The Americanization of the Jews

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Foreword

Norman J. Cohen

The aim of this book is to assess the current state of American Jewish life, drawing on the research and thinking of scholars from a variety of disciplines and diverse points of view. The groundwork was laid at a conference entitled "American Jews: Dreams and Realities," held in New York City in the spring of 1991. Cosponsored by the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion and the Joseph and Ceil Mazer Institute for Research and Advanced Study of Judaica of the Graduate School of the City University of New York, the three-day gathering took place at the Brookdale campus of H.U.C.–J.I.R. and at the Roosevelt House of Hunter College. The sessions drew large audiences of academics and professionals working in Jewish agencies as well as laypeople, and the presentations elicited vigorous response and interchange of ideas.

We are grateful to the staffs of the New York School of the College–Institute, in particular to Linda Jaffe, and of the Mazer Institute and the Hunter Jewish Social Studies Program, especially Rosalie K. Bachana and Marilyn J. Sladowsky, for making the myriad of arrangements for the conference. It could not have taken place and this volume would not have seen the light of day without the generous support of the Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation. The Steinhardts' concern for the future vitality of American Jewish life led them to subvent the conference and the preparation of this book, along with a plethora of other activities in the Jewish community.

We are grateful, too, for the support and encouragement of the
leadership of the College–Institute, especially President Alfred Gottschalk and Stanley P. Gold, Chair of the Board of Governors, as well as of members of the administration of the CUNY Graduate Center, especially Solomon Goldstein, former Dean of Research and University Programs.

Above all, our gratitude goes to Naomi W. Cohen, Distinguished Service Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and to Eugene B. Borowitz, Sigmund L. Falk Distinguished Professor of Education and Jewish Religious Thought at the New York School of H.U.C.–J.I.R., both of whom served with me and Robert M. Seltzer on the planning committee. We benefited greatly from Naomi Cohen’s careful reading of all the papers and her indispensable advice in shaping the manuscript. The project owes much to her acumen and friendship.

Our special thanks is extended to Dennis M. Dreyfus for all that he did in helping to transform these presentations into a unified book. He was a full partner in bringing this work to press, going far beyond normal editorial duties. He spent many hours with each article and each contributor, sharpening content and polishing style. We cannot overstate his thoughtfulness, cooperation, skill, and remarkable ability to work effectively in an area that was not his own specialization.

We would like to express our appreciation to the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation for a grant that helped defray publication costs and the preparation of the index.

We would also like to thank our editors at New York University Press, Niko Pfund and Despina Papazoglou Gimbel, for their gracious and patient encouragement, gentle but determined coaxing, and, in Bob’s case, for the warm friendship that has developed through this and other projects over the years.

Through this volume, we expect to bring to a wider audience the disparate insights and overall issues that permeated these papers and the discussion accompanying them. In so doing, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique nature of American Jewish life, its past and present, and to the key questions that shape our future on this continent.