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Hibernians Versus Hebrews? A New Look at the 1902 Jacob Joseph Funeral Riot[1]

by Edward T. O'Donnell, College of the Holy Cross

On July 29, 1902 a massive funeral procession for Jacob Joseph, the esteemed Chief Rabbi of the Orthodox community, wound its way through the streets of New York's Lower East Side. The solemn occasion was marred, however, when the procession was attacked by a group of factory workers. As the melee blossomed into a full-scale riot, a contingent of New York City policemen arrived and proceeded to pummel and arrest the mourners rather than the instigators. Historians have consistently cited this ugly incident as a vivid example of Irish Catholic antisemitism, noting that both the workers and policemen were "predominantly Irish." Indeed, it was a quest to learn more about the roots of Irish Catholic antisemitism that drew this historian to the subject. And yet, a thorough examination of the incident produced a startling result: a dearth of Irish defendants and a flawed historiography that ultimately call into question the validity of the Jacob Joseph Funeral Riot as an example of Irish Catholic antisemitism.

"Ireland, they say, has the honour of being the only country which never persecuted the Jews....And do you know why?...Because she never let them in."—from James Joyce, *Ulysses*

"I don't know anything about it, but I think he's guilty. He's a Jew."—Hennessy, in Finley Peter Dunne's "Mr. Dooley," commenting on the Dreyfus Affair.

The history of Irish-Jewish relations in America has always been complex, featuring both examples of cooperation and conflict. More often than not, the latter has seemed more commonplace. Anecdotally, the memoirs and oral histories of Jews who grew up in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and elsewhere are replete with references to clashes with Irish toughs.[2] Other works note how Irish machine politicians worked to garner the Jewish vote while simultaneously thwarting attempts by Jews to acquire

[1]I wish to thank the two very able researchers who assisted me in this project, Robert Newmann and Daniel Marquez.

[2]For recent examples in both non-fiction and fiction, see Steven G. Kellman, *Redemption: The Life of Henry Roth* (New York, 2005), 44, 49, 56; and Peter Quinn, *The Hour of the Cat* (New York, 2005), 260-63.

political office or patronage.[3] And, of course, populists Ignatius Donnelly and Father Charles Coughlin expressed virulent antisemitism.[4] By their very pervasiveness, clashes between the Irish and Jews represent an important theme in urban and ethnic history, one that tells us much about how, among other factors, political power, popular culture, shifting neighborhood demography, and European traditions played a role in interethnic conflict.

In chronicling this troubled relationship, historians have long cited one incident above all others as the supreme example of antagonism between the Irish and Jews, the 1902 Jacob Joseph funeral riot. For more than sixty years historians have used it to demonstrate the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes among the Irish. While the fact that such antisemitism existed and at times flourished among the Irish is beyond refute, the validity of the Jacob Joseph funeral riot as a stellar example is not. A close re-examination of the riot allows for both a new interpretation of the event and a fruitful inquiry into the nature of its subsequent historiography.

* * *

Rabbi Jacob Joseph was no ordinary man, and his funeral was no ordinary event. Born in Kovno, Russia, in 1840, he became one of Eastern Europe's most respected Talmudic scholars. He arrived in New York City in 1888 after accepting an invitation from the Association of the American Orthodox Congregations to serve as their Chief Rabbi. That group hoped he would bring unity and peace to the notoriously fractious Orthodox congregations of the Lower East Side, especially in regard to the kosher meat industry, where charges of corruption, impropriety, and fraud were rampant.[5]

To his dismay, Rabbi Joseph discovered soon after his arrival that while the Orthodox congregations wanted him to bring peace and harmony to

[3]Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley, 1988); Thomas Henderson, *Tammany Hall and the New Immigrants* (New York, 1976); Chris McNickle, *To Be Mayor of New York: Ethnic Politics in the City* (New York, 1993).

[4]Mary Christine Athans, *The Coughlin-Fahey Connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S. Sp., and Religious Anti-Semitism in the United States, 1938-1954* (New York, 1991); Michael N. Dobkowski, "Populist Antisemitism in U.S. Literature," *Patterns of Prejudice* 10 (May-June 1976): 19-27; Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago, 1962); Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* (New York, 1996).

[5]Abraham J. Karp, "New York Chooses a Chief Rabbi," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 44 (March 1955): 129-98; Kimmy Caplan, "Rabbi Jacob Joseph, New York's Chief Rabbi: New Perspectives," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 67 (1996): 1-43. Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1962), 148; Paul Masserman and Max Baker, *The Jews Come to America* (New York, 1932), 253-54; Peter Wiernik, *The History of the Jews in America, From the Period of the Discovery of the New World to the Present Time*, 3rd ed. (1912, repr. New York, 1972), 281; Abraham Cahan, "The Late Rabbi Joseph, Hebrew Patriarch of New York," *American Review of Reviews*, Sept. 1902, 312-13.

their ranks, they gave him no authority to do so. Many of his more Americanized constituents also bristled at his rigid religious orthodoxy. Thus, while respecting the eminent scholar and holy man, they largely ignored him. The Rabbi later suffered a stroke and spent his last few years in impoverished seclusion. He died July 29, 1902, a frustrated man, "more a martyr than a leader," as one contemporary put it.[6]

Ironically, when word of the Rabbi's death spread rapidly throughout the Lower East Side, the very people who ignored him while he lived honored him in death with an unprecedented outpouring of grief. Leaders of the orthodox congregations planned a funeral procession through the streets of the Lower East Side, with stops at each of the main Orthodox synagogues for the prayer of the dead. By the evening of the rabbi's death, it became clear that thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of mourners planned to participate.[7]

Recognizing both the probable enormity of the crowd and the legal requirement to procure a permit for such an event, one of the organizers called upon the local police. After receiving permission for the march, he informed the police official on duty that as many as 20,000 people might participate. He left assured that twenty-five policemen would be in place the next day and that more could be had if requested. Around midnight that same evening a reporter from one of the local Jewish newspapers called the precinct to warn the police to expect massive crowds and to assign a larger contingent of policemen to keep order. Apparently no one at the station took the warning seriously, and it never reached the officer in charge.[8]

At 11:00 a.m. on the morning of July 30, after the ritual preparation of the body and recitation of the prayer for the dead, attendants loaded the plain wooden casket carrying Rabbi Joseph's remains onto a bier. Behind it stretched a line of 200 carriages bearing family members, local officials, wealthy merchants, and dozens of prominent rabbis from around the country. Standing before them on both sides of the street stretched a crowd of 50,000 to 100,000 mourners. Sensing potential problems of crowd control

[6]Cahan, "The Late Rabbi Joseph," 313; Masserman and Baker, *The Jews Come to America*, 253-54; Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore, 1992), 176-77; Abraham Karp, *Haven and Home: A History of the Jews in America* (1955, repr. New York, 1985), 102-09; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, 2004), 182-83; New York *Sun*, Aug. 3, 1902.

[7]The most complete detailed account of the riot is contained in the "Report of Mayor's Committee on Responsibility for the Riot" (hereafter referred to as the "Report of the Mayor's Committee," with pagination corresponding to the *American Hebrew*), printed in the *American Hebrew*, Sept. 19, 1902, 497-99. See also: *Life*, "Hard on the Jews," 40, Sept. 25, 1902; *Collier's Weekly*, "The Fighting Qualities of the Hebrew" and "A Riot in the Ghetto," Aug. 16, 1902.

[8]"Report of the Mayor's Committee," 497; New York *Sun*, Aug. 2, 1902; New York *Times*, Aug. 2, 1902; New York *Tribune*, July 31, 1902.

Captain William Thompson, the policeman in charge, called for reinforcements and soon had more than 100 policemen on hand by the time the procession began.[9]

Weeping, wailing, and the chanting of Psalms filled the air as the massive entourage made its way to each of the main Orthodox synagogues. The crowds struggled and occasionally surged as particularly zealous mourners sought to touch the casket, but remarkably no serious incident occurred.[10] Two hours later, after recitation of the final prayers, the last leg of the march to the ferry at the end of Grand Street (the cemetery was in Brooklyn) commenced. Turning east on Grand Street, the procession soon came upon a massive brick factory that housed the famed printing press manufacturing firm of R. H. Hoe and Co.[11]

There the riot began. For the purposes of clarity, the events are presented in the following step by step manner:

> ***Stage One***: As the mourners began to pass the Hoe factory, some workers on the roof and upper-story windows started throwing food, water, oily rags, and pieces of wood and metal down upon them.
>
> ***Stage Two***: Outraged at such disrespect for so solemn an occasion, some mourners threw the missiles back, while others burst into the factory in an effort to stop the assault.
>
> ***Stage Three***: When the furious Jews entered the factory, first floor office workers, unaware of what had just happened outside, reacted by calling the police, turning the fire-hose on the invaders, and uttering one recorded antisemitic remark ("Get out, you sheenies, we'll soak you!"). They quickly expelled the Jewish mourners from the building.
>
> ***Stage Four***: Out in the street, a general melee ensued with more missiles and the water from the fire-hose emanating from the Hoe fac-

[9]Report of the Mayor's Committee," 497; New York *Sun*, July 31, Aug. 2, 1902.

[10]New York *Sun*, July 31, 1902; New York *Times*, July 31, 1902; New York *Tribune*, July 31, 1902. For additional information on the funeral as ritual, see Arthur A. Goren, "Sacred and Secular: The Place of Public Funerals in the Immigrant Life of American Jews," *Jewish History* 8 (March, 1994): 269-305.

[11]R. H. Hoe and Co. was founded by Robert Hoe, the Henry Ford of American printing. His introduction in 1832 of a two-cylinder press dramatically increased the speed and lowered the cost of printing to 4,000 sheets per hour. Continued innovations increased the output by 1855 to the unthinkable rate of 20,000 sheets per hour. Hoe's firm became the largest manufacturer of printing presses in the United States, a ranking it held in 1902, the year of the riot. For more on the Hoe firm, see: Frank E. Comparato, *Chronicles of Genius and Folly: R. Hoe & Company and the Printing Press as a Service to Democracy* (Culver City, CA, 1979); Alfred McClung Lee, *The Daily Newspaper in America: The Evolution of a Social Instrument* (New York, 1947); and Douglas C. McMurtrie, *A History of Printing in the United States* (New York, 1936).

> tory and rocks, bricks, and other articles being hurled back. Before long most of the windows in the factory facade were broken (total damage done to the building was estimated at $1,200 by the Hoe firm). In a matter of minutes, as the head of the funeral procession, now a half mile past the factory, began boarding the ferry to Brooklyn, the scene outside the factory by all accounts had begun to calm down.
>
> *Stage Five*: A few minutes later, at 1:20 p.m., a squad of 200 policemen, summoned at the outbreak of hostilities by the Hoe employees, arrived on the scene under the leadership of Inspector Adam A. Cross. "[W]ithout a word of warning or any request to disburse," stated the report on the incident commissioned by the mayor, the police "rushed upon the remnant of the gathering, some of them with great roughness of language and violence of manner."

Hundreds of mourners and bystanders were injured, most from the clubs and fists of the policemen. Eleven Jews were arrested, nine were subsequently fined between $5 and $10 each, two were held for $1,000 bail for "inciting" the riot. Four Hoe employees were eventually arrested.[12]

The incident outraged a large cross section of New Yorkers, most especially the Jewish community of the Lower East Side. Overwhelmingly the latter directed their anger, as one Yiddish paper put it, "against the police even more than against the bandits from Hoe's factory." The police had long proven themselves prone to antisemitic acts of harassment.[13] "But the police are the servants of the citizenry," the editor continued, "that is, they are obligated to protect the citizenry which maintains them." More than one commented on the outrageous irony that hundreds of thousands of Jews fled the persecutions of Czarist Russia only to experience a "police pogrom" in America. "[E]ven Russian *muzhiks* [peasants] would have respected" a Jewish funeral, asserted the *Forward*.[14]

New York's Jewish population, both uptown German Jews and the recently arrived Eastern Europeans, organized protest meetings and demanded an

[12]"Report of the Mayor's Committee," 497-98; New York *Sun*, July 31, 1902; New York *Times*, July 31, 1902; New York *Tribune*, July 31, 1902.

[13]The police later admitted that they were aware of such acts over the years. Only months before the riot, Hoe management posted a sign inside their factory admonishing their employees to refrain from continued harassment or face termination. "Report of the Mayor's Committee," 498.

[14]*Jewish Messenger* [Yiddish], July 30, 1902, p. 1; *Forward*, July 31, 1902, p. 1; *American Hebrew*, August 15, 1902, p. 345: "It is clear as a pikestaff that the Jews of the East side have been looked upon as the legitimate prey of the police; that the police have ruled them as their masters, and have altogether failed to understand that a public official is a public servant, even to the humblest citizen." Later the editor surmised that if the riot served to bring this point home to the police, it "will have been a blessing in disguise."

inquiry.[15] Mayor Seth Low, elected the year before on a pledge to reform the police department, obliged by forming an investigative committee of notable reformers, among them two prominent Jews (Nathan Bijur and Louis Marshall). He charged them with taking testimony and producing a final report on the incident with recommendations for action.[16] In the meantime, the Police Department accepted the retirement of two officers involved in the funeral proceedings, though not involved in the violence, and transferred a number of officers, among them Inspector Cross, to precincts beyond the Lower East Side.[17]

* * *

In the historiography of the Jacob Joseph funeral riot, scholars accept these essential facts and voice virtually no disagreement over their meaning and interpretation. Thus while references to the incident abound in the literature of the Jewish experience in America, they reflect a rare historiographic consensus that centers on three main points. First, historians characterize the incident as an Irish-versus-Jewish riot. They describe the 1,800 workers at the Hoe factory as "mostly of Irish descent" and the members of the police force as "predominantly Irish" and possessing "a reputation for brutal treatment of East Side Jews." Second, they cite the "constant encroachment of the teeming Jewish colony upon their own shrinking domain" as the central motivation of the Irish for attacking the mourners. Third, the mostly Irish New York police force possessed an additional motivation for assaulting the Jews. The latter had provided the margin of victory to a reform movement bent on rooting out the corrupt influence of the Irish-dominated Tammany Hall from all aspects of city government, especially the police.[18] This consensus historiography concludes that the riot stands as one of the most vivid examples of Irish antisemitism at the turn of the century. This accounts for the many references to the incident in histories of the Jewish experience in America.

While antisemitism was quite prevalent among Irish Americans at the turn of the century[19] and the assault on the funeral procession was clearly an act

[15]*Forward*, July 30, 31, Aug. 1, 2, 1902; *Times*, Aug. 1, 2, 1902; *Sun*, Aug. 1, 2, 1902.

[16]*American Hebrew*, Aug. 8, 1902, 331, and Aug. 15, 1902, 355.

[17]New York *Sun*, Aug. 3, 1902; New York *Tribune*, Aug. 3, 1902.

[18]Leonard Dinnerstein, "The Funeral of Rabbi Jacob Joseph" in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David A. Gerber (Urbana, 1986), 282; John Higham, *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (New York, 1975), 114.

[19]See, for example, Till van Rahden, "Beyond Ambivalence: Variations of Catholic Anti-Semitism in Turn-of-the-Century Baltimore," *American Jewish History* 82 (1994): 7-42; and Stephen H. Norwood, "Marauding Youth and the Christian Front: Antisemitic Violence in Boston and New York During World War II," *American Jewish History* 91 (June 2003): 233-67. See also footnotes 45, 46, and 47 for examples.

of antisemitism, closer analysis of the available evidence surrounding the incident calls into question the three central tenets of its historiography. One of the most immediate problems with the riot's interpretation to date has been the tendency of historians to overlook the fact that the riot actually consisted of two distinct parts, one involving the factory workers, the other involving the police. The moment they are studied separately, significant questions arise.

To begin with, close examination of the factory phase of the conflict reveals one arresting fact. The Irish factory workers fail to materialize. Contrary assertions aside, there are no extant records indicating a preponderance of Irish workers at the Hoe factory.[20] Even more revealing, none of the contemporary sources, including government reports, public statements, and mainstream, German-Jewish, and Yiddish newspapers, refer to the instigators as anything more specific than "factory boys," "some employees," or "a gang of hoodlums,"[21] "ruffians,"[22] "bandits," "loafers" (*loyfers*), "idlers" (*bod-yungen*), "troublemakers" (*boyanes*).[23] Nowhere are they referred to as Irish. Had they been, the Irish press, which never ignored any perceived affront to Ireland or the Irish surely would have responded. They were silent, except for the *Irish World*, which published a lengthy editorial condemning the attack as "a shameful outbreak of bigotry."[24]

Some historians have cited an editorial from the New York *Tribune* as evidence that the attackers were Irish.

> [I]t is evident that a great number of the rank and file of the [police] force, as well as many of the sergeants and captains, sympathize with the rowdies and are rather glad to see them give vent to race prejudice. The fact is that the "tough" spirit is strongly intrenched in the police force. The rowdies who think it smart to pummel "niggers," stone poor Russian Jews, kick over Syrians' fruit stands, annoy industrious "Dagos," pull the pigtails of the "Chinks" and trample under foot the plain citizens of American blood are generally the friends of the policemen. The policemen certainly look on

[20]Examination of the *Records of R. Hoe & Company*, New York Public Library, Science and Business Library Branch, microfilm, 15 Reels, revealed no reference to Irish workers. See also the New York *Times*, June 7, 1907 for an article on the graduates of the Hoe & Co. apprentice program. Of the nine names provided (of sixteen total), only one (Barry) is identifiably Irish.

[21]New York *Tribune*, July 31, Aug. 2, 1902.

[22]*American Hebrew*, Aug. 1, 1902, p. 292.

[23]*Forward*, July 30, 31, 1902; *Jewish World*, July 30, 31, 1902. See also the letters from Mayor's Committee member, Louis Marshall, regarding the riot. Neither mention Irish perpetrators. Charles Reznikoff, ed., *Louis Marshall: Champion of Liberty*, vol. I (Philadelphia, 1957), 10-12.

[24]*Irish World*, Sept. 13, 1902, p. 11.

> persons not of the dominant race in Tammany politics from the same point of view.[25]

Conspicuously absent from this editorial, however, is the word Irish (and German, for that matter). Only when one presupposes the attackers were Irish does this more general description of urban hoodlums suddenly denote Irishness. Indeed, other evidence points in the opposite direction. The New York *Times*, staunchly anti-Tammany and anti-Irish and very sympathetic to the battered mourners, editorialized shortly after the riot that initial charges of antisemitism were understandable, but unfounded. "It was the result of a mischievous and lawless spirit on the part of a lot of young hoodlums," opined the *Times*, "who would have played the same cruel game against any class foreign to their associations....Even Irishmen would have been their victims could they have felt sure that Irishmen would not amply defend themselves." Further undermining the contention that the rioters were Irish was the testimony by one of the mourners that an Irish teamster stopped to help the mourners, leading someone in the crowd to shout, "Even we have the Irishman with us."[26]

Who then committed the antisemitic outrages against the Jewish mourners? Of those arrested (Henry Stockhusen, George Stillgenbauer, George W. Church, and Emil Adams), most, it turns out, were German and none were identifiably Irish.[27] Nearly the same is true of the Hoe employees called to testify before the Mayor's Committee. Of the fourteen called, only two—Collins and Dwyer—are presumably Irish. Significantly, both were working on the first floor of the factory when the trouble began and, therefore, were not among the instigators positioned on the roof.[28]

These revelations call into question not simply the first premise of the current historiography (that the assailants were Irish), but also the second,

[25]New York *Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1902.

[26]New York *Times*, Aug. 1, 1902 (editorial) and Aug. 21, 1902 ("Irishman"). Meyer Schoenfeld, a labor leader, also argued against calling the attacks antisemitic. As he testified before the committee, "There is not anti-Semitism over here. These attacks are made by loafers and toughs, and are not the result of any sustained feeling." *American Hebrew*, Aug. 15, 1902, p. 355.

[27]New York *Sun*, July 31, 1902. For information regarding the ethnic origins of surnames, see: H. Amanda Robb and Andrew Chester, *Encyclopedia of American Family Names* (New York, 1995); Elsdon C. Smith, *New Dictionary of American Family Names* (New York, 1956, 1973); and Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames* (New York, 1988). Ethnicities in parentheses refer to likely ethnic identities as cited in the above surname sources: Stockhusen (French\German), Stillgenbauer (English\German), Church (English), Adams (English, French, Catalan, Italian, German, Flemish, Dutch, Polish, Jewish).

[28]Those who testified (ethnicities in parentheses refer to likely ethnic identities as cited in Robb and Chester, Hanks and Hodges, and Smith): Edward A. Collins (Irish), Herman C. Dwyer (Irish), Alexander McClay (Scottish), Walter Nevers (possibly English\German\Flemish), John H. Wilson (English\Scottish), Walter Paul (many possibil-

namely that the incident stemmed from Irish resentment against Jews moving into the neighborhood. To begin with, at least three of the four men arrested did not even live in Manhattan, let alone the Lower East Side.[29] Moreover, the heyday of the Irish on the Lower East Side (the Seventh, Tenth, Eleventh, Thirteenth, and Seventeenth Wards) had passed decades before 1902. The highest concentration of Irish residents in these wards was 22 percent in 1855, a figure that had dropped to 13.8 percent by 1890 (data for 1900 is not available). By far the most recognizable group in these wards was German (37 percent of the population in 1890). Thus, when Eastern European Jews inundated these wards in the 1880s and 1890s, they settled not in Little Ireland, but rather *Kleindeutchland,* a fact which may explain the preponderance of Germans among those arrested and questioned in connection with the riot.[30]

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider this question of conflict due to ethnic succession on the Lower East Side. If any immigrant group threatened the place of New York's Irish, it was the Italians who poured into areas indisputably Irish, where they competed for the same low-skill, manual labor jobs and fought bitter battles over the Catholic churches they came to share.[31]

If it is no longer possible to argue with any certainty that the first phase of the Jacob Joseph funeral riot was an attack of resentful Irish against newly arrived Jews, what does closer scrutiny reveal about the police assault? Here the issue of Irishness immediately becomes more obvious. Anecdotal

ities, none Irish), Wallace Carver (English), William Seakchhaver (unknown), Edward Shepard (English), George A. Duncan (Irish\Scottish), Henry Renken (German), Wilfred Hector (German\Scottish), Richard Fichte (German), and William May (English\French\German\Jewish). See New York *Times*, Aug. 19, 20, and 21, 1902; New York *Tribune*, Aug. 20, 1902.

[29]Records of the City Magistrates' Court, Third District, City and County of New York, subgroup 40321, indicate that Church lived in Stamford, CT. Records of the City Magistrates' Court, Third District, City and County of New York, subgroup 40320 indicate that Adams lived at 756 McDonough Street in Brooklyn. The New York *Times,* July 31, 1902, and New York *Sun*, July 31, 1902, say Stockhusen lived at 28 Grand Street, Brooklyn. An address for Stillgenbauer could not be found.

[30]Demographic information on the Irish on the Lower East Side is found in Ronald Bayor and Timothy Meagher, eds., *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996), 552-53. Demographic information on Germans in the area, comes from U.S. Industrial Commission, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration, Including Testimony with Review and Digest* (1911, repr. New York, 1976), 470. See also Stanley Nadel, *Little Germany: Ethnicity, Religion, and Class in New York City, 1850-1880* (Urbana, 1990), passim.

[31]See the New York *Tribune*, Oct. 2, 1905, for an example of Italian toughs attacking Jews. See also Mary Elizabeth Brown, "The Adoption of the Tactics of the Enemy: The Care of Italian Immigrant Youth in the Archdiocese of New York during the Progressive Era," in *Immigration to New York*, ed. William Pencak, et. al (New York, 1991), 109-25; Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany, 1984), 67; Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York, 1977), 48-50, 56.

as well as statistical evidence suggests that upwards of half of the New York City Police Department was Irish-born or of Irish ancestry in 1902. Ample evidence also supports the contention that the police as a rule exhibited hostility toward Jews and other new immigrants.[32]

Historians, however, have devoted particular attention to the *level* of violence as evidence of antisemitism. If the assault on the Jews at the factory was unique in its scope and intensity, it would indeed suggest antisemitic prejudice on the part of the police. Placing the incident in the context of common police practices, however, reveals the assault on the funeral marchers as less the exception and more the rule. As many historians have demonstrated, urban police forces at the turn of the century lacked concrete standards of training or conduct. When called upon to deal with crowd situations, policemen routinely responded by dispersing the crowd, invariably by violent means and often without issuing verbal warnings.[33] New York City's history is replete with such incidents. For example, in 1874 police brutally assaulted hundreds of unemployed workers gathered at a Tompkins Square Park rally to demand relief from city officials.[34] In 1886, the police beat hundreds of striking streetcar workers and their supporters who attempted to block the movement of cars.[35] A similar exhibition of prolonged police brutality occurred in 1895 during the Brooklyn trolley strike.[36]

Significantly, in the last two incidents the vast majority of the *victims* were Irish transit workers for whom Irish policemen demonstrated no mercy or ethnic affinity.[37] Finally, just two years before the funeral incident, New York City policemen mercilessly beat and arrested scores of African Americans on the West Side over the course of a two-week period in what became known as the Race Riot of 1900.[38]

[32]*Report of the Police Department of the City of New York for the Year Ending Dec. 31, 1902* (New York, 1903). James F. Richardson, *The New York Police, Colonial Times to 1901* (New York, 1970), 235; New York *Times*, Dec. 21, 1933, states that at least 7,204 (36 percent) of the city's 20,000 policemen were Irish-born or Irish-American.

[33]Mark Haller, "Historical Roots of Police Behavior: Chicago, 1890-1925," *Law and Society Review* 10 (Winter 1976): 303-23.

[34]Herbert Gutman, "The Tompkins Square 'Riot' in New York City on January 13, 1874: A Reexamination of Its Causes and Its Aftermath," *Labor History* 6 (Winter 1965): 48-55.

[35]See ch. 7 in Edward T. O'Donnell, "Henry George and the 'New Political Forces': Irish Nationalism, Labor Radicalism, and Politics in Gilded Age New York City," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1995).

[36]Sarah Henry, "The Strikers and Their Sympathizers: The Brooklyn Trolley Strike of 1895," *Labor History* 32 (Summer 1991): 329-53; New York *Times*, Jan.-March, 1895.

[37]That Irish policemen also failed to show favoritism toward their fellow ethnics is indicated by arrest records of the period in question. Irish-born residents of New York City accounted for 22 percent of the city's foreign-born population, but 14 percent of those arrested (the highest of any group). Jews, on the other hand, constituted 25 percent of the foreign-born population, but just 7 percent of those arrested. Source: *Report of the Police Department of New York City for the Year Ending December 31, 1902* (New York, 1903), 42-43. See also the New York *Tribune*, Aug. 19, 1905, for an example of Irish policemen taking on a crowd of violent strikers to save four Jewish bakers.

Thus placed in context, the brutal attack upon the Jews by the police fits into a longstanding pattern of violence against crowds, be they socialist, black, Irish or Jewish. Inspector Cross and his 200 men were called in not for the purposes of crowd control, but rather crowd dispersal. As they did in so many other incidents involving strikes and picketing, Cross and his contingent of 200 men likely viewed their task as securing a besieged factory from an angry mob, which in their eyes was not to be reasoned with—they had broken virtually every window in the building—but rather driven away. Given the regular occurrence of such police violence, in many contexts and against many groups, antisemitism alone (even when one account quotes Cross as shouting "Kill those sheenies!") cannot be cited as the sole motivating factor in explaining the assault in front of the factory.[39]

As yet unaddressed is the possible political dimension of the conflict. The reform coalition headed by Seth Low unquestionably owed its victory over Tammany in 1901 to a successful wooing of the East Side Jewish vote. To be sure, as police corruption was a centerpiece of the Low campaign rhetoric, the police no doubt harbored a certain level of animosity toward East Side voters. And yet, this was hardly a unique moment in the history of East Side electoral politics. As Moses Rischin points out, the East Side Jewish vote was notoriously quixotic. In presidential elections between 1888 and 1912, for example, the East Side never went for the same party twice in a row. Local elections were nearly as volatile.[40] Independent Jewish voters nearly cost Tammany the mayoralty in the famed election of 1886 (which featured the Labor Party candidacy of Henry George). More importantly, it did cost Tammany the election of 1893, a contest that mirrored that of 1901 in more ways than one. It, too, featured a reform coalition of anti-Tammany

[38]The spark which ignited the riot was the stabbing death of a police officer by a black resident of the West Side. See New York *Times*, Aug. 14-Oct. 30, 1900; Gilbert Osofsky, "Race Riot, 1900: A Study of Ethnic Violence," *Journal of Negro Education* 32 (Winter 1963): 16-24; Marilynn S. Johnson, *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City* (Boston, 2003); Marcy S. Sacks, "'To Show Who Was in Charge': Police Repression of New York City's Black Population at the Turn of the Century," *Journal of Urban History* 31 (Sept. 2005): 799-819.

[39]There is only one reference to this antisemitic outburst. All other statements by Jewish leaders expressing outrage at Cross cite his words as, "Club the life out of them" and "Kill them" (*Sun*, Aug. 1, 1902). Given the primary role played by Cross and the attention given him by previous historians, it is worth delving a little more deeply into his background. A name like Adam A. Cross, after all, is not exactly Irish. According to Robb and Chester, Hanks and Hodges, and Smith, the name Cross is mainly English and occasionally Irish. Genealogical research into Cross's ethnic origins makes clear that he was of mixed ethnicity, part of which may or may not have been Irish. His father, George Washington Cross, was born to Augustin Cross and Desire Bliven, both of New York. His mother Nancy was born to Adam Mattice and Nancy Uprans. Source: Department of Health of the City of New York, Bureau of Records, Certificates of Death: no. 34516 for Nancy Cross, no. 14472 for George W. Cross (both give names of parents).

[40]Rischin, *The Promised City*, 272-73.

forces that stressed police corruption as a key campaign issue. Tammany was so alarmed by the potential defection of East Side voters that it convinced Nathan Straus, the wealthy German-Jewish merchant, to accept its nomination. Straus later withdrew his candidacy, and Tammany lost the election.[41] No riot occurred, even though the Lexow Commission investigation into police corruption that year proved more damaging to the department than the investigations begun under Low in 1901 and led to the resignation of its legendary chief, Commissioner Thomas Byrnes, and his replacement by the zealous reformer Theodore Roosevelt.[42] The election of anti-Tammany reformers John Purroy Mitchel in 1913 and Fiorello LaGuardia in 1933 similarly relied heavily on the East Side Jewish vote but produced no incident like that of 1902.

The overall character of the Tammany style of ward politics also argues against drawing too close a connection between politics and the riot. One of the long-standing maxims of Tammany politicians, especially those in non-Irish neighborhoods, was cooperation over confrontation. Tammany always counted on its uncanny ability to come back in the next election; it could little afford to seek retribution. Reformers, remarked Tammany sage George Washington Plunkitt, were mere "mornin' glories." They "looked lovely in the mornin' and withered up in a short time, while the regular machines went on flourishin' forever, like fine old oaks."[43] Retribution against wayward Jewish voters ran counter to this philosophy of patience. Indeed, Tammany's district leader for the Lower East Side, John Ahearn, took the opposite approach, ordering party enforcers to break all the windows of the Hoe factory as an act of solidarity. "The Jews loved him for that," reported one contemporary.[44] Finally, with police corruption drawing fire going into the election, a calculated police assault against Jewish mourners made no sense, as it would create a highly visible incident for reformers to use against them.

We are left then to conclude while the incident unquestionably revealed antisemitic attitudes on the part of some Hoe employees and New York City policemen, much of the accepted historical interpretation of the Jacob Joseph funeral riot of 1902 is inaccurate. The "Irish" factory workers who were angry at the loss of their neighborhood turn out, so far as the available

[41]McNickle, *To Be Mayor of New York*, 16-19.

[42]Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1988), 481-514; H. W. Brands, *T. R.: The Last Romantic* (New York, 1997); and Theodore Roosevelt, *The Autobiography of Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Wayne Andrews (1913, repr. New York, 1958); Richardson, *The New York Police*, 240-42, 248-67.

[43]William Riordan, *Honest Graft: The World of George Washington Plunkitt*, ed. James Olson (New York, 1993), 69. See also David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1982), 89.

[44]Henderson, *Tammany Hall and the New Immigrants*, 22-23.

evidence indicates, to be non-Irish workers employed at a factory in a neighborhood that had long ago ceased to be heavily Irish. The mostly Irish police whose latent antisemitism was seemingly demonstrated by the level of brutality used in dispersing the mourners actually treated their Jewish victims as they had virtually any other crowd, of any ethnicity (including Irish), for the past thirty years. The theory of additional motivation on the part of the police, that of political revenge for anti-Tammany Jewish voting, while not disproved, is undermined by the larger context of Tammany practice and in any case cannot be shown to be explicitly antisemitic in character.

How then do we explain the emergence of the Jacob Joseph funeral riot of 1902 as the iconic example of Irish antisemitism at the turn of the century? First, despite the doubts raised in this paper about the nature and interpretation of the riot, there is no escaping the reality of an existing antisemitic sentiment among many Irish New Yorkers. *Irish World* publisher Patrick Ford, for example, possessed sterling credentials as an espouser of liberal causes, yet his call for financial reform led him into antisemitic rantings against Jewish bankers, not unlike Populist Ignatius Donnelly in the Midwest.[45] Irish nationalist John Devoy, who also published a newspaper, denounced William Randolph Hearst in 1903-04 as a puppet of both Jews and the British in his anti-Russian coverage of the Kishenev massacres and the Russo-Japanese War. "The Anglo-maniacs and the Jews have effected an alliance," he wrote on one occasion. "*They* know that it is the Jews who will make money out of this war [Russo-Japanese] no matter who wins...."[46]

More commonly one reads in the Jewish press and elsewhere of endless incidents involving gangs of Irish thugs beating up Jewish boys or pulling the beards of older Jewish men.[47] And, of course, there exists ample evidence beyond the 1902 riot of day-to-day abuse of Jewish peddlers by Irish policemen. Anti-Jewish cartoons and rhetoric were common in Tammany publications until the 1890s when courting the Jewish vote became crucial to the machine's success. We can even look to Ireland for evidence of antisemitism. Although Ireland always prided itself on being the one European nation never to persecute the Jews, incidents of antisemitic acts, many of them "preached" by local Catholic clergy, occurred with the arrival of Eastern European Jews in the 1880s. The worst of these was a mini-pogrom that occurred in Limerick in 1904.[48]

A second and more compelling explanation for the traditional interpreta-

[45]Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (New York, 1966), 57.

[46]*Gaelic American*, Jan. 9, 16, 1904.

[47]For examples, see *New York Times*, June 6, 1904, and Oct. 15, 1905; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 14, 1894, April 30, 1899, and Aug. 7, 1902. See also Rudolf Glanz, *Jew and Irish: Historic Group Relations and Immigration* (New York, 1966), 102.

[48]Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust* (Cork, Ireland, 1998), 26-53. See also Pamela Fletcher Jones, *The Jews of Britain: A Thousand*

tion of the riot is revealed in the evolution of the historiography itself. For when one follows the chain of historical works that successively discuss the riot, one finds a crucial point of transition in the year 1932. In the generation that followed the 1902 riot, historians paid little or no attention to the event. Peter Wiernik in his 1912 *History of the Jews in America* refers to the funeral only to describe how impressive it was, noting merely that it was "marred by a disturbance in which a number of persons were injured." He mentions nothing of Irish perpetrators, nor does he attribute an antisemitic character to it.[49] Twenty years later, Paul Masserman and Max Baker published *The Jews Come to America* and chose not to mention even the funeral, let alone the riot.[50]

But another work also published in 1932 represents the critical hinge of interpretation for the Jacob Joseph riot of 1902. In his autobiographical account, *Memories of an American Jew*, Philip Cowen described what he referred to as the only anti-Jewish incident in New York he could recall.

> My earliest recollections of the east side run back to the days of my youth when I went down there to patronize the Jewish book-dealers....this section then was abounded approximately by Henry, Mott, Houston and Pitt Streets. East of that to the East River was sacred to the Sons of Erin, many of whom worked at the factory of R. Hoe & Co., where as a rule, Jews sought employment in vain, however skilled they might be. The workmen engaged at the Hoe plant, like their parents before them, lived in the small one-family houses in the neighborhood, and, it was said, resented the Jewish newcomers crowding upon the natives.[51]

Here we see the establishment of the core elements of the historiographic interpretation which followed: Irish workers, employed at a factory which exhibited hostility toward Jews, attacked the funeral because they resented the influx of Jews into their largely Irish neighborhood. Significantly, the issue of antisemitism is treated gingerly (he does not use the word), and the role of the police, a majority of whom were Irish, is never mentioned.[52]

Cowen's memoir is significant because all subsequent historical treatments

Years of History (Gloucestershire, UK, 1990), 150-52, 170-71; David Englander, ed., *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain, 1840-1920* (Leicester, UK, 1994), 247-49, 281-88.

[49]Wiernik, *History of the Jews in America*, 281.

[50]Masserman and Baker, *The Jews Come to America.*

[51]Philip Cowen, *Memories of an American Jew* (New York, 1932), 289.

[52]Cowen's reference to "small one-family houses" in a section of Manhattan choked with tenements is further evidence that his memory and or knowledge of the Lower East Side ca. 1902 was quite poor by 1932.

of the issue take their cue from it, or from others which later drew upon it. Over time, historians wrote more and attributed more to the riot. One of the first was Moses Rischin, who devoted but six lines to it in his 1962 classic *The Promised City* and essentially reiterated Cowen's account and interpretation.[53] Four years later, Rudolph Glanz did much the same in *Jew and Irish*.[54] John Higham in 1975 drew the first serious attention to the Irish police and thereby signaled the seemingly wider implications of the event for Irish-Jewish relations.[55] A few years later Stanley Feldstein added intensity to the interpretation when he wrote in *The Land That I Show You: Three Centuries of Jewish Life in America* that the Irish police, "vomited up their anti-Semitic feelings and attacked the Jews...."[56] The highpoint, if we can call it that, of this historiographic snowball occurred in a recent work, *A History of the Jews in America*, by Howard M. Sachar, where we read that the police somehow came to be led not by Adam Cross, but by the more Irish sounding *Kevin* Cross. More significant, in addition to being antisemites, the Irish in New York were "traumatically impoverished, semi-literate" people who possessed (genetically or otherwise he does not say) "the proclivity to violence" and a "primal brutishness"—terminology that would make Madison Grant proud.[57] Subsequent histories of the Jewish-American experience and anti-semitism continue to cite the incident, though in less hyperbolic fashion.[58]

A third explanation for this magnified interpretation of the riot is found in the nature of the event itself. In an era when virtually all recorded incidents of Irish antisemitism were of the hard-to-quantify, low-level variety—street corner beatings, peddler harassment, verbal tauntings, and beard pulling—historians could only speak in general terms. But the events of July 30, 1902, appeared to offer an incident that was large-scale, vivid, intensely symbolic. Instead of some nameless rabbi getting his beard pulled by some nameless Irish thugs, the riot seemed to present a scenario in which the largest, most overtly Jewish public event (a sacred one, no less) in American history for an internationally famous rabbi was brutally assaulted by Irish workers and Irish policemen, with the acquiescence of Irish politicians. Those historians drawn to this event quickly found that 1902 also provided them with an extraordinary point of comparison: Irish Catholic Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan died three months before Rabbi Jacob Joseph and was

[53]Rischin, *The Promised City*, 91.

[54]Glanz, *Jew and Irish*, 103.

[55]Higham, *Send These to Me*, 114-15.

[56]Stanley Feldstein, *The Land That I Show You: Three Centuries of Jewish Life in America* (Garden City, NY, 1978), 181.

[57]Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York, 1992), 274-75. See also Richardson, *The New York Police*, for use of the riot to illustrate Irish antipathy toward new immigrants.

[58]See Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York, 1994); and Robert Michael, *A Concise History of American Antisemitism* (Lanham, MD, 2005), 99.

given an enormous funeral attended by virtually every significant figure in New York society (including leading German Jews) and legions of orderly, respectful policemen.

Historians had an additional interest in the riot that is revealed in the timing of the historiographic progression. It may be a coincidence that the first account of the riot as Irish in character occurred in the 1930s, but it is clear that subsequent historians chose to highlight it as an example of not just turn-of-the-century Irish antisemitism, but also as a prelude to the rise in the 1930s of a flagrant, institutionalized version known as the Christian Front and Christian Mobilizers. Higham expressed this sentiment most succinctly when he wrote, "The story of anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age is worth telling...if it suggests how the basic pattern of the more serious movements of political anti-Semitism in the 1920's and 1930's came into being. For those later movements, the Gilded Age set the stage and trained the cast."[59] In a word, the Jacob Joseph funeral riot appeared as the *perfect* vehicle both for illustrating the reality of Irish antisemitism at the turn of the century and more importantly, explaining its flourishing form in the 1930s.[60] Too perfect, it turns out.

* * *

In the end we are left with the knowledge that the full story of Irish-Jewish relations in turn-of-the-century New York has yet to be told. It is clear now that we cannot rely on a single event to explain so multi-faceted an experience, just as we can no longer be satisfied with the use of vague terms such as "Irish" or "Jewish." For if the last generation of ethnic studies has taught us anything, it is that group relations are complex precisely because the groups themselves are complex. That is, both the Irish and Jewish communities were riven by differences in class, ideology, and distance from the immigration experience. Relations between all Irish and Jewish New Yorkers were not uniform and certainly not explained in their entirety by one explosive event.

Future research holds the key to a greater understanding of these relations. There are many potentially fruitful areas of inquiry, of which I will mention four. For one, my own preliminary research into the ethnic press of that era suggests that middle- and upper-class German Jews enjoyed cordial, if not genial relations with their middle- and upper-class Irish counter-

[59]Higham, *Send These to Me*, 115.

[60]The outstanding account of ethnic strife and especially Irish antisemitism is Ronald Bayor's, *Neighbors in Conflict: The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, 1929-1941* (Baltimore, 1978).

parts.[61] On the other hand, the recent work of Jack Tchen on the role of the Irish stage in creating a negative stereotype of Chinese immigrants suggests the need to examine how Jewish immigrants were depicted and how that may have negatively affected working-class Irish attitudes.[62] Still a third area worthy of inquiry is suggested by the deep affection and mutual respect shared by labor leaders Leonora O'Reilly, Rose Schneiderman, and Pauline Newman.[63] If Irish antisemitism stemmed at least in part, as much evidence suggests, from the violent expression of working-class "manhood," did this mean that Irish women were less prone to antisemitism? Finally, given the success of many transatlantic ethnic studies, it is clear that we need to know much more about the roots of antisemitism in Ireland itself.[64]

In conclusion, the Jacob Joseph riot provides us with many insights into turn-of-the-century ethnic relations, just not as much as once thought. It also reminds us that we ought to guard against to temptation to read into historical events of one era, harbingers of events in a subsequent one.

[61]See for example: *Jewish Messenger*, Aug. 15, 1902, editorial support for the Irish boycott of theaters featuring plays with "stage Irishmen" caricatures; *Jewish Messenger*, Aug. 29, 1902, editorial chastising a Protestant minister who delivered an anti-Catholic sermon; *Jewish Messenger*, Sept. 5, 1902, effusive theater review of "The Emerald Isle"; *Jewish Messenger*, Nov. 14, 1902, editorial praising a resolution in support of the pogrom victims in Russia made by an organization of "Irish women [who] have always been famous for the generous hearts"; *American Hebrew*, Nov. 14, 1902, p. 741 on the growth of Irish-Jewish business ventures; *Irish American*, June 6, 1903, editorial praising Tammany Hall for appropriating $2,500 for the fund to aid victims of "bigotry and intolerance of the Russian horde who were responsible for the inhumane massacre of Hebrews" in Kishenev (see also Jan. 13, 1903); *Irish World*, Sept. 13, 1902, reprint of *Catholic Mirror* editorial condemning the Jacob Joseph riot.

[62]John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Bayor and Meagher, 125-52.

[63]Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire* (Charlotte, NC, 1995), 44.

[64]See Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland.*