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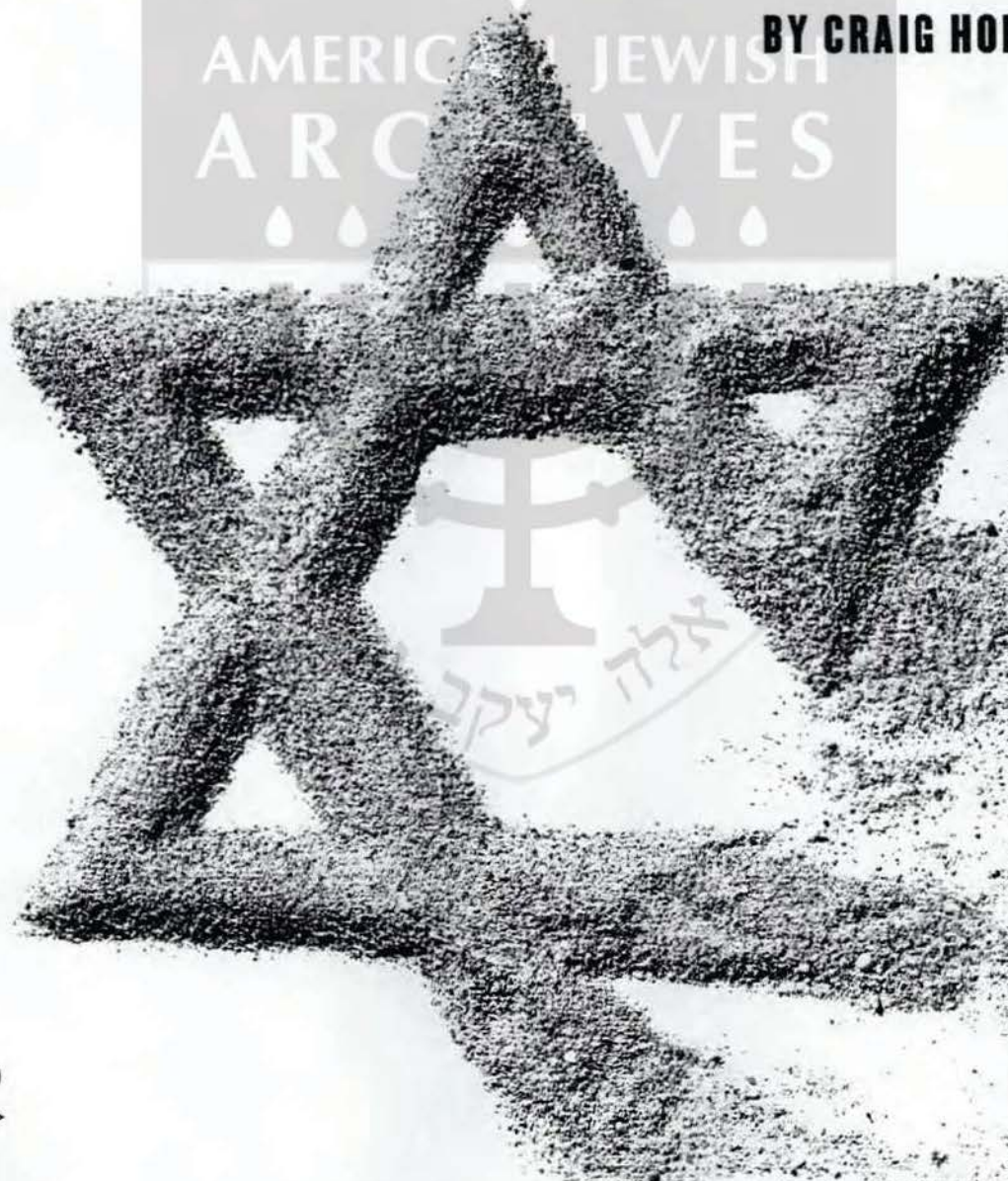
JULY 14, 1997

NEW YORK

Are American Jews Disappearing?

BY CRAIG HOROWITZ

AMERICAN JEWISH
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The fundamental Zionist analysis has been vindicated:

With the fall of the ghetto walls, there can be no future for a secular, stateless Jewish community anywhere. Not even in America.

JUNE 8, 97
N.Y. Times Magazine Section

Vanishing

As American Jews fail to reproduce, and as they intermarry, they are facing cultural extinction.

By Ari Shavit

ISRAEL



When I was in kindergarten, in the early 1960's, there were 1.9 million Jews in Israel. There were almost three times as many Jews in America. As Israel was still a shaky republic surrounded by a hostile Arab world, Israeli-born Jews like myself were taught to think of American Jewry as some kind of strategic hinterland. A safe, everlasting, natural resource. An enormous human reservoir.

Now, as Zionism is celebrating its 100th birthday, things look a bit different. While Israel's Jewish population has skyrocketed (growing by nearly 150 percent, to 4.6 million), the American Jewish population has hardly grown at all (5.7 million today). While Jewish Israel has proven to be the most demographically vibrant society in the Western world (average age, 29; average number of births per

mother, 2.6; hardly any intermarriages), Jewish America seems to be engaged in a process of demographic suicide (average age, 39; average number of births per mother, 1.6; a rate of intermarriage exceeding 52 percent).

If present trends persist — and barring a major catastrophe in the Middle East — Israel's Jewish population will surpass America's before 2010. A generation later, it is expected to be 50 percent larger than America's. By midcentury it might actually dwarf American Jewry altogether.

As American Jews fail to reproduce, as they find it impossible to keep their young within the faith, they are the ones now facing the threat of cultural extinction. At the turn of the 21st century it is non-Orthodox Jewish Americans who are becoming an endangered species.

True, Israel itself is having its own alarming identity problems. As its Tel Aviv-centered secular population grows more secular, its Jerusalem-centered, ultrareligious zealots grow more zealous. Since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the country has been in danger of being torn apart by cultural divisions that strain its fragile democracy. Yet even in such trying times, liberal Israelis cannot rely on what used to be their country's demographically rich uncle across the seas.

Demography aside, of course, the flamboyant uncle never had it so good. Count the 10 senators, 25 members of the

House, 2 Supreme Court justices and the president of the Federal Reserve Board — it seems American Jews have finally arrived. With scores of Nobel Prize winners and Wall Street barons, anti-Semitism on the wane and Judaism accepted as part of American culture, American Jews have made it in the most extravagant way.

There is no doubt about it: for 20th-century Jews, Ellis Island was the right choice. But for 21st-century Jews, America offers a far less promising prospect. It is now highly likely that the demographic collapse experienced by Europe's Ashkenazi communities over the last 50 years — some of them were actually halved — will be experienced by American Jewry over the next 50 years. At the fin of this siècle — whether or not the Zionist experiment succeeds — the fundamental Zionist analysis has been vindicated: with the fall of the ghetto walls, there can be no future for a secular, stateless Jewish community anywhere. Not even in America.

The evidence is all over the place: every year the mail brings to Jewish-American mailboxes more and more invitations to mixed weddings, indicating that the younger, non-Orthodox Jewish generation is largely marrying out. Every year the shock Allan Dershowitz went through when his son told him that he planned to marry a fine Irish-Catholic girl is being duplicated in Jewish homes across America. While there are a few

bold attempts at a counter-offensive — proclaiming a Jewish Revival, gathering again in the synagogues — the overall trend is unquestionable: the rate of intermarriage keeps climbing; the number of affiliated Jews stays low; hundreds of thousands are being lost from American Jewry every decade.

This is all but surprising. At the old Yiddish culture disappears, as Holocaust-era guilt feelings die out, as the pro-Zionist "blue box" generation ages, as third- and fourth-generation Americans lose the remnants of whatever *shtetl* background their parents and grand parents had, there is very little that could maintain the secular Jewish culture of the Diaspora. As American Jews find acceptance and success, and as their own Jewish identity becomes more and more vague, there is not enough spiritual cement to keep them together. Curiously, it is precisely America's virtues — its generosity, freedom and tolerance — that are now softly killing the last of the great Diasporas. It is because of its very virtues that America is in danger of becoming the most luxurious burial ground ever of Jewish cultural existence.

At the turn of this century most American and Israeli Jews are facing a common challenging question: whether a meaningful non-Orthodox existence is possible in the third millennium; whether we can all avoid being the last of the non-Orthodox Jews.

HA F-
In case you
missed it - a
succinct one page
on the state of US
Jewry. ML

The Young & Faithless

College Kids
Who Don't
"Do" Jewish

MARCELLA KOGAN

Tracy Rabin didn't need to be "saved" again.

It was bad enough that the pre-med junior at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Va., had already been approached by the Baptist minister—a doctor with whom she had worked while doing an internship—who tried to convince her that Jesus Christ is the savior.

Now representatives of the campus Hillel organization who noticed she hadn't come to many events were throwing her a rope to haul her back to shore. But Rabin—who has taken classes in both Jewish thought and the New Testament to try to figure out her feelings about God—didn't feel she was drowning.

"I consider Judaism a personal, individual thing. I don't feel a need to join a Jewish group to feel Jewish," said Rabin, a Reform Jew from Alexandria, Va., who still remembers what she felt to be the "cliquishness" of the B'nai

B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO) chapter to which she belonged in high school. "Why do Jewish leaders panic trying to get more people interested in Judaism? Those who want to be Jewish will come back to it," says Rabin, who had just pulled an all-nighter to study for a biology exam. "They [Jewish leaders] should recognize you don't need to be part of Hillel to care about your religion."

William and Mary, a small public liberal arts college, is hardly a center of Jewish life; its Hillel office doesn't even print a brochure about its programs. "That should tell you something," said a Hillel staffer from the college.

But Rabin's reaction is common among Jewish students, even at schools that have large Jewish populations. Many of these students acknowledge their Jewish identity but don't want to go to socials, Shabbat dinners, *hamantaschen-latke* debates, or other institutionally run activities.

"This is the dynamic of Jewish identity in the late 20th century," says Rabbi Gerald Serotta, director of Hillel at George Washington University (GWU) in Washington, D.C. "Most kids on campus have no formal Jewish education. They may have pride in their Jewish identity, but little background. There is also an intimidation factor. They're afraid the people in Hillel and organized Jewish life will find them deficient."

Rabin, whose father was raised Orthodox but now practices Reform, says she had enough of organized religion in high school. She is tired of the people who represent religious institutions. She'd simply prefer to explore her Jewish identity on her own terms.

The desire to get away from the familiar and experiment with different ideas is common—even desirable—in college, says Bernard Reisman, Klutznick Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. "The major

JEWISH WORLD

Muslim cleric found guilty

A London-based Muslim cleric accused of supporting Osama bin Laden was found guilty of urging his followers to kill Jews and others. Sheik Abdullah Faisal was convicted of three charges of incitement to murder.

Faisal, who was arrested by British anti-terrorist police last year, will be sentenced next week. The charges are punishable by life imprisonment.

High court refuses kosher case

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to consider reinstating New York laws that set standards for the labeling of kosher food. The court offered no comment when it refused the case Monday.

Last year, an appeals court struck down the New York laws, ruling that the laws improperly take sides in a religious matter.

Austria blasts own restitution

The Claims Conference welcomed a report commissioned by the Austrian government that called Austria's attempts at restitution "often half-hearted and sometimes utterly reluctant."

Reacting to the report, Gideon Taylor, the Claims Conference's executive vice president, said: "There seems now to be a new outlook on this matter, and we welcome the change. We hope that the conclusions and recommendations arising from this report will be properly and promptly implemented."

JCPA plenum opens in Baltimore

Daniel Pearl was honored Sunday as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs opened its plenum in Baltimore. The conference, which also brings together participants in Hillel's Spitzer Forum on Public Policy, honored the slain Wall Street Journal reporter by hosting a dialogue on hate speech on college campuses.

Also at the conference, Ken Pollack, a fellow at the Brookings Institution, gave participants a mixed report card on President Bush's efforts to build support for a war against Iraq, giving him "three A's, three F's and two incompletes."

'Pianist' cops European awards

A film about a Jewish musician's survival during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw won the British and French equivalents of the Oscar awards for best picture. Overall, "The Pianist" won seven awards at the Cesar Awards in Paris on Saturday night.

On Sunday, the film, which is based on a memoir, won the best picture award at the British Academy Film Awards. "Amen," a film about the Catholic Church's complicity in the Holocaust, won the award for best screenplay at the French awards.

Jewish population undercounted, experts say after new British census

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — There may be far more Jews in Great Britain than previously believed, experts said this month, following the release of 2001 census data.

The census found just under 267,000 Jews in England, Scotland and Wales, making them slightly less than 0.5 percent of the British population. But the religion question was voluntary and nearly a quarter of the population did not answer it.

Further, areas that are known to have substantial Jewish populations tended to have higher than average "no response" or "no religion" answers to the religion question, said Stanley Waterman of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, a London think tank.

"Everything points to an undercount by the census," Waterman told JTA.

Conservative calculations by the institute suggest there may be as many as 310,000 Jews in Britain — almost 10 percent more than the 285,000 estimate by the Board of Deputies, British Jewry's umbrella organization.

Waterman said the fervently Orthodox community in particular was undercounted. The census found slightly fewer than 11,000 Jews in the London borough of Hackney, home of the country's largest fervently Orthodox population.

Research by the Jewish community recently suggested there were between 17,000 and 22,000 Jews in the borough.

Rabbi Avraham Pinter, the principal of an Orthodox girls school and a former city council member from Hackney, said many fervently Orthodox Jews had not answered the religion question.

"I would have thought the vast majority didn't fill it out," he told JTA.

Many members of the community are second-generation Holocaust survivors, he explained, and they were concerned about telling the government their religion on a form that had their name and address.

Also, he said, one of the two newspapers serving the community discouraged fervently Orthodox Jews from answering the religion question.

"The Jewish Tribune had a negative attitude. They suggested there was a danger in the authorities having this information," he said. "My own daughter didn't fill out the religion question."

He estimated the fervently Orthodox population at 17,000 to 18,000 — and said it was growing at between 5 percent and 8 percent a year.

"All the schools are bursting at the seams. New schools are opening all the time, and they fill up immediately," he said.

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research has done research that may help calculate the size of the undercount.

Institute surveys conducted since the census found that only 84 percent of non-fervently Orthodox Jews in London and 89 percent of Jews in the northern city of Leeds said they were Jewish on the census form.

Barry Kosmin, director of the institute, said there was also an undercount among the elderly and the foreign-born — and perhaps among students, where there was a popular movement to answer the religion question "Jedi," based on the Star Wars movies. "No matter what way you look at it, I guess you have to add at least another quarter — 50,000 to 70,000 more Jews," Waterman said.

That would put the number at between 317,000 and 337,000.

Kosmin said the census found another surprising result: the presence of at least three Jews in every one of the country's 367 local authorities, except the remote Scilly Isles off England's southwestern tip.

While the census turned up a startling number of rural Jews, it found fewer than expected in urban areas.

"The major finding is that Jews aren't where you expect them to be," he said. □
The results of the British census are now available at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/default.asp>. The results of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research's London survey are available at: http://www.jpr.org.uk/Reports/PJC%20Reports/no_4_2002/index.htm.

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"ROOTS OF THE FUTURE"
RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

**WHITHER AMERICAN JEWRY?
TO LIVE ON OR TO DIE OUT**

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

Three hundred fifty years after its pioneers first appeared on New World soil, American Jewry faces its greatest crisis. The crisis is, ironically, of its own making and is so severe that by 2054, the 400th anniversary of Jewish settlement on this continent, American Jewry may be seriously diminished, reduced to less than one-half of one percent of the total population. There are those who derogate such predictions, countering with defiant slogans that a "renaissance" is in the making. Proof is offered in the form of increased day school enrollments, synagogue rejuvenation, wider adult education programs, and expanded Jewish consciousness on college campuses. All this is indeed positive, helpful, lovely to witness – and yet is hardly a renaissance. That term suggests a sweeping surge of creativity in all areas of Jewish activity – and does not describe the present condition of American Jewry.

Large numbers of Jews are simply drifting away from Judaism because they aren't living and thinking *as* Jews. They are living instead as single-identity persons (Americans only). They don't know much about Judaism, nor practice its rituals, nor relate to Israel in any way – not even as tourists. Worse, perhaps, they seem not to care. They marry "out" (of the faith), and most don't even try to bring their mates and children "in." The inevitable result: a combination of

ignorance, indifference, and intermarriage leading to total assimilation and disappearance into the culture of the majority.

Everyone in the American Jewish establishment knows what's happening. The chief fundraising organizations, United Jewish Appeal and Council of Jewish Federations, know it; the local federation system knows it. The synagogue system feels it. The national organizations suffer from it. Even far-off Israel knows it.

Intellectuals and writers have already covered the subject. Alan Dershowitz's latest book is entitled, *The Vanishing American Jew*; Seymour M. Lipset and Earl Raab have addressed *Jews and the New American Scene*; Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg recently wrote *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter*; and Elihu Bergman, a Harvard demographer with a long view, predicted 25 years ago that the Jewish population of the United States in 2076 would consist of fewer than one million.

Bergman used 2076 as his benchmark because that will be the 300th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. I prefer to use 2054 because that will be the 400th anniversary of the landing of the first Jewish settlers on this continent.

Nevertheless, I accept Bergman's population estimate. It is shocking to realize that the golden age of American Judaism, which has produced the most powerful and successful Diaspora community in the entire 3,700-year history of the Jewish people, may well be expiring as the anniversary of its fourth century in America approaches.

For many casual readers, it is difficult to accept such a prediction, for they see all around them an affluent, educated, prominent group of Jews who appear anything but "endangered." A modern paradox makes the confusion understandable. American Jewry today exhibits two faces, two facets, two definitions of itself. One is strong, vigorous, thrusting forward to new creative heights in every field of human endeavor; the other is weak, indecisive, stumbling toward a self-inflicted immolation.

The strong face has many features:

- Departments of Jewish studies functioning in more than 200 American colleges and universities, registering tens of thousands of

students, Jews and non-Jews alike. Oddly, the largest of these departments – in terms of endowed chairs, books published, outside lecturers brought in, students enrolled – exists at the University of Indiana, in the American heartland.

- Nine Jewish Senators, 25 Congresspersons, two members of the Supreme Court.
- A Reform Jewish day school in Los Angeles enrolling more than 3,000 students in grades K-12.
- A Conservative synagogue in New York welcoming thousands of enthusiastic members to overflow services every Sabbath evening and morning in a great singing and dancing congregation, which meets in a nearby Methodist church because its own building is too small.
- A fundraising philanthropy, the UJA, rating in 1996 as the fourth-largest public charity in the entire country, just behind the United Way and the Red Cross.
- Almost 400 national Jewish organizations dedicated to promoting various areas of culture, education, community relations with other groups, overseas aid, Israel-related projects, religion, and social welfare. In addition, hundreds of Federations are linked to thousands of local agencies.

It would thus appear that the relatively small Jewish community, a mere 1.8 percent of the total U.S. population, is thriving in the political, social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres. Yet the other face is equally impressive in its negative aspects:

- *The National Jewish Population Study* of 1990 indicated that more than 50 percent of American Jews have exogamous marriages – that is, with non-Jewish partners.
- In the late 20th century, only 38 percent of the Jews in this country belong to synagogues at various points in their lives. Life-long members form a much smaller percentage.
- Only 25 percent contribute to Jewish charities.
- The rate of ignorance of Judaism is incredibly high.

- The number of children in Jewish day schools (not counting the Orthodox network) is incredibly low – a national total of 35,500.
- Only one-quarter to one-third of American Jews have visited Israel during its 50 years of existence.
- The number of Jews considered “active” or “caring,” that is, participating in aspects of the community’s existence, is estimated at only 25 percent.

If the negative prediction of a constantly diminishing number of Jews during the coming half-century does indeed come true, specific and serious changes will result. One million Jews, scattered in small numbers throughout the nation’s cities and towns, will be insufficient to maintain the infrastructure necessary for communal existence. There will not be enough people to support the institutions, professional staffs, and annual budgets of the local and national agencies, to say nothing of the needs of less fortunate Jews overseas.

Such support amounts to billions of dollars every year. Without it, almost all of the Jewish infrastructure – synagogues, federations, centers, schools, homes for elderly, and so on – will gradually crumble as operations lose the money and/or the people-power to maintain them. Forget about supporting the JDC and ORT and all the Israeli universities and hospitals and museums and immigrant-absorption centers: They will be the first to suffer.

One million Jews, in a total American population that may easily reach 350 million by 2054 or 2076, will constitute such an insignificant factor that the final process of disintegration will accelerate. There will be no reason to hang on, and nothing to hang on to. Some portion of the core group itself may well emigrate to Israel.

The Orthodox community believes that its observance of ritual, obedience to the ancient unchangeable code of law (*halacha*), and emphasis on a parochial school education of at least 12 years for its youngsters will guarantee its survival, no matter what happens to the other 90 percent of the American Jewish population. Israel Zoberman, in a review in the Summer 1997 issue of the *Jewish Spectator* of a book by Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, entitled “Jews and the New American Scene,” wrote: “Is the Orthodox Jewish day school the magic bullet that will lead to Jewish survival?... Research indicates

that a stronger commitment to a higher level of Jewish education and observance leads to a lower level of intermarriage (not more than 2 percent) and assimilation....Choosing ritual observance is likely to lead to Jewish education, which in turn is likely to lead to choosing a Jewish spouse, which is likely to lead to providing a stronger educational and ritual base for one's children, who then perpetuate the cycle."

Although that reassuring theory may well be accurate for the Orthodox world, it does not fit the huge number of non-Orthodox Jews who have chosen alternative forms of religious expression. Many analysts argue that the minimal education now given to the great majority of children who receive *any* form of Jewish education is hopelessly inadequate and must be radically reshaped. The argument has validity, and there are faint signs that it is gaining wider acceptance among communal leaders.

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, a scholar and community leader, offers the following trenchant observation: "It is possible in this new age of America to evaporate out of being Jewish without making a decision to be anything else. In fact, the drift of life in contemporary America is toward free association. The older generation of Jews still finds most of its friends among other Jews; the young do not. They remain 'proud to be Jews,' but they are less and less likely to live their lives within the ethnic community."

Lipset-Raab acknowledge the problem but appear to be less apocalyptic: "Given the inexorably integrative forces of American society and the resultant parallel trends among Jews, it is reasonable to predict that the Jewish community as a whole will be severely reduced in numbers by the middle of the next century. The extent to which the remaining core will endure, or even possibly recoup, will depend on intrinsic factors....The religion-connected aspect of Jewish life provides the strongest deterrent to the swift or complete dissolution of American Jewry. It also is the most credible basis for the prediction that, while the Jewish community will be much reduced in size, it will not have disappeared and may even have reached some relatively stable plateau...."

"'Fragile remnant' is a term Benjamin Disraeli applied to Jews in the 19th century. The remnant of American Jewry, both the more devout and the fellow-travelers, will tend to be those who feel somehow connected to the

religious core of their tribal identity.... As a result, the remaining body of American Jewry may well be significantly less fragile than it is now. Yet, even that religious core cannot be durably nourished by isolationist remedies. The tribal dilemma in America is not to be solved for most Jews by requiring them to forgo those exceptional qualities of American society that have so beneficently created that dilemma."

Lipset-Raab seem to me to be fudging the question. They may be overly optimistic in their hope that a connection with religion plus an attenuated tribal loyalty will keep a diminished population Jewish, especially since they freely admit that Jews will not isolate themselves from a free, permissive, welcoming American society that will only become more so.

Dershowitz concludes that there is only one weapon with which to fight the dissolution – a new kind of education. He dismisses several alternatives offered by other observers:

- *Religion* is not the wave of the future for most young intellectuals. Today's American Jewish community is secular.
- *Israel* is not Judaism's salvation. Most American Jews want to remain where they are.
- *Jewish ethics* cannot be transmitted to children without living a Jewish life (which most American Jews do not do).
- *Fundraising and charity* cannot ensure the Jewish future.

Dershowitz' singular solution; an educational system of a different kind.

Jewish education today is controlled almost entirely by the religious component of Jewish life and has been one of the great failures of the American Jewish community....We will have to loosen the monopolistic hold that rabbis have over Jewish education so that we can compete effectively in the marketplace of ideas for the minds and hearts of our Jewish youth.... We will have to educate our children differently, select our leaders differently, allocate our charitable giving differently – even define our very Jewishness differently. Jewish life will have to become less tribal, more open, more accepting of outsiders, and less defensive.

A new Jewish leadership must emerge to supplement the traditional rabbinic and political leadership of the Jewish people. Judaism has been led by kings, priests, rabbis, politicians, and philanthropists (in various epochs). Today a new leadership must be added to this pantheon of heroes. We need a leadership of Jewish *educators* who can address the pressing issue of Jewish illiteracy and ignorance. We need teachers who can inspire – who believe in Jewish education for its own sake – not for any other reason.

The Judaism I am trying to defend and enhance is a Judaism of ideas, attitudes, skepticism, justice, compassion, argumentation and inclusiveness. That kind of Judaism can survive, indeed thrive, in an open and welcoming world into which Jewish ideas can cast a beacon of light. That kind of Judaism does not depend on who is a Jew or whether one's father or mother is a Jew, or whether one is a 'whole' Jew or a 'half' Jew. That kind of Judaism is the power of Jewish ideas to educate, influence and repair the world. Every Jew who cares about our future must join in building the foundation for this new Judaism.

In my view, neither books nor authors will decide the destiny of American Jewry. That lies in the hands of the great leaders who are accustomed to dealing with crises and shaping solutions; their powerful organizations which formulate action plans and carry them out. They lead the mass of Jews to understand a particular emergency in historical terms and urge the mass to react in a certain manner.

All of that constitutes leadership in action. One has a right to expect action, but there is stunning silence instead. That is, there's a massive *failure* of leadership. We see a plethora of meetings, an outpouring of resolutions, discussions ad nauseam of the "continuity" problem, an outcry of lamentations, a restless formation of committees in every city in the country, all regurgitating the same data and repeating the pious statements that "education" is the solution.

The texts of resolutions passed by every local task force on continuity sound weirdly similar. And the culminating report of the National Continuity Commission of the Council of Jewish Federations, the result of a two-year effort, turned out to be an empty bladder of wind, over-wordy and non-

specific. Was that the mighty battle cry to mobilize the country? Both chairpersons, Marvin Lender and Shoshana Cardin, veterans of many monumental projects, who rank among our most able national leaders, confessed to me their frustration in being unable to emerge with a strong, revitalizing program. What should have been a huge *shofar* blast, summoning the nation to support a detailed plan of action, emerged as the weak bleat of a kazoo, a dull, pallid, bureaucratic failure.

It should be noted that during this very tense period, when great and urgent policy should have been formulated on a live-or-die question, the leaders of the two most important organizations, the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, spent their time tinkering over administrative matters: "merger" or "partnership"; one board or two; one executive director or two. From groups whose duty it is to shape the future, that amounted to a nauseating display of irrelevancy.

Never has the Biblical sentence of Proverbs 29:18 been more relevant.

בְּאֵץ חָזוֹן יִשָּׁרַע עָם

"Where there is no vision, the people break loose or perish"

In sum, the present generation of leaders has failed so far to provide vision, and the people have broken loose. The end of the process, if unreversed, must inevitably be to perish.

To prevent that calamity, vision must be coupled with reality. The UJA provided such a vision in rescuing the Jews fleeing the former Soviet Union. The organization's leaders named the action plan Operation Exodus (which resonated with the entire Jewish community), calibrated it to raise \$1 billion between 1990 and 1995, and succeeded brilliantly. That brief description hardly describes the quantity of brainpower, the number of personnel, the involvement of all sorts of experts in communication, the logistics of speakers going all over the country, the mobilization of some of the richest Jews in the country. All of that was simply the execution of the vision and its attendant plan. Alas, that essential combination is missing today, and without it, there is nothing.

In March 1995, as Operation Exodus drew to a close, I proposed to the UJA executive committee a vision plus an action plan for the next historic challenge facing the American Jewish community, namely, the rescue of our own youth. We helped rescue Russia's Jewish young people – why not our own?

Specifically, I suggested that the UJA raise \$500 million to \$1 billion in additional funds during the next five years to support an Israel Experience for all 15- to 25-year-olds at community expense. I had in mind a missionary-like approach that would galvanize the entire UJA/Federation system into "Judaizing" our own American kids. An Israel Experience is not merely a trip but a carefully designed program for getting under the skin of impressionable youth. The evidence showed that, when properly crafted, an exposure to the depth of Israel has instilled in thousands of young people a sense of commitment to Judaism and to Israel.

The UJA response? The leaders ignored the idea, without explaining why or suggesting any alternative for awakening the languid constituency.

If the UJA and Federation system understood the danger and mobilized all the strength they possess in both money and manpower, it might be possible to alter the course of the war of attrition and defeat that now confronts us. The American Jewish public, including its youth, has always responded in time of crises and emergencies. It is essential that its top leadership respond as well.

In addition, the Federation system must join with the synagogue system to fill the pews and classrooms with a new generation seeking Judaism. Such a commitment to new programs, backed by the necessary funds and the creative genius of the best lay and rabbinical minds, might well trigger the knowledge, enthusiasm, and commitment of a larger number of new members.

Make no mistake. The task is huge. Hundreds of schools must be built and thousands of talented teachers must be found, for children and adults alike. Tuition must be absolutely token, even free where necessary. Every college campus where more than 100 Jewish students reside must have a fully staffed Center for Jewish Life (a.k.a. Hillel) to provide constant stimulation. Every young teen should be exposed to a Jewish summer camp for several summers, again at a token cost. And in high school or college, every American Jewish youth should be given an Experience in Israel at communal expense.

The dimensions of such a program are so huge, so unprecedented, so demanding, and so expensive that no concerned Jew would remain unaffected by its scope. Fifteen billionaires could kick off the fundraising and thereby set the appropriate levels down the line; 150 Federated communities, currently sitting on almost \$5 billion in endowment or foundation funds, could use them as collateral to borrow ten times that much.

Funds would be quickly gathered to give momentum to this vast educational enterprise. The education itself would pose no problem. The reservoir of academics in all the hundreds of departments of Jewish studies in this country's colleges and universities is sufficiently large to provide teachers for all the subjects that need to be taught.

As an aside, let one point be very clear: the weakening or diminution or even withering away of the American Diaspora would not doom the Jewish people as a whole. A long look at Jewish history, studying the rise and fall of previous strong Diaspora entities in Babylonia, Egypt, Spain, Iran, and Poland (to name a few) teaches us that even as old communities erode, new seeds are being planted in other lands, on other continents. Those seeds sprout and flourish to produce – in time – a new and vigorous Jewish environment that will absorb the wandering fugitives from the old ones.

Should the spectacular American Diaspora come to a self-inflicted, tragic end in the coming century, those remaining Jews whose self-identity demands a robust Jewish environment can seek fulfillment in Israel, a land strong and capable of welcoming them to a new home whose seeds were sown two centuries earlier. Such is the magic of this hitherto unbreakable chain. The song "*Am Yisrael Chai*" (The People of Israel Live) embodies the core conviction. Even if some of its limbs and branches wither and disappear, the people as a whole is indestructible, immortal.

If its life in the United States can be invigorated and strengthened, there is no limit to the creative potential of an inspired Jewish community. I mean potential for its own benefit and that of the larger world, including the possibility of helping the American nation as a whole regain the moral values it so desperately needs and seeks. Thus, the ability to overcome a mindless assimilation becomes the major task of the next two generations of American Jews. In an optimistic vein, we can hope and pray that our leadership will

understand, respond to the challenge, make the plans and mobilize the funds to spark the renewal, and give birth to the renaissance.

American Jewry's national organizations plus America's thousands of synagogues must produce the electricity to light up the entire system. That can be done by crafting a national set of long-term strategic goals, publicizing them, blanketing the country with advertisements, videos, speakers, forums, and slogans to make it clear that all components of the total battle plan are linked and interwoven to achieve one common objective. We must educate every Jewish man, woman, and child we can reach with the desire to preserve Judaism and not drift away from it. There are nine elements, or individual goals, that form a complete mosaic designed to save our people and its mission. Here is what is specifically needed:

1. A widely expanded, communal, trans-denominational day-school system covering K-8, with scores and scores of such schools to be added within the next decade. Modeled after the best private schools in every community, these institutions must be of sufficiently high quality to attract the most secular parents as well as modern, Orthodox families. Annual tuition for the family should be a token \$100 per student. The total cost of the school system is a communal responsibility.
2. A high school system covering grades 9-12, with a strongly Judaic curriculum plus a secular one of such quality that the school's graduates can gain admission to the finest universities in the country; plus exciting extra-curricular activities and a wide array of athletic facilities. Again, annual tuition should be a token \$100 per student. Total cost is communal. The full network – one or more such high schools in every city – must be up and running within the next 15 years.
3. On every college campus containing more than 100 Jewish students, a fully staffed Center for Jewish Life to provide constant programming and stimulation. Most campuses will require much larger staffs than they currently maintain, as well as new or renovated buildings. Since the Jewish students are present in large

numbers (approximately 400,000 on 100 to 150 campuses), the need here is immediate.

4. An Israel Experience, providing a variety of programs for students between the ages of 15 to 25. Younger kids would spend four to eight weeks at a summer camp; tenth graders could spend a whole year in an accredited high school, and receive credit at their home-town high school; college students could spend junior year at an Israeli university, also for credit back home. Graduate students could spend two years in Israel working toward a master's degree. To succeed, the initiative needs a sufficient volume and variety of attractive programs in Israel; enough trained personnel to carry them out; pre-departure study to enrich the experience, and post-return courses to capitalize on the enthusiasm and establish a future pattern of Jewish action and living; universal and almost-free financing; and a major advertising program to inform everyone – parents and youth alike – that the opportunity exists and should be seized. Here again, the cost of whatever program is chosen, is at communal expense, with a family token of \$100 to \$500. This communal expense is an investment to secure our future.
5. A summer camp in the United States for every young Jewish person between the ages of 10 and 15. Few American camps excel at instilling Judaic influences while providing pleasurable recreational pursuits. At present, the Reform movement runs nine camps and the Conservative movement six. Each movement should have between 25 to 50 – at a tuition of \$100 for the summer.
6. For adults, a widespread duplication of the Wexner-type seminar program, which, as I have pointed out, is the most serious adult Jewish education program in the country. Wexner students pay nothing; Leslie Wexner himself shoulders all expenses. Every city in America even with only a small or medium-size Jewish population should duplicate his approach, programmatic as well as financial. Each community can find its own local Leslie Wexner.

7. Family educators who can help create, in the home, a Jewish environment of holiday observance, songs, and stories, as well as the historic knowledge to enable understanding of the Sabbath and holidays. These skilled professionals function best when employed by the synagogue system and assigned to service new member families. One good approach is to organize a group of such families, including children for a mission to Israel. Communal funds must be used to add such educators to the synagogue staffs.
8. A redesign of synagogue programs to offer educational series that will increase the present small number of participants. This is a large subject that cannot be detailed in a few sentences, but well-intentioned rabbis and synagogue officers could come up with many suggestions. As it is, the best ideas are usually discarded because they cost too much. If additional funds are required to supplement what the synagogue can afford, the community should provide them.
9. Welcoming the intermarried in every possible fashion. I don't consider union between a Jewish person and a non-Jew who converts to Judaism an intermarriage: According to Jewish law and history, the convert has the same status as the born Jew. (Contemporary arguments in this area relate to the credentials of the clergy performing the conversion. It's a sort of turf war, because even when non-Orthodox clergy observe all the requirements of Orthodox law, they still are considered suspect.) The sincerity and long period of study required often make the convert a more knowledgeable Jew than his or her Jewish-born mate.

When I speak of intermarriage, I am talking about a Jewish person and any non-Jewish person, not necessarily a Christian. Since millions of Americans are no longer *practicing* Christians, many so-called intermarriages involve American Jews who are marrying simply other Americans. Unfortunately, the Jewish partner usually takes no steps to enroll this "neutral" person, who might well be amenable to conversion. In that situation, everyone involved – and

potentially involved – is lost to Jewry: the Jewish partner, the mate, and any children they may have.

Every effort must be made – in honest, patient wooing and welcoming – to “rescue” the members of such families. Make the non-Jew feel comfortable, wanted, at home in the synagogue, the center, the federation, the social group, the vacation club, the bridge club, the mutual-fund club, the PTA, every institution with a niche into which to fit a new neighbor.

In the list of goals above, I have repeatedly indicated that communal funding is indispensable. Most middle-class parents simply cannot pay for Jewish primary and high schools, no matter how much they might want their children to attend them. Although it’s impossible to estimate the costs of all the above items, it could easily run into billions of dollars.

We should not be frightened by such a number. Our people’s life is at stake. In such a predicament, what meaning does money have? When catastrophe threatens, society spends whatever it must.

How do we obtain those huge sums? In the same way we obtained them for the earlier emergencies I have described. The UJA and all the Federations together must raise the rescue banner so widely, urgently, compellingly, skillfully, and constantly that they mobilize the entire organized Jewish community to a degree never before seen. The goal of the annual campaign must be pushed up into the billions.

Seventy-five percent of the American Jews – millions of people – are now not contributing a dime; they must be reached. Seventy percent of the wealth of this nation is in the hands of widows; they, too, must be reached. Communal property must be mortgaged. The billionaires must come forward, with sums they have never dreamed of, let alone contributed. Great *non*-Jewish foundations must be approached for “heavy” money; I predict a favorable reaction from them because their intelligent leadership will understand the immense impact that the disappearance of our talented people would have on America.

And the final resource; the gigantic nest egg that has been growing for the past quarter-century or more in the endowment funds, by whatever name they are called, of the country’s Federations. As noted above, that amount has reached about \$5 billion and is constantly growing. Individuals have donated

that money and taken their tax deductions, but they retain the right to advise the Federations how their funds should be used. We need to urge those individuals to recommend that *some* of their billions be used on school tuitions, or the Israel Experience, or the other programs suggested above. What governing body would refuse such a recommendation? None.

Bottom line: I'm not really worried about where the money needed to do a proper job would come from. In my opinion, it's available; it simply needs to be excavated. The endowment funds could also serve as collateral for borrowing – to quickly put several billion dollars at the disposal of a national master plan.

One other money matter: how the funds raised in the annual campaigns are to be allocated and specifically how the allocations would affect Israel. Most of the usual formulas used by the UJA and the local Federations would have to be substantially altered. Israel must be informed, openly and officially, that American Jewry has embarked on a long-range effort to save itself from self-destruction. Detailed discussions would then take place with Israeli officials, as to their essential needs and how much could be supplied to them.

I'm certain the Israelis would understand and cooperate. Why? Because of a conversation I had with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in New York in late October, 1995, two weeks before his tragic assassination. His closest aide, Eitan Haber, was present at that meeting. I asked Rabin how he would feel if the UJA took \$50 million off the top of the usual allocation to Israel and used it to finance an Israel Experience for 10,000 American Jewish kids. He asked in return how anyone could be certain the money would actually be used for that purpose. When I assured him that the UJA would monitor the operation carefully, he agreed wholeheartedly because he understood and wholly sympathized with the underlying motive. Sadly, the project discussed with Rabin never materialized.

The crucial, underlying question, then, involves will power. I speak now to the generation of leadership today, men and women in their 60s and 70s who still remember the horrors of the Holocaust and the glories of statehood. I speak also to the younger generation, in its 40s and 50s, whose members have been acquiring some Jewish sensibility and understand what is at stake. Do all of you, amounting to tens of thousands across the entire country, feel the

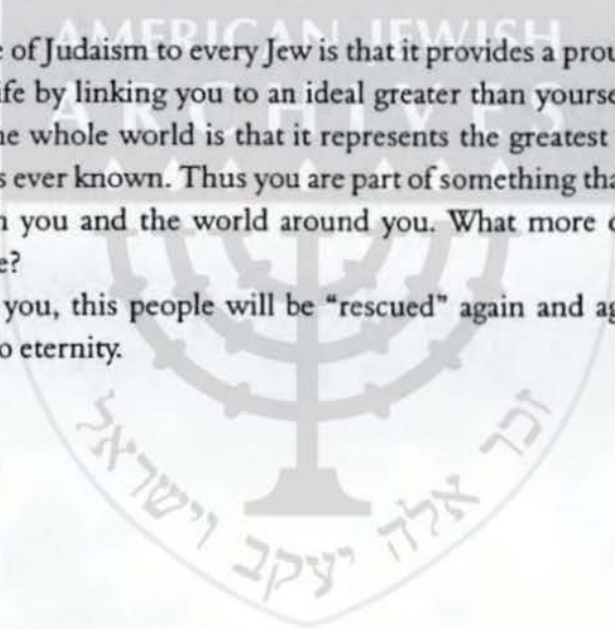
weight of history? Are you – especially you leaders – ready to give this effort your total conviction, dedication, commitment? In other words, is your will power fully energized?

If your answers are “Yes!,” act fast, even at the risk of making mistakes. *Not* acting is the only unacceptable response.

Jewish leaders, it’s your call. If you go to work quickly, with vigor and imagination, you can succeed brilliantly. Bear in mind that eternal existence is decided anew every 40 years with each new generation. A people 3,700 years old must regularly renew its claim to exist. If you protect your heritage, it will protect you.

The value of Judaism to every Jew is that it provides a proud identity and a meaning to life by linking you to an ideal greater than yourself. The value of Judaism to the whole world is that it represents the greatest civilizing moral force man has ever known. Thus you are part of something that immeasurably enriches both you and the world around you. What more can one man or woman desire?

Through you, this people will be “rescued” again and again, as often as necessary, into eternity.



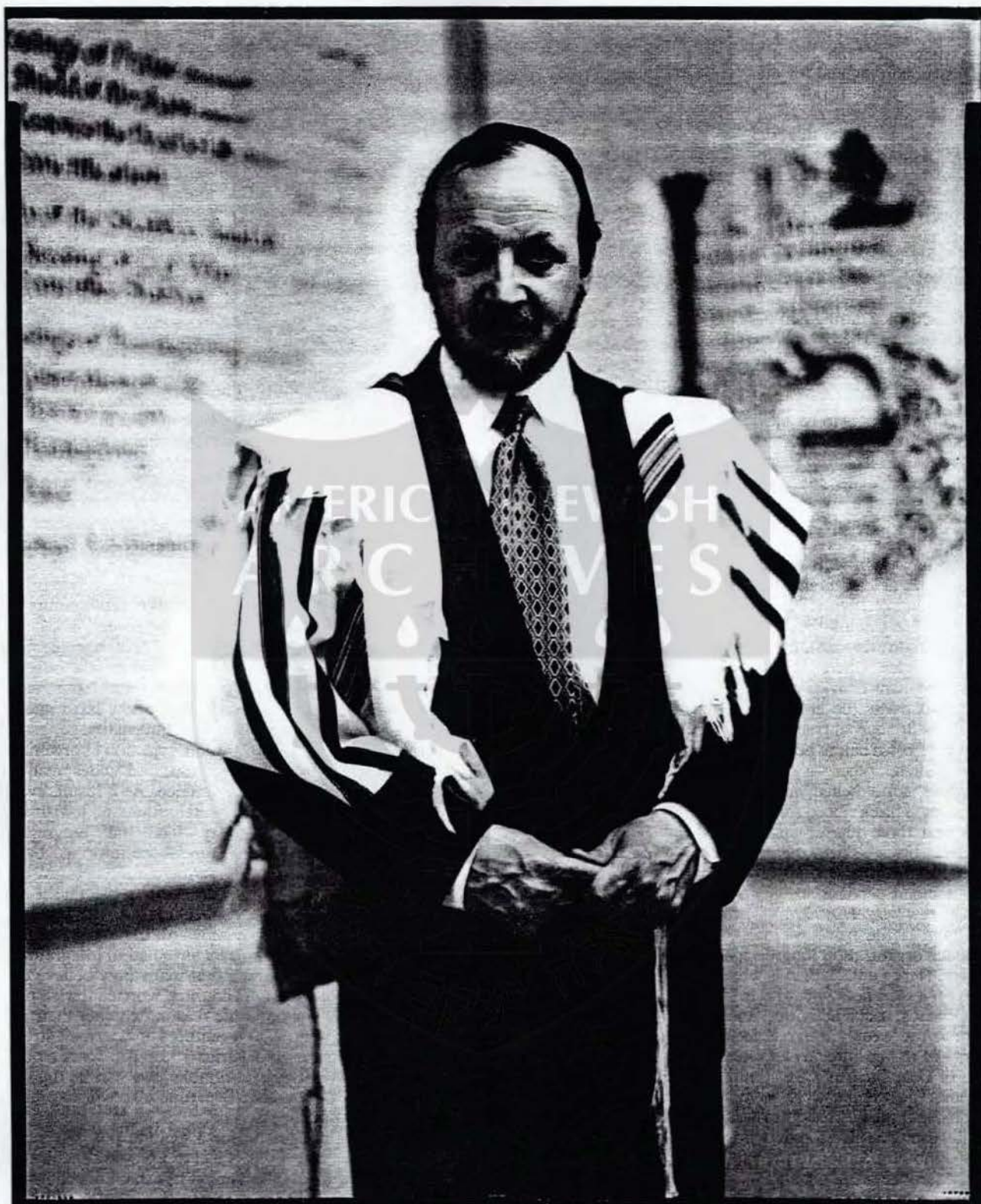
DECLINING BIRTH RATES. RAMPANT INTERMARRIAGE. THE "SEINFELD EFFECT." ARE AMERICAN JEWS ASSIMILATING THEMSELVES OUT OF EXISTENCE?

AT KEHILATH JESHURUN, A LARGE STONE SYNAGOGUE tucked among the brownstones and townhouses on East 85th Street, Esther Jungreis stepped up to the podium, opened her tattered Bible to the book of Leviticus, and looked out at the large crowd that filled the sanctuary. It was 7:30 P.M., show time, and even the balcony, with its soaring marble arches and two-story stained-glass windows, was jammed. One thousand people. On a Tuesday night. All drawn by word of mouth. ■ Most of the crowd was young (25 to 45) and with their supple leather briefcases and laptop computer bags would have looked more at home decompressing after

work in a bar. But here they were, an attractive mix of investment bankers, lawyers, ad execs, techies, and media types, sitting in a Torah class, spellbound by a 61-year-old wisp of a woman, a Hungarian native who survived Bergen-Belsen. ■ "I spoke at Oxford University recently," Jungreis told the rapt audience, which was so quiet you could almost hear the rustle of an Armani blazer anytime someone shifted in his seat. "And I said to them, 'I'm not impressed with your scholarship and your technology, your culture and your art. It's what you do with all of it that matters. Living a Torah life is what counts.' You know," she said, leaning forward



BY CRAIG HOROWITZ ■ PHOTOGRAPHED BY GREG MILLER



RABBI EPHRAIM BUCHWALD, FOUNDER OF THE NATIONAL JEWISH OUTREACH PROGRAM.

**"MAKE NO MISTAKE, THIS IS A SPIRITUAL HOLOCAUST.
THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IS COMMITTING SUICIDE."**

a little to create the illusion of intimacy in the vast interior of the synagogue, "the Torah is an instruction manual for life. When you study Torah, your soul develops, it is elevated. You can have all the material things. A house in the Hamptons. A house in Palm Beach. A private plane. You can have all of that and more. But if you don't have inner peace, you have nothing."

Jungreis prodded, challenged, implored, and comforted the audience during her 90-minute lecture. There were few rhetorical flourishes but little doubt about her message. "No Jew ever woke up one day and said, 'I'm not going to be a Jew anymore.' It's a process. It occurs over time. The first step is when you give up studying. And the second is to stop observing the Commandments."

As Jungreis worked the crowd, it was difficult not to think of her, at least momentarily, as a kind of Jewish Tammy Faye Bakker (minus the false faith and false eyelashes). It was partly gender (there simply aren't that many female evangelists) and partly the attention she pays to her appearance, from her frosted hair to her stylishly tailored clothes—a short, off-white jacket belted at her tiny waist, a black ribbed turtleneck and three-quarter-length tapered black skirt, heart-shaped earrings and a silver-and-diamond pendant spelling the Hebrew word *Hineni*.

Hineni is the name of the outreach organization Jungreis founded 24 years ago (the word means "Here I am," which is what Abraham says to God to indicate his readiness when he is called on in Genesis). Hineni runs classes, social activities, and trips to Israel. But the main event is the weekly Jungreis lecture, which began nearly ten years ago in her office as an intimate class for Patricia Cayne, wife of Bear Stearns CEO Jimmy Cayne, and several of her friends. The women were so moved, they began to tell their friends, and the classes quickly outgrew the office.

The young professionals who attend now are looking for some kind of meaning in their lives beyond their next promotion. Many come hoping to feel they belong somewhere, to connect with other Jews.

Most of this connecting takes place over coffee and cake after class, when the emphasis is on romance rather than religion. Eager to create Jewish couples, Jungreis and her staff do whatever they can to promote the mingling, even, on occasion, passing Polaroids and critical personal data from one interested single to another.

But the evenings with Jungreis are also remarkable for what they reveal about the conflicted state of the American Jewish



ESTHER JUNGREIS, FOUNDER OF THE OUTREACH ORGANIZATION HINENI.

**"LIVING A TORAH
LIFE IS WHAT COUNTS.
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community. On the one hand, the fact that Jungreis is able to draw a thousand people to her lectures without any advertising or promotion is evidence of a yearning many Jews have to return to religion. All over the city there are signs of a grass-roots Jewish revival, of a hunger for the comfort and certainty of an unambiguous set of rules and values. Some synagogues have nearly been overwhelmed by the surge in interest. At B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side, for example, Friday-night services are so popular that there are two sessions—and still, there's often a line down the block to get in.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, Jews are discarding their heritage and opting out in record numbers. Indeed, the American Jewish community—the most vibrant, diverse, productive, creative, and powerful Diaspora Jewish community in history—believes it is under siege. The danger comes not from some hostile outside aggressor but from enemies within: a low birth rate, rampant intermarriage, assimilation, rejection of organized religion, and widespread indifference. As a result, even the celebrations of Jewish identity—like the Jungreis lectures—are informed by a crisis of confidence, an almost desperate sense that it is time to circle the wagons, to turn inward, to huddle together.

It's ironic that the success Jews have had in integrating into American life is the very thing that many now believe threatens their future. All across the country, worried Jewish parents wonder, with good demographic reason, whether their grandchildren will be Jewish. And it requires only a small stretch of the imagination to see an America 75 or 100 years from now in which the only readily identifiable Jews will be the Orthodox and the ultra-Orthodox. Everyone else will have assimilated themselves out of existence.

"Our grandparents prayed for a melting pot, but what we have now is a meltdown," says Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, the founder and director of the National Jewish Outreach Program, which, like Hineni, runs classes and lectures as well as more broadly based programs like Shabbat Across America ("For the price of a chicken you can bring a Jew home"). "Over the last three decades, the rate of intermarriage has doubled every ten years, and it is leading us into oblivion," says Buchwald, who for fifteen years was director of education at Lincoln Square Synagogue, one of the country's premier centers of Jewish renewal.

"There are no barking dogs and no Zyklon-B gas," Buchwald says, "but make no mistake: This is a spiritual Holocaust. For all

practical purposes, the American Jewish community is committing suicide, and no one is saying anything about it."

IN FACT, THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE SAYING A LOT ABOUT IT. THE critical issue within the Jewish community right now is survival, or what's vogueishly referred to as Jewish continuity—as in, will Jews continue to be Jewish and continue to be a significant part of American life into the next century? Ever since the release of the now-infamous 1990 National Jewish Population Study—which reported that the intermarriage rate among America's Jews had ballooned to 52 percent—there have been panels, commissions, reports, and studies. From the boardrooms of the thickly muscled major Jewish organizations (UJA, the American Jewish Committee, et al.) to coffee klatches at local synagogues, the continuity debate has raged with the uncontrollable intensity of a forest fire. But there has been little consensus about a viable response. The Jewish Establishment, traditionally so effective at fund-raising, arm-twisting, and problem-solving, seems almost paralyzed by the complexity of the issues and their long-term implications.

"What we don't need right now is more surveys," says Dr. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University. "We are being surveyed to death. By the time another survey is completed, we'll lose another generation of kids. We know what needs to be done," he says. "We need to make some real choices. But a community that's trying to make everyone happy—you know, this 'I'm okay, you're okay' attitude—is not going to make real choices. Because real choices mean that for everything you accept, there is something you must reject."

In order to make real choices, there must first be some agreement on what's important and on what the nature and the character of the American Jewish community should be. And for a group about whom Abba Eban once said, "Jews are a people who simply can't take yes for an answer," consensus-building does not come easy. Should the American Jewish community continue to be open and pluralistic? Should it continue to fully embrace American standards and values? What does it mean, at the end of the twentieth century, to lead a purposeful life as a Jew in America? Should intermarried couples be welcomed in synagogues? Will this result in more converts and more kids being raised as Jews? Can you prevent intermarriage in a free and open society? And if it's true that nearly half of America's Jews have remained either moder-

ately or seriously engaged, how do you allocate your resources? Do you spend money to maintain the committed or do you use your resources to try and turn on the disengaged?

This is all essentially uncharted territory. For most of this century, America's Jews have been obsessed with becoming good citizens, with blending in, and with succeeding in a competitive, democratic society. Their Jewishness took care of itself. They lived in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods. They shopped mostly in Jewish stores. They socialized primarily with other Jews, and their kids all grew up and married within the religion.

And along with their shared experiences and immigrant backgrounds, they were galvanized as a community by external events. The Holocaust. Building and protecting Israel. The battle against anti-Semitism. The effort to rescue Jews in trouble around the world. For decades, American Jews were bound together by a political-cultural-social glue that superseded any belief in God or religion.

"It was always the ethnic impulse that seemed to be a preserver of Jewish identity," says Leonard Fein, a leading Jewish writer and activist. "A generation back, no Jew had to apologize for being an agnostic or an atheist. Even the Jewish atheists knew what the God in which they did not believe expected of them."

But the bagels-and-Bloomingtondale's brand of Judaism is disappearing almost as fast as Yiddish did in the last generation. To begin with, many of the key ingredients in the ethnic alchemy that produce the Jewish persona have been soaked up and absorbed by the larger culture. As a result, the secular Jewish world is losing its distinctiveness. Jewish humor, the Jewish perspective, the Jewish sensibility, are all being subtly blended into the American mainstream.

The cultural signposts of this transformation are everywhere. *Seinfeld*, for example, with all of its neurotic, edgy, whiny, and self-absorbed humor, would once have been considered far too Jewish to have broad appeal. Now, of course, it's America's favorite sitcom and one of the highest-rated programs on television. Philip Roth, the avatar and chronicler of American Jewish angst, creator of such hauntingly perverse Jewish characters as Alexander Portnoy and Mickey Sabbath, has written a new novel—*American Pastoral*—whose main character is so completely immersed in the American way that he is totally devoid of identifying Jewish quirks. No ennui. No self-doubt. No interminable bouts of introspection. And no lingering feelings of being the

THE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS WHO ATTEND ARE LOOKING FOR SOME KIND OF MEANING IN THEIR LIVES BEYOND THEIR NEXT PROMOTION.

JUNGREIS'S 1,000-STUDENT TORAH CLASS GREW BY WORD OF MOUTH.



outsider. He even marries a Christian beauty-pageant winner (every little Jewish boy's dream), and they settle into a grand, countrified life in a town called Old Rimrock. (This being Philip Roth, there is, of course, a heavy price to be paid for the seemingly ideal American existence.)

The decline of Jewish ethnicity has also been hastened by the high number of converts—primarily as a result of intermarriage—now active in Jewish life. "Think about it," says Fein. "They converted to the Jewish faith, not to some ethnicity. You can't convert to an ethnicity. It's a new phenomenon, and it's very confusing."

In a post-ethnic America, a country in which Jews hold two seats on the Supreme Court, 10 percent of the Senate, and five of eight Ivy League presidencies, and in which Christians are happy, even eager, to marry Jews, being Jewish is becoming less and less about ethnicity. Indeed, after decades of willful self-effacement to try to fit in—an Anglicized name, an altered nose—the secular Jew is morphing into a kind of American Everyman.

As a result, being Jewish in America in any meaningful way is beginning to have an explicitly religious overlay. Though 40 or 50 years ago it was the Orthodox Jew whose demise seemed inevitable, it is now the secular American Jew who is at serious risk. And the sudden rise in importance of Judaism as a faith is precisely what has immobilized the leadership of America's major Jewish organizations—many of whom are not observant.

"For the last century, being an American Jew," says UJA vice-president Dr. John Ruskay, "was all about one question: How do we become good Americans? But now the question is, How do we become good Jews? Can we fully embrace modernity and an open society and live fully engaged Jewish lives? That's the big question facing Jews over the next 50 years."

"What's really changed is America," he says, referring to the near-total acceptance Jews now enjoy. "So our institutions need to be reconceptualized to respond. What's required is a willingness to strengthen our educational programs and ultimately to strengthen the intensity of Jewish life. Is America's Jewish leadership ready to make that change? It's taken place at the rhetorical level, but whether there's really a readiness to engage more intensely in Jewish life is uncertain."

Though Ruskay gingerly steps around it, there is widespread ambivalence inside the Jewish Establishment over the crisis facing American Jews. "The mixed emotions among the leadership run very deep,"

a high-level executive at a major Jewish organization told me. "I think that this is truly about a change in the very nature of American Jewry. If what it means to maintain a Jewish life is that you have to live an insular existence and reject much of modern culture and modern values and modern scholarship . . ." he says, letting his voice trail off. "Look, if the choice comes down to Borough Park or assimilation, then we're all taking assimilation."

ESTHER JUNGREIS AND RABBI EPHRAIM BUCHWALD AREN'T PLAGUED by such doubts. They are part of a relatively new, decentralized movement in Judaism, a vigorous all-out effort to bring back Jews who have drifted away. While Jungreis was speaking at Kehilath Jeshurun, a rabbi named Noah Weinberg was addressing several hundred people just across the park on West 83rd Street on the "importance of loving every Jew."

Weinberg, a large, white-bearded man who lives in Jerusalem and affects a folksy speaking style somewhere between that of Jackie Mason and Ed Koch, is the founder of another aggressive outreach organization, known as Aish HaTorah. With a brand-new building off West End Avenue, a \$4 million annual

budget for New York (\$20 million internationally), and an army of volunteers, Aish will teach you the Torah in an hour, Hebrew in five lessons, or 3,300 years of Jewish history in three hours. In fact, it will teach a Jew anything he wants to learn about Judaism. The organization was founded on the idea, as discussed by Weinberg in his lecture, that "every individual Jew is part of the overall destiny of the Jewish people."

Throughout history, there have been Jews who have tried to persuade other Jews to be more religious, to be more Jewish. The most visible American example have been the Lubavitch Hasidim, who work the streets of America's cities with their "mitzvah tanks"—"Mister, you Jewish?"—trying to get Jews to observe the Commandments. For years, they were viewed within the assimilated Jewish Establishment as at best a source of amusement or curiosity and at worst an object of ridicule and disdain. (It's revealing that when the Crown Heights rioting took place in the summer of 1991, no major Jewish organization—not even the Anti-Defamation League—made any kind of public statement or expressed any outrage for more than a week. Imagine the thunder-and-lightning speed of the response if the riots had taken place in Forest Hills or on the Upper West Side, if the

**"A COMMUNITY
THAT IS TRYING TO
MAKE EVERYONE HAPPY—
YOU KNOW, THIS 'I'M OKAY, YOU'RE OKAY'
ATTITUDE—IS NOT GOING TO MAKE REAL CHOICES."**

NORMAN LAMM, PRESIDENT OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY.



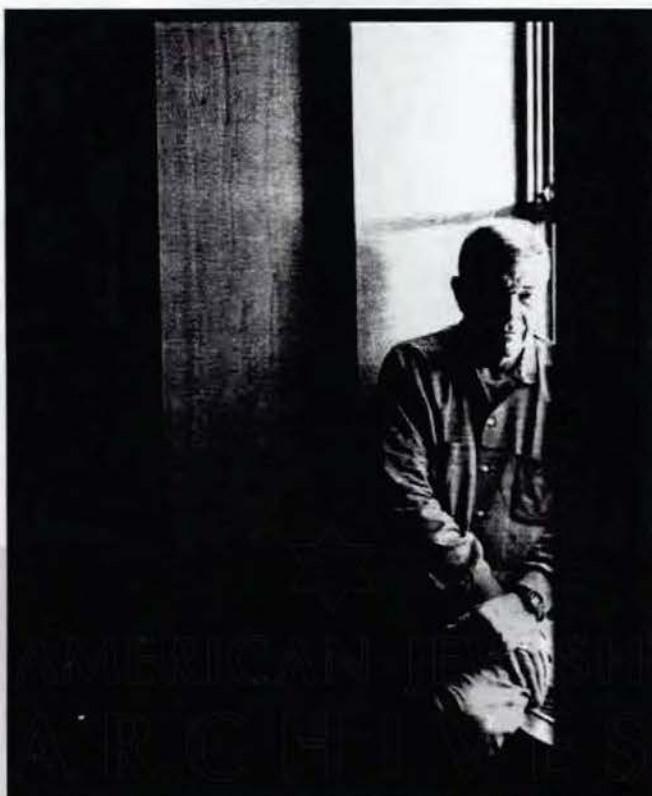
people under attack hadn't been those people.)

Nowadays, however, the cheerful proselytizing that Lubavitch has practiced for decades—and which is now mimicked by so many others—has become an accepted part of the mainstream. However grudgingly, the Jewish Establishment seems to have little choice but to help fund and support the outreach efforts, particularly since it is largely at a loss as to what else to do.

"We need to make some dramatic progress in the richness of Jewish community life available to people," says Leonard Fein. "Because I really think the principal problem is not assimilation or intermarriage. It's boredom. The fact is that being Jewish is a boring experience for many Jews who are incapable of finishing this sentence: 'It is important that Jews survive in order to...'"

THERE ARE 5.5 MILLION JEWS IN America today, more or less exactly the same number there were in 1950. But in that period, the country's population has grown from 150 million to 250 million. So as a percentage of the total population, Jews have fallen from just under 4 percent to just over 2 percent. "The numbers are of serious concern," says Steven Bayme, national director of communal affairs at the American Jewish Committee. "The real impact of the intermarriage numbers hasn't been felt yet. If someone intermarried in the last couple of years, we don't know what their kids will be raised as. That's the joker in the deck. It's possible we could go from 5½ million down to 4 million over the next twenty years. In the shadow of having lost one third of our population in the Holocaust, losing people through cultural assimilation is demoralizing. A society losing numbers is a society of decadence."

Though no one is willing to establish a threshold or a tipping point below which the falling numbers begin to have catastrophic impact, as a practical matter, given how small the Jewish community already is, almost any shrinkage raises troubling questions. Without a certain critical mass, it becomes difficult to maintain the network of institutions and the cultural richness that have been the cornerstones of the twentieth-century American Jewish community. Diminished numerical strength means diminished influence: politically, intellectually, economically, and culturally. Realistically, if Jews do fall below 2 percent of the population, it is hard to imagine that the enormous power of Jewish ideas, Jewish money, and Jewish creativity will not, over time, begin to wither. At less than 2 percent, Jews could conceivably start to slip toward the level of a bou-



LEONARD FEIN, REFORM WRITER AND ACTIVIST.

"A GENERATION AGO, EVEN THE JEWISH ATHEISTS KNEW WHAT THE GOD IN WHICH THEY DID NOT BELIEVE EXPECTED OF THEM."

a Washington think tank. "Their militant secularism needs to be reassessed. How is it possible for the Jewish community to thrive in a country that truly marginalizes religion? That separates religion from our collective life as a society? It's possible to do it as a Hasid, but most Jews are going to live a much more integrated life. It helps us stay Jewish when we live in a society that values and reinforces religious commitment."

This argument is not likely to win much support in the Jewish community. Historically, any significant breakdown of the barriers between church and state in countries where Jews have been a minority has been disastrous for them. In the worst cases, of course, it has led to unbridled anti-Semitism and persecution. At best, you have a situation like the one in England, where there's a state-sponsored religion and Jews live a kind of quiet, unobtrusive existence in the background.

And an alliance with the Christian right may be an even tougher sell. Whatever the intellectual merits of this strategy, it is unlikely most Jews could get past their gut feeling that the Christian right is, deep down in its collective soul, anti-Semitic and out to convert them to Christianity. The writings of Pat Robertson have not gone unnoticed in the Jewish community,

tique religious group like the Amish or the Quakers.

"In the wake of World War II, in the late forties and early fifties, we created this fiction of Judaism as one of America's three great religions (along with Catholicism and Protestantism)," says Elliott Abrams, former assistant secretary of State in the Reagan administration. "This was done at a time when Judaism was not really an American religion. Jews were immigrants. But this gave Jews a certain status in American society. Now it may be," says Abrams, who has just written a book called *Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America*, "that you can maintain that fiction at 4 percent, but it's questionable at 2 or one. Especially when you've now got growing Asian religions and, of course, Islam. I think it's clear that the status of Jews in American society is greatly endangered by this kind of numerical change."

Not surprisingly, given his conservative credentials, Abrams believes that Jews have made a critical mistake in their unflinching support of liberal causes and of the separation between church and state. He argues that Jews should unite with the Christian right in an effort to win a more significant role in society for religion. "American Jews really ought to rethink their attitude toward religion," says Abrams, who runs

nor have the comments of people like Bailey Smith, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who said, "God does not hear the prayers of a Jew."

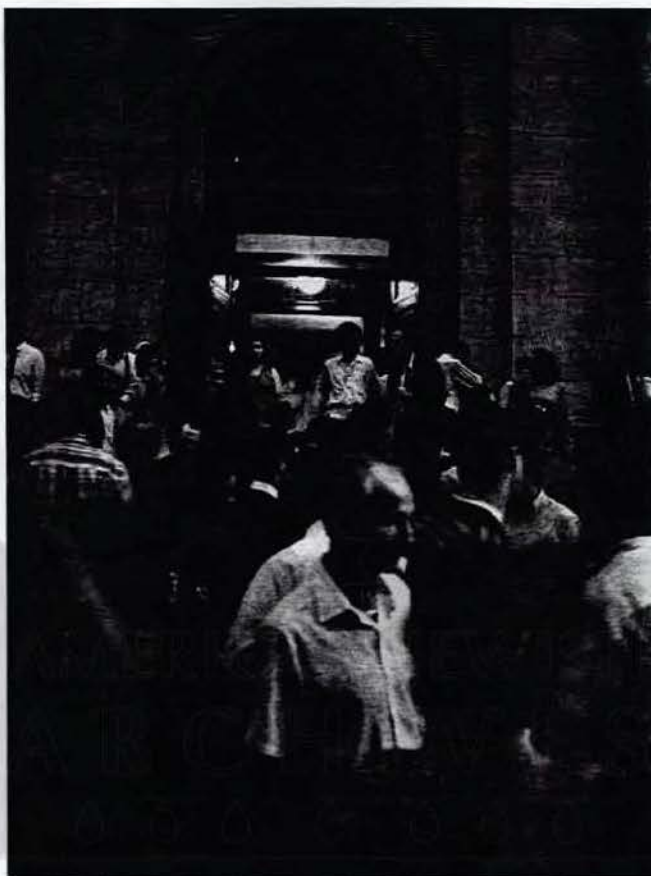
BUT THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF A more conservative outlook that have, as the continuity crisis in the Jewish community deepens, begun to gain acceptance. The pivotal issue in this movement toward the right is the enormously complicated question of intermarriage. No other trend is as troubling to Jewish leaders or poses as great a threat to the future vitality of the American Jewish community. "It's not only the rate of intermarriage that's unprecedented," says Jack Wertheimer, a historian, and provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who has spent a great deal of time studying the crisis. "It's also the psychological toll, which simply cannot be underestimated. Parents in our time do not have a realistic hope that their children will marry Jews and that their grandchildren will be Jewish. This has created an uncertainty bordering on despair that I see even when I talk to some rabbis."

Yeshiva University's Dr. Norman Lamm puts it in even more starkly dramatic terms. "We have three and a half thousand years of history and tradition invested in us. And if we abandon that to intermarry, it's an act of criminal, historic vandalism."

Simply as a practical matter, preventing large numbers of Jews from marrying non-Jews, in a society where 98 percent of the people are not Jewish, looks like an unachievable goal. In addition, since secular Jews have become increasingly more like everyone else, why not marry out? If religion is the only real difference, and that religion is not taken seriously anyway, what's the justification for drawing a line of separation at the altar?

For the Jewish leadership, the problem of intermarriage has two parts: how to prevent it and how to respond when it happens. On both fronts, the momentum is now on the side of adopting a harder line. As far as prevention is concerned, the logic of a more rigid philosophy is pretty simple. What's been done up to now—i.e., the softer, more fluid approach—hasn't worked. Wertheimer, like Abrams, believes that Jews must begin to question what have for decades been widely accepted liberal values and norms. In particular, he believes young people must be taught to think critically, even to see Judaism as countercultural.

"We've got to challenge some of these liberal teachings like the shibboleth that we're all the same," says Wertheimer. "That the most important thing is whether somebody's a good human



THE CROWD OUTSIDE FRIDAY-NIGHT SERVICES AT B'NAI JESHURUN.

WHILE THERE'S A RENEWAL AT ONE END OF THE SPECTRUM, AT THE OTHER END JEWS ARE DISCARDING THEIR HERITAGE IN RECORD NUMBERS.

Glaser decided to write the book after she met and married New York Times editor Stephen Engelberg, a Jew, while working in Washington. Glaser never really considered converting to Judaism until her husband was assigned to cover Poland for the Times in 1990. He was writing about the country's emerging capitalism; she was writing about its new nationalism, and its anti-Semitism.

"My husband had this immediate connection to complete strangers because of his Jewishness," Glaser says, "and I began to understand this connection for the first time. I began to see what it meant to be married to a Jew in a Christian society. The whole Poland experience made me make a choice. We could hang back and kind of be Jews, and maybe celebrate both religions. But I knew at that point that I didn't want to be in an interfaith marriage anymore. I wanted one religion in our household."

When Glaser and her husband came back to the U.S. after three years in Poland, Glaser converted to Judaism following seven months of study. "It was a lovely time in my life," she says, "except for the tension between me and my mother. I'd

being. We've got to get everyone to look more closely at the religious, cultural, and ethnic differences and the value of preserving those differences. We need to demonstrate what's lost to the individual, to the group, and to society by all this leveling that's taking place. We've got to rethink the extent to which we can teach people that the way to live a moral life, at least for Jews, is through Judaism as opposed to through these more universalist teachings."

But a blanket antagonism toward intermarriage ignores not only those cases in which it ends up producing a Jewish family but also the notion that Judaism will always—even in the best of times—mean different things to different people. Gabrielle Glaser, 33, a converted Jew, is a case in point. A Westchester mother of two who was raised on a farm in rural Oregon as a Protestant, Glaser has written a book called *Strangers to the Tribe*. Due out in September, the book is a moving account of the ways in which twelve couples struggle to deal with the issues of intermarriage.

"What I learned from doing the book," says Glaser, "is that there are so many ways to be Jewish. It's not just this unique experience in the Northeast corridor of having two Jewish parents with European ancestry. There are so many people who are not within the Halakic tradition of being a Jew and so many unusual ways in which Judaism has struck people."

once told her I'd never convert. She was concerned about losing her grandchildren—I was pregnant with my second daughter—and she saw my conversion as a rejection of her. There was a sadness for me, I won't deny that."

But even after what Glaser has gone through, she is still often seen as an ersatz Jew. "I was standing with one of my daughters in the hallway several weeks ago at the synagogue we belong to," says Glaser, who also serves on its board, "and I was talking to another member. She said, 'I know you're not Jewish.' And I said, 'What do you mean by that?' She said, 'Look at that child. This doesn't look like a Jewish child.'"

A MORE CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHY REGARDING THE TREATMENT of interfaith couples has also begun to have some traction. Once courted and welcomed under almost any circumstances, interfaith couples are now often expected to demonstrate at least some level of religious commitment to Judaism. "Even at your most hospitable, you're only going to attract a minority of intermarried families," says Wertheimer. "Others will never be interested. So it's a phony argument to say that if we only do X, Y, and Z, we'll attract all these families."

This argument about how much synagogues ought to bend to attract people is not limited to interfaith couples. "You do want people to return to Judaism," says Abrams, "but there is a question about what they're going to be returning to. If you lower the bar too much, it diminishes the meaning of being a Jew. Look, even the Reform movement has recently said it doesn't want kids in its Hebrew schools who are also getting instruction in another religion. Do you lose some of those children? Tough. You have to draw the line somewhere."

It is remarkable, however, that for all the breast-beating, all the teeth-gnashing, and all the fretting over the extraordinarily high rate of intermarriage and the fate of the Jews, there hasn't been more debate about the sorry state of Jewish education. It is the community's dirty little secret. If the assumption is that a Jew who understands where he comes from, knows what it is that makes him unique, and is familiar with the rituals and practices his forebears have engaged in for more than 3,000 years is a Jew who will not easily reject his heritage, then the lack of attention to Jewish education is surprising.

"You can't have people loyal to something they know nothing about," Norman Lamm says of Jewish illiteracy. "Jewish pride must be about more than crowing over how many Nobel Prize winners we have. That kind of pride is rather empty. There has to be pride in tradition, history, destiny, language, and a way of living. That requires a real Jewish education. A watered-down education is sometimes counterproductive."

There are essentially two kinds of Jewish education. Private, all-day religious school, which takes kids out of public

education and away from people who are not like them. And afternoon Hebrew school, which kids who go to public and non-religious private school attend at a synagogue a couple of times a week. During the fifties and sixties, when Jews were racing toward assimilation, afternoon Hebrew school was not exactly a priority. Though parents wanted their kids to get bar mitzvah—for upper-middle-class Jews in particular, the parties became extravagant, essential social events—they didn't really want them tortured with too much of a Hebrew-school load. In an effort not to offend and not to drive anyone away from Judaism by asking them to bear too heavy a burden, the Conservative and Reform synagogues—which are the denominations that 90 percent of all American Jews identify with—didn't ask for much of a commitment.

But the argument now is that this effort to make Judaism more palatable actually had the opposite of its intended effect. Kids intuitively recognized that no one was taking this too seriously, so why should they? And why would they want to give up baseball or soccer or time with their friends to go to Hebrew school, where they weren't really learning even why it was important for them to be there? It also left the baby-boomers to go through life with a 13-year-old's view—since the bar mitzvah is often the last time many of these kids learned anything about their religion—of a Judaism that no one seemed to have that much invested in.

"If the people who run Jews for Jesus were smart," says Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, "they'd pay to send every Jewish kid to an afternoon Hebrew school, because in most instances it proves to be a great turnoff to Jewish life."

There is a growing sense today that the best strategy to dis-able the ticking demographic bomb that threatens to destroy America's Jewish community is education. Many people would

like to see UJA, which is one of the top money-raising charities in the U.S., redirect some of its funds away from things like hospitals and senior citizens' homes, to address the quality of Jewish education. And to lower the cost of Jewish day school, where tuition can run more than \$10,000 a year.

"The ultimate question," says Leonard Fein, "is, can you have a Jewish community if it doesn't have some elements of a distinctive culture? And can you have the elements of a distinctive culture given the immense power of popular culture and the immense failures of Jewish education?"

NOT EVERYONE AGREES THAT THE Jewish community is in serious trouble. At the City University Graduate Center on 42nd Street across from Bryant Park, Dr. Egon Mayer, a soft-spoken sociologist, runs an organization called the Jewish Outreach Institute. It's a kind of national clearinghouse of services for interfaith couples. They can find support groups, local synagogues where they'd be welcome, (continued on page 101)

"AMERICAN JEWS REALLY OUGHT TO RE-THINK THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGION. THEIR MILITANT SECULARISM NEEDS TO BE REASSESSED."

ELLIOTT ABRAMS, AUTHOR AND FORMER REAGAN ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL.



Horowitz continued from page 37

and a Website that covers everything a non-Jew living with a Jew might need: from a guide to preparing your first Seder to a thorough explanation—including sound effects—of why a shofar (ram's horn) is blown on the High Holidays.

"I call this fear that Jews are disappearing the Houdini syndrome," says Mayer. "It crops up periodically. But it hasn't happened in 3,000 years, so it is difficult to take seriously." Mayer is right when he says that forecasts of a Jewish demise have been around for a long time. As far back as the turn of the century, sociologists were somewhat hysterically predicting that assimilation in America would destroy the Jewish community.

In 1964, *Look* magazine ran a cover story called "The Vanishing American Jew." But America was a very different place during both those periods. Even three decades ago, it was a place in which Jews were unsure of themselves, still subject to overt anti-Semitism and still faced with limits because of their religion. And the rate of intermarriage then was about 12 percent.

And while Mayer is right that in many respects America is a multiethnic, multicultural society with no expectations that cultures blend together, the fact that blending is not expected does not mean it doesn't happen—especially when members of a group want it to.

"People are never as observant as their leaders want them to be," responds Mayer. "But if you whip people hard enough over the head about an issue like this, the assumption is that the fear will drive them to be more passionately attached to Jewish institutions, to be more supportive of them, and that all of this will help sustain their cultural distinctiveness."

"Well, I'm a social scientist," Mayer says, removing his wire-frame glasses, "and it's bad when you confuse your fears with reality. It's called paranoia."

Even Mayer, however, acknowledges that the American Jewish community is in the midst of a difficult passage, the outcome of which is by no means certain. "For Jews, being Jewish has always meant being exclusively Jewish," Mayer says. "It's historically been viewed as a master identity. In other words, if you're Jewish, that governs everything else you are. But there are many more people now, and there will be even more in the future, of mixed backgrounds for whom being Jewish is only one of many identifying factors. That's new. And we really don't know what Judaism and a Jewish community peopled by these individuals looks like."

But a Jewish community that's more diffuse, more porous, and less clearly defined than today's is exactly what some

Jews believe will save them. "I would say that the outlook for the Jewish future is fifty-fifty," says lawyer Alan Dershowitz, whose most recent book is *The Vanishing American Jew*. Dershowitz, who wears his Jewishness the way a career soldier wears his medals, argues that the future of the American Jewish community actually depends on openness, and on its ability to learn how to deal with good times.

Though Dershowitz already had a personal stake in the issue when he decided to write the book, it took on more meaning when his son told him he was marrying a non-Jew. Suddenly he faced the prospect that his own grandchildren, at least by today's definition, would not be Jewish. "My mission," he says humbly, "is to try and preserve a sense of Judaism for the many Jews I know who have doubts about the supernatural."

"I'm not calling for a secular Judaism," he continues, authenticating his own credentials by mentioning that he studies the Talmud every day. "What I'm calling for is a Judaism that transcends the religious, that makes room for the secular. An eclectic Judaism."

The brief against this position is that the past 25 years have already shown it will not work. "You don't draw people into Jewish life by erasing boundaries and eliminating distinctions," says Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Reform organization that represents nearly 1.5 million American Jews.

"If there aren't any differences between us and others, between those of us who are committed to Torah and those who are not," Yoffie says, "then why would anybody—Jews or non-Jews—have reason to identify with us? We have 3,000 years of experience to tell us that Jewishness without Judaism doesn't work."

SITTING AT A WINDOW TABLE IN CAFÉ CLASICO, a lively Kosher restaurant on West 57th Street, Steven Eisenberg is so revved up he seems about to levitate out of his chair. "This is like watching a house burn down," he says of the Jewish-continuity question. "Jews are at the forefront of every cause. They fight for Mandela, they worry about the whales, they protest for the Dalai Lama, but when it's their own people, when it's the Jews who are in trouble, they do nothing."

A 38-year-old managing director at the investment-banking firm of Ehrenkrantz King Nussbaum, Inc., Eisenberg devotes much of his time and energy to fighting for his "own" people. Though he is an Orthodox Jew, in his blue suit, blue shirt, yellow tie, and black velvet yarmulke that's nearly invisible against his dark hair, he looks (continued on page 108)

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Horowitz *continued from page 101*

like any other young, successful guy in the stock market.

His epiphany came when a friend decided to marry a non-Jew. Back in the eighties, Eisenberg was working at Bear Stearns when a colleague told him she was getting married and asked him to be an usher. But because she was not marrying a Jew, Eisenberg refused to even go to the wedding.

"I couldn't go, by Jewish law," says Eisenberg, who grew up in West Orange, New Jersey. "The fact that our sensibilities are so dulled today because intermarriage is so common does not change the fact that every time someone intermarries, you're witnessing the destruction of the Jewish people in a microcosmic way."

Eisenberg's family founded the Shop-Rite supermarket chain, and he was raised in a typically schizophrenic Jewish household. They were kosher at home but not on the outside; they went to synagogue sometimes but were not Sabbath-observant. He began to become religious as a teenager.

"I felt really guilty when my friend married," he says. "I felt there was something I could have done. But a few weeks later, I wandered into Rabbi Buchwald's beginner service at Lincoln Square Synagogue and was amazed at how he was connecting with people. So I started encouraging my friends to go."

Eisenberg believed he had found a way to channel his fire. He began organizing events, hosting Shabbat dinners for hundreds of people, and generally doing whatever he could to get people to be more observant. He became, essentially, an evangelist. He believes it is up to his generation to bring Jews back to synagogue.

"The federations aren't doing it," he says. "They're using a rowboat in a tidal wave. The lay Jewish leadership are illiterate themselves. They have a problem with ritualistic life. Ask them to sing two Christmas carols and they'll have no problem. But ask them to sing two Shabbat songs and see what happens."

Eisenberg, who used to bring kids from the Wharton School to meet Jewish business leaders like Ron Perelman—"You're God," they'd tell him—has been willing to take time from his work and sacrifice some measure of success to fight what he calls a spiritual pandemic.

"When I was young, I used to ask my grandmother how people did so little during the Holocaust. 'How could it happen?' I remember asking her," Eisenberg says between forkfuls of salad. "Well, when my kids ask me where were you at the end of the twentieth century when the Jews were washed away, I won't have to squirm in my seat."



Engageable or unreachable? Jewish students challenge the community.

value of a university, which is a purveyor of modern Western culture, is that we are all equal and should minimize the differences among us. In this universalist environment, in which Jews are right in the middle, their Jewish agenda is somewhat muted. But it's not forgotten."

How many "muted" Jewish students are out there?

Hillel figures that about 60 percent of the 400,000 Jewish students across the United States and Canada can be targeted under its "engagement" program, which is designed to attract students who wouldn't typically be interested in participating in Jewish campus activities, says Rhoda

Weisman, the director of Hillel's Center for Jewish Engagement. Another 20 percent are already committed to Jewish activities, she says, and the rest are classic non-joiners. "We are trying all kinds of techniques to find out who is among the 60 percent, where they come from, and what they need, so that we can create strategies to engage them Jewishly," she says.

"This 60 percent reflect in many ways the American Jewish community," Weisman adds, "from people who know little and are not interested in knowing more to people with a strong Jewish identity who don't act on it for a million reasons."



"Students tell me they have better things to do. And I'm not going to tell them to be Jewish."

Jill Yanofsky, former Hillel "engagement" professional at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.



"A lot of students just want to relax, party, and study. They won't get involved in anything. We say play rugby and still be Jewishly involved."

Shira Stutman, director of the student-run Jewish group Lights in Action.

Commonly the non-joiners are turned off to organized Judaism and Jewish groups not because they haven't experienced it but because they *have*. Take Marissa Steingold, 19, a sophomore at Princeton University who is majoring in music composition. She was raised in a liberal Reform home and dated a guy from her BBYO group. "I joined [BBYO] for two years, but I wasn't into it," she says. Then she joined United Synagogue Youth, the Conservative youth group. "I hated it. The kids were all from Jewish day schools. I didn't relate to that. There was no Jewish culture in my school." Steingold, an opera singer and classical pianist, went to Sidwell Friends School in Washington, D.C., a prestigious liberal Quaker school where there were lots of Jewish kids but none involved in Jewish culture. At Princeton she joined an eating club

that, she says, is an "artsy, whacked out, way-Left kind of place," far different from the eating clubs where the "L.L. Bean types" (prep school grads and those who dress like them) hang out. She says she's turned off by the students who frequent Princeton's Center for Jewish Life, a \$4.5 million showcase for Jewish activity at Princeton. "The women remind me of this whole status-oriented thing I despise."

She was talked into singing at the center after a Friday night dinner, but she wasn't thrilled about being there. "To me, everyone being Jewish is just not enough of a common bond," she says. Like Rabin, she also says she resents being pressured to join. "I know kids who freely admit they're Jewish, but they don't want to be bugged. That's understandable."

But Steingold wants to make one thing clear: It is Jewish groups, not Judaism, that turn her off. In fact, the more she studies about Judaism in classes, she says, the more turned-on she is to her background. "There are a lot of liberal aspects of Judaism I never thought about. The commitment to learning is great. You don't have to believe in God. I'm starting to associate Judaism a little less with my parents and a little more with me. That makes it cooler."

Can Judaism be made "cooler" for non-joiners like Steingold?

One student-run organization dispenses "cool" Judaism by direct mail—in effect, offering information without intrusion. Lights in Action (LIA) mails entertaining, upbeat, creative educational materials that examine various aspects of Judaism to about 60,000 college students twice a year. The organization's funding comes chiefly from the Avi Chai Foundation, the Bronfman Foundation, the Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation, and the Schusterman family of Tulsa, Ok.

The mailings, which include a cover letter, a booklet on a topic, and a poster calendar, don't dwell

on Jewish crises like the perils of intermarriage, says Shira Stutman, LIA's executive director. "We think the Jewish community is missing the point by focusing on intermarriage. To secure the Jewish community we need to instill pride."

Lights in Action tries to be hip and enticing—making the leap, as it were, from Sesame Street to Madison Avenue. Take a recent mailing on the Sh'ma, the watchword of the Jewish faith: "As the saying goes, this is not your father's Oldsmobile. The Sh'ma has antilock brakes, off-road abilities, lug tires, and goes from 0 to 60 in 2.3 seconds...but we digress. This Sh'mah is a meditation, a treatise on physics, a dialogue with your heritage, and an expostulation on Israel. In other words, this Sh'ma is relevant, palatable and—yes, even interesting!"

David Lipsitt, a 19-year old GWU student, always makes time to read the materials. "It's on my desk," he says. "It's a cool mailing." Lipsitt, who was active in Jewish youth groups in high school, is too busy with homework and theater to go to any Jewish activities, he says, so LIA is his Jewish touchstone.

"There are a lot of students who just want to relax, party, and study at college," says Stutman. "They won't get involved in anything. We want to touch those students. We say you can be on the rugby team and still be Jewishly identified. We get response cards from students who say, 'This is the only Jewish thing we do in college.'"

Stutman emphasizes that although LIA is not part of Hillel, it does not compete with it, either. "We are not a programmatic organization," she says. "That's what Hillel does, and does well. But we compile a national list of college students and go into mailboxes in a way that Hillel does not. We believe in the need for Hillel, but we also believe that unless Jewish students are truly empowered to make changes in the Jewish community



Lights in Action's mailings include posters that combine arresting graphics with challenging and entertaining texts that address, for college students, the "why" of being Jewish, as well as the "how."



AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

on campus, they won't feel ownership. Empowerment doesn't mean attending events. It means planning them." Stutman says that, at her Hillel at Columbia University, students planned events with the "intense supervision of professionals. That's not bad, but it's important that students create with their own ideas."

Rabbi James Diamond, of Princeton's Center for Jewish Life, finds LIA's materials "attractive. If they really want to step up the ante," he comments, "they could pull off LIA over the Internet. Kids are reading more from the screen than in 'hard copy.'"

Hillel is also trying to tailor its message to the MTV generation. Students may be cynical, uninformed, or intimidated. But hopeless? Hillel leaders say no. That's why in 1995 Hillel created the Center for Jewish Engagement to serve the needs of free-floating Jews like Rabin, who might be interested in participating in Jewish life if she didn't have to come to the Hillel building.

Under this program, members of Hillel's Steinhardt Jewish Campus

Service Corps, recent college graduates receive one-year fellowships to rove through campuses to get to know the interests and concerns of students and to build programs to match them. The corps, founded by New York philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, currently has fellows working on 80 campuses.

"I ask students why they are not involved in Hillel," says Jill Yanofsky, last year's service corps worker at GWU. "They tell me they have better things to do. So I talk to them about themselves. I ask them what they like doing. I want to show students that everything they do can be related to something Jewish. But I won't tell them to *be* Jewish."

The attractive, enthusiastic Yanofsky, who has now transferred operations to Syracuse University, goes to meetings at fraternity houses, makes contacts with student government leaders, and introduces herself to just about everyone she sees. When Yanofsky walks into the student center with a tray, she doesn't just sit anywhere; she surveys the territory. Instead of seeing pasta counters, pizza outlets, and salad bars, she sees

fiefdoms—and heads for the section where the frat guys congregate.

"When I find Jews in the Greek system, I ask who is Jewish but has no interest in being Jewish," says Yanofsky. By hanging out with them, she finds out who the key players are, what the guys like to do, and when the big frat events will take place. Then she goes back to her office, on the top floor of the Hillel building, and makes calls, sends e-mail, and organizes activities.

Yanofsky says she got one student activist interested in organizing a mentor program to help incoming Jewish freshmen cope with college life. Another student, who writes for the school paper, agreed to participate in a Black-Jewish forum and then write an article about it. In another instance Yanofsky heard that a student was interested in ecology. "I knew Tu B'Shevat was coming up," she says, "so I suggested we work on an environmental Shabbat and hold it at the student center rather than at the Hillel building." A major snowstorm kept many students indoors that night, as things turned out. The student was dis-

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Young and Faithless

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appointed but hoped to try other Jewish activities.

Will an eco-Shabbat dinner or other special events make her a more committed Jew? Would she explore her Jewish heritage anyway, without Hillel's help? What impact will her Jewish activities in college have once she has graduated? It's impossible to know.

Despite millions of dollars spent on Jewish college programming, very little is actually known about America's estimated 400,000 Jewish college students. The last comprehensive study to be conducted on Jewish campus life was commissioned by the American Jewish Committee in the mid-1980s. And it dealt only with student attitudes toward marriage and family; it offered no insight into what happens to those students after graduation.

"When you are dealing with students," says Ruth Cernea, Hillel's director of research and publications, "you never know whether your idea is finding fertile soil. The kids may be excited, but is it changing their lives? Hillel directors have many stories of students coming back five years later saying, 'This program changed my life.'"

"We know that if there is food people will show up," she adds. "But does that tell you whether they'll be more Jewish 10 years from now?" A longitudinal study gauging the ongoing impact of Hillel's programs may be conducted in the future, which should shed some light on the benefits of college-age involvement in Jewish life.

Some critics question whether outreach efforts expend too much time and resources on marginal Jews—resources that would be better spent meeting the needs of the already committed. In their article "How to Save American Jews" (*Commentary*, January 1996), Jack Wertheimer, Charles S. Liebman, and Steven M. Cohen wrote that the community's highest priority must be to shore up the 44 percent of American Jews who are already engaged and need more affordable synagogues, day schools, and summer camps.

The article doesn't mention college students or the campus program. But some students feel too much attention is being placed on people who don't

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care about being Jewish. Sandi Rudenstein, an 18-year-old GWU environmental studies major who says she used to "love" BBYO in New Jersey, says she wishes Hillel offered more substantive events and more of them to choose from. Take away the Jews and latkes from a recent Hanukkah "chugger," she says, and it was just another smoky bar. "I miss BBYO," says Rudenstein, who keeps a picture of her old group by her bed.

Rabbi Haim Dov Beliak, a former Jewish chaplain at Claremont College, in Claremont, Ca., believes that Hillel should engage students in more Jewish activities and not serve the watered-down Judaism that it seems to be dish-ing out to the uninvolved. "Hillel, with all its goodness—and it means well—is still playing in a battle with a squirt gun when it should be using heavy artillery. Engagement is something that needs to be done. But we need to do a thousand other things as well."

He adds, "We need 10 Jewish liberal arts colleges with the quality of Harvard and Yale—tomorrow." As a model, he points to the Campus Crusade for Christ, a group of college graduates

who "work in the trenches on campuses," holding study groups and doing outreach.

Rudenstein says she isn't sure she'd appreciate such an intense level of Jewish activity at school, but she would like something more than what she's got. What will happen if Hillel doesn't offer her the programs she seeks? Maybe she'll lose interest in her Jewish identity, or maybe she'll continue exploring Judaism on her own. Even if Hillel sponsors the best programs, she may decide she has had it with institutions and just drop out of the scene for awhile.

Egon Mayer, professor of sociology at the City University of New York and director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, says he too believes that students are yearning for a Judaism that demands more of them, not less. He points to the boom in Jewish studies programs nationwide—over 400, as compared to only a handful in the 1960s. "Clearly there is *somebody* interested in Judaica, Holocaust studies, Jewish philosophy," he says.

"Much of the attempt to engage Jewish students is to engage them in recreational, leisure time," Mayer says. "That ignores large chunks of the rest of their lives. [Hillel] does not seem to be involved with career aspirations or emotional well-being. Yet these are the real, existential concerns that students deal with when they are not out drinking."

"When immigrants came here," he continues, "the Jewish community found tangible services that linked the newcomers to the community in a powerful way—through job placements, bonds, and so on. If we want to captivate students in a profound way, we should focus on their most profound existential needs and what we can do to meet them."

Other people concerned with involving young people in Jewish life suggest that Jewish organizations provide students the emotional support that in college they sometimes lack. "Adjusting to student life can cause depression and anxiety," says Michael Jolkovski, a psychologist at the American University's Center for Psychological and Learning Services, in Washington, D.C. "It's a great transition. Think of what holds our identity together: jobs, family, home, car. All those are fluid for students." Getting involved in Jewish activities could help students through the transition if the organization provides the security that students are seeking.

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Brad Jacobs, who was enlisted last year by campus service corps' Yanofsky to organize a Hanukkah "chugger" at a local bar, says he just isn't interested in getting more involved in Jewish activities right now. He dates non-Jewish girls and doesn't plan on stopping that. "If I fall in love with a woman and I want to marry her," he says, "I want to marry her. Being Jewish shouldn't make a difference." When he hears that intermarriage was a top concern expressed by Jewish students who met at GWU for a recent national conference, he scowls.

"Nobody I know seriously thinks about marriage," he says, adding that intermarriage seems to be an obsession only with Jewish organizations. "In college you're not looking to get married. Maybe when I'm 25 that will matter."

Jacobs may not feel his Jewish life is blossoming, but Yanofsky would probably consider him a success story.

"It's igniting a spark," says Yanofsky. "Students are returning for other experiences. They want a life that has meaning for them. We tell them that there is a tradition out there, not necessarily religious, that has a lot to say about how to live your life."

So far the service corps has talked to about 35,000 students. Not all of them will jump on the Jewish bandwagon, but some will.

"[That] students seem less interested [in getting involved] shouldn't be interpreted as a diminution of Jewish interest," says Reisman, at Brandeis. Often, he says, "Jewish leaders use panic as a way of mobilizing the troops. That just shows they don't have much confidence in themselves." Reisman says he is confident that Jewish students who are raised with a sense of *yiddishkeit* will go back to it, even after a period of rejection.

In the meantime most will probably remain largely uninvolved, like Jacobs. What matters to him right now is doing better on his law boards. "My priority, when I came here, wasn't finding my Jewish roots," says Jacobs. "It was to make friends, adjust to school, adapt to work. I think most people feel that way." M

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The survey did not show where the departing Jews had gone.

The survey's 30 percent intermarriage rate was up sharply from a 1988 study carried out by the same groups. For those younger than 30, the intermarriage rate increased to 40 percent, the survey found.

France
FRANCE

In addition, the survey confirmed the marked change in the demographic structure of the community since World War II.

Around one-quarter of France's Jews died in the Holocaust. With the influx of Jews from former French colonies in North Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, the community was transformed into a largely Sephardic population.

Here too, the findings showed a continuing trend, with 70 percent of those interviewed describing themselves as Sephardic and 24 percent as Ashkenazic.

The numbers from 1988 were 50 percent and 34 percent respectively.

The survey provides valuable information for Jewish welfare organizations, most notably regarding the community's educational needs.

Only around 15,000 children went to Jewish schools in 1988. The figure has shot up today to some 29,000, and Sa'ada believes it could double again in the next decade.

"This is a positive trend, because we see young Jewish families keen to impart a sense of Jewish identity and education to their children," Sa'ada said.

But it doesn't mean the community is becoming more inward-looking, he told JFA. "Eighty-five percent of those children go to schools which are registered with the Ministry of Education. They follow the same secular curriculum as any other French child in a state school," he said.

Such a "return to community" manifests itself in other ways in the survey as well. Only 22 percent of French Jews said they visited a community institution at least once a month in the 1988 survey, a figure that has risen to 50 percent in the latest poll. Those who said they never attended community institutions fell by half, from 35 percent in 1988 to just 18 percent in 2002.

Moreover, when respondents were asked to indicate which institutions they visited, synagogues far outpaced community centers, other Jewish institutions and study circles, reflecting another of the study's finds — an increase in religious practice.

Fears of insularity largely have been dismissed, with the survey showing that Jews are as likely to donate to non-Jewish causes as are other French citizens.

On Israel, the reality differs from the perception in the French media, which have tended to portray French Jews as hard line.

According to the survey, however, 48 percent of French Jews believe Israel should trade land in exchange for peace, while 39 percent do not. Another 13 percent said French Jews shouldn't express an opinion on the subject.

On aliyah, there has been a polarization during the past 15 years. In 1988, 40 percent of respondents said they had no intention of moving to Israel, a figure that climbed to 58 percent in 2002.

On the other hand, those saying they would make aliyah "very soon" increased from 3 percent to 6 percent over the same period. Moreover, the figure rose to 12 percent among families with school-aged children, and reached 28 percent among families with children currently in Jewish schools.

These figures were confirmed recently by statistics from the Jewish Agency for Israel, which showed that aliyah from France doubled in 2002 to more than 2,500. □

Five Uneasy Pieces

The most important Israeli and Jewish stories that got lost in the war in 2002.

Jonathan Mark
Associate Editor

The first casualty of any war is truth, but there are other casualties — important stories and issues that are obscured by the daily coverage of Israel's battle against the Palestinians' more than 2-year-old uprising. Here are five issues this year that have been covered only to some extent, considerably more so in Israel than here, but are deserving of greater conversation and examination.

1. Israel's Economy

Israel needs more than just tourists and cookie sales. There's been a runaway gap between rich and poor — the second largest differential in the world. A Knesset committee recently reported that 66 percent of Israel's private wealth is in the hands of 10 percent of the population, with these 10 percent having assets of 800 billion shekels and the other 90 percent having 340 billion. Unemployment has quadrupled since 1987, and is rising at the rate of 47,000 a year.

The committee advised that Israel needs tax reform, welfare reform, wage policies that encourage work, a reduction in the vast armies of foreign workers and more money for education. The Wall Street Journal Europe warned that Israel's economy "badly needs reform-minded leadership." In November, the editors of Yediot Achronot warned that "Israel is moving in leaps and bounds towards a situation where it will be classified a third world country in everything connected to education, the economy and the health system."

It's not just the fault of the war. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's economic policies have been criticized by Israeli economists, who know full well that there is a war. The newspaper Hatzofeh called Israel's government "the most bloated government" that Israel has ever had. "No government has been more wasteful," Hatzofeh said.

Evidence contradicts the presumption that the problems are the result of Israel's isolation in the world. In the last decade, Israel was the beneficiary of more foreign investment than Greece or Turkey; 51 percent of foreign investment came from countries other than the United States or Canada. Business is coming in, but more Israelis are drowning rather than rising with the tide.

Micha Odenheimer, who has written extensively on Israel's economy, says that "Israel has had its sense of solidarity and mission corroded by the insatiable greed of its economic elite and the politicians that serve them."

The early Zionists were wrong about the economic viability of socialism, but they were right that Zionism cannot demand an almost religious fidelity from all Jews or claim to be "the flowering of our redemption," if so few Jews can buy a ticket on that train bound for glory.



2. Israeli Traffic

On Dec. 8, to take one day at random, the headlines in Maariv and Haaretz blared: "Seven killed in weekend road accidents." The story earned no mention in the Jewish or American media.

From the start of this war there have been two contradictory impulses in the Jewish community. The first is to complain that we are victims on a scale comparable to the Hitler years. The second is to insist that Israel is so safe that one is more likely to die in traffic than from terror, so what are the non-tourists so afraid of?

Well, which is it, genocide or a fender bender?

Ironically, the Arab media have taken up this very same dismissal of terror with articles, most recently in the Jordan Times, shrugging off that more folks die from accidents than from terror, so what's the big deal?

Few arguments may be more vulgar in the face of the dead. Yet the traffic argument hasn't been examined for its morality or scope. If it is true that more people die and are disfigured in traffic, how is that comforting to those who are dead or disfigured by terror?

In 2002, Israel expects to see from traffic alone more than 600 dead and 35,000 injured. This has ballooned 35 percent in a decade when traffic fatalities actually decreased by at least that much in several other Western countries through better policing and traffic laws.

During the recent High Holy Days season more than 1,000 Israeli cyclists held a memorial protest ride on behalf of two Israeli bikers killed last year by an Israeli driver under the influence of drugs. Here in America we couldn't cycle alongside them but, out of respect for the dead and the severity of the situation, it may be time to elevate the traffic-terror comparison



Although the war has hurt the Israeli economy, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's economic policies are also at fault. Getty Images

out of the realm of cliché and into the chambers of horror.

3. Domestic Jihad

Yes, we know "Islam is a religion of peace," but according to the American Correctional Association, the number of Muslims in the federal prison system has tripled in the last decade, and Muslims now comprise some 20 percent of all New York prisoners.

The magnitude of what happened on 9-11 so dwarfs lesser acts of terror that the media has sometimes ignored the lesser acts altogether. There seems to be no common standard. For example, on Dec. 1, Reuters sent out on its international wire a story from Belgium about Molotov cocktails that attempted, but failed, to ignite an Antwerp synagogue. By contrast, two weeks later, The New York Times had no coverage at all of the conviction of local Palestinians who threw Molotov cocktails that failed to ignite a shul in the Bronx.

Numerous "minor" incidents in 2002 never received any serious coverage, yet they paint an ominous picture.

On April 8, a caller to the ADL said he defended a religious Jewish woman on an N train from two girls who were yelling obscenities in her face. They had Palestinian flags on their pocketbooks. Later that month, six young Palestinian youths threw rocks at a chasidic man's car while yelling "All Jews must die,

NEW YORK

"we will get you." When the man stopped to make a phone call, one of the Palestinians punched him in the head.

And more: This summer, a Jewish medical student was hospitalized after being jumped outside a Manhattan bar by five young Arab men, who prefaced the attack with anti-Semitic remarks. In November, workers at a Lower East Side deli chased an elderly Jewish man with a broomstick, yelling, "Jews are not served in this store."

The extent of attacks by American Muslims against Jews has not been explored as it might have been.

4. Israel's Political System

Supporters of Israel have long bragged that Israel is the most vital democracy in that part of the world. In fact, a recent editorial in Yediot called the political system "despicable and corrupt," an opinion shared by many Israelis of all parties and persuasions.

The unstable system has led to five prime ministers in less than 10 years; a bribery and horse-trading scandal regarding Likud's current electoral slate; and a parliamentary system that has no district representation but encourages special interests and splinter groups who at times don't have the greater national interest at heart. The daily Hatzofeh says Israel's odd political machinations "show us to be a corrupt banana republic." And all this in wartime, when the country can least afford it.

At the same time, the Arab vote in the last election approached 13 percent of the total, meaning issues of Jewish destiny may hinge on those whose dreams are not our own. There may be a dozen non-Zionist Arabs in the next Knesset. If the United States had a dozen senators who sympathized with the Taliban and Saddam Hussein and who felt the American flag wasn't their own, Americans would recognize a grievous problem that wouldn't lend itself to self-congratulation.

It's a Knesset that begs for a Jefferson but keeps coming up with Jefferson Davis-types who care less for the union than sectional self-interest.

The greatest democracy in the region? Compared to what?

5. The State of the Jews

Israel was created to be a preserve for an endangered species — Jews. The recent numbers, though, aren't pretty. Seven out of 10 new immigrants, particularly from the former Soviet Union, are not Jewish, by even the most liberal definitions. In 1960, Jews comprised 89 percent of the Jewish state. In 2002, it's down to 78 percent. Aside from West Bank Arabs, demographics and Jewish illiteracy threaten the Jewish character of the state within its most narrow boundaries.

The death of Abba Eban points up that emigres from the United States and the British Commonwealth — who have a high degree of Zionist and Jewish commitment, and can greatly contribute to a modern, tolerant, serious Israeli Judaism — have not become major influences on the political or religious scene. For some reason, Sephardic emigres to Israel are thought of as pure Israeli by American Jews, but Eban types are thought of as "outsiders." In Israel's ethnically Balkanized political system, there is no political party that speaks to "Anglo-American" values — they alone out of all of Israel's groups have no special interests. In the coming elections, the highest slated American-born Jew is Eli Kazhdan of the Yisrael B'Aliya party, in the fifth slot.

Unlike Sephardim who proudly bring the traditions from Arab lands with them, many American Jews seem to want to leave America behind. After the young American-born Koby Mandell was horrifically killed by Palestinians last year, the New York Daily News quoted his father, Rabbi Seth Mandell, who said, "I didn't admire the value system of America, the materialism, the kind of issues people thought were important, the work ethic." His emotions were not atypical of many American olim who then would be hardly inclined to fight for precisely those American political, religious and social values that Israel could use more of.

This summer, the Education Ministry expressed concern that too many Israeli children don't know the basics, let alone the sophistication, of Judaism or Zionism; some children of bar mitzvah age cannot identify a pair of tefillin or basic biblical story lines. Two weeks ago, Yediot Achronot noted the widespread breaking of the Sabbath laws around the country.

"The battle by religious groups for keeping the Sabbath in Israel has been lost," the paper said.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. Or is there?

In the arts, Israel is emerging from a decade when its artists had more of a Eurotrash orientation than a spiritually Jewish one. One singing group waved Syrian flags after a European concert. The Batsheva Dance Company wanted to strip naked for a performance celebrating the nation. It was Israel's own

pantomime of surrender. In America, movies celebrate the "greatest generation" of World War II veterans; in Israel, movie after movie features chain-smoking, sulking war veterans who experienced only personal ruin after fighting in any of Israel's wars for survival. American Jews stopped paying attention to Israeli popular culture.

As Leonard Cohen explained in song, "It's hard to hold the hand of anyone who is reaching for the sky just to surrender."

But change is coming, perhaps brought on by the truths of this war. Esta, a musical group that is not religious in the traditional sense, can title an instrumental piece "Tekia, Shevarim, Teruah," after the notes of the shofar, or can base another piece, "Tikvateinu," on the "Hatikvah," with the words, "We haven't lost our hope yet ... Play on, speak to God." □



See #5 next page
Especially underlined re:
school system

JEWISH WORLD

Iranian student wins asylum

A Yeshiva University student who fled Iran because of anti-Semitism has won asylum in the United States.

The 20-year-old student, whose identity is being kept private for fear that relatives still in Iran would face persecution, recently won political asylum, according to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The student arrived in the United States as a tourist with his family in 1998, but remained when they returned home.

His parents faced increasing anti-Semitism at a time when 13 Iranian Jews were accused of spying for Israel, and HIAS helped the other family members flee to Vienna.

Prayer amendment opposed

A U.S. Jewish group spoke out against a proposed constitutional amendment allowing school prayer.

"As a religious community, we know that prayer has deep value and power," Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center, said at an event Thursday in Washington marking National Religious Freedom Day. "As members of a religious minority, however, we are all too aware of the danger of amending the Constitution to sanction government-sponsored prayer."

Pelavin said a school prayer initiative introduced in the new Congress by Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) would interfere with parents' right to raise their children according to their own religious beliefs, and would trigger numerous questions about the bounds of religious prayer in school. At the same event, Richard Follin, legislative director of the American Jewish Committee, urged passage of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which would require employers to accommodate the needs of observant employees.

ADL: Rallies may preach hate

Antiwar protest rallies scheduled for this weekend may employ anti-Israel and anti-Jewish rhetoric, the Anti-Defamation League warned.

Organizers of the Jan. 18 rallies in Washington and San Francisco have previously embraced statements supporting Palestinian terrorism, equating Zionism with Nazism and calling for the destruction of the Jewish state, the ADL said.

Pro-Israel ad features MLK

A new pro-Israel TV ad features the words of slain civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

The ad, sponsored by the Washington-based Center for Security Policy, features King saying, "Israel must exist."

It ends with a voice-over: "Martin Luther King understood courage. Stand with Israel."

Monthlong project aims to make Israel central to Jewish education

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — In the poster, a girl wearing a peace sign necklace shouts during a rock concert, a boy in baggy jeans skateboards and a sullen-looking teen with a partly shaven head wears his headphones askew.

Over these black-and-white images run blue, white and yellow lines like some kind of video test pattern. The phrase "tune in" splashes across the scene, alongside some high tech-looking icons.

Focus on the icons, though, and they reveal images such as a palm tree, a camel and a map of Israel.

The poster isn't advertising some music video; it's for Israel Education Month.

The campaign, which runs from Jan. 19 to Feb. 16, involves an unprecedented array of Jewish and Israeli organizations who hope to return study about Israel to the center of the American Jewish educational agenda.

The program is aimed at young American Jews, whom organizers consider the future of Israel-Diaspora relations. "We want to hard-wire kids about Israel and Israel's place in Jewish life," said Benita Gayle-Almelech, director of the Renaissance and Renewal Alliance of the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella and of the Jewish Education Service of North America.

Beyond the goal of winning young Jewish hearts and minds with a hip package, the campaign — led by the UJC, JESNA and the Jewish Agency for Israel — is designed to integrate teaching about Israel into "the educational life of institutions and individuals," said JESNA's President, Jonathan Woocher.

In the past, there have been isolated efforts by individual schools and federations to boost Israel education.

But the monthlong smorgasbord of teaching plans, curriculum ideas, Web resources and events caters to educational settings as diverse as Hebrew and synagogue schools, Jewish day schools and youth groups such as Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

While earlier efforts came in response to specific threats such as the Palestinian intifada, Israel Education Month hopefully will "create a new framework" that makes a lasting educational impact, said Marion Blumenthal, chair of the UJC's Task Force on Educational Involvement With Israel.

Israel once took center stage in American Jewish classrooms, but organizers of Israel Education Month say programs emphasizing Israel's centrality to Jewish life have fallen victim to social and historical forces.

As historic turning points such as the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War have receded into memory, teaching about the Zionist enterprise has taken a back seat to lessons about Jewish religion and culture.

In addition, less Jewish history is now taught in Jewish schools, reflecting a shift away from history lessons in general education, initiative organizers said.

In fact, "there was a sense among educators that Israel has never received the central place it deserved in the totality of the educational process," said Eilan Ezrachi, an official with the Jewish Agency's Department of Zionist Education.

In recent years, programs such as Birthright Israel have tried to promote Zionism by bringing young people to Israel on free trips. Some U.S. Jewish summer camps also focus on Israel programs.

Over the past year, those behind Israel Education Month began meeting to discuss ways to renew classroom focus on Israel. They eventually designed the month-long menu of programs.

Among the offerings:

- Israeli educators from the Jewish Agency and from the MELITZ America program will make "house calls" on educational professionals, lay leaders and students to discuss issues about Israel and develop classroom materials; and

- Educators from Kibbutz Gezer's Pinat Shorashim Jewish theme park will visit U.S. classrooms to discuss how to create an interpretation based on a biblical story about the Land of Israel.

2.) b.)

"The Vanishing American Jew"

In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century

Alan Dershowitz

In previous times, the threats to Jewish survival were external- the virulent consequences of anti-Semitism. Now, however, in late 20th century America, the danger has shifted. Jews today are more secure, more accepted, more assimilated and more successful than were before. They've dived into the melting pot and they've achieved the American Dream. More than 50 percent of Jews will marry non-Jews, and their children will most often be raised as non-Jews. This means that American Jews will vanish as a distinct cultural group sometime in the next century-unless they act now.

Dershowitz offers two solutions: Since he especially cherishes intellectual accomplishments (he states, of America's Nobel Prize winners in science and economics, nearly 40 percent have been Jews. And of America's 200 most influential intellectuals, half are full Jews and 75% have one Jewish parent.) his answer is to institute vigorous schools of Jewishness "Jewish day schools must be every bit as good as Chaote, Andover, Exeter, Dalton, Friends and Horace Mann."*

His second solution (p.340-341)- a world wide 24-hour-a-day Jewish television educational network which would transmit a diverse array of Jewish courses, discussion groups, religious programming and news of concern to the Jewish people.

There's no excuse for Jewish schools not being the best in the county." He suggests that the community's be re-allocated, with funds shifted from the defense organization toward education. He doesn't mean only day schools and afternoon schools, but serious learning for adults too." If learning is indeed the secret of Jewish survival, then unless we can reverse the trend toward Jewish ignorance, we are doomed.

*My idea in Jerusalem in the 1970's.

2.) c.)

“A Jew in America”

My Life and a People's Struggle for Identity

Arthur Hertzberg

Hertzberg challenges the wisdom of what he views as banking the future of Jewish continuity on the twin pillars of unquestioned support for Israel and veneration of the Holocaust. He refers to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington as “the national cathedral of American Jewry's Jewishness” and contends that the proliferation of courses on the Holocaust will not be sufficient to stop a large number of Jews from leaving the Jewish community.

Hertzberg has advocated that a true Jew is not an ethnic Jew who makes central his support for Israel on his fight against anti-Semitism, but rather a person deeply tied to religion and its principles and values.

2.) d.)

“Smaller Numbers Speak to Values”

By Adin Steinsaltz

The Jewish Week

The data describes a community that is slowly, but inexorably, dying out. The actual rate necessary to sustain the population is 2.1 children per family. The Jewish family is averaging 1.8 children. This signifies a decline in the number of Jews, even without considering other elements that diminish our numbers, such as assimilation and mixed marriages.

The inescapable conclusion is that at least in the diaspora, the Jewish people are in demographic decline. We are shrinking and becoming older. If nothing dramatic occurs to reverse these trends, it may be that the Jewish community should no longer concern itself with building schools but with constructing more old-age homes and larger cemeteries. Declining birthrates seems to be attributable to the influence of the values that have held sway in the West for more than a generation. And so it leaves us with a fast aging, slowing dying people.

"Trustees of Jewish Survival"

Some thoughts regarding Rabbi Herbert Friedman's project
"Protecting the Future" with possible subtitle
"Jewish Survival 2002".

The well-thought-out organizational structure of the project should be supported and constantly motivated by a small, really top-level group of prominent American Jews in various spheres of cultural, financial, political and economic life, who would constitute the supreme governing body of the project.

They could be called "Trustees of Jewish Survival" in order to emphasize the historic importance of their commitment. As a matter of fact, this heading might even make it possible to include one or two very special persons who are not necessarily members of the Tribe - -. A name that comes to mind in this context might be Bill Gates, who owes a good part of his enormous wealth to Jewish genius and brainpower. A commitment of a small fraction by one of his multi-billion foundations, in order to perpetuate the Jewish genius could be decisive.

Preferably, the chosen few prominent American Jews should not necessarily be known as being active particularly in Jewish affairs. In fact, their specific weight in support of Jewish survival through education would be even more significant if they attained their prominence in various general spheres of public life.

In comprising the list of potential prominent candidates for this chosen elite group, one ought to consider whether readiness for a personal financial commitment in support of the project should be a prior condition for their selection, even if this would mean their eventual exclusion. A case in point might be James Wolfensohn, the Chairman and CEO of the World Bank, whose active support of the project could certainly motivate other key persons, although he may not be able to make a financial commitment in view of his unique position.

Some of the other candidates for "Trustees of Jewish Survival", whose names come to mind merely as examples, although they might not be able to commit directly because of their position, but could motivate others, are, not necessarily in this order:

Steven Spielberg
Barbara Streisand
Arthur ("Punch") Sulzberger
Bernard or Marvin Kalb
Tom Friedman
William Safire
James Rubin
Dennis Ross
Martin Indyk
Daniel Barenboim
Michael Bloomberg
Michael Blumenthal
Joseph Lieberman
Tom Lantos
Henry Kissinger (to make up for his life-long estrangement)
Madeleine Albright (Jewish descent and guilt)
Zubin Mehta (totally Jewish-Israel-committed outside the Tribe)

Just few examples of potential foundation commitments, to be significantly expanded, also with seeking bequeathments:

Annenberg Foundation
Bill Gates Foundations
Charles Bronfman Foundation
Edgar Bronfman - World Jewish Congress (by definition)
Michael Steinhardt Foundation
Hollywood - film magnates foundations etc. etc.
Bequeathments by wealthy individuals

These are primarily samples of the kind of names, people and foundations one might try to mobilize for the sake of Jewish Survival, who could inspire others to commit financially, even if they themselves cannot do so for various reasons - see James Wolfensohn, for instance.