Special Articles
A Century of Reform Judaism in America

by Sefton D. Temkin

The standing information given by the American Jewish Year Book includes a list of "National Jewish Organizations," divided into seven classes. Some are well known and some less significant. What is obvious is that none can speak for American Jewry as a whole on any subject, a fact brought out by the existence of such coordinating agencies as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council and the Synagogue Council of America. The existence of these coordinating agencies indicates, too, a striving for unity, not always explicitly stated and never completely attained. Sixty-one of the "National Jewish Organizations" are grouped under the heading "Religious, Educational," of which the oldest is the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Today it is one among a number of congregational associations. It is the most active, but representative of the Reform element only. In its early days the Union did not derive its distinctive place from the sectarian label, but rather from the fact that it seemed to embody the aspiration for unity among the Jews of America.

The Kehillah

The 24 refugees from Brazil who were given reluctant permission to settle in New Amsterdam in 1654 forthwith established a congregation, Kahal Kadosh Shearith Israel (Holy Congregation of the Remnant of Israel), the New York congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews. The Hebrew word kahal (or kehillah), which was taken into its name, is susceptible to more than one shade of meaning. It can mean "congregation" in the sense usually understood today: one of many localized groups concerned primarily with providing a place of worship and with carrying on those religious and educational activities which in the surrounding society are usually associated with
a place of worship. It can also signify the unit which controls the totality of Jewish group life in a given area, usually a whole town, embracing social functions to which the term "religious" does not ordinarily apply, but necessarily providing a place of worship (or more than one) and religious authorities, as well as facilities for religious instruction and observance. When used in this sense, the word is better translated as "community."

Broadly, the ramifications and authority of the kehillah depended on the nature of the society in which Jews lived. Where they were a group segregated from the general society, the kehillah was an imperium in imperio. Where the Emancipation had given the Jew equal legal status, the functions of the kehillah tended to be narrowed down to those having to do with religion—the factor distinguishing him from his fellow citizens—though here a legacy from pre-Emancipation days usually left to the Jewish congregation a wider range of concerns than those possessed by the neighboring churches.

Though the disabilities imposed on them by law were few and the environment lent itself to social assimilation, the first American kehillot, while based on a house of worship, embraced a wide range of community functions: the provision of kosher food, burial, relief of the poor, education, relations with secular authorities. Because of the range of the congregation's functions, exclusion from it was a serious matter; and with that ultimate sanction at its disposal, the congregation could discipline a recalcitrant or unaffiliated individual. Numbers were small; settlements were separated from each other by considerable distances; growth was slow; suspicion of the outside world, sustained by memories of past disasters, reinforced cohesion. A single minhag (ritual usage), that of the Sephardim, prevailed. Circumstances (including the non-hierarchical character of the Jewish religious system) did not call for any departure from the established European practice of basing the totality of Jewish life on the local kehillah. And as the Jews of Europe had little by way of national organizations (we are dealing with a period of time in which the nation-state was far from being the rule), there existed no institution concerned with organizing Jewish life in North America.

**Divisive Factors**

Several factors contributed to the fading away of the all-embracing kehillah.
First was growth in numbers. In 1815 the long-drawn-out Napoleonic wars came to an end. The channels for migration were opened up, as was the vast interior of the North American continent. Various causes united to impel large numbers of German-speaking Jews to seek their homes in the United States. New communities sprang up, and existing communities multiplied in size. In particular, the opening of the Erie Canal (1825) accelerated the growth of New York as the port through which the produce of the West was exported and immigrants from Europe entered the United States, and in which the largest and most diverse Jewish community was established.

The Jewish community in America, consisting of some 3,000 in 1818, doubled its number by 1826 and rose to about 15,000 by 1840. At the same time, it rapidly assumed the diverse character of the country as a whole, consisting of Jews of English, Dutch, German, Polish, Bohemian, Russian, Spanish, and Portuguese origins, as well as of native Americans.¹ A conservative estimate gives the number of Jews in New York in 1825 as 500. In 1840 it was 7,000.²

The origin and growth of New York Jewry are evident from the formation of new congregations and their composition. B'nai Jeshurun, a breakaway from the congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, was established by English, Dutch, German, and Polish Jews in 1825; Anshe Chesed by German, Polish, and Dutch in 1828; Ohabey Zedek by Polish and German in 1835; Shaarey Zedek by Polish in 1839, and Shaarey Shamayim by German Jews in 1839.³ No longer was there a limited number of congregations whose members fell in with the Sephardi ritual. The newcomers were not well-tutored in Judaism and the relative significance of its many observances. They remembered the ritual which had prevailed in the localities from which they had migrated, and they expected to see them duplicated in the New World. The rapid multiplication of congregations within a single city in the short period from 1825 to 1840 was not repeated outside New York; but many cities, as far west as Chicago and as far south as New Orleans, did see the establishment of Jewish congregations for the first time.⁴

⁴Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 271.
In the present age of rapid communications, of highly developed institutional life, of pervading social homogenization, it is difficult to visualize, and equally hard to exaggerate, the kind of problems these pioneers faced. Old-world stock had been uprooted and was being transplanted into the New World. If the areas in which they settled were not near wilderness, and often they were, they experienced all the problems of mushroom growth and the absorption of newcomers in large numbers; for this was a period when many immigrants, gentile as well as Jewish, came from Germany. Each individual had to cope with the primary task of making a home and a living in the strange environment. Then he had to face the task of absorbing a strange language and grasping a different culture, all the time outpaced in his own household by children whose capacity to absorb what the New World had to offer was not held in restraint by memories of the old.

**Contrasts With the Old World**

As much as anywhere else, American freedom and the lack of order as an accompaniment must have been felt in the sphere of religion. In Germany, the wars of religion were two centuries behind, and the axiom *cuius regio eius religio* had long provided a basis for governmental ordering of denominational affairs and the settlement of relations between religions. In America, the revolutionary doctrine of separation of church and state held sway, and complete freedom of religious expression and association in a volatile pioneer society opened the door to extravagant novelties in religious life and schisms within existing denominations.

But the turmoil went deeper than organizational differences. For Christians, the age was one of religious revival, and the multiplication of sects was an outcome of a renewed fervor in religion. Missionary work at home and abroad increased, the organizations responsible often crossing denominational lines. The American Bible Society (1816) and the American Tract Society (1825) drew support from all Protestants.\(^5\) The Protestant denominations were also active in founding theological seminaries and secular colleges, the latter particularly in the West.\(^6\)

---


\(^6\)Ibid., p. 252.
This activity had no counterpart among the Jews of America. At first they did not have the numbers to sustain it, but, even when numbers grew, they were not impelled by any tradition in this field. Throughout their history, the Christian denominations had been accustomed to a church polity extending beyond the parish, and in some cases it was a representative of the European mother-church who organized the American branch. Jews had no such polity: they had no "mother-church," no ecclesiastical hierarchy, no regular synods or conferences, no missionary societies. Each kehillah, using that term in the broader sense, was independent of the others, though all accepted the law laid down in Bible and Talmud and codified in the Shulhan 'Arukh.

Within that framework were variations in minhag, the two main streams being those of the Ashkenazim (Central and East European Jews) and Sephardim (Spanish and Mediterranean Jews), each with its own innumerable local variants. The authority in these matters was the local rabbi, though the kehillah and its rabbi might on their own initiative accept the opinion of another rabbi. Above all, this system had developed within ghetto walls. The European kehillot enjoyed legal autonomy and could impose sanctions on those who disobeyed their rulings. This power, as well as the precarious situation of the Jew in a hostile environment, curbed any inclination to flout the discipline of the kehillot.

Such factors did not operate in free America. Apart from absence of compulsion, there was an absence of rabbis, and rulings on rabbinic law had to be sought from outside. Shearith Israel naturally sought the opinion of the Sephardi authorities of Amsterdam and London. When B’nai Jeshurun, New York’s first Ashkenazi congregation, was established in 1825, it used the Chief Rabbi of London as its authority. The congregations were governed by laymen, and the task of reading prayers and teaching children was discharged by men of uncertain status and education, who presumably chose this calling because they were not suited for more lucrative work. Moreover, the circumstances of the transplantation from Europe were such that Jews from different parts of Europe, accustomed to divergent minhagim, now found themselves living side by side in America. Trivial as the differences in practice might seem when viewed against the philosophy of religion and the history of Judaism, they assumed great importance in the eyes of the unlearned and could lead to discord within congregations and strained relations between them.
Beginnings of Reform

To add to the confusion, the authority of the Shulhan 'Arukh began to be questioned. In 1818 a Reform temple was founded in Hamburg, and thereafter the question of Reform was in the air in Germany. It therefore could be expected that in the New World, where the situation of the Jews was revolutionary in every respect, religious reform would be taken up.

Thus, to the problems of acculturation and organization facing the new American Jewish community was added one of a more directly theological character. The discipline necessary to maintain the old-style kehillah was lacking. The openness of the New World turned the weapon of excommunication into a museum piece. The Bill of Rights made the separation of church and state an axiom of American life. The supervising hand of the ruling power, before whose disdain Jews would be inclined to compose their differences among themselves and which, in any event, was instinctively averse to anything that subverted authority, was withdrawn. A religious congregation of any denomination was an association, and association, like secession from it, was free—a matter of individual decision.

Of course, the different congregations growing up in New York were free to establish some form of local union which, while preserving the autonomy of its separate units, would undertake tasks, originally the responsibility of the first congregation (e.g. charity, burial, kashrut supervision), which really belonged to the community as a whole. But that would have required a high degree of self-discipline and constitutional expertness which clearly were lacking in a population of pioneer individualists. None had been called upon to devise such a structure in Europe. Besides, this need arose at a time when the currents within American life were flowing in another direction.

The era was one of sectionalism in politics and schism in religion. Christian denominations, long accustomed to a regulated church organization, were riven by fissiparous tendencies. It is hardly surprising then that the removal of Old World restraints was not conducive to the immediate creation by Jews of new forms of union. Thus, as the Jewish community of New York developed, it ceased to be based on the congregation. New congregations did come into being, but they were restricted in scope and diminished in authority; they
were associations among other associations, serving those who chose to join them, but leaving to the non-congregational bodies that now sprang up, or to private enterprise, functions which could be handled just as easily outside a house of worship. The fact that such services as charity, burial, the provision of kosher food, and perhaps education were provided independently of congregational life removed incentives for joining a congregation. Moreover, sometimes such facets of Jewish life as the construction and maintenance of a Jewish hospital assumed dimensions going far beyond that of the synagogue; they had broad appeal in that they involved direct human benevolence untrammeled by abstract theology or by Old World differences in ritual—an appeal which could find roots in the teachings of Judaism and ample nurture in the soil of practical-minded America.

Something of this spirit brought into being a new species of Jewish association, the fraternal order. B’nai B’rith was founded in New York in 1843 as a membership organization to transcend the divisions in Jewish life. "Benevolence, Brotherly Love and Harmony" was its motto. "B’nai B’rith has taken upon itself the mission of uniting Israelites in the work of promoting their highest interests and those of humanity" were the opening words of the preamble to its constitution. This union was "to enable them to carry out matters of common concern and general interest." By 1851 it had spread to other cities. It had District Grand Lodges and, at the top, a Constitution Grand Lodge. B’nai B’rith was followed by other fraternal orders and inevitably became a sectional organization itself.

Thus it was that in New York the Jewish community came to have no integrated structure, but to be merely an agglomeration of institutions working in harmony, in rivalry or with indifference toward one another, as circumstances occasioned.

Outside New York this change in the pattern of Jewish community organization was less obvious. Numbers were smaller, and, as a result, there was less scope for either the multiplication of congregations or the growth of large noncongregational organizations. But the attitudes of the ever growing metropolitan community also affected the smaller places, especially as many of the members of these communities had earlier lived in New York.

Religious Leadership

Common to all these communities was the problem of religious education and leadership. Rabbis and scholars preferred to remain
within reach of their houses of learning in the Old World. Jewish religious law prescribed no rite of ordination for the officiant at religious services, and congregations had to make do with whoever offered himself. The talent available was of no high order, but even supermen would have found the tasks daunting. In the New World respect was accorded to the man of action rather than to the scholar, and, above all, there was a conflict between the generations, which was not less harassing because it took the obvious form of a difference of language, and was harder to resolve because of the absence of textbooks in English. The task of recruiting or training rabbis and teachers and of publishing textbooks was obviously beyond the resources, mental as well as financial, of any single congregation.

There was one man who saw beyond the problems of his own parish and articulated the needs of the American Jewish community as a whole. Isaac Leeser, born in Germany, came to the United States in 1824 and, after five years of earning a living as a clerk, became hazzan (minister) of Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia. Working by himself, Leeser made a beginning at providing the American Jewish community with the tools for the acculturation of Judaism to the American scene. Though lacking the authority of a rabbi, he began to preach regularly in English. He prepared and published translations of the Bible and both Ashkenazi and Sephardi prayer books. He wrote textbooks for children.

From 1843 until his death in 1868, Leeser issued a monthly magazine, The Occident. His publication brought him correspondence from all the Jewish communities in the country, and he sought to learn more about their needs by regular visits. Seeing the need for a native rabbinate, a year before his death he managed to open a rabbinical seminary. Most of the things he advocated came to pass in the name of others; none took root in the form in which he tried to plant them. Though Orthodox, Leeser felt that some practices tended to divide congregation from congregation and to mar the service. And since

---


these were matters of custom, not of law, he was willing to allow changes in externals to enhance the dignity of the ritual.

Early in his ministry Leeser perceived that American Jewry must unite if it was to tackle its problems. In 1841 he formulated a program for a federation of synagogues which, while guaranteeing congregational autonomy, would deal with trans-congregational problems. The attempt came to naught; the resolution of Congregation Beth Elohim in Charleston, S.C., in voting against the plan may be quoted as illustrating the prevailing sectionalism and fear of national organization: “All conventions founded or created for the establishment of any ecclesiastical authority whatever . . . are alien to the spirit and genius of the age in which we live and are wholly inconsistent with the spirit of American Liberty.”

In 1847 there was another attempt to add a unifying factor, less extensive in scope yet more pregnant with the dangers complained of by the Charleston Congregation. A rabbinic court (Bet Din) was established in New York. The leading spirit was Max Lilienthal (1815–1882), a German-trained rabbi who was then serving three New York congregations. Among the members of the Bet Din, which met on one occasion only, was Isaac Mayer Wise, who had arrived from Bohemia in 1846 and served as rabbi in Albany. Wise became a consistent, forceful champion of union and he made his own a specific task assigned to him by the still-born Bet Din: the framing of a uniform liturgy for the synagogues of America.

Adherence to prayer books brought from different parts of Europe was probably a fertile cause of dissension within and between American congregations. Would the existence of a “book of common prayer,” produced by a body which could lay claim to the respect of all congregations, be the harbinger of a single Jewish church? And if a prayer book was stamped with the authority of such a body, what matter if it diverged from those used in Europe? The New World was as entitled to its minhag as were the various parts of the old. The question of a uniform liturgy was always raised in connection with attempts to unite the congregations.

---

9 Davis, Emergence . . . , p. 119.

10 Occident, March 1849, p. 616.
A "Call to Israelites"

Next came a joint effort by Wise and Leeser. A large part of The Occident for December 1848 was devoted to a "Call to Israelites" by Wise, in which he dwelt on the anarchy and ignorance prevailing in American Jewish life and the indifference which they produced. He called for an assembly of "ministers and other Israelites" to meet in Philadelphia in the following April, "to consider what should be done for the Union, progress and welfare of Israel." Leeser backed the proposal enthusiastically, but the response was inadequate.

By this time Wise had become identified as a Reformer, and probably fear of Reform tendencies was an additional factor leading congregations to hesitate to fall in under his banner. While the projected Philadelphia meeting was still a possibility and the chance of enlisting the traditionalists still existed, Wise emphasized that his conception of Reform implied no rejection of authority:

I am a reformer, as much so as our age requires; because I am convinced that none can stop the stream of time, none can check the swift wheels of the age; but I have always the Halacha for my basis; I never sanction a reform against the Din. I am a reformer, if the people long for it, but then I seek to direct the public mind on the path of the Din; but I never urge my principles upon another nor do I commence to start a reform in a Synagogue.  

Undaunted by the indifference of the community, Wise lost no opportunity to champion the idea of a union of congregations under whose auspices American rabbis would be trained, an American prayer book produced, and needful reforms authorized. His style was discursive rather than exact; now one desideratum and now another would take first place, but the subjects were always the same. In 1854 he moved to Cincinnati, "Queen City of the West," and became rabbi of one of the country's leading congregations. Immediately he launched The Israelite, a weekly in which he could expound his views, and followed it with a German sister-journal, Die Deborah. Then he started the Zion Collegiate Institution, intended both to train rabbis and to provide higher secular education, only to meet with failure. In 1855 he returned to the attack and, together with a number of colleagues,
issued a summons to a meeting to be held in Cleveland on October 14, 1855. The summons stated that the conference was to deliberate on the following points:

1. The articles of a Union of American Israel in theory and practice.
2. A plan to organize a regular synod, consisting of delegates chosen by the congregations and societies, whose powers, privileges, and duties shall be defined, to be sent to the several congregations for their approbation.
3. To discuss and refer to a committee a plan for a Minhag America to be reported to the synod at its first session.
4. A plan for scholastic education in the lower and higher branches of learning.
5. Other propositions either sent in by congregations, or made by the ministers or delegates at the conference.  

There was nothing in the summons to suggest that Reform was to be the basis of the proposed action, though naturally Wise's initiative aroused suspicions among the Orthodox that such might be the outcome. More ominous in the atmosphere of unlimited congregational independence, plans for a "Union of American Israel," "a regular synod," and "a Minhag America" suggested the desire to set up a uniform system of ecclesiastical control, and the decision of the conference to call a regular synod and to prepare a uniform ritual did nothing to dissipate the apprehension. Wise was able to appease the Orthodox Leeser by bringing forward a "platform" which acknowledged not only the divine character of the Bible but also the authority of the Talmud as a guide in all matters of practice and study. And this the conference accepted. Thus a group of rabbis had come to an agreement on the fundamentals of Judaism, and one could understand the participants in the Cleveland conference believing, as it broke up, that they had laid the foundations of unity in American Israel.

Union or Reform?

The reverse was the case. The agreement reached at Cleveland led to discord such as American Jewry had not known before. The suspicions of the Orthodox were not allayed, and, what was worse, Wise's acceptance of the authority of the Talmud was denounced bitterly by Reformers as treachery to the cause of Reform. His fiercest antagonist was David Einhorn, who, because of his liberalism, had been denied

---

the possibility of preaching in Europe and who had arrived in Baltimore shortly before the Cleveland conference. To Einhorn the principles of Reform were all-important, and he was as dogmatic as were the Orthodox in his refusal to barter them away. Whereas Wise wanted to establish a broadly based union, believing that out of it an American interpretation of Judaism acceptable to a large cross-section of the community would emerge, Einhorn could not conceive of a union unless the parties first hammered out the ideology on which they were prepared to unite.

Einhorn became the leader of a group of rabbis who had been educated at German universities and had been thoroughly imbued with the doctrines of Reform Judaism that were being argued in Europe. Their congregations were located mainly on the Eastern seaboard, and they looked for inspiration to Germany rather than the American continent. The rough-hewn Wise aroused their disdain for his intellectual deficiencies and ideological infirmities. They suspected that a desire for his own elevation lay behind his persistent advocacy of a union. Wise’s strength lay in the Mid-West. He mixed with the people, traveled regularly to outlying congregations, and knew their problems. Above all, he was thoroughly American, insisting on the need for American-trained rabbis, and repeatedly took issue with those who would Germanize the American synagogue.

The failure of the Cleveland conference effectively set back the chances of union, and the bitter dispute between Wise and Einhorn to which it gave rise may have weakened the influence of the synagogue altogether and enhanced the prestige of those charitable and fraternal organizations which performed deeds of practical benevolence and were not tainted by the charges and countercharges of spiritual leaders.

The Cleveland conference had appointed Wise a member of a committee to produce a uniform ritual, and, though the synod to which that ritual was to have been submitted never came into being, he treated the mandate as continuing in force. The outcome was the Minhag America prayer book, a curtailed version of the traditional Hebrew liturgy, with English and German translations. Through Wise’s personal influence, Minhag America was used in many congregations in the South and West. Einhorn, convinced that the times called for a radical reconstruction of Judaism, produced another prayer book, ‘Olat Tamid, which discarded much of the language and forms of the past and contained many newly composed German
prayers. Now the rivalry between the two rabbis often focused on their prayer books.

The Board of Delegates

A few years after the failure at Cleveland, a representative Jewish organization was born, but the fractional support it received suggests that personal and regional rivalries were an important obstacle to a union of forces. On November 27, 1859, a conference of representatives of 25 congregations in 14 cities resolved to create the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. These steps came in the wake of the "Mortara Affair" in Italy, which had brought to notice the absence of a representative body able to communicate to the United States government the views of the American Jewish community. The Board’s objectives—to gather statistical information, to promote education and literature, to watch over events at home and abroad, (in Europe, it cooperated closely with the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Board of Deputies of British Jews), and to establish a "court of arbitration" for the settlement of disputes between congregations without recourse to litigation—suggested no intention to establish a religious hierarchy.

The main support for the new organization came from traditionally-minded congregations in New York and Philadelphia. Although its concerns were directed more to the relations of Jews to the non-Jewish world than to matters making for religious differences among Jews, both Wise and Einhorn found reason to voice their opposition.

However, the Board did give its support to one venture of a theological character. In 1864 Isaac Leeser succeeded in establishing Maimonides College for the training of rabbis, the first of its kind in America, and two years later it received the sponsorship of the Board of Delegates. The institution drew little support. Wise, who had never ceased to argue that a theological seminary was one of the first requirements of American Jewry, heaped derision on Maimonides College. After Leeser’s death, it was shut down.

The Board of Delegates had scarcely come into being when the Civil War overshadowed attempts to organize the American Jewish community. Hampered from the beginning by sectional and personal

13Ibid., p. 18.
jealousies, the Board never recovered its original impetus, and again the quest after unity ran aground.

Forces for Unity

Heavy as was its toll of life and property, the Civil War stimulated more than it retarded the expansion of the United States.

... The question of national unity was settled once for all as a political theory, and it was to be settled even more effectively by a national economic development on a vaster scale than had yet been conceived. The removal of all barriers to inter-State commerce through the rapid extension of the railway system... the opening up of the grain States west of the Mississippi to the limits of the arable land; the utilization of the grazing facilities, and the exploitation of the mineral resources of the Rocky Mountains and the arid plains; the transformation of the Pacific slope from a series of mining camps to an important source of agricultural and forest supplies; the expansion of eastern industry in response to the discovery of the new resources, to a continuous series of new inventions, and to the increasing market; the discovery of prosperity in the South... these were the causes which operated during the thirty years after the Civil War to bind all sections of the country together with the bonds of mutual commercial interest. ... The country bulked bigger to all sections and classes; enterprises hitherto considered magnificent now became ordinary; and the confidence in the future, which encouraged the spirit of daring speculative enterprise, was at the same time the common possession and the common pride of the whole people.14

In this dynamic economy many a peddler became a storekeeper, many a storekeeper became the owner of an emporium, and many a workshop became a factory. The post-Civil War era can hardly be described as one of high idealism. (Its shortcomings were openly admitted in some of the statements printed in the early proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.) Nevertheless, the country was forging ahead. The Jewish communities were increasing in size and shared in the prosperity of the North. As the railway network became closer, communities became less distant, and the waging of a successful war in defense of the Union strengthened the centripetal forces in subsidiary branches of national life.

Wise had never ceased advocating the need for a union of congregations, a common liturgy, and a seminary for training American rabbis. His two weeklies continued to be a platform for this

cause, and he continued to expound his ideas on his visits to the communities. The Cincinnati Jewish community had prospered greatly, and in 1868 Wise's congregation inaugurated a magnificent new temple. In every way he appeared able to move from a position of strength.

Wise and His Opponents

In February 1869, either because he had definite plans or was trying to stir interest, Wise announced in *The Israelite* the convening, that summer in Cincinnati, of "a conference . . . to be composed of all Hebrew ministers, teachers and representatives of the congregations and Young Mens' Associations." The announcement was made in a brief paragraph, without rhetoric or exhortation. All he added to the bare facts was: "There are now before the public a number of important questions which can be disposed of by a conference only."

The exhortation came in full measure a week later. In an article entitled "Our American Israel," Wise called upon rabbis and presidents to "act speedily and together." The needs he specified as requiring concerted action were for Jews to express their view in the conflict over the use of state funds for sectarian education; to provide themselves with American preachers and teachers (here he lamented over the Germanizing of the American synagogue, a favorite thrust at the Eastern Reformers), and "to bring system and uniformity into the religious school, in plan, system, subjects. . . ."

Wise did not use the word "Reform," though from a passage quoted later it might be inferred that reform of worship was one of his objectives. Neither did he mention *Minhag America*, which he loved to advocate and whose acceptance in any congregation he never failed to record. But he did emphasize once more the need for uniformity:

... The synagogue . . . must be placed on a footing of uniformity and must be brought into harmony with the spirit of the age. It matters not to us, which particular system of public worship may prove most acceptable to the congregation, if it be only in harmony with liberal principles and American wants. Uniformity and firmness are things we need. We need uniformity, that the Israelite of any place find himself at home in any other place of worship which he may chance to visit; that books and music can be stereotyped and sold at such low figures, that they become

---

15 *Israelite*, February 26, 1869, p. 4.
accessible to all; that the divine worship can be taught in the schools. We need firmness in the form of worship to give it holiness, and commanding respect.\textsuperscript{16}

The emphasis was on practical problems rather than on theological correctness or sectarian labels. Still, the possibility that uniformity of action might be expected was left open.

Wise's writing appeared to indicate discouragement because his announcement of a conference had not brought the overwhelming response to which, in his view, the urgency of the matter to be discussed entitled it. In the April 30 issue of \textit{Die Deborah}, he published a letter from a Dr. Schlesinger of Albany, urging him to write again about the necessity of a conference. Commenting on it in that week's \textit{Israelite}, he alluded to the "personal abuse" he had suffered at the hands of the opponents of the Cleveland conference. More followed, about his being a scapegoat and the object of causeless hatred, leading up to the declaration that if 25 congregations made it clear they wanted a conference, a conference would be called. This was followed by further strong exhortations for action and the last-minute information, received after the article had been set in type, that the congregations of Detroit and Memphis had resolved to join in the call for a conference.\textsuperscript{17}

On May 21 Wise was able to announce that altogether 11 of the 25 congregations had agreed to participate. By this time he had assembled a conference committee consisting of Rabbis Max Lilienthal (Cincinnati), Leopold Kleeberg (Louisville), and Jacob Mayer (Cleveland), and Messrs. Henry Mack and Louis Freiberg (both of Cincinnati).\textsuperscript{18} No word in any of the printed propaganda suggested that members were to be drawn from Western communities only, but the "East" had no share in the arrangements.

Wise's movement was thus gathering strength when the Eastern Reformers—German-speaking rabbis who, while there had been no public name-calling, had surely not forgotten Wise's criticism of their \textit{Deutschtum}—without any overt warning decided to move. As in 1855, the result was that, instead of seeing the fulfillment of his aspirations

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, March 5, 1869, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, April 30, 1869, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, May 21, 1869, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
for a united American Judaism under his leadership, Wise found himself deflected again and involved in a strife on a grander scale than any he had yet experienced. On June 1, 1869, Samuel Adler of Temple Emanu-El in New York and David Einhorn issued a "call" inviting "Die theologisch-gebildeten Kollegen, welche dem entschiedenen religiösen Fortschritte huldigen" to a conference to be held after the forthcoming Holy Days, with the object of securing an understanding between rabbis who were striving for the same ends on the principles—not the form—of the modern ritual and the solutions of practical religious questions, particularly those relating to the law of marriage.

Contrasts between their approach and Wise's appeared at every turn. The stress on "theologically educated colleagues" may imply disdain for the "mixed multitude" whom Wise was proposing to call together. Where Wise wanted a conference for the purpose of uniting American Israel, the theologians had in mind the strengthening of a particular theological tendency; and even so, less to encourage practical measures than to establish the formulas of a denominational standpoint.

The issue of this call must have presented Wise with a problem, but for the time being he showed unusual restraint. All he said was that he did not consider the call "for a meeting of rabbis of the progressive school" to be in opposition to the conference of all congregations and their ministers which he advocated.

The Eastern conference, with 11 rabbis participating, opened on November 3 in the study of Dr. Samuel Hirsch in Philadelphia. Wise did not attend; he had gone South and did not return until the third session. Einhorn clearly dominated the conference. He had arrived with a set of proposals in printed form, and these were made the basis of discussion. The resolutions that emerged showed little substantial difference from the form in which Einhorn proposed them.

19"Theologically educated colleagues who favor decided religious progress." This conference was conducted in German. A translation of the proceedings, with an introduction by this writer, appears under the title The New World of Reform (Bridgeport, Conn.: Media Judaica, 1973).

20This is made abundantly clear in the editorial article in Jewish Times (New York), for June 1, 1869, accompanying the "call."

21Israelite, June 11, 1869.
A Radical Program

In fact, they followed the line of thinking Einhorn had first articulated in connection with the Frankfurt rabbinical conference twenty-four years earlier: The members of the conference did not hope for the restoration of the Jewish state under a descendant of David. The destruction of the Second Jewish Commonwealth was not a punishment, but part of a divine plan to disperse the Jews so that they might realize their mission of leading the nations to a true knowledge of God. The destruction of the Second Temple had once and for all consigned priesthood and sacrifices to the past. Any distinction between Cohanim and other Jews was meaningless. The mission of Israel was to be emphasized. Belief in bodily resurrection had no religious foundation. Though the cultivation of Hebrew was desirable, it was unintelligible to the vast majority of Jews and therefore must give way to prayer in language that was understood. There were also a number of resolutions dealing with marriage and divorce: the formulae of the marriage ceremony were to reflect the equal status of the bride, and the existing benedictions were to be replaced; polygamy, the special marriage laws concerning priests, halizah, and get were abolished, and presumption of death of a marriage partner was to be matter for the law of the land.

Wise had been pressing for a conference and a synod which would make for a broad union of American Jews. By contrast, Einhorn and his followers set out to assert a doctrinal standpoint; and though they doubtless hoped that it would attract adherents and even win a majority, to get the majority under the roof of a single organization was not their first concern. The line of division was similar to that in the controversies following the Cleveland conference.

In the discussion of doctrinal issues, Wise had not forgotten his practical plans. He proposed that the rabbis meet in Cincinnati the following year, and that an assembly of the congregations be called at the same time. The proposal to meet in Cincinnati was accepted.

---

unanimously. But the idea of an assembly of the congregations drew from Einhorn the reply that the congregations still were not ready to rise to the loftiness of Judaism; that the theologically-educated rabbis would never be able to move forward if in their debates on religious questions people participated who had the right to vote but possessed no theological knowledge; that even in the two New York Reform congregations a large part of the membership was not yet ready for the rabbis’ conclusions; and that the Leipzig synod of that summer, which was unable to muster support for its proposed biennial cycle of Torah readings, furnished striking evidence of the deplorable results that a meeting of congregations would produce for them. Einhorn feared that the more advanced congregations would fall back in order to produce agreement with the more hesitant.

Despite this rebuff, Wise continued to participate in the conference. In fact, he presided over the concluding sessions, and he and Lilienthal were chosen to constitute the committee charged with making arrangements for the 1870 meeting in Cincinnati.

Wise Backs Away

The attempts by the Jewish Times (New York) to explain the real significance of the resolutions adopted by the Philadelphia conference bore out Einhorn’s suspicion that the congregations were not yet ripe for the viewpoint for which he was able to get the endorsement of his colleagues. The resolutions adopted had nothing to do with the solution of problems confronting the layman; they rather attacked institutions he was prepared to respect, if for no other reason than that they did not interfere with him much. To him it mattered little that the blessings used in the marriage ceremony expressed ideas that rang strange; and he found offensive declarations condemning this time-honored ritual.

The publication of reports of the conference caused something of a sensation, and there was reason to believe that displeasure was felt in Cincinnati. Wise’s own concern to disengage himself from responsibility for the Philadelphia resolutions and the conservative standpoint later expressed by the president of his congregation suggest that he felt embarrassed. Two years before the Philadelphia conference, his reflections on “Some Lessons” drawn from visits just made to other congregations were typical of his middle-of-the-road point of view. After paying his respects to “the benumbed” conservatism, “the
congealed and crystallized dogmatism and ritualism, commonly but falsely called orthodoxy," he addressed himself to the other extreme:

Our travels teach another lesson still. Our people are much too pious and conservative in matters of religion, to be hurled and precipitated into extreme, radical and impracticable measures. Nobody believes that one must smoke cigars on Sabbath and eat pork in vindication of principle, in order to be considered an honest friend of Israel's consecrated cause. Nobody believes that any reform is necessary or lawfully admissible, unless it elevates Judaism and endears it to the thousands of Israel. Innovations for the sake of innovation, and reforms for the sake of reform, find no favor with our people, who, thank God, care little for the whims of fashion, and are pervaded with the desire to remodel the external appearance of Judaism to correspond with the modern standard of taste and the acknowledged canon of criticism. Extreme and radical measures in matters of religion, are naturally as odious to our people as is the attempt to Germanize the synagogue, and make Judaism a stranger in this land of freedom.

This brought him to an expression of his views on Hebrew:

We are Jews, and still steadfastly remain in the path of our fathers; we are the bearers and preservers of the great and holy book which God entrusted to our care and safekeeping; therefore we will preserve the Hebrew language in our schools and in our temples, the main portion of divine service must be in Hebrew, the balance of prayers, hymns, instructions and admonitions must be in the vernacular of the country.24

Einhorn, seeing things in a cold, clear light, could be aloof from popular sentiment, confident that the strength of his feeling and the rightness of his position would draw others to his lofty heights. Unlike Einhorn, Wise was always contriving to gain popular support. Wise was convinced that the middle road was popular, and soon after Philadelphia he returned to his old position of union above party.

... To us all parties in Israel appear necessary. The camp must have a vanguard, and there are our radicals who constantly point onward and march forward. It must have a rear-guard, and these are our conservatives who hold on to all the remains of past centuries. It must have its center, and these are the liberal masses of our people who prevent the rear and van from falling apart into sects or hostile factions ... We will not shout Amen to the resolves of the one or the other side. But we will hear all of them, work with each as far as we can go without the sacrifice of principle, and remain among the mighty columns of the center. ...25

---

24Israelite, June 14, 1867.
25Ibid., December 24, 1870, p. 8.
By repeating what he had said time and again, Wise showed that his participation in the Philadelphia conference, with its definite, not to say narrow, approach, had made no difference.

In February 1870 Wise was sufficiently confident to press for "the necessity of a general convention of all American Jewish congregations" without making any allusion to what had been decided in Philadelphia. He then moved on to another course and began a brief flirtation with the Board of Delegates, though he had previously refused to associate with it. He did so with a view to taking over Maimonides College, which he had previously denounced as a fraud. In June, when the conference which had begun in Philadelphia was due to resume in Cincinnati, he suddenly announced his own conference. The emphasis was on union of worship to be achieved with his prayer book.

On and after Monday, July 11, 1870, in the city of Cleveland, O., the rabbis favorable to the preservation and further promulgation of the MINHAG AMERICA, will meet for the purpose of revising and re-editing the said Minhag America Books. All rabbis, ministers, or representatives of congregations favoring the union of synagogal worship, are respectfully invited to attend the said conference, . . .

This move put an end to any expectations that the Philadelphia conference could lead to some plan of practical action. It widened the rift between Wise and the Eastern Reformers, and put an end to the prospect that a group of rabbis might form the vanguard leading a united American Jewry.

Thirteen rabbis attended the July meeting in Cleveland, which, not completing its work, decided to resume on October 24. New York was chosen as the meeting place to secure the participation of the Eastern Reformers. It is doubtful whether much could have been accomplished in conciliating Einhorn and his friends, but the bumptious note struck by Wise was not likely to help: "The Minhag America," he insisted, "will be the liturgy of the American Israelites in spite of all private interests and private whims." Wise said that the congregations all

---

26Ibid., February 18, 1870, p. 8.
27Ibid., June 17, 1870, p. 8.
28Ibid., July 22, 1870, p. 8; the theme was repeated in the issue for the following week.
over the country wanted "one prayer book for all," but that the Philadelphia Conference "refused, positively refused, to comply with the wish of the congregations for one united liturgy."  

That, he continued, was why the Cleveland meeting had been called—"to make an end to the synagogal anarchy and confusion; to give to the congregations one prayer book for all, exactly as they want it, and to revise the Minhag America to become the Minhag of the American Synagogue."  

Rabbinical Controversies

The Eastern Reformers denounced Wise, and the New York meeting took place without them. But when the meeting decided that the name of the prayer book should be changed, Wise withdrew in anger and had to be coaxed back. Though called for the limited purpose of revising Minhag America, the conference extended its concern also to other matters. It resolved to meet in Cincinnati in 1871; when it did, there were 27 participants.

At Wise's insistence the conference adopted a scheme to establish itself as a permanent body, the Union of Israelite Congregations of America, among whose objectives were to be: to establish and maintain a seminary, to provide congregations with Bibles and textbooks, and to support weak congregations. The Union was to be governed by a synod, to meet biennially and to consist of the representatives of affiliated congregations, their rabbis, preachers, or teachers of religion. A committee of five, appointed by the conference, was to call the synod into being as soon as 20 congregations, "adhering to reformed principles and none others," and with at least 2,000 members, should have resolved to enter the Union. The conference also considered in some detail a curriculum for the proposed rabbinical seminary. It resolved to meet annually, except in the synodal year, and the 1872 meeting was fixed for the second Monday after Shavu'ot, in Chicago.

29Ibid., August 12, 1870, p. 8.
30Ibid.
31Jewish Times, August 26, 1870, p. 408; October 14, 1870, p. 520.
32Israelite, November 11, 1870, p. 8.
Here then was what Wise had been fighting for ever since his arrival in the country 25 years earlier. The absence of Einhorn and his friends did not trouble him—for one thing, he did not have to part with his beloved Minhag America. He had organized a permanent rabbinical conference, and it had decided to call into being a congregational union, a synod, and a theological college. It also was coordinating plans for the conduct of religious schools, the supply of textbooks, and the organization of circuit preaching. It had “finally settled the liturgical questions.” Well might he say towards the end of three long columns of enthusiastic summary, “The Conference was a brilliant success.”

But the calm gave way to a storm as fierce as any in which Wise had ever been involved. Instead of the speedy accomplishment of the conference’s intentions there was another interlude of violent recrimination, which doubtless led the “old hands” to recall the meeting of 1855 and to prophesy similar results.

It appears that, in the course of an excited debate, Wise used language implying a denial of the idea of a personal God. This was reported in the daily press and evoked a strong denunciation of Wise, signed by 14, mostly Eastern, rabbis. The declaration goaded Wise into a frenzy, and he returned the attack with interest. The decisions taken in 1870 withered in the fire, and not even Wise’s energy could breathe life into them. No move was made to set up the synod, and the appointed day in 1872 went by without the conference of rabbis having met.

The Laity Intervene

At this stage the laity began to act. In September 1871 Wise’s congregation, B’nai Jeshurun, in general meeting, endorsed the scheme for a Union of Israelite Congregations of America, propounded at the rabbinical conference shortly before, but, amid the controversies between the rabbis, the project made no headway. At the next general meeting the congregation took it up in a more decided manner and also, as far as can be judged, took it out of Wise’s hands. The congregation’s president, Moritz Loth, alluded to the need for a Jewish theological faculty to train rabbis. He suggested that B’nai

33Ibid., August 12, 1870, p.8.
Jeshurun and the other Cincinnati congregations each appoint a committee of 12 to consider jointly calling a general conference of all congregations of the West, South, and Northwest with a view to forming a union of congregations. There was no reference to the decisions of the 1871 rabbinical conference, no suggestion even that anyone had ever thought of the idea before. Moritz Loth’s proposal indicates a regional limitation. But there also was a theological limitation which ran counter to the 1871 decision that the union was to be confined to Reform congregations. The aims of the proposed union, Loth said, should be first, to establish a Jewish theological faculty and second, to publish books for Sabbath schools. A third aim, according to Loth, was:

... to adopt a code of laws which are not to be invaded under the plausible phrase of reform; namely, that Milah [circumcision] shall never be abolished, that the Sabbath shall be observed on Saturday and never be changed to any other day, that the Shechitah and the dietary laws shall not be disregarded, but commended as preserving health and prolonging life, as it has been statistically proved in such cities as London, Prague, Pressburg and Pesth.

And it shall be a fixed rule that any Rabbi who, by his preaching or acts, advises the abolishment of the Milah, or to observe our Sabbath on Sunday, etc., has forfeited his right to preach before a Jewish congregation, and any congregation employing such a rabbi shall, for the time being, be deprived of the honor to be a member of the Union of Congregations.

I hope that you will act favorably on my recommendation, and that it will receive the support of our sister congregations, which would lead to a Union of Congregations at large, and the adoption by that body of some safeguard against the so-called reform, which, if not checked, may become disastrous to our cause. 34

Moritz Loth was pointing in a direction that Wise had left unspecified, even in the days of his flirtation with the traditionally minded Board of Delegates. Did Loth speak for himself alone, for the leading Cincinnati laymen, or for his rabbi as well? That Wise had neglected any opportunity to persuade the president of his congregation of the need for a seminary and a union was unlikely; that he was practical enough not to oppose his president’s views became evident

34See “Introduction” to Proceedings of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Vol. I, 1873–1879. From the time of its inception the minutes and reports of the UAHC were printed in a uniform style and bound in volumes. Hereafter they are referred to as Proceedings. The first volume contains documents anterior to the founding of the organization.
immediately. The qualified manner in which Wise expressed approval of Loth's proposal suggests that the latter had been speaking his own mind, or at least not his rabbi's.

He was convinced, Wise said, of the "justice or prudence" of excluding the congregations of the East. Loth's "primary points," as Wise described them—the union and the seminary—expressed his own innermost wishes, but the third, which made certain fixed rules the basis of the union, was "casuistical, and ought to be left to a conference of rabbis, or at least to men learned in law." Wise expressed the hope that the move would be successful and urged the other congregations to cooperate. "Whenever the Committee shall have organized," he continued, "we will report its proceedings, but that is all we can promise to do at present." The note was an unusually cautious one for Wise, especially as the project was so dear to him. What was the reason for this wait-and-see policy? Was he smarting under past rebuffs? Was he calling the shots from behind? Had the Cincinnati laity, prodded by Wise to act, made it clear to him that since the rabbis had not been able to agree among themselves, the laity must play their own hand? Loth later referred to the union as having been "planned and brought into existence by humble laymen, and not a rabbi or rabbonim." 36

Call for a Convention

The movement quickly took shape, and Wise enthusiastically recorded its progress in the columns of The Israelite. The Cincinnati leaders set up their committees; Wise's name was not among their members. A call went out for a general convention of representatives of all congregations of the West and the South to meet in Cincinnati on July 8, 1873; Wise was not among those who signed the call. He was mentioned as a delegate to the convention, representing not his own

35 Israelite, October 18, 1872.

36 Loth made this remark in his "President's Report" to the second meeting of the UAHC Council, held in Buffalo in 1875; see Proceedings, Vol.1, p. 122. At the first meeting of the Council, held in Cleveland in 1874, Loth alluded to the failure of the convention held in that city in 1855, adding, "But that convention consisted of rabbis only. Today the practical businessmen of this land are here assembled"; ibid., p. 28. For a brief estimate of Loth's part in establishing the Union, see Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, 1913, p. 144.
congregation but Congregation Zion of Shreveport, La. The correspondence submitted to the convention showed that various congregations which were interested in the scheme communicated with Wise, and that he served on the committee set up to draft a constitution for the union. On the other hand, we do not find Wise (or any other rabbi) among those elected to the first executive board of the union. It is difficult to believe that all this was not the result of conscious decisions. Wise may have been keeping himself in the wings deliberately; or the laity may have felt that, were he allowed a position of prominence, the newly formed union would be endangered, or at least warped, by the bitter controversies which had long divided the congregations.

In later years it was taken for granted that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been founded by Isaac Mayer Wise. While his quarter-century struggle for the idea must have had its effect, and his enemies regarded the idea as his, the evidence does not warrant describing Wise as "founder" of the Union. Also, the fact that five weeks after the Union had been founded Wise chose to accept a pulpit in New York—from which his Cincinnati admirers persuaded him to withdraw—may mean that he had felt slighted at being kept at a distance from Union affairs; but, again, we have no conclusive evidence.

Thirty-four congregations were represented when the "First General Convention" opened on July 8, 1873 (a number sent letters indicating their adherence to the cause). The largest congregation reported 200 members, the smallest 14. The "Call for a Convention" set out the following plan of organization:

1. That all the congregations of the West and South shall be represented by delegates to the General Convention, as provided in the above call.

2. That the congregations thus represented shall form themselves into a "Union", under the auspices of which the contemplated "Jewish Theological Institute" shall be created and maintained.

3. That thereupon a preamble, constitution, and by-laws shall be adopted by said "Union", setting forth its aims and objects, and the mode of carrying out the same, having always preeminently in view the establishment of a "Jewish Theological Institute," and that this "Union" shall be styled as the Convention may direct.

4. Upon the adoption of such preamble, constitution, and by-laws, a Board of officers shall, in pursuance thereof, be elected, who shall secure an incorporation of said "Union," in order that they and their successors may properly maintain said "Jewish Theological Institute," thus sought to be established.
5. That the General Convention shall adopt such other measures as its wisdom may deem beneficial to the interests of education, and to the prosperity of the congregations of Israel.

The manner by which funds necessary to sustain these worthy objects shall be secured, will properly be a subject for the determination of the General Convention, but we have no doubt that in obedience to the proverbial yearning of the Jewish heart to contribute to whatever may promote education, ennoble humanity, or advance any honorable or praise-worthy cause, the heart and hand will be zealous in the good work in view.37

**Objects of Union**

The convention decided to call the new organization "The Union of American Hebrew Congregations," and, except for one point, the adoption of a constitution seems to have caused little difficulty. Debate fastened on the statement of the aims of the Union, which, in the form finally adopted, read as follows:

Article II—It is the primary object of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to establish a Hebrew Theological Institute—to preserve Judaism intact; to bequeath it in its purity and sublimity to posterity—to Israel united and fraternized; to establish, sustain, and govern a seat of learning for Jewish religion and literature; to provide for and advance the standard of Sabbath-schools for the instruction of the young in Israel’s religion and history, and the Hebrew language; to aid and encourage young congregations by such material and spiritual support as may be at the command of the Union; and to provide, sustain, and manage such other institutions which the common welfare and progress of Judaism shall require—without, however, interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregation.38

This article failed to give expression to Moritz Loth’s desire to set bounds to Reform. It also implied the end of the idea of a synod. Wise had long urged a synod, and the last rabbinical conference had supported it. In a draft constitution for the congregational union, which Wise published in May, the term synod is also used to describe the “representative and legislative body of the Union.” A Mr. Hirschberg, who represented Madison, Ind., at the convention, wished

37Ibid., pp. 4–5.
38Ibid., p.22; the italics appear in the original. The veering between “Hebrew,” “Israelite,” and “Jewish” in the denominational label probably reflects the uncertainties of the early Emancipation period: the terms “Jew” and “Jewish” were stamped with the degradation of the ghetto, “Hebrew” and “Israelite” with the loftiness of the Bible.
it to resolve that the establishment of a Union was "in no wise to be construed into the formation of a synod for the fixing of religious principles or the government of the several congregations." Such a resolution was indefinitely postponed after considerable debate, "in which it was urged that no threat had been made of interference with the principles of government of the several congregations, and that therefore no such disavowal was necessary." But the feeling expressed was taken into consideration in framing Article II of the constitution. To the statement of the Union's objectives was added the proviso, "without, however, interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregation."

There was no suggestion of promoting a special religious tendency, no suggestion of religious oversight, even by way of voluntary arbitration. The word synod did not occur, even as the name of an administrative body; it was replaced by the more innocuous word "council" (Article V). The plan of government was simple. Each congregation was to make an annual contribution of one dollar per member and was to be entitled to one council representative for up to 25 members, with an additional representative for each additional 25. The council was to meet annually and to elect an executive board of 20 members. The council and the executive board of the Union were each to have a president, as were the board of governors and faculty of Hebrew Union College—the name given to the Hebrew Theological Institute—when the rules establishing them were approved in 1874 and 1875. There was no president of the Union. The arrangement seems to point to a division of authority and a desire to play down fears that any one individual might assume lordship over the whole community.

Several rabbis attended the inaugural convention as delegates of congregations, but the constitution made no provision for a rabbinical element. Membership was open to "any Hebrew Congregation of the United States lawfully organized" (Article III). The right to belong was qualified neither by Loth's concern for minimum standards nor by Wise's for a uniform ritual.

After much argument and denunciation there was now in being the union of congregations which Wise and Leeser had advocated as a necessity years before. Week after week Wise trumpeted forth the event as an achievement of millennial dimensions; he charged every

Jew to join a congregation, and every congregation to join the Union. His enemies sneered at this latest attempt to use any edifice, however shaky, to raise himself above his fellows.

The new movement, declared the *Jewish Times* of New York, "is on a level with all the plans and schemes that were ever set on foot by Dr. Wise. They can not rise above the niveau of the commonplace, and this last product of his fertile mind will fare no better: it will also end in dust and smoke." It reviewed the previous conferences Wise had sponsored, treated this one as the latest of his enterprises, and expressed certainty that, without the support of the powerful congregations of the Eastern seaboard, his plans could not be carried out.⁴⁰ But one did not need to be an inveterate Wise-hater to doubt the viability of this new venture. Would it fall apart through the individualist tendencies of a mercurial community; would it lapse into inertia, as the Board of Delegates had done; or would it become an instrument for welding together the widely scattered American Jewish community?

**A Regional Organization**

At the outset the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was a regional organization. The important Jewish communities of the East had not been invited to join in establishing it, and in the West many congregations held aloof. Of the 20 members of the first executive board, 11 lived in Cincinnati. No doubt this was a practical necessity, but it tended further to localize the organization in a single community. Resources were not available to maintain full-time officials, and for professional staff the Union depended on Lipman Levy, a Cincinnati attorney who conducted the UAHC’s business from his office. His career with the Union, at the outset honorary, was to last until 1918. After one year he reported that the work of his office had increased to such an extent that he required an assistant.⁴¹ But a committee of the executive board, having investigated the matter, reported that it was

⁴⁰*Jewish Times*, July 25, 1873, p.344. In the *Jewish Messenger* (New York), December 19, 1873, Lewis N. Dembitz, who at certain periods had worked with Wise, expressed the opposition to the Union which was widespread outside Cincinnati and based on dislike of Wise.

unnecessary to employ a regular assistant, for the reason that the work of the Secretary is not of that character that an assistant is at all times required." However, as at times the labor was greater than one man could conveniently perform and was increasing, it recommended that the secretary receive $300 for the year, out of which he would have to pay any assistant whom he might employ.

The first meeting of the council of the Union assembled in Cleveland on July 14, 1874. By this time 55 congregations had joined, and the $1,966 received in dues more than sufficed to meet its modest clerical and printing expenses.

In his inaugural address at Cincinnati, Loth had anticipated that donations would be received in addition to dues, and that the Hebrew Theological Institute would open as soon as a $10,000 annual income was secured. Articles XIII and XIV of the constitution, adopted at the same meeting, envisaged a "sinking fund," which was to remain intact until it reached $60,000; the income from this sum was to go to the Theological Institute. And as soon as $160,000 had been raised for the sinking fund, $100,000 of it would become available for a college building.

Nothing like this sum was ever raised. In September 1873, not many weeks after the Union was launched, the country was in an economic crisis. For a time all industry seemed to be at a standstill, and for some years there were no signs of reviving prosperity. Many pledges to the sinking fund had not been redeemed when the acquisition of a college building became urgent, and income to meet current expenses was so short that they had to be paid out of the sinking fund.

The first step toward strengthening the Union was to make it more comprehensive by bringing in the congregations of the East. The decision to limit its founders to congregations in the South and West was doubtless an expedient to keep at a distance the warfare between Wise and the Eastern rabbis. From the first, resolutions were passed inviting all congregations in the United States to join. However, it was more than could be expected for New York or Philadelphia to seek the hand of Cincinnati, and, with a few unimportant exceptions, the Eastern congregations held aloof.

In fact there appears to have been an attempt at a counter-movement. In 1865 the Emanu-El Theological Seminary Society was founded for the purpose of training rabbis "on the basis of Reform."

---

42Davis, Emergence ..., p. 57.
It proved ineffective. In February 1876, a few months after the Union opened its college, a convention of congregations in the East was called "for the establishment of a college of Hebrew learning." The convention met in May but accomplished nothing.  

In the same year, amalgamation of the Union with the Board of Delegates came into view. At the Board's annual meeting, it appointed a committee of three to confer with similar committees appointed by the Union and the "New York College Convention" to bring about "a complete union of all Hebrew congregations of the United States." Mayer Sulzberger, who was a member of the Board of Delegates' committee, was present when this resolution was communicated to the UAHC council. He was asked to address the council, which then appointed a "committee of conference."

As far as the Board of Delegates and UAHC were concerned, the road to unity was open; and by the time the Union's council met in 1878, a good part of it had been traversed. There was agreement that (1) the Board of Delegates was to go out of existence and be replaced by a board appointed by the Union, with offices in New York or Philadelphia, and (2) "as soon as a sufficient number of Eastern congregations shall have joined the Union, the latter shall establish or support a preparatory department of the Hebrew Union College in the city of New York or any other Eastern City, to be managed by a local Board of Directors, to be elected by the Council."

A united American Israel was in the offing. For the first time, the Union's committee observed, "we have the opportunity to act without reference to the claims of individuals, congregations, parties or localities, and to form an organization of Jews as wide as the land in extent and as far-reaching as Judaism in its objects." There were some difficulties in working out the details of the proposed merger, but these were overcome by a provision that of the 30 members of the Union's executive board half should come from the Eastern states. The

---

43Ibid., p. 181.
45Ibid., p. 347. In 1877 Wise went to the Pacific Coast on behalf of the UAHC and recorded his impressions in The American Israelite. Commenting on these impressions as reprinted in Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly, Vol. IV, April 1972, p. 150, William M. Kramer suggested that Wise deliberately stayed away from the fourth Council of the Union, held in Philadelphia, to avoid confrontation with his old rivals (p. 152). The suggestion is an attractive one, but no evidence has been given.
The proposed changes were not to become effective until Eastern congregations representing 2,000 members were ready to join the Union, and the representatives of the Board of Delegates were ready to make immediate efforts to see that this was done.\footnote{Ibid., p. 381.}

The Eastern congregations did not join immediately. When the council met in Milwaukee in 1878, its president reported that, despite the efforts of the Board of Delegates, the requisite number had not been attained. However, while the council was in session, delegates from Emanu-El and Beth El of New York arrived and presented credentials, and an announcement was made that the requisite quota of Eastern congregations had been filled. The Union then took over the functions of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, which was dissolved, and set up its own Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights. The Union amended its constitution, adding to its objects “To establish relations with kindred organizations in other parts of the world, for the relief of the Jews from political oppression, and for rendering them such aid for their intellectual elevation as may be within the reach of this Union.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 538. Currently, Article II of the Union’s constitution defines its objects as follows:  
\begin{itemize}
  \item[a)] To encourage and aid the organization and development of Jewish congregations;
  \item[b)] To promote Jewish education and to enrich and intensify Jewish life;
  \item[c)] To maintain the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion;
  \item[d)] To foster other activities for the perpetuation and advancement of Judaism.
\end{itemize}

At the period in its history when the political aspect of the Union’s work is strongest, the suggestion that such work is among its objects receives no formal recognition.

Though Article II ascribes no denominational label to the Union, in accordance with its original conception, the preamble to the Union’s constitution declares that the member congregations “affirm their faithful attachment to Judaism and their adherence to its liberal interpretation.” The writer understands that proposals have been under discussion with a view to emphasizing the Union’s denominational standpoint, even to the extent of changing its name.
violation of such rights occur."

It may be that the leaders of Emanu-El were concerned lest the Union develop political activity within the boundaries of the United States: only the relief of oppressed Jews abroad was to be the concern of the Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights.

Though the formal Proceedings do not reveal it, Wise had helped to lift the barriers. That summer he had encountered Jesse Seligman and other leaders of Temple Emanu-El at Saratoga Springs, and he had used the opportunity to dispel their prejudices against the Cincinnati organization.

The terms of peace (for so we may describe them, since they ended a long rift) provided that the Emanu-El Theological Seminary in New York was to be maintained as a preparatory school for Hebrew Union College; that a "commission of competent scholars" was to "devise the necessary plans of instruction for all the institutions under the control of the Union, fix the standards of admission, promotion and conferring of degrees."

Now Gustav Gottheil, rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, as well as David Einhorn of Beth El were members of the board of governors of Hebrew Union College, and circumstances were propitious for the Union to hold its next meeting (1879) in New York. This it did in an atmosphere of complete harmony between East and West.

By coincidence, the delegates to that meeting of the council were able to be at Temple Beth El for the farewell sermon of David Einhorn. In the course of his address, he emphasized the importance of preserving German as the language in which the ideas of Reform Judaism could be made understandable. He died later in the year; until the end, America was a wilderness to him.

---

49 This wording appears as Section 2 of Article II recommended by the executive board at its meeting on May 12, 1878. However, when the Council met in July, the wording of the earlier text was preferred. See Proceedings, Vol.1, pp. 420, 422, 538.

50 The meeting was arranged by Isidor Lewi, an Albany friend of Wise. He recorded the incident in a memorandum, preserved in the American Jewish Archives (Cincinnati). Lewi's belief that it was this encounter which broke the resistance to the Union is borne out by the fact that the delegates from Emanu-El and Beth El arrived and presented their credentials in the middle of the first day's proceedings, the two congregations presumably having taken a hasty decision to participate: ibid., p. 524.

51 A provision to this effect was inserted in Article VI of the constitution in accordance with an agreement with the Eastern reformers: ibid., p. 539. The New York branch became known as the Emanu-El Preparatory School of the Hebrew Union College.
A Representative Body

By 1879 the Union of American Hebrew Congregations could claim to be fairly representative of organized Jewish life in America. Its range of objects was broad enough for a wide variety of national and international activities. It had 118 member congregations located in all parts of the United States. According to the Union's own committee on statistics, this appears to have been a little more than half the total number of congregations in the country. The likelihood is, however, that many of the congregations which had not joined were insignificant in membership and outside the mainstream of American Jewish life.

What shades in the religious spectrum did the Union congregations represent? In considering this point it is important not to be governed by labels which only conjure up religious distinctions of the present day. In what way the stream would divide—indeed, whether it would divide at all—could not then be foretold.

For developments within individual congregations have shown the secondary importance of hard and fast sectarian labels at that time. We find, for example, that in the year the Union was founded Congregation Anshe Chesed of New York, disappointed at not securing the services of a Prague rabbi who was almost Orthodox, turned to a moderate reformer like Wise and, after his withdrawal, came under the spiritual leadership of the radical reformer David Einhorn upon merging with another congregation; that a few years later Congregation Ahavath Chesed, which, under Rabbi Alexander Kohut, had been the rallying point for a counter-Reformation, turned into a conventional Reform temple soon after his death. We also find that the same destiny was in store for Shaaray Tefila of New York and Rodeph Shalom of Philadelphia, both of which withdrew from the Union because they disapproved of Wise's outlook.

Some of the rabbis were ready to take their congregations all the

---

52Ibid., p.687. The report gave 224 as the number of congregations, with an aggregate membership of 12,193. It estimated a Jewish population in the United States of 250,000. An earlier report of the same committee shows that in 1875 among the fraternal orders B'nai B'rith counted 20,000 members; Kesher Shel Barzel 10,000; and Free Sons of Israel 2,632; ibid., p. 351.

53It was at this synagogue (now known as the Central Synagogue), in summer 1885, that the newly-arrived Kohut launched the attacks on Reform which stimulated the adoption of the Pittsburgh Platform (p. 45).
way to Reform; others were more conservative than their congregations. In their personal lives, the laity had departed some distance from traditional Jewish ways, but still had some hankering for them. There was a readiness to have those ways maintained in the synagogue, provided they were suitably Americanized. How that could be done was always a problem, but congregational independence did not permit the Union to deal with it. No doubt it was hoped that the American rabbis which the Union was to send forth through its theological seminary would show how the old and the new could be blended.

The position of Moritz Loth, president of the Union's executive board, and of Issac M. Wise, president of the Hebrew Union College, could hardly be equated with the Reform with which the Union and the College were later identified. Their emphasis was on comprehensiveness, and, though they had not secured everything they wanted, they had set up a body capable of serving American Jewry on many fronts. Moreover, the Union had no rivals. The Board of Delegates had dissolved, and B'nai B'rith was entering a period of decline. If service was needed, the Union was sufficiently broad in membership and sufficiently flexible in its aims to give it.

The potentialities were present for a broad Jewish organization which would grow with the American Jewish community, serve it, and represent it in a variety of ways. (The analogy of the Canadian Jewish Congress or the Union of Swiss Jewish Communities comes to mind.) Instead, UAHC turned into a complacent but stable organization, little known save for one aspect of its work, maintenance of the Hebrew Union College.

Hebrew Union College

Until 1925, when the College received a separate charter of incorporation, its board of governors was technically a committee of the Union. For the first seventy years of the college's existence, the Union seems to have been widely regarded as being principally the organization which supported the College. Hebrew Union College opened in 1875 in inauspicious circumstances. For all the efforts expended in preparation, it began as little more than a group of boys meeting after school hours in the basement of one of the Cincinnati temples. But it was presided over by a man of unflagging energy and inexhaustible determination. Isaac Mayer Wise gave his services as president of the College free. He sought out students, taught them,
fathered them, and placed them. He recruited teachers and built up a library. The leaders of his congregation probably had given him a promise of support when, in 1873, he withdrew his acceptance of a position at Congregation Anshe Chesed in New York.54

Ahad ha‘Am once observed that more than that Israel kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept Israel. One has the impression that, had the Union not had the College to support, it might have faded away. The opportunity of becoming the mother organization for American Jewry eluded its grasp.

How was it that, with American Jewish life burgeoning, as it did in the decades after 1873, the achievement of UAHC was so limited? It is not unjust to infer that there was some inertia on the part of the leaders. Business was all-absorbing, and the concerns of life were local rather than national. To build and maintain a local temple was to build and maintain something visible; to build up a national organization did not have the same appeal and was quite secondary. It was the emergency situation created by the First World War that compelled the American Jewish community to think in national terms, primarily fund raising for the relief of Jews abroad. But here, too, the many proposals coming before the Union had no note of urgency.

Had Moritz Loth’s conception of current needs animated his associates, the Union might have become the trail-blazer in national fund raising; for at the 1878 meeting of the council he moved: “That the Executive Board be authorized to engage a minister at a fixed salary, whose duty it shall be to organize Sabbath schools in small congregations, and to preach every Sabbath in some of those congregations, and to organize Ladies’ Educational Aid Societies, and also to solicit donations to the Sinking Fund of the Hebrew Union College.”55 The motion did not carry.

The Union’s locale, too, cannot have had an invigorating influence. Cincinnati remained prosperous, but the decline of the South after the

54 The details of the history of Hebrew Union College lie outside the scope of these pages. The board of governors’ minutes, including Wise’s reports (usually verbose and often bombastic), are set out at length in the Proceedings. Conditions cannot have been as ideal as the immaculate pages of the Proceedings suggest; but Wise persevered, as always. Sometimes he revealed the difficulties he faced, as for example, in a report of 1881, indicating the atmosphere of indifference with which the Union as well as the College had to contend: Proceedings, Vol. II, 1879–1885, p. 1043.

Civil War deprived it of much of its importance as a point of interchange, and the convergence on Chicago of the East-West railroads made that city the capital of the Midwest. Cincinnati continued to remain isolated from the East Coast, where the shape and dimensions of Jewish life were constantly being altered by the arrival of immigrants. It was a situation that lent itself to a narrowly conceived range of activities based on the experience of the families of German Jewish immigrants who had climbed the ladder of prosperity.

*Plans Gone Awry*

Moritz Loth, who served as president of the executive board until 1889, was a Cincinnati businessman. He was unusual in his generation, not so much because he made (and lost) more than one fortune as because he also was a writer. He was a frequent contributor to *The Israelite* and the author of several novels. The *American Jewish Year Book* for 1905–1906 (vol. 7, p. 83), in a biographical note probably supplied by Loth himself, mentions that he “personally collected more than fifty thousand dollars at the inception of the Hebrew Union College, its original endowment, and obtained many valuable books for its library.” His reports to the executive board and the council of the Union frequently contained plans for large-scale action, but they never seem to have come to fruition. The precise reasons for Loth’s inability to translate his ideas into action are not clear. It is obvious, however, that he cannot have received any strong measure of support from his associates.

Typical of the proposals which, at meeting after meeting, Loth would bring before the Council are the following recommended for consideration in 1876:

1. Whether it would be expedient to request the Congregations who are members of the Union, not to engage hereafter any Rabbi unless he has placed his credentials for record. . . . Such a measure . . . would save the Congregations from any chance of being imposed upon, and also preserve the Rabbis from the perils of slander.

2. To inaugurate a system by which the small Congregations who are not able to engage a Rabbi permanently, can every three or four weeks, be visited by one who is fully able to illustrate the passages of the Bible and its sublimity.

3. To consider by what manner and means the Sabbath schools can be improved.

4. What measures are best to adopt for a stricter observance of the Sabbath by every Israelite.
5. How to induce every Israelite to join a Congregation.

6. To issue a new appeal to every Congregation to join the Union, and thus strengthen the house of Israel.

7. To direct the attention of parents to the importance of their sons learning a mechanical trade, or pursuing agricultural industries.

8. To empower the Executive Board to adopt such measures as they may deem best to obtain by donations the sum of three hundred thousand dollars, in order to erect the College Building; provide it with a good library, and leave an ample amount in the sinking Fund, so as to induce celebrated Professors to accept positions in the Hebrew Union College.

9. To take also into consideration whether it is advisable to open a correspondence with the Alliance Israélite Universelle of Paris and with similar bodies in London, Vienna and Berlin, with a view of colonizing, in the United States, all those of our brethren who dwell in countries whose laws do not protect them in their lives, liberty and property, and thereby embitter their existence . . . in those lands where the light of civilization has not as yet penetrated, and where it is slow to penetrate, owing to the darkness of fanaticism.\footnote{Ibid., p. 190.}

No action resulted from any of these recommendations.

"Circuit preaching," the sending of rabbis to small congregations, had been advocated by Loth at the first meeting of the council.\footnote{Ibid., p. 36. The congregations did not act on this, as Loth reported to the Council in 1878, and the Union did little to stimulate the concern of small and isolated congregations.} In 1878 he was able to report that the executive board had divided the country into circuits and made known the availability of visiting preachers. Still, no effective action followed.

Also at the first meeting, Loth had suggested that the Union "could also, if endowed, assist poor orphans or children of poor parents to learn a mechanical trade."\footnote{Ibid., p. 37.} The idea was not pursued, but the suggestion itself indicates the range of activities that was thought open to the Union. When he asked the second council "to consider in what manner the Council could influence our sons to adopt mechanical and agricultural pursuits in order to save them from the oppressive cares and uncertainties of a mercantile career,"\footnote{Ibid., p. 120.} the reply came: "... one cannot see what legislation could be had by this Council
which would give force or strength to the laudable desire.' 60 Hebrew Union College was not thought of as necessarily the sole educational enterprise to which the Union could turn its hand. Loth repeatedly brought forward the idea of a "young ladies seminary," but it was never taken up. 61

It will be seen that, even before the era of pogroms in Russia, there was interest in settling persecuted Jews in the United States, but Loth's suggestion failed to evoke any response from his colleagues. 62 When the situation in Eastern Europe became critical, Loth immediately came forward with a proposal regarding Russian-Jewish refugees. Reporting to the executive board in July 1882, he prophesied that a large number of them would arrive in the United States in the future. He suggested that rather than "settle in the large cities, and live in crowded tenement houses and eke out a bare existence in the lowest strata of commerce," they should be led into agricultural pursuits under the auspices of UAHC. Loth realized that for this a large sum of money would be needed and recommended that a committee be appointed to go to Europe and, jointly with local organizations, appeal to the prominent Jews of Europe for several millions of dollars. The executive board rejected the proposal as not expedient. 63

After World War II, the Union received important help from its well-developed regional organization. The efforts to bring this into being go back a long way. In January 1881 the executive board authorized its president and secretary to set up local committees for the purpose of soliciting subscriptions. They sent "commissions and instructions" to prominent members of congregations in ten cities, formally constituting each a local board of the Union and assigning to it a number of tasks, all designed to augment the Union's resources. 64 The move appears to have been fruitless. A proposal to endow a professorship in honor of the hundredth birthday of Sir Moses Montefiore was enthusiastically adopted by the members of the council, but the response to the appeal was negligible.

60Ibid., p.161.

61For example, ibid., pp. 120, 161, 188, 285, 408, 570. The fate of a resolution designed to promote this project confirms that the Union was not for it.

62Supra.


64Ibid., p. 949.
What today is known as rabbinical placement preoccupied minds nearly a century ago. Perhaps the problem of ascertaining the suitability of rabbis was more serious then because men could appear from somewhere in Europe and produce what appeared to be proper credentials, which were difficult to verify. One proposal made at the UAHC council in 1881 was for establishing five regional committees to "ascertain the moral standing, character, and antecedents" of applicants "for permission to become rabbinical candidates; and secondly a recommendation to member congregations not to receive applications from candidates who were not furnished with the certificate of one of these committees." The matter was referred to the executive board, which did not act on it.

**Straitened Finances**

Although the Union refused to become involved in additional projects, it remained short of funds. The needs of Hebrew Union College increased, and by 1883 the Union seemed to feel that there was no chance of raising additional funds within its own structure. The council therefore instructed the executive board "to enter into correspondence with all Jewish bodies or associations in the United States, congregations excepted, with a view of soliciting their aid and assistance in support of indigent students in the Hebrew Union College." The board wrote to all lodges of the main fraternal orders—B'nai B'rith, Free Sons of Israel, and Kesher Shel Barzel—requesting a contribution of five cents per quarter year from each member. The B'nai B'rith leaders were outraged:

Disregarding the questionable propriety of the method chosen to reach our lodges, we beg to state that the object sought to be obtained is entirely outside of the province of our order, and our lodges have not the constitutional right to tax their members for the purpose.

To support the "Hebrew Union College," directly or indirectly, is strictly the affair of the congregations, who are fully able to do so.

The greater number of our brethren are members of congregations, and we are justified in asserting that in this, as in every good work, they lend willing and effective help.

---

65 Ibid., p. 1124.
66 Ibid., p. 1410.
On several occasions the question of supporting institutions for the education of Jewish ministers or preachers has been discussed in the councils of our Order, and in every instance been emphatically rejected, and it has become a well settled principle that a connection or interference with congregational or doctrinal matters in any way will not be permitted by the Order.\(^{67}\)

But in fact B'nai B'rith was not of one mind. District No. 6 stated it could see "no reason why lodges should not be permitted to act" in support of Hebrew Union College, if they wished. Against this, the Constitution Grand Lodge quoted a resolution of 1874 declaring it to be "not within the sphere of the Order to interfere with congregational or doctrinal matters in any shape or form," and reminded the lodge that disobedience might lead to the revocation of of its charter.\(^{68}\) The incident was soon forgotten, but it reflects a view which persisted for many years: namely, that there was a non-sectarian—so to speak—Jewish community which would lose its identity by supporting ventures of a theological nature. This influenced many philanthropic organizations and dictated aloofness from the synagogue. Today the Union and similar bodies receive some support from welfare funds.

**Religious Sectionalism**

A second factor, which a more enterprising response to calls for practical action might have overridden, decisively militated against the possibility of the Union's becoming the unifying factor in American Jewish life: it lost its comprehensiveness in religion and became sectional. The proviso to Article II of the constitution, by which the Union was prevented from "interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregation" was taken seriously; and when, in 1878, a member of the council proposed that "a Committee... be appointed... to devise means for the creation of a 'Union Prayer Book' for the use of Union congregations, at the option of said congregations, and which Union Prayer Book shall be the property of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and to be sold at cost price," and "that an amount of $500 be offered

\(^{67}\)Letter of October 1, 1883, from B'nai B'rith executive committee to UAHC: *ibid.*, p. 1450.

for the prayer-book—the existing prayer-books included—this Council at its next annual meeting may choose to adopt," his motion was ruled out of order.\(^69\) So was a proposal made by Loth himself a few years later for convening a synod. This was because both an authorized prayer book and a synod would have involved an official stand on religious issues.

An incident in 1883 alienated some of the more traditionally minded supporters of the Union. The great day arrived when Hebrew Union College was to ordain its first rabbis. The three examiners who endorsed this action reflected the shades of religious opinion found within the Union: Kaufman Kohler, Einhorn’s son-in-law, was a radical Reformer; Benjamin Szold, who today would be considered a Conservative, had led his congregation (Oheb Shalom of Baltimore) away from Reform;\(^70\) George Jacobs was Isaac Leeser’s successor at Congregation Beth El Emeth of Philadelphia. In celebration of the event Isaac Wise had arranged a banquet, employing a Jewish caterer. But the joy of the occasion was marred when, at the beginning of the meal, the traditionalists discovered that forbidden food was being served.\(^71\) Wise had previously been in conflict with the traditionalists for his disparagement of what he called ‘‘kitchen Judaism,’” and now they could accuse him of molding the future rabbis of America in the same spirit. This incident encouraged the withdrawal from the Union of some of the traditionalists and increased the reluctance of traditionally minded rabbis to cooperate with Wise.

At the council meeting in 1885, Loth raised the question of a synod, one of the subjects, he said, which had to a large extent engaged the attention of the Jewish press of the country. In support of a synod, he argued:

Mindful of its controversial aspects, it is the object of our Union to unite American Israelites in all that is essential to their welfare. At the same time we should not jeopardize the good we have accomplished by introducing into our deliberations and conclusions anything which might tend to detract from our ability to maintain those institutions which so well illustrate ability of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to become the rallying point for all American Israel in its efforts in behalf of Judaism. It will be a glorious day in our history when our rabbis and


\(^{70}\) See Davis, Emergence . . ., pp. 141–44.

learned men will come together and agree upon a declaration of principles and a course of action upon which the whole of our people can unite, which they will do when they see that there is unanimity among our rabbis and teachers.\textsuperscript{72}

Loth's obvious desire to see a synod was deliberated by a committee, which decided that Article II prevented the council from legislating on this subject.

\textit{The Pittsburgh Platform}

Interest in a synod at that point of time was more than a personal fancy on the part of Moritz Loth. Not long before, the question of Reform versus tradition had received a conspicuous airing in New York. In May 1885 Alexander Kohut had arrived in New York to become rabbi of Congregation Ahavath Chesed (now Central Synagogue). He enjoyed a considerable reputation as a scholar and preacher and was acclaimed as a new light in American Israel. He began his ministry by preaching a series of sermons in defense of tradition. These were answered week by week from the pulpit of Temple Beth El by Kaufman Kohler, and the public followed the polemic with keen interest. Hence the desire for a synod.

If the Union was not allowed to convene a synod which would give an authoritative answer to such decisive questions, it was open to an individual rabbi to call together likeminded colleagues. This Kaufman Kohler did, with the result that in November of the same year a group of 19 rabbis assembled in Pittsburgh. Wise took the chair, but the proceedings were dominated by Kohler, who produced and secured the acceptance of a statement of principles in eight paragraphs.

The "Pittsburgh Platform," as it came to be known, was a radical and for the most part negative document.\textsuperscript{73} Inevitably it led to

\textsuperscript{72}Pro\textit{ceedings}, Vol. II, p. 1795.

\textsuperscript{73}"The Pittsburgh 'Declaration of Principles' is a peculiar document which can only be understood on the basis of contemporary intellectual currents. Nothing was said of faith or piety; the advantages of Judaism over other religions were indeed mentioned, but not clarified. It was not a \textit{Confessio Judaica} but a homage to the European school of thought in science, in history of religion and particularly of the religious evolution of Israel. The laymen did not get much out of this platform; they did not learn what to believe and what to do, but only what not to believe and not to do . . . "': Ismar Elbogen, \textit{A Century of Jewish Life} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945), p. 344.
stiffening of attitudes among the traditionalists. Neither the Union of American Hebrew Congregations nor Hebrew Union College formally identified with the document. But the president of Hebrew Union College chaired the gathering and gave the platform his endorsement; and the impression remained that it represented the point of view in which the rabbis of America were being trained.\(^74\) Hence, the first move of the traditionalists, in January 1886, was to organize a seminary conducted on conservative lines, and out of that seminary there arose, in 1913, the United Synagogue of America, the congregational counterpart for Conservative Judaism to what the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had become for Reform.

It was not surprising that the radical outlook (since known as "Classical Reform") should take over the Union and the College. The teachings of Darwin and Spencer, and biblical criticism eroded many a hallowed belief; the conditions of American life encouraged men to put aside the past without restraint; and the withdrawal from the affairs of the Union and the College of those who disagreed hastened the process.

Was the separation inevitable? The trefa banquet and the Pittsburgh Platform proved to be like burning matches dropped on parched grass. Supposing such accidents had been avoided, at least until the climate had changed, would the rift have been averted? Given the conditions of American life—the perfect freedom of each congregation to mark out its own path and of each rabbi to set his own standards, as well as the inclination to make use of these freedoms—the development of rival groupings on a national scale was inevitable.

The crystallization of the Classical Reform viewpoint is always explained as a reaction to the arrival in New York of Alexander Kohut. At this time, it must be remembered, Reform Judaism had to justify itself to a constituency in which agnosticism possessed the attractions of avant-garde thought. In particular the Ethical Culture movement, started in 1876 by a candidate for the Reform rabbinate, had acquired a vogue among intellectual Jews.

Kaufman Kohler clearly intended the Pittsburgh Platform to be a

\(^74\)That the Pittsburgh Platform caused discomfiture to some members of UAHC is evident from statements issued by its executive board and by the chairman of the Hebrew Union College board of governors. See *Proceedings*, Vol. III, 1886-91, p. 2006.
constructive step. Introducing his proposals, he indicated that "to many Reform appeared the name for deserting the old camp and standard, while others beheld in it only anarchy and arbitrariness," and that "most of our so-called enlightened Jews welcomed the watchword of Reform as long as it meant emancipation from the old yoke of the Law." But, "when it demanded positive work, the up-building of the new in place of the torn-down structure, they exhibited laxity and indifference." While there is no reason to question the earnestness of Kohler's intention to consolidate and to build, in practice the program he formulated gave the very impetus to throwing off the yoke of the law without "the up-building of the new," which he wished to arrest. The rabbis who supported the Pittsburgh Platform may have regarded the denigration by Kohler and his associates of traditional ceremonial law as the expression of a set of more advanced spiritual values; but to the rank and file it often gave sanction to the line of least resistance and served as a prelude to assimilation.⁷⁵

The Reform edifice was completed in 1889, when the rabbis who were in Detroit for the meeting of the Union council decided to form themselves into the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). Wise became its president and held office until his death in 1900. Adherence was not formally conditioned by acceptance of any particular view. But the circumstances of convening the conference, as well as a specific resolution giving authority to what had been adopted at the earlier meeting, made the Pittsburgh Platform a strong influence in shaping CCAR's attitude.⁷⁶

The question of the prayer book early engaged the attention of the Central Conference. The result was the Union Prayer Book (1894-6), which leaned on the radical 'Olat Tamid, rather than on the more traditional Minhag America. It became the liturgy of the Union and the College. Thus comprehensiveness yielded to sectionalism, and the spirit of Einhorn reigned in organizations presided over by Wise.

---


⁷⁶Bertram Wallace Korn, ed., Retrospect and Prospect: Essays in Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1889–1964 (New York, 1965), discusses the history of CCAR.
American Jewry Transformed

A third factor militating against the realization of the hopes originally cherished for the Union was that its constituency, without withering away, became a distinct minority in American Jewry. While the Union was moving into the camp of Reform, the American Jewish community was becoming transformed in every way, and the Union was consequently becoming sectional in a social as well as theological sense. In 1879, when the organization was consolidated, a reasonably homogeneous American Jewish community could be visualized. The position that was crystallizing might be summarized with reasonable accuracy in words to be used by Wise some years later, in connection with the establishment of the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

It records the fact, that reformatory Judaism is identical with American Judaism, as the conservative or orthodox, or more correctly the anachronistic men and congregations never could and can not now show a united representative body approximately near in numbers to this Central Conference which embraces the spiritual guides of the largest and most important congregations in the land everywhere between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, between and even beyond the lakes and the Gulf of Mexico. This is proof before all the world, that American Judaism is identical with reformatory Judaism; the conservative orthodox or anachronistic parties are the minority sects, whom we ought to respect and treat with fraternal kindness and consideration, but no longer as a vox populi or an influential factor in the historical process of the American Judaism. An organized majority represents itself and the disorganized minority; the latter disappears under the former in the just estimation of the world.77

But America was a fluid country, and by the time Wise uttered these words the Jewish community was no longer the one he knew. Those whom he was prepared to patronize were becoming not merely an "influential factor in the historical process of American Judaism," but the majority element.

To the 250,000 Jews estimated to be living in the United States in 1880, immigration added half a million during the remaining decades of the century. Between 1900 and 1914 another 1,250,000 entered. The great majority of the newcomers came from Eastern Europe. They were poor, of Orthodox background, and their adjustment to life in the New World created social issues, trends, and problems calling for immediate action.

Families were separated and traditional family stability and security was threatened and often destroyed; parents and children were alienated from each other by a new language, new mores, and new moralities, sweated and child labor was common; economic insecurity was the rule rather than the exception. Jewish life began to experience desertions, alcoholism, tuberculosis, juvenile delinquency—all the stigmata of rapid industrialization and urbanization.  

As the congregations and rabbis belonging to UAHC were moving, religion would at best have provided only a limited basis of association between the German and East European Jews. However, nonreligious factors wiped out even this possibility:

... the two main points of contact between the two elements were such as to provoke friction. The first was intimate industrial contact. In the main the older settlers, already firmly established and prosperous, were largely of the employing class—merchants and manufacturers. The newcomers, who arrived here penniless, were happy to secure employment in their establishments. The antagonism generally obtaining between labor and capital could only serve to intensify the already existing dislike. Where the employee, whether through shrewdness or self-denial and resourcefulness, became a business competitor, the older immigrant became resentful and the notion of caste grew stronger.

The second point of contact was, unfortunately, the charitable organization. As soon as Russian Jewish immigration began, the Jews of this country organized and raised funds to help the newcomers. The spirit which actuated them forms one of the brightest pages in the history of Jewish philanthropy in this country. The help they rendered was both intelligent and generous, testifying to the good-heartedness and liberality of the “German” Jews. But contact with the dependent and poverty-stricken elements of any people is not conducive to respect for them. The erroneous and deplorable though natural impression gained ground even among the best men and women that these applicants for relief were typical of all the immigrants from Eastern Europe. There was quickly established between the two elements the unfortunate relationship of benefactor and beneficiary, which was made still more difficult by unsympathetic treatment on the part of untrained and ill-paid charity clerks and even ignorant volunteer workers on the one hand, and on the other hand extreme sensitiveness and emotionalism on the part of those who sought aid.


New Priorities

Whatever the inadequacies in philanthropic administration, the vast influx from Eastern Europe meant that the already settled element in the American Jewish community—the constituency of UAHC—needed to redouble its efforts in that field. It was there that the visible, practical, urgent demands appeared, and from efforts to meet these demands emerged a new focus for the aspiration toward unity in American Jewish life. In 1895 the leaders of the Boston Jewish community and, in the following year, the Jews of Cincinnati began to federate their charities. The federation movement spread quickly, and in communities large enough to warrant such an organization the annual campaign for funds and the distribution of the proceeds became a major axis round which efforts and influence revolved. The membership transcended the limitations of any single congregation, and the practical, broadly humanitarian goals transcended the creedal distinctions argued by the rabbis.

The problems of philanthropy having spilled over local boundaries, in 1899 the National Conference of Jewish Charities (later known as the National Conference of Jewish Social Service) was formed. No national campaign for funds was yet contemplated; that came with the needs for European relief during World War I and increased still further the claims of philanthropy and its organization on the life of the American Jew. Again philanthropy provided a focal point for unity. In 1914 American Jewry was a very seriously divided group. In every community, Orthodox and Reform, German and East European, employer and trade unionist looked askance at each other. Now the contending elements came together in support of a Joint Distribution Committee which would provide succor for the Jews of Europe.

The transformation of the American Jewish community through the burgeoning East European sector drew little response from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. It is true that the problems created by this change were too manifold and serious to be handled by any single organization. Still, as a national coordinating agency, the Union might have been able to attack some of them. There was desultory talk and little action. The Union "failed to command the support of even all the native-born in the community. It made no
serious, sustained effort to cope with the problems of the East European immigrant masses, which, in turn, ignored the Union.\textsuperscript{80}

**New Organizations**

The leaders of the Union must have known that the changes in the American Jewish community posed national problems with which they were not attempting to deal. In January 1903 the UAHC council adopted a resolution instructing its executive board to invite various national religious, educational, and philanthropic organizations to appoint delegations to an American Jewish congress. Invitations were issued; but after a conference with the organizations that accepted, the Union found that there was no general desire for a congress and decided to abandon the project.\textsuperscript{81} This abdication of responsibility occurred at a time when the Kishinev pogrom had convulsed the Jewish world and stimulated the desire for a representative organization to watch over the general interests of the Jews of America.

Where the Midwestern leaders of UAHC failed to respond to the challenge, it was taken up by an ad hoc group of Jewish leaders in the East, who in 1906 established the American Jewish Committee. The founding of this new organization demonstrated the ineffectiveness and superfluity of the Union's Board of Delegates on Civil and Religious Rights.

The considerations that had to be weighed when the American Jewish Committee was in process of formation indicated that the Jewish community's transformation had altered the conception of Jewish identity, greatly reducing the synagogue's role in it. When, at one of the preliminary meetings, Louis Marshall proposed that the Committee be set up by "having individual congregations across the land send delegates to a national convention,"\textsuperscript{82} one of the few


representatives of the "downtown" Jews challenged the definition of Judaism which Marshall's proposal implied. The basis of membership in the new organization was changed entirely, and the phrase "to promote the cause of Judaism" was deleted from its statement of aims "because of its religious connotations." The East European immigrants not only had brought into being a Union of Orthodox Congregations (1898), whose viewpoint clashed with that of UAHC; they also engendered ideologies hostile to Reform and Orthodoxy alike. The American Jewish community had become so heterogeneous that it was again impossible to find a platform on which all elements could find a place. What the American Jewish Committee then purported to do was to provide a channel through which a group of prominent individuals could act in the public interest. Five years after its establishment, the Committee sought to endow itself with a token representative character, and UAHC was among ten national organizations offered representation.

The desire for united action and for a representative body which could command such action surfaced again during World War I, and after much agitation and sharp conflict an American Jewish Congress was established in 1917 on a strictly limited basis as to purpose and duration. In large measure the conflict was between the spokesmen of the newly arrived East European Jews and the leaders of the older established German Jews. Though the latter were associated with Reform temples, they were not involved with UAHC, and UAHC took little part in the controversy. The theological differences separating Wise from Leeser, or Wise from Einhorn, now sat lightly on the leaders of the various factions. The future of Palestine and the rights to be claimed for the Jews of Europe, as well as power within the American Jewish community, were the matters at issue. UAHC had been fashioned in the nondogmatic spirit of Wise, and, though it had received an infusion of Einhorn's doctrines, their effect was negative. They did not inspire passionate convictions about religion, still less their application to daily living.

Although the unity achieved through the American Jewish Congress was not lasting, the progress of events gradually had the effect not of coalescing the diverse elements in American Jewry, but of bringing them closer together. The responsibilities for European Jewry assumed

\[83\text{Ibid.}, \text{p.14.}\]
during World War I were not cast off. The Joint Distribution Committee, which at one stage planned to dissolve, remained in existence. Zionism achieved a new status, and its concerns were manifold. American Jewry's most cohesive force was philanthropy. The national campaign for funds now became a permanent feature of American Jewish life, and the establishment in 1932 of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds gave organizational expression to the national scope which philanthropy had assumed. Competition for allocations created difficulties, but the practical advantages of unity in fund raising won through.

Both nationally and locally, philanthropy put the synagogue in the shade. Federations and welfare funds operated on a larger scale, catered to visible needs, and called for and received the support of the wealthiest members of the American Jewish community. Out of the organization evolved an ideology. Fund raising was a big enough operation to be considered as an end in itself, and fund-raising organizations embraced a community whose concerns went beyond the sectionalism of the synagogues. Federations and welfare funds tended to exclude as beneficiaries theologically oriented organizations, possibly because of the potential disruptiveness inherent in their rivalries. But the axiom, derived from the First Amendment to the Constitution, that church and state should be separated seems to have been imported into their affairs: the fund-raising body was "the community," and it was not the business of "the community" to support religion.

The Union's Place

Within the ferment of American Jewish life, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations continued along a comparatively placid course. It did not claim the whole field as its own. The excitement was to be found in the portions taken over by others, but its own patch was in the most advanced stage of cultivation. The Reform temples were the wealthiest in the land, possessing the stateliest edifices, conducting their ritual on a par with other American denominations, and contrasting palpably with the unstable and outlandish institutions of the immigrants. UAHC could not fail to partake of their prestige.

Hebrew Union College, the support of which was the Union's principal activity, made progress. The great turning point came in
1900 with the death of Isaac Mayer Wise. Kaufman Kohler, who became president in 1903, was a distinguished and productive scholar. He set about raising academic standards, and he left little doubt that he intended the college to be a Reform institution. This hardening of lines was more than a matter of personalities.

A group of Eastern millionaires, mostly associated with Reform temples, had come to the conclusion that Reform rabbis were not the sole answer to the spiritual needs of the transformed American Jewish community, particularly the children of the Russian immigrants. In the year preceding Kohler's arrival in Cincinnati, they had taken the moribund Jewish Theological Seminary of New York under their wing with a view to providing rabbis acceptable to traditional Jews. It was given a building close to Columbia University and was placed under the direction of Solomon Schechter, a child of the ghetto who had attained a high reputation in Western academic circles while remaining an observant Jew.

The process begun by the ordination banquet and the Pittsburgh Platform was being fulfilled. The leaders of the Union set about modernizing the College facilities. In 1905 they purchased a fine 18-acre tract of land opposite a park and close to the University of Cincinnati, and the first buildings in what was to become an imposing group were opened eight years later. This development added a visible factor to the Union's position—indeed its chief claim to recognition—as the sponsor of Hebrew Union College.

In 1903 the Union consisted of 115 congregations. In that year it decided to set up a Department of Synagogue and School Extension, with Rabbi George Zepin as director. He left three years later, but in 1910 returned to the Union as its director, a post he held until his retirement. To a large extent the successes and limitations of the Union during the next three decades largely reflected his personality. Zepin was a model civil servant, wholly devoted to his duties, self-effacing, firm in his belief that it was his duty to guide and support his elected officers, and that the elected officers were entitled not only to take the decisions, but to appear to the world as having taken them. He had many ideas, but lacked the ability to inspire his officers to take action on them.

Nevertheless, the Union gradually did broaden its activities. The idea of circuit preaching (p. 40) was taken up in earnest. Small
communities were visited and many were organized into congregations. Efforts were made to provide religious instruction for children in rural areas. Work among Jewish students at the universities was initiated, and in fact the first Hillel Foundation, at the University of Illinois, was organized by UAHC. Its Department of Synagogue and School Extension organized visits to all kinds of institutions where Jews were to be found. It also arranged religious services at summer resorts. The work was undertaken largely by rabbis serving an established congregation in the region. The Department also took over the work of the Hebrew Sabbath School Union, and in 1905 created a Board of Editors of Religious School Literature—the forerunner of the present Commission on Jewish Education—which stimulated the writing and publication of textbooks, as well as curricula and teachers' guides, at a time when little was available in English. UAHC was doing important pioneer work in Jewish education (see chapter below).

In 1925 Hebrew Union College was incorporated as a separate institution, though with the majority of its board of governors appointed by the Union. This move was made in conjunction with a campaign for a $5,000,000 endowment fund because it was believed that if the College were a separate entity rather than a branch of the Union it would be more apt to attract gifts.

The establishment in 1926 of the Synagogue Council of America may be viewed as an attempt to assert the place of the synagogue among the representative agencies of the American Jewish community. The Union and its Orthodox and Conservative


85An example of the literature of this period is *The Book of Genesis*, by Julian Morgenstern. Originally published in 1919, it was republished in 1965 in a paperback edition (Schocken Books). It was a pioneering work in what its author describes as "a popular scientific interpretation of Genesis, but an interpretation which is not merely analytic, and therefore largely negative and destructive, but which is also, and more pronouncedly, synthetic, constructive and Jewish."

86In that year UAHC was stated to have 280 affiliated congregations with an aggregate membership of 57,000, and the United Synagogue of America to have 200, with 55,000 members. The Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations was given as having 200 congregations, but it is likely that very many Orthodox synagogues were not affiliated with any national organization. See H.S. Linfield, "A Survey of the Year 5687," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 29 (1927–1928), p. 27.
counterparts, as well as their rabbinical organizations, were the constituents, UAHC being the best-organized of the three groups. The formation of the Council marked the end of a stage in the conflict between Orthodoxy and non-Orthodoxy in American Jewry, each group recognizing the other as part of the community and each acknowledging that it did not represent the whole. But the apparent lowering of barriers by Orthodoxy against association with the non-Orthodox did not go far. It occurred because at the time Orthodoxy was an immigrant phenomenon, whose apparatus was unstable and whose viability on the American scene doubtful. The remarkable resurgence of American Orthodoxy in the post-World War II period has eliminated its sense of dependence on more acculturated groups and reinforced the position that would allow no association with the non-Orthodox. In general, the progress of the Synagogue Council has been limited and its role ill-defined, in its relations with both its constituent and the secular organizations.

Education

In the Union's early day there was much fruitless discussion of means of helping congregations improve their educational work. In 1886 a separate, Union-supported Hebrew Sabbath School Union was established. UAHC's Department of Synagogue and School Extension in 1905 took over the task of publishing textbooks, curricula, and teachers' guides, absorbing the Hebrew Sabbath School Union.

Evidently there was dissatisfaction among the rabbis with the

---

87 The atmosphere prevailing in this period is reflected by Dr. Louis Finkelstein in a review (Jewish Quarterly Review, XVIII, 1927, p. 210) of Affirmations of Judaism, by Dr. J.H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, specifically Hertz's blistering attack on Liberal (i.e., Reform) Judaism:

In the larger communities of America this controversy has somewhat subsided since the leaders of both groups have begun to understand that the real danger to Judaism lies mainly in the indifference to it of the vast majority of its children. The problem of the American rabbi, reform and traditional, is to interest in his faith the large masses of dejudaized Jews. . . . While the American reader will inevitably feel the infectious passion of Dr. Hertz's words, he will, particularly in the last three chapters on the "New Paths," be taken aback at their polemical tone. Certainly the fiery zeal of the British Chief Rabbi for the Judaism which he teaches is greater than that which we have seen in this land for many years.
Union's educational activities and, to forestall a proposal by CCAR to set up a Federation of Jewish Religious Schools, the Union appointed Emanuel Gamoran director of education in 1923. A disciple of Samson Benderly and a graduate of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Gamoran in many ways represented the antithesis of Reform philosophy advocated particularly by David Philipson, who was chairman of the Union's Commission on Jewish Education. Gamoran developed curricula for elementary, high-school, and adult classes, and a supporting program of textbook publication at all levels.

The material issued by the Union was in range, conception, and appearance superior to anything done by any other segment of the community, and therefore was used also by Conservative and even Orthodox schools. Gamoran was a Zionist and a Hebraist, and his outlook gradually influenced the work of his department. He gave new importance to the teaching of observances and the Hebrew language and exerted tactful pressure for an increase in the hours of instruction. The foundations were being laid for a more complete revision of the Reform program.

Throughout this time, UAHC was slowly increasing in numbers. The register of affiliates does not, however, record the change in the complexion of the congregations. Children of East European Jews were entering Reform temples or establishing new Reform congregations, and their conception of a Reform program had little to do with the experiences of a Wise or a Kohler, or with the premises of the dominant group in the Union. Many members of the rabbinate were drawn from the same element. The influence of Zionism was growing among them, and the teaching of Mordecai Kaplan, which combined

---


89The membership figures at the time of the formation of the Synagogue Council of America are given in note 86. Jewish Encyclopedia, 1925 printing, Vol. XII, p. 345, gives 267 member congregations in 1923. Reporting to the 25th Council in 1917, the president observed: "For some time past we have been unable to report any substantial gain in membership. In fact there do not appear to be many additional congregations available for membership." (Proceedings, Vol. IX, 1916-20, p. 8111). In the ensuing years there was a gain, for a 1937 survey reported 303 congregations with a total individual membership of 59,177.
rationalist modernity with a deep sense of Jewish peoplehood, had relevance to the actual situation of the American Jewish community.

**Rival College**

To some extent, the differences within Reform were differences between New York and Cincinnati—the Eastern seaboard affected by the fascination of new ideologies, the isolationist Midwest standing by the ideals of German-American Reform—though the differences were over issues entirely unlike those of the East-West clash of the 1870s. They came to the surface on one occasion after the Free Synagogue in New York, a UAHC constituent led by the great individualist Stephen S. Wise, decided to establish a New York rabbinical seminary. The intention was to make the new institution available to all denominations in the Jewish community. In May 1921 the Free Synagogue addressed to the Union’s executive board a communication outlining the considerations which had induced it to take this course and inviting the Union’s approval of the plan and its cooperation in working it out. The board appointed a special committee to confer with the Free Synagogue, and at their first meeting, in December 1921, sought to dissuade the Free Synagogue from going ahead on the ground that there was no need for an institute in addition to Hebrew Union College.

At the final meeting, held in March, 1922, Dr. Wise submitted to the Union’s representatives a proposal for his Jewish Institute of Religion to become an activity of the Union, but with no more than 20 per cent of its board of trustees appointed by the Union; to coordinate with Hebrew Union College, but retain its autonomy. The Union was to make the necessary budgetary provision and promise to provide the Institute with a minimum of $45,000 annually for the first three years. For their part, the officers of the Institute, including Dr. Wise, were to place themselves at the Union’s disposal for raising funds for both seminaries.

Thus, the Jewish Institute of Religion was to be launched on an equal footing with the 45-year-old Hebrew Union College, and both were to become dependent on the oratorical talents and mercurial temperament of a man to whom the attitudes prevailing among leading Reform Jews were abhorrent. The Union, with its 241 affiliated congregations and control over a college which had graduated 200
rabbis, would not accept these terms, and Stephen Wise went ahead independently. At various times there were suggestions for a merger, but they led only to bickering. It was not until 1948, when Dr. Wise no longer could manage the Jewish Institute of Religion and Dr. Nelson Glueck, who had not been involved in the earlier controversies, became president of Hebrew Union College, that the merger of the two institutions was effected.\(^90\)

Although personalities were clearly involved both in the initial dissociation and the eventual unification of the institutions, the development no doubt reflected the vast changes in Jewish life in America between 1921 and 1948. Whereas at the earlier point of time two Jewish communities had faced each other, by 1948 the cessation of immigration had led to the virtual disappearance of many of the old distinctions. Reform temples had ceased to be the bastions of the German Jews, and Yiddish-speaking Orthodoxy or aggressive secularism had ceased to characterize the East European sector. With changes in economic relationships, the social problems of the two groups ceased to be disparate. As Jews, too, they had been united by the perils of Nazism, and the divisive issue of Zionism/anti-Zionism had been resolved. Within American Reform Judaism, the anti-Zionists had become an impotent minority represented chiefly by the American Council for Judaism. These changes strongly affected the Union. It underwent a thorough reorganization and was being thrust forward by a greatly broadened conception of its functions and a new responsiveness to the diverse nature of its constituency.

**New Challenges**

The turning point in the history of the Union had come in 1941. For many years the small group of men who led it had acted, as Isaac M. Wise in his old age expressed it, as if the Reform Judaism in which they had grown up was the normative one for American Jews. The travail of their generation seemed to have passed them by; new challenges to the teachings of Judaism, and the responses those

---

\(^90\)Correspondence embodying the controversy between UAHC and the Free Synagogue was circulated at the time and is to be found in the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. See also I. Edward Kiev and John J. Tepfer, "Jewish Institute of Religion," AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, Vol. 49 (1947-1948), pp. 91-100.
challenges evoked, failed to interest them. They had good reason to entrust the day-to-day administration of the Union to the faithful and skillful hands of George Zepin; they found no reason to burden themselves by taking up his suggestions for expanded activities.

Competent, devoted work was not the diet American Jewry was craving in the thirties. The Depression did much to undermine belief in life on a permanent plateau of prosperity and in a religion based on faith in the inevitability of progress. Conflicts sharpened, and the search for new and even desperate answers drew a wider following. Jews suffered doubly as the Depression brought in its wake an increase in antisemitism and seemingly stable Jewish communities faced destruction. "There are periods," wrote William Ellery Channing, "when . . . to dare is the highest wisdom." The prescription offered by the well established group in Cincinnati contained nothing of that element.

The rabbis encountered at first hand the disquiet of the people, of all classes and regions, and the ideological battles of the period were fought out in the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Social justice was repeatedly on its agenda; Zionism received sympathetic acknowledgement in 1935. Still more remarkably, in 1937 the Conference adopted a set of "Guiding Principles on Reform Judaism" (the so-called "Columbus Platform"), which recorded a substantial deviation from its earlier outlook:

... Torah remains the dynamic source of the life of Israel. ... Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body. ... we recognize in the group-loyalty of Jews who have become estranged from our religious tradition, a bond which still unites them with us.

Judaism as a way of life requires in addition to its moral and spiritual demands, the preservation of the Sabbath, festivals and Holy Days, the retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value, the cultivation of distinctive forms of religious art and music and the use of Hebrew, together with the vernacular, in our worship and instruction.91

This statement was keenly debated, and the crucial resolution which made possible its adoption was carried only by the chairman’s casting a vote.

The sharpness of the argument within the rabbinate and the subsequent conflicts within the Reform movement support the assumption that the more conservative lay leaders resented these departures from what had been their belief. On the subject of social justice their view was expressed directly. In 1938 the president of the Union’s executive board, addressing the CCAR convention, said: "There is no desire or attempt on the part of the Union to impose a censorship on your deliberations or a curb on your actions." However, he felt that, "While you must be free to act according to your lights, it should be of great benefit to you to have the reaction in advance of men of practical affairs. I think that in the past many of your pronouncements on social, economic and political questions have not had the consideration either by yourselves or others, that the importance of the pronouncement deserved. Thus their effectiveness is minimized while their possibility for harm is increased." The disavowal of censorship showed the desire to restrain, and it was in this fashion that UAHC brought itself to public notice in connection with the burning issues of the day.

The Depression naturally led to a curtailment of programs; but even as it abated, and while other causes were becoming important, the Union had to confess an inability to raise funds for the expansion of its work. There was growing dissatisfaction with the stagnation in the Union’s affairs. The United States was still at peace, but the Nazis had overrun Europe, and the sense of catastrophe requiring some kind of new exertion must have haunted even those most comfortably at rest. This induced the leaders of UAHC to appoint a survey committee, composed half of rabbis and half of laymen, which reported to the 1941 council meeting. Before the meeting George Zepin, obviously aware of the desire for a new broom, announced his intention to retire, though he was not yet 65.

"While the Union Slept"

The sensation of the council meeting was an address by Rabbi Louis Mann of Chicago, later reprinted under the title, "While the Union Slept." It was an excoriation of the Union’s existing regime, and its effect was intensified because Mann was able to state that the survey

---

committee agreed with much of what he was about to say and that his criticism expressed the view of the overwhelming majority of the rabbinate.

Mann's starting point was that the Reform movement had been left behind in the progress of events:

The Reform Movement has not grown in the United States in proportion to the Jewish population or in proportion to its opportunities and potentialities. It has not grown in numbers and it has not grown in influence. While its numerical growth has been negligible, its lack of growth in influence, as a matter of fact its loss of prestige, has been significant. Where there is no growth, there may be retrogression. Reform Judaism in America, at best, is in status quo or in a period of arrested development. Time was when the Liberal Jew, because of his prestige and prominence, spoke for all Jews of the United States. Frequently, during the last few years, Reform Jews were not even represented among those who spoke authoritatively for American Israel. While we should never forget that we are Jews, before we are Reform Jews, yet Reform, as such, has a definite contribution to make to American life.

We took for granted that the spread of education and the liberal atmosphere of the American scene would naturally cause Jews to leave orthodoxy behind. The fact that social prominence and financial prestige were on the side of Reform seems to have made for a "laissez-faire" attitude among reformers. Not sufficient effort has been made to keep Reform alive and alert, creating ever larger opportunities to express itself.

Professionals on the staff who had outlived their usefulness, Mann continued, should be pensioned, and the new director should be given carte blanche to employ the best talent available. He was equally severe with the executive board on which sat men of wealth and prominence. "But unfortunately and tragically," he said, "many of them gave only their names. . . . I am not intimating that these men were 'stuffed shirts' in their own work, because they are not, but they were little more than 'stuffed shirts' in the work of the Union."

With that introduction Mann proceeded to catalogue some of the Union's omissions: it had failed to raise money; though begged to do so, it had refused to sponsor the Hillel Foundation by pleading lack of money; it had failed to seize the opportunity of radio broadcasting; it had been so negligent of the need for antidefamation work that it had allowed the Board of Delegates to die and was now ignored by those active in the field.
New Brooms

To succeed Zepin, the Union appointed Rabbi Edward L. Israel of Baltimore executive director for a period of five years. If, under the influence of the survey committee, the Union was in a mood to broaden its activities and to take cognizance of the diversity of outlook within its constituency, Rabbi Israel seemed to be the right choice. He was an ardent Zionist, an active member of the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress (both led by Stephen S. Wise), a former president of the Synagogue Council of America, and a champion of social justice. Unfortunately, Rabbi Israel died shortly after taking office. One indication of his views was that on being offered the appointment he immediately raised the question of the desirability of moving the Union's headquarters from Cincinnati to Washington.

The Union's choice for Rabbi Israel's successor was Dr. Nelson Glueck, professor of Bible and biblical archaeology at Hebrew Union College. Dr. Glueck had not then reached the height of his fame, but he had many influential connections in Cincinnati, the city of his birth. The arrangement was that he was to take up the post on July 1, 1942, for an indefinite term, while retaining his professorship at the College. The lay leaders' readiness to agree to a part-time directorship may have meant subordination of the Union to the College and a retreat from the dynamism promised by the earlier choice of Rabbi Israel, perhaps as a result of the distraction of the war. However, before Glueck could assume office he was called to take up important war work in the Near East, and the Union decided to grant him a leave of absence. In January 1943 Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath of Toronto was appointed interim director. Dr. Glueck's war work continued, and in October 1943 he sent a letter of resignation to the executive board. Dr. Eisendrath then was appointed executive director for a period of five years.

The executive board met on December 7, 1946, shortly after its president, Adolph Rosenberg, had died, and elected Rabbi Eisendrath "President of the Union" on a full-time basis. At the same meeting, Rabbi Eisendrath requested the board to approve in principle New York City as the general headquarters of the Union. The title
"President of the Union" contrasted with the more limited title "President of the Executive Board," previously held by lay officers. Similarly, in the course of time the name of the council, the Union's governing body, was changed to general assembly.

**Union Transformed**

During Rabbi Eisendrath's presidency UAHC has shown a sharp break with the past in every respect. It would therefore be a pardonable exaggeration to say that, at the zenith of his leadership, it had become the lengthened shadow of the man. He has indicated an intention to retire from office with the celebration of the organization's centenary, so that the last thirty years of the Union's existence can be marked off as a clear-cut era in its history.

From the outset, the new leadership sought to eliminate the spirit of isolationism and its concomitant, neutralism, from the Union's attitude toward the affairs of the day. When Dr. Eisendrath took over the situation was a delicate one. The Union was structurally weak at the same time that its constituency was becoming inflamed by passions ablaze in the rest of the Jewish world. In particular, controversies over Zionism, which had been subdued for some years, came to a head in the Central Conference of American Rabbis. This resulted in the formation in 1942 of the American Council for Judaism, bringing into being organized resistance to any deviation from the pattern of "classical" Reform, particularly in relation to Jewish nationalism.

Simultaneously, the old quest for unity in American Jewish life was revived. All Jewish organizations were caught up in the controversy that arose out of the drive for an American Jewish Conference, which was to be similar in scope to the American Jewish Congress of World War I. Sponsored by the Zionists, it foreshadowed a move to have the demand for a Jewish state endorsed in the name of American Jewry as a whole, and the non-Zionists were in opposition. The Reform movement contained protagonists of both points of view, and to have remained neutral regarding the American Jewish Conference obviously would have been a safe course to follow. However, Dr. Eisendrath succeeded in placing the Union behind the Conference movement and played an energetic role in its affairs. It was a signal that the Union meant to extend its reach and to offer a point of view to, and on behalf
of, the Reform congregations, even if it was controversial and beyond the immediate scope of synagogue life.

At the same time, the Union underwent transformation of size. Growth was one of the salient characteristics of American life during most of this period—in population, gross national product, higher education, overseas interests, international responsibilities. It also pervaded the activities of religious denominations and, as far as concerned UAHC and similar bodies, was heightened by a marked tendency within the Jewish community toward reaffiliation with the synagogue. Under the impact of the war and the Holocaust, Jewishness was affirmed and religion became intellectually respectable. The process of Americanization, the economic advance of American Jewry, and the move to the suburbs helped to deprive expressions of Jewish life outside the synagogue of their significance, while the successful establishment of the State of Israel both stimulated Jewishness and deprived organized Zionism of its separate raison d'être. All these factors helped enhance the role of the synagogue as the basic unit of American Jewish life, and the combined result was that many congregations sprang up where none had existed before, and existing congregations expanded their membership and range of activities.

UAHC did not bring about this revival, but the revival found it poised for action. The Union was then endowed with a flexible, imaginative, energetic leadership ready to take advantage of any currents within the American Jewish community. As a result the Union, which in 1943 had 300 affiliated congregations, had 461 ten years later, and 703 in 1970. Growth alone enhanced the Union's

93 The growth of the Reform movement was paralleled by Conservative Judaism; in 1969–70 the United Synagogue of America counted 830 congregations. Though this number exceeded that of UAHC, United Synagogue expenditures were half, which points to a less developed program. Formally, the institutional structure of the two movements is similar: a union of congregations, a rabbinical training college, and an association of rabbis working in close liaison. In practice, however, the relationship is different. As the Reform movement developed, UAHC became the leading element in the structure, with Hebrew Union College second and the Central Conference of American Rabbis third. Within the Conservative movement, first place has always belonged to the Jewish Theological Seminary; the Rabbinical Assembly comes next in influence and the United Synagogue of America third. Comparisons with Orthodoxy are difficult because of a multiplicity of organizations and a difficulty in obtaining reliable information; and also because Orthodoxy ascribes authority to individual rabbinic personalities rather than to formal organizations.
standing; but it became still more forceful when it moved its headquarters to New York. Not without opposition from the old guard, the decision to leave Cincinnati became final in 1948. The Union then erected an imposing building strategically located on Fifth Avenue, facing Temple Emanu-El, the great edifice of Reform Judaism. When opened in 1951, it was given the name House of Living Judaism. Ten years later, the continuing expansion of the Union’s work required the addition of three floors.

The Union not only made itself prominent in a metropolis where previously it had little more than a toehold; it also covered the country with a network of sixteen regional councils which elect their own officers and have their regular gatherings. In effect, they are controlled by regional directors, usually rabbis, appointed by the president in New York and paid by the Union. The departmentalization of headquarters kept pace with the increasing range of activities. The major program divisions are education, synagogue administration, interfaith activities, social action, public relations, and Israel. Apart from its member congregations, the Union has a number of national affiliates: the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, National Federation of Temple Youth, National Association of Temple Administrators, National Association of Temple Educators, and the American Conference of Cantors; and it continues to work closely with the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Besides publishing a full range of textbooks and other educational materials, the Union spares no effort, through periodical publications, memoranda, and news releases distributed to member congregations and their professional personnel, to keep its leaders and their activities before the eyes of its constituents and the general public.

Naturally, UAHC’s budget has increased markedly. From $150,000 in 1943, it rose to $1,370,000 in 1953 and to almost $3 million in 1973. Among post-war innovations is a network of youth camps, whose assets are valued at $2.7 billion. Funds to meet the Union’s needs are raised jointly with Hebrew Union College; other sources include a levy on congregational revenue.

This expansion in the Union’s membership and activities has made it the most conspicuous and influential of the triad of Reform organizations. Its interests began to encompass fields once left to the Central Conference of American Rabbis. And whereas it had lived for
many years in the shadow of Hebrew Union College, its expansionist mood engendered fears for the independence of the College. Yet another version of the East-West conflict was played within the Reform movement. Until about 1963, the two bodies were repeatedly at odds; thereafter the relationship seemed to settle down to watchful nonbelligerence.

Although the "in-fighting" between the College and the Union was an every-day subject of conversation within the Reform movement in the fifties and sixties, the storms were rarely allowed to ruffle the surface of things. This style of conducting business (due, no doubt, to the importance attached to the current techniques of public relations) may be contrasted with the unrestrained polemics between rabbis mentioned earlier in connection with the Union’s foundation. An exception was the reaction to Rabbi Eisendrath’s "State of Our Union Message" at the Union’s biennial assembly of 1963, in which he used language which appeared to suggest that the Vatican Council’s reexamination of the church’s attitude to the Jews made a revision of the Jewish attitude to Jesus desirable. Although the incident, itself, had no lasting significance, it gave rise to a riposte from the president of Hebrew Union College and to one of the few references to the rift in the general press. 94

Professionalism and Its Problems

Another outcome of the Union’s expansion was to make it an example of the "managerial revolution" within American Jewry. The nature and extent of the change in style may be inferred from earlier references to the self-effacing personality and civil-servant demeanor of George Zepin. As in other organizations, and indeed also in business and government, no extension of activities was possible without giving more authority to the professionals. In other spheres this authority is subject to overriding restraints, such as are provided by the Constitution of the United States or the laws governing

94 See Time, November 29, 1963. Rabbi Jacob Rudin had alluded to the situation more broadly when, in the course of a presidential address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, he observed: "It is no secret that the pendulum of the relations between the Union and the College-Institute has for some years swung in an uneasy arc between precarious armistice and hardly concealed divisiveness." Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, Vol. XLVIII, 1958, p. 9.
business. Among voluntary organizations, however, external controls are not clear-cut; and since no code of conduct delimits the respective spheres of the full-time executives and the elected representatives of the membership, a vigorous executive can reduce the control of the latter to nominal proportions, especially at a time when total activities are increasing.

In the case of UAHC, a new relationship would have been a consequence of the transfer of headquarters to New York, for this ended the traditional control of the small Cincinnati group which, until then, had provided the lay leadership, and de facto it would have placed in the hands of the permanent staff the task of building up a new cadre.

Developments of this kind can be observed throughout the American Jewish community. In the case of UAHC the change was accentuated by the fact that the chief executive officer was given life tenure in 1952 and took the title of president, emphasizing to the world the primacy of his role. Moreover, Rabbi Eisendrath, who came to the office with a record of success in the pulpit, made it clear that he intended to retain the freedom to speak his mind on the issues of the day, which he had exercised as spiritual leader of a single congregation. The forcefulness of his views was enhanced by the fact that his new office made him a national figure and placed at his disposal excellent machinery for making his opinions widely known. Reform rabbis had long cherished the ideal of "Prophetic Judaism," which made them heirs to the qualities and responsibilities of the Prophets of Israel and conferred on them the right, and imposed on them the duty, to criticize the existing institutions of society. As president of one of the major institutions of the American Jewish community, Rabbi Eisendrath sought to exercise this right.

A further consequence of professionalisation is that the leadership has become rabbinical. In contrast to the earlier situation when, though

---

95 Though Jewish academic institutions have long followed the general practice of designating their chief executive officer as "president," the nonacademic reserve it for their lay head, the title "executive vice president" having come into vogue for the chief professional. It has been the practice to print and circulate Dr. Eisendrath's "State of Our Union" messages and his reports to the Union board of trustees. Often they were documents of considerable length, so that a summary of their major points or an analysis of their relationship to the scope and style of the Union's activities would be beyond the limitations of this article.
rabbis participated in Union activities, it was assumed to be a laymen's organization, today the key offices are filled by rabbis, and the assumption seems to have taken shape that they can only be filled by rabbis. Thus the Union can be said to be the pacemaker of a new sacerdotalism in American Jewish life.

As before, the biennial general assembly (as the council was now called) nominally controlled the Union. In the earliest days, the council was primarily a business meeting. But as the scope of the Union's work became fixed, business was routine, and the greater part of the biennial gatherings was devoted to public lectures and discussions. This too was changed: the general assembly became a much more striking platform for the concerns and views of the Union leadership. The fifty-first General Assembly may serve as an example of the scale of the proceedings. It opened in Los Angeles on Thursday, November 4, 1971, and continued until Wednesday, November 10, drawing an attendance of 1,600 men and women. Apart from regional meetings, breakfasts or luncheons, and plenary sessions, there were numerous forums and workshops. Thus on the morning of Sunday, November 7, three forums were proceeding simultaneously on the following subjects: "How can Reform Judaism and the Synagogue be More Relevant for Jewish Youth?"; "Toward a Viable Theology for Reform Judaism," and "The Meaning of Jewish Identity." These continued on the following morning, with still a fourth forum on "Challenge to Survival."

The proceedings revealed that the Union had built up over the years an elaborate convention ritual, with a careful distribution of honorific assignments: chairmen, recorders, panelists, moderators, and deliverers of invocations and benedictions. The Sabbath was ushered in by "a new Sabbath service" contrived for the occasion; the Sabbath morning service was used for a performance by a "dance-drama troupe" which "depicted the prevalent dilemma of a mother no longer able to communicate with her daughter." Obviously, spectacle and novelty are needed because the transaction of business would not attract the large numbers the organization needs. But the possibility that these supposedly auxiliary factors have become ends in themselves cannot be overlooked. The fact that these devices have been used so extensively in Reform is probably related to the denuding of its adherents' lives of the controls and emotional outlet provided by the ceremonies of traditional Judaism.
Rabbi Eisendrath's report took the form of a "Presidential Sermon" at the assembly's Sabbath eve service, a modification of the customary "State of Our Union" message, and was featured as the high point of convention programs. Eisendrath's annual messages, printed, were distributed to the news media, as were his reports to the Union's board of trustees meetings. He made them the vehicles for his views on a wide variety of issues; and no doubt the spectacular nature of the convention proceedings made it desirable that their expression be pointed.

It is not always easy to know when an individual speaks for himself and when he speaks for his organization, and the liberal emphasis of Rabbi Eisendrath's public statements on controversial issues aroused the resentment of a number of conservative-minded congregational leaders, not least the trustees of the Union's neighbor, Temple Emanu-El of New York. In the past, the Union's tradition of neutralism, already alluded to in connection with specifically Jewish issues, had been even stronger on matters outside the Jewish field: in 1931 it rejected a resolution advocating a federal law against lynching; in 1934 it adopted a resolution merely asking for "adequate measures" to curb lynching, but apparently only on condition that the text did not call for congressional action. The leaders of the Union were uncomfortable with pronouncements by rabbis on social and economic issues; the opinion, "let the churches stick to religion," was widespread in the Reform laity as well.

After simmering for some time, the issue reached a climax in 1964 over the Union's intention to open a Religious Action Center in Washington, D.C. This seemed to drive home UAHC's transformation from a body serving its member congregations to an instrument for pressing home in their names the political viewpoint favored by its president. There was danger of secession by a number of congregations, but the dispute was settled. Minor constitutional changes were introduced, purporting to give the member congregations greater control over the Union's policies, and the Religious Action Center was duly opened.

The leaders of the Union were also successful in overcoming the threat of a rift because the Union was retreating from its former anti-Zionist position. Though it resisted demands that it withdraw from the American Jewish Conference, the division of opinion on the 1943 Conference resolution calling for a Jewish state was sufficiently strong
for the Union initially to withhold endorsement and later to declare its neutrality. The issue was settled by the successful establishment of the State of Israel. In line with the well-nigh universal sentiment among American Jews, the Union moved to an attitude of support.

The transition was probably eased by the propaganda of a small diehard element, whose spokesman was the American Council for Judaism. Statements in the name of the one body upbraiding the other were numerous, and the Union’s reaction to the attacks served to accentuate the position to which it had moved. At its General Assembly in April 1957, the Union adopted a resolution disavowing the Council and declaring *inter alia* "there is no antithesis between Judaism as religion and Jews as people." 96 Ten years later the Union set up a Committee on Israel, and in 1971 it decided to build a center of its own in Jerusalem, adjoining the handsome building erected by the Hebrew Union College.

That center is also to serve as the headquarters of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, with which UAHC became associated when it was founded in London in 1926. At that time German Liberal Judaism was a powerful force, and London was geographically suited to be headquarters of the world body. But European Judaism had become a shadow of its former self and the leadership of the English Liberal movement was enfeebled. Typifying the new assumption of worldwide responsibilities by many sectors of American Jewry, UAHC showed that its concerns were not limited by national boundaries, and in 1959 took the World Union into its own headquarters in New York. The decision to sponsor the transfer of the World Union to Jerusalem indicates the symbolic importance the Holy City had attained for American Reform Judaism.

**What of the Future?**

At the end of its first century, UAHC is engaged in the wide range of interests envisaged for it by its founders. The quest for an organization which would unify the Jews of America has been abandoned. Orthodoxy and Conservatism have their organizations, parallel to those of Reform, with the Synagogue Council of America serving as a

---

shaky bridge for the three groups. The failure to work together more closely is often attributed to the exclusive and rigid attitude of Orthodox ideology. While this is a factor, the organizations' concern for their own prestige has been just as influential and shows no sign of abating. In other spheres, where the odium theologicum is absent, e.g. defense against antisemitism and the protection of Jewish rights abroad, efforts at unification have also had little result; the coexistence of overlapping organizations is accepted, and coordinating agencies seem to do little more than to add to the complexity of the machinery.

In the case of UAHC, the maintenance and development of the organization is all-important, since the theological undergirding of Reform Judaism is of limited significance in the movement as a whole. Alvin J. Reines, professor of philosophy of religion at Hebrew Union College and one of the contemporary theologians of Reform, has written:

The most general mode of defining Reform Judaism is to utilize the standard of membership in Reform Jewish institutions. Thus, any person is to be considered a Reform Jew who is affiliated with one of Reform's three formal institutions. . . . Moreover, inasmuch as the constitutive factor in being a Reform Jew, according to the membership definition, is affiliation and not doctrine, religious thought and belief will be Reform Jewish so long as the one who professes it is a Reform Jew. Hence a Reform Jewish system of thought or belief will be the religious thoughts or beliefs of any person who is a Reform Jew. . . . A cursory glance at the writings of Reform religious leaders reveals significant differences of opinion concerning God, revelation and the other great religious themes; hence the term "Reform Judaism" embraces different and even contrary religious systems.97

It is pertinent to add that Hebrew Union College has been careful to avoid theological commitments and successful in not producing rabbis who conform to any single theological mold.

Definition by organization membership does not mean that there is no urge within Reform Judaism to find ultimate religious truth and no desire to make one religious system delimit the whole. But the attempt has never succeeded, and if the movement cannot be defined in intellectual terms, its institutions tend to attain paramount importance and their promotion becomes a substitute religion. It may be no accident that of all the Jewish denominations Orthodoxy is least unified by its institutions. Anchored to the beliefs of the Maimonidean creed

and the observances of the Shulḥan ‘Arukh, it has less need of them.

With no such anchorage, Reform institutions are liable to move in whatever direction their individual leaders may deem advantageous. When the tide is rising, the experience is exhilarating, and it is natural to cherish the belief that problems have been solved; when the tide turns, the problems are exposed, and the advances proclaimed are apt to appear illusory.

The "religious boom" slowed down by the mid-sixties, and when the seventies began, the distemper caused by the grave social problems festering under the coating of affluence called into question the adulation of growth, including the growth of churches and synagogues. Standing apart from the contemporary world, the Orthodox synagogue was affected little. The antiseptic, heavily organized Reform temple was much more the expression of superficial suburban living, which in its prosperity had ignored social decay and against which youth was, or was said to be, in rebellion; and UAHC was dependent on that constituency.

Like other white liberals, the Union's leaders found that while their following was increasingly fearful of black militancy, their espousal of civil rights, by which they had set great store, evoked little response from the spokesmen of the black community. Interfaith work, another sphere in which UAHC had invested heavily and which had always been a special concern of Reform Judaism, seemed to have yielded little; the expressions of goodwill towards the Jews of America had not committed Catholics and Protestants to any line of policy toward the State of Israel. These experiences do not invalidate the ideals that were being pursued; they do leave the impression that the approach was superficial and too much aimed at instant results in terms of personal or institutional réclame obtainable from attractive slogans.

What of the Union's less sensational activities? It has continued the program of textbook publishing in which it was the pioneer, and it has shown enterprise and imagination by the proliferation and range of educational material it makes available. But this program is part of the task of serving member congregations, to which the Union had quietly devoted itself before pursuing wider and more public causes. It is hardly sufficient to generate the feeling needed to keep the Union's expanded machinery in motion. Besides, other organizations are now at work in the same field.

Sociological studies of the American Jewish community suggest that
in the course of time the Union’s base may be eroded through intermarriage and assimilation. This in turn suggests that the educational aspect of UAHC’s program needs to be intensified. However, it appears that the Reform Jew’s self-image is not that of religiosity, and to get him to give a high priority to Jewish education and Jewish observances in his personal life would involve a reversal of attitudes heretofore held, something much more fundamental than the mere proclamation of slogans by headquarters. Here the question arises whether such a reversal is conceivable without some form of theological commitment, which the Reform organizations have avoided.

The independence of congregations and their rabbis was a virtual sine qua non for the establishment of the Union, and the weight of a whole century would militate strongly against the imposition of religious standards by the central body. There is a fair degree of uniformity in practice, and it is obvious that, whatever the claims for Reform, exercises of piety find a relatively small place in the program of its institutions. For some, freedom from such commitment is one of the attractions of Reform.

The same attitude can be observed in the Union’s own activities, and no clarion call has gone out that will offset this feeling. We have seen that the Union was able to effect significant changes of attitude in regard to Zionism and social action. To do so in regard to personal religion would probably be much more difficult. It would require a change of heart among leaders conditioned to give first thought to institutional values; it would be resented by congregations which, feeling the malaise, would like the national organization to come up with instant, painless solutions, and which question its utility when it fails to do so.

There is a groping after a formula that will provide a system of Jewish education that will seal the leaking dikes. The urgency of the need has been expressed in all sectors of American Jewry; but the

98 An inquiry among Reform Rabbis and laymen, commissioned by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, concluded: “More than one in three congregants, aged 20 to 24, is now married to a spouse who was born non-Jewish. One in four of this age group is married to a spouse who has not converted. . . . On every issue of Jewish identity on which they were queried, Reform youth seem to be more detached from Judaism and Jewishness than their parents”: Theodore I. Lenn and Associates, Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), pp. 395, 400.

99 Ibid., pp. 270–77.
feeling is general that it exceeds the capacity of any one group to handle. Therefore pleas for more extensive support have been addressed primarily to the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, not to UAHC or to its Conservative or Orthodox counterparts. This may spring from continued faith in the saving power of an allocation of funds, but it also suggests a diminished role for the congregational bodies.

Uncertainties within UAHC were reflected by the refusal of the 1971 General Assembly to agree to the full increase in dues sought by the leadership. Costs have been rising, in the individual congregations as well as at headquarters, and members are no longer willing to pay more.

Difficulties are also suggested by the first signs of a "job problem" in the Reform rabbinate. The large classes graduated by Hebrew Union College—one suspects, without due thought and as part of the pursuit of growth—have begun to outpace the growth of the movement. "The American synagogue imperiled," was one of the themes touched on by the president of CCAR in his 1972 presidential address. It followed a number of published articles asking whether the American synagogue has a future and even prophesying the extinction of the American Jewish community. A recent survey of Reform rabbis found that many of them "expressed concern that Reform Judaism was in the midst of a crisis—a situation that will become worse, many felt, before it becomes better."

100

No doubt there is an element of hyperbole in some of these statements. Some aspects of the current situation call to mind the aphorism of a gloomy ecclesiastic that in matters of religion nothing fails like success. Worship and priesthood are among man's primary needs and therefore will continue to exist. The American synagogue is not doomed, though it may have to endure a shaking out. The process will be uncomfortable, but the synagogue may emerge healthier. Institutions have their own momentum, and with leisure increasing, there should be a public large enough to support them. As the Union of American Hebrew Congregations reaches its centenary, it has lost a vision of itself as pioneer, together with the exhilaration of recent success. On the other hand, neither is it overwhelmed by despair. It is simply shadowed by the disenchantment that hangs over much of American life.

100Ibid., p. 184.
The Sephardim of the United States: An Exploratory Study

by Marc D. Angel

Western and Levantine Sephardim • Early American Settlement • Development of American Community • Immigration from Levant • Judeo-Spanish Community • Judeo-Greek Community • Judeo-Arabic Community • Survey of American Sephardim • Birthrate • Economic Status • Secular and Religious Education • Hispanic Character • Sephardi-Ashkenazi Intermarriage • Comparison of Four Communities

Introduction

In its most literal sense the term Sephardi refers to Jews of Iberian origin. Sepharad is the Hebrew word for Spain. However, the term has generally come to include almost any Jew who is not Ashkenazi, who does not have a German- or Yiddish-language background. Although there are wide cultural divergences within the

Note: It was necessary to consult many unpublished sources for this pioneering study. I am especially grateful to the Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City, for permitting me to use minutes of meetings, letters, and other unpublished materials. I am also indebted to the Synagogue’s Sisterhood for making available its minutes.

I wish to express my profound appreciation to Professor Nathan Goldberg of Yeshiva University for his guidance throughout every phase of this study. My special thanks go also to Messrs. Edgar J. Nathan 3rd, Joseph Papo, and Victor Tarry for reading the historical part of this essay and offering valuable suggestions and corrections, and to my wife for her excellent cooperation and assistance.

Sephardi world, common liturgy and religious customs constitute underlying factors of unity. Thus, whether a Jew traces his background to Africa, Asia, or the Sephardi communities of Europe, he may still feel part of Sephardi Jewry.

Jews also may be classified as Sephardim if they have been culturally assimilated into the Sephardi fold and consider themselves to be Sephardim. To define the group only on the basis of genetics or lands of origin is inadequate; it is essential to broaden the definition to include cultural behavior and identity.

Sephardim of all backgrounds live in the United States. The majority are of Turkish and Balkan origins; their mother-tongue was Judeo-Spanish. There is also a large group of Syrian Jews of Arabic-speaking background. Other segments of the Sephardi population have come to the United States from various parts of Africa, Asia, and Western Europe.

Because Sephardi communities in different lands developed under differing cultural and historical conditions, it would be more proper to speak of Sephardi cultures than of one monolithic Sephardi culture. Each group has had unique experiences and has made contributions to Jewish and general civilization. Each group deserves to have its own historians and researchers. However, for the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to delineate certain general cultural characteristics of several major Sephardi groups in the United States. In his book, Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews, Professor Mair José Benardete describes two strains of Sephardim: the Western Sephardim and the Levantine Sephardim.

**Western Sephardim**

The Western Sephardim are descendants of ex-Marranos who returned to Judaism and established communities throughout Western Europe—in such places as Amsterdam, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Hamburg, London, Paris. Their communities were characterized by pride, wealth, culture, and grandeur. Benardete draws on the description by Ezra Stiles, then president of Yale University, of the colonial American Sephardi merchant Aaron Lopez to indicate the general qualities of these Sephardim. According to Stiles, Lopez “did business with the greatest ease and clearness, always carried about a sweetness
of behaviour, a calm urbanity, an agreeable and unaffected politeness
of manners."

The Western Sephardim formed an aristocracy within the Jewish
world. Eminent not only for their social graces but also for scholarship
and cultural contributions, they were the envy of many non-Sephardi
Jews. One striking example of the attempt of Ashkenazim to emulate
Sephardim is found, oddly enough, in tombstone inscriptions in
Leghorn. The ex-Marranos carried their hidalguism to their cemeter-
ies, adorning their tombstones with lavishly engraved artwork, as well
as with poetry written in Spanish. Ashkenazi Jews who tried to imitate
their Sephardi brethren in life also tried to imitate them in death, and a
number of their tombstones bear Spanish inscriptions.

Western Sephardim migrated to the New World in the hope of
finding and cultivating opportunities for economic advancement. They
settled in such places as Curacao, Surinam, St. Thomas, Jamaica, and
Recife. In 1654, as we shall see later, they began to settle in North
America. For various reasons the Western Sephardim have dwindled
in number and influence, so that today very few congregations of this
tradition still enjoy a vibrant existence.

**Levantine Sephardim**

In the course of the century beginning with the persecutions of 1391
and closing with the expulsion of 1492, Spanish Jews who refused to
convert to Catholicism left their homes and settled in more tolerant
lands. They migrated to Turkey, North Africa, as well as points in
Europe, where they established significant communities and produced
extraordinary literatures in Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew. The Jewish
world has not really been fully aware of the importance of their cultural
contributions. Scholarly research into their history has begun only
recently.

The Judeo-Spanish Sephardi communities in the Levant suffered a
gradual cultural erosion, which began in the latter part of the 17th
century. The Shabbetai Zevi debacle, Turkey's economic decline, and

---

2Mair Jose Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews*

3Ibid., p. 43; see also bibliography at the end of this article for works dealing
with Western Sephardim.
low cultural standards of the general population, all contributed to the disintegration of Sephardi life. To be sure, Levantine Sephardim have made significant contributions to Jewish life up to our own day; but the masses drifted into relative ignorance. Thus the cultural influences most instrumental in shaping modern Levantine Sephardim have been folk qualities. The Sephardi's sense of poetry, music, and aesthetics has been shaped by his rich Judeo-Spanish heritage. His view of the harmony between religion and secularism and his love of the joys of life have been inherited from his Levantine Sephardi ancestors.

The Sephardim who lived in Arabic lands and who spoke Judeo-Arabic were influenced by their cultural milieu. They established well-organized, tightly-knit communities and produced rabbis, poets, and thinkers. Many of these Jews developed a keen sense of business, trade, and barter.

The Sephardim of Asia and Africa were strongly affected by the French-language schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which brought Western education to thousands of their young and imbued them with the desire to advance academically. Although some Sephardi Hispanicists have objected to the Alliance's stress on French, the fact remains that its schools served a valuable and needed purpose. Many Sephardim who have advanced in American society owe much of their success to their early training in Alliance schools. The most notable individual who came from the Alliance to work with the Sephardim in the United States was Nissim Behar (1848–1931).4

DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Early Settlements

The history of the Jewish community of North America actually begins with the founding of Congregation Shearith Israel in New Amsterdam in September 1654. Most of the twenty-three refugees

from Recife, Brazil, who founded the congregation were of Spanish and Portuguese descent, and they were the ones who set the communal organization patterns and synagogue customs. Other communities developed later in Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, Charleston, and Montreal. All were Spanish and Portuguese, stemming from the ex-Marrano or Western Sephardi tradition.

It is a widespread myth that Jewish immigration to the American colonies was overwhelmingly Sephardi. The fact is that relatively many Ashkenazim also came during this period, working with the Sephardim to build Jewish life on American soil. In New York, for example, the Ashkenazim outnumbered the Sephardim by 1730, the year the first synagogue building was completed on Mill Street. While the synagogue was under construction, the Sephardi Moses Gomez presided over the community in the first half of 1729, and the Ashkenazi Jacob Franks in the second half. The often-repeated claim that the Sephardim looked down on the Ashkenazim is not borne out by the facts. On the contrary, the two groups got on surprisingly well together in spite of original cultural differences. They cooperated in every area of Jewish life. Marriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were extremely common.6

Students of the Spanish and Portuguese settlements in North America often have underplayed the profound Sephardi cultural influence on the Ashkenazim. It has been stated that because of widespread Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriages, "the resultant mixture, often miscalled Portuguese, was really more Ashkenazic than Sephardic."7 The final determination of what makes a community Sephardi or Ashkenazi is based on culture rather than genetics. So long as the Spanish and Portuguese culture predominated in the community

6See Samuel Kohs, "The Jewish Community," in Louis Finkelstein, ed., The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion (New York, 1955), Vol. 2, p. 1275, who claims that German Jewish immigrants "were not too cheerful about the welcome they were receiving." Yet Ashkenazim served as officers in the various Sephardi synagogues, and from available evidence it seems that the two groups cooperated reasonably well. Hyman Grinstein, The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 166, states that the "so-called Portuguese Jews . . . felt superior to and disliked the Ashkenazim," but notes on the very next page that Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriages were so common that, after a short time, "there were virtually no real Portuguese left."
7Grinstein, ibid., p. 167.
it could be accurately described as Sephardi, even if all its members were of Ashkenazi origin.

The dominant role of Sephardi culture in Colonial America, therefore, justifies calling the early communities Spanish and Portuguese, even those where Ashkenazim actually outnumbered Sephardim. The Sephardim had pride in themselves as well as in their ancestry. They had ability in commerce. They had the traditional Western Sephardi savoir faire and social flexibility. At their best, they could adapt admirably to American life and still retain their distinctive Sephardi Jewish tradition. As happened in other communities where Western Sephardim met Ashkenazim, the Sephardim in America prevailed in the cultural sphere. Since Ashkenazim admired the cosmopolitan and enlightened Sephardim, they attempted to become Sephardim—and very often succeeded.

That Sephardi culture more than descent determined the Sephardi character of the early communities is well demonstrated by the history of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal. In the 1760s Jewish settlers began to arrive in that Canadian city. Of those whose names we find in the synagogue's early records, nearly all were of non-Sephardi origin. The earliest minutes of the congregation, dated 1778, established the structure of the community according to Spanish and Portuguese custom. A parnas, gabay, and a junto of three elders served as leaders. Yet not one of the seven men who signed the minutes had a Spanish or Portuguese name. The same was true of the thirteen men who signed the congregation's by-laws in 1778. Thus it is obvious that what influenced these men to establish a Spanish and Portuguese synagogue was not their own descent, which was either completely or partly non-Sephardi, but their cultural attachment to the Sephardi ways.

The strong influence exerted by the Sephardim on the Ashkenazi settlers accounts for the survival of the three remaining Spanish and Portuguese synagogues in North America: Shearith Israel in New York City, Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, and Shearith Israel in Montreal, each of which has long had a high percentage of non-Sephardi members. They could never have survived unless Ashkenazim were attracted to Sephardi culture. Ashkenazim wanted to be part of the

---

8Solomon Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue* (Montreal, 1968), pp. 28, 32.
Sephardim in the United States / 83

Sephardic community. And this would explain why, between 1654 and 1825, Shearith Israel in New York was the only Jewish congregation, a fact that has troubled some historians.⁹

Being Sephardi in outlook, the communities were quick to adapt to their new society. Western Sephardim were receptive to the forces of secularism; they did not isolate themselves in self-imposed religious ghettos. Thus Gershom Mendes Seixas, the famous minister of Shearith Israel in New York (1768–1816), not only showed enthusiasm for science but was known also to quote from the New Testament. Because of his receptivity to matters not strictly religious or Jewish, some students today wonder about Seixas' "Orthodoxy."¹⁰

Indeed, Jacob Rader Marcus likens Seixas to Israel Jacobson, founder of Reform Judaism. Marcus makes a point of Seixas' "insistence on Western dress, decorum, dignity, and an increasing use of the vernacular."¹¹ And yet, all these characteristics were common to Western Sephardi religious leaders long before Seixas was born. Certainly he was influenced by his American milieu; but his Sephardi roots must not be forgotten.

Though they made many significant contributions to Jewish and American life,¹² the Spanish and Portuguese communities gradually diminished in influence. Assimilation and intermarriage cost them some losses. The comparatively large immigration of Ashkenazi Jews in the early 19th century engulfed the old Sephardi communities. Ashkenazim founded synagogues and institutions of their own. To be sure, they borrowed ideas from their Spanish and Portuguese predecessors, but there could be no doubt that the Sephardi influence decreased with each new shipload of Ashkenazim. As the Ashkenazi immigration began to skyrocket, there was not time for the Sephardi

---

⁹Grinstein, op. cit., p. 40.


¹¹Ibid., p. 67.

¹²The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York, for example, founded, or helped found, such institutions as Mt. Sinai and Montefiore hospitals, the traditionalist Jewish Theological Seminary, and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Members of the community were among the founders of the New York Stock Exchange. The Hendricks family developed the copper industry in America. For more information, see David and Tamar de Sola Pool, An Old Faith in the New World (New York, 1955); Maxwell Whiteman, Copper for America (New Brunswick, 1971).
synagogues to absorb the newcomers. There simply were too many arrivals for the Spanish and Portuguese communities to cope with; the immigrants needed their own communal organizations.

At the same time, there was so little Sephardi immigration that the few remaining Spanish and Portuguese congregations must have felt that they were being overrun. They tenaciously clung to their synagogal customs and rituals, fearful that without such rigor the entire minhag would collapse.

When Sephardi Jews from the Levant began to come to the United States in the early 20th century, the old Sephardi institutions felt new hope. The Shearith Israel Bulletin (New York) of February 1912 recorded: "The great increase in the number of Sephardic Jews in America is a happy guarantee of the survival and spread in the United States of the ancient minhag of our Congregation." Now, for the first time in a century, Sephardi culture in America had the opportunity to grow and spread. But these Levantine immigrants, though authentic bearers of the Sephardi tradition, were mostly poor and uneducated, and the question was how they would adjust to conditions in America.

**Levantine Jewish Immigration**

In the course of the 19th century, the Sephardi communities of the Levant began to absorb Western ideas. The Alliance Israélite Universelle established a network of schools throughout the Oriental Sephardi dispersion so that modern French education was reaching an increasing number of young people. The result was a slowly developing undercurrent of discontent with the established modes of life. In particular, the have-nots began to seek new opportunities for economic and social advancement; the old mode of life offered nothing but a future of hard work and poverty.

As Western education spread, and as Levantine businessmen on their travels became aware of modern ideas and attitudes, a subtle change in thinking occurred in the Sephardi communities. More and more of the Sephardim became imbued with the modern spirit of progress and were ready to seek out opportunities in other lands. To be sure, the majority remained in the Old World, but their attitudes too were undergoing transformation. They realized that their long-standing cultural isolation was coming to an end, that their communities were going to face demographic as well as ideological changes. A new era had begun.
The progressive among the Sephardim urged the youth to study in Western schools and to advance academically. Since the economic and intellectual opportunities in the existing communities were usually limited, ambitious Sephardim set their visions on new worlds. They would migrate. They would become wealthy. They would send money back to the Old Country, or perhaps they would even return some day to their hometowns to live in luxury. Though some Sephardim migrated to various places in Europe, Africa, and South America, by far the greatest number was attracted to the promise of the United States.

In the history of Sephardi migration many incidents revealed the transition from the traditional to the modern milieu. One anecdote serves to illustrate the tragicomic element in Levantine Jewish life at the turn of the century. On the Island of Rhodes, an ancient and illustrious Sephardi community of about 6,000 persons, lived a man named Jacob Aroghetti. He avidly campaigned for emigration to America, claiming that only in this way could the people progress. He made plans for himself and a group of followers to settle in Seattle, Washington, where a small group of Sephardim was already established. But when he bought the tickets he asked for passage to Washington, not bothering to specify the city, Seattle. As a result, he and his group landed in Washington, D.C. After a hopeless search for his Seattle Sephardi friends in Washington, D.C., Aroghetti finally realized his mistake. He was discouraged from traveling across the country, and settled in New York City where he became a leading figure in the Sephardi immigrant community.

The Sephardim were not the first people from the Levant to come to America. Hundreds of non-Jewish Greeks and Slavs had preceded them by a generation. When the earlier immigrants sent news of America back to the Levant, the Jews probably learned of the opportunities the new land offered. Also, some Sephardi merchants had visited the United States to attend various expositions. Young Sephardi bachelors were most apt to believe the glittering reports about America. Those who ventured to the New World sent letters back home, often enclosing money. The fame of America loomed larger and larger.

13 In personal conversation with Dr. Maurice Amateau, who was born in Rhodes and presently lives in New York.

14 Benardete, op. cit., p. 139.
The changes in the Zeitgeist which led to an increased interest in migration among the Levantine Jews brought a steady stream of immigrants to the United States. The total number was not large. According to figures derived from the records of the United States Commissioner General of Immigration, 2,738 Levantine Sephardim came to the United States between 1890 and 1907. The figure reported by the Hebrew Immigrant Shelter and Aid Society (HISAS, later known as HIAS) was somewhat higher. Soon, however, events militated for a rise in Levantine Sephardi immigration.

In Turkey, the 1908 revolt of the Young Turks, which aimed at securing constitutional government, created hardships for many Jews. The institution of compulsory military service, for the first time also for Jews in the Levant, made it more difficult for the men to support their families and interfered with religious observance. The disruptions of life in a country torn by revolution, the Turko-Italian war, as well as natural disasters such as a fire and earthquake, contributed to the insecurity of the country's Jews. During the 1912-13 Balkan war against Turkey, the Sephardi communities in the belligerent countries were ravaged. When defeated Turkey ceded territory to the Balkan allies, the latter began to battle among themselves for the distribution of the newly-won territories. In July all-out war involved Rumania, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. A treaty at Bucharest ended the war in August 1913.

When peace came, the tragically worsened conditions of Levantine Jewry became apparent. Poverty was rampant. Constantinople and Salonika were crowded with refugees from the war zone. Besides, the allies imposed economic measures which proved injurious to the Jews. Major cities of Sephardi settlement, such as Monastir, Janina, Castoria, Kavala, and Andrianople, were severely hit by the wars. The Jews of Bulgaria were forced to appeal to European and American

---


Jewry for help. It was estimated that 200,000 Jews in European Turkey were poverty-stricken.\(^{18}\)

The troubles for the Jews in the Levant were not to subside with the end of the Balkan wars. It was not long before World War I engulfed them. Jacques Magid, HIAS representative in Constantinople, reported in February 1920 that there were hundreds of persons in and around Constantinople who had relatives in America and who were in dire need of aid. A second HIAS report supported his statement.\(^{19}\) Magid was asked to prepare a list of the needy so that "a reasonable amount of money" might be spent to relieve their condition.

It was to be expected that many Levantine Sephardim decided to leave their homelands. According to United States government figures, 10,033 of them entered the United States between 1908 and 1914. Immigration lessened during World War I, but between 1920 and 1924 another 9,877 came. In 1925 the figure was drastically reduced to 137 persons as a result of new quota restrictions. But Levantine immigration had begun to slacken considerably earlier, after the adoption of a temporary measure in 1921.\(^{20}\)

**Distribution of Population**

According to government figures, a total of 25,591 Levantine Sephardim entered the United States between 1899 and 1925.\(^{21}\) The actual figure was somewhat higher because a number of Sephardim no doubt were counted as non-Jewish Turks, Greeks, Syrians, and others. Various estimates of the number of Sephardim in the country and of their concentration in New York City are as follows:


\(^{19}\)Minutes of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, February 10, 1920, p. 91. See also minutes for July 28, 1920, p. 128. Microfilms available at Yivo Institute, New York City.

\(^{20}\)Hacker, op. cit., p. 34. The increased immigration was due not merely to the Balkan wars, but as said before, also to a growing desire for economic and social betterment. See *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 15 (1913–14), p. 431: HIAS Minutes, op. cit., December 13, 1921, p. 249, note a drop in Levantine immigration.

\(^{21}\)Hacker, ibid.
Although there are some serious discrepancies, all estimates agree that by far the largest group of Sephardi immigrants settled in New York City. Estimates for 1913, 1916, and 1926 seem more reliable than later figures, mainly because the bulk of the Sephardim at that time were immigrants, and immigration figures, though not completely accurate, were available. Therefore the Sephardi population could be reasonably accurately established without having to guess at rates of natural increase. In later years, with the increase of American-born Sephardim, estimates were less likely to be accurate. The present estimate of 100,000 is no more than a guess; it may be much larger, but probably is not smaller.

The Sephardi immigrants can be classified into three major groups having distinct cultural characteristics and mother tongues. The great majority spoke Judeo-Spanish and came from Turkey and the Balkan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Total</th>
<th>New York City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>9,000&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>80 to 90 per cent&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>32,000&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>vast majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>50-60,000&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>at least 40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>45,000 (Spanish-speaking)&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>45,000 (Spanish-speaking)&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>25,000 (Spanish-speaking)</td>
<td>25,000 (Spanish-speaking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>55,000&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current</td>
<td>100,000&lt;sup&gt;h&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Jewish Charities, March 29, 1913, p. 11.
<sup>b</sup>Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," op. cit., p. 212; the American Hebrew (December 12, 1913, p. 190) figure of 15,000 seems to be exaggerated.
<sup>c</sup>In an unpublished talk to the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, New York, November 1916, Cyrus Adler estimated some 30,000 Levantine Jews, most of them Ladino-speaking, had immigrated since 1907.
<sup>d</sup>Hacker, op. cit., p. 34.
<sup>e</sup>Max Luria, "Judeo-Spanish Dialects in New York City," in J. Fitzgerald and P. Taylor, eds., Todd Memorial Volumes (New York, 1930), Vol. 2, p. 7. If Greek- and Arabic-speaking Jews were to be included, the New York figure would be 50,000-60,000, and the U.S. figure some 80,000-90,000, or more.
<sup>f</sup>Barocas, op. cit., p. 64; Matarasso's estimate appears to deal only with Spanish-speaking Sephardim.
<sup>h</sup>This figure appears in brochures published by the Yeshiva University Sephardic Studies Program. There may be many more if children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages were included.
countries. Of the two smaller groups one was Greek-speaking and the other, largely from Syria, Judeo-Arabic-speaking. There was also a trickle of Levantine Ashkenazi immigration. Thus even within the ranks of Levantine immigrants there was diversity of language and culture.

By Western standards most Sephardi newcomers were uneducated and unskilled, and poorly prepared to meet the challenges of America. They encountered their first problem on Ellis Island, even before entering the United States. A lead article in the national Judeo-Spanish weekly *La America*, June 9, 1911, complained that Jews from Turkey were having real difficulty with American immigration officials. These Jews were not familiar with American immigration laws and did not know how to answer the questions put to them. Thus some poor frightened immigrants were detained for weeks before setting foot in this country. Others were actually sent back to Turkey. In an effort to help, *La America* printed American immigration regulations in Judeo-Spanish.

Many Sephardi immigrants were saved from deportation by American Jews. In the fall of 1916 some recent arrivals from the ports of Salonika and Kavala were in serious difficulty because they had diseases which, according to the provisions of immigration laws, barred them from entering the United States. Because deportation to their war-torn homes endangered the lives of these Jews, HIAS persuaded Beth Israel and Montefiore hospitals to admit them as patients.²²

When the Sephardi Jews finally were admitted, they found themselves in complete isolation. Of course, all immigrants needed a period of adjustment; but Sephardim were more severely handicapped than Ashkenazim because the American Jewish community did not quite know what to do with them. All its immigrant facilities were geared to Yiddish-speaking Jews. What was to be done with several thousand Spanish-, Greek-, and Arabic-speaking people? Who could even understand them?

The burden of responsibility naturally fell on the one existing Sephardi congregation in New York, the ancient Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Shearith Israel. HIAS helped by establishing an Oriental Bureau, and other individuals and groups also became

---

involved. But, as we shall see later, attempts at assisting the Sephardim were less than successful.

In the early stages of Sephardi immigration—and of Ashkenazi as well—attempts were made to settle the newcomers outside New York City. The theory was that they would develop better in less unwieldy groups than those in New York. The scatter program would also ease the burden of New York Jewry. Thus, in 1907, the Industrial Removal Office, a Jewish organization begun as part of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, sent a number of Levantine Sephardim to Seattle, Gary, Cincinnati, Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland. The New York Kehillah, the communal organization of the New York City Jews, established Sephardi colonies in Glenham, N.Y., and Raritan, N.J.  

Yet despite all these attempts, perhaps as many as 90 per cent of the Sephardim settled in New York, on the Lower East Side and later also in Harlem. In 1914 other Sephardi communities were in Seattle (about 600), San Francisco (100), Atlanta (100), Rochester (90), and Portland, Ore. (80). Smaller communities were found in Chicago, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, and Montgomery.  

Since most of the Sephardi immigrants spoke Judeo-Spanish, it was believed that they would more easily adjust in Spanish-speaking countries, and that they therefore should be encouraged to settle in Latin America. Dr. David de Sola Pool of Congregation Shearith Israel, who was also chairman of the Oriental Committee of its Sisterhood, considered such proposals. The Oriental Committee of Congregation Mikveh Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue of Philadelphia, apparently also considered this possibility. HIAS explored living conditions in Cuba. Some Sephardim were indeed sent to Latin American countries; but the overwhelming majority settled in the United States. 

The adoption of the 1924 Immigration Act, which embodied the national origins quota system, led to the sharp curtailment of the main


24 Ibid.

sources of Jewish immigration. The Levantine immigration in particular was almost completely choked off. 26 La America, October 17, 1924, published “A New Chapter of Sephardi History in America,” by its editor M.S. Gadol, who reported that many Sephardim were going to Cuba in the expectation of being permitted to enter the United States a year or so later. This, Gadol stated, would not be possible in view of the strict quota law. He felt that Sephardim in the United States, whose numbers would no longer be replenished by new waves of immigrants, now had to rely on their own resources to create viable communities.

New York City Community

In the midst of the many thousand Yiddish-speaking immigrants on the Lower East Side, a relatively small community of Sephardim led an insular life. In the early days, the language barrier cut them off almost entirely from the Ashkenazim. And within the Sephardi community, those speaking Spanish, Greek, and Arabic were separated from each other as well. Even in matters of religion the Sephardim and Ashkenazim formed distinct tribes. Variations in ritual, synagogue liturgy, and pronunciation of Hebrew enlarged the gulf separating them. The Sephardim really had no choice but to form their own community; they were far too uncomfortable in an Ashkenazi setting.

The story goes that the first Sephardi settlers simply were thought not to be really Jewish by the city’s Ashkenazim, for their names, language, appearance, and mannerisms were strange. In light of such cultural differences, Sephardim naturally tended to develop separate communities.

Some New York Ashkenazim at first thought that the Sephardim could be integrated into the general Jewish community, but this idea was immediately rejected as impossible. It would have been not only impossible; it would have been a mistake to try to strip the Sephardim of their identity. Dr. Pool argued that the Sephardim would advance

---

26 Minutes of the Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel, The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in the City of New York, Vol. 9, March 4, 1924, p. 267, records their resolutions against proposed immigration quotas, which were submitted to Congressmen serving on the House Immigration Committee.
more readily if allowed to have their own synagogues and schools, and to function in a milieu that was comfortable and natural for them; that, in time, they would become Americanized socially while maintaining their own distinctive Sephardi ritual, a development that was to be desired.  

Some twelve years later, Hacker, too, discussed the isolation of the New York Sephardim which, he said, was caused by religious, linguistic, and psychological distinctiveness. As a result they established their own institutions: not only synagogues and Talmudé Torah, but also grocery stores, restaurants, and cafés catering to Sephardi taste and eating habits.

As a matter of fact, the coffee houses became a source of contention between the Sephardi immigrants and the American Jewish establishment. Only the male Sephardim frequented them while the women remained at home with the children. After the day's work the men would go to the café, their only outlet for recreation and social intercourse, and their one escape from the bleak tedium of daily life. They would sip Turkish coffee, tell jokes, gossip, complain, discuss politics, read the Judeo-Spanish papers, laugh, cry, and dream. The coffee house, a regular feature of the communities in the Levant, had always been popular with the working people and always unpopular with the rabbis. The Sephardi cafés in New York were no exception to this rule.

As a Sephardi rabbi, Dr. Pool felt keen responsibility for the welfare of the new group of Sephardim. He considered the coffee house a bad influence, condemning it as the enemy of progress, a place of idleness, gambling, and other undesirable activities. However, his words had little influence on reducing patronage of the cafés. Indeed, lay leaders among the Levantine Jews avidly defended them.

Like all Sephardim, the Levantine Jews had a strong sense of pride. They were particularly proud of their ancestry, of their historic Sephardi names. They therefore did not like to feel that they were a "problem." Neither did they consider themselves to be part of the


28 Hacker, op. cit., pp. 32–33.

29 See for example, M. J. Israel, Shenoth Yamin (Smyrna, 1867), pp. 10b, 56a.

lower classes, although they were poor. This pride—which sometimes bordered on stubbornness—made them even more of a problem than they otherwise would have been. Traditional methods of aiding immigrants were seldom effective with them. They resented charity and violently opposed any person or group attempting to help them in a conspicuous manner.

Maurice Hexter, conducting a study of the Cincinnati Sephardi colony in 1913, asked the assistance of Ma'r José Benardete, who later became a recognized Sephardi scholar. Recalling his work with Hexter, Benardete, commented: "It was not a very comfortable feeling to have, as the thought dawned upon my boyish mentality, that the small tribe in the cheapest section of the sooty city by the muddy Ohio River, was presenting difficulties to the charitable agencies of the Ashkenazic Jews who were by comparison numerous and prosperous."31 But it was a fact. How could aid be given to Levantine Jews if they hindered those who wanted to help?

Again and again Levantine spokesmen insisted on their self-dependence. Again and again they asked their would-be benefactors to treat them with respect. They were not beggars. They quickly gained the reputation of being people who would not appeal to local charities except in the most urgent cases, and they rarely appealed a second time.32 As Dr. Cyrus Adler summed it up: "The Oriental Jews unless they be decrepit, blind or maimed ask and take no charity, and to maintain themselves no work is too hard."33 According to Hacker, the Sephardim "consider themselves a people apart; they are 'Spanish Jews' with a distinct historical consciousness and, often, an inordinate pride."34

No doubt the Levantine immigrants created a serious problem for American Jewish agencies. Delegates from two Sephardi organizations, the Ahavath Shalom Society of Monastir and the Union and Peace Society, who attended a meeting of the New York Kehillah in February 1911, told the gathering in no uncertain terms that not even

31 Benardete, op. cit., p. 140.
33 Address to the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, New York, November 27, 1916, as recorded in its Minutes. See also Pool, "The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States," op. cit., p. 15.
34 Hacker, op. cit., p. 33.
one member of their societies would need communal assistance during the coming year; that they themselves could handle any problems that might come up.\textsuperscript{35} The Sephardi community approved of this stand. At a conference of Jewish social work leaders, Joseph Gedelecia, a Levantine Jew of Ashkenazi origin, admitted that the immigrants were a problem to the American Jewish establishment, but he added that the latter did not know how to cope with the situation properly. Defiantly he exclaimed: "But it is a problem you do not understand. When the Yiddish Jews go to Turkey, they, too, are a serious problem there."\textsuperscript{36}

In view of the barrier existing between the Jewish social service agencies and the Sephardi Jews, Dr. Pool advised local federations and charities not to assist the Levantine Jews unless asked to do so. He also suggested that, whenever possible, aid should be given to the Sephardim through their own organizations.\textsuperscript{37}

Although in the early days of the Sephardi settlement misery and poverty prevailed, the future held promise. The overwhelming majority of the Sephardim were unskilled, struggling, and working long hours as candy peddlers, bootblacks, cloakroom attendants, waiters, and the like. Many sold fruits and vegetables. But it was not long before they began to rise economically. They were careful to save money and, in time, bootblacks became owners of shoe-repair shops; fruit vendors opened grocery stores; candy salesmen bought candy concessions in movie theaters, and some went on to buy the theaters as well.

Sephardi children went to public schools; some went on to college. On June 8, 1917, \textit{La America} reported that Jack David Hananiah, who had come from Smyrna, received a dentist's diploma; he was the first of New York's new Sephardi colony to enter that profession. Soon there there were also Sephardi doctors and lawyers. As early as 1914, Joseph Gedelecia boasted that New York's Sephardi community had eighteen doctors, three lawyers, sixty teachers, four professors, and various civil engineers and manufacturers. Several of the Sephardim amassed large fortunes, as, for example, the Schenazy brothers who were cigar manufacturers. Although Gedelecia's statements may have

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{La America}, February 17, 1911, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Jewish Charities}, June 1914, p. 29.

been somewhat exaggerated, they were nevertheless indicative of the upward mobility of the community. The economic progress continued with each succeeding generation, so that today the Sephardi community is relatively comfortable.

A serious problem of New York’s Sephardim since their arrival early this century has been disunity. They formed societies, and even social clubs, based for the most part on geographical origin. Thus there were two clubs of Syrian Jews, one for those from Damascus and the other for people from Aleppo. Greek-speaking Jews formed Ahavah veAkhvah Janina and Tikvah Torah. The Spanish-speaking community had, for example, the following organizations: Ahavath Shalom for Monastir Jews; Hesed veEmet for those from Castoria; Mekor Hayyim for those from the Dardanelles; Yeshu‘a veRahamim for Rhodes Jews; Hayyim veHesed for those from Gallipoli; Etz Hayyim for those from Smyrna, and Ezrath Ahim for those from Rodosto, Silivria, and Tchorlu. A progressive group of Turkish and Moroccan Jews formed the Union and Peace Society whose official language was English. The Progressive Oriental Society was composed mostly of Ashkenazim from Turkey. And as the Sephardi population increased, the number of these groups multiplied.

In 1912 twelve congregations of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews held High Holy Day services. Most of them had originated as benevolent and self-help societies. In 1926, Hacker reported, the Sephardim had a number of small, struggling synagogues: eight on the Lower East Side, three in Harlem, and three in Brooklyn. They also had some thirty-six burial and mutual-aid societies.

In the intervening years, there had been several major attempts, as well as a host of minor ones, to achieve unity among the New York Sephardim.

---


40 Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
FEDERATION OF ORIENTAL JEWS

Since none of the Sephardi societies was large enough to support adequate schools and synagogues or to provide enough social and cultural services to serve the many needs of the entire community, Sephardi leaders urged the groups to unite into a central authoritative organization.\(^41\)

Early in 1912 it seemed as though unity was about to be achieved. *La America* of March 22, 1912, carried a front-page article by Gadol announcing the consolidation of different societies into the Oriental Jewish Federation of America. The Federation of Oriental Jews, as it came to be known, did not really solidify itself until December 1913. At a Federation-sponsored mass meeting held on December 7, the Sephardi leadership announced their intention to found a “self-supporting Ladino community where all the emigrated Jews from the Orient may find themselves ‘at home.’ ”

Funds for community institutions would come from an annual fee of $12.00 to be paid by each Federation member for the support of religious schools, a social house, an employment bureau, and a “spiritual adviser.” The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution which underscored the desire for financial independence: “Be it hereby resolved, that it is the sense of this meeting, that in the future, any organization or individual applying for funds for Oriental Jews, are doing so against the expressed wishes of our people and against the principle that, henceforth, we intend to carry on our own work without outside assistance.”\(^42\)

This resolution irked the non-Oriental individuals and groups who had taken up the cause of these newcomers. The Oriental Committee of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York felt insulted and outraged. It left the Federation, and stated in its letter of resignation that it intended to take full control of the Uptown Talmud Torah in Harlem, thus severing all official cooperative ventures with the Federation of Oriental Jews.\(^43\)

\(^{41}\) *La America*’s editor, M.S. Gadol, often called for such unity; see for example the issue of January 12, 1912, p. 2.

\(^{42}\) *American Hebrew*, December 12, 1913, p. 190. See also issue of December 19, 1913, p. 220.

\(^{43}\) Sisterhood Minutes, December 17, 1913, pp. 9–11.
For all its grand plans, however, the Federation did not succeed. It was little more than a loosely connected union of various small, independent societies, made powerless by each group's insistence on autonomy. If any member-society disapproved of a project, the Federation could proceed only at the risk of resignations.

Recognizing the impotence of the Federation as then constituted, Gadol ultimately turned against it. He argued that the Sephardim needed a central community organization with a community house. He reported some progress toward this end in 1916.44 *La America* announced, in its issue of July 6, 1917, the election of a provisional committee to establish a democratic Sephardi community. A month later (August 3), the paper outlined the functions and scope of the community. On October 12 *La America* invited everyone to a meeting two days later, at which the "Sephardi Community" was to be officially founded. This attempt, too, was abortive.

During the years of these early struggles for unity, the question of appointing a *haham* (chief rabbi) for the Sephardi community was often discussed. As already mentioned, the Federation of Oriental Jews advocated such a move. *La America* dealt with the issue as early as January 25, 1913. Dr. Pool discussed the matter with Dr. Judah L. Magnes, the head of the New York *Kehillah*, and it was agreed that Shearith Israel would be given charge of the finances in order to employ a chief rabbi 45 who, it was hoped, would achieve unity in the community.

When the Federation learned that non-Oriental groups were interested in a *kolel*—a community with a chief rabbi and a governing body of responsible lay leaders—it refused to go along with the idea.46 A letter from Magnes to Gadol, published in *La America*, June 9, 1916, expressing the *Kehillah*'s frustrations, said in part: "I regret to

---

44*La America*, March 17, p. 2; March 31, p. 4; July 28, p. 2; August 25, p. 2; December 8, 1916, p. 2.

45Sisterhood Minutes, November 24, 1913, p. 2; December 11, 1913, p. 6.

46Trustees Minutes, Vol. 8, January 24, 1914, p. 455; Sisterhood Minutes, May 19, 1914, p. 37. A letter dated May 20, 1914, from Mr. Mayer Swaab, Jr. of Shearith Israel to Dr. Magnes of the *Kehillah* complains that though Shearith Israel had agreed to pay $500 to start a *kolel* under the auspices of the *Kehillah*, the Federation of Oriental Jews refused to cooperate. Swaab attacked the leaders of the Orientals as being destructive to the welfare of their community. See also David de Sola Pool, "Report of the Committee on a Progressive Policy in the Congregation," April 22, 1927, p. 7 (in possession of New York Congregation Shearith Israel).
say that it is not possible for me to keep up with the difficulties and controversies that seem to disturb the Oriental or Sephardi Jewish community. I do sincerely hope that some way may be found of bringing about greater harmony and more united activity on behalf of the Jewish cause." The community was to remain without a chief rabbi until 1941.  

SEPHARDI JEWISH COMMUNITY OF NEW YORK, INC.

In 1924 another major effort was made by New York's Sephardim to establish a central communal institution, this time the Sephardi Jewish Community of New York, Inc. This organization had little success, as Louis Hacker reported. It, too, was based on the local societies, not on the community as a whole. In 1926 it had approximately $6,000 in its treasury, but no definite program for which to spend the money. Still, Dr. Pool called it "a stable and responsible organization." It purchased a community house on 115th Street and seemed to be heading in the right direction. But in time, this organization, too, disintegrated; it lacked vigorous leadership and broad vision. And, as the Sephardi population moved from Harlem, the Community collapsed.

UNION OF SEPHARDIC CONGREGATIONS

The problem of Sephardi unity was not confined to New York City. Numerous small colonies of Sephardim were scattered throughout the United States, each existing as an island. The Sephardim in America had no focal point, no recognized organization which could spur their activities and development. The need for guidance in religious matters was particularly acute. Each synagogue had its own prayer book, so that there was no uniform Sephardi liturgy. Jewish education was sorely inadequate. Sephardim

---

47 The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia (New York, 1942), Vol. 8, p. 586, states that, until 1941, Dr. Pool was "the sole spokesman for Sephardic Jewry in the U.S. representing both the newer arrivals from the Levantine countries and the Sephardim who had lived for many generations in the English-speaking lands." However, he never officially held the post of chief rabbi.

48 Hacker, op. cit., p. 36.

were not producing religious leaders and teachers. Dr. Pool envisioned the establishment of the Union of Sephardic Congregations to deal with the many problems of Sephardi synagogues. In 1928 committees of Shearith Israel in New York met with representatives of Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia and Shearith Israel of Montreal, and these three ancient congregations took the lead in founding the Union. Sephardi congregations throughout the country responded to the call and the Union was born.  

The Union’s main accomplishment was the publication of Sephardi prayer books, translated and edited by Dr. Pool. It also held a number of conventions, but these seldom spurred constructive actions. (At the May 1949 convention held at Shearith Israel Dr. Pool deplored the failure of so many New York congregations to send delegates.) It asked that promising young men be sought for Sephardi rabbinic training; that Jewish education receive top priority; that Sephardi synagogues adopt a uniform minhag. But the Sephardi Jews, as a whole, had no interest in such matters. In the course of time, the Union of Sephardic Congregations has become relatively inactive.

CENTRAL SEPHARDIC JEWISH COMMUNITY OF AMERICA, INC.

The last attempt at unity was made by Rabbi Nissim J. Ovadia, born in Turkey and recognized as a scholar and leader by the Sephardim in Europe. Shortly after his arrival in the United States in 1941, he succeeded in his effort to establish the Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America, Inc., at a meeting in May of Sephardim of all language backgrounds. Although the organization was concerned mainly with New York City, its membership included Sephardim of other cities as well. Rabbi Ovadia served as chief rabbi until his death in August 1942, at the age of 52. Rabbi David Jessurun Cardozo, then assistant minister of Shearith Israel, began to work with the community; he helped organize its women’s division, together with


Mrs. Mazal Ovadia and Mrs. Acher Touriel. Rabbi Isaac Alcalay became the community’s chief rabbi, a position he continues to hold today.

The Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America set itself important goals. It worked to maintain Sephardi tradition in worship; to give religious education to the young; to deal with immigration problems; to Americanize Sephardi immigrants as quickly as possible; to find employment for Sephardim; to provide social welfare; to create a Sephardi Bet Din, an authoritative rabbinical court. It also sponsored cultural and social programs.

The Central Sephardic Jewish Community seemed to have a real chance of succeeding. In September 1943 it launched a bulletin, The Sephardi, whose purpose, its first issue stated, was “to awaken the Sephardi masses to the necessity of a united Sephardi community throughout the Western Hemisphere.” It appeared intermittently until 1957, when it ceased publication.

In December 1944 Joseph M. Papo, a trained social worker, was appointed the Community’s executive director. This was a felicitous move; for, if the organization was to succeed, it needed trained, able professionals. John Karpeles was hired as director of youth activities. In 1946 the community’s Youth League had four chapters: in the Bronx, on Lower East Side, in New Lots, and in Sheepshead Bay. Papo initiated a census of New York’s Sephardim to determine the condition of Sephardi life, but this was never completed. The Community’s post-war activities aiding Jewish survivors of World War II depleted its financial resources.

However, despite its initial structural strength, today the Community does not receive the support it needs. Its Women’s Division does much constructive work, but it has had difficulty recruiting younger members. Perhaps the main reason for the Community’s weakness is that the younger generation is not vitally interested in its survival. The young Sephardim did not have a good religious and Sephardi education and, as they married and moved into new neighborhoods which often

---


54 See The Sephardi, March 1946, p. 6; June 1946, p. 7.

had no Sephardi synagogues, they lost their interest in the Sephardi community.

RELATIONS BETWEEN NEW AND OLD SEPHARDIM

The old Sephardi congregations, most of their members being of Ashkenazi or mixed Sephardi descent, were relatively affluent and certainly quite Americanized. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York occupied a grand building on the corner of Central Park West and Seventieth Street. It saw the influx of poor, unskilled, seemingly uncouth Levantine immigrants as a significant challenge, especially since the two groups shared little except a common past in Spain centuries ago. Still, considering their many differences, there was relatively little conflict between them. Many of the Levantine immigrants attached themselves to Shearith Israel with singular devotion, and there has been truly remarkable harmony between them and the old Sephardi families.

To be sure, relations between the affluent and the poor were not always completely cordial, and there were misunderstandings. Some of the old-line Sephardim apparently felt uneasy because the new immigrants called themselves Sephardim. They were afraid the term would fall into disrepute, and they urged that the newcomers be called "Orientals." HIAS acceded to a request that it change the name of its Sephardi Committee to Committee on Oriental Jews.56

The immigrants at first accepted the new designation, but later came to resent it deeply as a slur against them. The impression had been created that the Sephardim were noble and rich, while the Orientals were ignorant and poor. As one Ashkenazi leader once said to M.S. Gadol, the Sephardim were those who belonged to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, while the immigrants were nothing but "Orientals" and "Ladinos."57 The irony was that many of the immigrants who were pure-blooded Spanish-speaking Sephardim were called Orientals, while Shearith Israel members who were Ashkenazi and of mixed blood were considered the true Sephardim. Realizing that


57La America, October 13, 1916, p. 3; see also issues of October 29, 1915, p. 2; November 3, 10, 17, and 24, 1916, all p. 2; July 5, 1918, p. 4.
the immigrants resented being called Oriental and Levantine, the Spanish and Portuguese establishment eventually abandoned these designations.

Shearith Israel felt a moral obligation to help the newcomers, but its outstanding efforts were not always recognized or appreciated. The Sisterhood established an Oriental Employment Bureau. And, maintaining that the "Oriental brethren, proud though poor, ask of us only an opportunity for honest employment," Shearith Israel Bulletin in March and April 1912 appealed to members to help them find jobs, especially the kind that would not involve the violation of the Sabbath.

Dr. Pool made every effort to make the immigrants feel at home. Thus, at a meeting in February 1912 to which the leaders of Shearith Israel invited some fifty of them, he stressed that they and the members of the congregation shared the same Sephardi customs. But one of Shearith Israel's ladies made a speech which, though well-intentioned, hopelessly missed the essential needs of the newcomers. Among other things, she said she would see to it that Sephardi girls learned to play the piano and to speak pure Castilian Spanish instead of their Judeo-Spanish—skills that were far removed from the practical needs of the immigrants. Gadol therefore felt that Shearith Israel's promises were empty; rather the newcomers needed a first-rate Talmud Torah. If Shearith Israel could help establish one, this would be a real service. The congregation rose to this challenge and later announced plans for such a school.\(^{58}\)

The old Spanish and Portuguese group soon became deeply involved in every phase of the immigrants' welfare. Shearith Israel often was asked, and very rarely refused, to give financial aid and to lend religious articles to new Sephardi synagogues.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\)La America, February 16, 1912, p. 3; February 23, 1912, p. 1; March 1, 1912, p. 1. For a general picture of Shearith Israel's relations with the Sephardi immigrants, see David and Tamar de Sola Pool, An Old Faith in the New World (New York, 1955), pp. 43f.

\(^{59}\)For some dealings involving Shearith Israel and the Sephardim, see Trustees Minutes, Vol. 8, May 1, 1906, p. 294; December 6, 1910, p. 384; October 19, 1914, p. 474; November 5, 1914, p. 475; January 5, 1915, p. 479; February 2, 1915, p. 481; Vol. 9, October 5, 1915, p. 6; November 15, 1915, p. 8; April 4, 1916, p. 16; May 22, 1916, p. 20; October 16, 1916, pp. 26-27; April 1, 1919, p. 99; May 6, 1919, p. 101; June 13, 1922, p. 207. See also Sisterhood Minutes, December 6, 1913, p. 384; December 17, 1913, p. 8; May 19, 1914, pp. 38-39. La America, on January 30, 1914 reported one of many cases of death among the immigrants in which Shearith Israel conducted burials at no cost. The earliest cases are recorded in Trustees Minutes, November 9, 1908, p. 343; April 8, 1909, p. 349; May 3, 1910, p. 373.
Since 1909 Shearith Israel had been conducting free Holy Day services in its auditorium for the needy, most of whom were Oriental Jews. Gadol, who attended such "overflow services" in 1913, found that 90 per cent of the worshipers were middle-class Turkish Jews, and he argued that they should have been permitted to occupy empty seats in the main synagogue. Gadol felt that the congregation was degrading the immigrants by asking them to go to the services in the auditorium downstairs, and he urged Turkish Jews to stay away from the "overflow services" and attend their own synagogues. 60

Gadol's charges clearly illustrate Shearith Israel's frustrations, for no matter what it did for the newcomers, it was attacked in the Judeo-Spanish press. What did Gadol and his sympathizers actually want? But if Gadol was fanatical and more than unfair in his charges, his attitude made some sense: he did not want immigrant Sephardim to become accustomed to taking charity. If they relied on the "overflow services," they would never make an attempt to build their own synagogues, to stand on their own feet. While Shearith Israel was giving temporary help, it was not, thought Gadol, teaching the Sephardim to become independent, to plan for stable synagogues of their own.

However, Shearith Israel continued its free services until 1924, when the trustees decided to stop the practice. In a letter to Mortimer Menken, then president of the congregation, Dr. Pool argued against the move which, he thought, would undermine the gradually improving relations between Shearith Israel and the Oriental community. It would give rise to mistrust and antagonism among the Oriental Jews and "representative and influential members of the Oriental Jewish Community, such as Mr. [Jack] Barkey, Mr. [Victor] LaHana, Mr. John H. Levy and Mr. [Edward] Valensi, [who] have joined our Congregation." The free High Holy Day services were reinstated in 1927. 61

Shearith Israel invited members of the Sephardi colony to attend other services and programs it conducted. This, too, led to controversy at times. A particularly unfortunate incident occurred on Sukkot of

60La America, October 17, 1913, p. 2.
61Pool, "Report . . .," loc. cit. Excerpts of Dr. Pool's unpublished letter to Mr. Menken, dated November 25, 1924, are printed with the permission of Mrs. David de Sola Pool. Interestingly, La America criticized Shearith Israel for canceling its free services—after a long history of agitating against them.
1924, when visitors, some of them new Sephardim, were barred from the synagogue's overcrowded sukkah. Again, Dr. Pool pacified Mortimer Menken, who was close to losing patience with the immigrants, by writing: "We should be prepared to forego much for the sake of harmony and peace, for the sake of the broader interests of our own Congregation, for the sake of the welfare of the Oriental Sephardi community, and more especially for the sake of their American-born children who can so easily be lost without our friendship and solicitude." Had this not been Shearith Israel's general approach, relations between the old and new Sephardi communities would have been disastrous. The congregation ultimately won the friendship and admiration of most of the Oriental Sephardim, who now are counted among its most active and generous leaders.

**SETTLEMENT HOUSE**

The Sisterhood of Shearith Israel, in particular, dedicated itself to helping the newcomers. In the early days of immigration it operated a Neighborhood Settlement House on the Lower East Side which emphasized the need of the Sephardim to become Americanized. The Sisterhood gave parties, put on plays, and arranged all kinds of celebrations. Independence Day in 1912 saw a gathering of some 500 guests; music was supplied by the Fourth of July Committee of the City of New York. The Sisterhood distributed to each guest the text of the Declaration of Independence and an especially prepared Judeo-Spanish translation of it (perhaps the first in American history).

The Neighborhood House also had its own synagogue, Berith Shalom. In return for regularly attending services at that synagogue, worshipers and their families were offered, in March 1914, associate membership in Shearith Israel at a charge of fifty cents per month. This

---

62 *La America*, October 17, 1924, p. 7; Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, October 23, 1924, p. 289; Minutes of joint meeting of Trustees of Shearith Israel, the Sisterhood, and Berith Shalom, December 2, 1924, pp. 2–3.

63 See *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, September 1912, p. 15. The Sisterhood often sponsored Purim celebrations, serving free dinners to all guests. Unfortunately, Gadol's bitterness led him to condemn the Sisterhood even for such generous parties. See *La America*, March 20, 1914, p. 2; April 3, 1914, p. 2. Other information dealing with various celebrations may be found in *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, March 1912, pp. 6–7; *La America*, March 8, 1912, p. 2; June 28, 1912, p. 1; March 8, 1918, p. 3.
entitled them to all services granted or performed by the synagogue, including the use of a section in its Long Island cemetery. Membership privileges, however, were limited to eleven months a year (excluding the High Holy Day season) and were withdrawn for boys after their eighteenth birthday. The plan was warmly received by many downtown Sephardim.  

By 1912 the Neighborhood House dedicated itself exclusively to the needs of the Sephardi immigrants. The difficult task of giving leadership to the Berith Shalom worshipers and of maintaining harmony between Shearith Israel and the synagogue was successfully performed by Reverend Joseph de A. Benyunes. He was a humble and good man, a member of the old Spanish and Portuguese community. Social workers, club directors, Talmud Torah teachers, and other trained personnel were engaged to direct other activities.

NEED FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

Responsible individuals and groups within the Sephardi colony continued to advocate Americanization. English classes were held, and immigrants were strongly urged to study and apply for American citizenship. Indeed, the desire to Americanize was so strong among the younger Sephardim that there was fear the new generation would be lost to Judaism. The Sephardim now desperately needed high-quality Jewish educational programs to maintain the young people's interest in their heritage. But no such schools existed, and the resultant loss to the religious sensibilities of both the Sephardi and general Jewish communities is immeasurable. The Sephardim were busy establishing themselves and had neither time, resources, nor the will to establish good schools. And now, several generations later, neither time, resources, nor will can fully compensate for what has been lost forever.

Reverend Benyunes did all he could to preserve the Sephardi heritage by working with the Sisterhood's downtown and uptown

---

64 For a record of these events, see Trustees Minutes Vol. 8, March 8, 1914, p. 459; March 16, 1914, p. 461; April 7, 1914, p. 461; May 25, 1914, p. 465; July 1, 1914, p. 469. At a meeting on October 23, 1916 the Trustees abolished the special associate membership.

65 La America, November 25, 1910, p. 2; August 4, 1911, p. 1; December 29, 1911, p. 1; July 21, 1916, p. 2. See also Sisterhood Minutes, December 22, 1913, p. 14.
religious schools. But the problems with these and other Sephardi Hebrew schools were manifold: inadequate staffing, lack of discipline and organization; erratic attendance of students; antiquated curricula.  

SEPHARDI CLUBS

The Sisterhood's Neighborhood House, for its part, sponsored clubs to keep the young involved in Jewish life. The Jewish Friendship Circle, founded in January 1914, was the first organization of this kind for Sephardi children. The members had parties, put on dramatic performances, played games and had other activities. Arrangements were made for children to attend camps during the summer months. Benyunes worked with this group as well as with the Society of Helpful Women, which was also designed to strengthen religious observance among the Sephardim.

As the programs expanded, the old Neighborhood House became inadequate and facilities were twice moved to larger quarters: to Orchard Street in 1913 and to Eldridge Street in 1916.

The boys who had outgrown the services of the Settlement House founded their own clubs, such as the Alba and the Sephardic Progressive. In 1918 young Sephardi men in Harlem founded the Filo Center Club, which is still in existence. Other clubs for the Judeo-Spanish were the Zenith, Sunray, and much later, the Abravanel Square Club. The Greek-speaking Jews met at the Athenian Club. The Broome and Allen Boys, one of the Judeo-Spanish groups still

66 Sisterhood Minutes, November 24, 1913, p. 2; December 11, 1913, p. 5; January 28, 1914, p. 18; March 9, 1914, p. 29; November 16, 1914, p. 49; December 21, 1914, p. 53; January 26, 1915, p. 57; October 6, 1915, p. 69; January 24, 1916, pp. 86-88; December 26, 1916, p. 98. See also Shearith Israel Bulletin, January 31, 1924, p. 2.

67 La America, February 13, 1914, p. 2. Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, December 12 (p. 188) and 25, 1921, p. 190; October 17, 1922, p. 220. Barocas, op. cit., p. 10. Sisterhood Minutes, op. cit., January 28, 1914, p. 19; March 9, 1914, p. 27; March 15, 1915, p. 61, all deal with the problem of rowdyism at the Neighborhood House clubs.

68 Sisterhood Minutes, January 28, 1914, pp. 18-19; December 21, 1914, pp. 52-53.

functioning, undertook as its permanent task to provide needy children with summer camp vacations. This they did in recognition of the help they received from the Sisterhood when they were boys.

COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

Relations between Shearith Israel and Berith Shalom showed signs of improvement in 1923, largely due to the efforts of Henry S. Hendricks, Berith Shalom's president and an outstanding leader of Shearith Israel. In March Berith Shalom added to its name "of Shearith Israel." The entente cordial lasted until the spring of 1925, when Berith Shalom dropped its formal association with its mother congregation. By this time, the community was largely self-sufficient. Many of the Sephardim had been in America for a decade or more, so that the initial problems they had faced as immigrants were rapidly disappearing. There no longer was a valid reason for remaining under the wings of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.

In his famous report of 1926, Louis Hacker spoke of the changing character of the Sephardi community. He pointed out that the Sisterhood's Neighborhood Settlement House was steadily losing influence as Sephardim were moving away from from the Lower East Side. No new immigrants requiring its services were arriving. But while the Sephardim no longer needed welfare, they continued to need spiritual and cultural guidance; for this they lacked proper leadership.

Indeed, the last years of the decade and the early 1930s were a period of transition for the Sephardim of New York City, as well as for the other communities in the United States. The first American-born generation was old enough to marry. The old clubs were breaking up. Neighborhoods were changing. This was the beginning of a new era in Sephardi history in the United States.

---

70Barocas, ibid., pp. 1, 12–15.
71Shearith Israel Bulletin, February 2, 1923, p. 2; Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, November 17, 1924, p. 291; November 25, 1924, p. 296; December 2, 1924, p. 297. A letter dated November 20, 1924 from N. Yohai of Berith Shalom to I. Phillips Cohen, clerk of Shearith Israel, deals with the problems between the two organizations. For the formal break, see Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, June 3, 1925, p. 310. For later attempts to improve relations, see Pool, "Report. . . .", op. cit., pp. 6f.
Sephardi Communities Outside New York City

The small Sephardi communities scattered throughout the country shared a common development. The problems of one could, with changes of names and places, serve as a fairly accurate description of the problems of all. The difficulties plaguing the New York Sephardim were those of the Sephardim in Seattle, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Rochester, Indianapolis, and elsewhere.

In his 1913 study of the Sephardi colony in Cincinnati, Maurice Hexter counted 219 immigrants with 27 American-born children and three Russian-Jewish wives. Most of the families came from the Dardanelles, a minority from Salonika. Their language and culture isolated them from the rest of the community. Attempts at Americanization had not yet been successful, and Hexter urged that the Sephardim be encouraged to become citizens. They were at the bottom of the economic ladder, working as peddlers, petty salesmen, unskilled workers, shoemakers, tailors, waiters. Of the fifty families in Cincinnati, forty-three lived in tenements. Many took in boarders or lodgers to supplement their meager incomes. Hexter noted that here, too, "their social centers are two pernicious poolrooms and coffee houses." As in New York, little progress was made in Jewish education.

Just as the New York Sephardim were fragmented into groups based on geographic origins, so were several other, much smaller, communities. Thus Jews from the Island of Rhodes, always eager to maintain their own synagogues and benevolent societies, established separate organizations in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. The Atlanta community split into two factions in 1912, but reunited two years later. Seattle, with only some forty Sephardi families in 1910, had two distinct religious groups and three mutual-aid societies. To this day, it has two Sephardi synagogues; one for those originating on the Island of Rhodes, and the other for those from the Turkish mainland, particularly from the Marmara littoral. The Rhodes Jews also maintain their own synagogue in Los Angeles.

Sephardi communities with sizable groups of different geographic

74Maurice Hexter, "The Dawn of a Problem," Jewish Charities, December 1913, pp. 2-5.
origins usually had to struggle for unity. But, as in New York, they seldom achieved more than moderately peaceful coexistence. They organized no cultural or educational institutions of their own, except synagogues and mediocre Hebrew schools. Even fairly united communities, which usually were small in size, did not properly plan for cultural and spiritual survival.  

It is difficult to estimate the number of Sephardi congregations in the United States. Some are too small and others too new to be known. The *Diary and World-Wide Directory of Sephardic Congregations*, published annually by Shearith Israel in New York, lists a total of thirty-six. Though this listing is not complete, it is doubtful whether there are more than fifty or sixty. A few of them are growing and expanding, but many are stagnant and some are on the verge of dying. While, at present, nostalgia still ties the Sephardim to their past, this will no longer be true in a generation or two.

**Sephardi Cultural Endeavors**

One of the bright spots in the intellectual history of the Sephardim in the United States is the Judeo-Spanish press. *La America* began publication in 1910 as a national weekly. It closed down in 1923. Besides Sephardi news, it printed provocative editorials, historical essays, poetry, and fiction. Reading *La America* is an exciting experience even today; one is stirred by the vigorous and perceptive intellect of its editor, M.S. Gadol.

Other national Judeo-Spanish publications were published later: *La Boz del Pueblo*, *El Luzero Sephardi*, *La Luz*, *El Progresso*, *El Emigrante*, and *La Vara*. *La Vara*, which appeared from 1922 until February 1948, was by far the most important and popular. Its circulation rose from 9,000 in 1926 to 16,500 in 1928. In a 1924 series of articles, *La Vara*'s editor, Albert Levy, called for the publication of a daily Sephardi newspaper, pointing to the need for such a cultural organ. The idea never became reality. On December

---

77 *La Vara*, August 29, 1924, p. 4.
La Vara announced the establishment of the Sephardi Publishing Company on Rivington Street. It was not possible to determine the extent of its activities. When La Vara ceased publication, the Judeo-Spanish press in America came to an end.

Various Sephardi societies also issued publications, some written in Judeo-Spanish but most in English. Among them were The Sephardic Bulletin, an English-language Zionist paper of the late 1930s; The Progress, the newspaper of Seattle’s Sephardim, 1934–35; El Ermanado, an annual published by the Sephardic Brotherhood of America.

The Sephardic Home News, a monthly newsletter with a national circulation of about 10,000, is published currently under the editorship of Dr. Joseph Dalven. (It is the organ of the Sephardic Home for the Aged in Brooklyn, established by Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish and Greek backgrounds. The Home, founded in August 1951, is the only institution of its type created by and for Sephardim. It has an impressive record of growth and expansion.)

Every Sephardi community put on biblical and historical plays like Joseph, the Righteous, and his Brothers and Dreifus, written in, or translated into, Judeo-Spanish by Sephardi playwrights for local showing. In Seattle, for example, Leon Behar excelled as both producer and playwright. But this kind of theater no longer exists in the United States.

Within the past decade there has been some creative activity in the American Sephardi communities. In 1964 Yeshiva University established a Sephardic Studies Program. Originally conceived by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Haham Solomon Gaon, and Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of Yeshiva University, the program includes not only academic courses and cultural events but also community service activities. In this area, Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky of Yeshiva has done much to promote unity among the Sephardim. The Sephardic Studies Program also publishes The American Sephardi, an annual scholarly journal which circulates in

---

78 Levantine Sephardim were Zionists ever since their earliest settlement in the United States. Gadol was a devoted Zionist.


sephardim in the united states / 111

every sephardic community of north america and is on file in many
university judaica libraries.

In 1969 the foundation for the advancement of sephardic studies
and culture was incorporated, mainly through the efforts of professor
and mrs. m. j. benardete, david barocas, and louis n. levy. it
publishes tracts on various phases of sephardic history and culture.
though the foundation's impact has been limited because of
inadequate staff and financial support, it has created some cultural
waves, especially among sephardim of judeo-spanish origin.

most recently, an organization calling itself the world sephardic
institute has begun publishing a newsletter, sephardic world. while
major support of this group seems to come from sephardim of arabic
background, the newsletter attempts to reach all sephardim. on
another front, there also has been an attempt to strengthen the
american branch of the world sephardic federation through the
encouragement of the jewish agency.

mention should be made of the interest in sephardic studies by the
spanish government whose supreme council for scientific studies
established the instituto arias montana de estudios hebraicos in
madrid in 1939. the institute's quarterly journal, sefarad, deals with
all phases of jewish history and culture, but focuses on the sephardi
past. the 1960s also witnessed a revival of the study of general and
hispanic jewish culture in spain. the universities of madrid,
barcelona, and granada established chairs of hebrew language,
jewish history, and jewish literature. an institute of sephardic studies
was established in madrid. in 1964 a sephardic center was created in
toledo by decree of the head of state.

the instituto ibn tibbon of the university of granada, directed by
professor david gonzalo maeso, has initiated the publication of
biblioteca universal sefardi in collaboration with editorial gredos.
so far they have produced several volumes of the me'am lo'ez, the
great judeo-spanish bible commentary, with introduction and notes.
the books are printed in latin letters, not in the rashi script of the
original. 81

81 the first volume in this series was the prolegomenos to the me'am lo'ez (madrid,
1964). see also iacob hassan, t. rubiato, and e. romero, eds., actas del primer
simposio de estudios sefardies ("proceedings of the first symposium of sephardic
studies; madrid, 1970), 789 p., for the record of a historic symposium in spain, held
in 1964.
Syrian Sephardi Community

In a recent survey of American Sephardim, Hayyim Cohen of the Hebrew University found that, while Jews of Judeo-Spanish origin are scattered throughout the United States, almost all Sephardim of Syrian origin are concentrated in one neighborhood in Brooklyn (there are also small communities in Bradley Beach and Deal, N. J., and in Myrtle Beach, S. C.);\(^{82}\) that Egyptian Jews, most of whom actually are of Syrian origin, live in the same neighborhood, as do several hundred Lebanese Jews; that Iraqi Jews are found in Queens, Manhattan, and Long Island.\(^{83}\)

Cohen estimates that some 5,000 Syrian Jews are living in Brooklyn;\(^{84}\) Syrian leaders, however, put the number at some 20,000,\(^{85}\) a more realistic estimate. The Syrian Jews maintain a number of synagogues, all of them very well attended.

The Syrian community has risen to relative affluence during its several generations in America. Many of its members are proprietors of retail stores. The number of professionals is rising, though not to the degree found among Judeo-Spanish Sephardim. This is because Syrian Jews are more business-oriented, and fewer attend college.\(^{86}\)

Of all the Sephardi communities in the United States, the Syrian community of Brooklyn is doubtless the strongest and most viable. Syrians have kept their neighborhood intact. When the young marry, they often choose to settle within the community. Syrians also tend to


\(^{84}\)Ibid., p. 159.


marry within their own group to a far greater extent than other Sephardim. Intermarriage with non-Jews is extremely rare. 87

The Syrian Jews are the only Sephardim who have developed an educational system of their own. They support several day schools attended by an estimated 85 to 90 per cent of all school-age children. The Syrians also have several yeshivot for advanced Jewish learning, the largest and most important of which is the Sephardic Institute directed by Rabbi Mosheh Shamah. The Institute is attended by over fifty young men, many of whom are also studying for degrees in colleges or graduate schools. The Syrian community can boast of dozens of rabbis and talmudic scholars who attended its own or Ashkenazi yeshivot.

North African Sephardim

Sephardim of North African origin have settled throughout North America. In the United States, they are represented in small numbers in nearly all Sephardi communities. They generally have enjoyed a steady upward mobility educationally, economically, and socially. In Washington, D.C., a group of 250 Moroccan Jews has established its own congregation. 88

A far greater number of North African Jews settled in Canada, notably in Montreal and Toronto. In June 1967 Professor Jean Boulakia 89 of Montreal estimated that of some 9,000 Sephardim (about 8 per cent of the total Jewish population) living in Montreal, some 7,000 were of Moroccan origin. The rest of the Sephardim came from Tunisia, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Algeria, Italy, Greece, and elsewhere.

Most Sephardim in Canada are French-speaking and are thus separated linguistically from the English-speaking Ashkenazi majority. The Montreal and Toronto communities 90 are plagued by poverty and associated social ills. The new immigrants are having adjustment

problems similar to those of the Sephardi immigrants in the United States earlier in this century. They too suffer from lack of unity and internal leadership, but the situation seems to be improving.

SURVEY OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM

Under the sponsorship of the Union of Sephardic Congregations this writer conducted a study of American-born Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish background. Between January and March 1972, a total of 941 questionnaires were mailed. We received a total of 251 acceptable responses from Atlanta, Denver, Detroit, Highland Park (N. J.), Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Montgomery, Portland (Ore.), Rochester, Sacramento, Seattle, and from all parts of Metropolitan New York. (Since all respondents did not answer each question, the totals in the discussion below do not always add up to 251.) It must be remembered that this study does not deal with other Sephardi communities, as, for example, the Syrian.

The survey was essentially exploratory, since there was no way of selecting a truly random sample of American Sephardim. Mailing lists were made available by Sephardi synagogues and organizations, usually with American-born members designated. Questionnaires were sent to every qualified person on these lists, but that excluded many Sephardim who had completely dropped out of the Sephardi fold. At the same time, over 24 per cent (61) of the respondents were not affiliated with Sephardi synagogues and therefore only nominally connected with the community.

Because the questionnaire was sent almost exclusively to Sephardim who were still somewhat tied to the community, the study may be more important than it otherwise would have been. Data on the perpetuation of culture, for example, will have been drawn from Sephardim who were in some way involved in their community. If a

91For helping me obtain lists of American-born Sephardim, I would like to thank Rabbi Michel Albagli, L. Bill Angel, Rabbi Benjamin Aronson, Dr. Irving Benveniste, Rabbi Murray Berger, David Chicorel, Rabbi Solomon Cohen, Rabbi David Glicksman, Rabbi William Greenberg, Rabbi Eli Greenwald, Rabbi S. Robert Ichay, Rabbi Solomon Maimon, Rabbi Arnold Marans, Joseph Papo, Rabbi Myron Rakowitz, and Victor Tarry. I would also like to thank all survey participants for their cooperation.
cultural decline occurred among these, it can be safely assumed that the decline was even greater among those entirely separated from the Sephardi world.

This study takes into account that the survival of Sephardim in the United States involves a two-fold survival—as Jews and as Sephardim having particular cultural characteristics. Sephardim who drift from Jewish life will be lost to the Jewish community altogether. Those who live a Jewish life but adopt non-Sephardi characteristics in place of their own will be lost to the Sephardi community. The continuity of Sephardi life demands then that Sephardim exist as a small minority within a small minority—an awesome task.

At the outset, we must recognize that the social characteristics of Sephardim strongly resemble those of the Ashkenazim. Living in the same open society, both groups have been exposed to similar social forces. Except for groups having maintained closely-knit communities, most middle-class, American-born Jews share a host of characteristics.

**Birthrate**

The low birthrate among Jews is a well-known phenomenon. But it usually is not known that the Sephardi birthrate, too, is quite low. To be sure, the families of Syrian Jews have been larger than the average American Jewish family. Among Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish origin, however, the birthrate has dropped sharply over the past several generations, a decline reflecting changing ideas and attitudes among Levantine Sephardim under the influence of secular society. Table 1 shows birthrate trends, as derived from the survey data. For the sake of clarity, respondents have been divided into three categories: 1) the 40-years-of-age or older, generally raised in tight Sephardi neighborhoods; 2) the under-40-years-of-age, but still of the second generation, generally raised under more open and prosperous conditions and more strongly influenced by Americanization forces; 3) the third generation, generally raised in middle-class, Americanized families. The birthrate of each of these three groups is compared with that of their parent groups.

---

TABLE 1. BIRTHRATES OF AMERICAN-BORN SEPHARDIM AND THEIR PARENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Average Family Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 40 Parents</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2nd generation) Parents</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3rd generation) Parents</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In view of the drop in birthrates, it is doubtful whether Sephardi communities in the United States can depend on natural increase to compensate for cultural defections in order to assure survival. Neither can they depend on an increase by immigration, which is practically nonexistent.

Sephardim have become quite Americanized and more affluent, and it is ever more difficult to hold the new generation in the community. The Sephardi neighborhoods—where one lived within walking distance of most relatives; constantly heard Judeo-Spanish chatter; looked to the synagogue as the center of life, and learned and observed Sephardi customs in the course of living—have almost completely disintegrated. People are moving to the more fashionable suburbs. The young are encouraged to attend college and learn a profession. Broadening interests and mobility have sharply decreased the need for neighborhood activities. And, as neighborhoods cease to be the once strong cultural force, the influence of non-Sephardi social patterns naturally becomes stronger. The result is that some Sephardim completely lose their sense of group belonging.

**Economic Status**

The survey data indicated that most of the respondents were fairly well-to-do (Table 2). Nearly all who listed incomes of between $5,000–10,000 were either retired or young people just starting jobs. Of the 214 respondents who listed their occupations only four were unskilled laborers, all being over 40 years old. For employed
Sephardim under the age of forty, the occupational pattern is particularly revealing: businessmen, 53 per cent; professionals, 39 per cent; artists, 5 per cent; skilled laborers, 3 per cent. By contrast the first generation of Sephardi immigrants for the most part had been unskilled laborers.

Table 2. **Annual Incomes of Households**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 or more</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30,000–49,999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000–29,999</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000–19,999</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000–14,999</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000–9,999</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Secular Education**

Implicit in these figures is the fact that the level of education among the Sephardim is higher than it was in their parents' generation. Indeed, the Sephardim consider college education almost an essential for their children's future. In response to the question, "Did, do, or will your children attend college?", 203 Sephardim answered yes and only three answered no.

On the other hand, when asked to list their fathers' educational backgrounds, the responses of 139 American-born Sephardim aged 40 and over were as follows: 120 said that their fathers had received less than a high school education; 15 said they graduated high school; 3 that they attended a college, and only one that his father was a college graduate.

The older, second-generation American Sephardim often were poor. Although many attended college, a large percentage dropped out of school to help support their families. For second-generation Sephardim under the age of 40 and for third-generation Sephardim, who generally enjoyed a higher economic status, college was more readily available (Table 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Aged 40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under Age 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher degrees</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With college education so prevalent, young Sephardim inevitably are being strongly influenced by the egalitarian spirit on the campus. Because the Sephardi students constitute a small number, they find it hard to maintain themselves as a particular group and therefore mingle freely with fellow students of all backgrounds. Thus, an examination of some of the major sociological features shared by Sephardim and Ashkenazim with the American middle class indicates that many of the Sephardi characteristics have been lost in the course of three generations. The birthrate, neighborhoods, economic condition, and educational background of the modern Sephardi differ radically from those of the immigrant generation. Although signifying material progress, these changes also constitute a serious challenge to the continuity of Sephardi life in the United States.

Jewish and Sephardi Education

As stated earlier, Sephardi survival depends on the strength of the group both as Jews and as Sephardim. Sephardi literature, folklore, customs, language, law, and cuisine are inextricably linked to Jewish sources. Sephardism separated from Judaism is a gross mutation. Because this is so, the survey sought to elicit information that would give a general idea of the state of Jewish education, observance, and belief among Sephardim. The results showed a definite correlation between attachment to Judaism and attachment to Sephardi culture.

A culture can be transmitted only through the process of education. While some immigrant Sephardim had attended good Jewish schools in the old country, many had received no formal Jewish education. But this was compensated by the fact that all lived in an intensely Jewish environment where religion and culture were absorbed in daily living. However, in the United States, formal Jewish education soon became crucial. Children no longer could readily learn religious values and teachings from the people around them. Things had changed. Social and economic pressures in America pulled Sephardim from their old ways.

When the Sephardim came to this country, they found no Sephardi schools for their children. Because they were poor, stubborn, and without adequate leadership, they set up a host of small afternoon Talmudé Torah which, as already noted, were almost always poorly run, poorly staffed, poorly attended. But it was in these schools, which
certainly did not equip them to perpetuate Jewish and Sephardi values, that most second-generation American Sephardim received their Jewish education.

With the rise of the Jewish day school, some Sephardim have chosen its more intensive training for their children, especially in Seattle and, to lesser degrees, in Atlanta and New York. The Sephardim also have access to synagogue schools which, with time, have become better organized and staffed. Still, a growing number of their children either receive no formal Jewish education at all or only go to Sunday school. Among the American-born Sephardim aged 40 and over, about 10 per cent received only Sunday school education or less, while the rest had more intensive schooling. The percentage increased to 15 for those under the age of 40. For the third- and fourth-generation Sephardim, it jumped to nearly 30 per cent, thus indicating a definite rise in the number of Sephardi youths who receive practically no Jewish education.

Even Sephardim who had a good Jewish education did not know enough about their Sephardi heritage. For example, they seldom studied the history of their ancestors in the Levant. They seldom were told of the significant rabbinic and poetic literatures created by the Sephardim of the past four centuries. They were not given a real awareness of their cultural roots, and therefore did not really understand Sephardism.93 Table 4 indicates a general decline in Sephardi education.

Religious Observance

Although the vast majority of Sephardi immigrants had been observant Jews, the conditions of American life soon brought a relaxation of religious observances. Sabbath observance was often the first to be discarded, since poverty drove immigrants to work on that day. Kashrut, too, sometimes was compromised as a result of economic or social pressures. But if the first generation struggled to adhere to ritual, their children were less inclined to do so. This was, of course, also the experience of the Ashkenazim.

Of 219 respondents, 68 per cent (150) reported their homes were

TABLE 4. SEPHARDI ORIENTATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Age 40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>139</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>91</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>135</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents' View of Emphasis on History of Levant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age 40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great deal</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate amount</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>143</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>88</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

less observant than those of their parents. Eighty per cent of the immigrant generation had kept kosher homes, as compared with only 28 per cent of their children; 95 per cent of the immigrants had at least some special Sabbath observances, as compared to a reported 63 per cent of their children.

Since the synagogue is the only Jewish cultural institution in most Sephardi communities, an attempt was made to establish trends in terms of synagogue attendance (Table 5).

The apparently paradoxical finding that the percentage of men under 40 attending services weekly is higher than of those over 40 can be explained by the fact that 11 of the 17 younger men live in Seattle and are members of observant families. In other cities the rate of weekly attendance is far lower. Also, Table 5 indicates that 17.9 per cent of men under 40 attend only on High Holy Days or not at all, while this is true of only 7.3 per cent of men over 40. The figures also reflect the diminishing stress on synagogue attendance by women in the Sephardi community. A general pattern of less frequent synagogue attendance...
TABLE 5. SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Men 40 and Over</th>
<th>Women 40 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least weekly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least monthly</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on holidays, special occasions</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on High Holy Days</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>109</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Under 40</th>
<th>Women Under 40</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least weekly</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least monthly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on holidays, special occasions</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only on High Holy Days</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

can hardly be denied. And this means that the only institution on which Sephardi survival now rests is gradually losing its influence.

That Sephardi synagogues are in difficulty is also indicated by data on affiliation (Table 6). The third-generation figures were derived from answers of third-generation respondents (who were also included in the under 40 category) and from the second-generation respondents who listed the affiliations of their adult children. Aside from indicating serious movement away from Sephardi synagogues, the findings imply a sharp decline in synagogue affiliation generally.

The decline in religious observance and affiliation is indicative of the secularization of American Sephardim. While nearly all the immigrants were Orthodox, the American-born generations drifted from Orthodoxy. Of the 47 respondents who are members of Ashkenazi synagogues, 5 (10.6 per cent) belong to Orthodox, 23 (48.9 per cent) to Conservative, and 19 (40.4 per cent) to Reform congregations. Although some chose a particular synagogue for convenience and physical proximity, the majority no longer claim to hold Orthodox beliefs. This is true also of members of traditional Sephardi synagogues. Table 7 analyzes responses to the question,
TABLE 6. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
<th>3rd Generation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sephardi</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkenazi</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 7. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Are your religious beliefs most in harmony with Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform Judaism, or something else?" The data shows that, although there has been movement away from Orthodoxy, most of the Sephardim have not gone all the way to Reform. For the time being at least, reverence for tradition remains a strong force in shaping religious attitudes.

Hispanic Character

A distinguishing characteristic of Levantine Sephardim throughout the past four and a half centuries has been their language. They spoke a tongue known variously as Judeo-Spanish, Judezmo, Ladino, Spaniolit. They thought, spoke, wrote, and sang in this sonorous language. But when they came to America, it was bound to undergo change and decline.

First-generation Sephardim spoke their language regularly because they lived in closely knit communities. They even Hispanicized some English words and used them in conversation. Thus "parkear" meant to park, "drivear" to drive. One of the most peculiar words to enter the language was "abetchar," meaning to bet, which derived from the
English slang phrase "I betcha." But when their children began to go to public school, English became the dominant language. For the third and fourth generations it has become, for all practical purposes, the only language. Responses from third- and fourth-generation Sephardim indicated that 73.6 per cent could not speak Judeo-Spanish at all. Roughly half of the second-generation respondents thought the disappearance of Judeo-Spanish as a spoken language would be a cultural tragedy; the other half felt that its disappearance was inevitable. About 9 per cent did not care whether or not the language survived.

The third generation of American Sephardim marks a transition in Sephardi history. Many still have nostalgic memories of their Judeo-Spanish heritage. But while most can remember hearing parents, grandparents, and older relatives chattering, singing, and cursing in Judeo-Spanish, they hardly speak it well enough—if at all—to transmit the language to the next generation.

One element of the Hispanic character of Sephardim is their feeling toward Spain. It is often stated that they have a strong emotional attachment to that country for historic and linguistic reasons. The Spanish scholar Federico Castro, romanticizing the Sephardim's love for Spain, wrote that they still reminisce about the old cities of their forefathers with love and emotion, with tears in their eyes.94 There is no doubt that some Sephardim do feel deeply attached to Spain; but our study indicates that this should not be generalized or exaggerated (Table 8).

**TABLE 8. FEELING OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM FOR SPAIN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Over Age 40</th>
<th>Under Age 40</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep respect and love</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More attraction for Spain</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than other countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little or no feeling</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Customs and Foods

Since many customs are tied to religious precepts, their observance has declined among American Sephardim along with religiousness. About 73 per cent of the 40-and-over respondents indicated they observe Sephardi customs, as compared with 61 per cent of those under 40. The most commonly practiced customs today are related to the Seder and the Rosh Ha-shanah evening meals, and are often observed for nostalgic rather than purely religious reasons.

One of the ancient Sephardi customs has been to name children after living grandparents, often to the dismay of observing Ashkenazim. It has been the cause of many disagreements between the spouses in Sephardi-Ashkenazi "mixed" marriages, but the Sephardi partner usually has prevailed. Of the Sephardi respondents married to Ashkenazim, 79 per cent (89) stated they named or will name children after living grandparents. The percentage is about the same for men and women.

This custom is widely observed today, but often with modifications. For example, if a grandparent has a Spanish or Turkish name, the grandchild will be given an English equivalent. A growing trend is to give the child an English name of one's choice (perhaps with the first letter identical to the first letter of the grandparent's name), while giving him the grandparent's Hebrew name for religious purposes. This type of modification is also common among Ashkenazim.

A major aspect of the folk culture of a people is its cuisine. The so-called "Jewish" foods, such as gefilte fish, tzimmes, or kreplach, were completely unknown to the immigrant Sephardim. "Jewish" food meant something quite different to them. On the Sabbath, for example, Sephardim would eat huevos haminados (hardboiled eggs, cooked in water, oil, and onion skin so that they become brown in color); bolemas (a turnover filled with spinach or eggplant, and cheese); borekas (a pastry filled with eggplant or potato, and cheese).

In the course of time the Sephardi cuisine has been greatly modified and now includes many other dishes, some typically Ashkenazi. Yet, of 234 respondents only 5 stated they never eat Sephardi foods; 124 said they eat them regularly. The others eat Sephardi foods only on holidays or special occasions. Although the under-40 group scored less than those 40 and over, only slightly more than 3 per cent of the
younger group claimed never to eat Sephardi foods. Within the past several years, a number of Sephardi women's groups published Sephardi cookbooks, in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. Evidently, cuisine is a strong factor in group identity and pride.

**Group Consciousness**

As Sephardim mingle with the Ashkenazi majority and with non-Jewish Americans, their group identity is severely challenged. They feel less and less the need to remain within their own group or to perpetuate their group's values and culture. Yet they continue to feel a sense of kinship with other Sephardim. Responding to a query about their feelings when meeting another Sephardi for the first time, 88 per cent of the 40-and-over survey sample and 82 per cent of the under-40 said they felt a special kinship.

Respondents also were asked two highly subjective questions aimed at discovering what Sephardim thought of themselves and their heritage (Tables 9 and 10). The replies to both questions show a somewhat lower degree of group chauvinism in the under-40 group. Negatively expressed, this means that fewer of the younger Sephardim feel that non-Sephardi Jews discriminate against them (Table 11).

In sum, it can be said that, while Sephardi group consciousness has shown a slight decline among the younger generation, most Sephardim—regardless of how much or how little they are steeped in Sephardi culture—feel a special relationship to others in their group. They do indeed take pride in their Sephardi identity.

**Sephardi-Ashkenazi Intermarriage**

Almost all Sephardi immigrants of the early 20th century had Sephardi spouses, assuring the perpetuation of Sephardi values and customs in their homes. American-born Sephardim, on the other hand, often chose Ashkenazi mates. Stories of prejudice on the part of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi families against the other, though certainly rooted in fact, tend to be exaggerated. Ashkenazi parents had to be convinced that their children were actually marrying Jews. After all, the Sephardim did not speak Yiddish, did not have "Jewish" names,
### TABLE 9. “Do you think Sephardim generally have more self-pride than Ashkenazim?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reply</th>
<th>40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 10. “Do you feel that the Sephardi heritage is generally superior to the Ashkenazi?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reply</th>
<th>40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>140</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 11. “Do you feel discriminated against in your contacts with non-Sephardi Jews?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>40 and Over</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 40</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and never ate gefilte fish. Sephardi parents, too, were reluctant to give their children in marriage to non-Sephardim. Despite cultural barriers, however, American-born Sephardim and Ashkenazim found that they had much more in common than not. Third-generation marriages of
Sephardim to Ashkenazim are quite common; one might say that they have become the rule, rather than the exception (Table 12).

**TABLE 12. BACKGROUND OF WIVES OF SECOND-GENERATION AMERICAN SEPHARDIM***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Under 40 Number</th>
<th>Under 40 Per Cent</th>
<th>Under 40 Number</th>
<th>Under 40 Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sephardi</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkenazi</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The response of women regarding their husbands' background was too small to be meaningful.

The figures for third-generation Sephardim are even more dramatic. They are based on replies of third-generation as well as second-generation Sephardim who listed the spouses of their children (Table 13).

**TABLE 13. BACKGROUND OF SPOUSES OF THIRD-GENERATION AMERICAN SEPHARDIM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sephardi</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkenazi</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures for the spouses of children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages, though too small to be conclusive, may indicate a pattern. Of the 21 respondents, only 1 was married to a Sephardi, 17 were married to Ashkenazim, and three to non-Jews.  

The high rate of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages makes it inevitable that Sephardi culture has been, and will continue to be, subject to changes. All such marriages require compromises by both sides, even

---

by the dominant partner. For the Sephardi community this means a
decline in Sephardi culture, at least in such obvious manifestations as
food, custom, and language. To what extent, then, has Sephardi-
Ashkenazi marriage influenced Sephardi life in America?

The findings of the study indicate that Sephardim married to
Ashkenazim are more likely to drop out of Sephardi synagogues than
are Sephardim married within their group. This is especially true of
Sephardi women who marry Ashkenazi men.

There was a total of 61 responses from Sephardim who are not
affiliated with Sephardi congregations: three are single; 40 are married
to Ashkenazim; 18 are married to other Sephardim. Expressed in
percentages, 35.4 per cent of all Sephardim with Ashkenazi spouses,
men and women, left the Sephardi synagogue, as compared with 22
per cent of those who married other Sephardim. Of the Sephardim who
are married to Ashkenazim but belong to Sephardi synagogues, 20.5
per cent are also members of Ashkenazi synagogues. Dual synagogue
membership is held by 6.3 per cent of Sephardim married to other
Sephardim. Since the rate of Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriage is
presently about 75 per cent (see Table 13), Sephardi synagogues are
very likely to lose more members. Supportive evidence is the
synagogue affiliation of the adult children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi
marriages: of 47 respondents, 13 (27.7 per cent) belong to Sephardi
synagogues; 18 (38.3 per cent) to Ashkenazi; 16 (34 per cent) to none.

Sephardi synagogues have in fact kept the majority of “mixed”
marriages within the fold. A concerted effort to make the Sephardi
synagogue meaningful to Ashkenazim, especially to those married to
Sephardim, will most probably assure its continued existence. The
Sephardi congregation with only Sephardi members is rapidly
becoming a thing of the past. Sephardi leaders must recognize changes
in their community and adjust synagogue planning accordingly. This
does not mean adopting non-Sephardi innovations in their services. It
is hoped that the beauty and nobility of the Sephardi synagogue
tradition will attract many non-Sephardi members, if they are made to
feel welcome. Sephardi synagogues will have to make cultural
converts: people who will want to be Sephardim though they have little
or no Sephardi blood.

Sephardim married to Ashkenazim reported slightly less observance
of Sephardi customs, use of Judeo-Spanish, and consumption of
Sephardi foods than did Sephardim married to other Sephardim. This
was to be expected. Moreover, there was little difference between the two categories in identification with the Sephardi group. For example, 85.3 per cent of the intermarried claimed to feel a special kinship for a Sephardi in a first meeting; 55.1 per cent believed Sephardim had more self-pride than Ashkenazim; 45.4 per cent thought the Sephardi heritage was superior to the Ashkenazi. As for feeling discriminated against by non-Sephardi Jews, 32.1 per cent stated they did. This surprisingly high figure may be explained as a reaction to the attitudes of Ashkenazi in-laws. One Sephardi respondent commented typically: "My Ashkenazi in-laws don't exactly discriminate against me. But they still have no idea where Salonika is, and they don't think I'm really Jewish."

In the matter of providing Sephardi education for their children, Sephardim married to Ashkenazim fare somewhat worse than those married to Sephardim. But in both cases the level of education is too low.

### TABLE 14. Sephardi Orientation of Religious Education of Children of Sephardim Married to Ashkenazim and of Those Married to Sephardim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Sephardi-Ashkenazi</th>
<th>Sephardi-Sephardi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Per Cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>105</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, the categories of degree are somewhat vague. Different Sephardim will have different definitions of "complete" or "somewhat." If children study in an Ashkenazi school where they learn Ivrit, some parents may evaluate the orientation as being "somewhat" Sephardi, others may feel it is "not at all" so. Still others think that as long as their children attend a Sephardi Talmud Torah, even though the teachers may not be Sephardim and may know nothing about Sephardi history and tradition, their education is "completely" Sephardi-oriented. However, even with these possible differences in interpretation, the figures fairly accurately reflect the true situation.
Four American Communities

The data considered above reflect general tendencies on a national scale. However, it is also valuable to focus attention on several specific Sephardi communities to detect local deviations from national trends. The communities selected were Metropolitan New York, Atlanta, Seattle, and Portland, Ore. New York has the largest number of Sephardim. Atlanta and Seattle have the most viable Sephardi communities. Portland's small community appears to be on the verge of collapse. The respondents of Atlanta, Portland, and Seattle were almost equally divided between the 40-and-over and the under-40 age groups. In the New York area two-thirds of the respondents were over 40, a fact that must be taken into account in analyzing the data.

Role of Synagogue

A comparison of synagogue affiliation and attendance in these four cities reveals some specific characteristics of each community (Tables 15 and 16).

Atlanta shows the largest percentage of Sephardim belonging to a Sephardi synagogue; it also has the best general attendance record. Although Seattle has more Sephardim who attend weekly, Atlanta has a much higher percentage of those who attend at least once a month (63.9 per cent, as against 47.9 per cent in Seattle). To be sure, the Seattle community has a hard core of faithful synagogue goers; but the majority of the Sephardim attend only on holidays. The community is polarized between observant and nonobservant, much more so than in Atlanta.

The Sephardim in the New York area attend synagogue and are affiliated with Sephardi synagogues much less frequently than those in Atlanta and Seattle. Here the size of the city is an important factor; in smaller communities there is more communal pressure and more need for formal affiliation. In the smaller communities, too, many of the Sephardim are related to each other or originate from the same cities in the Levant. They are, therefore, more apt to join synagogues and feel part of the community.

The Portland Sephardim are not strongly attached to their
TABLE 15. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sephardi</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkenazi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 16. SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holidays, special occasions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Holy Days</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the Atlanta Sephardi community is the most successful in holding its young. The New York Sephardim show the least ability to
keep their children in Sephardi synagogues and, indeed, to keep them in any synagogue.

RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

A consideration of the religious beliefs of the Sephardim in each of the four communities will do much to explain the difference in religious observance and affiliation. Portland shows an almost even spread in religious belief. New York has a large percentage of Conservatives, but also a fairly sizable percentage of Orthodox. Atlanta is overwhelmingly Conservative. Seattle is more polarized than the other communities, with by far the largest and strongest Orthodox group, but (except for Portland, where the numbers are quite small) also the largest and strongest Reform group. In Seattle, 7 of the 7 respondents who are not members of a Sephardi synagogue belong to a Reform temple. In Atlanta, the ratio is 1 of 4; in New York, 3 of 13; in Portland, 2 of 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked whether their homes are more observant than their parents', Sephardim responded as follows (Table 19):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These figures only reflect possible trends, not actual levels of religious observance. Homes considered to be more observant than parents' homes may still be quite nonobservant. Conversely, homes may be less observant than parents' homes, and be quite observant.

Whereas half of Atlanta's respondents said they were at least as observant as their parents, this was not true of the Sephardim in the other cities. Again, Seattle has a higher rate of increased observance than Atlanta; but it also has a more dramatic increase in Sephardim who are less observing than their parents.

ADHERING TO SEPHARDI TRADITION

The four communities more or less resemble each other in Hispanic character, with Seattle showing a higher rate of adherence to Sephardi customs than the others.

The Seattle Sephardim had the highest proportion of in-group marriages, about 51 per cent. This compares with 30 per cent for Atlanta, 45 per cent for New York, and 38 per cent for Portland. However, in all cities these are for the most part in the 40-and-over age group.

The Sephardim in the four communities have a strong feeling of kinship with other Sephardim, and a high degree of group identity. Ninety per cent of Atlanta respondents feel a special kinship at the very first meeting with other Sephardim. This is true of 85 per cent of the Sephardim in New York; 86 per cent in Portland; 81 per cent in Seattle.

Tables 20 and 21 indicate patterns of Sephardi chauvinism in the four communities. The data show greater group pride among Sephardim in Atlanta and New York than in Portland and Seattle. There seems to be some correlation between this characteristic of Sephardim and Ashkenazi discrimination against them: where discrimination has been more pronounced, Sephardim have been more inclined to think less of themselves.

As for the religious education of Sephardi children in the four communities, Seattle has the largest percentage (25) in day schools, but Atlanta has the largest percentage (92) attending Talmud Torah at least several times a week. In New York the percentage receiving no Jewish education at all is highest (25). Portland's children generally attend only Sunday school (64 per cent).
TABLE 20. "Do you feel that the Sephardi heritage is generally superior to the Ashkenazi?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 21. "Do you think Sephardim generally have more self-pride than Ashkenazim?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the same</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 22. "Do you feel discriminated against in your contacts with non-Sephardi Jews?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>New York</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly always</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of all the Sephardi communities in the United States, Seattle has produced by far the largest number of rabbis and religiously-educated laymen. Almost every year a few Sephardi students leave for other cities to continue their studies at yeshivot. Six have been ordained in the past few years, and three of them are rabbis in Sephardi synagogues.
Students who want advanced Jewish educations must leave Seattle because the city has no yeshivah high school or theological seminary. And since some of the yeshivah students choose to go into the rabbinate or Jewish-education fields, they seldom return to their native city for lack of positions, as well as for other considerations. Despite this drain of talent, the Seattle Sephardi community has the strongest core of religiously educated and committed Jews of any other in the country.

Conclusion

If there is no reversal in the trends indicated by our data, no viable Sephardi communities may be left in the United States in two or three generations from now. Clearly, synagogue buildings alone cannot insure the survival, let alone growth, of Sephardi culture. Sephardim must establish good schools of their own, or insist that existing day schools teach more about the Sephardi past. They must also create meaningful cultural institutions—Sephardi theaters, newspapers, libraries. They must encourage their youth to pursue higher Jewish education and, if necessary, provide financial incentives to promising students. It is to be hoped that these efforts will strengthen religious observance, and wipe out the widespread ignorance of Judaism and Sephardi Jewish tradition. Unless this can be accomplished now, the Sephardi heritage will be lost.

APPENDIX

Readers wishing to study Sephardi history and culture will find it helpful to refer to the following works:

JEWS IN SPAIN


THE MARRANO AND EX-MARRANO COMMUNITIES


Sephardi Melodies (London, 1931).


COLONIAL AMERICAN SEPHARDIM

Chyet, Stanley, Lopez of Newport (Detroit, 1970).


Molho, Michael, Literatura Sefardita de Oriente (Madrid, 1960).

———, Usos y Costumbres de los Sefardies de Salonica (Madrid, 1950).


Rosanes, Solomon, Dibrei Yemei Yisrael beTogarmah, 6 vols. (published in various places, 1907–45).

See also the voluminous writings of Abraham Galante.

LEVANTINE SEPHARDIM

Benardete, Mair José, Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews (New York, 1952).

Chouraqui, André, Between East and West (Philadelphia, 1968).


JUDEO-SPANISH FOLK LITERATURE


LEVANTINE SEPHARDIM IN THE UNITED STATES


Hexter, Maurice, “The Dawn of a Prob-


SEPHARDIM AND ASHKENAZIM


PUBLICATIONS WITH GENERAL INFORMATION

American Sephardi, journal of the Sephardic Studies Program of Yeshiva University.

Publications of the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, New York.