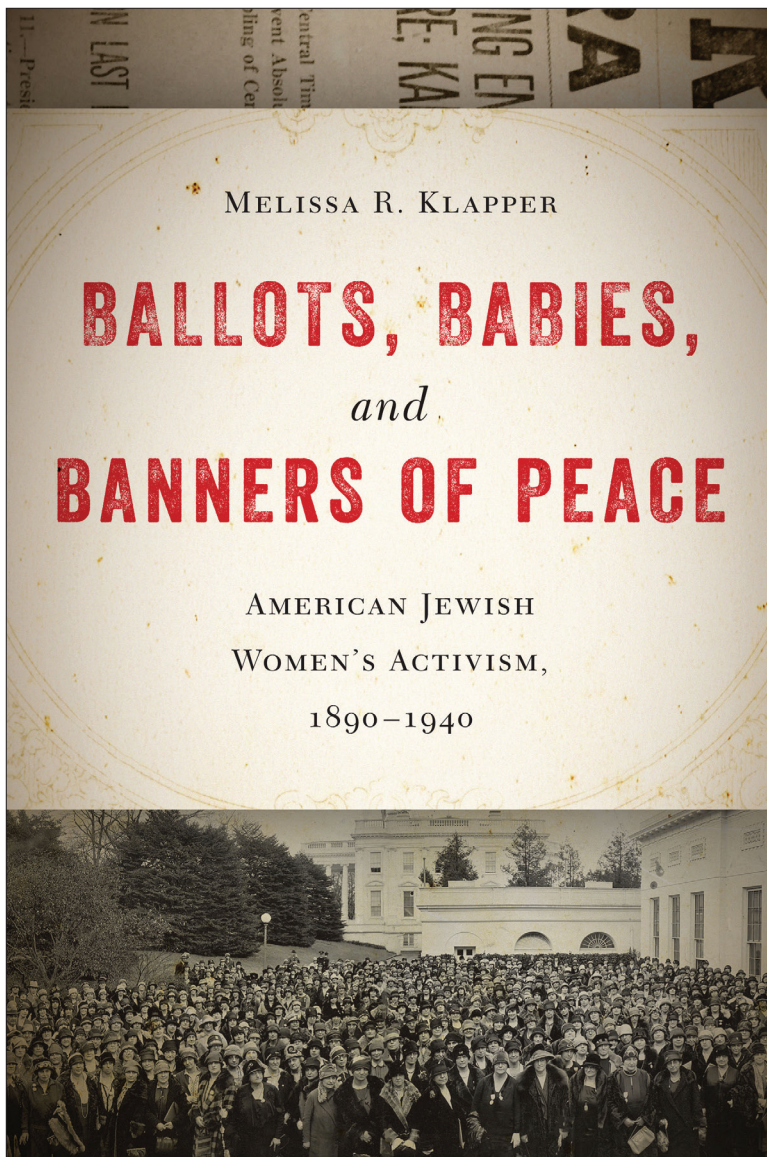


BALLOTS, BABIES, AND BANNERS OF PEACE

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Winner of the 2013 National Jewish Book Award, Women's Studies

Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace explores the social and political activism of American Jewish women from approximately 1890 to the beginnings of World War II.

Written in an engaging style, the book demonstrates that no history of the birth control, suffrage, or peace movements in the United States is complete without analyzing the impact of Jewish women's presence. The volume is based on years of extensive primary source research in more than a dozen archives and among hundreds of primary sources, many of which have previously never been seen. Voluminous personal papers and institutional records paint a vivid picture of a world in which both middle-class and working-class American Jewish women were consistently and publicly engaged in all the major issues of their day and worked closely with their non-Jewish counterparts on behalf of activist causes.

This extraordinarily well researched volume makes a unique contribution to the study of modern women's history, modern Jewish history, and the history of American social movements.

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U.S History, Women’s Studies, and Jewish Studies: Teaching Guide

For students of U.S. History, Women’s Studies, and Jewish Studies, *Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace* provides a fresh look at women’s critical social and political activism during the first half of the twentieth century. Through an engaging and accessible narrative focused on Jewish women’s participation in the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the interplay of gender, religious, ethnic, and national identities. They will see how important a role Jewish women activists played in shaping not only the American Jewish community during a tumultuous period of immigration and consolidation but also in first-wave feminism. The narrative also conveys the ways in which anti-Semitism both at home and abroad shaped Jewish women’s activist experiences. The deeply researched book paints a vivid picture of a world in which both middle-class and working-class American Jewish women were consistently and publicly engaged in all of the major issues of their day and worked closely with their non-Jewish counterparts on behalf of activist causes.

CONTENTS

- Chapter Summaries with Discussion Questions
- Questions for Reflection
- Supplementary Assignments

Opening with a biographical vignette about a Jewish woman heavily involved in activities both inside the Jewish community and outside it, the introduction notes the great reform energy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. American Jewish women, whether native-born or immigrant, found that involvement in activist movements provided a path toward acculturation. Although they were secular movements, the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements formed a cluster of feminist activity that appealed greatly to large numbers of American Jewish women. A broadly conceived focus on maternalism as a rationale for women's activism allowed Jewish women to join these movements despite shadows of anti-Semitism, since motherhood was a value shared by American women across all kinds of class, ethnic, racial, religious, and national boundaries. American Jewish women activists have been absent from the literature on both first-wave American feminism and American Jewish history. Exploring their participation in the suffrage, birth control, and peace movements restores them to their rightful place and deepens our understanding of the complex process by which women fought for full citizenship in the United States.

The introduction serves as a foundation for the themes of the book, which include:

- The relationship of feminist causes such as suffrage, birth control, and peace to each other
- The ongoing feminist activism during the decades following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment
- The greater diversity within the women's movement than has typically been acknowledged
- The relationship between the development of the American Jewish community and the larger women's movement
- The ability of the women's movement to alter relations of power and to connect the personal and the political
- The tensions American Jews, like all ethnic groups, faced in balancing the benefits of acculturation with the preservation of their heritage
- The importance of thinking broadly about Jewish identity and identification in the lives of historical actors
- The persistence of anti-Semitism in even the most progressive social movements
- The simultaneous emergence of both Jews and women as political actors and citizens during the first half of the twentieth century

The introduction also places the book in the context of scholarship in the history of feminism, American Jewish history, American ethnic history, religious studies, and women's and gender studies. Almost none of the extensive archival material at the core of the book has ever been examined by scholars before.

“We Jewish Women Should be Especially Interested in Our New Citizenship”: American Jewish Women and the Suffrage Movement (pages 18-67)

SUMMARY

This chapter begins with a brief history of the suffrage movement in the United States and then explores multiple facets of American Jewish women’s involvement as individuals and members of both non-sectarian suffrage groups and Jewish women’s groups committed to enfranchisement. Jewish women played significant roles in a variety of suffrage campaigns from approximately 1890 through 1920. Though there was some ambivalence toward suffrage, exacerbated by various expressions of anti-Semitism in the movement, in general the American Jewish community supported women’s right to vote. This support was evident in everything from voting patterns to rabbis’ sermons to favorable coverage of the issue by the American Jewish press. Middle-class and working-class Jewish women found in suffrage a cause that could help bridge the gap between them, though important political differences persisted. In the aftermath of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, American Jewish women demanded more of a voice in their communal institutions such as synagogues and looked forward to continuing to exert their influence on the world around them.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ➔ What were the multiple ways in which Jewish women participated in the suffrage movement?
- ➔ In what ways did the American Jewish community support women’s right to vote?
- ➔ How did anti-Semitism affect Jewish women’s attitudes toward suffrage? What does this reveal about the social and religious limits of the past? Are there any present-day comparable situations?
- ➔ How did the diversity among Jewish women affect their experiences in the suffrage movement?
- ➔ What impact did women’s enfranchisement have on the American Jewish community?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Maud Nathan (Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives)
- Annie Nathan Meyer (Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives)
- Gretrude Weil at a suffrage demonstration (North Carolina Office of Archives and History)

“I Started to Get Smart, Not to Have So Many Children”: The American Jewish Community and the Early Years of the Birth Control Movement (pages 68-102)

SUMMARY

The desire to control the timing and spacing of childbirth is an ancient one, but the birth control movement per se took off during the early twentieth century as new technologies like diaphragms moved that control into women’s hands and became part of a highly politicized debate. This chapter investigates the early history of the birth control movement and the critical role Jewish women played in it, especially as “early adopters” and as activists fighting against the criminalization of many aspects of birth control and the classification of contraception as obscenity. The radical roots of the birth control movement in the United States meant that a substantial number of politically progressive Jewish women learned about contraception and adopted it early on as a means of personal autonomy and upward mobility. As contraception became somewhat more accessible to larger numbers of Jewish women, the American Jewish community conducted an extensive debate over birth control, eventually resolving in its favor, though pockets of resistance remained and found expression in cultural productions. Jewish women accustomed to politicizing domestic matters such as kosher meat consumption found that Judaism, which traditionally both celebrated and regulated (married) sexuality, proved fertile ground for birth control adoption and activism within the American Jewish community.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What connections were there between the suffrage and birth control movements?
- How did the radical roots of the birth control movement affect its reception within the American Jewish community?
- What impact did the birth control movement have on American Jewish culture and vice versa?
- In what ways did Jewish women participate in the early birth control movement?
- How and why did so many Jewish women gravitate toward the birth control movement when traditional Jewish culture emphasized the importance of motherhood?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Rose Heiman Halpern and her six children greet Margaret Sanger (Corbin/Bettman Archive)
- Rose Pastor Stokes (Library of Congress)
- Flyer advertising the Brownsville birth control clinic in English, Yiddish, and Italian (Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College)

“We United with Our Sisters of Other Faiths in Petitioning for Peace”: Jewish Women, Peace Activism, and Acculturation (pages 103-134)

SUMMARY

The women’s peace movement of the early twentieth century attracted activists of many backgrounds by explicitly foregrounding gender identity. American Jewish women found appealing this approach to peace work, which carried the additional benefit of fighting anti-Semitism worldwide. They also drew on Jewish texts and traditions, which encompassed multiple rationales for seeking peace. The imperative for peace strengthened following the first world war, as did the belief that women’s activism was necessary to bring an end to war. Individual Jewish women became major players in groups like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and Jewish women’s organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women and the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods gained international renown for their significant peace work through the 1920s.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How and why did a separate women’s peace movement emerge internationally following World War I?
- What were the multiple motivations for American Jewish women’s involvement in the peace movement? How did this activism contribute to their acculturation?
- In what ways did the American Jewish community support peace work? Oppose it? What role did anti-Semitism play in these communal attitudes?
- Why were so many Jewish women’s organizations so heavily focused on peace work? What were some of their activities in the movement?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Fanny and Arthur Brin with their children (Judith Brin Ingber)
- Lillian D. Wald (Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives)

“TheyHaveBeenthePioneers”:AmericanJewishWomenand the Mainstreaming of Birth Control (pages 135-173)

SUMMARY

During the 1920s and 1930s, the locus of the birth control movement shifted to the proliferation of clinics across the United States and the ultimately successful battles to remove many (though not all) of the legal restrictions on contraception. Jewish women continued to work for the movement as activists and professionals, serving through their organizations as particularly important advocates for local clinics. A disproportionate number of Jewish women doctors became the human face of the birth control clinics and also conducted important research on contraceptive techniques and usage. Various elements of the sometimes contentious American Jewish religious establishment took up the question of birth control and gradually came out in favor of it, following rather than leading the huge numbers of American Jewish women who used birth control with alacrity. Although concerns about the relationship between birth control and eugenics remained salient, in general American Jews acted in their own best interests in supporting the birth control movement and focusing on the potential for synchronicity among religion, traditional culture, and technology.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- In what ways were Jewish women connected to the birth control clinic movement and the fight to decriminalize contraception?
- What were so many Jewish women’s organizations’ motivations for offering such vigorous support to the birth control movement?
- Why were so many Jewish women doctors prominent in the movement?
- What were some of the Jewish religious debates over the issue of birth control?
- How is the importance of historical context especially apparent in any discussion of eugenics and birth control?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Hannah Mayer Stone (Library of Congress)
- Bessie Louise Moses (Planned Parenthood of Maryland Collection, University of Baltimore)

“Where the Yellow Star Is”: American Jewish Women, the Peace Movement, and Jewish Identity during the 1930s and World War II (pages 174-204)

SUMMARY

Although peace activists worldwide were riding a wave of optimism as the 1930s began, the world situation quickly deteriorated as totalitarian regimes came to power. Jewish women activists, well-informed about world events and connected to Jewish communities abroad, faced a deep crisis as their universalist ideals of peace increasingly came into conflict with the very particular threats posed by Hitler and Nazism to Jews and Judaism. The peace movement in general turned out to be ill-equipped to respond to such threats, and Jewish women felt great disappointment in the unwillingness of their long-time activist colleagues to take a stand. Anti-semitism, latent or otherwise, played a role in these dynamics. As the world careened toward war, growing numbers of Jewish women reluctantly sided with their religious/ethnic identity rather than their previous commitments to pacifism, though many chose to focus on helping to assure a peaceful postwar order. In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, some Jewish women’s groups found their previous pacifist stances embarrassing, and peace quietly slipped off their communal agenda for some time to come.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- ➔ In what ways were Jewish women heavily involved with the peace movement during the early 1930s?
- ➔ How did Jewish women and the American Jewish community more generally react to the growing threats of the 1930s? What happened as universalist ideas about peace came into conflict with particularist threats to Jews and Judaism in Europe?
- ➔ How did the larger women’s peace movement respond to the deteriorating world situation during the 1930s and then during World War II? Why were Jewish women peace activists so upset about this response? What role, if any, did anti-Semitism play?
- ➔ Why did Jewish identity become more important to peace activists during this period?
- ➔ What did Jewish women involved in peace work do once World War II broke out?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Rebecca Hourwich Reyher (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)
- Fanny Brin, Jane Addams, Hannah Greenebaum Solomon, and Elsa Levi at a National Council of Jewish Women meeting (Judith Brin Ingber)
- Estelle Sternberger delivering a radio broadcast (Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives)

(pages 205-209)

Reflecting on the role Jewishness played in women's activism during the first half of the twentieth century, the conclusion explores the multiple meanings of Jewish identity and considers the question of why Jewish women activists engaged in first-wave feminism have been invisible to historians in a way they were not at the time. The conclusion also broadens the implications of the book to include the role of gender in processes of acculturation more generally. American Jewish women during this period left a legacy of social and political activism that continues to shape both American feminism and the contours of the American Jewish community.

- What does it mean to focus on Jewish women in secular or non-sectarian social movements?
- What role did anti-Semitism play in both limiting and encouraging American Jewish women's activism?
- Although this book focuses first on gender, how does it also address other issues of diversity, including class, religion, national origins, religion, and race?
- How are the histories of each of these social movements changed by attending to Jewish women?
- How did their Jewishness figure prominently into the ways Jewish women viewed their own activism? Did it always do so?
- When, why, and how were tensions within the American Jewish community evident in this book? What can be learned from them?
- How do activists cope when reality challenges their deeply held visions and ideals?
- Why have historians of American women largely neglected religion and ethnicity in their analyses?
- How and why did participation in modern social movements enable Jewish women to grapple with becoming American citizens?
- When, why, and how did Jewish women's progressive activism either underline or come into conflict with their ethnic/religious identities?
- Which of the activist strategies that you read about do you think were most effective at the time? Do you think any of these strategies would work today? Why or why not?
- How do you make decisions about what social or political causes to be involved in?
- Are there elements of this history that surprised you? How and why?

- Select one of the women's movements for further research. Who are some of the other groups of activists who seem to be missing from the master narratives about these movements?
- Using periodicals from the time period (1890s-1940s), investigate the opposition to suffrage, birth control, or peace. What kinds of arguments did opponents of these movements mount? What kinds of activism did the opponents engage in? Were there any similarities between the groups of people supporting or opposing the cause?
- Investigate the history of second wave American feminism. What are the connections to the first wave feminism of earlier in the twentieth century?
- Jewish women were heavily involved in the labor movement and Zionism at the same time as suffrage, birth control, and peace. Research this activism, which took place within a much more ethnic/religious context, and compare it to their activism outside the Jewish community.
- Locate and read several sermons about war and peace (delivered by clergy of any religion or denomination). How can religion be used to strengthen peace movements? To undermine them?
- The birth control movement of the 1930s achieved success in eliminating some of the legal restrictions on contraception, but not all of them. Research the history of other major legal battles over birth control and reproductive rights.
- Design a campaign in support of some cause you believe in. How do you win people to your side?
- Explore some of the Jewish texts referred to in the book that served to support women's activism. Do you find this religious material convincing?