

AMERICAN JEWRY'S COMFORT LEVEL

AMERICAN JEWRY'S COMFORT LEVEL
PRESENT AND FUTURE

Manfred Gerstenfeld and Steven Bayme



Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs
Institute for Global Jewish Affairs



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Dedicated to the memory of Emanuel Rackman, revered intellectual, communal, and religious leader, for his indefatigable and persistent advocacy on behalf of the unity of the Jewish people in both Israel and the Diaspora.

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Acknowledgments

At the beginning of this decade the Center for Jewish Community Studies, affiliated with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, published four books on the position of Jews in the American public square. This was undertaken in the framework of a research project initiated by the Pew Charitable Trusts.¹

The last of these books, *American Jewry's Challenge: Conversations Confronting the Twenty-First Century*, by Manfred Gerstenfeld, came out in 2005. It contains interviews with seventeen prominent American Jewish personalities and presents their thoughts about the future. This new book of essays and interviews, *American Jewry's Comfort Level*, is a sequel to it. As in the previous volume, authors and interviewees often consider the same issues from different perspectives.

Many thanks are due to the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and the American Jewish Committee for publishing this book. We would like to thank the authors of the essays and the interviewees for sharing their knowledge with us. The authors are grateful to David A. Harris, executive director of AJC, for providing the Foreword to the volume.

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Manfred Gerstenfeld

Steven Bayme

Note

- 1 Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Robert Licht, *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Square*

(New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Robert Licht, *Jews and the American Public Square* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Alan Mittleman, *Religion as a Public Good: Jews and Other Americans on Religion in the Public Square* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Manfred Gerstenfeld, *American Jewry's Challenge: Conversations Confronting the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

David A. Harris

Foreword

As we approach the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, American Jewry faces daunting new challenges that demand fresh responses. The ever-accelerating pace of change renders policies of the past as obsolete as yesterday's newspaper.

The situation that the organized Jewish community addressed a generation ago was strikingly different than the reality today. On the international scene, the world stood in awe at Israel's swift victory in the Six-Day War of 1967. Israeli security seemed assured. Israel advocacy meant educating the world to understand that Israel had gained large stretches of territory on its borders in a war of defense for its very life, and that it was up to the Arab world to offer peace for land.

How different the picture is now. Israel has indeed negotiated peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan in exchange for land. But American Jewish support for Israel is up against the widespread perception that Israel—no longer the David that defeated Goliath—has “colonialist designs” that prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and that this constitutes the chief obstacle to rebuilding American influence in the Arab world. And in other Western countries, the anti-Israel bias is even worse. Making the task of interpreting Israel's policies even more difficult, a good number of American Jews buy into the “blame Israel first” line too.

What is the Israel advocate to do?

Four decades ago, anti-Semitism seemed on the wane, as books, films, and plays about the Holocaust resonated with the broad public, and most people absorbed the lesson that the hatred of Jews that was translated into mass murder could be turned against any other vulnerable minority as well. Advocacy on this issue amounted to little more than pinpointing and publicizing the activities of fringe extremist groups.

But anti-Semitism in our day has metamorphosed into the big lie that, of all the nationalist movements in the world, Zionism is uniquely evil and constitutes a danger to world peace. Ironically, it is Iran, which had good relations with Israel until 1979, that bangs the drums most loudly for the destruction of the Jewish state, and is developing the nuclear capacity that could carry out that threat.

How shall we counter the new anti-Semitism—the demonization of Zionism—and how can we convince the world to stop the Iranian nuclear program?

The domestic political terrain on which Jewish community-relations groups operated a generation ago was relatively simple. Americans, especially those in

leadership positions, were overwhelmingly whites of European ethnic origin, Christian in religion, or else blacks, also Christian, with deep ancestral roots in the United States. They possessed a cultural awareness, at least on a basic level, of Jews, Judaism, and Jewish history, so that Jews' concerns fit within their frame of reference.

That is no longer the case. Latino, Asian, and other non-European groups—many of them recent immigrants—have emerged on the political scene. They have had relatively little historic contact with Jews, and hence their understanding of Jews' priorities cannot be taken for granted. The same is true of the growing non-Western religious groups, such as Buddhists and Hindus—not to mention American Muslims, whose political clout is on the rise.

Where will Jews find coalitional allies in this increasingly complex American mosaic?

Perhaps the biggest change for the worse has occurred internally—or as the legendary American cartoon character Pogo famously put it, “We have seen the enemy and he is us.” The Jewish community for which our organizational structure spoke forty years ago was small but relatively robust. The great majority of Jews married other Jews and brought up their children to feel part of the Jewish collective. Whether one was religious—of whatever denomination—or secular, a common sense of peoplehood, underlined by the memory of the Holocaust, strengthened by the emergence of the state of Israel, and heightened by the Six-Day War and the Soviet Jewry movement, bound Jews together.

That sense of group identity has gradually waned and in its place has emerged a largely privatized identity: one is attracted to particular ideas or practices that enhance self-fulfillment, whether they come from Jewish or non-Jewish sources. The rate of out-marriage has skyrocketed while only a minority of children of such marriages identify Jewishly. Thus the Jewish percentage of the American population—tiny enough to begin with—diminishes apace, further weakening our collective morale and electoral strength.

And just as the need grows for outreach to young Jews, the community of identified Jews is undergoing a Balkanization process. Internal differences of religious and political opinion, even to the point of mutual delegitimization, are undermining the standing of mainstream bodies that used to be able to mold a consensus and represent us on the American and world scene.

Is it possible to rebuild cohesive Jewish identity in a postmodern age, when the global village and the web wipe out old boundaries and render traditional loyalties obsolete?

Since the first step toward dealing with these daunting dilemmas is to lay out the “facts on the ground,” I am excited about the publication of *American Jewry's Comfort Level*.

The pages that follow represent AJC at its best.

First, the book marks a fruitful collaborative effort between AJC's Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations and the prestigious Jerusalem

Center for Public Affairs. When Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld, the distinguished chairman of the Board of Fellows of JCPA, who has done pioneering research on American Jewish leadership and other important scholarly topics, approached us to join in this project we readily agreed, seeing it as carrying on the AJC tradition of partnering with sister agencies that share our priorities and interests.

Second, the contributors are all eminent scholars and communal leaders with considerable experience in thinking through and confronting these thorny issues. This, too, is a signature AJC mode of operation: commissioning the best minds to work on the crucial questions that confront us.

And finally, virtually all of the topics covered by these essays—American Jewish demography, intra-Jewish tensions, American Jewish-Israeli relations, the Jewish family, Jewish education, and Israel advocacy—have been the subjects of AJC research, conferences, and programming over the decades. Central to the pursuit of all these issues have been the leadership and scholarship of my cherished AJC colleague, Steven Bayme. As his coeditorship of this volume and his own essays amply illustrate, Dr. Bayme is a treasure for the entire Jewish community.

I fully expect that this volume will help lay the groundwork for the development of innovative approaches that will serve our community well as we go forward.

David A. Harris
Executive Director, AJC

Steven Bayme

American Jewry Confronts the Twenty-First Century

American Jewry, like the America of which it is a component, in the years following World War II perceived itself as poised to undertake global responsibilities. By far the largest community in world Jewry, untouched by the horrors of the Holocaust, and closely identified with the world's leading superpower, American Jewry prepared itself to undertake relief and reconstruction work, to bury longstanding divisiveness over Zionism, and to tend to its own internal needs of preserving Jewish security and enhancing Jewish vitality.

Generally, American Jews were proud of their position within American society, particularly their intellectual influence. One of the reasons that Will Herberg's 1955 study, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, resonated so well among Jews was its celebration of the fact that Jews, comprising less than 3 percent of the overall population in America, exercised one-third of the religious influence in the country. To be sure, few read or remembered Herberg's concluding jeremiad—that in becoming so much a part of American society, the distinctive voice of Judaism had become too bland to have much of an impact.¹

Specifically, six major assumptions dominated American Jewish self-understanding in the immediate postwar period:

First, Jews defined their identity through affiliation with their synagogue. Close to two-thirds of American Jews paid synagogue dues, primarily to Conservative and Reform temples. Orthodoxy was regarded as weak and essentially an expression of nostalgia for a bygone world. In joining synagogues, Jews were not necessarily becoming more religiously observant. Instead they were defining the synagogue as the central Jewish address. Much as America had become a nation of churchgoers, the Jews, enjoying the benefits of postwar suburban affluence, happily engaged a project of synagogue growth and construction.

Second, news of the Holocaust had made anti-Semitism disreputable within American society. Where the wartime years had witnessed increased anti-Semitism, the postwar years saw its rapid decline. At a minimum, survey respondents consistently repudiated sentiments of anti-Semitism. At a maximum, Jews were enjoying unprecedented security in an America eager to prove itself receptive of and welcoming to Jews.

To be sure, many, if not most Jews, rejected this hypothesis. They maintained that anti-Semitism remained rife in American society, but that it now lurked

beneath the surface. Whether those sentiments were a further illustration of Abba Eban's doctrine that the Jews are the only people unwilling to accept good news or whether it represented a realistic foreboding of American Jewry would be tested time and again over the course of the postwar decades.

Third, American Jewry attained its newfound predominance almost precisely at the moment of the birth of Israel and the return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood for the first time in two thousand years. The relationship between these two Jewish communities would be initially distant, become especially intensive in the 1960s–1970s, and then undergo serious transformation in the 1980s. Clearly American Jews realized that in the birth of Israel they had a new agenda item—cultivating relations between their government in Washington and the Israeli government in Jerusalem.

Fourth, these two seminal events—the Holocaust and the birth of Israel—as the dominant events of contemporary Jewish history, became the symbols of postwar American Jewish life. Especially after 1967 these two symbols in effect became the civil religion of American Jews. Rabbis might lament the relative absence of God-talk among Jews, but few could deny the power that Holocaust memory and the image of the self-reliant Jewish state held in formulating postwar American Jewish identity.

Fifth, in terms of expectations of Jewish continuity, American Jews assumed that Jews would continue to marry other Jews. Endogamy remained normative, and the few studies of intermarriage that existed suggested that intermarriage rates remained at historic lows. Within individual Jewish families intermarriage may have connoted a personal tragedy, but the phenomenon itself seemingly posed little threat to the collective Jewish future.

Less noticeable but at least as important was the expectation that Jewish families would have three or more children representing a net gain in Jewish population growth. The postwar years were the years of the baby boom in America, and the perception was that Jewish families shared in the overall fertility patterns of population growth.² As a result, American Jewry appeared to many to be on the cusp of numerical expansion, benefiting both from a positive birthrate and the prospect of continuing immigration, especially of Holocaust survivors.

Last, American Jews assumed that Jewish education formed the key to the collective Jewish future. Whereas in the prewar years probably only half of American Jews received any form of Jewish education, by the postwar years Jewish education in some form, usually in the pre-*bar* or *bat mitzvah* (coming-of-age ceremony) years had become normative. What type of Jewish education would work would become a contentious issue, but few disputed the value of Jewish education per se as key to Jewish continuity.

These assumptions need to be traced historically. Initially formulated in the 1950s, they evolved in the 1960s and 1970s into a crescendo of optimism about the Jewish future by the 1980s. In the 1990s, these assumptions were sorely tested, and in the first decade of the twenty-first century in some cases had been

shattered. To understand American Jewry's self-perception as it confronted the challenges of the twenty-first century, then, the paradigms by which American Jews perceive themselves require revisiting and in some cases revision.

Concerns of the 1950s

The 1950s do represent a useful point of departure. American Jewry at the time numbered approximately five million out of a total American population of 150 million. In 1950, American Jewry comprised both the largest Jewish community anywhere in the world and the highest percentage of the general population that Jews enjoyed anywhere in the Diaspora.

Moreover, by historical standards, Jews appeared to be doing very well. Affiliation rates with synagogues exceeded 60 percent. Conversely, intermarriage rates stood at a relatively negligible 6 percent. Actual attendance at synagogues was relatively weak. Where 40 percent of Protestants in America attended church on a weekly basis as did almost three-quarters of Catholics, only 18 percent of Jews did so, suggesting that American Jews felt it important to belong but less necessary to participate actively. The synagogues they were joining were largely Conservative and Reform—both paralleling the rise of Jewish suburbia with the synagogue rather than the urban neighborhood serving as central Jewish address and signaling the gradual eclipse and future disappearance of Orthodoxy in American Jewish life. Almost six hundred new synagogues opened their doors in the 1950s, primarily Conservative and Reform.³ Moreover, given the political atmosphere of the Cold War, Americans asked Jews to join in distinguishing Western culture from “Godless communism.”⁴

Notwithstanding weak regular attendance at synagogues, so astute an observer of the Jewish scene as Herberg confidently predicted a religious revival among American Jews. Returning GIs generally wanted more religion rather than less—another indication of the adage that there are no atheists in foxholes—even if the religion they desired was noticeably devoid of theological ferment. More generally, Herberg perceived America as a triple melting pot in which Jews were not assimilating into America generally, but rather joining the American mainstream by identifying with one of its three major faiths. Religion in effect gave voice to feelings of ethnicity. Jews were by no means necessarily more religious, but to affirm membership within a major faith of America constituted a critical component of their identity as Americans. President Eisenhower stated explicitly the centrality of religion in America by claiming that “our government has no sense unless it is founded on a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is.”⁵

American Jews, therefore, could be among the most religious and secular of Americans at the same time. To be sure, Herberg uttered some prophetic cautions about these trends. Jews quickly embraced his model of the triple melting pot

because it celebrated Judaism as one of America's three primary faiths. Generally, however, they ignored Herberg's concluding twenty pages in which he warned that religion in America had become excessively man-centered with little focus on faith. Herberg questioned what had become of the prophetic image and message—the willingness to challenge the status quo rather than affirm it. Absent this distinctive prophetic stance, Herberg argued that the centrality of religion to American society mattered little because the message of these three faiths had become simply too bland to make much of a difference.⁶

For Jews specifically, Herberg warned of the limits of liberal theology. For Judaism to be meaningful, he argued, it needed to affirm much more than good American values. Herberg asked what was the distinctive message of Judaism that would challenge American culture and mores. Liberal theology in his view had eliminated the Divine encounter. Herberg sought to restore that sense of Divine encounter by translating for American audiences the theologies of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig with their emphases on Divine revelation to human beings.⁷ Formerly a Marxist, by the 1950s Herberg had become very much a Jewish religious thinker and a critic of the tendency of American Jews to identify with all good things American. Much as Herberg had provided American Jews with validation of their status as Americans, and his book had become one of the few bestselling works on religion in 1950s America, few took to heart his warnings that absent Jewish distinctiveness there might be little worth preserving about American Judaism.

Yet even as Jews warmed to Herberg's celebration of the place of Jews in American culture, they remained quite skeptical of the most surprising trend of the 1950s—the consistent decline of anti-Semitism within American society. In 1964, a conference on anti-Semitism sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) documented the retreat of anti-Semitic opinion among Americans generally since the conclusion of World War II.⁸ Beyond the survey data, which at times was derided as providing politically correct responses to questions, several test cases of potential anti-Semitism suggested how relatively weak it had become in American political culture.

The Rosenberg case provided one such example. The conviction of two Jews on charges of espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union gave rise to enormous fears of an anti-Semitic backlash. Occurring at the height of the Cold War, the trial featured a Jewish judge, a Jewish attorney, and the Rosenbergs themselves whose espionage network included a number of fellow Jews. Jewish organizations made great efforts to distance themselves from the Rosenbergs, some going so far as to advocate capital punishment (which even as outspoken an anticommunist as FBI director J. Edgar Hoover opposed in the case of Ethel Rosenberg). By contrast, communist sympathizers and fellow travelers had a field day in depicting the Rosenberg case as an example of American anti-Semitism even while blithely ignoring the very real anti-Semitism evident in the Czechoslovakian Slansky trials that occurred at approximately the same time.⁹

Seen retrospectively, the Rosenbergs were convicted fairly and were in fact true believers in their cause. Remarkably, however, their case was accompanied by a notable dearth of anti-Semitism. Jewish organizations maintained that their outspoken stance against the Rosenbergs had prevented an anti-Semitic backlash. But few could deny that Americans generally had reacted with fairness. They viewed the Rosenbergs and their crime as appalling, but they did not extend the guilt of the Rosenbergs to American Jews generally.¹⁰

Perhaps equally noteworthy was the McCarthy phenomenon of the 1950s. Senator Joseph McCarthy clearly was a demagogue who embodied the worst features of American political culture. Jews naturally feared McCarthy because he embodied so many of the attributes usually associated with anti-Semitism—conspiratorial thinking, rabid anticommunism, resentment of the eastern establishment, especially the intellectuals, and so on. The Anti-Defamation League, to be sure only in 1956, retrospectively charged that McCarthy was “effectively an anti-Semite.”¹¹

Without question McCarthy was both reckless and malicious—willing to destroy lives and careers without evidence. However, he appears to be innocent of the charge of anti-Semitism. Even so fierce a critic of McCarthy as historian David Oshinsky exonerates him of the charge, noting that the senator praised Israel, underscored Soviet anti-Semitism, and even urged the retention of Hebrew-language programs within the United States Information Agency. Perhaps mindful of the fact that many would suspect him of anti-Semitism and perhaps realizing how disreputable anti-Semitism had become, McCarthy employed two Jewish attorneys on his staff, Roy Cohn and David Schine.¹²

Somewhat more tangential to Jewish consciousness in the 1950s was the place of Israel as a Jewish state. To be sure, Jewish leaders understood that helping Israel develop and safeguarding its security constituted vital concerns for the American Jewish community. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was created in 1954 so as to provide a unified voice in support of Israel in addressing the administration in Washington and thereby avoid the divisiveness among Jewish organizations, which was understood as undermining the case for rescue of Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was created that same year to lobby Congress on Israel’s behalf. In 1950, the AJC secured the Ben-Gurion-Blaustein Agreement pledging support for Israel coupled with promises to refrain from interfering in each other’s internal concerns, whether they be those of American Jewry or Israel. For the historically non-Zionist AJC to endorse Israel connoted the Jewish state’s acceptance by virtually all sectors of American Jewry. Already the Reform movement had repudiated its anti-Zionist past, and the American Council for Judaism found itself almost completely marginalized in American Jewish public life.¹³

Surprisingly, however, only occasionally did Israel enter the consciousness of American Jews. Few Jews had actually visited Israel. Study programs within

Israel touched only a tiny fraction of Jewish young people. Only rarely did Israel enter the curriculum of Jewish schools or the liturgy of synagogues. Sadly, the narrative of the return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood—perhaps the most inspiring of Jewish stories of the past two thousand years—had failed to penetrate Jewish self-understanding in the 1950s. It was this absence of attachment to Israel coupled with the apparent decline of Orthodoxy that appeared to be the primary weak links in the otherwise optimistic portrait of American Jewry in the 1950s.

The Optimistic 1960s

Many of the trends of the 1950s continued into the 1960s albeit with significant modifications. Affiliation rates continued to exceed 60 percent. By 1965, the number of Conservative synagogues had risen to 800 and the number of Reform to 656, compared to 250 and 300, respectively, in 1945.¹⁴ The baby boom persisted until 1964 but then came to an abrupt halt. Over time Jewish birthrates would fall consistently below replacement level. In the post-baby boom era, a total population in excess of five million American Jews could be maintained only via incipient immigration from abroad, primarily the Soviet Union.

Few, however, were then prepared to worry about declining birthrates. By contrast, intermarriage had begun its path to becoming a dominant Jewish communal concern. In 1964, sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in their landmark study *Beyond the Melting Pot*, described Jews as “highly endogamous.”¹⁵ Intermarriage rates themselves remained relatively modest but had increased to 17 percent by the mid-1960s. Marshall Sklare, dean of American Jewish sociologists, was perhaps the first to sound the alarm that although the overall intermarriage rate remained fairly low, outside the major urban concentrations of Jews intermarriage had become a clear and present danger.¹⁶ A widely cited article titled “The Vanishing American Jew,” published in the popular magazine *Look*, sounded a note of panic.¹⁷ To be sure, in the decades since that publication, historians have often noted that *Look* magazine has since vanished twice and the Jews are still here!

But the most pronounced change in the patterns of American Jewish life in the 1960s concerned the intensification of relations between American Jewry and Israel. In many ways the month of May 1967 cemented bonds between the two communities. Daily threats to eliminate the Jews accompanied by the silence of the churches and the apparent neutrality of the liberal powers reawakened all the memories of the Holocaust years and convinced many that Jews could rely only on one another. By contrast, Israel’s June victory indicated that today the Jewish people was different—able to protect itself and no longer dependent on gentile goodwill.¹⁸

For American Jews, Israel post-1967 became a major focal point of attention and a source of pride in Jewish achievement. Study programs in Israel for post-

high school and college students proliferated—either at the Hebrew University or in various Israeli yeshivot. Arthur Hertzberg, the noted historian and rabbi, argued in *Commentary* that the Six-Day War had changed the map of Israel-Diaspora relations in profound and irrevocable ways.¹⁹ Visits to Israel, once rare, now became an exciting opportunity that increasingly Jews would seize.

Last, notwithstanding Jewish forebodings, anti-Semitism, although never disappearing, appeared quite marginal to American society. By the 1960s quotas for Jews in American universities had virtually disappeared. The 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace, an arch-exponent of racial segregation, was remarkably free of anti-Semitism. Jews naturally assumed that someone like Wallace must despise Jews. Indeed, less than 2 percent of Jews gave him their votes. Yet Wallace and his campaign steered clear of anti-Semitism, a sure sign of its marginality in mainstream American politics.²⁰ Similarly, Jews feared an anti-Semitic backlash in light of the prominence of Jews within the student New Left.²¹ Groups such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Weathermen in fact contained many Jews in leadership positions and by the close of the 1960s had become perversely destructive. Remarkably, however, no anti-Semitic backlash ensued.

What did rightly concern Jews were relations in the longstanding civil rights coalition of blacks and Jews. The 1968 New York City schoolteachers strike was a case in point, inflaming tensions and giving voice to anti-Semitic sentiment within the black community. Jewish pride in fighting for the civil rights of blacks began eliciting charges of paternalism. Jews responded by evoking the myth of a golden age of black-Jewish relations even as they began to confront the reality that forces of discord existed within both communities.²²

Thus by the end of the 1960s Jews remained generally optimistic in their self-assessment even as they were giving expression to incipient forebodings. Israel's 1967 triumph had awakened Jewish identity among many who had been previously silent and evoked pride among Jews everywhere. The Soviet Jewry movement, one of the great foreign policy successes in twentieth-century Jewish history, in some respects was inspired by new-found Jewish pride and assertiveness post-1967.²³ Vatican II augured a new era of Jewish-Christian understanding. Jewish education appeared poised for new successes and Jewish day schools now existed in virtually every community with at least 7,500 Jews. Where as recently as the 1940s Jewish day schools barely existed outside of the major metropolitan centers, by the 1960s they enrolled about 10 percent of all Jews receiving some form of Jewish education. Last, although Jews could never ignore anti-Semitism, their overall position in American society continued to appear stable and secure.

Yet Jews also did not lack for worries. Intermarriage appeared a looming danger. The much-heralded black-Jewish alliance appeared to be fraying. Some were even beginning to argue that absent a critical mass of Jews interested in leading a creative and intensive Jewish life, efforts at Jewish defense at most were ultimately transitory in significance. Yet Jews confronted these new challenges

with an optimistic and “can do” mentality perhaps best captured in the ethos of the popular 1960s television program *Star Trek*, which attained cultlike status in subsequent decades. *Star Trek* portrayed a universe without Jews but one in which Jewish ideas, optimism, faith in science and technology, and mutual tolerance between races prevailed. That ethos of the *Star Trek* “Federation” soon translated into the mood and mindset of Jewish federation leaders of the 1970s.

The Growth of the Federations

Previously understood primarily as a fundraising and social service arm of the Jewish community, federations grew exponentially in significance in the decades post-1967. Providing economic assistance to Israel eclipsed Jewish social service agencies as prime purpose and target of federation fundraising. In turn, as Israel increasingly assumed center stage on the Jewish communal agenda, federations became the central address for local Jewish communities. On the local level, federations now stood alongside synagogues as the most critical grassroots Jewish institutions.

Moreover, federations broadened their agendas locally, increasingly funding Jewish educational institutions, including day schools. In the 1950s, local Jewish philanthropists in Boston had rejected the request of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, dean of American Orthodoxy, for a modest grant of \$40,000 to purchase a building for his day school.²⁴ By the 1970s, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston was partially funding, on a per-student basis, all day schools in the Boston area. Similarly, for local planning purposes, federations assumed responsibility for conducting demographic studies of local Jewish communities. Last, the growing importance of federations transformed the major gathering of North American federation activists, the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, today known as Jewish Federations of North America, into the dominant event on the annual Jewish calendar.

To be sure, federation predominance in Jewish communal affairs meant leadership by consensus, generally avoiding controversial stands. Thus, Yehuda Rosenman, long-term Jewish communal affairs director for the AJC, in 1980 criticized federations as “ideologically bland.”²⁵ For example, Rosenman pointed to the growth of mixed marriage, perhaps the most controversial item on the Jewish agenda, as an issue that federations had studiously avoided lest it give offense to key constituencies on different sides of the issue.

Although acknowledging these limitations, federation leaders did strive to enhance the Judaic content of federation programming. Jonathan Woocher, then a professor of Jewish communal studies at Brandeis University, described federation leaders as practicing a “civic Judaism” of *tzedakah* (charitable giving), Jewish peoplehood, *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), support for Israel, Judaic study, Holocaust memory, and affirmation of American culture as a value in itself.

Rabbis often did decry “civic Judaism” as “checkbook Judaism” in which God was strangely absent. Woocher and others, however, praised civic Judaism both as a pronounced improvement in the Judaic culture of federations and as a practical ideology for Jewish survival.²⁶

In turn, the federations began looking to Jewish religious leaders to provide Judaic content for their meetings and to serve as spiritual guides. The critic and author Irving Howe, in fact, had proclaimed an elegy for secular Jewish identity in his bestselling 1976 book *World of Our Fathers*. Howe challenged American Jewry to remember a glorious secular Jewish culture even as he held out little hope for a future revival of it.²⁷ By contrast, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, founder and president of CLAL (the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership), emerged in the 1970s as unofficial rabbi of Jewish federations. Few had done more than Greenberg to cement Holocaust memory into Jewish historical consciousness. He praised federations as practicing a “holy secularity”—that is, demonstrating that the very secular work federations were performing on behalf of the Jewish people and humanity generally represented the “*kedushah*” or holiness of Jewish spirituality. Greenberg’s personal and spiritual impact on federation leaders was profound, inspiring the involvement of Jewish leaders in virtually every federation in ongoing Jewish study and sensitizing them to the critical importance of Jewish education as key to the Jewish future.²⁸

The twin symbols of Holocaust and Israel became the dominant banners of federation activities and served as calls to arms for unstinting sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people. The Saturday-evening *havdalah* ritual, marking the end of Shabbat, became a spiritual banner for Jewish unity. The culture of the annual General Assembly was greatly intensified Jewishly, featuring kosher meals, a plethora of Shabbat *minyanim* (prayer groups) representing all streams of Judaism, and noted scholars-in-residence, who brought the fruits of Jewish academic scholarship into Jewish communal discussion.

Some criticized these developments as public Jewish expressions that were in effect replacing the Jewishness of the home—an ironic inversion of the nineteenth-century slogan “Be a Jew at home and a man in the street.” Frequently the very same individuals who so vigorously asserted their Jewish commitments in Washington and the American public square generally lacked the language to explain to their own children in the privacy of their own homes why leading a Jewish life might be important. Few could deny, however, that federations had become the dominant institutions of Jewish life and, in the process, had enhanced significantly the Jewish quotient and texture of Jewish communal life.

The 1970s: Continuing Optimism

The 1970s also presented American Jewry with a clear-cut laboratory to test the thesis of declining anti-Semitism. The 1973 oil embargo, accompanied by

a virtually overnight tripling of the price of gasoline alongside long lines at the pumps to purchase limited supplies, was designed to punish America for its support of Israel. Gratifyingly, however, Americans did not respond with anti-Israel or anti-Semitic sentiment. Beyond a few bumper stickers—widely reported but rarely actually seen—Americans blamed the oil crisis on the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) monopoly rather than on Jews advocating for American support for Israel.

On the more private level, however, American Jewry was beginning to face a crisis of continuity. The Council of Jewish Federations in 1970 had sponsored the first national study of American Jewry. This study reported that the mixed marriage rate had increased to 31 percent, nearly doubling the rate of the previous decade. Some local communities were in fact reporting rates that were much higher, usually owing to the small number of Jews in the community that limited the pool of available Jewish dating partners.²⁹

Although these findings caused considerable hand-wringing, Jewish leaders did believe they had the appropriate response. In a landmark address to the Reform movement, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (today the Union for Reform Judaism), urged revision of the age-old Jewish reluctance to seek converts and return to the Talmudic support for proselytizing of potential converts to Judaism. Schindler hoped to convert the “unchurched.”³⁰ In practice his proposals operated primarily to encourage the conversion of the non-Jewish partner in mixed marriages. American Jews remained uncomfortable with proselytizing beyond the parameters of mixed marriage.³¹ Surprisingly, Conservative and even Orthodox leaders, notably Rabbi Soloveitchik, tended to agree on the importance of conversion to Judaism so as to create a wholly Jewish home albeit insisting that conversions be *halachic* (according to Jewish law).³² Quickly the norm became accepted that in cases of mixed marriage the single best outcome was the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish spouse.

Initial results were encouraging. Although estimates varied, some reported that as many as one-third of non-Jewish partners in mixed marriages were converting to Judaism.³³ Conversely, conventional wisdom held that few Jews were converting to Christianity—if anything there was greater concern about Jews converting to eastern faiths such as Buddhism. Studies by the AJC reported that converts to Judaism were enhancing Jewish identity within the home, a finding that led the AJC’s director of research, Milton Himmelfarb, to quip, “Our imports [are] better than our exports.”³⁴ Hopefully, Jewish leaders argued, if the trend toward conversion to Judaism could be strengthened, what appeared to be a loss to the Jewish people could be transformed into a net gain. If nothing else, this optimistic forecast provided considerable solace to Jewish parents who expressed remorse and guilt over the intermarriage of their progeny.

Thus by the close of the 1970s the optimism of Jewish leaders appeared to be holding. Israel had survived the existential threat posed by the 1973 Yom

Kippur War, and American Jewish leaders prided themselves on their role in advocating successfully for American military assistance to Israel during the course of the war itself. By 1979 Egypt, the leading Arab nation, had signed a formal peace treaty with Israel, and ambassadors of the two countries had taken up residence in Tel Aviv and Cairo, respectively. Jewish public life appeared more overtly Jewish, causing many to reflect on how the community had changed from the days when its agenda was primarily to help immigrant Jews become Americans. Inter-marriage, to be sure, had become a real and disturbing phenomenon, but Jewish leaders understood conversion as a positive vehicle to transform crisis into opportunity. In turn, the guarded optimism about the Jewish future prevalent in the 1970s became far more heady and unrestrained in the 1980s.

The 1980s: Coexisting Optimism and Pessimism

By the mid-1980s widespread, albeit by no means unchallenged, optimism prevailed concerning the Jewish future in America. Again, a single book seemingly captured the communal ethos and mood even as it gave rise to considerable debate. In a *tour d'horizon* of Jewish life inviting comparison to Alexis de Tocqueville's survey of America in the 1830s, Charles Silberman, a noted journalist and sociologist, discovered no crisis in American Jewry but rather much to celebrate. In Silberman's view, anti-Semitism continued to decline as Jews were welcome in all corners of American society including the upper corporate suite. Beyond isolated pockets of Jewish poverty, Jews were generally quite comfortable and economically successful. Nor did Silberman see much danger in low birthrates and high rates of mixed marriage. He argued that Jewish women still intended to have two children, just later in life. As for mixed marriage, he calculated the overall rate at 28 percent—somewhat high but still manageable. Most significantly, he argued that conversion to Judaism would result in a 40 percent gain for the Jewish community in population numbers.³⁵

Although some disputed Silberman's reading of the demographic data, most acknowledged that a perspective that celebrated Jewish renewal rather than bemoaned erosion possessed considerable merit. Politically, AIPAC had become one of the most widely admired lobbies on the Washington scene, suggesting that Jews had learned to avail themselves of the unprecedented leeway America provided for exercising collective minority politics. Similarly, the Soviet Jewry movement could be counted as one of the great success stories of Jewish foreign policy in the twentieth century. Economically, the emergence of Jewish foundations suggested that leading Jewish philanthropists were prepared to devote the resources necessary to sustain Jewish life. Culturally, academic Jewish scholarship had become one of the treasures of American universities thereby legitimizing the study of Judaic civilization as part of American elite culture. In

1960, academic Jewish studies had been present on only a handful of American campuses. By the 1980s there was hardly a university of note that did not house an impressive department of academic Jewish studies.

Jewish feminism also constituted a critical aspect of this era of Jewish empowerment. By the 1980s the Conservative movement had accepted the ordination of women as religiously and morally correct much as the Reform movement had done in the 1970s. Even within the precincts of Orthodoxy one encountered women's prayer groups and advanced study circles notwithstanding considerable opposition to at least the former by leading Talmudic authorities. To the observer of Jewish life, the fact that women were demanding increased rather than decreased responsibilities within religious life argued for Jewish renewal and renaissance rather than decline.³⁶

Last, and strangely ignored by Silberman, was the rise of Jewish day schools providing intensive Judaic and general education within every community across the country. Once perceived as an option for Orthodox Jews alone, by the 1980s day schools were operating within each of the religious movements and held out the promise of a committed and Judaically literate leadership for the future. Within a generation the number of day school students nationwide had increased from fifty thousand in 1960 to over one hundred thousand in 1985—a growth that took place long after the baby boom had faded.³⁷ Significantly, by the 1980s the major complaint concerning day school education had become less about the quality of education provided than about the capacity of middle-class parents to afford it.

In effect the portrait of American Jewry in the 1980s painted by Silberman suggested a community in which Jews were becoming far more Jewishly identified than their parents or grandparents ever might have imagined. This story of Jewish renewal did present tangible evidence on its behalf and found in Silberman its narrator.

Missing from the narrative, however, was the story of assimilation and erosion. Two groupings in particular challenged Silberman's overoptimistic portrait: Orthodox Jews and Zionists. Both argued that assimilation was a far more powerful factor affecting the Jewish future than Silberman had suggested. Inter-marriage was more pervasive than he reported, and the fact that Jewish women said they wanted two children did not mean they actually would have them given delayed marriage and the heavy pressures of career.

Thus, Arthur Hertzberg, for one, noted that Silberman had omitted completely the mixed marriage rate in Los Angeles, the second largest Jewish community in the country, and one that had reported a mixed marriage rate of 39 percent.³⁸ Hertzberg agreed that the 1980s had brought about an era in which Jews increasingly were taking responsibility for their destiny. But he argued that only a religious revival, which he doubted would occur, ultimately could secure and sustain the Jewish future in America.³⁹

The Impact of the 1990 NJPS

Many of these forebodings were sharply confirmed by the early 1990s. In 1991, the Council of Jewish Federations released the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), the single most comprehensive survey of American Jewry ever conducted. The study reported a dual message: Jews were doing extremely well as Americans, much less so as Jews. This dual narrative of external success accompanied by internal weakness failed to penetrate public Jewish consciousness. Instead what everyone remembered about the 1990 NJPS was a single set of statistics: 52 percent of Jews who had married within the previous five years had married non-Jews, and only 5 percent of gentile spouses had converted to Judaism. Only 28 percent of children of mixed marriages were being raised exclusively within the Jewish faith.⁴⁰

It was these data that shocked the Jewish community and inaugurated the crisis of Jewish continuity. The findings implied that Jews were as likely to marry a gentile as a Jew and that the faith in conversion as answer to mixed marriage was hardly well grounded. If children were being raised outside the Jewish faith, hopes for realizing Jewish grandchildren were indeed in peril.

To be sure, some challenged these findings. The actual intermarriage rate apparently lay below 50 percent, a fact that provided some psychological comfort that more Jews were marrying Jews than gentiles. Others noted that the study should not be interpreted globally but needed to be contextualized within different segments of the Jewish community. When viewed segmentally, some Jews were most unlikely to choose gentile spouses; others overwhelmingly so. Much depended on geographic locale, size of the local Jewish community, and relative degrees of intensity and richness of Jewish life. New York City, for example, reported mixed marriage rates at or below 25 percent.⁴¹

These nuances, however, could not mitigate the report's devastating impact. The heady optimism about the Jewish future so prevalent in the 1980s was now called seriously into question. Jewish leaders convened conferences and task forces to determine actions and policies, or, as some cynics noted, to search for a magic bullet that would secure Jewish continuity.

Quick fixes, however, were not to be found because the problem of assimilation ran much deeper than supposed. For one thing, Jewish birthrates had fallen below replacement level. The total Jewish population stood at 5.5 million where in 1950 it had been five million. By contrast, the general American population numbering 150 million in 1950 had nearly doubled in the ensuing forty years. Or, as one wag quipped in response to the comment of a Christian minister that God does not hear the prayer of a Jew, the real story may be that there were simply not many Jews praying to begin with.

Intermarriage, however, ignited the sharpest debate over communal policy within the community. Some argued that intermarriage was now inevitable in American society, efforts at its prevention were futile at best and harmful at

worst, and that resources now needed to be directed at outreach to mixed married couples to enable them to draw closer to Jewish life. Others questioned the effects of abandoning efforts to encourage endogamy and conversion so as to avoid giving offense to mixed married couples. Still others questioned the effectiveness of outreach to those whose Jewish connections were so tenuous in any case.⁴²

A third area of contention concerned the relationship with Israel. At most, only a third of American Jewry—notwithstanding American Jewish affluence—had ever visited Israel at all, roughly half the rate of Jews in other English-speaking Diasporas such as Britain or Canada.⁴³ Declining interest in and attachment to Israel seemingly was a reflection of growing distance from and declining interest in matters Jewish generally. Thus assimilation was undermining some of the most critical assumptions of postwar Jewish life.

The relationship with Israel underwent further strains on the political level. The longstanding consensus of the Conference of Presidents that Jewish organizations speaking in Washington political circles ought to support the legally elected government of Israel began to fray in the 1990s. Americans for Peace Now supported the first Bush administration's policy of suspending loan guarantees to Israel to resettle Soviet Jewish immigrants unless Israel halted settlement activity on the West Bank.⁴⁴ In turn, their dissent from the communal consensus supporting Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on loan guarantees set a precedent for right-wing groups, notably the Zionist Organization of America and the National Council of Young Israel, to lobby against American support for the Oslo process in direct contrast to the policies of Israel's legally elected government. For the first time in Israel's history, domestic American Jewish groupings were asking the U.S. government to oppose Israeli governmental policy.

As American Jewry wrestled with demographic findings that challenged long-held communal assumptions about the Jewish future, two issues prevailed in Jewish communal discourse: securing Jewish continuity and recalibrating Israel-Diaspora relations in light of the Oslo process. Both issues were inherently divisive and aroused considerable passion on both sides. Securing a communal consensus appeared feasible in the face of external threats but quite elusive on the controversial internal questions of Jewish education, intermarriage, fertility, and attachment to Israel. Some argued for increased funds for Jewish day schools, which had become the jewel in the crown of the Jewish education system. Others looked to Jewish summer camps as the key to Jewish continuity. Still others maintained that the growth in intermarriage could be transformed into an opportunity for Jewish population growth.

The one program that succeeded in garnering communal support—albeit not without considerable difficulty—related to Israel-Diaspora relations while holding out the potential of securing future Jewish continuity. Stimulated by a partnership of leading philanthropists, Jewish federations, and the government of Israel, the Birthright Israel project sought to increase the number of Jews visiting Israel by providing free ten-day trips for Jews aged eighteen to twenty-six.

Numerically, the program succeeded far beyond expectations. Over the course of its first decade, Birthright had brought two hundred thousand young Jews to Israel. Early evaluations were quite positive, though long-term effects in terms of Jewish identity and attachment to Jewish peoplehood could be measured only longitudinally.⁴⁵ Philosophically, however, Birthright had sent positive signals. By making a visit to Israel a matter of right rather than privilege, Birthright was underscoring how 1948 had changed the map and meaning of Jewish peoplehood in irrevocable ways. Second, the philanthropists supporting Birthright were making a profound statement of philanthropic norms—namely, the priority of Jewish continuity projects in communal allocations. Last, the partnership between Israel, Jewish federations, and megaphilanthropists connoted a statement that Jews themselves had the resources and capacity to reshape the Jewish future.

Notwithstanding the optimism of Birthright's organizers, by the end of the twentieth century the dominant paradigm of American Jewish life remained the threat of assimilation and what to do about it. The nomination of Senator Joseph Lieberman for vice-president by the Democratic Party symbolized the arrival and acceptance of Jews within American society. The eight years of the Clinton administration had marked the collapse of whatever remaining barriers existed to Jewish participation in American society. The administration ceased counting how many Jews it employed and really did not care. No society in Diaspora Jewish history had afforded Jews as many opportunities as had the United States. What Jews would do with those opportunities remained the open question for the twenty-first century.

The 2000–2001 NJPS: Issues of Interpretation

The data reported for the twenty-first century reflected overall continuity with patterns reported earlier accompanied by some change. The 2000 National Jewish Population Survey reported intermarriage rates at 47 percent, suggesting a possible leveling off in intermarriage rather than an inexorable increase. Conversion to Judaism occurred approximately in 15 percent of cases, possibly suggesting that the conversion rate of 5 percent reported in 1990 had been artificially low. A third of mixed marrieds reported that they were raising their children as Jews, though exactly what they meant by that statement was by no means certain.⁴⁶

A subsequent study in Boston reported that in the Boston area 60 percent of mixed marrieds were raising their children as Jews, prompting widespread calls for increased allocations to programs that serviced mixed marrieds à la those of the Jewish Federation in Boston. Others noted that the Boston survey questions had not included the response option of raising children partly as Jews and partly outside the Jewish faith. Still others cautioned that the claim to raising children as Jews hardly guaranteed adult Jewish identification given the tenuous ties to faith and peoplehood among mixed marrieds themselves, let alone their progeny.⁴⁷

What NJPS 2000–2001 did suggest was that American Jewry required understanding in segmented rather than differentiated terms. Some Jews were in fact greatly intensifying their Jewishness. Others reported increasingly tenuous ties of Jewish identification. Was American Jewry becoming weaker or stronger? It depended on whom you asked and where you looked.

For example, if one adopted mixed marriage statistics as a barometer of Jewish identification, all depended on where one was looking. Orthodox Jews reported mixed marriage rates as low as 6 percent, Reform synagogue members reported a mixed marriage rate of 36 percent, and Conservative synagogue members reported a rate of 19 percent, significantly higher than the Orthodox, but significantly lower than Reform. The largest differentiation occurred between intermarriage rates for synagogue members and for nonmembers: unaffiliated Jews reported intermarriage rates in excess of 65 percent.

This model of a bipolar Jewish community with both ends of the spectrum becoming stronger at the expense of the middle can be demonstrated most sharply with respect to Orthodoxy. Although comprising only 8 percent of the Jewish population, Orthodox Jews represented 17 percent of the under-thirty-five population. Among children the distinction was even more pronounced: Reform synagogues reported a total of 197,000 children of synagogue members. Conservative synagogues reported 155,000. Orthodoxy, however, given higher birthrates, reported 225,000. In other words, the smallest of the movements contained 38 percent of the children within affiliated homes.⁴⁸ The pattern pointed clearly to a future Orthodox ascendancy within American Jewry. For example, 74 percent of Orthodox Jews reported multiple visits to Israel contrasted with only 31 percent for Reform Jews, suggesting intensive and long-term Orthodox attachment to Israel.⁴⁹

Yet all is hardly well within the Orthodox camp culturally even if it demonstrated considerable demographic strength and resilience. Orthodoxy itself had to confront the demographic increase of *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) families whose birthrate far exceeded those of the Modern Orthodox. Moreover, Orthodox institutions, particularly day schools, often experienced great difficulty in finding Modern Orthodox faculty and often were forced to rely on *haredi* instructional personnel.

Haredi Orthodoxy proudly pointed to its capacity to fill Madison Square Garden for a celebration commemorating completion of the study of the Talmud on a daily basis over a seven-year period, while secular and non-Orthodox organizations could hardly dream of such numbers in attendance at their events. Others pointed to Orthodox difficulties in cooperating with the non-Orthodox movements and to an overall spirit of Orthodox triumphalism, which frequently trivialized or dismissed the serious efforts to promote Jewish continuity within the non-Orthodox movements.

Perhaps most important, American Orthodoxy, beginning in the 1970s, had introduced a new norm of post-high school, precollege study in an

Israeli yeshiva for an extended period. Commonly referred to as the “gap year in Israel,” the study period often extended to two or even more years. The transformative impact on American Orthodoxy was dramatic: students returned to the United States strongly committed to Israel, the Jewish people, and religious practice. Over time, the norm became widely accepted for day school graduates. Yeshivot sent recruiters, day schools employed guidance counselors for Israel study programs, and many schools proudly took out ads in the media touting the fact that well over 50 percent of their graduating classes were spending at least the next year at an Israeli yeshiva. By 2002, 65 percent of New York City day school graduates were spending their gap year at an Israeli yeshiva.⁵⁰

These benefits could not be denied. Yet the impact of the experience in other and more dubious ways transformed the culture of modern American Orthodoxy. For those who attended Yeshiva University or Touro College, a step strongly encouraged by faculty at the Israeli yeshivot, the Israel experience meant limiting college to three years or less, diminishing by at least 25 percent the impact of undergraduate coursework in secular studies. More broadly, the Israel experience intellectually signaled the ascendancy of *roshei yeshiva* (heads of yeshivot) as primary influences. The hallmarks of secular education—encouraging questioning and doubt—gave way to a quest for certitude.⁵¹

In this context, the norm concerning spending the gap year in Israel merits serious communal debate. All acknowledge that Orthodoxy had been strengthened by the experience and that attachments to Israel had been deepened. Yet many who had championed or participated in the program question the phenomenon of enhancing the authority of Orthodox faculty uninterested in secular education, isolation from more modern and secular Jewish intellectual currents, and “flipping out,” the widely observed transformation of American Jewish Orthodox teenagers into black-hatted adolescents, who now perceived college as at best a necessary evil rather than an exciting intellectual opportunity.⁵²

In truth, each of the religious movements was experiencing both strengths and weaknesses as each confronted the new millennium. Conservative Judaism had forfeited its demographic primacy to Reform as aging congregations reported significant membership losses. Reform had become the largest movement but often found itself required to speak on behalf of large numbers of Jews whose identification with Reform was at best minimal and therefore opposed to a language of serious Jewish commitments and demands. Most important, each of the movements was experiencing tensions between inclusivity and distinctiveness—two worthy goals that coexisted only with great difficulty.

The more distinctively Jewish an institution became, the greater the difficulty it experienced in being inclusive of all Jews wishing to enter. Conversely, the more inclusive the institution was, the more difficulty it encountered in attempts to articulate distinctive Judaic teachings and messages. In the case of Reform, these tensions had been especially evident given the large numbers of mixed

marrieds and their families within Reform synagogues. Thus synagogues were debating questions of inclusivity such as whether a non-Jew should receive an *aliyah* (in this sense, the privilege to read publicly from the Torah) or be eligible for holding synagogue office.⁵³

Nor did consensus exist as to even how many Jews lived in the United States. NJPS 2000–2001 reported 5.2 million American Jews. Others pointed to the estimates of local Jewish communities, which in the aggregate totaled closer to six million.⁵⁴ Still others argued that non-Jewish members of Jewish households should be included in the number, which would raise it to 6.8 million. Given the blurring of boundaries between Jew and gentile in twenty-first-century America, in theological terms it had become increasingly difficult to determine who exactly had stood at Sinai.

Against this overall image of historical evolution within American Jewry, our original operating assumptions can now be revisited and their relevance in contemporary America tested:

1. The Eclipse of Orthodoxy

Demographically, as noted above, an Orthodox ascendancy is likely on the way—certainly among the active and engaged community. Given the convergence between high Orthodox birthrates and the disparity in degree of Jewish activism between in-married and out-married Jews, sociologist Steven M. Cohen goes so far as to predict: “If Orthodox Jews continue their demographic growth, perhaps approaching a quarter of the U.S. Jewish population in some 40 years, and if they continue to exhibit relative Jewish ‘hyper-activity,’ it’s certainly possible that they’ll make up as much as half of the Jewish communal activists in another generation or two.”⁵⁵

The communal implications in terms of intra-Jewish relations remain to be considered. First, the rest of the Jewish community, increasingly agonizing over whether it will in fact enjoy Jewish grandchildren, will do well to emulate the dedication of the Orthodox to ensuring Jewish continuity by insisting on the primacy of Jewish education, and strengthening ties to Israel as central to the meaning of Jewish peoplehood and identity. Conversely, a resurgent Orthodoxy, frequently accompanied by a rightward political and ideological shift, often suggests the triumph of extreme rather than moderate positions as religious norms. The current effort to restrict even further conversion to Judaism serves as a case in point.

Moreover, a resurgent Orthodoxy differs with the larger Jewish community on a range of American domestic policy and church-state questions. Tuition tax credits for Jewish children attending Jewish day schools are one example. To be sure, Jewish communal divides on these issues date back at least half a century. However, Orthodoxy today, rightfully impressed with its tangible successes

within America, appears far more willing to intensify political initiatives on the domestic political agenda.

Finally, the Orthodox resurgence risks widening the divide between Israel and American Jewry. The longstanding monopoly of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel over questions of personal status suggests continued friction between Israel and the Diaspora over the definition of who is a Jew, who is a convert to Judaism, and the rights of non-Orthodox rabbis to officiate at lifecycle events. These questions—critical to Jewish identity—present a face of Orthodox Judaism at odds with, and even alien to, non-Orthodox brethren in the United States.⁵⁶

2. The Decline of Anti-Semitism

Jewish security in America largely remains unthreatened. The long-term patterns of the gradual receding of anti-Semitism to the margins of American society continue into the twenty-first century. To be sure, anti-Semitism does exist and pockets of concern do need to be addressed, particularly the delegitimization of Israel on American campuses, the intellectual assault on pro-Israel activism, and interethnic and interreligious tensions. Nevertheless, the broad consensus remains intact. No society in Diaspora Jewish history has been as receptive to Jewish participation as has the United States. Every door remains open to Jews regardless of which party is in power. Test laboratories for anti-Semitism—the Pollard and Boesky affairs of the 1980s, the Marc Rich affair in the 1990s, the 9/11 terrorism, and the Walt-Mearsheimer controversy in the twenty-first century, all noticeably failed to inspire an anti-Semitic backlash.⁵⁷ The fact of acceptance of mixed marriage demonstrates alone that not only has the Jew become a desirable in-law but that anti-Semitism has been relegated to the margins of American society.

Some danger signs do exist. Black-Jewish tensions erupted in the 1991 Crown Heights riots. The militant rhetoric of some black leaders, such as Louis Farrakhan, stoked the flames considerably. Perhaps too whimsically Jews often hark back to a mythical golden age of black-Jewish relations, implying that by comparison today we have fallen upon hard times. Yet correctives for the mistakes of Crown Heights, such as lack of communication between Jewish and black leaders, have since been installed, and tensions between the two communities have subsided considerably, both nationally and locally.⁵⁸ That nearly 80 percent of American Jews voted for Barack Obama for the presidency of the United States testifies to positive relations between Jews and African Americans.

In recent years great concern has been focused on the university campus. A number of high-profile incidents of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism have occurred, including at elite universities. Particularly frightening were pressures on Jewish students demonstrating on behalf of Israel, pressures that included potential threats of violence.

Understandably the Jewish community has been greatly agitated by these

incidents. So much faith had been placed in American universities as vehicles of Jewish integration into American society that the specter of anti-Semitism on campus augurs for many a major setback to Jewish aspirations. Moreover, Jews traditionally have assumed, in many cases wrongly, that higher education serves as an antidote to anti-Semitism. To encounter anti-Semitism within some of the most highly educated sectors of American society therefore is especially disturbing.

Yet it remains important to understand the overall context of Jews in American universities. Most universities have no problem with either Jews or Israel. Less than 2 percent of the population generally, Jews constitute 5 percent of the student population, 10 percent of university faculties, and 20 percent of the faculties on elite campuses. Today, Ivy League universities routinely report over 25 percent Jewish enrollments and have been led on occasion by Jewish presidents. The most remarkable aspect of these statistics is that the Jewish presence, once sharply restricted on leading campuses, is now taken for granted as a desirable norm. Vanderbilt University went so far in recent years as to announce a special recruiting program designed to increase the number of its Jewish students. In recent years universities have introduced new courses in Israel studies—a phenomenon virtually unheard of a mere decade ago. Jewish life on campus may not be a “golden age,” as some have intimated, but it is far from the “disaster area” forecast in the 1960s.

3. Intensification of Israeli-American Ties

The longstanding closeness between American Jews and Israel—greatly intensified since 1967—now requires reexamination. Many have feared that for younger Jews, who have no memory of May 1967, the attachment to Israel has become tenuous. One 2008 study reported that only 49 percent of non-Orthodox Jews under thirty-five would perceive the destruction of Israel as a personal tragedy—in pronounced contrast to the overwhelmingly high percentage of Jewish communal leaders who would feel such a loss in highly personal terms.⁵⁹ Still other social scientists claim that the relationship between Israel and American Jews remains stable and that younger Jews remain as close to Israel as did their forebears.⁶⁰ Put another way, social scientists are divided as to whether Israeli-American ties and the longstanding pro-Israel consensus of American Jews remained salient or were experiencing some degree of attenuation.

Relations between American Jewry and Israeli society may be described as a pyramidal structure. At the apex of both communities—Israeli governmental officials and American Jewish leaders—relations generally remain quite close. The further one penetrates down to the grassroots of those societies, differences of culture, politics, identity, and sheer lack of knowledge and understanding about one another threaten to pull apart the world’s two largest Jewish populations.

Two primary issues were of dominant concern to American Jews when they considered Israel: the future of the peace process and Israel's future as a democracy. With respect to the former, a profound shift of thinking has taken place since the collapse of the Oslo process. American Jews have become more skeptical of Palestinian intentions and desires for sincere peace with Israel. However, the discussion has evolved from concerns of history/theology to concerns with Israeli security. Even among the Orthodox one detects a shift away from religious conviction and "Holy Land" to concerns as to whether a peace will be secure and lasting.

More important, American Jews clearly divide over Israeli settlement policy. Orthodox Jews tend to be quite supportive of settlements—citing friends and family members who often populate them. By contrast, Conservative and Reform Jews favor dismantling at least some of the settlements as part of an overall peace process. This issue will likely divide American Jewry much as it divides Israeli society and augurs a possible widening of differences between American and Israeli governmental policies.⁶¹

Yet perhaps even more important to Israeli-American Jewish relations than the role of the peace process is the perception of Israel's future as a democracy. Great resentment exists over the Orthodox monopoly within Israel over laws of personal status. Orthodox Jews defend this monopoly as necessary to ensure the Jewish character of the state and preserve the unity of the Jewish people by positing a halachic standard of who is a Jew. Non-Orthodox Jews, by contrast, fear a looming Jewish theocracy and desire greater separation of synagogue and state. These issues of religious pluralism and their place within Israeli society may well constitute flashpoints of concern between the two communities likely to weaken American Jewish attachments to Israel.

These legitimate concerns, however, need to be placed against the backdrop of both Jewish assimilation and renewal in American society. Frequently, those who are most outspokenly critical of one or another aspect of Israeli policy are those most committed and attached to Israel as a Jewish state. For example, a recent study of independent minyanim—hardly a venue where criticism of Israel is *verboten*—found that 96 percent of minyan participants had been to Israel at least once compared to only 35 percent of American Jews generally.⁶²

Indeed, as Jack Wertheimer has written, the real divide in Jewish life is between "young Jews who have spent considerable time in Israel and those who have not."⁶³ Put another way, those who are seeking to strengthen their relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people naturally perceive Israel as an appropriate vehicle for doing so. Conversely, those who are uninterested in leading a creative Jewish life are distancing themselves from Israel as well. Indifference, in other words, constitutes a greater danger to American Jewish-Israeli relations than criticism of particular Israeli policies and practices. For example, issues of religious pluralism evoke far greater resonance among committed Conservative and Reform Jews, for many of whom Israel plays a large role in their Jewish

identities, than they do among those whose attachments to Judaism and Jewish peoplehood are more tenuous.

4. The Continuing Salience of Holocaust Memory

Historians of Jewish memory describe the 1950s as an era of communal silence concerning the Holocaust. Nathan Glazer, who authored in 1957 the then-standard work on American Judaism, noted at the time that the Holocaust had made remarkably few inroads into Jewish communal consciousness.⁶⁴ Where some detected conscious suppression of memory, others maintained that the event had been simply too shocking to absorb and respond to within such a short span of time. Thus the novels of Elie Wiesel went unread. Returning American GIs in fact were prepared to tell what they had seen, but few found many listeners. The 1954–1955 judicial inquiry into the wartime behavior of Reszo Kastzner, a Hungarian Jewish leader accused of collaboration with Eichmann in Budapest and subsequently assassinated by Israeli extremists, sent shockwaves through Israeli society but caused barely a ripple within the American Jewish community.⁶⁵ When the Holocaust was invoked, for example, the 1959 film on Anne Frank, it was its universal dimensions rather than its particularistic Jewish themes that were emphasized.⁶⁶

Most recently Hasia Diner of New York University has challenged this portrait of the suppression of memory. She marshals a myriad of evidence to indicate that American Jewry on grassroots levels did remember the Holocaust in multiple ways—memorials, synagogue programs, Jewish camping, even folksongs.⁶⁷ Although Diner mounts an impressive array of evidence, the overall portrait of relative communal silence remains compelling. The Holocaust simply failed to penetrate Jewish public consciousness in the 1950s to the degree it did in the 1960s and 1970s. Of course people knew of the human losses—it could hardly be otherwise given that virtually every family had suffered a personal loss. However, the rhythms of Jewish communal life remained relatively unaffected and referenced the Holocaust at most only occasionally. Certainly the Holocaust was hardly a banner or rallying cry of Jewish public activity. World War II textbooks relegated the Holocaust to virtual footnote status. Jewish education, perhaps appropriately, underscored the need to connect with Judaic heritage rather than with the destruction of the Jews.

By contrast, the 1960s marked a breakthrough in Holocaust consciousness. The Eichmann trial brought awareness of the Holocaust to the American public. The month of May 1967, as noted earlier, evoked all the echoes of the 1940s—daily threats to eliminate the Jews, the silence of the churches, and the relative indifference of the liberal world. Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* and Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died* served as chilling reminders of how isolated and vulnerable Jews had been during the Holocaust years. Elie Wiesel became

the primary narrator of the Holocaust experience through literature and the spokesman for Holocaust survivors.⁶⁸

After 1967, in particular, as noted, the Holocaust, together with the state of Israel entered the civil religion of American Jews. For some Jewish leaders, the Holocaust became a banner for political activity, particularly the Soviet Jewry movement. Courses on the Holocaust on university campuses multiplied exponentially. Some Jewish academics questioned whether it was indeed more critical to study about Auschwitz than it was about Maimonides, but few doubted the popularity of Holocaust courses. By 2000 the UCLA Hillel director was reporting that, with the important exception of Hebrew-language courses, enrollment in Holocaust courses at UCLA outnumbered enrollment in all other Judaic studies courses combined. In 1979, the television miniseries *Holocaust* brought into people's homes an admittedly sanitized narrative of the Holocaust and initiated a process whereby the Holocaust penetrated not only Jewish historical consciousness but American historical consciousness about Jews as well.

The 1985 Bitburg affair seemingly posed a challenge. Excluded from the 1984 D-Day commemorations, and eager to promote a "safe nationalism" in contrast to the radical German Left, the German government invited President Ronald Reagan to lay a wreath at the Bitburg cemetery for World War II veterans. Apparently unaware that the cemetery contained the graves of SS officers, Reagan agreed to the visit notwithstanding the subsequent protests of Jewish leaders, particularly Wiesel. American Jewry, appalled by the failure to internalize the lessons of the Holocaust, redoubled its efforts to ensure that the Holocaust narrative be told and remembered.⁶⁹

Some, however, began to question this direction. Robert Alter, a prominent professor of Jewish literature at Berkeley, critiqued the emphasis on the Holocaust in Jewish communal and institutional life.⁷⁰ Deborah Lipstadt, an Emory University historian and in later years a justly-hailed defendant in a celebrated lawsuit initiated by David Irving, who objected to being characterized by her as a Holocaust denier, questioned the image of the Jew as perpetual victim. Lipstadt claimed that the emphasis on the Holocaust distorted Jewish historical vision and encouraged what the late Salo Baron had decried as the "lachrymose conception of Jewish history."⁷¹

Notwithstanding these reservations the project of enshrining Holocaust memory continued to advance, partly owing to the perseverance of survivors and partly to the determination of Jewish leadership that the story should remain ever-present within historical consciousness. The opening of the United States Holocaust Museum in 1993 signaled a major breakthrough. The museum attracted over two million visitors per year, 84 percent of them non-Jews. Among visitation sites in the DC area, the museum attracted more visits per year than any other site after the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and the Museum of American History.

Moreover, Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film, *Schindler's List*, told the

Holocaust story in a way that Americans could internalize. The narrative of rescue and the righteous gentile gave voice to the lessons of the Holocaust in ways that resonated with Americans. The film suggested that good continued to exist even in history's darkest moments. By the same token, secondary school curriculum units, such as the widely adopted *Facing History and Ourselves* compared the Holocaust experience to the persecution of other minorities.⁷²

Within Jewish education, programs such as the March of the Living enabled Jewish teenagers to visit Auschwitz and bring back the message that the Jewish condition is very different today. The visit culminated in a trip from Poland to Israel suggesting that Israel as a Jewish state provides every Jew with a potential refuge, and therefore "never again" should Jews be so defenseless.

By the turn of the century, the communal consensus prevailed, albeit with misgivings, that the Holocaust, as a dominant event of our times, must be taught both to Jews and to gentiles. The story of the Holocaust demonstrated effectively the dangers of Jewish vulnerability and the importance of Israel as symbol of Jewish power and self-defense. As Yitz Greenberg, a former chairman of the United States Holocaust Commission and a historian and theologian who had promoted study of the Holocaust within university curricula, commented, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, but absolutely powerlessness corrupts the most."⁷³

Yet by the twenty-first century more voices were challenging the emphasis on Holocaust education. Ruth Wisse of Harvard University argued that study of anti-Semitism in some measure was demeaning to Jews because it implied that the most important thing about Jews was not their achievements but the "negative passions they inspire."⁷⁴ In this context Wisse's university rejected funds for a chair in Holocaust studies arguing that a chair in modern Jewish history was a more pressing priority.

Moreover, one of the critical assumptions about Holocaust education was that it would reduce anti-Semitism. Yet by the twenty-first century it had become evident that even countries that had excelled in Holocaust education contained some of the chief purveyors of anti-Zionism. For example, the Scandinavian countries had introduced extensive Holocaust education, but now large sectors of left-wing elites within both Norway and Sweden equated the chief perpetrators of evil with Israelis.

Perhaps the most problematic area of Holocaust education, however, was its message for Jews and Jewish identity. For one thing, it distorted Jewish historical memory. Polish Jewish history serves as one example. Rather than recall seven centuries of Polish-Jewish interaction, the primary lens contemporary Jews have on Polish-Jewish history are the years of the Holocaust. The treasures of rabbinic scholarship, the extensive Jewish communal self-government, and Jewish enlightenment and *Haskalah* in Poland have all receded in historical memory in favor of the destruction of Polish Jewry. Moreover, the emphasis on the Holocaust distorts the meaning of contemporary Jewish identity, perhaps lending

credibility to Jean-Paul Sartre's claims that Jewish identity is primarily a reaction to anti-Semitism. In this view Jews and Judaism do not possess sufficient power in themselves to sustain the Jewish enterprise. The choice by individuals to lead a Jewish life is far less significant for the Jewish future than a gentile society that will not permit the Jew to forget who he is.⁷⁵

Not only is this a distorted reading of the Jewish experience, it fails to address the reality of American Jewry today. American Jews feel welcome in all sectors of American society. The problem of Jewish identity for them is why be Jewish in a society that gives Jews every possible choice. By underscoring Holocaust memory Jewish leadership in effect has said, "Be a Jew because terrible things happen to Jews." Conversely, however, if terrible things do not happen to Jews, Jewish leaders often find themselves incapable of articulating a compelling rationale for why leading a Jewish life is worthwhile in itself.

A less myopic view of Jewish history would stress that it concerns far more than Jewish suffering. It contains a story of Jewish creativity, community, peoplehood, and, yes, positive relations between Jews and others. Many of the greatest expressions of rabbinic Jewish scholarship flourished not because of gentile oppression but because of a friendly and supportive gentile environment. Yet, as Lipstadt noted, the dominant memory of the Holocaust leads one to believe that the lachrymose conception of Jewish history indeed is accurate. In turn, the emphasis on the Holocaust diverts the community from the more critical questions of securing future Jewish continuity and nurturing stronger ties of peoplehood, ties that need to be based on common Jewish aspirations and hopes rather than fears.

There are other distortions resulting from the current emphasis on the Holocaust in communal programming. Virtually every Jewish high school features the Holocaust as central to historical memory. By contrast, however, the other seminal event in modern Jewish experience—the birth of Israel—rarely receives adequate attention. Moreover, given the current emphasis on the Holocaust in communal programming, we have, unfortunately, become embroiled in an unseemly competition for "victim status," a status in which traditional Judaism saw no merit and took no pride. We have become quite shrill in our denunciations of President Roosevelt's failure to rescue while ignoring his real achievement, which was to lead America out of its isolationist mindset and, like Winston Churchill, to recognize that Western democracy could never coexist with Nazi Germany. Lastly, we have held our heads in shame over the Jewish community's own failure to rescue, ignoring how little actual influence and leverage American Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s in fact exerted over American public policy.

Moreover, the emphasis on the Holocaust in American public culture distorts the presentation of Jews and Judaism to the American mindset. For American society, it is as if the Jews had been given a magic wand to make mandatory one but only one chapter of Jewish history. Yet rather than choose, as the foundational narrative of the Jewish people, from among the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the

return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood in modern Israel, or the emergence of prophetic Judaism as a protest culture challenging the status quo, we have chosen the single most negative chapter in the experience of Jews as a people for Americans to grasp of Jewish history. Thus Holocaust museums have become the dominant expression of Judaic culture in American public space.

An ironic illustration of this trend occurred in the context of President Obama's 4 June 2009 speech in Cairo. Jewish leaders rightly objected to his speech in terms of the narrative of Israel. The speech implied that the primary rationale for Israel's existence had been the memory of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Jewish leaders correctly took offense that Obama had failed to invoke Jewish historical aspirations and ties to the homeland.⁷⁶ Yet, in fairness, the president had only articulated what Jewish leaders themselves had been emphasizing. In other words, one may hardly object to use of the Holocaust trope as rationale for the need for a Jewish state when Jewish leaders themselves have been striking those chords for the American public over several decades.

To be sure, important reasons remain for the focus on Holocaust education. In itself it represents the most horrendous chapter of Jewish history if not of all human history. Moreover, there remain those who deny the facts of the Holocaust. A larger number, particularly among historians, attempt to relativize the proportions of the Holocaust, in effect reducing it to one tragedy among others in twentieth-century history. For these reasons Holocaust history is significant. But it needs to be contained within a larger narrative of the modern Jewish experience. Building a strong Jewish identity requires surefootedness in the riches of the Jewish experience. Similarly, the message of what it means to be a Jew should never be equated with the image of perpetual suffering.

5. The Values of Endogamy and Conversion

Perhaps no issue has been as divisive among Jews as have been contrasting communal perceptions on mixed marriage. Some perceive mixed marriage as representing a collapse of communal values of family and endogamy and define mixed marriage as the single greatest threat to Jewish continuity. Ideally, for them, intermarriage should be prevented. When it does occur the single best outcome is the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Others take a more benign view of mixed marriage, which, in any case, will doubtless remain a fact of American Jewish life. For this group, all efforts should be geared toward outreach to mixed married couples, encouraging their involvement in Jewish communal life and increasing the percentage of mixed marrieds willing to raise children as Jews.⁷⁷ This latter group regards the rhetoric of endogamy and conversion as potentially offensive to mixed marrieds and their families.

Two critical values of Judaic heritage seem to have fallen off the radar screen in recent decades: the importance of marriage within the faith and that conversion

of the non-Jewish spouse provides the best outcome to a mixed marriage. The prevailing reality of mixed marriage as a phenomenon absent conversion to Judaism makes it difficult to sustain these twin messages. Yet failure to articulate them cedes ground to a dominant American culture that perceives mixed marriage as normative and as American as apple pie. In fact, over 1.6 million non-Jews currently reside in homes alongside Jewish loved ones.⁷⁸

Once-sacred taboos clearly have fallen. Nearly 50 percent of newly-affiliated couples in Reform congregations contain at least one partner who was not raised as a Jew. These, however, in turn—that is, those mixed marrieds prepared to become synagogue members—represent but a fraction of the overall numbers of mixed marrieds, most of whom do not join temples. Contentious issues arise over whether non-Jewish partners can become officers of synagogues, and some have even suggested that the ban on rabbis or rabbinical students having non-Jewish spouses needs to be lifted.⁷⁹

Yet the differences between in-marrieds and mixed marrieds remain considerable and have ominous implications for the Jewish communal future. For example, the Christmas tree, once prevalent inside American Jewish homes, today exists in only 3 percent of in-married Jewish homes; yet 82 percent of mixed marrieds maintain a Christmas tree in their home. Two-thirds of mixed marrieds who claim to raise Jewish children remain totally unaffiliated with any Jewish communal institution, four times the rate for in-marrieds with children. Last, children of in-marrieds are twenty times more likely to travel to Israel than children of mixed marrieds.⁸⁰

One small incident helps to clarify this debate. Some years back, around the time of the High Holidays, I received a greeting card urging me to add a new *Al chet* (confession of sin) to the Yom Kippur confessional liturgy. In itself this was by no means unusual. Generally, I set these recommendations aside on the grounds that my bill of accounts to the Almighty is already sufficiently weighty and requires no additions. This one, however, caught my eye.

Specifically, the greeting card requested that I confess, “for the sin we have committed against Thee in the exclusion of the mixed marrieds.” The message of the card clearly signaled a sharp transformation of Jewish values. Historically, mixed marriage constituted a sin and outreach a vehicle of mitigating its effects. Rabbi Schindler’s 1978 address insisted that dealing with mixed marriage through outreach did not mean accepting it.⁸¹ Now, however, we were informed that intermarriage itself is perfectly acceptable, and the only sin is the failure to engage in sufficient outreach.

Conversely, the rise in the phenomenon of mixed marriage does signal the increased acceptability of Jews in American society and should allay Jewish fears of a looming danger of anti-Semitism in the United States. As the numbers of Americans with Jewish loved ones increases, the number of people offended by anti-Jewish comments or stereotypes is also likely to increase. The real question, however, is whether, as outreach advocates eloquently put it, we should now

view mixed marriage as an opportunity to be embraced rather than a danger to be contained.

Several qualifications, however, are in order. First, the Jewish community can indeed operate upon a principle of inclusivity in which it is open to all interested in joining and partaking of its services. No specific need exists to apply the “who is a Jew” test for communal services and programs that are not religiously based, such as political activism, adult Jewish learning, child care, and so on. By the same token, outreach in the form of Jewish education easily may include mixed marrieds within programs targeted to larger Jewish populations. Much as a college professor would never distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish students in courses of academic studies, Jewish communal programs designed to teach Judaism to families and individuals may absorb mixed marrieds who are open to and interested in leading a Jewish life. This type of outreach can maximize Jewish content without validating mixed marriage as a phenomenon.

The second set of questions relates to the goals of outreach. Many outreach advocates fail to articulate the goal of conversion to Judaism. Still others fail to proclaim the virtues of an exclusively Jewish home. Reportedly one rabbi goes so far as to maintain a Christmas tree in the lobby of his synagogue as a sign of welcome!⁸² One may easily understand the good intentions underlying such an approach. Outreach advocates maintain correctly that mixed marrieds are suspicious of the agenda of the Jewish community and hope to allay the fears of mixed marrieds by a language that validates where they are rather than articulates where they ought to be. Those are, to be sure, legitimate concerns. However, they do raise the specter of a Jewish community that abstains from a language of sustained Jewish expectations and commitments so as to avoid giving offense to key constituencies. The Conservative movement, for example, long perceived as underscoring conversion as the single-best response to mixed marriage, may be retreating from this stance.⁸³ More generally, a Brandeis University study of congregations found that many failed to encourage conversion to Judaism as an appropriate and meaningful response to the fact of mixed marriage.⁸⁴

Last, outreach advocates frequently request communal neutrality on intermarriage so as to be effective in their approach to mixed marrieds. For example, Irwin Kula, the widely esteemed copresident of CLAL, among many others, urges the Jewish community to stop inveighing against intermarriage, which “poses no intrinsic threat to Jewish life.” Kula urges that “it is not about lowering boundaries but actually imagining that there are no boundaries.”⁸⁵

More important, neutrality toward mixed marriage connotes surrender to it as normative. American culture itself proclaims mixed marriage as quintessentially American, manifesting American traditions of tolerance and diversity. Only the Jews can articulate a countermessage, and failure to do so may easily result in a mixed marriage rate that exceeds 90 percent given the tiny percentage of Jews in

American society. Nevertheless, outreach advocates generally prefer sacrificing the language of endogamy so as to enhance the message of outreach. Both messages are significant, and both need to be articulated.

Jewish leadership, thus far, has failed to see mixed marriage as a challenge of balancing conflicting imperatives of welcome, inclusivity, and enlarging our demographic base coupled with preserving a distinctive Judaic ethos that underscores the importance of endogamy and conversion to Judaism. Instead, Jewish leaders look for comforting news that will somehow guarantee the Jewishness of grandchildren even absent the commitment to raise children exclusively as Jews. For example, the Boston study, which did not probe specifically whether children are being raised exclusively as Jews, is taken as proof that outreach to mixed marrieds will ensure Jewish continuity. If only we replicate Boston's commitment to outreach, the intermarriage crisis will become a success story! Whether Boston is an exception and whether the offspring of Boston's mixed marrieds will in fact identify as Jews as adults and will be Jewishly active are questions that may be measured only over the long term. In the short term, Jewish leaders need to keep in play the twin challenges of encouraging in-marriage and welcoming the participation of interested mixed marrieds in Jewish life rather than sacrifice one of these goals for the sake of the other.

6. Jewish Education as Key to the Jewish Future

Perhaps the most pressing long-term concern relates to the future of Jewish education. Day schools currently attract over two hundred thousand students across the country. Yet, as noted, as early as the 1980s, the primary complaint about day schools pertained less to the quality of education provided and more to the capacity of middle-class parents to afford it.

For the Orthodox, twelve years of day school education have clearly become normative. Among the non-Orthodox, by contrast, the dropout rate after bar or bat mitzvah suggests that children are lost precisely at the moment when day school education is likely to exert the most profound influence in shaping and forming their Jewish lives.

Research studies have established the power of Jewish education on the high school level. There are, at least, four aspects of these success stories:

1. Jewish civilization is a bookish culture celebrating the beauty and power of Jewish ideas. Only during adolescence do students become sufficiently mature to understand the complexities of Jewish ideas, let alone their interaction with Western mores and values.
2. The friendship networks established during high school are particularly important and often serve as predictors of degree and intensity of long-term Jewish involvement.

3. Adolescence is precisely the time when questions of dating, marriage, and family expectations begin to assume salience for young people.
4. Day school education at its best provides an excellent opportunity to explore the fundamental assumptions of modern Jewish identity: that Judaic heritage and modern culture may feed on one another in exciting ways, and that the conflicts and tensions between these two value systems need to be weighed carefully rather than ignored. The Covenant Foundation recently recognized this potential by offering one of its esteemed awards to a biology teacher who explored with her students the conflicts of science and religion and the salience of Judaic heritage for ethical dilemmas raised by contemporary scientific research.

Sadly, most American Jews remain unconvinced of the potential of Jewish high schools. Notwithstanding growth in the Reform and Conservative day school movements, few of these have been high schools. Collectively, non-Orthodox high schools report barely 5,600 students nationally.⁸⁶ Some are concerned that intensive Jewish education may mean diminished involvement in the broader American culture and possibly negatively affect community relations. This is an untested but unlikely assumption given the unprecedented degree of Jewish integration into American society, and day schools, with the notable exception of the haredi sector, remain dedicated to educating students to the proposition that American Jews do live in two civilizations.

Policy implications, therefore, are clear but warrant redefining priorities and norms within the Jewish community. First, the Conservative and Reform movements need to be challenged to build and maintain more high schools. School closings need to be prevented and success narratives widely disseminated. Both movements are committed to Judaic literacy, and Jewish high schools provide ideal vehicles for realizing that aim.

Second, high schools must be made affordable for all Jews. The Jewish community, to date, has resisted tuition subsidies for day school students generally on the grounds that their numbers, currently over two hundred thousand, have so increased that meaningful subsidies for all would prove too heavy a communal burden. Yet if day schools make the greatest difference on the high school level, the policy implication is to target subsidies to those attending the ninth grade and beyond—a more limited and affordable yet most worthy goal.

Most important, however, the Jewish community needs to undergo a profound cultural change in how it perceives day schools. Adolescence remains a critical age for formation of Jewish identity and warrants communal intervention to secure it. The Jewish community's embrace of day schools, albeit significant, to date simply has not extended to the high school levels with the critical exception of American Orthodoxy. Jewish educators are currently frustrated at the fact that the teenagers are lost precisely at the moment when Jewish education might make the most difference to them Jewishly. Judaic literacy, to be sure, is no guarantee

of Jewish commitment. Yet a literate Jew remains the most likely to remain a committed Jew.

7. The Ongoing Salience of Religious Denominations

American Jewish religious life over the past two centuries has been denomination-centered. Sephardic Orthodoxy enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the early days of the Republic. Reform Judaism enjoyed an ascendancy in America under German Jewish leadership. The post-Civil War onrush of immigration created an Orthodox ascendancy, notwithstanding the fact that most immigrants coming to the United States were doing so against the wishes of East European rabbinical leadership and therefore were unlikely to attend synagogues in any case. However, the Orthodox synagogue became the synagogue that immigrant Jews chose not to attend. Conservative Judaism, established originally in an unsuccessful effort to attract East European immigrants, found its most natural base in suburban America. Thus it enjoyed its greatest growth spurt in the post-World War II era and by the 1990s clearly had become dominant among the religious movements.

By the twenty-first century, however, as noted above, Conservative Judaism was going through a crisis of self-confidence given significant demographic and institutional losses. Reconstructionism, always the smallest of the movements, was experiencing some growth but its intellectual and institutional significance far outweighed its demographic numbers given the prominence of Reconstructionist rabbis in Jewish education and in Jewish cultural institutions.

Yet the critical question by the twenty-first century was whether denominations still mattered at all. A postdenomination ethos had been current since at least the 1970s with the publication of the *Jewish Catalog* series. These volumes formed a do-it-yourself guide to Jewish living as practiced and expressed by the 1970s Jewish counterculture and *havurah* (small religious fellowship) movements. For the editors of the *Jewish Catalog*, the religious movements had ceased being relevant to the needs of their generation. Denominational differences in their view were, at best, quite trivial. Their motto became a “do it yourself” Jewish identity and practice guided by Judaic heritage but governed by no particular denomination.⁸⁷

By the twenty-first century this view had evolved into an exhortation to the community to “do Jewish,” that is, advance the programs to secure the Jewish-continuity agenda but avoid getting bogged down in what were perceived as irrelevant denominational disputes. In 2005, Limmud, a Jewish learning initiative, pronounced that “denominations are yesterday’s news.” Similarly, prominent philanthropist Michael Steinhardt and the above-mentioned Jewish intellectual and spiritual leader Yitz Greenberg in 2003 announced a movement known as “common Judaism,” beyond the parameters of the respective religious denominations.⁸⁸ By 2005 Steinhardt was arguing, “The period when Reform,

Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism were vibrant, growing, intellectually exciting movements has all but ended,” in effect homogenizing the non-Orthodox movements.⁸⁹ Fluidity and denomination-switching suggested that theological and ideological distinctions critical to leadership meant little to the rank and file for whom style and behavior counted far more than theology.⁹⁰

But the denominations themselves continue to possess considerable salience for the Jewish body politic. Seventy-three percent of American Jews continue to self-identify as either Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist. These are far more Jewishly active than those who do not so identify. The latter score far higher on intermarriage rates and far lower on affiliation rates.⁹¹ Second, the disputes between the denominations are by no means trivial. Questions of personal status, definitions of who is a Jew, approaches to intermarriage and conversion, and, last but hardly least, how to read Scripture and its record of revelation remain powerful ideological issues that the Jewish community needs to debate and confront.⁹² Similarly, the denominations provide much of the institutional structure—schools, camps, youth movements—essential to transmittal of Jewish identity.⁹³

Most important, however, is the power of ideology and commitment. The more Jews battle over what it means to be Jewish, the greater the communal discord but also the greater the passion over the meaning and conviction of what it means to be a Jew. The greater the passion underlying the message, the greater its sustaining power. Conversely, Jewish leaders who espouse postdenominationalism are effectively stating that there are enough enemies from without, and Jews should not deflate their numbers further by squabbling over who precisely is a Jew. Younger Jews in particular often resonate to this reasoning, and, as noted, they bring greater experimentation and more denominational switching.

Moreover, often overlooked is the critical role denominations play in encouraging Jewish passion and ideological commitment. Jews willing to enter intellectual battle over these questions are more likely to be committed to their respective ideas. As the Talmud put it, “a dispute for the sake of heaven is likely to be sustained.” In this view, a key to Jewish continuity lies in creating passionate and committed members within each of the religious movements who will translate that passion into active and vibrant Jewish religious institutions. To be sure, such a vision presupposes a contentious Jewish people, for the chasm between these denominations in fact runs quite deep. A contentious people, however, is not necessarily a divided people. Instead the model of a contentious people suggests a critical mass of serious Jews committed to their respective religious movements so as to dedicate themselves to ensuring its future success and continuity.⁹⁴

By contrast, homogenization of the non-Orthodox movements will not create more committed Jews. On the contrary, given such homogenization the most committed elements are likely to find non-Orthodox Jewish life too bland to be sustaining.

Conclusion

How, then, may one characterize the place of Jews in twenty-first-century America? The fundamental paradigm remains that the narrative of Jews as Americans underscores America as the Diaspora that has worked extraordinarily well for Jews. The Jewish story in America has been an unprecedented success story. The outer lives of Jews as Americans elicit the envy of virtually every other ethnic and religious grouping. Jewish security rests on firm bases, and Jewish social and economic upward mobility remain high. By the criteria of educational and income achievements, Jews have done extremely well. For example, Jews are at least three times as likely as other Americans to possess graduate degrees.

The paradox, however, relates to the inner lives of Jews as Jews. Jewish insecurity and anxiety relate to concerns over future Jewish continuity expressed by high intermarriage rates, low fertility rates, and the huge gap between secular educational attainments and minimalist Jewish educational attainments. To be sure, Orthodox Jewry provides an important exception. Moreover, pockets of Jewish renewal exist within each of the religious movements. Yet that story of Jewish renewal coexists alongside a larger narrative of assimilation and erosion.

In short, it remains the best of times and the worst of times. Jews have become so well integrated into American society that the boundary between Jew and non-Jew has become so fluid as to be frequently nonexistent. Intermarriage itself, a barometer of Jewish weakness, also signals the unprecedentedly high degree of acceptance of Jews within American society.

Moreover, the Jews form an extraordinarily well-organized community. No community in Diaspora Jewish history has constructed so impressive an array of Jewish institutions. At the conclusion of the recent film, *The Reader*, a German barrister questions a renowned Jewish author of Holocaust literature whether a Jewish organization exists to promote literacy. She replies, "There must be; there is a Jewish organization for everything." Whether that impressive and costly network of Jewish organizations can survive economic downturn and the assimilation of many of its supporters is likely to prove a major challenge for the Jewish future.⁹⁵ When economic resources were abundant, few choices needed to be made between conflicting communal priorities. The pressure of balancing budgets and meeting payrolls at a time of economic downturn, however, may well create the necessity for making such difficult choices and in turn cause considerable shakeout among frequently overlapping and competing Jewish institutions.

Second, continuing Jewish political influence can by no means be taken for granted. Demographics alone suggest an aging Jewish population with fewer young people. In political terms that translates into fewer Jewish votes. In large measure Jewish political power depends on the rules of the Electoral College, which awards large numbers of electoral votes in presidential elections to precisely those states of densest Jewish concentration. Jews may constitute less

than 2 percent of the overall population but 4 percent of the voting population given the relatively low turnout at the polls. Yet fewer Jews in turn mean fewer Jewish votes.

Fortunately, Jewish political influence has never depended on demographics alone. Elections require finances, and the willingness of Jews to involve themselves financially within political campaigns means that candidates will continue to court Jews so as to capture their largesse. Most important, so much of the political discussion in American culture has been conducted by Jews within both liberal and conservative camps. The presence of Jewish intellectuals and thinkers within universities, policy think tanks, and organs of public opinion means that politicians of both parties will continue to ask what is on the minds of American Jews.

Will these patterns continue in the future? In 2004, Daniel Pipes pronounced an incipient end to American Jewry's golden age.⁹⁶ In his view, a growing Muslim population augured poorly for continued Jewish political influence. Perhaps of even greater concern is the predictability of Jewish voting patterns. Since 1928 a virtual iron law has prevailed among Jewish voters: Jews will vote for the more liberal candidate—Jewish or not—who is not perceived as hostile to Israel. Conversely, Jews will not vote for the more conservative candidate notwithstanding his or her strong support for Israel. To be sure, Jews have punished candidates at the polls who were perceived as hostile to Israel, notably President Jimmy Carter in 1980. By 2010, the predictability of Jewish voting patterns possibly constitutes the Achilles' heel of Jewish political strength. If the more liberal candidate can take Jewish votes for granted and the more conservative candidate can harbor no illusions about capturing Jewish votes, little need exists on either side to court Jewish voters.

There remain two exceptions to the patterns of predictability. In 2000, a majority of Orthodox Jews voted for Vice-President Al Gore. By 2004 nearly 70 percent of Orthodox Jews voted for President George W. Bush in pronounced contrast to 86 percent of Reform Jews who favored Senator John Kerry. Russian Jews were also far less predictable and more likely to vote for the more conservative candidate. Together Orthodox and Russian Jewry constitute 18 percent of the Jewish population, suggesting that Democratic candidates may reasonably continue to expect large Jewish majorities but that the potential of a Jewish shift to the Republican camp remains a possibility, especially given fertility and age rates among Orthodox Jews.

To take the most recent election, in 2008 some voiced concerns about the putative presidency of Barack Obama with respect to Israel, yet over three-quarters of American Jews voted for him. Nevertheless, the perception of Jewish influence remains. High-profile politicians, especially Senators Kerry and Clinton, loudly proclaimed their interest in discovering Jewish members of their respective family trees. In 2008, all presidential candidates continued to seek out Jewish votes and express themselves positively on Jewish concerns. The defection of

some sectors of elite opinion from the pro-Israel consensus, for example, the charge by Profs. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer that the “Israel lobby” has hijacked American foreign policy, in fact failed to evoke much resonance within the political campaign or among voters.⁹⁷

The underlying problem, however, clearly remains assimilation. Jewish political influence presupposes a critical mass of Jews interested in leading a creative Jewish life. Fewer Jews concerned with Judaism means a weakened Jewish people. What Jews should do with themselves as Jews and why they should lead a Jewish life clearly have become the most vexing questions that need to be answered in order to shape the Jewish future. American Jews had survived well the storms of the twentieth century. How they would cope with an America that loved Jews and welcomed them into all sectors of American society remains very much an open question.

Notes

1. Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), esp. chs. 10–11.
2. On the baby boom, see Chaim Waxman, *Jewish Baby Boomers* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), introduction. For some evidence indicating that Jews did *not* share fully in the postwar baby boom, see Samuel C. Heilman, *Portrait of American Jews* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 41–42.
3. Arthur Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 187. See also Heilman, *Portrait*, 29–30; Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 323–25. These attendance rates seem to have held until at least 1970, according to Gallup surveys. See Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 202, n. 57.
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5. Deborah Dash Moore, “Jewish GI’s and the Creation of the Judeo-Christian Tradition,” *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 8, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 53, n. 42; idem, *GI Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 257–59.
6. Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*. See also Harry Ausmus, *Will Herberg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 141–51.
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8. Charles Stember et al., *Jews in the Mind of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), part 1. See, more generally, Edward Shapiro, *A Time for Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), ch. 2; Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), ch. 8.
9. Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton, *The Rosenberg File* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1983), 349–55.
10. Edward S. Shapiro, *We Are Many* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 95.
11. See the memoir of ADL’s general counsel and associate national director, Arnold Forster, *Square One* (New York: Primer, 1988), 125.

12. David Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 205, 428.
13. On Ben-Gurion-Blaustein, see Zvi Ganin, *An Uneasy Relationship* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), ch. 4. On the American Council for Judaism, see Thomas Kolsky, *Jews against Zionism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), Epilogue and Conclusion.
14. Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 21, 23, 117.
15. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1963), 164.
16. Marshall Sklare, "Intermarriage and the Jewish Future," *Commentary*, April 1964, reprinted in Marshall Sklare, *Observing American Jews* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1993), 234–47.
17. Heilman, *Portrait*, 58–60; Waxman, *Jewish Baby Boomers*, 12.
18. J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 133–38.
19. Arthur Hertzberg, "Israel and American Jewry," *Commentary*, August 1967, 69–73.
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21. Charles Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 164–68.
22. Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong?* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 257–63.
23. Henry Feingold, *Silent No More* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 62–69.
24. Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, *The Death of an American Jewish Community* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 40, 56–57. See also Seth Farber, *An American Orthodox Dreamer* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 96, 153.
25. Rosenman expressed his critique at a retreat for Hadassah leadership in May 1980. He expanded on these views in many private discussions with me during my tenure under him at AJC.
26. Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), esp. chs. 3–4.
27. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 639–46.
28. Steven Bayme, "Yitz Greenberg: A Biographical Introduction," in Steven Bayme and Steven Katz, eds., *Continuity and Change: Festschrift in Honor of Irving (Yitz) Greenberg's 75th Birthday* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, forthcoming).
29. Egon Mayer, "Intermarriage Research at the American Jewish Committee: Its Evolution and Impact," in Steven Bayme, ed., *Facing the Future* (New York: Ktav and AJC, 1989), 168–69.
30. Peter Berger, "Converting the Gentiles?," *Commentary*, May 1979, 25–29.
31. Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 81.
32. Soloveitchik's remarks occurred in a Hebrew-language interview printed in *Ha-doar*, 22 August 1986, and subsequently cited in Marc Angel, *Choosing to Be Jewish: The Orthodox Road to Conversion* (New York: Ktav, 2005), 15–16.
33. Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, *Conversion among the Intermarried* (New York: AJC, 1987), 1–2.
34. Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 123.
35. Charles Silberman, *A Certain People* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), chs. 5–7.
36. Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath of Life* (New York: Free Press, 1993), *passim*.
37. Jonathan Woocher, "Mountain High, Valley Low: Status of Jewish Education Today," in Bayme, *Facing the Future*, 117.
38. Arthur Hertzberg, *Jewish Polemics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992),

- 140–41. See also Steven Bayme, “Crisis in American Jewry,” *Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 8 (1986), reprinted in Steven Bayme, *Jewish Arguments and Counterarguments* (New York: Ktav and AJC, 2002), 415–18.
39. Hertzberg, *Jews in America*, 387–88.
 40. Barry Kosmin et al., *Highlights of the CJF National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1991), passim. For reactions to the NJPS, see Marianne Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 369–74.
 41. Jacob Ukeles and Ron Miller, *Jewish Community Study of New York* (New York: UJA Federation, 2004), 163.
 42. For a diverse range of responses, see *A Statement on the Jewish Future: Text and Responses* (New York: AJC), 1997.
 43. David Mittelberg, *The Israel Connection and American Jews* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 61.
 44. Dan Fleshler, *Transforming America’s Israel Lobby* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009), 106.
 45. Leonard Saxe and Barry Chazan, *Ten Days of Birthright Israel* (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press, 2008), passim. Significantly, in 2009, one Birthright trip provider resigned after being told that he could not encourage endogamy among participants. See Sharon Udasin, “A Divorce in the Birthright Family,” *New York Jewish Week*, 8 July 2009.
 46. United Jewish Communities, *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population* (New York: UJC, 2003), 16–19.
 47. Steven M. Cohen, Jack Ukeles, and Ron Miller, “Read Boston’s Study on Inter-marriage with Caution,” *Forward*, 8 December 2006. See also Leonard Saxe et al., *Boston’s Good News on Inter-marriage* (Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 2006).
 48. Jonathan Ament, *American Jewish Religious Movements* (New York: UJC, 2005), see tables on pp. 5, 21, 24. See also Ukeles Associates, *Young Jewish Adults in the U.S. Today* (New York: AJC, 2006), 79–83 for data on younger American Jews.
 49. Steven Bayme, “An Orthodox Ascendancy,” *Jewish Week*, 27 March 2009, 22. See also Jonathan Ament, *Israel Connections and American Jews* (New York: UJC, 2005), 26, table 5.
 50. Samuel C. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 112–22.
 51. Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in discussions concerning Middle Eastern politics. Religious Zionism—one of the chief features of Modern as opposed to haredi Orthodoxy—now often became identified with the religious messianism of Gush Emunim, the West Bank settlers’ movement. To take one personal example, when my daughter wrote an essay at the conclusion of her year in Israel in which she called for open debate and discussion concerning the Oslo process, the instructor, rather than engaging the issue, much less acknowledge the criticisms of Gush Emunim of the revered dean of Modern Orthodoxy, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, marginalized her by saying such a student obviously did not belong in the program.
 52. Unfortunately, research on the one-year programs is extremely limited. The volume by Shalom Z. Berger et al., *Flipping Out?* (New York: Yashar Books, 2007), by the authors’ own admission is based on research from a decade ago and tracks subjects for only one year rather than longitudinally. Unfortunately, no study exists of the programs themselves and the many shades and distinctions among them.
 53. See articles by Deborah Rubin, “Eden Temple to Reassess Non-Jews as Officers,” and

- “Temple Reasserts Stance on Non-Jews as Officers,” both in *New Jersey Jewish News*, 26 May 2009 and 9 June 2009, respectively.
54. The *American Jewish Year Book* for 2006 reports two different estimates. Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky estimate the American Jewish population as 6.4 million; Sergio DellaPergola argues for an estimate of 5.275 million. *American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 106 (2006): 134, 561, respectively.
 55. Steven M. Cohen, email communication, 10 August 2009.
 56. David Landau, *Who Is a Jew?* (New York: AJC, 1996), passim; Jack Wertheimer, *All Quiet on the Religious Front?* (New York: AJC, 2005), 20–22.
 57. Jonathan Pollard, a Defense Department specialist with access to classified material, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1985 for transmitting classified materials to Israel. Ivan Boesky, a prominent Jew in Wall Street and philanthropic circles, was found guilty of financial misdeeds and served time in prison. Marc Rich benefited from the intercession of prominent Jewish leaders with President Clinton in the waning moments of the Clinton administration to secure a pardon enabling him to return to the United States despite charges of financial wrongdoing. Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer published an extensive article, subsequently a book, in 2006 charging that American foreign policy interests had been hijacked by the domestic pro-Israel lobby. Jewish leaders feared that each of these affairs would provoke domestic anti-Semitism. All indications are that no collective anti-Jewish backlash ensued.
 58. Edward S. Shapiro, *Crown Heights* (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press, 2006), ch. 7. Notwithstanding these efforts, Shapiro suggests that real tensions do continue to simmer albeit somewhat below the surface. For a somewhat more whimsical portrait, see Cheryl Greenberg, “Negotiating Coalition,” in Jack Salzman and Cornel West, eds., *Struggles in the Promised Land* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168. See also Shapiro, *We Are Many*, 239–47, on efforts by Jews to romanticize their relationship with blacks and reconstitute the black-Jewish alliance.
 59. Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, *Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel* (New York: Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies), 9, table.
 60. Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin, and Leonard Saxe, *American Jewish Attachment to Israel* (Waltham, MA: Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University, 2008), passim.
 61. Sam Freedman, “In the Diaspora: American Jewry’s Green Line,” *Jerusalem Post*, 11 June 2009. See also Steven Bayme, “American Jews and the Settlements,” *New York Jewish Week*, 23 July 2009. In the *2009 AJC Annual Survey of American Jews* (available on website), 51 percent of all U.S. Jews disagreed with the Obama administration’s call for a freeze on all new Israeli settlement construction. Forty-one percent supported the Obama initiative.
 62. Jack Wertheimer, “The Truth about American Jews and Israel,” *Commentary*, June 2009, 42–44.
 63. *Ibid.*, 44.
 64. See Judith Miller, *One by One* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 221.
 65. The Kastzner case has been treated most recently in Anne Porter, *Kastzner’s Train* (New York: Walker, 2007), chs. 31–34, and Ladislaus Lob, *Dealing with Satan* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008), ch. 13. For the reverberations of the case within Israeli society, see Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), chs. 13–16. By comparison, American reaction was quite muted.
 66. See the treatment of the Frank Diary upon its publication in 1952, its becoming a Broadway production in 1956, and a movie in 1959 in Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and*

- the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 16–19.
67. Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), *passim*.
 68. See Wiesel's memoir, *Night* (New York: Hill & Wang), 1960. Originally published in Yiddish in 1956 and subsequently in French in 1958, this work was translated into English only in 1960 and only later became standard reading within courses on the Holocaust. In 2006, Oprah Winfrey broadened its impact and reach to the American public remarkably by including it in her book club. Among Wiesel's many novels and fictional portrayals of the Holocaust, perhaps the most compelling is *The Gates of the Forest* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966). Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* (New York: Grove Press, 1964) caused a sensation by portraying through drama the silence of Pope Pius XII concerning news of the Holocaust. Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died* (New York: Random House, 1968) was particularly influential in indicting the Roosevelt administration for its failure to rescue.
 69. The fullest treatment of the Bitburg affair may be found in Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Historical Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), *passim*.
 70. Robert Alter, "Deformations of the Holocaust," *Commentary*, February 1981, 48–54.
 71. Miller, *One by One*, 232.
 72. Alvin Rosenfeld argued that the American narration of the Holocaust told its story in ways that suited the optimistic temperament of Americans and American society. See Alvin Rosenfeld, "The Americanization of the Holocaust," in Alvin Rosenfeld, ed., *Thinking about the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), ch. 6. For a critique of "Facing History and Ourselves," see Deborah Lipstadt, "Not Facing History," *The New Republic*, 6 March 1995.
 73. Greenberg's remarks were delivered in a lecture to the Hadassah National Board for Yom Ha-shoah in April 1981.
 74. Ruth Wisse, *If I Am Not for Myself* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 44.
 75. *Ibid.*, 144.
 76. See, e.g., Eric Fingerhut, "Rounding Up Opinions on Obama in Cairo," *JTA*, 4 June 2009.
 77. For a summary of this debate, see Steven Bayme, "Jewish Organizational Responses to Inter-marriage: A Policy Perspective," in Roberta Farber and Chaim Waxman, eds., *Jews in America* (Hanover, NH, and London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 151–62.
 78. Jonathan Sarna, "Preface," *Non-Jews in the Jewish Community* (New York: AJC, 2009), v.
 79. Rubin, "Eden Temple." See also Julie Wiener, "The Last Taboo: Inter-married Rabbis," *New York Jewish Week*, 5 June 2009, 22.
 80. Steven M. Cohen, "Seeking a Third Way to Respond to the Challenge of Inter-marriage," address to the CCAR, Convention, 31 March 2008, kindly lent to me by the author.
 81. Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 178–79. The Jewish Agency experienced firsthand how normative Jewish values concerning mixed marriage had become too culturally offensive in Diaspora circles when it had to withdraw an advertisement warning of potential losses to the Jewish people through mixed marriage. Associated Press, 10 September 2009.
 82. Paper by Dru Greenwood, director of outreach, Union for Reform Judaism, conference, Brandeis University, 26 April 2004. I thank the author for kindly sharing a copy of the paper with me.

83. Stewart Ain, "Conservatives End Push to Convert Intermarrieds," *New York Jewish Week*, 8 July 2009.
84. Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing?* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 148–49.
85. See the remarks of Irwin Kula, copresident, CLAL, cited in "Maverick Rabbi: Don't Resist Intermarriage," *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent*, 18 June 2009. Contrast the position of Union for Reform Judaism president Eric Yoffie on the need to maintain certain boundaries, Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 173.
86. Marvin Schick, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2008–2009* (New York: Avi-Chai, 2009), see tables on pages 6–7. Significantly this marks an increase of nearly 50 percent from the data for non-Orthodox high schools reported in 2005. For the earlier data, see Schick, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2003–2004* (New York: Avi-Chai, 2005), see tables on pp. 6–7.
87. For a description of the *Jewish Catalog* series, see Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 320–21. See also Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism*, 156.
88. See the interview with Greenberg and Steinhardt in *Contact*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 3–8.
89. Michael Steinhardt, "My Challenge: Toward a Post-Denominational Common Judaism," *Contact*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 14.
90. David Ellenson, "Thoughts on American Jewish Denominationalism Today," in Zachary I. Heller, ed., *Synagogues in a Time of Change* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009), 74.
91. Steven M. Cohen, "Non-Denominational and Post-Denominational," *Contact*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Summer 2005): 7–8.
92. Surprisingly, these debates are often dismissed as petty or trivial. See, e.g., Sanford Cardin, "A Personal Reflection on Contemporary Trends in American Judaism," in Heller, *Synagogues*, 186.
93. Jonathan Woocher, "Jewish Education: Postdenominationalism and the Continuing Influence of Denominations," in *ibid.*, 143.
94. Steven Bayme, "Foreword," in Wertheimer, *All Quiet?* v–vii.
95. Jonathan Tobin, "The Madoff Scandal and the Future of American Jewry," *Commentary*, February 2009, 11–14. See also Jonathan Sarna, "The American Jewish Community in Crisis and Transformation," *Contact*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 5–6.
96. Manfred Gerstenfeld, Interview with Daniel Pipes, "The End of American Jewry's Golden Era," *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism*, 20, 2 May 2004.
97. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007), *passim*.

Manfred Gerstenfeld

American Jewry: Present and Future

The condition and comfort level of Jews are influenced to a great extent by society at large. Hence, to assess the future of American Jewry attention must also be given to potentially major changes in the social, political, and economic environment in the United States. With this comes the question of the future of America's status—including that of the continued relevance of its military might, Pax Americana, and the defense of democracy—in the world. Indeed, how the current administration and the following ones will modify the United States' role as the single superpower is yet to emerge. One of the most immediate questions is whether the future withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan will be viewed as defeats. Even if such an analysis of the future can only be superficial, it can be helpful.

Two major events of the last decade in the United States have greatly affected the world at large. At the turn of the century, few, if any, would have predicted that the United States would soon be hit by a terrorist attack of major magnitude. The events of September 11, 2001, led the United States—jointly with lesser allies—into two wars in Asia. Furthermore, a major economic crisis started in 2008 whose full consequences are not yet known.

The Larger Picture

When looking at the American scene from abroad, both mega-events appear as part of a larger picture, framed by the reemergence of major totalitarian forces in the Islamic world. Most such forces had faded away many centuries ago. In recent decades, however, they have mutated into new variants, of which the worldview promoted by Al Qaeda is one.

The functioning of the Western economic system is another source of potential great unrest. "Vulnerability" and "uncertainty" may become important code words of the coming decades. The 2008 crisis began in the United States and metastasized from there. The reverse could happen in the future. It is doubtful whether the checks and balances of the extensive European monetary system are adequate to deal with major problems that may arise. At present some international bankers already say that neither the dollar nor the euro are safe investment vehicles.

It is important to remember that there had been warning signs for both mega-

events in the United States. It was widely known that the “subprime mortgage” market in the country was unsound. Intelligence services had indications about the activities of Al Qaeda. If regulations had been followed, most of the middle-class Saudi terrorists who perpetrated 9/11 would not have been allowed into the country.¹

Abraham D. Sofaer, a former legal adviser to the State Department testified: “The fact is that, well before September 11, 2001, the intelligence community and the ‘Terrorism Czar’ and everyone to whom they reported all knew that additional attacks by Al Qaeda were being planned and would certainly be attempted. Nonetheless, they failed to do before September 11 what was done immediately thereafter.”²

The problems of nations not wanting to deal with future threats are often structural. Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice-chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said: “It was impossible to tell the American people that the Taliban represented a danger. When I mentioned this in my speeches as early as 1996, people looked at me as if I was discussing a conflict on Mars. I said to audiences: ‘You don’t know where Afghanistan is or who the Taliban are, but eventually your grandchildren will pay the price if we fail to act.’”³

All this emphasizes that, even when some major signs of the future can be read, action will not necessarily be taken to prevent disasters from happening. The possible realization of Iran’s nuclear plans may provide additional proof of this.

The Nature of Postmodern Society

The complex nature of postmodern society needs to be understood as well. It can only be defined in relation to what it has gradually replaced—modernity. Its major characteristics include the multitude and fragmentation of issues that come to attention in a disorderly fashion.

In such a culture, defining common priorities becomes increasingly difficult. The same is true for the maintenance of common values by large parts of society. In a postmodern world, multiple identities, secularism, fundamentalism, and the breakdown of authority can all flourish simultaneously. How postmodernity’s characteristics will influence American society, whose values include multiculturalism and pluralism, is largely unpredictable.

Individualism leads to the breakdown of responsibility. Being nonjudgmental can be shamelessly presented as a merit rather than a deficiency. It may mean that concern for the perpetrator and for the victim are equivalent narratives.

Alan Mittleman suggests that a key issue in contemporary society is the loss of faith in institutions, especially those of government, but including other traditional institutional loci as well. He observes: “There is a hollowing-out of faith in long-

established American myths, such as progress, upward mobility, and so on. There is a concomitant loss of social or public hope. None of these malign phenomena precisely map onto ‘individualism.’”⁴ Indeed it may well be that the next generation of Americans will not do better economically than that of its parents.

The combination of some of these factors leads to increased polarization, which further intensifies the disintegration of society and is affecting the American Jewish community as well. David A. Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee said: “Younger American Jews do not reflect their parents’ attitudes so much as the overall apathy or cynicism toward society.”⁵ Yet at the same time new institutions, initiated by members of the younger generation, are flourishing.

When trying to forecast where the United States may be ten years from now, one must assess, as much as possible, trends regarding a large number of issues. This should be done by asking multiple questions. Some are unanswerable; others can be answered with a high probability. Examples of the first are: when will the next economic crisis occur? Where and from what will it originate, and how major will it be? What will be its main consequences? Another possibly related question: will oil continue to flow to the West without interruption?

An example of a question about the future that can be answered with little uncertainty is: will society be more or less complex ten years from now? With technology and communications developing in so many directions, it is highly probable that complexity will increase even further. One can ask, moreover, whether a greater or smaller percentage of people will be able to cope with the challenges of such an environment. The answer is that the more complex society becomes, the more likely it is that fewer people will be able to cope. In such a social order there will probably be even greater tendencies toward fragmentation, that is, disintegration. In such a society the borders of the politically correct will also be increasingly challenged and taboos increasingly broken.

The Future of Jihadism

In a world whose main elements are becoming opaque for an increasing number of people, is Muslim jihadism going to disappear, or at least greatly weaken? That seems unlikely both in view of the fanatically ideological commitment of its promoters and because people are inclined to look in an amorphous world for something they perceive as more certain.

The Muslim world is permeated with a clear-cut recipe for an apocalyptic totalitarian future. This does not contradict the possibility that even more Muslims will reject extremism. Some surveys show declining public support for suicide bombings among many Muslim populations. A 2009 Pew study, however, also found that more than 20 percent of Muslims in Indonesia, Jordan, and Egypt have confidence in Osama bin Laden doing “the right thing in world affairs.” Among

Nigerian Muslims this percentage was over 50 percent.⁶ When President Barack Obama said in his Cairo speech of June 2009 that the extremists were a “small but potent minority,”⁷ he was clearly understating the problem.

The Pew study and other data indicate that there are many more current adherents of extremist Islam than the number of Nazis at the time Hitler invaded Poland in 1939. They are far from a majority in the Muslim world. The same, however, is true of the committed moderate and secular Muslims on the other side of the ideological spectrum. These are also less well organized. A large, presently uncommitted center will usually side with the likely winner.

Is the world thus moving toward a large-scale clash of cultures? There seems little place for this in a postmodern reality. Far more possible is that there will be many clashes of segments of cultures. The main ones are likely to be between parts of Muslim and parts of Western culture. Tensions with China and Russia may further complicate matters, fostering additional disorder. The United States will also be influenced by these developments. In such an environment preventing a gradual disintegration of society may become more important than working for a better world.

What can those who are in positions of responsibility do to cope with these challenges? The answers seem to be varied, and include greater flexibility in thought and action. Requirements include the acquisition of multiple skills, continuous monitoring of change, and developing as many safeguards against risks as possible.

A Classic Approach

Hereafter, a more classic analysis will be made of a necessarily limited and selective number of issues concerning American Jewish society's present, as well as its future prospects and challenges.

“Jewish continuity” became a key subject in the American Jewish public discourse following the publication of the 1990 United Jewish Communities (UJC) National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS).⁸ This study provided a wealth of data about the community and caused disquiet among its leaders, partly because of the high percentage of interfaith marriages. The 2000–2001 NJPS further strengthened these feelings. At present there are no plans for an additional NJPS.

Jewish continuity has many disparate aspects, among which are issues such as Jewish identity, education, marriage, aging, gender relations, the strengthening of communities, leadership, mobility, attitudes toward Israel, philanthropy, outreach, government relations, anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism, building alliances, interfaith relations, and many others. In a postmodern society, fragmentation of views on these issues is likely to increase further.

In each of these areas the Jewish community faces major challenges. A cost-effective way to identify and analyze them is by asking qualified individuals to

assess some of their main aspects. The essays and interviews in this book are aimed at stimulating public discussion about the future of American Jewry.

The Importance of Numbers

In the discussion about the Jewish community's continuity, great importance is ascribed to the number of Jews who identify as such. This has led to an increased interest in Jewish demography.

A 2008 publication by the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI) estimates the Jewish population in the United States at 5,275,000. This represents the middle range between two large national surveys conducted in 2000 and 2001, the above-mentioned NJPS and the American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS).

Despite the fact that they are dated, these surveys still provide the best estimates of the size of the American Jewish population. Both pointed to effective Jewish population reduction since the early 1990s. The causes for this negative trend are later and less frequent marriages, low fertility, continuing increases in out-marriage rates, an aging population, and declining numbers of Jewish immigrants from other countries.⁹

Various other figures have been mentioned, which depend largely on how one defines "who is a Jew." Ira M. Sheskin, who heads the Jewish Demography Project at the University of Miami, has a somewhat different opinion on the number of Jews: "It is likely that somewhere between 5.2 million and 6.4 million Jews live in the United States, with the most probable range being 6.0–6.4 million."

He remarks that the variance in numbers derives from methodological difficulties in estimating Jewish populations as well as different definitions of Jewish identity. The main one is that while Orthodox and Conservative Jews recognize only matrilineal descent, the Reform and Reconstructionist movements accept patrilineal descent as well.¹⁰

Sheskin comments: "Whether the American Jewish population is increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same is not totally clear, though it will almost certainly decrease in the future." He explains that the "current and changing size of the American Jewish community has political, economic, and psychological impacts." Sheskin's main conclusion is that "it appears that this Jewish community will maintain numbers large enough that it will continue to significantly influence events both in the United States and the Jewish world internationally."¹¹ It may well be, however, that the definition of who is a Jew will become so elastic that figures will be almost meaningless.

Retaining as many Jews as possible for the Jewish collective is even more crucial because the overall U.S. population is likely to increase substantially in the coming decades. The percentage of Jews in the total population is thus inevitably bound to decline. This has multiple consequences, and influences the discussion on many subjects of concern to American Jewry. The desire to preserve Jews for

the Jewish community has led to an increased emphasis on Jewish education, both formal and informal, as well as manifold entrepreneurial outreach activities.

As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to forecast how the dynamic social and economic environment in the United States will evolve. Several major matters concerning the future of the Jewish community are dependent on developments in American society at large. One example among many: the economic crisis and specific aspects of it, such as the fallout from the Madoff affair, have shown how some individual projects may be greatly affected if the wealth of certain philanthropists interested in them is harmed. This random impact is not related to the specific activities for the Jewish community. It might be described in management terms as prioritizing by accident.

Regional Dispersion and Mobility

New York, California, Florida, and New Jersey together account for close to two-thirds of American Jewry. Four more states, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Maryland, contain another 15 percent.

A 2009 study on the impact of the geographic mobility of the Jewish community found that

Jews continue to exhibit high levels of residential mobility, especially in growing Jewish communities in the South and West.... More recent movers are much younger than non-movers, less likely to be married, more likely to be college graduates (but with lower income) and slightly less likely to have a Jewish denominational identity.... Mobility reduces all Jewish Federation related perceptions and behaviors, including familiarity with the local Federation and giving to the Federation at any level. In general, the strongest adverse effects of mobility are in the domain of philanthropy, particularly with respect to local Jewish Federations.¹²

The mobility of Jews has many other aspects, of which only some can be addressed here. Steven Windmueller, dean of the Los Angeles campus of Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, has studied the Jewish population of the West Coast. He points out that “different types of Western Jewish communities have emerged, reflecting unique economic and social factors. Western Jews have taken on many of the attributes associated with their region. They are struggling with the core issues of low affiliation, high intermarriage, and limited financial participation.”

Windmueller also notes that West Coast communities are experiencing significant growth. For instance, a demographic study of San Diego found that only one in ten respondents was born in San Diego County, while one in four was born in California. The majority of Jewish adults in San Diego had lived there

for less than ten years. Nineteen percent of the respondents were born outside the United States.

“The West,” he points out,

has always been receptive to immigrants. Los Angeles and other parts of the West have become new population centers for Iranian, South African and Latin American Jews. Significant numbers of Israeli and Russian Jews have also found the West to be welcoming. In earlier times Sephardic Jews settled in Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles. Today, Los Angeles is home to one of the largest Israeli communities outside of Israel.¹³

Mobility in general affects Jewish institutional life. Those who have relocated may not identify with the institutions of their new residence, while having severed ties with those in the location they came from. In a few cases, however, households maintain strong relationships with other communities. For example, many elderly Jewish retirees in Florida continue to maintain synagogue memberships and to donate to federations in other states.¹⁴

Small Communities

Living in a small Jewish community is a factor in enhancing mobility. The most committed Jews living in such areas often have problems in accessing adequate services such as Jewish schooling for their children, kosher meat and other foods, and so on. In particular for Orthodox Jews, this has led to a decline of Jews living in small communities as they relocate to larger cities.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Weinreb, then executive vice-president of the Orthodox Union (OU) said “Orthodox Jews are increasingly concentrating in New York, Baltimore, Miami, Chicago, and Los Angeles.... There comes a point at which an Orthodox synagogue or community is no longer viable. With twenty to thirty Orthodox families one can maintain a synagogue service, but not a kosher butcher or baker.”

He explains that the OU is

making a major effort to reverse or slow that trend. Living in a small town at a lesser cost holds many benefits for young Orthodox families who are starting out in life and need job opportunities and housing. For instance, in Milwaukee, the city’s University of Wisconsin campus is within walking distance of the synagogue. The city also has three training hospitals and various hi-tech companies are located there. It is easier to find employment there than in New York.

We asked ourselves how we can help such people. One of our approaches involves a program that subsidizes a couple moving to such a town to the

extent that they can make the down payment on a house. We are now developing another program that asks young people to move to a far-flung community for three to five years as part of their service to the Jewish world.

In this way we want to encourage young doctors, lawyers, computer specialists, and scientists so that they can satisfy their nascent careers, live in an interesting place, and also serve the Jewish people. Thereafter they may stay or may move to a larger city. Synagogue members in small communities often have the ability to assist newcomers in finding employment. They can also be helpful in integrating them into the community and giving them active roles in synagogues.¹⁵

Weinreb adds:

The disappearance of the smaller communities is for many reasons not good for the Jews. One reason is that in terms of voter patterns and influencing the federal government and Congress, coming only from the big cities does not make a good impression. We have missions that go to Washington. If these include representatives from states such as Maine, Kansas, and Iowa, we present ourselves very differently, even if they come from small communities.¹⁶

The issue of vanishing communities is not only of concern to the Orthodox. Larry Blumberg, a philanthropist from the town of Dothan, Alabama, has offered families up to \$50,000 if they would be willing to relocate to Dothan and become active members of Temple Emanuel, a Reform synagogue. The condition is that they must stay for at least five years. Blumberg says he wants to find young people who would come to the religious schools and help create a familylike atmosphere in the temple. The historian Stuart Rockoff says the number of Jews in the Southeast has increased in recent decades. However, dozens of small-town synagogues have closed as younger Jews leave for the bigger cities.¹⁷

Jewish Identity

Before analyzing how to strengthen Jewish identity, the term has to be defined. Sociologist Steven M. Cohen posits that there is no accurate word for the complex of Jewish belief, behavior, and belonging. He says that, purely for lack of a better term, the word identity is used for this purpose.

Cohen remarks that over the past several decades Jews in the United States have “reshaped their Jewish identities in line with geographic dispersion, cultural changes and generational shifts. Of special note is that Jews have fewer Jewish spouses, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and formal ties to other Jews. They feel less attached to both Jewish peoplehood and Israel, which results in a decline in Jewish collective identity.”

He observes that for many, being Jewish no longer entails a set of obligations. Cohen comments that, for most American Jews, Judaism is an aesthetic understanding and being Jewish has increasingly become a matter of individual choice. Therefore, the essential challenge confronting American Jewry today is to develop policies for bridging the gap between the Judaic mission and the Jewish marketplace.¹⁸

Rabbi David Ellenson, president of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion notes that nowadays many Jews who intermarry “want to remain in the community and identify as Jews. The Reform movement would not have decided to accept patrilineal descent if there were not so many intermarried Jews who still want to be part of the Jewish community.” He suggests that only the future will tell whether this approach will succeed.¹⁹

The Construction of Identity

Ellenson comments: “From a social-science viewpoint, there are at least three ways in which identity is constructed. On the first level, it is a matter of how one views oneself. Second, how is one viewed by one’s community? Third, how is one viewed by the outside world?”

He adds:

In premodern times there would have been virtually no dissonance for Jews between the three spheres. After all, the community’s political structure alone was a legal authority that could determine such status. In the modern period, where no such authority exists in much of the world and cultural identities are multiple, there can be a great many disparities. For instance, somebody who has a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother may see himself as Jewish. Reform, Reconstructionist, and most secular Jews would view him as Jewish. Orthodox and certain Conservative Jews, however, would not consider this person as having a lawful Jewish status. If his name is Benjamin Cohen, most non-Jews would see him as Jewish as well. This illustrates how complex and layered is the issue of Jewish identity in the modern world.

Part of the challenge for Judaism in the modern world is that people have myriad identities. People also have hybrid identities.... This further underlines how difficult it is to create a collective Jewish identity. People insist that they have multiple identities and that the way they define themselves is legitimate. Jewish religious leadership of any denomination may define identity and determine Jewish status (i.e., who is “sufficiently Jewish” to marry another person defined by these leaders as possessing such status) in one way. However, this may not be “enforceable” and sociopolitical reality may allow identity to be established in other ways.

Ellenson observes: “As if that were not enough, identities are also fluid. Many children with only one Jewish parent, who have never been raised as Jews, suddenly discover that they are Jewish and define themselves as Jews. They may then go on a ‘birthright’ trip to Israel. There are many more individual examples of returning to the Jewish community.”²⁰

Talk-show host Michael Medved opines: “For most American Jews, the core of their Jewish identity isn’t solidarity with Israel; it’s rejection of Christianity.... Jewish voters don’t embrace candidates based on their support for the State of Israel as much as they passionately oppose candidates based on their identification with Christianity—especially the fervent evangelicalism of the dreaded ‘Christian Right.’”²¹

Identity in the Public Square

One important indicator of the comfort level of Jews in a society is whether they want to be identified as such in the public square. A few years ago Rabbi Norman Lamm, then president of Yeshiva University said:

We have learned not to be shy about our Jewish identity. This sense of pride in our religion and our way of presenting it before the public without shoving it in their faces emerged by virtue of the example of the black community, which started to say “black is beautiful,” and to be proud of their identity.

Today’s Modern Orthodox Jewish generation enjoys a profound education that is both religious and general. In New York hospitals one sees many doctors wearing skullcaps. Jewish lawyers and other professionals often also wear skullcaps in their offices and on the streets. This phenomenon did not exist thirty years ago.²²

This contrasts with West European countries where many Jews avoid wearing *kippot* (skullcaps) or Stars of David in public, though they used to do so. One sometimes sees *mezuzot* (cases with biblical texts on parchment) inside the homes rather than on the entrance doorpost. Some Jewish organizations there avoid displaying their name outside their buildings. In other words, members of certain cultural groups have intimidated many Jews enough to prevent them from exercising the full options of Jewish culture. Currently such phenomena are infrequent in the United States.

Multiple Modes of Jewish Engagement

Another important issue for the future of American Jewry is the relationship between generations. The American Jewish community is subject to the cultural

patterns, fashions, and trends of society at large. As noted, postmodernism has brought with it a fragmentation of society and a desire for greater individualism, and this also finds major expressions among Jews.

Within the Jewish community these include multiple modes of Jewish engagement. There are many signs of a new vitality and social entrepreneurship. For instance, the Slingshot Fund was founded by Jews in their twenties and thirties and is “designed to highlight, encourage and provide support for a subset of the undercapitalized organizations.”²³ Cohen notes that a large amount of American Jewish life is led by people in their twenties and thirties outside the traditional Jewish societal structure.

He observes: “Perhaps most exciting is the work of many of the younger generation—Jews in their twenties and thirties—who are involved in self-initiated acts of Jewish communal creation.” As an example Cohen mentions independent *minyanim* (prayer groups) and rabbi-led emergent spiritual communities. “About eighty of these have sprung up all over the United States, several of them outside the major Jewish centers.... These minyanim and rabbi-led communities keep costs very low. They may get a Torah scroll donated and rent a church on a Shabbat morning.”²⁴

Cohen emphasizes that affiliation with a particular movement is becoming less relevant for a large part of the younger generation of Jews. Noncoercive options are the new norms for this generation. They define as optional formally monolithic standards of Jewish participation such as in-marriage and support for Israel.²⁵

Marriage

When analyzing the future of the Jewish community, rates of intermarriage are important. But this alone is too crude a measure for a detailed assessment. Not surprisingly, more in-married than intermarried Jews consider being Jewish important. However, the differences are not as dramatic as one might have expected. This has been pointed out by Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer of Brandeis University.²⁶

Barack Fishman comments that parents, when saying to their children “I don’t want you to date a non-Jew. I only want you to date a Jew,” must be prepared to add, “It matters to be Jewish because....” She observes: “Many American Jewish parents, however, say that they have no desire to cast off their own Jewishness, but do not know why it matters to them. And because they are uncomfortable or confused about articulating it, they often do not.”²⁷ Much of this analysis of the intermarried and their parents supports Cohen’s earlier-mentioned observation that for many American Jews Judaism is an aesthetic understanding.

Cohen says:

The in-marriage norm is so critical that it has true value. I believe the in-marriage norm affects the size of intermarriage, even if it is not a total obstacle. We have some evidence that when people say “my parents were against it,” there are lower rates of intermarriage. In my work, I saw the connection between being worried about the State of Israel, and concerned about one’s relationship to intermarriage.²⁸

Ellenson mentions how touchy it is to express preference for in-marriage in the Reform movement. He relates that Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, stated that it is desirable for a born Jew to marry another Jew, or to have the non-Jewish partner convert to Judaism. A third alternative is for the intermarried couple to decide to raise their children as Jews. When Yoffie made this statement at the movement’s biennial convention in 2005, it sparked much controversy.²⁹

Sociologist Rela Mintz Geffen, a former president of Baltimore Hebrew University, says one of the myths surrounding intermarriage is that grandparents will be the ones to teach the grandchildren about being Jewish and thus function as transmitters of the Jewish heritage. This is rarely true because, in such a sensitive situation, grandparents are reluctant to fulfill this role even if they are knowledgeable about Judaism.³⁰

Gender Issues

The historian Hasia Diner writes:

Of all the transformations launched by the student movements of the 1960s, none had as revolutionary an impact on American Judaism as Jewish feminism. Jewish feminism made possible the admission of women into rabbinical and cantorial school, the emergence of women as lay leaders in their synagogues, and the transformation of the liturgy in reflecting the era’s regnant idea that women had an equal share in the history and destiny of the Jewish people.³¹

She also mentions that Jewish women “have created new rituals and crafted new texts to express their sense of themselves as Jews and as women.”³²

Barack Fishman and Parmer found that among the non-Orthodox denominations women have become increasingly prominent, while men are being marginalized. This is a major departure from the historical norm where men were the leaders in Jewish affairs, including public religious functions as well as rituals. This remains so in the Orthodox settings.

This development has many implications. One is that, among many non-

Orthodox Jews, men and boys attach less value to Jewish activities and friends as well as to in-marriage. Barack Fishman and Parmer maintain that research and policy planning may change the situation.³³

Mintz Geffen mentions that women have risen to public leadership of the Jewish community more in the ritual sphere and lay leadership than in the professional domain. She expects more women to reach the top positions in lay leadership as these rotate frequently. Mintz Geffen concludes that the enfranchisement of Jewish women has enriched Jewish life and that gender is no longer the central issue in the American Jewish discourse.³⁴

In 2008, however, an important professional position was filled by a woman: Rabbi Julie Schoenfeld was chosen as the executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative movement's rabbinical association.³⁵

Michael Berenbaum, executive editor of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* mentions that the changed position of women is reflected by the fact that the authors of this edition have greatly increased the coverage of them. Berenbaum says this was a subject

that we felt merited much more attention. One might call it an affirmative action program. It was necessary, however, in order to complete the experience of the Jewish people. The previous essay on the *mikveh* [ritual bath] dealt with what men—sages and rabbis—had written about it and its *halachot* [religious laws]. No attention was given to women's experience of entering the mikveh and what it represented for them. There are entries on *techinot* [women's prayers], women's commentaries, women leaders, and on women's studies itself.³⁶

A potentially radical change occurred when Rabbi Avi Weiss, head of the Orthodox Yeshivat Chovevei Torah announced that he would confer the title of "Rabba" on graduates of his Yeshivat Mahara't for women. However, after discussion with the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), Weiss reversed his decision and wrote a letter to RCA president Rabbi Moshe Kletenik in which he said, "It is not my intention or the intention of Yeshivat Mahara't to confer the title of 'Rabba' upon its graduates."³⁷

Aging

The age structure of the community presents multiple challenges for Jewish institutions. According to Sheskin,

The percentage of Jewish elderly is currently much higher than is the case for all Americans, with 16 percent of Jews being age sixty-five and over compared to 12 percent of all Americans. In addition, the first baby boomers will soon reach age sixty-five, which will further increase the number of

Jewish elderly. As life expectancy continues to increase, the percentage of elderly who are age seventy-five and over, and more importantly age eighty-five and over, will see significant increases and lead to increases in the demand for services.

Sheskin comments that planning housing and social services for this population will soon strain Jewish, other private, as well as secular social service agencies. Data on Jews from the 2000–2001 NJPS are not all that useful because planning for services for the elderly must be done on the local level.

As the number of Jewish elderly has increased, many have migrated from the homes they lived in before age sixty-five to other areas, particularly Florida. This means that the age distribution of many northern Jewish communities has not increased significantly while some Jewish communities in retirement states—such as South Palm Beach where 62 percent of Jews are age sixty-five and over—are impacted disproportionately by the aging of American Jewry.³⁸

Mintz Geffen notes that for the first time in history there are many cases of four generations of Jewish families alive simultaneously in the United States. For a long time immigration and thereafter the Shoah destroyed the possibility of an extended family for many Jews who had come to the United States and left part of their families behind.

Mintz Geffen stresses that there is no defined role for grandparents. As one can become a grandparent over five decades, grandparents can be at very different stages of the lifecycle. She includes in issues to be researched: what do Jewish men and women think about grandfathers and grandmothers? What would they like their behavior to be, as compared to what their behavior is? How are grandparents involved, or not, in their grandchildren's lives?

She adds that the increasing aging of Jews has fostered new trends. Some Jews aged around eighty-five who had earlier moved to the Sun Belt states are returning to their home states. This often brings them close to a younger family member who can help manage their care.

Even when family members do not live close to each other, the improvement in communications changes the nature of relations. Families can be in daily contact despite geographical distance.³⁹

Denominations

Synagogue membership is the largest affiliation of American Jewry. According to the 2000–2001 NJPS, at that point 44 percent of Jews were members of a synagogue. However, many more Jews who at present are not members of a

synagogue were so or will be during specific periods in the lifecycle. In many communities, about 85 percent of American Jews are synagogue members at some point during their adult life.⁴⁰

The sociologist Chaim I. Waxman analyzes the shift in synagogue memberships among the various denominations. Reform has become the leading denomination in American Jewry. At the turn of the century, of Jewish households belonging to a synagogue, 38.5 percent were Reform, while 35 percent of Jews were Reform. Waxman points out that the Reform movement's numbers have grown fivefold since 1937.

Conservative Judaism, on the other hand, is seeing a significant decline. Over a decade it has lost two hundred congregations. On its right wing it has lost a relatively small group of traditional members who are now organized in a separate body, the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ). Marc B. Shapiro of Scranton University says this movement has little future because of developments on the left wing of Modern Orthodoxy that leave little space for it. He sees UTJ becoming part of this wing.⁴¹

Orthodoxy is growing. Waxman mentions that, according to the 2000–2001 NJPS data, the percentage of American Jews whose affiliation is Orthodox had risen to 10 percent in 2001, while they represented 21 percent of synagogue members.⁴²

Dana Evan Kaplan, a Reform rabbi, offers his view of the future:

Relations between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews have been steadily deteriorating. The two groups are rapidly moving toward nonrecognition of one another, and this is already leading to the creation of two separate Jewish peoples.... Despite efforts by the United Jewish Communities, private family foundations, and others to keep the entire Jewish community united, nothing substantive has been achieved. An era of dual denominationalism is developing, supplanting the tripartite division of American Judaism that emerged in the early years of the twentieth century.⁴³

Historian Jonathan Sarna gives a more detailed analysis:

American Jews, living in a society that privileges individualism and gives no official recognition to religious group identity, face the challenge of preserving Jewish unity. With so many bitter divisions in Jewish life—between the different religious movements and among them; between Jews of different backgrounds and ideologies; between in-married Jews and inter-married Jews; between matrilineal Jews and patrilineal Jews; between straight Jews and gay Jews; between born Jews and converted Jews; between American Jews and Israeli Jews; between committed Jews and indifferent Jews—some have questioned whether Jews can remain a united people at all in the twenty-first century.⁴⁴

Reform

Important shifts are taking place in all denominations. This leads to soul-searching concerning the future. Ellenson points out that the Reform movement is obliged to address the broad array of Jews whose life is not halachic. He remarks that the success of his movement will be measured by whether it imparts a Jewish future to people in this category.

In order to do so, Ellenson says, it will have to provide a meaningful sense of Jewish roots. He explains that Reform is becoming more traditional and that this is in line with a general trend in society, as more people feel the need for boundaries and community.

Ellenson notes that he explains to his students that life is always led according to certain conventions; many rituals work for people, others do not. This leads to a situation where a functional equivalent of tradition must be invented to provide both for communal life and personal meaning. He sees day schools as a crucial element in the ongoing life of the Jewish people. At the moment, however, such schools in the Reform movement are very few and far between.⁴⁵

Conservative Judaism

Conservative Judaism is under pressure from both the Left and the Right, being a moderate movement in a polarizing Jewish community. Cohen notes that “as Jewish ethnicity has weakened, with the decline of Jewish marriages, friendships, and neighborhoods, so too has Conservative Judaism.”⁴⁶

He observes:

Conservative Judaism still occupies a very critical place—ideologically, socially, and philosophically—between Orthodoxy and Reform. The movement offers a model of intensive Jewish living that is both modern and accessible to large numbers of American Jews. It boasts an institutional infrastructure that embraces congregations, day schools, camps, youth movements, Israel-based institutions, publications, and informal networks, to say nothing of its thousands of rabbis, cantors, educators, other professionals, and lay leaders.⁴⁷

Arnold M. Eisen, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), says that Conservative Jewry faces three major challenges. These concern its message, quality control, and structure. The definition of the message has become a priority in part because of the blurring of the boundaries with other movements. He adds that quality control is a prime issue because Conservative Judaism depends on “franchises.” It relies on local organizations—synagogues, camps, day and

congregational schools, youth groups, men's clubs, and sisterhoods—to provide a quality product.

Eisen also notes that Conservative Judaism has structural problems because it only has a loose umbrella body, the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism. He points out that a major restructuring of the movement is underway. Eisen defines ten elements that together characterize Conservative Judaism's worldview: learning, community, *Clal Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood), Zionism, Hebrew, changing the world, *mitzvah* (commandment), time, space, and God. He mentions that the JTS has initiated a major project to make Conservative Jews more aware of the role of mitzvot.⁴⁸

Modern Orthodoxy

When discussing Orthodoxy, one has to distinguish between Modern Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy. Overall for both groups, higher fertility and retaining the loyalty of a large percentage of their children will, as former JTS provost Jack Wertheimer wrote, make them “an ever larger, more visible, and better represented part of the total community.” He noted: “As against the overall average of 1.86 children per Jewish woman, an informed estimate gives figures ranging upward from 3.3 children in ‘modern Orthodox’ families to 6.6 in Haredi or ‘ultra-Orthodox’ families to a whopping 7.9 in families of Hasidim.”⁴⁹

Modern Orthodoxy, a moderate movement, is under pressure, mostly from the Right. Lamm says Modern Orthodoxy is a form of Orthodoxy that is open to the outside world. He considers that it is characterized by five principles: its outlook on education, its stance toward Israel, its attitude toward the role of women, a mindset of inclusiveness, and a moderate mode of speaking and reacting.

In defining moderation Lamm says, “We do not always assume that ours is the only opinion that counts. Most of us are willing to engage in dialogue with other Jews. We remain convinced of the rightness of our convictions, but we respect the right of others to disagree. This is far from the Ultra-Orthodox position.”

He regards greater Jewish learning by women as an important ongoing development. Lamm thinks that as the number of women Talmud scholars grows, they will be teaching it and become role models for the next generation of women. They “will not become rabbis, nor is that the aim of the present women scholars.”

He adds: “I think they will serve in a semi-Halachic manner, very similar to the Halachic...consultants in Israel who often act as buffers between the rabbinic authorities and the lay public, especially in areas where women may be reluctant to directly consult a male, as in the family-purity laws.”⁵⁰

Shapiro suggests that American Modern Orthodoxy consists of at least two rather distinct types, an intellectual and a sociological one. Intellectual Modern

Orthodoxy has an ideology of combining the best of Western civilization with a commitment to Jewish law and traditional Jewish values. Sociological Modern Orthodoxy numbers many more people and is mainly a lifestyle choice. He sees it as a commitment to Jewish law combined with the better things in life. In his view Modern Orthodoxy is presently in a potentially more promising phase than it was fifteen or twenty years ago.

Shapiro identifies as a key development the Yeshivat Chovevei Torah rabbinical school in New York, which presently offers a more liberal perspective of Modern Orthodoxy. He considers the rabbis ordained at this institute both an intellectual and halachic challenge to the rabbinical establishment. Shapiro notes that the more traditional opponents of the Chovevei Torah experiment try to prevent these rabbis from obtaining pulpits so as to cause its failure.⁵¹

Beyond this approach there are those who move the borderline of Orthodoxy a little bit further, for instance, through more egalitarian services, also known as partnership minyanim.

Ultra-Orthodoxy

The sociologist Samuel Heilman has discussed the characteristics of American ultra-Orthodoxy in his book *Sliding to the Right*. At the time it was published in 2006, there were approximately two hundred thousand *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) Jews in the United States representing about 30 percent of American Orthodox Jewry. Of these, over 140,000 American ultra-Orthodox lived in the New York area, with about 75,000 of them in Brooklyn.

Hasidim account for about 45 percent of the ultra-Orthodox population. The Satmar Hasidim are by far the largest Hasidic group. A major concentration of the *Misnagdim* (non-Hasidic ultra-Orthodox) is in Lakewood, New Jersey, where their leading yeshiva is located.⁵²

The ultra-Orthodox are increasing in numbers thanks to their high fertility rate, which is far above the American average or that of American Jewry. Heilman says that by all objective criteria, nowadays more people in the United States actively pursue the *haredi* life than has been the case for generations. There is more communal vitality, security, sense of entitlement and being triumphant, more holy books and commentaries published, and there are many more yeshivot filled to overflowing than was ever the case in so-called golden eras of the idealized past abroad.⁵³

Israeli Jews in the United States

A subgroup of Jews in the United States, about whose size and attitudes relatively little research has been done, is Israeli Jews. Sheskin says that a Jewish Agency

report at the beginning of the 1980s claimed that as many as five hundred thousand Israelis lived in the United States. It was part of an effort to identify the problem and attract these emigrants back to Israel.

Using 2008 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and having reviewed other studies, Sheskin put the number of Israeli Jews at no more than two hundred thousand and said it could even be as low as one hundred thousand. If one adds various types of “Israel-connected” people, the total is unlikely to be more than three hundred thousand. Much depends on the definition of an “Israeli.” In using U.S. Census data, one can examine such criteria as place of birth, language (Hebrew?) spoken at home, persons who claim Israeli “ancestry”, and so on. Among the Israeli-born population, 31 percent live in New York State, 21 percent in California, 9 percent in Florida, and 8 percent in New Jersey.

Using data from twenty-one local U.S. Jewish community studies, Sheskin found that Israeli Jews are more Jewishly connected than non-Israeli Jews in the United States. Israelis in New York are generally more Jewishly connected than those in other parts of the country.⁵⁴

Cohen and Judith Veinstein have researched the numbers, characteristics, and patterns of Jewish engagement of Israeli Jews in greater New York. They also found relatively high levels of Jewish involvement by almost every measure used and say:

This pattern holds up even when we exclude Orthodox respondents from the analysis to “correct” for the large presence of Orthodox Jews among Israelis. Accordingly, Israelis who are non-Orthodox are more Jewishly engaged than New York or American Jews who are non-Orthodox.... There is one exception to this overall pattern: New York (but not the nation) Israelis trail non-Israelis in making donations to their local Jewish federation. In other words, despite their high levels of Jewish involvement, Israelis in New York under-participate in the UJA-Federation campaign.

Cohen and Veinstein comment: “Conventional wisdom holds that Israelis are less Jewishly engaged than other Jews in New York, or the United States for that matter.... As matters turn out, the conventional wisdom about Israelis’ Jewish engagement is wrong.”⁵⁵

Outreach

In a shrinking community that views Jewish continuity as a key aim, a multipronged approach to outreach is necessary. On the one hand, households with Jewish members must be sustained. On the other hand, one must reach out to others. A prime target here is the non-Jewish partner in mixed marriages.

This leads to some rather unexpected situations. Barack-Fishman and Parmer

write: “Many non-Jewish wives of Jews in our interview population complained: ‘I am in the weird position of initiating activities in a religion that I don’t know a whole lot about.’ They remarked that ‘everyone we know who is interfaith—the mother is not Jewish—says the children are primarily being raised Jewish.’”⁵⁶

The inclusion of many intermarried people in Jewish communal institutions poses new challenges. Wertheimer comments on some of them:

The continuing ripple effects of massive intermarriage have had huge implications for Jewish education, even if little systematic thinking has gone into addressing the needs of children of intermarried parents. Jewish institutions seem to assume that inclusion is the sum total of what is necessary for intermarried families and everything else will work itself out. But as anyone who reads the blogs of young Jewish adults who have been raised this way knows, matters are far more complex.⁵⁷

The Birthright Israel project plays, thanks to its size, an important role in both strengthening Jewish identity and outreach. Leonard Saxe of Brandeis University says that “We have learned from Birthright Israel that the program has an attitudinal impact irrespective of whether your parents are both Jewish, whether one parent was a convert to Judaism, or whether he or she never converted. The children of intermarried parents also come out of the program with strengthened Jewish identities.”⁵⁸

Universalism

Humanitarian aid to weaker communities and people nowadays attracts significant numbers of mainly younger Jews who participate in either non-Jewish or Jewish frameworks. Ellenson stresses that one of Judaism’s important challenges is its insistence on universal human dignity and simultaneously on the Jews’ particularity. He observes:

In American Jewry today the great irony is that universalism has brought many Jews back to Jewish particularity. One successful organization is the American Jewish World Service. Tens of thousands of young Jews are anxious to participate in various causes of international assistance within a Jewish framework. This promotes a type of Jewish identity.

Another such organization is Avodah Service Corps. It enables young Jews, to whom it teaches Jewish texts, to work in impoverished neighborhoods in the United States.

Other comparable organizations are the Jewish Fund for Justice and the Progressive Jewish Alliance. These work on issues of minority rights, workers’ rights, and providing low-cost housing in urban American areas

where neighborhoods are becoming gentrified. The paradox is that many Jews have been brought back to Jewish frameworks because the Jewish tradition seems to be promoting this kind of universalistic commitment.⁵⁹

Ellenson adds:

Whether and how this involvement in *tikkun olam* (social justice and repair of the world) will ultimately bring all these Jews to accept Jewish particularity—and whether the source of this activity is actually Judaism itself or the ethos of the modern world—remains a matter of debate and discussion in the Jewish world. However, I remain optimistic about what these developments may mean for the relevance of Judaism to countless young American Jews.⁶⁰

Ethics

Ethics are likely to become a more important issue in the American Jewish discourse. The subject has gained major impetus in recent years particularly concerning kosher food. This came to a head because of a scandal involving Agriprocessors, formerly the largest kosher meatpacking company in the United States with more than \$300 million in revenues and over a thousand workers.

In May 2008, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement raided the company's main slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa. This followed reports questioning the treatment and illegal immigrant status of many workers. The raid generated the financial collapse of the plant with defaulted loan payments and ultimately bankruptcy.⁶¹

The collapse of Agriprocessors raised many questions about the ethics of the kosher meat industry.⁶² Several rabbinical organizations gave their opinions on this issue. In 2008, the leaders of the Conservative movement had asked its rabbis to speak about Magen Tzedek, a seal of ethical justice that kosher food manufacturers should be persuaded to apply.⁶³ At the biennial conference of the Union for Reform Judaism in November 2009 in Toronto, its president Rabbi Eric Yoffie asked Reform Jews to eat less red meat and to check carefully the food being served in synagogues.⁶⁴

Shapiro notes that the OU and many others in the Orthodox world stood behind Agriprocessors, though later events forced the OU to reevaluate this position. He adds:

The young Turks of Chovevei Torah see kosher food as not merely a halachic concern but an ethical issue as well. Some of the students were at the forefront of educating the public about the hypocrisy of kosher food being produced in a “nonkosher” fashion. They pushed for what can be called kosher working

norms, which go beyond the strict halachic standards of slaughter. The Rabbinical Council of America also issued a statement about this, but it was the Chovevei Torah students who identified this as an issue before the mainstream rabbinic community.⁶⁵

In the wake of the Agriprocessors and Madoff scandals, the OU, the RCA, and Yeshiva University sent a joint letter to affiliated rabbis in advance of the 2009 High Holidays asking them to address Jewish ethics in their sermons. It was the first time ever that such an appeal was issued by the three bodies together.

The Conservative seal Magen Tzedek calls “for a wide range of social justice measures that go above and beyond just respecting basic legal standards.”⁶⁶ By the beginning of March 2010 Uri L’Tzedek, an Orthodox social justice organization, had given thirty-six kosher eateries its seal, which recognizes “work practices that respect the pay, time and dignity of...workers.”

Judaism and the Environment

For a long time, the discussion on the relationship between *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws), ethics, and environmental issues was mainly a narrative outside the mainstream of Jewish society and largely the province of New Age Judaism. It was Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi—the founder of the Jewish Renewal movement—who proposed the concept of eco-kashrut, which was gradually picked up by a few others.⁶⁷

For instance, Reconstructionist rabbi Mordechai Liebling wrote in 1990: “We need to take a hard look at the system that organizes our eating—kashrut—and transform that system into one that truly upholds the holiness of life. How much pollution does the production of this food incur? How much did the animal suffer? Was the production of this food an efficient use of the world’s available resources?”⁶⁸

Jewish organizations that focus on protecting the environment have also developed somewhat in recent years. However, research into the scholarly basis for a Jewish view on environmental issues has not made much progress.

Education

Jewish education is a central element of Jewish identity. According to Jonathan Woocher, chief ideas officer of the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), “organized American Jewry is not yet capable of adequately measuring the scope of Jewish education.” Thus any assessment of the situation in the community can only be an impression. Jewish education seems to be improving for those who are engaged Jews, as they have increasing educational opportunities.

Woocher concludes, however, that for those not engaged, the community tends to lose ground.⁶⁹

A 2008–2009 census of American Jewish day schools, conducted by political scientist Marvin Schick, found that there were 228,000 students enrolled in such schools, representing an 11 percent increase from 2003–2004. He found that five out of every six day schools are Orthodox. The overall enrollment in non-Orthodox day schools had fallen by 2.5 percent in the same period.⁷⁰

Woocher identifies a number of sectors as currently receiving special attention: early childhood education, day schools, informal education, and adult education. There has also been greatly increased interest in Israel education. He mentions that part-time education—also called supplementary education—has not yet attracted major funding. However, this still remains the framework with the largest number of pupils.⁷¹

A census of Jewish supplementary schools, prepared by Wertheimer, found that an estimated 230,000 children were enrolled in such programs during the 2006–07 school year as against about 170,000 in the earlier census for 2003–04. Most of the 1,720 schools for which data are available are small. The study concluded that schools and parents differ as to the purpose of supplementary schooling. Many parents link Jewish education with *bar/bat mitzvah* (coming-of-age ceremony) preparation, while for the schools' educators this is a low priority.⁷² In synagogue supplementary schools, however, the acquisition of synagogue skills and understanding of the Jewish calendar are usually treated as important.

Wertheimer says that, among the important new trends that have reshaped the field of Jewish education, one overarching development in recent decades has been families' insistence on choice, as they try to find the schools and programs offering the best for each of their children. These expressions of consumerism have required Jewish educational institutions to tailor their programs to the needs of individual students and their parents. He adds that a number of "immersive educational experiences" have attracted larger populations. These include day schools, overnight summer camps, and a diverse mix of programs in Israel.⁷³

Wertheimer adds that an issue to be reevaluated is Israel education. He notes that over the decades it has become a complicated enterprise, and its proper focus and content need to be assessed. In this context the place of teaching modern Hebrew should also be reevaluated.⁷⁴

Harnessing New Technologies

Technological changes will also impact Jewish education. Woocher points out that "changes in domains such as global telecommunications, the Internet, wireless technologies, and on-demand media have created a new environment for

Jewish education.” In 2006, he typed in the words “Jewish education” on Google and got close to thirty-five million results or about 2.5 web links for every Jew in the world. This is yet another relatively uncharted challenge to the Jewish educational world.⁷⁵

Wertheimer sees a vast array of possibilities and challenges arising from new technologies. He mentions the massive Jewish educational presence on the internet where much information about Jewish matters is available. Yet he is less certain about how Jewish education—both formal and informal—can utilize it. He adds that there are many aspects to the capability of new technologies to connect people across vast distances. Wertheimer summarizes: “In all likelihood, we are only at the beginning of a revolution in the delivery of Jewish education that will remake schools, classrooms, the roles of educators, and individual learning.”⁷⁶

An ongoing challenge is to find sufficiently qualified teaching personnel. Wertheimer stresses the problem of the recruitment and retention of trained teachers for a field that does not pay high salaries and often offers only part-time employment. Woocher says: “Jewish educators are generally paid less than public school educators. This is not unusual for private education in the United States in general, but in some cases the gap is significant.”⁷⁷

Taglit-Birthright Israel

By autumn 2009, nearly 225,000 young Jewish adults aged eighteen to twenty-six from around the world had participated in Taglit-Birthright Israel, which consists of a ten-day educational experience in Israel. About 75 percent of the participants were from North America, with the great majority coming from the United States.

The Birthright Israel program, which was established in 1999 and has grown rapidly in the new century, is the largest-ever communal education program in Jewish history. Its aim is to make Jewish identity more relevant to the participants, to enhance *ahavat Yisrael* (love of the Jewish people), and to promote a sense of Jewish peoplehood.

Saxe says: “The Jewish community needs to decide if it wants an Israel experience to be a normative element for its youth. If the funding is available, and we can reach a point where well over 50 percent of the American Jewish population has had an Israel experience, Diaspora Jewry would be transformed.”⁷⁸

Interviews with Birthright Israel participants have shown that these trips lead to changes in attitude for the great majority. However, there is far less change in behavior. The program has not existed long enough to determine whether changes in attitude persist in the long term. One of the major challenges for the initiators is how to follow up on the program once participants have returned to their homes and campuses.⁷⁹

Jewish Studies at Universities

The expansion of Jewish studies programs at universities over the past decades has been remarkable. This has manifested itself in many ways including, for instance, the increase in the number of Jewish studies faculty, the rise in membership of the Association for Jewish Studies (AJS), and the publication of important studies.⁸⁰ The AJS, founded in 1969, now has more than 1,800 members and there are about 230 endowed chairs for Jewish studies in the United States.⁸¹

Jehuda Reinharz, the outgoing president of Brandeis University, says that while liberal arts have undergone a decline in status over the past four decades, Jewish studies are flourishing. Unlike many subjects in the humanities there is no problem of funding for Jewish studies. He notes further that, while in the past anyone who sought quality Jewish studies needed to spend time at an Israeli university, today this is no longer the case.⁸² Holocaust studies have also become an important field over the past decades.

An emerging field is Israel studies. Mitchell Bard says: “The Second Intifada created the incentive among the American Jewish philanthropic community to promote education and scholarship on Israel. At the time there was much anti-Israel activism on some college campuses. Public attention was mainly focused on student activities including ‘mock checkpoints’ and ‘apartheid walls.’”

A program for visiting Israeli professors was organized by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE) and began in 2004–05. It has gradually brought an increasing number of Israeli professors to the United States and by the academic year 2008–09, twenty-seven such scholars were teaching on twenty-six campuses. By the end of 2008 about fifteen chairs in Israel studies had been endowed.⁸³

The publication of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* in 2006 has shed further light on the development of Jewish studies in the United States. Berenbaum notes that whereas the original edition was a product of German Jewry, the new encyclopedia is written mostly by Israeli and American scholars. He points out that there is major cross-fertilization between the two sides.

Much can be learned about trends in the Jewish world, including American Jewry, from what this encyclopedia’s editors considered topics demanding emphasis as well as those they considered controversial. As mentioned earlier, Berenbaum said one important indication was that women had been largely left out of the history, biography, and other sections of the previous edition. Mintz Geffen, who collaborated in the new edition says: “The role of women had to be mainstreamed into existing articles such as, for instance, those on kashrut and candles, while many biographies had to be added.”⁸⁴

Among the more controversial issues were how editors should deal with homosexuality, the Israeli settler movement, and who should be included as Jews. As Berenbaum observes, “Many who are not halachically Jewish see themselves within the context of Jewish discourse and Jewish faith.”⁸⁵

Leadership

One crucial current issue is Jewish leadership. Wertheimer asserts that there are no longer any universally recognized leaders among American Jewry. He found that among the national organizations those more frequently cited as leading forces in the Jewish community are the ones that address international needs, such as AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the Claims Conference.

According to Wertheimer, there is far less consensus regarding domestic Jewish policy. While several leaders of American Jewry are effective heads of their organizations, they rarely rise above their own sphere to influence the discourse on broader issues affecting Jewish life.

He contends that the locus of organized activity has shifted from the national to the local level, where much of American Jewry's energy is now focused. Synagogues, *havurot* (small religious fellowships), federations, educational programs and institutions, as well as grassroots social-action organizations and salons seem to appeal particularly to younger Jews.⁸⁶

The leadership issue also comes up in various ways. It has, for instance, raised questions in Reform Jewry. It has become the largest American denomination and is likely to remain so for many years to come. On the other hand, at the local level it is the least uniform of the denominations.

In this context, Ellenson asks what Reform rabbis should be trained for. He concludes that, in seeking common elements, a central place must be given to Israel in this training. Hence he opposed those who did not want to send rabbinical students to Israel for a year of study during the Second Intifada.⁸⁷

The main leadership challenge in the future thus seems to be: who will be able to speak for American Jewry about the multiple challenges the Jewish community will have to face? And as American Jewry is the largest Diaspora community, how will it be able to address the many problems concerning world Jewry in the years to come?

American Jewish Journalism

Jewish newspapers have fulfilled an important role in keeping community members informed. With the advance of electronic media, however, this role is likely to be diluted and fragmented.

In 2004, Sarna identified three central problems regarding American Jewish journalism. The first concerns its mission; the second, its responsibilities; and third, the compromises it should be prepared to make so as to ensure its survival.⁸⁸ These three problems may appear in different ways in the electronic media.

He adds:

It is “the best of times and the worst of times” for American Jewish journalism. On the positive side, thanks to the internet, newspapers boast more readers than ever before, and important local articles can quickly find their way around the world. On the negative side, paid circulation and advertising are way down at all American Jewish newspapers, and many fear for their very survival.⁸⁹

Coalition Building

A relatively small community such as the Jewish one, which wants to protect its rights and advance its interests and those of Israel, must seek to build coalitions with other ethnic groups. Given its shrinking percentage within the American population, this will require greater efforts in the future. Much of coalition building is done by local Jewish Community Relations Councils (JCRCs). For example, the JCRC in New York describes its role as “the ultimate hands-on strategic bridge builder, within the Jewish and the multi-ethnic communities of New York.”⁹⁰

Particularly in cities where the ethnic composition changes rapidly, the JCRCs must be very dynamic and establish contacts with growing new communities. New York is one of these. From 1970 to 2000 its foreign-born population doubled from 1.4 million to 2.87 million. Nearly 43 percent of New York City’s foreign-born came to the United States in the 1990s.⁹¹

On a national basis, Latinos have by now become the largest minority in the United States. Numbering an estimated forty-five million, of whom up to a quarter are illegal immigrants, they account for 15 percent of the total population. Windmueller observes that “from the Jewish standpoint, the relevance of Latinos is their growing importance in the United States. Latinos are increasingly playing a role in local and national politics. In the economy they also interact increasingly with the rest of society, which means with Jews as well.”⁹²

Windmueller says that shared values are the key to improving Jewish-Latino intercommunal relations. These include a great love for family and a strong commitment to the education of children. He adds: “One important goal for the Jewish community is to identify young Latinos who are emerging as leaders in their communities. Jews should develop strategies to introduce the next generation of Latino officials to Jewish leaders and to Israel, and to nurture such connections in general.”⁹³

Economics

Economics have an important impact on all communities. There are some economic issues that affect the Jewish community specifically. One of these is

that in an aging community, the need to take care of the elderly will necessitate investments in nursing homes and assisted-living and other senior-citizen facilities as well as greater support for them, as there will be more people not earning a living and who have small retirement funds.

A second economic aspect concerns the cost of living Jewishly, particularly for those with the strongest Jewish identity. Their commitment entails great expenses for schooling, camps, and so on. Keeping a kosher home also involves above-average costs. To this must be added synagogue and often also Jewish Community Center memberships.

A third economic impact stems from the recent financial crisis. It affected both individuals who lost their jobs and philanthropic donations. For instance, the announcement of the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy in September 2008 led to many articles about the loss of major charitable donations by Jewish executives in the firm.

As a reaction to the expected reduction in donations, the officers of the UJA-Federation of New York stated in October 2008 that, if necessary, they would be willing to take money from the organization's \$850 million endowment funds to supplement funds raised annually.

John Ruskay, executive vice-president of UJA-Federation of New York, stated: "The reserves will be available during acute crises, whether to rescue Jews globally or to assure that those in our community can live in dignity." Irv Rosenthal, the group's chief financial officer, said, "If we need to dip into our endowments, we are prepared to do it. No Jews will go hungry and nobody will be without a roof over his head."⁹⁴

Some foundations decided to temporarily stop accepting grant applications. This included a major one when in autumn 2008 the Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation, which donates about \$100 million annually to Jewish causes, announced that it would not accept new applications for four months, until the end of March 2009.⁹⁵

The economic crisis also affected attendance at the United Jewish Communities' (UJC) annual General Assembly, which was held in Jerusalem in November 2008. While about five thousand people from North America were originally expected, only 2,500 actually came.⁹⁶

Another aspect of economics concerns a number of scandals in the financial world. In the *Forward's* annual list of the fifty most prominent Jews, a special section was devoted to scandals. The paper wrote:

We take no pleasure in highlighting misdeeds and embarrassments caused by fellow Jews, but they, too, are part of our story.

Consider this: Last year at this time, only those in the know had heard of Bernard Madoff; now his name is synonymous with the worst kind of greed and betrayal. Last year at this time, J. Ezra Merkin's name was associated with his revered, philanthropic family; now he is being sued in connection

with his alleged role in Madoff's Ponzi scheme. Last year at this time, few might have guessed that Solomon Dwek, son of a prominent rabbi, was a cooperating witness in an FBI sting that nabbed New Jersey politicians and prominent members of his Syrian Jewish community.⁹⁷

Costs of Education

As noted earlier, Jewish education is a central element promoting Jewish continuity and identity. The burden on the Orthodox community especially, with its relatively large number of children, is already heavy, with tuition costs increasing faster than income. In particular, tuition for Modern Orthodox day schools places a heavy burden on parents who often have several children in such schools.

Lamm says: "Day schools are the only form of education that can secure future generations.... We face a crisis. If a parent earns \$100,000 and it costs about \$20,000 or more to send each child to school, then it is impossible to have large families."⁹⁸ To this must now be added the financial crisis that has hit the United States.

Wertheimer has estimated that the average annual cost for a Jewish day school education per child was around \$10,000 a few years ago. This meant that the total outlay for day school attendance of parents, philanthropists, and communities came to about \$2 billion per annum. Adding another hundred thousand children to the day school system would mean not only an additional \$1 billion annually, but also investment of \$135 million in school buildings and maintenance.⁹⁹

Windmueller has made some assessments on the possible impact of the economic crisis on American Jewry. He says it may take years before all its consequences emerge.

These economic challenges threaten the existing infrastructure of the American Jewish community, leading to a new order of institutions and leaders. The changes are already having a social and psychological impact on American Jewry. For many older Jews, many of their core institutional patterns of personal engagement have been altered. For younger Jews, the dislocations may foster opportunities for further experimentation and disengagement from the traditional patterns.

He adds:

The long-term outcome of the transformation is likely to be a far weaker, less cohesive American Jewish community. As the economy moves beyond the current crisis and as institutions adjust, a new leadership will also likely emerge that will need to draw on the lessons of this period. The "new"

American Jewish scene they will inherit will display a smaller communal and religious system with fewer resources.¹⁰⁰

Poverty

Even before the economic crisis that started in 2008, poverty was a problem in some Jewish communities, particularly in large northeastern ones. Ruskay drew attention to the nature of the substantial Jewish poverty in New York. “The Jewish Community Study of New York showed that from 1991 to 2001 the number of Jewish poor in New York increased by a dramatic 35 percent. Roughly one-third of the Jewish poor are elderly, one-third are immigrants, and one-third are large ultra-Orthodox families. For a family of four, this means an income of less than \$27,000 per year.”

Ruskay notes that one has to think globally as well.

There are also Jewish poor in the former Soviet Union, Argentina, and Ethiopia, as well as elsewhere. In Israel and New York there are government-funded human safety nets, however inadequate these may be. These do not exist elsewhere. A Jewish philanthropic mutual fund’s responsibility is to first make sure that no one is starving. Thereafter, one has to try to determine where one can have an impact to get people to the next level.

Similarly, we have a shared responsibility for Jewish education in communities that cannot afford it. A few years ago, Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon invited a few of us to come to his home for dinner and said “Israel needs your help; we must make certain that every Jew who wants to can get out of Argentina as the economy there is in a free fall. For those who stay, we have to make sure that they have adequate food and education.” The Federation system made a commitment on the spot for up to \$50 million.¹⁰¹

In its report on Jewish poverty the UJA-Federation states that “244,000 Jewish New Yorkers are poor and that an additional 104,000 live just above the poverty line, disqualifying them for entitlements.”¹⁰²

International Charity

The main American Jewish organization to provide international charity is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC). It operates in more than seventy countries on behalf of North American Jewry. It carries out major activities in the former Soviet Union, where it provides basic nutrition and medicine to close to 170,000 Jews. It also provides nonsectarian humanitarian assistance for victims of natural and man-made disasters.

Though it is the largest such organization, it is far from being the only one. Ruskay mentions that the UJA-Federation of New York more than a decade ago ended the division between domestic and overseas issues, which reflects a changing worldview:

Maintaining “domestic” and “overseas” divisions was anachronistic.... All our planning, allocating, and fundraising are now rooted in the concept that we are a global Jewish people.

The question should have been how a philanthropic entity like UJA-Federation of New York can have maximum impact in caring for Jews, enhancing Jewish identity, and strengthening the Jewish people by developing a sense of global cohesiveness. We have thus created three commissions to deal with our planning and allocations. They reflect the three pillars of our mission: *chesed* (caring), *Clal Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood), and *chinuch* (Jewish identity and renewal).

This new approach creates a different understanding of collective responsibility. As a global people, we are responsible for one another. Within this context, we believe the Jewish Agency for Israel might be more appropriately named the Jewish Agency for the *Jewish People*.¹⁰³

Israel in American Jewish Identity

The place of Israel in American Jewish identity is a subject of much debate. This is likely to increase further in the future. The issue of whether American Jewry is getting more distant from Israel has been debated for a long time. Many Jewish leaders have expressed their fears on this score. A study by Cohen and Ari Kelman found that by every measure there is a decline of attachment to Israel in each younger generation. For instance, 80 percent of Jews aged sixty-five and above said that “caring about Israel is an important part of being Jewish.” For those under sixty-five the figure was 60 percent.¹⁰⁴ A study undertaken in 2008 by Brandeis University on behalf of Taglit-Birthright Israel contradicts this common belief, also known as the “distancing hypothesis.”¹⁰⁵

Attacks on Israel in the new century not only fostered an increase in commitment to Israel among many core elements of American Jewry. They also led to the establishment of an array of pro-Israel grassroots organizations. This development should also be seen within the framework of the mounting individualism in American society at large.¹⁰⁶

Since its initiation in 1965, the “Salute to Israel” parade in New York has grown into a major expression of American Jewry’s identification with Israel. Marissa Gross of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs writes that “the parade is a barometer for the community and its trends. The attendance of the parade also suggests American Jews’ sense of comfort and security in the United States.

The participants, the themes that are chosen, and the dynamics of the parade itself reflect how American Jews relate to Israel and to themselves.”¹⁰⁷

Future Comfort Levels

One major question that will remain on the American Jewish agenda concerns the level of comfort of Jews in American society. Rabbi David Wolpe says:

We are not used to being, and being accepted as, part of the great collective. Whether labeled Jewish American or American Jews, “Jewish” always pulled at the purity of the other half of the compound word.... This tension, of course, has long been an accusation of our enemies. But it is not an issue of divided loyalty; that is a canard. Rather, the sense of disquiet is a natural accompaniment to being the outsider, the marginalized one who does not feel fully at home.¹⁰⁸

American Jewry can find comfort in the large number of Jews in Congress and the Jewish presence on the Supreme Court. There is also a significant number of Jews among American Nobel Prize winners. Jews, moreover, are found in the forefront of philanthropy and many other respected activities.

One structural example of tension was mentioned by Sarna: “The holiday of Christmas, for example, annually reminds American Jews just how far apart they stand from central aspects of contemporary American culture. Although they may attempt to magnify the relatively minor holiday of Hanukkah into a surrogate for Christmas, Christmas remains an awkward day for many American Jews.”¹⁰⁹

The general opinion is that the American Jewish experience is unique. This is often called the “exceptionalism” issue. Former *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz wrote regarding the Jewish immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century:

Obviously there was no gold in the streets, as some of them may have imagined, and so they had to struggle and struggle hard. But there was another kind of gold in America, a more precious kind than the gold of coins. There was freedom and there was opportunity. Blessed with these conditions, and hampered by much less disabling forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination than Jews had previously grown accustomed to contending with, the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these immigrants flourished—and not just in material terms—to an extent unprecedented in the history of their people.... Through the unique benignity of their experience in the United States, the Jewish people bear witness to the infinitely precious virtues of the traditional American system.¹¹⁰

Windmueller observed:

Probably no other definitive standards can as effectively be employed to determine a society's level of connection and openness to its Jewish population as the presence/absence of anti-Semitism and support for the State of Israel. Employing both standards of assessment, the U.S. must be seen as unique in its welcoming of Jews and supportiveness of Israel. In the current political environment, the American model must be seen as both significantly different from other nations, and in turn, particularly appealing.¹¹¹

The absence of any state-supported or sponsored anti-Semitism in American society is indeed a very important element in the American Jewish experience. It should, however, not be the only tool used to assess the future comfort levels of American Jewry. There are signs in some areas that certain forms of distress are emerging, some of them from different sources, such as the campus and mainstream Christian churches, than in the past.

The 2000–2001 NJPS questionnaire included a question phrased as “I feel like an outsider in American society because I am a Jew.” Three percent of those polled strongly agreed, 14 percent somewhat agreed, 18 percent somewhat disagreed, 63 percent strongly disagreed, and 2 percent did not respond.¹¹²

The status of Israel in American society at large also contributes to the comfort level of American Jews. A Gallup poll in February 2010 found that Israel ranked fifth among countries viewed most favorably by Americans. Only Canada, Britain, Germany, and Japan ranked higher. Sixty-seven percent of the more than a thousand people polled said they had a favorable opinion of Israel compared to 25 percent who had an unfavorable one. Sixty-three percent had more sympathy for Israel than for the Palestinians. This was the highest level of support for Israel in nineteen years. About 15 percent said they sided more with the Palestinians.¹¹³

Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israelism

In recent years it has become increasingly clear that anti-Israelism and anti-Semitism overlap to a great extent. The best-known current definition of anti-Semitism is the working definition of the EUMC.¹¹⁴ It reads:

Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

In addition, such manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity. Anti-Semitism frequently charges Jews

with conspiring to harm humanity, and it is often used to blame Jews for “why things go wrong.” It is expressed in speech, writing, visual forms and action, and employs sinister stereotypes and negative character traits.

The document containing this working definition gives a series of contemporary examples of anti-Semitism.¹¹⁵ One of these is: “Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.”

The document also states that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.” It lists examples of how anti-Semitism can manifest itself concerning Israel:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.¹¹⁶

The anti-Semitic character of anti-Israelism can be proved through the analysis of cartoons, survey findings and other statistics, and semantics.¹¹⁷ During the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in Gaza at the turn of 2008–2009, the many attacks on Jews around the world provided further proof of this.

There is overwhelming evidence that the three main permutations of the core theme of anti-Semitism have many common characteristics, with their principal submotifs being identical. These permutations are: religious anti-Semitism, which can more precisely be called anti-Judaism; ethnic (racist) anti-Semitism; and anti-Israelism (anti-Zionism).

The common characteristics of the three permutations include the main motif that the Jew—now including also the Jewish state as the new Jewish collective—constitutes absolute evil. This motif manifests itself according to prevailing worldviews at any given time. Furthermore, there is an ongoing powerful promotion of a discourse of Jew-hatred (now represented as hatred of Israel).¹¹⁸

Jews as Inciters

A small number of Jews and Israelis are central to the anti-Semitic discourse. This phenomenon is something the mainstream Jewish community will have to continue to live with.

Alan Dershowitz of Harvard University said:

Many of those who are most guilty of stoking anti-Zionist hatred on college campuses in the United States and Europe, are Jews. Among the best known are MIT Professor Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, the latter an unsuccessful academic who has made a career out of attacking pro-Israel Jews.... They represent few Jews, but their positions enable non-Jews to claim that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are not the same. The latter only have to claim that they are joining “the best of the Jews” in their critique of Israel.¹¹⁹

Edward Alexander and Paul Bogdanor phrased it somewhat differently: “To the new anti-Semitism Jewish progressives are indispensable because they are ever ready to declare that what might seem anti-Semitic to untutored minds is really nothing more than ‘criticism of Israeli policy.’ After all, who should know better than Jews whether something is anti-Semitic or not?”¹²⁰

Alvin Rosenfeld of Indiana University analyzed the anti-Zionist hatred of a number of “progressive Jews.” He remarks that

In some quarters, the challenge is not to Israel’s policies, but to its legitimacy and right to an ongoing future. Thus, the argument leveled by Israel’s fiercest critics is often no longer about 1967 and the country’s territorial expansion following its military victory during the Six-Day War, but about 1948 and the alleged “crime,” or “original sin,” of its establishment.¹²¹

The more one analyzes anti-Semitic attacks on Israel by Israelis and Jews, the more one sees that they are frequently indistinguishable from those by gentiles. Among the specific features of the anti-Israel writings of some Jews are the use of their family’s Holocaust experiences, their references to being Jewish, or to their association with Israel.¹²²

Anti-Semitism in Society at Large

Anti-Semitism is not a major issue in American society at large. This is borne out by various studies by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). In its 2008 annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, it counted “1,352 incidents of vandalism, harassment and physical assaults against Jewish individuals, property and community institutions in 2008, representing a 7 percent decline from the 1,460 incidents reported in 2007.” Nevertheless, Jews remain the religious group most targeted for hate in the United States.¹²³

Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the ADL, has said that while the audit is a barometer of anti-Semitism, there are certain fields where anti-Jewish

manifestations are hard to quantify. He specifically referred to the internet, Facebook, and YouTube. Foxman added: "In 2008, the financial crisis brought about an increase in rhetoric targeting Jews, with letters in newspapers and on Web sites blaming Jews for the misdeeds of a select few, with Bernard Madoff topping the list."¹²⁴

Steven Bayme comments that in general American society has demonstrated repeatedly that when Jews commit misdeeds, Americans react fairly and do not blame the Jews collectively. This has been the pattern consistently since the Rosenberg trial in the 1950s.¹²⁵

The ADL's October 2009 poll of American attitudes toward Jews found that "Anti-Semitic propensities are at a historic low since 1964, matching the previous all time low point in 1998." Only 12 percent of Americans hold anti-Semitic views. Yet, as far as particular stereotypes are concerned, 79 percent of Americans think Jews have too much power in business and 64 percent say Jews have too much influence in the United States. Twenty-nine percent of all Americans believe that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ.¹²⁶

There are various areas where anti-Semitism manifests itself significantly. This pertains mainly but not exclusively to its anti-Israel mutation. Some examples are college campuses, mainstream Christian denominations, and major progressive online media.

Campuses

One area where the anti-Israel mutation of anti-Semitism continues to develop in particular is the campus. Initially much of the anti-Israel campaign focused on convincing universities to divest their holdings in Israeli securities and in those U.S. companies that supply arms to Israel. There was much opposition to this campaign from Jewish organizations, university presidents, and many others. Ultimately not a single university decided to divest.¹²⁷

In recent years the problems have been of a different nature. A number of universities stand out as places where anti-Israelism is structural. One example is the University of California (UC) system, with the University of California at Irvine being a hotbed of anti-Israelism.

In February 2008, for example, an Israel Apartheid Week was held there. Included in the program was a lecture by Imam Mohammad Al-Asi titled "From Auschwitz to Gaza: The Politics of Genocide."¹²⁸ He claimed that Israel is an apartheid state and that "Israel is on the way down...your days are numbered. We will fight you until we are martyred or until we are victorious."¹²⁹

Al-Asi returned to UC-Irvine in May 2008 to take part in a weeklong event to commemorate the *Nakba*, that is, the Arabs' catastrophic defeat in the 1948 war against Israel. Another speaker was Norman Finkelstein. There the imam Amir Abdel Malik Ali praised Palestinian mothers who send their children out

as suicide bombers.¹³⁰ In February 2010, while addressing students of the Law School and Political Science Department, Israeli ambassador Michael Oren was heckled and frequently interrupted by Muslim students. Police made eleven arrests.¹³¹ Thereupon UC president Mark G. Yudof and the chancellors of ten UC campuses condemned “all acts of racism, intolerance and incivility.”¹³²

Columbia University has also held several anti-Israel events over the past few years, even if only a limited number of its staff is involved in these.¹³³ Columbia stood out negatively again in September 2007 when Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke at its World Leaders Forum. The idea of inviting him had already been raised the previous year. At the 2007 lecture, Columbia president Lee C. Bollinger challenged Ahmadinejad and others did so as well. Yet the fact of Columbia’s invitation gave legitimacy to the Iranian president, who consistently calls for the elimination of Israel and the genocide of Jews.

One paradigmatic phenomenon was the statement of the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend the University.¹³⁴ More than 650 academics, including scholars from almost every Ivy League school, signed this petition that was in part an attack on supporters of Israeli power and those fighting anti-Semitism in American academia.

The statement begins by stressing the essential role of academic freedom, blaming pressure or lobby groups for imposing limitations on this freedom. It singles out pro-Israel activities. According to supporters of the declaration, the Israel lobby has taken control of the universities via donations, linking anti-Semitism to anti-Israelism, and exerting other types of influence.

Campus Watch director Daniel Pipes unmasked the hypocrisy of the Ad Hoc Committee by pointing out that the anti-Israel academic Noam Chomsky has no problem being invited to speak at American universities and added: “When I go on universities I can barely give a talk.”¹³⁵

Gradually the many ideological abuses on American campuses have led to a number of counteractions. An important example was an investigation of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel hate at UC-Irvine by members of the Jewish community of Orange County. They examined the structural problems in their totality rather than only dealing with some individual incidents. This can serve as a model for similar investigations at other universities.¹³⁶

Teaching in the Classroom

The discriminatory developments in the academic world that have been exposed may, however, only be the tip of the iceberg. More severe problems exist in the classroom. Biased teachers in various areas of the humanities make discriminatory remarks about Israel, but outsiders rarely know anything about it. An exception occurred at Columbia where the David Project created publicity about the misbehavior of various teachers in the Middle Eastern department (MEALAC).

Columbia had no choice but to investigate the incidents, even if the investigation avoided many issues.¹³⁷

For information on what goes on in the classroom, one must depend mainly on anecdotal evidence. Students talk about how anti-Israel books, such as those by Walt and Mearsheimer and Jimmy Carter—which will be discussed below—are used as textbooks without any balancing material. In this way students are indoctrinated against Israel.

The Arab states have long understood the importance of universities and have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to establish programs of Arab and Islamic studies that obfuscate many of the problems, which originate in Muslim states and societies but affect both their citizens and humanity at large. The financing of chairs in Western universities by Saudi Arabia and other Arab dictatorships is an issue that will require increasing scrutiny. Jay P. Greene, head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, says Persian Gulf Arabs donated a total of \$88 million to fourteen U.S. universities from 1995 to 2008. His own university was the largest recipient.¹³⁸

Carter, Walt and Mearsheimer

The accusation that the Jews aim to control the world is one of the classic motifs of anti-Semitism. The best-known manifestation of this is an invented text called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. It is published again and again, in great numbers mainly, but not exclusively, in the Arab and Muslim world.

A contemporary variant is that a powerful “Israel lobby”—consisting of Jews and others—controls American policymaking, leading to the United States making moves against its own interests. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt first published an article on this subject called “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” and later turned it into a book.¹³⁹ The main target of the attacks on this perceived Israeli power is AIPAC.

Walter R. Mead has given a convincing response: “Widespread gentile support for Israel is one of the most potent political forces in U.S. foreign policy, and in the last 60 years, there has never been a Gallup poll showing more Americans sympathizing with the Arabs or the Palestinians than with the Israelis.”¹⁴⁰

Another book, with a distinctly anti-Semitic title, was written by former president Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.¹⁴¹ Carter traveled all over the United States to promote his book and was even invited to speak at Brandeis University, which benefits from major Jewish support. As in many other cases, he refused to allow any debate on the book. Brandeis had invited Dershowitz to debate Carter. When the former president refused, Dershowitz was given the opportunity to speak after Carter left.¹⁴² The hosts’ willingness to accept Carter’s conditions was yet another example of how academic freedom is twisted at many American universities.¹⁴³

Although the book's many distortions were criticized from various directions, hundreds of thousands of copies were sold. CAMERA (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America) published a monograph detailing the many errors in Carter's book.¹⁴⁴ Kenneth Stein, first executive director of Emory University's Carter Center, and other board members resigned after Carter's book was published. In his resignation letter Stein stated as reasons: "the factual errors, copied materials not cited, superficialities, glaring omissions, and simply invented segments" in the book.¹⁴⁵

In December 2009, Carter sent a letter to the American Jewish community in which he offered a personal apology for the harm he had caused. He referred to Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state within secure and recognized borders. A few months later he repeated his earlier views. Foxman reacted: "President Carter's recent comments on Israel are profoundly disappointing, and leave little doubt of the insincerity of his apology."¹⁴⁶

High Schools

Another source of anti-Israelism about which very little is known is public-high-school curriculum and teachers. Weinreb has insights on this problem, the OU's National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) having established culture clubs in over 150 public schools across the United States that reach thirty thousand Jewish youngsters. He says: "We find that many children are very anti-Israeli. They have been very much brainwashed by an extremely anti-Israeli education establishment. We need a component of Israeli advocacy."¹⁴⁷

High school textbooks are another source of bias. In their book *The Trouble with Textbooks: Distorting History and Religion*, Gary A. Tobin and Dennis R. Ybarra reviewed twenty-eight high school textbooks from major publishers. They focused on four subjects: Jewish history, theology, and religion; the relationship between Judaism and Christianity; the relationship between Judaism and Islam; and the history, geography, and politics of the Middle East.

The authors found much biased scholarship. Several textbooks obfuscate or minimize Palestinian terrorism; others even justify it. Tobin and Ybarra found "that Arab and Muslim interest groups attempt to whitewash and glorify all things Islamic and promote Islam as a religion." These organizations also attempt, sometimes with success, to advance the Palestinian narrative. Tobin and Ybarra conclude that textbooks are frequently critical of Jews and Israel and sometimes show little respect for Judaism while Islam is depicted without criticism.¹⁴⁸

Fifteen years ago Bard published a study, titled *Rewriting History in Textbooks*, that surveyed eighteen of the history textbooks most widely used in American high schools. He found them "full of factual errors, oversimplification, omission, and distortion, consistently to the detriment of Jews and Israel. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that the authors are prejudiced."¹⁴⁹

Bard remarked that

high schools are, as far as anti-Israeli teaching is concerned, even worse than universities. This problem has grown since the Arab terrorist attacks of 9/11. They prompted a desire to better understand the Muslim world. The people who are producing the information about it in textbooks are largely funded by the Saudis. They are presenting a version of Islamic history that is often very selective, to put it mildly. We have tried during the last couple of years to produce texts on the history of Israel and found it surprisingly difficult to get them into public schools.¹⁵⁰

The Hadassah organization, as part of its “Curriculum Watch” activity, also reviews textbooks to “detect inaccuracies and bias as relating to Judaism, the Holocaust, and the history of Israel.”¹⁵¹

Anti-Israelism in Mainstream Churches

Christian anti-Semitism, mainly in the form of anti-Israelism, has grown in recent years. While it is found in some Catholic environments, its main foothold is in mainstream U.S. Protestant churches. Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, says: “Theologians and activists in some prominent Protestant churches are seeking to destroy Israel from Above. Their activities threaten to turn traditional friends into enemies and erode support for Israel in the United States.... They cast Israel as a theological mistake, conceived in the sin of the last gasp of Western colonialism.”¹⁵²

Dexter Van Zile, an analyst who works for CAMERA, monitors Protestant anti-Semitism. He writes:

For the past several years, a group of five Protestant churches—the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—have legitimized the increasingly virulent anti-Israel movement in the United States. Although these churches have suffered substantial membership declines since the mid-1960s, they still enjoy a considerable influence on the American scene, particularly on the Left, thanks to their role in American history and the affluence of their members.¹⁵³

One important development in recent years has been divestment campaigns by various liberal Protestant churches. For instance, in 2004 the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) passed a resolution calling for selective divestment from corporations doing business with Israel, specifically corporations that “support the occupation.”¹⁵⁴

Rabbi Eugene Korn comments:

The resolution precipitated a crisis in Jewish-Protestant relations in America. For many years there had been anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian rhetoric in member churches of the National Council of Churches (NCC) in America, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Europe. But it was just that—rhetoric confined to political posturing. It had few “teeth,” and most Jews and Israelis regarded it as a mild curiosity holding little potential for serious damage to Israeli or Jewish interests.¹⁵⁵

Korn notes that the threat of divestment, however, crossed the threshold to action. He observes that

divestment came as a shock to the Jewish community because American Jews had a longtime informal alliance with the mainline Protestant churches on domestic political issues. Historically, the American Jewish community has identified largely with the liberal end of American domestic politics on principles such as the separation of church and state, keeping religion out of the public square, and freedom of choice on abortion. In this posture American Jews were almost in lockstep with the positions of the liberal churches.¹⁵⁶

Korn thinks the hostility toward Israel in the mainline churches is confined to a minority. He therefore recommends that American Jews engage with moderate Christians so as to undermine anti-Israel church campaigns. This is even more so as Jews and Christians have common strategic interests in the Middle East against Islamic intolerance.¹⁵⁷

Mennonites against Israel

There are other Christian denominations as well in which anti-Israelism flourishes. Van Zile says:

Mennonite-supported peacemaking institutions have been at the forefront of the effort to discredit Israel to audiences in North America. These institutions portray Jewish sovereignty as the cause of conflict and suffering in the Middle East and downplay Muslim and Arab hostility toward Jews and Israel.¹⁵⁸

The prescription for peace offered by these activists—especially those affiliated with the Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Peacemaker Teams—is for Israeli Jews to abandon their insistence on maintaining Israel as a sovereign Jewish state and acquiesce to a one-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This prescription fails to take into account overwhelming

evidence that a Jewish minority would not be safe in a Muslim- and Arab-majority country in the Middle East.¹⁵⁹

In September 2007, MCC officials went so far as to help organize an interfaith dinner between Christian leaders and Iranian president Ahmadinejad during his visit to the United Nations in New York.¹⁶⁰

Progressive Political Blogs

A new field where Jew-hatred, in both its classic and anti-Israel forms, manifests itself is that of major progressive blogs. The nature of Jew-hatred in blogs has hardly been analyzed. A study by Adam Levick of some leading blogs found that three important historic anti-Semitic motifs appeared frequently: Israel resembles Nazi Germany; there is excessive Jewish power and control over American society and government; and Jews are more loyal to Israel than to their own country.¹⁶¹

Levick has also analyzed cartoons in a larger number of such progressive web media. There as well he found Israel recurrently portrayed as a Nazi country. In viewing these cartoons it becomes even clearer that anti-Semitism in the progressive sphere focuses on a limited number of motifs. Other negative portrayals of Jews such as the Jew as an animal—a staple in the Arab and Muslim world—and the Jews as God-killers are absent.¹⁶²

With the increasing importance of web media and blogs, the problem of anti-Semitism there will only intensify. Unlike most classic media, editorial control is largely absent.

Human Rights and Racism

For many reasons, Jews have always played a role disproportionate to their size in the promotion of human rights. This is still the case as shown by organizations such as the AJDC and the American Jewish World Service (AJWS). The issue of human rights has also become for many an alternative religion. Yet, in recent decades, the cause of human rights has been increasingly undermined in several areas. While many worthy causes are still being promoted, the moral integrity of the human rights movement at large is doubtful at best.

Gerald Steinberg, head of NGO Monitor has pointed out that:

For many years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that use the language of human rights and other universal moral causes have been exempt from independent examination. Their activities and publications were usually accepted at face value, under the assumption that the officials involved are

virtuous and unbiased. But, like other powerful political actors, NGOs need independent evaluation and constructive criticism to prevent abuse.¹⁶³

Many of the humanitarian activities of the United Nations have been corrupted. This became evident at the infamous UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban in August-September 2001 (Durban I).

Former Canadian justice minister Irwin Cotler says that by its discrimination against Israel, “the United Nations has become a case study of the new anti-Jewishness and the singling-out of the Jewish people for differential and discriminatory treatment.”¹⁶⁴ The Goldstone Report has become yet another example of this.

Anne Bayefsky of the Hudson Institute notes that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledges the debt to the Jewish people when it says: “Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.” She adds regarding the serious misconduct of the United Nations: “But over time, the UN has turned the Jewish victims of the Nazis into their counterparts of the 21st Century.”¹⁶⁵

Major human rights NGOs have also played a large role in undermining human rights. In October 2009 Robert Bernstein, who founded Human Rights Watch (HRW), accused the organization of anti-Israel bias. He said it had lost critical perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel had been attacked by Hamas and Hizballah, “organizations that go after Israeli citizens and use their own people as human shields.” Bernstein added: “These groups are supported by the Government of Iran, which has openly declared its intention not just to destroy Israel but to murder Jews everywhere. This incitement to genocide is a violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.”¹⁶⁶

Earlier HRW was forced to suspend Marc Garlasco, its senior military analyst, after it became known that he was a collector of Nazi memorabilia. Garlasco had been involved in HRW investigations of Israel.¹⁶⁷ In July 2009, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that an HRW delegation had gone to Saudi Arabia to “raise money from wealthy Saudis by highlighting HRW’s demonization of Israel.”¹⁶⁸

The semantics concerning human rights have been greatly distorted. After the Durban I conference, then-congressman Tom Lantos wrote that the official NGO document “debases terms like genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity by using them to describe Israeli settlement policies in the occupied territories.”¹⁶⁹

The abuse of human rights language has increased drastically over the past decade and there is little indication that this trend will be reversed. In this process a new type of racism has emerged that can best be called humanitarian racism. It is based on the assumption that only powerful people—in particular whites—can be responsible for their deeds, while others can only be victims.¹⁷⁰

Promoting Peace as a Tool for Totalitarianism

For almost a century many people claiming to be pacifists and peace promoters have used dishonest semantics in the field of ethics. In doing so they have also served the interests of various totalitarians. In 1922, Lenin instructed Georghi V. Chicherin, who led the Bolshevik delegation to the International Conference in Genoa, to present a far-reaching pacifist program. Chicherin was amazed by this radical change of policy. Lenin responded by saying: “Comrade Chicherin, you are too nervous.... In the name of our revolutionary proletarian party’s program, you have fought against pacifism. But tell me, then, where and when the Party has refused to use pacifism to break up the enemy...[?]”¹⁷¹

In our days the corruption of the civil liberties and social justice movements has not progressed as much as that of the human rights movement. Yet there are indications that, from time to time, promoters of social justice serve the perpetrators of crimes more than their victims. Those who consider civil liberties an absolute priority will increasingly have to confront accusations that they are facilitating terrorist attacks. These are further phenomena that must be monitored in the coming decades.

The concept of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) could be furthered as well if certain pseudohumanists who are hiding behind a humanitarian mask were to drop out of promoting ethics all together. What *tikkun olam*—a nowadays popular term for which there are few traditional sources—should embody will also require a thorough examination.

These challenges, which have emerged from the corruption of human rights and other types of ethics, will have a substantial place on American Jewry’s agenda in the years to come. As Ambassador Alfred Moses put it: “We cannot afford to have those who would destroy Israel pose as champions of the antiracism cause in the world.”¹⁷²

Muslims

In 2004, Harris said:

We will continue to confront radical Muslims, as we believe existential questions are at stake here that go far beyond Jews. The American Jewish community will not unilaterally withdraw itself from the public debate on central questions about America’s future and the world’s destiny. Let me be clear about this: We are not concerned about drawing too much attention to ourselves and roiling the waters—those days are over.¹⁷³

This statement remains valid. Yet in the United States the problems caused to Jews by segments of the Muslim community are far less severe than those in Western

Europe, where calls of “Death to the Jews” have been heard in the public domain in many cities. This has happened particularly, but not exclusively, during periods of tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There has also been substantial violence by Muslims against Jews, and often few or no Muslim organizations have condemned this behavior. The increasing numbers of Muslim voters also influence the political positions of some countries. In some European cities such as Malmö, Sweden, Jews have declared that they are leaving because of Muslim anti-Semitism.¹⁷⁴

In this regard, developments in the United States have been very different. In Europe violent Muslims began to target the vulnerable Jewish community first, before taking aim at the main target—society at large. In the United States the mass murder of 9/11 came at an early stage of Muslim violence. Muslim terrorism directed at general society thus became part of the American worldview relatively early.

There are other reasons why the American Jewish community is not (yet?) confronted with major problems of this kind. Unlike in Western Europe, Muslim immigration to the United States largely consists of a much more educated population. Many make an effort to integrate into a pluralistic society. Furthermore, according to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the American Jewish community is still substantially larger than the Muslim population.¹⁷⁵

Yet there are pockets where Muslim anti-Semitism in various forms has made substantial inroads in the United States. One such area in particular is university campuses. There were also anti-Semitic episodes during Israel’s 2008–2009 Gaza campaign. It was mainly Arabs and Muslims who participated in numerous demonstrations against Israel.¹⁷⁶ In some of them calls of “Death to the Jews” were heard.

In Fort Lauderdale, Florida, an extremist Muslim demonstration was accompanied by a prayer service in the public domain. One of the demonstrators shouted “Go to the oven!” several times at the participants in a pro-Israel counterdemonstration.¹⁷⁷

There is some anecdotal evidence of the Muslim presence affecting the comfort level of Jews. In one major city where there are many Muslim taxi drivers, a board member of a major Jewish institution said, on condition of anonymity, that she gets out of the cab one block away from a prominent Jewish building, and several of her colleagues do the same.

The Obama Presidency

Comfort levels also depend on the attitude of leading U.S. politicians toward Jews and Israel. The first year of the Obama presidency has not provided clear indications of how its policies might develop and what impact they may have on

the American Jewish community, both directly and indirectly, as a result of the United States' changing position in the world.

All one can do is watch the president's attitude concerning Jewish issues and Israel. At present this gives a confused view. From its beginning the Obama presidency has been characterized by a soft rhetoric toward the Arab and Muslim world, despite the many racist and other crimes as well as multiple human rights violations in these societies. The one exception where this administration's solicitous behavior has gradually changed is that of Iran.

Even though it was only after much hesitation, the Obama administration decided in February 2009 not to participate in the Durban II conference that took place in April 2009 in Geneva. In May Obama insisted that Israel freeze all construction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.¹⁷⁸

His Cairo speech in June 2009 contained many inaccuracies about Islam. Obama also linked the establishment of the state of Israel to the Holocaust, as if the Zionist movement had not already existed for more than forty years prior to World War II. Yet another indication was his choice of Jewish invitees to the White House for a meeting with Jewish leaders in July 2009. Besides well-established bodies these also included J Street, a very young and dovish organization.¹⁷⁹

One sign of the uncertainty regarding Obama's stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict emerged in a meeting Vice-President Joe Biden held with Jewish leaders before his visit to the Middle East in March 2010. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported:

A broad left-to-right consensus that the Obama administration has failed to make its case to ordinary Israelis has emerged in recent months among pro-Israel groups. Groups have been urging the White House to make a direct appeal, through a speech or a visit, since last summer—especially because President Obama has gone out of his way to reach out to Muslims in speeches and media interviews.¹⁸⁰

The Biden visit was not successful, in part because of Israel's announcement of plans for new construction in a Jerusalem suburb. The subsequent extremely disproportionate criticism of Israel by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others close to Obama, however, created a degree of tension between the two countries that had not been there for a long time.¹⁸¹

The Jew as an Indicator

Because of their history and the reactions to it, what happens to Jews has often become an indicator of developments in society at large and a sensor for future trends. Very often one can, by looking at a smaller group, see more clearly what is happening in a broader frame. In recent decades attitudes toward Israel in several

countries have also become a prism through which certain phenomena there can be analyzed more easily and earlier than by looking at society at large.

The phrase “canary in the mine” is often used for this indicator function of the Jews. These birds would fall ill from the increasing concentration of gas before the miners did, thereby enabling them to exit in time. It is an unfortunate association that should be avoided, since it entails that the canary must die so the miners can live.

This function of Jews is far more pronounced in Europe than in the United States. In the latter too, however, it exists in certain areas. One is academia. Academic freedom has in many cases become freedom of propaganda, indoctrination, incitement, and distortion. Together with tenure it has created a bulwark for the academic inciters that is almost impenetrable. On a significant number of campuses, many teachers of humanities have infected the search for knowledge with anti-Israel propaganda and are fostering ideology rather than advancing learning.¹⁸²

The sorry state of Middle Eastern studies in the United States is a further example of how bias can conquer an academic discipline. This has been exposed by Martin Kramer.¹⁸³

Watches Counteract Bias

Another area in which Israel fulfills a similar prism function is that of media bias. Here too distorted reporting on Israel is an indicator of a much wider problem that has permeated journalism. Thomas Friedman has pointed out that Western correspondents stationed in Beirut before 1982 did not even give a hint about the well-known corruption of the PLO leadership there. He also noted that these correspondents judged the PLO much more gently than they did the Phalangists, Israelis, or Americans.¹⁸⁴

As Jews and Israel are in the forefront of those attacked, they are also often the first to develop mechanisms to counteract the aggressions, distortions, and bias. Scholars for Peace in the Middle East was established in response to the anti-Israel incitement in academia. The media-watching function has developed particularly well in pro-Israel circles.¹⁸⁵ One leading example in the United States is CAMERA. Eye on the UN and the Swiss-based UN Watch monitor anti-Israel bias at the United Nations. NGO Monitor, located in Jerusalem, exposes anti-Israel NGOs and development aid agencies, including human rights bodies in the United States. There is, however, no systematic watch of the anti-Semitism and Israel-hatred in American Christian organizations.

While Jews, and nowadays Israel, are often among the first to be attacked, they are never the last. It would thus make sense for the outside world to watch what happens to the Jews and Israel so as to better understand what they might expect in the future.

Where to Go From Here?

Sarna takes stock of some present-day critical issues:

Jews feel bewildered and uncertain. Should they focus on quality to enhance Judaism or focus on quantity to increase the number of Jews? Embrace intermarriage as an opportunity for outreach or condemn it as a disaster for offspring? Build religious bridges or fortify religious boundaries? Strengthen religious authority or promote religious autonomy? Harmonize Judaism with contemporary culture or uphold Jewish tradition against contemporary culture? Compromise for the sake of Jewish unity, or stand firm for cherished Jewish principles?¹⁸⁶

The challenges confronting American Jewry are multiple. Some derive from developments in the societal environment, such as the declining general consensus on many issues. Others are the result of generational problems, both in society at large and within the Jewish community.

For the individual Jew private and family concerns dominate, with a heavy emphasis on economic issues accompanied by religious, social, and cultural needs. The communities' leaders, however, will have to confront a varied set of challenges.

Those who wrote or were interviewed for this volume clarify many aspects of where the community is and what may be awaiting it. The battle for the future of a vibrant American Jewry begins with understanding the present better and continues with assessing as best as possible what the future might bring.

With this comes the need to become more flexible in thought and action. Jews, because of their circumstances, have frequently outperformed larger societies as far as dynamic approaches are concerned. In other situations the challenges were so great that even this was not adequate. The need to develop tools to understand faster the changes occurring and their effects is perhaps the greatest challenge the American Jewish community has to confront.

Notes

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ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS

Interview with Jack Wertheimer

The Fragmentation of American Jewry and Its Leadership

“In the mid-1970s Daniel Elazar wrote a comprehensive and seminal book, *Community and Polity*, which analyzed the structure of organized Jewish life in the United States.¹ Elazar documented ways in which American Jewry had successfully developed from being highly fragmented to becoming an integrated polity with its own structure for self-governance and leadership. He described the important connections between American Jews and their organizations, how the various spheres of Jewish life came together, and how Jewish organizations intersected with one another.”

Historian Jack Wertheimer—the former provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)—observes: “Since Elazar’s book appeared thirty years ago, the integration process has largely reversed. The national leadership structure of the Jewish community has reverted to a fragmented state, a condition that might be far more the norm of American Jewish life than the unified structure that briefly held sway during the three decades after World War II.

“In the postwar era, powerful national organizations set the agenda of the American Jewish community. Today it is hard to discern whether truly powerful organizations in American Jewry still exist, let alone whether these set its agenda.

“This raises various questions such as: are there new organizations that have come into play? And: has the locus of organized activity shifted from the national level to the local one? There is no doubt that the latter has to a large extent occurred. Much of American Jewry’s strength is on the local level. That means synagogues, *havurot* [small religious fellowships], some of the local federations, local grassroots social action organizations, educational institutions serving Jews of all ages, and cultural programs now seem to evoke greater enthusiasm, particularly among younger Jews in their twenties and thirties.”

Power

Wertheimer reflects: “In historical hindsight it appears that the three decades after World War II were an aberration in American Jewish history. What Elazar described as the integration of the American Jewish community apparently

represented a very brief period of unity. The pendulum has swung in the opposite direction and the cohesiveness of American Jewry is much diminished. The forces of dissolution were already present a long time ago.

“To mention one example, it is doubtful whether the Jewish Federations of North America [JFNA]—previously United Jewish Communities [UJC]—the umbrella organization of the federations, has much power. In its earlier incarnation as the Council of Jewish Federations [CJF] in the early 1990s, there were major discussions about creating a voluntary system of ‘continental responsibility’ for Jewish needs to be financed through a program of self-taxation for all federations. The CJF aimed to serve as the central address of the American Jewish community and also as its agenda-setting agency. Eventually, the CJF merged with the two key institutions funneling American Jewish aid to Jews abroad, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal, but the new combined entity, now called the JFNA, is a weak agency.

“Few people today, including insiders, consider the JFNA to be an agenda-setting body. It is a national institution that has not yet clarified its precise mission and is still looking for an ambitious, yet focused agenda. Equally important, it is beholden as never before to a small number of the largest local federations that fund its activities and now are encroaching on its work, assuming through their own local bodies a far greater role in national and international matters.”

Leading Individuals

“My research involved interviewing twenty-five leaders of the American Jewish community in addition to the usual sifting of news accounts and other published information. One question posed in the interviews was: ‘Who would you identify as the leading individuals or organizations of the American Jewish community?’ It turned out that interviewees had much difficulty answering this question.

“One most commonly cited organization was AIPAC. Another was the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which acts on behalf of a range of Jewish organizations to address international issues. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee [Joint], which once was considered rather secondary, has also emerged as a major force, as has the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany by virtue of its extensive financial resources. The Joint is regarded as one of the most effective agencies in our time because of its ability to involve wealthy individuals. It now raises more money directly than it gets from the JFNA.

“When I asked about personalities, Abe Foxman was mentioned as someone with great visibility, as was Malcolm Hoenlein. That does not mean, however, they were considered national Jewish leaders or particularly effective. They were mentioned for their visibility. Other organizational leaders such as David Harris of the American Jewish Committee [AJC], Ruth Messinger of the American

Jewish World Service [AJWS], Steven Schweger of the Joint, and Eric Yoffie of the Union for Reform Judaism [URJ] were cited by peers as highly effective leaders in their particular spheres, but not as individuals who had a platform transcending their agencies. The difference between visibility and impact must be investigated in more detail if we are to assess Jewish leadership today. Some of the most effective Jewish leaders are barely known, including those who run AIPAC or the Joint.

“The situation today is much the same as in the 1990s. Then as now, it is hard to identify people with a broader vision. I hope a new leadership will emerge, even though I am not convinced the times favor such a development.”

No Longer a Wall-to-Wall Consensus

“Another question to ask is whether organizational power affects the ability to set the agenda. One major change concerning the American Jewish community is that it no longer has a clear agenda. Over fifteen years ago, Arthur Goren, then a professor of American Jewish history at Columbia University, wrote an important essay on ‘A “Golden Decade” for American Jews,’ which he defined as the ten years after World War II.² In my view, though, that period extended much longer.

“Goren argued that there was a virtual wall-to-wall coalition of American Jewish organizations in the postwar period that had achieved consensus on communal goals. That consensus rested on two pillars. The first was support for Israel, which was portrayed to the American public as a bastion of democracy surrounded by autocratic regimes. The second was the liberal agenda, which then meant fighting against any form of discrimination in employment and housing.

“There is no longer such a wall-to-wall consensus on Israel. Most Jewish organizations support Israel but there is much internal dissension as to the best way to offer that support. How much should American Jews back the policies of Israeli governments; to what extent should they serve as loving or not-so-loving critics? The Conference of Presidents has come out in favor of maintaining the unity of Jerusalem in any settlement reached with the Palestinians. Yet some of its largest constituent members complained about that statement, the main one being the URJ. This is one example of the major fault lines regarding Israel in the American Jewish community.”

Criticism from the Right and Left

“The same is true with respect to the liberal agenda. The emergence of the neoconservatives and the evolving understanding of what it means to be a liberal

in America have challenged the American Jewish community's positions on church-state separation. Some Jews now would like to see greater flexibility in how separation is applied. Similarly, the community is split over affirmative action with some arguing that it constitutes a form of reverse discrimination. There are disagreements on immigration policy, a hot issue today, and also about the war in Iraq. Some want to push the community to take a public stance opposing the war; others support the president.

"Both the neoconservatives and Orthodox Jews have been active in critiquing the traditional liberal positions. Although the neoconservatives have been influential, it is unclear whether they will remain so. The Orthodox will continue to be dissenters. Recent studies show that when it comes to Arab-Israeli negotiations, the Orthodox community views matters very differently from the rest of the American Jewish population. The same holds true on some aspects of domestic policy, particularly regarding state support for religious schools. Meanwhile, some groups on the Left view the Jewish community as too conservative or too moderate and would like to see it move toward more left-wing positions. The attacks thus come from both the Right and the Left.

"The strength of the American Jewish leadership structure until the period that Elazar dealt with was predicated on a consensus. While that consensus has not entirely disappeared, it has certainly eroded. It is hard to know whether and, if so how, a new consensus will emerge. There is a major emphasis in the Jewish community today on diversity, inclusiveness, and bringing in different populations. This hyper-attunement to every identity group within the Jewish community makes it even more difficult to imagine how American Jews will be able to build consensus at a time when there are so many subgroups, each demanding special attention to its interests.

"Thus more and more voices claim that those who speak for American Jews do not represent them. One hears this complaint within the establishment as well. The URJ through its Religious Action Center, for instance, has become much more confrontational, as evidenced by its critique of other organizations for refusing to publicly denounce the war in Iraq or castigate the Bush administration for its choice of Supreme Court justices. This lack of consensus and fragmentation makes it impossible for a national leadership structure to function as it did in times of unity."

The Survival of Organizations

When asked what the current agenda of organized Jewish life is, Wertheimer replies: "Unfortunately much of it concerns the survival of existing Jewish organizations. Agencies feel compelled to justify their utility and to stake out their own turf; not surprisingly in such a climate, it is hard to come together to work toward common ends. In addition, more and more new Jewish bodies have come

into existence. Thus all organizations are struggling to survive. One consequence is that all have to devote far more time to fundraising than ever before. They then have far less time to allocate to clarifying their mission.

“At the same time, professionals can rely less and less on lay leaders to be active partners in soliciting funds. This creates a vicious circle. The more some organizations are perceived as trying to ensure their own survival, the less attractive they are to donors. They have to compete with those who have a clear, powerful mission that appeals to philanthropists. The other side of the coin is that in order to differentiate themselves these agencies are sharpening their differences. That is yet another factor making it more difficult to work together.

“The community-relations sphere has always been one where organizations have competed with each other. This was true for bodies such as the AJC, the Anti-Defamation League [ADL], and the American Jewish Congress [AJCongress], all three founded in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The AJCongress had petered out to the verge of collapse, but was rescued by one or two individuals with enough money to keep it going for some years. B’nai B’rith is an organization that is struggling to define what it stands for.”

The ADL and the AJC

“Many Jewish organizations are trying to reposition themselves. In the Jewish community-relations area the ADL and the AJC are by far the strongest, with the former having a slightly larger budget. They have tried to divide the world into different spheres to avoid stepping on each other’s toes. The ADL deals basically with anti-Semitic incidents and the fight against discrimination. The AJC has a much broader agenda of winning friends for the Jews and Israel around the world. Yet both are heavily involved in the battle against the anti-Zionists. They deal with European manifestations of anti-Zionism and other forms of anti-Semitism.

“In recent years the AJC has focused far more on opening offices abroad and making friends in Europe and Asia. It will be interesting to see whether the ADL will take that route as well.

“The AJC is a membership organization whereas the ADL subsists on donors. It is not clear how much of these organizations’ funds come from non-Jews. This is fascinating but one has to wonder what its impact will be.”

The JCPA

“The Jewish Council for Public Affairs [JCPA], which is yet another organization in the field of communal relations, has also gone through many shifts in focus. In its current manifestation it is much more involved in issues concerning Israel than it was fifteen to twenty years ago. It also takes a stand on environmental questions.

“On the other hand, it has become more circumspect when it comes to hot-button issues. Major federation donors who support the JCPA have become far more diverse in their outlook. Some large federations have demanded that the JCPA avoid taking controversial positions on domestic policy matters that are divisive. Perhaps its greatest accomplishment in recent years was its work with mainline Protestant churches to persuade them not to support divestment from Israel.

“On church-state and family issues the URJ and the National Council for Jewish Women try to push the Jewish community to favor the left-liberal side of the political spectrum. The JCPA has donors who line up on both sides and therefore must be more prudent than it was in the past, to my mind a healthy development.”

The Reform Movement

Wertheimer goes on to discuss the major religious organizations. “There, too, there is fragmentation. As in the federation world, national organizations in the religious sector have generally become weaker.

“The Reform movement is the largest and its structure is also the most cohesive. But, having insisted on widening its tent to intermarried families, it faces difficult challenges. A survey the movement sponsored showed that half of all children in schools under Reform auspices have a parent who was not born Jewish. How the movement will address this vast population and win them over to Jewish life and a commitment to the Jewish people is one of the great challenges confronting Reform today. Its survey also demonstrated the dramatic falloff in enrollment after *bar/bat mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony], so that only a small fraction of teens in the movement are receiving a Jewish education.

“The Reform movement has bet its future on ‘autonomy,’ the belief that every Jew decides for himself or herself how to live as a Jew. If the movement cannot generate a passion for Jewish engagement, its current strength will be a passing phase. Still, to return to the theme of national purpose, the Reform movement through its URJ is the most cohesive and focused of all the religious movements.”

The Conservative and Orthodox Movements

“Both the Conservative and Orthodox movements are considerably more fragmented than is Reform. As a result, bodies such as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Orthodox Union wield scant influence among their own constituents. Most members of Conservative and Orthodox synagogues have no idea what these organizations do. Individual congregations in each movement

and local schools and summer camps are often highly successful, but this does not translate into national cohesion. The strength of these movements is far more on the local than the national level.

“The Jewish seminaries and universities are all struggling to figure out how best to train religious leadership—rabbis, teachers, cantors, and communal workers. The world has changed so much that they do not know how to balance more classical Jewish learning with vocational training. I do not think most of my colleagues at the JTS have a great impact on Conservative synagogue life. The same is true for the role of Yeshiva University [YU] in the life of Orthodoxy. A vast gap separates the seminaries from the congregations.

“The new Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, headed by Rabbi Avi Weiss, was founded as a counter-YU. It strives to train the next generation of Orthodox pulpit rabbis. Chovevei Torah also competes with YU for money. The latter is trying to play catch-up. The competition is shaking things up.”

When asked who plays an ideological role, Wertheimer answers: “American Jewry is not very ideological. That is perhaps why the Reform movement, which has little ideology, is so successful. In the Conservative movement, ideology is up for grabs and that will be one of the great challenges for Arnold Eisen, the chancellor of JTS.

“If one reads the current publications of the religious movements, three iconic figures are constantly invoked: Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Mordecai Kaplan. These individuals ceased to contribute more than twenty years ago and no replacements have emerged. In the religious sphere, the influence of most national organizations also has diminished.”

Grassroots Organizations for Younger Jews

“The most exciting developments in religious life are taking place locally. Hundreds of synagogues are trying hard to revitalize themselves. The new buzzword is synagogue renewal, and every congregation now casts itself as a ‘caring community.’

“There are now organizations that aim to help in this very active process. These include Synagogue 3000, which is now oriented mainly to research on how congregations improve themselves, and Synagogue Transformation and Renewal [STAR], which offers practical suggestions on how synagogues can get more people into their building on Shabbat. Some synagogues are also turning to Christian groups that have been active longer in the field of revitalization to learn from their techniques. A few synagogues are in touch with mega-churches, which sometimes have up to 25–30,000 members, to understand what they do right.

“Younger Jews are establishing grassroots *minyanim* [prayer groups] in many of the larger cities; some eighty of them have so far been counted, founded by and for Jews in their twenties and thirties, mainly singles. There are salons opening

now, which also have a social aspect. In addition grassroots organizations engage in social action efforts, enabling Jews who want to provide community service to volunteer and lobby under the flag of Jewish agencies. Increasingly Jewish environmental organizations are active as well.

“Individually all these bodies are limited in scope. Collectively, however, they tell a story of many new agencies arising locally to create opportunities for Jews to engage with causes they favor. The national organizations are trying hard to figure out how to win over Jews who support local initiatives. In short, the overall picture is not one of American Jewry without organizations; on the contrary, ever more groups are emerging. Rather, Jewish organizational life shows vitality on the local level, less so nationally.”

Jewish Education Leads the Way

Wertheimer concludes discussing the weakness of the national structure by referring to developments in the field of Jewish education. “Unlike the other sphere of American Jewish communal life, the field of Jewish education has grown *more* cohesive, rather than less, over the past twenty years. This is counterintuitive because Jewish education is fundamentally a local enterprise, with schools, camps, and programs generally established and run by locals.

“Although this remains the case, over the past twenty years a spate of new national organizations have emerged that serve as umbrellas for all the major divisions in the field—day schools, supplementary schools, summer camps, early childhood programs, youth movements. Their creation is largely the work of philanthropists with vision.

“This suggests that national leadership is possible, particularly when consensus is achieved around key goals. The reintegration of our badly fragmented national community will come when we formulate a new vision of what the larger enterprise must achieve and how it will address the internal problems besetting American Jewish life.”

Epilogue in 2010

Two years after the completion of the above interview, Wertheimer remarks: “Jewish organizational life has fragmented and weakened even further. The economic recession that has buffeted the United States has accelerated trends already in evidence several years earlier.

“As noted in early 2008, Jewish organizations had become ever more reliant on a small base of wealthy donors. When the assets of these donors plunged in value in the second half of 2008, the financial base of many Jewish institutions was hard hit and fewer dollars were raised. As a result, budgets have been slashed by 10–20

percent annually, many Jewish institutions and agencies have laid off personnel, and much of organized Jewish life is now focused on institutional survival rather than meeting new needs through creative initiatives. Symptomatically, graduates of Jewish professional programs—newly minted rabbis, cantors, educators, communal workers, and academics—are finding employment opportunities to be rare. Jewish institutions are not unique in this regard; virtually all American not-for-profits have suffered serious contraction.

“Though few would have predicted the extent of the damage, it was evident to informed observers of the Jewish community already a few years before the crash of 2008 that a reckoning was on the way. The institutional structure had become too dependent on a shrinking donor base, and too many Jewish organizations were competing for limited resources. The economic crisis has shaken even the largest and seemingly most successful organizations: the URJ, representing the largest stream in American Judaism, has been completely reorganized and downsized in the face of shrinking dues, a pattern evident as well in the weaker denominational structures of Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Judaism.

“Similarly, federations across the country have seen their budgets and programs slashed as they can no longer count on the levels of support more common before the economic meltdown. Organizations once strong in membership such as Hadassah have been hard hit and forced to sell off property in order to make ends meet. Not surprisingly, within Jewish institutions morale has suffered, as worry about finances rather than new thinking commands the attention of Jewish leaders.

“Moreover, the collapse of consensus so evident by the early twenty-first century has begun to devolve into something more ominous as organizations fight more openly for their share of the limited resources of money and followers. The decision of the Joint to break a fifty-year-long agreement on the proper allocation of federation-raised funds for international needs is but one example of the new competition. More globally, the scramble of organizations to attract Jews in their twenties and thirties attests to the dawning recognition that as older members are dying off, they are not being replaced by younger people.

“As the holders of significant assets, Jewish foundations, if anything, have risen in importance. True, the finances of even the best-run foundations have been hard hit, and some foundations were completely put out of business by Madoff’s Ponzi scheme, but major foundations and individual donors seem to have weathered the storm enough to be able to marshal significant sums. They alone can drive new initiatives. Virtually all the research on American Jewish life, with the exception of local demographic studies, is now funded by foundations; Jewish organizations that once were in the business of taking the pulse of American Jewish society now stand on the sidelines. Foundations are increasingly serving as the think tanks for Jewish life. And foundations and individual funders seem to be the only ones with the resources to launch new programs.

“Given past experience, there is good reason to expect the U.S. economy to

right itself, which will lead to the accumulation of new assets by some Jewish institutions. What is less clear is whether in the short term those organizations have the wherewithal to address the most pressing current needs. Are they capable of setting priorities for a community in distress in which significant numbers of Jewish families are cutting back on their synagogue membership, expenditures for Jewish education, and other ‘discretionary’ spending on Jewish living? Is anyone giving serious thought to which sectors of the community ought to get the limited resources available for strengthening Jewish life? Thus far, only a few local efforts have been launched to reach the neediest in ways that will enhance Jewish life.

“Moreover, with their eyes fixed on budgetary issues and organizational streamlining, are communal institutions currently capable of addressing larger political issues? If the ‘daylight’ between U.S. and Israeli policies grows larger, will a weak American Jewish community find ways to address its government and lobby effectively for Israel?

“As anti-Zionist propaganda spreads in the United States, as it has in Europe, will the agencies of the Jewish community have the resources to combat the new anti-Semitism? And as Jewish educational institutions teeter on the verge of collapse, will the organizations of the American Jewish community take action before a generation of young Jews is lost? The overall question, then, is whether the decline of organized Jewish life so evident over the past two decades and accelerated by the crash of 2008 will hamper efforts to address current and future threats.”

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Interview with Steven M. Cohen

Changes in American Jewish Identities: From the Collective to the Personal, from Norms to Aesthetics

Steven M. Cohen observes: “When discussing ‘identity’ of Jews the term ‘identity’ is misleading. When applied to Jews, its connotations are too individual, too static, and too attitudinal. ‘Jewish identity’ is—or should be seen as—a social identity, referring not only to beliefs and attitudes but also to how Jews interact with others, and how Jews act and behave. Judaism and Jewishness place primary emphasis on interaction with other Jews and participation in community and society. There is no accurate word for the complex of Jewish belief, behavior, and belonging. As a result, we employ the term identity for lack of a better one.”

Jews Within

He continues: “Critical to understanding how Jews’ identities have changed is the enormous change in the integration of Jews into the larger American society. In contrast with just fifty years ago, today’s Jews have far fewer Jewish spouses, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Not surprisingly, they feel less attached to both Jewish peoplehood and Israel.

“This increasing integration certainly reflects several positive developments such as lower anti-Semitism, rising Jewish achievement, and greater acceptance of Jews by non-Jews. Not only do most young American Jews have loving relationships with non-Jews, but hundreds of thousands of non-Jews love Jews—a very common circumstance now, and a fairly rare occurrence just a few decades ago. At the same time, this integration has brought several adverse consequences for Judaism and Jewishness.

“The other major development is the rise of the Jewish Sovereign Self, as Arnold Eisen and I argued in *The Jew Within*.¹ Jews feel far more ready to assert whether, when, where, and how they will express their Jewish identities, shifting from normative constructions of being Jewish to aesthetic understandings. A normative approach argues that Jewish involvement is good and right, and that certain ways of being Jewish are better than others. An aesthetic approach is less judgmental and directive. It sees being Jewish as a matter of beauty and culture, as a resource for meaning rather than as an ethical or moral imperative.

“In the 1960s there was still largely a consensus that being Jewish was a matter of obligations. Such norms can derive from God, parents, nostalgia, tradition, *halachah* [Jewish law], and/or belonging to the Jewish people. One could violate these, but then one felt guilty about it. Fewer people today regard being Jewish as a matter of norms and obligations.²

“The combination of these two shifts of increasing integration into American society on the one hand, and decreasing emphasis on Judaism as a normative system on the other, has led to both substantial changes and increasing diversity in what it means to be a Jew in America, as defined and experienced by the American Jewish public.”

The Major Denominational Labels

“The major labels that American Jews use to define their ways of being Jewish remain Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, albeit with other possibilities—such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal—and the growth in nondenominational and postdenominational tendencies as well. The Jewish Community Centers [JCC] movement is, however, the largest institutionally based association in American Jewish life, with about a million Jewish members. It even outnumbers Reform Judaism, the largest denominational movement in American Judaism.

“Few observers, however, think of the two hundred JCCs as constituting a movement within Judaism, notwithstanding an impressive organizational range and complexity that embraces early childhood education, day camps, youth groups, continentally based sports events, adult Jewish education, cultural events, communitywide organizing, and engagement with Israel.

“The denominational nomenclature is so prevalent in the United States because American society defines being Jewish as primarily a religious option: it’s Protestant-Catholic-Jew-and now Muslim, Hindu, and so on—rather than Italian, Irish, Hispanic, Jewish.³ In other regions of the Diaspora, where being Jewish is more overtly ethnic, denominational labels are far less compelling. It is thus worth reviewing each denominational camp.”

Growing Larger and Sliding Right

“In broad strokes, Orthodoxy has been demographically growing.⁴ Its population, by all standard sociological measures, scores highest in terms of Jewish commitment, education, activity, and social ties. On average, on a person-for-person basis, Orthodox Jews undertake more hours of Jewish education, perform more rituals, give more charity, have more Jewish friends, more often visit and move to Israel, more readily claim to be Jewishly committed, and on and on.

“At the same time, Orthodoxy has gradually become more separatist and sectarian with respect to other Jews.⁵ This ‘sliding to the Right’ is partly due to a triumphalist conviction that only Orthodoxy will survive, and in part a reaction to what Orthodoxy sees as the failure and immorality of non-Orthodox versions of Judaism. This attitude expresses itself in many ways such as the refusal of Orthodox rabbis to lend legitimacy in any way to non-Orthodox rabbis, even as many Orthodox bodies make a massive investment and commitment to reach and educate non-Orthodox Jews as individuals. Many of the most traditional Orthodox figures say, in effect, ‘To non-Orthodox denominations, nothing; to non-Orthodox Jews as individuals, everything.’”

Ethnic Decline and Conservative Shrinkage

“The Conservative movement has traditionally reflected the underlying ethnicity of Jewish America.⁶ Marshall Sklare referred to the Conservative synagogue as an ‘ethnic church,’ drawing its strength from the ties of family, community, and peoplehood that once widely characterized American Jews.⁷

“As Jewish ethnicity has weakened, with the decline of Jewish marriages, friendships, and neighborhoods,⁸ so too has Conservative Judaism. In the 1950s and 1960s it was the major affiliation of synagogue Jews, about two-thirds of whom belonged to Conservative congregations. Now it has declined to about one-third, and is rapidly shrinking demographically.

“Yet Conservative Judaism still occupies a very critical place—ideologically, socially, and philosophically—between Orthodoxy and Reform. The movement offers a model of intensive Jewish living that is both modern and accessible to large numbers of American Jews. It boasts an institutional infrastructure that embraces congregations, day schools, camps, youth movements, Israel-based institutions, publications, and informal networks, to say nothing of its thousands of professionals and lay leaders. Those who care about a healthy American Jewry should worry about how to help the Conservative movement revive itself and become again a strong pillar of American Jewry.”

Jews (and Others) Choosing Judaism

“The Reform movement, for its part, has made a signal contribution to American Judaism by strongly advancing and developing the notion of ‘Judaism by choice.’⁹ In effect, its leaders have taught that for Judaism to be compelling and sustainable, Jews must make their own choices, which are informed by teaching that is Judaically authentic and at the same time relevant to the contemporary, modern context.

“This approach has attracted and sustained the involvement of hundreds of

thousands of Jews, including many with minimal exposure to Jewish education and social networks. And, under the leadership of Rabbi Eric Yoffie of the Union for Reform Judaism [URJ], the movement has grown to over eight hundred congregations, many of an extraordinary level of energy and vibrancy. With four campuses in the United States and Israel, the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, led by Rabbi David Ellenson, has been training scores of rabbis, cantors, educators, and communal professionals annually for an expanding movement.

“At the same time, perhaps half of the couples joining Reform temples have a partner who was not born Jewish, only a minority of whom have converted to Judaism. Because the Reform movement attracts these people, it has a population of congregants that, on average, is not highly educated in Jewish terms, at least when compared to their Orthodox or Conservative counterparts in the aggregate.

“Not coincidentally, the Reform movement is often blamed for serving as the primary home for apparently ‘weak’ Jews in their midst. In response, we can do a thought experiment and assume that the Reform movement decided to close shop. What would happen to all these Jews, particularly those who are intermarried, or had weak childhood education in Judaism, or both—as is often the case? Certainly some would join Conservative synagogues, but probably the vast majority would not be attached to Jewish life. Nonetheless, over the years the movement’s official policies have placed more emphasis on ritual practice, Jewish learning, Zionism, prayer, and Hebrew, thus engaging with and struggling to engage with their population, some of whom are among the most marginally involved in conventional Jewish life.

“This struggle is to their credit. Sometimes they succeed. On other occasions they fail, as is manifest in the large number of congregants who leave their temples upon the *bar/bat mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony] of their youngest child; perhaps about half do so. Even more worrying are the large numbers of children raised in Reform Judaism who marry out, more by far than in the other two major movements. But, with that said, Reform is now the largest Jewish denominational movement in the United States, holding steady in recent years.”

The Orthodox Struggle with *Clal Yisrael*

“All three major religious movements are standing at a variety of crossroads. One of today’s major struggles within Orthodoxy concerns whether an Orthodox person can be part of the real *Am Yisrael* [the Jewish people] in America—not the Jews they want, but the Jews we have. That translates into ‘Can one have common educational, intellectual, or communal relationships, not only with non-Orthodox Jews but also with non-Orthodox rabbis? How does one maintain dialogue and genuine collaboration with them?’

“The isolation of Orthodoxy from the wider precincts of American Jewry means that those outside it who are arguing for placing Jewish interests first, seeing Israel as central, and stressing the importance of Jewish learning and observance are now viewed as more extreme and parochial in their movements. When Orthodoxy was more a part of the overall Jewish mix, these people were seen as more moderate.

“Yet despite these concerns, a number of notable efforts seek to promote more openness and engagement with all of Jewry. One finds an internal struggle at Yeshiva University over which way the institution will go under the leadership of Richard Joel as its president, either in the direction of greater sectarianism or greater engagement with all of Jewry. The newly established Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, headed by Rabbi Avi Weiss, is producing rabbis committed to the unity of the Jewish people.”

Conservative Turnaround?

“The population of the Conservative Movement is shrinking. Reflecting trends that date back to 1960 or so, there are probably twice as many Conservative senior citizens as there are Conservative children.

“The newly emerging Conservative leadership will be addressing the critical demographic challenges of shrinkage and aging. Any transition from great leaders of the older generation to younger persons of great talent raises hopes for change. With Arnold Eisen as the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS], there is a widespread expectation of revival in the movement, notwithstanding that JTS is just one important element in the Conservative institutional array.

“The emerging generation of prominent rabbis, congregational leaders, thinkers, and others will need to reconfigure the Conservative Movement so that it regains the attachment of its erstwhile natural constituency. These are young-adult Jews who are socially progressive, religiously liberal and, at the same time, religiously and textually serious, and committed to high-quality spiritual experiences. In the recent past, the exodus of such individuals to Orthodoxy or to nonaffiliated communities has deprived Conservative congregations of their highest-caliber potential leadership.”

“Who Lost BJ?”

“Over the years, the Conservative Movement has been extraordinarily productive, and has created important endeavors many of which, however, are no longer associated with it. It is American Judaism’s biggest exporter of home-grown talent, people, ideas, and institutions. Conservatism just cannot seem to hold on to some of its finest creations.

“The Reconstructionist movement is but one example of this tendency, as is the *havurah* [small religious fellowships] movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁰ Probably the best-known synagogue in the United States is B’nai Yeshurun [‘BJ’] on New York’s Upper West Side, which was formerly Conservative but disaffiliated some years ago. Just as some conservative American politicians used to ask, ‘Who lost Red China?’ there must be some Conservative Jewish leaders who ask—or should ask—‘Who lost BJ?’ This innovative congregation is one more formerly Conservative export.

“So too are the many independent *minyanim* [prayer groups] that have been started by people trained in the Conservative movement.¹¹ These leaders were, and are capable, of being leaders in the Conservative movement, yet have decided—at least for now—to build their communities outside the formal boundaries of Conservatism.

“One might thus conclude that Jewish intensification often means leaving Conservative Judaism. The question then becomes how does one create a space where these people will have a sense of belonging? How can they remain within the Conservative orbit even if they operate with no formal affiliation with the usual Conservative institutions?”

The Inter-marriage Challenge

“The Reform movement, in the forefront of efforts to engage intermarried Jews in congregational life, is tackling the question of how to keep the intermarried and their children attached to Judaism in an authentic way. More and more, Reform temples consist of growing numbers of well-groomed alumni of North American Federation of Temple Youth [NFTY], religious schools, and URJ camps alongside Jewish and non-Jewish congregants with minimal Jewish social and educational capital.

“The growth of both sorts of populations propels seemingly contradictory tendencies. For example, more alternative services have been springing up in Reform temples’ chapels and basements. At the same, the larger sanctuaries on Shabbat mornings are filled with one-Shabbat-a-year worshippers celebrating bar and bat mitzvahs. And a good fraction of these families will soon leave the congregation (a troubling event to say the least).

“Both intermarried Jews and their non-Jewish spouses function as full members of Reform congregations, serve as temple board members, and officers, albeit with frequent limitations on the leadership opportunities available to the non-Jewish partner. Their needs and values shape temple practices, policies, and personnel, underscoring the challenges posed by the presence of so many non-Jews and their intermarried spouses. For example, how does the rabbi clearly promote the conversion of non-Jewish spouses to Judaism without undermining the attempt to welcome mixed married couples? Even more pointedly, how does

one teach a confirmation class of adolescents that Jews should marry Jews when half the sixteen-year-olds are the children of Jewish and non-Jewish parents? Although these dilemmas are most keenly felt in Reform temples, they emerge in Conservative and Reconstructionist congregations as well.”¹²

Multiple Modes of Jewish Engagement

“There are many other ways outside of congregational life in which American Jews are Jewishly engaged. Many still live in such Jewish neighborhoods as New York’s Upper West Side, Squirrel Hill (Pittsburgh), and Silver Spring (Maryland). Jews in areas of greater residential concentration, largely in the Northeast and Midwest, not only have more Jewish neighbors; they also report more Jewish spouses, more Jewish friends, and more Jewish institutional ties than those in other sparsely-settled Jewish environs. Jews in the older areas of settlement often still have an ethnic style; many manifest Jewishness through domestic political concerns or with regard to Israel.

“On another plane, the JCC movement, as mentioned earlier, is widely overlooked as a locus of Jewish community-building, to say nothing of its great strides in informal Jewish education. Furthermore, American Jews have a very rich cultural life in music, art, literature, scholarship, journalism, dance, museums of various kinds, and also now on the internet.

“Indeed, there are hundreds of millions of pages on the internet on Jewish matters. Obviously, none existed fifteen years ago. There is a documented increase in Jewish involvement in social-justice activism, of which Ruth Messinger and the American Jewish World Service [AJWS] is the most visible phenomenon.”¹³

“There is thus a plethora of Jewish life that is being led by people in their twenties and thirties outside the traditional network. Perhaps most exciting is the work of this younger generation who are involved in self-initiated acts of Jewish communal creation.¹⁴ The newly established independent minyanim and rabbi-led emergent spiritual communities are particularly impressive. About eighty of these have sprung up all over the United States, several of them outside the major Jewish centers. Some such communities report upward of three thousand people on their mailing lists, while other communities number as few as sixty or seventy participants.

“These minyanim and rabbi-led communities keep costs very low. They may get a Torah scroll donated and rent a church on a Shabbat morning. To their credit, some local federations and foundations have made grants to some of these startup communities. Although most manage to get by on the passion of volunteer or underpaid leadership, at least fifteen such groups over the last ten years have emerged and then stopped functioning.”

Extended Singlehood

Cohen says: “The question is: how fast will the American Jewish community recognize the value of the endeavors by younger people outside the traditional institutional framework and support them in view of the major demographic shift that has just taken place: the vast expansion of singlehood among non-Orthodox younger adults?”

“Today, reflecting a worldwide pattern, most non-Orthodox Jewish adults under the age of forty are not married. In the recent past Jews used to marry five to seven years after leaving university. This now happens after ten to fifteen years, if at all. There are also somewhat higher divorce rates than at mid-century. All this means that among non-Orthodox Jews there is a large percentage of unmarried people, almost always without children. In the past, childrearing has brought Jews to congregations and JCCs.

“Since this younger generation is spending many more years unmarried and without children, the Jewish community must develop institutions they can use. Few will come to JCCs, synagogues, or federations as currently constructed. There they would find mainly married people, most of them to Jews, and often with young children of their own, or middle-aged and older empty-nesters.”

Strengthening the Jewish Collective

“If I had to point to one issue, I’d say that our primary challenge is to strengthen the Jewish collective. The decline in commitment of many Jews to the Jewish people, Israel, and the Jewish community is deeply worrying. Fewer Jews see themselves as obligated to support the collective interests of the Jewish people, or even to relate personally to the very notion of the Jewish people at all.¹⁵

“The extent of intermarriage and intergroup friendship is truly significant. About two-thirds of older American Jews have mostly Jewish friends. In contrast, two-thirds of the under-thirty generation have mostly non-Jewish friends. Most young Jews today who have a partner are either married or romantically involved with non-Jews. I can say with relative certitude that none of my grandparents ever dated a non-Jew; and I can say with equal certitude that the vast majority of Jews my children’s ages have had intimate and loving relationships with non-Jews. Personal experiences inexorably affect collective identities.

“The interpersonal integration of Jews with non-Jews poses major questions as to how one can strengthen, preserve, or make meaningful the Jewish commitment to the collective, without seeming or being racist. How does one argue for and promote Jewish marriage and friendship in this world without appearing bigoted and insular? Causes such as Israel, building the Jewish community, or caring about Jews locally and all over the world demand the establishment and nurturing of strong Jewish networks of friends and family. Yet to many Jews, younger

somewhat more than older, teaching to forge and pursue such in-group ties seems so un-postmodern and un-American.”

Taking Hold of Torah

“If Judaism is a matter of norms, of right and wrong, one can teach one’s children that Jewish involvement is right, and distancing from Jewish life is wrong. But if to be Jewish is a matter of aesthetics, then one can only teach that Jewish engagement is akin to the love of music and art—lending purpose and meaning and spiritual enrichment, but by no means a moral decision. In fact, many Jews now see being Jewish this way—a good thing to do, but not a matter of right or wrong. They have no sense that for a Jew to be Jewish is the right way to be, akin to one’s patriotic duty as an American or other nationality.

“Such morally laden language and concepts, while Judaically authentic, are admittedly not the most immediately compelling way to reach indifferent contemporary Jews. We need to develop a way of speaking, modeling, and teaching, one that combines the normative and aesthetic approaches. This approach should appeal to Jews so that they find it meaningful to be obligated, or, to quote the title of Arnold Eisen’s book, that they engage in *Taking Hold of Torah*.¹⁶ We need both individual autonomy—‘taking hold’—and a turn to Torah, in the broadest sense.

“Rabbis and other leaders in all three movements and beyond are struggling to bridge the longstanding gap between the Judaic mission to which they are committed and the reality of the American Jewish marketplace in which they work. To the extent that they succeed, the future of American Jews and Judaism will be assured. Fortunately and unfortunately, the diversity of American Jews, and the inevitability and rapidity of change makes the task of bridging Judaic mission and Jewish market an ongoing and never-finished challenge.”

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Chaim I. Waxman

Changing Denominational Patterns in the United States

In the mid-twentieth century, Marshall Sklare, the “dean of American Jewish sociology,” declared regarding Orthodoxy that “the history of their movement in this country can be written in terms of a case study of institutional decay.”¹ Indeed, it was not only institutional decline that plagued the Orthodox. The available evidence suggested that they were decreasing in numbers as well. For at least a decade thereafter, it appeared that they would continue to do so.

The mid-twentieth century was the heyday of Conservative Judaism, and almost all predictions were for its continued dominance. However, the picture has shifted dramatically since, and many of the changes reflect broader changes in American religious patterns.

To many in the mid-twentieth century, the United States appeared to be a highly secular society in which organized religion had poor prospects. In the mid-1960s, theologian Harvey Cox’s ideas in *The Secular City*² were widely discussed, a group of “radical” theologians were proclaiming the “death of God,”³ and there followed a variety of articles on that topic in the news media, including the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine.

In 1967, sociologist Peter Berger published his highly influential work *The Sacred Canopy*, in which he saw public, nonreligious education and the growth of science as pointing to the secularization of society. Furthermore, major survey research appeared to confirm the secularization of America’s public sphere. For example, a series of Gallup polls indicated that Americans viewed religion’s influence on their society to be waning. From 1957 to 1968 the number of Americans who saw religion’s influence on the rise decreased from 69 percent to 18 percent, whereas the rate of those who saw religion as a declining force went from 14 percent to 67 percent, an almost total reversal.

The secularization was perceived to be so powerful that Berger predicted: “By the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture.”⁴ By the mid-1970s, however, what Berger had earlier portrayed as but “a rumor of angels”⁵ had developed into a full-blown societal development involving a “new religious consciousness.”⁶ Indeed, the country was undergoing what Robert Wuthnow called “the restructuring of American religion.”⁷ American religious patterns witnessed a marked decline in liberal Protestantism and a growth in Evangelicalism. At the

end of February 2000, a cover story in the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* featured a religiously conservative Christian family who, together with other Evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, “make up about 25 percent of the American population.”⁸

Jewish Denominational Trends

As far as Jewish denominational trends are concerned, the rate of American Jews whose affiliation is Orthodox rose from 6 percent in 1990 to 10 percent in 2001.⁹ The rate of American Jews who are synagogue members has not changed dramatically since 1990; in 2001, this figure stood at 44 percent. However, the denominational percentages of the synagogue memberships have changed significantly. From 1990 to 2001, the proportion of Conservative memberships declined from 51 percent¹⁰ to 33.1 percent, while Orthodox and Reform increased from 10 percent to 20.8 percent, and from 35 percent to 38.5 percent, respectively.¹¹

Declining Conservative Numbers

Conservative Judaism has experienced a significant decline in recent years. By 2001, only 26.5 percent of America’s Jews identified as Conservative. Demographic decline had been occurring for two generations, primarily as a result of intermarriage. Many who were raised as Conservative are now unaffiliated or affiliate with Reform.

Some observers argue that the Conservative movement suffers from leadership malaise as well as the lack of a clearly formulated and compelling ideology. Alternatively, it has been claimed that Conservative Judaism is experiencing a winnowing, similar to that of Orthodoxy in the first half of the twentieth century, with younger Conservative Jews more committed than their elders. Formal education has experienced something of a renaissance, becoming more intensive. There are now sixty-six Conservative Solomon Schechter lower schools and eight high schools in the United States, as well as a Conservative yeshiva in Jerusalem offering a variety of intensive study programs for young adults. Other evidence, however, suggests less encouraging developments.

Conservative Tensions and Struggles

Over the past ten years the Conservative movement has lost two hundred congregations. Twenty-five years ago, the issue in Conservative Judaism was how the rabbi and the synagogue should deal with the Jewish spouses in intermarriages—whether they should be entitled to membership, be called up

to read from the Torah, and so on. Today, the issue is the role of the non-Jewish spouse in the Conservative synagogue, as increasing numbers of these synagogues become highly welcoming of them.

Today, the overwhelming majority of young Conservative Jews believe that intermarriage is acceptable, though the children should be raised Jewishly. A group of Conservative rabbis on the West Coast authored a small book, *A Place in the Tent*,¹² that takes a more liberal approach toward outreach to the intermarried than is the official stance of the movement's Rabbinical Assembly. The group coined a term to describe non-Jewish partners of Jewish congregants, *k'rov Yisrael* (close to the Jews), a much more inclusive and positive term than "non-Jew." As one group member put it, "there's tremendous power in acknowledging someone's humanity and existence, and giving them a place within the structure."

Increasingly, the Conservative Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs are inviting non-Jews to serve on their boards. In 2005, the movement's United Synagogue Youth organization changed its stance of opposition to *keruv* (outreach).

The modernizing of Conservative Judaism is apparent in other developments, including growing ambivalence about ordination of gays and lesbians and regarding same-sex marriages. In contrast to previous statements that simply reaffirmed the traditional rejection of homosexuality, the United Synagogue—the synagogue organization of Conservative Judaism—and the Rabbinical Assembly have called for civil rights for gays and lesbians.

The increasing religious modernism of Conservative Judaism was evident in the 2001 publication of an authorized Torah translation and commentary, *Etz Hayim*, which included essays explicitly questioning, if not rejecting, the historicity of various biblically recorded events. Although the movement has always permitted a less than literal interpretation of Scripture, it had also not explicitly rejected the historicity of many of its recorded events.

Traditional Judaism

A group of rabbis, some of whom taught at the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, and laypeople who opposed changes spearheaded a new group, the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism (UTCJ), which initially was to be a "loyal opposition" within the movement. Subsequently, it viewed Conservative Judaism as deviating further from tradition. UTCJ objected to—among other issues—some of the textual revisions in the new Conservative prayer book, *Sim Shalom*, as well as the Conservative alliance with Reform in a struggle to have Israel accept non-*halachic* (according to Jewish law) conversions. UTCJ argued that Conservative Judaism was initiating reforms that even conflicted with its own halachic authorities.

Consequently, the group formally broke with Conservative Judaism and was renamed the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ). Its membership comes

primarily from the Conservative Right and the Orthodox Left, and seeks to deemphasize denominational labels. It has established a rabbinical seminary, the Institute of Traditional Judaism (Metivta), and a rabbinical organization, Morashah (Moetzet Rabbanim Shomrei Hahalachah), but is as yet a small movement whose development remains to be seen. It has, however, sapped much of the strength of Conservative Judaism's right wing; at the same time, developments in Reform Judaism have attracted increasing numbers of its left wing.

Reform Judaism

Like Conservative Judaism, Reform lacks a coherent ideology, but it has not experienced the same consequences. The movement's numbers have grown fivefold since 1937. The National Jewish Population Survey figures show that 35 percent of America's Jews identified with Reform in 2001.

The patterns of Reform Judaism resemble the broader patterns of religion in American society. Whereas classical Reform all but excised spirituality from Judaism, contemporary Reform has vigorously restored it. It has also reintroduced Hebrew into its most recent official prayer book, *Gates of Prayer*, and has reemphasized the notion of *mitzvot* (commandments) and the *bar* and *bat mitzvah* (coming of age) ceremonies, as well as a wide range of traditional rituals earlier defined as antithetical to modern sensibilities.

Whereas both the observance of dietary laws and the wearing of *kipot* (skullcaps) and *tallitot* (prayer shawls) were once perceived as retrograde, today they are viewed positively by Reform rabbis and congregants.¹³ Compared to the early twentieth century, there has also been a revolution in Reform's position on Zionism and Israel.

Reform Judaism has also reversed its attitudes toward Jewish education, and has established a number of Reform day schools. Indeed, today, Hebrew Union College in New York even has a *kollel* (institute for advanced study). The Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Reform rabbinic organization, has become much more rooted in traditional Jewish sources. To some, contemporary Reform sounds at times little different from Orthodoxy, but that is hardly the case. The essential difference remains that, for Orthodoxy, religious observances are viewed as *mitzvot* in the literal sense commandments of a Higher Authority. For Reform, such observances do not have the binding character of *halachah*, but are symbolic acts that derive from and appeal to personalism and voluntarism, a search for self-meaning.

The CCAR Responsa Committee, unlike parallel bodies in Conservative and Orthodoxy movements, is solely an advisory committee, and its "responsa provide guidance, not governance."¹⁴ There is, therefore, no inconsistency between Reform's adaptation of traditional rituals and its simultaneously sanctioning behavior that is taboo in the tradition, such as intermarriage and same-sex partnerships, which

in 2000 the CCAR declared as “worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual.”¹⁵ Thus, despite Reform’s “traditionalist” manifestations, the rift between it and the traditional Jewish community remains wide.

Until recently, “triumphalism,” the prediction by one denomination of the demise of another, was limited to the Conservative and Orthodox trends. Reform has now entered the fray and, in an article in a CCAR publication, the organization’s executive vice-president predicted that the Conservative and Reconstructionist movements’ congregational and rabbinical organizations will soon either join the Union for Reform Judaism or disappear.¹⁶ The claim exacerbated relations between the Reform and Conservative movements. Ironically, it may also spark a reaction that could slow or even halt the Conservative decline.

Orthodox Judaism

Not long ago, the Orthodox were known for having the highest proportion of elderly. In 2001, they had the highest proportion of young children. Thirty-nine percent of the Orthodox population are children; only 12 percent are elderly. The corresponding figures in the total American Jewish population are 20 percent and 19 percent. As noted earlier, among those American Jewish households who belong to a synagogue, 21 percent are Orthodox.

Two important societal developments of the late 1970s and 1980s affected the character of American Orthodoxy. The “turn to the Right” that occurred in Orthodoxy reflected, in large measure, a broader trend and rise of fundamentalism in the United States. Moreover, “on the international religious scene, it is conservative or orthodox or traditionalist movements that are on the rise almost everywhere.”¹⁷ The forces of moderation have widely been replaced by fundamentalism, and it has become fashionable to reject the culture—although not the technology—of modernity in favor of “strong religion.”¹⁸ It should, therefore, be no surprise that American Orthodoxy moved to the Right.

With these developments, the *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox) have apparently gained self-confidence that manifests itself in greater assertiveness. For example, whereas at mid-century religious outreach was the province of the modern Orthodox, with the *haredim* being somewhat suspicious of *ba’alei teshuva* (the newly religious), by the end of the century the *haredim* were heavily engaged in religious outreach. Some of the frameworks include the National Jewish Outreach Program (NJOP), the Association for Jewish Outreach Programs (AJOP), with hundreds of Orthodox outreach affiliates, and the Orthodox Union’s National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY). Many of these were initially Modern Orthodox but are today staffed by *haredim*.

While Orthodox or traditional Jews have more than one identity, their identity as Jews is paramount. This is not true of the other 90 percent of Jews in America. This is demonstrable by the language they use to describe themselves as

a group. Until the 1970s and 1980s, fiction and sociological literature referred to Jews living in America as American Jews. The last twenty years has seen a shift toward the appellation Jewish Americans, showing the primacy of the identity as American, even though the modifier “Jewish” is important for most. It appears that today the movement toward assimilation has passed its low point, and the return to a more intensive Jewish lifestyle, as a function of identification, is palpable and normative, even among a substantial portion of the intermarried.

Modern Orthodoxy Turning Inward

Ironically, the Modern Orthodox who pioneered religious outreach have turned inward and, institutionally, are hardly engaged in such activity. For the most part, the Modern Orthodox have become defensive and are much more likely to engage in intellectual discussions among themselves, rather than actively reaching out beyond their borders. Likewise, as Adam Ferziger has demonstrated,¹⁹ the Modern Orthodox rabbinical seminaries have turned more inward and emphasize halachic expertise, whereas the more right-wing institutions have programs that train rabbis in outreach. Even in NCSY, which is a branch of the Orthodox Union, much of the leadership has a strong haredi influence.²⁰

On the other hand, there have been some significant recent developments in Modern Orthodoxy that suggest a significant base of those who are committed to working with the larger Jewish community as well as with the larger society. Most notably, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT), founded in 1999 with an explicit ideology of openness, continues to grow despite the fact that its ordainees are not accepted as members in the major Orthodox rabbinic organization, the Rabbinical Council of America. Some of YCT’s ordainees have found pulpits in Orthodox synagogues, and many others have gone into positions in other institutions such as Hillel, Jewish schools, and other Jewish communal settings.

Although it might have been expected that the Modern Orthodox, like those of the larger American society, would be less likely to be affiliated and actively involved with communal organizations,²¹ evidence indicates that they are highly engaged communally. Thus, in their study of young Jewish adults, Jacob Ukeles and associates found young Orthodox Jews to have the strongest degree of Jewish connections,²² and the director of the American Jewish Committee’s Department of Contemporary Jewish Life predicted that “younger Orthodox adults are likely to play increasingly important roles in organized Jewish life given their commitments, numbers, and fertility patterns.”²³

The Ultra-Orthodox

The ultra-Orthodox, on the other hand, have moved precisely in the direction

of outward involvement. Agudath Israel, for example, became very active in the public sphere during the latter half of the twentieth century. It maintains a fulltime office in Washington, DC, as well as others across the United States, and actively lobbies all branches of federal, state, and local government on issues that it views as of Jewish interest. Its public relations specialist frequently publishes columns in Jewish newspapers across the country and internationally, expressing the Aguda perspective on broad issues of importance to Jews.

Indications are that the haredim are increasingly attached to the larger society, and view living their lifestyle as a right rather than something that sets them apart from it. One possible indication of this is the widespread display of American flags at homes and businesses in heavily Orthodox neighborhoods following the 9/11 attack. The fact that the national office of Agudath Israel sent strongly-worded letters imploring its members to contribute to the fund for families of firefighters and police victims of the disaster also seems to indicate a deep sense of identification with the tragedy as Americans, and of being an integral part of the society.

Food, Publishing, Voting

The coming of age of Orthodoxy in American society manifested itself in additional developments during the second half of the past century. One was the growth of the kosher food industry. Previously, it was difficult to be an observant Jew, especially with regard to the dietary requirements. Because of a combination of cultural and structural factors, this is no longer the case.

The general trend of both spouses in the family working outside the home precipitated a growing need for readymade foods and, for observant Jews, kosher readymade foods. Increasing numbers of food products that are sold in supermarkets and grocery stores around the country are kosher. Clearly, most of those partaking of kosher food today are not Orthodox or even Jewish. The emergence of this industry is evidence, among other things, of the socioeconomic mobility of American Orthodox Jews.

Orthodox Publishing

Another industry that has developed dramatically is that of English-language Orthodox publishing. The largest in this field are Rabbis Nosson Scherman's and Meir Zlotowitz's ArtScroll and Mesorah, which publish a wide array of translations, including the very popular ArtScroll *Siddur* (prayer book).

Critics have argued that ArtScroll censors its books to present only haredi perspectives. However, most observers agree that ArtScroll has revolutionized Jewish learning in America and raised its level to unprecedented heights by bringing many sacred texts to the attention of the general public. In addition, it has

played a key role in the popularization of daily Talmud study through publication of an English-language translation of the Talmud.

One manifestation of this phenomenon was a series of major celebrations, comprised of more than twenty-five thousand Jews who completed the entire Talmud by studying a page each day for approximately seven and a half years. By the close of the century, being Orthodox not only appeared acceptable but almost the “in” way to be Jewish. As suggested, this dramatic turn was precipitated by a variety of internal Jewish as well as broader societal developments.

American Orthodox Jews have typically voted more conservatively than mainstream American Jewry, but they have not played a prominent role in conservative politics. This now appears to be changing. That Orthodoxy is now “kosher” in America was obvious at the 2004 Republican National Convention, where kippot of both the haredi and modern varieties were evident all over. Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis gave the benediction on the second night, and an Orthodox woman read Psalms in Hebrew and requested a minute of silence for recent victims of terror.

The “Cost of Jewish Living” and Its Impact

This author has argued that the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) data indicate that Orthodox families have lower annual incomes than Conservative and Reform families. Therefore, the “cost of Jewish living,” while affecting all the denominations, is higher for the Orthodox, who send their children to private day schools, as well as contribute to a variety of other Jewish communal institutions. There is, thus, ample evidence that the Orthodox are disproportionately affected by what has been called “the high cost of Jewish living.”²⁴

The lower income of the Orthodox continued to be evident in the 2000–2001 NJPS. For example, of those identifying as Orthodox, 80 percent had incomes of less than \$100,000, compared to 77 percent for Conservative and 73 percent for Reform. Five percent of those who identified as Conservative had incomes of \$300,000 or more, compared to 3 percent for Reform and only 1 percent for Orthodox. It must furthermore be taken into account that the Orthodox have larger families.

The Orthodox community encompasses a range of values and lifestyles from ultra-Orthodox to Modern Orthodox. At the most religious end of this spectrum are a significant sector who live in poverty but continue to uphold their beliefs and practices. The potency of the community and its institutions serves to support these values and practices. Thus the economic hardships of the most impoverished are often mitigated, to a degree, by the readiness of community members and institutions to help. Giving *tzedakah* (charity) is a hallmark of the community and is seen as a requirement, a *mitzvah* in the sense of a commandment and not just an opportunity to “do good.”

Gerald Bubis assumes that the cost is not a barrier for the Orthodox community because their Jewishness is the most important aspect of their identity.²⁵ However, he does not consider that cost may play a role in the fact that Orthodoxy has not grown as rapidly as one might have expected. It may also play a role in the haredization of American Orthodoxy because the haredi community is more tightly knit and has much greater provision for *hesed* (good works) of all kinds, for those who do not have the means.

Conclusion: The Decline of Overt Interdenominational Tension

The marked decline in overt interdenominational tension in recent years is viewed by many as a very positive development in American Judaism. It is believed to bespeak a new era of tolerance and even pluralism, which are viewed as signs of communal health.

Some, however, such as Jack Wertheimer, are not so sanguine. Wertheimer correctly avers that: "Despite all the positive rhetoric and cooperative programming, the religious leaders of the various movements speak very different languages and employ entirely different categories of religious discourse."²⁶

The question, however, is why this should matter. Does community require that everyone agree or even employ the same categories of religious discourse, or instead, that despite their differences they feel a sense of kinship and at least behave civilly toward each other? What is important is that the various factions view themselves as a common community and that, despite their ideological differences, they cooperate civilly with each other to the degree feasible.

Notes

1. Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955), 43. The augmented edition included an entire new chapter in which Sklare analyzed the dilemmas of Conservatism and contrasted its development to that of Orthodoxy, which "has transformed itself into a growing force in American Jewish life [and] reasserted its claim of being authentic interpretation of Judaism" (New York: Schocken, 1972), 264.
2. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
3. Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, eds., *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).
4. "A Bleak Outlook Seen for Religion," *New York Times*, 25 February 1968, 3.
5. Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).
6. Charles Glock and Robert Bellah, eds., *The New Religious Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).
7. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

8. Margaret Talbot, "A Mighty Fortress," *New York Times Magazine*, 27 February 2000, 36.
9. UJC, "Orthodox Jews: A United Jewish Communities Presentation of Findings," February 2004.
10. Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Efraim Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 40, Table 3.1.
11. It should be noted that denominational identification has declined overall in recent years. According to Barry Kosmin, the percentage of Americans who identify as Jews by ethnicity but claim no religion has risen dramatically in recent years, from around 20 percent in 1990 to about 37 percent in 2008 (Barry Kosmin, "The Changing Population Profile of American Jews 1990–2008," paper presented at the 15th World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 2009). For a discussion of the meaning of this rise, see Bruce A. Phillips, "Accounting for Jewish Secularism: Is a New Cultural Identity Emerging?" *Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2010).
12. Tiferet Project (Rabbi Mark Bloom et al.), *A Place in the Tent: Inter marriage and Conservative Judaism* (Berkeley, CA.: EKS, 2004).
13. http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=45&pge_prg_id=3032&pge_id=1656.
14. <http://ccarnet.org/documentsandpositions/responsa>.
15. <http://urj.org/yoffie/archive/gender>.
16. Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "Reform Leader Predicts Demise of Conservatives," *Jewish Week*, 5 March 2004.
17. Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center and Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 6.
18. Gabriel A. Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2003.
19. Adam S. Ferziger, "Training American Orthodox Rabbis to Play a Role in Confronting Assimilation: Programs, Methodologies and Directions," Research and Position Papers, Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality, Faculty of Jewish Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 2003.
20. On the haredi influence in NCSY, see Nathalie Friedman, *Faithful Youth: A Study of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth* (New York: National Conference of Synagogue Youth, 1998).
21. Political scientist Robert Putnam amassed considerable data indicating that Americans are increasingly less likely to join parent-teacher associations, unions, political parties, and other social groups. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
22. Jacob B. Ukeles, Ron Miller, and Pearl Beck, "Young Jewish Adults in the United States Today: Harbingers of the American Jewish Community of Tomorrow?" American Jewish Committee, September 2006, 64–71.
23. Press Release, American Jewish Committee, "AJC Study: Young Jewish Adults to Reshape U.S. Jewry," www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ijITI2PHKoG&b=1531911&ct=2356233.
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25. Gerald B. Bubis, "The Costs of Jewish Living: Revisiting Jewish Involvements and Barriers," Contemporary Jewish Life Department, American Jewish Committee, 2005, 8. Quoted with permission.
26. Jack Wertheimer, *All Quiet on the Religious Front: Jewish Unity, Denominationalism, and Postdenominationalism in the United States* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2005), 23.

Steven Bayme

Intermarriage and Jewish Leadership in the United States

There is a conflict between personal interests and collective Jewish welfare. As private citizens, we seek the former; as Jewish leaders, however, our primary concern should be the latter.

Jewish leadership is entrusted with strengthening the collective Jewish endeavor. The principle applies both to external questions of Jewish security and to internal questions of the content and meaning of leading a Jewish life.

Countercultural Messages

Two decades ago, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) adopted a “Statement on Mixed Marriage.”¹ The statement was reaffirmed in 1997 and continues to represent the AJC’s view regarding Jewish communal policy on this difficult and divisive issue. The document, which is nuanced and calls for plural approaches, asserts that Jews prefer to marry other Jews and that efforts at promoting endogamy should be encouraged. Second, when a mixed marriage occurs, the best outcome is the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, thereby transforming a mixed marriage into an endogamous one. When conversion is not possible, efforts should be directed at encouraging the couple to raise their children exclusively as Jews.

All three messages are countercultural in an American society that values egalitarianism, universalism, and multiculturalism. Preferring endogamy contradicts a universalist ethos of embracing all humanity. Encouraging conversion to Judaism suggests preference for one faith over others. Advocating that children be raised exclusively as Jews goes against multicultural diversity, which proclaims that having two faiths in the home is richer than having a single one.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for Jewish leaders to articulate these messages. Some have already given up. For example, one Reform rabbi in a prominent city dedicated his Rosh Hashanah sermon to the need to honor “members of our community who practice both Judaism and Christianity.”² The president of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman, went so far as to claim in an interview with the London *Jewish Chronicle* that opposition to intermarriage has become “racist” and “begins to sound a little like Nazism.”³

Thus, American Jewish leadership finds itself in a dilemma. Most Jewish

leaders would probably affirm all components of the AJC's 1997 policy statement. However, at a time when public discussion of this issue has become problematic, conveying these messages publicly requires great political courage.

An Enduring Jewish Dilemma

Perhaps this paradigm may not have originated in the United States, but in France in 1806 when Napoleon posed his twelve questions to the Grand Sanhedrin. The third and most difficult question was: do Jews encourage marriage between Jews and gentiles? Napoleon's intent was obvious: fifteen years after the Jews' emancipation, he was asking how they could genuinely be citizens of France, or integrate into French society, without looking favorably on intermarriage.

The response of French Jewish leadership has been much debated for two hundred years. At the very least, they hedged, saying they did not favor mixed marriage but did not proscribe those who had intermarried from leadership positions in the Jewish community. Yet, in effect, they defied Napoleon, who presumably wanted a clear statement that endorsed intermarriage. Although many have subsequently criticized the French Jewish leaders, their statement was one of wisdom in the political context.⁴

The choice itself has remained the same: between integration into the broader society and distinctive Jewish survival. American Jewish leadership, similar to French Jewish leadership back then, would prefer not to choose, to avoid an unequivocal answer. Nevertheless, the current realities of American Jewish life increasingly compel choices, however difficult.⁵

What is known about American Jewish leadership attitudes toward mixed marriage? First, it is important to acknowledge, though it is often forgotten, that each of the three main religious movements, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, has maintained strictures against intermarriage, unequivocally opposing it in principle. Reconstructionism has taken a more nuanced position, encouraging rabbis to participate in civil ceremonies but not supporting rabbinic officiation at intermarriages per se. Although differences exist on the intermarriage issue among the three major movements, it is notable that the strictures have survived despite the immense growth in the phenomenon itself.

A Growing Acceptance

The greatest change has taken place in the Reform movement. In 1979, less than 10 percent of Reform rabbis were willing to officiate at mixed marriages. By 1996, according to a study by the Jewish Outreach Institute, 46 percent of Reform rabbis, with various stipulations, were willing to do so.⁶ Even among the 54 percent who did not officiate, the prevailing attitude was respect for those

colleagues who did. Thus, there has been an undeniable change even as Reform, as a movement, expresses opposition to mixed marriage.

Moreover, the change in Reform Judaism reflects the fraying bonds of Jewish peoplehood due to the incidence of mixed marriage. Ties to the Jewish people are particularly weak among those who choose gentile spouses. In this regard, the challenge to Jewish leadership in the twenty-first century is to foster a collective Jewish will sufficiently compelling that Jews will affirm membership in that collective.

Some Jewish leaders, however, call for a change in Jewish values to meet current realities. One of the most prominent is Alan Dershowitz of Harvard Law School. In *The Vanishing American Jew*, he advocates a new attitude toward mixed marriage and favors encouraging rabbis to officiate at such marriages.⁷ Dershowitz is by no means alone; he expresses what many Jewish leaders want to hear—that the old strictures have failed, the traditional policies are bankrupt, and it is time to shift gears. Mixed marriage, then, is viewed as an opportunity rather than a danger.

In a new cultural phenomenon, a small minority of Reform temples go further and grant *aliyyot* (going up to read from the Torah) to gentile spouses or gentile family members of mixed marriages. There is even a particular formulation for the occasion: instead of the recitation, “Blessed be the Lord Who has given the Torah to the Jewish people,” the wording is along the lines, “Blessed is the Lord Who has shared the wisdom of His Torah with all humanity.”

Restoring Conversion?

At conventions of the Conservative and Reform movements, a different development occurred. Both movements affirmed conversion to Judaism as the best leadership response to the mixed marriage phenomenon. In other words, they sought to restore conversion as the best possible outcome in these situations.⁸ They did so for quite different reasons.

Within the Conservative movement, what drove the decision was demographics. In 1990, the Conservatives were the largest of the three denominations. By 2000 they had experienced a decline, probably from 43 percent to 33 percent of affiliated Jews. The hope now is to recover some of the losses through conversion.

The Reform movement’s response was impelled more by self-criticism. The head of Reform, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, observed that in the well-intentioned desire to be welcoming and inclusive, Reform Judaism “perhaps sent the message that we do not care if they convert...but that is not our message.”⁹ In other words, Reform’s heavy focus on outreach to mixed marrieds had created an atmosphere of neutrality on the conversion question.

For example, addressing an AJC meeting in Park City, Utah, several years

ago, the local rabbi, invited to explain the nature of Jewish life in the area, commented that no one in Park City raised questions about who is a Jew. Although the synagogue welcomed conversions, it made no distinctions between Jews, whether by birth or choice, and non-Jews in joining synagogue functions. The rabbi extolled the principle of inclusiveness, ignoring the fact that where there is indifference about conversion, inclusiveness and welcome may be self-defeating. That rabbi's attitude is the one Rabbi Yoffie sought to counter.

Beyond the confines of the religious movements, however, all strictures have fallen. Time-honored Jewish values of endogamy and conversion have been lost in our era.

Once it was believed in the American Jewish community that leaders of Jewish organizations should be married to Jewish spouses. That is no longer the case. Although only a tiny minority is involved, the principle has been established that marriage between Jew and Jew is not a prerequisite for heading major Jewish organizations. This is found on various levels including even Jewish family service agencies, which may be headed by those who themselves are not married to Jews and not raising a Jewish family.

In an announcement in the Sunday Styles section of the *New York Times*, a senior executive with an important Jewish agency announced his marriage to a Hindu woman. Officiating at the wedding were a rabbi and a Hindu priest. This broke new ground in terms of a rabbi's willingness to co-officiate with a Hindu – as opposed to Christian – clergyman. Even more startling was that the bridegroom announced this in such a public forum with such a professional identification.¹⁰

Views on Mixed Marriage

There are distinctions among Jewish leaders who intermarry. Some take the attitude: "I did what was good for me; I don't expect the Jewish community to approve." Others say: "I did whatever I did; given my position in the Jewish community, at minimum I expect the community to refrain from opposition, if not granting endorsement and sanction."

The world of Jewish federations generally has adopted a more delicate approach of saying nothing, one way or the other, about mixed marriages. Some federation leaders state with candor: "Watch what we do, not what we say. If you watch what we do, we are primarily funding programs that lead to marriages between Jews. Don't watch what we say, because we prefer to say nothing lest it prove divisive."

As for American Jewish public opinion, the AJC survey of 2005 found no change over the past ten years on the issues of anti-Semitism and mixed marriage. In this period American Jews consistently, by a 2–1 margin, rated anti-Semitism as the greater danger of the two.¹¹ In part, this reflects Jewish forebodings and historical memories. In part, people prefer to locate the problem elsewhere than

in themselves. Moreover, anti-Semitism plays a fundamental role today in Jewish identity formation. First articulated by Spinoza, more recently by Sartre, the liberal view of Jewish survival as dependent on anti-Semitism implies that there are no compelling internal reasons to lead a Jewish life.¹²

The 2000 AJC survey asked the same questions but was the only one to probe more deeply the issue of whether anti-Semitism or mixed marriage poses the greater danger. Here, 50 percent of American Jews said opposition to mixed marriage is racist. It was unprecedented for the time-honored Jewish ideal of endogamy to be seen as fundamentally contradicting American egalitarianism. In other words, half of American Jews regard opposition to mixed marriage as sinful. Only 25 percent responded that conversion to Judaism was the best outcome of a mixed marriage. The late Rabbi Alexander Schindler, in his 1978 presidential address to the Reform movement, stated plainly that conversion is the best result of mixed marriage. Two decades later, only one in four American Jews agreed.¹³

Yet if American Jews do not promote endogamy, no one else will do it for them. American culture – television, movies, and the media – portrays mixed marriage as admirable and deeply American. The deplorable film *Meet the Fockers*, which is about a meeting between prospective in-laws to a mixed marriage, has a memorable last scene. After the profound conflict between two sets of in-laws is resolved, the Jewish side of the family arranges the wedding. It appears perfectly normal that a rabbi officiates; that is the message and standard instilled by American culture. Only the Jews can present a distinctive countermessage.

A Lack of Candor

In the American Jewish community, open discussion of this subject has become difficult if not impossible. Candor requires acknowledging that there is very little good news about mixed marriage. The facts indicate that it means minimal Jewish identity. Children of mixed marriage report even less affiliation than their parents, and grandchildren almost none at all. Although the efforts of outreach advocates to reverse this trend should be encouraged, as a strategy this is inadequate.

This author and Jack Wertheimer of the Jewish Theological Seminary collaborated on an article called “Real Realism Regarding Mixed Marriage.” Although some Jewish leaders claim the traditional positions are outdated, realism and candor mean recognizing that the situation is not good and that confronting it is an uphill task.¹⁴

The Language of Inevitability

Intermarriage is part of the price of living in an open society. Several years ago, a report of the AJC elicited the response from a sociologist that it was pro-mixed

marriage, the report having asserted that mixed marriage is an indicator of the low level of anti-Semitism. Yet acknowledging that intermarriage is part of living in a broader society does not require a language of inevitability, which many Jewish leaders are now using. American Jewry is not an undifferentiated mass in which all are equally likely to marry a non-Jew. Factors such as size of the Jewish community, its location, level of Judaic literacy, and level of Jewish education all correlate with lower or greater intermarriage.

One argument for the language of inevitability is that intermarriage is now a foregone conclusion and nothing can be done about it. The second is that it is now so pervasive that parents are powerless to discourage it, leaving no room for personal accountability or guilt. Again, the facts suggest otherwise. In an open society, mixed marriage may always occur, but what is said and done can increase or decrease its likelihood. Shoshana S. Cardin, one of the best-informed and most articulate Jewish leaders, has repeatedly argued that while one cannot guarantee that one's grandchildren will marry Jews, one can tell them all the reasons one thinks intermarriage is not a good idea, and thereby lower the probability.¹⁵

The language of inevitability, however, conveys powerlessness. Although that suits the needs of many outreach advocates, a more realistic attitude is that few things are inevitable in history, and what Jewish leaders do and say counts.

The public sector's capacity to affect private decision-making is, of course, limited. Leadership can, however, create a climate in which people's decisions are informed by millennia-old Jewish values. The alternative is to cede all influence to the American media, which foster an ambience that is entirely pro-intermarriage.

Jews' Collective Responsibility

As noted, 50 percent of American Jews now view opposition to mixed marriage as racist. The ethos of in-marriage and conversion is especially off-putting to younger American Jews. If they have been told that all people are equal and created in God's image, it is jarring to be told that they should not marry some of them, or that a gentile spouse should become a Jew.

What, then, should be done? The answer leads away from sociology and toward the specifically Jewish heritage and culture, the Jew's willingness to protest the status quo. As the late Reform theologian Emil Fackenheim observed in his underappreciated book *What Is Judaism?*, Judaic prophecy was less concerned with predicting the future than with conveying a message that challenged society's dominant themes.¹⁶ It takes courage to argue a point that people do not want to hear, and the prophetic metaphor is apt since the prophets were hardly the most popular among Jewish leaders.

Why, as in the *havdalah* ceremony, do Jews end the Sabbath with a statement of distinguishing between sacred and profane? Ultimately, Judaism is a language

of distinctions. Just as, on the calendar, Jews define the Jewish week and Jewish time, on the philosophical level it is the questioning of the status quo that makes Jews unique as a people.

Addressing the intermarriage issue, however, is difficult because Jewish leadership seeks consensus. It is easier to function when there is unity. For example, the emergence of a pro-Israel consensus among Jews after 1948 enabled Jewish leadership to work for a pro-Israel consensus within American society, which encompassed both liberal and conservative administrations. Similar unity on such issues as Soviet Jewry and anti-Semitism was achieved both among American Jews and in America as a whole.

In the 1990s, Jewish leaders began to see Jewish continuity as the most critical problem. The continuity agenda has had certain successes, such as the Birthright Israel program. The issue of continuity, however, is inherently divisive, with serious disagreements on questions of who is a Jew, what constitutes a Jewish family, and what are Jewish values.¹⁷

Jewish leadership's ultimate challenge is to recognize its responsibility for the collective welfare of the Jewish people. That collective welfare is hardly equivalent to the personal good of any individual Jewish leader. When Jewish leaders address the mixed marriage issue, they are concerned about the reaction of their own daughter-in-law, nephew, or wife. In one case a well-meaning Reform rabbi, toward the end of his career, who apparently had not noticed the changes within his own synagogue, devoted his Yom Kippur sermon to the question of mixed marriage. He was stunned when the daughter-in-law of one of his most prominent contributors stormed out in anger, and the father-in-law took him to task.

The challenge for Jewish leadership regarding mixed marriage, then, is to focus on the collective Jewish interest. One Jewish leader, Charlotte Holstein of Syracuse, New York, captured this in an essay titled "When Commitments Clash" that was cited by Elliot Abrams in his important book *Faith or Fear*.¹⁸ Holstein found herself confronting the out-marriage of her own child precisely at a time when, as a national AJC leader, she was spearheading a policy debate within the AJC about the above-mentioned "Statement on Mixed Marriage." Although personally torn, she concluded that she had far greater responsibility for the general Jewish welfare than for her personal situation. Many other Jewish leaders do not appear to see it that way.

Notes

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 7. Alan Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew* (Boston and New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 322–23.
 8. *Forward*, 25 November 2005, 8; 9 December 2005, 3.
 9. *New York Times*, 12 February 2006, 1. See also Steven Bayme and Jack Wertheimer, “Revisiting and Promoting Conversion,” *New York Jewish Week*, 6 January 2006.
 10. Sunday Styles Section, *New York Times*, 28 March 2004.
 11. *2005 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion*, American Jewish Committee, Question #31, www.ajc.org.
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 13. *Responding to Inter-marriage: Survey, Analysis, and Policy*, American Jewish Committee, Department of Contemporary Jewish Life, January 2001.
 14. Jack Wertheimer and Steven Bayme, “Real Realism about Mixed Marriage,” *Forward*, 9 September 2005, 11.
 15. Shoshana Cardin served as chair of the Jewish In-Marriage Initiative. Her statement was made at a founding board meeting of the Initiative. The language of inevitability is most associated with the late Egon Mayer, who argued that being for or against intermarriage “is like being for or against the weather,” *Forward*, 16 November 2000, cited in Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing?* (Hanover, NH and London: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 129.
 16. Emil Fackenheim, *What Is Judaism?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), esp. 120–25.
 17. Steven Bayme and Alan Silverstein, “Failing to Address Crisis from Within,” *New York Jewish Week*, 6 January 1996, reprinted in Steven Bayme, *Jewish Arguments and Counterarguments* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav and the American Jewish Committee, 2002), 234–36. See also Jack Wertheimer, Charles Liebman, and Steven Cohen, “How to Save American Jews,” *Commentary*, January 1996, 47–51, and “Letters,” *Commentary*, May 1996, 16–21.
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Sylvia Barack Fishman

Transformations in the Composition of American Jewish Households

Introduction: Diverse Reasons for Common Behaviors

Jewish societies around the world have certain commonalities, but also differ from each other in significant ways. Indeed, Jews who travel are often struck by attitudes, behaviors, and life circumstances among Jews in other countries that seem quite different from their own. This is true even when statistical “bottom lines” appear similar.

Thus, although demographer Sergio Della Pergola documents that rising rates of intermarriage are observable to varying extents in Jewish communities worldwide,¹ recent research shows that the reasons for intermarriage and the reactions to it can differ dramatically from place to place.² From a public policy standpoint, it is important to recognize and analyze these differences. Effective strategies for dealing with intermarriage must be responsive not only to the fact that it occurs, but even more so to the circumstances that generate it.

Endogamy and Exogamy Both Influenced by Wider Culture

What are the specific contexts of contemporary intermarriage in the United States, and possible policy responses? As demonstrated by both the 1990 and 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Surveys (NJPS), respectively conducted by the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) and the United Jewish Communities (UJC), about half of recent marriages involving a Jew are marriages between a Jew and a non-Jew, which means that about one-third of recently married American Jews have married non-Jews.³

Although those concerned with Jewish cultural continuity often regard rising intermarriage rates as a specifically Jewish phenomenon, contemporary American Jewish attitudes, values, and behaviors clearly reveal the broader cultural influence. Partly because endogamy was a widespread cultural norm at mid-century, most affiliated American Jews within all the major wings of American Judaism assumed that their children would marry Jews. In the post-World War II years up to 1970, when the mixed marriage rate was under 10 percent, the relatively limited number of Jews who married across religious-

cultural lines were largely men, and substantial proportions of their non-Jewish wives converted to Judaism.

In contrast, American Jews today are intermarrying in a fluid cultural context characterized by porous boundaries. The majority of American Jews—like non-Jews in their socioeconomic and educational cohorts—regard intermarriage as part of the American lifestyle. American Jewish resistance to intermarriage has been replaced in recent years by the view that intermarriage is normative.

The great majority of American Jews believe that intermarriage is inevitable in an open society, and fewer than half actively oppose such marriages among their children, according to a study published in 2000 by the American Jewish Committee (AJC).⁴ When asked whether “it would pain me if my child married a gentile,” only 39 percent of American Jews agreed, including 84 percent of Orthodox, 57 percent of Conservative, 27 percent of Reform, and 19 percent of “just Jewish” respondents. Of Jews who said that their Jewishness was “very important” to their lives, only 54 percent said their child’s marriage to a non-Jew would be a source of pain.

Partly as a result of these and other shifting attitudinal norms, rates of conversion to Judaism have not risen proportionally along with intermarriage. Only one out of five non-Jews who marries a Jew converts, and many do not do so until long after the marriage.⁵ Younger Jewish women’s rates of intermarriage are almost identical to those of men, and men in general are far less likely to convert into another religion than are women.

Intermarriage as Part of Pluralistic Culture

It is largely in this context of pluralistic models of contemporary Jewish families that intermarriage occurs in the United States. The same social fluidity that characterizes family life also characterizes American culture. Instead of the cultural hegemony of middle-class, Middle-American, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture that provided the dominant images and language for American culture until the late 1960s, Jewish images, language, and customs have become increasingly familiar to the American public and increasingly popular. Jews in many other countries report that their cultures have not been Judaized to the extent of American culture; in some cases, their cultures are openly hostile to Jews and Judaism. The Judaization of the broader culture is arguably particular to the United States, and, even if not unique, marks a departure from many other situations that Jews have lived in and are living in today.

On one hand, this cultural fluidity has fostered overt expressions of Jewish culture in American environments. These expressions range from high to low and popular culture. For example, most universities offer some sort of Jewish studies; many have Jewish studies departments or programs. Radio and television announcers, who once were schooled to be as “Middle American” as possible

in their pronunciation and word choice, now routinely use Yiddish and Hebrew words as part of their cultural toolkit.

It is, indeed, commonplace for non-Jewish American newscasters to use words like “chutzpah,” “schlep,” and “tushy,” and to respond to an announcement that two movie stars have gotten engaged or married by exclaiming “mazel tov.” For several December seasons Jews and non-Jews alike have sung along with entertainer Adam Sandler, who performed his Chanukah song to a sold-out audience of mostly non-Jews for an HBO special broadcast: “it’s time to celebrate Chanukah, take out your harmonica, drink your gin and tonica...” The Chanukah song is played frequently on pop music stations.⁶

National Public Television and Radio both use Jewish programs to raise money from a very broad population, such as violinist Yitzhak Perlman playing klezmer music in the streets of Warsaw. These programs are played repeatedly for a general U.S. population that is only 2 percent Jewish.

The United States was very different in the 1940s, 1950s, and even the early 1960s, when ethnic and religious groups were still in the “melting pot” mode and playing down their distinctiveness. This author recalls that when growing up in Middle America in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, in the 1950s, no one played klezmer music at their wedding—not even most religious Jews, since it was not popular among the general population. Now that non-Jews like klezmer music, Jews like it too.

Coalescence of Values and Behaviors Even in Orthodox America

On the other hand, American Jews have incorporated much of American values into their notion of Judaism. This concerns not only their daily lives and values, but also their idea of what Judaism is. This coalescence of Jewish and American values characterizes the entire American Jewish denominational spectrum.

For example, Kiryas Joel is an enclave of rebellious young Satmar Hasidim in the Monroe-Woodbury district of rural New York. The *New York Times* sent a reporter who wanted to know how such a traditionalist group could stage a rebellion against rabbinical authority. A young Hasid ungrammatically but poignantly said, “It is our democratic right to freely express ourselves.”⁷

This indicates the extent to which in the United States—even in the ultra-Orthodox community—American values have been incorporated into the Jewish ethos.

The incorporation of feminism into American Judaism is another example of this phenomenon. It has also played an important role in the transformation of American Jewish family life and religious environments. It is not at all unusual, for example, for Orthodox women to attend daily early-morning *minyanim* (prayer groups) for *kaddish* (the prayer of mourning) in the United States during their year of mourning, which they take on as a serious obligation. Women say

kaddish, and male worshippers answer them, indicating a shifting communal norm. Similarly, the *bat mitzvah* (coming-of-age ceremony for girls) is ubiquitous in American Jewish communities, including the Orthodox. American feminism is part of American Judaism.

Jews Are Attractive to Non-Jews

As America has become more Judaized and as American Jews have become more Americanized, not only Jews have changed but America as well. These changes have social as well as cultural implications. Inter-marriage has risen not only because Jews want to marry non-Jews but also because non-Jews want to marry Jews. One striking example is that non-Jews subscribe to JDate, a Jewish online dating service, because they want to meet Jews to date and, hopefully, marry. A woman named Kristina Grish recently published a book called *Boy Vey: The Shiksa's Guide to Dating Jewish Men*. Jews of the opposite gender have a very good reputation among non-Jews.

Among Jews, however, Jews of the opposite gender do not necessarily have such a good reputation. Stereotypes of Jewish women, especially, are very negative: Jewish mothers are portrayed as overbearing and controlling, much like the “Polish” mother in Israeli culture; Jewish daughters are viewed as spoiled and demanding. In this author’s research interviews, one of the most frequent themes was that Jews would describe Jews of the other gender in very pejorative terms.

In contrast, non-Jewish men mention the same characteristics when describing Jewish women, but in flattering terms. For example, whereas Jewish men describe Jewish women as “aggressive,” “overly talkative,” and “domineering,” non-Jewish men say Jewish women are “vivacious” and “articulate.”

Thus, while once it was predominantly Jewish men who married non-Jewish women, currently there is almost no gender gap. This author’s interviews indicate that part of the explanation is that Jewish women—who generally prefer to marry Jewish men—get tired of waiting for a Jewish man who likes them as they are.

Children of Inter-marriage Usually Also Inter-marry

Even in a situation of intense fluidity, however, all segments of the community are not equally affected by inter-marriage trends. Among American Jews aged twenty-five to forty-nine, 22 percent of those who grew up with two Jewish parents are inter-married. Among those who grew up with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent, 75 percent are inter-married.⁸ Thus, the widely discussed inter-marriage rate of about 50 percent reflects two different populations with dramatically disparate rates. Young Jews with two Jewish parents are less than one-third as likely to marry a non-Jew as are those from inter-married parents. It is

important to heed this difference in the face of cultural resistance to advocacy for endogamy. For example, a Jewish Outreach to the Intermarried (JOI) pamphlet written by Jewish communal leader David Sacks asserts that intermarriage is a phenomenon as fixed and inevitable as the “cycles of the sun and the tides.”⁹ Research shows, however, that intermarriage is not random, and it is possible to enhance the possibility that a person will grow up to want to create a Jewish home by marrying another Jew.

One of the surprising discoveries from the above-mentioned research interviews is that many Jewish singles have an attitudinal incongruence regarding the desire to have Jewish children and the need to marry another Jew. Most American Jewish singles say they would prefer to have Jewish children, but do not see a connection between this and marrying a Jewish person. Young American Jewish women, especially, often say, “I can have a Jewish child on my own. I don’t need a man to create and raise a Jewish child.”

Part of the reason is not only a lack of understanding about marriage, but also the individualism that is so pronounced in the United States. It is difficult for Americans, including American Jews, to accept the idea of dependence on another. This is closely connected to the above-mentioned trend of extended singlehood. It is hard for many American Jews to consider making a permanent “purchase”—and they do think about marriage in that way. They have “lists” of characteristics they are looking for, and human relationships are commodified.

This phenomenon pervades singles life across the denominational spectrum, including, though to a somewhat lesser extent, the Orthodox. The West Side of Manhattan is now home to many Orthodox singles. They too have lists, which also include religious criteria.

American Culture Accepts Jews and Promotes Intermarriage

There is no positive reward today in the United States for escaping one’s Jewishness. Formerly, being primarily associated with the non-Jewish community, including sometimes having a non-Jewish spouse, could promote one’s career. Currently, the parents of young Jews who marry non-Jews do not have ambivalent feelings about being Jewish, but, rather, about advocating for an endogamous family. This ambivalence about encouraging a completely Jewish home—from not dating non-Jews to not marrying them—is attributable to the prevailing ethos of multiculturalism. Most Jewish parents are uncomfortable saying, “I only want you to date Jews” because they are afraid it will sound like racism.

The general U.S. culture not only opposes manifestations of “racism,” but actually advocates intermarriage. Over the past two decades, interfaith families and dual religious observances are frequently presented as a cultural ideal in television programming for children as well as adults. The media promote mixed marriage, and religious syncretism in mixed married households. Popular

television series' Christmas episodes present the inclusion of two religious traditions as tantamount to spousal generosity.

In one episode of *Thirtysomething*, for example, a Jewish husband and his Christian wife perform acts of religious generosity that echo O'Henry's story "The Gift of the Magi." At the end of the episode, to the background of "Silent Night, Holy Night," the Jewish husband, who had previously resisted Christmas symbols in his home, drags a Christmas tree home through the snow for his wife. He finds his beautiful non-Jewish wife in their warm and cozy home polishing a *menorah* (Chanukah candelabrum) for him.

Thus, Jew and non-Jew are united in marital loving kindness in the celebration of each other's religious traditions. They are both willing to give up something important out of love for the other. Here, there is a strong didactic agenda: an interfaith household is actually better than a single-faith one because it fosters empathy.

What is perhaps more striking is the extent to which the interfaith family as cultural ideal has been incorporated as a didactic element into children's programming. One Nickelodeon program for children, *As Told by Ginger* (2 December 2002), is particularly revealing. Ginger, the protagonist, discovers that she has Jewish as well as Christian ancestry. She is confused about how to honor her Jewish antecedents. At first, she refuses to participate in any Christmas festivities, because she wishes "to be fair to my Jewish heritage." However, she then feels she is not being "fair to my Christian heritage."

In the end, Ginger decides to include both Jewish and Christian symbols in her December life. Surrounded by colorful accoutrements such as a Christmas tree, hanging stockings, and a menorah, Ginger, her mother, and her friends joyfully celebrate her "evenhanded" solution to her double religious heritage. The episode is entitled "Even Steven." Religious syncretism is presented as appropriate behavior in Jewish-Christian households, not only a symbol of American empathy and religious tolerance, but also a normalized cultural ideal.

Three Keys to Jewishness: Parents, Peer Group, and Jewish Education

American Jewish parents, then, find it difficult to say to their children, "I really care that you should be Jewish because..." When saying to a teenager: "I don't want you to date a non-Jew. I only want you to date a Jew," one must be prepared to add, "It matters to be Jewish because..." Many American Jewish parents, however, say that they have no desire to cast off their own Jewishness, but do not know why it matters to them. And because they are uncomfortable or confused about articulating it, they often do not. This author's interviews revealed, strikingly, that nearly two-thirds of the Jews who had married other Jews said their parents had spoken to them about interdating and intermarriage

while they were growing up, and that there had been rules about dating in the household. In contrast, nearly two-thirds of the Jews who married non-Jews said their parents had never openly objected to interdating while they were living at home. They had not spoken to them about marrying a Jew. Today, it is not in college that young Jews start dating non-Jews; most American Jews who end up marrying non-Jews started dating non-Jews while they were still in high school living under their parents' supervision.

The high school years are critically important for later behavior patterns, including Jewish-family formation. The 2000–2001 NJPS revealed that high school peer group has a powerful correlation with whom one ends up marrying. There are three factors in the high school years that can greatly enhance the possibility that children will grow up to marry Jews: parents, peer group, and pedagogy.

- *Parents.* It matters to have Jewish observances on a regular basis in the home. It does not have to be Orthodox observance. American Jews who grow up in strongly identified Reform or Conservative households where there is regular observance of Shabbat and Jewish holidays end up strongly identified as adults and want to recreate such a Jewish home. Rich Jewish home life even has an impact where there is intermarriage. Where there was regular observance in the parental home, when a child marries a non-Jew this spouse is more likely to convert to Judaism. Even if there is not a conversion, the Jewish spouse is more likely to want to create a Jewish ambience for the children.
- *Peer group.* Jewish teens who have mostly Jewish friendship networks in high school tend to replicate that pattern in college. They have a much greater likelihood of dating Jews and eventually marrying one.

Interestingly, this is also true of the non-Jews who marry Jews. These non-Jews tend to have many Jewish friends in high school, not necessarily because there are a lot of them, but because they are drawn to Jews and Judaism. For most of them, the person they marry is not the first Jew they become close to.

In the above-mentioned interviews, non-Jews made revealing statements regarding what they like about Jews. They mentioned discovering with delight that Jewish families argue about politics and ideas at the table. (Jews, conversely, may find it appealing to be with a group in which people do not interrupt each other.)

- *Pedagogy.* Formal Jewish education is the third element in this triad. Jewish education that continues through the teen years dramatically affects the likelihood of marrying a Jew and creating a Jewish home. Each year of formal Jewish education after age thirteen has more of an

impact than the previous year, so that keeping Jewish teens in some kind of Jewish schooling through twelfth grade has a great impact.

Even supplementary school has an impact, and it may be because it affects the peer group. Most American Jews no longer live in densely Jewish neighborhoods. If the teens, however, go to a Jewish supplementary high school that brings them together, say, on Sunday mornings or Tuesday nights, they have enough Jewish friends that some can be considered “cool.”

The “coolness” aspect is very important. If the only cool people a teenager knows are not Jewish, then coolness becomes a non-Jewish attribute. But if he or she is friendly with enough Jews so that some of them are cool, then it eventually becomes possible to meet and marry a cool Jew.

These three important factors give much reason for hope. They are things one can do something about; intermarriage is not inevitable. To be sure, when raising children there are no guarantees. However, community leaders and policy planners as well as parents can enhance the likelihood that children will grow up to want to create their own Jewish households.

A Top Priority: Creating Educational Programs for Teens

What can the Jewish community as a whole do? One important policy decision would be to place priority on creating supplementary high school programs in every community. In many communities there is only a choice between an Orthodox day school and high school, or nothing. Most parents, however, will not send their teenagers to Orthodox schools if not Orthodox themselves, so the lack of other alternatives means teenagers do not continue with Jewish schooling.

But if a community is large enough, it is possible to have a community high school, or a Conservative or Reform one. If, though, it is not large enough, a supplementary high school enables Jewish teens to know each other. In Boston, which also has several day school options for teenagers, the Prozdor supplementary school program has gone from 150 students to over a thousand.

Parents need to be less afraid of their homes being “too Jewish,” and also need to learn how to articulate why being Jewish matters to them. Many parents have asked this author to request that their synagogues and Jewish Community Centers create workshops for parents to talk about their commitments to Jews and Judaism—that is, to help them learn to express their Jewish values.

Finally, Jewish communities need to appreciate the role of peer groups. It is important to create venues for Jewish teens to spend time together.

There is much that is positive, indeed a renaissance, in Jewish life in the United States. While only affecting a segment of the population, it facilitates

creating programs. Through its proactive responses—or lack of them—the American Jewish community itself can have an impact on dynamic positive developments in the American Jewish population or, on the other hand, on stagnation and possible shrinkage. Much depends on whether the community can find the communal will to take those actions that can enhance the future of American Jewish households.

Notes

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Ira M. Sheskin

The Usefulness of Local Jewish Community Studies in Examining the American Jewish Future¹

More than 50 American Jewish federations completed local Jewish community studies from 1993 to 2010. Below examples are cited of how the results of these studies have been utilized to guide Jewish community decision-making.

The North American Jewish Data Bank (www.jewishdatabank.org) archives about 200 local Jewish community studies. Fifty-four such studies have been completed since 1993, based on over 53,000 random telephone interviews at a combined cost of \$8–10 million. The vast majority of these interviews took 15–20 minutes. They covered diverse topics, including the geographic distribution of the Jewish population, migration patterns, basic demographics—such as age, marital status, and income—religiosity, intermarriage, memberships in synagogues, Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), and Jewish organizations, levels of Jewish education, familiarity with and perception of Jewish agencies, social service needs, Israel, anti-Semitism, use of the Jewish and general media, philanthropic giving, voting patterns, and many other topics. About 75 percent of the American Jewish population lives in the more than 50 Jewish communities that have completed local Jewish community studies. Of the 25 largest American Jewish communities, only one (Rockland County, New York) has not completed a study.

Almost all local Jewish community studies have collected information for three main purposes. The first purpose is to provide data that will direct and focus the organized Jewish community in providing services and programs that will contribute to its development and will offer compelling reasons for Jews to maintain their Jewish identity as well as be active members of the community. The second purpose is to assist the organized Jewish community in actualizing its goals by providing data useful in its decision-making, ranging from prioritizing its objectives, to funding agencies, programs, and institutions, to the undertaking of capital campaigns, to making relevant policy decisions, and to best providing social, cultural, recreational, and educational services to that community. The third purpose is to assist Jewish federations and other Jewish organizations in financial resource development.

The overriding question is whether local Jewish community studies have proved useful to the Jewish communities completing them. To answer this, a number of concrete examples are given below.

Addressing National Issues

The results of local Jewish community studies have been employed in addressing national concerns in three areas:

- 1) examining consistent correlations between behaviors measured in local Jewish community studies in support of national programming efforts;
- 2) providing guidance as to the extent to which given situations are prevalent nationally; and
- 3) providing large sample sizes—that would be unobtainable from a typical national study—for small geographic areas that have relevance at the national level.

Addressing Local Issues

Communities typically spend between \$100,000 and \$250,000 on a local Jewish community study. Respondents are generally willing to cooperate by donating only a limited amount of time for a telephone survey; usually a 15–20-minute time frame for the questionnaire is the goal.

There are at least ten areas in which local Jewish community study results have been utilized by local Jewish communities to shed light on local Jewish community issues. Examples are: 1) changing Jewish population size; 2) changing geographic distribution of the Jewish population; 3) place of birth; 4) age distributions; 5) Jewish continuity; 6) intermarriage; 7) synagogue membership; 8) Jewish preschool; 9) anti-Semitism; and 10) Israel.

Example I: Changing Jewish Population Size

Detroit has a large, but decreasing, Jewish population, which was confirmed by the 2005 Detroit local community study. Thus, planning in Detroit should occur in an environment that assumes a continuing decrease in the Jewish population. The strong attachments of many Jews to this area suggested by other findings in the study provide evidence that the current decrease will probably not continue forever.

Las Vegas presents an entirely different scenario. The 2005 Las Vegas Jewish community study² found 89,000 persons in 42,000 Jewish households of whom 67,500 persons (76 percent) are Jewish. From 1995 to 2005, the number of *Jewish households* increased by 44 percent. Assuming that the prevailing rate of in-migration continued in the following few years, these data suggest that the number of Jewish households in Las Vegas was increasing and would probably continue to increase during the next few years as a result of migration into and

out of Las Vegas. Thus, planning should occur in an environment that assumes a continuing increase in the Jewish population.

Does this mean that Detroit should not be looking to add capital facilities and programs and services while Las Vegas should? The answer is, probably not. In fact, many other results in these two studies show that Detroit has a population far more connected to Judaism than does Las Vegas, and that any type of Jewish facility or programming may have a better chance of success in Detroit than in Las Vegas.

Were the Jewish communities in Detroit and Las Vegas aware—prior to receiving the results of their studies—that their Jewish populations were decreasing and increasing respectively? Yes, they were. However, the Detroit Jewish community had assumed that their decrease was far more severe than it was. Las Vegas Jewish community leaders, on the other hand, had been touting that theirs was the fastest-growing Jewish community in the country and estimating a Jewish population in excess of 100,000. These assumptions proved exaggerated.

Example II: Geographically Shifting and Stable Jewish Populations

A significant geographic shift in the location of the Jewish population occurred in West Palm Beach from 1987 to 2005.³ The percentage of persons in Jewish households in West Palm Beach who live in Boynton Beach increased from 12 percent in 1987 to 37 percent in 1999 and 43 percent in 2005 (from 9,250 persons to 37,300 persons to 58,600 persons). Together, the two southern geographic areas (Boynton Beach and Lake Worth) increased from 40 percent in 1987 to 59 percent in 1999 and 63 percent in 2005. Over the same time period, and in stark contrast, the percentage of persons in Jewish households who live in the central area decreased from 33 percent in 1987 to 13 percent in 1999 and 8 percent in 2005.

The problem created by this shift in the geographic location of the Jewish population is that the main campus for this community—which includes the Jewish federation, the Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Service, the Jewish day school, and various other agencies—is located in the central area, where the population is decreasing. Boynton Beach/Lake Worth, where the Jewish population is exploding, has been served by a relatively small facility.

In contrast to the shifting Jewish population of West Palm Beach, the geographic distribution of the Jewish population of Bergen County, New Jersey was shown by their 2001 study not to have changed significantly since 1994.⁴ In Bergen, therefore, planning should occur in an environment that assumes no significant changes in the geographic location of Jewish households.

Clearly, communities need to be aware of changes in the local geographic distribution of their Jewish population. In fact, concern about the current

locations of community facilities or decisions about where to locate a proposed new community facility often prompt a community to undertake a study. If a capital facility is not optimally located then it may be underutilized, while needs remain unmet in other parts of a Jewish federation's service area. Thus tens of millions of dollars might be wasted.

Example III: Place of Birth

About 40 local Jewish community studies have asked the place of birth of adults in Jewish households. Two statistics derive from this question: the percentage of adults in Jewish households born locally and the percentage foreign-born.

The percentage born locally varies from 0 percent in South Palm Beach and 1 percent in Las Vegas and Sarasota to 57 percent in Cleveland and Detroit, and 59 percent in New York. The median value is 24 percent. Jewish communities with a high percentage of locally born adults, mostly in the Northeast and the Midwest, have an advantage in community building over those in the South and the West. Adults who were born in an area feel more of an attachment to it and its institutions than do adults who have recently moved to an area.

Example IV: Age Distributions

All local Jewish community studies ask the age of all persons in Jewish households. A population's age distribution is among the most important demographic indicators and is a major determinant of the types of programs a Jewish community must offer. Age is related to everything from the need for preschools, Jewish day schools, supplemental schools, and nursing-home beds to levels of religious observance, synagogue membership, and levels of philanthropy.

The 2005 Detroit study⁵ showed that a decrease in Jewish day school enrollment was likely due to a decreasing number of children. In San Antonio,⁶ some community members were considering an expansion of the Jewish day school until they were presented with the results of the study showing that 7.0 percent of persons in Jewish households were age 10–14; 5.9 percent were age 5–9; and 3.7 percent were age 0–4.

The age distribution in West Palm Beach in 2005 showed that 57 percent of persons in Jewish households were age 65 and over.⁷ This figure is the second highest of about 45 comparison Jewish communities. The 9 percent who are age 0–17 is the lowest of about 50 comparison Jewish communities. Thus, while no one would argue that children are not a priority, no matter how small their percentage of the Jewish population, these results clearly indicate that this community must prioritize services for its elderly.

Example V: Jewish Continuity

The most important issue facing the American Jewish community today is that of Jewish continuity. All local Jewish community studies indicate that some percentage of any given community is for the most part disassociated. Yet, some communities face a more severe situation than others. This contrast can be seen by comparing the results from the Las Vegas 2005 study with those from the Detroit 2005 study.

Overall, the level of Jewish religious practice in Las Vegas is lower than in almost every other comparison Jewish community.⁸ Among about 35–50 comparison Jewish communities, Las Vegas has the lowest percentage of households who always or usually participate in a Passover Seder (50 percent) and always or usually light Sabbath candles (11 percent). Las Vegas also has the third highest percentage of Jewish households who always, usually, or sometimes have a Christmas tree in their home (34 percent).

While 83 percent of Jewish households in Las Vegas are involved in Judaism in some way, either through religious practice, synagogue attendance, membership in the organized Jewish community, or Jewish philanthropic giving in the past year, this is the lowest percentage of about 35 comparison Jewish communities. Thus, significant efforts are needed in Las Vegas to engage Jewish households in Jewish life.

The issue of Jewish continuity in Detroit presents a very different picture.⁹ On almost all measures of “Jewishness,” Detroit is one of the most “Jewish” Jewish communities in the country. Among about 35–50 comparison Jewish communities, Detroit has the second highest percentage of respondents who keep kosher in and out of the home (14 percent) and who refrain from using electricity on the Sabbath (10 percent). Households under age 35 in Detroit have stronger Jewish identities than is true of most Jewish communities.

However, in many ways, Detroit is a *bifurcated* community, in which many households maintain a significant degree of commitment to their Jewish identity while others clearly consider their Jewish identity of somewhat marginal importance.

Thus, Las Vegas and Detroit show significantly different patterns with respect to Jewish continuity. While both communities will no doubt make Jewish continuity programming a high priority, the case may be more compelling for diverting funds from social service provision—the historic mission of the Jewish federation movement—to Jewish continuity programming in Las Vegas than in Detroit.

Example VI: Inter-marriage

More than 50 local Jewish community studies have asked questions that facilitate the calculation of an intermarriage rate. The percentage of married couples in the

Jewish community who are intermarried (the *couples intermarriage rate*) varies from 9 percent in South Palm Beach to 50 percent in Atlanta, 55 percent in San Francisco and Seattle, and 61 percent in Portland (ME). The median value is 33 percent. Depending on its specific intermarriage rate, each community will make its own decision regarding the emphasis it places on efforts to provide outreach to, and integration of, intermarried couples.

Local Jewish community studies assist in community-specific policymaking and program design. Many communities concerned about their intermarriage rate focus on younger couples. Unlike in most other Jewish communities, programs to integrate intermarried couples into the Portland Jewish community should be directed not just at the young, but at all age groups.

For many years, some in the Jewish community maintained that although intermarriage was increasing, many intermarried couples were well integrated into the Jewish community. However, while many intermarried couples have at least some Jewish activity evident in their household, on individual measures, intermarried households are generally much less connected to Judaism than are in-married households.

Each synagogue and Jewish organization needs to develop its own policies and programs for grappling with the issue of intermarriage. Jewish identity initiatives must carefully balance “outreach” to the intermarried population with “in-reach” to moderately affiliated Jews. This balance should no doubt be influenced by the extent of intermarriage in each community and should be informed by the overall lower levels of Jewish involvement of intermarried households.

Example VII: Synagogue Membership

More than 50 local Jewish community studies have asked whether households are current members of a synagogue. Synagogue membership varies from 14 percent in Las Vegas to 56 percent in Essex-Morris, St. Louis, and St. Paul, and 58 percent in Tidewater. The median value is 45 percent. Depending on its specific synagogue membership rate, a community campaign designed to increase membership has more potential to succeed in some communities than in others.

While a membership campaign might prove fruitful in Tucson, for instance, Tidewater (Norfolk and Virginia Beach) is less likely to benefit from such an effort.¹⁰ Synagogue membership there is high despite relatively low to average levels of home religious practice and synagogue attendance. Tidewater, being a typical southern community, is highly “churched.” There, joining the “Jewish church” is a form of “assimilation.” San Antonio exhibits a similar pattern.

The relationship between household income and synagogue membership suggests that cost may be an important factor limiting membership. Such relationships are seen for almost all of the comparison Jewish communities,

suggesting that the “cost of being Jewish” is a significant barrier for many and that policies to reduce this cost might prove fruitful.

Example VIII: Jewish Preschool

More than 30 local Jewish community studies have asked whether children age 0–5 in surveyed households were enrolled in a preschool or child care program and, if so, whether it was a Jewish program. The *Jewish Preschool/Child Care Market Share (market share)* is defined as the percentage of Jewish children age 0–5 in a preschool/child care program attending a *Jewish* preschool/child care program. *Market share* varies from 5 percent in Seattle, 25 percent in Philadelphia, to 92 percent in San Antonio. The median value is 55 percent.

Enrollment of Jewish children in preschool/child care programs within the Jewish community is often utilized as an entry opportunity to involve young families in Jewish life, and particularly in synagogue life, prior to enrolling their children in a religious school.

The preschool example illustrates the importance of comparing local Jewish community studies with one another. Without the comparison with 30 other Jewish communities, planners in Rhode Island might have concluded that their 33 percent market share was good. With the realization that 26 other Jewish communities had higher market shares, it became clear to planners that Rhode Island should be doing far better in this area.

Example IX: Anti-Semitism

Fourteen percent of Jewish respondents in San Antonio personally experienced anti-Semitism in the local community in the past year, which is about average among about 30 comparison Jewish communities.¹¹ The 26 percent of San Antonio respondents who perceive a great or moderate amount of anti-Semitism in the local community is the second lowest of about 30 comparison Jewish communities.

The percentage of children age 6–17 experiencing anti-Semitism in the past year varies from 8 percent in Washington and 9 percent in Miami, South Palm Beach, and Tucson to 34 percent in San Antonio. The median value is 18 percent. The 34 percent result for children in San Antonio was surprising and suggested that the Jewish community should consider discussing this issue with local school boards. The local Jewish day school should also make parents aware of this result, as it provides an additional reason for parents to send their children to a Jewish day school.

Anti-Semitism also shows itself to be a major factor motivating donations to Jewish organizations. This motivation derives not so much from respondents

personally experiencing anti-Semitism, but from a perception that anti-Semitism is extant in the local community. The percentage of adults who personally experienced anti-Semitism in the past year varies from 7 percent in South Palm Beach, 9 percent in West Palm Beach, and 11 percent in Atlantic County, Broward, and Sarasota to 31 percent in Orlando. The median value is 17 percent.

While data on this question are not available for previous generations, it is probably fair to say that during the first 70–80 years of the twentieth century an overwhelming percentage of Jews probably would have reported personally experiencing anti-Semitism.

Thus, the motivation for donating as a result of anti-Semitism is almost certainly derived from the perception of anti-Semitism as a significant problem. The perception of a great deal or moderate amount of anti-Semitism probably explains why, in about 20 comparison Jewish communities, when presented with a list of reasons that Jewish households donate to Jewish organizations combating anti-Semitism is usually ranked as the number one or number two motivation. These results suggest that Jewish federation marketing might do well to emphasize those aspects of its mission related to exposing and combating anti-Semitism.

Example X: Israel

About 35 Jewish community studies have asked if any household member has visited Israel. The percentage of households in which a member visited Israel varies from 26 percent in York (Pennsylvania) and 33 percent in Las Vegas to 60 percent in Los Angeles, 61 percent in South Palm Beach, and 62 percent in Bergen and Miami. The median value is 43 percent.

On most measures of Jewish identity—such as religious practice, synagogue attendance, membership in the organized Jewish community, and Jewish philanthropy and volunteerism—all local Jewish community studies show a significant positive correlation with visits to Israel, particularly if the Israel trip was sponsored by a Jewish organization, although cause and effect cannot be attributed to these relationships.

In Las Vegas, the 36 percent of Jewish respondents who are extremely or very emotionally attached to Israel is the third lowest of about 30 comparison Jewish communities.¹² Fundraising efforts to support Israel programming should consider the relatively low level of emotional attachment in Las Vegas, and efforts are needed to promote greater levels of attachment to Israel. Organized programs should be considered that bring together emotionally attached participants who have visited Israel in the past with less involved Jews.

The percentage of households containing a child who has visited Israel varies in about 40 comparison Jewish communities from 4 percent in Charlotte, St. Petersburg, and West Palm Beach and 6 percent in Atlantic County, Los Angeles,

and Wilmington to 18 percent in Monmouth and St. Paul, 20 percent in Detroit, 27 percent in Miami, and 33 percent in Bergen. The median value is 11 percent. Communities toward the lower end of this range can be seen as having a mandate for expanding programs to increase the percentage of children who have visited Israel.

In about 20 comparison Jewish communities, when presented with a list of motivations for Jewish households to donate to Jewish organizations—providing social services for the Jewish elderly; combating anti-Semitism; providing Jewish education for children; supporting the people of Israel; helping Jews overseas who are in distress; providing Jewish individual and family counseling; providing social, recreational, and cultural activities for Jews; and supporting educational trips to Israel—supporting the people of Israel is usually shown to be a moderate motivator, while supporting educational trips to Israel is invariably the lowest. This suggests to the Jewish federation campaign departments that motivating donations by emphasizing the federation's role in funding educational trips to Israel is not as effective as emphasizing the Jewish federation's roles in meeting local needs or in its support for the people of Israel.¹³

Conclusion

No doubt community studies will continue, as will the questioning of the expenditures involved. As evidenced by the numerous communities that have completed studies, including almost all of the large communities, arguments about cost and accuracy do not win the day. Rather, American Jewish communities are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of sound planning based upon a scientific assessment of the environment in which they operate.

Most importantly, in the context of the current volume, while most discussions of the American Jewish future examine national data, an important implication of this examination of some of the findings of local Jewish community studies is that there is not one future for the American Jewish community. Rather, that future, and the planning that is necessary to try to assure a positive future, differs significantly by community. The demographic variations among local Jewish communities present varying challenges to these communities. The differences in levels of Jewish continuity among communities imply that varying levels of effort will be necessary in different Jewish communities to assure that future.

Notes

1. For a more detailed analysis, see Ira M. Sheskin, "Local Jewish Community Studies as Planning Tools for the American Jewish Community," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 21, nos. 1–2 (Spring 2009).

2. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Community Study of Southern Nevada* (Las Vegas: Milton I. Schwartz Hebrew Academy and United Jewish Communities of Las Vegas, 2007).
3. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Community Study of Palm Beach County* (West Palm Beach: Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County, 2006).
4. Ira M. Sheskin, *The UJA Federation of Bergen County and North Hudson Community Study* (River Edge, NJ: UJA Federation of Bergen County and North Hudson, 2002).
5. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Community Study of Detroit* (Detroit: Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, 2007).
6. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Community Study of San Antonio* (San Antonio: Jewish Federation of San Antonio, 2007).
7. Sheskin, *Jewish Community Study of Palm Beach County*.
8. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Community Study of Southern Nevada* (Las Vegas: Milton I. Schwartz Hebrew Academy and United Jewish Communities of Las Vegas, 2007).
9. Sheskin, *Jewish Community Study of Detroit*.
10. Ira M. Sheskin, *The United Jewish Federation of Tidewater Community Study* (Virginia Beach: United Jewish Federation of Tidewater, 2002).
11. Sheskin, *Jewish Community Study of San Antonio*.
12. Sheskin, *Jewish Community Study of Southern Nevada*.
13. Ira M. Sheskin, *The Jewish Federation of Rhode Island Community Study* (Providence: Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, 2003).

Steven Windmueller

The Jewish Communities of the Western United States

Twenty-five percent of all American Jews live in the Western United States, representing a distinctive and growing voice within Jewish life. Participation and identity in these communities show different features from the rest of American Jewry, in part reflecting the social mores of the West. A lack of longstanding communal histories and established behaviors has also made it easier for Western Jewry to develop special creative aspects.

Clearly, not all Jewish communities in the West are the same. The histories and communal cultures of the San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland communities differ from each other to varying extents. As more established centers, these cities show characteristics both consonant with the national Jewish patterns and distinctive to the West. In turn, the communities of the “sun,” including Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and San Diego, are more notably marked by attributes that separate Western Jewry from the rest of the nation:

1. The pioneering and independent spirit of the West, affecting Jewish contributions and choices
2. The special histories of Western communities
3. “Distance” from other centers of Jewish life as a factor in shaping Western Jewish behavior
4. The impact of the “wide open spaces” on the building of communities
5. The unique role of leaders, especially rabbis, in shaping Western Jewish life
6. The West as an alternative lifestyle model, affecting communal affiliation and participation

The Statistical Picture

The key Western Jewish communities that were considered in this study include: Las Vegas, Los Angeles (metropolitan area), Phoenix, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco (metropolitan area), and Seattle.

Excluding Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland, these Western Jewish communities were among the largest growth areas. Each of these communities is currently reporting that its population continues to grow, exceeding the last official numbers available.

For example, the 2002 Greater Phoenix Jewish Community Study found a total of forty-four thousand Jewish households in Greater Phoenix. This is an increase of 138 percent from 1984 and considerably greater than the 78 percent growth of general households within Greater Phoenix in the same period.¹ The Phoenix study also found that “nearly half of Jewish households have lived in Greater Phoenix less than 10 years; 23 percent—10,000 households—have lived in the Valley five years or less.”²

These statistics reinforce one of the central features of Western communities in general and Western Jewish communities in particular: the absence of an indigenous population base. Few individuals can trace their family ties beyond one or two generations. This leads to a weaker role for religious institutions and other social infrastructures, and, in turn, a lack of leadership and commitment. As a result, communal and religious organizations constantly struggle to recruit new participants and to identify and engage new leadership.

The Pioneering and Independent Spirit

In the various periods of rapid growth, many new residents were immigrants seeking to make a new start. Many had strong commercial motives and the area developed a strong individualistic ethos. Communities were created whose residents shared no prior connection or allegiances. The open land allowed people to live much farther from neighbors than had been possible in Eastern cities, and an ethic of tolerance emerged. California’s state constitutions were largely drafted by groups concerned about personal property rights and freedom, arguably at the expense of ideals fostering civic community.

Western Jewry is best defined in terms of various “pioneering” experiences. Jews were among the original pioneers who during the Gold Rush era helped settle the Western United States and launch the development of key cities such as San Francisco or Carson City, Nevada. Successful businesses and industries were established by Jews over time. In the nineteenth century, for example, the Levi-Strauss Company was formed in San Francisco and has continued to play an important role in the American clothing industry. More recently Starbucks Coffee, a Seattle-based corporation, has revolutionized American consumer habits. Jews were also among the first to make Las Vegas a gambling and entertainment center.

Ava Kahn and Marc Dollinger note regarding California’s Jews:

Jewish immigrants to California took advantage of its physical environment, ethnic diversity, and cultural distinctiveness to fashion a form of Judaism unique in the American experience. California Jews enjoyed unprecedented access to political power a generation earlier than their New York counterparts. They thrived in the multicultural mix, redefining the classic black-

white racial binary by forging relations with a variety of religious and ethnic groups in both San Francisco and Los Angeles.³

Jews were the driving force behind the Hollywood entertainment industry. Jews are also major players throughout the larger Western communities in the real estate and construction industries. They are often responsible for technological innovation, including in Silicon Valley. In the area of medical research, eight universities and teaching hospitals in the West that rank among the top in the nation have a significant presence of Jewish physicians, faculty, and researchers.

Political activism is also a trademark of Western Jews. Two of the centers of American Jewish liberalism are in the West, namely, the Bay Area and West Los Angeles. Large communities of Iranian and Russian Jews have supported pro-Israel and hawkish political candidates. As in other areas of the United States, Jews in this region have been active in both political parties and for particular candidates and high-profile issues. Ever since settling in the West, Jews have served in public office at all levels.

Affiliation Levels

Jews of the West turned out to have lower levels of religiosity. Only 5 percent indicated that they were Orthodox compared to 14 percent of Jews in the Northeast. Of Western Jews, 35 percent described themselves as Reform, 19 percent as Conservative. Among Midwestern Jews, 46 percent considered themselves Reform and 25 percent as Conservative.⁴

By all standards of affiliation and participation, Jews of the West rank lowest. They are also least likely to contribute to federation campaigns or other Jewish causes. Only 22 percent donate to federation campaigns and only 39 percent to any Jewish cause. In the Midwest, more than 37 percent of Jews give to federation campaigns and 48 percent to other Jewish causes.⁵

Israel is another measure of Jewish engagement. One can define “emotional attachment” as significant engagement with Israeli peoplehood and its political situation, economic support, and travel to Israel. Only 29 percent of Western Jews have traveled to Israel compared to 35 percent of American Jews generally and 49 percent of those in the Northeast. When asked about their emotional attachment to Israel, Western Jews are tied with Southern Jewry (29 percent) as having the lowest, compared to the highest-ranking Northeastern (61 percent) and Midwestern (59 percent) Jewry regions. In addition, only 50 percent of Western Jewry ranked Israel’s need for U.S. financial support as very important. This was the lowest rate for the country.

Jews of the West also give the least to all causes, Jewish and non-Jewish combined. Whereas 78 percent of Midwestern Jews, the highest givers in America, report giving to all causes, the figure for Western Jews is 69 percent.

“Using the Internet for Jewish purposes” produced a higher score among Western Jews (41 percent) than any other regional cohort except Midwestern Jews (46 percent). In contrast, Jews of the West were the least likely to read Jewish newspapers or magazines (62 percent); Midwestern Jews were the most likely (72 percent).

Western Jews are among the nation’s wealthiest based on a number of business surveys, including the Forbes 400 where a significant percentage of all Jews mentioned reside in the West. At the same time, data from both the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) for 2000–2001 and local community studies show a higher percentage of Western Jews living in poverty. The NJPS (2000–2001) found 46 percent of elderly Jewish households in the West with incomes under \$25,000 compared to the national Jewish average of 37 percent.⁶

Various community population studies conducted in key Western Jewish communities point to a set of defining social characteristics. The key elements are lower affiliation patterns and a larger percentage of adults compared to other regions of the country.⁷

The Distinctive Histories of Western Communities

Although the West is perceived as a single region, its Jewish communities have had distinctive histories.

In Northern California, the Gold Rush brought Jews who became prospectors and businessmen. To Arizona and Southern California came Jews who were merchants and traders. Among the earliest Jewish settlers in the Seattle area were Sephardic Jews, and they remain a significant part of that community. In general, the early Jewish settlers also became leaders in the public sector. The years surrounding World War II reshaped the Western communities. A population explosion enhanced the role and prominence of the Western cities and, in turn, their respective Jewish communities.

San Francisco’s Jewish community is marked both by its old wealth as well as its newly emergent wealth. The San Francisco Jewish Community Endowment Fund responds to emergencies and provides seed monies for innovative programs to ensure a Jewish future. “It consists of unrestricted, restricted and designated funds, over 880 donor-advised funds, and over 72 supporting foundations.... With more than \$2.8 billion in assets, the Endowment Fund is a vital community resource and is one of the country’s most successful Jewish foundations.”⁸ Two other primary San Francisco Jewish resources are the Koret Foundation, which supports organizations and initiatives in the fields of education, economic development in Israel, and strengthening Bay Area communities, and the Jim Joseph Foundation, which supports programs to enhance identity and engagement among Jewish youth.

The Factor of Distance from Other Jewish Centers

Being far from the “capital” of American Jewry, New York, has had a profound psychological and functional impact on Western Jewry. The greater the distance from the center of Jewish power, the greater the institutional tensions. Many national institutions have had difficulties in organizational relationships with their West Coast affiliates. Western regional structures of synagogue movements, membership organizations, and policy groups have sometimes struggled with their central administration over questions of autonomy and proportional representation within these national systems.

An example is the 1995 decision by the Conservative-affiliated University of Judaism—now the American Jewish University—based in Bel-Air, California, to separate itself from the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Similarly, Hadassah in the Pacific Southwest area has created a different organizational and governing model than that prescribed by the national administration.

A 2002 *Los Angeles Times* article, “American Jews Face East-West Power Struggle,” highlighted the dismissal of the Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL) longtime Los Angeles director David Lehrer. The story noted: “Among some Jews here, the brouhaha has reignited long-simmering resentment over the way national Jewish organizations in New York still treat Los Angeles as ‘a colony,’ as one put it. The same kind of tension—often between national headquarters and regional offices—has surfaced in other American Jewish organizations in recent years.” As Lehrer put it, “my ouster is in part a reflection of the East-West divide in American Jewry. I hope the Los Angeles Jewish community continues to assert its independence and uniqueness.”⁹

Western federations, for example, have complained that their communities are underrepresented on national policy boards of the federated system and other governing bodies.¹⁰ In turn organizational representatives have argued that the leadership in the West has failed to accept greater responsibility for actively participating in these national bodies. Other critics of Western Jewry have pointed to a longstanding absence of committed leaders from these communities who could play major roles in the national agencies.

Indeed, compared to other regions of the country, fewer national Jewish leaders emerge from Western communities. This is true of other Western religious communities as well.

The Impact of the “Wide Open Spaces” on Community Construction

Geographic distance and size play important roles in the West. Vast distances between population centers, extensive urban sprawl, and large general populations create difficulties in creating shared points of connection and providing social and educational services. As a result, Jews who wish to escape the pressures

associated with communal participation or synagogue membership can, in many Western communities, move outside the more densely settled and identified Jewish “neighborhoods.” Additionally, since Western communities experience significant population movement, it is difficult for religious and communal structures to define population trends or strategically position core Jewish services.

Unique pockets of Jewish life are another distinguishing feature of the West. These include Hollywood with its high proportions of Jewish actors, writers, directors, and producers, and Silicon Valley with its many Jewish “techies” and entrepreneurs who have helped develop the hi-tech and biotech fields. Jews are also strongly represented in the growing financial sector and in the land development/real estate industry.

The West and Communal Participation

New Communities

Unlike Jewish communities elsewhere in the United States, many West Coast communities are experiencing significant growth. Fifty-four percent of Jewish adults have lived in San Diego for less than twenty years, of which 19 percent for less than five years.¹¹

But in San Diego, as in many other Western locations, rapid growth and geographic sprawl are accompanied by low rates of engagement in the organized Jewish community with only three out of ten Jews reporting that they belong to a synagogue or temple. Only 46 percent report participation in organized Jewish activities, and 35 percent feel “not at all connected” to the San Diego Jewish community.¹²

Diverse Immigrant Communities

The West has always been receptive to immigrants. Los Angeles and other parts of the West have become new population centers for Iranian, South African, and Latin American Jews. Significant numbers of Israeli¹³ and Russian Jews have also found the West to be welcoming. In earlier times Sephardic Jews settled in Portland, Seattle, and the Los Angeles. Today, Los Angeles is home to one of the largest Israeli communities outside of Israel.

These communities often create distinctive institutional structures, for example, in the cases of the Sephardic, Russian, and Iranian Jews. Synagogues have been established to serve these constituencies; social and fraternal groups provide various support services; in some cases, umbrella representative bodies address shared concerns and financial priorities. For example, some twenty smaller organizations affiliate with the Iranian American Jewish Federation in Los Angeles. Similarly, Bay Area Russian Jews have created their own communal infrastructure that enables them to meet their specific needs. There are smaller pockets of Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Moroccan Jews in the Los Angeles area as well.

The Psychological Factor of Moving West

Some Jews come to the West to avoid the burdens of communal participation. They feel they have “done their Jewish thing somewhere else” and, once in the West, steer clear of the formal obligations associated with being a community participant or synagogue member. The results are seen in the low rates of affiliation and giving among Jews.

Alternative Models of Community

Jews take on the characteristics of others living in the West, often seeking alternative lifestyle options. There is a high degree of experimentation with Jewish religious and social practice. Beyond the core denominational movements, throughout Western communities one finds Jewish Renewal, Humanistic Judaism, and an array of unaffiliated synagogues.

Nearly every Western Jewish community holds annual Jewish or Israeli film festivals including San Francisco, San Diego, Palm Springs, Orange County (California), Phoenix, Sacramento, Seattle, and Los Angeles. Other communities, such as Tucson, sponsor Jewish art festivals.

With new residents regularly arriving, most Western communities also have some type of welcoming system. Examples are “Shalom San Diego”; “Get Connected,” a series of programs sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle; or “Jewish Newish,” a project of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix.

Increasing numbers of groups have made the West their locus for organizing. Maintaining their home offices in Los Angeles are: Mazon, the Jewish Response to Hunger;¹⁴ the Simon Wiesenthal Center (see below); Jewish World Watch, “established in October, 2004 as a Jewish response to horrors perpetrated by human beings against others” and Jews for Judaism, “an international organization that provides a wide variety of counseling services, along with education, and outreach programs that enable Jews of all ages to rediscover and strengthen their Jewish heritage.”

The liberal magazine *Tikkun* is headquartered in the Bay Area. Toward Tradition, a conservative Jewish-Christian organization founded by Rabbi Daniel Lapin, is based in Seattle.¹⁵

Jewish culture as an organizing theme has led to the establishment of Jewish museums, theaters, and arts programs. The Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles and the Contemporary Jewish Museum of San Francisco¹⁶ reflect this focus on making Jewish arts and culture a centerpiece of Western Jewish life. Similarly, the Brandeis-Bardin Institute (BBI) in Simi Valley, California, was created as a model of melding Jewish camping and culture.¹⁷ It has since merged with the University of Judaism to create the American Jewish University.

Yossi Klein Halevi, writing about the Los Angeles-based Kabbalah Centre,

captures in his comments some of the features that merge Jewish life with the world of Hollywood and that uniquely reflect the culture of the West:

I'm at the international headquarters of the Kabbalah Centre—the new-age movement that claims to have reached over three million people, including non-Jewish pop stars, such as Madonna, Mick Jagger, and Britney Spears. With its fast-paced prayers and separate seating for men and women, the Centre could be a typical Orthodox synagogue, except for a few oddities—like the fact that some men wear yarmulkes and prayer shawls and phylacteries, while others are bareheaded. Or that some of those wearing phylacteries may not be Jewish. The Centre has transformed Kabbalah—considered by Jews to be the inner sanctum of Jewish devotion and thought—into generic, nondenominational mysticism. It is “the secret” of life, according to the Centre’s website, supposedly studied by everyone from Plato to Shakespeare. In an interview last year with “Dateline NBC,” Madonna, who has donated some \$5 million to the Centre, called herself “a Kabbala-ist [sic]” and noted the similarity between Kabbalah and punk rock. Both, she explained, are forms of “thinking outside the box.”¹⁸

Numerous institutions related to health, spirituality, and Judaism can be found in the West including the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center and the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health, which is based at the Los Angeles campus of Hebrew Union College. There is also much institutional innovation among Western communities, including the Lehrhaus Judaica Library, a five-thousand-volume circulating academic Jewish studies library, serving the Bay Area community from its facilities in Berkeley. The Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) educates, advocates, and organizes on issues of peace, equality, diversity, and justice, as a progressive voice in the Jewish community and a Jewish voice in the progressive community.

The Role of Leaders in Shaping Western Jewish Life

Lay leaders operate as kingmakers in controlling the distribution of power and personnel. In their history of the Jews of Los Angeles, Vorspan and Gartner identify several generations of such elites.¹⁹ However, the peer economic and social relationships that sustain Jewish giving and engagement elsewhere in the United States are absent in many of these Western communities. This hinders building a culture of support for Jewish causes and a tradition of communal leadership. Outside of Los Angeles and San Francisco, this region’s lay leadership has not shown the quality, depth, and capacity for cohesion found in the rest of the nation.

Indeed, rabbis play a far greater role in shaping Western Jewish public life than in any other region. Congregations and, more directly, their rabbinic leadership

have emerged as key institution builders and community spokespersons. For example, Rabbi Isaiah Zeldin was the founding rabbi of the Stephen Wise Temple (Reform) in Los Angeles. Considered today to be America's largest congregation, it serves more than ten thousand individuals and nearly three thousand families through its various schools and programs.

Other Western rabbis have played significant roles beyond their own spheres. Rabbi and author Harold Schulweis (Conservative) helped form the *havurah* (small religious fellowships) movement, established the above-mentioned Jewish World Watch, and introduced innovative religious practices. Rabbi and author David Wolpe (Conservative) has been invited to teach at a number of universities. Rabbi Steven Weil (Orthodox) formerly of Congregation Beth Jacob in Beverly Hills, the largest Orthodox congregation outside the New York metropolitan area, is now the national director of the Orthodox Union. Rabbi Elliot Dorff (Conservative), rector and Sol and Anne Dorff Distinguished Service Professor in Philosophy at the American Jewish University, has played a significant national role in the debate over medical and social ethics. Other prominent West Coast rabbinic figures include Seattle-based Moshe Kletenik, president of the Rabbinical Council of America; Brad Artson, dean of the Ziegler Rabbinical School of the American Jewish University; and Chaim Seidler Feller, who has served for many years as the director of UCLA Hillel.

Some of the main communal-institution builders have been rabbis. For example, Rabbi Uri Herscher is founding director and CEO of the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles and Rabbi Brian Lurie, who is active in various civic causes, was executive director of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation and later national director of the United Jewish Appeal. Rabbi Marvin Hier established the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. Rabbi Hier's contributions include the visibility and popularity of the Museum of Tolerance as well as the national and international growth of programs on the Holocaust, tolerance, and counteracting anti-Semitism that originate in the Wiesenthal Center.

Western Jewish politicians have long played a prominent role on both the local and national levels. Currently seven members of the House of Representatives and three U.S. senators are Western Jews, including both senators from California, Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, and Ron Wyden of Oregon.

Summing Up

Jews of the West represent a new breed of American Jewry. Despite such challenges as low affiliation patterns, high intermarriage rates, and limited financial participation, Western Jewry has generated new organizational models. The Western pioneering spirit seems to have made its mark on Jewish communities as well and inspired their leadership.

Some critics have suggested that some of the West's problems of affiliation and participation will become more prevalent among American Jewry in general. But as the Western communities grow, some of their new institutional and religious models are also likely to find their way to other regions.

Los Angeles and San Francisco anchor and dominate West Coast Jewish life through their financial prowess, institutional creativity, and distinctive cadre of Jewish leaders. Los Angeles in particular, given its size and its status as an entertainment and media center, will continue to influence American Jewish culture overall.

The distance from New York means Western Jews will continue to struggle with questions of autonomy and control. Regarding the special character of the West's Jews, it has been noted that: "There is a solid tradition of outdoorsy Jews who have abandoned their synagogues for the mountains."

To some extent both a new type of Jew and a different type of Jewish community are emerging in the West. A distinguishing feature is the alignment of this emergent Judaism with the arts and culture, and with the environment and social justice concerns.

Western Jewry shows the characteristics of the Western United States in general, including innovation, cultural diversity, and mobility. At the same time, the West Coast institutional models in particular integrate traditional Jewish tenets of *tzedakah* (charitable giving), *gemilut hasadim* (generosity and kindness), and *avodah* (worship).

Kahn's words about California relate to Western Jewry generally: "There's an idea this is the promised land, with the same climate. I think California has always been a place people can reinvent themselves.... And I think Jews are a part of this. People can come out from wherever they were in the world to California and start over."²⁰

The story of Western Jewry is still unfolding and is one of the most challenging and interesting American Jewish experiences.

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Sylvia Barack Fishman and Daniel Parmer

Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance among America's Jews¹

Introduction

Jewish men and women in the United States have become characterized by a gender imbalance that differs from most Jewish communities historically and from many other Jewish communities around the world today. In liberal Jewish America, women have become central and men have become marginal.

The “feminization” of almost every aspect of non-Orthodox American Jewish life means not only that girls and women outnumber their male counterparts, but also that Jewish activities have less value and seem less appealing to Jewish boys and men. American Jewish women are more engaged than American Jewish men in the “peoplehood” aspects of Jewishness: visiting Israel, seeing Israel as very important, having mostly Jewish friends, wanting to marry a Jewish husband and to raise Jewish children.

This contemporary American Jewish gender imbalance reverses a historical gender imbalance that is still characteristic of Orthodox Jewish societies in which girls and women are marginalized from public Judaism. American synagogues, Jewish classrooms, religious ceremonies, rituals, and secular cultural expressions disproportionately do not engage boys and men. The challenge facing the American Jewish community is not that women are more active—surely a positive development, but that men and boys have retreated from much of American Jewish life.

The feminization of religion has long been common in Protestant America, and the feminization of Judaism can be regarded as a dimension of assimilation. American social scientists routinely assert that women are more “religious” than men, whether through essential psychological differences or social conditioning: “By now it is so taken for granted that women are more religious than men that every competent quantitative study of religiousness routinely includes sex as a control variable.”² But the feminization of American Judaism has an insidious sociological impact on Jewish societies. Because Jews have regarded themselves as a people—not only as a belief system—the disengagement of men constitutes a crisis.

Gender Roles in Jewish Societies Yesterday and Today

In historical Jewish societies women were largely absent from—or invisible in—male public religious settings like the synagogue and the study hall. Although women were central to the religious life of the home, their visibility was limited even at home.

Yet the premodern Jewish construction of gender was idiosyncratic. For centuries, Jews often differed from their neighbors in how they understood “maleness” and “femaleness.” The Jewish ideal of masculinity emphasized ritual piety, spiritual intensity, and intellectual learnedness, instead of physical prowess and stoicism. Traditional Jewish ideals of femininity also differed from non-Jewish societies; Jewish women in medieval societies were often actively involved in economic and even educational pursuits.³

Emancipation and *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment) were among the multiple factors that transformed Jewish gender role construction, along with many other aspects of Jewish life. In nineteenth-century Germany, while Jewish men immersed themselves in commerce according to the middle-class pattern, and Jewish thinkers reformed and transformed synagogue life, Jewish women became the transmitters of Westernized lifestyles and forms of Judaism to the next generation.⁴

When the Western, assimilated Zionist theorists created their images of a “new” Jew, they rejected the pious masculinity of the *shtetl*, which they perceived as being powerless and thus effeminate. In its place they proposed a new Jewish masculinity that incorporated all the physical prowess and aggressiveness that the old Jews lacked.

With emigration to America, West European gender role constructions became normative for Jewish new Americans. Expectations that religiosity would be an attribute primarily of females and not of males had already begun to permeate the American Jewish community during the period of rapid socio-economic upward mobility in the 1930s and 1940s.

Nevertheless, synagogues within liberal wings of Judaism remained male bastions of religious leadership, as trained male leadership presided over passive male and female worshippers. This all changed with the rise of American “Second Wave Feminism.” American Jewish feminists in the 1960s and beyond questioned many primary tenets of middle-class institutions and social structure, including the until-then nearly universal assumption that rabbis should be males.

The rise of women into leadership of the American Jewish community was part of an environment in which activism and spiritual searching helped produce a readiness to experiment with new forms of religious expression. Sweeping social-historical changes provided impetus and context for transformations in women’s roles.

Rather than devoting their excellent educations to volunteer work, which had been the previous American Jewish pattern, in the 1960s Jewish women began

to take jobs for pay outside the home.⁵ Today, the majority of American Jewish women are employed for pay even when they have young children at home. For American Jewish women, this strong work profile has had an extremely important influence on expectations of the Jewish world as well. Jewish women grew to expect to achieve in Jewish environments because they were able to achieve in the world outside.

Jewish feminists have had several different areas of primary interest. New or revised celebratory rituals sacralized women's lifecycle events, with women and girls as leaders and participants in Jewish public worship. Women also upgraded their Jewish education and cultural literacy, promoted scholarship by and about Jewish women, and examined Jewish religious texts, laws, customs, and culture through the lens of gender equality.

As late as the 1960s, in all sectors school-age boys were more likely than girls to receive Jewish education, partially because preparing for the *bar mitzvah* (coming of age) ceremony was a prime educational motivator for many families. By the 1970s and 1980s, that gender gap had narrowed significantly in response to the spread of the *bat mitzvah* (coming of age) ceremony for girls. Today, the gender gap has been reversed for American Jews in the liberal movements, and school-age Jewish girls are more likely to receive Jewish education than Jewish boys. Differences in Jewish educational levels of young girls and boys become major as they enter their teens: after bar/bat mitzvah age, girls are far more likely to continue in formal and informal Jewish educational settings.⁶

Jewish girls in college participate in Hillel activities and take Jewish studies classes in much greater numbers than Jewish boys, except for the Orthodox young men. On an elite level, increasing numbers of women have become Judaic studies scholars, teaching and publishing in all areas of the field.

For many observers, the impact of Jewish feminist change has been epitomized by the movement of women into public religious leadership roles. In 1972 the Reform movement ordained the first female rabbi, followed in 1974 by the Reconstructionist movement. In 1985, urged on by the Jewish feminist group *Ezrat Nashim* and a determined group of rabbis, the Conservative movement's first woman rabbi was ordained. Today, women constitute a large proportion of rabbinical and cantorial candidates, and serve in numerous congregations.

Attitudes toward Religion and Judaism among Men and Women

American social scientists assume that women are "naturally" more religious than men, as we have noted. It has certainly become characteristic of liberal American Jews. In the interview data that we analyzed for this study, women—both Jewish and non-Jewish—were more likely to describe themselves as more "religious" than their husbands.

Women, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were more likely to describe their

intermarried households as relating to one of the movements of Judaism, while men, both Jewish and non-Jewish, leaned more toward calling the household Secular or Cultural, or Atheistic or Agnostic. Mothers, rather than the fathers, said it was important that their children have some type of religious orientation. Men are much less convinced that organized religion is the foundation of moral and ethical behavior.

A substantial minority of Jewish and non-Jewish fathers of “Jewish” children saw religion as a good framing structure for children as they grow up but unnecessary for adults, something that could and should be put aside as people mature. Men typically said they feel “disconnected from religion,” and that they would tell their children about their real values during “their early teen years.”

Our study statistics, which depict the importance of being Jewish among in-married and intermarried affiliated and unaffiliated intermarried families, are particularly revealing. The majority of intermarried Jewish women (54 percent) who are affiliated with a synagogue or temple in any wing of Judaism say that being Jewish is “very important” to them, compared to 27 percent of affiliated intermarried Jewish men. Put another way, intermarried Jewish mothers are twice as likely to see Judaism as “very important” as are intermarried Jewish fathers.

In the American setting, in which religiosity is perceived as a female rather than a male characteristic, it is not surprising that secularized Jews have absorbed that expectation. Jewish fathers as well as mothers in in-married families often have extensive connections to Jews and Judaism, and are committed to raising Jewish children, while Jewish fathers in intermarried families have limited or weak connections and are much less likely to be committed to raising Jewish children. In-married Jewish fathers play a much more active role in the family’s Jewishness and in familial relationships. More than three-quarters of both in-married husbands and wives feel religion is important in their lives and in the way they raise their children. Yet the feminization of Jewish gender roles is apparent even in in-married families, though less so than in intermarried families.

Synagogue Life: A Gender Shift to the Distaff Side

For much of Jewish history, the synagogue was the place where little boys left the world of their mothers to join the world of their fathers. Today, females are much more active than males in almost every aspect of religious and educational Jewishness within liberal American Judaism. In the fall of 2005, women outnumbered men two to one in the entering rabbinical class at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. Girls outnumbered boys in all youth activities, in proportions anywhere from 57 to 78 percent according to Rabbi Michael Friedman, director of junior and senior high school programs at the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).

Friedman graphically connects this demographic shift directly to the movement's ordination of female rabbis and the predominance of female cantors:

"Before it was always a man high up on a *bimah* [platform in synagogue] wearing a big robe in a deep voice, a model of leadership that was male-only and top down," Friedman comments. "Those synagogues now have everybody sitting in a circle with someone playing a guitar and sharing feelings...they are styles that women may be more comfortable with than men...[boys] don't necessarily see themselves there."⁷

Reform rabbi Jeffrey Salkin notes his reflections on "The Retreating Man" in an issue of *Reform Judaism*. "Liberal Judaism is following the lead of liberal Christianity," he notes, but it is the Christian Right that is growing today, while liberal Christianity is shrinking. "Tough Christianity" does well because it makes demands on its adherents, especially men, Salkin asserts. Liberal Judaism, like liberal Christianity, makes few demands.

Salkin describes a kind of "Catch-22" situation. On one hand, "demonstrating Jewish skills—like *davening* [prayer], chanting Torah, and putting on *t'fillin* [phylacteries]—is a kind of Jewish macho that fathers want to pass on to their sons," a pattern that can be very engaging for boys and men. On the other hand, these skills are often not salient to men in the liberal wings of Judaism, although they have become desirable to many women in recent years. Perhaps even more important, if men do not have the skills, expecting them to have them can actually alienate men by making them feel incompetent.⁸

Synagogues: Affiliation and Belonging

Our quantitative and qualitative statistics show that how often Jewish parents attend synagogue varies by four characteristics: (1) whether they are married to a Jewish spouse; (2) what wing of Judaism they affiliate with, if any; (3) whether or not they are synagogue members; and (4) whether they are male or female. Among in-married Jewish parents, if they are Orthodox Jews, almost nine out of ten men attend synagogue weekly or more, compared to four out of ten women.

Conservative men (14 percent) and women (16 percent) have almost identical weekly attendance rates. Reform women (17 percent) are almost twice as likely to attend services every week as Reform men (9 percent). At the low end of the in-married spectrum, affiliation or lack of affiliation was far more important than gender: "Never attending services" was reported by 34 percent of unaffiliated mothers and 37 percent of unaffiliated fathers, with affiliated mothers (16 percent) and fathers (15 percent) half as likely to "never attend."

However, among intermarried Jewish parents, gender made a difference within the affiliated population. Of affiliated Jewish mothers who were married to

non-Jews, 54 percent said they attend services twice a month or more, surprisingly similar to the synagogue attendance rates of affiliated in-married Jewish mothers. For the intermarried Jewish fathers, however, the rates were strikingly different. Of affiliated intermarried fathers, 41 percent said they never went to synagogue services. Fifteen percent went there once or twice a year. About one-third (32 percent) of affiliated intermarried Jewish fathers said they attended services twice a month, compared to well over half of intermarried mothers. Among intermarried, unaffiliated men and women the rates of synagogue attendance were exceedingly low.

Gender is also much more of a key factor affecting ritual observances in intermarried families. Simply put, homes with Jewish mothers tend to have much higher levels of ritual observance than homes that have Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers. Whether one speaks of yearly rituals, or weekly observances such as Shabbat, having a Jewish mother makes a big difference. Perhaps most symbolically, American Jewish mothers, including intermarried Jewish mothers, were far more likely to insist on their sons having a *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) than were Jewish fathers.

American Jewishness and the Religious Factor

For many secular Jews in the United States the measuring of variables such as synagogue attendance or Jewish ritual observance may seem irrelevant. Synagogues are not central to their lives. Why then does our study focus on religious aspects of Jewishness when assessing the centrality of Jewish connections?

American Jews who have Jewish social networks find those networks by associating with Jewish institutions. The more Jewish institutions, the more Jewish friends. This is why, on a sociological level, synagogues matter.

The same is true for children and teenagers and Jewish schools. Attending Jewish schools from the preschool through the teen years is important, because for most American Jews the way young Jews create Jewish friendship networks is by attending Jewish schools. Jewish friendship networks matter because they are the single factor that is most predictive of whether or not an individual will have a positive Jewish identification and Jewish connections as an adult.

As we noted, teenage girls are much more likely to continue their Jewish education after bat mitzvah than boys are after bar mitzvah. Partially as a result, they also have more Jewish friends. The combination of more Jewish education and more Jewish friends is part of what makes American Jewish adult females more attached to Jewishness.

Within each wing of Judaism some Jews develop extensive Jewish social capital. Some of this capital can be defined as “secular.” Some of it is specifically religious. In Jewish culture, the ethnic and religious aspects of social capital have long been intertwined. Even today, “secular” Jewish ethnic social capital may

be derived from and borrow much from religious terms, history, concepts, and activities.

Jews increase their ethnic social capital when they learn Jewish languages, are involved with Jewish organizations, read Jewish books, listen to Jewish music, and view Jewish films. Social capital deepens when Jews are engaged by ideas of Jewish peoplehood, when they make and keep many Jewish friends, and visit and care about Israel.

Within the more traditional wings of Judaism, these characteristics typify both men and women. Within the liberal wings of American Judaism, the Jews who are most likely to have religious and ethnic social capital today are female Jews.

Research and Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance

Our research shows that the alienation of boys and men from Jews and Judaism is a systemic problem in liberal American Jewish society. It affects not only religious rituals and synagogue attendance, but also attachments to Jewish peoplehood, in the form of friendship circles, marriage choices, caring about Jews in Israel and around the world. This phenomenon has been developing for many decades, but it has been virtually ignored, and today it has become a crisis.

American males are less attached to Jewish life not because men are innately “less religious” than women in some essential psychological way, but because American culture and society value religious activities and behaviors for women but devalue them for men.

It would be a mistake to regard male distance from Judaism as a kind of tsunami that cannot be addressed or ameliorated. There are at least two sources of models that can and should be worked with in devising strategies to create stronger bonds: models provided by girls and women, and models provided by traditional Jewish communities.

Strategies for men can be based on the way Jewish women have reclaimed many traditional lifecycle rituals for their own use, and are inventing other rituals to help them sacralize lifecycle events that are specific to the female experience. Women have sought out and revitalized some and created other Jewish rituals because many people find ritual meaningful and satisfying on a personal, communal, and spiritual level.

Because so many Reform-affiliated Jewish homes include weakly identified Jewish men and their non-Jewish wives, the Reform movement is leading the way in exploring strategies to engage Jewish boys and men in Jewish experiences and connections. At the 2007 Biennial of the Union of Reform Judaism, for example, a men-only *minyan* (prayer group) took place, along with the more typical egalitarian services. Reform Jewish educators and men's club leaders are increasingly devising activities that will meet men's needs for male bonding and increase their engagement with Judaism.

One of the problems that leaders trying to engage men struggle with is that men seem to be more sensitive than women to feelings of incompetence. When men think they should have the skills to do something Jewish, and they do not have those skills because of gaps in their education or Jewish experience, they often avoid Jewish activities. They may not articulate their avoidance in this way. Instead, they often say, “I don’t like that,” or “I’m not interested in that.” This avoidance is observed among men who have never learned Hebrew and feel deeply uncomfortable in services that include substantial amounts of Hebrew. But when men are given the opportunity to acquire the requisite skills, they may then enjoy the activity.

Applying creativity in adapting traditional Jewish activities to men’s lives—as women have done—is one very important positive response to the challenge of gender imbalance. For example, Mayyim Hayyim, an independent communal *mikveh* (ritual bath) and educational facility in the Boston area, created by author and activist Anita Diamant, is hosting a first-ever “Men, Mikveh, Macanudos and Single Malt” event for men only.

The invitation states: “Mikveh is not just for women. At Mayyim Hayyim, men immerse to celebrate milestones, for healing, to prepare for Shabbat and High Holidays—for a whole host of reasons. With this event, we hope to reach out to more of the men in our lives and our community.”⁹ It is true that in traditional Jewish communities men’s mikveh immersion can offer a male bonding experience. Similar creativity is taking place with classes, trips to Israel, cultural events, weekend retreats, and sports activities for fathers and sons and male peer groups.

Models for bringing Jewish boys into a positive relationship with their own Jewishness can be fruitfully adapted for liberal Judaism from traditional Judaism. Observant societies did, and still today, effectively enculturate boys into Jewish male roles with step-by-step socialization. Toddlers, school-age boys, and young teens each in turn have positive bonding experiences within their peer group. Such boys typically admire the boys and men slightly older than them who model the next accomplishments: the first haircut, the first day at Jewish school, the first leading of the congregation in the closing hymns, the first leading the congregation in the prayer service as a *shaliakh tsibbur* (cantor), and ultimately as a groom standing under the wedding canopy. For these boys, bar mitzvah is no stand-alone event terminating Jewish education. It is one of many steps certifying bona fide membership in a male community, a position that carries with it status as well as responsibility. The challenge today is how to recreate that status, without making it dependent on marginalizing girls and women.

Research and policy discussions about gender imbalance must start with an awareness that gender imbalance is not a foregone conclusion. For much of Jewish history men have defined Jewishness. Without advocating that historical Jewish gender imbalance, we must acknowledge that many American Jewish men are alienated, and Jewish peoplehood needs men as well as women. It is

now “politically incorrect” to confront this issue, and research and discussions exploring it are attacked as attempts to discriminate against women.¹⁰ Now that we are finally confronting this critical issue, it would be tragic for the Jewish community to turn away. We need targeted research, along with honest and open conversations to learn from each other how to honor “Jewish sisterhood” and “Jewish brotherhood” as well.

Notes

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9. For more information, write to laurend@mayyimhayyim.org.
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Interview with Rela Mintz Geffen

How the Status of American Jewish Women Has Changed over the Past Decades

“Until a few decades ago, Jewish women were literally written out of Jewish history. The *Encyclopedia Judaica*, published in the 1960s, contained biographies of some women, but in scholarly articles individual women and the role of women as a group were hardly mentioned. In recent years, when revisions were made, the editors decided to restore women to Jewish history.

“They appointed Judith Baskin, president of the Association for Jewish Studies and a scholar of medieval literature, to be a ‘gender editor.’ I myself was asked to update more than ten articles specifically on gender issues.

“For example, the encyclopedia article on candles did not mention the word woman. The article on *kashrut* [Jewish dietary laws] did not discuss the role of women. In my revision, I pointed out that while supervision and *shechita* [ritual slaughter] were male tasks, the community had to rely on women to keep the dietary laws and to teach them to their daughters. Without trust in the faithful execution by women of *mitzvot* [commandments] related to *kashrut* there would have been no observance of the dietary laws or of holidays such as Passover.”

Boycotting Kosher Butchers

Geffen mentions an early important role of women in American Jewish history. “In the first decade of the twentieth century, Jewish women in New York City successfully organized a boycott of kosher butcher shops to counteract a precipitous rise in the price of kosher meat. They eventually broke the butchers.

“According to the American Jewish activist Paula Hyman, they ‘went so far as to inspect the *cholent* [Shabbat stew] pots of women en route to the bakery—where the dish was kept warm—on Friday afternoon in order to ensure that the Shabbat meal would be a meatless one...they also interrupted synagogue services on the Shabbat in order to gain the support of male worshipers for their cause and to secure rabbinic endorsements.’¹ These tactics were the precursors of those of various American labor unions such as the garment workers.”

Change over a Short Time

“From the perspective of the social sciences, four decades is not a long time span to see major social change. Yet as far as the role of Jewish women in America is concerned, many changes have taken even less time.

“The changed role of women has led to alterations in the complexion of the American Jewish community. These changes are undeniably related to what is happening in American society at large. Yet they have a specifically Jewish flavor and take place in many areas across Jewish life. One proof of how far it has gone is that at major ultra-Orthodox conferences there are now separate women’s sections. In the past, women would not have been present at all.

“The opening of the study of rabbinics and classical Jewish texts to women is one major area of change. In the past, some Jewish women came from very wealthy families and their fathers could afford to hire special tutors who visited them at home. Others were women living in homes of scholars, and studied with their fathers, husbands, or brothers. Most women could not follow suit as there were no Jewish schools for them.”

The Pioneer

“Working with Prof. David Halivni, Judith Hauptman received the first PhD in Talmud awarded to a woman at the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS]. This is a very difficult degree to obtain. At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Prof. Ephraim Urbach’s last PhD in Talmud was awarded to Tirzah Meachum, a Canadian woman. I consider these even greater accomplishments than the ordination of female Reform rabbis, which started in 1972 with Sally Priesand.”

In 1965, Geffen was one of the first three women Talmud majors at JTS and wanted to go on for an MA in Talmud. “I was told that this was impossible as all advanced classes were in the rabbinical school. A few years later, matters changed somewhat and Hauptman started to work on an MA in Talmud, which took her ten years. Her PhD followed, and now she is a full professor at JTS.

“Even if only a few tens of women have such degrees, the access of women to Jewish classics has a great impact. Through university study as well as the excellent classes provided at MaTaN in Jerusalem and the Drisha Institute in New York, women can access rabbinical sources directly and often have a better Jewish education than their husbands.

“In some Jewish schools in the United States, boys and girls have the same curriculum even if they learn in separate classes. Those with coeducational classes certainly have the same curriculum. In ultra-Orthodox Bais Yaacov schools girls are not only separate but the curriculum is different from that of boys’ schools.

“Another major influence stems from the introduction of Jewish studies on

many American campuses. During the first half of the twentieth century, many Jewish women did not receive a formal Jewish education. Their access to these studies, particularly since the exponential growth of Jewish day schools and of Jewish studies on hundreds of American college campuses, has greatly advanced their knowledge. As women are half the population, this affects the tenor of the community very much. One can now find several hundred Jewish women teachers holding doctorates in Jewish studies and being university scholars, which, in turn, impacts the way Jewish history is taught.

“In academe there has been great progress. Prof. Jane Gerber was the first woman president of the Association for Jewish Studies. Since then professors Ruth Wisse, Judith Baskin, and Sara Horowitz have held this position. I was the only female president of a Jewish university or college. Yet there are some female deans at JTS and at Hebrew College in Boston.”

Community Leadership

“Women have risen to public leadership of the Jewish community in lay positions more than in the professional realm. Shoshana S. Cardin is the best known. She and June Walker have been the only woman chairs of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Cardin has also chaired the United Israel Appeal and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, and has been president of the Council of Jewish Federations, which now has become The Jewish Federations of North America.

“Carol Solomon was the lay head of the Jewish Agency and Judy Yudof was president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Barbara Balser became the first female president of ADL. In 2003, Rabbi Janet Ross Marder was elected the first woman president of the Reform movement’s Central Conference of American Rabbis. In 2004, Judge Ellen M. Heller of Baltimore was elected president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In 2009, Rabbi Julie Schoenfeld was selected to be executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the umbrella organization of Conservative rabbis.

“It remains, however, much easier for a woman to become a Reform or a Conservative rabbi or president of a synagogue than the executive director of a federation. There have been women executive directors only in smaller federations such as Cindy Chazan in Hartford, Connecticut. At present, of the forty largest Jewish federations, there is only one woman CEO, Janet Engelhart at the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island.

“At the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Hannah Rosenthal held the top executive position for a short time. At the UJA-Federation of New York, Aliza Rubin Kurshan is the number two executive and Louise Greilsheimer occupies a parallel position.

“In 2001 United Jewish Communities [UJC] and Advancing Women

Professionals [AWP] launched a study of the status of women professionals in the Jewish community. In 2004 a comprehensive report was issued that documented gender inequality throughout the Jewish federation system.² In 2005 the alumni of the Wexner Heritage Program for Jewish volunteer leaders were surveyed about leadership positions held in the past five years. Male and female alumni were almost equally represented at the level of committee chairperson. However, at the level of board member or board president, women were underrepresented.

“A study of women on Jewish organizational boards commissioned by Maa’yan: The Jewish Women’s Project identified forty organizations as major agencies. Of those, only two had women CEOs as of the year 2000. In the same study, more than half of the thirty national organizations that answered a survey question on compensation did not have a woman in their five highest-salaried positions. Gender inequity within the Jewish communal field has long been a subject of controversy and concern.” One reason for the overall situation, Geffen suggests, is that the top professional positions of Jewish organizations are filled by executives who remain there for many years. With so little rotation it takes long to reach the top.

Entrepreneurial Women

Geffen observes: “One success story is Ruth Messinger, who heads the American Jewish World Service. She is very entrepreneurial and smart. Messinger gave life to a dying institution. In order to get recognized in the Jewish community, however, she had first to become borough president of Manhattan and run for mayor! So if you come from a prominent family, as Messinger does, and you were a serious candidate to become mayor of New York City, you can get an executive position in the Jewish community. This is an indicator of the lack of utilization of all the rich human capital available to the community.

“Entrepreneurial women who began new institutions could be at their helm. Gail Twersky Riemer founded the Jewish Women’s Archives. Shifra Bronznick created AWP to study and remedy the problem of the glass ceiling for women in the American Jewish community. Barbara Dobkin, a philanthropist who founded the above-mentioned Ma’ayan, a women’s study and resource center in New York, together with her husband Eric, donated \$1 million to fund the UJC study on the status of Jewish women in the federations.”

Philanthropy

In a previous interview, Geffen said: “For many decades, the philosophy of fundraising was ‘talk to the man and get the woman out of the way.’ This was

based on a stereotype that regarded women as selfish, urging their husbands not to give so as to ensure more disposable income for themselves.

“Women’s divisions or departments were auxiliary to the main fundraising body. They raised what was called ‘plus giving.’ There were women’s divisions in every federation, and counterpart organizations like B’nai B’rith and B’nai B’rith Women. This was the normative form of Jewish organization. When B’nai B’rith went coed, B’nai B’rith Women seceded, becoming Jewish Women International. Perhaps the most notable is Hadassah, probably the most important of Zionist organizations and exclusively the creation of Jewish women.”

Geffen added: “Today’s Jewish women also tend to do volunteer work in fields which interest them—education, medical research and so forth. Once attracted to such issues, they will give both money and time, even if the latter is difficult to find.”³

Now, Geffen remarks: “A major effort has been made by women’s organizations as well as departments of local Jewish federations to bring women into Jewish philanthropy. In almost every city there are women’s giving circles, which can be considered a new ‘in’ thing in the United States. A woman who gives, say, one thousand dollars a year, becomes part of the group that can allocate funds. Many federations have tried to create internal women’s giving circles. There are also many independent circles funding projects that serve women and girls.

“In February 2005, a Baltimore business newspaper reported a study showing this trend has taken hold in Greater Baltimore. More people are pooling their resources by forming giving circles to collectively support community development. These range from informal gatherings of a group of friends to national networks functioning as their own nonprofit, and have collected more than \$44 million nationally since 2000. In Greater Baltimore, twelve giving circles have raised more than \$1 million over the last several years.⁴ Federations have also reshaped their women’s departments to some extent. They are doing a bit better with professional women. Some Jewish foundations have a female chief executive. Harlene Appleman, who was very active in Jewish family education in Detroit, now heads the Covenant Foundation, which gives grants and awards in Jewish education.

“Some women are prominent in their own family foundations. Terry Meyerhoff Rubenstein, one of the late Joseph Meyerhoff’s daughters, manages the Meyerhoff Foundation in Baltimore. This is by national standards a very powerful Jewish foundation. Barbara Dobkin has supported the Jewish Women’s Archives as well as Ma’ayan. Often in past decades the only women who held such positions were widows of philanthropists who assumed power after their deaths. Lynn Schusterman, who now heads—with her daughter—a major American Jewish foundation, the Schusterman Foundation, was a full partner with her husband, until his death.

“There are several powerful Jewish women in public life who are not active

in the Jewish community. Nevertheless, they may be considered spokespeople for the community when the moment is right. With Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, the state of California has two Jewish senators. Among the Supreme Court justices is Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She could be a very important spokesperson, but like most Supreme Court justices has chosen to remain circumspect. There are also Jewish women presidents of major American universities.”

Religious Leadership

“Religious leadership is another type of public leadership. In the religious sphere women have been able to achieve good positions more easily than in the public, secular one. That is partly because when a woman becomes a rabbi, she automatically steps into a position that confers what sociologists call ‘ascribed status.’ Still, a recent study by Steven M. Cohen and Judith Schor showed that the salaries of female graduates of the JTS rabbinical school are substantially lower than those of men and so are their positions.⁵ A major step was taken by the Rabbinical Assembly, the ‘union’ of Conservative rabbis when, as aforementioned, Rabbi Julie Schoenfeld was chosen as the new executive vice-president in 2009.

“Within the Reform movement—for the first time—a number of women have attained the position of senior rabbi at major congregations. This has taken a long time. Of course, if a synagogue has a team of rabbis, social workers, and educators, it is quite usual today for one of them to be a woman rabbi. Yet some people want to have a male rabbi lead funerals or perform weddings. Thus, having senior female rabbis is a true breakthrough.

“The Reconstructionist movement was founded based on egalitarian principles and thus has admitted and ordained women since the founding of its rabbinical college in 1968. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso was ordained in 1974, second only to Rabbi Sally Priesand, the first woman ordainee from the Hebrew Union College [HUC]. Several women have served as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association [RRA].

“Many female graduates of rabbinical school—like many men—have gone into educational work. One increasingly sees more women as principals of day schools, educational directors of synagogues, and chaplains in hospitals.”

Lifecycle Rituals

“Besides the public aspect of religion, there is the private one—what individuals and families do at home in the household. There is a debate about the current role of the home in maintaining a Jewish life. The family is still functioning and powerful. However, it is not necessarily working positively on Jewish matters.

For many Jews the synagogue remains the central grassroots Jewish institution in America.

“The Jewish feminist movement began with lifecycle rituals. The *bat mitzvah* [the coming of age of girls] ritual was part of its origins. The story is that on 18 March 1922, the first bat mitzvah was that of Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Mordecai Kaplan founder of the Teachers Institute at JTS and later of Reconstructionism. At the age of twelve, Judith was called to the Torah on Shabbat morning, recited the blessings and read the final portion. She wrote that her own grandparents were shocked by it at the time.

“No change in the ritual lifecycle field took place for a long time. However, in the 1950s bat mitzvah began to reemerge in the flourishing suburban synagogues of the Conservative movement. The Reform movement, which had replaced *bar mitzvah* [the coming-of-age ceremony of boys] with confirmation in 1846, returned to celebrating it due to parental pressure. Bat mitzvah was then established as an equivalent coming-of-age ceremony for girls.

“The bat mitzvah became normative in American Conservative synagogues only in the 1960s. But it was still optional and only in a few places did it take place on Shabbat morning. In most synagogues it was on Friday night. It was thus neither here nor there.”

The Conservative Movement

“In 1956, when a religious ruling was requested from the Conservative movement’s law committee about whether women could be called to the Torah, there were very different opinions. Several minority opinions were adopted by the Committee on Law and Standards. The result was that each rabbi, as *mara d’atra* [local religious decisor], could decide the policy for his own synagogue.

“In practice very little happened. In a survey I undertook for *Outlook*, the Jewish Women’s League’s magazine in the early 1970s, I wrote to sisterhoods all over the country and sent them a questionnaire. One question was whether women could be called up to the Torah, and under what circumstances. At most, ten synagogues in the whole United States answered in the affirmative. Even then, for several it was only on special occasions.

“The general feminist movement came onto the American scene in the early 1970s. Among its leaders were important Jewish women. For most Judaism was peripheral to their lives. At the same time, there were many Jewish women who cared about Judaism but not about feminism. Thus there was no synthesis until a group was formed of women who were both feminists and Jewishly learned and cared much about traditional observance.

“This happened around the nexus of Columbia University and the JTS. Many of them came out of Camp Ramah, and the development was also connected to the beginning of the *havurah* [small religious fellowships] movement. Many

suburban synagogues had become large and impersonal. Founders of the *havurah* movement sought to create groups that would study, pray, and celebrate together in a more personally committed way.

“Many social movements were formed at that time—this was related to the situation in American society—the feeling President Kennedy engendered that people could make a difference in the world, and the general 1960s atmosphere. It was very American, but it was also very Jewish.

“Ten to twelve women started a group called Ezrat Nashim. They could do so because the world was ready to be changed. Several were doctoral students at Columbia and JTS, observed Shabbat, and went to synagogue. The *New York Post* interviewed one of them, Hyman, who later became a dean of List College and JTS and now holds a chair in Jewish history at Yale, and asked her: ‘How is it that you turn into a different person on the weekend?’ At Columbia she was an active feminist working on her doctorate in Jewish history. However, on Shabbat she would go to the seminary synagogue for services and sit separately in the women’s section.

“One group member was Hauptman, who had advanced knowledge of the Talmud. The group studied all sections of it that had to do with women. As a result of their study, by the end of the first year they became radicalized. In the second year, they continued and started to do projects such as collecting books about Jewish women, writing birth ceremonies for baby girls and nonsexist holiday stories for Jewish children.”

Presenting a Manifesto

“They finally wrote a manifesto, and decided to present it to a group of rabbis. On 14 March 1972 they went to a meeting of the Rabbinical Assembly. They asked permission to be let into the conference to address the rabbis, which was refused. So they called a meeting of all the rabbis’ wives in the lobby. They had alerted the media, and the *New York Post* and *New York Times* were there and all read their manifesto.

“*Response* magazine gave the guest editorship of one issue to the women of Ezrat Nashim in 1972. A series of articles was published that became a Bible of the Jewish feminist movement. One focus was on lifecycle rituals, another on the role of women in Jewish public life.

“One of their first projects was the creation of *simchat bat* [rejoicing over a girl] material—it was not yet called that at the time—and injecting it into American Jewry as a parallel to *brit milah* [the male circumcision ceremony]. It quickly became necessary to explain why one had not had a ceremony to welcome a baby girl. Everybody was ready for it.

“Until then hardly any rabbis had acted to implement the 1956 Conservative responsum on calling women to the Torah. In 1973, when the law committee

decided to permit the counting of women in the religious quorum of ten that can enable community prayers, within six months about half the country's Conservative synagogues were calling women to the Torah.

"Ritual has changed dramatically because of women becoming part of the service. One example is that in many synagogues both professionals and laypeople now read the Torah. Women got so excited about being allowed to do it that many learned how to chant the cantillations.

"Women's greater prominence in the lifecycle ritual had various repercussions. Besides having ceremonies for baby girls, mothers were now more included in the ceremonies for baby boys, and both boys and girls were called the children of both parents when their Hebrew names were used. Ceremonies for baby girls would only take place once the mother was there for the naming ceremony. The previous situation was that in suburbia women often did all the preparation for various joyous celebrations, but when it came to the actual ceremony, they were not necessarily able to participate or even to be in the room.

"Another important field is divorce. In the Conservative movement, both parties to the *ketubah* [wedding contract] agree that they will submit to the decision of any religious court appointed by the JTS with regard to dissolving the marriage. It is thus not that you agree to accept a divorce if the other party asks for it, but you accept the decision of the court. The Reform movement accepts civil divorce as binding."

Modern Orthodoxy

"The concept of prenuptial agreements has also been accepted in the Modern Orthodox movement. Many Orthodox rabbis have the bride and groom sign a separate agreement. Some rabbis will not officiate at a wedding if there is no such agreement.

"Many Modern Orthodox rabbis also realized that there were no *halachic* [Jewish legal] problems with home ceremonies for baby girls. They increasingly started permitting inclusion of women and girls when they felt they could do so within *halachah* [Jewish law], both to be more inclusive and to show that they weren't antifeminist. For example, if a synagogue could be architecturally designed so that women could see the service, they tried to have this done. They also encouraged public celebration of bat mitzvah, often with the girl giving a learned presentation from the pulpit after the service or at a luncheon or dinner that followed. Some Orthodox women were involved in the Jewish feminist movement from the beginning. Of these, Blu Greenberg remains the most important."

Geffen says that she collects bat mitzvah invitations from the Orthodox community. "Sometimes this ceremony is called Bat Torah. The ultra-Orthodox world has to react to this because it is so powerful. They often do so very negatively. A more recent development among the Modern Orthodox is that

rabbis hire female assistants. These are qualified rabbinic interns from places like Drisha, a women's Talmudic study institute in New York. The new title coined for them is Maharat. In Israel, the training and functioning of the *to'anot*—rabbinic court advocates for women—parallels this development.

"The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance [JOFA] has held conferences attended by thousands of Modern Orthodox women and men. Their stated mission is: 'to educate and advocate for women's increased participation in Orthodox Jewish life and to create a community for women and men dedicated to such change...guided by the principle that halachic Judaism offers many opportunities for observant Jewish women to enhance their ritual observance and to increase their participation in communal leadership.'

"Following public debate over the ordination of women resulting from the decision of Rabbi Avi Weiss to change the title of Sara Hurwitz from Maharat to Rabba, the Rabbinical Council of America [RCA] in 2010 placed the issue of women's religious leadership positions as the primary theme of its national conference. On 5 March the RCA issued the following resolution regarding women's leadership roles and Orthodoxy:

Resolution on Women's Communal Roles in Orthodox Jewish Life Adopted Without Dissent by the 51st Convention of The Rabbinical Council of America

- 1) The flowering of Torah study and teaching by God-fearing Orthodox women in recent decades stands as a significant achievement. The Rabbinical Council of America is gratified that our *haverim* [members] have played a prominent role in facilitating these accomplishments.
- 2) We members of the Rabbinical Council of America see as our sacred and joyful duty the practice and transmission of Judaism in all of its extraordinary, multifaceted depth and richness—halachah, *hashkafah* [worldview], tradition and historical memory.
- 3) In light of the opportunity created by advanced women's learning, the Rabbinical Council of America encourages a diversity of halachically and communally appropriate professional opportunities for learned, committed women, in the service of our collective mission to preserve and transmit our heritage. Due to our aforesaid commitment to sacred continuity, however, *we cannot accept either the ordination of women or the recognition of women as members of the Orthodox rabbinate, regardless of the title.* [emphasis added]
- 4) Young Orthodox women are now being reared, educated, and inspired by mothers, teachers and mentors who are themselves beneficiaries of advanced women's Torah education. As members of the new generation rise to

positions of influence and stature, we pray that they will contribute to an ever-broadening and ever-deepening wellspring of *talmud Torah* [Jewish learning], of *yir'at Shamayim* [fear of God], and *dikduk be-mitzvot* [strict adherence to the commandments].

Geffen concludes: “To sum up: the enfranchisement of Jewish women has greatly enriched American Jewish life. Egalitarianism has become so pervasive and normative in American Jewish life that it rarely makes headlines. The only way that gender makes Jewish news now is when something really unexpected occurs such as changes in the Orthodox community or in the area of public organizational life where there remains a dearth of women professionals.”

Notes

1. Paula E. Hyman, “Gender and the Immigrant Jewish Experience in the United States,” in Judith R. Baskin, ed. *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 234–35.
2. The full results of the study were published in book form in 2008 as Shifra Bronzick, Didi Goldenhar, and Marty Linsky, *Leveling the Playing Field* (New York: AWP and Cambridge Leadership Associates).
3. Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Rela Mintz Geffen, “Sociological Changes in the Community,” in *American Jewry's Challenge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 209–19.
4. Kate Milani, “Study: Giving Circles Growing,” *Baltimore Business Journal*, 9 February 2005.
5. Steven M. Cohen and Judith Schor, “Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis: A Survey of Rabbis Ordained since 1985,” Rabbinical Assembly, New York, 2004.

Interview with Jack Wertheimer

The Future of Jewish Education¹

“It is hard to think of any sphere of organized Jewish activity in the United States that has exhibited as much dynamic energy and creative rethinking in recent decades as the field of Jewish education. Much of the experimentation has been driven by large foundations and their staff members in partnership with creative educators. They, in turn, have acted in response to significant new trends in the American Jewish community.”

Historian Jack Wertheimer adds: “Among the most important shifts has been the insistence of parents on choice. Families seek the right Jewish educational fit for each child, and this has compelled institutions to tailor their programs to the needs of individuals, a development with both healthy and problematic consequences. Healthy because schools are now forced to be more attuned to individual needs and learning styles; problematic because schools are at times taxed beyond what they can possibly deliver given their limited resources. A number of day schools and some supplementary schools have created separate tracks and in other ways try to address varied learning styles.”

Day Schools

“A second important shift has been the new receptivity of parents to placing young Jews in immersive educational environments. This is evident, for example, in the impressive growth of day schools, a form of Jewish education in which children attend five days a week, generally from sometime between 8–9 a.m. until close to 5 p.m. In the early 1940s, barely more than a handful of Jewish day schools existed outside of New York City. Nowadays almost every Jewish community with a population of over ten thousand has at least one Jewish day school, and quite a few communities numbering only five thousand Jews support such schools. Initially, day schools spread far and wide thanks to the efforts of the Orthodox Torah U'Mesorah movement. And to the present day, Orthodox schools are dominant in this arena. According to the most recent census of day schools by the political scientist Marvin Schick, over 80 percent of children are in schools under Orthodox auspices.²

“Although some day schools under Conservative and communal auspices were established earlier, it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and particularly in its last decade, that non-Orthodox families have been attracted in greater numbers to day schools. Initially these were mainly Conservative

schools. In the past years, the greatest growth in day schools has been in the nondenominational community sector and Chabad outreach day schools for non-Orthodox children. Both draw children from diverse backgrounds, although the main feeders are Conservative homes.

“Conservative day schools—usually called Solomon Schechter schools—have suffered setbacks in the twenty-first century. Nearly one-third of the schools have disappeared and overall enrollment has declined by more than 25 percent, according to Schick. This is attributable to the decline in population of self-identified Conservative Jews and also to pressure some federations have placed on Schechter schools to shed their denominational affiliation and become community schools for all families interested in day school education.”

Supplementary Jewish Schooling

Wertheimer’s research on successful supplementary schools was groundbreaking and has had significant impact. He now says “The vast arena of part-time Jewish schooling has also been subject to rethinking in recent years. Thanks to the early efforts of the Experiment in Congregational Education at the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles and programs such as the NESS initiative begun in Philadelphia by the local bureau of Jewish education, considerable work has gone into reexamining how education ought to function in a synagogue environment. Recognizing that educational programs in these settings cannot be separated from the life of the synagogue—and that education must be central to everything a congregation does—some innovators have experimented with bold new efforts to create what educational thinker Isa Aron has dubbed ‘congregations of learners.’ The earlier notion that children can literally be walled off in separate school wings has been rejected in favor of an effort to integrate Jewish education into everything the synagogue does.

“A great deal of new thinking is also informing efforts to reverse deeply entrenched stereotypes about the alleged tediousness and shallowness of supplementary Jewish schooling. Educators strive to ensure that students enjoy rich experiences in school, and work hard to mix formal and informal educational elements so as to make school time more enjoyable. Some schools have experimented with hiring full-time teachers to give their staff greater incentives to invest themselves in the task of educating the next generation.”

Targeting Families

“In line with this larger goal, family and parent education have risen in importance too. Educators understand that children cannot be taught in isolation. Families are needed as allies in the process of Jewish education. This, in turn, has led

some supplementary schools to expand programs bringing families together for religious and educational activities. Parents are urged to deepen their own Jewish education if they are to be partners with schools.

“Often institutions don’t have a choice in the matter because parents are clamoring for attention *for themselves* in school programs. A study, *Back to School* by Alex Pomson and Randal Schnoor, focuses on a community day school in Toronto³ and demonstrates how a day school is as much about the parents as about the children. Parent bodies have come to regard the school as a place where they will receive continuing Jewish education and as a locus of community for their families.

“This placed a serious new burden on schools. It is difficult enough to educate children. Now schools are expected also to educate parents. Hard as it may be schools have no choice. For them to run programs for parents once a week or a couple of times a month is, indeed, a radical shift. But educators understand that unless parents are on board to reinforce what is being taught, it will be that much harder to win over the children. They also recognize that they have an opportunity to reach parents who never acquired a strong Jewish education. Jewish schools are now assuming a larger role as educators of the entire family.”

No Magic Bullet

“Time constraints continue to vex Jewish education. This is most true in part-time Jewish schools, many of which have reduced the number of contact hours with students. When the latter are present for merely a handful of hours per week over a twenty-five-week school year, how much Judaica can be taught?

“This situation is further exacerbated by the precipitous rates of attrition in the post-*bar mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony for boys] and *bat mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony for girls] years. Beginning with seventh grade, the number of children enrolled in supplementary schools declines and that drop becomes ever sharper after grades 8 and 9. By twelfth grade, merely a small fraction of children who were enrolled before their bar or bat mitzvah are still taking classes.

“As they try to retain teenage students, some high school programs have developed diverse options that attract hundreds of teens. A number of informal educational ventures such as youth group activities and Israel trips have been established to engage teens. These programs also offer music and art, *chesed* (social action) projects, Israel advocacy, and other forms of service. Unfortunately, all these efforts combined only attract a minority of Jewish teens.”

Funding

“Many of the most interesting initiatives in Jewish education have been devised

and funded by foundations. This in itself represents a marked departure from the past when central agencies for Jewish education, denominational education departments, and federations played a more prominent role. On the positive side, foundations and philanthropists can move quickly and adroitly to address needs; they also have shown some capacity to plan creatively rather than rely on old models. The maverick nature of foundations, however, reduces coordination. Every foundation decides for itself on priorities.

“Fortunately, some funders have created partnerships. Working in concert, they have created new umbrella organizations to strengthen subfields of Jewish education. These include organizations to help day schools [PEJE], early childhood programs [JECEI], supplementary schools [PELIE], and residential camps [FJC]. Each of these offers help in marketing programs in one of these subfields and in raising additional financial resources for them. In some cases, they also work to bring about savings through the pooling of resources.”

Costs of Jewish Education

Wertheimer underlines that simultaneously there are ongoing major challenges in the Jewish education field. “In some communities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and Kansas City lay leaders have emerged as dedicated champions of Jewish education, and as noted, a number of foundations with assets in the hundreds of million dollars have involved themselves in support of Jewish education. Still, the needs far outstrip available resources. This especially pertains to the high cost of the most immersive types of Jewish education. Day school tuition can run from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per child for each year of enrollment; summer camps can cost \$4–8,000 for a season; and trips to Israel are equally if not more costly. If these forms of Jewish education are not to become solely the province of the wealthy, large sums of scholarship money must be raised.

“Equally challenging, programs and schools are forced to subsist with a lot less than they need to deliver excellence. Only a limited number of cutting-edge curricula, online resources, and enrichment programs are available for Jewish educators. Many day schools must make do with shabby physical facilities. And continuing education for teachers and school heads is limited. In the current recession, service providers such as denominational education departments and local central agencies for Jewish education have been the first victims of deep cutbacks.

“Even before the latest economic crisis, educators have been supported in only limited ways. This is especially evident in small schools, lacking in resources. Sixty percent of Jewish supplementary schools enroll fewer than one hundred children and 40 percent of Jewish day schools enroll fewer than fifty. These schools cannot afford to be picky in the personnel they assign to the classroom. Many supplementary schools rely largely on avocational teachers who volunteer

their time. Although many of these people are highly dedicated, they are neither professional nor licensed.”

The Personnel Crisis

“The part-time nature of many forms of Jewish education contributes to the challenge of recruiting personnel. Some supplementary schools meet only once a week for two or three hours. Many others meet twice a week, for five to six hours. Given that part-time work is not well remunerated and has little status in the Jewish community, is it any wonder that it is hard to recruit and retain personnel?

“There is yet a further ramification to the part-time nature of Jewish education: it is hard to expect teachers to participate in planning meetings that could strengthen coordination between classes. It also is not reasonable to expect part-timers to invest their own time in in-service programs to help them upgrade their pedagogic skills and Jewish learning. Some foundations and federations have begun to fund special in-service programs that provide part-time teachers with incentives to upgrade their Judaica and pedagogic skills.

“The need for such upgrading was highlighted when the Reform movement invested heavily in a sophisticated, carefully conceived supplementary-school curriculum. Although hundreds of schools adopted the Chai curriculum, as it is called, a great many could use only portions of it because the teaching staff was not equipped to handle some of the more challenging sections.”

Day Schools

“Day schools contend with a different set of personnel issues. Unlike supplementary schools, they can offer more or less full-time employment. Many educators also are attracted by a schedule that takes Shabbat and the Jewish holidays into account, permitting them time to prepare for these occasions. Men and women from the *haredi* [ultra-Orthodox] and Hasidic communities are especially drawn to day school teaching.

“This presents an ideological issue: Modern or Centrist Orthodox day schools rely increasingly on a teaching staff drawn from the *haredi* sector; but they cannot reasonably expect those teachers to reflect the ideals of the school. Similarly, when a day school under Conservative auspices, for example, employs teachers of a Chabad outlook, they cannot expect those teachers to support Conservative ideals and practices. The same challenges face community day schools.”

Financing

“Communities assume responsibility for Jewish education in different ways. The further right one goes in the Orthodox world, the larger the sums of scholarship money available and also the lower the tuitions are. In Modern Orthodox, Conservative, and community day schools, progressively less scholarship money is available. Why? Because Jewish education is viewed as a communal responsibility in some quarters and not in others.

“Federations of Jewish philanthropy also allocate per capita support for day schools, summer camps, and Israel trips according to wildly different standards. The most contentious issue is federation support for day schools. Moreover, within federations, there are tugs-of-war over favoritism toward day schools. Rather than seeing such schools as a powerful instrument for preparing students to participate in Jewish life, some communal leaders still regard day schools as a private choice parents make, and therefore unworthy of communal support.

“Some communities and federations have begun to amass special endowment funds for day school scholarships. George Hanus, a philanthropist in Chicago, has been a strong advocate of such endowments. Although the sums raised to date are not yet adequate to the challenge, the general direction is encouraging because it bespeaks a broader understanding that a Judaically well-educated population is a vital necessity for the American Jewish future and therefore must be a high priority for communities.”

The Debate over Priorities

“Communal support for Jewish education is also hampered by a lack of prioritization. For much of American Jewish history, Jewish education was the province of a small sector, often toiling in near isolation. Given what we now know about powerful assimilatory trends sapping Jewish communal life, Jewish education can no longer be treated as a luxury, but as a vital necessity for the future of American Jewry. If this is properly understood, communal thinking will have to shift. Some of the issues will be painful, particularly as they implicate competing priorities. Which institutions are most worthy of continuing support? How does a federation balance the needs of the elderly, whom we are commanded to revere and support, while we are also commanded to provide a Jewish education to our children? In a time of limited resources, what is the proper tradeoff between social and educational institutions, between community relations work and heightened literacy?

“In the case of day schools, creative, new thinking about ways to tap government money in the form of tax credits or funding for the general-studies portion of day school education would also help. Given the strict separationist

convictions of most Jewish organizations, though, this new thinking is unlikely to gain traction. The question is whether such public policy stances make sense any longer, in particular when one looks beyond America's borders to Australia, Britain, France, and part of Canada, where Jewish day schools receive state funding. Jewish communities there don't seem to be any worse for the wear. Indeed, they boast far higher rates of day school attendance than are commonly found in the United States. Debate on these issues has been largely suppressed in the key organizations of the American Jewish community who continue to be pious adherents of the separationist faith, even as families stagger under the burden of tuition payments or eschew the most intensive—and impactful—forms of Jewish education.”

Supplementary Education

“Supplementary education is another area meriting new ideas. The product of massive geographic mobility in the post-World War II period when new synagogues were established mainly in suburban areas, it is primarily conducted under the aegis of congregations. Virtually every synagogue, regardless of its resources, is convinced it must run its own supplementary-school program in order to attract members. Once congregations began demanding that families wishing to celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah must enroll their children for three to five years of Jewish education, they created a synagogue and educational model predicated on the right of passage at puberty. American Jews quickly learned that they must join a synagogue when their children reached school-age. Many also decided to drop their synagogue membership once their youngest child had celebrated a bar or bat mitzvah.

“Supplementary programs would do well to rebuild as institutions with a mission to socialize and educate young Jews for participation in all aspects of Jewish life, not only for bar or bat mitzvah performances. Some of this work has begun. Supplementary schools are incorporating a mix of experiential, family, and formal education into their programs. They are creating tracks to accommodate the demanding schedules of students and their parents. They are running religious and study programs on Shabbat. And they are offering elective opportunities to high school students in order to meet the needs and interests of a diverse learning population. All this has warmed up the atmosphere of schools and has converted them into far more welcoming settings. Morale among students and teachers in such schools seems to have risen.

“The remaining challenge for supplementary schools is clarifying what they hope to achieve with their programs. Each school would do well to create a process to define what its graduates should experience and absorb over the years they are enrolled. The next step is for educators to determine how students will be exposed to Jewish learning and living that they can internalize. Focusing on

learning and experiential outcomes will help supplementary schools articulate their objectives and the step-by-step process for attaining them.”

Educational Haves and Have-Nots

“Jewish communal and educational leaders must also consider the gap between what I will call the Jewish educational ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’ In Jewish education we increasingly see a sector of young Jews who are receiving multiple Jewish educational exposures through day school or supplementary-school education, while also attending Jewish summer camps, traveling to Israel on programs, being involved in youth-movement activities, and being embedded in an educational and social setting that reinforces Jewish learning. Not surprisingly their levels of Jewish literacy and connection are strong. But the majority of Jewish children are not given these multiple exposures. Barely one in ten participate in youth movements and trips to Israel. Only a small fraction remains enrolled in supplementary programs after bar or bat mitzvah. And only small numbers travel to Israel, a pattern Birthright Israel seeks to remedy. How will the American Jewish community avoid a deep chasm between the educated haves and the undereducated have-nots?

“Certainly, these categories are not fixed. Some parents who themselves did not receive a rich Jewish education want better for their children. And some programs targeted at adults are impressing upon them that they and their children will live richer, more meaningful lives if they do not settle for the minimum. In a number of communities, an experiment was conducted in which the Melton adult-education program was provided free of charge to parents of very young preschool children. As a result of their exposure to those classes, many parents who would have been in the uncommitted camp in the past became much more interested in the types of Jewish education their children were receiving. They also wanted to expand their own Jewish knowledge through adult education.

“A second example: the Wexner Heritage Foundation has informally emphasized the value of day school education to people who have never had any kind of exposure to it. In the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, several new day schools were established by Wexner alumni. When asked why, they explained: ‘I didn’t know anything about day school education in the past and would never have considered it. As a result of my educational experiences I now want more and better Jewish schooling for my children.’ Thus the borders between the educationally engaged and disengaged are not firm.”

Harnessing New Technologies

“New technologies and forms of information gathering have posed a different

set of challenges. True, there is a massive Jewish educational presence on the internet in the form of portals for finding information about many Jewish matters. Less certain is how Jewish education, both formal and informal, can utilize the new technologies.

“The looming issue is whether to substitute web-based curricula, self-guided study, and even online textbooks for the frontal, teacher-driven classroom experiences that have long stood at the center of formal Jewish education. Educators in the United States and Israel have been developing web-based options to enable students to pursue their own interests, while working at their own pace.

“New technologies also open new options to enrich small schools at a vast geographic remove from large centers of Jewish population. Properly harnessed, the internet can connect far-flung classrooms across the country. Similarly, videoconferencing makes it possible to expose students to teachers who live far away from their schools. Thus, the often-noted capability of new technologies to connect people across vast distances is being adapted for class use in Jewish educational settings. In all likelihood, we are only at the beginning of a revolution in the delivery of Jewish education that will remake schools, classrooms, the roles of educators, and individual learning.”

Conclusion

Wertheimer concludes: “Fifty years ago, no one could have predicted any of the following: that day school education through high school would become the dominant experience of nearly all Orthodox youth and a significant minority of young people raised in Conservative homes; that Jewish parents would enroll their children in multiple types of formal and informal Jewish education, rather than rely on a minimal number of years spent in the nearest congregational school; that foundations with hundreds of millions of dollars would become the prime movers of the Jewish educational enterprise; and that the American Jewish community would create so vast an array of educational options for Jews as young as preschool all the way through adulthood. These are but a few examples of the huge transformation in American Jewish education over the past few decades.

“Still, there is no gainsaying that large challenges remain: recruiting and retaining qualified teachers has become, perhaps, more difficult than ever before; time constraints are increasingly severe in the most popular forms of education; funding is limited; and the population is dispersed ever more widely, making it harder to deliver a Jewish education to some children. Most important: even as evidence mounts of a strong association between intensive and immersive Jewish educational experiences in childhood and later adult engagement in Jewish life, many American Jews continue to resist placing their children in the kinds of settings that will educate and socialize them for future Jewish civic participation.

“The outcome of all these challenges is hardly foreordained. Much depends on the will of funders, educators, parents, and communal leaders to invest in nurturing the next generation of American Jews. A brief look backward demonstrates just how much has been accomplished in a short period.

“Looking at the contemporary scene, it is evident that a dramatic transformation has occurred in the way informed Jewish adults think about Jewish education. Once the communal stepchild, Jewish education has moved from the periphery of consciousness to a position of centrality where many influential leaders look to educational institutions to remedy much of what is sapping the vitality of American Jewish life. It is a tall order, but educators and their allies must rise to the challenge. The future of American Jewish life is riding on their ability to adapt to the new environment and educate the next generation.”

Notes

1. For a more detailed version of this, see Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with Jack Wertheimer on “The Future of Jewish Education,” *Changing Jewish Communities* 52, 15 January 2010.
2. Marvin Schick, *A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2008–2009* (New York: Avi Chai Foundation, 2009), 1.
3. Alex Pomson and Randal F. Schnoor, *Back to School: Jewish Day School in the Lives of Adult Jews* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008).

Interview with Rela Mintz Geffen

Jewish Grandparenting in the United States

“For the first time there are many cases of three and even four generations of Jewish families who are alive simultaneously in the United States. During the great wave of immigration of East European Jews from 1880 to 1920, families were split by the ocean. Even monthly correspondence was difficult often making a final separation inevitable.

“Stories of husbands who preceded wives and children to the ‘*Goldina Medina*’ and then abandoned them abounded in the Bintel Brief column of the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper, which provided answers to questions posed by immigrants. Sometimes family members never saw or even heard from each other again. Later, in the twentieth century, the Shoah destroyed the possibility of an extended family for many Jews who had come to the United States, leaving part of their families behind.”

Rela Mintz Geffen observes: “By the last quarter of the twentieth century there were many Jewish families of three generations, quite a number of which included at least two generations of native-born adults. In the mid-century decades, children often moved away from parents so as to succeed in their careers. In the 1970s and 1980s a different generational trend saw parents moving away from their grown children to retire in Florida, Arizona, and other ‘sunshine’ states.”

Health and Technological Revolutions

“The health and technological revolutions have affected the reality of grandparenting. People live longer, but often with chronic conditions with which it is not easy to cope. In other words, people who in a previous era would have died at seventy-five, can today conceivably be kept alive for perhaps another ten years. This may, however, require a lot of support. Gerontologists often speak of the senior adult population as the ‘young old’ (ages sixty to seventy-four) and the ‘older old’ (seventy-five and older).¹

“In the past we talked about the ‘sandwich generation,’ those adults who were trying to raise their children and pay for their schooling while simultaneously taking care of their aging parents. We have now moved to a situation where some grandparents are taking care of great-grandparents. I call this the ‘double-decker’ sandwich generation. According to the most recent National Jewish Population

Survey [NJPS 2000–2001], the American Jewish population is older than the Jewish population of a decade earlier. The median age of the Jewish population was 42, five years older than the overall median age in 1990 and seven years older than the overall median age for the U.S. population.²

“The aging of the Jewish population, with 19 percent age sixty-five or over, has led to other new trends. For instance, a number of Jews who are eighty-five and older who had moved earlier to the Sun Belt states are returning to their home states. In this process of reverse migration, close family members, such as children or adult grandchildren who live in or near their earlier residence, become caregivers.

“The technology revolution has intensified national and international contacts. For a long time telephone was the main mode of communication between people in different places in the United States. In addition there was good mail service. Now many people are online together daily. There are recent estimates that a significant and growing number of seniors are internet users. This finding is related to socioeconomic status. As Jews have the highest educational levels, occupational achievement, and income of any group in the United States—Jewish men are comparable to white Episcopalian men—it is likely that many of those in the ‘young old’ population are online. The introduction of Skype and similar phone systems has been a further step forward.

“With video and web cameras on screens, this new type of communication has become a way of life. These inexpensive possibilities have yielded a great increase and ease in communications. It is different from the immigrant generation when people lived together on a ‘Jewish’ street, but in this new way much family interaction is taking place.”

The General Situation

“Grandparenting in the American family has hardly been addressed by sociologists. In 1986 Andrew Cherlin and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., published a book titled *The New American Grandparent*.³ At that time, they could not find a single academic study on the subject. The main mention of grandparents in sociological literature was that in the immigrant generation they were a negative force that slowed their children’s opportunity for upward mobility.

“The regnant theory was that the nuclear family would provide the best springboard to success in a capitalistic system. The underlying assumption was that the younger generation of family members would be impeded by demands on their time and resources imposed by their parents, grandparents, and other extended-family members. They would refrain from moving away to get better jobs or from going to a school away from home.

“It is hard to believe, but nearly all mentions of grandparents in twentieth-century American sociological literature on the family are negative. Usually,

however, the subject of extended family was simply missing from the analysis. An exception was discussion of the surrogate parenting role of some grandparents in the African American community.”

Following General Trends

“Sociologists of the American Jewish community often follow the general trends among their peers. The American Jewish community has also, to a large extent, been obsessed with demography over the past four decades. The majority of studies that were funded were community- or national-demographic in intent. From these studies one can get—at most—the percentage of American Jews who are grandparents and at what age they became so. It is sometimes possible to know whether they have Jewish grandchildren. One does not learn anything about what grandparenting means to them.

“For that one has to do qualitative research studies. In order to unpack the phenomenon of the American Jewish grandparent in all its ramifications one has to conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups.

“Another complicating factor is that in the United States in general there is no defined role for grandparents. The median age for American women to become grandparents is forty-five. In Jewish communities it is fifty-five or even older. One can, of course, become a grandparent at any time over the course of five decades. Grandparents are often at very different stages of the lifecycle and have very different roles vis-à-vis their children and grandchildren.

“Many women return to the fulltime labor force and shortly afterward become grandmothers. They do not want to go back to child care and housekeeping roles when they have just entered a new stage of life. Some grandparents live far from their progeny and some are physically unable to help because of aging. To summarize, there are no defined roles for grandparents in the United States today.”

A Broad Framework

Geffen explains that she is at the beginning of her research and can only provide a broad framework. “At this stage one receives mainly anecdotal and impressionistic information. One such example was reported by Dr. Judy Marcus, a specialized physician who treats children suffering from cancer. She told me that early in her practice she had read a footnote in an article saying that physicians brought grandparents into sessions when they discussed the child’s condition and health plan with the parents. As a result, she also started to include grandparents and found that this made a great difference in the care of the child.

“Examples of anecdotal information about extended family roles in Israel include the fact that Israeli grandparents often pick up their grandchildren from school and feed them a main meal. There are many other situations in Israel where it is assumed that grandparents will step in. We don’t know whether this results mainly from a traditional Jewish view, whether it is affected by the economic situation or, alternatively, the availability of grandparents in a small country.

“It may be that the large group of survivors that is found in Israel have brought with them an intense feeling about the regeneration of extended family after the Shoah. Children in Israel also live at home longer than in the United States and there are often more of them per family so that parents go through the empty-nest stage much later. All this should be investigated.”⁴

Stereotypes

Geffen mentions that several of her graduate students did some initial work in the field. They found that the way people define their roles as grandparents is often shaped by the experience they had with their own grandparents. “Some didn’t know their grandparents. This was a much more frequent phenomenon in Europe due to the Shoah. Others didn’t relate well to one or all of their grandparents. Some rebelled and didn’t necessarily want to follow the model of their families of orientation.

“More recently I have done some preliminary exploration of roles of grandparents with groups emanating from the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs, a Conservative organization. I was present at their national convention and at a weekend seminar where synagogue members who work with *keruv*—welcoming interfaith couples into Conservative synagogues—were meeting.

“There are many stereotypes about Jewish grandparents. I asked the *keruv* workers and other attendees at the session what adjectives (and nouns) they would use to describe grandparents.⁵ For grandfathers common adjectives were: loving, nice, active, generous, friendly, supportive, playful, proud, and protective. For grandmothers they were: spoilers, loving, caring, confident, cook, trusted, affectionate, planner, shaper, fun.

“Grandparents in interfaith situations are also the subject of many stereotypes. A kind of fantasy prevails among Jews that the grandparents will do everything ‘right.’ They will be the ones to teach the children to be Jewish thus functioning as transmitters of Jewish heritage. They are supposed to be the conveyers of the feeling of the Jewish holidays. B’nai B’rith even started a special trip to Israel called ‘Grand Explorers’ for grandparents and their interfaith grandchildren.

“The sociologist Bruce Phillips, in his study of interfaith families with a Jewish partner, said that a genealogical relationship is no guarantee of a sociological one.

He found very little evidence of intergenerational transmission of attitudes of grandparents to grandchildren. He had initially analyzed interfaith couples from the data of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. He later interviewed members of a thousand households.”⁶

Trial Interviews

“Over a decade ago, under the auspices of B’nai B’rith, I did a study of interfaith couples and their parents along with the late Egon Mayer. The work was published under the title *The Ripple Effect: Interfaith Families Speak Out*.⁷ During the research, focus groups were conducted with Jewish grandparents of interfaith grandchildren.

“The one characteristic that emerged most strongly from these focus groups was a certain fear. Grandparents were afraid to say anything about religion to their grandchildren. One is supposed to ask permission from the parents not only before spoiling grandchildren, but also before introducing difficult subjects. In an interfaith situation religion is the touchiest one of all. There is some evidence that a norm of noninterference by grandparents is present in many American families.⁸

“In the case of the grandparents in the focus groups, many were afraid that their children would punish them by withholding contact with the grandchildren. They thus trod very lightly in this area, even when they were knowledgeable about Judaism. Many others are from the generation that had the least Jewish education so that even if they wanted to be transmitters of Jewish knowledge, they lacked the tools.⁹

“A notable exception to the norm of noninterference by grandparents occurs after divorce when people often turn to their parents and siblings for support. Unfortunately, interfaith couples have a higher divorce rate than endogamous ones. At this particularly vulnerable moment, there is a strong welcoming of support and influence from the Jewish grandparents, particularly the maternal grandparents if it is the mother who is Jewish.¹⁰

“The interfaith situation is the one field where a few books on Jewish grandparenting have seen print in the last decade. Sunie Levin’s *Mingled Roots: A Guide for Jewish Grandparents of Interfaith Grandchildren* was published by the Union for Reform Judaism [URJ] in 2003. More recently, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, executive director of the Jewish Outreach Institute [JOI] and Paul Golin have published *Twenty Things for Grandparents of Interfaith Grandchildren to Do* [Tora Aura Productions, January 2007]. These self-help books reflect the perceived possibilities for continuity of identity inherent in the attitudes of many American Jews and are based on the experiences of outreach workers all over North America. The academic research that would underpin a finer analysis has yet to be undertaken.”

Studying the Entire Family

“Analysis of the grandparenting situation inexorably leads to studying the entire extended family including aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on. In many families, immediately after a new baby is born, email updates arrive including pictures and detailed information. The amount of knowledge about what is happening in the lives of extended-family members is vast compared to twenty years ago, and it is also immediate.

“Another interesting subject to investigate is whether any Jewish rituals have developed involving grandparents, particularly as a part of rites of passage. In Israel the custom started of including the names of grandparents on wedding invitations, even though they may be deceased. This may be related to the Shoah, as an effort to keep their memory alive. It also shows that the family came from somewhere and is rooted.

“While in the United States this is not done, grandparents are often acknowledged in the nearly ubiquitous program booklets prepared for attendees at Jewish weddings.¹¹ Also, it is the custom in North America for the officiating rabbi to explain the ceremony and also to speak to the couple in a personal way under the *huppah* [wedding canopy]. In this context grandparents and other close relatives who didn’t live to see the wedding day are often mentioned.”

Comparison with Israel

“Eventually it would be fascinating to compare the American Jewish community to the Jews in Israel. This would be meaningful only if the study were divided by ethnic group. Among the Russian Jews who came to the United States many of the grandparents’ generation could not learn the language and get paid employment. They often took care of the grandchildren so that the parents could go out and make a living. This was an example of functioning extended households that were beneficial to the immigrant generation. One would assume that in Israel the same was true for the Russian immigrants.

“Yet another subject for study is how grandparenting functions in the kibbutz. I spent time in Sa’ad, a religious kibbutz, where the grandparents were addressed by all members as *Abba* (in Hebrew, “father of”) or *Ima* (in Hebrew, “mother of”) plus the name of their adult child who was a member of the kibbutz. They were placed in the hierarchy of the kibbutz in a relational way. It is ironic that the kibbutz started out as anti-nuclear family and has since become a very family-oriented society. The kibbutz will take in parents of members, if they want to retire there near their grown children and grandchildren.

“In various societies grandparents have different roles and status. In the Far East when people introduce themselves they may tell you their age, because they know that the older they are, the more respect people will give them. In the United

States many people will do anything not to tell their age and to hide it until they are very old.”

Geffen concludes that there are many issues to be examined regarding American Jews' current attitudes and perceptions about grandparenting. “Are the roles of grandfathers and grandmothers defined differently? What are the expected and actual roles that grandparents play in transmission of Jewish identity to their grandchildren? What would they like their behavior to be, as compared to how they actually behave? How are grandparents involved, or not involved, in their grandchildren's lives? Does their role change after the divorce of an adult child? What do the grandchildren expect? What about their parents' view of the roles of the grandparents in family life? How strong is the norm of noninterference? Is the role of the Jewish grandparents different when their child is in an interfaith marriage?”

Finally, she reiterates that “all this has to be looked at in the context of broader family relationships and also against the background of a more in-depth study of the Jewish tradition on the issue. For example, how broad is the extensive classical literature on the fifth commandment? Are there sources that speak to obligations to and of grandparents or other kin?”

Notes

1. “Dr. Allan Glicksman, an authority on aging in the Jewish community, gave me this information in a conversation. He notes that the gerontological and social work literature does contain work on grandparenting though it has largely been devoted to certain ethnic groups and issues of caregiving.”
2. Data on the total U.S. population come from the 2000 U.S. Census or other U.S. Census Bureau studies.
3. Andrew Cherlin and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., *The New American Grandparent: A Place in the Family, a Life Apart* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). In their introduction the authors note that “The idea of studying the nature of grandparenthood had intrigued us because of the peculiarly marginal nature of American grandparents. Until recently, they were a *mere footnote* [emphasis added] in the social science literature on the family” (3).
4. “There is no doubt that traditionally Jews considered the extended family as very important. Some of this has carried over to the New World. A number of studies done on ‘cousins clubs’ in the United States documented this phenomenon in the mid-twentieth century.”
5. “I found out that one has to ask first about the grandfather because otherwise the grandmother gets most of the positive ones.”
6. See, for example, his “Re-examining Inter-marriage: Trends, Textures and Strategies,” report of a study by Bruce A. Phillips, Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies and American Jewish Committee, July 1996. In March 2008 the sociologist Steven M. Cohen noted in his remarks to the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) that “Inter-marriage remains North American Jews’ principal route of exit during their lifetimes. As...Bruce Phillips reports, of those with two Jewish parents, 98 percent are

raised as Jews; of those with one Jewish parent, the figure drops to 39 percent, albeit with noticeable differences when the mother is Jewish than when the father is Jewish; and of those with one Jewish grandparent, just 4 percent are raised as Jews.”

7. Rela M. Geffen and Egon Mayer, *The Ripple Effect: Interfaith Families Speak Out* (New York: B’nai B’rith Center for Jewish Identity and the Jewish Outreach Institute, 1998).
8. Jennifer Mason, Vanessa May, and Lynda Clark (“Ambivalence and the Paradoxes of Grandparenting,” *Sociological Review*, vol. 55, no. 4, November 2007, 687–706) identify two main cultural norms of grandparenting that emerged from their data: “being there” and “not interfering.” The study found very high levels of consensus that these constituted what grandparents “should and should not” do. However, these two norms can be contradictory and are not easy to reconcile with the everyday realities of grandparenting.
9. “I found this in all four of the groups I talked to and wondered whether they were typical. Later I collected some anecdotal evidence confirming what was expressed in the focus groups. In a discussion with a rabbi in Jerusalem whose daughter had married a convert to Judaism, I recalled my surprise at the prevalence of the fear factor. He said that he was not surprised at all. In fact, he personally was extremely careful not to seem to be influencing their grandchild about religion. This, despite the fact that he is a rabbi and that his son-in-law had converted.”
10. Harriet and Moshe Hartman have completed a book on gender and American Jews, updating their 1996 volume based on the 1990 NJPS with data from the 2000–2001 survey. *Gender and American Jews: Patterns in Work, Education and Family in Contemporary Life* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009). Their chapter on intermarriage gives the percentages of divorced among intra- and intermarried men and women aged thirty-five to sixty-four. For men, the percentage ever divorced of endogamous men is 18.7; for intermarried men it is 31.4. For women the percentages are 14.7 and 26.8, respectively.
11. On the subject of booklets for rites of passage, see Rela M. Geffen, “Life-Cycle Rituals: Rites of Passage in American Judaism,” in Dana Evan Kaplan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 12.

Interview with Rabbi David Ellenson

The Future of Reform Jewry

“The work of the (non-Jewish) sociologist Peter Berger offers an illuminating context for considering the overarching situation that confronts American Judaism in general and Reform in particular. In his book, *The Heretical Imperative*, Berger points out that in the pluralistic condition that marks the modern setting, myriad lifestyle options are unavoidable and increase at dizzying paces. This manifests itself in many ways and results from multiple factors. Numerous people leave their hometowns. In such a situation, traditional kinship and associational patterns are radically altered and frequently attenuated. Television, computer, and media images change people’s cultural worlds and offer them new vistas as well. Hence, the traditional Jewish community confronts new and profound challenges in making Jewish life meaningful today.”

Ellenson adds: “Part of what modernity means is that people who were formerly chained to or informed by tradition—and for whom it would be a taken-for-granted part of life—are no longer compelled to observe it at all. My teacher Arthur Hertzberg used to say: ‘modernity is the solvent in which tradition dissolves.’ Unaffiliated Jews, to my great regret, are therefore the fastest growing segment in the American Jewish community.

“In another book, *The Homeless Mind*, Berger pointed out that in a world marked by a ‘homeless mind’—meaning unprecedented demographic mobility and countless cultural options for individuals—people still desire to find a ‘home,’ that is, roots. The spiritual homelessness that characterizes modernity does more than act as a solvent for the dissolution of the tradition. It stimulates a search for meaning as well. Berger, himself a religious and social conservative, is therefore delighted that the secularization process he formerly saw as all-encompassing has in fact weakened and to some degree been reversed, resulting in a revival of religion and tradition in many precincts of the modern world. He believes that the cohesion religion provides speaks to people’s spiritual needs today just as in past eras, and that religion is necessary to promote collective social and civil life.

“Emile Durkheim, the nineteenth-century Jewish sociologist and the son of an Orthodox rabbi, focused his researches on how societies cohere and achieve stability. He viewed religion as a major force that permits a society to forge common values and assumptions. The question is: how are such values and assumptions—so essential for the emergence of a body politic—maintained and formed when one lives in a world where traditional religion is not present? Can this aspect of modernity or postmodernity be reversed?

“Rabbi Yitz (Irving) Greenberg, a maverick Orthodox rabbi who is one of the most creative and articulate Jewish thinkers in the modern world, charged that the Holocaust demonstrated that secularism alone—an unbridled faith in secular Enlightenment as a source of meaning—proved an insufficient source of values for society. He also charged that classical Diaspora Judaism made Jews too passive in the face of the Nazi threat and that American Jewish leaders were not sufficiently assertive in demanding that the American government address the plight of the Jews during World War II. Consequently, Rabbi Greenberg regards the state of Israel as a moral necessity, since Jews, as well as others, should never be completely powerless to guide their own destiny and protect their own children.”

Reform Growing Rapidly

Ellenson observes, “In a general American social context marked by intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews and cultural homogeneity among third- and fourth-generation American Jews themselves, the Reform movement is growing rapidly, with almost nine hundred congregations claiming over a million members. In 2006, about fifty thousand new members joined Reform congregations. When American Jews under the age of forty affiliate, a large plurality join the Reform movement. We can therefore anticipate that membership numbers in the Reform movement will remain strong for the foreseeable future.

“During the twentieth century, Conservative Judaism was by far the numerically dominant movement in American Judaism. Its admixture of tradition and change served as a powerful magnet for the children and grandchildren of East European immigrant Jews, whereas Reform developed patterns of ritual and decorum that principally addressed the German Jews who had come to this country and their children during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During 1815–1880, a period that American Jewish historians call the ‘era of Germanic domination,’ 225,000 German-speaking Jews came to the United States. At the beginning of the Federalist period in 1790, there were approximately three thousand Jews—mostly Sephardic—in the country. Thus, Jews of Germanic origin dominated American Jewish life during most of the 1800s.

“In the twentieth century, over two million East European Jews—including all my grandparents—immigrated to the United States. Like the German Jews before them, they desired acculturation. They found their religious expression in the Conservative movement. Even as late as the 1960s, there were clear differences—attitudes toward Hebrew, Israel, *kashrut* [Jewish dietary laws], and ritual observance—between Reform and Conservative laity. These have diminished greatly in recent years.

“The Reform movement today, given the cultural homogeneity of American Jewish life, is obliged to address the broad swath of Jews whose life is not

halachic [according to Jewish law]. When I analyze what direction Reform is taking today and the population it must address, I am purposely excluding the Orthodox Jewish population. Their commitment to a halachic way of life places them for all practical purposes beyond the purview of Reform.

“The challenge that acculturation poses to the American Jewish community compels us to ask what the quality of these people’s Jewish lives will be. They are not part of what the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz would label a ‘thick religious culture.’ Yet the question the Reform Movement must ask is whether it can succeed in instilling a meaningful sense of Jewish roots in these persons and thereby assure a Jewish future for them and their descendants?”

Educating Rabbis

“Jewish education is the key. The people we intend to serve know much about American culture and have studied at top universities, though they often lack strong Judaic backgrounds. Our task is to make them Jewishly literate. As president of HUC-JIR, I must address this reality in the students we educate, so that they in turn can cope with the challenges American Jewry faces.

“We must aim for enough common purpose that a central sense of Jewish peoplehood will be imbibed by the great bulk of American Jews. The continuity of large segments of the community depends on the ability of the Reform movement and its leaders to address and inspire these Jews.

“There are at present 1,500–2,000 ordained Reform rabbis in the United States. There are perhaps 120 candidates each year for the Reform Rabbinate, and we accept entering classes that number between forty and fifty-five. We ordain, including Israel, about fifty rabbis per year. That is close to the numbers we need. About three-quarters become pulpit rabbis in the United States at some time or another. At any one time, perhaps 60 percent of them have pulpits.”

Intermarriage, Few Children

“Many people raised in Conservative congregations join the Reform movement. We now have hundreds of thousands of such members. Membership in Conservative congregations has declined in recent years and the differences between the two movements on a lay level—on matters such as Israel, Hebrew, egalitarianism, and gay rights and inclusion—have diminished in the past two decades.

“Among the Orthodox, the notion of Judaism as a collective remains strong. In Israel, Jewish identity—as Steven M. Cohen and the late Charles Liebman have pointed out in their work—is also generally informed by the notion of the collective.

“In the United States, however, Judaism is largely informed by an

individualistic sensibility. Arnold Eisen, the current chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary [JTS], and Cohen, who is now on our HUC faculty in New York, have explained in their book *The Jew Within* that the notion of ‘the sovereign self’ dominates the consciousness of most non-Orthodox Jews. These American Jews, by and large, do not approach Judaism from the perspective of the collective. Their individualistic orientation causes them to ask the very personal question: ‘How can Judaism enrich my life?’¹

“The research of social scientist Bethamie Horowitz also shows that these individuals use Judaism to help construct meaning in their life in highly eclectic nonhalachic ways. They use their subjective judgment to determine what is authoritative for them. This is contrary to the position of Orthodox Judaism, where issues of personal meaning are subordinated to the demands of the halachic system.”²

“Cohen claims, in light of the overwhelming rate of intermarriage among non-Orthodox Jews in the United States, that most children and grandchildren born from these intermarried couples will no longer identify as Jews.³ Our task is to ensure that these prognostications, based on real evidence, turn out to be false.

“Jack Wertheimer, the former provost of the JTS, wrote that in a few decades a great percentage of the leadership of the American Jewish community may well be taken from Orthodox ranks and that a plurality of affiliated American Jews may be Orthodox as well in light of the high birth and retention rates that mark the Orthodox segment of the American Jewish community. He surely makes a convincing argument based on hard data. At the same time, that prognostication presumes many constants.”⁴

Ellenson remarks that he and his wife have five children and adds, “People in the non-Orthodox world usually wait much longer to marry. As a result they have at most two to three children. Most do not have even that. To promote birth in the non-Orthodox community is not something I have focused on in my nine years as HUC president, though I am certainly not opposed to it!”

Patrilineal Descent and Intermarriage

One major break with Jewish tradition that the Reform movement made in the 1980s was the acceptance of people as Jews who have a Jewish father but not a Jewish mother. Ellenson comments: “I opposed this move initially. Making it an official position represented a very radical departure from the Jewish tradition and its classical definitions of Jewish status. At the time the decision was made, I was very disturbed by the decision, notwithstanding the fact that ‘patrilineality’ had been in effect *de facto* for many years.

“Social reality and personal experiences have made me change my mind. There are such a high number of intermarried persons who now reside within the

ambit of the Jewish community and many of these people participate actively in Jewish life. The classical halachic definition of Jewish status is simply too narrow to encompass the diverse reality of the Jewish people today. The essential challenge before us—in my opinion—is crafting a communal policy as well as practice that will attract children of mixed marriages to enter actively into the community. Patrilineality is an approach that allows us to embrace these people. Another consideration to take into account is that conversion is always an option for those Jews who are descended from non-Jewish mothers and Jewish fathers and who do elect to become more traditional and enter into the more traditional sectors of the community. Their halachic status as non-Jews is not necessarily a permanent one for which there is no ‘remedy.’

“This issue is part of a broader one confronting Reform—the issue of mixed marriage. The movement’s position as articulated by my colleague Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union for Reform Judaism and leader of our movement, is that it is desirable for a born Jew to marry another born Jew, or to have the born non-Jewish partner convert to Judaism. The third alternative from Reform’s standpoint is for the mixed married couple to decide to raise the child Jewishly.

“Rabbi Yoffie made a speech outlining these points at our last biennial in 2005. He said, ‘We honor those non-Jews who are part of the Jewish community and have their children raised as Jews.’ However, he also added: ‘We should seek to convert people to Judaism in cases where intermarriage occurs.’

“This raised much controversy in American Jewry. He could not have constructed his statement more carefully. Yet, even then, many found it problematic. The *New York Times* reported on this on its front page. I agree with Yoffie, but have not yet found a way to deliver that message in a way that expresses support for the two preferred options without alienating other people who wish to affiliate with the Jewish people. It may not be possible to do so.”

Picking and Choosing

Ellenson summarizes: “Liberal Jews pick and choose from Judaism in a way that is an anathema to Orthodoxy.” He mentions some examples which while not typical, illustrate his point. “I have friends who wear a *kippa* [skullcap] all the time, even when they drive on Shabbat. From a halachic viewpoint, this is jarring. However, for them, as individuals, this affirms their participation in Jewish tradition and allows them to assert and display a sense of Jewish identity. Yet, they do so outside halachic norms.

“We see similar phenomena among our students. Many come from nontraditional backgrounds and learn at HUC for the first time about Jewish tradition. They can simultaneously wear *tsitsit* [ritual fringes] and smoke a cigarette on Shabbat.

“In another example, a student once heard a lecture in Jerusalem on how important it was for Jews to feel a sense of pride and connection with Israel. He subsequently went to a tattoo parlor and had a Star of David tattooed all over his arm. This violated all halachic norms about tattoos. However, it served as a constant reminder to him of his Jewish identity and his connection to Israel, and he proudly showed me this tattoo.

“People like these have returned to tradition outside halachic categories. They do not ask what is permitted and forbidden, nor think within the framework of a legal system.”

Ellenson observes that most examples of this widespread approach are not so extreme. “At all our HUC campuses we surely have students who engage in premarital sex and even live together. At the same time, they will ask me about issues concerning the *mikveh* [ritual bath] and laws of family purity, as they believe that such practices will enhance the holiness of their lives and provide a richer sense of spirituality and meaning. The turn to the mikveh in a number of Reform circles is surely a major step toward the appropriation of the Tradition. Yet, it is done in a way that would seem problematic from within a classical halachic framework. Those students who ask me about this practice while remaining unmarried—however inconsistent this might seem from a traditional halachic point of view—are asking, ‘How can I sanctify my life?’”

What Can Appeal?

Ellenson returns to the key issue with which he grapples. He states, “I live in a community where I ask myself how I can exercise influential religious authority in a way that moves people. Rabbi Greenberg once said to me that a leader must never be more than 10–15 percent ahead of his people. If you are too far ahead, you are going to leave your people behind.

“In a society marked by individualism, I cannot make the simple statement: you ought to have a sense of collective responsibility for the Jewish people. It is not likely to be persuasive. For the large bulk of unaffiliated Jewry, Jewish tradition is often perceived as irrelevant to modern life. At the same time, Israel is often portrayed negatively, as a victimizer rather than a victim, and this further alienates many Jews from Jewish life.

“One then wonders what can appeal to such Jews, as the memory of the Holocaust does not inform them. Nor does this generation of Americans identify with the issue of anti-Semitism despite the attacks and criticisms lodged against Israel by so many. In this regard there is a great difference between the United States and Europe.”

About himself, Ellenson wrote a few years ago,

After completing my M.A. in religious studies at Virginia, I was prepared to

leave my native state. I moved to Kibbutz Mishmar Ha-Emek in the Jezreel Valley, where I spent eight wonderful months before entering the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem for the 1972–73 academic year. The time in Israel was an exceptional one for me. I felt a wholeness and completion I had never felt before or since—and to this day I will confess that I feel myself to be a “failed Zionist.” Only in Israel at that time did I ever approach anything resembling the sense of *shlemut*—not so much “wholeness” as “normalization”—that had desperately eluded me during all my years in Virginia. I am still uncertain why I ever left Israel.⁵

Now he says, “Israel remains a major source of potential Jewish renewal. Many more youngsters want to come on Birthright Israel programs than there are places. The studies of Leonard Saxe, director of the Cohen Center at Brandeis University, have shown that these trips have an enduring effect. A few years later the attitudinal changes remain. The problem is that because of lack of money and insufficient follow-up planning, we do not yet know how to capitalize fully on the opportunity Birthright Israel offers for the reengagement of these young people in Jewish life.

“At HUC-JIR, we address the desire to have our students internalize a sense of Jewish peoplehood at the very center of her and his soul through a requirement that every future rabbi, cantor, and educator whom we will ordain or graduate must spend a year of study in Israel. We see this as a major way of inculcating within them a sense of Jewish solidarity. The quest for religious leadership is surely more than a personal one and must be connected to a devotion to the Jewish people.”

Are We Strong Enough?

“All these questions lead to the practical question: is Reform Judaism strong enough to promote an ethos that constructs a sense of meaning in today’s world? It is not my intention to attack ritual. However, many of our people who are most strongly devoted to the observance of ritual often never ask questions about what Judaism has to say about leading a meaningful life. They also frequently fail to manifest publicly the ethical values of our tradition. Such a Judaism has become irrelevant for a great many people.

“Yet, there is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism in general. It derives from the fact that people have a need for boundaries and communities. Traditional religions provide this very well. Some of the renewal in non-Orthodox Jewish circles is explained by the same desire.

“I am convinced that the approach of teaching people how to think with a ‘content-less’ curriculum is doomed to failure. If people do not know anything, they are unable to think. Content is necessary. A Judaism devoid of substance

will be unable to transmit itself over the generations. That explains why Reform is becoming more traditional. My message to American Jews is that there has to be some meaningful sense of connection to a tradition.

“I mention to my students that there comes a point for everyone where what one does is not the same as what one is capable of affirming logically. Life is always led according to certain conventions. Many rituals work for people. But others do not. Hence, creativity is always necessary, as some functional equivalent to the tradition must then be invented for communal life to emerge and personal meaning to be attained.

“I would like to have Judaism taught so that people know what it says in a period of psychological distress—for instance, after a death. The Jewish tradition has significant resources that can address the needs humans have for meaning and community. At the same time, we cannot return to the world of the ghetto and the resources of the tradition must be explained and interpreted in a modern trope that can resonate with Jews in the modern setting.”

In Need of a Canon

“How does one create a balance between a tradition and the options individuals have to choose? In Jewish society, particularly its liberal quarters, the debate is only a reflection of what takes place in society in general. Columbia University has always upheld its core curriculum. One has to read the Great Books of the Western tradition. I think one needs a certain canon. People can add to it, but they cannot delete from it.”

In an interview four years ago Ellenson said:

It would be a great success if—ten years from now—we have a Jewish community with millions of well-educated, committed Jews. It would still be good even if we have less Jews who are more involved. The day school movement is crucial for this. It represents a radical transformation from the view of a previous generation of Reform Jews, which exclusively embraced public schools. Accepting the new reality of Jewish life was an important but traumatic change for the Reform movement. We now employ a director of day school projects and programs at HUC. I will give this program the strongest support possible.⁶

Ellenson now repeats that he sees the day schools as crucial to the ongoing life of the Jewish people. “With appropriate Jewish education and the socialization of young people into Jewish tradition and values, there is a much greater chance that Judaism will speak to individuals and to society. As president of the HUC I have attempted to promote day schools. We just created a program with the Avi Chai Foundation to produce more day school teachers and administrators for the

community in general and for Reform Jewish day schools in particular. Another program called DeLeT works to further educate teachers in present Jewish day schools.

“I work very diligently on improving the performance of the day schools in the Reform movement. Prof. Michael Zeldin, whom we appointed a few years ago as director of our Program for Jewish Day School Education, now heads the entire School of Education in Los Angeles. This represents a further elevation of the day school within the Reform movement.

“My hope is now to persuade more and more parents to choose that kind of option for their children. I will not retreat on that position, even if I do not know how effective it is. At the same time, however, we also have to turn to after-school education. We have to provide significant supplementary education—both formal and informal—for the great bulk of our youngsters who do not go to day schools.”

Notes

1. Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
2. Bethamie Horowitz, “Connections and Journeys: Shifting Identities among American Jews,” *Contemporary Jewry* 19 (1998).
3. Steven M. Cohen, *A Tale of Two Jewries: The “Inconvenient Truth” for American Jews* (New York: Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, 2006).
4. Jack Wertheimer, “Jews and Jewish Birthrate,” *Commentary*, October 2005.
5. David Ellenson, *After Emancipation: Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 2004), 16–17.
6. Manfred Gerstenfeld, interview with David Ellenson, “New Concepts for Teaching Reform Rabbis,” in *American Jewry’s Challenge: Conversations Confronting the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 229–30.

Interview with Arnold M. Eisen

The Future of Conservative Jewry

According to Arnold Eisen—the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS)—The Conservative Movement faces three major challenges related to message, quality control and structure. When Eisen speaks throughout the United States and Canada to Conservative Jews, he says, many of them do not know what the movement’s message is. Even some rabbis complain that they are not able to convey its essence to their congregants. Some seem not to know it themselves.

Eisen believes the definition of Conservative Judaism’s message has become a priority for several reasons. One is that on the Left, the Reform movement has made changes so that it more resembles Conservative Judaism. On the Right, a type of left-moving Modern Orthodoxy has emerged in New York and other places. Rabbi Avi Weiss’s seminary Yeshivat Chovevei Torah is perhaps close to ordaining women in a way that is partly similar to that of male rabbis (though without all the same roles and obligations). Thus some people leave Conservative Judaism because they want something more to the Left or the Right. This new blurring of boundaries requires a clear definition of what Conservative Judaism stands for. The JTS, Eisen says, has already taken the lead on this matter.

Currently one cannot take for granted that a person born Jewish is going to remain committed to Judaism, he says. Certainly one cannot assume that a person raised in one denomination will remain in it. One thus has to give Jews a good reason to live as Conservative Jews. Intellectuals tend to overvalue the importance of ideology. However, the quality of a person’s experiences within the movement may, Eisen believes, count for more than its message.

Quality Control

Quality control is thus a prime issue that the Conservative Movement has to confront. For an international organization like Conservative Judaism, which depends on “franchises,” it is particularly important. The movement relies on local organizations—synagogues, camps, day and congregational schools, youth groups, men’s clubs, and sisterhoods—to provide a quality product. There are many fine Conservative Jewish professionals and first-rate institutions, Eisen says, but also acknowledges that others are mediocre or worse.

Eisen observes that quality control is so important because any individual's judgment of Conservative Judaism is based on what he or she encounters on the local level. It is difficult to ensure overall quality throughout the far-flung movement.

The issues with quality control result in part from the structure of the Conservative movement. Eisen explains that Reform has a distinctive edge in this matter thanks to the existence of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), which is a relatively unified organization. There is one person at the top of its hierarchy, Rabbi Eric Yoffie. Together with Rabbi David Ellenson, the head of Hebrew Union College, he has set much of the recent course for Reform Judaism.

Conservative Judaism, by contrast, has only a loose umbrella body, the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism (LCCJ). The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) represents the congregations. The movement also has separate men's and women's groups. The educators are separately organized and so are the rabbis and cantors. So, too, is the Masorti movement in Israel and around the world. The LCCJ meets several times a year. Many different organizations are represented there, and in such a framework it is hard to function in a unified manner.

The USCJ will be fundamentally reorganized in the near future; Eisen would like to see a more unified Conservative movement with a structure similar to that of the Reform movement, though he will entrust its form to the commission, currently at work, that is jointly run by the USCJ and a broad range of rabbis and leaders who call themselves HaYom. He hopes that the spiritual and intellectual leadership of Conservative Judaism will continue to come primarily from JTS, and that JTS will have a closer relationship with the congregations, schools, youth groups, and camps.

JTS also has a certain amount of influence at the Ramah camps, which operate under its auspices. Many Ramah staff members are JTS students or graduates and part of the curriculum is planned by the seminary. Eisen says that JTS intends to make Camp Ramah more of an integral part of its organizational structure in the future. JTS is also hoping for a strong relationship linking Ramah and JTS to United Synagogue Youth. He would like to see JTS develop connections with young people as early as possible, rather than waiting for them to enroll at JTS as college or rabbinical students.

Nonideological Challenges

According to Eisen, the leading challenge Conservative Judaism faces today is demographic in nature, combined with a lack of economic resources to deal with it. For example, Conservative Judaism has been strong for decades in many small towns, especially in the Midwest and the Northeast. These are losing population in general and Jewish inhabitants in particular.

Many Conservative congregations are closing or are under siege in less successful economic areas. There are also regions of the country like the Midwest that are losing Jews to other parts of the country, like the Southwest, where Reform is traditionally stronger. Economic and organizational limitations have prevented the Conservative movement from acting quickly enough to plant new institutions in the areas to which Jews are moving.

The Essentials of Conservative Judaism

In October 2007, Eisen gave a much-publicized speech to the Biennial Convention of the USCJ in Orlando. It was titled “The Things That Still Unite Us.” He mentioned ten elements that, for him, defined Conservative Judaism: learning, community, *Clal Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood), Zionism, Hebrew, changing the world, *mitzvah* (commandment), time, space, and God. He elaborated on each of them.

Eisen outlined there the essentials of Conservative Judaism. He says he based his approach, on the one hand, on the German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, who—without knowing it—was a great Conservative theologian. On the other hand, Eisen says, his thoughts were rooted in those of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was also a great Conservative theologian though he, too, did not call himself that. Eisen remarks that Heschel, along with Mordecai Kaplan, is with him every day as he ponders the future of Conservative Judaism and JTS.

Based on their ideas, Eisen listed those ten elements that together make up the Conservative Jewish worldview. Some are shared with non-Jews, who face many similar challenges. They also have much in common with forms of Judaism other than Conservative.

Conservative Judaism, for example, has been Zionist in America, almost from the very beginning. Although its strong Zionism no longer distinguishes Conservative Judaism from other contemporary movements, Eisen says, “it is an integral part of our ‘whole’; crucial to who we are.”

As for Jewish peoplehood, Eisen says that if one asks whether it is as important a concept in the Reform movement or in Orthodoxy as it is in the Conservative movement, he would reply empirically, “No.” As a scholar of modern Judaism, he would make the case that the Reform and Orthodox movements do not value Jewish peoplehood as a core plank of their movement as Conservative Judaism does, and that their members have not been as active in leading *Clal Yisrael* organizations. This core principle has been embodied in every major statement of the movement since Solomon Schechter.

However, Eisen urges a realization that ethnic Judaism is on the decline in North America. When he and Steven M. Cohen polled a representative sample for their book *The Jew Within*, close to half the interviewees said they felt no greater obligation to other Jews than to the rest of humanity.¹

History, Texts, and Traditions

Eisen posits that the key distinguishing mark between Conservative Judaism and other religious movements is that it insists that the Torah wants Jews to live Judaism in a way that is firmly grounded in and continuous with the history, texts, and traditions of the Jewish people. That means, he says, the tradition in all of its complexity, nuance, variety, and substance. Conservative Jews aim, as well, to be fully involved with the larger society and culture of which they are part. He believes this understanding emanated directly from the Torah.

Eisen is clear that he does not regard Conservative Judaism as a compromise with modernity. The tradition entails the commandment to love the Lord, our God, with *all* our heart, soul, and mind. The word heart, he says, should be interpreted as the Torah means it to be: both mind and emotion, holding nothing back. The Torah does not want Jews to separate themselves out from the world at large, but to be fully involved in it. This should be done at the same time as Jews are completely devoted to the Torah, to the *mitzvot* (commandments), and to the Jewish community.

Conservative Judaism insists that this, while difficult, is possible, Eisen says. The question, then, is how it is done. How can one be fully involved with contemporary society and culture and simultaneously live according to the Jewish tradition? Heschel talked about the dialectic of *halachah* (Jewish law) and *agaddah* (Jewish tradition), one of the many “polarities” as he called them. Both are required for Jewish existence.

What Heschel was essentially arguing (and told organizations of rabbis in 1953), Eisen explains, was that Orthodoxy put the emphasis on halachah to the detriment of agaddah, while Reform put the emphasis on agaddah and eliminated halachah. His point was that both are absolutely necessary. Both depend on—and lead to—a personal relation to God, a sense of what Heschel called “the ineffable.”

Observance

Conservative Judaism teaches that a strong set of communal observances and norms is needed. Eisen acknowledges that the critique that Conservative Judaism needs more observance today, particularly as far as Shabbat, the Jewish holidays, and the dietary laws are concerned, is well founded. “We need more and better learning, more regular and passionate *tefilla* [prayer],” he says. “Low levels of Conservative observance do not please him, but he sees the opportunity to raise them, and will be trying to do so. The Mitzvah Initiative that he has launched is designed to get people to think about those observances and norms, and to elicit more consistency and deeper levels of commitment.

The Conservative movement has a vastly varied array of congregations

across North America, Eisen says, and there is no uniformity of observance. Still, he contends there is more consensus and cohesion than one might think. Many Conservative Jews must be challenged to do more—and many are quite active in performance of some mitzvot (service to Israel and other communities, for example), even if they are not regular students or synagogue-goers.

At present, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) is reexamining itself and trying to figure out how the halachic decision-making process should work in Conservative Judaism. Should it, for example, take the view of the majority of voting committee members as normative? Will the leadership strive through other means for greater uniformity in the movement? Will Conservative Judaism clarify the role of the individual rabbi as *mara d'atra* (the local authority) in relation to the law committee and movementwide standards? Eisen believes such matters must be resolved quickly so as to achieve greater agreement on what is normative for and/or expected of Conservative Jews. One cannot move ahead, he says, if one denies that Judaism has been changing throughout the centuries. Gerson Cohen, a former chancellor of JTS and one of the greatest historians of Judaism in his generation, was often asked why Jews could not live the same way as they had always done. Eisen says Cohen loved the question so that he could contradict it.

Cohen used to reply, “Show me what Jews have always done. Obviously, we have Orthodox and especially ultra-Orthodox Jews claiming that they are doing things the way they have always been done, but Judaism has a history of constant change and innovation within the framework of the inherited Jewish past.” Eisen iterates that Cohen was right. The issue is not one of tradition versus change—or even tradition plus change. There cannot be a tradition *without* both continuity and change. That, Eisen says, is what Conservative Judaism stands for.

Achieving a Balance

Eisen encourages Conservative Jewish leaders to avoid focusing exclusively on externalities, even if that is what many people look at. The classical questions were: is the prayer in Hebrew? Do men and women sit together? Then the synagogue had to be Conservative. If men and women sat separately and the service was in Hebrew, it had to be Orthodox; if they sat together and the service was in English, it must be Reform. Now it is more complicated, Eisen says. But there is a style of being a traditional Jew in the modern world that is distinctively Conservative.

In the Conservative movement, Eisen says, any question can be asked. The method of asking these questions and answering them is different from that of both the Orthodox and Reform movements. To realize this, one need only see what is studied at the rabbinical schools of the movements and how it is studied, or go to one of the congregations to hear what is said from the pulpit. This comes back to the issue of the Conservative movement both respecting halachah and

being an integral part of the modern world. There is a balance between the two that Eisen believes is best achieved in the Conservative movement.

Eisen says he has always argued that if one does not master Hebrew and does not put an emphasis on the range of Jewish texts, studied in their original language, one cannot have a firm grasp of tradition. One cannot know intelligently how to carry Judaism forward unless one understands the Jewish past in its complexity and variety.

Living Tradition Today

If one understands the ten elements mentioned, Eisen explains, one can easily see how Conservative Judaism differentiates itself from Orthodoxy on the one side and Reform on the other. Conservative Jews would, however, be wrong to define themselves only in terms of what they are not. One should instead define oneself by what one is. Deuteronomy teaches that the commandments are a way to understand life, blessing, and goodness. That is not across the sea or in Heaven but in one's heart to do.

To Eisen, this is a message that demands Conservative Judaism: "How do I know in which way to live this tradition today? I have to comprehend in great depth what Judaism has been thus far and also to fully understand contemporary circumstances. I have to live in this world, be a part of it and to some degree apart from it."

Gap between Rabbis and Many Members

Eisen observes that in Conservative Judaism there is a gap between the attitudes of the rabbis and the most observant members on the one hand, and many other members on the other. There is an overlap in observance between Conservative rabbis and perhaps 10 percent of the laypeople, he says. Once this elite is made much larger, the difference between the movements will be much more apparent.

One of the great achievements of Modern Orthodoxy in the last generation, Eisen says, has been the reduction of a similar gap in its movement. People do not remember that there used to be many members of Orthodox synagogues who did not keep kosher. This situation has now vanished.

Orthodoxy, remarks Eisen, has done a wonderful job in educating its laypeople by building strong communities where observance is normative. Reform has a very small gap between leaders and congregants because of its lower level of observance. Data collected by Cohen show a significant gap between the Reform and Conservative movements concerning the level of observance, for variables such as Shabbat, education, tefilla, and keeping kosher.

But Eisen says he is the first to admit that unless Conservative Jews can raise levels of observance—and in particular of Shabbat, the Jewish holidays, learning, and *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws)—the movement cannot stay strong. It will lose both young people and the most committed adults unless it can give them a higher level of passion, learning, and observance.

When Eisen goes to Conservative congregations, he often sees that there is a problem in dealing with young persons who come back from the Pardes Institute or the Conservative Yeshiva in Israel, or Camp Ramah. These may have had an intense experience of Jewish learning and/or prayer. He then asks: “Can these people find intense learning on a high level in your congregation or community? Is there a passionate prayer service available in your congregation?” Clearly, he says, the movement has work to do in this regard. And rather than give up on it and assume it cannot be done, he says there is a lot to build on.

The movement’s most pressing need, Eisen says, is perhaps Shabbat communities. Too many Conservative congregations do not have one. When traveling, Eisen meets many loyal Conservative Jews who want the movement to succeed. They cannot imagine themselves being Orthodox or Reform. Even those who go to services at a Modern Orthodox or a Chabad congregation consider themselves Conservative Jews and are looking for Conservative institutions to bring them home.

There is no doubt that it is sociologically easier to have a Shabbat community if one walks to synagogue, sees others walking, and meets people at the synagogue one can invite to walk home with one for lunch. It is harder when one has to invite them to drive their car to one’s house.

Conservative Judaism in this respect was weakened by the decision to allow driving on Shabbat. On the other hand, if Conservative Judaism had not made that decision the movement would have a fraction of its current membership.

Israel

For Eisen, the state of Israel is the perfect, urgent, and paradigmatic case for Conservative Judaism. It is an utterly revolutionary development in Jewish history. The Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz spoke very eloquently on this point in the 1950s. He said that the new reality of Israel demanded both a new halachic and a new agaddic response. One now had to take account of and apply what is “Jewish” about politics, economics, and foreign policy in the new century.

One cannot look up ready-made answers in the classic codex of the *Shulchan Aruch* or other sources. Torah has to be carried further. This can only be done if one is firmly involved in contemporary society and culture, as well as thoroughly grounded in the past and tradition. In Israel, however, most contemporary Orthodoxy lacks a principle of change and is much too hesitant. One has to say:

“This is a different reality. Torah needs to speak to this reality and thus must be adapted and brought forward.”

Eisen stresses that Israel is vital to American Jews. “It gives us hope and faith. Israel is crucial to the meaning of being Jewish for every American Jew who gives thought to this subject. American Jews who visit see a society that is predominantly Jewish. They see what it is like for Jews to live in Jewish time and space and for Torah to extend to every area of society. This is in some way continuous with the Jewish past, yet in other ways radically different.”

Demands from Rabbis

To know what and how to change in response to the changed conditions, Eisen says, great training is required. “The JTS rabbinical school could offer a shorter course of study and be cheaper to run if we didn’t insist on a profound degree of learning. The community must have rabbis who are as learned as, if not more learned than, the most knowledgeable members of the congregations they lead. JTS rejects many candidates because the program insists on very high levels of learning (and observance).”

As far as outreach is concerned, Eisen tells rabbinical students at JTS that if they cannot exhibit love for the Jewish people and Judaism, they have chosen the wrong profession. The Conservative movement is strong on academics; there are many PhDs who can provide the required footnotes. It is, however, not always good at conveying passion in its services. Heschel spoke fifty years ago about synagogues lacking fervor. One can only have a missionary capability if one has a very clear message—and the passion needed to transmit it.

Eisen admires Chabad’s ability in this area but notes that they do not reach out to non-Jews; he thinks Conservative Jews could do much in this field, especially given the increase in intermarriage. Eisen says he wants to reach out to the non-Jewish partners and bring them ever closer to Torah.

A Major Project: Mitzvot

When Eisen came to JTS as chancellor, he asked himself what JTS could do for the Conservative movement in the opening years of his leadership. He decided that what was needed was to get Conservative Jews talking to each other about mitzvot, studying and doing mitzvah together. He says he had learned from Heschel that one cannot talk about halachah if people have no concept of mitzvah, and he learned from a host of evidence and thinkers just how problematic mitzvah is for modern, autonomous, “sovereign” selves.

He thus launched the Mitzvah Initiative in the Conservative movement. This year, about thirty congregations plus (Conservative) Schechter schools and some

Ramah camps will talk about, study, and perform mitzvot. The participants will reflect on what the mitzvot mean, and hopefully increase the level of individual and collective observance in their congregations. One can only have a strong Conservative movement with a strong notion of mitzvah.

Eisen explains that the program begins with small groups in congregations discussing what they believe obligates them and why, what they are responsible for, what in Judaism they love. The instinctive response of American Jews, like Americans in general, is that a commandment is the opposite of freedom. They consider themselves “free” and therefore no one can command them. But, if one pushes them a bit, they realize that they do have obligations and responsibilities. Some are evident, such as those to their children, aging parents, friends, or their community. Many also recognize that distinctive responsibilities exist—because they are Jews—to Judaism, to other Jews, or to Israel.

If one asks them why this is so, some of them reply that it is a matter of conscience. God often enters into the discourse, even if they do not believe in Divine revelation at Sinai. Almost all admit their special obligations as Jews, whether or not these are connected to God.

Once this honest discussion has taken place, one can start explaining the concept of *ta’amei hamitzvot*, the broad range of meanings provided by Jewish tradition. Some mitzvot center on one’s home, such as keeping kosher and making *kiddush* (the blessing over wine) on Shabbat. Other commandments are fulfilled primarily in the synagogue or in the community. Some are “between a person and his or her fellows.” Others are “between man and God.” Some commandments are distinctly Jewish; others concern all people, such as working against genocide in Darfur and helping to save the planet.

The essence, Eisen says, is to help Conservative Jews see mitzvah as a unified path, in a way that has not been presented to them before. Many rabbis with whom Eisen has talked told him that they had never thought about the mitzvot themselves in this way, let alone spoken to their congregations about them. The yearlong curriculum of study and practice on the mitzvot has enabled this to happen. The results so far are inspiring.

Eisen argues that Judaism cannot accept what he and Cohen call the “sovereign self,” an individualism that borders on narcissism. He believes that American Jews harbor a much larger notion of being responsible and commanded than they initially acknowledge. “We need to encourage that sense,” he says. “The future of our community hangs in the balance.”

Note

1. Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

Interview with Marc B. Shapiro

Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenges to Its Establishment

“American Modern Orthodoxy consists of at least two distinct types, an intellectual and a sociological one. Intellectual Modern Orthodoxy has an ideology of joining the best of Western civilization with a commitment to Jewish law and traditional Jewish values. It is both an intellectual and a spiritual movement that sees the secular world as an opportunity to enrich the Jewish world in order to arrive at a synthesis. Like all such movements it only appeals to a numerically limited intellectual elite, those who have serious Jewish learning and also a broad secular education.”

Marc B. Shapiro remarks: “Sociological Modern Orthodoxy numbers many more people. Its followers are characterized by their interest and finding value in certain observances: Shabbat, eating kosher, and so on. This is mainly a lifestyle choice. It is a commitment to Jewish law combined with the better things in life such as fancy cars, vacations, attending sports events, and various forms of entertainment. In the United States it is nowadays possible to be fully observant and do all of this.

“These people would not feel welcome in the ultra-Orthodox community, so it is natural that they associate with Modern Orthodoxy, which has always had an ‘open door’ approach. This is so even though the philosophy of intellectual Modern Orthodoxy does not provide a *hechsher* [religious approval] for much of what goes on in sociological Modern Orthodoxy.

“What defines these people as Modern Orthodox is not their thought processes but the laws they keep. Their way of thinking is, to a large extent, similar to that of their non-Orthodox and even non-Jewish neighbors because they watch the same TV shows and read the same magazines. They live in the secular world while maintaining certain Jewish observances.

“The Modern Orthodox Jew of the sociological type is similar in many ways to the pre-Second World War German Jew. There many rabbis complained about how Torah and *Derekh Eretz* [Western culture] became a lifestyle movement without much stress on either Torah study or spirituality.

“In its present form one might call sociological Modern Orthodoxy a combination of ‘the good life’ and Jewish law. This bourgeois movement looks for quality schools for their kids, nice clothes, good kosher restaurants, and the like. This attitude of the sociological Modern Orthodox has led to criticism that

they lack both intellectual and spiritual content. Theology and why they follow certain laws play little role in their thinking.”

Threats from the Left

“Modern Orthodoxy keeps most of its young in its camp, even if these have only a sociological identification. The widespread notion that Modern Orthodoxy is declining or will be defeated by the ultra-Orthodox is inaccurate.

“There are many challenges to Modern Orthodoxy from both the Left and the Right. To the Left it loses a certain percentage of youngsters to secularity. This will always be the case when one sends one’s children to secular universities.

“The threat of the Conservative movement of more than fifty years ago no longer exists. Many Modern Orthodox now view the Conservative movement mainly as self-destructive. Large numbers of people are leaving it and the movement is suffering financial strains.”

Threats from the Right

“On the other side a sizable number of religiously serious Modern Orthodox youngsters turn toward the ultra-Orthodox vision, which they consider a more authentic approach. Countering this is that in many Modern Orthodox synagogues one finds congregants who have left an ultra-Orthodox background.

“Modern Orthodox rabbis often feel that they are losing some of their best people, either to ultra-Orthodoxy or to *aliyah* [emigration to Israel]. American Modern Orthodox youth often go to Israel for a year or two. When they come back a significant percentage abandon their parents’ style of Orthodoxy, adopting a more rigid and more spiritually uplifting kind. In such cases the stay in Israel creates a culture gap between the generations.

“Yet Modern Orthodoxy will remain a force in American Judaism. The average Modern Orthodox Jew will not want to live an ultra-Orthodox lifestyle where his mind is closed off from general pursuits.”

Modern Orthodox Education

“The Modern Orthodox movement has some of its major achievements in education. It has become almost standard that after their high school study, pupils go to Israel for a year or two. Thus, the typical young Modern Orthodox Jew today knows much more than his parents, who went to Jewish day schools but didn’t have the Israel experience with its strong emphasis on Jewish learning. He knows far more than his grandparents.

“Even those Modern Orthodox students who go to colleges other than Yeshiva University [YU] can find Jewish learning there. There is strong Orthodox attendance at the Ivy League schools. There are also Orthodox *minyanim* [prayer groups] and *shiurim* [religious study courses] at places where one would never have imagined this several decades ago.”

Costs of Being Modern Orthodox

In Shapiro’s opinion the financial commitment it requires is the major factor preventing Modern Orthodoxy’s growth among the non-Orthodox. “Many more people find the traditional Jewish lifestyle potentially appealing. It is, however, extremely difficult to be an economically lower-middle-class person and join the Modern Orthodox world.

“If one is not affluent and yet was brought up in Modern Orthodoxy one may stay in it, get scholarships for one’s children, and make the best of things. These people don’t live the lifestyle they would like. They can’t take fancy vacations, don’t buy new cars, and live in smaller houses than they would if they were less observant.

“There are typical American Jews who begin to observe some Jewish rituals and live near a synagogue and find it appealing. They might consider taking on more Jewish commitments, sending their children to a Jewish day school and so on. Many of these are scared away when they find out the financial commitment that is entailed. Participation in camps requires additional funds and so does eating kosher.

“One major reason why some families I know move to Israel is that school tuition is free, though parents are responsible for various payments. In the United States it is against the law for the government to fund private schools. When one has four children one can educate them almost for free in Israel, whereas in America Jewish elementary day school for these kids would cost close to \$50,000 a year. In high school the tuition goes up to \$20,000 per child a year. Modern Orthodoxy has thus been turned into an upper-middle-class phenomenon. The ultra-Orthodox have a much cheaper school system.”

New Ideas Required

“A few years ago there were talks, for instance, in Lawrence, Long Island, about bringing back the Talmud-Torah system. Pupils would go to the public schools in the morning and thereafter they’d have a few hours each day of Jewish school. That would cut the tuition significantly.

“Such a trend would destroy the Jewish day school movement. Yet tuitions have been going up faster than inflation. Some new ideas will have to be proposed

because the burden is becoming so extreme that eventually Modern Orthodox Jews will be sending their kids to public school. I have already seen some examples of this.

“There cannot be Jewish continuity in America without day school education. Meanwhile it is said jocularly that the best form of birth control in the Modern Orthodox world is the cost of tuition. From living in the community, I know that quite a number of Modern Orthodox parents have fewer children than they would prefer.”

The Position of Women

Shapiro considers that while the position of women is discussed in some intellectual circles, their actual position in Modern Orthodoxy remains more or less the same as thirty or sixty years ago. “They function as mothers and homemakers as in previous generations. From my observations I don’t see much desire on the part of the typical Modern Orthodox woman to change this.

“The typical Modern Orthodox synagogue does not permit a woman to be president. Women have no active involvement in the prayers and services. The fact that many women have college degrees has not translated into demands that the synagogue be run differently. Also, my experience is that the typical Modern Orthodox woman doesn’t want to get up every morning at 6 a.m. to go to services or to appear in synagogue early on Shabbat (who would watch the kids?). The typical Modern Orthodox man doesn’t look forward to doing this either, but many do, because they feel it is their religious obligation. Since women’s presence is not required at public prayer, I don’t see how it will ever be a significant religious activity for women.”

Little Impact of Feminism

“Despite all the predictions it doesn’t seem that feminism, which has empowered women and given them access to secular and Jewish education, has had much of an impact on Jewish ritual in mainstream Modern Orthodoxy. It certainly has not had any real impact on Jewish law. The one issue where there has been more of an impact concerns the so-called *agunot* [women whose husband’s whereabouts are unknown or who refuses to grant them a religious divorce]. This has, for instance, led to prenuptial agreements becoming standard in the Modern Orthodox world. These obligate the husband to issue a religious divorce in the event the marriage breaks down.

“Women in general are more connected to religion and spirituality than men, and that has drawn them to rabbinical positions in the Conservative and Reform movements. There is no possibility that this will happen in Modern Orthodoxy.

In the educational field, however, one sees some differences from what we had in the past. Women are studying Torah at a higher level than before, and some are even studying advanced Talmud. YU offers advanced programs for women. So does the more recently established Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (though its programs are not exclusively for women). In New York there is also the Drisha Institute, the first establishment for advanced study of Jewish texts by women.

“The one field where there could be an increased role for women is as advanced teachers. They could even become, to a certain extent, halachic [Jewish-law] authorities, in particular on women’s issues. This would not, however, be within the realm of institutions. In Israel we see perhaps a beginning of women *poskot* [Jewish-law decisors], but in American this has not developed.”

Zionism

“The one distinguishing feature that connects all types of American Modern Orthodoxy is their great commitment to the state of Israel and the Land of Israel. In their synagogues the prayer for the state of Israel is usually recited enthusiastically.

“It is probably impossible to be a Modern Orthodox rabbinic figure or leader without sharing the religious-Zionist outlook. You cannot publicly express non-Zionist views and remain part of the Modern Orthodox rabbinate.

“From my personal experience I know that in many Modern Orthodox synagogues people who have dovish positions keep this to themselves. The Modern Orthodox world has, in recent decades, been transformed into a bastion of right-wing religious Zionism, much as Israel’s National Religious Party was transformed.”

The Orthodox Union and Young Israel

“The Orthodox Union (OU) has become by far the main institutional movement of the Modern Orthodox community. It has made a great effort to ensure that there is kosher food available all over the United States. The OU is well known as the dominant provider of kosher food supervision.

“The OU is first of all a grouping of synagogues. It has a strong youth movement, the National Conference of Synagogue Youth [NCSY], that promotes Jewish education and Israel tours. It also has a center in Jerusalem that has a very active program. In addition, the OU has an office in Washington, DC, which attempts to influence congressional legislation in matters where the Orthodox have a stake, as well as in matters concerning Israel. It is competently run and successful in reaching out to the Washington powerbrokers. The average Modern Orthodox Jew may not care or even know much about the OU. Yet a typical Modern Orthodox synagogue is a member of it.

“Young Israel was at one time a very significant organization, but has lost much of its original vision. Currently, Young Israel synagogues do not have a distinctive identity. Some people even argue that, in view of the type of rabbi in many Young Israel communities, it has grown closer to ultra-Orthodoxy. It is rather ironic to recall that the movement once was famous for sponsoring Saturday-night dances where boys and girls could meet, in order to prevent assimilation.

“Young Israel should have merged with the OU many years ago, as they served—and to a large extent continue to serve—the same community. Unfortunately, in recent years Young Israel appears to think that it has found a new niche of activity, which is opposition to Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.”

A More Exciting Phase

Shapiro remarks that Modern Orthodoxy is presently going through a potentially more exciting phase than it was fifteen to twenty years ago. “The main catalyst for this development is Chovevei Torah, which is presenting a more liberal—one might say left-of-center—perspective of Modern Orthodoxy on a host of issues (for example, halachah, feminism, and social justice). It will increasingly challenge YU in terms of training Orthodox rabbis. Its creation is the result of a backlash against the perceived growing extremism of rabbis coming out of YU, which is supposed to serve the Modern Orthodox community.

“More and more, two types of Modern Orthodox rabbis will compete for congregations. On the one hand, there will be the more conservative rabbis coming out of YU. On the other, there will be more liberal, some might say avant-garde, rabbis who want more interaction with the wider world in terms of social justice and the like, and they will be trained by Chovevei Torah.

“One test case for this was the Agriprocessors scandal. In May 2008 their kosher slaughterhouse in Iowa was raided by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and found to employ a large number of illegal workers in addition to having many other flaws. The OU and many others in the Orthodox world stood behind the firm, although events later forced the OU to reevaluate this position.

“The young Turks of Chovevei Torah see kosher food as not merely a halachic concern but an ethical issue as well. Some of the students were at the forefront of educating the public about the hypocrisy of kosher food being produced in a ‘nonkosher’ fashion. They pushed for what can be called kosher working norms, which go beyond the strict halachic standards of slaughter. The Rabbinical Council of America [RCA] also issued a statement about this, but it was the Chovevei Torah students who identified this as an issue before the mainstream rabbinic community.

“These students are also interested in broader issues of social justice. For that reason they march for human rights in Darfur. The traditional Jewish world is

very insular in such matters, so we see another challenge to the old way of doing things.”

Influenced by Outside Ideologies

“This new type of Modern Orthodox Jew, while being halachic, sees himself also to some extent as postdenominational. He doesn’t fear involving himself with non-Orthodox Jewish clergy. Non-Orthodox ideologies have also had an impact on their thinking. One example is feminism. The idea for a new approach to standards of kosher food probably can be traced to the Jewish Renewal movement.

“Far fewer rabbis graduate from Chovevei Torah than from YU’s rabbinical school. But whereas almost all of the Chovevei Torah graduates would like to become community rabbis and leaders, many of the YU alumni do not look for a pulpit.

“Both the RCA and Young Israel try to prevent Chovevei Torah graduates from obtaining pulpits. These opponents of Chovevei Torah realize that if its graduates are not able to integrate into the mainstream Orthodox world, it will be a failed experiment. Yet I am confident that they will succeed, as there are sections of the Orthodox world that are a good fit for the Chovevei Torah students. Their graduates have even moved into established synagogues in Bucharest, Montreal, and Denver, to give just a few examples. Furthermore, they have become rabbis in Hillel positions that influence the next generation. One can see on their website the variety of places where Chovevei Torah alumni are serving.”

A Halachic Challenge

“The Chovevei Torah rabbis are not only an intellectual challenge, but also a halachic one to the rabbinical establishment. Matters concerning women’s role are very controversial. Some of these rabbis are followers of Prof. Daniel Sperber and believe that women should be able to read the Torah in a regular Orthodox service. They may not practice this in their synagogues, but are amenable to smaller changes such as women being presidents of synagogues or giving *divrei Torah* [a sermon].

“In one of their synagogues I visited, the men did not say the daily blessing of praising God for not making them a woman. There are other quasi-halachic issues that also cause controversy. Many Chovevei Torah rabbis think interfaith dialogue is acceptable. One might sum up their position by saying they are a bit more flexible when dealing with some aspects of Jewish law.

“The right wing of Modern Orthodoxy sees Chovevei Torah as a reincarnation of Conservative Judaism a hundred years ago. They view it like the Breslau

Seminary of Zacharias Frankel in Germany and the Jewish Theological Seminary at the turn of the twentieth century.

“When the Union for Traditional Judaism [UTJ] split from the Conservative movement it was thought that there was a place for their new seminary, the Institute for Traditional Judaism. It has not been able to thrive because there aren’t that many traditional Conservative synagogues, that is, synagogues that are genuinely committed to halachic observance. Had it not been for the creation of Chovevei Torah, UTJ might even have been able to appeal to certain liberal Orthodox synagogues. But Chovevei Torah has filled this vacuum, and the future of the small UTJ movement seems to be in the left wing of Modern Orthodoxy.”

Outreach

“Modern Orthodoxy has only limited activities in the field of outreach to the non-Orthodox. The National Conference of Synagogue Youth, for instance, does do some of this with Jewish youth in public schools and tries to give them some Jewish background.

“Almost all Orthodox outreach is done by ultra-Orthodox organizations. The major forces of Jewish outreach today in the United States are probably those associated with yeshivot such as Aish HaTorah or Ohr Sameach. Both belong to the Lithuanian branch of ultra-Orthodoxy. One also finds them on some large college campuses. They have very trendy websites. Chabad also has a strong position in the large cities, but I think it is much more influential in smaller municipalities, where they are often the only game in town. They have even opened Hebrew schools and are now siphoning off Conservative and Reform families from the mainstream synagogues.

“ArtScroll, which comes out of the Lithuanian ultra-Orthodox world, has also been able to put its prayer book and Torah translations in almost every Modern Orthodox synagogue in the country. In fact, when it comes to religious literature, Artscroll dominates the English-language Orthodox world. Modern Orthodoxy has missed the boat here. One would have expected that with its large number of college graduates and the sophistication of many of its adherents, it would have dominated this field.”

American Politics

“Until about thirty years ago the Modern Orthodox community voted solidly Democratic like the overall Jewish community. Since the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, there has been a steady political move to the Right among both the ultra-Orthodox and the Modern Orthodox. There are, however, still some groups of liberal Modern Orthodox who vote Democrat.

“The Modern Orthodox are now the main Jewish community that votes Republican. The Republicans are usually more hawkish about the Middle East than the Democrats. This fits in with the Modern Orthodox conservative mindset and specifically with the fact that Modern Orthodox often have children living in Israel and have right-wing attitudes toward it. Here the Modern Orthodox diverge from both the ultra-Orthodox—which other than Chabad do not have much of a stake in Judea and Samaria—and the non-Orthodox.

“Another important factor in their shift of voter preference is that the Modern Orthodox have become quite successful financially. Cutting taxes and the hope of school tuition vouchers are big issues for many of them. However, the ultra-Orthodox world, particular the Hasidic sector, benefits greatly from various entitlement programs, and when it comes to local politics is thus often very comfortable with the Democrats.”

Interfaith Dialogue

“In 1964 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the most significant leader of the Modern Orthodox, published an article titled ‘Confrontation.’ He came out against theological dialogue between Jews and representatives of other religions. Rabbi Soloveitchik believed that in theological dialogue, each side will demand something from the other. For instance, Jews wanted Catholics to remove remarks detrimental to Jews from their prayers. Thus, it could be expected that the Catholics would expect some sort of theological compromise from the Jews on matters of concern to Catholics. Rabbi Soloveitchik was certainly pleased by what happened at Vatican II, but he saw a danger if Jews were involved in what should be an internal Catholic development.

“Rabbi Soloveitchik did not have a problem with dialogue with other religions on, for instance, environmental issues and human rights. During his lifetime, though, virtually no Modern Orthodox figure was willing to engage publicly in interfaith theological dialogue because of his opposition.

“Since his passing there have been breaks in this position. On the left wing of Modern Orthodoxy, some rabbis believe a different era has begun. They argue that Rabbi Soloveitchik’s fear that large parts of the Church—both Catholic and Protestant—were mainly interested in missionizing is no longer valid. In today’s dialogue no one is being asked to compromise on core theological principles.

“Also, they argue that in a world dominated by secularism, religions need to stand together to propound common spiritual values. This cannot be done without understanding the other person’s religion and theology. Also, religious people cannot engage in a neutral zone when talking about the environment and the nature of humanity. Such topics always include musings and discussions of a theological nature.”

Dialogue with Evangelicals

“When we speak in the United States about significant interfaith dialogue of Jews, it is with Catholics and Protestants, especially Evangelicals. The Modern Orthodox have a political alliance with Evangelical Christians in support of Israel. This troubles many of the non-Orthodox because the Evangelicals are strongly prolife. They are also more hard-line on Israel than, for instance, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was.

“Evangelicals have not only supported Russian Jews in Israel, they have also financially assisted some yeshivot. They stand strong for the Land of Israel and an undivided Jerusalem. They speak at dinners of American Modern Orthodox organizations. Evangelicals are viewed positively, contrary to the liberal churches, which are regarded as anti-Israel.

“Therefore, the Modern Orthodox are largely willing to overlook the Evangelical theology. This theology often states that in the latter days Jews will all convert to Christianity. Confronting this has been set aside because the Evangelicals are at present such great allies of the Jewish community.”

Relations with Muslims

“The Jewish community at large is not engaged in any significant discussions with the Muslim community. This often centers on the fact that it is very difficult to find Muslim leaders who will, without qualification and attempts at ‘understanding,’ condemn Islamic terrorism. This is unfortunate. Because of our shared ‘pure’ monotheism, Jews and Muslims should be natural dialogue partners. One hopes this is not simply a messianic dream.”

Interview with Leonard Saxe

The Birthright Israel Program: Present and Possible Future Impacts

“The program that is now known as Taglit-Birthright Israel was launched in late 1999—early 2000. The Israeli parliamentarian Yossi Beilin had proposed the idea almost a decade earlier. He wanted to change the Israel-Diaspora relationship from Israel being a supplicant and a recipient of Jewish philanthropy to it becoming an educational center for the Jewish world. Beilin proposed that the Diaspora, instead of donating to Israel, should spend its funds educating Diaspora youth—making it the ‘birthright’ of every Diaspora Jew to have an educational experience in Israel.”

Leonard Saxe elaborates on how the actual Birthright Israel program (now known as Taglit-Birthright Israel) started. “Two American philanthropists, Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt, were looking for a way to have a major impact on what they saw as declining interest and engagement in Jewish life. They adopted the idea of Birthright Israel and created an organization to make the program operational. They gathered a consortium of private philanthropists and they garnered the support of Jewish federations in the United States, communities around the world, and the Jewish Agency for Israel. With the assistance of the Israeli government, they were able to launch the program.

“Prior to Birthright Israel, Charles Bronfman was involved in supporting and developing Israel-experience programs for non-Orthodox youth. However, most Israel-experience programs were designed as summer programs for high-school youth or gap-year programs after high school.”

Saxe and Barry Chazan describe in their book *Ten Days of Birthright Israel* the project’s launch: “Registration for Birthright Israel in North America began in August 1999, just as the academic year at colleges and universities was starting. The criteria for participation were designed to be simple and straightforward: one had to self-identify as Jewish, be eighteen to twenty-six years old, and never have visited Israel as part of an educational program.”¹

Saxe remarks: “By autumn 2009, nearly 225,000 young Jewish adults in the eighteen-to-twenty-six age group around the world had participated in the program, which consists of ten-day educational experiences in Israel. Approximately 75 percent came from North America, the majority of them Americans. The remaining 25 percent originated in more than fifty countries around the world.

Large groups have come from Argentina, France, Germany, and Russia. This makes Birthright Israel the largest Jewish communal education project ever.”

Participation per Cohort

“Our estimate is that in North America there are eighty to ninety thousand young Jewish adults in each age cohort (age eighteen, age nineteen, and so on). In the United States, among young adults born in 1985 and 1986, more than 15 percent have now participated in Birthright Israel. In Canada, Birthright Israel has reached nearly 25 percent of the young adults born in 1986 and 1987.²

“In 2007–2008, the program expanded substantially. If the number of participants from these years were sustained, the proportion of the young adult population who are program alumni could increase in the coming years to 35 percent. The program has not yet had the funding to send all of those who apply and it is possible, if the resources were made available, that the majority of North American Jewish young adults could participate in an Israel experience by the time they reach their mid-twenties. The recession of 2008–2009 slowed the program’s ability to achieve this goal, but relative to the amounts spent on Jewish education, Taglit’s cost is modest and I’m confident a way will be found to fund it.

“The Jewish community needs to decide if it wants an Israel experience to be a normative element for its youth. If the funding is available, and we can reach a point where over 50 percent of the American Jewish population has had an Israel experience, Diaspora Jewry would be transformed.

“There is some overlap between Birthright Israel participants and those who later matriculate in university programs for foreign students in Israel. To reach the majority of a cohort, Birthright Israel has to take—on a consistent basis—40,000–45,000 young people per year from North America.”

Characteristics of the Program

“The idea of developing a short-term program for college and post-college age participants—that would attract the least engaged in the community—represented a change in thinking about Israel-experience education and about Jewish education in general. It was based on models of informal/ experiential education and focuses on developing personal connections.”

Saxe adds: “Perhaps Birthright Israel’s defining educational element is the *mifgash*, an encounter that allows Diaspora participants to get to know Israeli peers. It is an experience of young adults from the Diaspora living and seeing Israel in the company of Israeli young adults. The Israeli participants are similar in age, but most are soldiers whose lives are very different. Nevertheless, they find a common language and develop profound connections with one another.

“The program aside, the organizational structure of the project is also very different from that of other programs. The Birthright Israel office in Jerusalem is relatively small. It works with private tour organizers, educational groups such as Hillel and the Chabad-affiliated Maayanot, as well as other bodies that run the trips. Birthright Israel sets the organizational standards and the parameters to evaluate the groups. Shimshon Shoshani, a former director-general of the Israeli Education Ministry, was the CEO and founding director of the program. He created the original educational model.”

Funding

When asked how much money has been spent overall for the Birthright Israel program, Saxe answers: “The average cost per participant from North American is about \$2,300. Given the costs of transportation from overseas, it’s remarkable that they have been able to maintain relative stability in costs. In view of the number of participants, by the end of 2009 nearly \$500 million had been invested in the program.

“The original vision for funding the Birthright gift was that it should be a three-way partnership. One-third of the funding would come from private philanthropists; one-third from community bodies such as North American Jewish Federations, Jewish communities around the world, and the Jewish Agency; and the final third from the Israeli government.”

Context, Identity, Peoplehood

“A key factor is the attachment of Jews to the Land of Israel, to our heritage, tradition, and Torah. Being in the land where the Jewish nation was created is central to Birthright. Being in an environment where Hebrew is spoken, where the calendar is Jewish, is a very different experience for young adults than going somewhere else with a Jewish group.

“As the program is focused on personal relationships, in principle, it should not matter where one goes to be part of a Jewish group. But context is critical. The context—the Land of Israel—reinforces the messages of identity and peoplehood that are central to Birthright Israel’s goals.

“However assimilated a Jew is, as long as he or she acknowledges Jewish heritage, being in Israel and living as part of a Jewish group is a powerful experience. It affects virtually all who participate, but one sees the greatest impact on the most assimilated, most disconnected young Jews.

“This was confirmed during the intifada in the years 2001–2004. Because of concerns about security, those who participated in Birthright Israel were more likely to have come from homes with higher levels of Jewish practice and the

percentage of assimilated young Jews was lower than before or after that period. Although participants' experience was still very positive and transformative, the effects were even greater when there were more of the less affiliated and less knowledgeable participants.

"We released a study of the long-term impact of Taglit-Birthright Israel on participants, looking at those who applied to the trip in 2001–2004, some of whom went to Israel and others who did not.³ The results are, in some ways, stunning: along with confirming long-term positive attitudinal changes about Jewish identity and Israel, we also found that non-Orthodox married alumni were nearly 60 percent more likely to be partnered with someone Jewish. The surprising finding was the strength of the marriage effect. Participants were 'voting' to be Jewish by their marital decision-making."

Key Indicators and Values

"Although predicting the future is always uncertain, we suspect that program impact may be even stronger in the future because more of the post-2004 cohorts come from families that are not highly engaged in Jewish life. Impact is greater on those without prior engagement.

"In terms of indicators of prior engagement, we have been tracking knowledge of Hebrew. It indicates both prior Jewish education and involvement in Judaism. In more recent cohorts, just about half of the participants report that they can read Hebrew but don't understand it. They went to Hebrew school, most until *bar* or *bat mitzvah* [coming-of-age ceremony], but didn't learn to speak or understand the language. "More telling, though, is that the number of those who do not know the Hebrew alphabet is now more than 20 percent of the North American participants. For this group of individuals who have had little or no Jewish education, the impact of the program is even greater, in part because they have more distance to traverse in terms of their connection to Israel and Jewish identity.

"One element of the power of Birthright Israel, however, is being in a group that includes Jews from a broad spectrum of backgrounds. I doubt whether the program would be as effective if none of the participants on a bus spoke or read Hebrew. The key value of the program is in people being able to see and experience others who have different levels of knowledge, connection, and observance of Jewish tradition than they do. It would be much harder to engage a bus filled with individuals who had no such connection, even though that may be the group you want to engage most."

Uniformity of Impact

To the question of how it is possible to significantly strengthen identities in a

period of only ten days, Saxe replies: “As a researcher who studies change in social behavior, I’m not surprised. Taglit-Birthright Israel creates what social psychologists call a ‘cultural island.’ It takes young people away from their normal environments and puts them into a unique setting and group context. The twenty-four-hour-a-day nature of the experience makes it possible to produce change. It is Birthright Israel’s task to help inspire hunger and thirst for engagement with Jewish life and it does so with the vast majority of participants.

“Perhaps the program’s most surprising element is the relatively uniform way in which it affects participants and how they describe their relationship with Jewish life and Israel.⁴ We have interviewed tens of thousands of participants and almost as many applicants who didn’t have a chance to go on the program. The consistency of participants’ descriptions of the program is extraordinary. The vast majority describe it as an ‘amazing experience’ and our long-term data indicate that most regard it as ‘life-changing.’ This is true for those who are intellectually inclined as well as for those who are not, for those who prior to the trip were connected to their Jewish identity in various degrees and those who were not. There are differences in the magnitude of their response depending on their starting point, but the patterns of change are identical.

“What they learn is mostly about people, but they also report that ‘they learned a great deal about Israel’s landscape and natural environment, Israeli culture, modern Israeli and Jewish history.’ They learn less about Jewish customs and practices, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Israeli social problems, but in part that is because the program eschews a religious focus, as well as a political orientation.”⁵

Shabbat in Jerusalem

Saxe adds: “If I were to describe the overall strategy, one might call Birthright Israel a model of social engineering that has been under development for more than three thousand years. The way in which the Jewish community organizes itself, and the values it has, together form a very powerful system. Unfortunately, too many Diaspora Jews have no experience of being part of that.

“If, before the trip, we asked Birthright Israel participants what they would want to do in Israel, I doubt that a significant number would answer that they’d like to spend the twenty-five hours of Shabbat in Jerusalem. They would not have an idea of what that is. But when participants return from the trip, the Shabbat that they all spend in Jerusalem is often one of the most powerful memories.

“The Shabbat experience is not necessarily a religious one, though participants are offered that opportunity. Rather, it’s a time to participate in the rhythm of Shabbat. For many participants, it connects to their earliest memories of Judaism and their reading *Bereshit* [Genesis]. The program provides a context, but it is the setting and the group within which the experience is created.

“The essence of what Birthright Israel does is to make a participant’s Jewish identity salient. Some scholars use a computer metaphor to describe identity. Each of us has multiple identities—national, professional, gender, and a myriad of others—they are like windows upon our desktop. For many Diaspora Jews, Judaism is similar to a program on a hard disk that is never executed. Birthright Israel executes the Jewish program and, by putting it on the desktop, makes it relevant.

“Hopefully, it begins a process. Nobody claims that in ten days one can provide young adults with an educational experience that will make up for not having studied Hebrew or having learned the history and traditions of their people.”

Tour Operators

The uniformity of reactions to Taglit, and the role played by experiences such as Shabbat in Jerusalem is, perhaps somewhat surprising given that multiple tour operators are responsible for delivering educational content. The operators have different orientations to Judaism and to the narrative of Jewish peoplehood and Israel.

According to Saxe, two elements contribute to ensuring that participants have a broad and balanced experience. First, Taglit’s educational standards provide a common framework. Although *morei derekh* [educators] have flexibility in how they meet Taglit’s educational requirements, the standards—for which operators are held accountable—impel them to include diverse perspectives in every trip. Second, and perhaps most important, the *mifgashim* level the “playing field.” Engaging Diaspora participants with their Israeli peers ensures that the narrative of Israel and the Jewish experience is based on the reality of contemporary Israel.

Saxe notes that there has been “mostly healthy” competition among the tour operators; they compete for applicants and must sell their approach to Israel, including how much “fun” participants have on their trips. As a decade-long observer of Taglit trips, he believes that the current tour operators do an increasingly good job balancing ‘substance’ and fun. “It’s a traditional Jewish notion to make the study of Torah ‘sweet’ and Taglit *madrichim* [youth group leaders] are experts at knowing how to deliver sophisticated content in a way that is both palatable and meaningful to college and postcollege young adults. As the program evolves, efforts are underway by Taglit to enhance the educational armamentarium available to *madrichim* and find the ‘sweet spot’ between content and group process.

“As Taglit evolves, perhaps one direction will be to encourage tour operators to differentiate their trips in terms of educational content. Already, some groups are organized by professional focus (e.g., medical students). But I could see groups being organized for those interested in improving their Hebrew or to study

archeology. And, if Taglit were to become more involved in helping participants postprogram, there are dozens of opportunities to enhance the educational value of programs.”

After Returning

Research on program participants has found that many of them change their attitude toward Judaism as a result of the visit to Israel. Saxe says: “Our studies show that the impact lasts for a number of years. Until recently, the strongest impact that we documented was attitudinal—views of Israel and Jewish identity. What is now clear is that this extends to important life choices.”⁶

“One of the issues with follow-up after participants return home is that, often, the members of the group are physically dispersed, as are the Diaspora educators who traveled with them. Even with students, they graduate and leave the campus community. Birthright Israel participants are at a time in their lives when mobility is normative. Initiatives based on the assumption that participants will return to the communities from which they originated are bound to fail.

“At the same time, those who traveled with friends or on campus- or community-based trips identified their newly established Jewish network as critical to their subsequent decision to attend Jewish activities. It seems to work best for college students who go with campus groups and return there, at least for one to three years. How to follow-up on what has been initiated with the Birthright Israel trip remains an issue. Much needs to be done, but compared to the challenge of bringing well over two hundred thousand young people to Israel, creating follow-up programs seems a modest goal.”⁷

Changes on Campus

Saxe observes: “One of our studies found that ‘half the respondents strongly agreed that the trip encouraged them to become more involved in their Jewish communities back at home.’⁸ The fundamental problem is that the Jewish communities that many participants were disconnected from when they came to Israel remain the same ones they return to. Birthright Israel may not be able to change that, but it is not unreasonable to ask Diaspora communities to do so. My own community, Boston, has taken the challenge and has made working with this population one of its strategic priorities.

“To date, we see the most change on campuses. The fact that so many Jewish students have participated in Birthright Israel trips leads to a difference in the way many Hillel and Chabad organizations on campus function. As the participants’ level of interest in Judaism has changed there is more involvement in courses on Jewish studies and Israel.

“Perhaps the most difficult group to reach is young Jewish adults after college. In previous generations, most people got married at that point in their lives. They had rabbis marry them and they created their own families, which often brought them into contact with the Jewish community. Today the average age of marriage is postponed by five or more years, as is the age of childbirth. The result is that young adults don’t have good reasons to be involved with the traditional Jewish institutions.”

Birthright Next

“To respond, in part, to the follow-up problem, there is now an organization, Birthright Next, which is trying to create opportunities for young people to be engaged in Jewish life in their communities. It will be successful to the extent that it fosters change. Diaspora communities need to restructure themselves, to empower young adults, and to provide meaningful opportunities for them to engage Jewishly on their own terms.

“That process is still in its infancy and Birthright Next will have to find a way to be more than another organization that provides programming for the community. One hopeful sign is that there has been a dramatic difference in community attitudes over the last ten years. Hillel has gone from a ‘backwater’ of Jewish institutional life to being prominent, and there has been an explosion of programs designed to engage young adult Jews.

“A number of communities are at the forefront of these efforts. Along with Boston, Toronto is a model. It has a well-developed system for trying to engage participants. It starts with recruitment and orientation to the trip. Other communities are not quite as cohesive. The largest Diaspora community is based in the New York area. Nearly one-quarter of the participants come from there. But this is a huge area and, in some ways, is a collection of smaller communities. Developing an effective strategy for New York will be a critical test as to whether follow-up of Birthright Israel can be successful.

“Talking about follow-up now is like taking a snapshot of a moving stream. There are likely to be major changes in the coming years. In part, the changes are the result of a dramatic increase in the number of program alumni, but as well, the creation of Birthright Next. It is going to be interesting, for example, to see whether their efforts to promote Shabbat dinners will ‘take.’ Their goal is to make involvement in Shabbat activities a focus of enhanced Jewish life after the participants’ return; it is the obvious ‘Jewish starting point.’ It follows to some extent the Israeli model where Friday night is the central time for the family to get together, however secular its members are. Birthright Next has the backing of philanthropists, from Michael Steinhardt to the Jim Joseph and Schusterman foundations.”

Conclusions

“Along with studying how Jewish education can be more effective, we are also learning about the Diaspora’s evolving relationship with Israel. There has been concern that American Jewry is growing more distant from Israel, but our work with Birthright Israel participants suggests just the opposite.⁹ A large subset of the Jewish young adult population has been positively engaged with Israel as a result of the program. In the past, young adults were the least likely to be committed to Israel. The new form of engagement is based on friendships and social networking and has the potential to transform the fundamental connection among Jews around the world.

“Another conclusion concerns the distancing of Jews from Judaism through marrying out, which leads to distancing from Jewish identity and Israel. We have learned from Birthright Israel that the program has an attitudinal impact irrespective of whether your parents are both Jewish, whether one parent was a convert to Judaism, or whether he or she never converted. The children of intermarried parents also come out of the program with strengthened Jewish identities.

“Program alumni do not necessarily return to their Diaspora homes ready to defend Israel against criticism. They do, however, have connections to Israelis and knowledge about the country, which most Americans don’t possess. That allows them to hear and understand the media reports on Israel in a very different way. They have seen that Israel is a vibrant democracy where issues are passionately discussed, even in the face of challenges. From an American point of view, which holds free speech and freedom of association as fundamental values, Israel ‘makes sense.’

“Clearly, part of what shapes Birthright Israel and its impact on young adult Jews is the reach of communication. Participants can stay in contact with one another, whether they live in North America, Israel, or elsewhere. Because of the internet, it is just as easy for participants to read Israel’s English newspapers as it is for them to read U.S. ones. That also makes it easier for Birthright Israel participants who decide to return to Israel, either to make *aliyah* [immigrate] or to study there temporarily.

“Another observation concerns the Israeli participants. One of our recent findings is that Israeli participants report the same kinds of positive impact as their Diaspora peers. Young adult participants come to see themselves as members of *Clal Yisrael* [the Jewish people at large], not just as Israelis.

In our study of mifgash participants, the vast majority of Israelis indicated that the program made them feel pride—pride in service to the IDF, pride in their country, and pride in being Jews. To a lesser extent, but still significant, we found that it also stimulated them to want to learn more about Judaism.¹⁰

“Although the worldwide economic downturn will likely result in fewer participants and longer wait-lists than in 2008, the program seems assured of

providing an Israel-education experience for twenty-five thousand or more Diaspora young adults each year. As said, it perhaps needs to serve close to fifty thousand youngsters per year in order to reach its transformative potential, but that's not an unreachable goal."

Notes

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Steven Bayme

The Intellectual Assault on Israel and Pro-Israel Advocacy: How the American Jewish Community Should React

American support for Israel historically has rested on four main pillars: the high esteem Jews enjoy within American society; the strong base of Christianity within American culture; the kinship Americans have for a fellow democracy; and, especially since 9/11, the common foes that confront both America and Israel.

None of these pillars may be taken for granted; nor are they necessarily unequivocal. For example, the base of Christian support for Israel often is accompanied by promillenarian sentiments, with some going so far as to claim that the destruction of Israel may constitute Divine retribution for Jewish failures to acknowledge Christ.¹ Moreover, as Boston University professor Richard Landes has noted concerning millenarianism generally, Christian disappointment with failed millenarianism often has translated into scapegoating Jewish behaviors.²

Second, the nature of minority politics in a democratic society mandates that minorities will succeed only to the extent that they can persuade the majority that their cause is both just and consonant with majority values and interests.³ In this context, the case for Israel has never been limited to Jewish concerns. Instead, pro-Israel activists have spared no efforts to demonstrate that friendship for Israel constitutes part of American national interests.

The critical ingredient, however, in securing success in pro-Israel advocacy has been the question of how compelling is the case for Israel. One constant of recent American Jewish history has been that for over sixty years the idea of Israel has been compelling for Americans generally. It has captured the support of both a Hubert Humphrey and a Ronald Reagan, or, more recently, a Bill Clinton and a George W. Bush. That bipartisanship of support for Israel is perhaps the strongest refutation of those who claim that a Jewish minority has hijacked American foreign policy on behalf of Israel's interests.

An Intellectual Assault

What, then, constitutes the recent intellectual assault on this pro-Israel consensus? Earlier this decade Prof. Tony Judt, a distinguished professor of history at New

York University, opened the attack on Israel's legitimacy in a widely read article in the *New York Review of Books*. Titled "Israel: The Alternative," it argued that the idea of a Jewish state had already become an anachronism. Since Israel was born as a nation-state in an era of postnationalism, its very creation was a mistake.⁴

To some extent this argument may be understood as a secular equivalent of the doctrine of supersessionism. Israel as a Jewish state may have made sense after the First World War. But by the close of the Second World War, with the decline of empires and nation-states, Israel as a Jewish state had been superseded by the ideas of postnationalism.

Second, Judt argues that the contemporary leaders of Israel are heirs to Zionist "fascism." Those who were not democrats in the 1930s have been succeeded by leaders who continue this tradition uncritically. To describe Revisionist Zionist leaders in the 1930s as fascists constitutes a considerable historical error. To argue that Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert are continuing a tradition of fascism represents malicious falsehood.

Third, Judt dismisses the two-state solution as a chimera. Given the presence of over a quarter of a million Jewish settlers on the West Bank, he claims it would be impossible to disengage from the territory and create a Palestinian state.

Lastly, and perhaps most personally, Judt argues that Israel's existence threatens Diaspora Jews. Israel's actions embarrass Diaspora Jews and make them uncomfortable in their own settings. This argument in many respects parallels the protest of Lord Edwin Montagu, British High Commissioner of India in 1917 and heir to a distinguished Anglo-Jewish family, that he could not be expected to represent the British government in India when the Balfour Declaration had informed him that his homeland lies in Palestine.⁵

Judt concludes that the alternative solution is to redefine Israel as a binational state. He thereby resuscitates an older and discredited paradigm. To be sure, he acknowledges that a binational solution will be difficult to implement. Yet he concludes that binationalism is preferable to the other alternatives, which have now been proved failures. His argument echoes that of Israeli post-Zionists as well as the *Future Vision* statement of Israeli Arab intellectuals.⁶ Significantly, Judt provides an American base for these notions. Binationalism would be a disaster for the Jewish people and a tragedy for contemporary Israeli citizens. Nevertheless, the idea of binationalism, considered moribund just a few short years ago, today has considerable backing.

The second major assault on pro-Israel activism originated in an important article in the *London Review of Books* by Profs. Stephen Walt of Harvard University and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago, later released as a book by the prominent American publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Walt and Mearsheimer approach the issue of Israel from the "realist" school of international relations in pronounced contrast to the "idealism" of the Bush administration, which hoped to build democracy in Iraq. They argue that a powerful group of pro-Israel lobbyists essentially has hijacked American foreign policy and held

it hostage to Israel's interests. In turn, American pro-Israelism has sparked anti-Americanism in Europe and in the Middle East. This pro-Israel viewpoint dominates the media, the think tanks, and the universities. Lastly, the authors argue that it is virtually impossible to discuss these problems openly and candidly because Jewish intellectuals and communal leaders immediately hoist the charge of anti-Semitism against anyone who chooses to question continued American support for Israel.⁷

This last card of anti-Semitism, albeit somewhat disingenuous, does not in any case provide an effective response to the Walt-Mearsheimer assault. Whether the authors are anti-Semitic is both unprovable and beside the point. The real question for minority politics, as noted, lies in whether the arguments are compelling and whether they are consonant or dissonant with majoritarian values and interests.

Israel as Scapegoat

First, the cause of Israel remains overwhelmingly popular with the American public. Jews would never have been as successful in marshaling support for Israel if the idea of Israel had not been compelling for Americans generally. Walt and Mearsheimer, of course, argue that the Israel lobby is so powerful because it controls the major communications media. But Lincoln's adage remains apt: you can't fool all the people all the time, and pro-Israel opinion has prevailed within American society consistently since 1948. The most recent Gallup survey (February 2010) of American opinion on the Israel-Palestinian conflict reports Americans are favoring Israel over the Palestinians by a record-high majority of 63%–15%.

What the authors have done is attribute America's multiple dilemmas in the Middle East largely to the problem of Israel. Former president Jimmy Carter committed virtually the same error in his recent book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.⁸ If Israel ceased to exist, the problems of oil supplies, terrorism, Iran, Iraq, nuclear proliferation, Shia-Sunni divisions, and preventing the destabilization of moderate Arab regimes would still be in place. Walt, Mearsheimer, Carter, and others all have elevated American support for Israel as exacerbating all the problems confronting American foreign policy in the region. By charging that support for Israel distorts American foreign policy interests, Walt and Mearsheimer challenge the long-held bipartisan consensus that supporting Israel remains the right thing to do.

Moreover, the authors err substantially in treating the Israel lobby as monolithic. Paul Wolfowitz can in no way be equated with AIPAC, nor AIPAC with Christian Zionism; Christian Zionism can hardly be equated with pro-Israel columnists; and the American Jewish Committee can hardly be equated with the Zionist Organization of America (which the authors pointedly do). Rather than

being interchangeable entities, these groupings are independent of, and often in disagreement with, one another about various aspects of Israel's policies.

To be sure, Walt and Mearsheimer concede the right of a minority to lobby for the policies it favors. That is essentially what American Jews have done. In turn, they have been responsible for building a special relationship between America and Israel that is not paralleled among other liberal democracies of the West. That is what is meant by a strategic triangle linking Israel, America, and the American Jewish community.

Walt and Mearsheimer do not quarrel with the right of Jews to advocate for Israel's interests. They resent, however, Jewish successes in doing so. Their argument brings to mind an incident recorded by Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews*. When Queen Cleopatra of Egypt invaded the realm of the Hasmonean monarch Alexander Jannai, two Jewish generals in her entourage approached her and urged her to desist lest she incur the wrath of Alexandrian Jewry.⁹ The message of these two generals expresses the political influence of a Diaspora Jewish minority some two thousand years ago that, notwithstanding some changes in context, is by no means irrelevant for contemporary American Jewish leadership.

In this context, the Jewish community should not respond by claiming powerlessness. First of all, there is no virtue in powerlessness. Second, Jews cannot purport, on the one hand, to possess influence, yet retreat the minute someone criticizes that influence. Minorities that attain power and influence do incur resentment, but minorities without influence remain in ever more precarious straits.

An American Jewish Response

How, then, should the Jewish community respond to this intellectual assault? Jews should neither trivialize it by claiming its stupidity nor dismiss it as anti-Semitic. Both those notes were struck when the article by Walt and Mearsheimer first appeared. Neither succeeded in negating the article's significance.

Third, Jews should not claim that American universities have become hotbeds of anti-Zionism or anti-Semitism. American Jews embrace university culture, and with good reason. Jews form 2 percent of the general population but 5 percent of the university-student population, 10 percent of faculty, and 20 percent of faculty at elite institutions. At certain Ivy League institutions the proportion of Jews on campus has been conservatively estimated at 20–25 percent. Such data hardly demonstrate Jewish powerlessness.¹⁰

Nor, as noted, could Jews' pro-Israel advocacy have been so successful if Israel did not appeal so much to Americans generally. Rather than "hijack" American foreign policy, pro-Israel advocates have succeeded in persuading American society that supporting Israel is the morally correct thing to do. In this

context, it is important to recall that 97 percent of pro-Israel sentiment in America emanates from gentile rather than from Jewish sources.¹¹

What should concern the community is that Americans do not understand Israel's policies concerning West Bank settlements. Pro-Israel advocates correctly argue that the settlements are hardly the primary obstacle to peace. The reason there is no Palestinian state today is the same reason no Palestinian state was created in 1947: the Arabs rejected a two-state solution then and since. Nevertheless, the weak link in the case for Israel remains the settlement policy. Americans cannot understand why Israel builds settlements in areas that ultimately are expected to form part of the state of Palestine.

No doubt the settlement issue is complex. Many defend settlements as necessary for security, as did the late Prime Minister Rabin for those in the Jordan Valley. Others invoke Zionist values and the principle of the right to settle in any part of the historical Land of Israel. However, Americans are primarily concerned about whether settlements are indeed an obstacle to peace. Do they create facts on the ground that will make Israeli withdrawal from the territories difficult, if not impossible? Israel, too, remains divided over the question of settlements. Many Israelis perceive them as a bargaining chip; others maintain that they inflame the atmosphere between Israel and the Palestinians.

In intellectual opinion specifically, the settlements have been a particular sore point of criticism of Israeli policy. In the eyes of critics such as Walt and Mearsheimer, the settlement policy casts Israel as a colonial power. Defenders of Israel are hard pressed to maintain the moral case for Israel at a moment when Israel expands West Bank settlements. Pro-Israel advocates are reduced to arguing that the settlements remain negotiable; some settlement blocs may be maintained as part of a final agreement, possibly including land swaps; and most important, the settlements themselves are not the critical obstacle to a two-state solution.

Lastly, Walt and Mearsheimer in their book, as well as in the earlier article, manage to ignore the entire context of Arab rejectionism of Israel's right to exist. They treat Arafat as a benign figure who favored a two-state solution and for whom no evidence could actually be found linking him to the *Karine-A*, a freighter captured by the Israeli navy in 2002 bearing fifty tons of weapons and explosives and apparently headed for Gaza in direct violation of the Oslo accords. Noticeably absent is the record of Arafat's rejection of the offer at Camp David in 2000 without making alternative proposals save to say that he did not believe a Jewish temple had ever existed on the Temple Mount in any case.

By the same token, American Jews are blamed for preventing a peace treaty with Syria. In other words, the authors claim that a less confrontational American policy toward Syria since 9/11 by now "might well have produced a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty," and they blame AIPAC and other American Jewish groups for demonizing Syria. Putting aside questions of Syria's actions in Lebanon and elsewhere, this analysis blithely assumes Syria's willingness to agree to a full

peace with Israel if only American Jews were less forceful in their pressure on Washington.

An Ongoing Commitment?

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the visibility and prestige of these intellectual assaults on Israel's legitimacy and American support for Israel, American public opinion remains overwhelmingly pro-Israel as it has been consistently since 1948.¹² Thus far the attacks have had no popular or electoral impact. Candidates running for office remain quick to demonstrate their pro-Israel credentials. Americans also have no sympathy for the British-proposed boycott of Israeli universities. Over four hundred American university presidents signed a full-page ad condemning the boycott as a severe violation of the values of academic freedom.¹³

Concerns, of course, remain. For one thing, the views of Judt, Walt, and Mearsheimer may not be popular at present but could become more so in the future. Moreover, they evoke some resonance within key circles in the security and intelligence establishments. Furthermore, a number of high-profile incidents of anti-Zionism on elite campuses have caused considerable agonizing within American Jewish communal circles. In turn, people rightly question whether support for Israel is eroding within American intellectual culture.

These concerns are hardly illusory and require sustained attention. But the underlying problem pro-Israel advocates face on campus is less hostility to Israel than ignorance or indifference toward it. Not knowing leads to not caring, and not caring leads to questioning why America should support the Jewish state.¹⁴

In other words, the appropriate way to engage the campus on Israel is not through glib slogans or counterpropaganda—no matter how factually accurate. Instead, the campus should be engaged academically through courses, curricula, and scholarship on Israel. If the cause of Israel is just, then more education on Israel will lead both to greater knowledge about it and greater caring.

Concern about Israel's image within American culture, however, raises the question of Israel's image among American Jews. Are American Jews still persuaded that Israel's cause is just? Here, confidence is not in order. Supporting Israel assumes an American Jewish community that is knowledgeable, committed, and surefooted in its pro-Israel mindset and its Jewish identity. It assumes an American Jewish community that is willing to state clearly that it cares passionately about the future of the Jewish state. However, as American Jews become increasingly assimilated, as a distinctive Jewish identity erodes, American Jewish support may well prove to be the real weak link in the case for Israel.

American society at large remains open to persuasion that America's support for Israel is just. Whether the Jews will care enough about their Jewishness to continue to make that case remains an open question. The distancing from

Jewish matters in general is at the core of American Jewish distancing from Israel. However remote the possibility may seem today, a Jewish community in danger of losing its Judaic distinctiveness may one day no longer be sufficiently committed to engage in pro-Israel activism.

Notes

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