The History of American Jewish Political Conservatism
April 15–16, 1999
American University, Washington, DC

This conference was the first major exploration of the history of American Jewish political conservatism in this country. The growth of a Jewish conservative movement began in the 1930s among a small group of intellectuals who broke with Communism and Stalinism. It expanded during the Cold War among a number of thinkers and activists who began to challenge not only Soviet expansionism but the welfare state as well. In the 1970s and 1980s this group of primarily New York intellectuals gained wider attention and played a significant role in the Reagan administration. At the close of the 20th century, a larger group of young conservative Jewish intellectuals and activists worked in Washington “think tanks,” the media, and academia. They helped develop a body of conservative political thought and action that contributed to the ascendency of political conservatism. The historical development of American Jewish political conservatism has been an often-ignored yet important part of the American Jewish experience.

Papers Presented:
(Many of these papers appear in American Jewish History, vol.87, nos.2 and 3, June 1999 and September 1999.)

David Dalin, Visiting Associate Professor, Jewish Theological Seminary
Helping Others to Help Themselves: The Jewish Philanthropic Tradition From Biblical Israel to Modern America

Jonathan Sarna, Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History and Chair, Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Brandeis University
American Jewish Conservatism in Historical Perspective

David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
Contemporary Jewish Liberalism: Its Roots in Religious Thought and Historic Practice

George Nash, Independent Scholar
Forgotten Godfathers: Premature Jewish Conservatives and the Rise of The National Review

Hillel Fradkin, Associate Director, Shalem Center, Director, Shalem Center Washington office
Leo Strauss as a Premature Neo-Conservative

Richard Gid Powers, Coordinator, American Studies Program, Graduate Center, City University of New York
Roy Cohn and Right-Wing Conservatism

Midge Decter, Author and Critic
The Making of a Jewish Neo-Conservative

Jerald Podair, Assistant Professor of History, Lawrence University
Mugged Liberals: Jews, Blacks and New York City’s Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis

John Ehrman, Independent Scholar
Commentary, The Public Interest and the Frustrations of American Jewish Conservatism

Edward Shapiro, Professor of History, Seton Hall University
Jewish Neo-Cons and the Rift within Conservatism

Jay Winik, Senior Scholar and Adjunct Professor, School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland at College Park
Jewish Political Conservatism and Ronald Reagan’s Foreign Policy

Panel Discussions
“Jewish Conservatives And Israel”
Panelists
Charles Krauthammer, Syndicated Columnist, Contributing Editor, The New Republic

Elliott Abrams, President, Ethics and Public Policy Center
Paul Berman, Critic-at-Large

“The Next Generation”
Panelists
David Brooks, Senior Editor, The Weekly Standard
Lisa Schiffren, Writer

Adam Wolfson, Executive Editor, The Public Interest