

**THE SOCIOLOGY OF JEWRY:
BLUEPRINTS FOR THE FUTURE
FROM CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS***

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If (my) effort proves successful the gap that now separates contemporary Jewish studies from other academic disciplines in general will . . . be narrowed. New research will then appear, the present effort will become outdated, and new anthologies on the sociology of the American Jew will be required. May they appear speedily and in our time.

—Sklare, 1974:viii.

The sociology of Jewry, both professionally and academically, has been characterized by its excessive functionalism and conservatism. New directions for both research and policy are called for by many quarters. The following may be seen as a brief outline of these directions, as well as a call for the appearance of meaningful and effective research. In a word or two, the sociology of Jewry needs its own C. Wright Mills, its own Alfred McClung Lee.

The present paper's basic assumption is that political, professional, and sociological perspectives are all interdependent, each influencing the other. One's politics (or lack of same) influences one's professional role. How that role is defined, in turn, influences one's theoretical perspective, the subjects chosen for analysis, the audience *for whom* one engages in such research, and policy formulations derived from research and political positions.

The person best exemplifying the traditional functionalist and "Cautious Conservative" approach to contemporary Jewish studies is the same person considered by many to be the founder of contemporary Jewish studies: Marshall Sklare. No sociologist can deny his impact on the field. To the extent that we see the distant horizon more clearly, it is because we all stand upon his shoulders. Characteristically, he is willing to have his students (And are we not all his students in many ways?) outdate his own efforts by moving forward in new directions.

*I would like to thank several anonymous critics of this paper. They will see that I have utilized their very helpful comments within its context.

Professionally, Marshall Sklare toiled almost alone in the field of the sociology of Jewry, for many years on the margins of mainstream sociology, as director of the Division of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee and at Yeshiva University. It is for this reason that he is not better known among younger sociologists and graduate students unless they specialize in the sociology of American Jewry.

It could very well be that contemporary Jewish studies is still too "specialized" or even "esoteric" a subject to be awarded the same status as, for example, social theory or methods. This was more the case during Sklare's formative years in the 1950s. Events in the late 1960s—the rise of ethnic consciousness, the Jewish student movement, the Black Power movement, and the Six-Day War—enhanced the position of all ethnic studies, including Jewish studies.

Politically and religiously, the present generation has been shaped by an entirely different set of historical circumstances than that shaping Sklare's generation. His generation's excessive cautiousness and innate conservatism was forged from an era that produced world war, fascism, McCarthyism, red-baiting, and group anxiety. Sklare began his professional career at a time when there were few Jewish studies programs, little funding except from conservative-oriented Jewish organizations such as Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee, and few colleagues with whom to share his professional and intellectual concerns. Few others wished to devote their academic lives to such an endeavor. The 1950s must have been a difficult time for any academic, let alone one specializing in the study of contemporary Jewry.

Sklare's sociological interests also may have been influenced by the "survivalist" concerns of Jewish organizations funding his research, and by the general fears and hopes of the American-Jewish community. This could explain his overriding interest in such issues as intermarriage, the synagogue as central to Jewish survival, and Conservative Judaism, a quintessential "survivalist" form of Judaism.

Furthermore, perhaps because he was funded for many years by that most "American" of Jewish organizations, his early writings (pre-1967) rarely dealt with Israel, Zionism, or similar topics. Being funded by the most "elite" of Jewish organizations, his research totally ignores such crucial issues as the Jewish community power structure, decision making, the Jewish upper class, the Jewish poor, or such "dirty linen" as crime and deviance among Jews. Being an American, rather than a European, scholar, he rarely writes on Yiddishism. Given that Sklare is essentially a Diasporist, one will find little on Zionism. And for a variety of reasons, one will find little on socialism, Labor Zionism, and trade unionism.

One cannot, in all candor, criticize Sklare for not conducting research in all of these topics. That would be entirely unfair to any scholar. In fact, it is incumbent upon us to proceed on to these items now that Sklare has laid the groundwork. The purpose for pointing out omissions in Sklare's work is to show how and why one's research and writing is influenced by one's historical moment, one's political perspective, the political perspectives of those who fund research, and a host of other professional and political impact points.

What are some of the alternative positions and directions that concerned social scientists might take, vis-a-vis the study of contemporary Jewry?

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTIONS

There are many professional problems facing our field, but one issue seems more salient than the rest at this moment in time: the professional status and intellectual legitimacy of "Jewish sociology." One aspect of this complex problem was highlighted by the recent statement of a young sociologist in New York City:

If one were not a full-time Jewish professional but a professional who was Jewish, one should find ways to make one's profession serve the Jewish people . . . Ergo, if I wanted to be a sociologist I should be a sociologist of the Jews who employs all the sophisticated quantitative techniques to analyze Jewish problems.

Now, as an untenured Assistant Professor, I find Jewish articles can't get published in prestige journals. No prestige journals, no tenure. So, now I'm writing about ethnic and religious groups in America (but you and I know they're really about the Jews, right?). And, after (if) I get tenure I'll come out of the closet and write about the Jews and the sociological profession can screw off. Right? Well, at least I hope so. (Cohen, 1976: 51)

Much of the anguish expressed in these comments is unnecessary. First, articles on Jewish topics have been and will continue to be published in prestige journals; of course, they must be of an exceedingly high caliber. Two, one can be granted tenure without publishing hundreds of articles. Three, one could strive to change the present-day working assumption that sociological articles on Jews are "second-class citizens." It is, of course, true that specializing only in the sociology of Jewry may well narrow one's vision (and limit one's ability to secure a teaching position). As Jewish sociologists, we are, and should be, both specialists in our chosen field (Jewish studies) and generalists in other areas (theory, history, urban affairs, etc.).

This tension between secular and religious, between academic and yeshiva settings was a long and honorable one, but has been in decline. Jewish studies, in the setting of the secular university, has had a fairly extensive "trial period" and has been found an acceptable aspect of the academic curriculum. The tensions still existing may be engendered, not by non-Jewish scholars and administrators, but by assimilated and confused Jewish scholars, who have used academia as a secular substitute for religious or socioreligious involvement with the Jewish community.

However, since the legitimation of racial and ethnic studies, and especially since the 1967 Israeli-Arab War, increasing numbers of Jewish academics have become involved with Jewish studies, as well as with Israeli and Jewish concerns off-campus. And professional groups, such as the Association for Jewish Studies and the Association for the Sociological Study of Jewry, can no longer acquiesce to pejorative assumptions (i.e., that Jewish studies are "second-class") but must actively work to abolish such biases. For example, if a prestigious journal such as *American Journal of Sociology* can devote a special issue to women, why can it not have one on Jews as well?

The ASSJ should move vigorously in academic and nonacademic communities, becoming more like a caucus, than remaining solely a *chug* (discussion group). It should meet and confront (if necessary) the Marxist section of the ASA, the Black and women's caucuses, or various Christian (Catholic, Quaker), Third World, and Arab elements in the profession. It should demonstrate for the rights of Jewish and Jewish-involved professors, and for the growth and legitimacy of Jewish studies, just as women, Black, and Marxist caucuses do.

The overall image of ASSJ can stand improvement. Many sociologists still do not know what functions ASSJ serves, nor what stances it assumes on issues. To assimilated Jews, it is too "Jewish," therefore too "parochial and narrow." To Marxist Jews (Is that a contradiction in terms?), it is either a bourgeoisie, conservative curiosity, or a haven for "Zionist propaganda." To still other sociologists, it is too "bland."

Some of these negative stereotypes we can confront and refute as an association; others, we can ignore. Like Jews throughout history, we are somewhat of a Rorschach ink blot. Our colleagues will perceive a variety of contradictory images about us, many merely reflecting images of their own biases and fears. But several of the negative or fuzzy ASSJ images can be modified or eliminated completely by our meeting and engaging in serious dialogue and discussion with the groups mentioned above. From such intellectual ferment may come innovative and serendipitous results.

SOCIAL POLICY DIRECTIONS

A professional organization must eventually confront issues of a political nature. This does *not* mean that ASSJ should be "politicized," or that it should engage in political activity or even formulate social policy. However, in its academic capacity, it must be a forum for the discussion and debate both of political issues confronting the Diaspora and Israel, and of social policy made by and for Jews. ASSJ must confront the effects of research on Jewish social policy as well as the effects of Jewish policy on social research. ASSJ must involve itself in evaluating the political and policymaking stances of Jewish communities both here and in Israel.

SOCIOLOGICAL DIRECTIONS

The field of contemporary Jewish studies is a new one in many ways. Never have there been so many trained Jewish social scientists ready to embark on research. The more than "seven lean years" Marshall Sklare and a few others toiled have passed, and many more than "seven good years" hopefully lie ahead. The following topics will suggest the excitement, innovative possibilities and creative ferment of the field, a field no longer relegated to Jewish journalists, biblical historians, critics, and rabbis.

1. *Social Movements*. Yiddish, trade unionist, socialist, social democratic, bundist, Zionist (religious, revisionist, labor) collective behavior; labor studies; unionization and politicization of Jewish workers; the Jewish labor movement; the economic mobility of Jews.
2. *The Jewish Press*. English, Yiddish, and Hebrew presses; the interaction and interrelationships between the Jewish press and Jewish philanthropic organizations; Jewish journals; Jewish intellectuals and their role in the community.
3. *Jewish Crime and Deviance*. White-collar crime; crime rates among Jews; Jews in prison; alcoholism; drug abuse; wife and child abuse.
4. *The Jewish Family*. The uniqueness and nonuniqueness of the Jewish family; social disorganization within the Jewish family (divorce, desertion, separation); definitions, characteristics, and factors facilitating Jewish family solidarity; intermarriage.
5. *Sexual Behavior*. Sexual deviance among Jews (homosexuality, bisexuality); feminism and Judaism; children of mixed marriages.

6. *Alternative Forms of Family*. Jewish singles; childless marriage; communal marriage; open marriage; single-parent families.
7. *The Synagogue*. Factors influencing increase/decrease in synagogue membership, and membership activity; alternatives to the synagogue; *havurot*; creative services; "tradition" in Reform and Conservative *shuls*; the contemporary roles of rabbi; the rise and impact of ultra-Orthodox sects (Lubavitch, Satmer, other Hassidic groups) and their communal support systems.
8. *Democracy in Jewish Life*. Democratization of Jewish communal and philanthropic leadership; the rise to power of Jewish philanthropies, overshadowing the power of synagogues and other institutions; power-structure research; decision making on local, national, and international levels; the relationship of North American Jewish leadership to Israeli leadership; conflicts in such relationships; alternatives to established Jewish philanthropic and national leadership; *Tzeddakah* collectives as philanthropic alternatives.
9. *Social Stratification*. The Jewish upper class; the Jewish poor.
10. *Jewish Youth*. Youth movements (Zionist, non-Zionist); youth organizations (BBYO, USY, NFTY, etc.); Jewish student groups; radical Jews and Jewish radicals; the Jewish Defense League; the transition from movement to organization; the interrelationships between summer camps, winter retreats, and community centers, and indicators of Jewish identity.
11. *Jewish Arts and Letters*. Writers as reflectors of the sociology of Jewry; Jewish actors and comedians; poets and novelists; Jews in the media (television, radio, press, movies); the Yiddish theater.
12. *Anti-Semitism*. Inner city anti-Semitism; anti-Semitism in academia, the business world; the relationship between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism; roots of racism and genocide.
13. *Cross-cultural Studies*. Jews across class lines and backgrounds; non-American and non-Western Jewish cultures; similarities and differences between Jews and non-Jews; contrasts between Israeli and Diaspora family, institutions, etc.
14. *Contemporary Jewish Immigration*. North American (the impact of new Soviet and Israeli (*yordim*) immigrants on American Jews, American society).
15. *Community*. Indicators of its existence; factors facilitating or hindering its development; dimensions of the American Jewish community.
16. *Ethnography*. The Hebrew School; the Jewish delicatessen, the *brit millah*, the "tefillin-mobile," the Jewish sorority and fraternity; the Zionist summer camp; the Jewish old-age home.
17. *Jewish Neighborhoods*. Changing patterns; varieties of neighborhood transition; old stereotypes; the Jewish businessman in the ethnic ghetto; the Jewish "middleman" role in various ethnic ghettos.
18. *Intergroup Contact*. Relationships between Jews and Blacks, white "ethnics," upper-class Protestants, others; ecumenical movements.
19. *Holocaust Studies*. The impact of the Holocaust on various Jewish communities; survivors in America (and elsewhere) and their children.
20. *Survival*. Its meaning; what we can learn from Holocaust survivors and their children; alternative directions of assimilation; alternatives to assimilation; Jewish "futurology"; new and emerging relationships between America (Diaspora) and Israel.

These are but a few of the topics available for research. Jewish defensiveness and self-consciousness must be put aside. As with Blacks or women, we need no longer be apologetic either about our professional roles or our scholarly interests—as Jews, as sociologists, and as citizens. Alvin Gouldner once said: "There is no Jewish sociology or Black sociology or women's sociology or radical or conservative sociology—there is only good . . . or bad sociology." Everything is open for discussion.

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FRED SOLOMON SHERROW MEMORIAL PRIZE**1978****CALL FOR ENTRIES**

The Sherrow Prize is awarded annually to the author of a research paper or study (in English, Hebrew, or Yiddish) by a predissertation graduate or undergraduate student on a topic related to contemporary Jewish studies. The paper or study may be in the area of Jewish history, sociology, philosophy, or political science.

This year, for the fourth time, the prize will be awarded through the Association for the Sociological Study of Jewry. It will be awarded at the business meeting of the ASSJ held during the annual convention of the American Sociological Association. The prize is in the amount \$250. The prize will be given to only one recipient; in the event that the Sherrow Memorial Prize Committee deems that entries do not meet appropriate standards no prize will be awarded.

Papers will be forwarded to the chairperson of the award committee by Dr. Chaim I. Waxman, Dept. of Sociology, Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903.

All entries should be marked "Sherrow Award," typewritten, double-spaced, and should not exceed 50 pages. Entries will not be returned. All entries must be postmarked no later than May 31, 1978.