

Cyrus Adler and The Development of American Jewish Culture: The 'Scholar-Doer' as a Jewish Communal Leader

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In the years since his death in 1940, Cyrus Adler has come in for a great deal of criticism. The Zionist leader Louis Lipsky, unhappy at having failed to win Adler's support for his movement, characterizes him in his autobiography as someone who "resisted innovation . . . was old when he was young," and was "a conservator, not a creator." Herbert Parzen, author of *Architects of Conservative Judaism*, dismisses his leadership of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Conservative movement as a whole as "less than beneficent and hardly adequate." Bernard Martin, in his *Movements and Issues in American Judaism*, describes him as a man "who seemed to have endless energy but was, even as an administrator, little more than mediocre." Eli Ginzberg, recalling the views of his father, Louis Ginzberg, castigates him as "no leader . . . not a Jewish scholar" and merely an agent of the Seminary's board of trustees.¹

All of these criticisms are valid to a certain extent, and together they help to offset the adulation which Adler commanded when he was alive. Yet by focusing so heavily on Adler's character, Seminary career, and personal foibles, critics have too often lost sight of his larger significance in terms of American Jewish history and life. The recent publication of his letters, ably edited by Ira Robinson, helps to redress the imbalance somewhat, reminding us of the vast breadth of Adler's involvements and communal concerns.² But letters are no substitute for a full-scale critical biography, and that we still lack.

My purpose here is to emphasize two interrelated themes in Adler's life that to my mind have been particularly neglected.

1 Louis Lipsky, *Memoirs in Profile* (Philadelphia: 1975), pp. 268-272; Herbert Parzen, *Architects of Conservative Judaism* (New York: 1964), p. 126; Bernard Martin, ed., *Movements and Issues in American Judaism* (Westport, CT: 1978), p. 110; Eli Ginzberg, "The Seminary Family: A View From My Parents Home," in Arthur A. Chiel, ed., *Perspectives on Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of Wolfe Kelman* (New York: 1978), p. 118.

2 Ira Robinson, ed., *Cyrus Adler: Selected Letters* (Philadelphia: 1985), hereafter *Adler Letters*; see reviews by David Dalin in *Modern Judaism*, 6 (October, 1986), 313-316; Lloyd Gartner in *Jewish Social Studies*, 48 (Summer-Fall, 1986), 334-337; and Jonathan D. Sarna in *Commentary* (February, 1986), 68-69.

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First, I shall argue that Adler played a pivotal role in the development, professionalization and Americanization of Jewish culture in general and Jewish scholarship in particular. If America has today become a center of Jewish creativity and learning, it is to a very great extent due to the groundbreaking efforts that he undertook during his lifetime. Second, I shall argue that Adler represents a new and not previously identified kind of American Jewish communal leader, what I call (for want of better term) the "scholar-doer." Viewing him in this context not only clarifies important functional aspects of his career, especially his role as an "ethnic broker," but adds also to our understanding of other figures in American Jewish life and of ethnic leadership as a whole.

Adler's interest in Jewish culture and scholarship began in his youth. Only three and a half years old when his father died, he was raised in Philadelphia by his uncle, David Sulzberger, who wanted him to be "a good Jewish scholar, a good general scholar [and] a lawyer." Cousin Mayer Sulzberger, a distinguished lawyer, bibliophile and intellectual, possessed a fine library that included numerous rare items of Judaica, and Adler spent many pleasant hours there, reading whatever caught his fancy. By the age of thirteen, he recalls in his memoirs, he had already gone through George Smiths' *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, which acquainted him with Assyrian and cuneiform research, and he had met, through Sulzberger, some of the leading figures in Philadelphia Jewish life. Adler was not, by his own admission, a brilliant student in school, but he was apparently good enough to deliver his high school commencement address in 1879, entitled, I think significantly, "Eccentricities of Great Men." The title suggests that Adler, even as a teenager, was fascinated by people of distinction and eager to understand them. This interest would carry through to the end of his life.³

As a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Adler displayed certain traits of greatness as well as extraordinary perseverance: He studied long into the night, usually until two in the morning; he undertook an intensive program of Judaic study with Philadelphia's rabbis in addition to his regular college courses; he wrote a scholarly paper dealing with a Hebrew manuscript of the year 1300 that he would later bring to press; he prepared a catalogue of Isaac Leeser's library; and he published articles in

3 Cyrus Adler, *I Have Considered the Days* (Philadelphia: 1941), hereafter Adler, *IHCTD*, pp. 3-47, esp. 12, 19, 43. For a brief elegiac biography, see Abraham A. Neuman, *Cyrus Adler: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: 1947)

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several newspapers, including the *American Hebrew* and the *Philadelphia American*. Yet some of his classmates, finding him aloof and withdrawn, seem to have been uncertain as to whether he was really quite as great as he seemed. In the class record they depicted him as a question mark; the accompanying inscription reads, "I am Sir Oracle, when I ope my lips let no dog bark."⁴

In the decade following his graduation, Adler made two fateful decisions that affected not only his own career but American Jewish culture as well. First, in 1883 he decided to abandon the career path expected of him and to become a scholar rather than a lawyer. Whereas his mentors, Philadelphia Jews like Mayer Sulzberger and Moses Dropsie, had made law their vocation and Jewish studies their avocation, he decided to pursue scholarship on a professional basis and enrolled in Johns Hopkins University, where he specialized in Semitics. Johns Hopkins at the time was a great experiment in American higher education, modeled as it was on European universities, and Adler enrolled in the seminar of the newly appointed young Semitics professor from Göttingen, Paul Haupt. He followed the prescribed course of study, passed his exams, and in 1887 became "the first person who received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Semitics from an American university."⁵

The degree obviously meant a great deal to him. Forever after, he liked to be addressed as "Doctor Adler," preferably with the word "Doctor" spelled out in full.⁶ This was more than just vanity and stuffy formality (although it was that too), for the title bespoke an important cultural milestone: for the first time a native-born American Jew, trained exclusively in America, had mastered the academic discipline that was closest to Jewish studies, and received the professional degree that accorded him standing in the company of scholars.⁷ To be sure, Jewish involvement in Semitic studies often had a parochial agenda as well as a scholarly one. Philanthropist Jacob Schiff, for example, believed that "a better knowlege of Semitic history and civilization"

4 Adler, *IHCTD*, 22–47, esp. 29–30; see the list of his publications in Edward D. Coleman and Joseph Reider, "A Bibliography of the Writings and Addresses of Cyrus Adler," in Cyrus Adler, *Lectures, Selected Papers, Addresses* (Philadelphia: 1937), hereafter Adler, *Lectures*, p. 369.

5 Adler, *IHCTD*, pp. 48–71, esp. p. 64.

6 Parzen, *Architects of Conservative Judaism*, p. 224, n. 13.

7 Louis Finkelstein argues that Adler became passionately devoted to Semitics "as a means for the better understanding of Scripture"; see *Adler Letters*, 1: xviii and cf. pp. 4–8 for letters revealing his interest in Jewish studies during this period.

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would encourage the world to "better understand and acknowledge the debt it owes to the Semitic people." Adler himself, however, always stressed the patriotic aspects of his achievement, the fact that from his day onward students of Semitics no longer had to travel to Germany to be trained. Years later he co-edited a *festschrift* to his teacher Haupt and contributed to it an article entitled "The Beginning of Semitic Studies in America."⁸

In 1893, when he was thirty years old, Adler made what I consider to be the second fateful decision of his life: he abandoned academia, resigning his position at Johns Hopkins to become full-time librarian of the Smithsonian Institution. Adler had worked at the Smithsonian before on a part-time basis and helped prepare government exhibits for the Cincinnati and Chicago expositions (1888 and 1893). But his main job had been at Johns Hopkins, where he rose to the rank of associate in Semitics and hoped to become a professor. Now, as Ira Robinson explains, his ambitions were thwarted; he could not find a permanent, secure position. Unwilling to wait, and feeling somewhat constrained by Johns Hopkins's academic atmosphere, he left Baltimore for Washington and a new life as an administrator.⁹

According to Professor Louis Finkelstein, Adler told him that the decision to leave Johns Hopkins "marked a deliberate change in his plan for his whole life." Adler, Finkelstein reports, "had decided that the greatest service he could render American and world Jewry was not personal development as a biblical scholar, but the establishment of institutions that would create many scholars."¹⁰ This may have been a retrospective view rather than what he felt at the time, but it does accurately reflect what subsequently happened. In the years that followed, Adler devoted himself more to scholarly institutions than to scholarship itself.

Adler's contribution can be measured, on one level, by a simple listing of the major scholarly institutions that he helped to found, lead, administer, or control behind the scenes. These include the Jewish Publication Society of America (JPS), the

8 Cyrus Adler, *Jacob H. Schiff: His Life and Letters* (New York: 1929), 2:21; Cyrus Adler, "The Beginning of Semitic Studies in America," *Oriental Studies Dedicated to Paul Haupt* (Baltimore: 1926), pp. 317-328; see Jonathan D. Sarna and Nahum M. Sarna, "Jewish Bible Scholarship and Translations in the United States," in Ernest S. Frerichs, ed., *The Bible and Bibles in America* (Atlanta: 1988), pp. 94-95.

9 Adler, *IHCTD*, pp. 66-75, 171-181.

10 *Adler Letters*, 1:xix.

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American Jewish Historical Society, Gratz College, Dropsie College, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. In addition, he served on the editorial board of the *American Hebrew*, helped to bring Solomon Schechter to America, assisted in the editorial and administrative work of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, founded and edited the *American Jewish Year Book*, transferred the *Jewish Quarterly Review* to America and became its co-editor (later editor), chaired the editorial board of the JPS 1917 Bible translation, oversaw the JPS Schiff Library of Jewish Classics, and created the JPS Hebrew Press, making possible for the first time the publication in America of scholarly Hebrew texts. Indeed, for a full half century (1888–1938) practically no significant Jewish cultural project was undertaken in America in which he was not somehow involved.

Naomi Cohen has analyzed some of the motivations that stood behind Adler's passion for developing American Jewish scholarship. "He believed," she writes, "that Judaism, studied and taught according to the canons of modern scholarship, would enhance its respectability and that of its adherents." In addition, he believed that the "scientific study of Judaism" would discredit higher critics whose findings disparaged the contributions of pre-Christian Israel to Western culture and that Judaism properly studied would reinvigorate traditional Judaism and counter the spread of Reform. For all of these reasons, she concludes, he pursued cultural activities on three levels: first, through the modern training of Jewish scholars (Dropsie College and the Jewish Theological Seminary); second through the education of American rabbis and teachers (Gratz College and the Seminary); and third, through fostering community education (e.g., the Jewish Publication Society, and the *Jewish Encyclopedia*).¹¹

Cohen's analysis can scarcely be improved upon. There are, however, two additional themes that need to be stressed, and they concern, as I have already indicated, Adler's interest in the *Americanization* and *professionalization* of Jewish scholarship. Others obviously shared these twin concerns; they are, indeed, central to understanding twentieth-century American Jewish scholarship as a whole. Still, Adler pioneered in promoting these developments, and thanks to his pivotal position in so many different organizations he was able to do more than anybody else to bring them about.

11 Adler Letters, 1: xxviii–xxx; cf. Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter with Emancipation: The German Jews in the United States 1830–1914* (Philadelphia: 1984), pp. 203–210, where the theme of Americanization is more prominent.

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Americanization of Jewish scholarship involved two different but interrelated tasks. First, Jewish scholarship had to be cultivated in America so that the country would be transformed into a center of Jewish learning, and second, the language and agenda of Jewish scholarship had to be shifted to take account of the new American milieu. Adler's concern for both tasks was evident from the very beginning of his career. As early as 1888, when at age twenty-five he helped to found the Jewish Publication Society, he joined Mayer Sulzberger and others in calling for widespread support of Jewish scholarship. "Our brethren in this country are growing in prosperity and intelligence," the circular published by the JPS in that year read. "One by one scholars are arising among us who, by their devotion to Jewish literature and their high general culture, reflect honor on our community." The circular went on to urge that "scholars who devote their lives to literature . . . be supported like other workers," and concluded with the hope "that Israel in America may proudly claim its literary period, as did our ancestors aforesaid in Spain, in Poland, and in modern Germany."¹²

In 1894 Adler argued even more forcefully in the *American Hebrew* for a "revival of Jewish learning." "The intellectual activity of the Jew in relation to Jewish learning," he wrote, "is shifting to the English speaking world." He called for "libraries of books and manuscripts, as well as avenues of scientific publication, in order that this growth may be properly nurtured in America," and proposed the establishment of a "Jewish Academy of America" as its scholarly center and focal point. While the idea died aborning, Adler's subsequent efforts — the institutions that he built and the projects that he undertook — all stemmed from this same firm belief in American Jewry's proud destiny.¹³

The other aspect of Americanization — the conscious effort to alter the agenda of Jewish studies to make it more patriotically American — is equally apparent in Adler's work. It was he, after all, who issued the original invitation to the 1892 meeting that established the American Jewish Historical Society and set as its object "the collection, preservation, and publication of material having reference to the settlement and history of the Jews on the

12 *The Jewish Publication Society of America* (Philadelphia: 1888), pp. 4, 8.

13 *American Hebrew*, 56 (1894), 25, 181; in *Adler Letters*, 1:70 "not witnessing a revival" should read "now witnessing a revival." David G. Dalin points out that this same patriotic attitude lay behind Adler's coolness to Zionism; see his "Cyrus Adler, Non-Zionism, and the Zionist Movement: A Study in Contradictions," *AJS Review*, 10 (Spring, 1985), 55–87, esp. 56.

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American continent.” At the Jewish Publication Society he repeatedly insisted that wherever possible books have some “American dimension.”¹⁴ In the Society’s first book, Lady Magnus’s *Outlines of Jewish History* (1890), he helped to supply that dimension, coauthoring a special section on Jews in America not found in the original British edition (1886, 1888).¹⁵ He also edited the articles on America in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, helping to set their upbeat tone. The message conveyed in those articles, that American Jewry was blessed with an exceptional past and looked forward to a glowing future, very much reflected his own views.¹⁶

Adler even insisted that the Hebrew Press he set up in 1921 have an American appearance. Although the press was built in Europe and managed by an ex-employee of Vilna’s famed Romm Press, he boasted that the typeface was designed in the “American tradition.” The claim is somewhat dubious, for in fact the typeface, although designed by an American, was actually a modified version of one used in the seventeenth century by Manasseh Ben Israel. Still, the fact that Adler made the claim is revealing. Even here he sought to establish what was for him a basic principle: that American Jews would not rest content merely to imitate European Jewish practices but would insist on transforming them through their own traditions and experiences.¹⁷

Adler’s concern for professionalization, as opposed to dilettantism, was no less a matter of principal. He knew, based on his own experience at Johns Hopkins and his familiarity with learned societies in other disciplines, that Jewish scholarship needed full-time practitioners. The age of professionalization had come to America, and it was clear, at least to Adler, that the field could

14 Nathan M. Kaganoff, “AJHS at 90: Reflections on the History of the Oldest Ethnic Historical Society in America,” *American Jewish History*, 71 (June, 1982), 466–485; Jonathan D. Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture, 1888–1988* (forthcoming), Chapters 3, 4.

15 Katie Magnus, *Outlines of Jewish History* (Philadelphia: 1890), pp. 334–367. The single paragraph Lady Magnus herself devoted to the New World, sandwiched between accounts of Jews in China and in Turkey, described Judaism in the United States as “not always in a very much better state of preservation than among the semi-savage sects of ancient civilization” (London, 1888, p. 313).

16 Shuly Schwartz, “The Emergence of Jewish Scholarship in America: The Publication of the *Jewish Encyclopedia*” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987), pp. 247–262.

17 Simon Miller, “Cyrus Adler and the Hebrew Press,” *American Jewish Year Book*, 41 (1940–41), 700–701; Cyrus Adler, “A New Hebrew Press,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 41 (1921), 225–229; Sarna, *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture*, Chapter 5.

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never develop properly so long as it depended on busy men of affairs whose scholarly work was "done by stealth, or when they should be sleeping or taking a walk." He also understood that professional scholars, if they were to teach, research and write, needed the standard accoutrements of scholarship: good libraries, eager students, a scholarly journal, a publisher of scholarly books, a learned society, and grant money. In his 1894 proposal for a "Jewish Academy" he sought to solve all of these problems in one bold stroke:

I propose the establishment of the Jewish Academy of America. This academy should collect a library, should publish scientific researches, provide facilities for students, be the central point of meeting of all our learned men, and last, but not least, have connected with it a staff of men who would themselves be constantly engaged in advancing Jewish science. For such an academy, the endowment should be no less than half a million dollars.¹⁸

Thirteen years later, arguing that "it is time that we became professionals," he put forward a different but equally unsuccessful proposal for a "University for Jewish Studies" embracing the Seminary, Dropsie College, and Gratz. In 1916 he returned to the subject again, calling this time for a "Jewish University of America" with a "fund for research fellowships," an employment bureau for graduates, and an "Academy . . . of scholars devoted to Jewish learning."¹⁹

Yet if these grand proposals for rationalizing and centralizing Jewish studies as a professional discipline all failed, Adler's more narrowly focused projects aimed at creating optimal conditions for Jewish scholarship to take root showed highly encouraging results. The *Jewish Quarterly Review*, which he arranged to transfer from England to Dropsie so as "to give the scholars in

18 *Adler Letters*, 1: 70–71. Adler was familiar with professional developments in American science (1: 322) and was also influenced by European calls for an international organization of Jewish scholars; see Ira Robinson, "Cyrus Adler, Bernard Revel and the Prehistory of Organized Jewish Scholarship in the United States," *American Jewish History*, 69 (June, 1980), 503. For the professionalization of social sciences during this period, see Theodore S. Hamerow, "The Professionalization of Historical Learning," *Reviews in American History*, 14 (September, 1986), 319–333; Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: 1977). On the simultaneous professionalization of the American rabbinate, see my comments in Jacob R. Marcus and Abraham J. Peck, eds., *The American Rabbinate* (Hoboken, N.J.: 1985), p. 7.

19 Adler, *Lectures*, pp. 231–239; *Adler Letters*, 1: 322.

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this country a vehicle for their scientific work,"²⁰ remained, at least while he was its editor, the journal of professional Jewish scholarship in the English-speaking world. The Schiff Library of Jewish Classics, which he helped plan and later oversaw, made available \$50,000 to support basic textual research and resulted in the publication of 17 volumes of enduring scholarship. The Jewish Theological Seminary and Dropsie College libraries, built up under his administration and with his encouragement, allowed professional scholars to pursue their research without having to travel abroad.

To be sure, on one occasion Adler opposed a move toward professionalization by helping to thwart Bernard Revel's efforts to form "the Society of Jewish Academicians of America." A closer look, however, reveals that Adler's concerns in this case were basically professional. As Ira Robinson points out in his study of this episode, "the Society's criteria for membership involved strict adherence to Orthodox Judaism." Furthermore, "it was proposed to include within the Society not only those people actively engaged in Jewish scholarship, but also those people with advanced university degrees of any sort who met the religious requirement and were interested in Jewish issues." In the view of Adler and most of his colleagues, the proposed society was thus a sham and not academic at all. "We are not dealing with people who have a right to claim justification," Adler wrote, "but simply with down right fraud and lying [sic]." He remained eager to see an organization of Jewish scholars come into existence and talked of creating one. But he insisted that it be professional to the core: "the only test for entrance," he wrote, "should be meritorious productive Jewish scholarship."²¹

Had Adler done no more than develop, Americanize, and professionalize Jewish scholarship his place in American Jewish history would certainly have been secure. Just as Daniel Coit Gilman, under whom he worked at Johns Hopkins, is remembered for bringing new ideas and professional standards into American higher education, so he would have been recalled as the man who brought many of these same ideas and standards into American Jewish higher education. But Adler did more. His

²⁰ *Adler Letters*, 1: 156.

²¹ *Adler Letters*, 1: 319, 322; Robinson, "Cyrus Adler, Bernard Revel and the Prehistory of Organized Jewish Scholarship in the United States," 497-505; see Ira Robinson, "The American Academy of Jewish Research," in Michael N. Dobkowski, ed., *Jewish American Voluntary Organizations* (New York: 1986), pp. 7-11.

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interests extended beyond academia into Jewish communal affairs, and he played a central role in the American Jewish Committee, the Kehillah (organized Jewish community) of Philadelphia, and the National Jewish Welfare Board. He was, by all accounts, one of the foremost Jewish leaders of his day, respected by lay and religious figures alike.

As a Jewish leader, however, Adler is somewhat difficult to classify. He did not command great wealth, he was not a lawyer, judge, rabbi, diplomat, or newspaper editor, he was not particularly charismatic, was not known for his oratory, and held no political office that might have given him an outside base of support. Instead, he represents a new kind of Jewish communal leader not previously seen in the United States. He was American Jewry's first great "scholar-doer," the first Jewish leader who emerged from academia and whose legitimacy stemmed largely from his learning and commitment to scholarly ideals. His biographer, Abraham Neuman, understood this. "His colleagues," he writes, "were worldly successful men. He was the academican." As such, Neuman continues, "he had much to contribute that was distinctive and unique. . . . His was the voice of authority which met with more ready acceptance because he spoke with knowledge. . . ." Louis Marshall once similarly described Adler as combining "all the finest qualities of a great scholar and of a practical man of broad vision."²²

Leadership from the academy is an old and respected tradition in Jewish life. Sages who laid claim to the "Crown of the Torah" once wielded considerable communal authority and were held in high esteem; they vied as equals with those whose leadership stemmed from their wealth, family connections, or "priestly" religious functions.²³ The American scholar-doer harkened back to this prestigious tradition and may have won respect because of it. But his role was entirely different. As Adler's career demon-

22 Neuman, *Cyrus Adler*, p. 83; Charles Reznikoff, ed., *Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty* (Philadelphia: 1957), 2: 891. To be sure, as Ira Robinson points out in his article in this issue, this evaluation of Adler was not shared by the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The Seminary's trustees, however, most certainly did view Adler as a scholar and treated him accordingly (see Robinson's note 62). I would submit that scholar-doers typically face this problem, especially when they become college presidents.

23 Stuart A. Cohen, "The Concept of the Three *Ketarim*: Its Place in Jewish Political Thought and Its Implications for a Study of Jewish Constitutional History," *AJS Review*, 9 (Spring, 1984), 27-54; Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart Cohen, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present* (Bloomington: 1985).

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strates, the scholar-doer within the American Jewish community was less a defender of the faith, waving aloft the banner of the Torah against Americanizers who sought to trample it, than a mediator bringing different factions together to work for common ends. His commitment to scholarly ideals, to disinterested pursuit of truth, meant that the scholar-doer could serve as a broker between conflicting groups. Rich and poor, Reform and Orthodox, rabbis and laymen, Germans and East Europeans all accepted him as a fair-minded neutral. Commanding the respect of all sides and personally identified with none, he better than any other Jewish leader of his day was able to reconcile opposites and to help produce the compromises that paved the way for harmonious community action.

Historians have only recently turned their attention to this kind of group leadership, and they describe it under the broad heading of "ethnic brokerage." "Within ethnic communities," Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman explain, " 'ethnic brokers' commonly emerge who attempt to bridge the gap between different cultures. Many of these individuals seek to alleviate some of the tensions and problems associated with marginality. . . . [B]rokers mediate between the ethnic community and the larger society, between two ethnic groups, or within an ethnic community composed of various subcommunities."²⁴ The kinds of brokers generally identified by historians have been insiders: members of the immigrant elite (like Abraham Cahan) who established ties to the larger society, or sympathetic native-born leaders (like Louis Marshall) who established ties to the immigrant camp. Adler fits neatly in neither category, demonstrating that the whole concept

24 Mark K. Bauman and Arnold Shankman, "The Rabbi as Ethnic Broker: The Case of David Marx," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 2 (Spring, 1983), 51-52; Mark Bauman, "Role Theory and History: The Illustration of Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community in an Era of Transition and Conflict," *American Jewish History*, 73 (September, 1983), 71-95; Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders 1800-1910* (Baltimore: 1987), pp. 4-7; and now Daniel K. Richter, "Cultural Brokers and Intercultural Politics: New York-Iroquois Relations, 1664-1701," *The Journal of American History*, 75 (June, 1988), 40-67, esp. p. 41: "As simultaneous members of two or more interacting networks . . . brokers provide modes of communication; with respect to a community's relations with the outside world, they 'stand guard over the crucial junctures or synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole.' Their intermediate position . . . occasionally allows brokers to promise more than they can deliver. The resulting maneuvering room allows skillful mediators to promote the aims of one group while protecting the interests of another — and thus to become nearly indispensable to all sides."

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of brokerage needs to be broadened. The American Jewish community was not completely polarized into immigrants and natives, as too much of the literature implies; there were instead a whole series of subcommunities and people like Adler who resisted categorization and sought to maintain an academic aloofness.²⁵ Being somewhat marginal to every group, Adler was committed to scholarly values that all could share.

Adler was particularly successful as a broker because he personally embodied so many of the polarities that he sought to reconcile. He had ties to wealthy aristocrats but was not personally rich, he was as committed to decorum and modernity as any Reform Jew but was a thorough traditionalist in his own Jewish practices, he could discuss Jewish sources on the same level as most rabbis but was never ordained, he was a staunch Americanist but worked to preserve immigrants' faith and heritage, and he was an accomplished academic yet eager to assume a role in community affairs. In the end, he merged scholarly detachment with communal activism, and came to fill a distinct spot on the Jewish leadership spectrum.²⁶ He was the man who could speak to all sides, effect compromise, and win results.

As Adler became ever more successful in this role, his services as a mediator (or broker) were called upon again and again. At the Jewish Publication Society he fought partisanship and chaired the committee that produced the compromise 1917 Bible translation, accepted by English-speaking Jews everywhere. At Dropsie College he strove to create an environment that was "broad and liberal, without a trace of polemic or sectarian tendency."²⁷ At the Jewish Theological Seminary he endeavored to reconcile Reform-minded trustees and Orthodox-leaning faculty members. At the Jewish Welfare Board he oversaw the creation of a Jewish military prayerbook and an abridged Bible suitable for Jewish soldiers of all backgrounds. These were all essential tasks that only a person like Adler could carry out. When he died, a new generation of mediators, many of them scholar-doers in his own image, had to be called upon to fill the void.

25 For a sense of how aloof Adler seemed to those who did not know him well, see Julian B. Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi* (New York: 1980), p. 289.

26 For this concept, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Spectrum of Jewish Leadership in Ante-Bellum America," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1 (Spring, 1982), 59-67.

27 Abraham A. Neuman, "Dropsie College," *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* 3:601; see also Herbert Parzen, "New Data on the Formation of Dropsie College," *Jewish Social Studies*, 28 (July, 1966), 131-147.

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There were, to be sure, numerous problems with Adler as a leader: he took on too many obligations, proved increasingly fearful of new initiatives, and too often confused administrative efficiency with institutional dynamism. His leadership, while contributing to the cause of peace, unity, and stability, lacked zeal and spirit. It needed to be balanced by some bold, inspiring vision that he, as a committed broker, was incapable of providing. Many of these flaws are characteristic of leaders like Adler, for they stem from the very qualities that make such people so successful as mediators. Yet in faulting Adler for what he could never be it is important not to lose sight of his central and seminal contribution. He did more than anyone before or after him to bring Jewish scholarship to America and to make American Jewry culturally independent.