

**“Is this Any Way for Nice Jewish Boys to Behave?” American
Jewish Masculinity and the Jewish Defense League**

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For all those who say they can't. You can. Just go for it. Push through.

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Figure 1

Display Ad.(2)
 New York Times (1923-Current file); Jun 24, 1969;
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index;
 pg. 31

Question:

Is This Any Way for Nice Jewish Boys to Behave?



The Jewish Defense League answering a demand for reparations from synagogues.

Answer:

Maybe. Maybe there are times when there is no other way to get across to the extremist that the Jew is not quite the patsy some think he is.

Maybe there is only one way to get across a clear response to people who threaten seizure of synagogues and extortion of money. Maybe nice Jewish boys do not always get through to people who threaten to carry teachers out in pine boxes and to burn down merchants' stores.

Maybe some people and organizations are too nice. Maybe in times of crisis, Jewish boys should not be that nice. Maybe - just maybe - nice people build their own road to Auschwitz.

THE JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE

IS DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITIONS THAT:

- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not be forced out of their jobs by hoodlums.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not be victims of quota systems and reverse discrimination in schools.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not become victims of totalitarian revolutionaries of the Radical Left.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not be forced out of their stores and see a lifetime of work destroyed by extremist thugs.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not be forced to pay a penny to extortionists for crimes they never committed.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not have to endure the potential rise of a Radical Right reaction which would destroy democracy.
- nice Jewish boys - or any nice boys - should not be victims of a do-nothing city, state or federal government.
- NICE JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, WHITE AND BLACK BOYS SHOULD CREATE A SOCIETY OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY IN WHICH PEOPLE CAN GET BACK TO BEING NICE.

*We Are Speaking of
 Jewish Survival!*

*We Are Speaking of
 The American Dream!*

*How Much Is Jewish Survival Worth To You?
 How Much Are You Prepared To Give For It?*

<p>Gentlemen:</p> <p>I am overjoyed at your work. I wish to help in any way I can. Enclosed is my contribution of</p> <p>— \$10,000 — \$5,000 — \$1,000 — other</p> <p>Name</p> <p>Address</p> <p>Please mail to:</p> <p>THE JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE 156 Fifth Avenue New York, N. Y. 10010</p>	<p>I am overjoyed that your group has been formed.</p> <p>— I would like to join. Enclosed is \$10 for membership. (\$3 for students)</p> <p>— I also enclose an additional sum of</p> <p>toward your urgent needs.</p> <p>Name..... Phone.....</p> <p>Address</p> <p>THE JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE 156 Fifth Avenue New York, N. Y. 10010 Tel.: 989-6460</p>
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THE JEWISH DEFENSE LEAGUE
 156 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10010 • Tel. 989-6460
 MEIR KAHANE, National Director HERTRAM ZWEDON, General Counsel

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INTRODUCTION

When readers of *The New York Times* awoke on the morning of June 24th, 1969 and turned to page 31, they could hardly miss a startling and unsettling full-page advertisement. The ad portrayed a group of six young men holding baseball bats and clubs with the caption: “Is this Any Way for Nice Jewish Boys to Behave?”¹ It was an image and caption that undoubtedly jarred its viewers, because it challenged conventional notions of Jewish manhood. Many believed that Jews — particularly young Jewish men — shouldn’t be holding bats and clubs with stern, aggressive looks on their faces. Placed in the *Times* by Rabbi Meir Kahane, the advertisement served as a grandiose introduction to the radical and militant Jewish Defense League [JDL], an organization that sought to combat antisemitic actions and institutions through aggressive and even militant confrontations. As anthropologist Janet Dolgin describes in *Jewish Identity and the JDL*, her excellent examination of the Jewish Defense League, the organization was focused on “the explicitly particularistic” issues that included crime in the streets, Black antisemitism, a supposed “liberal do-nothing city government” and rapidly changing neighborhoods.”² This thesis proposes another and arguably just as significant area of focus of the JDL: changing conceptions of American Jewish masculinity.

The JDL was conceived by Rabbi Meir Kahane and two of his fellow synagogue members Bert Zweibon and Morty Dolinsky from Young Israel of Laurelton, a quiet modern orthodox congregation in Queens.³ It initially portrayed itself as a “Jewish Defense Corps” to protect those in unsafe neighborhoods, according to an advertisement Kahane placed in the

¹ Jewish Defense League, “Is This Any Way for a Nice Jewish Boy to Behave?” *New York Times*, June 24, 1969. See previous page for the advertisement as printed in the *Times*.

² Janet Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 16

³ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), 91.

Jewish Press.⁴ They convened on a Shabbat afternoon in May in 1968 and developed the Jewish Defense League. Kahane, an Orthodox rabbi, served as the chief architect of the organization. Born in August 1932 in New York City to a rabbi father from Mandate Palestine, Kahane became first exposed to politics and violence when the militant Revisionist Zionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky stayed in his home.⁵ As a teenager, Kahane joined an American chapter of Betar — where he would meet Dolinsky⁶ — the youth group that advocated for Jabotinsky's ideas of militancy and nationalism.⁷ Jabotinsky's ideology deemed that “rifles, not ploughs or shovels” were of utmost importance to the Jewish and Zionist cause.⁸ By age sixteen, along with other members of Betar, Kahane was arrested for the first time for throwing eggs and tomatoes at Ernest Bevin, the antisemitic British foreign minister who, after the Holocaust, forbade European Jews from emigrating to Israel.⁹ This act occurred two decades before the establishment of the Jewish Defense League but provides two key takeaways to understanding Kahane and the League. It demonstrates the future emphasis of youth in the League, whom Kahane would indoctrinate through sessions at Camp Jedel¹⁰ modeled after Kahane's experiences with Betar as a child, as well as a significant desire for direct and radical action. Like the JDL, those in Betar in Israel and Eastern Europe under Jabotinsky's leadership would seemingly be prepared at a moment's notice to listen to their

⁴ “We Are Talking of Jewish Survival,” *The Jewish Press*, May 1968.

⁵ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker*, Jewish Studies, Book 1 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 6.

⁶ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), 91.

⁷ Betar, was also known by its opponents and even some of its supporters as Jewish fascists, a nickname that some would eventually apply to Kahane's JDL.

Jabotinsky in particular advocated for a more “aggressive” approach to dealing with the Palestinian population. He founded the Union for Revisionist Zionists in 1925. Jabotinsky and his followers supported a Jewish-led state that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Western borders of contemporary Iraq and Saudi Arabia. (Kupfert Heller, 3-4).

⁸ Daniel Kupfert Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3.

⁹ Breslauer, 7.

¹⁰ Jedel represents: JeDeL, the abbreviation of the Jewish Defense League.

commander and fight whomever necessary in order to bring about a Jewish State in the land of Israel.¹¹

Kahane was educated at Brooklyn College where he earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science and eventually an L.L.B from the New York College of Law as well as a master's degree in International Studies from New York University. Like his father, Kahane eventually became a rabbi at a congregation of his own, Howard Beach Synagogue in Queens. He also spent some time in news reporting, covering the New York Yankees for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.¹² He gained public footing through his position as a columnist for the *Brooklyn Jewish Press*, which allowed him to write one and sometimes multiple weekly articles devoted to coverage of acts of antisemitism and his thoughts on the increased threat of extremism toward the Jewish people in the United States. Fascinatingly, Jabotinsky also wrote a weekly column in a newspaper in Poland that would attract the attention of both his most ardent supporters and constant enemies.¹³ The *Press* functioned as an institution to disseminate tremendous fear of antisemitism among both Jews and even non-Jews. For example, Patricia Tuorills, in a letter to the editor, wrote, "I congratulate you all who work for the *Jewish Press* for your guts against gangsterism and all manner of intimidation."¹⁴ Tuorills also commended Kahane for his "courageous" reporting of the "racial crisis" in New York City.

In an era of increased suburbanization and wealth in the Jewish community, Kahane believed that the so-called "Jewish Establishment" failed to protect the interests of urban and often poorer Jews. Further, as he articulates in *Never Again! A Program for Jewish Survival*,

¹¹ Kupfert Heller, 3.

¹² Breslauer, 7.

¹³ Kupfert Heller, 11.

¹⁴ "From a non-Jewish reader" *The Jewish Press*, January 29, 1969.

American Jews had neglected to help their brethren in the Holocaust, rhetorically asking “What did the leaders of the prestigious organizations, whose reason for being was to defend Jews, do in this most awesome of times? When told that Jews would have to die, what was their reaction?”¹⁵ For Kahane, the significant majority of these institutions did nothing, greatly upsetting him. In creating the JDL, Kahane established an organization that aimed to fight — at times literally — on behalf of neglected Jews, be they elderly Holocaust survivors or impoverished Orthodox families in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Initial members of the JDL thought that the municipal government in New York City and Jewish leaders inadequately addressed the urban Jews’ primary concerns of religious education, combating crime and dealing with economic hardship.¹⁶ The Jewish Defense League consistently critiqued prominent Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress, for supposedly falsely representing the true concerns of American Jewry, especially those in the poorer areas of New York City.¹⁷ However, as this thesis will argue, the JDL also sought to redefine and reconstruct a new form of Jewish masculinity. The organization aimed to propagate the type of Jewish masculinity presented in that full-page *New York Times* advertisement, starkly different from what it — and a significant majority of the American Jewish community — imagined as an emasculated and timid Jewish male.

Intriguingly enough, a few days prior to the JDL’s controversial full-page ad, a *New York Times* reader, Martin M. Mosho wrote to the paper about the organization, explaining that “Jews everywhere are tired of being advised to ‘play by the rules’ while being the

¹⁵ Meir Kahane, *Never Again! A Program for Survival* (Los Angeles, CA: Nash Publications, 1971). 15.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Gurock, “Crises and Contention,” in *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010*, vol. 3, 3 vols., *City of Promises: A History of the Jews In New York* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 142.

¹⁷ This term will be utilized throughout the thesis and is defined in the first chapter. It is used as an umbrella term for a number of Jewish organizations that appeared to represent solely the wealthy suburban Jews, not the poorer urban ones.

victims of those who break them.”¹⁸ The JDL was designed to fight in a militant manner in response to qualms such as Mosho’s. When the JDL gained notoriety throughout New York, many organizations and prominent leaders in the Jewish community condemned the group not only for its actions but also because of its ideology which drastically differed from typical American Jewish behavior. One example of these criticisms, included in the report to the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations, stated: ““To some the televised pictures of menacing Jewish toughs are startling and disgraceful; Jews should rely as usual on their ‘traditional’ intellectual skills.””¹⁹ These “traditional intellectual skills” served as a source of ire for Kahane and the Jewish Defense League, particularly when applied to Jewish men. The organization aimed to rid the Jewish people of this internalized mentality, believing it contributed to their perception that the Jews simply went to their deaths during the Holocaust.

This thesis focuses on how the JDL challenged the conception and stereotype of the physically weak Jewish male. It discusses the circumstances that produced the organization, the characterization it ultimately tried to establish, and the actions it took to implement this mentality.

Many scholars have explored the JDL through varying cultural, political and academic lenses. Dolgin’s work serves as perhaps the most noteworthy cultural anthropological analysis of the League. She confronts the complexities of how the JDL developed ethnic identity and created connections between language, image, history and ideology. Dolgin argues that the JDL constructed its own ideology and perhaps even its own religion. Her research provided tremendous narrative insight into how the JDL’s members

¹⁸ Martin M. Mosho, “For Defense League,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1969.

¹⁹ Shlomo M. Russ, “The Zionist Hooligans’: The Jewish Defense League” (Ph.D Dissertation, City University of New York Graduate Center, 1981), 102

saw each other and its place in American life. Shlomo Russ's vivid investigation of the JDL through social movement theory proved of significant value in understanding the timeline of the JDL's prominence. Russ posits that "the Jewish Defense League is a study in paradox," explaining that while Kahane can be seen as a demagogue, the *New York Times* provided him a platform to write Op-Ed articles.²⁰ In analyzing primary documents such as *Never Again*, it becomes evident that Kahane's emphasis on physicality originates from the widely-held characterization that many Jews during the Holocaust went to the gas chambers as "sheep to slaughter,"²¹ that is without fighting back. In his masters' thesis, Matthew Brittingham sought to understand the role the Holocaust played for Kahane and the JDL in its formative years. With a focus on the theme of "collective memory," Brittingham contextualizes two core JDL concepts discussed in *Never Again* and *The Story of the Jewish Defense League: Barzel (Iron)* and *Ahavat Yisrael (Love and commitment to the Jewish people)* to memorialize the Holocaust. Brittingham asserts that Kahane aimed for the JDL to serve as the accepted arbiter of Holocaust remembrance, putting forth a recurring idea of the JDL as the supposed "authentic" Jewry. Religious Studies scholar S. Daniel Breslauer expands upon and challenges Kahane's supposition of the JDL as an "authentic" form of Jewry. Breslauer scrutinizes the uniquely Jewish aspects of the organization and argues why Kahane's ideology remains "untrue to traditional Judaism."²² While this thesis focuses primarily on gender and the history of the organization, it is nonetheless crucial to recognize that the JDL arose from supposed issues in the Jewish religious sphere; Breslauer's analysis provides crucial insights in this area. Kahane believed there was little the Jews could do to avoid

²⁰ Russ, 12.

²¹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 153.

²² Breslauer, 16

significant persecution and discrimination in the United States except for radical and militant responses. This thesis examines these concepts of religion and the Holocaust from Kahane's perspective, but the bulk of its focus will be on gender and more specifically, Jewish masculinity.

Much scholarship on gender in Judaism has tended to focus on the Jewish feminist movement. It is possible that this is due to an overwhelming emphasis on men in Jewish Orthodox tradition and scholars have sought to remedy this in the 20th and 21st centuries.²³ An example of such a phenomenon occurs in the anthology *Gender and Jewish History*, which includes only one — intriguingly enough the final piece — essay about Jewish masculinity, by historian Beth Wenger. Wenger describes how time in Eastern-Europe shaped Jewish men to embody the seemingly Jewish characteristics of scrawniness and bookishness once they arrived in the United States. The children of these men aimed to reconstruct this stereotype. Kahane touches upon such insights in *Never Again* and how the Jews internalized such a mentality upon migration to the United States. Other scholars who examined Jewish masculinity include Sarah Imhoff, who writes about the lack of aggressiveness and desire for dominance among Jewish men in the 20th century — a problem that Kahane criticizes and attempts to undermine with the JDL. Paul Breines in his book *Tough Jews* discusses Jews who “fought back” but does so without a discussion of Kahane and the JDL, believing it to “to divert attention from the more ordinary, mainstream and widespread instances of American Jewish toughness,”²⁴ an approach which this thesis will deem flawed. For example, the JDL received coverage in the *New York Times*,

²³ Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 20.

²⁴ Paul Breines, “From Masada to Mossad: A Historical Sketch of Tough Jewish Imagery,” in *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York, NY: Basic Books Inc, 1990), XI.

widespread analysis in the *Jewish Press* and magazine profiles in *Time* and *Newsweek*. The JDL gained tremendous notoriety and awareness throughout the late 1960s and 1970s and thus arguably serves as a mainstream and significant example of Jewish toughness.

There have been some who have made initial connections between the JDL and Jewish masculinity, providing justification for an extended analysis of this issue. Miriam Mora, in a recently-written dissertation titled *From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America*, devotes a section to the JDL in her analysis of Jewish toughness and hypermasculinity. She argues that the JDL appealed to those Jewish men who felt emasculated and desired an organization focused on strength and eradicating the sense of helplessness among themselves. In a personal essay in the book *Brother Keepers: New Perspectives on Jewish Masculinity*, Jackson Katz discusses his own confrontations with the JDL and its significant appeal to Jewish men. “What I witnessed in that room had more to do with Jewish masculine pride than anything to do with Arabs. . . . To focus only on JDL’s racism is to miss the deeply wounded Jewish masculinity that lies at the heart of its appeal, both for its members and their closeted sympathizers.”²⁵ Here lies the essence of the thesis and the Jewish Defense League: to examine its events and protests through the lens of antisemitism isn’t enough. One must delve deeper, investigate the writings and actions of its leaders and profile of its members to recognize that the Jewish Defense League at its core aimed to reinvent American Jewish masculinity.

The thesis will focus on the period of 1968-1971, when the JDL primarily concerned itself with American antisemitism. The first chapter will analyze the events and community

²⁵ Jackson Katz. “Not-So-Nice-Jewish Boys: Notes on Violence and the Construction of Jewish-American Masculinity in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries.” *Brother Keepers: New Perspectives on Jewish Masculinity*, Harriman, Tennessee: Men’s Studies Press, 2010, 62.

that led to the formation of Jewish Defense League. It discusses Kahane's abhorrence of the "Jewish Establishment" and how these organizations seemingly ignored the poor, often religious New York City Jews, who remained in working class areas of Crown Heights and Brownsville for example, while their wealthier brethren moved to suburbs. The chapter examines circumstances of the 1960s, a time of radical change in the Jewish community and how it fostered the beginnings of the JDL. Further, it scrutinizes the supposed worldwide antisemitic conspiracy perpetuated by Kahane to spread his message. Along with Kahane's *Never Again*, reflections from historian Mark Naison on growing up Jewish in Crown Heights in the 1950s and articles from journalist Paul Cowan on the "Poor Jews" of New York City, provide the core primary sources of this chapter.

The second chapter focuses on how the Jewish Defense League represented American Jewish masculinity. It examines how the JDL aimed to change the typical image of American Jewish men. Using Norman Podhoretz's landmark *Commentary* article, "My Negro Problem — and Ours," as an initial tool for framing, the chapter discusses typical characteristics of a Jewish man and how the JDL aimed to eradicate this mentality and these conceptions. Further, it utilizes the key pillars of the JDL to emphasize how Kahane would craft the rebirth of his vision of a Jewish man. It discusses New York City Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham's 1908 article in which he claimed Jews were incapable of committing violent crime and asserts how the JDL aimed to present itself as an organization that prided itself on embracing a violent and "hoodlum" label. The chapter primarily relies on Kahane's *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* and a number of other newspaper and magazine profiles of the League ranging from *The Jewish Press* to *Time Magazine*. Additionally,

Mora's dissertation proved instrumental in defining the emasculated characteristics of Jewish men.

Finally, the third chapter analyzes how the JDL *transformed* traditional ideas of Jewish masculinity once it received news coverage and developed massive protests. The chapter analyzes Camp Jedel, a summer camp organized by Kahane and the JDL to teach Jewish toughness. The chapter scrutinizes Kahane's plans for JDL actions and demonstrates how JDL members not only fought antisemitism, but served as a rebuke against the expected Jewish male behavior. Whereas the second chapter analyzes the JDL's *desires* to change the Jewish image, the third chapter concentrates on *how* it honed on these ideas and transformed Jewish American masculinity. It describes in detail the JDL's protest of James Forman at Temple Emanu-El, its boycott of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the marching and entry of the WBAI radio station. *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, Russ's comprehensive dissertation as well as articles from *The New York Times* and *Jewish Press* serve as the main sources in this chapter detailing the JDL's actions and events in implementing the JDL's new image into actuality.

CHAPTER ONE: The Circumstances, City and Community that led to the JDL

“There are thousands of Jews who live in the worst slum areas of the country. They are poor Jews; they are elderly Jews; they are frightened Jews. But above all, they are forgotten Jews.”¹ (from *Never Again: A Program for Jewish Survival*)

They found themselves trapped in freezing, unfurnished and decrepit apartments. Isolated, friendless and likely afraid. Some might say their community abandoned them, these elderly, frail individuals barely scraping by in late 1950s and 1960s New York. They needed significant assistance in an era in which seemingly the most mundane activities — relaxing on a park bench or strolling through a neighborhood — could be met with muggings or antisemitic remarks. The so-called Jewish Establishment had seemingly failed them, neglecting to notice that their neighborhoods rapidly changed year-by-year, or even month-by-month. This “Establishment” encompassed a number of prominent Jewish communal organizations including Federations of Jewish Philanthropies in various cities, which were created to provide services and funds for those in the Jewish community along with the Anti-Defamation League, initially designed solely to prevent defamation on stage, screen and in print of Jews. Another organization included the American Jewish Committee, established with the sole purpose of defending the Jewish people.² These organizations, along with many

¹ Meir Kahane, *Never Again! A Program for Survival* (Los Angeles, CA: Nash Publications, 1971), 34.

² Daniel Judah Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 34.

others, had seemingly neglected the poorer Jews possibly at the expense of aiding other ethnic groups in similar situations. Soon, people who looked and acted different from Jews took over housing projects and neighborhood homes, replacing many Jews who, with their newfound wealth moved to the suburbs. Many of these suburban Jews gained this wealth through a departure from their overt Jewishness — often not keeping kosher and trivializing the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, for example.³ From the neighborhoods of Brownsville, Brooklyn, and Tremont in the Bronx, they migrated to Long Island and Westchester neglecting their fellow kin still living in Jewish neighborhoods. Still, many Jews remained in these once-immigrant neighborhood, including thousands, alone, afraid and uneasy about their rapidly changing community and the lack of assistance from fellow Jews.

Meir Kahane certainly agreed with these Jews that the prominent organizations had neglected them. Kahane believed that the Jewish community or what he would term the Jewish “establishment” abandoned Brooklyn, the Bronx and other parts of New York City, where a greater number of devout and impoverished Jews resided, unable or unwilling to leave these first and second-generation neighborhoods. These areas dramatically changed in the late 1950s: sections of the city that had been 66% White and significantly Jewish, became by the 1960s, 75% African-American and Latino.⁴ By the 1960s, data shows that many Jews acquired middle and upper-middle class status wealth and economic success.⁵ However, Kahane, writing in the early 1970s in his ideological manifesto *Never Again*, believed that

³ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker*, Jewish Studies, Book 1 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 30-31.

⁴ Jeffrey Gurock, “Crises and Contention,” in *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010*, vol. 3, 3 vols., *City of Promises: A History of the Jews In New York* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 129.

⁵ Paul Burstein, “Jewish Educational and Economic Success in the United States: A Search for Explanations,” *Sociological Perspectives* 50, no. 2 (2007): 209–28, see tables 2, 3 and 4 on pages 211-213. The analysis shows with quantitative data how many Jews succeeded economically and educationally relative to their Protestant and Catholic competitors.

the Jewish people constituted the third-poorest ethnic group in the City.⁶ Assimilation had seemingly torn the Jewish community apart. Political scientist Daniel Elazar defines “Jewish community” as the idea that “Jews were seeking some neutral means to describe their continued corporate existence during the height of the era of emancipation.” Further, Elazar writes that Jews “were only willing to acknowledge themselves as bound by religious ties; for fear of jeopardizing their newfound status as civic equals in the countries of the West, but nevertheless did (they) perceive that they were connected to other Jews even across national boundaries.”⁷

But after emancipation, once a certain number of Jews began to accumulate wealth, the — arguably once-largely united — American Jewish community began to fracture, no longer united against the tide of antisemitism or anxieties about transitioning to a new country. Wealthier comfortable Jews paid less attention to Jewish religious observance and more to social welfare and cultural concerns such as a Jewish Hospital or a Jewish Community Center Basketball Team⁸, endeavors that did little to strengthen Jewish unity. As becomes clear in Kahane’s manifesto, Jewish unity and pride were in his eyes the essence to Jewish survival and continuity. Elazar’s analysis substantiates Kahane’s assertions. He explains that as these organizations — the Jewish Community Centers and Jewish hospitals —grew, they became more of a fabric of the local context in which they originated, the *American city*. Elazar discusses “community service organizations,” institutions that “pride[d] themselves on their commitment to serve the entire Jewish community and frequently the non-Jewish community as well — at times to the point where their Jewish

⁶ *Never Again*, 32.

⁷ Elazar, 4.

⁸ Kahane, *Never Again*, 241.

connection is nominal.”⁹ In Kahane’s perspective, these Jewish Community Centers and Jewish hospitals — to name just two institutions — sacrificed their unique Jewishness and pride in their religion as their community changed. This shift angered Kahane as well as the Jewish elderly and Orthodox residents of the neighborhoods which these institutions were established to serve, during an era when Jews may have once been prohibited from similar places. *Hadar*, the Hebrew word for pride, would function as crucial to the Jewish Defense League and vital for the reinvigoration of American Jewry. For thousands of poor Orthodox Jews, young and elderly, the Jewish Establishment had failed them by servicing the needs of non-Jews in what they viewed as a de-emphasis on the Jewish cause. Orthodox Jews even grew smaller in number, declining throughout the 1960s to just 11% by 1971 — the year Kahane wrote *Never Again*, coincidentally.¹⁰ Perhaps because of lower synagogue dues — as was commonplace among many of these Orthodox institutions¹¹ — the synagogues of these communities fell into disrepair and community life depreciated.¹² Simultaneously, neighborhoods where these struggling Jews lived, underwent significant drastic and cultural shocks, increasing Jews’ fear and isolation.

This chapter focuses on these circumstances that led to the apparent *need* for the Jewish Defense League. The chapter examines the decline of Jewish outreach to the elderly in changing-New York City neighborhoods and a lack of unity. It explores who the League represented, and how the League catalyzed these individuals to seek it out for help and protection. Further, it discusses the role of demographic changes of 1960s New York in the Jewish Defense League’s formation and ultimately how the City’s rapidly changing diversity

⁹ Elazar, 194.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Gurock, “A More Faithful Following,” in *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 209.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Kahane, *Never Again*, 39, 279.

contributed to the establishment of the organization. With an understanding of the circumstances behind the need for a militant, Jewish group in New York City, it will become evident how the Jewish Defense League exploited these conditions and events to completely alter traditional American Jewish conceptions of masculinity.

First, it is imperative to understand Meir Kahane's targets for JDL membership in New York City, and why they might have chosen to participate in such a violent organization in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during the League's neighborhood patrol era. The Jewish Defense League aimed to represent and advocate on behalf of these urban, elderly, and often poorer Jews. As historian Eli Lederhendler explains, "Kahane, who was very much an outsider, attracted the most alienated and marginalized young people from lower-or lower-middle-class homes."¹³ Thus, it could be argued that Kahane sought the attention of those like him, Orthodox, proudly Jewish in an area and era in which both seemed frowned upon. Kahane demonstrated this advocacy in *Never Again*, discussing how Hasidic Jews with large families and small incomes struggled to make ends meet as factory workers, manual laborers, and low-paid civil servants. He writes: "The beard and black frock make them easy prey for job discrimination and there is no one to fight for their rights."¹⁴ Kahane believed that the wealthy Jewish lawyers would offer no time to help the Jewish poor of New York City. These poor Jews could be found "living out their desperate lives in misery and fear. They are the only Jews left in certain areas because, ironically, all the other Jews fled long ago."¹⁵

¹³ Eli Lederhendler, "Fragment and Confront: The Politics of Division," in *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity*, Modern Jewish History (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 194.

¹⁴ *Never Again*, 32.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

It wasn't only Kahane who believed that assimilation and suburbia had hampered the American Jewish experience and "destroyed generations of young Jews."¹⁶ Some young Jewish activists agreed that the Jewish people had been constrained and impeded by assimilation, such as feminist Aviva Cantor Zuckoff. In her famous 1971 essay bluntly titled "Oppression of Amerika's Jews," she writes that at the time, she believed it was implied that it "is not considered "kosher for a Jewish organization to fight for only Jews."¹⁷ In Michael Staub's *Torn at the Roots*, Staub analyzes Zuckoff's, some of her peers' and even Kahane's critiques of the Jewish community. Staub discusses Zuckoff's argument that Jews had been subdued into a psychologically submissive state by the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Staub, Zuckoff argued that "through a 'passivity conditioning' exacted by a ruling elite kept 'the Jews paralyzed by fear for their own survival and unable to think beyond it.'"¹⁸ According to this interpretation, New York Jews either appeared unable or unwilling to stand up on behalf other Jews. Zuckoff surmises that a lack of aggressiveness and assertiveness of many Jews resulted from assimilation and a lack of connection to Judaism. One might argue then, that not only did the Jewish Defense League aim its practices toward the isolated and fearful Orthodox and impoverished Jews of New York City, but also at young college students who veered from their traditional Jewish roots. This idea may be found through Kahane's writings, as he wrote: "Countless young Jews were not only non-Jewish but apparently *anti-Jewish* (emphasis original) and eagerly marched for causes that were clearly aimed at destroying Jewish power, influence and survival. Israel was imperialist and colonialist, cried the Arabs, and from a thousand foolish Jewish voices came the call,

¹⁶ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), viii.

¹⁷ Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "Oppression of Amerika's Jews," in *The Jewish 1960s*, ed. Michael T. Staub (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 248.

¹⁸ Michael T. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: Jewish Liberalism in Crisis*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 205.

“Right on!”¹⁹ In S. Daniel Breslauer’s monograph on Kahane, he writes that the JDL had become a youth movement, composed of students “disillusioned” with their parents’ Judaism and sought “personal authenticity” offered by the JDL.²⁰ Kahane sought to change the minds of these students in his establishment of the Jewish Defense League. Kahane wasn’t alone in seeking to combat assimilationism among American Jews. At Camp Ramah Palmer (New England) in 1970, young Jews established the Radical Zionist Alliance. It rejected the assimilationist idea outright and affirmed the need for a “liberation movement”²¹ for American Jews. The leaders of this movement wrote in a manifesto that “North American Jews are a marginal people in a society of economic, political and cultural oppression.”²² In writing *Never Again*, Kahane utilizes similar rhetoric, “When the world is in trouble it is demanded of the Jew that he help, because he is a human. When the Jew is oppressed, humanity is freed from any obligation because it is a Jewish problem.”²³ The Radical Zionist Alliance and the Jewish Defense League though, differed on their views of combating these issues. While both emphasized direct action, the JDL operated by an “any-means-necessary”²⁴ mentality, which often included violence and fighting.

In its initial stages, though, the Jewish Defense League primarily represented the elderly, who either could not afford or proved too frail to depart their dangerous city neighborhoods. Some of these people had survived the Holocaust and now found themselves victims of muggings. Others simply needed protection as they traveled to the grocery store or

¹⁹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 63.

²⁰ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker*, Jewish Studies, Book 1 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 24.

²¹ Staub, 200.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kahane, *Never Again*, 8.

²⁴ Jewish Defense League, *The Jewish Defense League: Aims and Purposes* (New York, NY: The League, 1970), 11.

walked around the neighborhood. Kahane proposed that the Jewish community — perhaps led by the JDL — would engineer a plan to mass-migrate these elderly Jews out of these unsafe neighborhoods into more secure places. Ideally, he hoped, Jewish Federations would help subsidize his plans.²⁵ According to Elazar, the primary concern for these Jewish Federations upon their founding in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was to function as a mechanism of philanthropic services. By the 1920s and 1930s, more federations continued to emerge as a response to increased antisemitism and widespread Jewish anxiety.²⁶ But after World War II, they began to transform into what Elazar terms as “comprehensive-representative bodies”²⁷ intended to represent *all* of American Jewry rather than merely serving as a method of appropriating funds. In theory, this idea might have succeeded, but in reality, as Elazar describes “these tasks fell to a handful of affluent and influential individuals whose prestige and position placed them at the forefront of the community. . . .”²⁸ As a result, the leaders of these federations included many suburban community members who may not have been necessarily the most cognizant of the ideal and necessary solutions for American Jews. Kahane, for example disagreed with the new Federation policies. For him, the “Jewish Establishment” and “Liberals” had only one solution for the qualms of these Jews: to integrate, participate in the Melting-Pot of American culture, an idea that Kahane utterly despised, terming it “a great and wondrous myth”²⁹ that led Jews on a path of assimilation. For Kahane, assimilation was arguably equal to un-Jewishness. While one need not have been Orthodox to join the JDL, one needed to appreciate the merits of parochial

²⁵ Kahane, *Never Again*, 280.

²⁶ Elazar, 181.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 180-182

²⁸ *Ibid*, 196.

²⁹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 57.

Jewish education — in Yeshivas, that is — and recognize the power of Jewish tradition to be an authentic member of the Jewish community.

In short, the Jewish Defense League primarily represented the Orthodox, urban and impoverished Jews of New York City in places such as Brownsville. The League also aided the vulnerable elderly Jewish community of these and other areas and even came to represent — or attempted to — younger, middle-class Jewish students who struggled with the assimilationist tendencies of their parents. With this understanding, it is worth answering the question of what motivated Kahane and the Jewish Defense League to represent the interests of these struggling individuals.

For Meir Kahane, the answer was simple: Who else would represent them? He believed that the wealthier and assimilated Jews had neglected the members of their own community. In Kahane's perspective, wealthier Jews moved to suburbs such as Westchester and Long Island, abandoning those who couldn't afford or refused to come to the urban and dangerous sections of New York. These mass departures left the remaining Jews vulnerable and with less of an influential voice in their communities. Historian Jeffrey Gurock discusses that muggings, violence and robberies were not merely a tactic used by Kahane to strike fear in the Jewish community, but rather, they "reverberated" throughout the community and sparked a mass exodus of those who could afford to leave. By the mid-1960s — around the time Kahane founded the JDL — the once-thriving Jewish community in East Tremont hardly existed. Gurock describes the meagerness of these conditions, explaining: "The poor and elderly remained trapped in what was later described as 'ravaged hulks' with residents barricaded in their freezing apartments."³⁰ About this same issue, Kahane wrote, "They have

³⁰ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 129.

been forgotten by our Jewish leaders and Jewish organizations who are too busy bleeding for others and castigating *us* (emphasis added) for not caring about those others. Their plight is seldom thought about by their brethren in the split levels of America and no symphony conductor or composer gives cocktail parties for them.”³¹ Failure to help these vulnerable members of the American Jewish community stemmed from an immense negligence by the American Jewish Establishment.

Kahane calls the “Establishment” “morally bankrupt” in *Never Again* and terms it one of, if not the greatest, “antihero” in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*. Because of Kahane’s pessimistic perspective on the future of American Jewry, he claims that the ending will soon come time will come for the Jews’ prosperity in the United States and no one will be safe, not even those who have assimilated. Such a thought prompts Kahane to ask in *Never Again* “If not the Jewish Establishment whose *raison d’etre* is to aid Jews — who?”³² This idea shows Kahane’s mindset as he reflects on his formation of the Jewish Defense League. The JDL became “the who,” to solve this problem. Kahane noticed a power vacuum in this area of Jewish abandonment and aimed to remedy this issue. When wealthier Jews moved to the suburbs of New York, they no longer were aware of nor did they regularly see rape, burglaries and robberies in their neighborhoods.³³ Because of their lack of exposure, they perhaps become less inclined to fix these problems, especially for the Jewish community, which they likely associated with wealth, secularism and suburbia, not poverty, religiosity and urbanity. Kahane vividly describes these events for the urban Jew, writing “The vandalizing of synagogues and Jewish institutions and the attacks upon Jews returning

³¹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 34-35.

³² *Ibid*, 38.

³³ Other comparable suburban neighborhoods across the country included Shaker Heights in Ohio and Newton in Massachusetts.

from them; the robbing of and assaults upon children in public schools. . . . In a word, they make up the nightmare of crime and violence.”³⁴ And the wealthy could not remedy these attacks, because these problems were not part of their daily routine. They did not spend their days worrying about the influx of immigrants and African Americans moving in and taking over their apartments and homes in their neighborhoods as occurred in the Vladeck Houses on the Lower East Side of New York near the Henry Street Settlement. Originally, this public housing project was built for Jews living on the Lower East Side, but by the 1970s, Puerto Ricans and African Americans moved into the apartments to the disappointment of the elderly Jews who lived there.³⁵

Jewish “Salon Liberals on Long Island” instead focused their attention on aiding the cause for Civil Rights, spoke with Black and sometimes even Arab militant leaders,³⁶ while abandoning the “nagging problems of the Jewish slums” as described by journalist Paul Cowan.³⁷ The Jewish Establishment focused on intermingling with members of the wealthier gentile class whom they likely perceived to be more similar than their poorer working class Jewish kin. In *Never Again*, Kahane considers that the Jewish summer camps, community centers and other activities often catered to not only Jewish participants but to “gentiles” which then led to intermarriage and the increasing disaffiliation of Jews in the subsequent generation.³⁸ The so-called Jewish Establishment’s focus on other marginalized ethnic communities was not a new phenomenon.

³⁴ Kahane, *Never Again*, 39.

³⁵ Paul Cowan, “Jews Without Money, Revisited,” in *Poor Jews: An American Awakening*, ed. Naomi Levine and Martin Hochbaum (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974).

³⁶ “... anyone so long as they were not Jewish” according to Kahane (*The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 63.)

³⁷ Cowan, 41.

³⁸ Kahane, *Never Again*, 37.

According to Kahane, this emphasis on helping others while neglecting Jewish interests occurred before and even during the Holocaust. The American Jewish community and the political leaders that it supposedly trusted, neglected the Jews across the world in Europe. Staub posits that “(the JDL) emphasized their own Jewishness as a weapon against members of the Jewish Establishment perceived to be too accommodationist to gentile society.”³⁹ Kahane criticized the widespread Jewish support of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Holocaust. His policies about combating the Depression aside, Kahane focused on FDR’s unwillingness to rescue the Jews in Europe. *Never Again*, Kahane’s ideological blueprint begins with a discussion of the tragic MS St. Louis in 1939, a ship filled with German Jewish refugees eager for a new home away from the persecution. Roosevelt though, prohibited them from entering the United States because of the immigration quota system. According to Kahane, Roosevelt should have adjusted the law or even neglected it in this specific situation.⁴⁰ Kahane believed that Roosevelt should have bombed the railroad tracks on the way to Auschwitz and his refusal to do so was “a crime.”⁴¹ But Roosevelt was in no way the central “villain” to blame. For Kahane, the central fault always lay with the Jewish Establishment, especially when factoring in his idea of *Ahavat Yisroel* (Love of Jewry), a concept that would be central to the Jewish Defense League. In both *Never Again* and in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* — Kahane’s reflections on the League’s founding and successes — Kahane signals out the Jewish Establishment and Jewish leadership. In *Never Again* he writes, “The final arbiter of the American judgment and, in particular, the American Jewish fate, will not be the handful of upper-class intellectuals, the

³⁹ Staub, 196.

⁴⁰ Kahane, *Never Again*, 9.

⁴¹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 77.

liberal political and social leaders with whom Jewish leadership has cast its lot,”⁴² deriding the group of people who seem to possess the political power in favor of a group with little overt political power, but tremendous *Hadar* (pride), one of the eventual pillars of the JDL. In *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, he comments on the lack of responsibility of the Establishment, saying that “The refusal to abandon the mantle of respectability, even when it came to saving Jewish lives, was the hallmark of a failure to understand fully the real meaning of Ahavat Yisroel.”⁴³

Kahane wasn’t alone in pressuring the Jewish Establishment for its inaction on behalf of the American Jewish community. In November of 1969, a group of radical Jews put 200 *mezuzahs* (doorposts) on the doors of the Jewish Federation building in Los Angeles because they thought that the Federation was being indifferent to Jewish educational, spiritual and cultural concerns. These Jews, from an organization called “Concerned Jewish Students” expressed skepticism over the Federation’s allocation of its funds, believing them to be primarily given to nonsectarian institutions. These activists “vehemently rejected the assimilationism they saw in their parents’ generation.”⁴⁴ In New York City too, similar groups and actions existed. The “Federation 45” as they would eventually be known because 45 protesters were arrested, “liberated” the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies by taking over the switchboard and blocking the entrances to the building. The protesters included students from Habonim, the youth movement of the Labor Zionists of America, the Jewish Liberation Project and the Radical Jewish Union of Columbia University. These forty-five young people refused to leave the building even after the threat of arrest. They demanded that

⁴² Kahane, *Never Again*, 260.

⁴³ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 77.

⁴⁴ Staub, 194-195.

the Federation promise quality Jewish education, help with obtaining funds for youth projects, sponsor Jewish cultural activities and contribute \$10,000 to a march for Soviet Jewry.⁴⁵ The Federation refused, leading to the protesters' arrest.⁴⁶ Such a demonstration appears similar to one of the Jewish Defense League, albeit focused more on civil disobedience rather than an emphasis on poor Jews in changing New York City neighborhoods. Both instances involve speaking up on behalf of a Jewish community that no longer wished to remain silent for itself.

Jewish radical student newspapers also criticized the Jewish establishment, seeking more overt Judaism and seemingly less integration. One writer in a Socialist-Zionist newspaper at the University of Illinois-Chicago wrote that “Our task is to confront ‘Jewish leaders’ militantly with the full consequences of their contradictory policies: pious efforts to battle assimilation and equally pious efforts to further remake the Jewish community into a model of liberal bourgeois America.”⁴⁷ The phrase “liberal bourgeois America” sounds eerily similar to Kahane in *Never Again* when he discusses the “Salon liberals” of Long Island. It is a clear, direct critique of a rapidly changing American religious community that focuses increasingly on the former (American) with a diminishing emphasis on the latter (religion). These radical Jews offered a socioeconomic critique while Kahane fought for a religioethnic shift. Through violence and mass demonstrations combined with an emphasis on Jewish education, Kahane would reignite *Hadar* in the American Jew — a united stand and love for the Jewish people, no matter their economic background. And if this meant owning a gun or fighting back, Kahane encouraged it. The JDL ensured that the Jewish people would no

⁴⁵ Notably, the plea for Soviet Jewry would eventually become a core part of the Jewish Defense League in the 1970s.

⁴⁶ Staub, 196.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 199.

longer cower to the gentile community. For these other radicals, such as Zuckoff and M. Jay Rosenberg, they took issue with what they saw as a misappropriation of Jewish funds. They helped non-Jewish causes — which Kahane also criticized — and ignored Jewish college students despite aiding those of other ethnicities. Jerry Kirshen’s comic strips illustrate this idea, as Staub explains that Kirshen critiqued the “tradition of philanthropic giving and marching on behalf of others, and mercilessly skewered craven assimilationism.”⁴⁸ Kahane created an organization with a specific focus on the Jewish religion. He did not care about developing connections with the American community. These connections and relationships, Kahane had reasoned, occurred at the expense of Jewish pride and identity. It was these circumstances and this loss of identity that angered Kahane so tremendously.

Contemporary Judaism in this era had become significantly focused on Yiddish culture and American Jewish food, rather than its more religious traditions.⁴⁹ This angered Kahane, who wrote in *Never Again* that that suburban Jews eliminated “ a beautiful culture of two-thousand years for a cult of plastic pizza-eaters. . . .”⁵⁰ According to Lederhendler, urban neighborhoods were viewed differently. He writes that “they were no longer a nurturing environment or a launching pad toward wider civic participation, it now denoted a retreat behind boundaries.”⁵¹ In the early 1960s, before Kahane came to prominence, many Jews were seemingly afraid of being publicly Jewish and exhibited their religion mainly through culture rather than ethnic pride. Jonathan Braun, an editor of the student newspaper *Flame* at City College of New York, criticized “bagel and lox Judaism” of the “assimilation minded, Establishment Jews” and that kids who were denied full access to Jewish heritage “were now

⁴⁸ Ibid, 214.

⁴⁹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 121

⁵⁰ Ibid, 122.

⁵¹ Lederhendler, 166.

raising their clenched fists before the pop-poster ghost of Che Guevara.”⁵² Staub also discusses the notion of *Galut* (exile) mentality of American Jews and terms them “checkbook Zionists” whose sole connection to the State of Israel came through monetary contributions without truly understanding the importance of the country to the Jewish people. As Kahane writes in *Never Again*, the *Galut* mentality “is the whispered anguish: what will ‘they’ say?”⁵³ It is this mindset of many American Jews that, in part, provided the rationale for the Jewish Defense League. Jewish people, in Kahane’s eyes, desired approval from non-Jews. Kahane aimed to eliminate the concept of respectability and intended for Jews to stop trying to please non-Jews even if it meant inhibiting cordial relationships. “Such respectability must be buried before it buries us (the Jews),”⁵⁴ he wrote in *Never Again*.

The Jewish Defense League officially began in May of 1968 on a Shabbat afternoon in a Brooklyn synagogue. It was initially conceived as a grassroots alternative to a lackluster Jewish Establishment that failed to care for Jewish needs.⁵⁵ By July of that same year, the League ran ads in the *Jewish Press*, where Kahane served as an editor and wrote weekly columns claiming that antisemitism is “exploding” and right-wing extremism rising. The League, the ads reasoned, proved central for “Jewish Survival,” a phrase which Kahane would popularize in *Never Again*. Gurock called the newspaper “an organ hypersensitive to any manifestations of anti-semitism,”⁵⁶ stressing the ultra-right-wing ideology of the paper. In understanding the establishment of the League in Brooklyn, it is crucial to recognize the

⁵² Staub, 202.

⁵³ Kahane, *Never Again* 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 73.

⁵⁵ Staub, 223

⁵⁶ Gurock, 137.

role of New York City as well as how its changing demographics contributed to the apparent *necessity* — in Kahane’s eyes — of such a militant Jewish organization.

In *Jews in Gotham*, Gurock explains how many younger members of the Jewish community moved out of New York City and into neighborhoods with suburban attributes, such as Riverdale. They abandoned their roots and according to Kahane, participated “in a frantic race to emulate and integrate with the Gentile,”⁵⁷ neglecting the concerns of those Jews who could not leave. Simultaneously, taking the place of these departed Jews, were poorer families who moved into homes that Gurock terms “dilapidated.”⁵⁸ Many of these families were African-American, who would become involved in ethnic conflicts with the Jewish community, which had been in these areas of New York City since the early 20th century. One example of such a conflict occurred in July of 1964, when the police murdered a 15-year-old African-American child. Citizens rioted and looted local stores and merchants, and according to Lederhendler, Jews constituted “a great many” of the shop owners who had to rebuild.⁵⁹ However, Gurock’s analysis portrays this as a mere coincidence, as Jews owned the majority of the shops in the area.⁶⁰ The community of Brownsville in particular, known throughout the 20th century as a tight-knit, Jewish communal area, rich with Judaic culture, saw an influx of African-Americans after World War II looking for economic advancement.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kahane, *Never Again*, 120.

⁵⁸ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 129.

⁵⁹ Lederhendler, 166.

⁶⁰ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 135.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 130-132.

But it wasn't only Brownsville, Crown Heights too, saw demographic and religious change in its neighborhood. And while many Jews left, the Orthodox, particularly the Chabad Lubavitchers, "would not leave an enclave they had labored to build up."⁶² Mark Naison, a native Brooklynite discusses this shift in his essay "Crown Heights in the 1950s." He describes his early life of a Crown Heights neighborhood that was populated with second and third-generation Jews, Italians and Irish, a time in which parents expressed to their children "a feeling that the world was fundamentally benign."⁶³ Jewish people lived in six-story elevator apartment buildings built in 1920 side-by-side with Italians, surrounded by parks, benches, softball fields and basketball courts. In the 1950s, at least, according to Naison, there was merely a "sprinkling"⁶⁴ of Black families in the neighborhood, which did not cause any issues among the Jewish community. There was little crime and Naison even grew up with two black peers as a part of his group of friends. The starkest divide, he writes, occurred through the employment of African-American and Afro-Caribbean women as maids who came to clean Jewish homes and apartments. This distinction provides the foundation for later inter-ethnic conflict. Naison asserts that the employment of these women led to "lower-middle class Jewish families simultaneously improv[ing] their standard of living and acquir[ing] a morally damaging complicity with racial discrimination."⁶⁵ Jewishly, religious observance arguably served of little importance for Naison and his community. Jewish culture became tantamount, with emphasis on eating bagels and lox and other seemingly "Jewish" foods while deemphasizing Jewish knowledge and tradition. It is crucial to recognize that *these* types of Jews, such as Naison and his community, exemplify the people

⁶² Ibid, 133.

⁶³ Mark Naison, "Crown Heights in the 1950s," in *Jews of Brooklyn*, ed. Ilana Abramovitch (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 143.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 144.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 145.

whom Kahane would likely have disdained. They were Jews who neglected many kinds of religious observance including keeping kosher. Such practices ignited a fury in Kahane, who writes in *Never Again* that even if a son — note the emphasis on son, rather than a daughter — were to marry a “Shiksa”⁶⁶ his future home he would build “[would] be no less kosher than the nonkosher Jewish one in which he was raised.”⁶⁷

In Naison’s assimilated early life in Crown Heights, race hardly played a factor. His middle school served nearly all Jewish kids and “less than twenty” African-Americans. The homogeneity allowed him to thrive. By the 1960s, when Naison began high school, Crown Heights’ supposed harmonious “color blind era” came to an end. At George W. Wingate High, Naison’s fellow students included hundreds of African-Americans who took the bus from Bedford-Stuyvesant, and while the reception of Blacks in the 1950s was at best ambivalent, this implementation of bussing ignited a drastically different reaction. Naison explains that “(the African-Americans’) arrival triggered waves of anxiety among Jews and Italians who had previously lived in harmony with their small number of black neighbors. Race would become a central preoccupation, something they talked about, and acted on, in a highly conscious way.”⁶⁸ The 1960s represented increased ethnodiversity in neighborhoods such as Crown Heights and with that came increased fear from the Jewish community. Many Jews — who had the means — moved out of the neighborhood, but others, whether for pride or tradition remained in Crown Heights.

⁶⁶ Shiksha is a Yiddish and derogatory word for a non-Jewish woman. It is only utilized here to reflect Kahane’s language.

⁶⁷ Kahane, *Never Again*, 114.

⁶⁸ Naison, 152.

Samuel Schrage, a prominent Lubavitch Rabbi⁶⁹ was among those who stayed in Crown Heights. In April of 1964, four Hasidic students who left a Yeshiva were assaulted by 50 Black teenagers and two weeks later, a Black man broke into a Crown Heights home and attempted to rape the wife of a popular Lubavitcher rabbi. Though the woman fought back, she received wounds across her face and neck. These two horrific acts of violence demonstrated that circumstances had shifted, and Jews needed to be more cautious in New York City.⁷⁰ The event also led Rabbi Schrage to establish “The Maccabees of the Community,” an organization that Lederhendler calls a “neighborhood radio patrol group.”⁷¹ Each night, cars manned with multiple men would drive around the nearly one hundred blocks of the Crown Heights neighborhood. If they saw an issue, they would speak to the police but if the authorities could not be contacted, they would simply assist the victim themselves, with whatever the victim sought.⁷²

In *Never Again*, Kahane discusses how “the Jew in the poor and oppressed areas has gone to the police a thousand times and a thousand times he has been left unsatisfied.”⁷³ The exploits of Rabbi Schrage and the Maccabees early in the 1960s, perhaps run counter to Kahane’s assertions. Schrage for instance, eventually became the leader of New York City’s Neighborhood Action Program.⁷⁴ A key difference between Kahane’s JDL and Schrage’s

⁶⁹ For explanation of the term “Lubavitch” as well as an examination of the role of Chabad in the United States, see Adam S. Ferziger, “From Lubavitch to Lakewood: The ‘Chabadization’ of American Orthodoxy,” *Modern Judaism* 33, no. 2 (2013): 101–24.

⁷⁰ Matthew Shaer, “Tough Jews,” *Tablet*, December 14, 2011, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/86067/tough-jews>. Also, Lederhendler, 165.

⁷¹ Lederhendler, 165.

⁷² Emanuel Perlmutter, “Rabbi Samuel Schrage, 44, Dies; Was Organizer of the Maccabees,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1977, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/01/04/archives/rabbi-samuel-schrage-44-dies-was-organizer-of-the-maccabees.html>.

⁷³ Kahane, *Never Again* 43.

⁷⁴ The action program was designed to function through block associations as places where residents of deprived neighborhoods could go to voice complaints. (Perlmutter, “Rabbi Samuel Schrage, 44, Dies.”)

Maccabees' focuses on their origins and the rationales behind them. For Schrage it appears as if his desire to form Maccabees arose from defined incidents in which Jews were physically harmed. Recognizing the evolving demographic character of Crown Heights and Brownsville, he proposed a method to remedy and mitigate the problem. For Kahane, years of antisemitism and assimilation had simply grown too much and needed to be completely eradicated. Kahane and the JDL in some ways built upon strategies utilized by Schrage and the Maccabees, but, as Gurock writes "with no ambiguity about its enemies."⁷⁵ One could then surmise that Kahane focused his JDL on a macro scale — on the dangerous neighborhoods of Brooklyn, but also on American Jewry's apparent lack of *Hadar* and the neglect for the Soviet Jewish community. Schrage then, could be viewed as combatting immediate dangers to the Jewish communities, leading an organization focused on muggings and robberies. Kahane and the JDL fought these issues as well — as this thesis will discuss in connection to conceptions of masculinity — but through more overt and often violent means. The JDL saw these neighborhood issues as part of a larger conspiracy from the "forces of antisemitism"⁷⁶ and assimilation to completely eradicate the Jewish people from not only the United States, but the world. As Gurock writes, Kahane "projected his people as under existential attack."⁷⁷ And, in *Never Again*, Kahane asks a question that serves as a test-case to define the two groups, inquiring "Why is it that we cannot get Jewish leaders *to see the danger to Jewish survival* (emphasis added) and fight for us as they fight for others?"⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 141.

⁷⁶ Kahane, *Never Again*, 240.

⁷⁷ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 141.

⁷⁸ Kahane, *Never Again*, 49.

Nonetheless, despite Schrage's Maccabees patrolling at night and escorting those who needed assistance, there existed a growing divide between the newly-arrived Blacks and the diminishing Jewish community. Likely modeled after the Maccabees, Black residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant developed their own crime-watch organization with dogs and foot patrols too. The Black residents of these communities lived in greater rates of run-down housing than did Whites and Jews, 23% to 5.4%, respectively as a result of federal policies such as redlining.⁷⁹ The area most ripe for conflict, however, focused on the schools in New York City, which, as a result of the suburbia that Kahane so despised, became increasingly majority-minority as its faculty and leaders remained White and primarily Jewish. As Lederhendler discusses, the "Public school system that emerged was the key symbol of institutional failure. . . . The record of New York's schools in terms of the educational attainments of African American and Hispanic children was dismal by all accounts."⁸⁰ Knowing this information, the inclination might be for the parents of these African-American and Hispanic children to protest and seek out alternatives to remedy this problem. One of these alternatives was the notion of "Community Control," the idea that the schools would be represented by people and the communities that they served — led by those who looked like them. Lederhendler explains: "The logic of neighborhood networking was that people with a 'stake' in their own immediate environment would be more committed to improving it. . . ."⁸¹ There appeared some quantitative justification for this assertion. In 1965, New York City schools were segregated at a higher rate than in 1955, immediately after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case which declared segregated schools unequal. This was due, at least partially to the White flight to the suburbs and private and parochial schools, as well

⁷⁹ Lederhendler, 167.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 167-168.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 169.

as the influx of Black and Puerto Rican arrivals in the City.⁸² Another fascinating statistic deals with the overall racial composition of New York City compared to that of its public schools. Whites and Puerto Ricans constituted 60% of the total Manhattan population but just 28.72% of public school enrollment.⁸³ With this knowledge, Black families' desires for community control makes sense. They yearned for local school boards as a way to assert their power for their schools. Lederhendler posits that with municipal services and politics "up for grabs" rather than formally redrawn by force of law, raw conflict was unavoidable and negotiation deteriorated into a frustrating confrontationalism — most often between vying groups or competing minorities within the neighborhood communities themselves."⁸⁴ And Jews, at least initially, represented a "very large portion" of the school faculty, which especially factored into these conflicts when Black and Hispanic control took center stage.⁸⁵

Such ideas bitterly angered Kahane and only fueled his frustration toward those wealthier and primarily Liberal Jews who worked to aid the causes of the African-American and Latino poor while neglecting the Jews who lived in the same areas. Numerous suburban Jews would value the struggling *other* minorities rather than focusing on helping their *own* — the Jewish community. They would focus their attention on improving these public schools and preaching the notion of "Separation of Church and State" while ignoring the decline and deemphasis of government aid for many yeshivas, places of Judaic study for Orthodox Jews.⁸⁶ Kahane explained in *Never Again* that many Orthodox parents sent their children to these separate institutions because of fear for their children's safety. As a result,

⁸² Robert G. Weisbord and Arthur Stein, "The New York School Crisis and Its Aftermath," in *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1971.), 161-170.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 197.

⁸⁴ Lederhendler, 170.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 173.

⁸⁶ Kahane, *Never Again*, 243.

Kahane rhetorically asks who will protect the cause of these yeshivas. Kahane writes: “Suddenly the lawyers who cannot be found to go to court for individual Jewish problems descend in hordes to make sure that no government money goes to aid the hard-pressed Yeshiva” because, Kahane reasons, “the Jewish Establishment is seemingly opposed in principle to the Jewish yeshiva.”⁸⁷ Kahane succeeded in articulating the contrasts of “Brooklyn versus affluent Manhattan that reflected real disagreements among Jews.”⁸⁸ The 1960s demographic shift and events of the JDL and overall racial climate “transformed outer borough Jews from ‘optimistic universalism’ to nervous parochialism’ while inner-borough cohorts maintained their longstanding personal equanimity and liberal equilibrium.”⁸⁹

The Jewish wealth divide was incredibly apparent and Kahane exploited it in his establishment of the Jewish Defense League. A poll conducted in 1968 compared the wealthier and secular Manhattan Jews with those Jews who lived in Brooklyn. Less than 50% of the Jews in Manhattan saw a “rise of anti-Jewish feeling in the city” while nearly two-thirds of those in Brooklyn felt an *increase* in such tensions. Further, Brooklyn residents denied that Blacks experienced discrimination and tended to be more susceptible to typical black stereotypes. Manhattan Jews disagreed with these perhaps prejudiced characterizations.⁹⁰ As Gurock summarizes “the proposition that ‘blacks tended to be anti-Semitic’ was emphatically denied by Manhattan Jews. . . . But solidly believed by Brooklyn Jews.”⁹¹ It comes as little surprise then, that Kahane founded the JDL in Brooklyn, backed by many of these people who felt rejuvenated by a leader who would articulate statements such

⁸⁷ Ibid, 37.

⁸⁸ Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 142.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 143

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

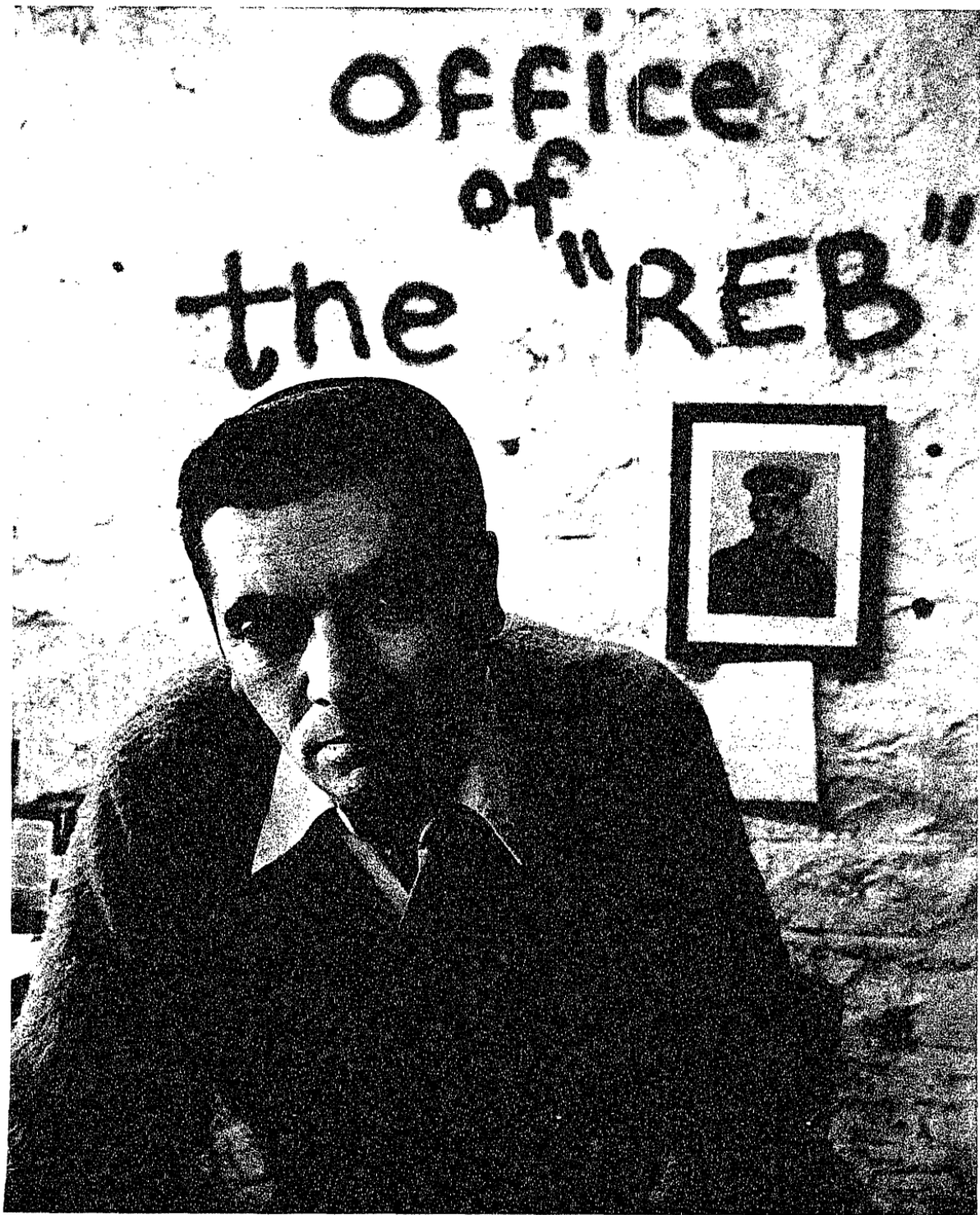
as “The Negro — now insisting upon being called Black — community turned on its noble and generous benefactors with a hatred and rage that horrified all the Jews, who pointed uncomprehendingly at all the Great Neck benefits, at all the Rosenwald money and efforts for Negro schools, at all the Jewish presidents of the NAACP.”⁹² The truthfulness of such a statement notwithstanding, it catalyzed the beginning of a radical militant movement for the Jewish people. No longer would they sit and be taunted by antisemitic slurs by Blacks, or have to go grocery shopping in fear. Now, with the establishment of the Jewish Defense League, they would fight back, and in doing so not only protect elderly Holocaust survivors and the most vulnerable, but reinvent ideas of what it meant to be a Jewish man.

In the 1950s and 1960s, certain Jews who endured muggings from African-Americans and antisemitic barrages when walking through their ever-changing New York City neighborhoods sought help from their Jewish leaders and organizations. When these “Establishment” institutions failed to provide them with the necessary protections desired, a number of Jews sought organizations that promised direct action. Some, especially students, joined a variety of radical movements such as the Radical Zionist Alliance and the Jewish Liberation movement. These Jews, growing up amidst assimilation and a stress on cultural Judaism, found themselves yearning for a Jewish identity of yesteryear, a tight-knit Jewish community that fought for Jews. Other Jews found it in the Jewish Defense League, created in 1968 by Rabbi Meir Kahane. It aimed to develop concrete solutions to these issues that plagued not only New York City but the entire United States. And it planned to do so violently, if necessary. It would “fight back” against those new neighbors who would make the working-class Jew’s life miserable. It would protest and cry out during a school protest

⁹² Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 64.

that sent many Jewish teachers to a new school with little justification. It would publicly demonstrate and speak out against antisemitism, wherever and whenever it manifested. It did so in a method that upset many, especially in the Jewish Establishment, organizations that neglected the Jewish poor in favor of aiding a variety of other ethnic groups. In understanding the circumstances, the city and the community that led to the formation of the Jewish Defense League, it is now appropriate to demonstrate how the League not only aimed to combat antisemitism but to challenge traditional ideas of what it meant to be an American Jewish man. Combining the lessons of this chapter, of the role of New York City, the Jewish Establishment and Orthodox Jewish men played, the following chapter will illustrate how the JDL used these aspects to construct a new ideal of what it meant to be an American Jew who “fought back.”

Figure 2



CHAPTER TWO: The JDL's representation of American Jewish Masculinity

“The word *chaya* in Hebrew means ‘beast,’ and we wanted to develop Jewish ‘beasts’ or ‘animals’ who would frighten the anti-Semite to the roots of his soul. They served an invaluable function in the changing of the Jewish image in America.”¹

In his infamous, controversial and landmark 1963 *Commentary* essay, “My Negro Problem — and Ours,” prominent neoconservative Norman Podhoretz described growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and his interactions with his fellow African-American public school classmates. He wrote of the intense bullying he faced and his fear of these classmates. His experiences in these 1930s-era neighborhoods greatly shaped his identity and fostered a perspective that might be deemed absolutist. Podhoretz seemingly believed that all Jews were wealthy while Blacks were not. The Jewish people possessed intellectual prowess, while African-Americans succeeded at junior-high sporting events. Podhoretz internalized these stereotypes throughout his childhood and as he grew older and became a nationally-known writer, he struggled to reconcile his new perspectives with his significant childhood trauma. But along with these critiques and an admission that he still despises and trembles when he sees Africans Americans — albeit “not in the same proportions and not in the same way,”² another fascinating characterization becomes clear from this essay. Norman Podhoretz articulates feelings of masculine inferiority in his New York City neighborhood, especially as an increasing number of African-Americans moved into the area. Podhoretz wrote that African Americans “seemed the very embodiment of the values of the street—free,

¹ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975). 278.

² Norman Podhoretz, “My Negro Problem — and Ours,” *Commentary*, February 1963, issue 35.

independent, reckless, brave, masculine, erotic.”³ Further, Podhoretz saw that the African-American children “were defiant. . . . But most important of all, they were tough; beautifully, enviably tough, not giving a damn for anyone or anything.”⁴

Written five years before the advent of the Jewish Defense League and Rabbi Meir Kahane’s rise to notoriety, Podhoretz’s article demonstrates not only the conflicts between Blacks and Jews, but also a desire for a different type of masculinity in the Jewish community, one not necessarily associated with intellect and fear, but with freedom, toughness and ruthlessness, which Podhoretz believed to be inherent in African-American culture. In an interview in the *New York Times* nearly a decade later, Kahane said that an aim of the JDL “was to come to Jews — and particularly young Jews — and say ‘Jewish is beautiful.’ ‘Be proud that you’re a Jew.’”⁵ This idea of Jewish pride, or as Kahane called it *Hadar*, played a crucial role in the JDL’s quest to represent Jewish masculinity. Podhoretz in some senses felt ashamed of his Jewishness and the timidity and cowardliness he associated with it. Kahane and his JDL members represented themselves much like the Black peers of Podhoretz’s schoolyard days. They acted defiantly and aggressively in an effort to combat antisemitism and provide assistance to struggling elderly Jews in seemingly unsafe neighborhoods. No longer would Jews “cry out or run away like sissy[s],”⁶ as Podhoretz often considered doing when confronted with attacks by his black classmates. Jews would now fight back, and in doing so not only help the Jewish cause, but also reaffirm and re-represent the Jewish masculine one as well.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Walter Goodman, “Rabbi Kahane Says: I’d Love to See the J.D.L. Fold Up. but --'.” *New York Times*, November 21, 1971.

⁶ Podhoretz, “My Negro Problem.”

In her dissertation on twentieth-century American Jewish masculinity, Miriam Mora discusses the role played by the 1967 war between Israel and the bordering Arab nations for American Jews in the United States. She explains how the militant Zionist movement increasingly criticized the more affluent and less-religious members of the Jewish community for their lack of attentiveness to the Jewish fight. Mora highlights the criticism of American Zionism, what she terms “Zionism deluxe,”⁷ the idea that the American Zionist *only* had to provide monetary charity to impoverished Jews all over the world rather than concrete actions to help them. It reflects an overall passive mindset that Kahane aimed to eradicate. She then alludes to the youth organization *Betar*⁸ of which Kahane was a member and its role in perpetuating these — often harsher — critiques. *Betar*, Mora writes, seemingly saw what the rest of the Jewish American public didn’t; Israelis didn’t need money, but rather “blood and sweat in the fight for a Jewish state.”⁹ The 1967 Israeli war, which saw the young nation of Israel capture the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the West Bank, catalyzed a birth of militant masculine Jewish movements in the United States. Israel’s unexpected victory and acquisition of these new territories, according to Mora, “exemplified a new pride in masculine Jewishness, which provided a platform for a new, hypermasculine, American Jewish manhood.”¹⁰ In sum, the rise of these militant movements, including the JDL, would likely not have been possible without the 1967 war, Mora argues. Kahane then,

⁷ Miriam Mora, “From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America” (Dissertation, Wayne State University, 2019), 279.

⁸ *Betar* comes from both the last Jewish fort to fall in the Bar Kokhba revolt (136 CE) and to the altered Hebrew name of “Brit Yosef Trumpeldor” (ברית יוסף תרומפלדור). See Zerubavel, 84-96

⁹ Mora, 279.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 318.

became the leader and face of a movement which prided itself on violence and intimidation in what Mora terms the “most extreme Jewish emulation of toughness.”¹¹

In Queens, New York in 1967, an act of antisemitism occurred at the Montefiore Cemetery on Halloween. That October 31, vandals from the neighborhood desecrated the graves of the many Jews buried in this area. It is perhaps unsurprising that such an act occurred at this specific cemetery, as it was located within two Black neighborhoods of St. Albans and Cambria Heights.¹² As a result, many of these vandals were African-Americans, highlighting both the changing city neighborhoods as well as Black-Jewish tensions. While undoubtedly a horrific incident, what particularly infuriated many who lived in the area — including Kahane — “was the fact that police in the area, who included the number two man in the department, Sanford Garelik,¹³ had not taken effective action against the bands of Black hoodlums.”¹⁴ Coverage from the *New York Times* supports Kahane’s account, detailing that just five teenagers were arrested as “300 Negro Youth stoned passing cars and threw debris and rock at police”¹⁵ who appeared to have done little but monitor crowd control at the scene. Such a lack of response angered Kahane. So one year later, the JDL responded in kind through what Kahane deemed the “first JDL type action.”¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Shlomo M. Russ, “The Zionist Hooligans’: The Jewish Defense League” (Ph.D Dissertation, City University of New York Graduate Center, 1981), 74.

¹³ Garelik would eventually become the first Jewish chief inspector of the New York Police Department and interestingly — especially when considering the Montefiore Desecration — while an officer, proposed a monthly “Anti-Graffiti Day” in 1972. Matt Flegenheimer, “Sanford Garelik, Former Mayoral Candidate, Dies at 93,” *New York Times*, November 20, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/nyregion/sanford-garelik-former-new-york-city-mayoral-candidate-dies-at-93.html?mtrref=www.google.com>.

¹⁴ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 94.

¹⁵ “300 YOUTHS STONE AUTOS IN QUEENS.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Nov 01, 1967.

¹⁶ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 94.

Led by Chaim Bieber, a man Kahane knew as a teenager¹⁷ whom the rabbi described as “a huge powerful man who looked and was capable of breaking the heads of any five students together,”¹⁸ thirty-five JDL members traveled to the Montefiore cemetery on Halloween night. Russ details Bieber’s meticulous preparation. Bieber scouted out the cemetery a week before, inspecting its perimeter fence and noticed that Montefiore had private guards who supposedly “run at the first sight of trouble.”¹⁹ Bieber even recalled that he made contact with one police officer, alerting them of the JDL’s incoming presence.

The JDLers stood inside the cemetery holding clubs, bats and pipes, as nearly 150 teenagers approached the grounds — perhaps some of the same individuals from the previous Halloween — carrying bottles and, according to Kahane, “obviously aroused”²⁰ hoping to repeat last year’s festivities. But with Bieber and the other members of the JDL present, they did not do so, and instead scurried away in fear. Clearly this marked a successful event for the JDL. The JDL protected the interests of Jews and their own community in Queens, but more than that, it showed that at least *some* Jews were willing to fight back. Kahane summed up the Montefiore action by explaining: “It was a successful beginning of the JDL policy of changing the Jewish image and was a mark of Jewish willingness to use violence to protect Jewish lives and property.”²¹

Changing the Jewish image proved central to the mission of the JDL, along with its relentless commitment to fighting Jewish prejudice. The “image” of a Jew who would simply back down and succumb to attacks particularly troubled Kahane. Equally problematic for

¹⁷ Russ, 74.

¹⁸ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 114.

¹⁹ Russ, 75.

²⁰ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 94.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Kahane was that Jews seemingly embodied these detrimental characterizations of themselves. Rather than seek to change them, many Jews just adapted to them, as they continued to move to suburbs and increase their wealth. Such a notion is represented through the pillar of *Barzel* (iron) in the Jewish Defense League. Kahane wrote: “The Galut image of the Jew as a weakling, as one who is easily stepped upon and who does not fight back, is an image that must be changed. Not only does that image cause immediate harm to Jews but it is a self-perpetuating thing.”²² The JDL hoped to end this mentality by developing a *different* kind of Jew. One could argue that the JDL succeeded in this endeavor. It drove thousands of Jews to advocate on behalf of a type of Jew that fought back and was unashamed of violent actions. Earlier that century, such an idea would have been nearly unthinkable, at least according to New York City Police Commissioner Theodore Bingham.

In 1908, Bingham wrote an article in the *North American Review* which claimed that half of the city’s criminals were Jews. While undoubtedly antisemitic, particularly noteworthy about the assertion were his characterizations of the crimes and American Jewish men. Bingham explained that Jews primarily committed property crimes in the city, and as Religious Studies scholar Sarah Imhoff interprets it, “(Bingham) insinuated that Jews committed cowardly crimes.”²³ Further, Imhoff notes that Bingham “claimed that Jewish criminal activity was of a particular sort, . . . it was nonviolent because Jews rarely ‘had the courage’ or ‘aggressiveness’ to commit more violent types of crime.”²⁴ Because of their perception as weaklings, Jews were seen as incapable of violence and they rarely pushed back on this depiction. Perhaps they did not want to be associated with crime, but Imhoff

²² Ibid, 85.

²³ Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 199.

²⁴ Ibid, 26.

posits that this weakness mentality was truly entrenched within the rapidly-developing Jewish American tradition. Imhoff details that American male Jews had typical norms of expected behaviors focusing on cultivating healthy bodies as they began to adjust to American society. Her book touches upon the role of cultivating and farming the land of Israel in twentieth century Zionism. She explains how Jewish men formed agricultural schools and communities to develop these interests. What becomes apparent then, as Imhoff writes, “These masculine norms did not include physical strength, aggression, and domination as essential features. ... (They) did not even include interpersonal physical violence as a possible pitfall, even though other American masculinities did.”²⁵ The lack of this pitfall and these masculine norms in Jewish American masculinity serve precisely as counterexamples to the behaviors of the JDL. The League aimed to alter and represent a different kind of a Jewish man, one not only proud of his heritage, but willing to defend it by any means necessary.

Later in her book, Imhoff examines the role of the Diaspora in reconstructing narratives of Jewish male bodies. She contends that the Diaspora led Jews to a “weak, hunched over and passive”²⁶mentality. Zionism, Imhoff writes would bring the supposed “regeneration of the strong male body” as she defines it.²⁷ This type of Zionism though, differed from the militant type that Kahane would preach. It perhaps symbolizes the Zionism that Mora describes in her dissertation, one focused less on fighting for the land and more on simply supporting the land of Israel. In the ideological *Never Again*, Kahane strongly criticizes the “Galut Mentality,” of American Jews, a mindset that mirrors much of Imhoff’s

²⁵ Ibid, 28.

²⁶ Ibid, 182.

²⁷ Ibid, 180.

analysis. Kahane connected these “pathetic insecurities”²⁸ resulting from such a mindset to his idea of *Hadar*, intended to instill Jewish pride. Kahane further criticized the Jewish emphasis on love and acceptance — especially by the non-Jew — which according to him came at the cost of cultivating Jewish pride. Kahane wrote that “(Love) is a product of the centuries of Galut — exile — in which sufferings, persecutions, and holocausts engendered within us fears, insecurities and inferiority complexes of all kinds.”²⁹ The Diaspora represented weakness and fragility and because the Jewish people had spent centuries away from the Land of Israel, these attitudes became normalized and accepted. Jewish leaders — for better or for worse — neglected aggressiveness and ferocity when cultivating their culture. Even when they began to emphasize building the land of Israel, Imhoff writes that many of these early Zionist leaders “focused on non-physical traits such as courage ... building and securing a society for the vulnerable was the central task of American Zionist masculinity — not bodybuilding but society building.”³⁰ The leaders of these movements focused explicitly on men and manhood and their roles in Zionist and American Jewish cultures yet from the perspective of Kahane, neglected other valuable traits. In her essay “Constructing Manhood in American Jewish Culture,” historian Beth Wenger’s analysis substantiates Imhoff’s. Wenger cites sociologist Edward Ross, who said in the 1920s that “Jews are very poor in physique and the polar opposite of our pioneer breed. Not only are they undersized and weak muscled, but they shun bodily activity and are exceedingly sensitive to pain.”³¹ Nearly 50 years later, Kahane challenged such a conception with the

²⁸ Meir Kahane, *Never Again! A Program for Survival* (Los Angeles, CA: Nash Publications, 1971), 70.

²⁹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 135.

³⁰ Imhoff, 181-182.

³¹ Beth S. Wenger, “Constructing Manhood in American Jewish Culture,” in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore and Marion Kaplan (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 353.

JDL. By developing strong and militant men, the JDL would combat such attitudes and rid the Jewish community of these perceptions.

It was more than just in the streets of Brownsville, as Podhoretz explains, Kahane even made the — one might see it as far-fetched — argument that this non-physical emphasis may have even led to the sheer magnitude of the Holocaust.³² As Kahane explained in *Never Again*: “For so many long centuries, was the Jew a plaything for the nations of the world, for so long did we accept our beatings and agonies and death that we became a frightened and twisted people incapable of resistance and accepting our fate with the resignation of sheep being led to slaughter.”³³ The invocation of the Holocaust and the failure of not only the American Jewish community but European Jews themselves to respond and fight back shows the intrinsic nature of Jewish weakness. Matthew Brittingham, in his thesis on the JDL and the Holocaust, surmises that the notion of “sheep to the slaughter” that Kahane despises “added to the patsy image and gentile disrespect of the Jew.”³⁴ Kahane specifically addresses the “patsy” in *Never Again*, the same word also included in the controversial full page *New York Times* ad. While the origin of the word is unknown, it is taken to mean someone who is easily taken advantage of or blamed for someone else’s misdeeds. Not only did Kahane seek to undermine stereotypes of Jewish weakness, but he also wanted Jewish men in particular to push back when they faced criticisms, to no longer be an easy target. He exemplified this idea in *Never Again*, writing: “The image of the Jew as an easy mark, as one who backs off, as one who allows himself to be pushed back, as a ‘patsy’ is the image that must be

It should be noted however, that Ross was a known public antisemite and lost his position at Stanford University for his views. Still, his ideas were not necessarily uncommon, as Bingham’s writing earlier in the 20th century makes clear.

³² Kahane, *Never Again*, 154-155.

³³ *Ibid*, 153.

³⁴ Matthew H. Brittingham, “Meir Kahane And the Holocaust: The Jewish Defense League As Collective Memory Project” (Masters’ Thesis, Indiana University, 2014), 29.

changed.”³⁵ The JDL became the organization to do just that. It represented Jewish men in a rarely-before seen way. The “patsy” represented a different kind of Jewish man, one who simply walked to his death in the Holocaust without any desire to fight back. The JDL concerned itself with constructing an aggressive portrayal of a Jewish man who would not back down in the face of conflict or violence. In its *Aims and Purposes*, which answers detailed questions about the League’s founding and mission, this new representation becomes evident.

Written in 1970 and dedicated to the perished six million Jews of the Holocaust — whom Kahane likely would have deemed patsies — the document answers many hypothetical questions about the Jewish Defense League. It is perhaps puzzling that the JDL would dedicate a document that articulates its mission, to Jews whom it criticizes for venturing to the gas chambers without resistance. The organization might have dedicated it to those who resisted in the Holocaust, or even Biblical heroes. The JDL though, chooses the deaths of these innocent Jews as inspiration and motivation for prospective members of their organization. Holocaust victims are thus utilized as a tool with which the JDL can say “Never Again!” will such an atrocity occur because “Their pain is our pain and their suffering is our suffering, as the document states.”³⁶ The lack of effort among these murdered Jews sparks the beginning of an aggressive Jewish masculinity in the JDL, with a firm basis in seemingly avenging their deaths. The *Aims and Purposes* document answers questions and provides a blueprint for *how* exactly the JDL ensures that these mindsets and actions occur. In the document, the JDL answers questions ranging from basic musings, such as “Why was the Jewish Defense League formed?” and “Why does JDL teach the use of firearms?” to more

³⁵ Kahane, *Never Again*, 129.

³⁶ Jewish Defense League, *The Jewish Defense League: Aims and Purposes* (New York, NY: The League, 1970), 1.

specific issues including, “Is JDL racist? If not, why the emphasis on black anti-Semitism?” In answering these questions and dozens more, the issues of masculinity and violence reappear. In characterizing antisemitism, it becomes an issue of physicality and of violence. The document stipulates: “We understand only that when Jewish rights are in danger, when there is a physical danger to Jews, it is a Jewish problem — it is a JDL problem.”³⁷ Thus, the JDL becomes associated with solving issues related to violence and physicality, representing a new type of Jewish assistance. The other Jewish organizations may help with issues connected to country clubs or promotions in the workplace, as the document mentions, but the Jewish Defense League signifies a different type of Jewish response to prejudice and discrimination, one that involves a desire to fight back.

Criticism of the Jewish establishment by the JDL was discussed in detail in the previous chapter, but it is worth scrutinizing *how* the JDL sought to differentiate itself — by popularizing its aggressive, violent and *masculine* tactics. These *Aims and Purposes* include the idea of teaching Jews to defend themselves in a seemingly responsible way. Interestingly enough, these aims explicitly allow men, women, boys and girls to learn karate and how to fire weapons. In practice however, these practices disproportionately involved men. For example, in a 1969 session at Camp Jedel, the JDL’s famous summer institution to indoctrinate Jewish youth, only one female among nearly 40 male teenagers was present.³⁸ Further, in Dolgin’s experience spending time with the JDL, she explains that “Although the chaya squad was not officially closed to females, it was generally agreed that the ‘work’ of the chaya was ‘work’ only males could adequately carry out.”³⁹ In Kahane’s reflections on

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ John Peterson, “Camp Builds Cadre of Street Fighters,” *National Observer*, July 28, 1969.

³⁹ Janet Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 80.

the work and successes of the Chayas, he wrote that “It was a thing of joy to find a big, strong Jewish youngster and train *him* to defend Jewish honor, bodies and property. It was an even more satisfying thing to watch so many of the Chayas go into battle with their yarmulkes on their heads.”⁴⁰ Men then, served as the primary fighters for the JDL, the ones who wielded the power in crafting a new representation of the image of the Jew.

As a result, the JDL’s new representation is in essence a new representation of Jewish manhood. By featuring these Chayas most prominently and discussing their success, the JDL lauds the success of strong militant men. While women may have played at least some part in the organization — as evidenced by their inclusion in learning karate and how to shoot a weapon in the JDL’s *Aims and Purposes* — they were expected to take a backseat to the male leaders and demonstrators. Even Fran Grossman, the girl at Camp Jedel, recognized her place in the movement as inferior. In the *National Observer* feature, she explains that she attended the camp “primarily for the ideology,” according to writer John Peterson.⁴¹ Mora adds: “Perhaps when (Grossman) called it ‘primitive’ she was referring to the determinedly non-intellectual hyper-masculine, brutal training tactics.”⁴² Dolgin explains that men could serve as both “Scholars” — those who taught the JDL members about Jewish heroes — and *Chayas*; women could only work in the JDL offices.⁴³ This distinction reveals the JDL as a male-centric and male-dominated organization which Mora’s analysis substantiates. She explains that “the JDL’s recruiting materials, advertisements, and published materials used the words *boys* and *men* to the point of redundancy, never mentioning female members (and

⁴⁰ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 279.

⁴¹ Peterson, “Camp Builds Cadre of Street Fighters.”

⁴² Mora, 326.

⁴³ Dolgin, 80.

indeed there were very few.)”⁴⁴ The infamous advertisement, in fact, caters specifically to men, as it asks “Is this any way for nice Jewish *boys* (emphasis added) to behave?” Kahane and the JDL could have catered to nice, Jewish *people*, but this would deflect attention from the group’s focus, to develop new, aggressive and tough Jewish *men*.

The *Aims and Purposes* document interrogates the specific type of man the JDL targets. It stipulates the importance of youth, but rather than allowing for speculation, it once again uses male pronouns to focus its mission. In examining why a number of Jews identify as radical leftists, the document states that “the Jewish youngster is intelligent and sensitive. He is generally exposed to an environment of social justice which breeds this.”⁴⁵ This social justice environment, which often neglected the Jewish cause, perhaps also fostered an internalized sensitivity among the Jewish people. One could argue that the JDL believed that this seemingly accepted mentality led to a lack of Jewish pride. M. Jay Rosenberg, despite vastly disagreeing with the JDL’s ideas on violent extremism, might have related to such an assertion about Jewish pride. In his essay, “To Jewish Uncle Toms,” Rosenberg criticized the “the Jew, the classic, bumbling liberal” who is “so trapped by [his] Long Island split-level childhood that [he] can’t see straight.”⁴⁶ I posit that this “Long Island split-level childhood” serves a similar role in Rosenberg’s more subtle argument about the lack of Jewish toughness. It sounds much like Kahane’s descriptions of the wealthy suburban Jews, who neglected to exhibit any behaviors deemed “unorthodox” — shooting a weapon, for example — that would provoke and startle their gentile, suburban communities.⁴⁷ Rosenberg’s 1960s essay demonstrates that in this era of radical change, even among those who saw different

⁴⁴ Mora, 324.

⁴⁵ *Aims and Purposes*, 10.

⁴⁶ M. Jay Rosenberg, “To Jewish Uncle Toms,” in *The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook*, ed. Michael T. Staub (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 232–36.

⁴⁷ Kahane, *Never Again*, 66.

solutions to the lack of Jewish unity, this notion of timidity, incompetence, or in Rosenberg's case "bumbling," constantly reappears in characterizing the Jewish people. The JDL saw themselves in a new way. They saw themselves as tough fighters and immensely proud of their Jewish heritage when they demonstrated. It was a sentiment that many Jews in the early 20th century and even in the 1950s and 1960s did not always share.

In his examination of contemporary American Jewry in *A Certain People*, Charles E. Silberman details the initial tremendous fears many once had about Jewish life in the United States. Silberman explains that "for many Jews, their Jewishness was a source of embarrassment, even shame."⁴⁸ Silberman then details the story of political leader Henry Morgenthau III who believed that the "cure" for this "defect" of Judaism was to "was to be achieved through a vigorous lifelong exercise of one's Americanism"⁴⁹ that is assimilation into the greater secular society, at a loss of one's unique Jewishness. Even in later years of the 20th century, Silberman acknowledges that a similar mentality existed of Jews appearing uncomfortable and embarrassed by their religion. Growing up, Silberman's family encouraged him and his siblings to avoid public discussion of Judaism. Further, he writes that when a neighbor's father was seen reading a Yiddish newspaper, the neighborhood deemed it "not nice," which Silberman believed "meant that they were embarrassed by his public display of Jewishness."⁵⁰ As seen through Kahane's reflections in *Never Again*, Jews internalized this "nice" mentality and rarely expressed pride about their religion. The JDL though, made pride one of its core tenets and urged its members to boldly proclaim and demonstrate their Judaism.

⁴⁸ Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1985), 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

This pride or *Hadar* made Kahane especially joyous and he aimed to represent Jewish Pride and aggressiveness — two previously paradoxical ideas — together as one. Notably, in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, he commented on the pleasure his leading fighters took in their Jewishness. “Once Jews were ashamed of this skullcap; it called attention to their Jewishness and to their ‘difference’ which they were attempting to escape,” he wrote. “Now these proud young Jews went into battle with those yarmulkes and many of the ones who wore them were not even observant!”⁵¹ Such a public and grand action significantly contrasted with the deference learned by Silberman growing up. Silberman writes that his generation was taught “to not call attention to yourself. It would have been inconceivable for anyone, rabbi or layman to wear a yarmulke in public, notwithstanding the Orthodox injunction to keep the head covered as a sign of respect for God.”⁵² Kahane rejected this apparently widely-held notion, imploring members of the JDL to loudly and proudly celebrate their Judaism. In the process, he turned a religious symbol into a political one of defiant masculinity.

Jewish pride then manifested itself in a new form of Jewish masculinity, a violent and a tougher one. It is also intriguing to consider another anecdote from Silberman who writes: “A prominent Orthodox rabbi a few years my junior recalls the admonition his mother gave him during his student days, when he began wearing a yarmulke outside the home: ‘It’s not nice’ she told him.”⁵³ For Kahane, the yarmulke represented aggressiveness and assertiveness and the Jewish people reclaiming an aspect of their culture that had perhaps been co-opted. He completely transformed its meaning to the Jewish people. The JDL emphatically rejected

⁵¹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 279.

⁵² Silberman, 29.

⁵³ Ibid.

the “nice” label of seemingly emasculated Jewish men and embraced instead a mentality of militancy and authoritativeness. No more would the Jewish people conform to the so-called “nice” manner in which they were expected to behave. Further, in Orthodox Jewish tradition, only men are permitted to wear yarmulkes (skullcaps). Women do not wear them, and especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, would likely been reprimanded for doing so. This gender divide demonstrates that when Kahane envisioned the JDL, he foresaw Jewish *men* participating in these fighting activities exhibiting their Jewish pride publicly, and not women. Additionally, Rosenberg wrote in his essay that Jews recoiled at any mention of their Jewish identities in public spaces, whether it be a book by Philip Roth or a professor teaching on Yom Kippur.⁵⁴ Kahane’s JDL celebrated the religion and culture in a new and arguably innovative way. No more would Jews exhibit “Timidity, fear, unreasonable ‘reasonableness’ and insane bending-over-backward”⁵⁵ mentality in public. They would be fierce and armed — in many cases with literal weapons — with the knowledge of Jewish heroes who utilized violence and aggressiveness on behalf of the Jewish people. In the *Aims and Purposes*, the pamphlet states that education functions of utmost importance. Only then, once learning of the Jewish warriors and fighters, could the members of the JDL serve as the next generation of Jews fighting for their own heritage.

This reinvention of Jewish education was crucial in the JDL’s reconstruction of the Jewish man. In its education programs at its summer camps and in its chapter meetings, the JDL emphasized the role of Jewish heroes, specifically those who fought — if needed violently — in battle to combat antisemitism.⁵⁶ As the *Aims and Purposes* explains: “And so

⁵⁴ Rosenberg, 235.

⁵⁵ *Aims and Purposes*, 11.

⁵⁶ Kahane, *Never Again*, 247 and McCandlish Phillips, “Jewish Militants Step Up Activity,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1969.

the militant becomes the hero of the young for this is a natural thing. We all want heroes and the hero is the one who wins. ... The militants are being made winners.”⁵⁷ The document does not explicitly define “winning” but it is perhaps implied that this refers to the battles against antisemitism and to implementation of societal changes. Interestingly, certain Jewish heroes whom the JDL emphasizes didn’t always earn victory in their battles or rebellions. The JDL stressed the lessons of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, in which a number of Jewish people mounted one final revolt against the Romans, fighting back before ultimately succumbing to a valiant, albeit crushing defeat. In her book *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli Tradition*, historian Yael Zerubavel examines the transformation of the Bar Kokhba narrative from a “dubious leader of a failed revolt to a prominent heroic figure from antiquity.”⁵⁸ She details how retelling of the event emphasized the “the act of rebelling” rather than the failed revolt itself. It is also fascinating to note Zerubavel’s analysis of the Jewish holiday of Lag Ba-Omer⁵⁹ and its role in altering the meaning of Bar Kokhba’s rebellion. She details that the Zionist movement shifted the holiday into one that celebrated heroism and military victory, with a deemphasis on learning and scholarship and increased focus on soldiers.⁶⁰ In essence, Zerubavel writes, “Lag ba-Omer is first and foremost the holiday of the revolt, the holiday of the uprising against the Romans.”⁶¹ Additionally, in his book *Tough Jews*, Paul Breines argues that the Bar Kokhba rebellion

⁵⁷ *Aims and Purposes*, 10.

⁵⁸ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 96.

⁵⁹ Translated literally, the day means the 33rd Day of the counting of the Sheaf, between the Jewish holidays of Passover and Shavuot (feast of weeks.)

⁶⁰ Zerubavel, 100.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 99-100.

marked the end of “solid Jewish warrior ideals”⁶² among Jews. Breines further muses that after the rebellion began the internalization and acceptance of timid and resigned Jews. The JDL also taught the story of Judah and the Maccabees, who — despite a significant military disadvantage — bravely fought against the Seleucid Army and ultimately claimed sovereignty over the land of Israel, leading to the Kingdom of Judah. Breines summarizes that the memories of Bar Kokhba and the Maccabees became just that, “increasingly confined to prayer and daydreams, and increasingly less a reflection of the Jews’ actual social life.”⁶³

And as a result, centuries of accepted Jewish physical inferiority began. Kahane aimed to reignite and invigorate American Jews with these ancient stories of heroism. He believed that Jewish history was “replete”⁶⁴ with fighters for the Jewish cause who exhibited this notion of *hadar* in an incredibly aggressive yet successful manner, as Bar Kokhba did. Zerubavel explains that modern literature has commemorated and mythologized Bar Kokhba as one who utilized all his might in fighting a fictional lion with his bare hands, and did so alone.⁶⁵ Kahane also believed that the prophet Joshua, judges Gideon, Samson and Deborah, and Kings Saul and David “hardly turned the other cheek,”⁶⁶ that is, advocated on behalf of the Jewish people and stood up to antisemites. Zerubavel explains how Bar Kokhba continues this tradition in the rabbinic era. Many have described Bar Kokhba through his “impressive body and extraordinary physical strength,”⁶⁷ two characteristics that appear reminiscent of Kahane’s characterization of JDL muscle-man Chaim Bieber. The ability to

⁶² Paul Breines, “From Masada to Mossad: A Historical Sketch of Tough Jewish Imagery,” in *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York, NY: Basic Books Inc, 1990), 84.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 85.

⁶⁴ Kahane, *Never Again*, 151.

⁶⁵ Zerubavel, 111.

⁶⁶ Kahane, *Never Again*, 152.

⁶⁷ Zerubavel, 111.

act militantly and aggressively, as these Jewish heroes demonstrate, arose from centuries of Jewish biblical and rabbinic history.

In this sense, Kahane did not develop a “brand new” form of Jewish masculinity, but rather modernized and rejuvenated ideas for the twentieth century. In essence, he aimed to represent the values of Bar Kokhba and Samson for a new generation of American Jews. Some scholars have offered this supposition as well. Brittingham sees Kahane and the JDL as another generation in a lineage of Jewish heroes. Mora, too, asserts this claim. She contends that Jewish militants brought together the history of biblical heroes coupled with those who fought back in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Poland along with those who fought in the underground in Israel in the quest for a Jewish State.⁶⁸ Wenger also explains that American Jews in the early 20th century looked to history for examples of Jewish manhood. She surmises that “Modern American Jewish men had no opportunity to engage in physical struggles on behalf of the Jewish people.”⁶⁹ The JDL fit this need. It provided an opportunity through its chapter meetings and public demonstrations to participate in physical demonstrations of Jewish pride. It served a niche for men who greatly desired these activities in mid-twentieth century United States. As a result, when young Jews joined the JDL and participated in these large-scale events, Brittingham reasons, they now joined the ranks of leaders they had learned about in their JDL education courses.⁷⁰

This education didn’t simply stop with those from biblical and rabbinic times. Even in the European era, in a time when the *Galut* mentality had so encapsulated numerous Jews, there still existed a number of them who fought back, who combated antisemitism in a way

⁶⁸ Mora, 327.

⁶⁹ Wenger, 356.

⁷⁰ Brittingham, 44.

that civilized conversations could not. These figures included Tuvia Bielski⁷¹, Herbert Baum and Hersh Glick, who, unlike many of their fellow Jews, did not stand idly by against the Nazis. Bielski led a resistance group in the Polish forests, Baum led a group that organized an arson attack against the office of Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, and Glick fought Nazi soldiers in Estonia. Still, in *Never Again*, Kahane believes that these three men remain exceptions to the widespread submission mentality demonstrated by many Jews — who could not fathom fighting back. Kahane posits: “Had Jewish fighters possessed Jewish guns and known how to use them, more Germans would have gone to an early grave and the incredibly simple job of moving millions of pliable, unresisting Jews to the extermination camps would have been made infinitely more difficult, thus saving countless Jewish lives.”⁷² In Kahane’s eyes mass resistance hardly occurred and numerous Jews went to their deaths because of the seeming inability of their leaders to cultivate a desire to fight back. At their core, these ideas of resisting and fighting back symbolized the representation desired by the JDL — the notion to resist antisemitism in an aggressive and violent way, if needed.

And for Kahane, violent actions represented Judaism in its truest sense. The assimilationists, the “Jewish Uncle Toms” in the words of M. Jay Rosenberg, detrimentally affected not only American Jews, but specifically American Jewish men. Kahane aimed to reemphasize resistance, believing that “the ideas of the JDL were truly Jewish ones, the only ones that could promise survival for the Jew both spiritually and physically . . . were beginning to do the things that all the timidity, respectability and halting efforts of the leaders had failed to achieve.”⁷³ Once again he connected Jewish survival with physical — likely

⁷¹ Of note, Tuvia and his brother Zus are the subjects of the film “Defiance” starring Daniel Craig and Liev Schreiber, which details their fighting exploits in the forests of Poland.

⁷² Kahane, *Never Again*, 156.

⁷³ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 283.

militant — prowess. The JDL represented itself as the *singular* Jewish organization that not only cared about all types of Jews worldwide, but also would do what other organizations would not: fight in the streets and combat antisemitism. The only way that Jews could overcome threats to their security, in their fear-inducing, rapidly changing neighborhoods, was to protect themselves, even use guns if necessary. As the *Aims and Purposes* detailed: “The surest way not to have a confrontation is to be ready for a confrontation while the surest way to have one is to be unprepared for one.”⁷⁴

Before the JDL’s prominence, no Jewish organization represented this tough, masculine persona. The JDL didn’t shy away from this violent character as many Jewish men did, rather it embraced it. As McCandlish Phillips’ article on the JDL explained, “The league regards its readiness to use force as one of its virtues.”⁷⁵ To justify this seemingly overzealous preparedness, the JDL compared the Jewish people’s situation in the late 1960s United States to Weimar Germany.⁷⁶ Both countries demonstrated a semblance of democracy yet in the eyes of Kahane and the JDL nonetheless signified trouble for the Jews. Kahane explicitly reflected this idea in a conversation with *Time* in 1969, telling the reporter, “We see here the beginnings of the 1920s in prewar Germany. . . . This is a question of Jewish survival -- nothing else.”⁷⁷

To demonstrate successfully this readiness to fight anyone at any time by any means necessary, the JDL took on an image that many in the Jewish community despised. The *New York Times* wrote an editorial deriding the League, terming it “an American Nightmare” and

⁷⁴ *Aims and Purposes*, 2.

⁷⁵ McCandlish Phillips, “Jewish Militants Step Up Activity,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1969.

⁷⁶ *Aims and Purposes*, 5-7.

⁷⁷ “Jewish Vigilantes,” *Time Magazine*, July 4, 1969.

citing prominent Reform Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath,⁷⁸ who called the organization a “goon squad.”⁷⁹ Other organizations in the Jewish Establishment ridiculed the JDL as well, including Arnold Foster, lead counsel of the Anti-Defamation League. Cited by Phillips, Foster said that “the Jewish Defense League is a self-appointed group of vigilantes whose protection the Jewish community does not need or want.”⁸⁰ Further, Phillips explains that Foster accused the JDL of imitating “the mindless tactics of racial hoodlums.”⁸¹ Herein lies a core difference between the JDL and the supposed Jewish Establishment. For the leaders of organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the JDL’s strategies seemed juvenile and maybe even barbaric. They saw the JDL public demonstrations and acts of aggressive violence as harmful to the Jewish cause. Kahane though, considered this disconnect as a failure of the Jewish Establishment to understand the importance of an image shift, of a new representation of Jewish men, much like the Black Panthers did for Black Americans. Kahane even embraced the moniker of the Jewish Panthers on multiple occasions. In *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, Kahane explicitly mentions this Jewish Panthers nickname, writing “Jewish violence and Jewish threats of violence. Jewish Panthers. Jewish hoodlums. These were the things that, in the minds of the Jewish community, made up the Jewish Defense League. . . . [W]e *encouraged* (emphasis original) the labels and the reputation and were encouraged by them.”⁸² Because the JDL saw itself as a group dedicated to defending poor Jews and elderly Jews from

⁷⁸ Eisendrath was in charge of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, an organization that Kahane pointedly attacks in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 101-105.

⁷⁹ “Dream or Nightmare,?” *New York Times*, June 25, 1969, 46. .

⁸⁰ Phillips, “Jewish Militants Step up Activity.”

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 120.

“hoodlums”⁸³ in their neighborhoods, seemingly the only way to combat and defeat the threats, was to *become* hoodlums or Panthers themselves. This image was how the JDL members sought to represent themselves, much to the disappointments and frustrations of the Jewish Establishment, who seemingly preferred its men to focus on intellectual and economic prowess, as Podhoretz discusses, rather than physical or militant characteristics.

The Black Panthers and the JDL’s ideology greatly conflicted. In his book *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post Holocaust America*, American literature scholar Eric Sundquist discusses the antisemitism of the Black Panther movement, explaining that “Like (the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), the Black Panthers insisted that they were not antisemitic but only antizionist, a distinction their rhetoric at times made hard to discern.”⁸⁴ Sundquist also details that Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver appeared at an event with Palestinian Authority head Yasser Arafat. Still, the two groups did share some common enemies — namely police officers. Both the JDL and the Black Panther movement felt the police neglected their communities, with the latter comparing them to “Israeli troops in the West Bank.”⁸⁵ However, it wasn’t the Panther ideology that Kahane, the JDL and other militant Jewish groups utilized, but rather the Panthers’ mentality, their commitment to their cause by any means necessary including violence. Kahane confirmed this assertion in his 1971 *New York Times* interview with Walter Goodman.⁸⁶ Kahane acknowledged that his violent tactics had been influenced by the success of black militants, and while he argued for a ban of an American version of the Nazi party, would not ban the Black Panthers. This is

⁸³ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker*, Jewish Studies, Book 1 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 8.

⁸⁴ Eric Sundquist, “Black Power, Jewish Power,” in *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 332.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 337.

⁸⁶ Walter Goodman, “I’d Love to See the J.D.L. Fold Up,” 4.

likely because, as Staub explains, JDL members were not bothered by the “ideological contradictions” in appropriating Black militant style.⁸⁷ Additionally, Staub includes information from one individual who supposed that “The Jews must make an intense militant effort just like the Blacks did, or he’ll be pushed out like in Europe in the ‘20s and ‘30s.”⁸⁸ The JDL took on this militant image, even if its members attempted to frame themselves as concerned with survival.

Intriguingly, while representing themselves as equivalent to the Black Panthers and incorporating the hoodlum label, the JDL at times rejected its militancy characterization — though simultaneously advocated for such actions. One instance occurs in the *Aims and Purposes* pamphlet, which, in an answer to a commonly asked question of whether or not the JDL is a militant or extremist group, the pamphlet defines them as neither. The document states: “(The JDL) is a firm believer in firmness and strength to preserve the rights of Jews and all Americans.”⁸⁹ Another example occurs in the letters section of *Time* magazine in response to a story the magazine wrote about the League. Philip B. Birnbaum, claiming himself to be a member of the JDL, wrote in a letter to the magazine’s editor that “We should be under the heading of Jewish survival. The JDL is not a militant group but a group of Jews attempting to put an end to this antisemitism.”⁹⁰ And yet, Kahane supported this militancy ideology and advocated on its behalf, believing it to be the perfect antidote to typical ideas of American Jewish masculinity. In *Never Again*, he explains: “If a Jewish right is trampled,

⁸⁷ Michael T. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: Jewish Liberalism in Crisis*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 228.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Aims and Purposes*, 4.

⁹⁰ Philip B. Birnbaum, “Judaism Scarred?,” Letter to the Editor, *Time Magazine*, September 20, 1971.

there must be an immediate response, strong but responsible, *militant* (emphasis added) but carefully thought out....”⁹¹

In honing its aggressive and sometimes violent actions, the JDL served as a reawakening of the long-dormant militant Jew. A Jew much like Judah the Maccabee, who in the face of anti-Jewishness did not back down. A Jew like Tuvia Bielski, who even in the Holocaust, managed to escape Nazi persecution and fight the Germans in the forest. A Jew, that perhaps Norman Podhoretz once aspired to be growing up amidst facing brutal bullying from his black peers. The JDL represented this type of Jew, one who would no longer be “berated and insulted while smiling; beaten and kicked while shouting happily, “Beat me again!” whipped, vilified, and threatened while denying that there is any problem....”⁹²

Kahane’s words appear reminiscent of the Christian doctrine “Sermon on the Mount” from Matthew, in which Christians are encouraged to simply endure the resistance rather than fighting back. Christian theologian John Wright Buckham explains that there exist significant differences between receiving and “turning the cheek.” Buckham argues that “turning the other cheek is both strategy and victory. Submitting to a blow is a negative attitude; turning the other cheek is positive. It declares, indubitably, a principle and a policy. Such conduct disarms an assailant. It knocks his weapon from his hand by paralyzing it....”⁹³

The JDL represented the exact mentality that Buckham believes individuals should strive for. The JDL would feature Jews who learned karate, who knew how to fist fight and who knew how to fire rifles. Because of the tremendous fear of antisemitism, the JDL needed

⁹¹ Kahane, *Never Again*, 142.

⁹² *Ibid*, 140.

⁹³ John Wright Buckham, “Good-Will versus Non-Resistance,” *The Biblical World* 47, no. 1 (1916): 33–35.

to alter the “Nice Irving” stereotype which reflected the typical meek Jewish man.⁹⁴ Consisting of taxi-drivers, merchants, teachers, and students⁹⁵, the Jewish Defense League would travel to institutions that committed acts of antisemitism, whether widely supported or not, and would advocate on behalf of the Jewish cause. When they arrived at these buildings or neighborhoods, they often resembled the men in the infamous *New York Times* advertisement. The JDLers carried baseball bats and clubs, prepared to fight back at any moment, building upon their actions as they did for the first time in the Montefiore cemetery. They represented a new — though perhaps old — era of Jewish masculinity. The Jews, and in particular Jewish men, had greatly suffered. As Breslauer surmises, “Kahane’s conspicuous suffering encompasses only the oppressed Jewish male; when he says Jew he means Jewish man.”⁹⁶ Kahane and the JDL provided solutions on how to “fix” the oppressed Jewish man, by teaching him toughness and aggressiveness.

The JDL sought to challenge and reframe, in the words of novelist Maurice Samuel the concept that “The Jews are probably the only people in the world to whom it has been promised that their historic destiny is — to be nice.”⁹⁷ The final chapter will detail the actions that the JDL took to convey this image of a tough Jewish man and demonstrate situations in which “maybe, Jewish boys should not be that nice.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Staub, *Torn at the Roots*, 221.

⁹⁵ Tom Matthews, “The Jewish Vigilantes,” *Newsweek*, January 12, 1970.

⁹⁶ Breslauer, 106.

⁹⁷ Silberman, 30.

⁹⁸ Jewish Defense League, “Is This Any Way for a Nice Jewish Boy to Behave?” *New York Times*, June 24, 1969.

CHAPTER THREE: How the JDL's Actions Transformed American Jewish Masculinity

“I saw my friends getting the hell beat out of them...

Now I say never again. It used to be you hit a Jew, he turned the other cheek. We are saying, you hit a Jew, you gonna be hit back.”

-Steve Abrams, 25-year-old ‘burly karate expert’¹

In late April of 1969, Meir Kahane had an idea.² With his burgeoning Jewish Defense League on the cusp of success after protecting the heavily-Jewish Montefiore cemetery from vandals and protesting in front of the WBAI radio station — to name just two examples — Kahane was ready for a next step. He prepared himself to, in his words “create a Jew who would teach the world that ‘Jew’ was not a synonym for victim.”³ In order to accomplish this objective, Kahane believed he needed to establish a summer camp, an institution popular among the Jewish community.⁴ Building upon his own experiences with Camp Betar as a child⁵, Kahane envisioned a place where he would teach the ideas of the JDL to the next generation. A place where he would provide lessons in how to fight, how to shoot and how to act should the Jews find themselves under attack. This camp — Camp Jedel — served as the ideal mechanism for Kahane’s and the JDL’s desire to prepare for the worst situation by any means necessary. Camp Jedel exemplifies how the JDL put its ideas and representations of aggressive and militant masculinity into practice.

¹ Tom Matthews, “The Jewish Vigilantes,” *Newsweek*, January 12, 1970.

² Shlomo M. Russ, “The Zionist Hooligans’: The Jewish Defense League” (Ph.D Dissertation, City University of New York Graduate Center, 1981), 106.

³ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), 129.

⁴ *Ibid*, 130.

⁵ Russ, 105.

By May 2, Kahane began to take the first steps toward establishing the camp. The JDL placed an ad in the weekly *Jewish Press*, advertising a “Summer Seminar Training Camp.” The ad ran each week for the rest of the month, targeting high school and college youth. It promoted itself as “the most unique Jewish Camp in the United States.”⁶ At this camp, the League members themselves taught karate and other martial arts to prospective youth interested in joining the JDL. To further emphasize the military precision and camaraderie sought by the JDL, the organization hired an ex-marine to teach the teenagers drills. According to Shlomo Russ’s dissertation, “(Kahane) thought of (Camp Jedel) as a training camp of sort, a place to indoctrinate youngsters with ethnic pride, teach them Jewish history, and at the same time instruct them to become excellent fighters.”⁷ In this manner, Camp Jedel served as the fulfillment of many of the core pillars of the JDL, such as *Hadar* (pride) *Ahavat Yisroel* (Love for Israel and the Jewish People) and *Barzel* (Iron). It represented *Hadar* as the camp provided the opportunity for teenagers to learn “ethnic pride” as Kahane explains, which likely meant learning the lessons of Jabotinsky and Bar Kokhba, for example. The camp allowed for the youth to acquire love of Judaism and love of the Jewish people. And, with its emphasis on physicality and aggressiveness, Camp Jedel equipped campers with tools to succeed in future demonstrations and JDL-sanctioned acts of violence.

Russ details that JDL members purchased a Joy-Del Bungalow Colony located two miles east of Woodbourne, NY from two Queens physicians. The camp itself was “well-isolated,” as one could only access it through a long narrow dirt road.⁸ As it was located in

⁶ “The Jewish Defense League Is Now Accepting Applications for Its Summer Seminar Training Camp,” *The Jewish Press*, May 2, 1969.

⁷ Russ, 106.

⁸ Russ, 107.

the vicinity of the Catskills, the camp found itself situated among other more “typical” Jewish camps, places where children “did what nice parents enjoy seeing them do”⁹ activities such as canoeing, swimming, horseback riding and playing games. Kahane’s camp, however, drastically differed. It functioned as a place during the summer to persuade young Jews — specifically men — to see the merits of and eventually join the JDL. Kahane believed that one could teach “toughness” and “ideology” and he aimed to do so at his camp.¹⁰ Through this usage of “ideology” it becomes evident that Camp Jedel functioned less as a summer camp of leisure and learning and more as a training ground in which JDL could implement the image of the empowered and prideful Jewish male it sought to develop and perpetuate. By teaching young men about how the JDL works and its desires to reinvigorate Jewish pride, the JDL successfully transformed many emasculated Jews into fighters. For just \$150 for eight weeks (at least the initial summer), Jewish young men could travel to the Catskills and learn karate and how to fire a weapon.

The latter proved particularly significant to Kahane, who in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, muses that “How many mothers have told how many Jewish children that only *goyim* have guns?”¹¹ Firing a weapon, in the eyes of many Jews represented a seemingly “gentile,” foreign and perhaps *unJewish* activity. Because it signified non-Jewishness, Kahane wanted Jews to take advantage of it and learn how to shoot — a distinctly militant and thus arguably masculine activity. Marksmanship became necessary for members of the JDL to learn in order to succeed in the organization’s work. Kahane even believed riflery basic to survival, which then meant it was vital to understand the need to be prepared by all

⁹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

means necessary. And at Camp Jedel, these teenagers learned it all while simultaneously becoming fully immersed in militant Jewish ideology. Kahane invokes his hero Ze'ev Jabotinsky in emphasizing the importance of weaponry. Jabotinsky believed that all “Jewish youth, (should) learn to shoot.”¹² In an era of tremendous Jewish intellectual growth for many Jews, the JDL seemed savage and barbaric, and the role of weaponry only increased this perception of the JDL as merely a fringe “vigilante group” unworthy of discussion.¹³ Yet, for Kahane, the current issues of antisemitism, robberies and muggings which he termed “jungle” “[trumpeted] forth the need for studious and diligent Jewish study.”¹⁴ Kahane believed that for Jews in unsafe neighborhoods, it was crucial to learn how to respond to these incidents, even more than learning Jewish knowledge. As Haskell Lazere¹⁵ acknowledged, because the Jewish Establishment had appeared to have lost touch with the “rank and file”¹⁶ of the Jewish community, the JDL believed it was more important than ever to learn the “gentile” craft of marksmanship. It drastically differed from a Jewish culture that prided itself on intellectualism. While Kahane recognized the importance of Jewish education and Jewish history, his goal was to ensure that it never came at the cost of learning to “fight back.” Kahane specifically targeted those Jews who lived in dangerous neighborhoods, believing that the Jews in these places needed to transform themselves from constant victims because of their lack of weapons, to those who are “armed and dangerous.”¹⁷ Camp Jedel introduced instruction in how to use these weapons.

¹² Ibid, 131.

¹³ Haskell Lazere, “Haganah USA?,” *Dimensions in American Judaism* 4 (Spring 1970): 10.

¹⁴ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 131.

¹⁵ Lazere served as the director of the New York chapter of the American Jewish Committee, a truly “Establishment” Organization in the eyes of Kahane and the JDL.

¹⁶ Lazere, 10.

¹⁷ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 133.

According to John Peterson's *National Observer* article, the camp functioned as an institution to "build a cadre of street fighters."¹⁸ In analyzing how Camp Jedel served a role in transforming conceptions of Jewish masculinity, the response of one father whose son attended the camp is revealing. The "beaming" father explained that "'When I visited there last weekend,' ... 'my 15-year-old had become a man. He has matured and has a quiet confidence about him.'"¹⁹ This anonymous father reveals how the JDL's actions at Camp Jedel inspired changes in Jewish masculinity. Clearly — at least for this one teenager — his weeks spent learning martial arts and how to fire weapons had changed his mentality from a mere teenage boy, possibly emasculated and timid, to an aggressive — and Jewish — "man." Additionally, such a comment demonstrates once again the *male* emphasis within the JDL. One could argue that Camp Jedel served as a "Bar Mitzvah"²⁰ (literally, son of commandment) for its participants, as they mentally became *men* after learning these new strategies of how to fight. S. Daniel Breslauer examines such an assertion in *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero and Thinker*. He writes that Kahane transformed the Bar Mitzvah, believing that traditional ceremony "reinforced conventional views of Jewish communal solidarity"²¹ and termed his new vision of the practice "Bar Mitzvah Under Fire." Such a ceremony required a "performance of an act of self-conscious civil disobedience for the sake of oppressed Jews."²²

¹⁸ John Peterson, "Camp Builds Cadre of Street Fighters," *National Observer*, July 28, 1969.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ In the American Jewish community, the Bar Mitzvah service is one in which a Jewish 13-year-old reads from the Torah and becomes an "adult man" in the Jewish religion. In the 20th century, Bar Mitzvah parties became incredibly popular and materialistic, focusing less on the actual ceremony. It was this consumerist mentality that Kahane criticized.

²¹ S. Daniel Breslauer, *Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker*, Jewish Studies, Book 1 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 30.

²² *Ibid.*, 31.

I argue that participating in Camp Jedel constituted a Bar Mitzvah, as it required participation and engagement in truly strenuous activities. According to McCandlish Phillips' 1969 *New York Times* dispatch, the campers woke up at 5 AM for four hours of karate training, two hours of weapons training, one hour of "close order drill" and four hours of courses focused on "ideology" in the words of Kahane.²³ These intense endeavors show that it took a specific type of teenager to thrive at Jedel, which the JDL likely knew, as it picked its participants in the initial summer from a number of applications. Ultimately, Camp Jedel provided a medium for the Jewish Defense League to test out its ideas on the next generation of militant fighters. It allowed the League to transform itself from a number of neighborhood fighters to a multi-generational and empowered militant masculine organization, ready to fight and protest at a moment's notice. Finally, Camp Jedel aimed to instill this fear of the impending doom of American Jews in its campers, and then ultimately develop an aggressive and militant response. As Sam Shoshan, a member of the JDL executive board explained to a *Time* correspondent, "We want to encourage the belief that fascism is coming to America and that the Jew is not safe here. If there is just a slight fear in some Jews, we play upon it."²⁴ The JDL would play upon it by teaching the art of shooting weapons "to protect the shopkeepers"²⁵ as one 15-year-old camper explained. The JDL combined the concepts of fear, protection and militancy to forge a new type of Jewish male, honed in through activities at Camp Jedel. And in events ranging from synagogue protests to even vandalism, these teenagers and men would prepare to utilize these fighting skills many times on behalf of Jews everywhere — even if some Jews themselves didn't always welcome it.

²³ McCandlish Phillips, "Jewish Militants Step Up Activity," *New York Times*, June 25, 1969.

²⁴ Leonard Levitt, "Armed Summer Camp," *Time Magazine*, August 30, 1971.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In May of 1969, in Detroit at the National Black Economic Development Conference, prominent African-American Civil Rights leader James Forman announced his plan for national reparations for Blacks in the United States. He “demanded”²⁶ that houses of worship — synagogues and churches — pay a half-billion in dollars reparations to Blacks because of slavery. An analysis by Russ of a 1969 *New York Post* article from this time quoted Forman’s reasoning, “Six Million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and Israel is still getting reparations.... Fifty million blacks died in slavery and the black people have been paid nothing.”²⁷ Forman was true to his words at this conference. He marched into the Riverside Church in Morningside heights in Upper Manhattan along with eight of his followers and implored the Church to invest 60% of its income to the cause of reparations. Russ describes Forman “walking to the altar area, disrupt[ing] the services and present[ing] his ‘Black Manifesto’ to the worshippers.”²⁸ This incident at Riverside was just one example of Forman attempting to spread his ideas about reparations to the masses, which eventually included synagogues. The Jewish community became aware of Forman’s desires to speak at Temple Emanu-El at a Friday night service. This choice was perhaps deliberate by Forman and his team as Emanu-El was one of the oldest and wealthiest Reform congregations in the United States — founded in 1845. It represented the “heartland of the Jewish Establishment.”²⁹ It also was the only Jewish service broadcast over the radio, which Russ posits would lead to immediate and significant news coverage. Forman’s visit to Temple Emanu-El — or rather

²⁶ Russ, 99.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lazere, 7.

intended appearance — would attract tremendous media attention, albeit for a vastly different reason, the interference of Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League.³⁰

Kahane and the JDL did not particularly support the ideas and Jewish life advocated by Temple Emanu-El, a Reform synagogue. Kahane himself believed that the members of the posh, Establishment, Manhattan synagogue greatly differed from and had perhaps neglected their struggling fellow Jews in Brownsville and Crown Heights. Nevertheless, Kahane considered it essential to protect Emanu-El and stage a protest against the synagogue's acceptance of Forman into its sanctuary. In *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, reflecting on the mass demonstration, Kahane admits that he did not particularly care for these “assimilated Jews” who attended Emanu-El and “turned their backs on both Judaism and Jews decades earlier.”³¹ Kahane chastised them even further by assuming that parts of their own home cost more than Forman's incredibly large monetary demands.³² The JDL in Kahane's eyes protested at Emanu-El to defend the “concept” of the synagogue. The JDL believed that if Forman went through with his speech it would send a sign to other synagogues that Forman could make his pitch for reparations there, which would lead to tremendous danger for American Jews, which the JDL sought to avoid. Kahane justified the organization's actions by explaining that “the Formans of the world would have to learn that *no* (emphasis original) synagogue and no Jew would ever again be the target of threats without reacting.”³³

As was the norm with the JDL, the Emanu-El protest emphasized this idea of “resisting” or fighting back, to combat antisemitism rather than simply endure it. Kahane

³⁰ Russ, 99-100.

³¹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 103.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

aimed to rid the Jewish people of the principle of “turning the other cheek.” “Not” turning the other cheek symbolizes victory. It demonstrates that the JDL is willing to fight on its own terms, and it will no longer tolerate, in the case of Forman, “extremists” attempting to infiltrate Jewish spaces. The JDL appears to argue that rabbis such as Maurice Eisendrath accommodate extremists such as Forman by “turning the other cheek,” heeding his demands and letting him articulate his ideas to unassuming Jews while they mount no challenges.

Once the JDL found out that Forman would be speaking, its members immediately crafted plans to impede his speech. By Friday afternoon, the day he was scheduled to speak at Emanu-El, the group had implemented a concrete plan. *Men*, mostly in their 40s, stood in front of the synagogue as it began its Friday night services. Russ writes that some held baseball bats, others held chains, sticks and lead pipes. A few even wore motorcycle crash helmets ... parodying a motorcycle gang.”³⁴ It wasn’t a small group, as had been at the Montefiore Cemetery protest in 1968. Russ writes that there were more than 100 men present in front of the synagogue holding these clubs and baseball bats. They stood in two rows with their backs facing the sanctuary, seemingly ready to fight when given permission to do so. Amongst these men were many news reporters, eager to witness the confrontation between these seemingly “Not nice” Jewish men and James Forman and his supporters. Determined to prevent such a conflict from occurring stood more than 30 uniformed police officers and dozens more in street clothes, hoping to mitigate the violence. But such precautions arguably proved for naught, as Forman never showed up. Surrounded by all the members of press, it was, as Russ terms it “a televised coup de theatre.”³⁵

³⁴ Russ, 100.

³⁵ Ibid, 101.

The JDL received significant media attention as a result of this protest and gained more national notice. The *Jewish Press* helped perpetuate this coverage. The weekly newspaper constantly featured seemingly every act of antisemitism, accentuating even the most minor incidents in large capitalized letters. The JDL's protest was covered valiantly in the May 9 edition of the *Press* with the headline "JEWS DEFY THREAT TO SYNAGOGUES."³⁶ The article detailed the heroics of the JDL's demonstration, explaining how the organization exhibited "sharp defiance of a black extremist threat (Forman)"³⁷ and ultimately prevented his attendance. The article also noted the JDL's role in co-sponsoring a conference for all synagogues to "meet and outline concrete physical responses to any extremist takeover."³⁸ The paper emphasized the role of the JDL in stopping the "extremist" Forman, who, according to the *Press* had told the National Black Economic Conference that "We are declaring war on white churches *and* (emphasis original) white synagogues."³⁹

In Peterson's *National Observer* article written a few months later, Murray Schneider, a JDL chapter coordinator reflected on the event, explaining, "We felt that if they could extort money from one synagogue black extremists all over the country would do the same thing. If they can enter our synagogues they can just as well bring the machine guns now."⁴⁰ The *New York Times* covered the event as well and interviewed Rabbi Nathan Perilman, the spiritual leader of Emanu-El, who said that he "deplored" the League and that he would have

³⁶ Special to Jewish Press, "JEWS DEFY THREAT TO SYNAGOGUES," *The Jewish Press*, May 9, 1969.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Peterson, "Camp Builds Cadre of Street Fighters."

allowed Forman to read his demands about reparations.⁴¹ The article also detailed the presence of police at the synagogue in case of incident.

For Kahane, this event signaled a shift in the perception of both the JDL and American Jews. In the *Aims and Purposes* document written a year later, the League itself acknowledged the effect that the Emanu-El protest had on the transformation of Jewish image. The League believed that it demonstrated at Emanu-El for two reasons, to show that Forman's presence at the synagogue "would be met with whatever force was necessary and secondly to show the entire world that on this and any other issue, the Jew was no longer the 'patsy' that the world took him to be."⁴² The Temple Emanu-El protest reveals that after developing and constructing the ideal characteristics that the JDL wished to represent, the organization then utilized these pillars in concrete and public actions. By protesting at Temple Emanu-El, the JDL invoked the image that it and Kahane wished to propagate: that of a militaristic, aggressive and proud Jew. The JDL no longer wished for the Jewish man to be the person who seemingly accepts defeat on behalf of another person without a fight. It hoped to foster challenges for every instance of antisemitism and contention for the Jews. Further, the demonstration showcased the power that the organization held. It seemingly yielded enough influence that Forman and his men refused to show up and articulate his ideas about reparations that even the synagogue itself welcomed. These "hobgoblins,"⁴³ as Maurice Eisendrath referred to them, embraced this label and manifested it in— at least in the case of the Temple Emanu-El — successful protests. Additionally, the JDL believed that

⁴¹ Edward Fiske, "Forman Burns Writ on Church Disorder," *New York Times*, May 10, 1969.

⁴² Jewish Defense League, *The Jewish Defense League: Aims and Purposes* (New York, NY: The League, 1970), 11.

⁴³ "Defense League Scored by Rabbi," *New York Times*, May 18, 1969.

this protest sent a message to not only those radicals such as Forman but to the Jewish Establishment as well. In reflecting on the event and Eisendrath's comments, Kahane wrote that "when Eisendrath asserted that 'neither Jews nor Christians nor America need such protectors,' he certainly was not speaking for the Jew of the troubled neighborhoods where he did not live and which he had not seen in years."⁴⁴ The JDL then cemented itself as the hard-nosed and tough protectors of the marginalized Jewish community which mainstream Jewish leaders had neglected. An action such as the Emanu-El protest perhaps showed the benefit of an aggressive response and how it could provoke fear in an institution or an individual and in the case of Forman, cause them ultimately to back down. Intriguingly though, such a protest had little direct effect on neighborhood politics and on the marginalized Jews of Crown Heights and Brownsville. Still, one might argue that it had the *indirect* result of galvanizing these Jews into supporting the efforts of the JDL while other Jewish leaders simply abandoned them. As Lazere explains, in the infamous "Nice Jewish Boys" *New York Times* advertisement, the building in which the JDLers are positioned in front of could easily have been mistaken for Temple Emanu-El, thus symbolizing the profound reach of this event and its intended impact for the future of the JDL— beyond Central Park.

As it did during the Forman protest, The *Jewish Press* played a significant role in detailing and emphasizing the JDL's militant responses to antisemitic events, providing a contrast with that of the diplomatic Jewish Establishment. The impact of this coverage can be illustrated through a discussion of the "Harlem on my Mind" exhibit. In January of 1969, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City announced an exhibit dedicated to

⁴⁴ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 105.

commemorating the 68-year-old Black History of Harlem. The exhibit would be controversial in a number of ways for both Jews and Blacks. For example, the exhibit did not include any work from the Harlem Renaissance period nor did it include the participation of Black people from the neighborhood itself.⁴⁵ Additionally, art historian Bridget Cooks explained that Metropolitan Museum of the Art Director of Exhibitions Allon Schoener “engaged in a popular humanistic project” rather fully engaging and truly understanding the nuances of the Harlem community.⁴⁶ Cooks also detailed that Schoener based the exhibit, at least in part, on work he had done for the Jewish Museum of New York City about Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side of Manhattan titled: *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925*. In developing the exhibit, Schoener aimed to “to demonstrate the Met’s willingness to embrace a broad spectrum of community and cultural interests”⁴⁷ as art historian Susan Cahan termed it. According to Cooks, Schoener’s decision proved particularly controversial because “Harlem on my Mind” was “the Met’s first exhibition about the racial *other*,”⁴⁸ which in an era of significant contention between African-Americans and Jews augmented this disdain. Jewish art critic Arthur Cohen saw this controversy looming as well, saying at the time that ““the real problem, as an ideological problem (not unrelated to the question of sales) is that by and large the immigrant story is a success story and the experience of the black community in America is still an unrelieved tragedy.””⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Bridget R. Cooks, “Redux: Rediscovered Books and Writings: Harlem on My Mind,” *Aperture*, no. 223 (2016): 23–24.

⁴⁶ Bridget R. Cooks, “Black Artists and Activism: Harlem on My Mind (1969),” *American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2007): 13.

⁴⁷ Susan E. Cahan, “Harlem on My Mind at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” in *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 31.

⁴⁸ Cooks, “Black Artists and Activism, 16. (emphasis original)

⁴⁹ Cahan, 56.

Interestingly — though likely not surprising from Kahane’s perspective — the exhibit curator, Schoener, identified as a Jew. It was Schoener’s heritage, Cooks writes, that inspired him to undertake the development of *Portal to America*. In addition to the problems that “Harlem on my Mind” posed toward African-Americans, Schoener included in the introduction to the exhibit catalog, an essay written by a teenage girl named Candice Van Ellison that employed antisemitic ideas and language to describe the relationship of Jews and African-Americans. The *Jewish Press* printed Van Ellison’s term paper in full in the January 24, 1969 edition of the paper. It included lines critiquing the Jewish people such as “Behind every hurdle that the Afro-American has yet to jump stands the Jew who has already cleared it,”⁵⁰ and, what the *Jewish Press* termed “most shocking,” Van Ellison wrote that “Blacks may find that anti-Jewish sentiments place them for once within a majority. Thus our contempt for the Jew makes us feel more completely American in sharing a national prejudice.”⁵¹ The *Press* termed Ellison a “young black militant,” likely to stir up fear and increase sentiments of aggressive retaliation among its largely conservative and Orthodox Jewish readership. Once the language of the introduction became known, it wasn’t just the JDL that expressed outrage. Even Establishment organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Congress expressed indignation, with the president of the former, Dore Schary, even calling it “something akin to the worst hatred ever spewed out by the Nazis.”⁵² The American Jewish Congress took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* with the headline “The Enemy is Silence” criticizing the exhibit saying that ““We have long had experience with the big lie — in this case, the lie that the Negro plight is the result of

⁵⁰ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 111.

⁵¹ “Antisemitism in N.Y. Erupts Openly,” *The Jewish Press*, January 24, 1969.

⁵² Cooks, “Black Artists and Activism,” 20.

some kind of conspiracy by the Jews.”⁵³ Schoener defended the introduction and rejected any calls of its racism. Intriguingly, Cooks notes that only Museum Director Thomas Hoving, a White Protestant — and not Schoener, the Jewish individual — was “embarrassed” by the inclusion of the essay.⁵⁴ Schoener believed that his scholarly freedom was infringed upon when he faced criticism. Also, it appears that Hoving even mentioned to Schoener about the essay’s possible antisemitism which the latter rejected, saying that the essay did not imply antisemitic feelings.⁵⁵ As a result, museum studies scholar Yuha Jung argues that Schoener “enflamed feelings of hatefulness between Jewish and Black people that already existed in the two communities.”⁵⁶

By refusing to condemn or initially remove Van Ellison’s term paper, Schoener reflects what Cahan posits were his desires to convey a feeling of reportage, the sense that the viewer was experiencing Harlem’s history ‘as it happened.’⁵⁷ This can also explain Schoener’s justification for neglecting to include academic footnotes from Van Ellison’s essay, choosing to portray the words as the girl’s own.⁵⁸ Schoener did this deliberately, asserting that “‘Everyone was into black nationalism and black identity and it was very important for black statements to be listened to by white people. So for me to say in the introduction that this was a young black woman who was borrowing from white intellectuals would have been very inappropriate.’”⁵⁹ Further, as someone who learned from Marxist art historian Anthony Blunt in college and throughout his career had focused on “populist

⁵³ Cahan, 77.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Yuha Jung, “Harlem on My Mind: A Step toward Promoting Cultural Diversity in Art Museums.,” *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum* 7, no. 2 (February 2015): 8.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Cahan, 33.

⁵⁸ The offending catalogue statement had actually been paraphrased from a well-known book by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan called *Beyond the Melting Pot*. In Van Ellison’s original term paper, the text had appeared as a quotation (Cahan, 78.)

⁵⁹ Ibid, 78-79

endeavors,”⁶⁰ it is no surprise then that Schoener would have such a response to the exhibit’s criticism. It becomes easier to understand his reaction to the criticism when recognizing that Schoener did not participate in the Freedom Rides or Civil Rights Marches in the South and saw the “Harlem in my Mind” exhibit as an opportunity to be a Civil Rights activist, as Cahan writes.⁶¹ Thus, in a way, Schoener in his efforts to depict the authentic Harlem, supports the type of militant African-American ideology despised by Kahane and the JDL. In analyzing Schoener’s rationalizations about Van Ellison’s essay, her piece is perhaps similar to James Forman’s manifesto in the eyes of the JDL, in that the works both threatened American Jews and needed to be dealt with severely. Schoener did not appear to consider the antisemitic nature of these comments because they would come at the cost of the intended “authenticity” he so yearned to portray. One could then argue that Schoener acted in a manner similar to Charles Silberman’s analysis of Jewish shame that permeated much of the 19th and 20th century, when Silberman reflected, “Those who wanted to be part of the larger society had a harder time. Seeing Gentile manners as superior, they had to struggle constantly to destroy what they considered the vulgar little Jew within them; they lived in constant fear that Gentiles would associate them with other Jews — those they saw as loud or pushy or acquisitive and who were responsible, in their view, for anti-Semitism.”⁶² Schoener, perhaps in an effort to succeed in the world of elite museums, discounted his Judaism when making this exhibit. Kahane abhorred the mentality of such Jews. He wanted the Jewish people to be proud of their religion and culture and not have to disguise it. Worse, from the perspective of Kahane and the JDL, Schoener defended African-Americans over his own people, a

⁶⁰ Ibid, 36.

⁶¹ Ibid, 39.

⁶² Charles E. Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1985), 36.

tremendous act of betrayal in their eyes. Yet, scholars such as Cooks would disagree with Kahane's assertion, as Schoener only used photographs rather than artwork produced by African-Americans of this era. She asserts that "Schoener chose instead to construct an atmosphere that would recreate the way that he experienced Harlem from his position of privilege."⁶³

The JDL as expected would not stand idly by such a gross and public form of antisemitism. Rather than simply asking for a public condemnation and apology, the JDL reacted aggressively. More than 30 picketers from the JDL led a public march in front of the museum, and as the *Jewish Press* described "called on people to 'join us, stay out'"⁶⁴ in reference to the Met. The *New York Times* covered the protest as well, detailing the JDL's picketers and provided a particularly compelling photograph.⁶⁵ The image presents a (roughly) 20-something male, wearing a *yarmulke* holding signs about combating antisemitism. In this protest at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the JDL's picketers didn't simply voice anger about the overt antisemitism in the introductory catalogue. The JDL sought to present themselves on a public national forum while wearing distinctly Jewish items — the *yarmulke*, as is visible in the image — to fight antisemitism. This protest action in front of the Met showcased the transformation from a timid Jew to a Jewish man proud of his religion and unabashed about presenting it publicly.

The JDL demonstration proved successful too, as with the Forman protest. By the end of the month, the Met accepted responsibility and withdrew the catalogue from the exhibit.⁶⁶

Overall, the successful public protest at the Metropolitan Museum indicated the benefits of

⁶³ Cooks, "Black Artists and Activism" 17.

⁶⁴ *Jewish Press*, "Antisemitism in N.Y. Erupts Openly."

⁶⁵ Rudy Johnson, "2 Harlem Pastors Disagree on Exhibit," *New York Times*, January 20, 1969.

⁶⁶ Peter Kihss, "Museum Withdraws Catalogue Attacked as a Slur on Jews," *New York Times*, January 31, 1969.

the JDL's confrontational and aggressive approach — one to which many other Jews balked at— in solving problems.

The JDL gained even more notoriety — through the JDL would argue it was beneficial — when its members vehemently protested the WBAI radio station which broadcasted an antisemitic poem on the air. In December of 1968, Black educator Leslie Campbell went on the Julius Lester show on the WBAI station and read a poem written by a 15-year-old young black girl⁶⁷, which expressed objectively antisemitic sentiments. It included the lines: “Hey, Jew boy, with that yarmulke on your head / You pale-faced Jew boy, I wish you were dead.”⁶⁸ The *Jewish Press* included the text of this poem in full in its January 31, 1969 weekly edition. The poem concludes with the lines “I hated you Jew boy because your hangup was the Torah, and my only hangup was my color.”⁶⁹ This decision by the *Press* to publish this poem in full gave the poem increased awareness and notoriety as Lester's show did not have many listeners. Whether intentionally or not, this 15-year-old girl invoked Jewish characteristics specifically emphasized by the Jewish Defense League: boys and the wearing of the yarmulke. As seen in the Forman and Metropolitan Museum of the Art protests, Kahane would completely flip this sentiment, and strongly encourage, even demand that the JDL protesters wear them. The poem continues with the line “I can see you Jew boy — no you can't hide.”⁷⁰ By 1969, the JDL did indeed demonstrate that “no (they) can't hide” and marched to the WBAI and protested the overt antisemitism. Members of the JDL demonstrated with their yarmulkes for all to see, publicly displaying their Judaism. They

⁶⁷ It is intriguing to note that both the essay in the introduction to the Met Catalogue and the poem read on WBAI that drew the ire of the JDL were written by young African-American girls. Perhaps a coincidence, but nevertheless a fascinating one.

⁶⁸ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 160.

⁶⁹ Russ, 83.

⁷⁰ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 160.

were unabashedly proud of their Judaism and their rights and were willing to criticize an institution no matter the power it wielded. But it wasn't just Campbell who read an antisemitic poem, others who appeared on Julius Lester's show made similar offensive comments toward Jews including college student Tyrone Woods who said on-air: "As far as I am concerned, more power to Hitler. He didn't make enough lampshades out of them."⁷¹ Yet despite these multiple instances of obvious antisemitism, the WBAI board of directors refused to condemn Lester's show or the comments. Kahane and the JDL initially attempted to penalize the station through judicial means, asking the New York State Supreme Court for legal remedy but the case was eventually dropped.⁷²

The Sunday after Woods' comments, Kahane ordered the JDL's members to stage a demonstration outside of the station. In this letter, recounted by Russ, Kahane wrote that "Attendance at this demonstration should be obligatory for anyone who calls themselves a Jew."⁷³ On January 26, 1969 the JDL gathered outside the station holding signs that read "No Auschwitz Here," and "They Will Not Make Lampshades Out of Us," the latter in reference to Woods' comments on Lester's show. The *Jewish Press* covered this protest in detail and explained that the JDL had "three demands that they declared 'non-negotiable.'"⁷⁴ These demands included cancelling Lester's show, apologizing for "WBAI's 'insensitivity and complicity,' and pledging that no more airtime be allotted to such "hate shows."⁷⁵ The station, however, denied these demands because, according to *New York Times* coverage they

⁷¹ Ibid, 108.

⁷² Russ, 84.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Jewish Activists in N.Y. March against Radio Station WBAI," *The Jewish Press*, January 31, 1969.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

ran contrary to the first amendment.⁷⁶ The station championed free speech and advocated that its duty was to inform and illuminate rather than support an agenda, which Kahane greatly disputed, as he recounted in a February *Jewish Press* article. He then utilized the *Jewish Press* once again to advertise the JDL's exploits to its readers by explaining that the "JDL would use all means necessary"⁷⁷ to thwart Lester's program and articulate its demands.

Kahane put these words to action a few days later. Russ explains that Kahane scrutinized the WBAI building to see if he could gain access it, realizing that the JDL could enter WBAI's building by climbing over roof of the building next door which he eventually did, confronting the station's leaders.⁷⁸ By January 30, hundreds of Jews stood outside of the station to protest, leading to a violent clash between JDL and counter-protestors. In *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, Kahane remarks that this instance signified the first arrest of a JDL member and reflected that "it had indeed been the angriest Jewish demonstration and it was about time."⁷⁹ Kahane then emphasized that this WBAI protest "was the first of many demonstrations by JDL that 'violence is never good but sometimes necessary,'"⁸⁰ reiterating ideas reflected in *Never Again* and the "Aims and Purposes" that American Jews must be prepared for the case of violence and confrontation. In the case of the WBAI demonstration, this concern was warranted and the JDL was rightly prepared. The protest ended "inconclusively"⁸¹ as Russ termed it, with WBAI eventually "quietly" ordering the termination of such offensive language. Intriguingly enough, two years after this

⁷⁶ "WBAI-FM Rejects Jewish Group's Demands on Anti-Semitism." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Jan 28, 1969

⁷⁷ "Jewish Activists in N.Y. March against Radio Station WBAI."

⁷⁸ Russ, 86-87.

⁷⁹ Kahane, *The Story of the Defense League*, 110.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Russ, 88.

confrontation with the station the JDL received its own 15-minute program titled “JDL on the Air” broadcast weekly on WBAI.⁸²

Still, the protest and invasion of the WBAI building showcased the role of direct aggressive action in the JDL. The JDL wasn’t willing to simply wait for a change, it wanted to infiltrate the institution itself, even if this went against convention for Establishment Jewish groups. As explained in chapter one, with the “Federation 45” for example, some radical Jewish groups would use this tactic to obtain their desired demands. This action reveals the JDL’s relentless commitment to fulfilling the characteristics of its image. It wasn’t enough to merely advocate on behalf of this identity shift, the JDL needed to set an example for all American Jews of the necessity for direct confrontation. While acknowledging that violence is not ideal, Kahane recognized its power and capacity for a change in a way that diplomatic conversations had failed. As detailed in the *Aims and Purposes* Document, the JDL believed that “There is calculated assault and threat to physical life and there is a need for a group with a different and radical approach to this problem. This is why the JDL was formed.”⁸³ The previous strategies of dealing with antisemitic language were now in the words of the JDL “outmoded,” with “old defense groups not willing to go out and ‘get their hands dirty.’”⁸⁴ The JDL believed it needed to “get its hands dirty” to prevent such an instance of antisemitism from occurring over the airwaves ever again. And it believed that in order to successfully accomplish that, the JDL needed to orchestrate actions that articulated the anger expressed by American Jews, even if meant resorting to barbaric, uncivilized, generally “masculine” actions. Mora articulates how “The calls to arms which the JDL used to rally support directly appealed to the desire of Jewish men to regain (or gain)

⁸² Ibid, viii.

⁸³ *Aims and Purposes*, 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

some measure of tough masculinity.”⁸⁵ By orchestrating direct and — in the case of the WBAI protest — violent responses, the JDL functioned as an organization that allowed and encouraged Jewish men to express themselves in this tough manner.

After the WBAI protests, the role of the JDL in committing aggressive actions to solve problems began to spread throughout New York City. In the case of Eastern District High School in Brooklyn, an official from the school contacted the JDL for assistance. For Kahane, reflecting in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, such a moment proved crucial for the JDL’s future. He wrote: “This was the first time such a thing had happened (someone called for help) and marked in our eyes a turning point.”⁸⁶ The incident in question occurred on March 7, 1969, when 200 students smashed the offices of the Jewish dean Gideon Goldberg and urged his dismissal. The students distributed “obscure violent literature”⁸⁷ against Goldberg, overturned desks and shattered windows. According to Russ, the violence appeared to have some racial undertones with Goldberg’s decision to curb loitering interpreted as “racist harassment.”⁸⁸ As a result a “frightened”⁸⁹ — in the words of Kahane — Goldberg then decided to contact the JDL for assistance. The reality of the situation however, is a bit more nuanced. According to the *Liberation News Service*⁹⁰, Goldberg had been known to strictly police those who had been truant at the high school. He is quoted as

⁸⁵ Miriam Mora, “From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America” (Dissertation, Wayne State University, 2019), 324.

⁸⁶ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 113.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Russ, 92.

⁸⁹ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 113.

⁹⁰ “Founded in 1967, *Liberation News Service* was an alternative news agency, that issued twice-weekly packets aimed at providing inexpensive images, articles, and art reflecting a countercultural outlook. First from its office in Washington, D.C., and then from New York City, LNS provided underground and college papers around the globe with radical and unconventional coverage of the war in Vietnam, global liberation struggles, American politics, and the cultural revolution.” (Liberation News Service (New York, N.Y.) Records (MS 1007). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. <http://scua.library.umass.edu/umarmot/liberation-news-service-new-york/>)

saying “I harass anybody who is walking around without a pass. I harass anyone who is walking around (without) a hat. But I don’t call it harassing. I call it challenging.”⁹¹ In such a tense environment with students fighting teachers and police to get into the school, Goldberg had had enough. He found a student skipping class and threatened with suspension, to which, according to the *Liberation News Service*, the student said “he would bust Goldberg’s ass.”⁹² Goldberg this time threatened arrest, which ignited the protest of the students. The students of Eastern District gave the principal of the school a number of demands, including Goldberg’s termination, but the principal declined them all. Thus, fighting ensued.⁹³ Teachers were beaten, windows were broken, and the school was eventually closed for a couple days. All the incidents cost upwards of \$4500, according to a *New York Times* dispatch. The damage was so horrid and morale so low, that in the words of one student interviewed by the *Liberation News Service* “if the school were reopened the same thing would probably happen.”⁹⁴

The school did end up reopening with Goldberg contacting the JDL for assistance. Kahane recognized the importance of Goldberg’s decision to alert the JDL, not the police or other authorities or even the Jewish Establishment groups, but the JDL. This instance showed the JDL’s growing influence within the Jewish community. Especially in this situation, with an educator needing protection, Goldberg perhaps believed that the Jewish Establishment would not act appropriately in this situation, choosing to deal with it diplomatically and meticulously. Or, in the words of Kahane would “[study] the situation and [issue] their

⁹¹ “From Under the Dean of Discipline’s Desk,” *Liberation News Service*, March 15, 1969.

⁹² “The Error of Gideon Goldberg,” *Liberation News Service*, March 11, 1969.

⁹³ Richard J.H. Johnston "Two Schools are Closed here by Parent and Student Protests." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Mar 08, 1969.

⁹⁴ *Liberation News Service*, “The Error of Gideon Goldberg.”

protest”⁹⁵ before ultimately having a solution. At this point, Kahane hypothesized, the school might not exist and Goldberg would have the potential to suffer a serious injury. The JDL would develop a swift and vigorous reaction to aid Goldberg and ensure that he would never face this threat again.

Three days later, three members of the JDL drove Goldberg to school while 30 others stood guard as he arrived, surrounded by hundreds of students. According to Russ, the two JDLers who escorted Goldberg to the school sported the largest white yarmulkes that (JDLer Eli) Schwartz could find.⁹⁶ There were no police in sight and Goldberg walked in without any threat. Kahane explained that he “made it clear that we would wreck the school” to the other officials at Eastern District.⁹⁷ Goldberg remained in his position at the school and while antisemitism was not eradicated entirely, it became “passive and in total retreat” in Kahane’s words.⁹⁸ For the next few days, Chaim Bieber personally took care of and protected Goldberg. Bieber was an incredibly burly and strong man whom Kahane believed was capable of brutal violence as discussed in chapter two.

The JDL made the deliberate choice to march and publicly demonstrate at the high school and did so while exhibiting visible representations of Jewry, by wearing yarmulkes. Russ recounts the discussion between Schwartz and Marty Lewinter, in which the former expressed skepticism at the suggestion to wear yarmulkes. Schwartz implored his co-member, ““Marty, are you a Jew or not?”” “They already know JDL is Jewish; are we going to hide from it?””⁹⁹ In wearing these yarmulkes at Eastern District High School, Schwartz

⁹⁵ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 113.

⁹⁶ Russ, 93.

⁹⁷ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 114.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Russ, 93.

and Lewinter confronted the perceptions of American male Jews as timid and emasculated and debunked them by appearing as bold and powerful. Gary Goodman, in his dissertation examining Kahane's rhetoric, explains that "Unlike their 'sheepish elders,' who shake and quake in their 'respectable' fashion, the new-Jew expresses his discontent with a 'thundering cry.' . . . The new-Jew is depicted as not being content with silent and solemn protests but he proudly shouts, raises menacing fists, and publicly proclaims and asserts his identity as a Jew."¹⁰⁰ Schwartz, Lewinter and Bieber all reacted with a "thundering cry" in their responses to the Eastern District High School issue. They publicly asserted their Judaism and pride in their uniquely Jewish and male identities. By wearing the yarmulke, they, like those at the Forman protest, united behind the concept of *Hadar* and expressed pride in their Jewish tradition. They also exhibited *Barzel*, which Kahane emphasized as "toughness in dealing with those who would harm or destroy the Jew."¹⁰¹ The teenagers vandalized the school and placed tremendous fear in the Jewish Dean, Goldberg. However, one must consider the school itself and the overall climate that may have motivated the students to commit such actions. The *Liberation News Service* described the school as reflecting 70 years of slow decay, 1,500 too many students in the building and "rats and cockroaches [running] rampant throughout the building."¹⁰² The *New York Times* added that the school was 70% African American and 20% Puerto Rican, in an era in which there existed numerous tensions between African-Americans and Jews. It is likely that seeing a Jew in the position of Dean who utilized this position to "harass" — in Goldberg's own words — students fueled this antisemitism and caused them to riot as a sign of their anger and frustrations.

¹⁰⁰ Gary Scott Goodman, "Rhetoric of the Jewish Defense League" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1978), 56.

¹⁰¹ Meir Kahane, *Never Again! A Program for Survival* (Los Angeles, CA: Nash Publications, 1971), 142.

¹⁰² *Liberation News Service*, "The Error of Gideon Goldberg."

The JDL believed it had no alternative but to fight the response in a public and assertive method, because, as the organization would articulate in its *Aims and Purposes* — undoubtedly influenced by these events — “Timidity, fear, unreasonable ‘reasonableness’ and insane bending-over-backward guarantee further trouble.”¹⁰³ In *literally* carrying Goldberg to the school, and having Bieber shadow him for the next few days, the JDL aimed to prevent the worst for the Jews. In crafting a quick and strict response, the JDL averted any future threats and overt antisemitism from re-appearing at Eastern District High School. The JDL’s militancy struck fear in the eyes of students of the school; no longer could they bully their Jewish Dean into submission. Though the JDL didn’t commit any overt violence at the school, the message was sent: if the students were to act violently toward the school or its Jewish individuals, the JDL’s members would quickly respond. Perhaps, they might even have used the weapons they learned how to shoot during scorching early morning sessions at Camp Jedel.

The JDL held an open rally City College of New York against racism and reverse discrimination and combatted the supposed “militant” African-Americans who aimed to interrupt the rally. The JDL pushed back against the protesting mob and its demonstration continued. After this rally, Kahane recalls that four Christian students sought out Kahane and said to him ““you guys have guts, that was the first rally of this kind we’ve ever seen here. Can we join the JDL?””¹⁰⁴ Christian college students wanted to join a *Jewish* organization that fought for uniquely Jewish causes likely because of its fearlessness and its relentlessness to not back down in the face of confrontation. It is intriguing to posit what the students meant by “this kind” of rally. One could argue that they referred to the presence of Jewish students

¹⁰³ “*Aims and Purposes*,” 11.

¹⁰⁴ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 114. Kahane makes the claim in this book that at least 4% of the JDL was non-Jewish.

aggressively protesting and not capitulating to another group's demands. They did not "turn the other cheek" nor did they simply accept their fate. In the Forman protest, Metropolitan Museum of the Art demonstration and march into Eastern District High School, the JDL challenged traditional ideas of American Jewish masculinity. The JDL could have simply scrutinized the situation and developed a tactful method to solve Goldberg's fears for his safety at the school, but they chose to combat it through direct, confrontational and if necessary violent action. In order to ensure that these methods succeeded, future JDLers attended Camp Jedel to learn these skills. They learned Jewish pride, martial arts and how to fire weapons. Arguably most significantly, they became aware of the tools and mechanisms of how the JDL aimed to transform traditional ideas of Jewish masculinity. As the events of the Forman Protest, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a host of others reveal, the JDL succeeded. It combatted antisemitism but it showed American society that the Jewish people *could* indeed hit back if needed. It could act confrontational and aggressive. And finally, the JDL demonstrated to the world "that the Jew would not be stepped on and that violence would be met with equal violence."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ *Aims and Purposes*, 12.

Figure 3



Figure 4



CONCLUSION

“We are not doing this for *you* and we are not interested in what you think. We are doing this because you symbolize Jewish rights that are being trampled and we intend to see it that those rights are protected whether you like it or not.” — Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*¹

In a February 2019 article in the *Times of Israel*, prominent Israeli-American writer Yossi Klein Halevi, reflects on the appeal of Rabbi Meir Kahane to a young, Jewish teenager in the 1970s, writing, “I saw him getting clubbed after charging into a line of police. On the spot I became his follower. Here, finally, was an American Jewish leader ready to sacrifice for his people.”² Halevi has since renounced these views and become a noted scholar on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But as a teenager attending an orthodox yeshiva (school of Judaic study) growing up in New York City, Halevi looked up to Kahane. For Halevi, Kahane represented a leader who did not shy away from speaking loudly and proudly about Jews, in ways in which the Jewish Establishment could and would not. Halevi even joined Kahane’s neighborhood patrols in the late 1960s, an era of radical change in the United States. He saw Kahane as someone who loudly spoke about “Jewish pride and protection”³ and the JDL as a group which fought on behalf of Jews by any means necessary at a time when Halevi sought such an organization. Jewish pride symbolized was undoubtedly vital to the JDL but the group also represented the reemergence of a confrontational and combative Jewish masculinity. The JDL fused militancy, Jewish pride and an aggressiveness that contemporary

¹ Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Company, 1975), 277.

² Yossi Klein Halevi, “The Desecration of Israel,” *Times of Israel*, February 24, 2019, <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-desecration-of-israel/>.

³ *Ibid.*

emasculated Jewish men had seemingly never encountered. For young orthodox American teenagers coming-of-age in this era — Halevi among them — the Israeli victory in Six Day War showed the power of militancy and “fighting back.” Further, it showed a desire to resist and refute the narrative that ““(the Jewish kids) are soft, they’re not tough, they’re not really experienced in life. They have to assert their masculinity, and that’s a fundamental challenge,””⁴ in the words of a Columbia Faculty member during the Student protests at the University in 1968. The JDL fueled these desires to challenge the conventional norms of Jewish male behavior, as Halevi’s reflection showcases.

Halevi expresses the main aspects of Kahane’s animosity toward American Jews. Halevi’s assertion about “an American Jewish leader” references the American Jewish “Establishment,” the focus of Kahane’s criticisms detailed in the first chapter of this thesis. Kahane attacked organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, considering them inadequate in the fight against the plague of antisemitism spreading across New York City. In creating the JDL, Kahane sought to develop an institution that truly fought for those left behind, unlike the wealthier, out-of-touch suburban Jewish Establishment organizations. In essence, the JDL represented a Jewish organization seemingly “ready” in the words of Halevi to sacrifice for *all* Jewish people. Kahane truly intended to fight for everyone, whether they were poor, elderly Holocaust survivors in the Brownsville projects, Orthodox Lubavitcher Jews in Crown Heights, or even the wealthy reform Jews of the Temple Emanu-El synagogue. The Jewish people seemingly lacked leaders who would take aggressive approaches to combating antisemitism. They sought — or would eventually need — a uniquely *Jewish* organization,

⁴ Miriam Mora, “From Talking Softly to Carrying a Big Shtick: Jewish Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America” (Dissertation, Wayne State University, 2019), 296.

one which prided itself on confrontation and public demonstrations. Kahane filled these Jewish needs and desires with the establishment of the JDL. Halevi's reflections on his own motivations for joining suggest the power of Kahane's charisma and appeal to young Jewish men in particular.

Kahane and the JDL targeted these young Jewish men, intent on overturning the stereotype of the Jewish man as mentally intelligent, but physically weak. In his own thoughts on Jewish masculinity, Jackson Katz discusses the stereotypes of post-Six Day war Jewish men and how, much like Norman Podhoretz's sentiments in *My Negro Problem — and Ours*, Katz believed that “the quickest way to popularity in the larger culture was to prove myself not in the classroom but in violent physical competition with other boys.”⁵ In seeking this violent outlet, Katz could have perhaps turned to the Jewish Defense League, which utilized traditionally Jewish concepts and shifted them into symbols of aggressiveness and violence. Katz even acknowledges the organization's appeal to him, at least initially, explaining that he “was invigorated by the *raison d'être* of this extremist organization: the idea that Jews did not simply have to be victims and take the sort of abuse we had been dealt for thousands of years. We could fight back — we could even beat the goyim at their own game.”⁶ And this game, in the eyes of Katz and Kahane arguably as well, was violence. Kahane cultivated this sense of violence for many young male teenagers at Camp Jedel, with lessons in karate, marksmanship and Jewish heroism.

The JDL responded to Jewish fears about public displays of Judaism, most notably through the yarmulke, by transforming its meaning and significance. No longer would

⁵ Jackson Katz, “‘Not-So-Nice-Jewish Boys:’ Notes on Violence and the Construction of Jewish-American Masculinity in the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries,” in *Brother Keepers: New Perspectives on Jewish Masculinity* (Harriman, Tennessee: Men's Studies Press, 2010), 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

Jewish men fear wearing their yarmulkes in public, rather, they would proudly celebrate wearing them as they confronted antisemites in the street. The JDL reinvented what it meant to be an authentic Jew. It wasn't enough simply to study Jewish texts and engage in Jewish religious observance in New York City. Jews needed to understand their own history of those who resisted, such as Bar Kokhba or Samson or Tuvia Bielski in the forests of Nazi-occupied Poland. The JDL believed one needed to truly *fight* on behalf of Jews everywhere to reinvigorate a sense of pride and fearlessness that the Jewish people sorely lacked by the mid-20th century. In this way, Kahane and the JDL reflected Halevi's desires for someone who in "getting clubbed" was unafraid of his Jewishness and unapologetic about his desire to reframe the perceptions of the timid American Jewish male.

Kahane didn't just write manifestos, give interviews and propagate ideas in his *Jewish Press* columns about the need for a Jewish militant group. He implemented these ideas through public demonstrations, gaining widespread awareness and notoriety for the JDL. As Halevi writes, "American Jewry, the most timid of communities" had never seen anything like this outbreak of militancy for a Jewish cause."⁷ Kahane demonstrated this militancy through confrontations at the Montefiore Cemetery in Queens New York, in which dozens of JDLers defended the cemetery against vandals with clubs and baseball bats, able to stand their ground on a moment's notice. He exhibited this aggressiveness when he and the JDLers met counter protesters in front of the WBAI station and fought with them using their fists and baseball bats. The JDL further showcased its toughness and no-nonsense attitude when its members escorted Dean Gideon Goldberg into the halls of Eastern District High School. Ultimately, the organization took this seemingly incongruent idea of Jewish males

⁷ HaLevi, "The Desecration of Israel."

fighting and turned it into a common reality, successfully changing the conception of the aloof Jewish male through actions at Eastern District High School, WBAI, and the Montefiore Cemetery. It is a conception that even by the 21st century was still entrenched in the minds of American Jewish culture.

In 2007, the film “Knocked Up” written and directed by Jewish filmmaker Judd Apatow arrived in theaters. The movie details the story of unemployed slacker Ben Stone’s relationship with driven journalist Allison Scott which turns awry when the latter becomes pregnant from a one-night fling with the former. Jewish actor Seth Rogen portrays Stone and acknowledges his character’s Jewishness in the film.⁸ Most notably, Stone and his friends discuss the film “Munich,”⁹ with Stone emphasizing the radical contrast of the portrayal of Jews in the film compared to other depictions of Jews in cinema. Stone exclaims to his friend, “‘Dude, every movie with Jews, we’re the ones getting killed. ‘Munich’ flips it on its ear. We’re capping ‘em. Not only killing but like, taking names.’”¹⁰ Such a comment was intentionally included in the script and was not merely a coincidence. Apatow intended to emphasize the Jewishness of his characters, explaining in an interview about “Knocked Up” that “I thought it’d be funny that they talk about (their Judaism), because it’s truthful to their experience,” he said. “I didn’t set out to make any kind of statement like ‘You can have five Jews in a movie.’ ... (But) I didn’t want to shy away from it. I thought it was fun not to shy away from it. That these young Jewish guys are proud to be Jewish and they talk about

⁸ In addition to the scene about “Munich” there is also a moment in which one of Ben’s friends with a shaggy beard is mistaken for the Jewish reggae singer Matisyahu and the *mohel* (Jew trained in the act of circumcision) for Ben’s son.

⁹ “Munich” is a 2005 historical drama film produced and directed by Steven Spielberg and written by Tony Kushner and Eric Roth. It is based on the book *Vengeance*, an account of Operation Wrath of God, the Israeli government’s secret retaliation against the Palestine Liberation Organization after the Munich massacre at the 1972 Summer Olympics.

¹⁰ Judd Apatow, *Knocked Up* (Universal Pictures, 2007).

‘Munich’ and their Jewfro-style hairstyles and that it’s all OK.”¹¹ These Jewish men exhibited pride for their religion. It is worth scrutinizing exactly the *type* of pride that provided them with this satisfaction. Ben Stone and his peers were so proud of “Munich” for *finally* showcasing Jewish violence and Jewish resistance. In their eyes, they had constantly been subjected to narratives of Jews “turning the other cheek” in the words of both Kahane and Christian theology and yearned for a story in which Jews — presumably Jewish men — displayed a fighting and militant spirit. The group of friends celebrates Jewish violence for a righteous cause. Just as for Kahane and the JDL, the public demonstrations and militant activities they orchestrated at Camp Jedel and at the WBAI Station for example, were in their eyes legitimate and justified.

Sergeant Donny Donowitz from Quentin Tarantino’s “Inglorious Basterds” represents another character who reflects the characteristics celebrated by Stone and his friends in “Knocked Up.” “Inglorious Basterds” a fictional film set during the Holocaust, details the story of Americans who travel to Europe fight and brutally kill Nazis. One of these men includes Donny Donowitz notoriously known as “The Bear Jew” by the German soldiers the whom group aims to kill. Throughout the film Donowitz wields a baseball bat and a gun to kill the soldiers. Eli Roth, the actor who portrays Donowitz remarked at the time of the movie’s release that “Donny is a Jewish guy from South Boston who is fighting on behalf of Jews who can’t.” Roth adds that “He uses his baseball bat to pummel Nazis, so he can

¹¹ Gabe Friedman, “The Summer That Judd Apatow, Seth Rogen and Jonah Hill Took over Mainstream Comedy,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/07/26/arts-entertainment/the-summer-that-judd-apatow-seth-rogen-and-jonah-hill-took-over-mainstream-comedy>.

physically feel that sensation of cracking their skulls in.”¹² *Inglorious Basterds* exemplifies Kahane and the JDL’s ideas about not being afraid to use significant violence on behalf of the Jewish people and the Jewish cause. Donowitz’s obsession with not just fighting but brutally *killing* Nazis serves as an example of the Jewish male the JDL aimed to develop through intense trainings at Camp Jedel. For example, in *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, Kahane writes “the Jew should learn how to defend himself, to use firearms, and change the image of the Jew from one of a timid, frightened creature to that of one who is quite as prepared to bash the head of a Jew-hater as anyone else is to physically protect his own rights.”¹³ Kahane’s comments about “bash[ing] the head of a Jew-hater” sound similar to Roth’s assertions about Donowitz’s “cracking their skulls in” regarding the Nazis. Kahane essentially aimed for the JDLers to forge this mentality about non-Jews and anyone who acted in an antisemitic manner.

It also is intriguing to consider the ramifications that such a film — albeit fictional — has on the American Holocaust narrative. In *Never Again*, Kahane utilizes the Holocaust as an example of the failure of the American Jewish Establishment to help persecuted Jews and the inability of the Jews themselves to fight back. Kahane himself elaborates on this idea, as discussed in chapter two, believing that had the Jews had weaponry, they could have murdered Germans and possibly even saved Jewish lives. “*Inglorious Basterds*” imagines an alternative era in which American Jews fought back and killed Germans possibly saving many Jewish lives. The film represents an antidote to the supposed Jewish Establishment

¹² Naomi Pfefferman, “Violent Bear Jew Relishes His Role: Cracking Nazis Skulls,” *The Jewish News of Northern California*, August 21, 2009, <https://www.jweekly.com/2009/08/21/violent-bear-jew-relishes-his-role-cracking-nazis-skulls/>.

¹³ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 74.

idea of “Sympathy yes, Militancy never!”¹⁴ that Kahane so despised. Additionally, Donowitz’s usage of baseball bats conjures the image of the members of the JDL in the full-page *New York Times* advertisement. These members too, utilized baseball bats to fight antisemitism and neighborhood hoodlums challenging conventional ways of dealing with these issues that plagued urban Jews.

The Jewish Defense League aimed to radically alter perceptions of Jewish men. Under the leadership of Meir Kahane, seeing a need in an era of attacks on the elderly and changing neighborhood demographics, the JDL fought back. It openly and loudly critiqued the Jewish Establishment for their inability to tackle these problems of poverty and safety in urban neighborhoods and condemned and attacked African-Americans who the organization believed were excessively antisemitic. Through Camp Jedel, it sought to indoctrinate a new generation of young Jews, beaming with pride and built with muscle to proudly fight and advocate on behalf of the Jewish people. For Yossi Klein Halevi, it certainly worked as he joined the organization, allured by the mystique of its leader. Kahane was assassinated by an Egyptian born terrorist in New York City in 1993 after giving a speech. In memorializing Kahane, the *New York Times* wrote that “To his followers, he was the spearhead of insistence on Jewish rights. To established Jewish organizations, he was an embarrassment to the liberal traditions of Judaism and a right-wing danger to the faith.”¹⁵ Kahane paid them no mind in his development of the JDL, an organization that “def[ied] the stereotype of the Jew as a victim.”¹⁶ The Jewish Defense League demonstrated an attempt to reconstruct the image of the emasculated and timid Jewish male who yearned to “fight back.” It created a Jew similar

¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

¹⁵ John Kifner, “Meir Kahane, 58, Israeli Militant and Founder of the Jewish Defense League,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/06/obituaries/meir-kahane-58-israeli-militant-and-founder-of-the-jewish-defense-league.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

to Donny Donowitz, a Jew who Ben Stone and friends would likely have admired. Overall, the JDL existed to “change the Jewish image and teach the anti-Semite that Jewish blood is not cheap and that the Jew is not always a victim.”¹⁷ And in accomplishing that goal, reinvigorated a once-lost vision of Jewish masculinity.

¹⁷ Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 142

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