For Rav Yitz

Contents

Acknowledgments

Although I was not aware of it at the time, this book had its genesis on the evening of May 8, 2003. That was the date on which I first met Irving Greenberg.[1] Toward the end of my second year as a rabbinical student at the fledgling Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in New York City, three optional after-hours sessions were scheduled with Greenberg on the subject of Judaism and Sexuality. I was not familiar with Greenberg, but the fact that these sessions were not part of the regularly scheduled program alerted me to the possibility that he was a controversial figure in the Orthodox world. It was during these sessions that I was exposed to aspects of Greenberg's theology and how he applied it, in this case with regard to intimate relations. At the end of the first session, I shared a taxi back to Riverdale, where Greenberg and I both lived, and began to develop a profoundly important relationship with him. Of the many rabbinic mentors I have had, it is Greenberg alone who has unfailingly embodied his own teachings and values. A man of extraordinary compassion and empathy, matched only by his penetrating intellect, Greenberg remains the most influential mentor in my life to this day. Even as I left Orthodoxy, Greenberg remained an ally and a friend. Thirteen years after that first encounter, I acknowledge the many gifts I have received from Irving Greenberg during that time, not least of all the inspiration to complete this project.

There are a great many others who deserve recognition, without whom this project would never have come to fruition. First and

1 Greenberg is known almost universally simply as "Yitz"; however, I have chosen to use his formal name throughout the book.

foremost, I want to thank the good people at Academic Studies Press, who made a dream come true when they invited me to publish with them. Specifically, my thanks go to the Jewish Studies Acquisition Editor, Gregg Stern, and to the editor of the Studies in Orthodox Judaism series, Marc B. Shapiro.

This book is a reworking of my doctoral thesis, which was submitted and defended at the end of 2014. Singular thanks go to my doctoral advisor, Joel Gereboff. In 2009, when Joel was still the Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Arizona State University, he encouraged me to consider applying to graduate school. Despite my lack of an undergraduate degree, Dr. Gereboff worked with me to produce a portfolio and make the case to the graduate admissions department. My sincere thanks go to Arizona State University (Go Devils!) for considering my application and making the highly unorthodox decision to enroll me in the doctoral program in the Religious Studies department.

During my time at ASU, and in addition to Dr. Gereboff, I worked closest with Tracy Fessenden and Moses Moore. My courses with each of them broadened and deepened my understanding of religion in America, and sharpened my focus around questions of pluralism and postethnicity. They ultimately agreed to serve as members of my doctoral committee. I will forever be in their debt for the time and energy they invested in my growth as a student and scholar.

After the completion of my doctorate, I considered the possibility of turning my thesis into a book. I have been blessed with extraordinary friends, colleagues, and mentors who willingly gave of their time to review my thesis and make recommendations. Marc Dollinger and David Ellenson readily agreed to read the entire thesis, providing copious feedback and direction for how to transform my thesis into a book. Their honesty and clarity helped me quickly realize how much work I had ahead of me. In addition, Jack Wertheimer read the thesis chapter that surveyed American Jewish history and saved me from what would have been some rather embarrassing errors. Ari Kelman also took time to read an edited version of the manuscript in toto and presented me with characteristically

thoughtful feedback. I feel exceedingly lucky to call each of them colleagues and friends, and am grateful for their time and dedication. Of course, any errors that have remained in the manuscript are utterly my own.

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During the summer of 2014, I was lucky enough to be invited to participate in the Oxford Summer Institute in Modern and Contemporary Judaism. For ten days, some of the most respected scholars of Judaism gathered in the idyllic location of Yarnton Manor to consider "Modern Orthodoxy and the Road Not Taken: A Critical Exploration of Questions Arising from the Thought of Rabbi Dr. Irving 'Yitz' Greenberg." The conference presented a unique opportunity to discuss many of the ideas presented in this book and consider many others besides. My thanks go to the conveners, Adam Ferziger and Miri Freud-Kandel, for extending the invitation to participate in the conference. Thanks also go to the other participants: Sylvia Barack Fishman, Steven Bayme, Alan Brill, Arye Edrei, Zev Farber, Michael Fishbane, Martin Goodman, Blu Greenberg, Irving Greenberg, Samuel Heilman, Alan Jotkowitz, Steven Katz, James Kugel, Melissa Raphael, Tamar Ross, Marc Shapiro, Margie Tolstoy, and Jack Wertheimer.

It was at the Oxford gathering that I was lucky enough to meet Aryeh Rubin, a former student of Greenberg's. I am gratified to acknowledge the support of Targum Shlishi, a Raquel and Aryeh Rubin Foundation, for their generous contribution toward the publication of this book.

In many cases, writing a doctoral thesis is a solitary act. For me, I was lucky that a rabbinical school classmate and dear friend was also working toward a PhD, with Greenberg as a research focus. I am

thankful to Josh Feigelson for his friendship and his willingness to share ideas freely on a subject about which we both care deeply.

There have also been close friends who have taken an interest in my work and have read drafts of the manuscript and provided valuable feedback. In particular, I want to thank my dear friends Mari Chernow, Aaron Hahn Tapper, Sander Nassan, and Elana Storch for their thoughtful reactions to my work.

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I used to think that I was writing this book to explain my world to our daughters. I have recently come to the realization that, in fact, I have been writing it to explain their world to us.

Preface

It's a challenge to navigate identity. What Israel Zangwill offered as a rather simplistic melting pot metaphor describing how peoples and their cultures integrated into a new composite America developed some years later into Horace Kallen's orchestra, a pluralist approach that celebrated each sound in a way that strengthened the nation for its cultural differences. In contemporary America, neither of those approaches to describing identity pass muster. The melting pot demands the end of distinctiveness since everyone must give up the Old World to become part of the amalgamated new nation. The orchestra, while celebrated in theory, favors the cultural mores of the dominant group at the expense of minorities. To dramatize the point: which ethnic group gets to be the culture-defining tuba in the orchestra and which must be relegated to status as a lowly flute, struggling to have its contribution recognized?

In recent years, scholars have advanced a variety of new models to better understand the contours of identity. "Postethnicity," for example, asks us to look beyond the timetables of the early theorists and imagine identity along a much longer chronology. Others reject the very constructs of identity, describing it all as "the invention of ethnicity." In today's headlines, we read about intersectionality, the notion that each of us lives a variety of identities simultaneously. Sometimes they exist in conflict with one another and at all times our multi-identified selves force us to imagine new ways of understanding and describing who we are, what we believe, and why.

As Darren Kleinberg explains in *Hybrid Judaism: Irving Greenberg, Encounter, and the Changing Nature of American Jewish Identity,* these seemingly secular concepts of identity resonate within the

theological and sociological experiences of American Jews. To better articulate models of ethnicity, he argues, we must examine American Judaism as a gateway that offers vital new insights into our sense of individual identity and its impact on larger questions of intergroup relations. For Kleinberg, this exciting new model of ethnic identity grew from the thinking and writing of his mentor, Rabbi Irving Greenberg. "Yitz," as he is known to all, dove into these questions more than half a century ago, fashioning novel understandings of identity that sought to reconcile some of the most challenging identity-based questions in both American and Jewish life. While his work predates the term, Yitz lives an intersectional existence. Greenberg, a tradition-bound Jew with a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University, wrestles with how these different identities intersect, especially in a post-Shoah world. What a remarkable journey it has been.

Greenberg embodies what anthropologists call liminality, an in-between ritual moment during a person's transition from one sociological space to another. Applied more broadly, liminality has also been employed to describe a person who enjoys the rewards of simultaneous membership in more than one cultural group, yet, as a consequence, can never enjoy complete access to either. Greenberg's life journey, then, proves liminal. A modern Orthodox Jew, he cannot enjoy modernity to its fullest extent because of his observance of Jewish law. Complete adherence to traditional Judaism, in a similar way, remains elusive as long as he chooses to interact in the modern world. Many of his teachings, as a consequence, brought scrutiny from his rabbinical colleagues fearful that he went too far. His decision to maintain a primary identity as rabbi precluded an academic career typical of Harvard doctoral graduates.

In that space between Jewish tradition and modern America, in that tension and drama, Greenberg got to work. Liminality, it turns out, offers insights available only to those navigating between cultures. From his platform, Greenberg opined on the essential theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity, on the influence of modern America to the traditional world, on the horrors of the Shoah and its reframe of the cosmos. He can offer these perspectives in

ways his predecessors could not *because* he trespassed identity bounds at each and every possible moment.

And so did Kleinberg. A student of Greenberg's, Kleinberg's ode to his mentor grows from his own journey through the spaces between cultures. Born and raised a secular Jew in London, Kleinberg rebelled against the culture of his youth, eschewing the university pathway in favor of a yeshiva experience in Israel that led to a four-year immersion in the tradition-bound Orthodox world of Eretz Yisrael. While the *ba'al teshuvah* pathway is not so unusual, Kleinberg elevated his with his own, sometimes intense, liminal experience. Navigating between a secular upbringing that lacked a passion for Judaism and an adult life in *haredi* and Modern Orthodox Judaism that seemed far too rote, Kleinberg eventually landed as a student in the second-ever graduating class of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, New York's liberal Orthodox rabbinical school. There, seeking a via media between the cultures that defined his life, Kleinberg met Greenberg, who would emerge as his most-important teacher, mentor, and friend. Greenberg helped shape the contours of Kleinberg's then-emerging theology, understandings of Judaism, and its application in American life. In the years that followed, Kleinberg applied his secular adolescence and impressive understanding of text and tradition to his Greenberg apprenticeship, wrestling with the most essential questions about what Jewishness and Americanness mean.

Kleinberg's journey eventually brought him out of Orthodoxy and, in a fitting reverse parallel to his mentor's path, into his own Ph.D. program at a secular American university. This book, the product of those doctoral studies at Arizona State University, details the life of Yitz Greenberg as it, in its very creation, reflects as well the pathway of his student, Darren Kleinberg. *Hybrid Judaism*, then, when read with an understanding of the story behind its creation, mirrors itself. It is the story of a teacher, an Orthodox Jew who dove into secularity, written by his student, a secular Jew who embraced Jewish tradition.

To read this work, then, is to watch three streams intersect: the life of Greenberg, the life of Kleinberg, and the overlay of the

last 50 years of American Jewish life and theology. It is a treat and it offers its readers a deep dive into the most fundamental and the most complex questions that animate all who think about ethnicity, about theology, and about what it means to identify as an American Jew.

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Introduction

The American Jewish community is changing. In simple terms, Judaism today is but one choice among an almost endless list of available identities. One way of understanding this change is rooted in the writings of the central personality of this study, Rabbi Dr. Irving Greenberg. In 1974, Greenberg presented the opening paper at the International Symposium on the Holocaust, held at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, in New York City. The paper was subsequently published in a volume entitled *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (1977). Greenberg's chapter, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," represents his "most important statement on the subject" of the Holocaust (Katz, "Irving," 62). In the fourth section of the essay, addressing "Jewish Theological Responses to the Holocaust," Greenberg introduced his original concept of *Moment Faiths*. Extending Martin Buber's notion of "moment gods,"[1] Greenberg wrote that a full realization of the horrors of the Holocaust had to "end[] the easy dichotomy of atheist/theist …," and that, in a post-Holocaust age, "We now have to speak of 'moment faiths,' moments when Redeemer and vision of redemption are present, interspersed with times when the flames and smoke of the burning children blot out faith—though it flickers again" (Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke," 27). In a post-Holocaust era, Greenberg declared, faith in God could only be fleeting.

1 Greenberg explained Buber in this way: "God is known only at the moment when Presence and awareness are fused in vital life. This knowledge is interspersed with moments when only natural, self-contained, routine existence is present." (Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke" 27).

Today, more than 40 years after the symposium, and more than 70 years after the end of the Second World War, American Jews are in a different "moment." Rather than moment gods or moment faiths, the twenty-first-century American Jewish reality is one of *Moment Judaisms*. In this coinage, the plural form "Judaisms" is intended to indicate the very real distinctions between the many different expressions of Judaism across the American Jewish landscape.[2] The sheer variety of Jewish behaviors, rituals, and social mores demands an acknowledgment of the plurality of Jewishness and Judaisms. Furthermore, the simple fact that some will deny that other self-identified Jews are members of the same religious community demands that we cannot but think of Judaism in plural terms.[3]

In addition to highlighting the plurality of contemporary American Jewish life, it is also my contention that contemporary Judaisms are "momentary." The intent here is to recognize the impact of increasingly complex individual and group identities in the American Jewish context. For an increasing number of American Jews, the many Judaisms from which to choose are only some of the various identities that are available for adoption and that contribute to the complex identity politics of postethnic America. David Hollinger has described identity in postethnic America as no longer inherited, singular, or fixed, but rather voluntary, overlapping, and dynamic. As such, postethnicity has very real implications for Jewish identity in the twenty-first century. As Shaul Magid has written, in an era of postethnicity, "... American Jews are multiethnic. For many of them, being Jewish is one part of a more complex narrative of

2 The same might be said for world Jewry; however, my work addresses only the American Jewish experience.

3 For example, according to the interpretation of Jewish law (*halachah*) recognized by most members of the Orthodox community, one can only claim Jewish status if one has a halachically Jewish biological mother or if one has completed a religious conversion according to Orthodox standards. As such, those Reform Jews that have a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, or that convert to Judaism according to non-Orthodox standards, are not considered Jewish by most members of the Orthodox community. Therefore, it is appropriate to describe the Orthodox and Reform Jewish communities as representing distinct Judaisms.

identity" (Magid, *American Post-Judaism*, 11). These plural and momentary qualities call our attention to the fact that the nature and meaning of American Jewish identity—of American Moment Judaisms—is being renegotiated in the twenty-first century.

Rather than merely attempting to describe the changing nature of American Jewish identity, I will also offer a theological viewpoint that welcomes and embraces, rather than rejects, the changes I will outline. At the heart of this book is an appreciation and exploration of the theological contributions of Irving Greenberg. The postethnic reality that David Hollinger described in sociological terms was powerfully anticipated and conveyed in the language of theology by Greenberg. I have called Greenberg's theology of encounter Hybrid Judaism. Although not a biography, per se, I will also draw on important biographical episodes in Greenberg's life to provide important context for the development and culmination of his theology of Hybrid Judaism. Before fully introducing this concept, it is important to define some key terms.

Encounter and Identity

Encounter and identity are key terms that are interconnected and require definition. Simply put, encounter refers to interactions that result in a transformation of identity. Such transformations can be the result of encounters with individuals or groups, and sometimes as a result of encounters with ideas or past historical events. As we shall see later,[4] for Greenberg, encounter is also a theological term that refers to interactions that are informed by recognition that human beings are created in the image of God. Whether understood sociologically or theologically, encounter is central to our understanding of the changing landscape of identity.

As David Hollinger has suggested, the word "identity" is less than ideal. In Hollinger's words, "the concept of identity is more

4 See Part II, Chapter 9.

psychological than social, and it can hide the extent to which the achievement of identity is a social process by which a person becomes affiliated with one or more acculturating cohorts" (Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 6). Hollinger's point, that individuals become affiliated with groups (i.e., they adopt identities) as a result of a social process, is of central importance. Throughout this book, the term "identity" is intended to refer to an individual's affiliation, and thus sense of *identification*, with a given group—whether religious, cultural, ethnic, or any other—that results from socialization with that group. This emphasis on affiliation "calls attention to the social dynamics" that are involved in the achievement of identity (Hollinger, *Postethnic America*, 6). As a result, identity may be comprised of multiple affiliations with a variety of social groups. This is a critically important realization in the age of postethnicity.

Regarding the changing nature of American Jewish identity, intermarriage must be acknowledged as the most significant of social encounters contributing to the rise of Moment Judaisms. The Pew survey, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans* (2013), showed that in the 1970s more than a third of the marriages of American Jews were to a non-Jewish spouse and that, since the second half of the 1990s, the percentage had risen to more than half. These couples, and the offspring that are raised by them, have increasingly complex identities that are informed by the various religious, cultural, and ethnic ties that intersect their family lives. Shaul Magid[5] has proposed that

5 Magid is the first scholar to pay significant attention to "[American] Judaism in an increasingly postethnic world, a world where identities are mixed … … " (Magid, *American Post-Judaism*, 5). In addition to Magid's assessment of American Judaism in an age of postethnicity, he also makes the case for the Jewish Renewal movement and its founding figure, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, as representing a path for "'Jewish' survival in such a shifting society" (Magid, *American Post-Judaism*, 2). While I am generally in agreement with Magid's assessment of the meaning of American Judaism in an age of postethnicity (notwithstanding the distinction I draw above), it is my contention that Irving Greenberg's life and work are more accessible to a broader cross-section of American Jewry than are Schachter-Shalomi's, whose worldview—and the Renewal movement that

the changing nature of Judaism in America "is only partly the consequence of the empirical nature of intermarriage." According to Magid, "It is also the consequence of the changing nature of identity in America, moving from the inherited to the constructed or performed" (Magid, *American Post-Judaism*, 2). In contrast to Magid's claim, I am proposing that the changing nature of identity that he has highighted is precisely *the result* of increasing social encounters across group lines, with intermarriage being the most significant example. When the influence of high rates of intermarriage is accounted for alongside a wide variety of Jewish beliefs and practices, as well as differing standards for claiming personal status as a Jew, it becomes clear that we need to develop a more thoughtful and nuanced way of thinking about American Jewish identity in the twenty-first century.

Hybridity

In 2007, the Spertus Museum in Chicago took a step in the right direction when it hosted a groundbreaking exhibit entitled *The New Authentics: Artists of the Post-Jewish Generation*. The accompanying volume opened with an essay from curator Staci Boris, in which she wrote that "*Post-Jewish* … takes its cues from postmodernism—a pervasive if highly contested state of cultural affairs in which all notions of purity and certainty (modernism's key values) are rejected in favor of hybridity and relativity" (Boris, *The New Authentics*, 20). As the ensuing chapters of this book will demonstrate, it is the quality of hybridity that distinguishes contemporary Moment

followed from it—is appealing to a much more rarefied group. For an important discussion of Magid's book, see Allan Arkush, "All-American, Post-Everything," *Jewish Review of Books*, Fall 2013, https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/473/all-american-post-everything/; Shaul Magid, "'Why Bother?' A Response," *Jewish Review of Books*, August 29, 2013, https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/545/why-bother-a-response/; and Allan Arkush, "'Why Bother?' A Rejoinder," *Jewish Review of Books*, August 29, 2013, http://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/543/why-bother-a-rejoinder/.+

Judaisms from earlier articulations of American Jewish identity.[6] "Hybridity" is defined for my purposes as "Anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements" (*Oxford English Dictionary* [OED]), and points to the aforementioned impact of social mixing on identity formation.[7]

Pluralism

Pluralism is the final key term that requires definition. In a sense, this book is as much a critique of pluralism as it is anything else. It is my contention that pluralism is an outdated notion that has been superseded by postethnicity. We will explore Horace Kallen's sociological concept of cultural pluralism in detail in Chapter 3 but, for the time being, a few introductory observations are in order.

The earliest usage of the term "pluralism" dates back to the eighteenth century and referred to the simultaneous holding of two or more ecclesiastical offices by one cleric in the Church of England. In this sense, it was seen as a corrupt institution in which "parishes, or benefices, could be bought and sold to the highest bidder" (Bender and Klassen, *After Pluralism*, 7). In addition to this ecclesiastical application, later usages of pluralism have fallen into the philosophical, political, and sociological realms. Philosophically, pluralism has been used to mean "that the world is made up of more than one kind of substance or thing; (more generally) any theory or system of thought which recognizes more than one irreducible basic principle" (*OED*). This philosophical application of

6 Other works that have explored the changing nature of American Jewish identity include the wide-ranging collection of essays edited by Vincent Brook, *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture* (2006); Martin Jaffee's collection of short musings, *The End of Jewish Radar: Snapshots of a Postethnic American Judaism* (2009); and Shaul Magid's *American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society* (2013).

7 For a more heavily theoretical treatment of hybridity, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), and Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (1995).

pluralism is most often associated with Harvard philosopher William James (1842–1910) and his 1909 Hibbert Lectures, later published in the volume, *A Pluralistic Universe*. Politically, pluralism has been understood as a "theory or system of devolution and autonomy for organizations and individuals in preference to monolithic state power" or "a political system within which many parties or organizations have access to power" (*OED*). Of these three usages—ecclesiastical, philosophical, and political—the first has largely fallen out of use, with only the philosophical and political senses of pluralism still being employed.[8]

Turning to the sociological meaning of pluralism, the *Oxford English Dictionary* states its fourth definition of pluralism as: "The presence or tolerance of a diversity of ethnic or cultural groups within a society or state; (the advocacy of) toleration or acceptance of the coexistence of differing views, values, cultures, etc." (*OED*). Within this definition are included both descriptive and prescriptive qualities of pluralism. Descriptively, pluralism refers to the simple fact that there is a *plurality*, a diversity, of peoples. Prescriptively, the definition refers to "(the advocacy of) tolerance of a diversity of ethnic or cultural groups within a society or state."[9] While "the presence or tolerance of a diversity of ethnic or cultural groups" is descriptive, "(the advocacy of) tolerance …" prescribes, in Martin Marty's words, "ways of doing things about the diversities of constituencies … or ways of thinking about and conceiving them" (Cohen and Numbers, *Gods in America*, x).

8 For example, the political scientist, William E. Connolly, has published a philosophical work on the subject of pluralism. See William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). On the political side see, for example, Thaddeus J. Kozinski, *The Political Problem of Religious Pluralism: And Why Philosophers Can't Solve It* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), and Stephen V. Monsoma and J. Christopher Soper, *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009).

9 The questions of who is being tolerated, who is doing the tolerating, and what that means for power dynamics in a given society are important ones. For a thoroughgoing critique of the notion of tolerance, see Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

My consideration of pluralism will be limited to its sociological application, paying attention to both descriptive and prescriptive usages of the term. Because the major theorists of pluralism have failed to appreciate the importance of encounter in the achievement of identity, they have also misunderstood the changing nature of identity in America. An appreciation of postethnicity leads to a recognition of the shortcomings of pluralism as a framework with which to understand identity in America in the twenty-first century. Moreover, pluralism is no longer useful if we are to understand the nature of American Jewish identity or navigate the contemporary realities of American Jewish life in the twenty-first century.

Irving Greenberg and Hybrid Judaism

Irving Greenberg is one of the most influential American Jewish thinkers and activists of the past 50 years. He anticipated the changing nature of contemporary American Jewish identity long before it would become more widely recognized. Until now, much of the scholarship on Greenberg has suffered from an overemphasis on his work as a Holocaust theologian and as an activist on behalf of Holocaust memory. [10] The result has been that some of his most noteworthy theological and programmatic contributions have passed unnapreciated. Even the most thoughtful treatments of his work have failed to detect how far-reaching his ideas are and the importance they hold for understanding American Jewish identity in the twenty-first century. For Greenberg, the rise of hybrid identities is both a positive and

10 See, for example, Steven T. Katz's collection of essays, *Historicism, the Holocaust, and Zionism: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought and History* (1992); Michael L. Morgan's chapter, "Irving Greenberg and the Post-Holocaust Voluntary Covenant," in *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (2001); and Edward T. Linenthal's *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (1995).