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Articles, "The American University and Jewish Learning,"
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The American University and Jewish Learning

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER

BOSTON WAS FOUNDED IN 1628. HARVARD COLLEGE was established eight years later. Over the years, Christian sects, the several states, and various cities organized America's far-reaching network of colleges and universities. With the lone and late exception of Brandeis (1948) the American Jewish community made no move to share in this work. Why?

The immigrant Jewish community was not prejudiced against the university as an institution. Though the majority had little, if any, experience with secular education, most were eager for their sons and daughters to attend and graduate; and go and graduate they did, in significant numbers. To use a rabbinic idiom, the children of the immigrants went to college to provide themselves a spade with which to dig into the promising American lode. Generally, they and their parents were so eager to begin prospecting that the children asked no questions about the *tref* in the traditional academic diet and the parents silenced their fears about assimilation and apostasy. In this respect, Jews differed significantly from Roman Catholic immigrants. Catholics were generally willing to support the plans of the Jesuits or of their bishops to establish colleges where their children could be educated in a familiar and supportive atmosphere, even though remaining among their own might hold their sons back from the main chance.

It was also a matter of tradition. Harvard had been founded so that a native generation of Puritan ministers would not lack the learning that their predecessors had acquired at Cambridge or Oxford. Before coming to America, both the Protestant and Catholic communities had controlled sectarian universities which combined professional and classical materials in their curriculum. In Europe there had been no Jewish Cambridge, only *yeshivot*; and the *yeshivah*, whatever its merits, offered no courses in the major elements of western culture.

The drive among first-generation Jews for a college degree bordered on the frenetic and clearly exceeded the urgency of other immigrant groups. The conventional explanation has it that Jews swarmed to the universities because Judaism had sanctified learning and Jewish life had tied status to learning. But the surge began before "my son, the professor" was an accepted status symbol. The thirst for a university degree among American Jews seems to derive rather more from the "what makes Sammy run" syndrome, the drive for status and success.

It was the rare youth, usually a pre-rabbinic student, who enrolled in one of the courses in Hebrew or Old Testament offered by departments

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of religion or of Semitic studies. To be sure, these courses had an air of Protestant piety about them; most had been organized for the pre-professional training of future ministers or to satisfy theories of what every intelligent Christian should know. But the alien atmosphere of the classroom was not the major reason why Jews did not enroll. Why should they? One went to *heder* for "Jewish learning." Jews were at college, not to learn Torah, but to learn to make America work for them.

The university was not seen by faculty or students, Jews or non-Jews, as an appropriate setting for Jewish Studies. There was no tradition of formal Jewish Studies within the received curriculum which, for the most part, accepted the Christian piety that Jewish creativity had ceased when Jews had rejected the new covenant. Enlightenment ideas about the primacy of reason were popular in most faculties and intellectuals found little reason to interest themselves in the study of another positivist tradition. The Enlightenment emphasis on the universal in human experience encouraged the view that the university community was committed to a set of common values that were distinct from, and superior to, what even many Jewish professors patronized as "the parochial interests of Jewish life."

Prejudice was not absent from the academic community during the early decades of the century, but, formally at least, it was decried. Those Jews who went to college with an education, rather than a vocation, in mind, generally were prepared to accept the university's claim that here was a new world from which parochial divisions had been uprooted. Cultural pluralism was an idea whose time had not yet come. Few paused to consider the reality of the Protestant chapel whose spire rose above the campus; to most Jews who hoped to become academicians, the university represented the community of reason, what the world would soon be. College was the New Jerusalem from which a new Torah of universalist and humanist teaching would go forth and enlighten the world. Most who immigrated to this New Jerusalem became enthusiastic citizens, academicians of Jewish descent who consciously and deliberately put as much distance as they could between themselves and the Jewish community. The Jewish undergraduate, once his degree was in hand, had to go back to a world where many opportunities and the executive suite remained locked to him. He quickly learned that the New Jerusalem, if it existed at all, was limited to the halls of ivy. Jewish academicians, however, stayed in their messianic society, and so seductive was its promise that a tremendous wrench was required to force them to recognize that their colleagues could accept all of the Enlightenment assumptions and still regale each other with canards about Jews or Judaism and deny appointment to a Jew. At the root of the being of an Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. and a Franz Boaz was the soul of one who had made *aliyah*, who had consciously freed himself from all that smacked of *galut*, of all that was parochial, and who was determined never to be a *yored*.

Until World War II, the American university did not offer Jewish learning as Jewish learning, nor did students ask the university for such instruction. To provide itself with an educated leadership, the Jewish community established a number of limited-purpose institutions, seminaries and teachers colleges where educators and rabbis could be trained. The seminaries were adaptations of the European *yeshivot* and their graduates provided recognized and required services to the community. The seminaries developed large faculties and extensive libraries and, until quite recently, remained the only American locations where students could find competent mentors in most areas of Jewish learning. Much was accomplished, but there were problems. Women were, by tradition, excluded from seminary education. Teachers colleges for men and women came later and were never fully equal. Those who did not want to, or could not, take a confessional route were effectively excluded; and faculty were sometimes forced to toe a party line. Because America imposed upon the rabbi many roles besides that of scholar-halakhist, seminary training became increasingly vocational. Purely academic standards were sometimes lowered, even sacrificed, so that the rapidly growing community would have enough pulpit rabbis. A seminary graduate was not yet a full-fledged scholar, often not even a half-fledged one; a fact underscored throughout the early decades of this century by the continuing enrollment of future seminary faculty in German graduate schools.

To be sure, the seminaries graduated a number of men who became leading scholars, but seminary prestige was higher within the Jewish community than outside of it. America considered all denominational seminaries as an academic backwater and the "better" universities discounted their degrees. Publications by men of the stature of Louis Ginsberg and Jacob Mann were virtually unnoticed in the academic world. In a recent paper, Arnold Band quoted Gavin Langmuir, who said that, "In general, majority history as it relates to Jews has been marked by a lack of interest, when it has not also been marked by derogatory attitudes." University faculties simply were not interested in Jewish materials; and, even when there were shared concerns, researchers in Biblical and Hellenistic studies at schools like the Hebrew Union College found that to be noticed at all they had to seduce Protestant Bible scholars by offers of publication in their *Annual* or by invitations to lecture.

Christian interests had prompted the inclusion of Hebrew and Bible in the curriculum of the American college. The first Jews to teach Bible or Hebrew did so in what was, in effect, a seminary setting and some were apostates (e.g., Monis). Then, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a few departments of religion and oriental language evidenced interest in Jewish faculty, preferably those trained in the great German academic tradition, who could teach Biblical criticism without being cowed by pressures from denominational councils and who could broaden New Testament studies with rabbinic parallels. Nordheimer, Gottheil and

Jastrow were acceptable colleagues because they had been trained in *Wissenschaft* norms; trained, that is, to teach Judaism with critical dispassion and without active concern for the relationship of their studies to the identity problems of their students or the cultural reach of the Jewish people. As members of a university faculty, their subject might be particular, but their perspective would be universal.

The phenomenon which we call Jewish Studies, that is, conscious and critical interest in Jews, Jewish institutions and the Jewish tradition as a subject area, developed very slowly during the first half of this century as established faculties in the "better" universities became dissatisfied with the traditional boundaries of the received curriculum. Hellenistic Judaism and the Pharisees clearly had had an impact on the emerging Christian tradition; the Harvard of George Foote Moore needed a Harry Wolfson. Jews had played a significant role in nineteenth-century Europe; the Columbia History Department needed a Salo Baron. It did not hurt that Nathan Littauer and Nathan Miller were able to provide the wherewithal; but the impetus for the study of Jews and Judaism in a few distinguished eastern schools came from faculties, not from the development office, a fact of no small consequence, as the funding of Jewish Studies has required, and continues to require, a large and continuing outlay of university cash for men and books. I have seen estimates which suggest that universities have invested in Jewish study programs between twenty and twenty-five dollars of their own funds for every dollar contributed from within the Jewish community.

At mid-century, America's emergence as a world power catalysed a revolution on the American campus. The insularity of the earlier curriculum was no longer seriously defended. A wide range of area studies developed to complement the western civilization praxis. Religion departments began to include Catholic, Eastern and Jewish Studies as well as the standard New Testament and Church History offerings. The monopoly of senior positions in Bible, long maintained by Protestant scholars, was broken. Semitic language departments began to list conversational Hebrew as well as Weingreen. Historians offered courses in the History of the Jews as well as the History of Southeast Asia. Near Eastern studies began to include seminars on Zionism and on the social institutions of Israel. "Jewish Studies" had come into being; but it was rarely, and never easily, defined. To some it meant the classic disciplines of Tanakh and Rabbinics. Others were interested in Yiddish literature, *kahal* structures, Ladino, the demography of the existing community, etc. The term was as broad as the historic Jewish experience, and definition was pleasantly complicated by the interest of Jewish scholars from many specialties. Moved by emotions that they only partially acknowledged, particularly deriving from the Holocaust and 1948, emotions which challenged the facile universalism of an earlier period, these scholars began to find a Jewish component in their studies of cuneiform tablets or Persian

literature or the Gregorian chant or Marxist dialectics. A considerable literature has appeared which seeks to distinguish "Judaica," "Jewish learning," "Hebrew studies," "Hebraica" and "study of Torah" so that institutions could understand the parameters of Jewish Studies.

At the same time, a dramatic shift took place below-stairs. The post-war generation of Jewish undergraduates began to ask for Jewish learning as part of their general education. They no longer looked to college to provide them with a passport into American opportunity; they belonged. What they wanted was "an education," and that meant exploring themselves and their roots as well as their world. Other students had more practical motivations (preparation in Hebrew for a junior year program in Israel, content preparation for a social work career in a Jewish institutional setting). Still others were caught up in the ethnicity craze or wanted a Jewish parallel to black studies. The combined surge of faculty and student interest resulted in a remarkable two decades of growth for Jewish learning in America's universities.

Before World War II, less than a dozen scholars taught Judaica on a full-time basis in our universities and perhaps an equal number of Jews taught Hebrew. Today, over 300 colleges offer one or more credit courses in Jewish Studies, nearly 250 faculty teach full time in the field, and another 300 to 400 persons teach or work in this area on a part-time basis. I have seen estimates which suggest that as many as 50,000 undergraduates took a course in Jewish Studies during the 1973-4 academic year. More accurate figures will be available when a survey sponsored by the Association for Jewish Studies has been completed. The studies of the National Foundation For Jewish Culture suggest that as many as 300 young scholars are preparing for the Ph.D. degree in specialties which relate, in some significant way, to Jewish Studies.

The colleges which now offer one or more courses in Jewish Studies began to do so for varying reasons and continue to do so with varying emphases. Sometimes a religion department wanted to be ecumenical. Particularly after the Six Day War, some schools found it prudent to respond to Jewish student pressure for a Hebrew House or for a course on the Holocaust. In many cases, there was no clear academic rationale for the offerings. It was the case of an idea whose time had come and of a program that was "up for grabs" by anyone interested in picking up the ball. In at least one instance, to my knowledge, a Jewish Studies program emerged out of a Jew in the English Department whose interest was radical literature, a Jew in anthropology whose interest was in the *shtetl*, and a Jew in history who was a specialist in labor organizations.

Jewish Studies programs have grown from above and below, out of faculty interest in Jewish data and undergraduate interest in Jewish values. When you add to these divergent motivations the wide diversity of interest and specialization possible in a field called Jewish Studies, it is no wonder that vice presidents for academic affairs have had a difficult time

deciding where a Chair of Jewish Studies should be placed and what capacities the incumbent should possess. The common practice has been to center scholars in Jewish learning in a Semitic language department, in Near Eastern studies or in Religion, with the promise that a cross-departmental offering would be developed.

Jewish Studies at the undergraduate level has not escaped, and probably can never fully escape, confessional involvement. In some measure, this is due to American educational theory which emphasizes undergraduate education as a means of personal growth as well as of mastery of an academic discipline. Some young Jews seek the Confirmation class that they did not attend or paid little attention to when they were fifteen. Some undergraduates look upon a professor of Jewish Studies as their resident rabbi, a role for which he may be neither eager nor fit. For several decades, the search for a meaningful faith or philosophy has motivated many undergraduates, Jew and non-Jew, to enroll in courses in religion.

The interests of students in studying religion often run counter to the interests of scholars and teachers in the field . . . religious studies has recently achieved legitimacy in part by denying "relevance" . . . by avoiding "preaching," by distinguishing its aim from the functions that religious advisors and professional training serve. Yet, it is precisely at this time that the pressures have mounted for more attention to the needs and interests of students (James M. Gustafson).

In order to separate Jewish Studies from Hillel or chaplaincy programs, and to establish Jewish Studies as a creditable academic enterprise (the old disdain has not completely disappeared), Jewish Studies professionals have emphasized, and perhaps over-emphasized, the high wall of separation that should exist between the academic study of Judaism and the advocacy of Judaism: "It is not the duty of the professor of the history of Judaism or of Hebrew to interest himself in the state of the souls of his students, whether Jewish or gentile" (Neusner). The division is never that neat. Undergraduate tutoring inevitably involves counseling; totally dispassionate teaching is, itself, a confessional statement. Clearly, the classroom is not a place for narrow advocacy and, in the university classroom, data and literature must be approached critically and comparatively rather than as self-validating teachings.

The variety of materials which comprise Jewish learning suggest that any department which wants to offer more than a once-over-lightly survey must have a sizeable faculty: one must know the classic literature (Bible-Talmud-Midrash-medieval philosophy), another contemporary Jewish thought, still another the sociological and demographic components of modern Jewish life, and, since there is no scholarship without language competence, courses in Hebrew, Yiddish and, one would hope, Aramaic, should be available. No single scholar can teach all of the courses required for an undergraduate major, much less for a graduate degree. Intellectual honesty as well as the budget, particularly when you add to the cost of faculty the cost of maintaining extensive library holdings,

should limit graduate departments and even Jewish study majors to a few schools.

In many colleges a certain amount of makeshift is probably inescapable. If a school can hire only a single person, he will have to spend much of his time teaching basic surveys of Judaica and finding people who can be borrowed from elsewhere on the faculty—sociologists who can contribute a course on the *shtetl* or the *kibbutz*, classicists or philosophers who can offer a course in Alexandrian Jewish literature or medieval Jewish philosophy—or, from the community, rabbis and Hebraists from local Colleges of Jewish Studies who can relieve him of some of the burden of the basic courses. The use of local rabbis and teachers will continue to be a debated issue; some have denominational biases (*s'mikhah* does not a scholar make); and academic types are not immune to the usual disdain of the professional for the amateur. The desire fully to professionalize the field is understandable, but, except in certain well-endowed schools, realistically impossible. Not all rabbis or Hebraists are scholars, but some are, and the geographic spread of such persons has been invaluable during a period of rapid development.

The situation is dramatically different at a few universities where the faculty is deeper, the academic tradition older, and where Jewish Studies has emerged less in response to undergraduate soul-searching than out of the felt needs of the scholarly enterprise. These schools have a full catalogue of supportive courses in language, history, religion, the classics, Islamic studies and the Middle East, which have made it possible for well-conceived programs of undergraduate concentration and graduate studies to develop. In such schools, where the faculty often shares research interest in a broad range of topics—from the phenomenology of religion to patterns of cultural interaction—from the nature of religious leadership to the forms of mystical experience—a vigorous and significant scholarly exchange has developed.

The emergence of Jewish Studies within the university curriculum is too recent a development to allow confident predictions about its long-term significance or prospects. Much will depend on university budgets. Currently, because of budgetary constriction, administrations must select among their strengths as to what will be cut and what will remain. This would suggest a certain restriction in the number of colleges offering Jewish Studies as a major or as a graduate offering. At least for the next decade, there will be no dearth of scholars for the available positions and, at the same time, there will probably be greater need for the financial support of the Jewish community.

Though Jewish Studies is new to the American campus, the critical and analytic approach to Jewish learning has its roots in *Wissenschaft* and is an international enterprise. Wherever undertaken, it seeks to bind history into Jewish learning, to see the Jewish experience as a special case of the human experience rather than as unique, and to keep Jewish learning

free of either apologetics or confessional concerns. *Wissenschaft* studies were cool rather than hot; Judaism was viewed as an object to be studied rather than a living civilization to be savoured. Some in today's academy long for the determined dispassion of *Wissenschaft*, but today's scholars come out of a vigorous and culturally self-confident Jewish community and live in a world that no longer damns religious phenomena as crude superstition, and rather glories in cultural pluralism. Cool dispassion is not the way for most of this generation of participant observers and scholar activists.

The business of the university is to provide concepts which will help man to understand his world and the millions who move about in it. Critical understanding makes a scholar, not a Jew. Serious tensions will emerge between the Jewish community and the Jewish study field if the community identifies this work as a Jewish identity project and judges it accordingly. At the same time, if a majority of instructors insist that while their subject material is particular their perspective is wholly and only universal, they will then turn Jewish Studies from a creative undertaking in which undergraduates as well as advanced scholars can participate into an archival enterprise. Confessional advocacy does not belong in the classroom. The classroom can thrive only as a place of free inquiry and critical examination, but the scholar who scorns involvement in the life of the community assumes a measure of responsibility for the misuse of his scholarship by others.

Jewish Studies is no longer carried on in isolation. Methodologies and concept structures common in the university will necessarily be appropriated for, and by, Jewish Studies. The special American interest in sociology and social analysis already has provided a set of methodological and analytic tools which the Sklares and Elazars have applied with skill in their studies of the contemporary Jewish community and its institutions.

Most researchers now recognize the advantage of integrating Jewish data into their ongoing scholarly enterprise. Goitein's use of Genizah material to provide further understanding of the economics and the demography of the Mediterranean Basin during the Middle Ages is a magnificent case in point. In return, Jewish scholars have available to them all the research and conceptual tools developed in this century.

There is no doubt that this two-way process is well advanced, nor that a practical problem has emerged which is yet to be faced, much less surmounted. The age of Renaissance men is over. Each discipline, indeed, each sub-discipline, has its own language and set of tools and methodologies and no scholar can be expert in many. Yet, in most colleges, the Jewish Studies person will have to be something of a generalist. The Jewish experience is so long and its geography so scattered that a competent survey would require five or six professors; yet, usually, only one is available. The Jewish Studies field wrestles here with a problem not uncommon in the academic enterprise. Should the field organize itself for

the pursuit of knowledge and to permit research by scholars, or to provide insight and sensitivity to undergraduates? The answer is, of course, both/and; but it is not yet clear how the Jewish Studies field will adjust to this two-sided need.

One hopeful sign for the future is the creation of a corporation of men and women who share a common interest in Jewish learning, each with a speciality within the larger field. Ten years ago, when I convened the first meeting of the Academic Advisory Council of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, the invited scholars were strangers to each other. The sociologists around the table had never met the historians and the men who taught in the seminaries did not know, except by reputation, those who taught in a secular setting. Over the past decade an intellectual community has emerged. The Association For Jewish Studies now provides a forum for professional interests and a focus for the Jewish Studies enterprise. A journal is in the offing. Slowly, but perceptibly, a sense of order and articulated purpose has emerged and standards are being set. In time, I suspect, Jewish Studies will be defined as that which the members of the Association do.

Seminary faculties have been encouraged by their colleagues in the universities to use the new methodologies. The old anhistorical way is still the only way in some *yeshivot* and in some schools. Biblical criticism is still a problem area; but no work of competence can long be denied if only because the traditionalists must refute "heretical ideas." There is already some movement of men between seminary and secular faculties, and more will certainly occur, with benefit to students and studies in both types of institutions.

The field of Jewish Studies has made, and continues to make, significant contributions to the critical understanding of the Jewish experience; but Jewish learning in this sense is not *Talmud-Torah*. Jewish Studies refines a perception of Torah which binds the dimension of time and the study of mankind into the received tradition. Whether such a Torah can inspire and bind men to it remains an open question, one which, in the final analysis, the field of Jewish Studies is not compelled to answer.

JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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DR. ROBERT GORDIS, Editor

DR. RUTH B. WAXMAN, Managing Editor

November 3, 1975

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver
Tifereth Israel, The Temple
University Circle & Silver Park
Cleveland, Ohio, 44106

The Bicentennial of American independence on July 4, 1976 will, of course, be observed by all segments of the American people and from many disparate points of view. The Jewish community also will reflect a diversity of approach in commemorating this milestone in human history.

In view of the multiple crises confronting America and the world today, we believe that the Bicentennial ought to be an occasion for reflection and analysis, rather than of celebration and self-congratulation, on the part of both the American people and the American-Jewish community.

Accordingly, we are projecting a symposium for the Summer 1976 issue of JUDAISM on the general theme, "America and American Jewry - Mutual Influences." We are inviting you to join a group of distinguished scholars and thinkers to deal with various phases of this interaction. These include religion, economic life, the labor movement, literature, music, journalism, art, the theatre, the academic world, etc. Each contributor, an expert in his field, will be free to deal with his specific theme as he sees fit. We hope that he will concern himself with any or all of the following aspects:

- a) Analysis of the contribution of American Jews to this area.
- b) Evaluation of the impact of America upon American-Jewish activity in this area.
- c) Forecast of future trends.

In order that the Bicentennial Symposium may fulfill our expectations, each contribution should be in the neighborhood of 3,500 words and in our hands by February 15, 1976.

It gives me great pleasure to extend a cordial invitation to you to contribute a paper on "The Jewish Contribution to Academic Life."

As you undoubtedly know, JUDAISM is a quarterly, now in its twenty fifth year, basically concerned with exploring the content and the implications of Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics. While it is geared to the

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general intelligent reader, it possesses many of the attributes of an academic journal and, if I may say so, is highly regarded and widely quoted throughout the world. One of its less happy points of resemblance to an academic publication is the fact that it is not in position to pay its contributors. I may add that the Editor has functioned in his present capacity for six years as a labor of love and an act of service to the higher interests of the community.

I fervently hope that you will signify your acceptance of our invitation on the enclosed postcard. We look forward to your participation in what I believe will be a very distinguished contribution to genuine self-understanding in American Jewry.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours,

Robert Gordis

Robert Gordis
Editor

RG:tk
encl.



January 13, 1976

Dr. Robert Gordis, Editor
JUDAISM
15 East 84th Street
New York, N. Y. 10028

Dear Dr. Gordis:

Enclosed please find my article, "The American University
and Jewish Learning" for the bicentennial symposium of
Judaism. I have enjoyed working on it. With all good
wishes I remain

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

Encl.

[1976]

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AND JEWISH LEARNING

Daniel Jeremy Silver

Boston was founded in 1628. Harvard College was established eight years later. Over the years Christian sects, the several states and various cities organized America's far-reaching network of colleges and universities. With the lone and late exception of Brandeis (1948) the American Jewish community made no move to share in this work. Why?

The immigrant Jewish community was not prejudiced against the university as an institution. Though the majority had little, if any, experience with secular education, most were eager for their sons and daughters to attend and graduate; and go and graduate they did, in significant numbers. To use a rabbinic idiom, the children of the immigrants went to college to provide themselves a spade with which to dig into the promising American lode. Generally, they and their parents were so eager to begin prospecting that the children asked no questions about the tref in the traditional academic diet and the parents silenced their fears about assimilation and apostasy. In this respect Jews differed significantly from Roman Catholic immigrants. Catholics generally were willing to support the plans of the Jesuits or their bishops to establish colleges where their children could be educated in a familiar and supportive atmosphere, even though remaining among their own might hold their sons back from the main chance.

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The drive among first-generation Jews for a college degree bordered on the frenetic and clearly exceeded the urgency of other immigrant groups. It has been explained as a continuation, albeit in a secular mode, of Talmud-Torah. Presumably, Jews swarmed to the universities because Judaism had sanctified learning and Jewish life had tied status to learning. But all this happened before "my son, the professor" was an accepted status symbol. The thirst for a university degree among American Jews seems to derive rather more from the "what makes Sammy run" syndrome, the drive for status and success.

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The university was not seen as an appropriate setting for Jewish studies by faculty or students, by Jew or non-Jew. There had been no tradition of formal Jewish studies within the received curriculum which, for the most part, accepted the Christian piety that Jewish creativity had ^{CEASED} ~~ended~~ when Jews had rejected the new covenant. Enlightenment ideas about the primacy of reason were popular in most faculties and intellectuals found little reason to interest themselves in the study of another positivist tradition. The Enlightenment emphasis on the

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Christian interests had prompted the inclusion of Hebrew and Bible in the curriculum of the American college. The first Jews to teach Bible or Hebrew did so in what was, in effect, a seminary setting and some were apostates. (Monis) Then towards the end of the nineteenth century a few departments of religion and oriental language evidenced interest in Jewish faculty, preferably those trained in the great German academic tradition, who could teach Biblical criticism without being cowed by pressures from denominational councils and who could broaden New Testament studies with rabbinic parallels. Nordheimer, Gottheil and Jastrow were acceptable colleagues because they had been trained in Wissenschaft norms; trained, that is, to teach Judaism with critical dispassion and without active concern for the relationship of their studies to the identity problems of their students or the cultural reach of the Jewish people. As members of a university faculty,

their subject might be particular, but their perspective would be universal.

The phenomenon which we call Jewish Studies, that is, conscious and critical interest in Jews, Jewish institutions and the Jewish tradition as a subject area, developed very slowly during the first half of this century as established faculties in the "better" universities became dissatisfied with the traditional boundaries of the received curriculum. Hellenistic Judaism and the Pharisees clearly had had an impact on the emerging Christian tradition: the Harvard of George Foote Moore needed a Harry Wolfson. Jews had played a significant role in nineteenth-century Europe: the Columbia History Department needed a Salo Baron. It did not hurt that Nathan Littauer and Nathan Miller were able to provide the wherewithal; but the impetus for the study of Jews and Judaism in ^{A few} the distinguished eastern schools came from faculties, not from the development office, a fact of no small consequence as the funding of Jewish studies has required, and requires, a large and continuing outlay of university cash for men and books. I have seen estimates which suggest that universities have invested between twenty and twenty-five dollars of their own funds in Jewish study programs for every dollar contributed from within the Jewish community.

At mid-century, America's emergence as a world power wrought a revolution on the American campus. The insularity of the earlier curriculum was no longer seriously defended. A wide range of area studies developed to complement the western civilization praxis. Religion departments began to include Catholic, Eastern and Jewish studies as well as the standard New Testament and Church History offerings. The monopoly of senior positions in Bible, long maintained by Protestant scholars, was broken. Semitic language departments began to list conversational Hebrew as well as Weingreen. Historians offered courses in the

History of the Jews as well as the History of Southeast Asia. Near Eastern studies began to include seminars on Zionism and on the social institutions of Israel. "Jewish Studies" had come into being; but it was rarely, and never easily, defined. To some it meant the classic disciplines of Tanach and Rabbinics. Others were interested in Yiddish literature, kahal structures, Ladino, the demography of the existing community etc. The term was as broad as the historic Jewish experience, and definition was pleasantly complicated by a number of Jewish scholars from many specialties. Moved by emotions they only partially acknowledged, particularly the Holocaust and 1948, emotions which challenged the facile universalism of an earlier period, these scholars began to find a Jewish component in their studies of cuneiform tablets or Persian literature or the Gregorian chant or Marxist dialectics. A considerable literature has appeared which seeks to distinguish "Judaica," "Jewish learning," "Hebrew studies," "Hebraica" and "study of Torah" so institutions could understand the parameters of Jewish Studies.

At the same time a dramatic shift took place below stairs. The post-war generation of Jewish undergraduates began to ask for Jewish learning as part of their general education. They no longer looked to college to provide them a passport into American opportunity; they belonged. What they wanted was "an education" and that meant exploring themselves and their roots as well as their world. Other students had more practical motivations (preparation in Hebrew for a junior year program in Israel, content preparation for a social work career in a Jewish institutional setting. Other students were caught up in the ethnicity craze or wanted a Jewish parallel to black studies. The combined surge of faculty

and student interest resulted in a remarkable two decades of growth for Jewish learning in America's universities.

Before World War II less than a dozen scholars taught Judaica on a full-time basis in our universities and perhaps an equal number of Jews taught Hebrew. Today over 300 colleges offer one or more credit courses in Jewish studies, nearly 250 faculty teach full time in the field, and another 300 to 400 persons teach or work in this area on a part-time basis. I have seen estimates which suggest that as many as 50,000 undergraduates took a course in Jewish Studies during the 1973-4 academic year. More accurate figures will be available when a survey sponsored by the Association for Jewish Studies has been completed. National Foundation For Jewish Culture studies suggest that as many as 300 young scholars are preparing for the Ph. D. degree in specialties which in some significant way involve an aspect of Jewish studies.

The colleges which now offer one or more courses in Jewish Studies did so for varying reasons and continue to do so with varying emphases. Sometimes a religion department wanted to be ecumenical. Particularly after the Six Day War some schools found it prudent to respond to Jewish student pressure for a Hebrew House or a course on the Holocaust. In many cases there was no clear academic rationale for the offerings. It was the case of an idea whose time had come and of a program up for grabs by anyone interested in picking up the ball. In at least one instance, to my knowledge, a Jewish Studies program emerged out of a Jew in the English Department whose interest was radical literature; a Jew in anthropology whose interest was in the shtetl and a Jew in history who was a specialist in labor organizations.

Jewish Studies programs have grown from above and below, out of faculty interest in Jewish data and undergraduate interest in Jewish values. When you add to these divergent motivations the wide diversity of interest and specialization possible in a field called Jewish Studies, it is no wonder that vice presidents for academic affairs have had a difficult time deciding where a Chair of Jewish Studies should be placed and what capacities the incumbent should possess. The common practice has been to center scholars in Jewish learning in a semitic language department, in Near Eastern studies or in religion, with the promise that a cross-departmental offering would be developed.

Jewish studies at the undergraduate level has not escaped, and probably can never fully escape, confessional involvement. In some measure this is due to American educational theory which emphasizes undergraduate education as a means of personal growth as well as of mastery of an academic discipline. Some young Jews seek the Confirmation class they did not attend or paid little attention to when they were fifteen. Some undergraduates look upon a professor of Jewish Studies as their resident rabbi, a role for which he may be neither eager nor fit. For several decades the search for a meaningful faith or philosophy has motivated many undergraduates, Jew and non-Jew, to enroll in courses in religion. "The interests of students in studying religion often run counter to the interests of scholars and teachers in the field. . . religious studies has recently achieved legitimacy in part by denying 'relevance'. . . by avoiding 'preaching,' by distinguishing its aim from the functions that religious advisors and professional training serve. Yet, it is precisely at this time that the pressures have mounted for more

[Silver 1976]

attention to the needs and interests of students" (James M. Gustafson). In order to separate Jewish Studies from Hillel or chaplaincy programs, and to establish Jewish studies as a creditable academic enterprise (the old disdain has not completely disappeared), ~~many~~ Jewish studies professionals have emphasized, and perhaps over-emphasized, the high wall of separation that should exist between the academic study of Judaism and the advocacy of Judaism: "It is not the duty of the professor of the history of Judaism or of Hebrew to interest himself in the state of the souls of his students, whether Jewish or gentile" (Neusner). The division is never that neat. Undergraduate tutoring inevitably involves counseling; totally dispassionate teaching is itself a confessional statement; but, clearly, the classroom is not a place for narrow advocacy and in the university classroom data and literature must be approached critically and comparatively rather than as self-validating teachings.

The variety of materials which comprise Jewish learning suggest that any department which wants to offer more than a once-over-lightly survey must have a sizeable faculty: someone must know the classic literature (Talmud-Midrash-medieval philosophy); another contemporary Jewish thought, another the sociological and demographic components of modern Jewish life, and since there is no scholarship without language competence, courses in Hebrew, Yiddish and, one would hope, Aramaic should be available. No single scholar can teach all the courses required for an undergraduate major, much less for a graduate degree. Intellectual honesty as well as the budget, particularly when you add to the cost of faculty the cost of maintaining extensive library holdings, should limit graduate departments and even Jewish study majors to a few schools.

In many colleges a certain amount of makeshift is probably inescapable. If a school can hire only a single person, he will have to spend much of his time teaching basic surveys of Judaica and finding people who can be borrowed from elsewhere on the faculty - sociologists who can contribute a course on the shtetl or the kibbutz, classicists or philosophers who can offer a course in Alexandrian Jewish literature or medieval Jewish philosophy, - or from the community, rabbis and Hebraists from local Colleges of Jewish Studies who can relieve him of some of the burden of the basic courses. The use of local rabbis and teachers will continue to be a debated issue; some have denominational biases, semicha does not a scholar make; and academic types are not immune to the usual disdain of the professional for the amateur. The desire to fully professionalize the field is understandable, but, except in certain well-endowed schools, realistically impossible. Not all rabbis or Hebraists are scholars, but some are, and the geographic spread of such persons has been invaluable during a period of rapid development.

The situation is dramatically different at a few universities where the faculty is deeper, the academic tradition older, and where Jewish studies has emerged less in response to undergraduate soul-searching than out of the felt needs of the scholarly enterprise. These schools have a full catalogue of supportive courses in language, history, religion, the classics, Islamic studies and the Middle East, which have made it possible for well-conceived programs of undergraduate concentration and graduate studies to develop. In such schools where the faculty often shares research interest in a broad range of topics - from the phenomenology of religion to patterns of cultural interaction, ~~or~~ from the nature of religious leadership to the forms of mystical experience - a vigorous and significant scholarly exchange has developed.

The emergence of Jewish studies within the university curriculum is too recent a development to allow confident predictions about its long-term significance or prospects. Much will depend on university budgets. Currently, because of budgetary constriction, administrations must select among their strengths as to what will be cut and what will remain. This would suggest a certain restriction in the number of colleges offering Jewish Studies as a major or as a graduate offering. At least for the next decade there will be no dearth of scholars for the available positions and probably greater need for the financial support of the Jewish community.

Though Jewish studies is new to the American campus, the critical and analytic approach to Jewish learning has its roots in Wissenschaft and is an international enterprise. Wherever undertaken, it seeks to bind history into Jewish learning, to see the Jewish experience as a special case of the human experience, rather than as unique, and to keep Jewish learning free of either apologetics or confessional concern³. Wissenschaft studies were cool rather than hot; Judaism was viewed as an object to be studied rather than a living civilization to be savoured. Some in today's academy ~~may~~ long for the determined dispassion of Wissenschaft, but today's scholars come out of a vigorous and culturally self-confident Jewish community and live in a world that no longer damns religious phenomena as crude superstition, and rather glories in cultural pluralism. Cool dispassion is not the way for most of this generation of participant observers and scholar activists.

The business of the university is to provide concepts which will help man to understand his world and the millions who move about in it. Critical understanding makes a scholar, not a Jew. Serious tensions will emerge between the Jewish

community and the Jewish study field if the community identifies this work as a Jewish identity project and judges it accordingly. At the same time, if a majority of instructors insist that ^{while} ~~if~~ their subject material is particular their perspective is wholly and only universal; they will turn Jewish studies from a creative undertaking in which undergraduates as well as advanced scholars can participate into an archival enterprise. Confessional advocacy does not belong in the classroom. The classroom can thrive only as a place of free inquiry and critical examination, but the scholar who scorns involvement in the life of the community assumes a measure of responsibility for the misuse of his scholarship by others.

Jewish studies is no longer carried on in isolation. Methodologies and concept structures common in the university will necessarily be appropriated for and by Jewish studies. The special American interest in sociology and social analysis already has provided a set of methodological and analytic tools which the Sklare's and Elazar's have applied with skill in their studies of the contemporary Jewish community and its institutions.

Most researchers now recognize the advantage of integrating Jewish data into the ongoing scholarly enterprise. Gotein's use of Genizah material to provide further understanding of the economics and the demography of the Mediterranean Basin during the Middle Ages is a magnificent case in point. In return Jewish scholars have available to them all the research and conceptual tools developed in this century.

There is no doubt that this two-way process is well advanced; nor that a practical problem has emerged which is yet to be faced, much less surmounted.

The age of Renaissance men is over. Each discipline, indeed, each sub-discipline has its own language and set of tools and methodologies, and no scholar can be expert in many. Yet, in most colleges the Jewish Studies person will have to be something of a generalist. The Jewish experience is so long and its geography so scattered that a competent survey would require five or six professors; yet, usually, only one is available. The Jewish studies field wrestles here with a problem not uncommon in the academic enterprise. Should the field organize itself for the pursuit of knowledge and to permit research by scholars, or to provide insight and sensitivity to undergraduates? The answer is, of course, both/and; but it is not yet clear how the Jewish studies field will adjust to this two-sided need.

One hopeful sign for the future is the creation of a corporation of men and women who share a common interest in Jewish learning, each with his own specialty within the larger field. Ten years ago when I convened the first meeting of the Academic Advisory Council of the National Foundation For Jewish Culture the invited scholars were strangers to each other. The sociologists around the table had never met the historians and the men who taught in the seminaries did not know, except by reputation, those who taught in a secular setting. Over the past decade an intellectual community has emerged. The Association For Jewish Studies now provides a forum for professional interests and a focus for the Jewish studies enterprise. A journal is in the offing. Slowly, but perceptibly, a sense of order and articulated purpose has emerged and standards are being set. In time I suspect that Jewish studies will be defined as that which the members of the Association do.

Seminary faculties have been encouraged by their colleagues in the universities to use the new methodologies. The old anhistorical way is still the only way in some yeshivot, and in some schools there are still serious problems. Biblical criticism is still a problem area; but no work of competence can long be denied if only because the traditionalists must refute "heretical ideas." There is already some movement of men between seminary and secular faculties, and more will certainly occur with benefit to students and studies in both types of institutions.

The field of Jewish Studies has made and continues to make significant contributions to the critical understanding of the Jewish experience; but Jewish learning in this sense is not Talmud-Torah. Jewish Studies refines a perception of Torah which binds the dimension of time and the study of mankind into the received tradition. Whether such a Torah can inspire and bind men to it remains an open question, one which, in the final analysis, the field of Jewish studies is not compelled to answer.

JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

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DR. ROBERT GORDIS, Editor

DR. RUTH B. WAXMAN, Managing Editor

January 28, 1976

Dr. Daniel Jeremy Silver
Tifereth Israel (The Temple)
University Circle & Silver Park
Cleveland, Ohio, 44106

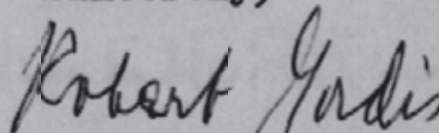
Dear Dr. Silver:

I am very happy that I invited you, and happier still that you accepted the invitation to participate in the Bicentennial Issue of JUDAISM. Your paper, "The American University in Jewish Learning," is everything we could have wished for in its clear and trenchant survey and analysis of this important aspect of Jewish experience in America. It will undoubtedly rank among the outstanding contributions to the symposium.

When Mrs. Waxman works on preparing the issue for the printer, she may be in touch with you with regard to one or another detail.

In the interim, many thanks. Warmest personal greetings.

Sincerely,



Robert Gordis
Editor

RG:tk

The Temple

DANIEL JEREMY SILVER - RABBI

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March 15, 1976

Mrs. Ruth B. Waxman
Managing Editor
Judaism
15 East 84th St.
New York, N. Y.

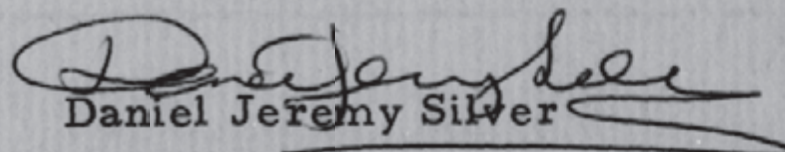
Dear Mrs. Waxman:

Weingreen is an English grammar which was given to practically every seminary student and first-year scholar in Hebrew in our universities from the first World War to the second World War. To study Hebrew was to study Weingreen.

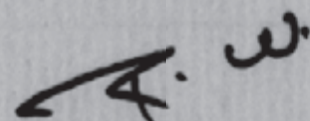
I assume that if you are making any changes in the manuscript beyond punctuation and minor corrections of language the material will be sent back to me for final approval. I take pride in my use of language and as the author I want the final say as to the manuscript's form.

With all good wishes I remain

Sincerely,


Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp



*The pre-
all we mean.*

*We still
need a*

*one-sentence
(or two) identified.*

Our 125th Anniversary Year

March 25, 1976

Dr. Ruth B. Waxman
Managing Editor
Judaism
15 East 84th St.
New York, N. Y. 10028

Dear Dr. Waxman:

You might identify me as: Chairman, Academic Advisory Council
National Foundation For Jewish Culture; Adjunct Professor of Re-
ligion Case Western Reserve and Cleveland State Universities;
Rabbi of The Temple in Cleveland.

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp

September 9, 1992



Prof. Daniel Jeremy Silver
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Dear Mrs. Silver:

Garland is planning a ten-volume facsimile reprint set of scholarly articles tentatively titled Judaism in Cold War America 1945-1990. This series will be edited by Professor Jacob Neusner, Graduate Research Professor of Religious Studies, University of South Florida. Enclosed is a proposed Table of Contents which will give you a representation of the project's scope.

Our print run for this series will be 250 copies. The books will be printed in facsimile on 250-year-life paper, in hardback library bindings.

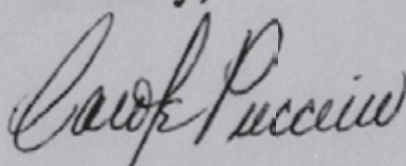
We are writing to ask permission to reprint Prof. Silver's, "The American University and Jewish Learning" in **JUDAISM Vol. 25** (1976) pp. 281-289, in the above mentioned series. We have already contacted the editor of the material in which his original article appeared, and they have informed us that his permission is required. We ask that, if you wish his article to appear in our series, you sign this letter below.

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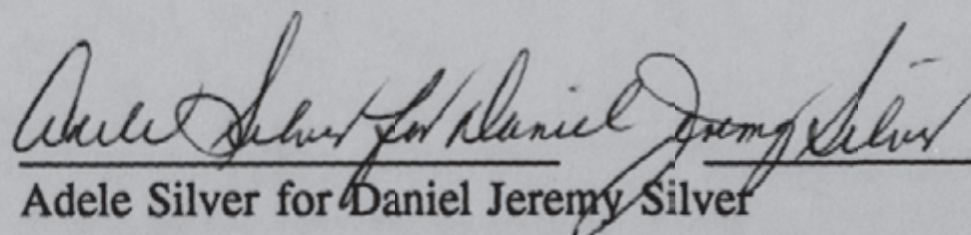
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We look forward to your reply in the near future.

Sincerely,



Carole Puccino
Associate Editor

 Sept. 29, 1992
Adele Silver for Daniel Jeremy Silver Date

original mailed 9/29/92

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