The American Jewish Committee
51st Annual Meeting
Background Memorandum for Mass Media Education Committee
Friday, April 25, 1958

USE OF AJC'S NAME ON PROGRAMMATIC MATERIAL

When the AJC first launched its mass media activities — some twenty years ago — and for many years thereafter, virtually no publications or programs designed for general public consumption bore the Committee's name. This policy was dictated by the nature of our pre-war and wartime activities. We were combatting imported anti-Semitism; and it was essential to make clear that the alignment in this struggle was Hitlerism versus the American people, not Hitlerism versus the Jews. Equally compelling was the likelihood that frontal attacks against bigotry, and appeals for national unity on the part of a Jewish organization, would be discounted in the public mind as motivated mainly by self-interest. AJC's purposes would be better served by furnishing information and other assistance to like-minded organizations interested in publishing material dealing with subject matters important to us.

Thus, for example, it was the Veterans of Foreign Wars — not the American Jewish Committee — that conducted
national campaigns exposing the anti-Semitic "Fifth Column." It was the U. S. Office of War Information, not the AJC, that called for unity against nazism's "divide-and-conquer" strategy.

But with the war's end, and as the atmosphere of crisis gave way, the need for this policy of self-effacement gradually diminished. It was now possible to take into account certain considerations that formerly had to be disregarded, namely:

First, only a handful of Jews throughout the country were acquainted with the Committee; even among those aware of its existence, few knew its purposes or program. An organization whose existence ultimately depended on broad community support could hardly afford continued soft-pedalling of its identity.

Second, it had become apparent that intergroup relations were a two-way street. There was need for an educational program aimed at orienting the Jewish community to AJC's outlook on issues closely affecting Christian-Jewish understanding - communism; Israel; religion in the schools; civil rights and civil liberties.

Third, the Committee's involvement in national and international affairs encompassing the whole human rights and human relations front made it advisable to seek public recognition as the agency representing
participation of Jews in far-sighted movements supported by groups of all faiths.

In recent years, these considerations have served as a rule of thumb in determining the imprint of the particular project at hand — be it a film, broadcast or brochure. In addition, the public relations impact and effectiveness must be weighed in each instance. Generally, there are four possibilities:

(1) Publication by AJC alone.

(2) Release by an outside organization whose interests coincide with the subject matter.

(3) Release by an AJC unit not publicly recognized as such — "Community Relations Services," or "The National Labor Service."

(4) Joint Sponsorship by numerous organizations — as in The Fence (on immigration) for which we secured 12 co-sponsors; and currently, In Your Hands (on human rights) with thirty-two.

The question now arises whether, instead of arriving at decisions on a project-by-project basis, it is possible to formulate a policy that may be applied in all instances where material is addressed to the general public, or to a non-sectarian or Christian audience, as opposed to AJC's constituents or the Jewish community.

As springboards for discussion, the following ex-
amples might be considered:

(1) **The Trophy** — a television program depicting young America's determination to end anti-Jewish discrimination in college fraternities.

(2) **The Princess in the Tower** — a motion picture primarily for children, showing the importance of "belonging."

(3) **The People Take the Lead** — annual report of civil rights advances throughout the U.S.A.

(4) **Pocket Guide to Middle East Questions** — a question-and-answer brochure.

(5) **The School Calendar** — annual teachers' guide to religious holidays of all faiths.

In each case cited above, AJC's name was used as the sole sponsor.

**Major Questions**

1. In any of these cases, would it have been better if sponsorship had been vested in
   (a) an outside organization?
   (b) a unit not publicly recognized as AJC?
   (c) a diversified group of agencies?

   If so, why?

2. Are there any other Mass Media situations in which the question of sponsorship should have been differently settled than it was?
We agree:

1. Mass media are unlikely to be useful in changing deep-seated antisemitism, which usually springs from emotional or constitutional cause which cannot be altered by communications media. Public opinion research available to AJC (in 1957, before the wave of reaction to southern integration) indicates that confirmed antisemitism is limited to about 10% of the U.S. population. In discussing how to use the mass media we are concerned only with the other 90% — or whatever percent at any time represents the more nearly emotionally balanced majority.

This does not mean, of course, that the attitudes of the 90% who are not confirmed bigots are the same or are favorable towards the Jews. In fact, there is a wide range in their attitudes. Mass media can be advantageously used to reinforce the positive attitudes of those already favorably oriented towards Jews; to instill favorable attitudes among those whose opinions and feelings are unformed; and to allay the antipathy of those prone to accept hostile or unfavorable stereotypes. By "favorable attitude" we mean the acceptance of Jews as neighbors and fellow Americans.

2. Frontal treatment of the subject of Jews in the mass media is, with rare exceptions, undesirable. Our objection to exposure of this kind does not stem alone from our preference for the indirect approach but also from the knowledge that programs and articles of this type are extremely difficult to do in a way which will attract a cross section audience and, at the same time, avoid a negative reaction or a feeling in the reader or viewer that he is being propagandized. To be done well they require a high order of writing and producing talent which is seldom available. Without these they are more likely to be liabilities than assets.

Articles and programs of this kind may have some value in supporting Jewish morale and in helping to raise money for Jewish causes, but these do not seem to us to be logical uses for media which reach all Americans. Exceptions to this generalization are programs and articles describing Jewish religion or philosophy. In the present climate of American opinion such productions can be expected to create a favorable impression provided they describe Judaism without seeming to propagate it.

3. The most practical way to use the mass media to encourage and reconfirm acceptance of Jews as fellow Americans is what we call the "salting-in process" — introducing into the normal flow of the mass media characterizations and situations which portray Jews in an unsterotyped and favorable manner. Favorable portrayal of Jews means not only their connection with medical discovery, teaching, acts of heroism, etc., but, more particularly, as ordinary, decent and accepted Americans. We feel that one favorable characterization or
situation salted into a radio or TV program, a movie, magazine article, news story or popular book is worth several times the amount of space or time in the same medium directed towards discussion of the problem of anti-Semitism.

4. Articles or programs which discuss or dramatize the dynamics of hatemongering and of the authoritarian personality provide devices for the discussion of anti-Semitism as merely one of the many side shows under the big tent of bigotry. They seem to overcome our objections to the direct approach to anti-Semitism in the mass media but pose extremely difficult problems of their own. Discussion of individual hatemongers frequently gives these men the publicity on which they thrive and further spreads their hate-laden charges against Catholics, Negroes and Jews. AJC evidence which is difficult to refute indicates that silence is the best weapon against these characters and causes.

Since this is the case, the creation of articles or programs about hatemongers which do not benefit them becomes an extremely exacting assignment. Productions of this kind should be encouraged only under the most favorable auspices.

5. Adverse and stereotyped characterizations and situations communicated by the mass media are injurious to the objectives of the AJC and their avoidance is a proper concern of MMEC.

6. Any use of mass media which helps realize or advance the rights of all Americans helps achieve the objectives of AJC.

* * * * *