Jewish Communal Affairs

Reverberations of the September 1993 mutual-recognition agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) continued to divide American Jewry throughout 1994 and early 1995. A vocal minority of American Jews, convinced that the peace process would prove fatal to the Jewish state, used public protest and political action to frustrate the stated policy of the Israeli government. The ramifications of the peace process, in turn, led to intensified debate about the future of American Jewish-Israeli relations and the impact of that relationship on the future of Jewish life in the United States. Other issues that attracted attention were the death of the Rebbe of Lubavitch, Menachem M. Schneerson, the renewed questioning—in light of the 1994 elections—of Jewish political liberalism, the fate of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard, and the ongoing relevance of Holocaust memory.

Debating the Peace Process

While a solid majority of American Jews, along with most of their major organizations, supported the Israel-PLO agreement with varying degrees of enthusiasm, a determined minority opposed it on security or religious grounds, or both. Another minority—less aggressive and vociferous, to be sure, since it basically agreed with Israeli policy—urged the Jewish state to be even more forthcoming in addressing Palestinian concerns.

On January 4, 1994, Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, delivered an address in Jerusalem on “American Jewry, Israel, and the Peace Process.” Acknowledging that American Jews felt “growing concern and apprehension about violence and terror” in Israel since the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn almost three months earlier, he denied any “real diminution” of American Jewish support for the peace process. Chiding the media for paying too much attention to the dissenters in the American Jewish community, Pollack declared that those dissenters “should express their views in responsible and effective ways.”

Early the next day, bombs were left outside the New York offices of two organizations that had long and vocally supported the peace process. A security guard found the bomb intended for Americans for Peace Now (APN), and the police disarmed it. The bomb left in front of the New Israel Fund went off, but caused no damage. Both had notes attached condemning Israel’s peace policy and signed by Maccabee Squad and Shield of David, hitherto unknown groups.

The entire spectrum of American Jewish organizations, including those opposed
to the peace process—even the Jewish Defense Organization, a successor to the late Rabbi Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League—denounced the attacks. Nevertheless, Israel's consul in New York, Colette Avital, interviewed on CBS's "60 Minutes," said that the bombing attempts were the inevitable result of extreme statements against the Israeli government and the verbal and physical abuse heaped upon Israeli representatives by certain American Jewish audiences. Letty Cottin Pogrebins, chairwoman of Americans for Peace Now, specifically blamed "supporters of the Likud and other rightist parties" for "using words like 'traitor' to delegitimate the Rabin government and its supporters." Former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir added fuel to the fire when he asserted that even had the bombs gone off, the damage would have amounted to less than that caused by Peace Now. The Conference of Presidents was about to condemn the comment, but executive vice-chairman Malcolm Hoenlein put in a call to Shamir, who explained that his statement had come out the opposite of what he intended.

In February the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), the umbrella organization reflecting the views of national and local Jewish bodies, took up the subject of the peace process. For the first time, it heard presentations not only from an Israeli government spokesperson—in this case, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin—but also from opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu. After listening to both sides, the delegates almost unanimously affirmed support for the peace process and resolved to mount an educational campaign "to broaden American public understanding of the peace process and risks related to it" and "to discourage divisive and inflammatory rhetoric" within the Jewish community.

HEBRON MASSACRE

On February 25, 1994, Baruch Goldstein, an American-born Israeli physician, opened fire on Muslims at prayer in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the heavily Arab West Bank city of Hebron. At least 29 were killed and many more wounded before Goldstein was subdued and beaten to death. The act was universally condemned in the American Jewish community, as both rabbis and Jewish organizations called it antithetical to Jewish values. In several American communities, Jews joined with Christians and Muslims at interfaith services to mourn the victims and pray for peace. Nevertheless, Jews differed with each other over the massacre's implications for the ongoing peace process.

The mainstream umbrella organizations supporting Israeli policy warned that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must not fall victim to this atrocity. Lynn Lyss, NJCRAC chairwoman, hoped that "today's tragedy will spur a renewal of efforts to bring peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians." Lester Pollock, the Conference of Presidents chairman, said: "We must not allow this or other acts of violence to undermine peace negotiations, incite tensions in the area, or provoke further bloodshed." The conference's regularly scheduled annual mission
to Israel began two days later. The talks that took place between the Jewish leaders on the mission and the Jews and Arabs they met focused on the fate of the peace process. Executive vice-chairman Hoenlein summed up the conclusions of the Americans: "There is a threat of polarization, both Palestinian and Israeli. The challenge for the Israeli leadership is to ensure that polarization not be allowed to predominate."

Groups to the left and the right of this mainstream had other ideas. Those ardently committed to furthering the peace process argued that Goldstein had been able to act because Israeli policy was too soft on militant Jewish settlers. Americans for Peace Now, for example, urged the Israeli government to "remove Jews from the heart of Hebron where their presence inflames relations and poses a danger to all residents of the area." And several weeks later, APN joined with the National Association of Arab Americans in a formal statement calling for the evacuation of all Israeli settlers from Hebron and Gaza. But on the other side of the political spectrum, Americans for a Safe Israel, affiliated with the Israeli Likud, blamed Israel's peace policy for letting Arabs "get away with murder," thereby nurturing the "frustration" among Jewish settlers that led to Goldstein's act. During the Conference of Presidents' mission to Israel, Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, publicly challenged a Palestinian leader to match Jewish condemnation of the Hebron massacre by condemning Palestinian killings of Jews. When he declined to do so, Klein called it a "frightening message about his insincerity in wanting to live in peace with the Israeli people."

Of all American Jews, it was the Orthodox who had the most difficulty coming to grips with the Hebron killings: Baruch Goldstein had been raised in a Brooklyn Orthodox home and educated in well-known yeshivas. Since those who knew him had only good things to say about Goldstein—"he was as nice a boy as you'll ever find," recalled one teacher—many could only explain his act as an outburst of irrationality. Shlomo Riskin, the American-born rabbi of the West Bank town of Efrat, said, on a visit to New York, that Goldstein was "a very compassionate doctor who just went insane."

Others were not willing to leave it at that and called for critical scrutiny of the kind of Orthodox Judaism that could produce a Goldstein. Rabbi Louis Bernstein, his Jewish history professor at Yeshiva University, recalled with regret the failure of modern Orthodox circles to ostracize Meir Kahane. "Ashamnu," he said, "we are guilty, we have tolerated this phenomenon of Kahanism in Jewish life." Ze'ev Chafetz, writing in the Jerusalem Report (March 24, 1995), claimed that "anyone who has visited Orthodox synagogues in America" knows the extent of Kahanist influence. And Shlomo Sternberg, an Orthodox rabbi, in a letter to the New York Times (March 9, 1994), asserted that "there is something rotten" at the core of modern Orthodox education. "Literalism, fundamentalism, and obscurantism," he wrote, had taken over the curriculum, ultimately producing a Goldstein. In response, 1,700 students from 22 yeshiva high schools paid for a full-page ad in the Times (March 18) deplored the massacre, but at the same time expressing "dis-
tress" at "the silence of Arab leaders in the face of wanton violence against Jews" and "concern" over the stereotyping of all Jewish settlers on the basis of Goldstein's act.

Even as the Hebron massacre evoked renewed calls both in Israel and the United States to curb the activities of militant Jewish settlers in heavily Arab parts of the West Bank, most Orthodox organizations—many of whose members had relatives living in the territories—continued to express skepticism about the peace negotiations. Orthodox fund-raising for the settlements in the territories continued, with a number of synagogues "adopting" specific Jewish settlements. Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, executive vice-president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, explained: "Our position is that the security and safety and development of the Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria must be protected and enhanced." Those within the Orthodox community who favored the peace process—they would form an organization later in the year called Shvil Hazahav (The Middle Way)—described themselves as a beleaguered minority, and some reported receiving death threats.

The organized American Jewish community found itself in the unaccustomed position of differing with the government of Israel over a proposed UN Security Council resolution condemning the Hebron massacre. While no one opposed the condemnation itself, the resolution had a problematic preamble that included Jerusalem as one of the "territories occupied by Israel in June 1967." American Jewish groups reacted with alarm, fearful that U.S. acquiescence with this wording might mark a retreat from the American position that Jerusalem is not "occupied territory." The U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution urging the administration to exercise its veto. Both the Conference of Presidents and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) were about to endorse the call for a veto when they were informed that the Israeli government wanted the resolution passed as worded, so as to bring the Palestinians back to the bargaining table to continue the negotiations broken off after the massacre. Thus, only the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) and—at the last minute—the Anti-Defamation League called for a U.S. veto. The UN resolution passed unanimously on March 18, with the American delegate abstaining on the objectionable language in the preamble, an act having no legal bearing on the validity of the resolution. Afterward, the American Jewish organizations that knew full well in advance that Israel had opposed a U.S. veto issued pro forma denunciations of the preamble.

In April the ZOA, whose official policy supported peace negotiations along with an insistence on meticulous PLO adherence to its undertakings under the agreement, announced the creation of a Peace Accord Monitoring Group in Congress to keep tabs on whether the PLO was adhering to the accords. Israeli authorities expressed no opinion about this move. Eager to establish and enhance their pro-Israel credentials, 45 senators and representatives joined the group over the next several months.

Through the spring and summer, there were numerous signs of rapprochement
between mainstream American Jewish organizations and the Arab world. In April
the American Zionist Movement held its first meeting ever with the PLO observer
at the UN. In May delegates to the American Jewish Committee’s annual meeting
in Washington, D.C., for the first time visited the embassies of Jordan, Saudi Arabia,
and Tunisia and the PLO office. Also that month, the AJ Committee met with the
Kuwaiti ambassador in Washington, the first time that any Kuwaiti leader had sat
with representatives of an American Jewish organization. And in June the United
Jewish Appeal added Jordan to the list of countries to which it sent organized
missions. The generally sympathetic attitude of the American Jewish public toward
Israeli policy was reflected in a poll conducted in May by an organization affiliated
with the Israeli Labor Party: 88 percent of respondents favored the peace process.

The Israeli government, however, recognizing the determination of the opposition
within the American Jewish community, continued to use the powers of persuasion
to reassure the doubters. In May 1994, both Uri Savir, director-general of Israel’s
Foreign Ministry and one of the architects of the Oslo accords, and Foreign Minister
Shimon Peres came to New York to defend the peace process before the Conference
of Presidents.

The annual Salute to Israel Parade in May 1994, which featured some 60,000
young marchers, managed to avoid political polarization. The parade chairperson
said afterward, “We refused to get bogged down in any extraneous issues, such as
‘Are you for the government peace plan or are you against it?’” Nevertheless,
dissident factions on the right and the left made their presence felt. Those of a dovish
persuasion carried signs calling for dismantling Jewish settlements in the territories
and the establishment of a Palestinian state, while the Betar Youth Organization,
affiliated with Likud, chanted antigovernment sentiments, and the followers of Meir
Kahane held up signs calling Yitzhak Rabin a traitor and Baruch Goldstein a hero.
After the parade, 20,000 people attended a rally in Central Park “in solidarity with
the settlements,” sponsored by the National Council of Young Israel, an Orthodox
synagogue group.

CONTINUING CONTROVERSIES

Over the course of the summer, the three ideological camps within the community
—followers of the Israeli line on the peace process, those favoring a more forthcoming
Israeli stand, and those opposed to concessions—all tried to influence U.S. and
Israeli government policy.

In June, as the U.S. Agency for International Development prepared to set up
an office to dispense funds for assistance to the autonomous Palestinian districts of
Gaza and Jericho, AIPAC, seconded by pro-Israel members of Congress, warned
that the office should not be located in East Jerusalem, since that would “erode
Jerusalem’s status as Israel’s undivided capital.” Americans for Peace Now dis-
agreed, arguing that such an office in East Jerusalem would not set any precedent
for the future.
The next issue of controversy, later that month, was Prime Minister Rabin's statement that Yasir Arafat would be allowed to pray in Jerusalem. The Likud mayor of Jerusalem urged Diaspora Jews to join him in demonstrations against any such visit, and some American Jewish groups hostile to the peace process indicated a willingness to come. The Conference of Presidents declined to take sides, but NJCRA issued a letter supporting the right of Arafat to pray in Jerusalem.

In early July, the Golan Heights also became a focus of controversy. Americans for a Safe Israel and other American Jewish groups opposed to the peace process, in alliance with a number of Christian pro-Israel organizations, pushed aggressively for the U.S. Senate to bar appropriations for any possible deployment of U.S. troops for peacekeeping on the Golan Heights in the event of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Though this move was ostensibly motivated by concern for the safety of American GIs, Israeli officials termed it a blatant attempt to stymie a deal with Syria by foreclosing the option of an American peacekeeping role. In Prime Minister Rabin's words, "This is simple stupidity, a distorted presentation by the Israeli right and the American Jewish right." With AIPAC espousing the official Israeli position and lobbying against the proposed Senate restrictions on U.S. peacekeeping, they did not pass.

Eventually, tensions between the mainstream Jewish bodies and those more skeptical of the Israeli peace policy flared into open war. On July 29, at an all-night session of a congressional conference committee seeking to finalize the U.S. foreign aid bill, ZOA president Morton Klein appeared, urging the conferees to endorse the Shelby-Specter Amendment, which conditioned aid to the PLO on that organization's compliance with the peace accords. The amendment passed, to the great chagrin of the conference committee chairman. AIPAC, long acknowledged to be the community's designated pro-Israel lobby, expressed outrage, charging that Klein, by failing to consult and coordinate with AIPAC, had acted in "an amateurish and hostile fashion" that "put the entire pro-Israel agenda at risk." AIPAC called on the Conference of Presidents to take disciplinary action against the ZOA. Klein, for his part, charged that AIPAC was just jealous that its turf had been invaded. "One organization," he said, "cannot possibly represent community consensus on every issue, and I have a responsibility to speak out."

Rejecting Klein's request for a public hearing on AIPAC's charges against him, the Conference of Presidents held a closed-door session of its leadership, which Klein refused to attend. What emerged was a set of guidelines for the future, reiterating that all Israel-related lobbying had to be cleared first with AIPAC, which voices the consensus of the community. Klein reacted by denying that there was any American Jewish consensus on Israel's policies, arguing: "If the community is split 50-50 on an issue, how can AIPAC reflect a consensus of the Jewish people?" AIPAC responded that American Jewry as a whole backed Israel's course, and that the organization was therefore justified in speaking for the community.

Meanwhile, American Jews eager to accelerate the peace process also pressed their case. In July Project Nishma sent a delegation to Syria, where it met for two
hours with President Hafez al-Assad and discussed the prospects for a Syrian-Israeli peace. In August the American Jewish Congress sent a similar delegation to speak with Assad. This trip was officially under the aegis of the Council of Foreign Relations, whose U.S./Middle East Project director, Henry Siegman, was the former AJCongress executive director. With the approach of the High Holy Days, the Israel Policy Forum, a pro-peace group, compiled a resource guide to traditional Jewish sources about peace, which it sent to some 4,000 American rabbis along with a cover letter suggesting that it be used for sermons. Not one of the 13 rabbinic signatories of the letter was Orthodox.

On September 13, to mark the first anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO, Prime Minister Rabin participated in a teleconference with American Jews in over 70 cities, a number of whom described to Rabin what their communities had done to further the peace process. This was also the theme of a booklet issued by the Conference of Presidents. The same day, the American Jewish Committee released the results of a survey of American Jewish opinion about the peace process that showed continuing strong support for the negotiations. However, comparisons with a similar AJC poll taken immediately after the signing a year before indicated some slippage in enthusiasm. “People responded in a less euphoric, more realistic manner,” explained AJC executive director David Harris. Significantly, while in 1993 no subgroup in the sample opposed the accords, in 1994 a majority of the Orthodox registered opposition.

When the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) convened in Denver in November, it heard not only from Prime Minister Rabin but also from Likud chief Benjamin Netanyahu. This marked the first time that the leader of the Israeli opposition had been invited to speak. In his address, the prime minister lashed out at Israelis opposed to his peace policies, who, he charged, had been lobbying members of Congress to bar the stationing of American troops on the Golan. Such lobbyists, he said, were damaging Israel by strengthening isolationist tendencies in American politics. Netanyahu, in his speech, denied that he had anything to do with lobbying on Capitol Hill and proceeded to criticize the notion of using Americans to patrol the Golan. The CJF Board of Delegates approved a resolution endorsing the official Israeli peace policy.

NEW CONGRESS

Several aspects of the November 8 congressional elections were noteworthy from a Middle East perspective. For one thing, donations to pro-Israel PACs dropped precipitously—50 percent since the 1992 election. Observers attributed this to the lack of any sense of imminent danger to Israel, as evidenced by the peace negotiations and the friendly stance of the Clinton administration toward the Jewish state. For another, the huge Republican landslide brought numerous freshman members to Congress, and AIPAC geared up to educate them about Israel-related issues. And since both houses of Congress would be Republican, American Jews hostile to the
peace process looked forward to key congressional committee chairmanships falling into the hands of foreign-policy hard-liners who would demand more of the Palestinians and the Arab nations than did the Clinton administration, or, for that matter, the government of Israel.

A clash emerged even before the new Congress convened. On December 1, a State Department report on PLO compliance with the peace accords unleashed another round of bickering within the American Jewish community and attempts by the competing factions to influence Congress. The report—which the Shelby-Specter Amendment required once every six months as a condition for American funding of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho—concluded that the PLO was sufficiently in compliance to merit the funding. Nevertheless, it cited numerous PLO words and deeds that seemed to contradict its professed commitment to peace with Israel. The ZOA, skeptical of the peace process to begin with, termed a “whitewash” the State Department conclusion that aid was merited and said it would use evidence in the report to lobby Congress against such aid. An official of Americans for Peace Now, on the other hand, while acknowledging that the Palestinians had not completely lived up to their obligations, was “encouraged by their progress.”

Striving to build a middle-ground position, AIPAC president Steven Grossman announced that his organization continued to back aid for the Palestinian Authority while expressing sharp criticism of the PLO leader: “The time has come for Arafat to ratchet up his compliance with his commitments. If the Israeli people, the American people and Congress are going to have full faith in Arafat, then he needs to be more assiduous and steadfast in his efforts.” This language proved too harsh for the Israeli government, which feared that it might give aid and comfort to those eager to cut off aid, a move that could sabotage the peace process. Israeli ambassador Itamar Rabinovich placed phone calls to American Jewish leaders urging them not to emphasize the negative aspects of the State Department report. Congress voted to renew funding.

EVENTS OF EARLY 1995

Meanwhile, the dovish critique of Israeli policy found its way onto the op-ed page of the New York Times (January 26, 1995). In the wake of a suicide bombing that left 21 dead Israelis and induced Israeli president Ezer Weizman to call for a moratorium on the peace process, Henry Siegman argued, to the contrary, that only an Israeli decision to remove the settlements in the territories and a commitment to a Palestinian state would provide the reassurances that would pacify the Palestinians. Phil Baum, Siegman’s successor as AJCongress executive director, and David V. Kahn, the organization’s president, responded with a letter to the editor countering that Siegman’s proposal would “confer on the fanatics a legitimacy the peace process wisely denies them” (February 1, 1995).

As the 104th Congress opened, attention shifted back to the issue of using U.S. troops to insure peace on the Golan. A new Coalition for a Secure U.S.-Israel
Friendship, made up of Jewish and Christian groups opposed to any peace treaty in which Israel relinquished control of the strategic Golan Heights, lobbied aggressively for legislation barring such use of American forces. The lobby’s message fit well with a popular disinclination to place American boys at risk in foreign countries and the isolationist tendencies evident in the new Republican Congress. Some 25 members of Congress—including the new chairperson of the House International Relations Committee—signed on to a statement urging a full debate and vote before American forces were sent to the Golan. The Israeli government, which explicitly included the possibility of an American peacekeeping force in its negotiations with the Syrians, found itself on the defensive.

After consultation with Israeli officials, the Conference of Presidents sought to defuse the matter. It issued a letter to two Republican senators pronouncing it “premature” to discuss a troop deployment that Israel had not yet even asked for and that would remain theoretical till Israel and Syria reached agreement. Some member organizations of the conference complained that the letter had been sent without their knowledge. Meanwhile, NJCRAC notified local community relations councils to influence their congressional representatives to back delay of any debate on the issue. And AIPAC sent a letter to all members of Congress urging that “no public position nor any legislative action, for or against U.S. personnel on the Golan” be taken. No congressional hearings were held for the time being.

U.S. EMBASSY

Like the question of American forces on the Golan, the perennial issue of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem had the potential to derail the peace process. The official policy of a long line of U.S. administrations was that the embassy did belong in the Israeli capital but could not be moved there until a peace treaty clarified the legal status of the city. In early 1995, with the Israeli government fearful that any movement of the embassy under current conditions would lead the Palestinians to break off negotiations, Senators Alfonse D’Amato (R.) and Daniel Moynihan (D.) of New York sought to skirt the problem by sponsoring a letter giving the State Department a deadline of May 1999 to move the embassy—exactly the date that Israel and the PLO had scheduled for the conclusion of final-status talks. AIPAC applauded this formulation, but the ZOA’s Morton Klein said, “Move the embassy now. Who knows what it will be like in five years?” Although 93 senators signed on to the D’Amato-Moynihan resolution, an alternative proposed by Sen. Jon Kyl (R., Ariz.), calling for an immediate transfer of the embassy, attracted the support of the ZOA, Americans for a Safe Israel, and the Jewish War Veterans.

In a speech to the AIPAC annual policy conference in May 1995, Senate majority leader and presidential hopeful Robert Dole (R., Kan.) announced that he was proposing legislation to begin construction of a U.S. embassy in Jerusalem by the end of 1996, with the ambassador to move in there no later than 1999. While Israeli officials at the conference, including Prime Minister Rabin, studiously avoided
comment, AIPAC announced its support. Americans for Peace Now and Project Nishma, however, attacked the proposal as inimical to the peace negotiations, the same position taken by the Clinton administration. NJCRAC, at a loss to reconcile its support for the Israel-PLO negotiations with its backing for moving the embassy, said: "We support the goal of the legislation. We also support the Middle East peace process and reconciliation between Israel and her Arab neighbors."

A new poll of American Jewish attitudes toward the peace process was conducted in May by Luntz Research Companies, a firm associated with the Republican Party that had also done some work for Likud. While three-quarters of those polled approved of Israel's negotiating policies in general terms, less than half considered the Israel-PLO agreement of 1993 a success. The survey also indicated that American Jews were almost evenly split over whether U.S. forces should monitor the Golan in the event of an Israel-Syria peace treaty.

The annual Salute to Israel Parade on May 21, 1995, was overshadowed by an ugly incident that occurred earlier in the day, which showed once again the potential for intra-Jewish violence over the peace process. At the behest of Israeli officials, Israel's minister of communications, Shulamit Aloni, an outspoken dove and secularist, addressed a pre-parade breakfast for dignitaries and big givers—many of them religiously traditional and unsympathetic to Israel's peace policy. After a barrage of heckling and insults, the parade chairman charged the stage and, according to Aloni, punched her. He later denied the charge, claiming instead that, fearing for her safety, he had sought to clear the stage. While there was universal condemnation of the alleged assault, many observers also faulted the Israeli diplomats who insisted that Aloni speak before an audience that was sure to be hostile.

In June, with funding for the Palestinian Authority once again up for renewal, Jewish groups opposed to the peace process argued that the PLO had broken its commitments and lobbied hard on Capitol Hill for a cutoff of funds. Reflecting their perspective, Senator D'Amato proposed legislation that would require the PLO to amend its covenant that still called for Israel's destruction, stop terrorism, and take steps against accused terrorists before it could receive aid. While the Israeli government and its American Jewish backers would have preferred legislation renewing PLO funding for another six months, they had to settle for a 90-day extension.

On June 21, a group calling itself the International Rabbinical Coalition for Israel, claiming a membership of 3,000 Orthodox rabbis, issued a statement in New York declaring that Israel's peace policy violated Jewish law. One rabbi, Abraham Hecht, president of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, said that it was permissible to assassinate Israeli leaders who sought to hand over Israeli land to non-Jews.

American and Israeli Jews

The reorientation of relations between the Israeli and American Jewish communities, sparked in part by the prospect of a "normalized" Israel at peace with its neighbors, continued amid considerable controversy.

Early in 1994, Yossi Beilin, Israel's deputy foreign minister, told a visiting Zionist
women's group that Israel should no longer be the object of Diaspora philanthropy. "If our economic situation is better than in many of your countries," he said, "how can we go on asking for your charity?" The women reacted angrily. The World Zionist Executive quickly issued a statement saying that "the greatest mistake Israel can make is to separate Diaspora Jewry from the State of Israel and to callously stop the contribution of Diaspora Jewry to the ingathering of the exiles and building of the State of Israel." Unfazed, Beilin stuck to his guns, explaining that, in his view, Israel had matured to the point where it need not rely on outside economic aid. Therefore, he suggested, the entire structure of Israel-Diaspora relations had to be reevaluated, and monies previously donated to help the Jewish state perhaps put to better use in strengthening Jewish education in the Diaspora and sponsoring trips to Israel for young Jews.

Inundated with irate inquiries from American Jewish leaders, Prime Minister Rabin repudiated Beilin's views as unrepresentative of his government. Quite aside from the economic benefit to Israel from Diaspora philanthropy, he noted, this transfer of money was also "the key to reinforcing the relationship between us and deepening the connection of Diaspora Jews with Israel." Rabin also noted that a diminution of Diaspora philanthropy to Israel might prompt second thoughts in the U.S. Congress about the $3 billion in aid it sent to Israel each year. He did add, however, that fund-raising should be supplemented by investment in the Israeli economy and by cultural activities that could draw the two Jewish communities together.

Ezer Weizman, the president of Israel, sought to deal with the emerging issues of Israel-Diaspora relations by announcing plans for a two-day conference at his official residence in June 1994. The more than 200 invitees—one-third Israelis, two-thirds Diaspora Jews—included not only leaders of Jewish organizations, but also intellectual and cultural figures. The president's purpose in convening this gathering was clearly to counter Diaspora criticism over his repeated delegitimization of their Jewish viability and his call for massive aliyah (immigration).

Weizman said that his plans had been formulated before the Beilin controversy and were independent of it. Nonetheless, it was Beilin who provided the fireworks at Weizman's conference by calling for the replacement of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization with a new democratic entity, Beit Yisrael, which would fund aliyah, visits to Israel by young Diaspora Jews, and Jewish education in the Diaspora. Beilin's proposal was ridiculed by the Diaspora Jewish leaders in attendance, who commented that the established organizations were already doing these things. The Diaspora participants were also highly critical of President Weizman, who, they felt, showed a shocking ignorance of Jewish life outside Israel. One by one, in their presentations to the conference, the American Jews sought to counter dismal stereotypes of Jewish life in their countries and suggested that many Israelis had at least as great a problem acknowledging their Jewishness as American Jews did. Shoshana Cardin, the former Conference of Presidents chairwoman and newly elected chairwoman of the United Israel Appeal, charged that it was insulting
for American Jews to be viewed as nothing more than "fodder for aliyah," and that Israelis must learn "to respect the integrity of Diaspora communities."

Although the only practical outcome of the conference was President Weizman's creation of a 12-person committee to devise ways for Israel to enhance Jewish continuity in the Diaspora, the publicity the conference generated, coming in the wake of the Beilin incident, thrust the question of Israel-Diaspora relations into the forefront of American Jewish communal life.

In February 1995, the American Jewish Committee board of governors, meeting in Jerusalem, issued a policy statement on the subject that stressed the mutual responsibility and interdependence of the two communities. It firmly rejected the Beilin view that philanthropy was outmoded, praised American Jewish immigrants while recognizing that mass aliyah from the United States was unlikely, supported programs that bring young Diaspora Jews to Israel, and suggested greater cooperation between Israeli and American Jews in devising ways of insuring Jewish continuity in both countries.

A more analytical treatment of the subject was provided by Samuel Norich, the former director of YIVO, in an exhaustive 86-page study, *What Will Bind Us Now? A Report on the Institutional Ties Between Israel and American Jewry*, sponsored by the Center for Middle East Peace and Economic Cooperation. After tracing the steady decline in American Jewish philanthropy for Israel and American Jewry's mounting interest in its own cultural survival, Norich analyzed five proposals—one of them Yossi Beilin's—for shifting the institutional relationships between the two Jewish communities.

In June 1995, one of the five proposals discussed by Norich on the basis of hearsay—a plan to merge the operations of the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal—was made public for the first time. The result of a two-year joint study by the two organizations, it suggested that UJA end its tie to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and become the fund-raising arm of the federation network for international, national, and local causes. Although this merger plan had the clear benefit of streamlining costs, it raised the concern that broadening UJA's focus from Israel-oriented to all-purpose fund-raising could lead to a further diminution of the percentage of the philanthropic dollar going to Israel, a danger underlined by a provision that CJF, whose major concern was domestic Jewish causes, would control at least 40 percent of the new UJA board. For the moment, however, this proposal was only in the discussion stage.

**NEW JEWISH AGENCY HEAD**

The choice of a new chairperson for the Jewish Agency—the body that receives and disburses the money collected by UJA for Israel—turned into a naked power struggle between the Israeli government and Diaspora fund-raisers. In February 1994, chairman Simcha Dinitz, under indictment for financial irregularities, took a leave of absence, and Israel's governing Labor Party, with the approval of the
Diaspora leaders, chose Yehiel Leket, head of the Youth Aliyah department, to replace him on an interim basis. But a year later—to the chagrin of the Rabin government—the "advise and consent" committee of the Jewish Agency board of governors, controlled by the Diaspora leaders, rejected Leket for the permanent position, choosing instead Avraham Burg, a Labor Party member of the Knesset who was extremely popular in the United States. Leket withdrew his candidacy, making Burg's election in June 1995 by the World Zionist Organization meeting in Jerusalem a foregone conclusion. Burg, espousing the slogan "one people, one body," announced his support for a merger of the WZO and the Jewish Agency. At the Jewish Agency Assembly, which was held at the same time, Burg distributed a booklet entitled Brit Am, detailing his ideas for joint educational programs to enhance the Jewishness of Israeli and American Jews, including a Jewish open university, satellite linkages, and a Jewish peace corps.

The Continuity Debate

The prominence of Jewish identity issues in the reevaluation of American Jewish-Israeli ties underscored the ongoing concern of American Jewry about its declining numbers. Ever since the CJF-sponsored 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, which showed an over-50-percent intermarriage rate for young Jews and other unmistakable signs of demographic erosion, many in the Jewish community agonized over what to do. Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin stated the challenge at the 1994 CJF General Assembly: With the opening of free Jewish emigration from the former Soviet Union, the slogan was no longer "Let My People Go," but "Let My People Be Jewish."

Ironically, one of the ways suggested to attack the problem was an American version of the Yossi Beilin approach, a strategy that would turn American Jewish energies inward. "Burden of Peace: American Jews Grapple with an Identity Crisis as Peril to Israel Ebbs," was the front-page headline in the Wall Street Journal (September 14, 1994). Emphasizing that "American Jewish leaders are casting about for a new way for the U.S. Jewish community to define itself, apart from Israel," the article noted that many Jews wanted philanthropic dollars diverted away from Israel and devoted, instead, to domestic Jewish continuity causes. But the reporter found no consensus either on which non-Israel-related issues could enhance the Jewishness of young people or on how to address them.

The organized Jewish community sponsored conferences and published reports arguing for changes to revitalize American Jewish life. The Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies released a pamphlet of essays about the need for federations and synagogues to cooperate and pool their talents to provide compelling Jewish programming. The Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University published a report by Gary Tobin, its director, that sharply criticized the panoply of American Jewish organizations, arguing that they should reorient their priorities to Jewish continuity or else consider going out of business. Responding to Tobin's
challenge, leaders of the major organizations agreed with him in principle, while insisting that their own agencies were already in the process of changing to meet the new challenges.

Much was expected from the North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity, an 88-member body of experts created by the Council of Jewish Federations in 1992 to prepare a series of recommendations for presentation to the CJF General Assembly in November 1994. The 36-page draft report distributed at the GA asserted that Jewish identity was "the bedrock of Jewish continuity." Its suggestions for improvement included maintaining Jewish identity as a top communal priority; research and evaluation to find out which Jewish-identity programs were most effective; greater focus on the needs of individual Jews rather than on institutional imperatives; a balance between "formative" and "transformative" Jewish experiences; and taking steps to insure that young Jews maintain Jewish involvement even after bar/bat mitzvah.

A distinct lack of enthusiasm greeted the report. For one thing, it made no attempt to define Jewish identity. For another, critics charged that it lacked specifics. As Rabbi David Elcott, academic vice-president of CLAL (National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership) put it: "If the report was talking about enhancing health, we would expect recommendations, such as 'don't smoke, exercise.' " Defending the work of the commission, Jonathan Woocher, executive vice-president of the Jewish Education Service of North America, who supervised the preparation of the report, said that specific priorities could not be dictated by a national body, but would have to emerge from local Jewish leaders familiar with the situation in specific communities. Martin Kraar, executive vice-president of CJF, agreed: "We have federations going in a variety of directions, and CJF has not addressed the effort except to do some networking of heads of local continuity commissions."

TRIPS TO ISRAEL

There continued to be considerable interest in promoting trips to Israel as a means to kindle a Jewish spark in American Jewish teenagers and young adults. Under large grants from the CRB Foundation and other organizations and individuals, the UJA sponsored programs and ran media advertisements in several Jewish communities to interest young Jews in visiting Israel. In addition, fully 45 percent of the money spent by the WZO Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education went for subsidizing programs in Israel for Diaspora young people. So impressed were many American Jewish leaders with the Israel experience as a key to Jewish transformation that UJA executive vice-president Brian Lurie suggested that the State of Israel itself allocate $10 million—to be matched by both the Jewish Agency and American Jewry—toward the creation of a $30-million "megafund" that would guarantee a trip to Israel for every American Jewish teenager.

There were skeptics. For one thing, it was noted that all the publicity and subsidies encouraging visits to Israel had not augmented the number of young
people going. As Howard Weisband, secretary general of the Jewish Agency, explained, children growing up in homes remote from Jewish life were indifferent to Israel and had no desire to visit there, no matter how low the cost (Jerusalem Report, July 27, 1995). And even for those who could be prevailed upon to go, the impact would surely be greatest on those who already came with some Jewish consciousness and knowledge. Those landing in Israel without previous exposure to anything Jewish were all too likely to react like the teenager who told a reporter: "When I got off the plane in Israel, I felt just like I do when I go to Florida. Everyone told me I would feel an instant connection, but even when I visited the Wailing Wall, I still didn't feel anything special" (Wall Street Journal, September 14, 1994).

Another suggested antidote to the erosion of Jewish identity was Jewish education. Like trips to Israel, proposed innovations in the transmission of Jewish knowledge and commitment had received considerable new funding from federations, Jewish foundations, and individual philanthropists since the disturbing results of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey became known. Leading the way were the Cleveland federation—which was spending one-third of its domestic budget on education—Morton Mandel's Council on Initiatives in Jewish Education, and the Wexner Foundation.

The relationship of Jewish education to Jewish continuity was the subject of a major 1994 study by Seymour Martin Lipset, The Power of Jewish Education, sponsored by the Wilstein Institute. Analyzing data from the 1990 NJPS, Lipset found not only a clear correlation between Jewish schooling and Jewishness, but also what he called "the iron law of 'the more the more.'" By that he meant: "The longer Jews have been exposed to Jewish education, the greater their commitment to the community, to some form of the religion, and to Israel." Lipset cautioned, however, that this did not necessarily establish a causal relationship, since the families that gave their children more Jewish education might have done so because they were already Jewishly committed. Nevertheless, Lipset concluded, "the evidence is congruent with the hypothesis that Jewish education makes a difference."

Yet despite all the attention paid to the subject, an analysis of American Jewish education by J. J. Goldberg concluded that "countless Jewish kids have yet to see their schools made any more engaging; so far, the revolution hasn't reached them" (Jerusalem Report, October 6, 1994). Noting that Jewish all-day schools seemed to be the most successful in transferring the tradition to the next generation, Goldberg pointed out that the great majority of Jewish parents rejected such schools for their children, not primarily because of the cost, but on the ground that such a "segregated" education would hamper the students' entry into the American mainstream. As for supplementary Jewish education, one reason for its shortcomings was the teachers' lack of training. A study conducted in Atlanta, Baltimore, and Milwaukee by the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education found that most of the teachers had had virtually no Jewish schooling since their own bar/bat mitzvahs.

The community's new focus on Jewish continuity also highlighted Jews on the college campus. Efforts over the previous few years to reinvigorate Hillel, the
association of Jewish college students, bore fruit at the beginning of 1995 when the Board of Delegates of the Council of Jewish Federations voted overwhelmingly for local federations to accept "collective responsibility" for Jewish campus activities—in much the same way that the federations had allocated responsibility for the absorption of Soviet Jewish immigrants in the United States. In practical terms, this meant that communities would contribute to Hillel on the basis of their size and income. While the vote was officially nonbinding, it was likely to be implemented by almost all the federations. In addition, total funding for Hillel, from federations and other sources, was expected to rise from $21 million to $50 million over the next seven years. Richard Joel, Hillel's international director, thanked the Board of Delegates "for triggering a Jewish renaissance."

Symptomatic of the growing interest in supporting Jewish cultural and spiritual renewal through higher education, two institutions—neighbors on New York's West Side—announced major developments. In October 1994, the Jewish Theological Seminary received a gift of $15 million for a graduate school of Jewish education. And in May 1995, Columbia University broke ground for a projected $6-million Center for Jewish Life.

Whether Jewish institutions should reach out to intermarried families remained a controversial aspect of the Jewish continuity debate. Despite the misgivings of some Jewish leaders, who felt that the limited resources available should be used primarily to reinforce the Jewish loyalties of those already affiliated to some degree with the Jewish community, others—including powerful figures in the federation world—opposed consigning the intermarried to Jewish oblivion. It was this second school of thought that dominated the CJF Task Force on the Intermarried and Jewish Affiliation, which issued a report in 1994 warning that failure to engage the intermarried in Jewish life meant "disfranchising a significant segment of the population." According to the report, which described what some communities were already doing for the intermarried, the Jewish community needed to show greater sensitivity, respect, and understanding of such families, or else risk losing them and their financial contributions. The chairperson of the task force noted that almost all its members had intermarried relatives.

For all the undoubted successes registered under the banner of Jewish continuity, it remained to be seen whether such efforts would make a significant difference in the pattern of American Jewish life. In a study of American Philanthropy in the 1990s, Brandeis sociologist Gary Tobin found that "Jewish continuity" did not excite potential donors, who could see no concrete evidence that the money already put into building Jewish identity had had any impact. In fact, many suspected—in Tobin's words—that "continuity" was "only the latest in a long series of crises generated by the fund-raising system."

Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, in Jews and the New American Scene (Harvard University Press, 1995), questioned the entire rationale of continuity campaigns, suggesting that the integrative forces of American life could turn out to be too strong for Jewish "social engineering" to combat, especially in Jewish circles.
devoid of spiritual roots. They foresaw a 21st-century American Jewish community substantially reduced in numbers, albeit made up of Jews "strongly and visibly committed to the tribal and religious depth of Jewish tradition."

**Religious Developments**

If Lipset and Raab were right, and the community's Jewish future depended largely on the continuing power of the Jewish tradition, the Jewish religious movements had a vital role to play in insuring continuity. Yet each of those movements was plagued with internal conflict over basic issues of theology and practice.

**REFORM JUDAISM**

In 1994 Congregation Beth Adam in Cincinnati applied for membership in the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). This congregation, whose rabbi was a graduate of Reform's Hebrew Union College (HUC) and a member of its Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), called itself "humanist," and had removed all references to God from the services. The Reform movement was now faced with a fundamental challenge: Did the Reform principle of the freedom to practice Judaism as one saw fit include the right to exclude God? When four Reform synagogues located near Beth Adam urged a rejection of its application, the congregation responded that it was "being castigated for exercising the freedom of worship." An opinion issued by the CCAR Responsa Committee and written by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut argued that, while Reform accepted diversity, Beth Adam had overstepped the limit and should not be admitted. But a minority opinion authored by Prof. Eugene Mihaly countered: "Exclusion, ostracism, mindless stringency to appease the traditionalists, institutional coercion, are alien to Reform Judaism." In June the UAHC board overwhelmingly rejected the application.

A survey of "Emerging Worship and Music Trends in UAHC Congregations," released early in 1995, confirmed the widespread impression that many Reform synagogues had readopted certain traditional practices that Classical Reform had eliminated. There was now more Hebrew in the service, wearing of kippah and tallit was more widespread, singing along with the cantor had become popular, and a two-day Rosh Hashanah was catching on. Suggesting that the influx of members brought up in Orthodox and Conservative homes had something to do with these changes, the author of the study also cited the changing needs of Reform Jews: "Expressions of personal spirituality are far more acceptable in America today than they were 30 years ago. If we perpetuated a 19th-century model, we'd be failing."

Another symptom of turning away from Classical Reform was the CCAR decision in June 1994 to develop a comprehensive new statement on the relation of the movement to Israel and Zionism. There was a clear need for this: early Reform had been sharply hostile to the Zionist movement, and, while the bulk of the Reform
rabbinate and laity had come to support the Jewish state, there was no authoritative Reform document on the subject.

However, even in its contemporary pro-Zionist incarnation, Reform objected strongly to the lack of religious pluralism for Jews in Israel. In the fall of 1994, when the Labor government in Israel sought to bring the Orthodox Shas Party into the coalition so as to broaden its mandate for securing Middle East peace, the Reform movement, both in Israel and the United States, reacted with fury. Despite its own strong support for the peace process, Reform felt it more important that Labor not succumb to the Shas request for a law nullifying any Supreme Court decision challenging the Orthodox monopoly of Israeli Judaism. Soon thereafter, the Association of Reform Zionists of America (ARZA) announced a campaign to raise $2 million to persuade the Israeli government to recognize Reform marriages performed there.

In January 1995, ARZA managed to get the American Zionist Movement to pass a resolution favoring religious pluralism in Israel. That March, 200 Reform rabbis holding their annual CCAR convention in Israel insisted on conducting a Reform prayer service, men and women together, at the southern edge of the Western Wall (they were interrupted only by the news media). Afterward they presented the case for religious pluralism to the leader of the Likud opposition, Benjamin Netanyahu, who disappointed them by affirming his support for the status quo.

In 1995 Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the president of the UAHC since 1973—known for his flamboyant style and such controversial policies as outreach to the unchurched and acceptance of patrilineal descent as a sufficient criterion for Jewishness—announced his retirement. Elected to replace him was Rabbi Eric Yoffie. While the contest between Yoffie and Rabbi Peter Knobel, his closest competitor, was portrayed in the media as a choice between Reform’s social-action thrust (Yoffie) and the new interest in deepened spirituality (Knobel), Yoffie insisted after his election that matters of the spirit would be given high priority.

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

The role of sexuality in Judaism continued to divide the Conservative movement. In April 1994, an 11-member commission on human sexuality set up by the Rabbinical Assembly two years earlier sent its draft report to the movement’s Committee on Law and Standards. While the creation of this commission had been triggered by a controversy over reevaluating the traditional negative Jewish attitude toward homosexuality, the report focused on the broader issue of nonmarital sex.

Frowning upon casual sex, the report suggested that teenagers “need to refrain from sexual intercourse, for they cannot honestly deal with its implications or results.” Sexual relations between unmarried adults were deemed acceptable if they were part of “an ongoing, loving relationship” in which sex was not “simply pleasurable release” but reflected the realization that people are created in the image of God. Partners were called upon to remain faithful to each other for the length of
the relationship. To prevent the spread of AIDS, partners should have themselves tested and use condoms. Adherence to these guidelines, the report concluded, could give nonmarital relations "a measure of holiness, even if not the full portion available in marriage," which creates the families that insure the Jewish future.

As for the specific issue of homosexuality, the report urged maintaining the status quo "until further study": sexually active homosexuals should not be allowed to become rabbis or cantors; rabbis should not perform ceremonies recognizing relationships between homosexuals; gay and lesbian Jews nevertheless should be welcomed in Conservative synagogues. In a letter appended to the report, the chairperson acknowledged that the commission had been unable to resolve the "fundamental tension" between traditional teachings and current reality.

The draft report was discussed intensively at the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) annual convention in May, and recordings of the discussions were made available to the members of the Committee on Law and Standards, which would, in turn, determine movement policy. At the convention, however, rabbis sympathetic to gay rights offered a resolution calling on the RA placement committee not to discriminate against gay rabbis seeking pulpits—a matter not dealt with by the report. The resolution was withdrawn, however, when more traditionalist members challenged it. In the weeks following the convention, the report on nonmarital sexuality was strongly attacked by Orthodox groups as well as by the Union for Traditional Judaism, a group made up of formerly Conservative Jews who had left the movement because of discomfort with what they felt were its deviations from tradition.

The role of women also aroused controversy among Conservative Jews. A decade after the movement began to ordain women as rabbis, there were persistent complaints of gender discrimination. The issue came to a head in September 1994 when 47 female rabbis and cantors formally charged that the Canadian Conservative movement had refused to distribute an issue of the Camp Ramah magazine because it featured an article about female former campers who were now rabbis and cantors. The coordinator of the protest claimed that the leadership of the U.S. movement had allowed this to happen out of fear of losing financial contributions from north of the border, a charge denied by the Jewish Theological Seminary. At its 1995 annual convention, the Rabbinical Assembly passed a resolution acknowledging a pattern of discrimination against its female members and instructed the movement's Placement Commission to treat men and women equally.

RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM

Marking the 40th anniversary of its official founding and the 20th year since the establishment of its rabbinical seminary, the Reconstructionist movement published a new prayer book for Sabbath and holidays. Compiled by a committee comprising an equal number of rabbis and lay people and termed "the first post-modern prayer book" by the editor-in-chief, the prayer book included selections from contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish sources. Theologically, the compilation maintained Recon-
structionist tradition by omitting any reference to the doctrines of the chosen people and the personal messiah. On other controversial concepts, readers were presented options to choose from, including traditional formulations that had been dropped in the first Reconstructionist prayer book.

The movement continued to experience difficulties in defining itself, even as the number of its congregations increased across the country. At a Reconstructionist conference in November 1994, at which the reasons for the lack of clarity were debated at length, some suggested factors were the large numbers of members who were brought up in other movements or with no Jewish background, the fact that other movements had appropriated certain practices instituted by Reconstructionism— inclusion of women in ritual, equality for homosexuals, and liturgical openness, for example—and the difficulty of squaring the individualist impulse with Reconstructionism's quest for community. Developments in Reconstructionism were not without their critics. The son-in-law and daughter of movement founder Mordecai Kaplan—Rabbi Ira Eisenstein and Judith Kaplan Eisenstein—insisted that Kaplan, a rationalist, would have been appalled at the turn to mysticism evident in parts of the movement, and, as a strait-laced Puritan on sexual matters, would have been shocked at the acceptance of homosexuality.

ORTHODOX JUDAISM

The success of Orthodoxy since the 1960s in holding its young people, influencing outsiders, and providing a model of intensive Jewish life had also generated internal tensions over whether to cooperate with—and risk legitimizing—non-Orthodox groups, or to "go it alone." The 1994 collapse of the Synagogue Council of America—which had, if only in a nominal sense, collectively represented all the American Jewish religious movements—marked a major victory for the Orthodox separatists, who had for over 40 years called for the Orthodox to shun it. Thus, in November, at the national convention of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (UOJCA)—itself a member organization of the defunct Synagogue Council—executive director Rabbi Pinchas Stolper publicly recited the traditional sheheheyanu benediction on its demise, blessing God "who has kept us alive and sustained us to reach this day." While the immediate cause of the Synagogue Council's demise was lack of funding, many observers believed that the Orthodox veto on decisions had hampered the council's functioning and rendered it ultimately ineffective.

The sense among many that Orthodoxy was strong enough to distance itself from umbrella organizations that offended its sensitivities led the three Orthodox organizations in the American Zionist Movement to "suspend" their membership in AZM in January 1995, after it passed a resolution urging the recognition of non-Orthodox forms of Judaism in Israel. When a similar resolution had been brought up by the UAHC at the NJCRAC plenum in February 1994, the UOJCA threatened to quit, a move that would have left NJCRAC with no Orthodox representation at a time
when the peace process was at the top of the agenda. The motion was not brought to a vote.

The rightward shift in Orthodoxy's center of gravity was felt even in the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the organization of modern Orthodox rabbis. In early 1995, it expelled one of its members, a rabbi from Atlanta, for cochairing the rabbinic fellowship of the Union for Traditional Judaism, many of whose members were not Orthodox. RCA leaders denied that this was the start of a "witch hunt."

The internal Orthodox tensions also affected Yeshiva University. Years before, the university's secular graduate schools had been legally separated from the rabbinical school so that they might be eligible for government funding. In late 1994, it became known that homosexual clubs existed at some of the graduate schools, and, like other student clubs, they were receiving funding from student-activity fees. Caught between the traditional Jewish aversion to homosexuality and the prospect of loss of funds from government and private sources if gays could claim discrimination, university president Norman Lamm decided: "As a rabbi, I cannot and do not condone homosexual behavior, which is expressly prohibited by Jewish law. But as president of a nondenominational institution that must accommodate people who reflect a wide range of backgrounds and beliefs, it is my duty to assure that the procedures of Yeshiva University conform to the applicable provisions of secular law." His decision brought a storm of protest from both outside and within the institution, as Orthodox critics charged that Lamm had subordinated religious values to political correctness and financial expediency. A New York Times article (May 10, 1995) contrasting Yeshiva's approach with Notre Dame's refusal to countenance gay clubs had the effect of making it seem, to many in the Orthodox world, that Yeshiva was less devoted to religious doctrine than was a Catholic university.

The sectarian Orthodox community, for all its attempts to avoid those modern values deemed inimical to Judaism, could not help but be influenced by the social forces undermining the institution of marriage. The rising incidence of divorce among the Orthodox was complicated by the halakhic requirement that the husband give the wife a Jewish divorce document (get) of his own free will before she was allowed to remarry, a situation that enabled unscrupulous men to extort money or custody rights as a condition for issuing the get. In the spring of 1995, the news broke of a new, spiteful tactic being used by a few husbands against their estranged wives. Based on a provision in ancient Jewish law that had been a dead letter for centuries, these men claimed that they had married off their young—below age 12—daughters in absentia, and would not disclose to their wives or to the girls the identity of the "husband" or the witnesses to the act. The practical effect was to prevent any of the girls from marrying—without a "divorce" from the unknown husband.

While there was considerable controversy over the exact number of such cases, the tactic—called in Hebrew kiddushei ketanah—was greeted with universal condemnation by the community. Yet Orthodox rabbinical circles could come up with no clear strategy to combat it till the end of June, when an oral decision by a noted
Jerusalem rabbinic scholar—since deceased—became known, stating that the father in such cases had no credibility, and that the claim to have married off his daughter could safely be ignored.

CHABAD-LUBAVITCH

It was the cover story in *New York* magazine (February 14, 1994): "Holy War: Ego. Ambition. Fanaticism. As the Lubavitcher rebbe—the Messiah to many—lies grievously ill, the faithful fight over the future." Menachem Schneerson, the 92-year-old charismatic leader of the Lubavitch Hassidic sect, had been incapacitated by a 1992 stroke, unable to speak and paralyzed on his right side. Since he was childless and had never appointed a successor, the future of his movement—whose outreach activities inspired Jews around the world and whose political clout was taken seriously in both Israel and the United States—was unclear. Some were proclaiming the Rebbe as the messiah, while many of his closest lieutenants, agreeing in principle that their master might be the promised messiah, opposed such public statements, partly because they tended to alienate potential donors.

In early March the Rebbe had a cataract removed and the next week was hospitalized after suffering another stroke. Lubavitch messianists interpreted the turn of events as a sign of approaching redemption: "This is the intensification of darkness which signals the coming light," said one. Even the fact that this second stroke occurred two years to the day after the first was viewed as providential.

The Rebbe died on the morning of June 12, 1994, and an estimated 35,000 attended the funeral that afternoon, including the mayor of New York City and leading Israeli diplomats. Even as his casket was being brought to the cemetery, there were those who spoke of his imminent resurrection and messianic emergence. In the weeks and months that followed, these "resurrectionists" answered charges that they had appropriated Christian theology by claiming that the idea of a messiah who returns from the dead was an original Jewish notion. A *New York Times* article (November 8, 1994) describing how the movement was slowly getting used to the absence of the Rebbe elicited a letter from the chairperson of the International Campaign to Bring Moschiach (November 14), asserting that "the time we have to endure without the Rebbe's physical presence will be very short, and very soon the Rebbe will lead us to the great and final redemption."

The Lubavitch mainstream, however, was critical of such speculation, and the established leadership charged those raising hopes of resurrection with disrespect to God and to the late Rebbe. What was needed, instead, was redoubled dedication to the task set out by the Rebbe: spreading the word of God. Indeed, Lubavitch emissaries all over the world—very few of whom had gotten caught up in the messianic frenzy—insisted that they would carry on as before, because that is what the Rebbe would have wanted. Indeed, contrary to the predictions of some that the movement would undergo a crisis without a charismatic leader at the helm, there was no indication that the organization was in any danger of collapse. And specula-
tion over possible successors to the Rebbe began to be replaced by suggestions that Lubavitcher Hassidim—who had access, after all, to extensive videotape libraries of Rabbi Schneerson in action—might not need another rebbe.

On October 19, both houses of Congress unanimously voted the Lubavitcher Rebbe the Congressional Gold Medal. And on June 19, 1995, New York magazine once again succinctly summed up the situation: “Beyond Belief: A year after his death, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson is still treated as a living presence by the Lubavitcher faithful. Indeed, his grave site has become a place of uncommon holiness, where thousands of pilgrims seek his blessing and an answer to the question, Is he really the Messiah?”

Jewish Liberalism Under Siege

Notwithstanding the intensity of their religious fervor, the number of American Jews who venerated Rabbi Schneerson paled in comparison to the number who associated their Jewish identity with liberal politics. Indeed, by early 1994 President Bill Clinton was more popular in the Jewish community than any other president in recent memory, primarily due to his supportive stance toward Israel and his domestic agenda. In the words of Jason Isaacson, the American Jewish Committee’s director of international and government affairs: “There seems to be a genuine focus by this president on the civic environment of the nation, with much greater attention to relations between groups and tolerance for diversity.” Mainstream Jewish groups backed the administration in opposing a balanced-budget amendment and supporting health-care reform, abortion rights, and gay rights. The increased clout of the “religious right” within the Republican Party—which differed fundamentally with the strict interpretation of church-state separation espoused by most Jews—provided an added incentive for continued Jewish adherence to the Democratic administration.

The November 1994 elections, then, came as an unpleasant shock to most Jews. With both houses in Congress now in Republican hands, Jerome Chanes, codirector for domestic concerns at NJCRAC, said: “The entire domestic agenda is clearly in trouble.” Matthew Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, which had been founded to attract Jews to the Republican banner, warned: “The Jewish community will lose influence if it does not start to support the party. There’s a choice—to get on board or be left outside.”

Jewish conservatives were buoyed by the Republican sweep. Toward Tradition, a Jewish organization that sought common ground with the religious right, ran an ad on the op-ed page of the New York Times (December 16, 1994) under the headline “Mazel Tov Speaker Gingrich—We Know All About 10 Point Contracts.” Signed by over 50 Jews—politicians, communal figures, intellectuals, and Orthodox rabbis—the ad claimed that classical Jewish teachings favored limited government, lower taxes, and the traditional family.

Jewish Democrats responded with a Times ad of their own in the same spot in
the paper two weeks later (January 3, 1995), asking "Toward What Tradition?" This ad, endorsed by a similar number of liberal rabbis and other activists, argued that social justice was the hallmark of Jewish values—"justice, equity, and compassion"—and pointed out that 78 percent of Jewish voters in the 1994 elections had apparently agreed by bucking the national trend and voting Democratic.

The NJCRAC plenum, held in Washington in February 1995, provided proof that the great bulk of the organized Jewish community sympathized with the second ad rather than the first. Despite the verdict of the election, the delegates from around the country heartily endorsed the administration's domestic program. In the discussion on a balanced-budget amendment, one frustrated conservative publicly complained: "The NJCRAC process does not allow minority views to be heard on economic and social programs. Our organization is viewed as the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and as such we are less and less relevant." So publicly identified was the Jewish community with the liberal cause that Hillary Clinton invited representatives of Jewish organizations to the White House in March to organize opposition to congressional budget cuts.

A perceptive front-page article in the Wall Street Journal (March 8, 1995) analyzed the new sense of unease among secular, liberal Jews, many of whom had the feeling of being outsiders in a Republican-controlled America, one in which any public display of Christianity—as advocated by the religious right—was by definition anti-Semitic. Sure enough, when, in May, Republican leaders endorsed the Christian Coalition's "Contract with the American Family," the mainstream Jewish organizations recoiled in protest. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, for example, declared that this contract was "wrong-headed, misguided, and divisive" and "runs roughshod over the diversity of American family and religious life." Only the Orthodox organizations withheld blanket condemnation, declaring that they would assess each issue in the contract on its own merits.

In June 1995, Norman Podhoretz announced his retirement as editor-in-chief of Commentary, the editorially independent magazine of opinion sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. Over the course of the 35 years that he ran the magazine, Podhoretz moved away from his original liberal leanings and turned Commentary into the primary organ of neoconservative thought in America. In accomplishing this, Podhoretz made a profound impact on the course of American political and cultural life.

The Pollard Case

Jonathan Pollard, convicted in 1987 of passing U.S. classified information on to Israel, was still serving his life sentence, despite the feeling of many in the Jewish community that the sentence was disproportionate to the lighter prison terms meted out to others who had spied for friendly countries. In February 1994, as President Clinton considered whether to grant clemency, NJCRAC—which had, until then,
consistently avoided involvement—for the first time took a position on the case. It sent Clinton a letter that did not go so far as to suggest clemency, but did note that "substantial elements" in the Jewish community considered the sentence excessive and had "great concern with respect to the fairness and the prospect of the sentence." If, it went on, the president's review of the case showed that the sentence was unfair, he should consider reducing it to time already served. The letter's delicate phraseology reflected tensions between the considerable misgivings of many Jewish leaders over getting involved in the case and the significant grassroots support for freeing Pollard.

In March the president turned down Pollard's clemency request because of "the grave nature" of his crime and "the considerable damage that his actions caused our nation." This disappointment only stimulated a new round of rallies by Citizens for Pollard, a national network of activists in 350 communities, now joined by several Hollywood celebrities such as Jon Voight, Jack Lemmon, and Whoopi Goldberg. But, in a new twist to the Pollard story, the convict, who had divorced his wife, Anne, in 1991, announced his prison marriage to Elaine Zeitz, the head of the Canadian pro-Pollard organization. Eschewing the careful diplomacy of the Pollard family and refusing to cooperate with his lawyers' strategy, Zeitz harshly attacked President Clinton for refusing clemency, comparing him to the biblical Pharaoh.

With Pollard eligible for parole in November 1995—the tenth anniversary of his arrest—rumor had it that Israel might arrange a deal whereby it would free an imprisoned Russian spy, Russia would release an American, and the United States would let Pollard go. In the spring of 1995, both NJCRAC and the Conference of Presidents sent letters to President Clinton and the U.S. Parole Board requesting that parole be granted. Seymour Reich, president of the American Zionist Movement and a leader of the movement to free Pollard, said: "The trick now is for the president to understand that this is a key issue for the Israeli government and the American Jewish community. And it's the latter that has been lacking."

**Holocaust Legacy**


On January 24, *Schindler's List* —about a German industrialist who saved over one thousand Jews during the Holocaust—won the Golden Globe Awards for best dramatic film, director, and screenplay. Two months later, the movie garnered seven Academy Awards, including best picture and best director—the first best-director award for Spielberg after three previous nominations. In accepting one of the awards, Spielberg said: "I implore all educators, do not let the Holocaust remain a footnote in history. Listen to the words, the echoes, the ghosts."

Yet the theme of Spielberg's film, that of the Righteous Gentile, remained contro-
versial. On the one hand, it was surely important to teach the message that individual goodness can make a difference, that, in the words of American Jewish Committee executive director David Harris, "We're not all powerless in a world where we may feel powerless." On the other hand, there were potential dangers. While no one denied that Schindler and other non-Jews had saved Jews, there was some concern that people seeing the movie and knowing nothing else about the Holocaust might focus more on the heroism of Schindler and the good fortune of the Jews he rescued than on the multitudes of Jews who went to their deaths as Gentile neighbors stood by, or even participated in the killing.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum continued to attract huge crowds. It also expanded its activities. In 1994 it launched a Center for the Study of Holocaust Resistance, which would collect evidence about Jews who fought back against their enemies. In 1995, the museum council voted to take on the responsibility of acting as a "committee on conscience" that would "influence policy-makers and stimulate worldwide action to bring acts of genocide to a halt." Asked if this did not entail making political judgments, council chairman Miles Lerman replied: "We do not plan to become a perennial fire hose that runs to every fire. We do not plan to become a shadow State Department. We are above politics. We deal with morality only."

Cornell University professor Steven Katz, chosen to be the director of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in January 1995, withdrew in March after disciplinary measures taken against him at Cornell became public. In May, Walter Reich, a prominent psychiatrist and author, was chosen as his successor. Himself a Holocaust survivor, Reich was considered an expert on the subject.

The central role that Holocaust remembrance had come to play in American Jewish life was underlined by a nasty dispute over the scheduling of the 1995 Salute to Israel Day Parade in New York City. The date originally chosen coincided with Holocaust Memorial Day, and when that was pointed out to the planners, they suggested holding Holocaust commemorations in the morning so that everyone could be at the parade in the afternoon. Many survivors reacted furiously when this became known in September 1994. Reflecting their feelings, Benjamin Meed, president of the American Gathering/Federation of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, publicly charged that the Holocaust commemoration was "under attack—not by fascists, nor by deniers, but by Jewish organizers of the Salute to Israel Parade." The organizers' offer to share the day he described as a demand to "make an early minyan and quickly recite Kaddish for our six million so that we can rejoice and dance in the afternoon. How rude and disrespectful." He threatened that if the parade were held on that day, the marchers would have to step over the bodies of Holocaust survivors. They got their way: the parade date was shifted.

Another incident, this in January 1995, proved that sensitivity to the Holocaust had penetrated far beyond the Jewish community into the precincts of government. As soon as House Speaker Newt Gingrich—whowhose Republican Party had won less
than a quarter of the Jewish vote—had to confront charges from Jewish groups that his choice for House historian had, years earlier, opposed federal funding for a proposed Holocaust curriculum on the ground that it did not present the Nazi point of view, he fired her.

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN