The Emergence of Environmentalism in America and within Social Action of Reform Judaism, 1920–1990

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Rabbinic Ordination

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March 16, 2017
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Table of Contents

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my maternal grandfather, Joe Rubin. Grandpa Joe (z''l) was my personal Jewish sage who taught me never to stop learning, growing, and most importantly to never stop loving.

Acknowledgments:

Completing this thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. Impossible to list them all, I must mention a few for whom I am particularly grateful. First, thank you to my parents and my sisters for always being there for me. Your endless love and support of me in pursuing my dream of becoming a rabbi has had a lasting impact.

To the world renowned faculty and staff at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati and those at the American Jewish Archives. In particular, thank you to my advisors Dr. Gary P. Zola and Dr. Dana Herman. Your commitment to American Jewish history and to me personally throughout the process of writing this thesis has proven most beneficial. You have helped me grow by challenging me to put forth my best effort, and as a result, I am eternally grateful.

To my rabbinic mentors and all pioneers in the field of Jewish ecology and Jewish outdoor education: Rabbis Jamie Korngold, Rabbi Evon Yakar, and Rabbi Mike Comins—thank you for paving the way and introducing me to the Jewish ways into the wilderness.

Finally, thank you to my fiancée, my better half and the love of my life, Nicki. Your confidence in me helped so much along the way. Your endless love and support is everything to me. Thank you for being the best partner.

Introduction

Today we are facing an unprecedented environmental crisis. Record-setting temperatures, rising sea levels due to melting glaciers and ice caps, severe droughts and storms are only a few of the latest consequences we are experiencing as a result of a general disdain for the preservation of the environment. Regarding the exploitive nature of human interaction with and regard for the environment, religion, more often than not, is cited as an influential source.[1] Many understand religion's justification of human dominion over the environment to stem from the biblical mandate in the book of Genesis, where God blesses the creation of human beings and commands us to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it" (1:28). However, a few verses later we read that God places man and woman in the Garden of Eden "to till and to tend the land" (2:15). The question centers on the degree to which humanity embraces "to till and to tend" as implying our obligation to preserve the natural world or whether "to fill the earth and master it" justifies western society's embrace of humanity's *dominion* over nature.[2] For millennia, these biblical injunctions have impacted humanity's approach to and interaction with the natural world.[3]

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[1] In 1969, Lynn White published the article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" wherein she suggests that the spread and acceptance of Christianity and the Bible played a pivotal role in creating the context for human exploitation of nature. "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *JASA* 21 (June 1969): 42–47, http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1969/JASA6-69White.html (accessed February 28, 2016).

[2] Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 5–8.

[3] For a thorough examination of the role of religion and American Environmentalism, see Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Today, Reform Judaism in America is committed to protecting the environment and does so as "heirs to a tradition of stewardship and partnership in the ongoing work of Creation," through Social Action as a means of *Tikkun Olam* – repairing the world.[4] Environmentalism today receives the global attention it deserves from a multitude of secular, Jewish, and non-Jewish faith organizations. However, given the lack of scholarly literature available on the history of environmentalism as a key feature of Reform Jewish Social Action, one may infer that the Reform Jewish commitment to environmentalism is a recent development. This could not be further from the truth. To date, no one has attempted to reconstruct a critical history of how American Reform Judaism has interacted with and participated in organized efforts to preserve our environment. This thesis will help to fill a void in the scholarship surrounding the history of American Reform Judaism on a particular social action issue, the environment.

By drawing upon the rich primary source materials located at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), this thesis will offer a critical and interpretative history of how the Religious Action Center (RAC)—the political and legislative outreach arm of Reform Judaism in the United States—began educating, advocating, and mobilizing the Reform Jewish community on matters of environmentalism, from the 1960s through to the early 1990s. By tracing the organizational and socio-political endeavors of American Reform Judaism on the subject, this thesis also offers a lens through which to view major trends in American environmentalism over three decades.

[4] Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC), "Environment," http://rac.org/environment (accessed February 25, 2016).

Review of the Literature

Critical examination of religion and environmentalism began in the 1960s and it developed into a leading academic field, Religion and Ecology, by the late 1990s.[5] Much has been written on the intersection of religion and ecology. A review of the literature reveals that a majority of research centers on how religious models and specific ideology and philosophy embedded within a given religious tradition inform believers' understanding of the environment.[6] Since the mid-1980s, religious environmental organizations have advocated for greater attention to be paid to the ecological crisis by faith communities across the country. Contemporary scholars have devoted considerable time and effort to producing written histories and analyses of the Religious Environmental Movement.[7] Nevertheless, the majority of these writings highlight the role of Christian inter-denominational environmentalism. There is little mentioned regarding the role of American Jewish organizations in helping to foster religious environmentalism in America. There are some written accounts of the role of Reform Judaism in American environmentalism; however, these volumes offer either more of the same

[5] The academic study of ecology and religion stemmed from a 1996–1998 conference series on World religions and Ecology held at Harvard University to explore elements of the world's religions that highlight human-Earth relations in scripture, ritual, and ethics. The primary objective of the conference was to explore how reconstructing the ecological dimensions of the world's religions would contribute to a sustaining and flourishing future for the Earth community. Over 800 international scholars and theologians of world religions participated in the conference, including leaders of American Reform Judaism. John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, "A History of the Forum on Religion and Ecology Background: Motivation and Intellectual Context," Yale University, 2009, http://fore.yale.edu/files/Forum_History.pdf (accessed January 6, 2017).

[6] For a thorough examination of the intersection of Judaism and Ecology, see Hava Tirosh-Samuelson et al., *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed Word* (Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2003).

[7] For an overview of the emergence of the religious environmental movement, see Stephen Ellingson, ed., *To Care for Creation: The Emergence of the Religious Environmental Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

traditional Jewish views on ecology or case studies exemplifying more recent instances of Reform Jewish involvement in promoting environmentalism.[8]

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter of the thesis discusses the rise of American environmentalism and the emergence of a Reform Jewish voice within that movement. It will place both the American environmental movement as well as the Social Action program of Reform Judaism in their proper historical contexts. I argue that from the 1920s to the 1960s, when a movement-wide social action program was developing within Reform Judaism, more pressing social action issues such as civil rights took precedence over environmentalism. In effect, the Reform movement's engagement with environmental issues was rather minimal. However, by the late 1960s, increasing environmental degradation catches noticeable public attention throughout the country. Subsequently, the Reform Jewish leadership begins to consider its relationship with and duty toward protecting the environment, and in response, brainstorms ways to engage their constituents throughout North America.

The second chapter of the thesis will focus on the top environmental issue in America during the 1970s, the energy crisis, and the degree to which the Reform movement was involved in public debate over conservation of energy. This chapter will argue that the Reform movement's positions on the issue of energy,

[8] See Albert Vorspan, *Jewish Values and Social Crisis* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1971) and Albert Vorspan and David Saperstein, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time* (New York: UAHC Press, 1999).

conservation, and U.S. foreign oil dependence in the 1970s differed from the views of non-Reform American Jewish organizations and institutions who also spoke on the issue during this time. By analyzing numerous position statements from a variety of Jewish American organizations, different news reports on the story from that time, and through a review of publications and literature on the subject from both general American Jewish organizations and the Reform Jewish movement, chapter two will explain how other Jewish organizations were more focused on Israel while Reform Judaism focused more heavily on the environmental impact of energy conservation. More broadly, this chapter also argues that the decision to include an Interfaith Coalition and America's faith communities in the fight for environmentalism was critical for the future success of the movement.

The third chapter, covering the period 1979 to 1989, focuses on the main environmental issue of that era, namely the management of nuclear energy and the regulation of toxic waste disposal. Environmental disasters in the late 1970s and mismanagement of toxic waste sites, such as the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown in 1979 and the exposure of Love Canal residents to toxins and pollution, are two examples of environmental disasters whose long-term effects played out in the 1980s. Under a new Reagan administration beginning in 1981, the environmental movement undergoes a significant shift from a mainstream approach to primarily grassroots environmental efforts. In addition to advocating on behalf of pro-environmental policy in the 1980s through position statements calling for a reduction in nuclear energy and pushing for greater regulation and enforcement of stricter environmental disaster cleanup and relief legislation, the Reform movement

continued to promote environmentalism as a matter of Social Action to its leaders while simultaneously encouraging American Reform Jewish communities to embrace environmentalism at home and in their congregations. A dual approach to environmentalism, striving to balance an embrace of grassroots environmentalism while continuing to fight at the mainstream level by promoting environmental legislation, as will be shown in this chapter, illustrates the importance of engaging in environmentalism from more than one perspective to best ensure success.

The conclusion will offer a summary of the preceding chapters and the major findings therein. Insights into the major implications of Reform Jewish involvement in American environmentalism will be provided. Final thoughts will be given on the overall effect of Reform Jewish environmentalism and suggestions will be offered as to how this research can be used in the future.

Chapter 1
The Rise of American Environmentalism and the Reform Jewish Voice, the Progressive Era to the 1960s

Many scholars trace the beginnings of the American Environmentalist movement to the public influence that came from nineteenth-century writers such as Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), whose book, *Walden*, helped thousands of readers to understand that the beauty of nature had a value on its own terms. Nature deserved to be respected quite apart from its utilitarian value to human beings. During the Progressive Era in the late nineteenth century, conservationism and preservationism brought this topic into the public arena. Arguably one of the most prominent figures during this early period was Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919). During his presidency, Roosevelt established national parks and signed the Antiquities Act of 1906. These presidential initiatives made conservationism a high profile concern for the first time.[9]

Today's social action program within Reform Judaism, which includes environmental stewardship, is a direct outgrowth of the development of social action within American Reform Judaism. The Social Action program of Reform Judaism in America today is a product of many decades of internal debate and discussion over the role of American Reform Judaism in promoting various matters of Social Action in America. This chapter aims to provide historical context from

[9] "Conservation movement: movement initially closely identified with the personality and politics of President Theodore Roosevelt. By the end of the 19th century, Americans were concerned with the rapid pace of social progress. They had seen the United States move quickly from a frontier to an industrial society, and the nation's much-cherished natural resources, especially its forests, appeared on the verge of extinction. Under Roosevelt's programs, the protection of forests, rangeland, and mineral and water resources began to evolve in piecemeal fashion." Kline, 197.

which the American environmental movement, and separately, the Social Action program of Judaism, both derived.

First, this chapter will identify the two leading ideologies that drove environmentalism in America—Conservationism and Preservationism—and discuss what sort of influence they had on setting policy. Furthermore, the lives and work of Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall will be profiled, as each was influential in advancing environmentalism in America during this time. Lastly, this section will provide an overview of how, by the 1960s, the lavish American consumer-centric lifestyle contributed to growing environmental concern, which led to increase public awareness and its implications by the end of the decade.

This chapter will also focus on the development of social action as a key feature of Reform Judaism in America, by providing a summary of the organizational bodies within the larger Reform movement that informs its Social Action policy. Secondly, this chapter will speak to the foundation of Social Action with Reform Judaism and its early manifestations. In so doing, this chapter will argue that environmentalism was far from a priority for Reform Jewish Social Action until the general public became increasingly more aware of environmental degradation in the 1960s. Only then did Reform Judaism begin to consider environmentalism as a growing concern to be taken up under the auspices of its social action program.

Early Environmentalism in America

Early environmental efforts in America laid the foundation that would support the movement's expansion later in the twentieth century. The industrial age

in America had profound effects on the environment during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this time, due to the excess waste and exploitation of natural resources, Americans collectively began to consider the impact this would have on the environment. As a result, a Nature Conservation movement in America began and was led, in large part, by President Theodore Roosevelt who, along with a determined group of government officials and citizens, fought for a more responsible use of natural resources.[10] Thus, for the first time in American history, nature conservation would emerge as a part of the national political agenda.

The focus of the conservationist movement has been stewardship and the sustainability of natural resources by seeking to balance America's natural resources and the needs of the people by advocating that the federal government control the nation's lands and resources.[11] However, conservationism was not the only approach to early American environmentalism. At about the same time, Preservationism emerged as an alternative ideology to Conservationism. The basis for the Preservation movement was a concern over the loss of wilderness and the animals that occupied those areas. Preservationism defined a spiritual and psychological relationship between the human and the natural world. Nature, in the form of wilderness, untouched by human activity, was considered to have intrinsic value.[12] Preservationist vision was heavily influenced by the romanticized view of American Transcendentalism and poets such as Henry David Thoreau, whose view

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[10] Ibid., 59.
[11] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement,* 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2005), 54.
[12] Robert J. Brulle, "The U.S. Environmental Movement," http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~brullerj/Twenty%20Lessons%20in%20Environmental%20Sociology-Brulle.pdf (accessed December 16, 2016).

of wilderness was analogous with religious sacredness. Whereas conservationist advocates believed that natural resources could be efficiently managed to provide for human needs, the preservationist objective was to preserve wilderness in a pristine state.[13]

While both conservationism and preservationism subscribed to a degree of protection of nature, the means of carrying that out was fundamentally different. Conservation was widely associated with the protection of natural resources, while preservation was characterized by the protection of objects, wildlife, and landscapes. Simply put, conservation sought to dictate the proper use of nature and regulate human use of nature, while preservation sought the protection of nature from use and tried to eliminate human impact on nature altogether. In general, President Roosevelt's conservationist approach held greater sway when it came to setting environmental policy for the country. Still to this day, approaches to environmentalism outlined by early conservationist and preservationist ideology continue to impact the debate over wilderness management in this country.

The work of two notable preservationists, Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall, during the early decades of the environmentalist movement would prove to have a lasting impact. Both Leopold and Marshall trained in the nation's first forestry schools. Together, they were founders of the Wilderness Society, a non-profit land conservation organization dedicated to the protection of natural areas and federal

[13] Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 215.

public lands.[14] Along with Leopold and Marshall, six other men founded the Wilderness Society, all of whom would be considered prominent conservationists of the twentieth century. Most notably, the Wilderness Society was instrumental in the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which spurred the creation of the National Wilderness Preservation System and guaranteed protection of over one hundred million acres of public land across all fifty states. The Wilderness Society is vital to the environmental movement for its ongoing contribution to the preservation and protection of public land and wildlife.

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) was influential in the arena of wilderness protection in America by emphasizing biodiversity, ecology, and wildlife management.[15] Today, he is best known for the development of modern environmental ethics, which sought to extend the traditional boundaries of ethics to include the non-human world. In his seminal work, *A Sand County Almanac,* he explained his concept of Land Ethics:

> Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals. A land ethic cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources', but it does affirm their right to continued existence.[16]

Aldo Leopold helped American environmentalism move from an anthropocentric point of view to a more ecologically sound understanding of how humans relate to the natural world:

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[14] The Wilderness Society, "Why Wilderness?" http://www.wilderness.org/why (accessed October 26, 2016).
[15] Curt D. Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Works* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
[16] Charles W. Schwartz and Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With Other Essays on Conservation From "Round River"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 243–244.

> In short, a land ethnic changes the role Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.[17]

In addition to his writings, Leopold would gain success as a professional political leader of American environmentalism. He served in several government positions including the Forest Service's District Three in Arizona and New Mexico territories. Then, in 1923, Leopold was elected as a professional member of the Boone and Crockett Club, a wildlife conservation organization. By the 1930s, Leopold became the nation's foremost expert on wildlife management. He was able to advocate for ethically informed and scientifically proven management techniques of wildlife habitats of both public and private land in America. He achieved this by eliminating an earlier approach to wilderness preservation that stressed a need for human dominance and replaced it with an environmental ethic intended to sustain our nation's growing National Parks system.[18]

Robert "Bob" Marshall (1901–1939) stands as the preeminent Jewish figure in the early environmentalist movement in America. Marshall grew up immersed in liberal values and was profoundly influenced by his father, Louis Marshall, the distinguished constitutional lawyer and protector of civil liberties.[19] Marshall was nurtured in liberal values at home and at Felix Adler's Ethical Culture School in New

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[17] Ibid., 246.
[18] Meine, 257.
[19] Louis Marshall (1856–1929), an American constitutional and civil rights lawyer dedicated his life to securing religious, political, and cultural freedom for all minorities. He was among the founders of the American Jewish Committee and an ardent conservationist who led the fight to protect the Adirondack region and Catskills Mountains. His strong interests in conservation led him to make a large endowment to the Forestry School at Syracuse University. For a full analysis of his life, see M.M. Silver's biography, *Louis Marshall and the Rise of Jewish Ethnicity in America: A Biography* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

York, which he attended from grade three through twelve and where social justice and reform were part of the central ethos:[20]

> [A] Haven for secular Jews who rejected the mysticism and rituals of Judaism, but accepted many of its ethical teachings. Additionally, because the institutionalized anti-Semitism of the times…the ethical culture school had a disproportionately larger number of Jewish students. Ethical was the only one that did not discriminate because of race, color, or creed.[21]

Robert Marshall was never particularly fond of organized religion. Nature was his sanctuary. In September 1925, Marshall recorded in his journal that he spent Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement – perched on a rock, contemplating the scene, and his life. He defended this anomalous approach when he wrote:

> There were not wandering of thoughts to the chance of the Pirates in the World Series, or next Sunday's walk, nor even to the less frivolous subjects of pine reproduction or the political situation. [Rather, I was] forced to confess that in Temple…It has in the past been impossible to banish such thoughts from my mind and that, at best, fasting, hard seats and dull sermons are not conducive to deep thought. Therefore, I felt that my celebration of Yom Kippur, though unorthodox, was very profitable.[22]

It is evident from Marshall's writing that he was very cognizant of his Jewish upbringing but preferred an entirely different means of engaging spiritually. Although not a practicing Reform Jew, he would nevertheless embrace the universalistic and social justice values imparted to him by his family and his education.

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[20] James M. Glover, *A Wilderness Original: The Life of Bob Marshall* (Seattle: Mountaineers Books, 1986), 15.
[21] Jeremy Bernstein and Rosalind Singer, "The Ethical Culture School," 1967, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/04/25/the-ethical-culture-school/ (accessed January 10, 2017).
[22] Robert Marshall, "Growth of a Forester," February 25, 1926, Box 3, Folder 7, MS-204, Robert Marshall Papers, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA), Cincinnati, OH.

In 1925, Marshall began his career with the U.S. Forest Service where he was able to combine his social values with his love of the wild. In the years to follow, Marshall held two important public appointed posts: From 1933 to 1937, he served as chief of forestry in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and from 1937 to 1939 as director of recreation management in the Forest Service. During this time, Marshall influenced new policies on wilderness preservation.[23] Throughout the 1930s, Marshall published many essays on the subject of wilderness conservation and as a forester, argued that wilderness belongs to all people, not simply the elite who believed in the exploitation of land for personal and commercial gains. At a time when American environmentalism was split between two ideologies—there were those who advocated for management of natural resources while others were strong proponents of pristine wilderness protection—Bob Marshall, "The People's Forester," was able to rise above the ideological differences to incorporate social justice values into wilderness protection policy. His efforts helped to move American environmentalism from being the interest of a few to a social movement for the masses.[24]

Both Robert Marshall and Aldo Leopold were influential in helping shape American environmentalism in their time. Not simply as a result of their work as foresters, but more importantly because their work was informed by universalistic social justice values. Leopold's work in environmental ethics was successful in helping reframe environmentalism from a place of asserting dominance over the natural world to an understanding that human beings are a part of nature. Robert

[23] Kline, *First Along the River*, 75.
[24] It is Gottlieb who dubs Marshall "The People's Forester." *Forcing the Spring*, 52.

Marshall was able to advocate not only for wilderness and natural lands protection but also for wilderness to be preserved for the rights of all people. Ultimately, Leopold introduced ethics into American environmentalism, and Marshall carried it forward during the early years of the movement. In decades later, religious organizations would also build on the ideas put forward by these two key figures.

The Social Action Program of Reform Judaism

Stemming from the Jewish mandate of what today is referred to as *Tikkun Olam*—repairing the world—Reform Judaism prioritizes social action as one of its key mandates. Social action is a values-based initiative to help guide Reform Judaism on a broad range of ethical and moral issues. Social Action is a vehicle of our intellectual and moral beliefs. From small acts such as using energy efficient light bulbs to more global concerns of ensuring clean drinking water, Reform Judaism's response to the environment is guided by our its overall commitment to Social Action as a means of *Tikkun Olam*.

Social Action is a vast arena and encompasses many crucial issues our society faces, including the environmental crisis. However, not until the 1960s did Reform Judaism begin to recognize environmentalism as a major Social Action concern. Before discussing the subject of environmentalism in the history of Reform Jewish Social Action, it is necessary to mention briefly the organizational, institutional, as

well as make a note of the philosophy behind the makeup of American Reform Judaism.[25]

In 1873, founder of the Hebrew Union College, Rabbi Isaac M. Wise established the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). As the first organizational body representative of American Jewish congregations, the initial objective of the UAHC was to secure the success of the Hebrew Union College.[26] Soon thereafter, the UAHC would address the degree to which Reform Judaism and its leaders ought to prioritize social justice and take on broader issues of the time. The question of social justice and the extent of involvement in Social Action on the part of Reform Jews were first formally introduced at the UAHC in 1878 during which time a constitutional amendment was passed, which makes clear the UAHC commitment to support causes concerning the civil and religious rights of Jews in America and abroad.[27] The Reform Jewish position on Social Action would evolve, as did the development of its professional organizations and institutional bodies therein.

In 1885, an assembly of Reform rabbinic leaders met in the city of Pittsburgh and adopted a "Declaration of Principles" on Reform Judaism. This document is commonly referred to as "The Pittsburgh Platform." This eight-point declaration outlined the fundamental tenets of the American Reform Jewish community. The final point of the of the Pittsburgh Platform, authored and promoted by Rabbi Emil

[25] For a full account of the history and development of the Reform Movement in Judaism, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995).
[26] Michael A. Meyer and Gunther W. Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* (New York: UAHC Press, 2000), 25.
[27] Steven E. Foster, "The Development of the Social Action Program of Reform Judaism, 1878–1969," rabbinical thesis (HUC-JIR, 1970), 1.

G. Hirsch of Chicago Sinai Congregation, asserted that Reform Jewish communities and their rabbis were obligated "to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."[28] The roots of American Reform Judaism's ongoing engagement in areas of social justice and related concerns are frequently traced back to the Pittsburgh Platform. [29]

Four years after the creation of the Pittsburgh Platform, in 1889, under the direction of Isaac M. Wise, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) was established.[30] Originally intended to be a regional organization, the CCAR evolved into the largest rabbinic organization in North America, composed of thousands of Reform rabbis throughout the world. For nearly one hundred and thirty years, the CCAR has spoken out on contemporary issues by producing "formal and informal statements interpreting the voice of prophetic Judaism."[31] Nevertheless, in the early years of the CCAR, the professional organization struggled to come together over the degree to which social justice would be a part of its collective agenda. In fact, in the first eighteen years of the CCAR's existence, the organization issued only two political pronouncements.[32] Despite the CCAR's inability to assert itself in the area of social justice during these early years, there were, of course, individual members of

[28] *CCAR Yearbook* I (1890): 121.
[29] Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch (1851–1923) would significantly advance social justice as a part of American Reform Judaism. As the rabbi of Sinai Congregation in Chicago, Hirsch was successful in advocating many social reforms. Often, Hirsch would preach on the importance of social justice within the purview of American Reform Judaism. See Bernard Martin, "The Religious Philosophy of Emil G. Hirsch," *The American Jewish Archives Journal* IV, no. 2 (1952): 66–81.
[30] Meyer and Plaut, 145.
[31] Central Conference of American Rabbis, "Rabbis Speak," http://www.ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/ (accessed January 10, 2017).
[32] Leonard J. Mervis, "The Social Justice Movement and the American Reform Rabbi," *The American Jewish Archives Journal* VII, no. 2 (June 1955): 171–223.

the CCAR who prioritized promoting political and social change as a part of their personal rabbinate.

In the early years of the CCAR, few members of the Reform rabbinate took it upon themselves to advance social justice causes in their local community. Nevertheless, there were examples of pioneering American Reform rabbis, like Stephen S. Wise, who did advocate for social justice causes as a part of Reform Judaism in America. Though they may have been few in number, these social justice pioneers were giants in terms of the influence they exerted on the development of a social justice platform of Reform Judaism in America.[33]

A centralized vision for a social justice initiative to serve as the foundation of Reform Judaism in America did not come to fruition until the beginning of the twentieth century. During this time, Reform Judaism entered an era retrospectively known as the epoch of "Classical Reform Judaism," wherein universalism and a focus on American society became the dominant emphases of Reform Judaism in America.[34] Simultaneously, in America, a drastically rising population and growing industrialization led to a myriad of societal issues. Metropolitan areas were overcrowded and unsanitary, which resulted in unfit living conditions, and society begun to take notice. In response, a spirit of social reform arose in America, complementing the focus of Classical Reform Judaism. The culture of Classical

[33] Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (1874–1949) promoted social service programs while serving as Oregon's child labor commissioner. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise held many positions of public and charitable offices throughout his rabbinate. In 1914, Wise was one of a handful of American Jews who co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For more information on the career of Stephen S. Wise, see Robert D. Shapiro, *A Reform Rabbi in the Progressive Era: The Early Career of Stephen S. Wise* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1988).

[34] "Focused on American society, it [classical Reform Judaism] both equated American values with Jewish ones and began to direct the movement toward a "prophetic" critique of economic inequalities." Meyer and Plaut, 148.

Reform Judaism helped advance the desire for a solidified social justice program for American Reform Judaism. Notwithstanding, traditional Reform culture is strikingly similar to the philosophical beginnings of Reform Judaism.

Early American Reform Judaism was built upon a foundation of "enlightened" Judaism, universal in nature, and striving toward a messianic goal for all humanity to embrace peace.[35] Contrast this concept of Judaism with the Judaism of pre-Enlightenment; the ideology of Reform Judaism was revolutionary for its time. German-Jewish immigrants living in post-Civil War America were eager to establish community and a place in the emerging United States of America. A pivotal time in American Jewish history, the late nineteenth century witnessed the mass migration from Europe, the Americanization of a population, and integration of politics into religion.[36] In the latter half of the century, Protestant activism gave rise to a full Social Gospel movement, which influenced the thinking of these early American Jewish religious reformers. The regard for social justice as a fundamental tenet of liberal Judaism in America reflects this influence.[37] Moreover, the careers and activism of early twentieth century American Reform rabbis reflects the influence of nineteenth-century social reform in America.

In 1910, the CCAR created its first substantive social committee, the Committee on Synagogue and Labor. This initiative was designed to address areas of social concerns along with other Jewish national groups.[38] The leadership of Reform

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[35] Ibid., viii.
[36] This periodization of American Jewish history is attributed to Hasia Diner. Jonathan D. Sarna makes reference to it in his book, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 30.
[37] Meyer and Plaut, 35.
[38] Foster, 5.

Judaism continued to work to establish a firm foundation on the matter of social justice from 1915 to 1918 when a new authorizing committee to spearhead social justice programs of Reform Judaism was established, the Commission on Social Justice. From the 1920s to the 1940s, the Commission on Social Justice fought against commercial and unfair labor laws, industrial relations, and matters of anti-Semitism.[39] In that time, the only environmental social justice issue was "Agriculture and the Farmer."[40] Just as environmentalism did not enter the American conscience until the Post-WWII era, Reform Judaism in America became more concerned with issues of environmentalism around the same time.

Beginning in 1945, under the leadership of Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations began working with the CCAR to tackle matters of social justice more effectively:

> Ever since the Union discontinued the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights it has surrendered the whole field of Social Action, with the significant moral and spiritual issues, to secular bodies…The splendid cooperation between the CCAR and the Union in our several joint commissions prompts me to recommend that the executive board authorize its director to explore, with the CCAR the possibility of establishing a joint conference Union Commission on Justice and Peace.[41]

In 1946, the CCAR and the UAHC formed a Commission on Social Action (CSA). The goal of CSA was to serve as a collective voice of both Reform Jewish leadership and laypersons within the movement on issues of social action.[42] In the years to follow, the newly formed CSA strove to find its place as the social action arm of American Reform Jewry.

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[39] Ibid., 30.
[40] *CCAR Yearbook LIII* (1943): 122.
[41] *UAHC Proceedings* XIV (1947): 94.
[42] Foster, 37.

Throughout the 1950s Reform Jewish leadership heavily debated the role that the movement should play in politics. The discussion revolved around whether as representative of a vast number of Reform synagogues and its members, the central body of Reform Judaism had a right to set forth such principles reflective of Reform Jewish values. Central to this debate was the issue of the establishment of the Center for Social Action, better known as the Religious Action Center (RAC).

The idea to establish the Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C. was made possible by a donation given to the Union by Mr. and Mrs. Kivie Kaplan of Boston.[43] The RAC would serve as the central location for the work undertaken by the Commission on Social Action. At the UAHC Biennial in 1959, the establishment of the RAC was authorized:

> The Commission on Social Action is now engaged in implementing a resolution authorizing the creation in Washington, D.C. of a Social Action Center. The Social Action Center will keep rabbis, laymen, and congregations informed of legislative developments with which we as Reform hold concern. [The RAC] will provide a national voice for our movement on current moral and social issues.[44]

On December 1, 1962, the RAC's building was officially dedicated, and its doors opened. Since that time, the RAC has been the political mouthpiece of the American Reform movement and pivotal to the movement's ongoing Social Action program:

> For more than fifty years, the RAC has been the hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in Washington, D.C. As the D.C. office of

[43] Kivie Kaplan (1904–1975) a prominent Reform Jewish civil rights leader, devoted much of his life to the advancement of equal rights for Jews and non-Jews alike. In addition to his philanthropic endeavors regarding Reform Judaism, Kaplan was elected to the National Board of the NAACP in 1954 and served as a trustee of two black colleges: Lincoln University and Tougaloo College. For more information see MS-26, Kivie Kaplan Papers, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[44] *CCAR Yearbook* LXX (1960): 100.

> the Union for Reform Judaism, the RAC educates and mobilizes the Reform Jewish community on legislative and social concerns, advocating on more than seventy different issues, including economic justice, civil rights, religious liberty, Israel, and more.[45]

The tradition of social justice in Reform Judaism grew alongside the movement as a whole. However as the place of social justice in American Reform Judaism grew larger, so too did the sense of responsibility among Reform Jewish leadership to become more involved in national and global matters of social justice. Eventually, Reform Judaism understood the necessity for more political action to complement the array of social justice pronouncements issued. The creation of the Religious Action Center proved to be vital in this regard.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism allows for a Reform Jewish voice for Social Action to be front and center in our nation's capital. By keeping the Reform Jewish community informed and engaged on legislative matters of Social Action, and lobbying Congress on behalf of the opinions of Reform Jews, the RAC continues to address paramount social concerns of the time. Beginning in the 1960s, the Religious Action Center stood ready to help guide American Reform Jews in matters of Social Action. By mid-decade, the RAC was able to introduce American Reform Jewry to the emerging environmentalism movement and, by 1970, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism was prepared to empower its constituents to view environmentalism as a cause to support.

[45] Religious Action Center, "About the RAC," http://www.rac.org/about-rac (accessed October 21, 2016).

Environmentalism as a Reform Jewish Cause

In the early years of the RAC, the rabbinic leadership of Reform Judaism was still debating the idea of social progress in America and the role of Reform Judaism within the American political scene. In a 1960 report of the Commission on Justice and Peace of the CCAR, chairman Rabbi Leon I. Feuer, declared:

> We are living in a time of crisis and danger, of conflicting ideologies and systems, of an incredible pace in scientific discovery and technological advance. Social problems proliferate and their solutions seem endlessly complicated. Yet we must never lose the Jewish spirit of hopefulness nor the courage to believe that which faith in God and the aid of reason solutions can be found. We must therefore make an urgent effort to understand the great issues of our time, to apply to them the historic principles of Judaism, and to express our convictions concerning these questions and the action, which they make necessary.[46]

From this text, we gain a sense of the importance of social activism in the eyes of the rabbinic leadership of Reform Judaism. Feuer calls upon Reform rabbis to remain vigilant toward social issues of the time, to respond with conviction, and to take a stance accompanied by action to further a cause. In a 1964 speech to the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, then-President Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, cited more than two-thirds of Reform congregations as having a Social Action committee or program. In addition to the increase in Social Action efforts by local Reform Jewish communities, Rabbi Eisendrath also spoke to the collective Social Action endeavors undertaken by the RAC, noting its role in chief civil rights initiatives such as the

[46] Leon I. Feuer, "Conservation of Resources, Report of Commission on Justice and Peace," *CCAR Yearbook* LXX (1960): 66.

Freedom Summer and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.[47] Clearly, by the 1960s, Reform Judaism began to engage in meaningful social action in support of a variety of contemporary issues such Civil Rights, Church-State relations, World Peace and Disarmament, Economic Affairs, and Soviet Jewry. [48] The environment was not among them.

The first mention made regarding the conservation of natural resources was by Rabbi Feuer in his 1960 report of the Commission on Justice and Peace. Based on the conviction that God created the earth for all humanity to enjoy and benefit from, Rabbi Feuer called attention to the "wasteful" tendencies of American culture and the need for government to intervene:

> Experts have been warning us for sometime about the depletion of our natural resources - water, soil, forests, and raw materials. In our own country we have been particularly wasteful in this regard. We urge our government as well as the governments of all nations to take planned measures to protect and preserve these bounties with which God has blessed our earth and to see that they are utilized, not only for the profit of the few, but for the welfare of all.[49]

Nevertheless, such mention was made almost entirely in vain, since environmentalism was insignificant to the Social Action efforts of Reform Judaism during this time. For the majority of the 1960s, the focus of Social Action efforts of Reform Judaism in American was elsewhere.

The records of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism corroborate this fact. In a 1964 report to the board of trustees of the UAHC, the CSA

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[47] Report of the President to the Board of Trustees of the UAHC, November 21, 1964, pp. 26–27, D1-1, Folder 4, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[48] Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism Report to Board of Trustees of UAHC, November 22, 1964, D1-1, Folder 3, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[49] Feuer, 71.

identified five priorities for their Social Action campaign: Civil Rights, Church-State, World Peace and Disarmament, Economic Affairs, and Soviet Jewry.[50] In the early years of the RAC's existence, Reform Judaism focused its Social Action efforts on issues such as Civil Rights and economic justice.

Out of the fifty-four position statements made by the UAHC throughout the 1960s, only two pertained to environmentalism. The resolutions included broad statements calling for a raised awareness from government entities, yet do not offer any concrete solutions regarding ways to combat environmental degradation. The first resolution, presented in 1965 at the 48th Biennial Assembly of the UAHC, which convened in San Francisco, spoke to America's thoughtlessness toward the Biblical injunction to conserve God's creation by abusing our natural resources. Furthermore, the position statement made mention of the reseeding of national forests and degradation of clean water sources.[51]

The second of two resolutions by the UAHC on environmentalism in the 1960s, enacted by the 50th General Assembly in October 1969, addressed the issue of environmental pollution and the devastating impact of air pollution not only on local and national communities, but its adverse effect on a global scale. Within the resolution, the UAHC cited industrial and automotive pollution as the main contributing factors to the larger air pollution problem. Moreover, the resolution called attention to the disruption of the ecological balance in nature resulting from

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[51] Union for Reform Judaism, "Resolution on Conservation and Development of Natural Resources," November 1965, http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/conservation-and-development-natural-resources (accessed October 22, 2016).

the overuse of pesticides. "The indiscriminate use of DDT and other poisonous chemicals must be stopped now," the resolution stated.[52]

The two position statements of the UAHC do reflect a growing concern with environmental issues of the day. For example, the UAHC was correct in its assertion that auto emissions were responsible for a significant portion of the air pollution in America.[53] Furthermore, America's growing fear over the inherent dangers of pesticides, a concern spurred by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, is reflected in the UAHC 1969 resolution's explicit mention of DDT, a major topic in Carson's book.[54] Lastly, the timing of the UAHC resolution on environmental pollution coincided with a series of environmental catastrophes in the late 1960s, including the 1969 burning of the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland and the Santa Barbara oil spill.[55] Coverage of these events undoubtedly resulted in increased public awareness of environmental concerns; it is reasonable to infer that these events had some influence on the decision of the UAHC leadership to create a position statement on environmentalism when it did.

In general, though, the lack of resolutions and statements on environmentalism put forth by the Reform movement in the 1960s shows what little import this topic had in the overall context of the movement's social action program.

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[52] Union for Reform Judaism, "Resolution on Environmental Pollution," October 1969, https://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions /environmental-pollution (accessed October 22, 2016).
[53] In 1967, Americans owned half of the world's 200 million motor vehicles and burned 80 billion gallons of fuel. Overcrowded roadways led to increased air pollution and smog, which forced residents of major cities like Los Angeles indoors. Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring*, 88.
[54] Carson, Rachel Louise (1907–1964), author of several scientific and popular articles and books about ecology and the environment. In *Silent Spring* (1962), she strongly criticized the indiscriminate use of DDT. The book helped stimulate environmental protection measures. Kline, 196.
[55] Mark Dowie, *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 24.

Though the religious leadership of Reform Judaism made mention of the importance of conservation of natural resources, the topic was nevertheless overshadowed by more pressing social issues of the time.

Conclusion

The history of environmentalism in America is just one part of the complex debate over human interaction with the natural world. In the early twentieth century, the emerging environmentalist movement was characterized by two distinct approaches, conservation and preservation. Though these two camps differed in their preferred method of managing the balance between humanity and nature, the two ideologies laid the foundation of the America's regard for the environment. Leaders of early environmentalism, such as Theodore Roosevelt, helped bring the issue into the political arena. Others, such as Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall, were influential in bridging the divide between conservation and preservation methods of environmentalism through their embrace of liberal and universalistic values.

There is a long-standing tradition of social justice in American Reform Judaism. Based upon the post-Enlightenment liberal Jewish philosophy of Germany, the early reformers sought to create a reformation of Judaism that fit alongside the emerging culture of modernity. In America, Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, one of the pioneering figures of American Reform Judaism, was responsible for the creation of an American rabbinical seminary, as well as the organizational and professional associations that shaped institutional life of American Reform Judaism. It was with

the help of these organizations that Reform Judaism in America grew. The idea of social justice concerns becoming a pillar of American Reform Judaism was initially introduced and fostered by rabbis such as Stephen S. Wise and Emil G. Hirsch, who helped create greater awareness amongst Reform Jews to the essential nature of social justice in Reform Judaism altogether.

Social justice as a tenet of Reform Judaism in America continued to evolve well into the twentieth century. As Protestant communities in America began to focus on moral issues and social concerns, the Reform Jews adopted a similar attitude. In the first half of the twentieth century, both the CCAR and the UAHC displayed efforts to promote social justice concerns of the time, not simply those impacting American Jewry. Not until after WWII, however, did the UAHC and CCAR combine efforts in the fight collectively for social justice, resulting in the creation of the joint Commission on Social Action. The creation of a centralized Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C., a hub of Reform Jewish Social Action in America, cemented the voice of American Reform Jews on matters of Social Action in this country.

In the first ten years of the RAC's existence, the focus of Reform Jewish Social Action efforts was primarily on advancing civil rights. Environmentalism was not a top priority. However, by the 1960s, when the American public became more aware of serious environmental concerns, environmentalism began to emerge as a topic of some concern for Reform leaders. Throughout the 1960s, as the effects of environmental degradation became more noticeable to Americans, Reform Judaism began to speak out on the issue by publishing two position statements on the

conservation of natural resources and the dangers of air pollution. Beginning in 1970, the RAC devoted more attention to environmentalism as a primary social action concern for the Reform community and American Jewry as a whole.

Chapter 2
1970s Environmentalism: the Energy Crisis and the Reform Response

The 1970s would prove to be a decade of tremendous growth for the modern American environmental movement. In the 1970s, environmentalism evolved from a counter-cultural initiative to a mainstream social issue as the American public was forced to confront the reality of finite natural resources.[56] Increasing support for environmentalism during this time led to the rise of mainstream environmental efforts, characterized by the introduction of environmentalism into the American political sphere.[57] In 1970, President Richard Nixon established – by Executive Order – the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In so doing, the tide of American public opinion on matters such as air pollution was, for the first time, turning in favor of environmentalists. The seventies became known as "the heyday of the environmental movement."[58]

Heightened anxiety surrounding the future of oil imports emerged across the country in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War when the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) enacted an oil embargo on the United States and other countries that backed the Israeli campaign against Egypt and Syria. There was even more at stake for the American Jewish community. According to Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Jewish Renewal movement, who is credited as having pioneered the development of "Eco-Judaism" theology, the organized Jewish

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[56] Stacy Silveira, "The American Environmental Movement: Surviving Through Diversity," *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review* 28 (2001), http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/ealr/vol28/iss2/7 (accessed March 9, 2016).
[57] Kline, *First Along the River*, 96.
[58] Ibid., 111.

community in the 1970s viewed energy as a Jewish issue in ethno-national terms.[59] There was added concern and anxiety within American Jewry that an energy crisis would result in grave implications for the state of Israel.[60]

This chapter argues that Israel was often the motivating factor in positions taken by organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) on the energy crisis of the 1970s. While the desire to safeguard the State of Israel was certainly a large influence on the American Jewish response to the energy crisis of the decade, this chapter argues that the Reform Jewish response to energy reform during this period focused more on advancing energy conservation for the sake of the environment. The political arm of the Reform movement, the RAC, encouraged its constituents to adopt home energy conservation measures and worked to advance new environmental policies in Congress and a national energy policy that was less dependent on fossil fuels. This chapter will also highlight the role of Reform Jewish leaders, such as UAHC President Rabbi Alexander Schindler and RAC Director Rabbi David Saperstein, both of whom were instrumental in leading the Reform Jewish response throughout the decade. Moreover, this chapter will focus on the Reform Jewish participation in a national Jewish organizational campaign for energy conservation and reform beginning in 1977 under the new Carter administration. By the end of the decade,

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[59] Arthur Waskow is credited as one of the leading creators of theory, practice, and institutions for the movement for Jewish renewal. Founder of The Shalom Center, Waskow is a prophetic voice in Jewish, multi-religious, and American life. The Shalom Center strives to bring Jewish and other spiritual thought and practice to bear on seeking peace, pursuing justice, healing the earth, and celebrating community. For a full report on the life and works of Rabbi Arthur Waskow, see The Shalom Center, "Arthur Waskow: Full Biography and Selected Bibliography," https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1008 (accessed January 14, 2017).

[60] Arthur Waskow, "Jews and Energy," (1973), N1-56, Folder 5, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

Reform Jewish leaders played a pivotal role in helping to develop the first faith-based environmental initiative in the country.

American Jewish Response to the Energy Crisis

Within the context of the energy crisis, there were areas in which the majority of American Jewish groups agreed and others in which they did not. Most Jewish organizations in America felt strongly in favor of energy independence, primarily for the sake and security of Israel. For example, as early as January 1973, the ZOA lobbied federal administration and Congress to put an end to U.S. dependence on Arab oil.[61] One of the earliest American Jewish organizational responses to the national energy crisis came from the American Jewish Committee, the long-standing global Jewish advocacy organization.[62] As an immediate reaction to the oil embargo of 1973, the AJC spearheaded the creation of an inter-group committee whose purpose was to speak on issues reflective of the energy crisis.[63] The early efforts of the AJC's National Committee for a Fair Energy Policy primarily focused on the economic implications of a fair energy policy.

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[61] "The Energy Crisis: Its Ramifications for the United States and the State of Israel", 1973, N1-56, Folder 5, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

[62] American Jewish Committee, "About AJC," www.ajc.org/site/c.7oJILSPwFfJSG/b.9196379/k.E030/About_AJC.htm (accessed November 29, 2016).

[63] It is worth noting that the AJC's major goals were to combat antisemitic or anti-Israel propaganda. During this time, the AJC feared that gasoline and oil shortages in the US would arouse antisemitism in America. However, there was little evidence to support this fear. The results of a confidential survey, "A Tactical Program Plan to Combat Anticipated Anti-Semitism Fallout from the Energy Crisis," conducted by the AJC demonstrated that the bulk of "hatred" aroused from the energy crisis, if any, was directed against oil companies and/or Arab countries, not the American Jewish population. For a full report of the AJC's involvement in the Energy Crisis, see Marianne R. Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong the American Jewish Committee, 1945– 2006* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 197–209.

From 1974 to 1978, the AJC position on national energy evolved from general position statements to more concrete legislative solutions. For example, in 1976 the AJC formed an ad hoc Committee on Energy to deepen their engagement on the issue. In a December 1976 statement on energy, the AJC called for the reduction of U.S. dependence on imported oil, greater efforts to reduce wasteful consumption, and maximizing research and development of alternative energy sources.[64] In promoting a Fair Energy Policy, the AJC may have offered more tangible solutions to advance their cause, but by favoring offshore drilling and the deregulation of newly found natural gas, the AJC moved even further from ensuring the conservation of the country's natural resources.[65]

The AJC proved to be an essential first responder among American Jewish organizations regarding the national energy crisis. Nevertheless, its position on offshore drilling and deregulation of gas prices became a point of contention between the AJC and the Reform movement. Among American Jewish organizations, there was a shared consensus regarding the opposition of America's reliance on OPEC oil.[66] However, the Reform Jewish response to the energy crisis throughout the 1970s differed and offered American Jewry an alternative perspective by which to understand the energy crisis as a Jewish issue.

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[64] "Statement on Energy," adopted by AJC National Executive Council. December 3, 1976. Energy File, AJC Resolutions and Statements Collection. Statement on natural gas, offshore drilling, and foreign oil, 1973–78. http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx?panes=2 (accessed January 15, 2017).

[65] "Energy Policy – Deregulation and Offshore Drilling," September – October 1977. Energy File, AJC Resolutions and Statements Collection. Statement on natural gas, offshore drilling, and foreign oil, 1973-78. http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx?panes=2 (accessed January 15, 2017).

[66] Letter to Senator Howard Metzenbaum from Rabbi David Saperstein, January 11, 1979, N1-56, Folder 1, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

The Carter Administration and the 1977 Energy Crisis

In 1977, the national energy crisis and conservation became a top priority for the new Carter Administration. President Carter was instrumental in promoting mainstream environmentalism via federal institutions and targeted legislation. In a televised speech, he spoke of the national significance of the energy crisis:

> Our decision about energy will test the character of the American people and the ability of the President and the Congress to govern. This difficult effort is the 'moral equivalent of war' – except that we will be uniting our efforts to build and not destroy.[67]

For President Carter, the issue of national energy and conservation was not merely political or economic. Rather, his remarks illustrate how the environmental problems of the 1970s weighed more heavily on the conscience of America. For this reason, in forming solutions to the energy crisis, President Carter valued the perspective of American religious institutions and actively sought their opinion. America's religious organizations, dedicated to the moral and ethical dimension of environmentalism, offered a more religious perspective to the fight for environmentalism and our nation's energy needs.

In the second month of his presidency, President Carter established the Alliance to Save Energy, a bipartisan nonprofit coalition made up of leaders in business, government, environment and consumerism committed to promoting energy efficiency for a healthier economy, cleaner environment, and greater energy

[67] PBS, "American Experience: Jimmy Carter," aired November 11, 2002, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carter/ (accessed November 28, 2016).

security.[68] Among those asked to serve on the advisory board was UAHC President, Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler.[69] This was a significant achievement for American Reform Judaism. However, the question remained whether Carter's National Energy Policy would be sensitive to American Jewish interests.

In 1944, the Council of Jewish Federations established a constituent organization, known then as the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC). This council was created to serve as a coordinating round table organization for the major national Jewish organizations as well as the local Jewish federations and community relations councils. In the mid-1960s, NCRAC became the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC). In the late 1970s, NJCRAC was active in shaping the Jewish response to America's energy crisis. In 1977, for example, NJCRAC created a joint cross-section Energy Task force to conduct a "close and critical study" of the measures proposed by President Carter earlier that year.[70] The joint committee consisted of representatives from the AJC, B'nai B'rith International, and the UAHC.[71] The goals of the joint committee were to raise the consciousness of the Jewish community on the issue, to encourage energy conservation in homes and communities, as well as to promote the need to develop

[68] Alliance to Save Energy, "About the Alliance," https://www.ase.org/about (accessed November 29, 2016).
[69] UAHC Press Release, 1977, N1-56, Folder 7, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[70] Today, NJCRAC is known as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA).
[71] At the time the Synagogue Council of America (SCA), the umbrella organization for the movements of American Judaism, had been in existence since 1926. Despite the fact that by the 1970s the SCA had turned to advocacy in political and social issues, the organization as a whole was beginning to dissolve by the end of the decade. Therefore, the NJCRAC was, at the time, the most encompassing American Jewish voice on the issue. Jonathan Golden, "From Cooperation to Confrontation: The Rise and Fall of the Synagogue Council of America," doctoral dissertation (Brandeis University Press, 1997), SC-15716, AJA.

an aggressive energy policy in the United States.[72] The committee decided to organize an energy conference aimed at leadership in the groups. There would be four primary objectives addressed at the conference: (1) the implications of dependency on OPEC oil; (2) the development of alternative energy sources; (3) the use of nuclear power; and (4) overall conservation techniques.[73]

In its response to the energy crisis, the NJCRAC called for a multi-faceted government-enforced program, which combined control on energy consumption with incentives to increase domestic production. The NJCRAC unanimously agreed on the importance of embracing energy conservation and felt America could do the same. The suggestions offered from NJCRAC included improving building standards, encouraging home insulation, enhancing public transportation, recycling and resource recovery, mandatory federal efficiency standards of appliances and machinery, and taxes and rebates as incentives for the production of fuel-efficient automobiles.[74] On the issue of oil, the committee was adamant about the dangers posed by growing American dependence on OPEC. Regarding the development of energy resources and reserves, the NJCRAC offered a seven-point position; however, the committee lacked consensus on the desirability of greater tax and price incentives to stimulate domestic production and on deregulation of prices.[75] It is

[72] Letter to Warren E. Eisenberg to Senator Henry Jackson, January 23, 1979, N1-56, Folder 8, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[73] Letter to Warren E. Eisenberg to Senator Henry Jackson, January 23, 1979, N1-56, Folder 8, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[74] "National Energy Policy Recommended Positions of the American Jewish Community," National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, July 1, 1977, N1-56, Folder 9, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[75] "National Energy Policy Recommended Positions of the American Jewish Community," National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, July 1, 1977, N1-56, Folder 9, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

worth noting that two of the endorsements made by the NJCRAC conflicted with the President's proposal. The first was the call for significant increase in production of coal, as it was the only fossil fuel available in abundance in this country. The second was the favorability toward the development of improved nuclear energy facilities.[76]

The majority of NJCRAC's proposal is in agreement with the motion set forth by President Carter. Nevertheless, NJCRAC asked more on the part of the government than what President Carter established. Perhaps the most significant component of the NJCRAC proposal is the part entitled Programmatic Guidelines, wherein the NJCRAC offered a commitment on behalf of the American Jewish community to serve as allies of American environmentalism. The concluding section of the NJCRAC proposal laid the foundation for a strengthening of the Jewish response to the energy crisis, further collaboration amongst religious institutions, and involvement of individual communities to engage in energy conservation.

Reform Response to the Energy Crisis

From the beginning of the decade, the Reform Jewish leadership responded to the growing public awareness of environmental issues in America by making the environment a key component of the social action program of the movement. Among the list of national priorities for Reform Judaism in a 1970 report of the CCAR's Committee on Justice and Peace was the need for "massive and imaginative

[76] "Development of Energy Resources and Reserves. National Energy Policy Recommended Positions of the American Jewish Community, NJCRAC," p. 7, N1-56, Folder 9, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

efforts" to address the crucial problems of ecology and environment.[77] In response, the RAC increased its efforts to educate constituents on the importance of environmentalism. In a written report from the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, entitled "Jewish Values and the Energy Crisis," the CSA made clear its two reasons for getting involved in the energy crisis of 1970. According to the document, Reform Judaism at the time believed the energy crisis to be significant not only for the negative implications on the State of Israel but for the dangerous consequences the situation might bring upon the environment.[78] In highlighting the energy crisis as an environmental concern, Reform Judaism emphasized the universalist nature of the issue as well. The Reform Jewish perspective on the national energy crisis relied heavily upon a tradition and value of human responsibility to the environment:

> We should pursue and develop those technologies which violate as little as possible the following values: the protection of human life from hazards which may threaten health or well-being; concern for the environment; concern for the future generations in their genetic integrity; fair and equitable conservation of energy resources.[79]

The UAHC also looked upon specific Jewish teachings to promote energy conservation. For example, the tradition of minimal use of energies (work) on the Sabbath was said to be "an archetypical energy saving law in religious garb."[80] Moreover, the legal precept of *bal tashchit* (the prohibition of destruction and waste) was used to show Jewish tradition's long-standing concern for protecting the

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[77] Report of the Committee on Justice and Peace, *CCAR Yearbook* LXXX (1970): 44.
[78] Chai/Impact Report, "A Service of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism." Jewish Values and the Energy Crisis," N1-56, Folder 5, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Frederick Forscher, "U.S. Energy Policy and American Jews," *The American Zionist* (January 1, 1979), found in N1-56, Folder 5, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

environment.[81] In general, the Reform Jewish community helped frame the energy crisis around both universalist and Jewish values.

At times, the Reform community championed solutions to the energy crisis that were not in agreement with other Jewish organizations. According to the then-director of the RAC, Rabbi David Saperstein, the areas of contention were over deregulation of energy prices and the role of nuclear power as an alternative to fossil fuels.[82] Reform Judaism believed that deregulation would be detrimental to low-income citizens and the overall economy, calling a plan to remove price controls from crude oil produced in the U.S. as "neither an effective means of encouraging conservation nor of assuring the production of new oil."[83] Moreover, the Reform movement took a strong stance on the limitation of as well as the increased supervision and regulation of nuclear energy as an alternative to fossil fuels. In a resolution adopted by the CCAR in 1975 on the topic of nuclear energy, the rabbinic leadership explained its position:

> We call for the establishment of effective national and international controls in the area of nuclear energy advancing technology. We stress the need for high standards of safety in nuclear powered facilities to avoid disaster. We call for stringent control on the disposition of plutonium created in nuclear reactors to prevent wholesale production of thermonuclear bombs. We call for action to require all nations acquiring nuclear powered facilities to adhere to

[81] The verse from which this body of law grows says that in time of war an enemy must refrain from destroying fruit-bearing trees whether for the purpose of building siege-works or for the purpose of defoliation (Deut 20:19). It is expanded upon in midrashic discussions (e.g. Sifrei and Yalkut Shimoni) to refer to any wanton destruction of the environment, including such indirect methods as diverting natural water sources away from trees. Phillip J. Bentley, "Rabbinic Sources on Environmental Issues." From the Justice and Peace Committee of the CCAR, N1-56, Folder 6, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[82] Letter to Senator Howard Metzenbaum from Rabbi David Saperstein, January 11, 1979, N1-56, Folder 1, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[83] "Reform Jewish groups opposes Carter's oil decontrol plan," UAHC News Release, May, 1975, N1-56, Folder 8, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

> all provisions of the nonproliferation treaty. As nuclear energy uses expand we stress the need for benefits to accrue not only to private interests but also to all the people. Finally, we urge our governments to require energy producers to accept full responsibility for possible damages, which may occur to people and to property, and to withhold subsidy payments from public funds to such producers.[84]

It is evident that the concerns of the Reform rabbinate over the need for high standards of safety in nuclear power development included more than just the protection of the environment. The rabbis spoke out against the potential dangers posed to humans, the implications of unregulated nuclear power production for the international community, and the need to hold those responsible accountable for their actions. At the time of this resolution was being considered, conversations around the numerous adverse effects of nuclear energy were just beginning. In issuing a position statement on nuclear energy as early as 1975, Reform Judaism was ahead of the curve on stressing the importance of the issue. By the end of the decade, the Reform Jewish position on national energy differed from that of the AJC. In a 1979 letter to Al Vorspan, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, David Saperstein expressed his reluctance to sign on to an AJC position on national energy due to differences of opinion. Namely, Saperstein was concerned that the thrust of AJC's position was too heavily focused on a national policy concerning domestic reliance on foreign oil and at the time, the Reform Jewish position was substantively different in focus.[85]

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[84] CCAR, "Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on Nuclear Energy," 1975, https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/resolutions/all/nuclear-energy-1975/ (accessed December 3, 2016).
[85] Saperstein to Vorspan June 4, 1979, N1-56, Folder 6, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

Despite the UAHC being a part of the NJCRAC, evidence suggests that the constituent bodies of Reform Judaism continued to pursue their own path in responding to the energy crisis. For example, in a separate response to President Carter's energy policy, the UAHC articulated the importance of the United States government to consider that "all sacrifices necessary to achieve our energy goals should be borne by all segments of our society commensurate with their ability to bear such burdens."[86] According to the UAHC, this meant that any and all efforts or incentives to increase energy conservation not place energy beyond the reach of those peoples – the poor and elderly living on fixed incomes – who are susceptible to falling below a decent standard of living.[87] Here, the UAHC stressed the importance of considering all demographics when devising a national energy policy. Reform Judaism's commitment to bringing moral and ethical values to the conservation on national energy is apparent in this example.

There are other examples of specific proposals for energy conservation in which the UAHC differed from the NJCRAC. With regard to the use of coal, for instance, the UAHC pointed to the high content of sulfur within the U.S. coal supply and the increase in risk to the health of both miners and consumers, as major deterrents against embracing coal production. The UAHC asserted that, "the development of energy sources must also afford maximum protection to the health of the people and the environment."[88] Furthermore, whereas the NJCRAC was supportive of increasing nuclear power production, the UAHC's position was

[86] Untitled Document, June 1979, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Untitled Document, p. 2, June 1979, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

strongly negative and in stark contrast to the position taken by the NJCRAC.[89] These differences are significant since the topics remained highly debated within the energy crisis for years. Despite these differences, however, the collective efforts of both the NJCRAC and the UAHC led to greater Jewish involvement in conservation.

In addition to the CCAR resolution on Nuclear Energy passed in 1975, by the decade's end, Reform Judaism in America passed bold statements of caution on the use of nuclear energy. The CCAR and UAHC, respectively, each adopted a two-position statement on nuclear energy. Both the CCAR and the UAHC stressed the need for high standards of control in the area of nuclear energy and they both called for stringent control in disposing of nuclear waste. In offering solutions for local communities, the Commission on Social Action of the UAHC encouraged its constituency to take an active role in embracing short-term strategies to address the environmental crisis. A 1974 memorandum prepared by the UAHC's Director of Synagogue Administration, Myron E. Schoen, urged UAHC synagogues, "to take it upon themselves to participate in the national effort [to conserve energy] by adopting energy-saving measures;" the UAHC offered communities a list of procedures suitable for congregational implementation.[90]

In 1979, an organization-wide effort to promote energy conservation was implemented in the Reform community. In a July 1979 memorandum, UAHC President Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, stated, "all Reform congregations, camps,

[89] Ibid., p. 3. The UAHC makes this clear, stating that Plutonium-239, the basic substance used to fuel nuclear fission power plants, is the most poisonous element ever handled in quantity by man.
[90] "Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism. Questions and Answers on the Energy Crisis," 1974, p. 11, N1-56, Folder 4, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

and other facilities would be asked to effect a 10% reduction in energy."[91] The movement gained national recognition when the RAC partnered with government officials from the Department of Energy and Housing and Urban Development, in promoting community conservation efforts.[92]

Interfaith Efforts

While today many religious communities are working together to advancement environmentalism, these inter-faith efforts began in the 1970s.[93] As conservation in the U.S. became more mainstream, regional interfaith environmental groups emerged throughout the decade, primarily across the eastern seaboard. The Interfaith Eco-Justice Coalition, a Connecticut faith-based environmental non-profit organization whose governing body included Rabbi David Saperstein of the RAC, brought together thirty Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant leaders and ethicists and became the first interfaith environmental organization. According to Rabbi Saperstein, no other national ecumenical agency was dealing with the matter of energy at the time.[94] It pioneered a broad-based constituency of American religious communities to build a network of education and action to

[91] David Saperstein, Memorandum, July 3, 1979, N1-56, Folder 7, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[92] "Energy Conservation Workshop/Conference: Council of Jewish Federations and Department of Housing and Urban Development," November 17, 1978, N1-56, Folder 14, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[93] According to one study completed in 2006, forty-five interfaith environmental organizations existed in America. See Angela M. Smith, "Faith-Based Environmental Groups in the United States and Their Strategies for Change" (2006), http://www.christiansforthemountains.org/site/Topics/Resources/Bible-Theology/Smith_MastersThesis.pdf (accessed November 29, 2016).
[94] David Saperstein, Memorandum, Interfaith Eco-Justice Coalition, August 21, 1975, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

engage religious leaders and their constituents on the issue of energy.[95] Growing from regional endeavors, the religious environmental initiative in America became a national phenomenon in which the leaders of Reform Judaism played a large part

Though not formally founded until 1980, the Interfaith Coalition on Energy (ICE) emerged three years prior as the first nationally recognized interfaith environmental organization in America. To a great extent, ICE's objective was to serve as an appropriate interplay of national organizational capabilities and the needs of the local religious communities.[96] From the onset, the ICE formulated inexpensive energy saving techniques and estimated that these measures could reduce energy consumption by 30% or more in most of the nation's three-hundred thousand plus religious structures. The goal was for the ICE to help local congregations throughout the country model responsible stewardship in their energy use.[97]

Leaders of the organization saw themselves as suppliers of the missing link in the struggle for the future of soft-energy.[98] Personnel from the United Presbyterian Church, the UAHC, the United Methodist Church, and the U.S. Catholic Conference, joined to promote dialogue on energy ethics, discussion between religious and secular leaders, and outreach and education into every community in the nation. For the first time, there was a national core of religious leaders dedicated

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[95] Ibid.
[96] Overview of ICE, pg. 2, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[97] "Interfaith Groups Recommends Religious Community Conserve Energy, Money," February 24, 1977, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[98] In 1976 energy policy analyst Amory Lovins coined the term soft energy to describe an alternative future where energy efficiency and appropriate renewable energy sources would steadily replace a centralized energy system based on fossil and nuclear fuels. Shepard Krech, "Soft-Energy," *Encyclopedia of World Environmental History: A-E.* (New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2004), 479.

to conservation.[99] It also served as a driving force to attract millions of people who otherwise may not have been involved in conservation efforts. Furthermore, its faith-based environmental efforts brought attention to the social impact of energy decisions on the disadvantaged, low-income citizens, the unemployed, and minority populations.[100] These would become major ingredients of the ICE's national campaign on conservation starting in the 1980s.[101]

In February 1979, the ICE launched its "Covenant for Conservation," a campaign aimed at having local churches and synagogues initiate particular energy conservation programs at the grassroots level.[102] Shortly after its inception, UAHC President Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler enthusiastically endorsed the Covenant for Conservation campaign on behalf of Reform Judaism in America. According to Schindler, it was an initiative that directly aligned with the energy resolution adopted by the UAHC general assembly at the end of the previous year.[103] The establishment of the nation's first interfaith environmental organization continued to gain momentum as the year went on. Its influence and impact on shaping the national energy policy became apparent after President Carter addressed the nation in July of 1979 on the subject of conservation.

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[99] A Proposal to Supply the Major Missing Link in the Struggle for a soft-energy future. submitted by the Interfaith Coalition on Energy, December 1977, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[100] "Overview of ICE," p. 3, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[101] Minutes, Interfaith Coalition on Energy, July 12, 1979, 2, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[102] "Churches have a duty to Conserve," March 10, 1979, *Ann Arbor, MI News*, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[103] Statement of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, February 22, 1979, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

On July 15, 1979, President Carter delivered a televised speech entitled, "Crisis of Confidence." This address was the fifth national speech given on the subject of energy by the President. At the beginning of the speech, Carter articulated his commitment to inviting individuals from "almost every segment of our society" to Camp David to address the critical energy issue facing the nation. At the climax of his speech, President Carter spoke frankly and conveyed the seriousness of the environmental threat while appealing to the hearts of the American people:

> The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation. The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and political fabric of America.[104]

Speaking to the American people on a deep moral level as the President did was similar to the approach taken by faith communities at the time. Whether or not President Carter had this connection in mind when choosing the words for his speech is not known. Nevertheless, from a written response of religious leaders to President Carter's address, we can see that the American religious community internalized the President's words and saw itself as a conduit to raise the nation in this time of need:

> Our present crisis offers us an opportunity to reexamine the value of the common good. If we cannot all pull together, we will certainly fall to fighting among ourselves, and a constructive solution will be lost. A carefully defined effort to solve the energy crisis and our economic difficulties, inspired by a communitarian ethic, can have a unifying effect on all Americans as we seek a more just and humane future. The religious community stands ready to help shape that future. We will urge all religious leaders to set a good example by adopting where

[104] "American Experience: Jimmy Carter" (accessed December 2, 2016).

> possible simpler means of living. We will ask our religious bodies to formulate programs of energy assistance for the poor and the elderly, the disabled, and those for whom the spiraling costs of fuel and home heating oil present especially critical problems. We will work together, we will undertake interreligious efforts to urge our congressional and other government leaders to move with greater speed, determination and unanimity in responding to our present economic and energy needs.[105]

The faith-communities' efforts in the latter half of the 1970s proved to be a new phenomenon within the environmentalist movement. The organized faith-based community would lead the way in grassroots environmentalism in America well into the next decade.

Conclusion

Today, the discussion within environmentalism regarding energy conservation centers on the need to adopt alternative power sources and turn away from the use of fossil fuels, which are a detriment to the environment. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, energy conservation was just emerging as a topic of environmentalism. Resulting from a rise in public support for cleaner air and water in America, environmentalism in the 1970s became mainstream. With the energy crisis of 1973 the need became apparent to conserve energy at home and in the broader community, as well as reform federal policy on the issue.

The majority of American Jewish organizations viewed the energy crisis and U.S. divestment from Arab oil as having potential negative consequences for the State of Israel. Therefore, American Jewish organizations such as the American

[105] "Religious Leaders' Response to Presidents Carter's Address," July 16, 1979, N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

Jewish Committee and the Zionist Organization of America prioritized Israel's safety and security over concern for the environment. From the onset of the 1973 Energy Crisis, only Reform Judaism came out in favor of energy reform for the sake of both the environment and Israel. In only its second decade of existence, the RAC educated its constituents on the subject and empowered them to conserve energy at home by adopting short-term energy conservation methods. It also partnered with the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory (NJCRAC) and other Jewish organizations to advance energy conservation in America by framing energy conservation as a Jewish issue. Reform Judaism helped to formulate a moral and ethical lens through which others could view the environmental crisis of the decade. This proved to be an effective approach as America's religious communities and its members invested heavily in the fight for energy reform.

Beginning in 1977, President Jimmy Carter encouraged the participation of America's faith-based communities in the formulation of a National Energy Policy. Among those religious leaders involved was UAHC President Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, whose presence on the board of the Alliance to Save Energy would lead Reform Judaism to become partners in the interfaith Covenant of Conservation beginning at the end of the decade. RAC Director, Rabbi David Saperstein, was the primary representative of Reform Judaism in matters of energy conservation throughout the decade. In particular, beginning in the latter half of the 1970s, Saperstein worked alongside leaders of the Protestant movement to create an Interfaith Coalition on Energy. Throughout the decade, the religious environmental community monitored a series of congressional bills on environmentalism to ensure

regulations addressed the concerns and needs of the religious community.[106] Interfaith efforts to promote energy conservation during the 1970s successfully empowered millions of people to conservation energy on their own as means of helping the overall cause.

The Reform Jewish efforts to promote energy conservation in the 1970s were successful in educating its members and helping to advance the issue at a national level. In the 1980s, religious environmentalism and interfaith environmental coalitions built upon the foundation established in the prior decade. The attention of the Reform movement turned toward an aggressive campaign to help individual communities reduce energy operation costs through performing energy audits and other short-term conservation techniques.[107] Under the auspices of the Interfaith Coalition on Energy, religious environmentalism in America throughout the 1980s established programs and policies that protected the poor, and encouraged the use of renewable energy sources.[108] The next chapter will discuss how the organized Reform Jewish community contributed to the overall religious environmentalist movement in America. The Reform movement became one of the leading advocates of environmental justice and grassroots environmentalism, both of which surfaced in the 1980s.

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[106] The Clean Air and Water Acts, the Creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, Endangered Species Act, Toxic Substance Control Act, and the Emergency Energy Conservation Act. Energy Conservation Workshop/Conference: Council of Jewish Federations and Department of Housing and Urban Development, November 17, 1978, N1-56, Folder 14, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

[107] Energy Efficiency/Conservation Kit for Synagogues, Jewish Community Buildings and Homes, Commission on Social Action of the UAHC and CCAR, p. 1, Spring 1981, N1-56, Folder 13, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

[108] "Proposal for Religion and Energy in the '80s Project," p. 1, N1-56, Folder 2, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

Chapter 3

Environmental Justice and Religious Environmentalism in America, 1979–1989

Environmental concerns of the 1970s would, by the 1980s, give way to new issues. Environmental disasters raised awareness of increased human exposure to toxic waste. Federal environmental legislation, a defining feature of the Carter Administration from 1977 to 1981, was drastically undermined, as 'deregulation' became synonymous with a Ronald Reagan Presidency.[109] On the eve of Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981, the White House Council on Environmental Quality was finishing a report entitled, "The Global 2000 Report to the President," which warned the new president of impending global environmental consequences and ecological instability by the year 2000 if present trends continued. A grave warning that was said to have gone unnoticed by the President.[110] In his first term, Reagan did everything in his power to ignore the voice of environmentalists. Despite some improvements in his second term, the Reagan Presidency steered the country far from environmentalism.[111]

The anti-environmentalism characteristic of the Reagan Administration led to a decline of mainstream environmentalism and the rise of grassroots efforts. Whereas *mainstream* environmentalism focused on top-down approaches to

[109] The Reagan Administration cut the budgets of government regulatory agencies, rolled back and tried to repeal environmental legislation, and appointed notoriously anti-environmentalist individuals to key environmental positions." Kline, 113.
[110] The potential for global problems of alarming proportions by the year 2000…The earth's carrying capacity – the ability of biological systems to provide resources for human needs – is eroding…If present trends continue the world in 2000 will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable ecologically, and more vulnerable to destruction than the world we live in now. Serious stresses involving population resources and the environment are clearly visible ahead…the efforts now underway around the world fall far short of what is needed." Dowie, *Losing Ground*, 65.
[111] Ibid., 66.

environmental change by pursuing federal environmental policies, *grassroots* environmentalism embraced a community-based and citizen-driven approach.[112] Grassroots environmentalism encouraged individuals and entire communities to embrace at-home energy conservation techniques. A major catalyst of grassroots environmentalism in the 1980s was America's faith community. The advancement of faith-based environmentalism and Reform Jewish involvement in American environmentalism during the 1980s reflects the rise in popularity of grassroots efforts. Nevertheless, as this chapter will demonstrate, despite a significant shift from mainstream to grassroots efforts, Reform Judaism employed a dual approach to environmentalism by focusing on both grassroots and mainstream endeavors.

This chapter will also examine the two major environmental issues of the 1980s: the antinuclear movement and the problem of toxic waste disposal as well as the federal response to both. Next, the work of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum (1925–1992) and the American Jewish Committee as part of the Interreligious Consultation on Religion and Energy will be explored as an example of how one American Jewish organization became involved in the matter. The primary focus of the chapter, however, will be the individual response and joint participation of Reform Judaism in American environmentalism during the 1980s, by relying upon position statements made by the CCAR and the UAHC at the time. Moreover, the role of the RAC in lobbying for environmental legislation while simultaneously supporting grassroots environmentalism efforts of its constituents demonstrates the dual approach of Reform Jewish involvement in American environmentalism throughout

[112] Ibid., 64.

the decade. With a firm anti-environmentalist government, the success of Reform Jewish efforts to advance environmental legislation was minimal; engagement with grassroots environmentalism became an essential tool in the success of 1980s environmentalism. Lastly, this chapter will explore the formation of inter-religious environmental organizations and initiatives, such as environmental justice, that would subsequently lead to the creation of a national religious environmentalism organization in the early 1990s.

Energy and the Antinuclear Movement

Nuclear energy became one of the most predominant environmental concerns in America, from the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the 1970s to its peak in the 1980s. Throughout the 1970s, environmentalists were split on the issue of nuclear energy. On the one hand, environmentalists saw the advantages of nuclear power as a possible alternative energy source to fossil fuels. At the same time, however, environmentalists became increasingly more critical of nuclear technology due to the threat of nuclear accidents and the high costs of nuclear power plants. The worst commercial atomic power accident in the U.S., the Three Mile Island incident, galvanized opposition over the environmental impact of nuclear technology by the start of the 1980s.[113] As a result, beginning in the 1980s, an antinuclear crusade in the United States took root.

[113] "The Three Mile Island accident was a partial nuclear meltdown that occurred on March 28, 1979, in reactor number 2 of Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, US." Kline, 102.

In 1980, the federal response to the nation's energy crisis was the signing into law of the Synthetic Fuels Bill, a piece of legislation said to be "the keystone of a National Energy Policy." [114] President Carter made clear the pervasiveness of the energy problem in American society: An increase in inflation due to a dependence on and rising cost of foreign oil to the environmental and economic degradation that would result if the country did not meet its annual rate of growth in energy demand. The Synthetic Fuels Bill offered guidelines and specific laws and policies to meet the difficult energy challenges of the 1980s.[115] Though the Synthetic Fuels Bill aimed to help guide US Energy policy through the decade, the 1981 election of Ronald Reagan as U.S. President and his policy of government deregulation put a halt to the bill's proposed goals.

Toxic Waste Disposal

National environmental disasters, such as the 1979 nuclear meltdown at Three Mile Island in central Pennsylvania, and nationwide news coverage in 1978 of residents' exposure to hazardous waste in the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, New York, spurred Congress to fast-track legislation outlining toxic waste cleanup procedures. In December 1980, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), better known as Superfund. Superfund was enacted to address the dangers of abandoned or

[114] Remarks of the President at the signing ceremony for S.932, Synthetic Fuels Bill, June 30, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.
[115] In 1976 the national percentage of energy demand was 5.4% and dropped to 0.05% in 1979 as a result of the many energy conservation measures implemented by the Carter Administration. National Energy Policy, Background Report by Office of Media Liaison of the White House Press Office, July 1, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.

uncontrolled hazardous waste dumps by developing a nationwide program for emergency response, information gathering, and liability analysis, as well as site cleanup.[116] Three years later, the EPA created the first National Priorities List (NPL) classifying 406 sites as the nation's top contenders for cleanup under Superfund.[117] While the Superfund program still exists today, the program came under scrutiny during Reagan's time in office.[118] However, support for the Superfund program came from a variety of sources including the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Grassroots Environmentalism: The AJC and Interfaith Efforts

During the 1980s, the nation's faith communities played an active role in fostering grassroots environmentalism. On January 10, 1980 in Washington D.C., an Interreligious Consultation on Religion and Energy took place. One hundred and thirty representatives from over forty religious denominations and agencies met with government officials and experts to analyze the moral components of the energy crisis and to map out a program of action for the religious community.[119] By communicating the reality of the energy situation and motivating a collective response, national and regional representatives of the nation's faith-based communities embraced their role in promoting environmental stewardship at the

[116] Kline, 114.
[117] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Superfund History," http://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-history, (accessed December 26, 2016).
[118] Ibid. Since its inception, EPA's Superfund program has helped protect human health and the environment, and today there are only 175 federal Superfund sites managed by the EPA.
[119] "Proposal for Religion and Energy in the '80s Project," N1-56, Folder 10, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

grassroots level.[120] As a result of the Interreligious Consultation on Religion and Energy, the Interfaith Coalition on Energy (ICE) was later established. Furthermore, in the months and years to follow, a myriad of faith-based grassroots initiatives surfaced across the country. Through its involvement in the Interfaith Coalition on Energy, the American Jewish Committee supported regional American Jewish efforts to create energy conservation programs in their synagogues and at home.

For example, the AJC helped the Interreligious Council of Southern California organize an environmentalist campaign. The Interreligious Council of Southern California (ICSC), which was established in 1969, began to engage in environmentalism in the 1980s. With the help of the AJC, the ICSC succeeded in drafting and unanimously adopting a statement on energy titled "Ethical Energy Stewardship." Three ideas were outlined, the first of which was rational planning, which called for religious institutions to advocate for energy planning that would account for resource limitations and the needs of the poor disadvantaged populations. Second, the Ethical Energy Stewardship called for an emphasis on the need for future energy production to be sensitive to the viability of life and the well-being of humanity. Finally, the statement called upon individual entities to encourage their members to engage in responsible consumption of resources and energy. These last points, as recorded in the policy statement, included carpooling and ride sharing, energy audits for buildings, educational programs on energy conservation, and public efforts by clergy and lay persons to influence

[120] Address to the Interfaith Consultation on Energy, Bishop William M. Cosgrove, January 10, 1980, p. 3, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.

environmental legislative decisions.[121] Throughout the campaign, the AJC served as a resource to the regional environmental efforts in Southern California and a sounding board for its leaders.

Another example of collaborative grassroots efforts of the Interfaith Coalition on Religion and Energy took place in Philadelphia. In the summer of 1980 three city-based religious institutions worked together to implement the first round of primary energy audits. Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum of the AJC oversaw the beginning of a Philadelphia-based interfaith energy conservation initiative. A Protestant and a Catholic Church, as well as a Reform Synagogue - Rodeph Shalom of Philadelphia – were chosen to participate in this initiative. The project's results were to be disseminated across the Philadelphia religious community.[122] Furthermore, the Interfaith Coalition on Religion and Energy worked together to organize a national "Responsible Energy Sabbath" by the end of 1980.[123] The objective of the Responsible Energy Sabbath was to demonstrate that the United States religious community was deeply committed to raising the public's awareness concerning the importance of environmentalism. The Responsible Energy Sabbath helped Americans see the range of moral and theological issues that the energy crisis brought to the fore. Under the auspices of the Interreligious Consultation on Religion and Energy, constituents from Catholic, Protestant, and Episcopalian

[121] Interreligious Council Energy Policy to Neil Sandberg from Jeffery Ellis, AJC Staff Intern, January 10, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.
[122] Rev. Edward Geiger from Robert L. Silverman, June 27, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.
[123] Religion and Responsible Energy Program Committee Minutes, May 27, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.

Church groups alongside Reform and Conservative synagogues became active participants in the need for energy conservation in America.

The American Jewish Committee not only helped regional Jewish communities to implement grassroots environmentalism but also promoted energy conservation and environmentalism via the radio and through its publications. The AJC issued a bi-weekly series of sixty-second taped public service radio commentaries available to national radio outlets at no cost entitled, "Energy Today."[124] Through its advocacy efforts, the AJC brought a Jewish voice to the realm of religious environmentalism in the early 1980s and worked alongside other religious communities to make conservation a priority nationwide.

Energy Conservation: The Reform Response

In 1975 and 1979, the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued two important position statements that addressed the potential negative consequences of nuclear armament on the safety of human life as well as the environment.[125] In the 1980s, the CCAR continued to address the dangers of nuclear energy. In a speech to his colleagues recorded in the 1982 *CCAR Yearbook*, Rabbi Dennis N. Math posed the question: "What effect would this kind of devastating nuclear exchange have on our planet?" In answering his own question, Math noted that further depletion in ozone levels could result in potentially fatal consequences for humanity. He urged his colleagues to take heed of the environmental crisis by citing the Jewish value of

[124] Correspondence to Area Directors from Susie Schub of AJC, June 25, 1980, Box 90, Folder 2, MS-603, Rabbi Marc H. Tannenbaum Collection, 1945–1992, AJA.
[125] "Rabbis Speak" https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/resolutions/all/nuclear-energy-1975/ (accessed December 3, 2016).

bal tashchit – do not destroy. Math warned his rabbinical colleagues that nuclear explosions or accidents would likely shatter the fragile ecological structure that permits humans to remain alive on this planet. He concluded his address with a call to action. He urged the entire Reform rabbinate to open its eyes and the eyes of its constituents to the prospect of utter environmental devastation.[126] Rabbi Math's plea is indicative of the Reform Jewish response to environmentalism throughout the 1980s.

Reform Judaism became actively involved in the cause of energy conservation in the 1980s. The representative of the Reform movement on the issue was the director of the Religious Action Center, Rabbi David Saperstein who, in 1980, was invited by the Social Security Administration to a briefing on a proposed regulation by the Department of Health and Human Services to implement the Home Energy Assistance Act of 1980.[127] At the same time, the Commission on Social Action of the CCAR and the UAHC, having denounced the proliferation of nuclear energy and made a commitment to conservation and development of renewable alternative resources, helped foster a greater sense of belief and action toward energy conservation within the entire Reform movement.[128] The Reform movement invested time and effort into promoting matters of environmentalism at the grassroots and mainstream levels throughout the decade.

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[126] Rabbi Dennis Math, "A Jewish Statement on Nuclear Arms," *CCAR Yearbook* XCII (1982): 140.
[127] RAC Correspondence, N1-56, Folder 15, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[128] The CCAR in 1975 adopted a resolution on Nuclear Energy that stresses the need for the highest standards of safety in nuclear-powered facilities to avoid disasters. The UAHC followed suit by adopting a similar resolution in 1979. CCAR, "Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on Nuclear Energy, 1975," http://www.ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/resolutions/all/nuclear-energy-1975 (accessed December 23, 2016) and "Energy," 1979, http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/energy (accessed December 3, 2016).

As part of the Interfaith Coalition on Energy's Responsible Energy Sabbath in 1980, the RAC informed and encouraged Reform Jewish communities across the country to participate by providing resources to them on the accessibility and benefits of conserving energy. The results of an Energy Survey conducted by the RAC in February of 1981 illustrated that Reform Jewish communities embraced this initiative in almost all regions of the nation. According to the records, while just fewer than fifteen percent out of approximately seven hundred and thirty Reform communities submitted responses to the survey, the small number of respondents did represent nearly every region of North America. The findings suggest that some Reform communities were aware of the energy crisis and learning about energy conservation—making their homes and houses of worship more energy efficient.[129]

According to the survey results, over two-thirds of communities that submitted results had created or were in the process of forming energy conservation programs in their temples.[130] For the majority, congregant volunteers spearheaded energy saving programs and worked to achieve at least one, if not two, means of making their synagogue more energy efficient. For example, three quarters of them had adjusted thermostat settings to use less energy throughout the year. More than half of synagogues reported having performed an energy audit as well as having installed a new furnace or replaced parts to improve energy efficiency. Furthermore, roughly the same number of synagogues indicated having made weatherization of their building a priority through such means as adding insulation

[129] Commission on Social Action of the UAHC and CCAR, "Energy Survey: Results. Energy Efficiency/Conservation Kit for Synagogues, Jewish Community Buildings and Homes," Spring 1981, p. 47, N1-56, Folder 15, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[130] Ibid., 48.

in walls, floors, attic, ceilings, and floors; installing storm windows and doors, and placing caulking and weather stripping to stop leaks.[131] Overall, the survey offers insight into ways that Reform synagogues, albeit a small but meaningful number of them, were making energy conservation a priority in their communities.

In describing a number of Reform communities taking an active role to save energy, the survey helps to identify the degree to which Reform Jewish communities felt compelled to invest in energy conservation. For instance, the entirety of the population studied indicates having little or no intention of installing solar power capabilities in their synagogues,[132] demonstrating that they were more inclined to embrace short-term energy conservation rather than investing in long-term conservation methods. Top reasons offered for lack of long-term conservation efforts included insufficient funds or reluctance to spend money and communities not owning their building.[133] The rise in the number of congregations embracing short-term energy conservation methods during this time is one example of how Reform Jewish leadership sought to revitalize congregational social action committees and to obtain more recognition of the centrality of social action in Reform Judaism communities.[134]

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[131] Ibid., 50.
[132] Ibid., 50.
[133] Ibid., 51.
[134] Commission on Justice and Peace, "Statement of Purpose and Function," *CCAR Yearbook* XCIII (1983): 130.

Toxic Waste Disposal: The Reform Response

By the mid-1980s, Reform Judaism addressed mounting environmental and human health concerns in connection with environmental pollutants and toxic waste disposal. Both the UAHC and the CCAR issued position statements, and the RAC worked to lobby legislators to do more to preserve the environment and the health of individuals—disproportionately urban minorities living in low-income neighborhoods—who had been exposed to high levels of toxins and pollution. In 1983 and 1984, both the UAHC and the CCAR issued position statements on the topic of Toxic Substances and the Environment. The Reform Movement reaffirmed its commitment to an environment free from the danger of chemicals and toxic radioactive waste. Moreover, in these position statements, Reform Jewish leadership recognized that all people should bear responsibility for solving the problem of environmental degradation. The Reform Jewish movement supported the strict enforcement of the Superfund program and encouraged industry to examine its waste production processes and the recycling of toxic waste.[135]

Lobbying efforts of the RAC further strengthened the position statements of the UAHC and CCAR. RAC director Rabbi David Saperstein appealed to members of Congress on pro-environmental issues. For example, in 1985, Saperstein, in cooperation with churches, environmental, labor and citizen group leaders led a campaign calling for the reauthorization of Superfund. In speaking publically on the

[135] CCAR, "Resolution Adopted by the CCAR on Toxic Substances," June 18–21, 1984, http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/resolutions/all/environmental-pollution-1984/ (accessed February 20, 2016); Union for Reform Judaism, "Toxic Substances in the Environment," 1983, http://www.urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/toxic-substances-environment (accessed January 26, 2017).

issue, Rabbi Saperstein reminded his audience that in solving the toxic waste problem, they were, in fact, addressing a very old problem, "how to justly treat the earth and its inhabitants." He continued by saying that "the toxic chemicals dilemma raise[d] some fundamental questions of justice in relationships among classes of people."[136] He concluded his speech with one last appeal to Congress to consider justice as part of its legislation decisions on Superfund:

> In Superfund, we have a just answer. The needed money for cleanup – money which comes from industries who profit from toxic chemicals, particularly those which have created NPL sites; a timetable to ensure the prompt protection of public health, citizen suit and compensation provisions, to put the control of their destiny back in the hands of the people; all these move us toward justice and away from Tyre's polluted wasteland. Superfund should not be a partisan issue, with people's very lives dependent on a candidate campaigning next to a local dump. It should be a matter of justice, justice which should be pursued by liberal and conservatives alike. Our faith reminds us that we are all only temporary tenants of a world, which belongs to God. Our government, which should serve <u>all</u> the people, must protect and care for our fellow householders. The time for cleanup is now.[137]

Rabbi Saperstein's speech is significant for it appealed to lawmakers on a human level. In urging for Superfund's reauthorization, he emphasized the widespread implications for all humanity and challenged legislators to reauthorize a policy that recognized and impacted the most severely affected population—disadvantaged minorities and low-income households. This perspective is also a theological argument. Here, Rabbi Saperstein is saying that in addition to issues of justice and fairness, the Superfund deserves to be renewed because God has entrusted human beings with the responsibility of caring for the world.

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[136] David Saperstein, "To Prevent The Polluted Wasteland: A Call for Justice," February 7, 1985, RAC Correspondence, N1-56, Folder 9, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.
[137] Ibid.

In 1986, Congress passed the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act. Superfund reauthorization would prove to be an accomplishment of mainstream Reform Jewish environmentalism. The reauthorization not only strengthened Superfund's enforcement provisions but also stressed the importance of permanent remedies and innovative waste treatment clean technologies. Most significantly, the reauthorization act placed more emphasis on human health problems posed by hazardous waste sites by instituting community right-to-know laws so that residents could be more informed about chemicals managed at a nearby facility.[138]

The lobbying efforts of the RAC regarding the reauthorization of Superfund remained a major victory of the decade for Reform Jewish mainstream environmentalism. In a briefing of the Commission on Social Action recapping the major victories and losses of the RAC during the 100th Congressional session, it reported that the RAC won 72% of the significant legislative battles it joined on behalf of the UAHC and the CCAR. Among those victories was the passage of aid to homeless and low-income residents. Among the major losses, however, were bills limiting nuclear testing. Evident from the briefing, major legislative victories fought by the RAC from 1987 to 1989 did not include any significant environmental legislation. The reauthorization of Superfund was the one significant mainstream environmental victory of the Reform movement during this time.[139]

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[138] EPA, "Superfund History."
[139] Commission on Social Action Briefing, N1-56, Folder 11, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

Perhaps most telling of Reform Judaism's commitment to environmentalism is that in 1984, the Committee on Justice and Peace of the CCAR and UAHC decided on "Preserving the Environment" as the Shabbat Hagadol theme for that year. As a result, the organizational and institutional leaders of Reform Judaism were responsible for compiling resource materials for colleagues' use in their synagogues.[140] Environmentalism became a part of the Reform Jewish vernacular during this time. In 1984, the CCAR Responsa Committee answered a question on the attitude of Judaism toward environmental concerns expressed by so many political groups. In its response, the committee noted the immense amount of material that pertained to this question. In providing an answer, focusing primarily on *halakhic* sources, the Responsa Committee concluded "Judaism has emphasized an appreciation of the environment and nature since the Biblical period. These issues do not play a dominant role in Jewish life, but they remain important."[141] The specific question posed to the CCAR Responsa Committee illustrates that by mid-1980s, Reform Jews were thinking more critically about the environment and eager to learn more about how Judaism could inform their understanding of the issue.

Environmental Justice and Religious Environmentalism

Out of the environmental concerns of the 1980s came the environmental justice movement, a campaign whose mission was to address the public health and safety of all Americans, in particular urban minorities and low-income

[140] Randall M. Falk, "Committee on Justice and Peace Report," *CCAR Yearbook* XCIV (1984): 111.
[141] CCAR, "Responsa on Judaism and the Environment," November 1984, http://ccarnet.org/responsa/carr-17-19/ (accessed December 28, 2016).

neighborhoods.[142] America's faith communities, including the Reform movement, became major proponents of environmental justice in the mid-1980s by emphasizing the moral and ethical dimensions of environmentalism. Environmentalism became a vehicle through which Reform Judaism advocated for social justice equality and the implementation of Jewish values. In a report to the CCAR in 1986, Rabbi David Saperstein illustrated this point:

> The indispensable role that Jews must play in our society is to insist that all human action and inventions – including social, environmental, economical and political programs – be measured and judged by how they advance or hinder [Jewish] values. As soon as we move from delineating the principles to applying them to contemporary problems, we move from that which is mandated by the tradition to that which is an exercise in individual human judgment.[143]

Environmentalism was, to a great extent, a mechanism for Reform Judaism to apply Jewish values to a contemporary problem. In 1988 and 1989, a significant number of rabbis dedicated their High Holiday sermons – viewed as the most important of the year – to the subject of environmentalism.[144] The commitment of Reform Jewish leadership in promoting environmentalism in their congregations would carry over into the decade to come.

The 1980s proved to be a challenging time for American environmentalism. Public concern over high levels of air pollution and the proliferation of hazardous waste became major environmental issues. Overall, the anti-environmental Reagan Administration and lack of government support dampened mainstream

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[142] Kline, 200.
[143] David Saperstein, "Report of the Religious Action Center," *CCAR Yearbook* XCVI (1986): 69–70.
[144] "Sermons on Environment 1988–1990," N1-56, Folder 14, MS-873, Religious Action Center Records, AJA.

environmentalism efforts. The Reagan Administration's anti-environmental policies resulted in pushback by individuals and communities to formulate grassroots environmental efforts. Together with the Christian faith community, Reform Judaism proved to be a major proponent of grassroots environmentalism in the 1980s by supporting regional and communal environmental efforts.

America's interfaith groups were a major supporter of grassroots energy conservation. Throughout the 1980s, the Interfaith Coalition on Energy promoted short-term energy saving techniques and advocated for individual conservation solutions among their constituents. The American Jewish Committee fostered Jewish involvement in this effort by providing educational resources and information at the individual and regional levels. Together, the American faith community was able to exponentially raise public awareness of and involvement in the energy conservation movement in the 1980s by framing the issue through a moral and ethical lens. Collaboration among the nation's religious denominations in the 1980s set the foundation for the growth of religious involvement in environmentalism through the 1990s.

Reform Jewish involvement in environmentalism throughout the 1980s demonstrated the need for both grassroots environmentalism while continuing to fight for environmentalism at the mainstream level. It devoted unprecedented attention to educating constituents and advocated for energy conservation techniques to be implemented at home and in synagogues. Meanwhile, the RAC continued to engage in mainstream environmentalism by lobbying specific pro-environmental legislation such as the reauthorization of the Superfund Program.

By the end of the decade, the Reform Jewish community worked in close cooperation with religious leaders of other denominations and faiths to formulate a national interfaith partnership for the environment. The outcome was the creation, in October 1993, of the first national interfaith environmental organization, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE).[145] The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) serves as the Jewish branch of this organization and continues to provide resources to Jewish communities in America on the importance of environmentalism as a Jewish value. Since its inception, the NRPE has grown significantly and has become more involved in the fight against environmental degradation, global climate change, and the protection of wildlife and natural resources.

[145] National Religious Partnership for the Environment, "History," http://www.nrpe.org/history.html (accessed May 1, 2017)

Conclusion

The Reform Jewish involvement in American environmentalism has evolved since the Progressive Era to today. However, only within the last fifty years did environmentalism really emerge as a component of the Social Action program within Reform Judaism. From 1920 to the 1960s, the role of Reform Jews in advancing environmentalism in America was done so on an individual basis. By examining the history of social action in Reform Judaism, this thesis has offered a critical and analytical history of the development of Reform Jewish involvement in American environmentalism and the religious environmentalism movement as a whole.

The focus of chapter one was the history of the emergence of American environmentalism and the Social Action program of Reform Judaism. Although these two entities emerged independently of one another, there are similarities regarding their respective origins. The American environmental movement stems from the Progressive Era and the Conservationist movement, wherein environmental conservation began as an interest of a few key individuals. Within a similar fashion, rabbis such as Stephen S. Wise and Emil G. Hirsch advanced early efforts for Reform Judaism to become involved in matters of social justice. Moreover, Reform Jews in the 1930s, such as Robert Marshall, helped introduce the notion of social justice values into the national debate on wilderness protection and environmental conservation.

Beginning in the 1960s, as Americans began to take stock of the negative impact of their actions on the environment, Reform Judaism was beginning to

organize a comprehensive approach to addressing matters of social justice in America. The result was the creation of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington, D.C. From its inception in 1962, the RAC has represented the American Reform Jewish voice on matters of social justice. Nevertheless, as mentioned in chapter one, the environment proved to be of lesser importance to the leadership of Reform Judaism than did other matters of social justice, such as civil rights and voting laws. Environmentalism would not emerge as a top priority among Reform Jewish leadership until the end of the 1960s, during which time pressing matters of environmental conservation, such as the National Energy Crisis and energy conservation, gained national attention.

Chapter two focused on the evolution of American environmentalism and the Reform Jewish involvement therein throughout the 1970s. As Americans were confronting the reality of finite natural resources, environmentalism became a mainstream social issue, and as a result, environmentalism became a matter of contention within the American political scene. This period saw the rise of mainstream environmentalism. The major environmental issues of the 1970s, which mainstream environmentalists sought to address at the federal level, included the nation's energy consumption, dependence on foreign oil, and the need for Americans to better conserve energy at home. The American Jewish community, including Reform Judaism, became intricately involved in the matter, as discussed in depth throughout the second chapter.

American Jewish involvement began after the 1973 OPEC Oil Embargo against the United States, as a consequence of its aid to Israel in the Yom Kippur

War. As discussed in the chapter, many American Jewish organizations such as the AJC and the ZOA advocated on behalf of energy conservation in America so as not to jeopardize the safety and security of the State of Israel. The American Jewish community voiced its opinion on the energy crisis of the 1970s, in particular to President Jimmy Carter, who welcomed the views of American religious organizations on the issue. The debate over energy conservation in the 1970s grew to include the voice of Reform Jewish leadership, such as Rabbi David Saperstein, as mentioned throughout the chapter.

Given the fact that the debate over energy conservation in America throughout the 1970s was mainstream and played out at the federal level, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism was able to contribute its voice on the matter in a way that proved to be unique compared to other leading American Jewish organizations of the day. Throughout the decade, the UAHC was successful in educating its constituents on the subject of energy conservation and empowered them to conserve energy at home by adopting short-term energy saving techniques. Moreover, President Jimmy Carter appointed UAHC President, Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, as a member of the board of the National Alliance to Save Energy in 1977. Rabbi Schindler represented the movement and offered a Reform Jewish perspective as part of formulating a partnership of interfaith clergy dedicated to increasing energy conservation efforts in America. In the 1970s, an interfaith effort to promote energy conservation for the sake of the environment became known as the Interfaith Covenant of Conservation. Rabbis Schindler and Saperstein represented the Reform Jewish movement in this effort.

Chapter three addressed the development of American environmentalism and the role of American Reform Judaism from the end of the 1970s to the early 1990s. In contrast to the development of mainstream environmentalism in America during the 1970s, community driven grassroots efforts characterized environmentalism in the 1980s. It arose as a result of the shift from a pro-environmental Democratic president in Jimmy Carter, to the election of the anti-environmental government of Ronald Reagan beginning in 1981. Major environmental issues of the decade included the deregulation of government environmental protection, problems of toxic waste disposal, and nuclear energy.

Throughout the decade, Reform Jewish involvement grew to include a vast majority of constituents embracing energy conservation at home and in their communities. Moreover, Reform Judaism played a critical role in the development of a national religious organizational environmental initiative by the end of the decade. Overall, the Reform Jewish community involved itself in matters of environmentalism at the local and national level during the 1980s. By the mid-1980s, religious environmentalism in America grew into a national effort and in collaboration with other faith-based communities Reform Judaism became a leading proponent of environmental justice.

The American Jewish response to the growth of grassroots environmentalism in the 1980s was positive. The American Jewish Committee helped foster regional environmental efforts, such as that of the Interreligious Council of Southern California, as described in Chapter three. Under the auspices of the Interfaith Coalition on Religion and Energy, a collaborative effort to encourage America's faith

communities to conserve energy manifested in a national Responsible Energy Sabbath. The interfaith effort to promote responsible energy consumption furthered the moral and ethical dimensions of the debate over energy conservation and contributed to the advancement of environmental justice movement during the decade. The Reform Jewish community was also involved in interfaith efforts to promote environmentalism.

Throughout the 1980s, Reform Judaism furthered its involvement in interfaith efforts to promote energy conservation by issuing educational literature to its constituents. A survey conducted by the RAC described in chapter three reveals that roughly fifteen percent of Reform communities adopted energy saving techniques. Moreover, the RAC continued to lobby Congress on pro-environmental issues and legislation, in particular, the Superfund Project. Nevertheless, due to a primarily anti-environmental President, Reform Judaism found the most success in promoting grassroots energy conservation and interfaith religious environmentalism. In 1985, America's faith communities were successful in promoting the moral and ethical dimensions of environmentalism.

The development of Reform Jewish environmentalism and religious environmentalism in America is indicative of the history of environmentalism in America overall. Considering its evolution, Reform Judaism could have done more sooner to promote environmentalism as a matter of social action within its own movement; however, social justice issues such as the civil rights movement took precedent. Environmentalism began to be a priority of Reform Jewish social action in America mainly in the 1970s, when environmental degradation and our ability to

convey its adverse effects were not as strong as they are today. The rapid expansion of religious and Jewish environmentalism beginning in the 1990s is indicative of the wide shift in acceptance of environmental degradation among Americans.

Personal Reflection

Although Reform Jewish involvement in promoting environmentalism in America has grown significantly since the start of a national religious organizational initiative in the early 1990s, I believe the RAC and leaders of Reform Judaism should devote more attention to promoting environmentalism today. After all, in the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a drastic change in environmental patterns and atmospheric conditions. At a point where all but three percent of the scientific communities agree that our planet is significantly warming and man-made carbon emissions are greatly to blame, Reform Judaism should dedicate unprecedented efforts to help educate and mobilize its constituents on what can be done to help fight against environmental degradation. More so than its level of involvement in the mid-1980s, the RAC must prioritize the environment now and in the future.

It is the author's hope that this thesis will serve as an educational resource on the birth of environmentalism as a social action topic of Reform Judaism in America. This work allows readers a glimpse into the parallel histories of environmentalism in America and social action within Reform Judaism. Moreover, it is my hope that by reading this thesis, readers may be empowered to become more involved in the environmental movement in America. Today, we are facing a myriad

of social action concerns that deserve the attention of not only Reform Jews, but the entirety of the American population. I decided to write on the origins of environmentalism as a topic of social action within Reform Judaism because the environment is a topic about which I am most passionate. Each of us has a matter of social concern, about which we are most passionate. It is my wish that after reading this thesis, you will begin to consider what topic of social action speaks most to you. In so doing, consider the Reform Jewish initiative in the 1970s, which sought to have Reform Jews in America participate in energy conservation with an act as simple as turning off lights in their homes. Becoming personally involved and promoting social change today is as simple as turning off a light switch. In so doing, you will be embracing our Jewish commitment toward *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world.

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