American Judaism and historians of American women. The former, even now, tend to discount both Jewish women's spiritual lives and the power of politics in American Jewish history. The latter
rarely acknowledge the presence of Jewish women in social movements they assume to have been either Christian or secular in nature. This omission is particularly surprising given the widespread acknowledgment that religion motivated much of American women’s collective action. In part, then, this entire book is a project of documentation and restoration.\textsuperscript{33}

Beyond that project, American Jewish women embodied the tensions that virtually all immigrant ethnic groups confronted in balancing the obvious benefits of Americanization and acculturation with the preservation of their heritage. Contested meanings of “Jewishness,” which could signify religion, ethnicity, culture, or even race, further complicated the issues. Some American Jewish women approached social movements from Jewish and female perspectives, while others initially paid little attention to their Jewish identity. During the 1930s, however, they were all forced to deal with the implications of growing anti-Semitism in domestic life and foreign affairs. Their struggles to define American Jewry at home and then—in some cases for the first time—to consider the ramifications of Jewishness as a force operating across national borders illustrates the complex issue of multiple and transnational identities in the modern world.

Jewish women’s experiences also illuminate the conditional alliances within the early twentieth-century women’s movement, exemplified in the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), which brought together working-class women and their middle-class allies to support women’s organizing and improve their work conditions. As many Jewish women workers and allies in the WTUL discovered, gender identification could unite women across barriers of class, culture, ethnicity, religion, and nationality (and, to a lesser extent, race), but only when those involved could successfully prioritize gender over all other identity claims.\textsuperscript{34} Both gender solidarity and feminism were larger than maternalism; not all feminists or Jewish women were maternalists. Still, it is unsurprising that so many Jewish women spoke of suffrage, birth control, and peace in maternalist terms because motherhood served as an important link between American and Jewish gender identities, especially for middle-class women. Motherhood also bridged religious, class, and national differences among Jewish women both in the United States and internationally. As a result, the language of maternalist politics, while never encompassing all of feminist activism, served ideological and instrumental purposes for most Jewish women in the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements. Like other universalist ideals of the period, however, maternalism ultimately proved to be contingent, if not entirely illusory.\textsuperscript{35}

The history of American Jewish women’s early feminist activism also complicates recent efforts to conceive of American Jewish history as stretched
between two opposing poles of communalism and dispersionism. Broadly defined, communalist history emphasizes self-proclaimed and self-identified Jewish individuals, organizations, and institutions, while dispersionist history encompasses anyone of Jewish descent, regardless of his or her engagement with communal Jewry and identification as Jewish. Proponents do not argue that the binary approaches are irredeemably divided. Still, the complicated lives of the women in this book disrupt any borders between communalism and dispersionism. Because notions of identity are fluid rather than fixed, it is impossible to differentiate between some kind of public Jewry and private individuals who happen to be Jewish. American Jewish actors of the past, blessed with free will, a shifting social, economic, and cultural landscape, and the possibility of a sort of voluntary Judaism not available elsewhere, very often found their Jewish identities changing over time and in response to circumstances. There were women in the peace movement, for example, who never gave much thought to being Jewish until the crisis of the 1930s cast a whole new light on what that meant, and their personal identities changed accordingly. They, and countless others like them, cannot be so neatly dismissed as dispersionists or even converted communalists.

The heavy involvement of Jewish women’s organizations in secular causes like birth control and peace upends any firm distinction between inward-looking communal organizations and outward-looking dispersionist activities. Both NCJW and NFTS, for instance, were founded with explicitly religious missions but, caught up in the era of progressive reform and a general expansion of women’s public activities, came to see secular activism as part of their Jewishness and religious mandate. The Jewish identity of these organizations provided the basis for their significant nonsectarian activities, which were then widely recognized by the larger social movements in which they participated. The same was true for countless individual women who found that Jewish identity, with or without religion per se, provided the major source of motivation for their commitment to effect change in the wider world. For them there was no conflict between communalist and dispersionist activism. Innumerable Jewish women joined Jewish groups and secular movements at the same time. Changes in Jewish communal organizations both shaped and were shaped by relationships with disparate political and social movements as brokered by Jewish women and men who moved easily from one to another.

Anti-Semitism further disrupts the communalist/dispersionist model. Jewish women activists, and by extension all Jews in America, may have had control over their own identities, but not over their identification. In the most benign sense, even those American Jews who felt no connection to the
Jewish community writ large were often identified as Jews by others. Some resisted this identification mightily, while others resigned themselves to it. In a less benign sense, Jewish women in secular social movements, especially those who took on leadership roles, were always aware that their colleagues saw them as Jewish. Sometimes that did not matter much; sometimes it did. The blatant anti-Semitism of parts of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Woman’s Bible frightened some Jewish women away from the suffrage movement; some birth control spokespeople adopted eugenicist rhetoric that many Jews found alarming; peace organizations for a long time refused to acknowledge the unique nature of the threat to Jews under Nazism. Whether they liked it or not, even the most dispersionist Jews then found themselves encountering communalist issues. By setting boundaries that were not always immediately apparent, anti-Semitism affected American Jewish women’s activism. Given the appeal of feminist activism to Jewish women from a variety of backgrounds and the heretofore unexamined role Jewish women played in the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements, consideration of anti-Semitism must recast our understanding of both American Jewish history and the history of American feminism.

This book proceeds both thematically and chronologically, drawing on a tremendous range of long-neglected archival materials as well as published primary sources and periodical literature in English and Yiddish. The first chapter traces Jewish women’s suffrage activism from the creation of NAWSA in 1890 through the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 and its aftermath. Jewish women primarily worked for suffrage as individuals, though intense debate flourished among Jewish women’s groups. There were some Jewish anti-suffragists as well. The American Jewish press devoted considerable time and space to suffrage, and rabbis aired the issue within the community. The cross-class and international dimensions of Jewish women’s activism were apparent in their involvement in suffrage, as was the anti-Semitism that set some limits on their activism. By the end of the suffrage campaign, some Jewish women had begun to draw parallels between expanding their civic roles as American citizens and their religious roles in synagogue and communal life.

Chapter 2 establishes the continuities and new directions in Jewish women’s activism during the 1920s, when Jewish women in growing numbers worked for a broader feminist agenda, like their non-Jewish counterparts. Even before the suffrage victory this agenda had included women winning
greater control over their bodies. During the 1920s, an explosion of birth control activism veered away from its radical roots and engaged ever more “ordinary” women and men. Jewish women became a significant consumer constituency for the birth control movement, challenging the restrictive legal environment. American Jewish culture generally supported contraception, although pockets of resistance persisted.

The third chapter analyzes the expansion of American Jewish women’s peace activism, which also predated suffrage victory but achieved new power and recognition during and after the First World War. Throughout the 1920s, Jewish women’s organizations devoted considerable resources to the cause, regardless of the suspect radicalism of peace work. Significant numbers of American Jewish women joined nonsectarian women’s peace groups as well and won the respect of peace leaders at home and abroad, although Jewish women were disappointed to encounter anti-Semitism within these groups. The American Jewish community conducted a lively debate about the relationship between peace and Jewishness. Multiple motivations fueled Jewish women’s peace activism, including religious imperatives, class identity, maternalism, and notions of international sisterhood.

Chapter 4 explores the challenges and successes that Jewish women in the birth control movement encountered during the 1930s. Most Jewish women supported the strategy of increasing the number of birth control clinics, and Jewish women’s organizations took up the cause in large numbers. Growing professionalization provided Jewish women with expanding opportunities as birth control doctors, activists, and consumers. The economic depredations of the Depression made contraception increasingly acceptable to both a general and a Jewish public, and a series of court decisions in which Jewish women figured prominently as attorneys and defendants moved birth control squarely into the mainstream. This chapter also examines the relationship between birth control and eugenics. Although the very word has a sinister overtone today, during the 1930s eugenics was a respectable, quasi-scientific approach to population and birth control that many Jewish leaders and laymen supported—even as a form of similar scientific racism undergirded Nazi policies in Germany that were about to throw Jews everywhere into crisis.

The fifth chapter probes a new set of challenges confronting Jewish women in the peace movement during the 1930s. As the international scene deteriorated, the Depression spread worldwide, and Hitler rose to power, the female and Jewish identities that underlay American Jewish women’s peace activism steadily came into conflict with each other. Eventually most Jewish women in the peace movement faced an agonizing choice between
their political beliefs and their religious, ethnic, and cultural identities. In the face of perceived indifference on the part of peace organizations to the plight of Jews under Nazism, Jewish identity ultimately prevailed. Decades of committed peace work at home and abroad, meaningful friendships, and synthesis of gender and religious identity could not withstand what most American Jewish women considered an existential threat to the survival of Jews and Judaism.

The conclusion of Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace reflects on the motivations of Jewish women engaged in early feminist activism. It considers the importance of fluid, but ever-present, Jewish identity to every kind of social movement in which Jewish women became involved. Women's social activism during the early twentieth century illuminates the gendered paths toward acculturation taken by various elements of the American Jewish community. The conclusion pays special attention to the impact of Jewish women on American women's feminist activism and the importance of recovering their voices in order to understand the foundational, critical involvement of Jewish women in postwar feminism.