

THE AMERICANIZATION OF THE JEWS

Edited by Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen

Jewish Continuity over Judaic Content: The Moderately Affiliated American Jew

Steven M. Cohen

All American Jewry is divisible into three parts.¹ One part consists of those most intensively involved in Jewish life, among whom are the religiously observant and pro-Israel activists. At the other extreme are those who are most peripheral to conventional Jewish life, including many who have married non-Jews. This group engages only in occasional acts of Judaic involvement and maintains relatively few informal links to other Jews and few formal ties to organized Jewry. Between these two groups is situated the vast middle of American Jewry. They are formally affiliated with Jewish institutions, engage in a variety of Judaic practices throughout the year, but are not nearly as active in organized Jewish life or Jewish ritual practice as those in the most Jewishly active group. For convenience, the most active group may be termed the "Involved," and the least active may be called the "Peripheral." I will refer to the intermediate group as the "Jewish middle" or the "Moderately Affiliated."²

The Moderately Affiliated are a pivotal group, especially with respect to the long-standing debate among scholars and practitioners over the vitality of American Jewry.³ Participants in this debate range from optimism to pessimism regarding the American Jewish present and future. At one pole are those who project the widespread "assimilation," in the colloquial sense of the term, of most American Jews, excepting only the Orthodox and a small



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK AND LONDON

number of other highly involved Jewish families. At the optimistic end of the spectrum are those who see many signs of a persisting cohesive community.

Most learned observers of American Jewry would probably agree that those who are most Jewishly involved stand the greatest chance of producing Jewishly identified progeny three and four generations hence. At the same time, even the so-called optimists concede that the mixed-married and others among the most peripheral Jews stand a very good chance of having their children and grandchildren leave the Jewish group. Thus, one's projection for the future of American Jews essentially turns on an assessment of the Jewish staying power of the American Jewish middle.

We have some degree of confidence as to why involved Jews are committed and why peripheral Jews are relatively indifferent to conventional Jewish ritual and communal life. Far more enigmatic to most of us who closely follow developments among American Jews is the nature of Jewish commitment among those in the middle. If these Jews really do care about being Jewish, how is it that they are not more involved? Alternatively, if they are nearly indifferent toward their Jewishness, why do they even bother to engage regularly in several acts of Jewish affirmation? In short, why is there a Jewish middle—why do the Jews of the middle not join the ranks either of the highly involved or of the more peripheral?

The debate over the American Jewish future can be largely reduced to differences over the nature and strength of the Jewish commitment of the Moderately Affiliated. Is their Jewish commitment, such as it is, transmittable to their children and sustainable over several generations? Or are they living out an eroding vestige, a progressively paler reflection of a once intensive but now fading ancestral Jewish past? To address these and related questions, this paper tries to advance our understanding of the Moderately Affiliated, those situated in the middle of the Jewish identity spectrum.

How do the Peripheral, the Moderately Affiliated, and the Involved Jews differ? The answer may be found in two simplifying catchwords: commitment to Judaic content and commitment to Jewish continuity.

As the analysis below demonstrates, many of those in the Peripheral segment may be nearly indifferent to their families' Jewish continuity; by definition their lives are relatively devoid of what Judaic specialists of almost all ideological stripes would regard as serious Judaic content. In contrast, Involved Jews are certainly deeply committed to Jewish continuity, but their commitment extends beyond continuity. They are also committed to a particular brand of Jewish culture and community, be it Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, Zionism, secularism, political liberalism, or something else. Often, their commitment to these particular strands is so profound that they regard abandonment of their own ideological camp for another as a betrayal. Passionate members of particular communities can be heard to remark that they would prefer that their children drop Judaism altogether than that they defect to what they would view as a particularly odious style of Jewish living.

In contrast with the Peripheral, most of the Moderately Affiliated Jews are committed to the continuity of the Jewish group and to their families' connection to that group. In contrast with the Involved segment of the population, the Moderately Affiliated generally exhibit far less ideologically motivated dedication to any particular brand of Jewish life. Hence, to abbreviate (and to overstate): the Peripheral are nearly indifferent to both Jewish continuity and Judaic content; the Moderately Affiliated are committed to continuity but generally not to a specific content; the Involved are committed both to content and to continuity. The details follow.

The issues raised above are explored below using data based on a mail-back questionnaire completed by 944 Jewish respondents nationwide in 1989. The Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee sponsored the research, and the survey was fielded by the Washington office of Market Facts, Inc. These respondents are members of the company's Consumer Mail Panel, a group of 250,000 individuals who have agreed to be surveyed from time to time on a variety of concerns. After the data are weighted to account for the underrepresentation of the Orthodox, the frequency distributions for the major sociodemographic and

standard Jewish identity variables resemble those found in recent population studies of major metropolitan Jewish communities.⁴

The questionnaire was unusual in that it contained scores of questions on Jewish beliefs and attitudes as well as the usual number of questions on ritual practice, communal affiliation, and other behaviors. The analysis presented is, in effect, an extract of the larger analysis upon which this paper is based. Thus, inferences below that are drawn from the answers to just a few survey questions actually derive from a much larger number of items in the original analysis.

The thrust of the analytic method is to discern distinctions among the three key subpopulations: the Involved, the Moderately Affiliated, and the Peripheral. For analytic purposes, the three groups were defined by their answers to just a few key indicator survey questions. The Involved group was defined as those who meet any one of the following conditions. The Involved Jews

1. attend synagogue twice a month or more, *or*
2. have visited Israel at least twice, *or*
3. maintain two sets of dishes at home for meat and dairy products (in accord with Jewish dietary laws).

The Peripheral group consisted of those who meet all of the following qualifications. The Peripheral Jews

1. attend synagogue only on the High Holydays (if then), *and*
2. do not fast on Yom Kippur, *and*
3. have never been to Israel.

Moderately Affiliated Jews are those who fail to meet the criteria of either the Involved or the Peripheral. This means that they attend synagogue less often than twice a month, that they have never visited Israel or have visited it only once, that none maintain meat and dairy dishes, and that most fast on Yom Kippur. Less than half of the weighted sample fell into the Moderately Affiliated group, about a third are in the Involved group, and a quarter qualify as Peripheral (first row, table 23.1 in the appendix).

Table 23.2 in the appendix enlarges upon the description of these three groups by presenting measures not directly used to construct the boundaries among them. The Involved group is predominantly

Conservative (43%) and Orthodox (29%). Almost all attend a Passover seder, light Hanukkah candles, and, if married, are married to a Jewish spouse. Substantial majorities (about two-thirds to three-quarters) of this group belong to synagogues, belong to other Jewish organizations, and have close friends who are almost always Jewish. About two-fifths give at least one hundred dollars to the local federation or UJA campaign, and an equal number sit on the board or a committee of a Jewish organization. As a whole, this group is certainly active in Jewish life, both at home and in the public sphere.

In contrast, most (58%) in the Peripheral group identify with no major Jewish denomination. Majorities report marriage to a Jewish spouse (80%), attending seders (59%), and lighting Hanukkah candles (67%), but these are the only Jewish identity traits in table 23.2 that characterize most Peripheral Jews. Almost half (46%) report that most of their closest friends are non-Jews. Just a few belong to synagogues (16%) or other Jewish organizations (19%), or give at least one hundred dollars to the UJA (15%). Only 3% serve on any Jewish organizational boards or committees. Certainly these are very inactive Jews.

The large middle group is, in all respects, intermediate between the Involved and Peripheral segments. The Moderately Affiliated are almost equally divided between Conservative (37%) and Reform (34%) identities. Their ritual and communal activity levels are not quite as high as those of the Involved Jews, nor as low as those of the Peripheral Jews. Significantly, with the lone exception of the near-absence of the Orthodox, the Moderately Affiliated group's characteristics are nearly identical to those reported by the entire sample (see the "total" column in table 23.2 in the appendix). In this sense, we may speak of the Moderately Affiliated as "typical" Conservative and Reform Jews.

We may now proceed to examine how the Involved, Moderately Affiliated, and Peripheral groups differ with respect to such critical issues as belief in God, commitment to Jewish law, ritualism, Zionism, and Jewish learning. To measure these attitudes, I constructed several indices, each built out of just two survey questions. Each pair of questions used to construct an index consisted of a "hard" and an "easy" question. An easy question is one that elicited affir-

mative responses from about two-thirds to three-quarters of the total sample; a hard question is one to which only about a fifth to a quarter of the sample responded affirmatively. As a general rule, easy questions distinguish the Moderately Affiliated from the Peripheral Jews; hard questions set off many of the Involved Jews from the vast majority of the Moderately Affiliated. The five indices below consist of three levels: the highest level answered both hard and easy question affirmatively; the second level answered only the easy question; the lowest level answered neither question in a manner signifying Judaic commitment of one sort or another.

The questionnaire asked respondents whether they accept or reject nine statements expressing traditional beliefs about God. Most respondents said they definitely believe that God exists and that God is a force for good in the world. However, only small minorities could express unqualified support for such statements as "God intervenes in the course of human events" or speak of God as answering prayers, punishing sin, rewarding good deeds, and having a special relationship with the Jewish people. In other words, while most American Jews believe God exists, only a minority are sure He does anything. It may be said that most American Jews (and, as we shall see, most Moderately Affiliated Jews) believe in what has been called the "Watchmaker God," a God that constructed the world and set it in motion but has little to do with keeping it in good and working order.

From the answers to two questions (one hard, one easy), we are able to distinguish three sorts of approaches to God. Some Jews believe in an active God; others, labeled simple "believers," believe in God's existence but doubt that He has a special relationship with Jews (emblematic of their doubts about an active and personal God, as expressed in their answers to several other survey questions). The "skeptics" doubt God's existence, as indicated by their failure to answer "definitely yes" when asked whether God exists. By these definitions, over a third of the Involved group believe in an active God, as opposed to half as many among the Moderately Affiliated and hardly any Peripheral Jews (table 23.3 in the appendix). Most Moderately Affiliated Jews believe God exists but are doubtful

about God's active involvement. In contrast, Peripheral Jews are almost evenly divided between simple "believers" and outright "skeptics."

In short, Moderately Affiliated Jews tend to believe in God more than Peripheral Jews. Compared with the Involved Jews, fewer of the Moderately Affiliated believe God is active in the contemporary world. We may infer that for many of the Moderately Affiliated, God exists, but, for much of the time God does not matter very much.

Traditional Judaism is a legal system. Obedience to the ancient law as given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and as interpreted by the ancient rabbis is the cornerstone of the traditional conception of what being Jewish means. In contrast, modern Western notions of religion (heavily influenced by the Protestant model) emphasize such concepts as individual autonomy and personal faith rather than active obedience to an obligatory law. For many modern Jews, the traditional customs and rituals have become voluntary rather than mandatory, presenting available options to be exercised when and if they are personally meaningful.

Two survey questions are especially relevant to these sorts of distinctions. One asks whether respondents are committed to keeping at least some Jewish traditions (53% feel this commitment to a great extent); the other asks about their commitment to obeying Jewish law (just 25% feel this commitment to a great extent). Nearly half (45%) of the Involved Jews are committed to both keeping traditions and obeying the law, as opposed to just 16% of the Moderately Affiliated and hardly any Peripheral Jews. The median or typical Moderately Affiliated Jew proclaims commitment to Jewish traditions but rejects commitment to Jewish law. In contrast, a large majority of Peripheral Jews express commitment neither to Jewish law nor to keeping Jewish traditions.

The rejection of obligation occurs elsewhere in the survey. Fully 90% of the total sample (though less among the Involved) agree that "a Jew can be religious even if he or she is not particularly observant." Just 20% of the sample (and more among the Involved) see Jewish law as "extremely important" to their sense of being Jewish. Less than a quarter regard keeping kosher, a key indication

of compliance with traditional Jewish law, as even desirable to being a good Jew.

As Charles Liebman has observed, the emphasis of voluntarism over obligation closely parallels another distinction: celebration over ritual. To the extent that American Jews view the tradition as a collection of customs and symbols that they may voluntarily appropriate when personally meaningful rather than as a corpus of Divinely ordained obligations, they also will be more attracted to acts of celebration than to ritual performance. The very term "ritual" connotes actions that are repeated, obligatory, and precisely defined and regulated. "Celebration" connotes voluntary activity with a very broad definition of which sorts of actions are acceptable or meaningful.

Not surprisingly, far more American Jews profess a commitment to celebrating Jewish holidays than to practicing Jewish ritual. Moreover, among Involved, Moderately Affiliated, and Peripheral Jews the distribution of these commitments varies predictably. The Involved divide almost evenly between those who are just committed to celebrating Jewish holidays and those who are also committed to practicing Jewish ritual. Among the Moderately Affiliated, only a minority (20%) are ritually committed, and a sizable majority (76%) feel committed to celebrating Jewish holidays. Hardly any Peripheral Jews are committed to ritual practice; the vast majority feel committed to celebrate certain holidays and a small but notable number are not even strongly committed to celebrating Jewish holidays.

In broad terms, the Involved Jewish population segment includes a substantial number (perhaps nearly half) who feel strongly committed to obligation, Jewish law, ritual commandments, and related traditional Jewish principles. The Moderately Affiliated segment contains few such people. By and large, and more than Peripheral Jews, the Moderately Affiliated feel attracted to Jewish customs, traditions, and holidays.

Traditional Jewish norms emphasized frequent and intensive study of religious texts. Ideally, Jewish men were to maximize the time devoted to text study; moreover, in the premodern Jewish community, those who were especially proficient in the art achieved pres-

tige, social status, and wealth. For today's American Jews, the contemporary understanding of what it means to be a Jew maintains the importance of some study, some learning, and some knowledge of Judaism. But as with the other dimensions presented above, we can distinguish different sorts of commitment of varying degrees of magnitude.

To elaborate, most respondents place some value on Jewish learning. Thus, almost all (88%) think that in order to be regarded as a good Jew, it is at least desirable (if not essential) to give one's children a Jewish education. About the same number (90%) think it desirable to know the fundamentals of Judaism. Almost as many (78%) say it is very important for their children to understand what it means to be a Jew. Two-thirds (68%) say it is at least very important for them to give their children a Jewish education.

These findings are evidence of high levels of support for statements expressing a broad commitment to Jewish education and learning, albeit loosely conceived. In contrast, far fewer respondents endorse more specific, narrower, and more intensive statements of commitment to Jewish learning. Thus, just over a quarter (28%) say it is very important for them to engage in some form of adult Jewish education. Less than half (41%) say it is at least desirable for a good Jew to study Jewish texts; just 21% say it is even desirable for good Jews to send their children to a Jewish day school.

These results suggest that most American Jews recognize the importance of some amount of learning, schooling, study, and Judaic familiarity. On the other hand, only a minority even approach the traditionalist principle of a maximalist commitment to intensive Jewish study for its own sake.

As with the dimensions presented earlier, we divide the respondents into three groups, using two key indicator survey questions. The group most intensively committed to Judaic study is defined as those who regard giving one's children a Jewish education as essential and who regard the study of Jewish texts as desirable or essential. The middle group accept their children's Jewish education as essential but reject text study as desirable. Those least committed to Jewish education are those who do not even regard children's Jewish education as essential.

Using these operational definitions, almost half of the Involved group is highly committed to Jewish learning. This compares with only a fifth of the Moderately Affiliated and only a handful of the Peripheral group. The Moderately Affiliated respondents are most typically committed to their children's Jewish education but not to text study. In contrast, most Peripheral Jews are not highly committed even to giving their children a Jewish education.

Once again, we observe clear distinctions among Involved, Moderately Affiliated, and Peripheral Jews.

It is certainly correct that the State of Israel enjoys widespread support among American Jews.⁵ In several surveys of American Jews, roughly two-thirds say, in various ways, that they care deeply about Israel. Israel is undoubtedly the major mobilizing issue in the American Jewish political domain.

Yet, several analyses have argued for a more qualified view of the place of Israel in the American Jewish psyche.⁶ They suggest that while Israel may dominate the public sphere of American Jewish life, it is largely marginal in the private sphere. The cause of Israel certainly pervades Jewish organizational life, but it has little real impact on the more intimate activities conducted with family and friends. For most American Jews, Israel plays little or no role in the celebration of Passover, High Holydays, Hanukkah, bar mitzvahs, marriages, baby namings, and *brit milah* ceremonies. (It is hard to imagine that most Jews relate seriously to the frequent mention of Israel, Zion, and Jerusalem in much of the liturgical material connected with the holidays and family life-cycle events that they do celebrate or that they are even aware of such references.) The art, literature, and music of Israel remain unfamiliar to the vast majority of American Jews. In the everyday conduct of their Jewish lives, American Jews maintain little substantive connection with Israel.

Parallel with this distinction between Israel's importance in the public and private spheres, several observers have noted that while American Jews may be pro-Israel, not many are Zionists in the classical sense.⁷ Zionists are distinguished from pro-Israel Jews not merely in the depth and intensity of their passion for Israel but also

in their understanding of the meaning of Israel. More than those who are merely pro-Israel, Zionists (1) see contemporary Israeli society as presenting a challenge to their Jewish life in the Diaspora; (2) believe Israel offers a greater chance of a fulfilling and secure Jewish life; and (3) are confronted with the possibility of settling in Israel and attracted to it. Thus, while most American Jews are pro-Israel, far fewer are Zionists in the classical sense.

The widespread support for Israel is demonstrable by the large majority (73%) who say support of Israel is at least "desirable" for their conception of a good Jew. Evidence of the far smaller minority who care most deeply about Israel is found in the much smaller number (19%) who regard such support as essential to their conception of a good Jew.

The operational distinctions between Zionist, pro-Israel, and those relatively indifferent to Israel are drawn by way of answers to two questions. Zionists are defined as those who might have given some thought to living in Israel (to making *aliyah*) and who say that caring about Israel is an important part of their being a Jew. The pro-Israel segment are those who care about Israel without having thought of *aliyah*. The indifferent group does not even claim to care strongly about Israel.

While most Involved Jews can be classified as merely "pro-Israel," it is only among them that we find a sizable minority (almost a third) who qualify as *aliyah*-oriented Zionists. Among the Marginally Affiliated just 10% are Zionists, and among the Peripheral the figure drops to 5%. Using the definitions outlined above, most of the Moderately Affiliated are pro-Israel while most of the Peripheral are relatively indifferent to Israel.

We have seen several ways in which the Involved segment differs from the Moderately Affiliated. More than the latter, Involved Jews believe in an active and personal God, accept Jewish law as obligatory, feel committed to Jewish ritual life, value Jewish text study, and maintain a Zionist orientation to Israel. The Marginally Affiliated also differ from the Peripheral segment. More than the latter, the Marginally Affiliated believe in God, feel attracted to Jewish traditions and customs, are attached to Jewish holidays and cele-

brations, believe in the importance of some familiarity with Jewish life, and care about Israel.

At the same time, most American Jews, no matter what their level of involvement, share certain elements in their Jewish identities. For example, Involved, Moderately Affiliated, and even Peripheral Jews all avow a certain pride in and stubborn connectedness to their identity as Jews. Vast majorities of the respondents agree with the following statements:

I am proud to be a Jew (97%).

Jews are my people, the people of my ancestors (95%).

Jews have had an especially rich and distinctive history, one with special meaning for our lives today (94%).

Being Jewish is so much a part of me that even if I stopped observing Jewish traditions and customs, I still couldn't stop being Jewish (91%).

Being Jewish is something special (87%).

Even among Peripheral Jews, agreement with these statements reaches rather high levels, ranging from 74% to 93% (see table 23.4 in the appendix). Moreover, with respect to the proportions simply agreeing with these views, the Moderately Affiliated and the highly Involved hardly differ.

The three segments do differ considerably, however, with respect to the number who "agree strongly" with these views. For each measure of strong agreement with an expression of ethnic pride, the Involved significantly outscore the Moderately Affiliated, who, in turn, exceed the Peripheral segment.

"Agree strongly" answers suggest a more passionate expression of Jewish pride and attachment than the simple "agree" answers. Accordingly, we may conclude that less involved Jews share with their more involved counterparts at least some measure of pride in their ethnic heritage. However, the salience of that identity and the potency of that pride climbs with increasing Jewish involvement. In short, almost all Jews are proud of being Jewish; the more involved are simply prouder.

Aside from a generalized pride in being Jewish, the vast majority of Jews from all three levels of involvement also express a keen affection for Jewish holidays, family, and food. Moreover, the three objects of their affection are often intertwined.

Thus, at least 80% of the respondents agreed with each of these statements (table 23.5):

The major Jewish holidays make me feel connected to my Jewish heritage and traditions (92%).

I find the religious significance of the major Jewish holidays very meaningful (80%).

For me, Jewish holidays are a time to be with the family (92%).

During major Jewish holidays, I feel a desire to make sure my children feel connected to Jewish traditions (86%).

Certain Jewish holidays evoke in me some very fond childhood memories (85%).

Some of my best feelings about the major Jewish holidays are connected with certain foods (80%).

Holidays are meaningful in part because they connect Jews with their current immediate family, their family memories (parents), and their family aspirations (children). The appeal of special foods consumed around holiday seasons derives to some extent from their consumption in emotionally charged family settings. This interplay of family, food, and holidays characterizes other American ethnic groups as well.⁸ Slavic, Italian, German, and Irish interviewees report special feelings connected with certain foods once prepared by their mothers and grandmothers during major holidays. Even if they were unsure whether the foods were genuinely associated with their particular ethnic group, they report a special affection for dishes linked in their memories with family celebrations of major holidays.

While family, food, and holidays enjoy affection among majorities of all three Jewish involvement segments, the extent to which such emotions are reported varies along familiar lines, ranging from

Involved to Moderately Affiliated to Peripheral Jews. For the most part, with respect to affection for Jewish holidays, family, and food, the Moderately Affiliated more closely resemble the Involved than the Peripheral segment.

Feelings about historic Jewish persecution, the Holocaust, and contemporary antisemitism constitute yet another important feature in the group identity of American Jews on all levels of involvement. Peripheral Jews appear to feel quite strongly about these issues.

American Jews are nearly unanimous in their recognition of historic Jewish victimization and in believing that prior victimization influences Jews today (table 23.6 in the appendix). As many as 99% agree that "Jews have been persecuted throughout history," and almost as many (93%) agree that "Jews are united by their history of persecution." When given a list of thirteen diverse Judaic concepts and symbols and asked to state their importance to their sense of being a Jew, respondents ranked the Holocaust first and American antisemitism third, just behind Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and just ahead of God. Fully 85% regard the Holocaust as very or extremely important to their sense of being Jewish and 80% feel likewise about American antisemitism. The sensitivity to persecution and antisemitism is hardly less widespread among Peripheral than among Involved Jews. Even the most Peripheral Jew who has "forgotten" an erstwhile attachment to Jewish family, people, and holidays "remembers" the centrality of victimization to the Jewish experience.

We return to the question posed at the outset. Who are the Moderately Affiliated Jews, and what constitutes their Jewish consciousness? The results presented above suggest the outline of an answer.

The Moderately Affiliated consist of those Jews situated in the vast middle of the American Jewish identity spectrum. They are neither the most involved nor the least involved in Jewish life at home or in the wider community. For the most part, they identify as Reform and Conservative Jews who, by and large, attend services only on the High Holydays and for family life-cycle celebrations. They celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, and Pass-

over in some fashion, while generally ignoring most of the other holidays on the Jewish calendar. The great majority of their close friends and (if married) their spouses are Jewish.

By and large, they refrain from adopting the commitments that typify the more involved Jews. Moderately Affiliated Jews tend to believe in God, but they tend to feel God is inactive and noninterventionist. They eschew the traditionalist religious conceptions of obligatory law and punctilious ritual observance. Instead, they feel attracted to a body of available religious activities from which they feel free to select in accord with their sense of personal relevance and meaningfulness. The historic emphasis on maximal study of religious texts has little appeal for them. Instead, they espouse a modicum of familiarity with what they regard as the fundamentals of Judaism, both for themselves and their children. While most Moderately Affiliated are certainly pro-Israel, very few have a vivid conception of Israel presenting an option for a fuller, richer Jewish life.

Certainly the Moderately Affiliated part company from the Involved Jews in many features of Jewish identity. Yet, at the same time, in several important areas the Moderately Affiliated share some things in common with their more involved Jewish counterparts. Perhaps most fundamentally, they express great pride in their group identity. In the private sphere, the key elements for Moderately Affiliated Jews revolve around family, food, and celebration of certain major holidays. In the public sphere, their key issue is antisemitism, the long history of Jewish persecution, and response to contemporary threats to Jewish survival and security.

In short, they are dedicated to the continuity of Jewish identity both in their families and among the Jewish people generally. However, they tend to lack a commitment to a well-defined Judaic ideology. Hence, we may arrive at the catchword expression of "continuity over content."

Is the Jewish identity of the Moderately Affiliated, such as it has been described, rich and attractive, or shallow and unappealing? Is it sustainable and, if so, for how long? Certainly these questions are interesting and intriguing. But ultimately their answers lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Appendix

TABLE 23.1
Variables Used to Define Involved, Moderately Affiliated, and
Peripheral Jewish Groups
(Entries Are Percentages)

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Distribution | 36 | 41 | 23 | 100 |
| Visited Israel | | | | |
| Twice+ | 35 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Once | 24 | 38 | 0 | 24 |
| Never | 41 | 62 | 100 | 63 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Attends Service | | | | |
| 2+ /month | 56 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| Once/month | 4 | 9 | 0 | 5 |
| 5-10/year | 19 | 33 | 0 | 21 |
| 1-4/year | 18 | 46 | 52 | 37 |
| Never | 2 | 12 | 48 | 17 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Fasts on Yom Kippur | 82 | 76 | 0 | 60 |
| Owns Meat & Dairy Dishes | 60 | 0 | 0 | 22 |

Key: Involved Jews: Visited Israel twice or attend services at least twice a month or own separate dishes for meat and dairy products.

Peripheral Jews: Never visited Israel, attend services only on High Holydays or less often, do not fast on Yom Kippur, and do not own meat and dairy dishes.

Moderately Affiliated: Qualify neither as Involved nor as Peripheral Jews.

TABLE 23.2
Denomination and Selected Jewish Identity Activities by Jewish
Involvement Classification
(Entries Are Percentages)

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|---|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Identifies as . . . | | | | |
| Orthodox | 29 | 2 | 3 | 12 |
| Conservative | 43 | 37 | 11 | 33 |
| Reform | 16 | 34 | 28 | 26 |
| Just Jewish | 12 | 27 | 58 | 29 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Attends a Seder | 96 | 85 | 59 | 83 |
| Lights Candles Hanukkah | 95 | 86 | 67 | 85 |
| Synagogue Member | 78 | 52 | 16 | 53 |
| Jewish Org'n Member | 71 | 44 | 19 | 48 |
| Gave \$100+ to the UJA | 41 | 29 | 15 | 30 |
| Jewish Org'n Committee or Board Member | 37 | 17 | 3 | 21 |
| Closest Friends Who Are Jewish | | | | |
| Almost all | 63 | 47 | 29 | 48 |
| Most | 26 | 29 | 25 | 27 |
| Half or fewer | 10 | 24 | 46 | 25 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Spouse Is Now Jewish | 97 | 89 | 80 | 90 |

TABLE 23.3
Major Dimensions of Jewish Attitudes by Jewish Involvement
Classification
(Entries Are Percentages)

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|--------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Faith in God | | | | |
| Active God | 35 | 17 | 6 | 21 |
| Believer | 44 | 58 | 52 | 52 |
| Skeptic | 21 | 25 | 42 | 27 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Key: Do you believe that there is a God? (Definitely yes.) Do you believe that God has a special relationship with the Jewish people? (Definitely yes.)

| Keeps Traditions vs. Obeys Jewish Law | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|---------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Both | 45 | 16 | 6 | 24 |
| Traditions | 28 | 40 | 19 | 31 |
| Neither | 27 | 44 | 75 | 45 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Key: To what extent do you feel a commitment to keep at least some Jewish traditions? (A great extent.) To what extent do you feel a commitment to obey Jewish law? (A great extent.)

| Celebrates Holidays vs. Practices Rituals | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|---|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Both | 51 | 20 | 5 | 28 |
| Celebrates | 49 | 76 | 81 | 67 |
| Neither | 0 | 4 | 14 | 5 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Key: To what extent do you feel a commitment to celebrate Jewish holidays? (A great extent.) To what extent do you feel a commitment to practice Jewish religious rituals? (A great extent.)

| Children's Jewish Education vs. Adult Study of Texts | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|--|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Both | 47 | 20 | 7 | 27 |
| Children only | 33 | 41 | 37 | 37 |
| Neither | 20 | 39 | 56 | 36 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Key: To be a good Jew one must give one's children a Jewish education. (Essential.) Study Jewish texts. (Essential or desirable.)

| Attitude toward Israel | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| "Zionist" | 32 | 10 | 5 | 16 |
| Pro-Israel | 55 | 65 | 45 | 57 |
| Neither | 13 | 25 | 50 | 27 |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Key: Caring about Israel is an important part of my being a Jew. (Agree.) Have you ever seriously considered living in Israel? (Yes; not sure.)

TABLE 23.4
Expressions of Pride in Being Jewish by Jewish Involvement
Classification
(Upper entries are the percentages who "agree" or "agree
strongly"; lower entries are the percentages who "agree
strongly")

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------------|-------|
| Proud to Be a Jew | 99 | 97 | 93 | 97 |
| | 81 | 69 | 47 | 68 |
| Jews Are My People | 96 | 95 | 93 | 95 |
| | 62 | 44 | 31 | 47 |
| Jews Have a Rich History | 96 | 93 | 90 | 94 |
| | 58 | 45 | 35 | 47 |
| Couldn't Stop Being Jewish | 95 | 93 | 83 | 91 |
| | 52 | 44 | 36 | 45 |
| Being Jewish Is Special | 93 | 88 | 74 | 87 |
| | 70 | 56 | 36 | 56 |

Key: I am proud to be a Jew.

Jews are my people, the people of my ancestors.

Jews have had an especially rich and distinctive history, one with special meaning for our lives today.

Being Jewish is so much a part of me that even if I stopped observing Jewish traditions and customs, I still couldn't stop being Jewish.

Being Jewish is something special.

TABLE 23.5

Expressions of Affection for Major Jewish Holidays by Jewish Involvement Classification

(Upper entries are the percentages who "agree" or "agree strongly"; lower entries are the percentages who "agree strongly")

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|------------|----------|
| Make Me Feel Connected | 97 64 | 85 50 | 81 20 | 92 48 |
| Meaningful | 91 56 | 82 40 | 60 14 | 80 39 |
| A Time to Be with Family | 97 67 | 94 52 | 80 25 | 92 51 |
| Make Sure Kids Are Connected | 94 57 | 89 46 | 68 18 | 86 43 |
| Fond Childhood Memories | 87 43 | 86 45 | 79 30 | 85 41 |
| Best Feelings about Foods | 69 21 | 72 26 | 68 18 | 80 23 |

Key: The major Jewish holidays make me feel connected to my Jewish heritage and traditions.

I find the religious significance of the major Jewish holidays very meaningful.

For me, Jewish holidays are a time to be with the family.

During major Jewish holidays, I feel a desire to make sure my children feel connected to Jewish traditions.

Certain Jewish holidays evoke in me some very fond childhood memories.

Some of my best feelings about the major Jewish holidays are connected with certain foods.

TABLE 23.6

Expressions of Centrality of Jewish Persecution by Jewish Involvement Classification

| | Involved | Moderately Affiliated | Peripheral | Total |
|------------------------|----------|-----------------------|------------|-------|
| Persecuted | 98 | 100 | 99 | 99 |
| Jews United | 92 | 95 | 89 | 93 |
| Holocaust Important | 89 | 86 | 77 | 85 |
| Antisemitism Important | 83 | 83 | 72 | 80 |

Key: Jews have been persecuted throughout history.

Jews are united by their history of persecution.

"The Holocaust" is very or extremely important to your sense of being Jewish.

"American antisemitism" is very or extremely important to your sense of being Jewish.

Notes

1. Someone once quipped that there are two types of people—those who divide the world into two and those who do not. For most analytic and policy-oriented purposes, it usually makes more sense to divide the world into three. The usual practice of distinguishing "affiliated" Jews from "unaffiliated," or "religious" from "secular," erroneously suggests a rigid bifurcation of American Jewry. A three-part division more readily connotes the dynamic quality of the identity and involvement of most American Jews.
2. In earlier works I called this group "marginally affiliated" Jews. See Steven M. Cohen, "Outreach to the Marginally Affiliated: Evidence and Implications for Policymakers in Jewish Education," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 62, no. 2 (Winter 1985): 147–57.
3. For contrasting views on this matter, see Charles Silberman, *A Certain People: American Jews and Their Lives Today* (New York: Summit, 1985); Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Continuity and Change: Emerging Patterns in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Calvin Goldscheider, "American Jewish Marriages: Erosion or Transformation?" in *Israel: State and Society, 1948–1988*, vol. 5, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Peter Medding, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 201–8; U. O. Schmelz and Sergio DellaPergola, "Basic Trends in American Jewish Demography," in *Facing the Future: Essays on Contemporary Jewish Life*, Steven Bayme, ed. (New York: Ktav and American Jewish Committee, 1989), 72–111; Steven M. Cohen, "Reason for Optimism," in *The Quality of American Jewish Life: Two Views* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987); Steven M. Cohen,

American Assimilation or Jewish Revival? (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Charles Liebman, *Deceptive Images: Toward a Redefinition of American Judaism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1988). Also see Steven M. Cohen and Leonard J. Fein, "From Integration to Survival: American Jewish Anxieties in Transition," *Annals* (July 1985): 75-88.

4. For more details, see Steven M. Cohen, "Content or Continuity? Alternative Bases for Commitment" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991).
5. See the following works by Steven M. Cohen: *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York and London: Tavistock, 1983); "Attitudes of American Jews toward Israel and Israelis: The 1983 National Survey of American Jews and Jewish Communal Leaders" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1983); "The 1981-82 National Survey of American Jews," *American Jewish Year Book* (1983): 89-110; "From Romantic Idealists to Loving Realists: The Changing Place of Israel in the Consciousness of American Jews," in *Survey of Jewish Affairs, 1985*, W. Frankel, ed. (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press), 169-82; "Ties and Tensions: The 1986 Survey of American Jewish Attitudes toward Israel and Israelis" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987).
6. Steven M. Cohen, "Are American and Israeli Jews Drifting Apart?" (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1988); Charles Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).
7. For example, Steven M. Cohen in *American Modernity and Jewish Identity*.
8. Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).