Contemporary Jewish Demography

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The current status and future prospects of the Jewish community in the United States are dependent, to a considerable degree, on its demographic structure—its size, distribution, and composition—and on factors affecting changes in these structural features. Like the general population of the United States, American Jewry has been undergoing steady alteration in its demographic structure. We can therefore expect substantial changes in family and household composition, in age composition, in economic activities and familial responsibilities for women and men, and in geographic distribution. The effects on the patterns and levels of births, deaths, and migration and in turn on the size, composition, and distribution of a population have enormous significance at both the local and national levels for the social, cultural, and religious viability of the community.

American Jews constitute the largest Jewish community in the world, but their total number has always been a matter of conjecture because the decennial census has never included a question on religious identity. Over the years, however, social scientists have developed a number of procedures for counting American Jews and estimating past and present Jewish population and trends. It is, of course, risky to project these estimates into the future; nevertheless, some trends are unmistakable.

The Jewish population of the United States grew from about one thousand in 1790 to 1 million by the end of the nineteenth century. This growth was dwarfed by the mass immigration that

brought some 3 million East European Jews to the United States between 1880 and 1930 and raised the percentage of Jews in the total population from 0.5 in 1880 to an estimated 3.6 (4.2 million) at the end of the 1920s. The proportion of Jews in the United States population reached a peak of 3.7 percent in the mid-1930s. Over the next fifty years, curtailed immigration, reduced fertility, and the effects of assimilation and intermarriage considerably slowed this growth rate. By 1986, Jewish households (defined as households containing one or more Jews) included approximately 5.7 million Jews. Because of their much slower rate of growth than the total American population, by 1986 Jews constituted only about 2.4 percent of the total population.

The cessation of mass Jewish immigration to the United States affected not only the source of growth but also the generational composition of American Jewry. Despite the influx of refugees after World War II and the immigration of Soviet Jews, Israelis, and others in the 1970s and 1980s, more than 85 percent of the Jewish community today is native-born, and half or more of these are third- and fourth-generation Americans. This means that the American Jewish community must depend demographically very largely on itself to maintain its numbers. It means, too, that the demographic, sociocultural, and religious future of the community will depend, to a great degree, on how its American-born members react to the freedom to integrate spatially, economically, and socially into the larger American social structure.

Marriage and Fertility

American Jews have had the distinction of having smaller families than virtually any other ethnic and religious group in the country. Available evidence from the late nineteenth century points to a Jewish birth rate lower than that of the non-Jewish population; this differential seems to have persisted to the present day, although convergence in fertility behavior between Jews and non-Jews has been taking place as a result of more widespread acceptance of the smaller family and the greater prevalence of family planning. Yet Jews still tend to marry later, desire and expect to have small families, be more approving of contraception, and apparently practice birth control more often and more efficiently than most other groups. These patterns reflect in part the attitudes

and practices of a highly urban, educated, and rational population. They may also represent a reaction to minority status and all that such status implies, socially and psychologically. Whatever the reasons, low fertility, particularly when it hovers at or goes below the replacement level of 2.1 children per married couple, could contribute to a decline in the total number of Jews.

Such decline may be accelerated as well by changing marital patterns, especially nonmarriage. In a recent review of fertility in the United States, Charles Westoff concluded that "it seems unlikely that the trend toward postponement of marriage has yet run its course." Citing the growing independence of women, the costs of marriage, and norms that permit couples to live together outside of marriage, he foresees further increases in average age at marriage rather than stabilization or decline.[1] Whether the current concerns with AIDS will change these norms remains to be seen. To what extent do Jews conform to these changing marriage patterns?

Young Jews still seem to place a high value on marriage and the family. A study of high school seniors showed that about 95 percent of the young Jewish men and women expect to marry, more than was true of the members of other religious groups; but a very large percentage of the Jews expect to marry later than non-Jews.[2] Jewish young people, like those in the general population, are postponing marriage, thereby raising serious doubts about whether they will realize the high levels of marriage indicated in their expressed expectations. Pooled national data documenting actual behavior for the 1960s and 1970s pointed strongly to a rise in age at marriage for Jews, a reduction in the percent ever married by the time they reached their forties, and a widening rather than narrowing gap between Jews and non-Jews.[3] In contrast to the 1960s, when 90 percent of Jews aged twenty-five to thirty-four were married, only 74 percent in this age group were married in the 1970s. For those aged thirty-five to forty-four, the level reached 97 percent in the 1960s but only 91 percent in the 1970s, 5 percentage points below the non-Jewish level.

Further evidence comes from the American Jewish Committee's study of Jewish college freshmen.[4] In a 1971 suvey of freshmen only 4 percent of the men and 20 percent of the women reported that they regarded it "essential or very important to get married in the next five years." By 1980, when most of these freshmen were in their late twenties, only 33 percent of the men

and 42 percent of the women were married (another 2 and 5 percent had been married and were already divorced). By contrast, among non-Jews 56 percent of the men and 57 percent of the women were married. Only about 5 percent of the Jews were already parents compared to 25 percent of the non-Jews.

Jews' characteristic late marriage and low levels of marriage are also suggested by various recent community studies. The 1986 MetroWest New Jersey study found that whereas two-thirds of those now aged thirty-five to forty-four had been married by age twenty-five, just under half of those now twenty-five to thirty-four married before age twenty-five.[5] Whether the 30 percent in the twenty-five to thirty-four age group who are not yet married will eventually marry and thereby reduce the nonmarriage level to the low of 4 percent now characterizing the thirty-five to forty-four age group remains to be seen. The 1984 study of Philadelphia's Jewish community (Yancey and Goldstein, 1984) found that as many as 11 percent of the women and 16 percent of the men between ages thirty-one and forty had never married.[6]

The comparative data from the 1975 and 1985 Boston surveys are indicative of the recent changes that occurred in marriage patterns.[7] The 1975 study found that among those aged thirty to thirty-nine 88 percent married and only 9 percent were still single. By 1985, only 69 percent in this age group were married; almost one-quarter (23 percent) were still single. The national data and those for MetroWest, Philadelphia, and Boston suggest that, for a rising percentage of Jews, postponement of marriage may lead to eschewal of marriage, at least until the end of the reproductive period. Delay and possible avoidance of marriage may, in turn, have implications for overall fertility levels in the absence of any strong trend toward extramarital fertility among single Jewish women.

Moreover, the impact of changing marriage patterns on fertility may be compounded by the changing divorce rate. Although divorce is considerably lower among Jews than non-Jews, the proportions of divorced Jewish persons and of one-parent households has risen in recent years.[8] For example, in Philadelphia, 6 percent of all women and 7 percent of all men aged thirty-one to forty were separated or divorced. A 1985 study of Baltimore found 5 percent of the adults separated or divorced compared to under 2 percent in 1968; it also found that of those who were married, 15 percent had been married more than once whereas in 1968 only 8

percent of the married adults had experienced multiple marriages, although some of these remarriages undoubtedly involved widowed persons. Among those aged thirty to thirty-nine, the Boston studies for 1975 and 1985 found an increase from 3 to 8 percent in divorced and separated persons, and for those forty to forty-nine that figure had risen from 2 to 12 percent. Increases in percent divorced or separated were also observed for all older groups up to age seventy.[9]

Currently, experts debate whether Jewish fertility is or will be sufficiently high to assure replacement. All seem to agree that, at best, Jewish fertility will not exceed the replacement level of 2.1 children per mother. The possibility of subreplacement levels depends on how much confidence can be placed in past and recent behavior as predictors of future behavior and on whether expressions of fertility expectations are reliable indicators of future childbearing. Steven M. Cohen argued that "on the basis of past experience, it does seem safe to say that the completed Jewish birthrate for today's Jewish parents may remain well below the number needed for replacement." His explanation seems reasonable. "So long as middle-class urbanized Americans experience low birthrates, so will comparable Jews. Jewish birth patterns will generally follow those of the larger society as they have in the past."[10]

More recently, citing data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth, as well as from earlier surveys, Calvin Goldscheider and Frances K. Goldscheider argue that Jewish fertility is likely to remain below that of Protestants and Catholics but that the 2.1 average number of children expected by currently and ever married women does not point to below replacement level fertility. They claim that this conclusion is reinforced by the findings that Jews in a 1972 national sample of high school seniors expect about two children on average and continued to do so in 1979.[11]

Yet the Goldscheiders acknowledge that the accuracy of the predictors of replacement level fertility will depend on the proportion of Jewish women who marry. If a substantial percentage of Jewish women do not marry or do not have children outside marriage, the fertility of the married, even if it averages 2.1 children, will not be adequate to replace all the married and unmarried. Moreover, the 2.1 average may itself be too high. For example, a 1985 study of Baltimore found 12 percent of Jewish women aged

thirty-five to forty-four still childless and 9 percent of women aged twenty-five to forty-four expecting to remain childless; a substantial percentage expected to have only one child.[12] The 1975 and 1985 Boston surveys also provide some insights into fertility. The comparisons suggest that "Jewish adults, along with postponing marriage, are also postponing having children, and, apparently, more are having no children."[13]

There has been speculation that changing family values associated with the later stages of the feminist movement are leading to a greater acceptance of children in the American family in the mid-1980s than earlier and that this trend may influence Jewish family size as well. Such an expectation is not warranted for the American population, however, according to comparisons of the results of national surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1985 and those conducted in earlier decades.[14] For example, in 1976, an average of 2,218 children had been born per 1,000 white women age thirty to thirty-four and a total of 2,390 per 1,000 was expected. By 1985, women in this age group had averaged only 1,612 children per 1,000 and expected a total of only 1,979, which is below replacement.

On the basis of such evidence for the American population as a whole, Charles Westoff (1986:558) finds "little basis for assuming that the low level of fertility in this country is a demographic aberration." To the contrary, he argues that the basic social forces that underlay the historical decline in fertility—industrialization and development of a service economy, the transition of children from being producers to being consumers, universal education, the replacement of traditional values by an ethos of rationality, the changing functions of the family and the improved status of women, and improved contraceptive technology—all point to continuing low level of fertility. He suggests that, if anything, the greater uncertainty is how low fertility will yet fall. Although all predictions are subject to error, Westoff's assumptions, like those cited by Cohen for the Jews, provide forceful arguments against expecting a return to above replacement fertility, particularly among Jews, who have been in the forefront of the decline in fertility. Given the patterns of late marriage and high educational levels that characterize the Jewish population, there is no convincing evidence that Jews will deviate from the pattern of low fertility that seems likely to continue among whites as a whole.[15]

Based on the available evidence, I believe that Jewish fertility levels are highly unlikely to forge ahead of those of non-Jewish whites, for whom below-replacement fertility levels are projected. It seems reasonable to conclude that Jewish fertility will not exceed replacement level in the near future and that, more likely, it will be at somewhat below replacement. It must be stressed that even if fertility is at replacement level, maintenance of population size is not assured if losses occur concurrently through the high mortality of an aging population and the impact of assimilation and intermarriage.

Intermarriage

Until fairly recently, the Jewish community has been much more concerned with the effects of intermarriage than of fertility on demographic survival. If marital assimilation takes place at a high rate, American Jewry faces demographic losses both through the assimilation of the Jewish partner and the loss of children born to such a marriage. Even if the Jewish partner does not assimilate, intermarriage is likely to reduce the Jewish rate of growth unless extensive conversions of non-Jewish spouses occur; intermarriage may also reduce growth because fewer children will be born Jewish. Regrettably, there is no fully reliable and recent set of information on the rates of intermarriage and its impact on identity. The evidence we do have suggests that the level of intermarriage, the extent of conversion, and the impact of conversion and mixed marriage on Jewish identity vary considerably, depending on the size, location, age, and social cohesiveness of a particular community. Despite these variations, virtually every study in recent decades points to rising levels both of intermarriage among young, native-born Americans and of conversion to Judaism. Evidence from the most recent studies, however, suggests that both may have reached plateaus and that conversions may be declining.

The results of the 1970–71 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) indicated that 7 percent of all Jews married at the time of the survey were in mixed marriages. This overall level was not unusually high, but the study also showed that intermarriages rose sharply from 4–5 percent of those marrying between 1950 and 1959 to 10 percent of the 1960–64 marriage cohort and to 22 percent of those marrying in 1965–69.[16]

The effect of intermarriage on demographic growth is largely determined by the extent of conversion to Judaism by the non-Jewish partner and by the extent to which children born within such marriages are raised as Jews. Overall, the evidence from the NJPS suggested that a substantial proportion of intermarriages resulted in conversion of the non-Jew, especially among the younger groups, which have a higher intermarriage rate. In an even larger number, the non-Jewish spouse identified as Jewish. Furthermore, about half of the children from such marriages were being raised as Jews.

In contrast to the NJPS's relatively optimistic conclusions regarding the impact of intermarriage, a 1976–77 eight-city study of 446 intermarried couples concluded that intermarriage represented a threat to Jewish continuity.[17] The evidence pointed to low conversion rates, a low level of Jewish conduct and practice in mixed marriages, a low proportion of children being regarded as Jewish, and most of the children not being socialized as Jews. The study stressed the need for outreach programs designed to provide more opportunities to enhance the Jewish content of the family life of the intermarried and especially to strengthen the likelihood that children would identify as Jews.

Community studies undertaken since the NJPS show that rates of mixed marriage continue to vary inversely with age and are generally higher among younger persons than those reported in NJPS. But the levels continue to differ considerably from community to community. A reasonable estimate seems to be that the average current intermarriage rate for American Jews is between 25 and 30 percent, indicating that in 45 percent of all newly married couples one partner is not Jewish. For example, in Baltimore, of all married persons, 26 percent aged thirty-five to forty-four and 36 percent of the youngest cohort, aged twenty-five to thirty-four; were not born Jewish; only about 30 percent of non-Jewish partners in the intermarriages of the youngest cohort converted to Judaism.[18] Also important is the evidence that 13 percent of the Jewish partners converted away from Judaism. Significantly, less than a majority of the children in households in which the non-Jewish partner did not convert were identified as Jewish. If rates of conversion are, in fact, declining and if most of the children in such marriages are not identifying as Jews, the impact of intermarriage on Jewish demographics may become more negative than in the past.

The MetroWest New Jersey study also found a steady rise in intermarriages, from only 6 percent of individuals married before 1964 to 14 percent of those married in 1975–80 and one-third of those married since 1980.[19] Concurrently, the proportion of intermarried households in which the non-Jewish spouse converted has declined. From a high of 44 percent of all marriages in 1971–74, the percentage converting declined to 27 percent of those marrying in 1975–80 and only 12 percent of those married since 1980.

The recent Boston data also point to rising levels of intermarriage. The overall level of intermarriage reported for adults married only once is 15 percent, but this figure rises from virtually zero among couples who married before 1956, to 10 percent of those who married between 1966 and 1970, and up to just under 30 percent of those marrying between 1976 and 1985. Moreover, among those married in 1985, only 14 percent of the non-Jewish spouses converted to Judaism; unfortunately, no comparative data are presented for the earlier survey. Among second marriages the percent involving a spouse not raised Jewish rose from none of the small number who entered second marriages before 1965 to over half of those doing so after 1965.[20]

Because of the limitations in the data on intermarriage, however, these patterns are suggestive at best. We do not yet know definitely if intermarriage leads to a quantitative gain or loss for the Jewish community. Of all items that warrant further research, intermarriage undoubtedly ranks among the very highest. And as the views of various segments of the Jewish community diverge with respect to who among the intermarried and their children should be counted as Jewish, the task of undertaking research on the subject will become even more complex.

Residential Mobility

At a time when American Jewish fertility has reached probably its lowest level and when intermarriage and assimilation may be threatening the demographic and socioreligious vitality of the community, increasing levels of mobility and greater geographic dispersion of the population nationally and locally are new threats and new challenges. According to the NJPS, about three-fourths of all adult Jews in 1971 no longer lived in their city of birth, and

one-third of all adults had moved within the previous five to six years.[21]

More recent data, albeit at the local level, confirm the mobility patterns identified by the NJPS. Statistics from the 1985 Boston survey indicate that only 45 percent of adults had been living in the same town for ten years or more. This percentage varied from only 22 percent of those aged twenty-one to thirty-nine to over 60 percent of those aged forty and over. As many as 30 percent of all adults had moved into the metropolitan area within the ten years preceding the survey, but the levels were much higher among the younger segments of the population, 60 percent of those aged twenty-one to twenty-nine and 38 percent of those aged thirty to thirty-nine. Furthermore, half of those in their twenties reported that they would likely move out of Greater Boston in the next five years, and 64 percent reported that they were very or fairly likely to do so within the next ten years. The data for Greater Boston corroborate a pattern of relatively high levels of mobility among Jews.[22]

The very features that help explain the mobility of Jews in Greater Boston—being better educated, more professional and managerial, more native-born, and living in smaller households—are also likely to be conducive to higher Jewish mobility nationwide. The patterns of redistribution shown by the Boston data—strong movement to the South and West by those leaving the area—conform to those characterizing the country as a whole.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Jews were heavily concentrated in the Northeast. In 1930, 69 percent lived in the region. Compared to the general American population, proportionally fewer lived in the North Central (20 percent) and southern regions (8 percent), and about as small a proportion lived in the West (5 percent).[23] By 1986, the Jewish population was distributed more nearly like the total American population. The Northeast still contained a disproportionate share of American Jewry (53 percent) but had declined substantially, as had the percentage in the North Central region (11 percent). Growing percentages lived in the South (18 percent) and the West (17 percent).[24] Since the education obtained by American Jews and the occupations they now enter often lead to movement away from family and out of centers of Jewish population concentration, these shifts in regional distribution are likely to become accentuated in the future.

The migration effects of changing educational and occupational patterns may be compounded by a higher marriage age, a lower percent marrying and a higher percent divorcing, and low fertility, all of which are conducive to greater mobility.

The Jewish population is being redistributed not only across regions but also within and between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. Jewish residential clustering in a limited number of urban neighborhoods is changing as Jews participate in the general suburbanization movement. Jewish neighborhoods in central city areas and in older suburbs have experienced population decline as newer outer suburbs have grown.

The metropolitan and national patterns of dispersion have probably been accentuated by the settlement of growing numbers of Jews in small communities throughout the nation. In the past, small communities have had great difficulty retaining their populations, Jewish and non-Jewish. Like their neighbors, Jews have left to seek better educational, occupational, and social opportunities in larger cities. Many of those who remained small-town residents tended to minimize their Jewishness and often intermarried or assimilated.[25] Beginning in the 1970s, Americans as a whole entered a new pattern of population redistribution with many moving to smaller towns and cities and away from metropolitan centers. Available evidence suggests that, consonant with this general development, a number of small Jewish communities have once again been gaining populations, and more such communities seem to be appearing. Some Jews who have sought the tranquillity and slower pace of small-town life at the same time seem to be developing a more active identification with Judaism in their new surroundings.

According to the *American Jewish Year Book,* there were 469 places with fewer than five thousand Jewish inhabitants in 1985. Indeed, 348 had fewer than a thousand Jews, and, of these, 283 had fewer than five hundred.[26] It is also fair to assume that considerably more such small communities exist which have either not yet entered the statistics of the *Year Book* or are buried in the statistics referring to larger metropolitan areas and states. Overall, the Jewish American population has become more dispersed. Although residential clustering will continue in metropolitan areas with large Jewish populations, Jewish population movement must nonetheless be considered a key variable in any assessment of the

future strength of the American Jewish community. On one hand, high levels of movement and especially repeated movement may weaken individual ties to local communities and institutions and reduce the strength of Jewish identity, compounding tendencies to high rates of intermarriage and assimilation. High turnover could also affect the viability of individual communities and of the American Jewish community as a whole. On the other hand, the shifts associated with population movement may give smaller communities the density and diversity of Jewish population needed to maintain and possibly strengthen basic institutions essential for group survival and enrichment. In either case, it seems clear that migration rather than fertility and intermarriage may well be the key dynamic affecting the vitality of Jewish communities and individual Jewish identity in the next several decades. Until we have more insights into its full implications and the extent to which policies can be designed to cope with them, while also recognizing that such movement has contributed to the development of a national Jewish community, dealing with this key demographic process may remain one of the major challenges the community faces.

Structural Variables

Size, distribution, and density are critical variables determining the strength and vitality of any segment of the population, but a wide range of demographic, social, and economic variables also significantly affects the community's current viability and future survival. Among these, age, education, occupation, and generation status have particular relevance for Jews. Emerging as an added variable is the potential religious polarization of the community.

Age. Of all the demographic variables, age is the most basic. Since at least the 1950s, the Jewish population of the United States has had an older age structure than the general white population. U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola estimated that by 1980 over 15 percent of America's Jews were aged sixty-five and over; they projected a rise to 17 percent by the year 2000. Equally significant is the projected sharp increase in the "old aged" (seventy-five and over) from about 314,000 in 1980 to 414,000 in the year 2000.[27] Such an aged population will have a depressing effect on

growth rates and will raise levels of overall mortality. Aging will also pose special challenges for the Jewish community to find the financial resources necessary to cope with increasing needs for health and social services, especially if a noticeable proportion of Jewish aged live below the poverty level.

Educational Attainment. At the same time that the population has been aging, it has been becoming more educated. The high premium Jews nationwide place on education is documented by several comparisons. The 1980 census reported that 67 percent of the U.S. population had a high school education or less and only 18 percent had at least a college degree. By contrast, not a single Jewish community in the comparative assessment reported in the *American Jewish Yearbook* or in surveys undertaken since then reported more than 45 percent of its population with only a high school or lower education. Most communities reported that close to 50 percent or more of their adult members had a college degree. In fact, in all but three communities, the percent with advanced degrees exceeded the percent in the total population with any college degree.[28]

That such high educational achievement has become accentuated over time is evidenced in the Boston comparative data. The percent with only a high school education or less declined from 55 in 1965 to only 19 in 1985. By contrast, the percent with an advanced degree grew from 12 to 29 percent over the same interval, and those with one to four years of college from 32 to 51 percent. That the trend is likely to persist is suggested by statistics for the twenty-five-to-forty-four-year age group, among whom only 11 percent stopped at a high school diploma or lower level; 42 percent already had advanced degrees, and another 42 percent had some college education.[29] Boston may not be typical of the United States as a whole, but evidence from other communities points in similar directions.

Several implications emerge. First, both nationally and locally, the organized Jewish community faces an ever more educated Jewish public, quite different from the less educated, more largely immigrant population of earlier decades. Second, to the extent that education may be correlated with greater integration into the American scene, educational level becomes a key variable around which to focus efforts to enhance Jewish identity, especially dur-

ing the four-to-eight-year period when undergraduate and graduate students are away from their family of orientation and before most have formed their own families. Third, since education is the key to occupational choice and will lead many to seek opportunities away from their hometowns, high levels of mobility will continue to characterize the Jewish population. The impact of education will be accentuated as more Jews obtain advanced degrees that lead to professional employment involving working for others—situations in which personal advancement, careers for spouses, and the transfer demands associated with national and multinational enterprises require repeated movement to achieve specified goals. That education has such an effect is reflected by the occupational profile of the Jewish population.

Occupational Affiliation. As has been true for decades, Jews are disproportionally concentrated in high white-collar positions. In 1980, the Bureau of the Census found 29 percent of the adult population of the United States to be in professional and managerial positions. Jewish community studies have indicated that between half and three-fourths of Jews are so employed. By contrast, the 1980 census found just under half of all Americans to be engaged in blue-collar work, but it was a rare Jewish community that reported more than 10 percent of Jews so employed, and for some it was below 5 percent. Obviously, the high education Jews obtain is associated with commensurate placement in the occupational hierarchy—although this does not necessarily imply that specific skills are fully used.

Some indication of the direction of change in occupational affiliation is evidenced by the Boston surveys. Among males, the percent employed as professionals rose from 32 in 1965 to 46 in 1985, while the percent earning a living as managers declined from 37 to 22. For women, the percentage of both professionals and managers increased. Although the percent of males employed as clerical and sales workers fluctuated over the twenty years between 15 and 20 percent, women experienced a substantial shift out of this category, with the percent so employed declining from 53 to 31 percent.

Particularly noteworthy for the Boston data is the increasing participation of women in the labor force, from 51 percent in 1975 to 60 percent in 1985. The differences by age are especially

striking, increasing from 57 percent of those aged fifty to sixty-four, to two-thirds of those forty to forty-nine, to 85 percent of those eighteen to twenty-nine. Significant, too, of those employed, two-thirds of all women worked full time, as many as 70 percent of those aged forty to forty-nine and three-fourths of those eighteen to twenty-nine. That only 53 percent of employed women aged thirty to thirty-nine worked full time probably reflects the presence of young children at home.

Clearly, increasing female employment and increased professionalization of the labor force as a whole were the two major changes characterizing employment of Jews in Boston between 1965 and 1985. To the extent that these patterns hold for Jewish men and women in the United States as a whole and that many professional occupations are associated with frequent mobility, the reliance on the professional communities as surrogates in place of the religious group may well increase at the price of less involvement in the local organized Jewish community.[30] Together, the higher education, greater professionalization and mobility, and consequent conversion of the Jewish community from a set of local constituencies to a national community present a major challenge to the vitality of the local community as well as to the strength of individual Jewish identity.[31]

Generational Changes

A major factor affecting the continued vitality of the American Jewish community in the past has been the transfusions received through immigration. Now, increasingly third- and fourth-generation Jews face the American scene without large-scale outside reinforcement. Although this emergent pattern has been somewhat modified in recent decades by the influx of Jews from the Soviet Union, Israel, and Iran, the full extent to which this immigration affects the demographic composition and sociological character of American Jewry, especially at the local level, remains to be documented. These groups may add to the number of Jews or compensate a bit for population declines. But either because of deficiences in Jewish background and experience or lack of integration with the organized Jewish community, their numerical contribution may not be matched by contributions to other aspects of Jewish communal life. Despite the influx of Russian and Israeli

immigrants, the foreign-born component is decreasing over time as older immigrants die. In most communities, the foreign-born now constitute only between 11 and 18 percent.[32]

The sharp changes in the generational composition of the population suggest that the community's future depends to a great degree on how its third and higher generation members react to the freedom to integrate into the American social structure. Whether trends toward assimilation are being stabilized, reversed, or accelerated and how the expression of ties to the Jewish community is changing require continuing monitoring and assessment.

Religious Polarization

Concerns with effects of changing patterns of demographic growth and composition may pale in the shadow of what could be a much more serious challenge for American Jewry. As we approach the twenty-first century, Irving Greenberg's key question may be particularly relevant: "Will there be one Jewish people by the year 2000?" If sociological forces are left unchecked, he warns, "the Jewish people will be split apart into two, mutually divided hostile groups who are unable or unwilling to marry each other."[33]

Will divisions stemming from different attitudes toward conversion, partilineal descent, and divorce so affect the definition of who is a Jew that a substantial segment of the projected 5.0 to 5.5 million American Jews will have their status as Jews questioned by another segment? If as many as 15 to 20 percent of all Jews were to be classified as marginal, as Greenberg suggests, the implications for the unity of the American Jewish community and for the potential assimilation of those outside the core group would be very serious indeed. Such polarization of the community would have critical implications for social interaction among Jews, for survival as one people, and, finally, for survival demographically at a level at which we can remain a key segment not only of the total American community but of world Jewry. From a research perspective, such a situation would add immensely to the complex tasks of defining and measuring intermarriage and of ascertaining the actual number of Jews in the United States.

Conclusion

Whether American Jewry faces greater assimilation or is transforming itself into a different but still dynamic community is the focus of ongoing debate in which the community's future demographics are a key concern. In combination, the current patterns of low fertility, high levels of intermarriage, lowered residential density, and changing composition can potentially weaken the demographic base of the United States Jewish population. This need not be so. To the extent that Jews retain a comparatively close-knit, ethnic-religious identification within the total society, the potential for continued vitality remains. Stability of numbers or even declining numbers need not constitute a fundamental threat to the maintenance of a strong Jewish community and to high levels of individual Jewish identity.

A stable or larger population base would certainly make the effort to ensure Jewish identity and vitality easier. Concern with numbers is especially relevant at the local level. It is unlikely, however, that the Jewish American community as a whole can do very much to control the changing fertility levels or the patterns of redistribution because these processes very largely reflect reactions to a wide and complex range of social, economic, and normative changes in the larger American society. It is perhaps more important for the community to undertake and maintain fuller and more scientifically sound assessments of the implications of the whole range of demographic developments and that it be prepared, on the basis of such evaluations, to develop new institutional forms designed, at a minimum, to mitigate the negative effects of population decline and dispersal. Ideally, these efforts should also increase opportunities for Jewish self-identification and for greater participation of individuals in organized Jewish life. Through such steps, the community will help ensure that the changes that do occur still allow for a meaningful balance between being Jewish and being American.

Two recent reviews of the quality of Jewish life in the United States and of the accuracy of projections about the future demographics of American Jewry have very correctly sighted the heart of the issue. Charles Liebman stresses that mere biological survival of Jews in the United States over the next century, a prediction which few, if any, reputable demographers would contest, is not

synonymous with assurance of a high-quality Jewish life in these years. As he correctly argues, concern with numbers is relevant only as these numbers affect the quality of American Jewish life.[34] The key concern about the future of the community must focus on maintaining the quality of that life. Although numbers, composition, and distribution are important factors affecting the outcome, they certainly are, as David Gordis has emphasized, "preconditions," not "conditions." As he has effectively expressed it, "The determinant of the Jewish future will not be demography or affiliation statistics. The key will be the internal character of Jewish life, the degree to which it affects the way Jews live their lives, the content of Judaism for Jews."[35] Institutional forces, operating within the constraints as well as the strengths imposed by demographic conditions, can still contribute to a vital, creative community.

Notes

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1. Charles Westoff, "Fertility in the United States," *Science* 234 (October 31, 1986), p. 556.
2. Calvin Goldscheider and Frances K. Goldscheider, "Family Size Expectations of Young American Jewish Adults," paper presented at Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 1985.
3. Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York, 1983).
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6. William L. Yancey and Ira Goldstein, *The Jewish Population of the Greater Philadelphia Area* (Philadelphia, 1984).
7. Sherry Israel, "Boston's Jewish Community: The 1985 CJP Demographic Survey," unpublished report, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, 1987.
8. Gary A. Tobin and Alvin Chenkin, "Recent Jewish Community Population Studies: A Roundup," *American Jewish Year Book* (Philadelphia, 1985), Vol 85, pp. 154–78.
9. Israel, "Boston's Jewish Community."
10. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*, pp. 118. 120; see also Steven M. Cohen and Calvin Goldscheider, "Jews, More or Less," *Moment* Vol. 9 (September 1984), pp. 41–46; Sidney Goldstein, "American Jewish Demography: Inconsistencies That Challenge," paper presented at Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, August 1985.
11. William D. Mosher and Calvin Goldscheider, "Contraceptive Patterns of Religious and Racial Groups in the United States, 1955–76: Convergence and Distinctiveness,"*Studies in Family Planning* Vol. 15 (May-June 1984), pp 101–11; Goldscheider and Goldscheider, "Family Size Expectations."

12. Gary A. Tobin, *A Demographic Study of the Jewish Community of Greater Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1986).
13. Israel, "Boston's Jewish Community," p. 19.
14. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Fertility of American Women: June 1985," *Current Population Reports,* Ser. P-20, no. 406 (Washington, D.C., 1986).
15. Westoff, "Fertility in the United States," pp. 554–59; U. O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola, "Some Basic Trends in the Demography of U.S. Jews: A Re-Examination," paper prepared for AJC Conference on New Perspectives in American Jewish Sociology, Findings and Implications, New York, May 1986. Fertility among the ultra-Orthodox is an exception to the low fertility rates characterizing Jews as a whole. The high birth rates of this group, reflecting their strong emphasis on the family and on traditional roles for women and their much lower use of birth control, do not, however, significantly affect overall Jewish fertility levels because the ultra-Orthodox are a relatively small percentage of the total population. Should this percentage increase in the future, as their growing number of children mature and form their own families, the impact of their higher fertility may be felt more strongly.
16. Schmelz and Della Pergola, "Some Basic Trends."
17. Egon Mayer, *Children of Intermarriage: A Study in Patterns of Identification and Family Life* (New York, 1983).
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24. Barry A. Kosmin, Paul Ritterband, and Jeffrey Scheckner, "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* (Philadelphia, 1987), Vol. 87, pp. 164–191.
25. Eugene Schoenfield, "Problems and Potentials," in Abraham D. Lavender, ed., *A Coat of Many Colors* (Westport, Conn., 1977), pp. 7–72.
26. "Jewish Population in the United States, 1985," *American Jewish Year Book* (Philadelphia, 1986), Vol 86), pp. 223–230.
27. Schmelz and Della Pergola, "Some Basic Trends."
28. Tobin and Chenkin, "Recent Jewish Community Population Studies."
29. Israel, "Boston's Jewish Community."
30. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity,* pp. 89–92.
31. Sidney Goldstein, "Demography of American Jewry: Implications for a National Society," paper presented at the Sidney Hollander Memorial Colloquium on the Emergence of a Continental Jewish Community—Implications for Federations, Parsippany, N.J., 1987.
32. Tobin and Chenkin, "Recent Jewish Community Population Studies."
33. Irving Greenberg, "Jews in the Year 2000," *Rhode Island Jewish Herald,* July 1985.
34. Charles S. Liebman, "A Grim Outlook," in *The Quality of Jewish Life—Two Views,* Jewish Sociology Papers (New York, 1987), pp. 33–55.
35. David M. Gordis, "Triumph or Tragedy: Contemporary American Jewish Life,"*Women's League Outlook* (Winter 1987), p. 30.

FOR FURTHER READING

1. Schmelz, U.O. and Sergio DellaPergola—"The Demographic Consequences of U.S. Jewish Population Trends" *American Jewish Year Book,* (New York & Philadelphia, 1983), pp 141–187. An excellent overview of American Jewish demographic trends by the top demographers at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Raises many important questions and policy issues pertaining to U.S. Jewry.
2. *American Jewish Year Book*—published yearly by the Jewish Publication Society and the American Jewish Committee. This encyclopedic annual contains important articles related to Jewish demography on a regular basis. It also contains estimates of Jewish population in the U.S. and Canada as well as the rest of the world every year. The U.S. estimates are broken down by state and city.
3. *Jewish Continuity and Change* by Calvin Goldscheider. Bloomington, 1986. An examination of the impact of the forces of modernization on the American Jewish community. Demographic changes put into a theoretical framework by an optimist.
4. Tobin, Gary A. and Alvin Chenkin—"Recent Jewish Community Population Studies: A Roundup", *American Jewish Year Book* (New York & Philadelphia, 1985) pp 154–178. A review of the results of the community studies done in most major US communities in the 1970's and 80's. Good summary statement on issues such as household size, age, gender, marital status, education, occupation, income and religious identification of U.S. Jews. Important because there has been no national Jewish population survey since 1970.
5. *Boston's Jewish Community*—The 1985 CJP Demographic Study—Compiled by Sherry Israel (Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston: Boston, Mass) 1987. Demographers and sociologists of the Jews love Boston because they did community studies in 1965, 1975 and 1985. The wealth of the comparative data is particularly available in this compendium of the findings of the 1985 survey. A model community study for those interested in reading about one large center of Jewish population in the U.S.
6. *Papers in Jewish Demography*—1985, edited by U.O. Schmelz and S. DellaPergola, Jerusalem, 1989. Papers presented in the demography section of the World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in 1985. Many of the articles are about North American Jewry and the methodology used to study it.
7. Goldstein, Sidney—"American Jewish Demography: Inconsistencies That Challenge", *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* (Jerusalem 16 October 1986). A good summary of the policy implications seen by the distinguished author of the article in this book, based on his analysis of the current demographic situation of American Jews.

8. Monson, Rela Geffen and Daniel J. Elazar, "Jewish Demography—Realities and Options", *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints* (Jerusalem, December 1987). A good companion piece to number 7. Originally written as a background piece for lay leaders attending the first World Conference on Jewish Demography in Jerusalem in 1987. Provides a summary of the demographic research on American Jewry until that year.