The Americanization of the Jews

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Published by NYU Press

Cohen, Norman S. and Robert Seltzer.
The Americanization of the Jews.
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PART SEVEN

Surviving as Jews in Twenty-First-Century America
Modern Times and Jewish Assimilation

Paul Ritterband

Sociologists of the Jews have been classified as accommodationists or assimilationists—perhaps more simply and explicitly as optimists or pessimists. I am among the assimilationists-pessimists, not on ideological grounds but on the basis of my reading of the sociodemographic data.

To be fair to the optimists-accommodationists, we should note at the outset that no modern diaspora Jewish community has produced the quantity of scholarship and intellectual product as has American Jewry. We need only contrast the struggle of the fathers of *Jüdische Wissenschaft*, who sought unsuccessfully to enter the mainstream of German academic life, with the authors in this volume, who are almost all affiliated with secular universities and enjoy the unself-conscious, comfortable life of American academe. Furthermore, there are more students in advanced yeshivot in America and Israel than there were at the high point of the Lithuanian yeshivot during the nineteenth century. One-third of all children currently enrolled in Jewish schools in the United States are attending day schools and yeshivot. On a secular level, Jews in America are doing extraordinarily well. Of the four hundred richest Americans annually listed by *Forbes*, it is estimated that approximately 25% are Jews, even though Jews constitute only 2.5% of the American population.

Other examples abound. From a barely tolerated minority whose entrance to high places was controlled by a *numerus clausus*, Jews have become major figures in American academic and intellectual
life. They are disproportionately employed in universities and, more significantly, the more distinguished the institution, the higher the proportion of Jews. Jewish professors publish more articles and books, secure more grants; by every standard measure of success in academe, Jews have arrived. While for a generation no Jew served on the United States Supreme Court (perhaps reflecting the conservative bent of the appointers and the liberal stance of most American Jews, including presumably Jewish jurists), that situation has now been corrected, and the House of Representatives and Senate have three times as many Jews proportionately as their number in the population would predict. Perhaps the only significant public arena in which Jews are underrepresented is sports, but that is generally true of the urban, white middle class.

If things are so good, why worry? First, the Jewish community of the United States is becoming bimodal: the distribution of Jewish behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes is moving away from the common bell-shaped normal curve to a "camel-backed" two-humped curve in which the more committed Jews have increased their commitment while less committed Jews have more and more opened themselves up to the forces of assimilation. Thus, to mix metaphors, Jewish day schools are bursting at the seams, and intermarriage rates are going through the roof. American Jewish institutions and ideologies that grounded themselves in "centrism" find themselves in increasing trouble. The inertial force of the culture of the immigrant generation has been all but lost.

Second, individual success is not paralleled by collective success. Jewishness is attenuating. Jews are leaders in modernization and secularization, processes that inevitably lead to assimilation and demographic decline. The structure of belief, in which both Jews and non-Jews participated, a structure that effectively made the Jews an imperium in imperio for so many centuries, has withered away, accompanied by serious decline in the viability of the American Jewish community. In this essay, I will focus on three demographic changes emblematic of the devolution of the Jews in our time: fertility, intermarriage, and geographic location.

Jewish commitment to secularization and economic rationality has contributed to individual success but has wreaked havoc with Jew-
ish collective life. The Jews of modernity are obsessed with modernity. Even among first-generation American Jews, it was a matter of pride to be considered modern and a compliment to call someone modern, as in "he keeps shabbes but he is modern." To modernize their children, immigrants gave their children "modern" names. No more Isaacs, but now Irvings. Gone were the Mottels, Moshes, and even Mordechais; in their stead came Mortons and Murrays. What Jews did not realize was that by transposing the surnames of WASPs into the first names (Christian names?) of their children, they were identifying them as Jews in WASP clothing. Another instance is the awkward term "Modern Orthodoxy." Do we find "Modern Methodism" or "Modern Islam" or "Modern Catholicism"? Why did Jerry Falwell call his television program the "Old-Fashioned Gospel Hour"? Why does one group of religious traditionalists call itself, with pride, "modern," and the other with equal pride call itself "old-fashioned"?

For Jews, modernity has meant the sloughing off of characteristics that non-Jews had defined as negative attributes of Jews. As a minority no longer protected by communal walls, Jews came to believe what gentiles said about them. They internalized the critiques of their enemies and putative friends. "Be a Jew at home and a human being abroad" became the watchword of Jewish enlightenment. If we could somehow save a kernel of the Jewish past, the essence of the Jewish experience, we would be able to eliminate the excrescences and become acceptable to non-Jewish society. A secular Messiah had arrived in the form of enlightenment and emancipation.

Jews did not assimilate to generic America: they assimilated to an America that exists only in the minds of a few, among them most Jews. America in the minds of the Jews is a culturally neutral society, one in which the public arena is secular, allowing space for Jews to enter not as Jews but as citizens. Further, Jews took secularization beyond the public sphere into their private lives. Thus, Jews have become the most secularized of all the ethnic groups in America of European origin. Jews became secular, at least in part, so that they could become American. By doing so they became less American as well as less Jewish. Fertility is one critical indicator of this metamorphosis.
The secularization and modernization (the processes are inseparable) of the rank and file of Jews for almost two centuries have become a major threat to diaspora Jewish continuity in the twentieth century. The demographic transition of the nineteenth century, in which birth rates plummeted, was led by Jews and was in part a consequence of increased secularity. I use the term "led" not to indicate that the Jews were active propagandists for fertility control, leading Europe into the era of the small family, but rather to indicate that in the aggregate, Jewish fertility declined far more rapidly, more precipitously, and much earlier than did the fertility of non-Jews. To paraphrase Heinrich Heine: as do the Jews, so do the Christians.

Low fertility, a characteristic of Jews wherever they became emancipated, was a corollary of their emergent modern status and secular turn of mind. During the immediately premodern period Jewish fertility was greater than that of the surrounding non-Jewish populations. The decline in fertility that became manifest for Jews in the early nineteenth century in Germany (and that preceded that of Protestants and Catholics by one and two generations, respectively) was concurrent with a wide variety of changes in the status and culture of the Jews. Such changes included a rapid decline of Jewish religious observance and traditional Jewish culture. Jewish fertility remained high in the villages of South Germany long after it had declined to subreplacement levels in urban centers. Within the villages, premodern patterns of fertility were to be found among the more traditional elements in the community. While we do not have compelling evidence of the relationship between secularity and low fertility for nineteenth-century populations, such evidence does exist for twentieth-century Jews as well as Christians (particularly Catholics), and there is reason to believe that it was true for the earlier period as well.

The Jewish lead in the demographic transformation continues to have serious consequences for Jewish continuity. Given current life expectancies and marriage frequency, it can be reasonably assumed that 2.1 children per Jewish woman are necessary for the biological continuity of the Jewish people (assuming no losses through intermarriage, of which more below). Western societies are reproducing
below replacement and the Jews lead the way, as they have for more than a century. The United States fertility rate in 1980 was 40% below what it was in 1950. Conforming to the well-established pattern, Jewish fertility (and nuptiality as well) was significantly below that of non-Jews. The March 1957 Current Population Survey reported that the number of children born to Jewish women forty-five years of age and older was 29% less than the number born to Catholics and 21% less than the number born to Protestants. A study of college freshmen of the class of 1974 found that, by 1980, 42% of Jewish women were married, as compared with 57% of non-Jewish women. About one in twenty Jews were parents, compared with one in four of non-Jews. Analysis of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey showed that the fertility of Jewish women is significantly below that of non-Jewish whites and significantly below replacement.

A counterargument asserts that Jewish women do not complete their childbearing years with fewer children than non-Jewish women; rather, they have their children later in life, so that their total fertility is underestimated. A 1982 data collection reported that Jews expect to have about 2.1 children, less than Protestants and Catholics but enough for replacement. Both the 1975 and 1985 Boston population studies report that currently married Jewish women expected to have 2.2 children. Closer analysis of the 1975 Boston data shows that the 1949–1959 cohort expected to have 2.8 children, while the most recent marriage cohort expected a total completed fertility of 1.9 children. Subjective fertility desires and expectations are, of course, subject to revision upward or downward. Panel studies that I have consulted show a significant downward trend of fertility desires for Jews and non-Jews. That does not take into account what has been termed “effectively Jewish fertility” (raising children as Jews, something quite problematic in the instance of exogamy), nor does it take into account infertility, divorce, death, and other impediments. Therefore, the actual fertility of ever-married Bostonian, and by extension American, Jewish women is likely to be significantly below replacement (taking into account decreased rates of nuptiality).

Jews have been committed to modernity (a mode of thought and behavior that includes, inter alia, commitment to the small nuclear
family) since they stepped out of the ghettos and villages of Eastern and Central Europe. To be modern was the dream of the rank and file of Jews over the past century or more. For most Jews, to be modern meant to become secular and to be secular meant to bear few children.

For a long time, Jews could feel themselves insulated from the sociological model in which acculturation inevitably led to assimilation. Jews felt that they could take on the characteristics of the public culture (style of life, language, and other ethnic markers) without giving up the Jewish neighborhood, Jewish friendship circles, and, most significantly, endogamy. Jews saw themselves, and were seen by professional social scientists, as sui generis.\textsuperscript{13} That sense of immunity from social forces was based upon reasonable evidence. The March 1957 Current Population Survey reported an intermarriage rate among Jews of only 4%, one-third that of Catholics and one-half that of Protestants.\textsuperscript{14} Yet, there were signs of the breach of the walls. A study of American college graduates, class of 1961, reported on religion-specific rates of intermarriage among those alumni who were married by 1964: while Jewish intermarriage rates were still relatively low (12% as compared with 16% for Protestants and 34% for Catholics), one could see portents of the future. Even at 12%, the vast majority of Jews did not choose their mates without consideration of Jewish criteria. With 2.5% of the population (not taking into account age squeeze in the marriage market) the 12% rate was far below the rate that would have occurred if total randomness had obtained. Distance from the immigrant generation was a powerful predictor (and probable cause) of intermarriage. Of those Jews who had no grandparents born in the United States, 11% intermarried; of those who had one to three grandparents born in the United States, 13% intermarried; while among those with all four grandparents born in the United States, 33% reported being intermarried. Generation (number of grandparents born in the United States) had little or no effect on Protestants and Catholics. Once again, for Jews Americanization has meant secularization, a phenomenon not found among Catholics and Protestants.\textsuperscript{15}

The proportion of American Jews who are third- and fourth-
generation Americans has grown enormously and with that growth there has been a substantial increase in rates of intermarriage and falling away from the community. Concurrently, there has been a decline in the community’s inhibition about intermarriage so that we now have a joint age cohort and generational effect of intermarriage. The most recent rate reported for intermarriage (that is, married between 1985 and 1990) was 52%, up from 9% for those married prior to 1965.

While intermarriage may reflect disinhibition and a change in priorities, it need not constitute a threat to group continuity. If half of the children of the intermarried were to be reared without ambiguity as Jews, then intermarriage might be little more than an interesting social fact. Some scholars essentially claim that to be the case; they claim that intermarriage per se does not lead to Jewish population decline because a significant fraction of the intermarried rear their children as Jews. As I interpret the evidence, this is not so. Most intermarriages, as recorded in communal surveys, lead to syncretism or religious neutrality in the home, a state of mind that almost inevitably terminates in cultural Christianity. The growing intermarriage rate is accompanied by a low rate of Jewish retention of children of such marriages. In recent mixed marriages, 28% of the children are reported as being reared as Jews, 31% as being reared with no religion, and 41% as being reared in some non-Jewish religion (in most instances one can presume that the religion is the Christian faith of the non-Jewish parent). If we examine the Jewish education and socialization of the children of intermarried parents, we can be even more pessimistic about the Jewishness of the grandchildren of intermarriage. Even when they are raised as Jews, their Jewish socialization is weak. This can be shown by the reports of Jewish education given to the children of the intermarried. What is not reported, because it is not asked, is the impact of the child’s functioning in a mixed network of relatives. One side of the family may observe a Passover of sorts while the other side observes a Christmas of sorts. The child receives two messages as to who he or she is and what is expected of him or her. Moreover, because of the way in which the question is asked in most of the surveys (beginning with the introductory filter question, “Is anyone in the household Jewish?”), it is easy to miss those
households where one of the partners was born or reared Jewish and is no longer Jewish, either through formal conversion to Christianity or through informal drift. More on this issue will emerge from the analysis of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

While intermarriage and fertility are perhaps the most dramatic indicators of Jewish decline, geographic location is an equally sensitive, if less intrusive indicator. Jewish spatial distribution has undergone massive changes in the past two centuries. There were many forms of such resettlement: the mass migration to the Western hemisphere, the migration from villages to large cities all over Europe, migration within the United States from densely Jewish New York to less densely populated Jewish communities, and local migration from areas of first and second settlement to areas of lessened Jewish population density. The last two forms of migration will be examined in detail.

The significance of religio-ethnic population masses and density is, on the face of it, clear. Its apparent simplicity, however, is misleading. For the modern period, density has been shown to be significant on multiple levels, affecting the rate of endogamy, affiliation with the Jewish community, the creation and maintenance of Jewish communal institutions, and so on. Difficult to measure exactly is the extent to which mass concentration of Jews is conducive to the creation of a public Jewishness, the Jewishness of the street, a Jewishness that at least potentially gives Jews, particularly youngsters, a sense of who they are and that they constitute a significant group. In premodern society, from the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century, there were few large cities in Europe and none in which there were large Jewish populations. As late as the beginning of the nineteenth century, only three cities in the world—Amsterdam, Salonika, and Constantinople—had Jewish populations of at least ten thousand. The vast majority of the world's Jews then lived in small towns and provincial cities in whatever country they called home. (Remember that the Rhenish Jewish communities of the High Middle Ages numbered Jewish populations in the tens, or at most, the hundreds, and that the famous Gluckel of Hamelin's family was one of only two Jewish families in town at the end of the seventeenth century.)
Small and scattered communities had their problems but were able to maintain basic Jewish institutional life: a school for children, a burial society, often a yeshiva. Despite the small numbers of local eligibles, intermarriage was not a problem because by definition and common consent, marriage with Christians was neither desired nor feasible in the vast majority of instances.

That small Jewish communities (small, that is, by the standards of the twentieth century) could survive and even flourish demographically and culturally was a function of Jewry as an international theocracy, tightly regulated by the revealed law. The Jews constituted a recognized corporate, self-regulating body. Modernity shattered that idyll. At least in theory, Jews became individual citizens with free choice of domicile, association, and mate. Given the freedom offered by modern society, geography took on more significance. In the absence of communal cultural and psychological walls, sheer density became a crucial factor in group maintenance.

Jews poured into the major cities of Europe and later of America, forming a critical mass that permitted a semblance of Jewish life to continue, albeit on a weakened institutional basis. Concentration in major cities made it possible for Jews, even the unbelievers among them, to interact largely with other Jews and to choose their mates from among Jews, by the sheer force of numbers and propinquity. In the American case, German Jewish immigrants in the middle nineteenth century spread across America rather evenly. With the flood tide of East European migration, Jews became more concentrated in the cities of the Northeast, particularly New York. I estimate that in 1880, 28% of America's Jews lived in New York City, a proportion that rose to 52% by 1910. From 1920, the New York fraction of American Jewry declined steadily so that by 1980, 19% of America's Jews lived in New York City.

Another way of viewing the same phenomenon is to measure the scatter of Jews over the inhabited area of the United States. In 1880, the Jewish population of the United States was more scattered than was the American population in toto. By 1910, the American Jewish population reached the lowest point in its scatter over the one-hundred-year period being examined, while the American population continued to steadily increase its scatter. Beginning with
World War I, whatever was keeping the Jews together spatially on the national level was weakening. By 1980 the Jewish population was almost four times as dispersed as it was in 1910.

In New York City, the largest single urban conglomerate in all of Jewish history, a similar story emerges. Taking as our statistical measure the proportion of Jews who would have to move to secure a random spatial distribution of Jews, we find that, in 1925, 59% of the Jews would have had to shift residence in order to achieve a random spatial distribution. By 1981, that proportion had dropped more than half, to 27%. It could be argued that with the emergence of telecommunication, good roads, and other forms of communication, spatial propinquity is not as necessary for the maintenance of communal ties. While this may be true to a limited extent, it remains the case that Jews were less likely to feel the need to live with Jews in the 1980s than they felt in the 1920s. The power and salience of Jewish identity have been weakened, allowing for the centrifugal force of geographic dispersion. Jews have less in common with other Jews, need them less, are more likely to choose residence, friends, and spouse based upon criteria that give less weight to Jewishness. The densely Jewish neighborhoods in which Jews born before the Second World War grew up are largely gone. The major exception is the Orthodox settlements in Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{19}

The decline in Jewish population density, as is the case with intermarriage, is a two-edged indicator. First, it expresses the lessened interest Jews have in associating with other Jews. In choosing a neighborhood, as in choosing a spouse, we make our choices in accordance with a scale of preferences that reflect our priorities. Not choosing to live with Jews and not choosing to marry a Jew both reflect the declining salience of Jewishness. In addition, they also make it significantly less likely that the current Jews will act out their Jewishness and that their children will be raised within a Jewish milieu. Inter alia, the rates of exogamy are significantly higher in the newer areas of Jewish settlement and in relatively small settlements. In the absence of strong religio-cultural walls, communal size has emerged as a significant factor in maintaining the Jewishness of individual Jews and the Jewish household.
For the past two centuries, world Jewry has attempted to come to terms with modernity. For the most part, it has collectively failed, though Jews have prospered individually, particularly in America. Modernity has produced many social, political, and religious answers to the questions of why and how Jews shall remain Jews. In Eastern Europe, there were the movements of social reform, including Yiddishism, Territorialism, and Zionism, of which only the last can be considered to have been at least partially successful. Diaspora nationalism failed, not only because of the brutality and thoroughness of the Germans and their many friends but also because it was built upon illusions, as was made manifest in the subsequent history of East Central Europe.

In the West, coming to terms with modernity generated religious movements to which American Jewry has become heir. Although American Jewry is overwhelmingly East European in origin, the society in which it finds itself is multireligious rather than multiethnic, having more in common with Western Europe than with Eastern Europe. Attempts to transfer East European secularist diaspora nationalism in any of its forms have been noteworthy in their failure to attract a significant fraction of second- and third-generation American Jews. While American Jews are overwhelmingly secular in that transcendent religious ideas and sentiments play a small role in their lives, they are not ideologically or institutionally secularist. The religious movements have been a success institutionally. On the level of individual commitment and loyalty to Judaism in whatever form, these movements have been a failure, despite claims to the contrary.

In the first generation, Orthodoxy was the default or residual category for American Jews; in the second generation, Conservatism; and in the third, Reform. Few Jews of the first generation were ideologically Orthodox, as few second-generation Jews were committed Conservative Jews, and few third-generation Jews are Reform by conviction. Unlike in the Christian denominations after which the American Jewish pattern by and large is modeled, ideology has played a very small role in American Jewish religious life—except for a small layer of religious professionals and an even smaller proportion of the laity.
The possible exception to the rule is a newly aggressive and self-confident Orthodoxy, which, while few in number (7% of the religiously self-identified American Jewish population), constitutes a "fighting force," unlike the other denominations, which are armies of generals without troops. Jacob Katz has summarized the Orthodox experience in two telling phrases. Rather than being the totality of the Jewish people, Orthodoxy has become "a section of Jewish society" in which "loyalty to tradition was the result of conscious decision." In becoming a willed community, with a sense of being besieged and needing to defend itself not only from an increasingly intrusive gentile society but from Jewish society as well, Orthodoxy retreated within the four cubits of the law, ignoring or denying the messianic ferment that ultimately produced the third Jewish commonwealth.

Conservatism initially saw itself as the heir to the mantle of tradition. At the time of the founding of the Conservative union of synagogues (1913), Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary, referred to the new body both as Conservative and as Orthodox. Schechter and his colleagues hoped to create a united front of traditionalists that would oppose the radicalism espoused by Reform. The newly founded Orthodox Union established itself as the leader of the Americanizing traditionalists, while the Seminary remained traditionalist and so did many of its alumni who served in Conservative pulpits. For the mass of Conservative Jews, however, the driving force of the movement was less a matter of ideology than of nostalgia, albeit in cleaned-up and decorous form. A leading Conservative rabbi remarked, "The suburban synagogue is not a shul, and it has become a service center for its affiliate members rather than a communal center." The functioning Conservative movement actually placed its bet—a bet that it is coming to lose—on the force of sentimentality for an increasingly passive laity and on Wissenschaft as the core of the rabbinic curriculum.

The Reform movement is rapidly becoming the modal Jewish religious identity for the mass of American Jews. However, looking beyond the sheer weight of numbers, one finds thinness and superficiality. Those who identify with the Reform movement tend to affiliate when their children are of an age to attend Sunday School
and disaffiliate shortly thereafter. (This is true to a somewhat lesser degree of the Conservative movement and is not true of Orthodoxy.) As Leonard Fein has noted, “As long as the young are ‘taken care of,’ the temple is, to most of its members, too peripheral an institution for them to get very excited about.” A child-centered movement that is not taken seriously by the parents will ultimately not be taken seriously by the children either. In the New York area, one in seven males affiliated with a Reform synagogue attends any given Sabbath service, as compared with one in four among the Conservatives and four out of five among the Orthodox. The costly services of Reform and Conservative congregations (high salaries for rabbis, cantors, choir leaders, often professional choirs and organists) capture the imagination and loyalty of few of their supporters, while the stripped-down, bargain-priced, pipe-rack Orthodox minyan does much better.

Thus, while there are some significant “survivalist” bright spots, the immediate prospects are not too bright. Philanthropy, once the much-admired hallmark of the Jewish people, has been shifting away from Jewish causes. As Jews become wealthier and further removed from the immigrant period, a larger proportion of their philanthropic dollar goes to non-Jewish causes. While the propensity of Jews to give remains constant, their targets have been shifting away from Jewish purposes. At one time, for the large fraction of Jews who would give (and still does), Jewish communal causes were the only game in town. Now that Jews are welcome participants in major cultural and educational institutions, recognition has become available from those who count in America. Jews wanted to be integrated into American society, but that integration is exacting a price.

Several years ago there were predictions of a Jewish population in the United States late in the twenty-first century of about 2% of its present size. To be sure, extrapolation from current behavior is a dubious enterprise: given the high fertility and statistical insignificance of intermarriage among ultra-Orthodox haredim in contrast to most of the rest of the Jews, it would not be more unreasonable to predict that by an arbitrarily chosen year, most American Jewish males will wear peyot and all married American Jewish women will wear wigs. With a birth rate of about five to six children per
woman (assuming no attrition through assimilation), the ultra-Orthodox population will double in twenty to twenty-five years. Assuming that they now number about one hundred thousand, they would number about 3,200,000 by the year 2110.

With the historians, I feel much safer in predicting the past. If forced to become a prophet, however, I cannot with confidence predict a rosy future for American Jewry as a functioning collectivity. This is not a matter of being a member of the "pessimist school" as opposed to the "optimist school" or the "accommodationist school" as opposed to the "assimilationist school." The data themselves do not make one optimistic. If the Jews are to be understood as an ethnic group, then it is likely that they will enter into what Richard Alba has so felicitously termed the "twilight of ethnicity." They will engage in episodic acts of "symbolic ethnicity" rather than a sustaining regimen of life. Jewish self-definition is that of a religious group, but few Jews are believers in any significant way. As a Reform rabbi stated, "Prayer is still the pretext, but the justification of the act, the real purpose, is now achievement of community, the sense of belonging." Prayer may lead to community, but only for believers or those capable of becoming believers. When the latent function of prayer is made manifest, its transforming power is lost.

As Jews lost the historic stigmata of Jewishness, they created a Jewish culture with new stigmata that they substituted, consciously or not, for the old. More concretely, at one time a Jew could be recognized by what went into his stomach, the clothes on his back, the cut of his hair and beard, the language that came out of his mouth. Now, if we find a group of individuals who are politically liberal, resolutely secular in values, well-educated and prosperous, patrons of the arts (members of museums, art auction attenders, concert goers), devotees of the various forms of psychotherapy, there is a better-than-chance probability that we have come upon a group of Jews. The boundaries of the newer forms of Jewishness are permeable to a far greater degree than were the older. The holy community, the building block of the larger Jewish society, has been shattered. Almost gone is a sense of transcendent Jewish obligation, what the tradition terms mitzvah. The purposes for which Jews gather are less frequently peculiarly Jewish (lest...
they be seen as parochial and not modern) and, ultimately, centrifugal force spins them out of the Jewish orbit. Modernity and secularity, the great loves of modern Jewry, have turned to ashes.

Notes


2. Compared with the Italians, the contemporaries of Jews during the period of great migration, Jews are almost twice as likely to be secular (sample-run based upon the data of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, no date).

3. While for the earliest period we have no direct evidence of the magnitude of Jewish fertility, the enormous growth of Jewish population from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century must have been due to very high fertility, higher even than that of the surrounding gentile populations. See Arthur Ruppin, “The Jewish Population of the World,” in The Jewish People Past and Present, vol. 1 (New York: Jewish Encyclopedia Handbooks, 1946), 348–60. See also Alice Goldstein, “Some Demographic Characteristics of Village Jews in Germany: Nonnenweier, 1800–1931,” in Paul Ritterband, ed., Modern Jewish Fertility (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 112–43.


7. Geraldine Rosenfield, “Jewish College Freshmen: An Analysis of Three


15. It should be clear by now that this is not a peculiarly American phenomenon. Both historical and contemporary evidence from other countries points in the direction of demographic decline for Jewry. The Jewish historical record for late Imperial Germany was similar. See Felix A. Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine Volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Munich, 1911). France serves as a useful contemporary example. Ignoring the problem of intermarriage and whether children are being reared as Jews, we find that as of 1979, Paris Jewry showed a total fertility rate of 2.4, well above the replacement level. However, the total fertility for Parisian Jewish women born in North Africa was 3.1, for women born in other parts of Europe, 2.8, and for native-born Parisian Jewish women, 1.7, significantly below replacement and not far from the total fertility of American Jewish women. Examining the fertility of North African–born Jewish women by marriage cohorts reveals that for those married in the first decade after World War II, fertility was 1.74 times that of native French Jews; for the next decade (1956–1965), it was 1.26; and for the 1966–1975 cohort, the fertility of North African–born Jewish women was exactly equal to that of the native born. Doris Bensimon, “Tendances démographiques des populations juives d’Europe occidentale,” paper prepared for the World Jewish Population Symposia, Jerusalem, 1987, typescript.


16. There is a marked decrease in inhibition concerning intermarriage among younger Jews. Goldscheider, Jewish Continuity and Change, 15, says that those over sixty years of age were twice as likely to be negative about intermarriage as were those eighteen to twenty-nine years of age.

17. Kosmin, et al., 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 14. Without question, from the perspective of American Jewish history the current rate of Jewish exogamy is very high, even though, when compared with other ethnic groups, Jewish intermarriage does not appear to be extraordinarily high. Thus, among Italians, as of the 1980 census, for the cohort born during or before 1920, 58% married Italian spouses while for the cohort born after 1950, 15% married Italians. The comparisons are being made with persons of single ancestry. Taking into account the fact that there are about twice as many Italians as Jews in the United States and that small groups show higher rates of exogamy (since much marriage is random with respect to ethnicity), the "true" Jewish rate is even lower. Richard Alba, Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 13.

18. Kosmin, et al., 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 16. Taking the effects of intermarriage, and thus effectively Jewish fertility, into account, we arrive at an estimate of the net reproduction rate of American Jews as of the late 1960s of 0.7 as compared with a net reproduction rate of 1.2 for American whites generally. A rate of 1.0 indicates zero population growth (net of migration). Clearly the Jews are subzero, that is, the excess of Jewish deaths over births leads to a decline in population (not counting the migratory balance, which at this point in time is a small component). For further discussion of this issue, see U. O. Schmelz, "Jewish Survival," 61-117. With the further increase in intermarriage and decrease in fertility in the twenty years since the 1970 NJPS, it is more than likely that the net reproduction rate of the Jews of America will have declined even further. For a very different perspective on the amount and impact of intermarriage, see Steven M. Cohen, American Assimilation or Jewish Revival (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), particularly 25-42 and 110-25.

Area (New York, 1959), mimeo. These are large districts; if we were to use census tracts, all the numbers would be increased but the trend would remain the same.


