

Dirty Jew-Dirty Mexican: Denver's 1949 Lake Junior High School Gang Battle and Jewish Racial Identity in the Rocky Mountain West

On Friday, September 30, 1949, three Denver Police Department squad cars sped toward West Sixteenth Avenue and Newton Street, near Lake Junior High School. A “gang battle,” reportedly between thirty “Spanish-American” and “Jewish” students had broken out with an estimated crowd of three hundred spectators watching the melee. Before the police arrived, however, a quick thinking housewife with a garden hose had broken it up—literally dousing the flames of racial discontent. No one was hurt, but it was the largest Jewish-Mexican fight on Denver's West Side to date, and made for an eye-catching story in the *Rocky Mountain News*.¹

Though historians have largely ignored this event, much can be learned from it.² Indeed, the Jewish response to it, especially through the local chapter of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and its involvement in an interracial neighborhood council, demonstrated how Jewish racial identity was in part informed by the curious racial geography of the West—a racial geography that was too often shaped by contrast with Mexicans.³ This episode of Jewish-Mexican violence, as well as a few notable instances of anti-Semitism that were perpetrated by Denver's Anglo population, also suggest a more nuanced story than the conventional wisdom, both at the time as shared by contemporaries and retrospectively by historians, about Jews feeling safe and secure in Denver. Indeed, the classic story of Denver's Jews has been one of contented coexistence and very little difficulty. In 1930, for example, a columnist for the New York City-based *Forverts* proclaimed, “No one [in Denver] can feel really snubbing or snubbed, oppressing or oppressed amid the pleasant mountains and with plenty of pure

air, gentle breeze, and caressing sun around.” The reporter went on to write that “there have been and still are Jewish instructors and professors on the faculty of Denver University and the University of Colorado; Jewish judges on the local bench; Jewish social workers, men and women, on the municipal Board of Charities . . . and other similar organizations of Denver.”⁴ Echoing this buoyant sentiment in 1960, historian Allen duPont Breck wrote with unabashed confidence, “the period of the heroic pioneer [Jew] is never over.”⁵ More importantly, however, historians have argued that one of the primary reasons why the West was different from the East was because anti-Semitism was relatively absent and subdued.⁶ While this might hold true for some western cities, this was not the case in Denver, where it was present and at times extremely overt. Furthermore, coupled with a pronounced anti-Mexican sentiment among the broader Anglo community, anti-Semitism proved important in the formation of Jewish racial identity.

More broadly, however, such a case study is worthy of careful scholarly consideration precisely because it does focus on Jewish-Mexican interaction, rather than Jewish-black interaction. Without a doubt, the literature regarding Jewish-black interaction is rich, with many decades of fruitful and careful scholarship behind it.⁷ On the other hand, the study of Jewish-Mexican interaction in the West, and on a more general level, Jewish-Latino interactions in the United States, has received comparatively little attention from historians. In fact, the only notable exception to this trend has been George J. Sánchez’s optimistic treatment of the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles during the Cold War. In his article length study titled, “‘What’s Good for Boyle Heights is Good for the Jews’: Creating Multiculturalism on the Eastside During the

1950s,” Sánchez examined the social and political collaboration between a small group of Jews and Mexican Americans, and the positive impact that relationship had on “civil rights” and “radical multiculturalism” in the neighborhood.⁸ Indeed, it has only been in recent years that trailblazing historians like Ellen Eisenberg have begun to write book length studies on the often complex and contradictory relationships between Jews and other racial groups in the West.⁹ More to the point, however, the story of Jewish-Mexican interaction is significant and worthy of study because it is a story that can only be best told and understood in the context of the American West; simply put, place does matter, especially when it comes to American Jewish history. Therefore, with this emphasis on place, the following section will attempt to sketch the ethnic landscape of Denver’s West Side and demonstrate how Jews and Mexicans ultimately came to occupy the same geography. And it is in this geography, the racially complex American West at the macro level, and Denver’s West Side at the micro level, each of which, in some ways, shaped by racial tensions between Jews and Mexicans, that I will show how Jewish racial identity was formed at the juncture of anti-Semitism from Anglo society and an attempt at racial othering towards Mexicans.

The Geography of Ethnicity on Denver’s West Side

Denver is anchored by its longest street, Colfax Avenue, that runs the entire length of the city. Following Colfax Avenue due west, from downtown toward the majestic Rocky Mountains, Denver’s Jewish West Side once stretched from the banks of the South Platte River to Jefferson County’s border. Since the earliest days of eastern European Jewish migration to the city in the late nineteenth century, synagogues, Jewish agencies, and businesses were common in this section of the city and catered to a

population that was predominantly eastern European in heritage. In fact, by the early 1950s—the height of Jewish cultural influence in this area—institutions like the Hebrew Educational Alliance, Beth Israel Home and Hospital, the Jewish Consumptives Relief Society (later renamed the American Medical Center), and the Guldman Community Center offered concrete testimony to the ways Jews had invested in making this part of Denver their community.

The nucleus of this community was established in the late nineteenth century from the remnants of a failed agricultural colony in Cotopaxi, Colorado. Fleeing poverty, pogroms, boycotts and the draconian dictates of Czar Alexander III, over two million Jews left the Russian Empire for a better life somewhere else. Most of these refugees found their way to the eastern shores of the United States. However, urban centers like New York City soon became breeding grounds for diseases that included tuberculosis—otherwise known as the “white plague.” Due to this and other reasons, Jewish relief agencies like the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) endeavored to resettle a number of these Russian Jews in less crowded and seemingly more healthful parts of the country. One of these alternatives was the small mining town of Cotopaxi.¹⁰

Situated in a valley near the banks of the Arkansas River, Cotopaxi was an excellent location for mining, but not for agriculture; in fact, poor soils, freezing temperatures and flooding characterized the nature of the region. Unaware of this at the time, and deceived by smooth-talking promoters, officials at the HIAS rejected fertile alternatives such as Oregon and California, and instead chose to settle Russian Jews at Cotopaxi. According to Breck, twenty Russian families were sent by rail to the colony in 1882. Upon arrival to the settlement, they were shocked to see dilapidated housing and a

hostile environment not conducive to productive farming. More importantly, however, the men and women who were brought over to work this land were more accustomed to richer soils and in some cases had no experience in the practice of agriculture. After a particularly tough winter in 1882, some of the colonists began to abandon the colony for Denver, and by June of 1884, the Jewish agricultural experiment near the Arkansas River had officially ended. Nevertheless, from this failure emerged the seeds of Jewish settlement in the West Side of Denver along Colfax Avenue.¹¹

In the decades that followed, coreligionists from Russia, Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Hungary augmented the Cotopaxians who had resettled around Denver's main street, Colfax Avenue. These additional waves of settlement added to the vibrancy and complexity of the community and pushed Jewish settlement further west along the Colfax corridor. But Jews were not the only group building a community on the West Side, for closer to the core of the city lay an ethnic enclave that was slowly taking shape and would eventually come to dominate the makeup of the area into the late twentieth century and beyond.

During the 1920s and 1930s, growing numbers of Mexicans, mainly out of economic necessity, migrated from the coalfields of southern Colorado, and the beet fields in the north, to Denver. The late 1920s heralded the end of the halcyon days when coal was king in Colorado. Mine operators in southern Colorado towns like Walsenburg were hiring fewer men due to the increasing use of petroleum as a way to heat homes up and down the Front Range. Moreover, the ensuing Great Depression of the 1930s forced hardworking farm workers to abandon the beet field colonies of Weld and Larimer counties and look elsewhere for work. Some of these individuals eventually settled in the

Auraria, Baker, and Lincoln sections of West Denver, not far from the emerging Jewish neighborhood. The permanent Mexican-American population for all of Denver exceeded 12,000 by 1940, an impressive increase from 2,500 in the early 1920s. To put this in some perspective, the Jewish population for Denver was estimated to be 18,400 in 1937.¹²

Without question, the heart of the Mexican-American West Side was the Auraria neighborhood. One of the oldest sections of the city, Auraria was first home to Irish and German immigrants. Indeed, flourmills and breweries with their accompanying smells and sounds were common in this area. In 1866, for example, a German immigrant by the name of Moritz Sigi founded the Colorado Brewery. By the turn of the century, John Good had purchased the brewery and renamed it after the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Tivoli would remain an important landmark in the neighborhood for decades to come, wetting the whistles of many Westsiders.¹³

Although breweries were important to the character of the neighborhood, so were its houses of worship. In 1887, the Germans built St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church and School. That same year, the Irish, not to be outdone by the Germans, constructed St. Leo's Catholic Church. During this early period, in the same neighborhood just beyond the traditional Jewish part of town, there was even a small Orthodox congregation, Shearith Israel, which catered to Jewish businessmen working in the downtown area.¹⁴

By the first two decades of the twentieth century, these immigrants and their children began to move out of Auraria, renting their homes to a small but increasing stream of working-class Hispanics from Mexico, New Mexico, and the northern and southern regions of Colorado. In 1922, this population began to hold services in Spanish

in the basement of St. Leo's Catholic Church. However, as it grew larger, this arrangement became untenable. Acutely aware of this, a well-to-do Irish Catholic family, the Mullens, donated land and money to help found a new parish in the area. On March 21, 1926, St. Cajetan's Catholic Church officially opened. Built in the Spanish Colonial style, it soon became the center of Mexican-American life in Auraria, providing a school, clinic, and credit union. Moreover, mutual aid societies such as the Sociedad Mutualista Mexico and the Sociedad Protectora Hispana Americana began to form.¹⁵

In the 1940s, Mexican Americans began to settle in other parts of Denver, closer in proximity to Jewish neighborhoods along the West Colfax corridor. West Side public schools such as Lake Junior High School, which had once enjoyed overwhelming Jewish majorities throughout the 1920s and 1930s, now had to deal with a growing Mexican-American population. With this demographic shift came associated ethnic tension and outbreaks of violence in the streets and schools of the West Side. But understanding this interethnic turmoil first requires an analysis of the Mexican-American perspective, using it as a launching pad into a more complicated and richer rendering of what actually lay at the root of Jewish-Mexican violence.¹⁶

A Little Door into a Larger World: Recovering the Mexican-American Perspective

By the late 1940s, fights between Jews and Mexican Americans became familiar scenes along the West Side. However, the key difference with regard to the 1949 gang battle was the reaction that it engendered from within Denver's Jewish and Mexican-American communities. Most likely born of the *News*'s October 1 article, questions began to be raised, especially by the local Jewish press, as to how things had gotten so out of hand and what could be done about it. For example, the *Intermountain Jewish*

News, the most important Jewish newspaper in the region at the time, reported that in the wake of the schoolyard fight “complete Jewish cooperation” and “inter-racial friendship” was being sought in order to identify and remedy the underlying cause of the situation. The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith (ADL), a well-respected Jewish advocacy and intergroup relations organization, even intervened in order to make sense of the circumstances. And while the Jewish community was attempting to comprehend what had occurred near Lake Junior High School, Mexican-American families living in the area were beginning their own initial exploration into what exactly went wrong and what could be done about it.¹⁷

The first meeting held by Lake’s Mexican-American neighbors took place on October 3. Sponsored by the Rude Community Center, it assembled teachers, students, and community leaders from the Spanish speaking population to discuss the incident. Minutes of the meeting record people with last names like Del Toro, Guzman, Rodriguez, Borrego, Ulibarri, Mendez, and Maes sitting in the audience. No Jews attended. The stated purpose of the meeting was as follows: to make sure the assembled community leaders knew all the “facts” of the incident; to emphasize that the incident was strictly a school issue; and to determine whether or not there was systemic ill-will between Jews and Mexican Americans in the West Side neighborhood “and, if so, it is the job of the persons concerned . . . to plan jointly for and to work on such activities as will eradicate undesirable attitudes between [the] groups.”¹⁸

With regard to the first purpose, Tom Borrego, a Mexican-American teacher at Lake, informed those in attendance that on the day before the fight a Jewish boy was getting a drink of water when he was snapped with a rubber band. The boy allegedly

snapped back by calling a Mexican-American boy near him a “dirty Mexican.” Borrego reasoned that this might have been a cause of the September 30 incident. Furthermore, by the time the fight was about to occur, older brothers, probably from nearby North High School, came to help settle the score between the two middle schoolers. Finally, Chicano students who were at the meeting confirmed that no weapons had been used, and that there was not a crowd of hundreds watching the fist fight as the *News* had reported.¹⁹

Indeed, participants at the gathering fumed with anger at how Denver’s oldest newspaper had portrayed the incident to the greater Denver community. For example, why did the *News* even have to reveal the ethnicities of the two groups? Furthermore, the paper reported that “Spanish-American boys” were “chasing Jewish boys,” making Mexican Americans appear to be hoodlums in the eyes of other Denverites.²⁰

Statements such as these suggest that this was an occasion when the vulnerable social condition of the Mexican-American community came into play. Discrimination against Mexican Americans was widespread in Colorado, affecting every sector of life, including health care, recreation, schooling, law enforcement, and employment. Furthermore, it was not until the 1950s that Mexican-American organizations such as the GI Forum, the League of Latin American Citizens, the Colorado Latin American Conference, and the Latin American Education Foundation, began to draw much needed attention to these serious social inequities.²¹ Perhaps more tellingly, Mexican Americans living in Colorado and the rest of the country would have to wait until 1975 for the United States Congress to extend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to them and other Latinos.²²

As discussion in the meeting moved away from concerns about the *News*'s portrayal of the fight, the issue of day-to-day interactions with Jews arose. Everyone unanimously agreed that the tension between the two groups had been building for some time. For example, a rumor had been circulating among Mexican-American students at Lake that one of their own had left the neighborhood and "joined the 'Jewish religion' and the other boys did not like him for that and intended to get him for his 'High Hattedness' [snobbishness]." In addition, Mrs. Fernandez, the current president of the Parent-Teacher Association for Lake (PTA), remarked: "Many Spanish-American parents felt that the Jewish children think Lake belongs to them." And Mrs. Guzman, a former Lake PTA president, expressed that Jews initially made Mexican Americans feel unwelcome and uncomfortable when they went to PTA meetings. On the other hand, Guzman was more evenhanded when she articulated that there was undoubtedly prejudice on both sides and that there needed to be more self-examination between the two groups. The next issue tabled for debate was the presence of law enforcement in the neighborhood.²³

For many Mexican Americans at the meeting, there was a perception that Jews called the police to tell them that Mexicans were lurking in their neighborhoods and that they should patrol more frequently. In turn, this attitude amplified Mexican-American feelings of uneasiness and mistrust toward Jews. Were Mexican Americans being accused of something? Were the squad cars present because the Jewish community had the economic and political pull to get them assigned there, acting as bodyguards to "protect Jewish children from Spanish-American children[?]" This anxiety-filled

language appears to point toward something more deep-seated, specifically, an acute class and racial divide within the West Side community itself.²⁴

Jews in the area were upwardly mobile, owned their own businesses and homes, participated in significant numbers in the professions, and had an active civic life. Mexican Americans, on the other hand, were solidly working class, in many cases economically disadvantaged, and politically disenfranchised. This, perhaps, helps to explain the feeling among Mexican Americans that Jews were snobs who preyed on economically vulnerable Chicanos. Reminiscing about life in Auraria, Russel DeLeon, a Mexican American, recounted that a Jew owned “the corner store, and he had high prices on his stuff.” DeLeon’s sentiment is indicative of a middleman minority dynamic, where, according to sociologists Adalberto Aguire, Jr. and Jonathan H. Turner, the “clients of middleman minorities, especially those in the lower social classes . . . tend to exhibit hostility toward the petite bourgeoisie, who are viewed as mercenary and exploitive.” Consequently, it matters less whether Jews were in truth economically exploitive of Mexican Americans; what mattered was that Mexican Americans firmly believed that Jews were, which greatly intensified racial tension on the West Side.²⁵

At the conclusion of the meeting, the group recommended that local churches and organizations combat prejudicial attitudes toward Jews during sermons and social activities, explicitly acknowledging that Mexicans, like many other Christians in the city, harbored negative attitudes toward Jews. Moreover, a recommendation was made that all parents make a better effort at being involved in the lives of their children. It is likely that these recommendations fell flat, however, for they excluded the Jewish community from the dialogue and lacked any apparent follow through. On the other hand, this proved to be

a crucial moment of introspection for the Mexican-American community on the West Side. It started to come to terms with the unsettling reality that there was a systemic problem between Jews and Mexican Americans in the area.²⁶

While the Mexican-American perspective is useful, illustrating an acute class and racial divide within the neighborhood and uneasiness on the part of Mexicans, it does not fully account for why Jews would engage in interethnic violence with Chicanos on the West Side. In short, something is missing. Pulling back yet another layer, however, reveals that Denver's Jews experienced many forms of anti-Semitism over a period of time, ranging from social exclusion to outright murder, which likely generated an uneasiness about their place in Denver society and a need to establish themselves in the city's landscape in relationship to other minorities. In short, Jews' relationship to *Anglos* had much to do with how they shaped their relationship with *Mexicans*. It is to this theme that I now turn.

Not Quite White: Anti-Semitism in Denver

Anti-Semitism in Denver manifested itself in many ways and affected virtually every Jew in the city regardless of socioeconomic status. Indeed, even well established and wealthy pioneer Jewish families—who were mostly of Central European origin—were not immune from the phenomenon. Thus, the history of anti-Semitism in Denver goes back to the earliest days of large Jewish settlement in the city. Amy Salomon, for example, a member of a wealthy German Jewish family, remembered her classmates heaving rocks at her and calling her a Christ killer.²⁷ Moreover, in 1903, turning from Christian to more racial anti-Semitism, a popular Unitarian minister in the city declared, “It's the Jewish race, not the Jewish church that is disliked. If free intermarriage with us

[Anglos] should be adopted the race hatred would vanish in three generations.”²⁸ In other words, the Reverend David Utter wanted a genocide of Jews through intermarriage. Although disturbing, these were not the worst manifestations of anti-Semitism that the Mile-High City had to offer.

On Christmas day in 1905—the very same year hundreds of Jews were being massacred in the Russian Empire—a gentile mob rampaged through the streets of Denver and successfully lynched Jacob Weisskind and severely injured Mendel Slotkin.²⁹ Philip Lynd and Philip Keiser, two German Denverites, orchestrated the violence. According to the *News*, shortly before three in the afternoon Lynd and Keiser spotted Weisskind and Slotkin—“loading a quantity of scrapiron on a flatcar of the Colorado and Southern at the Larimer street crossing”—a few blocks west of downtown. At first, the two hoodlums only verbally harassed the junkmen, heckling them for laboring on Christ’s birthday. Losing patience, however, Weisskind and Slotkin told the thugs “to go about their business.” Enraged, Lynd and Keiser vowed “vengeance” on the two unsuspecting Jews and retreated to the nearby saloons of Larimer Street.³⁰ A short time later, a mob consisting of “fifteen or twenty men” returned to the tracks where Weisskind and Slotkin were still working and began to beat them with stones, bricks and iron, slashing their faces and breaking their bones; in fact, they “crushed” Weisskind’s skull.³¹ While doing this, according to the Jewish paper at the time, the *Jewish Outlook*, Lynd and Keiser reportedly yelled out that they were “aveng[ing] the blood of Christ by shedding the blood of . . . Christkillers.”³² The story made national news two days later when the *Los Angeles Times* remarked that the situation in Denver “seemed just like Russia.”³³ Slotkin recovered from his wounds, but Weisskind died from complications stemming from his

head injury on February 14.³⁴ The *Outlook* later reported on the trial and conviction of Lynd and Keiser, contrasting in black and white the impassioned pleas of the prosecutor, Greely Whitford, for a verdict of murder in the first degree with the jury's shocking verdicts of voluntary and involuntary manslaughter.³⁵ The sentences, four to six years for Lynd and seven months fourteen days for Keiser, were in the words of the reporter, "altogether too light for the grave crime."³⁶

By June 1906, and in the wake of the devastating verdicts of the Weisskind trial, there was a brief attempt to strengthen Jews' position in Denver society. Indeed, the *Outlook* began to chastise the Denver dailies for their habit of distinguishing Jews from other whites when they were arrested for crimes. "By what right," wrote columnist Alfred Patek, "does the newspaper drag into its nauseating details the religion which the criminals at some time in the past, or their ancestors, may have professed." Patek went on to conclude that "the use of the word Jew [in this context] is but the outcropping of what in all generosity we will term a latent prejudice."³⁷

However, in 1907, latent prejudice once more transformed into overt hatred when two more Russian Jews, Michael Weisblye and Tevyah Bokser, were "brutally murdered" on West Colfax. Their assailants, Harold McKnaw and Wilbur F. Gilmer were given similar sentences to the defendants in the Weisskind trial, suggesting anti-Semitism on the part of the jury that did not see the victims as full citizens.³⁸ In contrast to these minimal punishments for murder, a Jewish youth by the name of Nathan Goldstein was sentenced to five to ten years in the state penitentiary for petty larceny in 1909. To add insult to injury, the presiding judge claimed that he was being lenient on Goldstein, who was also suffering from a severe case of tuberculosis. However, the *Denver Times* did

refrain from directly mentioning in the article that Goldstein was a Jew, reflecting a small but fleeting victory for the beleaguered community. On the other hand, Goldstein's name might have been sufficiently recognizable as Jewish that there was no need to include any ethnoreligious marker beside it. Regardless, the message was clear: there was no justice for Jews in the Mile-High City.³⁹

In the 1920s, Denver's Jews had more reason to feel insecure with the ascendancy of the Ku Klux Klan. By 1925 the mayor of Denver, the state governor, and one U.S. senator were known to be Klansmen.⁴⁰ Keenly aware of who wielded power in the Mile-High City, most Jews remained studiously silent in an effort not to incur the wrath of the blatantly anti-Semitic organization. However, this silence did not stop the Klan from boycotting Jewish businesses and parading through the Jewish West Side as they were on their way to burn a cross on Table Mountain above the city of Golden.⁴¹ More tellingly, however, Denver's most prominent and respected Reform rabbi, William S. Friedman, urged all of his congregants at Temple Emanuel—the city's largest and oldest synagogue—to not bring attention to themselves while the Klan ruled the city.⁴² Furthermore, Friedman opposed a plan by local attorney Charles Ginsberg to take out an advertisement in the *Denver Post* condemning the Klan's corruption of the judiciary.⁴³

On the other hand, there was good reason to remain silent and inconspicuous when it came to the Klan. Indeed, in 1920, Denver resident William W. Clawson had cold bloodedly murdered Joseph Zuckerman and been acquitted by a jury of his peers. Reporting on the verdict in 1920, the *Denver Jewish News*—the successor to the *Outlook*—declared that it was a “miscarriage of justice.” In the same article, attorney Joseph F. Jaffa remarked: “The season for the ruthless mauling and slaying of Jewish

horse and cattle traders and peddlers seems to be an open one in Denver. At least as far back as I can recall it has never been closed.”⁴⁴ More than four decades after the trial, however, Ginsberg disclosed that the not guilty verdict was attributable to the hooded nature of the judge, jury, and the defendant. But more important than that disclosure is the fact that Ginsberg actually *remembered* the execution of Zuckerman and the acquittal of his executioner, suggesting that even an elderly Jewish lawyer did not easily forget anti-Semitism in Denver. Furthermore, Jaffa’s original comment about the murder seems to reinforce the notion that Jews did not immediately forget the violence gentiles perpetrated against them. Nonetheless, there were no parades, plaques, or special observances memorializing the lynching of Weisskind, or any of the other killings for that matter. Such a lack of memorialization suggests a communal effort to gradually and purposefully forget incidents that would only serve as painful reminders of just how conspicuous and vulnerable Denver’s Jewish community actually was.⁴⁵ Moreover, in this context it would have been suicidal to memorialize, and thus Jews lived in a context that did not permit the establishment of public memory. Instead, it is driven underground, in private individual memories, and was reanimated through new experiences of discrimination. In effect, people remember it through the silent imperative to remain unobtrusive and through the re-experiencing of other forms of oppression.⁴⁶

However, forgetting or ignoring anti-Semitism was a difficult task in the Mile-High City. For example, even in the late 1940s and early 1950s Jews were routinely denied membership in many of the elite men’s clubs, including the Denver Club, University Club, and Denver Athletic Club.⁴⁷ Moreover, Jews consistently found themselves barred from certain Denver neighborhoods due to religious covenants and

bigoted real estate agencies and homeowners' associations. For example, one real estate firm, the Bromfield Company, proudly had as its sign, "These Homes are Insured by Protective Covenants," which stood as a visible symbol to Jews that they were not welcomed. Indeed, these "gentleman's agreements" would only end in the late 1950s due to intensive pressure from the ADL.⁴⁸

And during the 1940s and 1950s, at his tabernacle on 125 South Sherman, the Reverend Kenneth Goff walked in the footsteps of Progressive era preachers and the Klan by stoking the flames of anti-Semitism. With hateful sermons and incendiary literature, Goff linked Jews to virtually every social, economic and political ill, including communism. Of course, viewing Jews as inveterate communists had long been a focus of anti-Semitic propaganda beginning in the early twentieth century. Indeed, Henry Ford, Father Coughlin and a host of other anti-Semites "recycled" this lie in the United States.⁴⁹

But recovering Denver's anti-Semitic past only takes one so far analytically. After all, the power relations involved in all of the anti-Semitic incidents outlined above say more about Anglo-Jewish relations than they do about Jewish-Mexican ones. In these cases, Jews were the persecuted religious minority in Denver's white Christian landscape. Therefore, comprehending the totality of the 1949 gang battle also requires an examination of the curious racial geography of the West—a racial geography that was too often shaped by Jews contrasting themselves with Mexicans.

The Necessity to Hate: Jewish Attitudes Toward Mexican Americans on the West Side and the 1949 "Gang Battle"

In his influential study, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, historian Eric L. Goldstein found that geography played an important role in how Jews constructed their racial identities. Moreover, it was "how Jews *negotiated* their

place in a complex racial world” that mattered more than the cumbersome question of how Jews became white, which was unsuccessfully answered by anthropologist Karen Brodtkin. Indeed, Ellen Eisenberg, building on Goldstein’s astute observation of “a complex racial world,” demonstrated that Jews living in California, Oregon and Washington State “reflected the peculiarities of a western ethnic landscape in which . . . [they] were part of an ‘Anglo’ world that was defined, in part, by contrast with Japanese Americans, the region’s most conspicuous non-white group.”⁵⁰

In a similar way, the racial “peculiarities” of Colorado revolved around whites contrasting themselves with Mexicans. Indeed, during the Great Depression, Governor Edwin Johnson declared martial law along the border with New Mexico and deployed the Colorado National Guard there to keep Mexicans out of the state. In similar illegal and xenophobic acts, he demanded the expulsion of Mexican beet workers and deported Mexican-American citizens from Colorado Springs. State wide as well, relief agencies and county commissioners routinely lamented seeing Spanish surnamed individuals on their roles. In Colorado’s schools, too, children of Mexican heritage dealt with racially inflected taunts from Anglo children, ranging from “dirty Mexican” to “greaser.” And as previously demonstrated, Jewish school children in Denver were not above using identical racial epithets against Mexican-American classmates. Indeed, Jews living in the Hollenbeck section of Los Angeles in the postwar period used similar racial slurs to describe Mexican neighbors. “Jews,” wrote Allison Varzally, “were taught by their mothers to tell Mexican youngsters looking for friendship, ‘You’re dirty, you have a disease. I can’t play with you.’” But of more consequence to this case study is a report that was produced on the heels of the disturbance near Lake.⁵¹

On the morning of October 1, the same day that the *News* broke the story of the September 30 disorder, the ADL dispatched Nathan Perlmutter, a representative of the organization to investigate. Over the course of two days, Perlmutter interviewed five eyewitnesses to the fight and compiled a detailed report based upon his findings. More than just a dry recounting of the September 30 incident, this document provides a rare, but admittedly limited glimpse into the attitudes of Denver's Jews toward Mexican Americans. More importantly, however, it suggests that Jews living on the West Side were adopting a regional definition of whiteness based on contrast with Mexicans.⁵²

In Perlmutter's report, initial rumors about the fight within the Jewish community were circulated with erroneous and inflammatory details of Mexican-American youths knifing Jewish school children—echoing an Anglo attitude of Mexicans as violent and sinister.⁵³ In a similar fashion, interviewees in Perlmutter's report also imagined Mexican-American youths with menacing weapons. For example, the Gamzey children, Allan Boxer, and Mrs. Zellinger (the unidentified woman in the *News* article who hosed down the combatants) consistently accused Mexican-American students of carrying and using knives, even though no such weapons were actually used or seen during the September 30 melee. In addition to frightening “killing knives,” Perlmutter detailed how Jewish children associated other brutish weapons with overly aggressive Mexican-American youths. “Spanish-American children,” he wrote, “fought with taps on their shoes, chains, boards and buckled belts.”⁵⁴ But did this mean, as Perlmutter concluded, that Jewish boys systemically feared their Mexican American peers? I propose that if that was the case then Jewish boys would have most likely avoided physical confrontations with well-armed Mexican-American boys. On the other hand, a more likely explanation

might be that Jewish boys actively sought out fights with their Mexican-American counterparts in order to assert Jewish, and by extension, Anglo dominance over the neighborhood. Had not their fathers achieved similar ends through their businesses and professions, engendering a feeling—although probably unjustified—among Mexican Americans that Jews unfairly overcharged for goods and services in the neighborhood? This also speaks to Jews’ attempting to assert a more robust masculinity, diverging from the seemingly weak and effeminate Jews who shunned direct confrontation with the Klan in the 1920s. Indeed, Perlmutter found in a phone interview with Mrs. Zellinger that Jewish boys routinely objected to suggestions of extra police patrols in the area because it might reflect upon them as “sissies.” Allan Boxer, for example, recounted a fight where his mettle as a budding white Jewish male was tested against no less than “15 or 20” Mexican-American boys who ruffed him up in the presence of two girls he was walking home.⁵⁵ Simply put, Boxer and other Jewish boys were portraying themselves as “tough Jews” in a racial landscape that was largely defined by contrast with Mexicans.⁵⁶ With regard to the Lake incident itself, it was a Jewish student, Clifton Katz, who had “passed the rumor around the school that Sam Handler [a Jewish boy had] ‘beat up’ Pete Pedilla [a Mexican-American boy],” igniting the series of events that led to the confrontation near Lake. However, this important detail was relayed to Perlmutter with a qualification—that Katz had been ordered by Pedilla to spread the rumor in the first place. So how can this inconsistency be properly reconciled?⁵⁷

It appears that Perlmutter gathered this important piece of information from Saul Gayton, a Mexican-American boy who was friends with Jews in the neighborhood. Gayton characterized himself in the interview as being “on the side of the Jewish boys.”

Moreover, Gayton went to great lengths to articulate to Perlmutter the moral depravity of his own Mexican-American peers by stating that they “drink intoxicants whereas the Jewish friends of his do not.” Furthermore, the Jewish boys, according to Gayton, grouped together for protection, not necessarily to attack Mexican-American students (although they could have been doing both). Simply put, Gayton most likely fabricated the detail about Pedilla ordering Katz to spread the gossip in order to shift responsibility onto the Mexican-American participants and away from his Jewish friends, thereby absolving them of any blame. It worked, for Perlmutter underlined this detail in his report and recommended that the League use Gayton “in any school program decided upon by the ADL and the school authorities.” Unsurprisingly, Gayton “impressed” Perlmutter as “an unusually fine young man”; however, this was not because of Gayton’s apparent honesty or decorum, but because he recapitulated a curiously Anglo attitude of defective Mexican morality that was familiar to Perlmutter and other ADL officials. This is by no means a suggestion that Gayton wanted to be white, but that his attitudes toward other Mexican Americans closely resembled those of the Jews with whom he associated and called friends. On the other hand, understanding Gayton’s mentality is beyond the scope of this study, and speaks more to the state of Mexican-American identity in the postwar period more than anything else. Moreover, Perlmutter might have found Gayton “unusual” simply because he expressed sympathetic attitudes toward Jews.⁵⁸

Although Perlmutter was somewhat veiled in his attitudes toward Mexican Americans, other ADL officials in Denver were not. For example, in a confidential letter to his personal files J. Peter Brunswick remarked:

As a reaction to the treatment and position of the Jewish child, [better

socioeconomic status] the Spanish American child manifests an aggression complex, which is the result of his subconscious feeling of inferiority. . . . It is obvious that the low academic quotient is a result of a lack of appreciation of education and school. It may be safely assumed that few of the Spanish-American children are being kept home to study, by their parents, who in most cases, are even less educated than their children.⁵⁹

Historian Arnoldo De León found that Anglos in Texas systematically viewed Mexican culture as “backward,” “primitive,” and “firmly against innovation.” Moreover, De León continued, Anglos habitually identified “Mexican sections of urban areas with vice, licentiousness, and moral degradation.” But most importantly, there was a long-standing Anglo tradition in the West of perceiving Mexicans as cruel and naturally inclined to violence. For example, stories of Mexican atrocities against whites in the Lone Star State were common, usually stirring up passionate feelings of revenge among white populations. Furthermore, Sarah Deutsch found that similar stereotypes pervaded in Colorado. “Visions of lawless and irresponsible hordes,” she wrote, “visions unanchored by statistics, floated in the public mind.” Therefore, in a broader historical context, Jews’ attitudes toward Mexicans in the West Side of Denver were remarkably similar to their Anglo contemporaries. More importantly, however, such attitudes demonstrate that Jews were attempting to invalidate any comparison between themselves and Mexicans, thereby accentuating their affinity with the broader pan-ethnic white community.⁶⁰

Despite this pervasively negative attitude toward Mexicans, Perlmutter and other ADL officials did recognize that there was a severe problem between the two groups and that something had to be done about it; whether Jews were at least partly to blame for the

situation was another story. Regardless, the next step in dealing with the neighborhood's interracial tension and violence went beyond conducting interviews, or even the writing of detailed reports, (which the ADL was quite good at). Indeed, it took the form of an interracial neighborhood council where Jews, Mexican Americans, and Anglos could meet, talk, and “develop better understandings . . . between pupils, teachers, parents and other people in the Lake community.”⁶¹

Resolution: The Formation of the Lake Junior High School Human Relations Council and the Jewish Exodus from the West Side

Established in November of 1949, the Lake Junior High School Human Relations Council (LHRC) was emblematic of a national trend that historian Stuart Svonkin identified as the “intergroup relations movement.” This movement developed a set of principles that advocated “improved relations among racial, ethnic, and religious groups”; equal opportunity for all groups”; and “improvement of the quality of life within these groups.” Within this multiethnic movement, Svonkin continued, “Jewish organizations played the leading role in defining . . . tactics and objectives.” For example, in the aftermath of the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles (a severe outbreak of anti-Mexican sentiment), the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation Council of Los Angeles led the way in fostering productive partnerships between ethnic groups in the city. And in other western cities, such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland, Jews spearheaded the formation of committees and councils that advocated equality and cooperation. Furthermore, secular Jewish agencies like the ADL and the American Jewish Committee, which had originally been created to combat anti-Semitism, even embraced the principles of the intergroup relations movement by reaching out to African Americans and other groups in order to combat discrimination in housing, education and

employment. And for those secular Jewish agencies in particular, the struggle against anti-Semitism was strongly associated with the struggle against all forms of prejudice. In short, what affected one group affected all groups.⁶²

But as Svonkin has observed, the staff members of these Jewish agencies and other intergroup relations organizations also believed that eradicating social conflict benefited the country as a whole. In other words, fostering harmonious intergroup relations during World War II and into the Cold War period meant undermining the enemies of democracy both domestically and internationally. Therefore, although Jews stridently contrasted themselves with Mexican Americans, this did not necessarily preclude a powerful ideological desire, especially among members of secular Jewish agencies like the ADL, to establish peace, understanding and “inter-racial friendship” in the community. This meant that an ADL official like Brunswick could privately harbor ill will toward Mexicans, but simultaneously believe that it was his patriotic duty as an American to foster interracial tranquility in the neighborhood. In fact, Brunswick served as the ADL’s representative on the LHRC.⁶³ On the other hand, this also meant that Jews could finally stop having to prove themselves vis-à-vis Mexicans precisely by being magnanimous towards them. In short, I am suggesting that Jews were playing the role of benevolent whites, unlike the establishment, Christian, anti-Semitic whites.

Evidence suggests that the ADL, along with other ethnic and religious advocacy agencies in Denver, played an important role in guiding the LHRC in its program of intergroup relations at Lake. The few surviving minutes from the LHRC and records from the ADL hint at a bifurcated approach to the problems at the school: a sociological study of the area and activities that fostered harmony and understanding between groups. As

was indicative of intergroup relations organizations of the period, the LHRC employed “scientific research to analyze and counteract ethnic, religious, and racial bigotry.” Put another way, the approach to eradicating prejudice was similar to fighting a virulent disease, such as tuberculosis or polio.⁶⁴ For example, the LHRC, in conjunction with its member organizations, which consisted of the ADL, the Mayor’s Human Relations Commission, the Denver Unity Council, the Latin American Education Council, Denver Public Schools (DPS), and the Urban League, developed a comprehensive survey to measure “the basic inter-cultural problems in the community and to chart the course of action in their solution.”⁶⁵ Although the raw data and conclusions from this study is likely lost, a surviving copy of the questionnaire sent out to Lake’s parents provides some idea as to how the LHRC and its members approached the difficulties at Lake. Many of the questions posed by the survey focused on the possible causes of conflict within the community; for example, lack of good parenting, the staff at Lake, socioeconomic disparities, and ethnoreligious misunderstanding. Still other queries asked how those problems could be best addressed. Some of the solutions, for instance, ranged from increased police patrols to more activities that encouraged intergroup understanding. The study’s findings, it is reasonable to conclude, were put to good use by the LHRC and its member organizations.⁶⁶

By September 1950, the *Intermountain Jewish News* reported that conditions at Lake had markedly improved since the previous year’s violence. DPS made physical improvements to the school, and extra “athletic facilities and equipment are planned.” Moreover, representatives from the LHRC told the *Intermountain Jewish News* that teachers at Lake were making efforts at “better understanding” between students by

“pointing out the contributions of various racial and religious groups at every opportunity.” Bert Levin, a Jewish student at Lake, “opined that assemblies dealing with interracial relations last year ‘did a lot of good. As you go thru Lake . . . you make these kids your friends,’ referring to boys and girls of other faiths.” However, other students at the school, including Connie Martinez and Freyda Blumberg were more reluctant, cautioning that interracial cooperation and understanding should be allowed to grow naturally and not be forced. But forced it was.⁶⁷

In conjunction with DPS, the ADL championed joint observances of Chanukah and Christmas at Lake and other schools within the district, asserting Jewish Americanness and whiteness in the city’s racial hierarchy. Michael L. Freed, mountain states regional director of the ADL, expressed to Harry Nicholson, Lake’s principal, his “gratification over your splendid joint observance I was privileged to witness yesterday. In my opinion it reflected a fine understanding about, and keen sensitivity of, the many complex problems inherent in the subject matter.” In fact, throughout the country the ADL and other Jewish organizations were advocating for joint observances of Christmas and Chanukah in order to build harmony and intergroup understanding and to assert Judaism’s place at the American table. In Elizabeth, New Jersey, for example, the *National Jewish Post* reported that a Reform temple, Beth El, had “launched the community’s first Hanukah workshop for public school principals and teachers” to learn the history and customs of the Festival of Lights. It is fair to assume that programs such as the ones described above played an important role in easing intergroup tension at Lake and other schools in Denver and across the country. However, of more consequence to this case study was the movement of Jews out of the West Side, which likely brought

about a gradual end to the interracial tension and violence between the two groups and to the LHRC.⁶⁸

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jews on the West Side were abandoning their older homes for the newer, whiter, and more fashionable neighborhood of Hilltop in southeastern Denver, signaling their new realization of having successfully achieved their distancing from Mexicans in the racial geography that now needed to be manifested in physical geography. The 1960 federal census documented 43,147 Spanish-Americans in Denver, out of a total population of close to half a million.⁶⁹ The Jewish population of the Mile-High City, however, hovered around 21, 500.⁷⁰ In the wake of this dramatic demographic shift, the West Side's only Jewish community center, the Guldman Center, shutdown in 1964 and a new one was established near Hilltop.⁷¹ On the other hand, for those Jews who could not afford to move or chose to stay, they found that they had to adapt in the wake of a rapidly changing West Side. For example, Phil's Grocery, a fixture in the neighborhood since the late 1940s, began to sell Mexican food alongside Jewish food. Moreover, a Spanish language newspaper in Denver honored Phil Rosen, the proprietor of the establishment, for his "fairness and concern for his customers"—a noticeable change from previous accusations of Jewish merchants preying on economically vulnerable Mexicans.⁷²

But even though individual Jews and their families were moving out of the West Side, signaling their literal geographic movement into white Denver, that did not mean that secular Jewish agencies like the ADL and the American Jewish Committee were abandoning their intergroup relations principles or forgetting the social and economic plight of Mexican Americans. Quite to the contrary, Jewish munificence toward

Mexicans intensified. A desire to continue to play the role of benevolent whites, and the rise of the Chicano Movement in Denver and across the West during the late 1960s and early 1970s, meant that those agencies would utilize their resources in an important effort to advocate directly on behalf of Mexican Americans—primarily through the development and implementation of educational programming in secondary school and college curriculums and by founding, financing, and administratively supporting Mexican-American organizations. For example, in the late 1960s, the ADL launched “Project Mexican American” in an effort to eradicate cultural insensitivity toward Mexican Americans in western school districts and colleges. And the American Jewish Committee helped found Centro Cultural, a Mexican-American civil rights agency in Denver.⁷³

Conclusion: Moving Beyond the Optimistic

The 1949 gang battle, the ADL’s response to it through the LHRC, and a very real history of anti-Semitism, suggest that Denver’s Jews were not as at home in their scenic Rocky Mountain setting as once previously thought; in fact, evidence suggests that they were “uneasy at home.” To be sure, Jews had achieved a great degree of political, professional and economic success in Denver, helping to build a remarkable city. However, that outward veneer of success and self-assuredness did not necessarily guarantee that Jews felt inwardly secure about their position in the hierarchy of the city. Indeed, that internal insecurity occasionally manifested itself in the form of behavior and language that stridently contrasted Jews with Mexicans. Furthermore, social exclusion in elite men’s clubs and real estate, being stoned and called Christ killers, and instances of murder and outright lynching, all created a painful memory—at least for some Jews—of

anti-Semitism in the city. But for the most part, Denver's Jews either could not or chose not to publically memorialize those events, not wanting to further endanger themselves or be formally reminded of just how conspicuous and vulnerable they actually were. Compounding that situation was also the Jewish West Side's proximity to a growing Mexican-American enclave, which only intensified the desire to distance. Moreover, even ADL officials succumbed to this phenomenon, inventing contrasts with Mexican Americans, especially by pointing out perceived psychological deficiencies. This palpable uneasiness, I suggest, only made Jews on the West Side breathe deeper the toxic fumes of anti-Mexican sentiment that existed in Denver, Colorado, and the West—all in an effort to shape a racial identity that was more Anglo than Other.⁷⁴

However, intergroup relations principles, combined with an acute crisis and embarrassing press coverage, required Jews to work toward some kind of cooperation with their Mexican-American neighbors, allowing for the organization of an interracial council that was devoted to reestablishing calm on the West Side. Nevertheless, it was those very same principles that permitted Jews like J. Peter Brunswick to inwardly harbor scorn toward Mexican Americans, but outwardly serve on councils with them in the spirit of cooperation. Indeed, cooperating with Mexican Americans during the 1940s and 1950s was primarily in the interest of domestic tranquility and fighting anti-Semitism, and to finally assert a more rooted place in Denver's racial geography (someone else needed looking after as an oppressed minority, not the Jews) not necessarily to better the condition of Mexican Americans in Denver; in fact, if that occurred, then it was a bonus, but not an intended goal. And it would not be until the 1960s and 1970s, when most Jews

had left the West Side, that secular Jewish agencies would actually fight against prejudice against Mexican Americans, particularly in the schools.

Such motivations, however, did not diminish the fact that the ADL and the LHRC had improved conditions at Lake and other schools, chiefly through scientific surveys and joint observances of Christmas and Chanukah. But it is hard to deny that by the late 1950s Jews were leaving the West Side, constructing the most powerful barrier of all between themselves and Mexican Americans—that of physical separateness and segregated neighborhoods. What had once only existed in the mind now became an unbridgeable reality.

Finally, I have endeavored to go beyond the optimistic and triumphal tone of many historians in western American Jewish history, or American Jewish history for that matter, and inject an element of healthy skepticism—a skepticism of how truly “minimal” or relatively absent “overt” anti-Semitism was in the West; and a skepticism of how really self-assured western Jewish populations actually were. While this essay has examined just one instance of Jewish insecurity, it suggests that certain aspects of Jewish life in the West were not that different from the contested and sometimes violent and cruel urban spaces of the East.⁷⁵

¹ *Rocky Mountain News*, October 1, 1949, 22. Whenever practicable or to make a broader historical point, I do not alter the terms by which historical actors in the sources refer to themselves or to other ethnic groups. This also shows an evolution in how ethnic groups perceive themselves and others. However, for material outside of quotes, and for the sake of continuity and clarity, I refer to Jewish Americans mainly as “Jews”; those of Mexican heritage living in the United States as “Mexicans,” “Chicanos,” or “Mexican Americans”; and gentile whites as “Anglos.”

² This event is briefly mentioned by Allen duPont Breck in *The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado, 1859-1959* (Denver: The Hirschfield Press, 1960), 278. Yet Breck only mentioned the incident in passing giving it little analysis. The incident is also briefly mentioned by lawyer and historian Tom I. Romero in “Our Selma is Here: The Political and Legal Struggle for Educational Equality in Denver, Colorado, and Multiracial Conundrums in American Jurisprudence,” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* (Fall/Winter 2004), 78. Romero, however, is primarily interested in Chicano history and like Breck gives it little thought; in fact, it is only given a word or two in the endnotes.

³ I will elaborate on the origin of the idea of a racial “landscape” or “geography” later on in the article.

⁴ *Forverts*, January 19, 1930, English section, 1. I would like to thank Gennady Estraiikh for coming across this article and forwarding it to David Shneer.

⁵ Breck, *Centennial History*, ix. For optimistic accounts of Jews in Denver and Colorado see Jeanne Abrams, *Dr. Charles Spivak: A Jewish Immigrant and the American Tuberculosis Movement* (University Press of Colorado, 2009); Breck, *Centennial History*; and Ida Uchill, *Pioneers, Peddlers, and Tsadikim* (Denver: Sage Books, 1957; reprint, Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000). Page citations are to the reprint edition. To be fair, however, Uchill does have a nine-page chapter in her over three hundred page narrative that does at least describe anti-Semitism in Denver. Indeed, this chapter served as an important starting point for my research on the theme. Nevertheless, it suffers from an antiquarian approach and is a detour in a larger narrative of progress, success and eventual acceptance. Moreover, Uchill asserts that social anti-Semitism was of no concern to most Jews in the city and totally omits the strife between Jews and Mexicans on the West Side of Denver. On the other hand, credit should go to Uchill for mentioning anti-Semitism in her book. Indeed, without her pioneering work scholars like me would not have been able to easily find many important primary sources documenting anti-Semitism in Denver and put it in its proper context.

⁶ John Livingston, “Introduction,” in *Jews of the American West*, eds. John Livingston and Moses Rischin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 21; Jeanne Abrams, *Jewish Women Pioneering the Frontier Trail* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 11.

⁷ See Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Eric J. Sundquest, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post*

Holocaust America (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Jack Saltzman and Cornel West, eds., *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

⁸ George J. Sánchez, “‘What’s Good for Boyle Heights is Good for the Jews’: Creating Multiculturalism on the Eastside During the 1950s,” *American Quarterly* 56: 3 (September 2004), 634. Studies diverging from the black-Jewish paradigm and focusing on a multiethnic approach to the West include Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Shana Bernstein, “Building Bridges at Home in a Time of Global Conflict: Interracial Cooperation and the Fight for Civil Rights in Los Angeles, 1933-1954,” Ph.D diss., Stanford University, 2003.

⁹ Ellen Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice? Western Jews and Japanese Removal During WWII* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

¹⁰ Breck, *Centennial History*, 80; Uchill, *Pioneers*, 173-174.

¹¹ Breck, *Centennial History*, 74-80; Uchill, *Pioneers*, 173-174.

¹² Richard Gould, *The Life and Times of Richard Castro* (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 2007), 65-66; Carl Abbot, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 4th ed. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005), 357; Breck, *Centennial History*, 321.

¹³ Jodi Michelle Summers, “Auraria: From Neighborhood to Campus” (Masters’s thesis, University of Colorado, Denver, 2003), 32-39.

¹⁴ Summers, “Auraria,” 32-39; Jeanne Abrams, *Jewish Denver, 1859-1940* (Charleston: Arcadia Press, 2007), 69.

¹⁵ Summers, “Auraria,” 32-39; Abbot, Leonard, and Noel, *Colorado*, 357.

¹⁶ Abbot, Leonard and Noel, *Colorado*, 357; Michael J. Zelinger, *West Side Story Relived* (Denver: J. Wandell Press, 1987), 158.

¹⁷ Although no other instance of violence between Jews and Mexican Americans on the West Side of Denver received the press coverage that the “gang fight” at Lake did, reports from Lake Junior High School

officials and the ADL suggest that they were common enough. Moreover, the unidentified woman in the October 1, 1949 article in the *Rocky Mountain News* stated, “The trouble . . . [between Jewish and Mexican-American] students has been going on for a long time,” suggesting a pattern. More importantly, however, Mexicans and Anglos on the West Side were engaging in similar acts of violence against each other. Finally, it is important to note that school officials consistently referred to these events as “gang fights,” and not as innocuous scuffles between youths. See Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, Commission on Community Relations, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection (hereafter cited as CCR); Principal’s Report and Recommendations to the Lake Human Relations Council, March 2, 1950, box 2, CCR; and *Intermountain Jewish News*, October 6, 1949, 1. I would like to thank Tom I. Romero for clarifying a question I had about this collection.

¹⁸ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR.

¹⁹ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR.

²⁰ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR. More than just “chasing” Jewish boys, the *News* portrayed a situation where Jewish students were “running home from school” in panic.

²¹ Abbot, Leonard, and Noel, *Colorado*, 358.

²² F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Público Press of the University of Houston, 1996), 282.

²³ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR.

²⁴ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR.

²⁵ Magdalena Gallegos, *Auraria Remembered: An Oral History by Former Residents of Denver’s Westside Neighborhood Compiled by the Community College of Denver Staff and Honors Program Students* (Denver: Community College of Denver, 1991), 13; Adalberto Aguirre, Jr. and Jonathan H. Turner,

American Ethnicity: The Dynamics and Consequences of Discrimination, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007), 38-39.

²⁶ Report of Meeting Held Concerning “Lake Junior High Incident” reported in *Rocky Mountain News*, October 3, 1949, box 2, CCR.

²⁷ Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado), 194. Although Leonard and Noel attribute no exact date to this incident, it can be reasonable to assume that it occurred in the late nineteenth century or a bit earlier. Indeed, the Salomons were one of the founding Jewish families of Denver, involved in various forms of commerce in the city.

²⁸ *Jewish Outlook*, December 4, 1903, 8. This statement is typical of Progressive era eugenics-based anti-Semitism that advocated Jews’ racial distinctiveness and inferiority. See Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85-111.

²⁹ According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in order for a lynching to have occurred the following criteria must be met: “There must be evidence that someone was killed; the killing must have occurred illegally; three or more persons must have taken part in the killing; and the killers must have been serving justice or tradition. Cited at Project HAL: Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project, <people.uncw.edu/hinese/HAL/HAL%20Web%20Page.htm> (15 October 2009). The best-known instance of a Jew being lynched in American history is that of Leo Frank. Frank, a northern Jew and pencil factory manager, was accused of murdering a teenaged employee, Mary Phagan, in 1913. After his death sentence was commuted by the Governor of Georgia, Frank was dragged from his prison cell and hung. See Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

³⁰ *Rocky Mountain News*, December 26, 1905, 10.

³¹ *Rocky Mountain News*, December 26, 1905, 10; *Aspen Democrat*, December 27, 1905, 1.

³² *Jewish Outlook*, May 4, 1906, 6.

³³ *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1905, 11.

³⁴ *Jewish Outlook*, February 16, 1906, 10.

³⁵ *Jewish Outlook*, May 4, 1906, 6.

³⁶ *Jewish Outlook*, May 18, 1906, 6.

³⁷ *Jewish Outlook*, June 29, 1906, 6.

³⁸ *Jewish Outlook*, February 15, 1907, 1; *Jewish Outlook*, May 10, 1907, 1.

³⁹ *Denver Times*, March 6, 1909, 2. I came across the idea of Jews rescuing their whiteness and place in society in Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 55.

⁴⁰ Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, 190.

⁴¹ Charles Ginsberg, interview by James Harlan Davis, tape recording, May 5, 1963, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection.

⁴² Phil Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan: When the KKK Ruled Denver, 1920-1926* (Denver: New Social Publications, 2006), 74-77. I would like to thank David Shneer for mentioning the Klan and Jews during a conversation we had about the article.

⁴³ Charles Ginsberg interview.

⁴⁴ *Denver Jewish News*, May 5, 1920, 1.

⁴⁵ Charles Ginsberg interview.

⁴⁶ I would like to thank Phoebe Kropp for helping me think through and find the proper phrasing for this section on memory and memorializing.

⁴⁷ Pearl Alperstein, interview by Anna Dean Kepper, tape recording, July 13, 1978, Ira M. Beck Memorial Archives, University of Denver; Sheldon Steinhauser, interview by Michael Lee, digital recording, September 11, 2009.

⁴⁸ James A. Atkins, *Human Relations in Colorado: A Historical Record* (Denver: Colorado Department of Education, 1968), 130-131. Similar discrimination in housing existed in California, in spite of the fact that in 1948 the United States Supreme Court had ruled that restrictive and religious covenants violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. See Mary Ellen Stratthaus, "A Flaw in the Jewel: Housing Discrimination against Jews in La Jolla, California," *American Jewish History* 84 (Sept. 1996): 189-219.

⁴⁹ Born September 19, 1914 in Darien, Wisconsin, Goff came to Denver in the 1940s and founded the Soldiers of the Cross. He died in 1972 while on a speaking tour in the Midwest. See *Rocky Mountain News*,

April 4, 1972, vertical file, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection; Kenneth Goff, *The Scarlet Woman of Revelation* (Englewood, CO.: by the author, 1952); and Goff, *Hitler and the 20th Century Hoax* (Englewood, CO.: by the author, n.d.); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 113.

⁵⁰ Goldstein, *Price*, 5, 52-55; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down*, 31. For more on Jews, whiteness and the social construction of race see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White. The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); and Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 165-167, 140; Varzally, *Making a Non-White America*, 193. Varzally, however, did not address why Jews used language like this to describe Mexican Americans and instead focused on coalition building among non-white ethnic groups. Moreover, she perceived Jews as decidedly non-white.

⁵² Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2 CCR; Uchil, *Pioneers*, 318.

⁵³ Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR; Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 81-82; Arnolde De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 87.

⁵⁴ Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR.

⁵⁵ Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR.

⁵⁶ The quoted phrase is from Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). For more on Jewish masculinity see Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Warren Hoffman, *The Passing Game: Queering Jewish American Culture* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

⁵⁷ Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR.

⁵⁸ Nathan Perlmutter to L.E. Sidman, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR.

⁵⁹ J. Peter Brunswick to Files, October 4, 1949, box 2, CCR.

⁶⁰ De León, *They Called Them Greasers*, 31, 46, 87-103; Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge*, 151-152. For more on Anglo-Mexican relations in the West see Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987); Camille Guerin-Gonzales, *Mexican Workers and American Dreams: Immigration, Repatriation, and California Farm Labor, 1900-1939* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); David Montjano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); and Robert J. Rosenbaum, *Mexicano Resistance in the Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶¹ Principal's Report and Recommendations to the Lake Human Relations Council, March 2, 1950, box 2, CCR.

⁶² Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 1,2, 28; Eisenberg, *First to Cry Down*, 154, 155. I established the approximate date of formation for the LHRC by using the three remaining minutes of the organization and the *Intermountain Jewish News*.

⁶³ Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 5; *Intermountain Jewish News*, October 6, 1949, 1; Lake Junior High School Human Relations Council Minutes, March 2, 1950, box 2.

⁶⁴ Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 4, 30.

⁶⁵ Principal's Report and Recommendations to the Lake Human Relations Council, March 2, 1950, box 2, CCR.

⁶⁶ The Mayor's Human Relations Committee/Commission was formed by Mayor Quigg Newton in 1947 to study the socioeconomic conditions of Denver's minorities. The Latin American Education Council, later renamed the Latin American Education Fund, was established in Denver in 1949 to provide grants and loans to Mexican-American youths who were college bound. The Denver branch of the Urban League was established in 1947 for the economic and social improvement of African Americans. See Atkins, *Human*, 159-162, 219, 135-141. Well-to-do African Americans and whites in the city organized the Denver Unity Council in 1944. Like many intergroup agencies of this period, its goal was to fight for the equality of all citizens, regardless of race. See Nina Mjagkiji, *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopaedia of African*

American Associations (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001), 213; Lake Junior High School

Questionnaire for Parents, May 29, 1950, box 2, CCR.

⁶⁷ *Intermountain Jewish News*, September 5, 1950, 1.

⁶⁸ Michael L. Freed to Harry Nicholson, December 20, 1951, folder 2, box 11, The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Lodge 171, Ira M. Beck Memorial Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Penrose Library, University of Denver (hereafter cited as ADL); *National Jewish Post*, November 28, 1952, clipping, folder 3, box 11, ADL. For a summation of joint observances in Denver see Christmas-Chanukah Observances: The Denver Experiment, Draft of Talk given at Temple Men's Club, Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, March 7, 1956, folder 6, Box 11, ADL.

⁶⁹ Leonard and Noel, *Denver*, 390, 481.

⁷⁰ Breck, *Centennial History*, 321.

⁷¹ Uchill, *Pioneers*, 317-318; Phil Goodstein, *Exploring Jewish Colorado* (Denver: The Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society, 1992), 58.

⁷² Zelinger, *West Side Story*, 77.

⁷³ See file folder 11, Box 18, ADL for a full account of "Project Mexican"; *Intermountain Jewish News*, February 14, 1969, 12.

⁷⁴ The quoted phrase is from Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Anti-Semitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁷⁵ Jeanne Abrams, *Jewish Women*, 11, 187. Moses Rischin and John Livingston suggest the same in *Jews of the American West*. For interpretations of American Jewish history that examine themes of conflict, ambivalence and anxiety see Tony E. Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Ethnicity: 1950-1970* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse State University Press, 2001); Lederhendler, "The New Filiopietism, or Toward a New History of Jewish Immigration to America," *American Jewish History* 93 (Mar. 2007): 1-20; Goldstein, *Price*; and Gil Ribak, "'They are slitting the Throats of Jewish Children': The 1906 New York School Riots and Contending Images of Gentiles," *American Jewish History* 94 (Sept. 2008): 175-196.