Jewish Communal Affairs

The Jewish community in 1993 focused on the historic moves toward peace in the Middle East and the extraordinary impact of the new Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The ongoing debate over how to insure Jewish continuity in the United States was increasingly conducted in the knowledge that neither fear for Israel's security nor intense dedication to the memory of the Holocaust was compelling enough to keep a new generation of American Jews committed to Jewish life.

American Jews and a Dovish Israel

Despite overwhelming Jewish optimism about the apparent friendliness toward Israel of the new administration of President Bill Clinton, there was some trepidation about the appointment of Warren Christopher as secretary of state and Anthony Lake as national security adviser. Both men had been part of Jimmy Carter's foreign-policy team and were suspected of coolness toward Israel. Christopher and Lake sought to counteract their negative image in the Jewish community by assuring Jewish leaders of their support for the Jewish state.

Early in the year, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the primary umbrella organization that speaks for American Jewry on Israel-related issues, confronted a complicated challenge: the membership application of Americans for Peace Now (APN). On the one hand, APN was on record favoring Israeli recognition of the PLO and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Also, in 1992 it had favored holding back American loan guarantees for Israel unless there was a freeze on settlements in the West Bank. On the other hand, there was now a Labor-controlled government in Israel that explicitly favored a "land-for-peace" agreement, and Meretz, Labor's coalition partner, espoused a platform indistinguishable from that of APN. This made it extremely difficult to argue that APN was outside the Jewish consensus. Furthermore, several APN board members were close to the Clinton administration, which gave APN potential political clout. Morton Klein, president of the Philadelphia region of the reorganized American Zionist Movement, led the attack against APN membership.
In addition to the record of APN itself, he cited the past activities of its president, Gail Pressberg, who had previously worked for the American Friends Service Committee and the Foundation for Middle East Peace, both of which had been charged with pro-PLO and anti-Israel sentiments. She had also signed newspaper ads criticizing Israeli policies. Pressberg responded that her views corresponded to those of the Israeli peace movement, and that she had, in fact, been criticized by pro-PLO groups.

After weeks of intense lobbying on both sides — and a failed attempt by the American Jewish Committee and the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to get APN to agree not to testify independently before Congress on foreign aid matters — the conference met on March 29 and approved the membership of Americans for Peace Now by a vote of 27 - 10, with eight abstentions. Pressberg, the APN president, declared: “This vote recognizes the American Jewish community’s commitment to inclusion of all pro-Israel voices.” Three months later, Pressberg quit as APN president. Though she said she took this step for personal reasons, knowledgeable observers believed that the shift reflected the organization’s desire to moderate its controversial image. Gary Rubin, a longtime staff member at the American Jewish Committee, took over the reins as executive director.

Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin came to Washington in March for meetings with President Clinton and other top officials. The degree of warmth evident on both sides stood in marked contrast to the icy relations between the two countries under their previous administrations just a few months earlier. Rabin was scheduled to report on these talks in person to AIPAC’s annual policy conference in Washington, but when the situation in Israel required him to return home early, he spoke to the conference by satellite. Rabin said that Israel now had “a friend in the White House,” and told of American assurances of assistance during the coming peace negotiations, as well as a new agreement on sharing high technology and promises of American support in the fight against the Arab economic boycott of the Jewish state. He related that he had told the president: “We are ready to take risks, calculated risks, for the achievement of peace.”

Rabin also used the occasion to mend relations with AIPAC, which he had criticized in 1992 for exacerbating relations with Washington by pushing the demand for loan guarantees too aggressively. Acknowledging his previous “differences” with AIPAC, he now declared that he was “more than thankful” for its work, which he described as “holy.” And he urged AIPAC to use its influence with Congress to insure passage of the administration’s proposed package of $3 billion of aid to Israel. The sense of solidarity between the newly elected governments of Israel and the United States took on further credibility at a cordial meeting on March 17 between Secretary of State Christopher and over 100 Jewish leaders, where the secretary convinced his audience that the United States would do nothing against Israel’s interests.
THE PEACE PROCESS AND ITS CRITICS

But this seeming three-way honeymoon between the Clinton administration, Israel's government, and American Jewry was hardly uncontested. Even within AIPAC, which had received Rabin's address warmly, there was some skepticism. Speaking at one session of the policy conference, "Christian Zionist" Jan Willen Van der Hoeven got a standing ovation with an attack on the Israeli government's peace policies. Yet so sensitive was AIPAC to criticism from the Rabin regime that this speech was not mentioned in the organization's publication, *Near East Report*, which summarized all the other presentations.

Outside the AIPAC orbit, the peace policy was harshly attacked in *Commentary* by the magazine's editor, Norman Podhoretz. In "A Statement on the Peace Process" (April 1993), Podhoretz argued against the Israeli government's stand and explained why he, who had previously denied the moral right of American Jews to criticize Israel's security policies, now felt justified in doing so. Under the previous Likud regimes, claimed Podhoretz, American Jewish critics of Israeli policy undermined Israeli security by weakening Israel's case in the eyes of the American public and its leaders. By giving the misleading impression that American Jews were evenly divided between "hawks" and "doves," these Jews had encouraged President George Bush to try to pressure Israel into territorial concessions. In contrast, Podhoretz continued, under its new government, Israel was making so many concessions on its own that there was no fear that any criticism might encourage pressure to concede more. For Podhoretz, the peace process was nothing but a "trap" for Israel: Palestinian "autonomy" would lead to a Palestinian state, which in turn would inevitably bring civil war between the PLO and Hamas, followed by Syrian intervention and war with a territorially diminished Israel.

Another major assault on Israel's course came from A.M. Rosenthal, writing in his regular column in the *New York Times* (March 19, 1993). Like Podhoretz a staunch supporter of Israel, Rosenthal nevertheless suggested that Israel voluntarily cut back on the economic aid it got from Washington. Such a move would head off criticism from budget-conscious American politicians, force Israel to reduce its reliance on American aid, and thereby build a stronger free-enterprise economy. Then, he asserted, an economically independent Jewish state would have leeway to chart a political course not subject to American pressure — that is, one that did not have to make concessions to the Arabs.

As it became clear that there was no American Jewish consensus supporting the Rabin-Clinton approach to peace, and that staunch Likud supporters in America were not about to stifle their doubts about Israel's current path, the Israeli government and American Jews sympathetic to its point of view began to fight back. Israel's embassy in Washington issued a "Dear Friend" letter defending the peace policies of the Rabin regime. On the op-ed page of Rosenthal's own *New York Times* (April 20), Labor MK Ephraim Sneh argued that only Jews living in Israel, who experience the actual horrors of war, had the right to criticize the government's
peace initiatives: "hard-line criticism from a safe distance of 6,000 miles will not change the situation." Asked for his reaction to Sneh's argument, Rosenthal recalled: "During the Likud regime, not only was there criticism, but people like Peres and Abba Eban came to the United States openly trying to influence the U.S. government to be harder toward Israel in its policies. Nobody said they were anti-Israel for doing so."

Podhoretz, who had explicitly shifted his position on whether American Jews might criticize Israel, came in for the most severe criticism. Prof. Deborah Lipstadt of Emory University considered it unreasonable for Podhoretz to imply that "[o]thers who criticize Israel were not real friends of Israel; I am; therefore I have a right to criticize." Robert Asher and Michael Kotzin, officials of the Chicago Jewish Community Relations Council, charged that, by his attack on Israeli policy, Podhoretz was promoting "the polarization of American Jews." Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said he was not surprised that Podhoretz and others like him had changed their views about dissent from the official Israeli line: "I just underestimated the speed and shamelessness with which they did it," he noted. Responding to the critics, Podhoretz reiterated his distinction between criticism of Israel that lent aid and comfort to its enemies and criticism that it was going too far to placate those enemies. He asserted, too, that peace could come only when the Arab world "would truly be willing to live in peace with Israel." Until then, he recommended "holding steady and dragging out the peace process."

Israeli government leaders recognized the need to counteract what they called "diaspora lag," the persistence of opposition to the government's peace policy within the American Jewish community. Itamar Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to Washington, complained of the hostility he found among the Jewish audiences he addressed. He described himself as "having at one and the same time to argue our case with the Arab side at the negotiating table, while explaining to a skeptical minority of our own supporters that there is merit to this peace process, even though it is yet unproven."

Working cooperatively with the Israeli government, Project Nishma, an organization that for the last five years had worked for territorial compromise in the Middle East, attempted to rally American Jewish opinion. It ran newspaper ads signed by over 100 prominent Jews, portraying Yitzhak Rabin as a tough-minded military man who would surely never endanger his countrymen. Over a picture of Rabin in his chief-of-staff uniform, the headline read, "When it comes to Israel's security, nobody knows more than Yitzhak Rabin. Nobody." Tom Smerling, executive director of Project Nishma, explained: "This is the first blow against the Podhoretz Crowd. There's a silent majority of American Jews who support Rabin, and it's time

2*Commentary* (Letters from Readers), May 1993.
4*Commentary*, June 1993.
they were given a vehicle to be heard.” In addition, the Israeli Labor party set up a new body in the United States, the Israel Policy Forum, with Jonathan Jacoby, a former president of Americans for Peace Now, as its executive vice-president, to promote the policies of the current Israeli government in American Jewish circles.

AIPAC, having only recently returned to the good graces of the Rabin government after being suspected of pro-Likud sympathies left over from the Begin-Shamir years, now had to deal with open defiance in its own ranks. On June 6, AIPAC vice-president Harvey Friedman accompanied a delegation of members of Congress from his home state of Florida to meetings with Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, Friedman told Beilin, “Where does Rabin get the chutzpah to give up territory?” Notified of the incident, AIPAC executive director Tom Dine apologized and explained that Friedman spoke as an individual, not for the organization. But on July 1, the Washington Jewish Week ran an article that quoted Friedman calling Beilin “this little slimeball,” and Friedman was forced to resign. Beilin, expressing frustration that he and his colleagues had to “justify their desire to make peace” to American Jews like Friedman, said that “anyone who is interested in strengthening the Israel-U.S. relationship must understand that it is important that people like Friedman not stand among the leadership of AIPAC.”

Between the time of Friedman’s trip to Israel and his forced ouster, AIPAC was hit with a more serious crisis, one not related, at least directly, to matters of policy. On June 28, Tom Dine resigned as AIPAC’s executive director after a book was published that quoted him as describing ultra-Orthodox Jews as “smelly” and “low class.” Though Dine immediately apologized for the remark and explained that it did not reflect his true feelings, within a week he submitted his resignation on the grounds that his ability to function effectively had been irreparably compromised. Sources close to AIPAC, however, suggested that this incident had simply been a convenient excuse for the top lay leaders, more conservative politically than Dine and jealous of his high visibility, to remove him. The Israeli government, which had found Dine more sympathetic to its peace program than other AIPAC figures, expressed regret. Orthodox organizations — which had not asked for his ouster — commented that the incident showed a need for Jewish organizations to learn about and understand the sensitivities of Orthodox Jews. In the broader Jewish community, there was some concern that the departure of Dine — who had held his position since 1980 — might weaken AIPAC’s continued effectiveness.

THE PLO-ISRAEL ACCORD

The organized American Jewish community was caught by surprise at the end of August when negotiators announced that, as a result of secret talks, Israel and the PLO had reached a historic agreement providing for mutual recognition and Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho. The Conference of Presidents held a teleconference of its members on August 31, and executive vice-chairman Malcolm
Hoenlein described the consensus: "There was positive anticipation, but there is also caution. No doubt there will be increasing activity by Israeli right-wing parties to generate support here, but our position is unchanged: we support the government of Israel, and we support their right to make basic decisions on issues of security."

Summarizing numerous interviews with American Jews in the *New York Times* (September 3, 1994), reporter Richard Bernstein came to a similar conclusion. He described the prevalent reaction as "a kind of hard-headed optimism, a feeling that recognition of the PLO and establishing relations with its leader, Yasir Arafat, are risky but promising." Reflecting mainstream opinion was David A. Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee: "There's a great deal of confidence in the Rabin administration. I think Israel feels now that the risk of aggressive peacemaking presents more opportunity and less risk down the road than the alternative of simply maintaining the status quo."

The *Times* article cited dissident voices as well. Norman Podhoretz considered the agreement further confirmation of his previous forebodings. The Palestinians, he said, "have finally decided to adopt the so-called phase strategy, which calls for getting a foothold to begin with, a state in phase 2, and then using the state as a launching pad for a final assault." And Ruth Wisse, professor of Yiddish at Harvard, declared: "It's the first time that an Israeli government is doing something for which I, as an American Jew, would not like to bear moral responsibility."

On September 9, when Israel officially announced that it would sign an agreement with the PLO, AIPAC "warmly" welcomed the PLO's decision to recognize Israel and noted that "these changed circumstances" warranted U.S. dialogue with the PLO. The Conference of Presidents called the agreement "a hopeful augury of reconciliation between two peoples who have lived in tension and hostility for nearly a century." American Jewish leaders were heavily represented on the White House lawn on September 13, when Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat — urged on by Bill Clinton — shook hands and finalized the pact. That night, Project Nishma, the American Jewish Congress, and the Arab American Association sponsored a joint reception celebrating the event, and the AJCongress subsequently drew up a list of activities for American Jewish and Arab groups to carry out together. Somewhat taken aback by the Congress's enthusiasm, the executive director of the Arab American Association said: "It's good. It's a positive development. But we want to make sure people do not hug each other to death."

The great majority of American Jews were enthusiastic about the agreement. In an American Jewish Committee-sponsored poll taken just one week after the handshake, 90 percent of American Jews viewed mutual recognition as a "positive development from Israel's point of view." Asked whether chances for peace were now better or worse than before, 73 percent said that they were better. A clear majority even supported the creation of a Palestinian state, "given the current situation." Lingering doubts about Israel's negotiating partners showed up in answer to a question about the PLO: just 34 percent of American Jews felt the organization could be "relied upon to honor its agreements and refrain from terror-
JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS / 157

Mainstream Jewish organizations lined up behind the agreement. A week after the ceremony, top leaders of the United Jewish Appeal visited Israel and told Prime Minister Rabin that American Jewry was with him in the search for peace. The UJA quickly designed a new fund-raising theme: Israel’s “risks for peace” required redoubled support from American Jews. “It’s campaigning on positives, rather than fears,” said UJA national chairman Joel Tauber. And in November, a UJA delegation met with PLO activists in Jerusalem. Leaders of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) met in Israel with government figures and cited the results of the AJCommittee poll as proof that American Jews were overwhelmingly in favor of the government’s policy. They nevertheless warned that much of the euphoria generated by the handshake on the White House lawn would not last, and that there was a need to “educate” American Jewish communities about the complexity of the details that had yet to be worked out. The AJCongress sent a delegation to the Middle East to confer with Arafat, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, and the crown prince of Jordan. The Anti-Defamation League took steps to improve relations between Jewish and Arab students on American campuses.

American Jewish opponents of the peace agreement, if relatively few in number, were determined, vocal, organized, and deeply committed, especially in the Orthodox community, where, the AJCommittee poll had shown, support for the agreement was lower than in any other group. When Israeli ambassador Itamar Rabinovich came to speak at an Orthodox synagogue in Queens, New York, the night before the White House ceremony, he was greeted with cries of “Rabin is a traitor” and “Go to hell” and barely avoided being hit by thrown eggs and tomatoes. The rabbi of the synagogue deplored the behavior of the protesters, but did understand their anger: “There’s a psychological issue,” he suggested. “People have been told for 20 years the PLO is out of bounds. You can’t expect them to turn on a dime.”

The Rabbinical Council of America, the association of modern Orthodox rabbis, issued a call for new elections or a plebiscite in Israel, while the Lubavitch Hassidic movement geared up for a multimillion-dollar campaign to derail the peace agreement. In early November, 150 North American Orthodox rabbis went to Israel to lobby against the accord. Rabbi Moshe Gorelik, president of the Rabbinical Council of America and leader of the delegation, told reporters that Israeli policies were placing at risk Jewish settlers in the territories — many of whom were children or grandchildren of the rabbis and their congregants and who had been invited to come to these settlements by previous Israeli governments. Orthodox Jews, he added, were already cutting back on their donations to UJA, sending the money instead to be used by Jews in the territories. He further suggested that aliya was likely to drop, due to “the profound feeling of alienation and discontent with the government’s policies.”

Opposition was not confined to the Orthodox sector. Herbert Zweibon, who headed Americans for a Safe Israel — affiliated with the Likud — declared that
September 13, "when Israel's leaders signed an agreement with Arafat, to which American Jewish leaders eagerly danced attendance, is a date which will live in infamy." Zweibon, along with other activists, intellectuals, academics, and military experts, participated in an American Leadership Conference on Israel and the Middle East on October 10 in Arlington, Virginia. Its purpose, according to one organizer, was "to try and puncture the air of euphoria, to try to make people think of the difficult unresolved issues that will be coming up." There were also mass mailings and newspaper ads signed by two newly formed groups — Pro-Israel and the World Committee for Israel — denouncing the accords.

In November both Likud MK Ariel Sharon and former prime minister Yitzhak Shamir came to the United States to bolster the opposition. Calling the UJA "the United Jericho Appeal," Sharon charged that Israelis living on the West Bank were being denied basic services while the Jewish community was asked to help fund the PLO. Shamir, speaking before the Conference of Presidents, called on American Jews to oppose the peace policies of the current Israeli government. A month later, in a stunning demonstration of political effectiveness, hard-line opponents of the peace accords within the Zionist Organization of America elected Morton Klein president of the organization, and Klein promised to "expose" the PLO's violations of the agreement.

Israeli leaders did what they could to counteract the naysayers. Arriving in New York on September 27 to address the UN, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres sought to build American Jewish support for his government's stance. In a presentation to the Conference of Presidents he insisted that Israel remained firm on the unity of Jerusalem, the security of Jewish settlements in the territories, and opposition to any Arab "right of return" to Israel. But he managed to antagonize the Orthodox rabbis when he said that they "don't have the permission of the Lord to give preference to territory over spirit" and asserted that the Torah was precious to secular Israelis as well as to the religious. The Orthodox rabbis present were furious, but Peres later claimed that he had not meant to offend but rather to stress the "moral component of our policies."

Prime Minister Rabin also tried to mobilize American Jewry behind his peace policy in an address to the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, on November 21 in Montreal. Eager to dispel the notion that his concessions to the PLO placed Israel at risk, Rabin insisted that the agreement in no way threatened Israeli security: "We put our trust in no one — but ourselves," he insisted. "One hand we will outstretch in peace, the other we will keep poised on the trigger. We will live in peace and not with illusions. The danger has not passed. The hand of peace will, in time of need, pull that trigger."

The Labor party in Israel went so far as to set up an "American desk," under the supervision of Isaac Herzog, son of former president Chaim Herzog (his term had ended in May). He arranged for young Labor MKs who could speak English well to travel to the United States and address Jewish organizational functions. "I don't think the Jewish community is right-wing," said Herzog. "It just hasn't been exposed to us."
Meanwhile, thoughtful American Jews pondered what the future of their community would be like without Israel's physical survival to worry about. AIPAC president Steven Grossman insisted that things had not changed that much. He said: “The support of the United States every step of the way is going to be of significant importance to the Rabin government. That requires our continued vigilance, potentially for years to come.” But Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg recalled a satirical article he had written years before describing a nightmare in which Israel made peace with the Arabs, the Soviets allowed all Jews to leave, and Israel struck oil. “My nightmare,” he explained, “was that this joyous news would leave the organized American Jewish community unemployed, and totally disoriented.” Concluded Hertzberg: “Most of my nightmare has now come to pass.”

Enshrining the Memory of the Holocaust

If anxiety over the fate of the State of Israel — one traditional pillar of American Jewish identity — seemed on its way to obsolescence by virtue of a peace settlement in the making, another pillar of that identity — bearing witness to Hitler’s Holocaust of six million European Jews — saw its status elevated with the opening of the $168-million U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on government-donated land right off the Mall in Washington. The very creation of this museum implied official national acknowledgment of the Nazi crimes against the Jews.

The ceremonial opening of the museum took place on April 22. With ABC News anchor Ted Koppel as master of ceremonies, President Clinton, Vice-President Albert Gore, Israeli president Chaim Herzog, and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel addressed the thousands who gathered in the rain. The American president, noting that “the Holocaust reminds us forever that knowledge divorced from values can only serve to deepen the human nightmare,” said that the new museum would “bind one of the darkest lessons in history to the hopeful soul of America.” The vice-president declared: “We are reduced to a silence filled with the infinite pool of feeling that has created all the words for humility, heartbreak, helplessness, and hope in all the languages of the world.” President Herzog recalled his first impressions of the concentration camps as a British Army soldier: “To one who has seen anything of the Holocaust, even marginally, it ceases to be an abstract concept and becomes a searing actuality never to be forgotten.” Wiesel, the founding chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, which had planned the museum, said that “to forget would mean to kill the victims a second time” and urged the Clinton administration to learn from the lessons of the Holocaust and intervene to stop the bloodshed in Bosnia.

Throughout the ceremonies, a few dozen demonstrators could be heard just outside the dedication site chanting such slogans as: “We don’t buy the Holocaust lie,” “160 million German Americans demand the truth,” “America — Jews are your enemies.” While these dissenting voices were hardly noticed amid the excitement over the museum, they in fact exemplified those forces the museum was designed to combat. By early 1993, “Holocaust denial” had become a major Jewish
concern. Going beyond historical revisionism, which reinterprets the events of the past, Holocaust denial — invariably propagated for anti-Semitic and anti-Israel purposes — claimed that the systematic Nazi murder of six million Jews never happened. The new Holocaust museum, then, was a direct refutation of the deniers as well as an antidote to widespread ignorance of the subject. Just a few days before the museum’s opening ceremonies, the American Jewish Committee released a survey, What Do Americans Know About the Holocaust? that questioned both the adult population and teenagers. “For each of four questions measuring basic knowledge of the Holocaust,” the survey report noted, “from over one-third to just under two-thirds of adult Americans and a majority of American high-school students fail to answer correctly.”

The museum project had suffered from political infighting since the idea for it was conceived by the administration of Jimmy Carter in the 1970s. The atmosphere of tension continued as late as two weeks before the opening ceremonies, when the Clinton administration forced the resignations of Harvey Meyerhoff and William Lowenberg, chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. Although both men, Republicans appointed by President Ronald Reagan, would surely have been asked to resign in due course, the new administration was eager to place its own stamp on the council before the museum’s opening.

There was also an ideological dimension to the change. For years, the council had been riven by controversy over whether the museum should stress the particularistic Jewish experience of the Holocaust or a universalistic message that might be more relevant to non-Jewish Americans. Meyerhoff and Lowenberg, solidly in the camp of the universalists, did not want to invite outgoing Israeli president Herzog to speak at the opening ceremonies. President Clinton decided that Herzog should participate, and this hastened the departure of the two officials. Chosen to replace them were Miles Lerman as chairman and Ruth Mandel as vice-chairwoman. At their first council meeting, on June 24, they signaled their Jewish priorities by proposing that the museum close for Yom Kippur, not just Christmas, which was the only day of the year it was scheduled not to be open.

The impact of the museum itself was overwhelming. “At every twisted turn,” wrote Kenneth Woodward in Newsweek (April 26), “the museum’s industrial architecture evokes the closed, monitored world of the Nazi death camps.” The New York Times (April 23) editorialized: “It teaches what must be taught. How can anyone doubt the need for such instruction in a world that has produced ‘ethnic cleansing’?” Leon Wieseltier, writing in the New Republic (May 3), said: “The museum is a pedagogical masterpiece. . . . This, then, is the plot, the historical and spiritual sequence got right, of the infernal display on the Mall: memory, stiffened by history, then struck dumb.”

There were some discordant notes as well. Jonathan Rosen, executive editor of the Forward, wondered whether the lessons of the Holocaust had any American relevance. “The memory of the Holocaust must be preserved and taught and commemorated,” he wrote, “but grafting that mission onto the role of the Government,
inserting that obligation into American culture, seems inappropriate" (New York Times, April 18). The Forward's cultural editor, Philip Gourevitch, objected to the overwhelming image of the Jew as victim: "There . . . the victims of Nazism will be on view for the American public, stripped, herded into ditches, shot, buried, and then the tape will repeat. . . . Didn’t these people suffer enough the first time their lives were taken from them?" Harvard professor Ruth Wisse asked: "What person of dignity, what person of noble Jewish spirit, what person who believes in the eternity of Israel, wants to be presented to his fellow Americans primarily, if not exclusively, through the prism of the destruction of a third of his people?"

To judge by the thousands of visitors who flocked to visit the museum and their positive response to the experience, it was a huge success. In its first seven months of operation, nearly 750,000 people came, an average of 4,200 a day — and 94 percent said that their visit was "enjoyable," though 47 percent complained about the crowds. By December, officials had to warn potential visitors away. "We do invite everyone — but not right now," said the museum director.

The opening of the museum in Washington inevitably invited comparison with two other Holocaust museums, one, on the West Coast, already in place, and the other, on the East Coast, still in the planning stage. In February, two months before the Holocaust Memorial Museum opened, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles dedicated its $50-million Beit Hashoah-Museum of Tolerance. Immediately subject to criticism from some quarters for its high-tech gadgetry and Hollywood-style glitz, this museum appeared in an even worse light when compared to the relatively restrained and sensitive Washington museum. Meanwhile, the planned New York institution known as "A Living Memorial to the Holocaust-Museum of Jewish Heritage," already plagued by years of difficulties and dissension, now had to face the question of why a museum was needed in New York if there was an outstanding one in Washington. David Altshuler, director of the New York museum, argued that, unlike the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, his would be dedicated to the preservation of the historical Jewish heritage, not just its destruction by the Nazis. Whether this distinction would be enough to justify going ahead with plans for the New York institution remained unclear.

Yet another public acknowledgment of the Holocaust came on December 15 with the opening of Steven Spielberg's film Schindler's List, based on a book by Thomas Keneally about a German industrialist who saved over a thousand Jews from the Nazis by employing them in his factory. That Spielberg, the most successful filmmaker in movie history, would choose the grim theme of the Holocaust for his work — after such popular fantasies as E.T. and Jurassic Park — was itself an indication that the extermination of European Jewry had become an acceptable subject in mainstream American culture. And Spielberg's explanation that the decision to make this movie was an expression of his own heightened Jewish identity symbolized the extent to which much of American Jewry had come to associate remembering the Holocaust with their sense of Jewishness. The large audiences and critical acclaim that the movie attracted insured that millions of Americans who might not
have known anything previously about the Holocaust would now learn, in dramatic form, what was done to the Jews during World War II. Yet, as some critics noted, the film imparted a typically American, optimistic message that could be understood as somehow mitigating the horror: a “good” German had managed to save Jews.

Continuity, Continued

With Israel now apparently on the road to peace and the Holocaust saved from oblivion in movie theaters and museums, the discussion of “Jewish continuity” focused increasingly on how — and whether — American Jews could be made to feel sufficiently Jewish to want to pass their heritage on to their children. The aftereffects of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, which found that a majority of young Jews were marrying non-Jews, still agitated the community.

The June-July issue of Hadassah Magazine, which was devoted to the subject, contained the answers of 30 American Jews to the question: “What is the most important thing we can do to ensure Jewish survival in America?” The answers provide a sampling of the wide variety of perspectives on this issue. Orthodox rabbi Marc Angel stated that “the key to Jewish survival has always been commitment to a life of Torah and mitzvot. This is the only valid prescription.” Writer Francine Klagsbrun suggested three things: “education, education, education.” Another writer, Moshe Waldoks, suggested using the mass media more effectively to disseminate Jewish themes. More spiritual synagogues, deeper commitment to social justice, feminism, environmentalism, and outreach to the intermarried were the priorities of Rabbi Rachel Cowan. Richard Joel, director of B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations, said: “The community must support campus organizations that connect young Jews to their Jewishness.”

For Michael Lerner, editor of Tikkun, American Judaism could only be renewed once young Jews no longer experienced the Jewish world as “conformist, materialistic, dominated by the wealthy and the fund-raisers, undemocratic, sexist, lacking in spirituality, and defining everyone who criticizes Israeli policy as 'self-hating.'” “Turn Friday Night into Shabbos,” declared Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, director of the National Jewish Outreach Center. Brandeis professor Jonathan Sarna, whose relatively dispassionate answer perhaps reflected his own academic bent, provided a pungent commentary on all the other responses: “In the final analysis, the most important thing we can do is predict that Jews will not survive. That, more than anything else, will stimulate our best minds to prove us wrong.”

There were, indeed, signs that the organized Jewish community was shifting its priorities in order to build Jewish identity. In several cities, Jewish federations and synagogues, overcoming the barriers that had separated them in the past, began cooperative programs to bind young Jews to the community. The partnership made sense since each institution could offer something the other lacked: the synagogue’s expertise was in Jewish programming and outreach, while the federation’s was in fund-raising and community planning. In Cleveland and Philadelphia, representa-
tives of synagogues, schools, and the federation sat on the boards of new central organizations to coordinate Jewish education. In San Diego, the federation paid the salary of a community youth activities coordinator whose job description included supervising synagogue youth groups. In Boston, the federation helped synagogues increase their programs for young families at key periods when they were likely to look to a synagogue for support, such as the birth of a child or bar/bat mitzvah training.

In addition, individual synagogues, on their own, developed imaginative programs to serve the needs of diverse populations. For example, Congregation Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, sponsored a counseling center open to members and nonmembers alike, staffed by volunteers who were members of the synagogue and had undergone two years of training. Congregation Emanuel, a Reform temple in Denver, began a computer dating service for Jews called the Colorado Jewish Social Network, which, by the end of 1993, had led to 30 marriages and about the same number of new members in the synagogue. As a further incentive to young people, Emanuel offered three years of free membership to anyone under the age of 31. Eager to attract Jews at the other end of the age spectrum, Temple Beth El in Boca Raton, Florida, offered prorated part-time memberships to the retired Jews who spent only the winter in Florida.

ROLE OF EDUCATION

Many observers looked to intensified Jewish education as the key to continuity. The day schools, especially — primarily but not exclusively associated with the Orthodox community — were touted as essential vehicles to raise a new generation of committed Jews. Gary Rosenblatt, editor of the New York *Jewish Week*, wrote of what he considered “the dirty little secret about Jewish continuity” (November 12 - 18). The federation world, he asserted, which “operates out of a social work framework,” could not address the issue effectively: “federation vocabulary speaks of consensus and committee and process rather than using words like Torah and mitzvot and covenant.” What was needed, he said, was the creation and subsidizing of “quality Jewish day schools and high schools.” Prof. Samuel Heilman of Queens College agreed. Acknowledging that paying for a day school education was financially painful, he compared it to choosing to pay more for a car that had excellent safety features. “So I have spent more for a safe car and I have spent more for a sustaining Jewish education, both of which I trust will preserve my Jewish children” (New York *Jewish Week*, November 26 - December 2).

Evidence was forthcoming to prove that Jewish education did indeed have a positive effect on Jewish identity. In March the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis and the Jewish Education Service of North America jointly published *When They Are Grown They Will Not Depart: Jewish Education and the Jewish Behavior of American Adults*, by Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein. Based on data from the National Jewish Population Survey, the study found that,
while small amounts of Jewish education had little long-range impact, *extensive* Jewish education — defined as at least six years — had considerable impact. Jews with extensive Jewish education were considerably more likely to affiliate with a synagogue, volunteer for Jewish causes, marry a Jew, and oppose the intermarriage of their children. Because this pattern held true even after adjustment for Jewish denomination, the researchers concluded that education was the key variable underlying the degree of Jewishness.

Since an estimated 85 percent of American Jews attend college, the quality of Jewish life on campus was another focus of concern. Were Jewish college students being given enough Jewish programming to build and sustain a strong Jewish identity? The American Jewish Committee announced an essay contest for undergraduates on "What Being Jewish Means to Me" and launched a study of Jewish activity on American campuses. With roughly three-quarters of Jewish students having no Jewish involvement during their college years, Hillel, the national network of Jewish campus organizations, acknowledged the need to overhaul its operations. At Hillel's annual conference in December, Richard Joel, international director, proposed a new, two-track, approach: while continuing to serve those students already involved in Jewish life, Hillel would now also reach out to the much larger segment of uninvolved students with activities that were not necessarily Jewish but that students enjoy, such as sports, dances, and cultural events. Further, Joel explained, since B'nai B'rith, which founded the Hillel movement, had cut back severely on its financial subsidy, the Council of Jewish Federations would be doubling its contributions to Hillel organizations, and Edgar Bronfman's Fund for Jewish Campus Life would also raise money for them. A new board of directors for Hillel would include leaders of B'nai B'rith and the Council of Jewish Federations. Hillel also adopted a new official name, reflecting its broader role: Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

The concept of trips to Israel as a means of bolstering Jewish identity, already suggested in 1992, became even more popular in 1993, no doubt stimulated by the unfolding Middle East peace process. In the eyes of those concerned with continuity, Israel's functioning and vibrant Jewish society and rich culture contained the potential to inspire a dynamic American Jewish life.

An initiative to encourage visits to Israel for young Jews, announced in late 1992 by the CRB Foundation — in cooperation with the United Jewish Appeal, the Council of Jewish Federations, the Jewish Community Centers Association, and Jewish Educational Services of North America — gained momentum in 1993. The first wave of federations whose proposals were approved were those of Washington, Palm Beach, Atlanta, and the Manhattan and Westchester regions of the New York UJA-Federation. Several other communities had also announced their participation, though their proposals had not yet been finalized. The participating federations would pay three dollars for every one dollar put up by CRB to pay for trips to Israel and to finance innovative ways of attracting people to go on the trips. In the communities, the money had been donated specifically for this purpose by philan-
thopists eager to encourage Jewish continuity, so that existing federation allocations were not affected.

Perhaps the most original plan developed under the CRB program was New York UJA-Federation's idea of celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah by opening a special bank account to save money for a trip to Israel. As an incentive, the federation would contribute money to accounts redeemed for an Israel trip. The plan proved so popular that the CRB Foundation announced that it would sponsor a variation of it on a national basis: contributions to the account would start when the child was age seven and continue for nine years, with the local federation matching each annual contribution of $200.

If there were any lingering doubts over whether concern for Israel should now take second place on the American Jewish agenda to the future of American Jewry, they were assuaged by none other than the prime minister of Israel himself. Yitzhak Rabin's keynote address to the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations explicitly linked the dramatic changes in the Middle East to the future of Jewish life in North America. Israel, he noted, was a success story, and did not need handouts. If American Jews wanted to put money into Israel, they should invest in its economy. And he urged a new understanding of Israel-Diaspora relations: "This is the time to rewrite the covenant between Israel and world Jewry. The thrust of that covenant must be Jewish continuity and survival through the reclamation of our youth." The way to do this was "profound, indelible Jewish education coupled with Israel experience."

Denominational Developments

REFORM JUDAISM

For the non-Orthodox movements in Jewish religious life, the growing alarm over the future of American Jewry became a central theme. Within Reform Judaism, one proposed strategy was to convert non-Jews to Judaism. In his keynote address to the biennial convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) on October 23, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the organization's president, announced a $5-million program "to reach out to those of our neighbors who belong to no church or other religious institutions." Schindler took note of Judaism's historical reluctance to proselytize but claimed that Jews in ancient times did seek converts and only changed their approach in response to persecution by Christians and Muslims. Reform Judaism already did considerable outreach work to non-Jewish spouses and children of intermarriages, but now, said Schindler, it should broaden its efforts, "welcoming the strangers who choose to live in our midst." He felt that such a program would bear fruit, since "Judaism has an enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer our troubled world."

The proposal received a generally skeptical response. The more traditional de-
nominations were openly hostile. Sheldon Rudoff, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, called the move "another aberrational activity that we have difficulty understanding, another step which widens the gap between us." Chancellor Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative) termed Schindler's plan "a smokescreen to confuse the world about how weak we really are," a step that "will do violence to the integrity of Judaism and produce a historic hodgepodge."

Indeed, the large number of non-Jews already participating in Reform services presented a serious dilemma for the movement. In February, at a meeting of the executive committee of the UAHC, Rabbi Schindler spoke in favor of giving these non-Jews — generally spouses or in-laws of Jewish members — a greater role in the rituals. He was challenged by Rabbi Walter Jacob, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Reform rabbinical organization, who said: "There should be a very clear distinction between a Jew and a non-Jew in our religious services. It is wrong to have a non-Jew leading us in prayer. . . . [W]e cannot have gentiles mouth what they clearly do not believe."

Schindler was not dissuaded. In the same keynote speech at the biennial announcing the program to proselytize, he also called for non-Jews to be allowed, not only to have a role in the services, but also to handle the Torah scroll and be buried in Jewish cemeteries. There was considerable disagreement with his position among the delegates, with some critics arguing that enhanced participation by non-Jews decreased the incentive for them to convert to Judaism — which presumably was Schindler's primary aim in launching outreach to non-Jews.

Other figures in the Reform movement advanced different priorities. Rabbi Walter Jacob, completing his term as president of the CCAR, lamented the erosion of standards that had accompanied the democratization of Jewish life. While favoring support for and outreach to those Jews who did not live in traditional family settings, he deplored "a disturbing tendency to go further and to declare that all of these styles are all right and equally acceptable as Jewish ideals. They are not. The Jewish ideal remains the monogamous family."

Some Reform rabbis argued that their movement had placed so much stress on social action and the autonomy of the individual that the spiritual content of Judaism had been shunted aside. Several workshops at the UAHC biennial dealt with approaches to spirituality, and they attracted overflow crowds.

In 1993, Reform became the first Jewish movement to deal officially and forthrightly with a problem that had long been swept under the rug in all the Jewish denominations — and among Christians as well: sexual misconduct by members of the clergy. In the wake of several well-publicized incidents of rabbis engaged in extramarital relations with congregants, the CCAR approved stringent new regulations: The CCAR's Committee on Ethics and Appeals might investigate a rabbi suspected of an ethical violation — sexual, financial, or any other kind — even in the absence of a formal complaint; the committee might recommend that a rabbi under investigation be barred from using the CCAR placement service; and if the
committee decided to reprimand or censure the rabbi, his or her name would be listed in the CCAR newsletter.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

The Conservative movement, which attempts to balance the forces of tradition and change, witnessed a memorable confrontation between its two wings at the Rabbinical Assembly convention in March. Rabbi Harold Schulweis delivered an impassioned call for greater flexibility in the interpretation of Jewish law. While the immediate focus of his remarks was the role of homosexuals in Jewish life, his theme had far broader ramifications. Modern Jews, he said, are seeking spirituality and are confronted by Halakhah — Jewish law. Schulweis acknowledged the need for Halakhah, in the same way that tennis players need a net to play the game. But “the net is not the game,” he maintained. Halakhah had become irrelevant to the great bulk of American Jews, asserted Schulweis, because it had become an end in itself, was out of touch with life, and was at times inconsistent with morality. “Halakhah,” he stated, “must come out of its cloister. It must and can be demystified.”

In a response to the convention, JTS chancellor Ismar Schorsch urged his movement to see matters from the perspective of the laity. In his travels across the country, Schorsch found that ordinary Conservative Jews had little interest in an interpretation of Judaism that championed personal autonomy: “They appreciate the sacredness of the public realm and don’t rush to ask of us, their rabbis, to translate their foibles and idiosyncrasies into lofty principle and public policy.” Neither did these Conservative Jews strike Schorsch as being particularly excited about the “ethical imperatives” that Schulweis championed. What they wanted, he concluded, was “a rabbinic leadership marked by exemplars of piety, learning and love, not halakhic revolutionaries.”

The traditionalist tenor of the 1993 biennial convention of the United Synagogue — the congregational arm of Conservative Judaism — suggested that Schorsch was correct about what the laity wanted. The theme of the gathering was spirituality. Rabbi Joel Roth, professor of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary, insisted on the authority of Jewish law. “No path to spirituality is valid,” he said, “if it is non-halakhic.” The “mandated behavior” enjoined by the law “is designed to create feeling.” Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the organization’s executive vice-president, stressed the need “to convert Jews to Judaism — to Jewish living.” And he considered it an “error” to have allowed outreach to the unaffiliated “to overwhelm and dominate synagogue life.” No speaker echoed Schulweis’s call for radical change in the interpretation of Jewish law.

Two important books appeared during the year that dealt in considerable detail with Conservative Judaism. One, Neil Gilman’s Conservative Judaism: The New Century, was a highly readable history of the movement. Written by a JTS professor for the intelligent layperson rather than for the scholar, it was remarkably frank and objective in its delineation of the problems facing the movement and the struggles
between ideological factions to control its course. Mel Scult's *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan* was the first scholarly biography of the rabbi who influenced three generations of Conservative rabbis from his position on the JTS faculty and was the founder of the Reconstructionist movement. Based heavily on Kaplan's voluminous diaries, the book skillfully portrayed the development of the early Conservative movement, the reasons for Kaplan's disagreements with many of its more traditionalist leaders, and the origins of Reconstructionist thought.

**ORTHODOX JUDAISM**

The passing, on April 8, of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik at the age of 90 was a major loss for American Orthodoxy. Although he had been incapacitated and unable to exert personal influence for some years, the loss of the man the *New York Times* obituary called "the unchallenged leader of mainstream Orthodoxy," who was "also respected by the more traditionalist groupings" for his expertise in Jewish law, had an enormous impact on the balance of forces within Orthodoxy. Sectarian Orthodoxy — which despised Rabbi Soloveitchik's positive assessment of the State of Israel, secular scholarship, and willingness to cooperate with the non-Orthodox on communal matters, but had not dared openly criticize this talmudic luminary in his lifetime — no longer had to defer to the one rabbi who stood as living proof that one could indeed combine greatness in traditional Jewish scholarship with full participation in Western culture.

Not one of the heads of the sectarian Orthodox rabbinical schools attended the Soloveitchik funeral, and the May issue of the *Jewish Observer*, the official publication of Agudath Israel, contained a decidedly cool one-page article marking Rabbi Soloveitchik's passing that aroused a storm of protest from his disciples. After reviewing the basic biographical facts, the article assessed his career in equivocal words that could easily be interpreted in a negative manner: "He was alone in the path he took ... in admitted departure from the Torah world from which he came"; "Rabbi Soloveitchik ... was frequently quoted in conflicting manner by different people." The fact that many of Soloveitchik's defenders argued his case by downplaying his modernity and portraying him as a man whose primary interests lay in the study of talmudic texts — who only quoted secular sources to influence secularly educated nontraditional Jews — only served to underscore the degree to which the openness to modernity that he embodied had atrophied in the circles of his own students.

An apt symbol of the split between Orthodox modernists and sectarians occurred on Thanksgiving weekend, when each wing of Orthodoxy held its own convention about 100 miles away from the other. The newly formed North American Orthodox Leadership Conference, made up of 17 institutions associated with mainstream

---

1See full obituary article elsewhere in this volume.
Orthodoxy, sought to define its distinguishing characteristics. In his keynote address, Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, discussed four elements that he felt constituted the essence of mainstream, as opposed to sectarian, Orthodoxy: recognition of the validity of secular studies, devotion to the State of Israel, acceptance of the need for women to have a Jewish education, and a commitment to civility in dealing with the sectarians and with the non-Orthodox. The sectarian Orthodox felt equally embattled. The theme of the Agudath Israel convention was "The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity: Standing Up for Torah Principles." Rabbi Elya Svei of Philadelphia expressed a radically rejectionist approach to contemporary life: "The modern world around us has sunk so deeply into immorality and preoccupation with the basest instincts, as is so painfully obvious when we look around us. Should we, then, look to modern society for our values?"

Of the four items mentioned by Lamm as constituting the platform of the Orthodox moderates, it was the enhanced role of women in Jewish life that aroused the most anger at the Agudah convention.

The Agudah rabbis were responding to a number of well-publicized gains made by feminists in the mainstream Orthodox community. An Orthodox synagogue in New York City allowed a woman to read the Scroll of Esther on Purim. A woman was elected president of the Westwood Kehilla Synagogue in California; she was thought to be the first woman to achieve such a position in an Orthodox congregation. In June the Rabbinical Council of America introduced a mandatory prenuptial agreement that aimed to prevent husbands from withholding a get (religious divorce) as a negotiating tactic in case of divorce. The rabbis also called on religious institutions to refuse synagogue honors to, and publicize names of, spouses who refused to cooperate in issuance of a get. Most upsetting of all to the sectarians — and to many mainstream Orthodox as well — were two articles in the December issue of Moment, which appeared just prior to the Thanksgiving weekend conventions. One, by Orthodox feminist Blu Greenberg, entitled "Is Now the Time for Orthodox Women Rabbis?" answered the question affirmatively. The other was by an Orthodox woman who had applied to the rabbinical school at Yeshiva University — and had received no reply.

LUBAVITCH MESSIANISM

On January 3, the New York Times prominently featured a human-interest story about "The Watch for Messiah in Crown Heights." It described the ubiquity of "Moshiach beepers" in the heavily Lubavitch neighborhood, which were expected to go off as soon as the Messiah revealed himself. The man all these people considered the Messiah — 90 years old, severely paralyzed from a stroke, and unable to talk — was Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Rebbe of Lubavitch. In succeeding weeks, newspaper ads appeared announcing "LONG LIVE THE KING MOSHIACH" and listing the names of scores of rabbis around the world who had allegedly ruled that Rabbi Schneerson was indeed the Messiah.
This campaign, however, did not reflect a consensus of the Lubavitch leadership. It was led by Rabbi Shmuel Butman and others who claimed that the Rebbe, though unable to speak, seemed to nod his head when songs about the Messiah were sung. The Rebbe's longtime lieutenants, led by Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, scoffed at the notion. While not denying that his leader was the Messiah, Rabbi Krinsky said that to assert that Rabbi Schneerson was making the claim was "dishonest and damaging." The Krinsky group took out ads in the Jewish press, stating: "Recent pronouncements and advertisements purport to convey the official policy of the Lubavitch movement. We wish to put the public on notice that these pronouncements and declarations do not reflect the official policy of the Lubavitch movement." Most concerned about the negative impact of the messianic campaign were the Lubavitch emissaries outside New York, who feared it would alienate potential donors. One emissary told a *New York Times* reporter (January 29): "This 'King Messiah' stuff might play on Eastern Parkway, but not in Omaha."

The night of January 31 — its Hebrew date coinciding with the date the Rebbe had been inaugurated in 1951 and the previous Rebbe had died a year earlier — was an annual Lubavitch holiday, and Rabbi Butman spread the word that the Rebbe would be "coronated" as Messiah at the celebration. The morning after the event, the headline in the *New York Times* read: "Rebbe, But Not the Messiah, As Lubavitchers Compromise." Rabbi Krinsky had allowed the paralyzed Rebbe to appear, sitting in his wheelchair, for eight minutes, on the understanding that Rabbi Butman would back down on his claims. Butman told the audience: "This is not a coronation. No human being has the power to anoint the Messiah. . . . All that we can do is cry out to God that he will send the Messiah. . . ." The Rebbe seemed to nod his head several times as his followers sang a song with the words "Long live our master, our teacher and our rabbi, the King Messiah for ever and ever," but Rabbi Krinsky's office issued a statement that the Rebbe's appearance was nothing more than his usual attendance at evening services.

By November the conflict over the Rebbe's messiahship was overshadowed by an even more bitter struggle over his medical care. As his condition deteriorated, different factions in the movement, each with its own team of physicians supporting different therapies, engaged in verbal abuse, physical confrontation, and even death threats. One of the Rebbe's cardiologists told a reporter: "There is so much anger . . . and the doctors are caught in the cross-fire. We are stymied in inaugurating care." Another doctor charged one rabbi with "imprisoning" the patient. By year's end the Rebbe had lost all physical mobility and was almost completely blinded by cataracts.

**Judaism and Homosexuality**

The issue of Judaism's approach to homosexuality continued to divide the community. For the nonhalakhic denominations, the central problem was how to eliminate discrimination against gays. Thus, Reform Judaism called for a boycott on
meetings in Colorado after the state approved an amendment banning ordinances that would protect gays from discrimination. The Reform leaders argued for the boycott both in order to prevent "embarrassment and humiliation to those of our members who might be gay or lesbian," and because anti-gay discrimination raised "warning signals" for Jews as well. The Reconstructionist movement, responding to demands from gay and lesbian couples for religious recognition of their relationships, formally approved "commitment" ceremonies for homosexual couples. The executive director of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association explained that "Jewish holiness may be found in relationships between gays and lesbians, just as it can be found between heterosexual couples."

In the Orthodox community, many were prepared to fight a last-ditch battle against any Jewish legitimation of homosexuality. Three prominent Orthodox rabbis—Marc Angel, Hillel Goldberg, and Pinchas Stolper—publicly argued that an anti-gay rights stand could gain the Orthodox support among the rank and file of the other movements, and "we can halt, in the entire Jewish community, a major trend away from Torah" for the first time in 200 years. "Visible protest against the legitimization of homosexuality," they argued, "gives heart to the masses looking for leadership on the issue" (Jewish Action, Winter 1992-93).

It was Conservative Judaism—committed to Jewish tradition while open to the influences of modernity—that had the most difficulty handling the issue. In May, Rabbi Howard Handler, dismissed from his position in a New York City Conservative synagogue, claimed that he had been ousted because he was gay. Handler thus became the first Conservative rabbi ever to acknowledge being a homosexual. While the congregation denied that the rabbi's sexual orientation had anything to do with his firing, the Conservative movement had to face the unprecedented question of whether its placement office should try to find another rabbinic position for an open homosexual. In fact, the Committee on Law and Standards of the Conservative movement had, in 1992, ruled that a practicing homosexual could not be a synagogue rabbi. Yet that resolution had dealt with the ordination of rabbinical students, and did not, strictly speaking, apply to those already in the pulpit. On May 19, the committee voted on two resolutions. One, backed by 13 members, stated that gays and lesbians should not be given placement assistance, while the other, supported by seven members, said that they should. Under committee rules, both stands were considered approved. The executive committee of the Rabbinical Assembly, the body that ran the placement service, chose to abide by the majority report and did not help Handler find another position.

The Jewish Theological Seminary became a focus of controversy when the dean of the Rabbinical School—a renowned Talmud scholar and the movement's leading opponent of legitimizing homosexuality—stepped down from his position amid charges that he had engaged, years before, in improper behavior with a male research assistant and also that, more recently, he had asked inappropriate questions of a sexual nature while interviewing an applicant to the school. Chancellor Ismar Schorsch maintained that the charges were politically motivated: to discredit the
Seminary's leading voice for maintaining the traditional halakhic position on homosexuality. As the chancellor put it: “The attack on his character was prompted more by what he represented than anything he did.”

In this atmosphere of divisiveness over the place of gays in Jewish life, a crisis arose over the annual event that traditionally brought all Jews together: the Israel Day parade in New York City, scheduled for May 9. When Beth Simchat Torah, the gay and lesbian synagogue, requested permission, in March, to participate in the parade, an official of the American Zionist Youth Foundation, the parade sponsor, commented that “this is a very, very sensitive matter. The wrong word at this time could blow up the entire thing.” A meeting of Orthodox yeshivah principals — whose students always made up at least half of the parade marchers — decided that their schools would not march if the gay synagogue marched as an identified unit. Their rationale, arrived at after consultation with Orthodox rabbinic authorities, was that the parade must not be used as a vehicle for legitimizing an unacceptable lifestyle.

When the sponsoring organization suggested to the gay synagogue that it march without an identifying banner, synagogue officials responded that they were willing to delete all reference to gays and lesbians but insisted that their banner say “Beth Simchat Torah.” This proved unacceptable to the Orthodox. As these developments were reported in the press, the community became increasingly polarized. The Association of Reform Zionists of America, the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the Federation of ReconstructionistCongregations and Havurot backed the synagogue, while the Rabbinical Council of America condemned any “modification of authentic Judaism’s rigorous stand against homosexual behavior.” Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum of Beth Simchat Torah reported a jump in the number of threatening phone calls she had received.

On April 20, a compromise was reached: Beth Simchat Torah would march together with the Reform Zionists of America behind a banner carrying both names, with no reference to gays. But this arrangement started to erode almost as soon as it was announced, as some of the more traditionalist rabbis on the faculty of Yeshiva University denounced it. It fell apart completely on May 5, four days before the parade, when the New York Times carried a major article — “‘Luckiest Rabbi in America’ Holds Faith Amid the Hate” — about Rabbi Kleinbaum, who told the reporter about being harassed by fellow Jews and charged that the Orthodox refusing to march in the parade would only be satisfied by “our complete invisibility.” For the Orthodox — without whose participation the parade would be a shadow of itself — this was the last straw. The parade sponsor, claiming that Rabbi Kleinbaum’s interview had violated a pledge to keep a low public profile about the dispute, excluded the gay synagogue from the event. All the Orthodox groups that had been hesitant now opted to march, and an estimated 50,000 people turned out for the event on May 9.

While the parade was in progress, members of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah and their sympathizers gathered at a midtown synagogue near the parade route,
where politicians eager to demonstrate support could visit them after being seen at the parade. Rabbi Kleinbaum said: “Neither anti-Semitism nor anti-gay attitudes will render invisible our support for the State of Israel.” What all elements of the Jewish community could agree on was that advance planning would be needed to prevent a similar crisis at the 1994 parade.

**Reviving the Social Agenda**

For some American Jews, the election of Bill Clinton, coupled with a diminished sense of urgency about Israel, provided an opportunity for renewed involvement in domestic social issues. Rabbi Lynn Landsberg of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center expressed the mood among the activists: “Let's get our hands dirty, be there wherever we are needed, with literacy and anti-poverty programs, championing issues in the legislative arena.” When the new administration announced its spending plans in February, American Jewish organizations lauded the commitment to fund domestic programs that had been cut by the Republicans. Reflecting the Jewish consensus, the AJCongress stated: “We especially appreciate the president's reaffirmation of the notion that government must be an active force for helping the poor and near-poor.”

The stress on domestic social concerns was reflected in the 1993 Joint Program Plan of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), the umbrella agency that coordinates policy guidelines for national Jewish agencies and local community relations councils. For the first time in five years, the top issue was not of an international nature but rather “Equal Opportunity and Social Justice.” It listed as highest priority items poverty, the urban agenda, immigration, and health care. The introduction to the document explicitly linked Jewish communal goals with the new president: “By embracing the challenge for change offered by the Clinton administration, the organized Jewish community will strengthen its record of commitment to the social justice agenda.”

But it was one man — Michael Lerner — who, more than any of the Jewish agencies, came to embody the link between American Jews and the administration's domestic policies. A *New York Times Sunday Magazine* article on First Lady Hillary Clinton (May 23) discussed her commitment to “the politics of meaning,” which she learned about from Lerner, editor of *Tikkun* magazine, a monthly that seeks to counter the influence of neoconservatism in Jewish life by offering an amalgam of leftist social policy and Jewish tradition. The *Times* article quoted Lerner's definition of the politics of meaning: “to build a society based on love and connection, a society in which the bottom line would not be profit and power but ethical and spiritual sensitivity and a sense of community, mutual caring and responsibility.” When the reporter asked Mrs. Clinton what specifically this meant, she said: “As Michael Lerner and I discussed, we have to first create a language that would better communicate what we are trying to say, and the policies would flow from the language.”
With his influence on Mrs. Clinton public knowledge, Lerner became something of a media star, quoted in the press and interviewed on television. In its June 27 issue, the *Times Magazine* devoted another feature article — “This Year’s Prophet” — just to Lerner, accompanied by a photo of him with Hillary Clinton. While some found Lerner’s policy prescriptions vague — the *New Republic* (May 3) asked, “What on earth are these people talking about?” — Lerner ascribed the criticism to a cynical distrust of political idealism.

Jewish sympathy with the Clinton domestic agenda did not go unchallenged. A group of conservative Jewish intellectuals organized a Jewish Policy Center, based in Washington, to build support for conservative policies in the Jewish community. Its first program, on October 4, was a panel discussion featuring Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Ruth Wisse, and others.

**Organizational Ferment**

Just as 1993 brought considerable debate about shifting communal priorities, it also witnessed a good deal of ferment in the Jewish organizational structure.

**ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE**

The Anti-Defamation League, which monitors and exposes extremism and anti-Semitism, went through a wrenching ordeal in 1993. In February Arab-American groups in San Francisco charged that the ADL’s office there was given access to secret police information about Arab-Americans which it then passed on to the Israeli government. The San Francisco police department launched an investigation. Soon the charge escalated: the ADL was alleged to have paid informants in several cities who provided information about thousands of members of a wide variety of what the organization considered “extremist” groups. What the ADL classified as “fact-finding” was now being denounced as illegal spying.

The organized Jewish community rallied around the ADL. The Conference of Presidents issued a statement saying that “the ADL deserves our respect and confidence. We are certain that after all the legal processes are concluded, our trust in and respect for the ADL will be justified.” NJCRAC’s statement praised the ADL’s fact-finding activities for “countering extremism and protecting the rights of all Americans.” The ADL itself published a report about the controversy in April, entitled “Fact Finding: Protection Against Extremism.” The report stated that “ADL is cooperating fully with the investigation and believes that none of its operations have violated any laws. Nonetheless, ADL is reviewing its fact-finding activities to ensure that it continues to operate in an appropriate and legal manner when it gathers information and in its contacts with law enforcement.”

The attacks on the ADL took on an ideological tinge. Both in the *Village Voice* (May 11) and on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* (May 28), hostile writers charged that the troubles of the ADL were due to a shift in the organization’s
political stance: instead of fighting anti-Semitism wherever it was found, the ADL had allegedly closed its eyes to right-wing bigotry — that of the Ku Klux Klan and the white supremacists — in order to focus solely on anti-Semitism of the political left. On the same op-ed page, ADL national director Abraham Foxman answered that far more of its recent publications and reports had exposed extremist groups on the right than on the left. Foxman suggested that the charges against his organization amounted to a “Big Lie” that, by discrediting the ADL fact-finding operation, could only benefit the anti-Semites.

In November the ADL reached an agreement with the San Francisco District Attorney’s Office: no criminal charges would be filed, the ADL would provide $75,000 to fight hate crimes in San Francisco, and files seized by the district attorney would not be returned to the ADL. This still left several civil suits brought by groups claiming they had been spied on. Abraham Foxman commented: “The end result is that we have been vindicated.”

UNCONSUMMATED MERGER

While the ADL was undergoing its ordeal, the other two major Jewish defense organizations — the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress — were discussing plans to merge. Proponents of the merger — many of them wealthy donors who were solicited by both organizations — felt that such a step would cut costs and result in an organization stronger than either of its parents. They also noted that the two AJCs had become quite close ideologically. Following months of preliminary negotiations, in early March two joint committees were created, one to deal with finances, the other with governance.

In May, however, the talks broke off. One unresolved issue was the leadership of a merged organization. What would be the criteria for leadership? Some Committee leadership positions were partially based on financial contributions, while the Congress had no such requirement. Should leadership be divided equally between the two original groups? Also, the Committee’s budget was almost three times that of the Congress, despite the fact that the latter had more members on the books. This led many in Congress to fear that the merger would amount to a Committee takeover. There were also political differences: Congress was farther to the left than the Committee, both on domestic policy and on support for the dovish position in the Middle East. The presidents of the two groups — Alfred H. Moses of the Committee and Robert K. Lifton of the Congress — issued a joint statement that the failed negotiations had nevertheless “given us a renewed appreciation and respect for the traditions and accomplishments of both organizations.”

AMERICAN ZIONISM REORGANIZED

American Zionist organizations, in a state of decline ever since the proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948, agreed in January to reorganize themselves into the
American Zionist Movement (AZM). This would function as an umbrella body for the Zionist Organization of America, Hadassah, and other Zionist groups of the left and right, religious and secular. In an attempt to attract new faces, leadership in the AZM was open even to individuals not affiliated with any specific Zionist organization. Seymour Reich, a former president of B'ni B'rith and chairman of the Conference of Presidents, was elected president, and he announced his intention “to claim our rightful place as a strong and vivified entity.... The Zionist Movement is a sleeping giant.” He claimed that the new organization was unique in that Israel was its only priority.

Reich, speaking for the American Zionist Movement, evoked a storm of criticism in October when he suggested that positive changes in the former Soviet Union justified a reevaluation of the refugee quota from Russia, since Jews from there were “taking places that might otherwise go to Bosnian victims and other deserving refugees.” In urging a limitation on Russian Jewish entry to the United States, Reich was taking the traditional Israeli position that Jewish refugees from anywhere in the world should be steered toward the Jewish state. Defending his stand, Reich said he could not justify taking American Jewish money that could go for “Jewish education and other programs designed to make sure that the next generation of American Jews will be Jews” and spend it instead on the absorption of refugees, when Israel stood ready and willing to take them in.

UJA-FEDERATION

Earlier predictions of serious problems for American Jewish philanthropy began to come true in 1993. As the year began, officials at New York UJA-Federation — the country’s largest community philanthropy, which collected a quarter of a billion dollars in 1992 — announced that severe cuts in allocations would be necessary. The organization took out full-page newspaper ads urging donors to redeem their pledges in cash immediately: “Unless you reach deep into your pockets, we will have to say no to the many in need of our help.” The cuts in grants amounted to an average of 14.3 percent, though legacies and special endowments were used to lower the average cut to 7.9 percent. By August, staff cuts and workload changes caused by the budget woes produced serious labor-management problems.

Other Jewish communities experienced similar difficulties. The campaign in Boston, which ended up 10 percent short of its previous year’s total, cut allocations to constituent agencies by 5 to 15 percent. Cleveland, also coming up short, cut allocations nearly 3 percent and reduced the money sent to UJA for Israel by 6.5 percent. Los Angeles, badly hurt by an especially depressed economy in California, found that 13 percent of pledges could not be collected and cut $3.5 million out of its budget. Inevitably, agencies that had their allocations cut had to reduce services.

Other explanations for the crisis, aside from the ailing economy, were offered. Highly publicized special campaigns to resettle Ethiopian and Soviet Jews in Israel had induced many donors to give less to the general campaign. An older generation
of Jewish philanthropists was dying off, and their children were much more likely to give to nonsectarian causes than to the Jewish community. And those younger Jews who were interested in aiding Jewish causes were more likely to give to narrowly focused "alternative" charities, such as the Jewish Fund for Justice, Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger, and the New Israel Fund, where they knew exactly what their money was going for, rather than to the more established general-purpose Jewish philanthropies.

THE JEWISH AGENCY

The UJA-Federation system's problems were complicated by an escalating struggle for control of the Jewish Agency, to which much of the money UJA collected was channeled. The Agency was a nongovernmental body engaged primarily in bringing immigrants to Israel and resettling them there. On one side of the debate were the Israeli government and American Zionist groups; on the other were fundraisers from the Diaspora — primarily people associated with UJA-Federation in the United States. When the fund-raisers sought to eliminate two high-level political positions in the Agency on the grounds of organizational streamlining, Israel and the Zionists protested at the "de-Zionization" of the Agency. In February Israel's foreign minister, Shimon Peres, criticized the fund-raisers for trying "to run Zionist affairs from overseas" at the same time that less and less of the money they raised was going to Israel. A six-member committee set up to adjudicate the dispute could reach no agreement, and Israeli prime minister Rabin was asked to study the issue and recommend a solution.

The annual Jewish Agency assembly convened in Jerusalem in June amid allegations of financial irregularities by Simcha Dinitz, the chairman. Diaspora fundraisers were particularly upset by the scandal. Not only did it demonstrate what they considered the lax operating procedures of the "Zionists," but they claimed that reports of the affair in the American media were hurting the UJA-Federation campaign. The American fund-raisers called on Dinitz to resign. One federation director said: "If we had been charging stuff on the company credit card for five years, and suddenly it was discovered we hadn't been paying it off, we'd be gone by the afternoon." Dinitz, however, rejected their pleas that he resign, and Seymour Reich backed him, on the grounds that the allegations had not been proved.

The Americans threatened to retaliate. In September the United Israel Appeal, the American fund-raisers' conduit for sending UJA money to Israel, announced that it would not automatically renew the five-year contract binding the UJA campaign to the Jewish Agency. Max Fisher, a leading fund-raiser, explained: "It's not the intent of leadership to change the agreement. But at least take a look at what the Jewish Agency is doing."

A settlement was reached in November. The two political positions in the Jewish Agency would be eliminated, as demanded by the fund-raisers, but not until 1997. As a further step toward depoliticizing the Agency, its board of governors would

---

JEWISH COMMUNAL AFFAIRS / 177
be expanded to include 23 eminent Israelis who were not politicians. As the year ended, Dinitz remained at his post.

NEWSPAPER WAR

In many communities, the local Jewish federation subsidized a weekly Jewish newspaper. Since 1991, the New York UJA-Federation’s arrangement with the New York Jewish Week, whereby anyone contributing at least $36 got a free subscription, and the paper was given $15 per such subscription, had been under fire from the publishers of privately owned Jewish newspapers who insisted on a “level playing field.” The private papers suggested that donors be allowed to choose which Jewish newspaper their money should subsidize.

In July, as UJA-Federation leaders met to discuss whether to continue the arrangement with the Jewish Week, one privately owned paper, the Jewish Press, urged its readers to stop giving to UJA-Federation as a way of demonstrating their opposition to the status quo. While the other two major independents published in New York — the Long Island Jewish World and the Forward — declined to join the call for a boycott, they shared the sense of outrage that motivated it. In its October 15–21 edition, the World urged its readers to phone or write UJA-Federation “to help support a free Jewish press in America, to prove that free enterprise is not incompatible with Jewish journalism.”

At a meeting on December 1, the UJA-Federation board debated whether to continue its policy of subsidizing one paper, but no consensus was reached. The newly appointed editor of the Jewish Week, Gary Rosenblatt, went on the offensive against the demand of the privately owned papers (December 17–23). “It’s as if a group of private health clubs sought a subsidy from UJA-Federation because it supports YM-YWHA. What would then prevent any private entrepreneur from starting a Jewish newspaper in New York and demanding a subsidy from UJA-Federation?”

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS

Contrary to the popular folk wisdom that no Jewish organization ever goes out of existence voluntarily, it happened twice in 1993. In June the board of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews voted to cease its operations at the end of the year. The executive director explained that “all of the Jews are out of Ethiopia, that any stragglers are free to come and go as they please. Rather than metamorphose into something else, we decided to stick to our original guns.” In October the left-wing New Jewish Agenda ceased its national operations, though some local branches would continue. Though an officer of the organization said that “it’s difficult for progressive organizations to survive nowadays,” the increased prominence of Americans for Peace Now, appealing to many of the same constituency, probably had much to do with the decision.
The Pollard Case

At the beginning of 1993, the groundswell of American Jewish support for the release of Jonathan Pollard, who was serving a life sentence after being convicted in 1987 of spying for Israel, continued to grow. With the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1992 not to take up his appeal, the drive to free Pollard focused increasingly on Jewish communal pressure. On January 19, the day before he left office, President Bush turned down a clemency request for Pollard, despite pleas from prominent Jewish Republicans.

Given the intense feeling aroused in the community, it came as a surprise when the NJCRAC plenum, meeting in February, voted 162 to 147 — with 41 abstentions — not to send President Clinton a letter asking for a review of the life sentence. Thus NJCRAC maintained its prior neutrality on the case. While those member organizations of NJCRAC insisting on neutrality — most prominently, the Anti-Defamation League — justified their position on the grounds that there was no evidence of anti-Semitism in the conduct of the government, many delegates at the plenum charged that the behavior of some Pollard supporters had alienated potential sympathizers. Douglas Kahn, executive director of the San Francisco Jewish Community Relations Council and an advocate of pardon, was appalled at attempts by Pollard activists to justify the spy's actions, and AJCongress associate executive director Phil Baum said that the treatment he had received for insufficient zeal in Pollard's cause, while chairing a NJCRAC committee on the case, was "the most unpleasant and painful in all my years working with the Jewish community."

Attempts to obtain Pollard's freedom continued. Pollard himself wrote to President Clinton in March expressing remorse at what he had done, which, in his words, "was not only repugnant to American law, but was equally repugnant to God's Torah and to natural law." In August supporters of clemency, accompanied by Pollard's sister, lobbied on Capitol Hill for his release. In September the Anti-Defamation League reversed its position of neutrality and, like the other two major defense organizations, wrote to President Clinton asking for a review of the sentence. On November 9, a day named International Jonathan Pollard Lobby Day, 500 people came to Washington to urge their senators and representatives to use their influence in the Pollard cause. The American Zionist Movement took out a full-page ad in the New York Times: over a picture of Pollard appeared the headline "This Man Has Been Imprisoned Long Enough." At a press conference that day, the president announced that he had also received a letter from Israeli prime minister Rabin asking for clemency, but that he would make no decision until he received a report from the U.S. attorney general. On December 7, the New York Times reported that the president's advisers were leaning against clemency. This elicited a flood of mail, faxes, and phone calls on Pollard's behalf to the White House from the Jewish organizations.

But the tide was turning against Pollard's release. Rabbi Avi Weiss, who considered himself Pollard's personal rabbi, claimed that Pollard — contrary to his March
letter to the president — did not really feel that his actions were “repugnant” to the Torah or American law, and that Pollard had signed the letter only out of respect for the venerable Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, who had composed it for him. Without substantial evidence of remorse, Clinton had little justification to grant clemency. Then, on December 28, the *Times* reported that Secretary of Defense Les Aspin had written to the president charging that Pollard was still a security risk, since he allegedly tried to send out secret information from his prison cell by letter. While some of the Jewish organizations that had supported a review of the case now said they would reverse course if Aspin’s charges were true, Pollard’s more enthusiastic backers called the Aspin letter part of a government vendetta against the prisoner. As the year ended, President Clinton had not yet made a decision on the case.

Lawrence Grossman