



# Stepping Into Zion: Hatzaad Harishon, Black Jews, and the Remaking of Jewish Identity (Albma Rhetoric Cult & Soc Crit)

*Janice W. Fernheimer*

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By studying the multiracial Jewish organization Hatzaad Harishon, Janice W. Fernheimer's *Stepping into Zion* considers the question "Who is a Jew?"—a critical rhetorical issue with far-reaching consequences for Jews and non-Jews alike.

Hatzaad Harishon ("The First Step") was a New York-based, multiracial Jewish organization that worked to increase recognition and legitimacy for Black Jews in the sixties and seventies. In *Stepping into Zion*, Janice W. Fernheimer examines the history and archives of Hatzaad Harishon to illuminate the shifting definitions and borders of Jewish identity, which have critical relevance to Jews of all traditions as well as to non-Jews.

Fernheimer focuses on a period when Jewish identity was in flux and deeply influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. In 1964, white and Black Jews formed Hatzaad Harishon to foster interaction and unity between Black and white Jewish communities. They raised the question of who or what constitutes Jewishness or Jewish identity, and in searching for an answer succeeded—both historically and rhetorically—in gaining increased recognition for Black Jews. Fernheimer traces how, despite deep disagreement over definitions, members of Hatzaad Harishon were able to create common ground in a process she terms "interruptive invention": an incremental model for rhetorical success that allows different groups to begin and continue important but difficult discussions when they share little common ground or make unequal claims to institutional and discursive power, or when the nature of common ground is precisely what is at stake. Consequently, they provide a practical way out of the seemingly incommensurable stalemate incompatible worldviews present.

Through insightful interpretations of Hatzaad Harishon's archival materials, Fernheimer chronicles the group's successes and failures within the larger rhetorical history of conflicts that emerge when cultural identities shift or expand.

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