

The Los Angeles Jewish Community: An Examination of its History of Activism for Human Rights

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jews played an important role in the development of Los Angeles, as did other minority groups. As Los Angeles became a modern city, the Jewish community's civic role became constricted, and Jews became outsiders to the governing structure of the city. In this sense, Jews were much like African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans – all outsiders in a homogeneous, conservative community.

Jews played an active role in the civil rights and other human rights movements throughout the century. Shared outsider status laid the groundwork in the 1950's for a remarkable, historic coalition that challenged the white-dominated conservative hegemony of Los Angeles. Beginning with Edward Roybal's election to the city council in 1949 with Latino and Jewish support, biracial and multiracial coalitions grew in strength and scope through the 1960's. The apex of the coalition was the mobilization behind Councilman Tom Bradley's campaigns for mayor.

With Bradley's election in 1973, Jews, African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans emerged from civic exclusion to a central role in the governance of Los Angeles. For twenty years, the Bradley coalition dominated Los Angeles government, and the civic and social role of Jews and other minority groups expanded. City offices, public policies, and the spirit of government were opened up as never before.

With the end of the Bradley mayoralty in 1993, the massive coalition of outsiders became fractured. Jews remained insiders, whose access to government continued even with the election of a white Republican, Richard Riordan, as mayor. African-Americans were now outsiders, but by the time of Riordan's 1997 re-election, a majority of Latinos were Riordan voters. With their rising mobilization, Latinos seemed to have a powerful future ahead of them. But there was little contact with Jews. Indeed, on some political issues, important conflicts of interest have arisen between Jews and Latinos, despite continuing similarities in voting behavior between the two groups.

Some began to fear that Jews were turning inward, away from the open-handed stance of previous decades. However, a broader view indicates that Los Angeles Jews have always been pulled between an inward-looking vision of protecting the group's interests, and an outward-looking orientation toward other groups. In that sense, Los Angeles Jews resemble other minority groups who grapple with the appropriate mix of group self-interest and attachment to the aspirations and needs of other groups.

The prospects of a split among Jews and other minority groups concerns those who believe that Jewish residents have an important *function* in fostering the progressive development of Los Angeles. As whites with progressive attitudes compared to non-Jewish whites, Jews offer a possible bridge between minority aspirations and a still-powerful white community.

This research suggests that both Jewish leaders and leaders of other minority communities should take a fresh look at the potential for Jewish involvement in the advancement of human rights for minority groups. In order to foster a positive relationship, the communities need to meet as equals, to look for issues of common concern, and to examine the values that they offer each other during the transition to a different kind of Los Angeles. All minority communities in Los Angeles, including Jews, must constantly work and rework the fundamental balance between turning inward and reaching outward to build alliances.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Restoring and enhancing progressive alliances in Los Angeles will require a reconnection between the Jewish community and the minority communities of Los Angeles. The alternatives to that reconnection are conflict among the City's communities, or a mutual indifference that limits the possibilities for the advancement of human rights. Several steps are required to restore frayed ties.

There needs to be a greater understanding within the City's minority communities of the role the Jewish community has played in enhancing human rights and equality. Misperceptions about the role of Jews in the local community have rarely been corrected. Many people erroneously believe that Jews behave politically much like other whites, or that Jews have abandoned the progressive arena. The history of the Jewish community's involvement needs to be presented through voting and survey data, and through an analysis of organizational linkages to common action.

A greater effort should be made to incorporate Jewish participation in events that explore issues of diversity. The history of Jewish involvement in these issues should bring a seat at the table to Jewish activists, even at the risk of raising issues of power and control that make such interactions difficult. Jews represent an important bridge between minority and non-minority communities. Even the defensiveness and occasional conservatism of the Jewish community represent important guideposts to issues that are unlikely to sustain broad, interracial coalitions.

There needs to be a greater understanding within the Jewish community of the evolving needs and aspirations of minority communities in Los Angeles. Because there is much less day-to-day contact between Jews and other minority communities than in the past, media images of minority aspirations and agendas have increasingly replaced a more direct and personal understanding. Minority issues are rarely communicated fully and in all their complexity by the media, which tend to focus on the more sensational aspects of the minority agenda.

Jews also need to be aware that issues of power and control among groups complicate discussions in diverse Los Angeles. While a seat at the table is an important step for Jews, they will also need to be aware that members of minority communities often fear, not without reason, that whites (whether Jewish or non-Jewish) will seek to impose their own view on them. Providing room for minority activists to speak honestly, and even to air conflict with the Jewish community, will ease the concern that perceived power imbalances cause.

Forums for group interaction need to be established that are based on equal status of participants, which enhance human relations but move toward practical, pragmatic projects in areas of shared interest. Seeking out multiple forums where people feel at home will enhance the hope that coalitions can be formed on an equal basis. Even more important, the agendas for such meetings should allow each community to express its hopes and fears accurately and honestly.

Existing leadership networks must be enhanced and new leadership networks constructed so that group relations are not solely in the hands of candidates and elected officials. Politicians have often played a very constructive role in the development of intergroup alliances in Los Angeles, with Tom Bradley serving as a prime example. However, the winds of political ambition can often dictate electoral strategies that make intergroup alliance difficult, even while such strategies may contribute to victory at the polls for particular politicians. While politicians will likely continue to be crucial resources for linking communities together, they may also be the most likely to tear communities apart.

Leadership networks that do not depend solely on political candidates and elected officials can offer a consistent set of linkages that are not subject to the shifting winds of politics, especially in an era of term limits and office-holding musical chairs. Such leadership networks can also become vehicles for settling conflicts that arise in the political arena, or at least for keeping such conflicts focused on issues and not on perceived slights between and among diverse communities.

INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles Jewish community has a long history of activism in political and human rights. Jews have played a pivotal role in the development of progressive coalitions throughout the history of modern Los Angeles.

Coming to terms with the unique status of the Jewish community's relationship with minority communities has special importance in Los Angeles. No group has the numbers or mobilization to control Los Angeles by itself. The 1990 Census showed that Latinos were nearly 40% of the City's population, with African-Americans at 14% and Asian-Americans at 9%. But these numbers are deceiving. Even though minorities represent two-thirds of the city's population, whites represent two-thirds of the registered voters.

As power shifts in Los Angeles, Jews represent a balance wheel. Their political mobilization is very high; the Los Angeles Times exit poll in 1993 found that with 6% of the population, Jews cast 19% of the votes in the mayoral runoff election. And Jews have demonstrated an extraordinary interest in the politics of coalition building, participating in a network of interminority activities beyond the political arena.

The Times exit poll during the 1993 mayoral election found that 82% of Los Angeles Jews were registered Democrats, compared to only 48% of white non-Jews. In addition, Jews were twice as likely as white non-Jews to select the more liberal opinion on racial issues (Sonenshein and Valentino 2000). But Jews differed strongly from African-Americans (although not from Latinos) by supporting Richard Riordan's re-election in 1997.

Despite this long history and its contemporary manifestations, it is remarkable how little is known in Los Angeles about the role of the Jewish community in advancing the human rights of minority communities. This study will explore the relationship between Jews and minority groups in the City, with particular reference to African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans and examines the following questions:

- What is the history of Jews in Los Angeles? How have their numbers and strategic locations in the City changed? How does the history of the Jewish community compare to those of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans?
- In what ways has the Jewish community supported the political and social efforts of minority communities? What benefits has the Jewish community received from linkages to minority communities?
- What have been the principal sources of tension between the Jewish community and minority groups in the City?
- What organized efforts are currently going on in Los Angeles among Jews and minority communities?
- What are the prospects for positive relationships among Jews and the city's minority groups? What can be done to enhance these prospects?

After an analysis of Jewish attitudes and behavior nationally, the report will focus on three periods of Los Angeles history: 1) the formation of Jewish and minority communities, 2) the period of strong coalition between Jews and other minorities and 3) the contemporary era, in which the connection between Jews and other minorities has weakened.

JEWS AND MINORITY ASPIRATIONS

As racial and ethnic diversity increasingly dominate big cities, scholars and activists have explored the prospects for coalitions among minority groups (Oliver and Johnson 1984; Johnson and Oliver 1989; Underwood 1992, 1997). But the Jewish community has often been left out of the analysis.

Those who study and practice politics at the big city level often treat whites as a group. But Jews do not behave politically in the same way as other whites. Milton Himmelfarb once commented that "Jews live like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans." The truth of this aphorism has been shown time and again. Concentrated in states with large blocs of electoral votes, such as New York, California, Florida, and Illinois, Jews have maintained a hardy loyalty to the Democratic party in state and national elections.

From the rise of Franklin Roosevelt through the re-election of Bill Clinton in 1996, Jews have been by far the most loyal white voting bloc for Democrats. This pattern has a long historical basis. Jews have consistently resisted the tendency among white immigrant groups to become more conservative over time, to join the political melting pot (Allinsmith and Allinsmith 1948).

After World War II, thousands of Jews began a historic migration away from the eastern and Midwestern cities to the Sunbelt, particularly Florida and California (Moore 1994). Between 1930 and 1994, the Jewish population of California grew by an astounding 730%, while the Jewish population of New York State declined by nearly 16% (Table 1).

Table 1. Jews in California and New York State

State	1930 (a)	1994 (b)	Percent Change
California	123,000	922,000	+729.6
New York	1,904,000	1,645,000	- 15.7

a) Kosmin, Ritterband, and Scheckner 1987, Table 1, p. 168.

b) Kosmin and Scheckner 1995, Table 1, p. 186.

This table is from Sonenshein (1997, p. 112).

Despite the vast changes that might have occurred with this migration to sun-drenched conservative communities with few liberal traditions, the Jews of California have continued to be pillars of the Democratic party in state and national elections (Maller 1971; Sonenshein 1997).

Many have tried to explain the phenomenon of Jewish liberalism (Fuchs 1956; Rothman and Lichter 1982; Glaser 1997), pointing to the Jewish history of victimization and discrimination, as well as the moral teachings of Judaism. Whatever the explanation for Jewish distinctiveness, the stance of the Jewish community in favor of human rights has had important consequences for the minority search for equality.

Because Jews are so different politically from other whites, their relationship to minority communities is critically important. This strategic role is particularly vital in Los Angeles. Minorities had been excluded from the civic culture of Los Angeles until they joined Jews to overturn the hegemony of white conservatives in city politics (Sonenshein 1993).

The liberalism of American Jews, whether in the East or in the West, has been so remarkable that it has led to a profound misunderstanding of the roots of Jewish behavior in relation to minority communities. Conservatives have treated Jewish liberalism as the result of confusion between beliefs and

self-interest. Hoping against all evidence that Jews will see their behavior as internally inconsistent, conservatives scour election returns for signs that Jews have “come to their senses.” As Himmelfarb, a conservative, once lamented:

It is the obstinate, verging on suicidal, unwillingness of American Jews today to consider strategic alliance with American political conservatism that is spoiling my Sabbaths, and my weekdays too.” (Himmelfarb 1988, 78)

Members of minority communities have also often misunderstood Jewish attitudes. Minority activists often treat Jews as identical to other whites. Or, they may overestimate the extent of liberalism among Jews, and are therefore surprised and disappointed when Jews do not join them on all issues, and even oppose them on some issues.

But Jewish attitudes and behavior toward minority communities are internally consistent, even if they do not always lead to alliance and support for minority efforts. As Earl Raab (1996) has noted, “there will continue to be much truth in the notion that if you scratch an American Jew, you will find a Democratic voter. The complicating news today is that if you scratch somewhat deeper, you will not always find a liberal.”

While the roots of Jewish progressive attitudes are deep, the Jewish community, like any minority community, has always placed its survival interests first. The protection of Jewish community interests against various threats – whether from the Right or from the Left – has at times driven the Jewish community’s agenda. Sometimes these protective impulses have led to broad alliances with other minority groups, but in other cases, these fears have put these groups in conflict. Support for the State of Israel, a matter of fundamental importance to most American Jews, has an impact on Jewish attitudes toward other groups. When progressive groups appear to threaten the interests of the Jewish community, the attachment of Jews to liberalism has been eroded.

The crosscurrents of intergroup relations in the 1960’s and 1970’s took a toll on Jewish liberalism. Fears of anti-Semitism (personified by Louis Farrakhan) have meant that the Jewish relationship to minority communities has been more complicated than simple cheerleading from the sidelines.

On economic matters, it is worth noting the part of Himmelfarb's aphorism that is often overlooked: Jews live like Episcopalians. In other words, the life circumstances of Jews and other minorities (particularly Latinos and African-Americans) differ, and these differences can create interest conflicts. When political and social issues such as busing, crime or affirmative action hit close to home, Jews can become protective and even reactionary.

In other words, the behavior of American Jews toward minority communities is a "mixed motive" situation (Hinckley 1981), typical of coalitions generally. It is an uneven combination of progressive beliefs, Democratic loyalty, and protection of the Jewish community's interests and values. Jews are neither confused about their attitudes nor predictably liberal on all issues. Rather, they offer a combination of broad liberalism and selective conservatism (Sonenshein 1997).

This package, often hard to understand from the outside, still differs greatly from the stance taken by other whites toward minority needs and aspirations. Jews continue to be supportive of equal rights and a progressive agenda for minority aspirations than white non-Jews. But it is, of course, no easy matter to build alliances between and among groups all of which are pulled both by the protection of each group's interest and a broad belief in equality.

In big cities, these dynamics of affinity and enmity play out in different ways. The relationship of Jews with minority groups has varied from city to city, and from era to era. Jews comprise the base among white voters for interminority coalitions, but have also been in the middle of conflicts with minority communities over such issues as busing in Los Angeles and community control of the schools in New York City.

During the same years that African-Americans and Jews forged a historic coalition to take power in Los Angeles behind Tom Bradley, conflict between Jews and African-Americans over the public schools in New York City ensured the election and re-election of conservative Mayor Edward Koch (Mollenkopf 1992). Koch himself had once been one of the most liberal Jewish politicians in New York City, but had steadily moved to the Right. Some described New York City's Jews as in virtual revolt against traditional liberalism (Reider 1985; Sleeper 1990).

A frank analysis of the relationship between Jews and minority communities must pay attention to the issues and the periods in which the Jewish community has been alienated from minority communities as well as those times when they have been mutually supportive. It is by understanding the reasons for both alliance and conflict that a strong, long-term relationship can best be forged.

ROOTS IN LOS ANGELES

Jews came to Los Angeles as early as 1845, while California was still a Mexican territory. A small number of Jewish traders worked in Los Angeles in the 1840's. They were more successful than other Americans in the Mexican territory because of their ability to speak Spanish (Vorspan and Gartner 1970). In 1850, California joined the Union and Los Angeles became an American city.

Jews continued to come to Los Angeles in the 1850's and after, as Los Angeles developed into an American city. In the latter part of the 19th century, Jews played an important role in the rough-and-tumble multiethnic community of Los Angeles. Jews held public office, and helped establish the Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations. They were, even then, a highly mobilized group of voters and the Republican party avidly sought their support in the 1876 presidential election (Stern 1981). According to one study (Vorspan and Gartner 1970:18):

The community was rough, lawless, untutored in government. The Jews were peaceable, intelligent, literate. They were needed in early government and filled a vacuum which lasted until a later surge of immigration from the Midwest and the East changed the ethnic and civic complexion of the city.

A number of Jews held public office in Los Angeles between 1850 and 1900. A Jew was elected to the first city council in 1850. John Jones, one of eight Jews elected to the city council between 1850 and 1875, was chosen president of the council in 1870 (Caper and Stern 1984). In 1878, the Jewish politician Bernard Cohn served briefly as mayor pro tem, and was nominated for mayor by the People's Party. Cohn lost the election but was reelected to the council. In 1900, a Jewish candidate, Herman Silver, ran and lost as the Republican mayoral candidate (Stern 1980).

By the 1880's, Jews were among the most prosperous and accepted members of the community. In 1880, they represented 4.47 percent of the population, held a disproportionate share of white-collar jobs, and were nearly dominant in the dry goods and clothing businesses (Gelfand 1979; Sonenshein 1993:25).

Despite their successes as business people, many Jews were workers in Los Angeles and highly active in the union movement. Jewish labor organizing was particularly noteworthy because of the avid opposition of the powers-that-be in Los Angeles, including the Los Angeles Times and the notorious Red Squad of the Los Angeles Police Department. Jewish labor organizers were particularly successful in industries where there were large numbers of Jewish workers, such as needle-working (Vorspan and Gartner 1970). The growing Jewish community became a major presence in Boyle Heights, which is currently in the heart of the eastside Latino community. The remnants of old synagogues can still be found in Boyle Heights. The Boyle Heights Jewish community was working-class and often militantly progressive in its politics.

In her memoir, communist party organizer Dorothy Healey, the child of Russian Jewish immigrants, recalled that the bulk of her Party members were Jews from Boyle Heights active in the needle trades (Healey and Isserman 1990). Of course, Party members represented only a tiny percentage of the Jewish community. More broadly, according to Moore (1994:191), “the visible, immigrant, Yiddish-speaking community centered in Boyle Heights ardently supported FDR and the New Deal.”

Los Angeles was also a surprisingly accessible community for African-Americans, who could purchase property and live freely around town. The experience of African-Americans in Los Angeles was so vastly different from the South and the big cities of the East and the Midwest that it was described as a “paradise” in letters and advertisements sent around the nation to African-American communities (Bunch 2000; Sonenshein 2000). By the 1930's, an astounding 34% of Los Angeles African-Americans lived in owner-occupied housing, a figure far beyond the reach of African-Americans in the East and the Midwest, let alone the South (Bond 1936:22; DeGraaf 1970).

But while Jews and African-Americans found opportunity and promise in Los Angeles, immigrants from Mexico and from Japan and China found themselves on the bottom. If traditional anti-black

prejudice was less evident in California than in the South, anti-Asian sentiment was virulent, and led to legislation severely limiting the ability of Asian immigrants to own property. First, the Chinese and then the Japanese felt the sting of a city that used their labor but refused to grant them any stake in the community (Modell 1977).

As the city emerged from its Spanish roots into an American city by the 1880's, Mexican residents were increasingly marginalized economically, socially, and politically. New immigrants coming from Mexico to work in Los Angeles found only limited prospects for upward mobility, and a very real danger of deportation. One study found that there was virtually no improvement in the economic and occupational standing of Mexican residents between generations (Romo 1977).

With the growth of Los Angeles into a full-scale American metropolis, hopes for minority social and political influence in Los Angeles were frustrated. Modern Los Angeles was designed socially, politically, and economically to be a different kind of city than the great metropolitan communities of New York City and Chicago. Principally conservative white migrants from the Midwest shaped this modern Los Angeles. They created a city of great economic opportunity, but also one of constricted roles for nonwhite minorities and for progressive whites.

The Midwestern migrants who came to Los Angeles by the thousands were conservatives who sought to construct a big city in the form of a small town (Fogelson 1967; Gelfand 1981; Singleton 1979; Sonenshein 1993). Their version of the Progressive reform movement was exclusionary. Soon African-Americans were victimized by restrictive covenants and block agreements that prevented the sale of private homes to minorities in largely white areas. Jews were displaced from their important civic role, to be replaced by conservative whites. Asian-Americans and Latinos suffered some of the worst discrimination.

For the first half of the 20th century, Los Angeles government remained closed and hostile to the aspirations of Jews and other minority communities. The all-white, non-Jewish city council continued the long-standing effort to keep Los Angeles a homogeneous version of a Midwestern small town, despite the city's increasing diversity. While Jews and other minority groups managed to win membership in

governing coalitions in other major cities, such attempts failed in Los Angeles. *Indeed no Jew, Latino, African-American, or Asian-American held any elected office in Los Angeles in virtually the whole first half of the 20th century.*

THE COALITION OF OUTSIDERS

The Jewish population of the city grew steadily. There was a large influx of Jews in the first decades of the 20th century, and their small share of the population continued to grow (Kohs 1944). Then, a massive in-migration after World War II created a major Los Angeles Jewish community (Moore 1994). By the 1950's, nearly a half million Jews lived in the Los Angeles area, making Los Angeles the second largest Jewish community in the United States after New York City, and the third largest in the world behind New York City and Tel Aviv. At its height, the Jewish population of Los Angeles represented 7% of the City's residents; today it is roughly 6%.

In the 1950's and 1960's, Jews moved south and west. For a time they comprised an important part of the West Adams community, and then the bulk of the Jewish community moved west and north to the Fairfax area. A major migration into the San Fernando Valley created today's Jewish community, which is about evenly divided between the Westside and the Valley.

Jews have been economically successful in Los Angeles, enjoying occupational mobility beginning with the early 20th century (Gelfand 1981). But they experienced discrimination from local employers until well into the 1950's (Vorspan and Gartner 1970).

These exclusionary circumstances combined with the Enlightenment traditions already imbued in American Jews to create a Los Angeles Jewish community available for alliance with minority groups in movements for human rights. The exclusion of Jews and other minority groups helped set the stage for a massive Los Angeles coalition for human rights, in which Jews held a prominent place. Building on the aspirations of minority outsiders for a greater civic role, new alliances challenged the conservative hegemony in Los Angeles. Conflicts among the various minority groups were subdued because of their shared exclusion and their overwhelming desire to overcome the civic limitations of the Los Angeles political culture.

A sign of the emerging coalition came in 1946, when California voters turned down a ballot measure to institute a Fair Employment Practices Commission. Moore (1994:195) found that: “When Los Angeles Jews went to the polls in November, 1946, they voted overwhelmingly for a Fair Employment Practices Committee, although only 30 percent of the California electorate did. Whether they lived in Boyle Heights or Beverly Hills, Jews lined up in favor of the antidiscrimination proposal.”

The pattern was to be repeated in 1964, when the notorious and unconstitutional Proposition 14 was passed by a two-thirds majority of state voters. Prop. 14 would have overturned the Rumford Fair Housing Act, and would have allowed housing discrimination. Prop. 14 failed only in largely Black and Jewish areas of Los Angeles (Wolfinger and Greenstein 1968).

As the Cold War deepened in the late 1940's, Jewish concerns about “red-baiting” attacks on the loyalty of the Jewish community deepened Jewish support for free speech and racial equality (Vorspan and Gartner 1970). Jews were still victims of discrimination in Los Angeles, particularly in the medical profession. At the same time, Jews were extremely active in developing intergroup organizations and in founding the County Human Relations Commission (Vorspan and Gartner 1970).

In 1945, the Jewish Community Council (the forerunner of today's Jewish Federation) established the Community Relations Committee, which its executive director called “the public face of the Jewish community in Los Angeles” (Moore 1994:199). The CRC soon became a critical organizational vehicle to link the Jewish community to the progressive scene in Los Angeles.

The first electoral breakthrough for multiracial progressives came in Boyle Heights, an area of Latino and Jewish population, with the election of Edward Roybal to the 9th district council seat in 1949. Roybal's remarkable progressive coalition was built principally around Latinos and Jews, combined with the support of the small African-American community in the district (Sonenshein 1993; Underwood 1997). The Jews of Boyle Heights were a very liberal constituency, open to alliance with the working-class Latino community.

In 1953, Rosalind Weiner, later Wyman, was elected to represent the 5th council seat on the Westside. Only 22 years old, Weiner was the first Jew elected to public office in Los Angeles in the 20th century.

She became a friendly voice to complement Roybal's in a city council still dominated by conservatives. Among other things, Weiner backed Roybal's proposal to institute a Fair Employment Practices Commission in Los Angeles, a measure that failed to win council approval (Moore 1994:219-22).

Finally, African-Americans made their breakthrough in 1962 and 1963, when they won three council seats. In the most dramatic shift, Tom Bradley won election in the biracial 10th district, bolstered by a strong alliance of African-Americans and Jews. A number of Bradley's Jewish activists had previously worked in the Roybal organization (Sonenshein 1993).

The first Asian-American council member, Michael Woo, was elected in 1986. After Roybal won a seat in Congress in 1962, no Latino was elected to the City Council until 1985, when Richard Alatorre took office in the 14th District.

Tom Bradley's political career became a crucial vehicle to connect Los Angeles Jews to the aspirations of minority communities in a vast, historic enterprise that changed the nature of Los Angeles government. Bradley himself was a long-time activist in human rights organizations and in the reform wing of the California Democratic Party. Democratic reformers, led by Jewish activists, were organized in the California Democratic Club (CDC) movement. While most African-American politicians in Los Angeles were allied with the regular, non-reform wing of the party, Bradley was an avid member of the reform faction (Sonenshein 1993). The Tenth District, the cradle of the Bradley coalition, was a hotbed of liberal CDC activity, principally within the Jewish community.

Through these involvements, Bradley became closely tied to Jewish liberal activists, whose role in civil liberties and equal rights organizations was disproportionate to their numbers in the population. As Maurice Weiner, Bradley's long-time aide, said in 1982, "Tom was somebody we knew, from civil rights, from civil liberties organizations... And so it was an easy step to work with him" (Weiner 1981).

As Bradley's Tenth District coalition arose, Jews were drawn into direct joint action with the African-American community on the broad front of local politics. As Bradley's ambition soon came to encompass the mayoralty, the black-Jewish alliance became a vehicle for a virtual takeover of City Hall

by progressive, multiracial forces. In 1973, Bradley was elected mayor and he took his coalition with him to City Hall.

The rise and durability of the Bradley coalition of African-Americans and Jews challenged the conventional wisdom that biracial coalitions were dead. The Bradley coalition linked broad liberal ideology, shared political interest of outsiders getting access to the head table, and a mutually trusting network of leaders (Sonenshein 1993). The combination of the three factors was remarkable.

For the next twenty years, Jews were on the inside at City Hall, as founding partners of the Bradley coalition. This was as big a change for Jews as it was for African-Americans, and the Latinos and Asian-Americans who came along with Bradley. It would have represented a lesser change in the Eastern and Midwestern cities where Jews and minority communities had already won some partial entry into government.

Black-Jewish ties were strong enough to carry Los Angeles through the busing controversy of the late 1970's and the Black-Jewish struggles over President Carter's firing of U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young in 1978 for unauthorized meetings with the Palestine Liberation Organization (Sonenshein 1993).

The Black-Jewish coalition provided key political backing for Bradley policies that most impacted minority communities: diversity in appointment of city commissioners, affirmative action in hiring and promotion of city employees, and civilian oversight of the Los Angeles Police Department (Sonenshein 1993: ch. 9). Thus, Jewish involvement in the political climb of African-Americans helped improve the standing of a range of minority groups in Los Angeles, along with access to City Hall for the previously excluded Jewish community.

Jewish liberalism had changed dramatically from its pre World War II variant. By the Bradley years, Jews had moved from a left-liberal perspective heavily involved with labor organizing to a more moderate, progressive stance. To some degree, this change reflected an internal struggle within the Jewish community that was set off by the blacklisting of Hollywood during the Cold War. The organized Jewish community turned away from its most radical elements, particularly the communist party, into a

more mainstream liberalism involving support for Israel, civil rights and anti-communism (Moore 1994).

As Sandberg found in a mid 1980's survey:

The political identification of many Jews in Los Angeles has shifted substantially from the liberal and left-wing activism of the first half of the century to a current liberal-moderate orientation that expresses itself as a concern for social change without civic disruption (1986:165)

This form of Jewish progressive politics was to be severely challenged by the upheavals in Los Angeles that reached a crescendo in 1992.

THE CONTEMPORARY ERA: AN UNCERTAIN CONNECTION

In the later years of the Bradley mayoralty, ties between Jewish and minority communities became strained. The core relationship between African-Americans and Jews was particularly difficult. Conflict over Minister Louis Farrakhan poisoned some of the hard-earned trust between African-Americans and Jews. Jews were active in the slow-growth movement of the mid 1980's that conflicted with Bradley's pro-development stance. Jewish councilman Zev Yaroslavsky made serious moves toward challenging Bradley for re-election. And yet, when the most serious fight of the Bradley years took place, over the removal of Police Chief Daryl Gates and the passage of a police reform measure, the Jewish community was strongly in Bradley's camp.

In demographic terms, the Los Angeles community had been changing dramatically since the heyday of the Bradley coalition. Immigration to Los Angeles from Spanish-speaking and Asian nations had been rising since immigration laws were changed in 1965, but the process accelerated in the 1980's and 1990's (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). The soft word "diversity" masked the harder-edged conflicts that were certain to arise as Latino immigrants entered previously African-American South Central Los Angeles, and as Asian immigrants set up stores and shops in poor neighborhoods.

The decline of traditional manufacturing jobs, critical to the African-American community, and the rise of a new service economy with numerous, less secure positions filled increasingly by immigrants, had significant social consequences. These economic and social changes were certainly contributing factors

to the violence of 1992, although the direct trigger was the acquittal of the four police officers charged in the Rodney King beating.

The violence of 1992 had a devastating impact on intergroup relations. Jewish communal organizations made major contributions to the immediate and long-term rebuilding of South Central Los Angeles in the aftermath of the civil disorder (Rubin 1993). But the civil disorder damaged the Jewish community's relationship with minority communities. Already disoriented in a city whose countenance had changed so dramatically and apparently so quickly, Jews were further shocked by the scope and vehemence of the violence.

The civil unrest caused many Jews to reevaluate their support for liberal citywide policies and candidates, and helped lead many Jews to support Republican Richard Riordan's candidacy for mayor in 1993, and even more strongly to back his re-election in 1997. By the end of the Bradley years, and in the ashes of the civil unrest of 1992, the Jewish community of Los Angeles was showing considerable evidence of caution about radical or sudden change. And with personal ties among leaders weakening, the linkages with minority communities were bound to erode.

Yet, when faced with the choice to support or oppose police reform in June, 1992, only two months after the violence that pushed Jews toward a law and order stance, Jewish voters overwhelmingly backed a measure to enhance civilian control of the Los Angeles Police Department. Proposition F implemented the recommendations of the Christopher Commission, which had called for the removal of the Chief of Police's Civil Service protection and for greater oversight authority by the civilian Police Commission over the Department.

In the post-Bradley era, the relationship between Jews and other minority groups has become more distant and uncertain. The change reflects many things. One is that the civic role of the Jewish community survived the downfall of the Bradley regime, and made a smooth transition to the Riordan era. Unlike the more conservative and unpredictable Sam Yorty, Riordan has been a friendly face to the Jewish community: socially moderate and well connected with Jewish activists.

As one Jewish activist describes the Jewish relationship with Riordan: “it’s a love affair. He’s their generation. He spoke their language at the time of the civil unrest. They saw in him, and not in Mike Woo, the sense of security and putting things back together again. And they’ve been generally pleased with the fact that he’s tried to move in ways that I guess they feel pretty comfortable with” (Windmueller 1999).

On the other hand, a study of the 1993 mayoral election (Sonenshein and Valentino 2000) indicates that Jews remain distinctive from other whites, even as they have found the Republican Riordan a comfortable fit. In 1993, Jews split between Woo and Riordan; obviously, by comparison with the huge Jewish vote for Bradley in previous elections, this is a shift. But white non-Jews were far more likely to vote for Riordan than were Jews (Table 2), and the Riordan votes by white non-Jews were more connected to conservative ideology than were Jews (Sonenshein and Valentino 2000).

As Steven Windmueller (1999) noted, “The Jewish community is very tired, and is also sort of feeling robust and successful.” Tired, that is, of intergroup politics and secure that its interests are being protected.

Jewish support for Riordan's mayoralty places Jews at political odds with the African-American community, which has strongly opposed Riordan both in elections and in city policy. However, Jews and Latinos have emerged as closer politically than many had realized (Sonenshein 1999). Both Jews and Latinos edged toward Riordan in 1993, and turned overwhelmingly in his favor in the 1997 election. In addition, both Jews and Latinos have continued to vote Democratic in state and federal elections; to strongly support school bond measures such as Proposition BB (1997); and to support police reform. The two groups have become the balance wheels of city politics; whichever candidate or measure has the support of Jews and Latinos is the likely winner.

Table 2. Descriptive Differences between Jews and non-Jewish whites.

Characteristic	Jews	Non-Jewish Whites
Education		
High school or less	14%	20%
Some college	24	29
College graduate	63	50
Family income		
Less than 20K	11	12
20K to 60K	40	48
More than 60K	49	40
Issues important in respondent's vote*		
Jobs/The economy	51	53
Taxes	2	4
Age		
18-29 years old	6	10
30 - 49 years old	36	42
50 years or older	58	48
Union membership		
1 or more members of house in union	23	28
No member of house in union	77	72
Retrospective financial trend		
Worse off than four years ago	39	41
Same as four years ago	41	40
Better off than four years ago	20	20
Mayoral vote		
Woo	51	28
Riordan	49	72
Party registration		
Democrat	82	48
Independent	4	8
Republican	14	44
Ideology		
Liberal	45	25
Moderate	44	43
Conservative	11	33
Problems of urban minorities caused by:		
Racism	37	21
Personal responsibility	26	40
Both/neither	37	39
Total N=	540	1606

Note: Entries are percentages. Percentages for each variable may not add to 100 due to rounding. *Respondents were asked "Which issues - if any - were most important to you in deciding how you would vote today? (Check up to two issues). Entries are percentages of respondents who chose economic issues in either the first or second position. The list also included education, the environment, homelessness, race relations, rebuilding LA, crime, illegal immigration and improving the police department. Table 2 is from Sonenshein and Valentino (2000).

In addition, Jewish voters continue to be highly civic minded, providing the backbone of support for the 1999 reform of the City Charter. The measure received 75% of the vote in the 5th district, the area with the highest percentage of Jews in the city. The measure also carried strongly on the Latino eastside, failing to pass only in the African-American community.

If Jews are the outsiders become successful insiders, Latinos are the outsiders on the verge of generating a major impact on Los Angeles politics and government. For both groups, relationships with African-Americans, increasingly marginalized in the political and policy debates of the city, have become strained.

During the heyday of the Bradley coalition, the Jewish Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation was a dynamic body able to build alliances across racial lines. Complemented by the American Jewish Committee and the even more liberal American Jewish Congress, the JCRC was in an excellent position to be the Jewish community's ambassador to minority communities. These roles have become more limited, as the Jewish community retrenches and staffing for the JCRC has been drastically reduced by the Jewish Federation (Greenebaum 1999).

Meanwhile, minority communities are moving ahead without substantial contact with the Jewish community. In the aftermath of the civil unrest, there were numerous meetings held throughout the city to promote race relations. The panels invariably contained the obligatory mix of African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Latinos. It was rare to find Jews on the panels, even though Jews had been pivotal in the city's interracial dialogues for decades.

One of the most dynamic efforts is the Multicultural Collaborative. The MCC involves African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and others, and has taken a very active role in developing dialogue and joint action across racial and ethnic lines. As with the panels on intergroup relations, there has been relatively little Jewish involvement in the MCC. Whether this reflects a concern on the part of minority activists that white activists will seek to control the direction of intergroup efforts, or the distancing of the Jewish community, or a combination of both factors, remains to be seen.

Rabbi Gary Greenebaum, western regional director of the American Jewish Committee, is a member of the MCC board. But this does not compare to the sort of involvement once seen in the Black-Jewish coalition and other interracial groups involving Jews. Greenebaum became adept at gently teasing the MCC board members about their ambivalent attempts to include a Jewish perspective in the debate over diversity (Greenebaum 1999).

Some new organizational forums have emerged to link Jews to minority communities, such as the Latino-Jewish Business Roundtable sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of the B’Nai Brith. The Jewish Community Relations Committee sponsors numerous meetings between the Jewish community and various minority organizations. The American Jewish Committee continues to play a central role in negotiations and discussions between Jews and the City’s minority communities. These linkages are particularly important because the Jewish and Latino communities, as well as Asian-Americans, may increasingly find themselves in conflict over such public policies as mass transportation and the redistricting of legislative seats. But the ties do not compare to the extensive linkages that were in place before and during the Bradley years.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

On the surface, the Jewish relationship with minority groups in Los Angeles is “good” at one time (for example, the height of the Bradley coalition) and “less good” at another time (for example, today). But seen more broadly, there are problems even in the good times, and even in the bad times, there are silver linings. This is a more complex relationship than it immediately appears. As Sandberg points out, the shifting nature of Jewish political attitudes has been misinterpreted:

as moving to the right because of their revulsion against the New Left, racial tensions, and the fear of crime. Although the anxiety of Jews and others about civic instability has produced a new mood of social realism, Jews continue to vote against candidates of the right and in support of those who seek to advance the interests of Jews and the well-being of all (1986: 168).

Secondly, Sandberg identified in 1986 a trend that has remained true today: the turning inward of the institutional Jewish leadership.

The organized Jewish community of twenty or thirty years ago was led by people who were universalists and integrationists, but it is currently controlled by those who take pride in Jewish communal and political assertiveness. (124)

That this tension between inward-turning and outward-facing approaches is hardly new can be seen in Vorspan and Gartner's 1970 study. Referring to the post World War II period, the authors noted that:

It seemed somewhat an issue whether Jewish energies should not be devoted more to civic purposes than to Jewish communal effort. The view was heard that Jewish organizations "are so wrapped up" that the Jews fail to take "a proper role in matters affecting the political, social and philanthropic life of the community in general." It was even argued that the Jewish community "has erected around itself a wall which insulates it and cuts it off. (238)

Interracial coalitions, particularly those involving Jews, reflect the interplay among three factors: self-interest, ideology, and leadership (Sonenshein 1993). This view of coalition challenges some of the dominant views about race relations. Some had argued that ideology (shared liberal beliefs) would be enough to keep groups together. Browning, Marshall, and Tabb made an important pillar of this argument in their book Protest Is Not Enough (1984). They showed that the rise of minority power in Northern California cities depended on the mobilization and unity of minority groups along with the steadfast support of white liberals. They concluded that:

Liberals on race issues are very different from conservatives, and ideology has an important influence on the nature and outcome of the minority struggle for access to local government. (1984:248).

But another view, best expressed by Carmichael and Hamilton in their classic Black Power (1967) said that self-interest makes all the difference. Challenging the moral dimension of the civil rights coalition of the 1960's, Carmichael and Hamilton argued that:

"...political relations are based on self-interest: benefits to be gained and losses to be avoided. For the most part, man's politics is determined by his evaluation of material good and evil. Politics results from a conflict of interests, not of consciences." (1967:75)

The analysis of Jewish behavior in the area of human rights helps illuminate these two points of view. If one substitutes "Jews" for "liberals on race issues" and "non-Jewish whites" for "conservatives", it is demonstrably true that there are important, indeed critical differences among whites on political matters

involving human rights of minorities. These differences emerged strongly in the 1993 Los Angeles mayoral election (Sonenshein and Valentino 2000).

A Jewish liberalism that differs substantially from the attitudes of other whites turns up consistently over 30 years in Los Angeles (Sonenshein 1993). But a Jewish predisposition to liberalism does not always prevent conflict with minority aspirations. In the late 1970's, the busing controversy divided Jews among themselves and many Jews from minority communities. Valley Jews were leaders in the campaign to stop busing, and there was considerable ill will between them and minority activists. Jews were themselves divided. In one bitterly contested congressional race in 1980 that centered on busing, liberal Jewish activists backed incumbent Democrat James Corman while Jewish anti-busing activists supported the winner, Republican Bobbi Fiedler (Plotkin 1990).

In both 1969 and 1993, large blocs of Jewish voters deserted the liberal mayoral candidate to support Sam Yorty and Richard Riordan, respectively. In both cases, crime and civil disorder were major issues in the local election, and Jewish voters did not maintain their overwhelmingly liberal stance.

One explanation for this anomalous behavior is that liberalism does not completely predict Jewish behavior. Liberalism may not be the best word to describe the complex nature of Jewish attitudes.

Not surprisingly, self-interest or group interest, can play a particularly powerful role in local politics, where issues hit close to home. The nature of local schools and whether or not the streets are safe reach directly to people's self-interest. Conflict and competition over political offices at the local level affect people's sense that their group interests are being protected or exposed. There is every reason to expect, therefore, that the Jewish community will experience ambivalence and defensiveness that can lead them to turn away from where ideological liberalism might normally be expected to lead them.

The conflict of interest between Jews and other minorities became so pronounced in New York City in the 1960's that it virtually doomed efforts to create progressive, intergroup coalitions (Sonenshein 1993). In particular, severe Black-Jewish conflicts over the governance of local schools shattered the potential relationship, paving the way for the election of Edward Koch, a former liberal who had moved rightward in the 1980's, and Republican Rudolph Giuliani in 1993.

In Los Angeles, the Bradley coalition served both the ideological goals and the group interests of the Jewish community. In the years following the decline of the Bradley coalition, the self-interest of Los Angeles Jews has not so clearly lent itself to the involvement with the minority cause that general ideology might predict.

On the other hand, there are probably fewer interest conflicts than before. Jewish parents are far less likely to have their children in public schools, which are overwhelmingly minority. Jewish interests are rarely at risk in local politics, with busing dead as an issue and the crime rate continuing to fall. Jews are well incorporated into the civic culture.

But then, with great suddenness, those interests may be threatened in a way that brings Jews back in touch with their minority status. Such was the case of the 1999 racist shooting at a Jewish preschool in Granada Hills. The community response to the shooting reveals important dimensions of the puzzling relationship between Jews and minority communities today.

As a threat from the Right, the shooting in Granada Hills would likely strengthen the disposition of Jews to reach out to minority communities. It should also lead to a supporting stance from minority organizations. But Gary Greenebaum of the American Jewish Committee found that when minority activists put together a press conference to express support for the Jewish community, he could not arouse the interest of Jewish leaders to attend. Greenebaum attended as the only Jewish representative at the multigroup meeting, an experience that has become familiar to him in recent years (Greenebaum 1999). On the other hand, after some time had passed, there was substantial reforming of ties between Jews and minority communities because of the Granada Hills incident.

The interplay between ideology and interest makes clear that leaders matter in forging links between Jews and other minorities. Ideology and interest do not always dictate what can and should be done. There is some flexibility. How leaders frame issues; how they choose to portray their dealings with leaders of other groups; how imaginatively leaders define the playing field; all help determine the future relationship.

Los Angeles was once blessed with a whole generation of Jewish and other minority leaders who knew and trusted each other. That generation is getting older, and is no longer in charge. Will it be possible to build connections across racial and class lines, as has been done in the past? Or will the class differences between Jews and other minorities (especially Latinos and African-Americans) become insuperable obstacles to joint activity?

Today, the relationship between Jews and other communities is more than ever before in the hands of politicians -- of candidates and elected officials. How they choose to compete with each other and how they define issues will have greater power than ever before. The problem is that the communities cannot easily control the actions of the politicians. In 1998, a contested state senate election in suburban Los Angeles came down to a bitter fight between Jewish and Latino candidates, Richard Katz and Richard Alarcon, respectively. Greenebaum (interview 1999) was called on by the candidates to mediate the end of a divisive vote recount in the extremely close election. He found that "for the politicians, it's politics. When it is just Zev Yaroslavsky against Gloria Molina, I don't worry. I worry when it's Jews against Latinos."

The relationship between Jews and the minority communities of Los Angeles is at a turning point, caught in a transition between eras. Relations are not hostile, but neither are they particularly close. What are the emerging needs of minority communities and how might the Jewish community engage and assist in finding solutions? How can minority communities productively engage with the Jewish community?

Minority communities in Los Angeles have a number of pressing needs, some short term and others long term, in the areas of representation and economic opportunity. The city's minority groups are deeply concerned about being heard in the corridors of power, whether through elections or through government policy. They are concerned about the prospects for forming political coalitions, and about the dangers of fracturing and fragmentation among minority communities. They are also concerned that while there is an evident need for cross-racial coalitions in Los Angeles their own agendas should not be compromised beyond what is necessary to build alliances.

There is also great concern, especially among Latinos and African-Americans, that class issues not be excluded from the public agenda. The state of the city schools, largely Latino in student body, the quality of mass transportation on which minorities depend more than others, the availability of jobs in the private and public sectors, are critical issues for minority communities.

Los Angeles is entering a transitional era that is likely to create discomfort, as well, as hope. Latinos are likely to emerge dramatically at the forefront of the city's political and economic life, and that transition will have consequences not only for whites, but also for other minorities. Their new presence is likely to be felt most conspicuously by African-Americans, already reeling from the decline of political influence they have experienced since the end of the Bradley coalition.

Tensions among minority groups mean that there is no simple route to "rainbow coalitions" without some involvement by whites. Jews are likely to represent a key group of whites whose presence in coalitions may expand the options that minority groups possess.

In their daily lives, Jews do not live in similar circumstances to Los Angeles's minorities (except in some ways to Asian-Americans). The anomaly of Jewish behavior has always been the contrast between their socioeconomic status and their political stance. Bringing economic issues to the forefront (such as labor organizing and the living wage) will not have the same resonance with Los Angeles Jews that these issues had in the days when Jews were the core labor organizers in the city. Jewish support for these labor issues will derive more from beliefs about what is right than about mutual self-interest.

Cities in transition can make the change in several ways. One is that the existing power structure can rigidify in defense of its power and privileges. Another is that the insurgent forces can force the issue through the mobilization of political power, and create the conditions for ethnic succession. The two approaches are related, in that the greater the rigidity of the power structure, the greater likelihood that the insurgent forces will feel it necessary to storm the battlements of power.

Los Angeles is in transition to becoming a multiethnic city. No matter what the census numbers say, in political terms it is not nearly there now. In a city that is one-third white, two-thirds of the registered voters are white. In a city that is more than 40% Latino, no more than 15-17% of the registered voters are

Latino. The gap between the city's population and its structure of political power creates a potential instability that will complicate the transition period to come.

Even more significantly, non-white communities in Los Angeles are unlikely to create a "rainbow coalition" that will act as a ruling majority to supplant the existing Los Angeles political system.

Tensions among African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans are likely to impede the formation of an alliance of peoples of color in Los Angeles. The dynamics of coalition-building among the city's various groups are likely to remain central to the city's future development.

Transitional politics in Los Angeles is going to require that race not be the exclusive organizing principle of group politics. There is no way to realistically demand that color not play a key role in Los Angeles. But to the extent that assumptions of a clear demarcation line between whites and non-whites can be challenged, the city's groups will find themselves with greater flexibility to develop new, productive ways to govern Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles Jewish community can play a pivotal role in that transition, and in questioning the assumption that color defines political behavior. After all, while Los Angeles Jews are largely white, their political behavior is quite distinctive from non-Jewish whites. While Los Angeles Jews live in comfortable circumstances, their voting behavior most resembles Latinos, whose socioeconomic status is much lower.

While the potential for defensiveness among Los Angeles Jews is high, minority groups in the city can influence the likelihood of Jews turning inward. Productive relations with emerging minority groups in Los Angeles can give Jews a greater sense that while the city is changing, the changes may be as much cause for involvement as for disengagement.

Conversely, understanding the distinctive behavior of Los Angeles Jews can influence the potential for minority groups to develop political strategies based on unrealistic analysis of population figures. The productive outcome of seeking coalition with some whites is that the assumption of a clear color line in political life comes under attack.

In the years to come, Jews and minority communities will have to come to a new understanding of each other. Minority communities will need to gain a greater understanding of the Jewish history of involvement in human rights in Los Angeles. Hopefully, they will also come to see the complexity of Jewish attitudes, that Jews are neither monolithically liberal in all situations, nor have they turned away from the minority search for equality.

Jews will also need a greater connection to a changing, more diverse Los Angeles by moving from an image of past connections to finding ways to build new linkages. These new connections will require an understanding that Jews are no longer outsiders and may not share as many political interests with minority groups as they did in the past. Yet, this knowledge can also make possible new ways of speaking to each other, on the basis of shared values. It will be essential in this process to restore venues of direct contact, so that images of minority groups and their aspirations are not solely derived from media reports.

The potential for greater interaction between Jewish and minority communities can be a powerful vehicle for expanding the constituencies active in building a successful Los Angeles in a diverse, potentially divided community. In order to reach this goal, there is a greater need today than ever before for mutual knowledge, and for a sympathetic understanding of how groups both need to protect their own interests and advance their broad values.

In that light, for Jews and for other minority communities of Los Angeles, choices will be difficult. These choices may well echo the philosopher Hillel's searching questions: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

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