Special Articles
Jewish literature of the Holocaust is animated by the imperative to remember. Through the innumerable pages of the testimonial writings of those who endured the ghettos and camps of occupied Europe runs a passionate determination to record the Nazi crimes and transmit knowledge of them to others. These authors, for all the differences in their backgrounds and the diverse nature of their Jewish identification, issue one common appeal: know what has happened to us in these infernal places, and keep the memory of our fate alive.

To be sure, the inscription, transmission, and reception of historical memory are not simple matters. The work of the Holocaust deniers, whose manifest malevolence and dishonesty — as proven in Deborah Lipstadt’s legal victory over David Irving in a British courtroom in 2000 — put them beyond the pale, should be less a cause for concern than the work of the critics of what is coming to be called, pejoratively, “Holocaust consciousness.” These are writers who question not the facts but the prominence of the Holocaust in public consciousness and the motives of those who seek to perpetuate its memory.

Norman Finkelstein is a case in point. His book, The Holocaust Industry, published in 2000, indicts “The Holocaust” as an ideological representation of history that has been fraudulently devised and “sold” to the American public in order to revive a faltering Jewish identity and to “justify criminal policies of the Israeli state and U.S. support for these policies.” Beyond these motives, Finkelstein charges, those who run the so-called “Holocaust industry” are embarked on a multibillion dollar scheme of extortion, and the major share of these funds goes not to the survivors but to those who exploit their suffering for personal and communal gain.¹ Finkelstein’s book caused a stir in Europe, largely because of its harsh and inflammatory language. Yet for all its extremism, it represents little more than a new stage of a polemical engagement with the Holocaust that has been building over the years in the work of other writers, many of whom employ terms that resemble Finkelstein’s. As a result,

Holocaust memory at the outset of the 21st century finds itself under mounting attack.

Like all traumatic memories, the memory of the Holocaust has long evoked ambivalent and even antithetical reactions. These reactions have often been intense, compounded, as they frequently are, by complex issues of national identity, political ideology, economic interests, religious passions, cultural loyalties, and more. Two prime examples, strange as the implied comparison may seem, are Germany and Israel.

Since 1945, contrary pulls within German culture have given rise to periodic, heated, and public debate among intellectuals and politicians about responsibility for the Nazi crimes against the Jews. As Jane Kramer has put it, the Germans are looking for ways to resolve "a duty to remember and a longing to forget," a goal that so far has eluded them. As long as this radical ambivalence persists, sharply divided debates about Germany's Nazi past are likely to continue. The most recent manifestation of this division came to the fore in the Walser-Bubis dispute. In October 1998, in his acceptance speech upon receiving the Frankfurt Peace Prize, author Martin Walser declared his doubts about the construction of a central Holocaust memorial in Berlin. Arguing that "public acts of conscience run the risk of becoming mere symbols," Walser called for an end to the "incessant presentation of our disgrace." In response, Ignatz Bubis, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, accused Walser of "spiritual arson." The debate took off from there and revealed some strong differences in German public opinion regarding memory of the Holocaust.3

A similar ambivalence, though from an altogether different historical perspective, can be observed in Israel. Israeli culture is marked, on the one hand, by highly ritualized forms of public memorialization of the victims and, on the other, by a desire to be relieved of the burdensome legacy of the European catastrophe. Thus Tom Segev, who has chronicled this emotionally charged story in The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust, calls the Israelis' confrontation with the Holocaust a "great human drama of repression and recognition." And Segev is hardly alone in noting the deeply conflicted role that Holocaust memory plays in Israeli society.4

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3 For an incisive analysis of the Walser-Bubis controversy, see Amir Eshel, "Vom eigenen Gewissen: Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte und der Ort des Nationalsozialismus im Selbstbild der Bundesrepublik," Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geschichte 74, June 2000, pp. 333-60.
Because the Shoah is such a significant fact of Israeli life and is also subject to manipulation and misuse, many have voiced disquiet over the prominence of the Holocaust in the public sphere and, on occasion, have even advocated something like suppression. In a controversial essay published in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* in 1988, Yehuda Elkana, at the time a prominent scholar at Tel Aviv University and himself a child survivor of the Holocaust, argued that his compatriots suffered from a surplus of memory and would do well to unburden themselves of the symbols, ceremonies, and purported lessons of their traumatic past. While it "may be important for the world at large to remember," Elkana wrote, "for our part, we must forget!" Indeed, Elkana was so convinced of the pernicious effects of Holocaust memory that he saw "no greater danger to the future of Israel" than the perpetuation of such memory, and he exhorted his country's leaders to uproot "the rule of historical remembrance from our lives."^5

Elkana wrote his article during the time of the first intifada, in protest against the "abnormal" behavior of Israeli soldiers towards Palestinians. Searching for ways to understand this behavior, he attributed the soldiers' actions to the negative effects of a Holocaust consciousness that pervaded Israeli society and perverted the morality of the young. In his view, Israelis harbored an exaggerated sense of themselves as victims, and this fearful self-image, itself the result of "wrong" lessons learned from the Holocaust, prevented them from seeing the Palestinians in a more realistic light and thus impeded a reasonable political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Elkana's position was not representative of majority sentiment within Israel and provoked a good deal of criticism, but his "plea for forgetting" was endorsed by some prominent figures. As Amos Elon put it in an article of his own that ran along parallel lines, "our hope lies in the possibility that the vision of Yehuda Elkana will prevail" since, Elon believed, "a little forgetfulness might finally be in order."^6

Elon entitled his article "The Politics of Memory," and he was surely right in pointing out the role politics play in the memorialization of the Holocaust. But if there is a politics of memory, so, too, is there a politics of forgetting, evading, suppressing, and denying. Both—memory and forgetting—are in contention whenever the Holocaust is prominently invoked, and both are affected by contemporary social realities and political concerns as much as they are shaped by serious reflection on the past. In Germany and Israel, many yearn for normalization, which argues for

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one kind of response to the Nazi era, while others respond that the time is not yet ripe, a view that entails a very different response. When prominent German figures such as Martin Walser publicly declare that the time has come to begin to "look away" from the shaming images of the Nazi era, they strike a sympathetic chord among many Germans, just as they bring on protests from others, who insist that it is too early to draw a final line under the worst chapter of their nation's history. A similarly strong yearning for normalization exists within Israel as well, particularly among those who are convinced that an end to the conflict with the Arabs is being frustrated by the weight of the past.

In an essay published several years before Elkana's piece, Boas Evron argued that Holocaust memory was responsible for creating a "paranoid reaction" among Israelis and even a "moral blindness," which posed a real "danger to the nation" and could lead to an occurrence of "racist Nazi attitudes" within Israel itself. In line with this view, Elkana worried that a Holocaust-induced image of the Jews as eternal victims might encourage Israelis to justify the cruelest behavior toward the Palestinians. Drawing parallels between the "excesses" committed by soldiers in the territories and "what happened in Germany," Elkana was concerned that his countrymen could end up mimicking the behavior of the worst of their enemies and thereby grant Hitler a "paradoxical and tragic victory."

The evocation of Hitler in this context recalls some famous words of the philosopher Emil Fackenheim, but with a notable twist. Fackenheim exhorted Jews to remember the victims of Auschwitz, and thereby not hand Hitler a posthumous victory, while Elkana's exhortation to forget is based on the conviction that Hitler will prevail precisely if Jews continue to hold fast to the memory of the victims. What Fackenheim took to be the historical and moral imperatives of Holocaust memory, Elkana, Evron, and others have taken to be its dangers. There is simply no way to reconcile these two positions philosophically or to harmonize the different political understandings of present-day Jewish and Israeli life that derive from them.

In contrast to Germany and Israel, Holocaust memory in America had not been so passionately contested until recently. Indeed, since the 1960s, the Holocaust has come to public attention in ways that most people consider more salutary than not. But this consensus now finds itself em-

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8 Quoted in Segev, Seventh Million, p. 503.
battled and, in some instances, under outright attack. The issues on which the arguments typically turn have less to do with the Holocaust as a historical event than with accusations about the manipulative use of the Holocaust as an exaggerated element of contemporary Jewish identity.

What is at stake in these increasingly bitter debates, in other words, is yet another version of the politics of memory, according to which American Jews allegedly use the moral advantages that are theirs as privileged "victims" to advance parochial aims and partisan political agendas. The "centering" of the Holocaust in Jewish consciousness and general public awareness, it is charged, not only distorts Jewish identity and deforms Jewish life, but also seriously injures others, whose own histories of persecution and suffering have been marginalized and all but forgotten as a consequence of the overwhelming emphasis that has been placed on Jewish suffering. As it has been advanced in America by a "substantial cadre of Holocaust-memory professionals"—the term is Peter Novick's⁹—Holocaust consciousness serves the purposes of Jewish self-aggrandizement and prevents other victimized peoples from receiving a proper share of public attention and sympathy. For these and related reasons, critics see it as their proper function to expose the "Holocaust industry" for what it is and thereby loosen the hold that Holocaust memory has had on the Jewish and general American imagination for too many years.

While these charges have become more overt and impassioned over the last decade or so, versions of them, in milder form, appeared in American Jewish journals as far back as the late 1970s and picked up steam in the 1980s. The complaints then had to do with what some thought was the disproportionate amount of money and attention being devoted to Holocaust-related matters, at the expense of other priorities. Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf was among the first to maintain that the Holocaust had become the very "center of Jewish self-consciousness" and "is being sold—it is not being taught." Wolf charged that the "Holocaust now overshadows all else." He complained that in New Haven, Connecticut, the Jewish community was spending "about ten times as much money on the Holocaust memorial as it does on all the college students" in the city.¹⁰ Robert Alter, writing in Commentary, charged that a proliferation of college courses on the Holocaust was drawing on scarce academic resources that might better be spent helping students "find out what the Haskalah was, how a page of Talmud reads, or who Judah Hanasi might have

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been."\(^{11}\) Jacob Neusner bemoaned the fact that, as a result of their being so decidedly focused on the destruction of the Jews of Europe and the rebirth of Jewish life in Israel, Jews in this country were being kept from discovering America as their true Promised Land.\(^{12}\) Others argued that an overemphasis on the Holocaust has returned Jews to a lachrymose sense of Jewish history, submerging more positive aspects of Jewish identity; that it has distanced Jews theologically from the promises inherent in the biblical Covenant and left them too little room for hope; or that it has provoked anger and resentment among other minority groups and impeded constructive dialogue and useful political alliances with them. These and other criticisms demonstrate that there never has been an absence of voices within the American Jewish community to oppose what some have called the Jewish “fixation” on the Holocaust.

Of late, though, these criticisms have become more expansive and have taken on a tone of disparagement and derision that seldom appeared in earlier years. Michael Goldberg, in his 1995 book, *Why Should Jews Survive?* decried the emergence of Holocaust consciousness as something that “mutilates Jewish self-understanding” and insisted that “the challenge to Jews today is not outliving Hitler and the Nazis but overcoming the life-threatening story created in their aftermath.” The Holocaust, according to Goldberg, had become a “cult,” with its own “tenets of faith, rites, and shrines,” presided over by a “High Priest,” Elie Wiesel. Goldberg criticized Wiesel for the cultic powers he allegedly wields, the lecture fees he demands, and his supposed failure to sensitize his followers to the sufferings of others, most especially the Palestinians, who were “beaten, tortured, and worse” during the intifada. So convinced was Goldberg of the pernicious effects of Holocaust consciousness that he concluded his book by stating that “Jews cannot long remain Jews while holding a Holocaust-shaped story” and “neither can humankind stay human.”\(^{13}\)

Goldberg, like Wolf, a rabbi, opposes the “Holocaust story” also on theological grounds. He believes that its negative impact subverts religious faith and, with it, the very ground of Jewish existence. Philip Lopate, a prominent essayist who refers to himself as a “secular, fallen Jew,” has other reasons to oppose what he sees as an excessive Jewish preoccupation with the Holocaust. Writing in 1989, he declared the very term

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"Holocaust" objectionable because it has a "self-important, strutting air." As a rhetorical figure, "the Holocaust is a bully," used by the "Holocaustians" as a "club to smash back their opponents." Those who insist on the term's exclusivity "diminish, if not demean, the mass slaughter of other people": "Is it not possible for us to have a little more compassion for the other victimized peoples of this century and not insist quite so much that our wounds bleed more fiercely?" Like Goldberg, Lopate is not shy in singling out Elie Wiesel as the one most responsible for this Jewish chauvinism. Wiesel, he says, heads up the Holocaust as if it were "a corporation." Lopate acknowledges that millions of Jews were murdered by the Nazis, but he knows that multitudes of Bengalis, East Timorese, and Ibos have also been murdered, and "when it comes to mass murder, I can see no difference between their casualties and ours." Finding no justification in Jewish "extermination pride," and having no taste for "tribal smugness," Lopate argues that the most authentic stance toward the Holocaust today is one of resistance. As he puts it, "just because someone has suffered a lot doesn't mean you have to like them [sic]."

These critical voices must be understood against the development of Holocaust consciousness in America over time. For years after the end of World War II, Jews in America were unable or unwilling to face up to the horrors of what was not yet even called the "Holocaust." It was only in the 1960s, beginning with Israel's abduction and 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, and intensifying in June 1967, when the State of Israel seemed, like European Jewry a generation earlier, to be on the verge of destruction, that American Jews came to grips with the full significance of the Holocaust. Following Israel's victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 and continuing after the perilous situation that Israel faced in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, there was an outpouring of writing about the Holocaust, an exceptional effort by Jews to educate themselves and the public at large about the Nazi crimes. This was an important and legitimate goal, and it succeeded in bringing the Holocaust into the mainstream culture. That success, however, perhaps made it inevitable that Holocaust consciousness would become subjected to the compromises and abuses that come along with the popularization, commercialization, and politicization of history. Inevitable, though, does not mean desirable, and it is salutary that critical attention has been drawn to some of the more dubious ways in which the stories and images of the Holocaust have circulated in the public sphere.

Quite different, though, are the glib, caustic, and often mean-spirited

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attitudes that some of these critics show towards those they accuse of "selling" the Holocaust or otherwise promoting it for pecuniary or parochial ends. Attacks against the "purveyors" of Holocaust consciousness often carry exaggerated claims about a Jewish "obsession" with the Holocaust, Jewish "hegemony" over news about mass suffering, the elevation of the Holocaust as American Jewry's substitute "religion," and the like. Peter Novick, who has written the most comprehensive study of the development of Holocaust consciousness in America, names the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as "the principal 'address' of American Jewry" and states that the Holocaust is now regarded by American Jews as "the emblematic Jewish experience." Propelled by the power of American Jewish organizational skill, money, and media power, he charges, a virtual Holocaust juggernaut is sweeping away all other claims to Jewish identity, morality, and political sensitivity.

What is behind these charges is often a range of complaints about perceived failings in American Jewish life and in the broader American culture, for which the Holocaust is said to be responsible. Long before Schindler's List and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum drew the attention of millions, Rabbi Wolf lamented that "one does not learn about God or the Midrash or Zionism nearly as carefully as one learns about the Holocaust," and that while Jews found the money to erect memorials to the victims of the Nazis, there were no memorials in America "to the pioneers of Israel or to the rabbis of the Talmud, or even to the patriarchs and matriarchs." Similarly, Michael Goldberg charged that "virtually every Jewish community of any size is assured a turnout at its annual Holocaust observance that easily dwarfs synagogue attendance on Passover."

Surely, however, Holocaust consciousness is here taken to be the cause of developments that have their origins elsewhere. Well before the Holocaust had overwhelmed the Jews of Europe, for instance, most American Jews had stopped going to the synagogue on Passover, stopped engaging in substantial religious study, and stopped caring about the rabbis of the Talmud, let alone the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs. It was not attendance at public gatherings commemorating the Holocaust that distanced American Jews from traditions of Jewish piety and learning but rather the transforming influences of Americanization and secularization. Interestingly, just as the rabbis lament that attention to the Holocaust

16Novick, Holocaust in American Life, pp. 11, 10.
17Wolf, "The Centrality of the Holocaust is a Mistake," pp. 15–16.
is distracting American Jews from their religious duties, so avowed secularists like Peter Novick and Philip Lopate charge that too much Holocaust on the brain is eroding the social consciousness of American Jews and hardening their hearts to the sufferings of others. If, as Novick claims, American Jewry has turned “inward and rightward in recent decades,” it is surely not owing to the “centering of the Holocaust in the minds of American Jews,”¹⁹ a claim that Novick does not, indeed cannot, prove. Taking this line of thinking to another level of crudeness, Lopate contends that “the Jewish preoccupation with the Holocaust” has made American Jews “uncharitable, self-absorbed, self-righteous—and pushy.”²⁰ Had he seen fit to add “venal,” he would have rounded out the profile of the Ugly Jew in classic anti-Semitic fashion (Norman Finkelstein, in fact, has done exactly that through his brutal sketches of the opportunistic, money-grubbing Jew).

The Holocaust, in short, is supposed to be to blame for much of what ails American Jews. Traditionalists hold it responsible for distorting Judaism and replacing religious observance with a new civil religion that enshrines Jewish victimization, instead of God, at its core. And liberal-minded thinkers call it to account for narrowing the Jewish political vision and replacing an older, broader-based universalism with a chauvinistic particularism. The result, then, is that almost every deviation from what is held to be normative or desirable—the growing assimilation of American Jews, an alleged indifference to the pain and sufferings of other people, an apologetic attitude to what some regard to be Israeli “atrocities”—all of this, and more, is placed at the doorstep of those who have worked to perpetuate Holocaust memory.

To make matters even worse, one now commonly hears that Jewish Holocaust advocates are responsible, in no small measure, for what ails other groups as well. As proponents of a so-called radically ethnocentric view of history, “certain Jewish scholars and their acolytes” insist that the Holocaust is an unprecedented crime that bestows upon the Jews a pre-eminence of suffering.²¹ This “cult” of “zealots” with “powerful friends in high places” has managed to win broad sympathy for the Jews through a “self-serving masquerade of Jewish genocide uniqueness,” and anyone who raises questions about this “deception” is “immediately in danger of being labeled an anti-Semite.” Nevertheless, writes one author unimpressed by this Jewish strategy, “not only is the essence of their argument demonstrably erroneous, the larger thesis that it fraudulently advances is

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¹⁹Novick, Holocaust in American Life, p. 10.
fundamentally racist and violence-provoking. At the same time, moreover, it willingly provides a screen behind which opportunistic governments today attempt to conceal their own past and ongoing genocidal actions.” Among these governments, the worst is Israel, which has used the Holocaust as “justification for [its] territorial expansionism and suppression of the Palestinian people,” a crime that for too long has gone unacknowledged, thanks to the “hegemonic product of many years of strenuous intellectual labor by a handful of Jewish scholars and writers…”

I have been quoting from David Stannard, a scholar of Native American history. His work, and that of others like him, raises the argument against Holocaust consciousness to a new polemical level, introducing a rhetoric of aggression against Jews that, until now, has rarely been encountered outside of anti-Semitic literature. This same note is forcefully sounded in Ward Churchill’s *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present*. A scholar of Native American history like Stannard, Churchill is convinced that too little attention has been paid to the fate of indigenous peoples in the “American Holocaust” because too much attention has been paid to the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust. He charges that victims of other genocides have been virtually erased from history because a “substantial component of Zionism . . . contends . . . that no ‘true’ genocide has ever occurred other than the Holocaust suffered by the Jews. . . .” The politics of this militant chauvinism are clear for all to see: Jewish “exclusivism” serves to “compel permanent maintenance of the privileged political status of Israel, the Jewish state established on Arab land in 1947 as an act of international atonement for the Holocaust.” It also seeks to “construct a conceptual screen behind which to hide the realities of Israel’s ongoing genocide against the Palestinian population whose rights and property were usurped in its very creation.”

Both Stannard and Churchill accuse Jewish scholars of the Nazi Holocaust of “denying” other “holocausts.” Stannard charges the “Jewish uniqueness advocates” with being the equivalent of Holocaust deniers, even claiming that they “almost invariably mimic exactly the same assertions laid out by the anti-Semitic historical revisionists.” Churchill denounces these scholars in similar terms: “The techniques used by pro-


ponents of Jewish exclusivism in presenting their doctrine of ‘uniqueness’ [are comparable] to those of the neo-Nazi revisionists.” And he carries the accusation one step further: “The proponents of ‘Jewish exclusivism’ represent a proportionately greater and more insidious threat to understanding than do the Holocaust deniers,” for in denying that other peoples have been the target of genocidal crimes, they have marginalized the sufferings of countless others and rendered them inconsequential. They have, he says, peddled a “mythology” about history that “dovetails perfectly with the institutionalized denials of genocide” put forth by numerous governments intent on seeing to it that their own “hidden holocausts” remain hidden. For the sheer invidiousness of their work, therefore, the Jewish scholars—Churchill names Steven Katz, Yehuda Bauer, Elie Wiesel, Lucy Dawidowicz, Leni Yahil, Yisrael Gutman, Michael Marrus, Deborah Lipstadt, and Martin Gilbert—are in a class by themselves: “Those who would deny the Holocaust, after all, focus their distortions upon one target. Those who deny all holocausts other than that of the Jews have the same effect upon many.”

Stannard and Churchill are clearly guilty of the same fallacy that mars the work of some of the Jewish critics referred to above. While it is true that the history of Native American peoples has been neglected over the years, the fault lies not with scholars of the European Holocaust but with generations of American historians and political leaders who, for their own reasons, have not focused on some shameful chapters of their own country’s past. The omission is a serious one, but, chronologically, it long predates the Holocaust and therefore cannot reasonably be explained by pinning the blame on proponents of “Zionism” or “Jewish exclusivism.” Castigating scholars of the Nazi Holocaust for neglecting the history of Native American suffering would be equivalent to charging scholars of Native American history of diverting attention from the immense sufferings of African slavery, the massacres of Armenians, or the murder of millions of Cambodians. Each of these histories has unique features, and those who write about them are justified in saying so. Nevertheless, Stannard and Churchill place blame specifically on the work of those scholars who have understood the Holocaust to have unique historical dimensions. In their view, “uniqueness” equals “denial” of others, and the “Jewish uniqueness advocates,” in consciously aiding and abetting “the willful maintenance of public ignorance regarding the genocidal and racist horrors that have been and are being perpetrated by many nations,” are in “murderous complicity with both past and present genocidal regimes.”

These are serious accusations, and they have moved well beyond the sphere of academic Native American studies. The charge is now commonly made that Jews use their own past history of suffering as a pretext to inflict suffering on others or to divert attention from the oppression of other peoples. The State of Israel is often singled out, an Israel whose image has been transformed into that of an aggressor state shielded by the protective cover of Holocaust memory. No less an establishment media figure than *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman wrote, during the first intifada, that “Israel today is becoming Yad Vashem with an air force.”27 At the same time, but in less colorful language, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman reiterated the notion of an aggressive Israel that manipulates Holocaust memory for self-serving ends: “The Jewish state [has] tried to employ the tragic memories [of the Holocaust] as the certificate of its political legitimacy, a safe conduct pass for its past and future policies, and above all as the advance payment for the injustices it might itself commit.”28 Bauman’s words are favorably cited by Stannard, Churchill, Novick, Finkelstein, and others, for whom it is now a given that the Holocaust has been cynically used by the Jews, and especially by the Jewish state, as a matchless resource against its foes.

As it defines Holocaust memory as little more than a tool of Jewish empowerment, the political logic of this thinking is evident. In the name of Auschwitz, the Jewish state is said to be brutally oppressing another people. What is required to restore the Holocaust to its proper historical perspective and the Jews to their authentic ethical vocation is an “end to Auschwitz.” This critique of Holocaust consciousness, in other words, links an appeal to disengage from the Holocaust with an appeal for Jews to disengage from the exercise of political power by disconnecting from the State of Israel.

No one has stated this as clearly as Marc Ellis, a Jewish theologian and professor of religion with strong pro-Palestinian sympathies. From his standpoint, “Jews are essentially a diaspora people” that does not require a state organization anyway. For them to live freely and ethically among the peoples of the world, the Jews should recognize the need for the “de-absolutization of Israel,” which, he reasons, entails at the same time “de-absolutizing the Holocaust”29:

*Auschwitz has become a burden to the Jewish future. . . . To continue Auschwitz as a central overriding memory is in a sense to postpone . . . the explosive realities within our community as they relate to power and injustice. . . . Thus,

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to end Auschwitz is to admit that we are no longer innocent and that Israel is not our redemption. . . . “Ending Auschwitz” would also allow us, or perhaps even compel us, to think the unthinkable—that our future is bound up in an essential solidarity with those whom we have displaced, a solidarity with the Palestinian people. . . . The only way for the renewal of Palestine in the Jewish imagination to take hold is through ending Auschwitz; or, put another way, ending Auschwitz and the renewal of Palestine are bound together.  

The theological/political argument Ellis makes is predicated on the belief that “Auschwitz was in fact killing us as a people long after the crematoria were destroyed,” and that in the name of Auschwitz, Jews have felt at liberty to humiliate, oppress, and kill another people. Avishai Margalit describes the same connection even more cynically: “Against the weapon of the Holocaust, the Palestinians are amateurs. . . . As soon as operation ‘Holocaust Memory’ is put into high gear, . . . the Palestinians cannot compete.” It is no doubt due to this perceived linkage of the Holocaust and the State of Israel that Palestinian schoolbooks and newspapers, as well as the media in Arab countries, are so intent on exposing the Holocaust as a “myth,” and that the most passionate critics of Israel are so intent on deriding the “Holocaust industry” and putting an “end to Auschwitz.”

Although the notion of a “Holocaust industry” has been popularized by Norman Finkelstein, Peter Novick—a much more serious scholar—employs roughly similar terms in The Holocaust in American Life, which appeared in 1999. Through his repeated references to the work of well-placed Jewish influentials—including a “substantial cadre of Holocaust professionals,” a “growing cadre of Holocaust professionals,” Jews who “occupy strategic positions in the mass media” and who project images of the Holocaust “through the culture at large”—Novick comes close to positing a “Holocaust industry” in all but name. His book, which one reviewer has called “sharp, brusque, and sometimes nearly Swiftian in its acerbities,” is a combination of carefully researched historical analysis and harsh political complaint. It provides a valuable exposition of the evolution of Holocaust consciousness in America, but also puts forward

31Ibid., p. 39.
33Novick is on record as a critic of Finkelstein’s work and has written a sharply negative review of The Holocaust Industry; see “A charge into darkness that sheds no light,” Jewish Chronicle (London), July 28, 2000, p. 28. For Finkelstein on Novick, see London Review of Books, Jan. 6, 2000, p. 33.
a polemical, quarrelsome, and cynical treatment of "American Jewish leaders," whom the author holds responsible for shaping the history of Jewish suffering to further parochial Jewish aims. Novick's book, in fact, is a determined critique of the politics of Holocaust memory, stresses many of the same themes found in the writings of Stannard, Churchill, and others, and foreshadows the later full-blown attack of Norman Finkelstein.35

Novick, who undervalues the Jewish historical tradition of memorializing national tragedies,36 aims to expose Holocaust consciousness as a deliberate construct of American Jewish organizations and institutions. The leaders of these organizations, he says, recognized that Jewish identity in America was weakening. They focused on the Holocaust as "the one item in stock with consumer appeal" and set about shoring up flagging Jewish commitment by creating "a Holocaust-centered Jewish identity." In addition, they worked to spread Holocaust awareness to "mobilize support for a beleaguered Israel, pictured as being in a kind of pre-Holocaust danger." They were aided in these efforts, claims Novick, by a powerful Jewish presence among the "media and opinion-making elites" — the Jews who "play an important and influential role in Hollywood, the television industry, and the newspaper, magazine, and book publishing world." Through the dedicated work of these people — and Jews are "not just 'the people of the book,' but the people of the Hollywood film and the television mini-series, of the magazine article and the newspaper column, of the comic book and the academic symposium" — the Holocaust was repositioned from the margins to the very forefront of American consciousness. In addition, thanks to the efforts of certain powerful individuals of a traditionalist persuasion, such as Elie Wiesel and Irving Greenberg, the Holocaust underwent a "perverse sacralization" and emerged, for many American Jews, as something of a "mystery religion." In a culture that has come to valorize victims, Jews established primacy of place for the Holocaust and have reaped the benefits that come with such success. Not to be outdone in the high-stakes arena of "comparative atrocitology," the Jews now "possess the gold medal in the Victimization Olympics."37

Novick much prefers an earlier generation of American Jews with whom he more closely identifies, Jews who were integrationist and universalistic. He claims that it was "Holocaust consciousness" that "contributed to the erosion of that larger social consciousness" that was the

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35Novick, Holocaust in American Life, pp. 6, 168, 208, 12.
36This has led one reviewer to the conclusion that Novick is "a stranger to the inner life of the Jews." David Roskies, "Group Memory," Commentary, Sept. 1999, p. 64.
"hallmark of the American Jewry of [his] youth—post-Holocaust but pre-Holocaust fixation."\textsuperscript{38}

This negative note brings us, finally, to Norman Finkelstein. Drawing on the work of earlier critics of Holocaust consciousness—Novick, Arnold Jacob Wolf, Jacob Neusner, David Stannard, Boas Evron, and others—Finkelstein, in an earlier work, had already indicted "The Holocaust" as little more than "the Zionist account of the Nazi holocaust."\textsuperscript{39}

In \textit{The Holocaust Industry}, he appreciates what he calls the "muckraking" quality of Novick's book and affirms Novick's view of Holocaust memory as "an ideological construct of vested interests," but argues that Novick does not carry his argument nearly far enough. Finkelstein deplores the "soft" categories that Novick employs—"'memory' is surely the most impoverished concept to come down the academic pike in a long time"—and prefers to think in terms of "power," "interests," and "ideology." In making the shift from the "bland" categories of cultural analysis to the more "robust" categories of political analysis, Finkelstein is convinced that he has discovered the real culprits—not just the Holocaust memory manipulators, but the Holocaust racketeers and extortionists. He has nothing but contempt for these people, whom he denounces as shakedown artists whose corrupt practices are "the main fomentor of anti-Semitism in Europe." It is they who run the Holocaust industry, and it is they whom Norman Finkelstein is determined to run out of business so that "those who perished [can] finally rest in peace."\textsuperscript{40}

In a gesture that is calculated to win him special sympathy, Finkelstein adopts the persona of the indignant son of Holocaust survivors. Though a fierce opponent of the "exploitation of Jewish suffering," Finkelstein exploits the fact that his father and mother had been in Hitler's camps and were the sole members of their family to survive. His book, he avers, is an attempt to "represent my parents' legacy," but whatever that legacy might be, the book is, more than anything else, a tirade against a non-existent Judeo-Zionist conspiracy. But armed with the credentials of the son of his suffering parents, Finkelstein feels entitled to wage war on anyone and everyone who has dealt with the Holocaust in ways that he dislikes. With few exceptions, the works of other Holocaust scholars are dismissed as "worthless"—no more than "shelves upon shelves of shlock." The resources contributed to memorializing the Nazi genocide are also "worthless, a tribute not to Jewish suffering but to Jewish aggrandize-

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{40}Finkelstein, \textit{Holocaust Industry}, pp. 4, 5, 130, 150.
ment." As for Israel, "one of the world's most formidable military pow-
ers, with a horrendous human rights record," it has used the Holocaust
as an "indispensable ideological weapon" to "cast itself as a 'victim' state," even as it continues its unconscionable abuse of the Palestinians.
Finkelstein charges the "American ruling elites" who support the "crim-
inal policies" of the Zionist state with complicity in Zionist crimes. Avari-
cious lawyers intent on bilking Swiss banks and German industrial cor-
porations in the name of Holocaust survivors are excoriated for running
a "restitution racket." In his view, many people who pass themselves off
as Holocaust survivors often are not survivors at all, but masquerade as
such to get money. Furthermore, the testimony of the true survivors is
often suspect, and Elie Wiesel is contemptuously derided as the biggest
fraud of all, guilty of a "shameful record of apologetics on behalf of Is-
rael," and a "charlatan."

These people—bogus Holocaust scholars, Zionist ideologues, Israeli
aggressors, Jewish influence peddlers, phony survivors, and other as-
sorted Jewish politicos and mercenaries—make up Finkelstein's "Holo-
caust industry," a corrupt, ruthlessly exploitative bunch that has used the
Holocaust to acquire personal wealth and political power, and to gain im-
munity for those in the Zionist and American Jewish camps who are busy
"lording it over those least able to defend themselves." Rising above the
machinations of this morally bankrupt crowd is the figure of the author's
mother, whom he cites more than once for her moral probity and worldly
wisdom. Instead of exploiting Jewish suffering for selfish ends, Finkel-
stein writes, "the time is long past to open our hearts to the rest of hu-
manity's sufferings. This was the main lesson my mother imparted. .
In the face of the sufferings of African-Americans, Vietnamese and Pales-
tinians, my mother's credo always was: We are all Holocaust victims." Or
again: "If everyone who claims to be a survivor actually is one," my
mother used to exclaim, "who[m] did Hitler kill?"

One is tempted to set aside this book as so much sentimental drivel or
bullying rant, but that would be a mistake. To be sure, while Finkelstein
has not been taken seriously in the United States—the reviewer for the
New York Times Book Review, for example, called his book "sad," "in-
decent," "juvenile, self-contradictory, arrogant and stupid," "irrational
and insidious," among other things—he has found an attentive audience
in England, Germany, and elsewhere. His book, even before its transla-
tion into European languages, was widely discussed and, in some circles,

41Ibid., pp. 7, 55, 32, 8, 3, 7, 94, 82, 45, 4, 56.
42Ibid., pp. 38, 8, 81.
p. 8.
lauded. The notion that "we are all Holocaust victims" appeals to people who have had enough of the Jews and their sorrows. They do not like it that the Jews, and they alone, are singled out for special sympathy. In addition, Finkelstein's argument that crafty "Holocaust hucksters" are pumping up the numbers of survivors in order to cash in on Jewish suffering wins sympathy among those already inclined to see a predatory hand in the much-publicized Holocaust-related litigation.

Inevitably, the notion of an enterprising and manipulative "Holocaust industry" has found a willing audience among the worst of the Holocaust deniers. Though these people may not be his natural allies, Finkelstein, like them, has vilified Israel and "organized American Jewry" in relentless fashion and held "The Holocaust" up for scorn. Not surprisingly, extreme right-wing circles in Europe and the U.S. have been touting his book. Thoughtful people in Germany, in particular, worry that Finkelstein's fantasies will encourage the most dangerous elements in that country, who will find in the book ample confirmation of a Jewish conspiracy to exploit German historical guilt for selfish ends. In fact, as the alert reader will see, Finkelstein's "Holocaust industry" is as much an ideological construct as neo-Nazi constructions of a Holocaust-that-never-was. But for people who are weary of hearing about Hitler and the Jews, Finkelstein's impassioned "exposé" of an elaborate Holocaust extortion racket will be a welcome development long overdue. As one of his German reviewers has commented, reading The Holocaust Industry "is like opening a window for a sudden gust of fresh air." The German translation's initial print run of 50,000 quickly sold out, and, for a time, the book topped the German best-seller list for nonfiction. In a poll taken by the prestigious Emnid Institute soon after the German translation appeared, 65 percent of Germans questioned agreed, either fully or partially, that Jewish organizations exaggerate Holocaust-related compensation claims in order to enrich themselves.

Even under the best of conditions, Holocaust memory, like all historical memories, is bound to attenuate over time. Indeed, the very enormity of the Nazi crimes against the Jews makes it notoriously difficult for the mind to assimilate the horror, let alone to make any sense of it. One can hardly be confident, then, that public awareness of the Holocaust will be widely and responsibly maintained. It is no wonder that writers like Primo Levi, Jean Améry, and others, who reflected most deeply about the Nazi assault against the Jews, often came close to despair when they contem-

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44 Finkelstein has posted the laudatory reviews, and replies to the negative ones, on his Web site.
46 Der Spiegel, July 2000, p. 224.
plated the future of Holocaust memory, for they recognized how tenu-
ous a thing such memory is.

However, even the best of these writers could not have foreseen the in-
vidiousness that has come to accompany attacks on Holocaust con-
sciousness, often delivered in a tone that amounts almost to mocking the
dead. The popularization of the flippant expression, “There is no busi-
ness like Shoah business,” is symptomatic of the derisive attitude that is
now so common, one that calls into question the value of any ongoing
engagement with the Holocaust. Add to this belittling tendency an in-
clination to reduce the catastrophe to an ideological construct of vested
interests, and the story of Jewish fate under Hitler suffers further deval-
uation. And the integrity of Holocaust memory is weakened still more
by those who link their critique of Holocaust consciousness to a critique
of Jewish “power,” especially as such power is exercised in Israel. One
would never know, from the work of Finkelstein and some other critics
of Holocaust consciousness, that people might feel compelled to think
about the Jewish catastrophe under Hitler for other, less cynical reasons.
One would never suspect that there might be historical, religious, moral,
or ethical claims on consciousness as legitimate prods to remember the
Nazi crimes.

The accumulated force of the tendencies encouraging forgetting may,
over time, bring about the “end of Auschwitz.” But the result will be nei-
ther the return of the Jewish people to traditional religious practice nor
to a higher ethical calling, but their return to the kind of vulnerability
that preceded Auschwitz and helped bring it about.
The Jews of Cuba since the Castro Revolution

BY DANA EVAN KAPLAN

CUBA HAS BEEN ATTRACTING a great deal of attention recently. While the protracted custody battle over Elián González received the most publicity,¹ there have also been two cases of alleged spying, several high-level cultural exchanges, American trade missions, trials of Cuban dissidents, and even a series of baseball games between the Baltimore Orioles and a Cuban team.

From the Jewish standpoint as well, Cuba has become more important, as various American Jewish organizations send missions to visit the Cuban Jewish community, participate in religious and cultural activities, and provide essential food and medicine. Till soon after the revolution, the American Jewish Year Book published regular reports on the Jews of the country written by Abraham J. Dubelman. Dubelman’s last report appeared in the 1962 volume, and, with the exception of a report on the Cuban Jews of Miami,² this is the first AJYB article on the topic since.

The Jewish community in Cuba today is but a small percentage of what it was before the revolution of 1959.³ Then, among the more than six million Cubans, there were 10,000–16,500 Jews, with communities not only in Havana but also in Santa Clara, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, and

Note: The author thanks Jacob Kovadloff of the American Jewish Committee for his encouragement and assistance in the preparation of this article, and Dr. Margalit Bejarano, Dr. Moisés Asis, and Mr. Arturo López Levy for carefully reading and commenting on an early draft. He also thanks the many individuals in Cuba, the United States, Israel, Canada, and throughout the world who graciously answered questions, provided information, and gave constructive criticism.

³Robert M. Levine has written the standard work on the history of the Cuban Jewish community, Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience In Cuba (Gainesville, Fla., 1993). Another important source is Margalit Bejarano, ed., La Comunidad Hebrea De Cuba: La Memoria y la Historia (Jerusalem, 1996), a collection of oral histories.
many other locations. The Jews of Havana had five synagogues: Unión Hebrea Chevet Ahim, the United Hebrew Congregation, Adath Israel, Centro Sefaradi, and the Patronato, the largest, which had been built as a Jewish center in 1953 (its full name was Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba). About 75 percent of the Jews in the country were Ashkenazi, the rest Sephardi.

Unlike the Catholics, the mainline Protestants, and the smaller religious groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Gideon’s Band, and Pentecostals, substantial numbers of whom remained in the country after the revolution, most of the Jewish community emigrated. Those who remained, like the Christian religious groups, went into a “dormant state” enabling their community to survive in skeletal form under unfavorable political circumstances. Finally, with the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, the catastrophic decline of the Cuban economy in the early 1990s, and the resulting government reforms, religious groups were able to come out of hibernation and rebuild their organizations. After years of using a combination of confrontation, defiance, silence, cooperation, and subterfuge, the various religious groups are now in a position to play a leading role in Cuban society and perhaps assist the country in moving away from socialism.

Because of their small numbers, the Jews have been exceptionally careful to avoid antagonizing the government, and the government, for its own reasons, has been equally keen to avoid any action that might be perceived as anti-Jewish. Thus the Jewish community escaped the worst of the antireligious policies of the regime, particularly in the early decades of Communist rule. Nevertheless, in another respect the tiny Jewish community operated at a distinct disadvantage: Unlike the Christian groups, establishment or fringe, the Jews could not recruit freely from the general population. Nevertheless, a remarkable Jewish renaissance is under-

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5 Chevet Ahim is also spelled Chevet Achim, Shevet Ajim, or Shevet Ahim. The congregation was at Calle Inquisidor (Inquisitor Street!) número 407 in Old Havana. On the High Holy Days it met at Calle Prado número 557, a location also used for social functions.

6 In Spanish, Congregación Hebra Unida.

7 Jehovah’s Witnesses actively resisted the authority of the regime. As a consequence, many were jailed and the 1976 constitution specifically forbade their religious practices.

way in Cuba.\textsuperscript{9} To understand this phenomenon requires some background on Jewish life in the country during the Castro years.

\textit{The Cuban Revolution and The Jews}

It is difficult for Americans to conceive of a Cuba without its charismatic and idiosyncratic leader Fidel Castro. He has held power for more than 40 years, after leading a revolutionary movement that overthrew the corrupt government of Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar. Despite their small numbers and the enormous amount of military aid that the United States gave Batista, the revolutionary forces of Ché Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos took control of Havana on New Year’s Day, 1959. Most Cubans—including many Cuban Jews—greeted Castro’s victory with tremendous enthusiasm. Cubans of all economic classes had suffered under Batista’s rule and were disgusted by his excesses and corruption. Not only Batista, but the entire political system had been discredited; Castro and the other rebels had tremendous moral authority.

The majority of Jewish men were owners of small businesses, with about 15 percent owning large stores and wholesale enterprises. Others were professionals—engineers, physicians, managers, and so forth. Although many Jews, particularly among the Ashkenazim, had originally intended to pass through “Hotel Cuba” on their way to the United States, by the late 1950s nearly all who remained in Cuba had developed strong economic roots in the country. There was a small group of dedicated Jewish Communists, but since so much of the community owned businesses, Jews were identified as “capitalists.” Their businesses were potential targets for confiscation, putting their middle-class lifestyle in jeopardy. But at that point nothing was for certain.

1959 was a time of both hope and uncertainty as Cubans waited to see how the new government would deal with many pressing issues. In July 1959, President Carlos Manuel Urrutia Lleo resigned, and over the next several months Castro, then the premier, appointed Communists to head most of the ministries. Communists also took control of the trade unions. While few Jews emigrated during 1959, they watched the unfolding political events with great trepidation, worried less about anti-Semitism than about the political and economic policies that the government might adopt.

In fact the revolutionaries displayed no signs of anti-Semitic sentiments; if anything, they seemed well-disposed toward Jews. Three of the

ten original members of the Cuban Communist Party came from Jewish backgrounds. Fabio Grobart, who had arrived in Cuba with the name Abraham Simchowitz, remained an important Communist leader until his death many years later. Among the younger generation, Manuel (Stolik) Novigrod, whose parents had been long-time Jewish Communists, fought with the revolutionaries in the Sierra Maestra Mountains and became a career diplomat under the Castro regime. A number of other Jews also served in the revolutionary government, most prominently Enrique Oltuski, the son of Jewish immigrants from Poland who arrived in Cuba after World War I. While studying in Miami, he watched the unfolding of the revolutionary struggle with a growing sense of guilt. “My conscience pricked me. . . my comrades were dying and fighting in Cuba, while I was living well in the United States. Every day, I used to say I had to go back to Cuba, so one day I got up and went.” Oltuski joined the struggle in 1955 and organized the 26th of July movement in the province of Las Villas. In 1959, at the age of 27, he was made minister of communications, staying in the cabinet even after the fall of President Urrutia, in itself a remarkable political accomplishment. Originally at odds with Che Guevara, the two soon became quite close. Despite a number of political setbacks he continued in government service, and today is deputy minister of fisheries. Other Jews became prominent as well, such as Dr. Jose Altschuler, president of the Comisión de Intercosmos de Cuba, responsible for overseeing the Cuban space program.

Castro did not apply the same political pressure on the Jewish community that he did on the Catholic Church and most other Christian denominations. Unlike the Catholic Church, which had a vast organizational network that could conceivably have been used to develop an opposition movement, and unlike the other Christian groups, which had the potential to organize mass resistance among the populace, the tiny Jewish community was no threat whatsoever.

After the Revolution

During the course of 1959 it became increasingly clear that Castro’s economic policies would ruin the middle class, but still, very few Jews emigrated. As late as December 1960, the leadership of the Patronato—the most important Jewish communal institution—was essentially the same.

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as before the revolution.\textsuperscript{14} Herman Heisler remained president, Morris Konski, Dr. Enrique Eiber, and Herman Lipstein remained the three vice presidents, Isaac Gurwitz was the general secretary, and Abraham Marcus Matterin and Jaime Bloch were the vice secretaries. Dr. Bernardo Benes, later to become well known as emissary to Fidel Castro for Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan,\textsuperscript{15} was the congregation's attorney. Moisés Baldás, who would take over as president the following year, was not yet on the board.

According to the teachings of the revolution, those who had developed businesses were guilty of profiting at the expense of the masses, and were therefore "enemies of the revolution." As businesses were confiscated during 1960 and 1961, more Jews left. In 1961, Israel and Cuba reached an agreement permitting Cuban Jews to go to Israel in return for shipments of goats and eggs; a good number of these Jews soon left Israel and went elsewhere. Many more Cuban Jews left directly for Miami, the center of Cuban exile life. Others stayed, hoping that the situation would stabilize or improve. By 1962 all such hopes were dashed, and many more Jews left as part of a massive exodus of hundreds of thousands of other middle-and upper-class Cubans. Those who remained were disproportionately elderly or ill.

The emigration process could be traumatic. Once a family applied for an exit visa, a Cuban governmental official would come and make an inventory of everything in the house. If the family was suspected of removing things from the home prior to the inspection, emigration could be delayed. A representative of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) reported on the situation in July 1961:

\begin{quote}
It is disastrous—the rich have left, some having foreseen the situation, but these are few. all assets [have been] taken over by the government, the militia, or other bandits who have simply taken over everything which our brothers have left behind after having worked for many years, sacrificing themselves to make their way. . . . Those who remain can do nothing; business is dying for lack of merchandise, and the large industries, as well as the small ones, are being nationalized. Owners are being watched strictly.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

By December 1961 at least 3,800 Jews had already left the country, with another thousand in the process of leaving. The previous month Castro

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Comunitarias: Organo Oficial de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebreo de Cuba, 1, Dec. 1960, p. 4.
\end{itemize}
had declared: "I am a Marxist-Leninist and I shall be one until the last day of my life." This put an end to any remaining hopes for a return to the life that Jews had known before the revolution. By early 1963 a much larger number of Jews had left. At that time Congregation Adath Israel and the Unión Sionista de Cuba (Zionist Union of Cuba) conducted a census of those registering to receive Passover supplies. They found that there were only 1,022 Jewish families in the country, composed of 2,586 individuals, most living in Havana.

Israeli ambassador Haim Yaari estimated that 45 percent of the Jews who remained in the country during the 1960s were unemployed. Most of these people survived by gradually selling off their more valuable possessions, such as washing machines, dryers, ovens, family heirlooms, and jewelry. Once again, there is little evidence to suggest that Jews were singled out for negative treatment. A number of American Jewish organizations that were monitoring the situation stressed that Jews were fleeing Cuba because of political and economic difficulties, not anti-Semitism.

Charles Shapiro, an important businessman in Havana and an American citizen, appears to have been a specific target of violence. A leader of the United Hebrew Congregation, Shapiro had been living in Cuba for about 35 years. In August 1960 Shapiro and his wife, Wilma, along with ten other relatives and several servants, were beaten, tied up, and robbed in their elegant home by five armed Cubans, who ransacked the house and took all the money and jewelry they found. Almost simultaneously, the family's department store, Los Precios Fijos, one of the largest in Havana, went up in flames, and government authorities detained the Shapiro's son, the store manager, for a short time. While there was no evidence that the Shapiro's were targeted because they were Jewish, the incident increased Jewish trepidation about staying in the country.

Another spur to emigration was fear that the government might at some point decide to restrict the freedom of Cubans to leave the country. Indeed, a law went into effect on July 26, 1963, stating that all males between the ages of 15 and 50 were obligated to perform military service, and from then on emigration became more difficult for men in that age bracket and their families.


The Castro Government and the Jews

The revolutionary forces had portrayed themselves as reformers whose goal was to redress the injustices committed by the former government, and specifically to reverse the arrangements that had been allowed to develop through sweetheart deals signed by corrupt senior officials. The groups that faced retribution were those that had been part of the Batista regime, and virtually no Jews had been high-ranking government officials or military officers under Batista. It is true that some American Jewish gangsters, such as Meyer Lansky, were involved with Batista in the development of casino gambling, but none of them were arrested or tried. When Lansky’s Havana Riviera Hotel was officially confiscated on October 24, 1960, no one suggested that the Communists had anti-Semitic motives; after all, 165 other American enterprises, including the Cuban subsidiaries and franchises of Canada Dry, Goodyear, Kodak, Westinghouse, and Woolworth’s, were also seized.19

Although Castro’s foreign policy towards the State of Israel has had its ups and downs, he has pursued a consistently benign policy towards the local Cuban Jewish community. There are a number of theories about why Castro did not adopt the kind of anti-Jewish policies instituted by the Communists in the Soviet Union and its East European satellites. Castro had a number of Jewish friends and supporters, and his relations with one or more of them may have predisposed him not to attack the Jewish community. It is also possible that Castro wanted to avoid anti-Semitism precisely in order to differentiate his regime from that of the Soviet Union, an explanation that would also cover his decision to maintain diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War, when the entire Communist bloc broke relations with the exception of Cuba. Some have argued that the Castro regime did not want to generate additional hostility by persecuting a small and vulnerable religious minority, but it is hard to believe that the same government that was willing to antagonize the superpower to the north would fear the fallout from its treatment of local Jews. Havana historian Maritza Corrales Capestany suggests that, in the early years, many Cubans, and perhaps Castro as well, felt that Cuba and Israel were both small, struggling, socialist states beset by much larger and stronger enemies. Many Cubans also felt great sympathy for the tremendous suffering that the Jews had endured in the Holocaust.20

Another theory is that Castro believes he is of Marrano ancestry. Certainly the name Castro was a common last name of Marranos (anusim

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in Hebrew, sometimes called *conversos* in Spanish), Jews who converted to Christianity—either willingly or unwillingly—before or at the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. Maurice Halperin writes that in 1960 Castro told Ricardo Wolf, Cuba’s ambassador to Israel, that he had Marrano ancestors. Lavy Becker, who visited Cuba for the Canadian Jewish Congress, recalls hearing the same thing from Wolf. This account has also been confirmed by Dr. Bernardo Benes, who told reporter Ann Louise Bardach that “He [Castro] said to me in passing, ‘As you know, I have Jewish ancestry.’ He said he wanted Cuba to be a second Israel.” In a recent conversation, Benes added a few details: “I had heard that he [Castro] was from Jewish ancestry. . . . I told him, ‘The next time you go to a mirror, look at your nose, and look what you have done with this little island here in front of the powerful United States. Only a Jew could have done that.’ Castro asked me, ‘So there is no problem with being a Jew?’ and I said ‘Of course not, I’m one.’ ” Benes recalled a time in 1984, when he, Benes, was negotiating with Castro on behalf of President Reagan: “I remember the exact date. It was May 18, 1984. In the middle of an unrelated conversation, he said to me, ‘You know, my Jewish ancestors.’ I remember the words exactly.” Benes told me, “I gave him to read the autobiography of Golda Meir, *My Life.* He was very impressed after he read it. He told me that she was one of the most distinguished women of the 20th century.” “This is just my personal opinion,” concluded Benes, “but I think he wanted to do in Cuba what the Israelis had done in the Middle East.”

Castro’s daughter, Alina, has written that Castro’s maternal grandfather was a Turkish Jew from Istanbul named Francisco Ruz. She described her great-grandfather as “a boy in Istanbul, who had ancestral memories of a greater empire, when his family of Jewish renegades probably dropped a letter from their last name, shortening it [from Ruiz] to Ruz.” This would be a startling revelation if true, but it is not, since Alina Fernández told her mother Naty (Natalia) Revuelta that this was “the only lie in the book.” What apparently is true is that many of Cas-

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26 Interview with Jaime Sarusky, June 2000. Sarusky, a noted Cuban journalist and author, spoke directly with Revuelta.
tro's classmates called him _judío_, "Jew," because he had not been baptized by the age of seven. In popular Cuban usage, the word _judío_ was used to refer to a child who had not yet been baptized. It is certainly possible that this and other experiences made him sympathize with the plight of the Jews. In his discussions with Frei Betto, Castro talks about his memories of Holy Week:

Holy Week in the countryside— _I remember them from when I was very young_—were days of solemnity; there was great solemnity. What was said? That Christ died on Good Friday. You couldn't talk or joke or be happy, because Christ was dead and the Jews killed him every year. This is another case in which accusations or popular beliefs have caused tragedies and historic prejudices. I tell you, I didn't know what that term meant, and I thought, at first, that those birds called _judíos_ had killed Christ.

Whatever his motivations, Castro's attitude toward the Jews of Cuba after the revolution was remarkably positive. Instead of tarring the emigrating Jews with the taint of disloyalty, he expressed regret that so many Jews, who might have contributed much to the new Cuba, were leaving. James Rice, executive director of HIAS from 1956 to 1966, recalled that Castro asked the Israeli ambassador in Havana why Cuban Jews felt it necessary to emigrate, since he had nothing whatsoever against them and would have been happy to use their talents to develop the new socialist regime. Furthermore, David Kopilow has noted that the revolutionary government classified Cuban Jews going to Israel as _repatriados_, repatriated ones, rather than _gusanos_, worms, which is what other emigrants were called.

Despite the small number of Jews left in the country, Judaism continued to be a subject of great interest in Castro's Cuba. The regime found numerous ways to use Jewish subjects in creative ways consistent with its ideological program. The government-controlled media lavished attention on Jewish holidays and cultural events: Passover was portrayed as a celebration of the "national liberation" of the Jews, and other holidays were likewise given a "Fidelistic" interpretation.

Of course the country had many problems, and Cuban Jews suffered along with the rest of the population. On the most basic level, living in Communist Cuba meant adapting to a lower standard of living than before. Nevertheless, those affiliated with the Jewish community enjoyed

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certain benefits. Kosher butchers were among the few private businesses not nationalized by the government. There was a widely held perception that Jews were allowed additional meat and poultry to compensate for the fact that they did not eat pork. Moisés Baldás, head of the community from 1961 through 1978, believed that the Cuban authorities thought that Jews had to have kosher meat in order to comply with the Jewish religion; that is, that Judaism required the eating of meat. The government allowed a kosher restaurant to stay open in Havana, and Radio Havana continued to broadcast Communist propaganda in Yiddish even after other foreign-language radio programs were banned.

Aiding the Emigrants

When Cubans started fleeing Cuba, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW)—the government department with authority over resettlement assistance—asked the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to establish an office in the Miami area. The government hoped that HIAS, along with other refugee agencies, could help provide assistance to the large number of Cubans streaming into the country. And since, at the beginning of the exodus, many Cubans fled by small boats not only to the United States but also to islands in the Caribbean, HIAS set up a network of offices there as well to help Jewish communities deal with the influx.

Not all families left Cuba together: in the early 1960s, 14,048 children were sent out of Cuba without their parents. In December 1960 the American government held discussions about how to handle the possible arrival of large numbers of minors with no chaperones, and, on January 9, 1961, the U.S. Department of State granted Father Bryan O. Walsh the authority to grant a visa waiver to any child aged 6–16 entering the country under the guardianship of the Catholic Diocese of Miami. Reporter Gene Miller later dubbed the program Operation Pedro Pan, and the name stuck. Because the diocese coordinated the program, the perception developed that only Catholic children were taken care of in this manner. Actually the same provisions were also made with Protestant and Jewish agencies. In fact there were two separate operations. One, Oper-

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31 Correspondence with Margalit Bejarano, Apr. 2001. Bejarano conducted 20 hours of interviews with Baldás shortly after he left Cuba. Tapes of the interviews, in Hebrew, are in the Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.


ation Pedro Pan, was a semi-clandestine program to help children leave Cuba for the United States. The other was the Cuban Children's Program, which was a social service designed primarily to care for Cuban children who were in the United States without parents or other close relatives. HIAS was involved in Operation Pedro Pan, helping 28 Jewish children get out of Cuba, and the Jewish Family and Children Services participated in the Cuban Children's Program, assisting 117 children whose parents were not with them (the Catholic Welfare Bureau assisted 7,041 such children).

Marcos Kerbel, a former president of Miami's Cuban Hebrew Congregation, was one of the children who got out of Cuba through HIAS. Kerbel’s family had a clothing store in Guanabacoa, which they had developed into a thriving business over 30 years. Understandably reluctant to emigrate and leave behind all they had worked for, the Kerbels did not think the revolution would last, assuming, as did many others, that the United States would invade and overthrow Castro. Marcos Kerbel recalled:

In the summer of 1960 things began to get a little bit tight in Cuba, and some of my friends started leaving. We used to meet on Sundays at the Patronato and we had what was known as a bar mitzvah club. There was concern at the time that the laws would be changed, what was known as the patria potestas, which means that the state would have total control over the kids. And there were rumors that anybody between the ages of 14 and 27 wouldn’t be able to leave Cuba after that, even if they went into the service. They were in the process of drafting; meanwhile they wanted the kids, right after the first day of the school year, to go into the mountains to teach the peasants there how to read and write. That scared a lot of the parents, especially of the girls, because they felt that once the girls started going up into the mountains there that they were going to be coming back pregnant.

At first Kerbel found even his relatives unwilling to talk about their contacts with HIAS, but eventually they put him in touch with the local representative:

So the whole [emigration] movement started. I was not aware of the Catholic group [Operation Pedro Pan] until I arrived here, but there was a contact of HIAS in Havana, and I started checking how to get out. I did not have a passport at the time or a visa. I had found out at one of the Sundays that some

Yvonne M. Conde, a Pedro Pan child who left Cuba at the age of ten and now lives in New York, has written a sympathetic account, Operation Pedro Pan: The Untold Exodus of 14,048 Cuban Children (New York and London, 1999). In contrast, two Cuban writers have published a book that portrays the operation as part of an American “psychological war” against Cuba. See Ramón Torreira Crespo and José Buajesán Marrawi, Operación Peter Pan: Un Caso de Guerra Psicológica Contra Cuba (Havana, 2000). Conde's book uses the name “Pedro” Pan to signify that this was an operation done to save Cubans, while Crespo and Marrawi use “Peter” Pan to show that this was an anti-Cuban American operation.
cousins of mine were leaving, and I said, "how are you leaving? I know you
don't have a passport and you don't have a visa." So at first there was such
a hush-hush thing that even the kids' grandmother, who was my father's
sister-in-law, said, "I don't know anything." Finally I went to my godfather,
and I said, "What's going on here? Why are they leaving, how are they leav-
ing?" So he put me in touch with somebody who was the contact from HIAS,
telling him that I wanted to go.36

Fourteen-year-old Marcos was sent to Los Angeles, where he was
placed under the supervision of Vista del Mar Child Care, a Jewish or-
phanage. He was then sent to live with a strictly Orthodox family, but he
found the adjustment difficult. In June 1962 his uncles arrived in Miami
from Cuba, and Marcos went to live with them. His parents came on Oc-
tober 19, 1962, on the next-to-the-last Pan Am flight before the Cuban
missile crisis stopped all flights until 1965. In January 1963, the entire
family moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Marcos lived in Atlanta through his
college years, after which he settled in Miami.

Communal Impact

As Jewish emigration rose over the course of the early 1960s, the im-
 pact was felt even more strongly in the provinces than in Havana. Even
though a lower percentage of those from outside Havana emigrated,
many of those who remained in the country gravitated to the capital, de-
stroying the smaller communities. By December 1965 more than 90 per-
cent of the Cuban Jewish community had left, and of the roughly 2,300
who remained, 1,900 lived in Havana.

For almost 30 years, religious matters in Castro's Cuba have been
largely in the hands of Dr. José Felipe Carneado, director of the De-
partment of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Cuban
Communist Party. Carneado, a strong supporter of the revolution and
at the same time possessing a "deep respect" for popular Cuban tradi-
tion and beliefs, operated on the principle that religious groups that co-
operated with the government should be protected by the regime, and
Jews considered him a friend.37

Religious activities continued. All five synagogues in Havana held
weekly Sabbath services and most held services during the week as well.
Because of the difficulty of achieving a minyan (the quorum of ten re-
quired for group prayer) in Havana, it became customary to count Torahs
scrolls as part of a minyan—if there were only eight people, two Torahs

36Interview with Marcos Kerbel, July 2000.
37Margalit Bejarano, "The Jewish Community of Cuba: Between Continuity and Ex-
would be counted. The number of Torahs needed tended to increase, until a minyan might have as few as five breathing people. Jacob Kovadloff, the American Jewish Committee's consultant on Latin America, reports that the expression "having a Cuban-style minyan" has become common in several other Latin American countries as well. In 1961 there were 19 bar mitzvahs and 50 Jewish weddings in Havana up until Rosh Hashanah. But as emigration swelled thereafter, such occasions became few and far between. Until the revival of the early 1990s, the last bar mitzvah was celebrated in Havana in 1973, and the last Jewish wedding in 1976.

The congregation that suffered the smallest short-term decline in members was Adath Israel. This Orthodox Ashkenazi synagogue had approximately 800 members and, at least in the early 1960s, seemed to have survived the emigration rush. Adath Israel was the most traditional of all the congregations. Rabbi Everett Gendler, who visited in 1969, gave a description:

Maintaining a daily minyan morning and evening, it has curtained sections at either side of the main floor for the women worshipers. Yom Kippur morning there were some 250 people present, and before the Torah reading the devout davening [prayer service] was led by two older members of the congregation whose mastery of both the traditional nusach [melody] and the "oy vey" was quite moving.

The community shohet (ritual slaughterer), a man in his eighties, executed the Torah reading with great accuracy. Although many of the congregants were elderly, there were also eight to ten congregants in their late teens and early twenties, as well as a number of young children. Of course, Adath Israel too would eventually suffer the same diminution of numbers that the other congregations faced.

The congregation that suffered the most precipitous loss of members was the United Hebrew Congregation, which was Reform. The revolution caught United Hebrew in the midst of plans to build a new, larger temple on Fifth Avenue in Miramar. But most of the members, American Jews living in Cuba, left the country within a year of the revolution, and plans for the building were scrapped. Rose Granison, the widow of Rabbi Abram Granison, who served the congregation during the early 1950s, said, "When Castro came into power, everybody ran. He was not inviting people to stay. It was a very scary scene."

41Interview with Rose Granison, May 2000.
With the loss of the American Jews, who were the founders and still constituted the bulk of the membership, there was every reason to believe that the congregation would fold. However a number of dedicated Cuban Jewish families, led by Isidore Stettner, managed to keep the services going. Rabbi Everett Gendler also visited this congregation in 1969:

Temple Beth Israel, situated in a fine old converted mansion on a broad palm-lined boulevard of Vedado, is often referred to as the American congregation, even though the majority of its present members are not from the United States. They attend because it offers the only liberal service in Habana today. Established some sixty years ago through the merger of two groups, it uses the Union Prayer Book, gives page announcements in Spanish, carries on the services in Hebrew and English, and has a full Torah reading following the annual cycle. Men and women sit together, kippot [skull-caps] are used, and services are held Shabbat mornings and both days of the Festivals.

Gendler reported that the congregation had about 30 members, most of them in their fifties and sixties, and, he noted, “one senses both present dignity and sad recollections of a more vigorous and numerous community life in days past.”

In 1981, after Stettner’s death, the congregation ceased operating, but it survived as a legal entity. This was because the United Hebrew Congregation was the official proprietor of the Jewish cemetery, and, as Margalit Bejarano of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem explains, “in Cuba, as in other Communist countries, you exist if you exist on paper—not necessarily in real life.” Adath Israel took over the cemetery book and the congregational records.

The Patronato remained the most important Jewish institution in Habana. Herman Heisler, an immigrant from Lithuania, is credited with the original idea of building a community center in the thriving seaside suburb of Vedado. He was president of the Patronato Association, saw the project through to completion in the 1950s, and then served as president of the community center and synagogue until his emigration in the early 1960s. Once Heisler left, though, the Patronato went through a period of uncertainty, with several presidents serving for very brief periods. Finally, the election of Moises Baldás as president brought stability, and Baldás became the undisputed chief of the Havana Jewish community: “Everyone knew that if you needed to talk with the Jewish community, you went to Baldás.” By the mid-1960s, though, most of the members had emigrated. Everett Gendler described what he saw in 1969:

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43 Correspondence with Margalit Bejarano, Apr. 2001.
44 Interview with Adela Dworin, June 2000.
[The congregation] has a large building some fifteen years old, with synagoge, auditorium, dining hall, kosher kitchen, library, music room, game rooms. Ashkenazic-traditional in orientation, it had perhaps 250 worshipers occupying its one thousand seats on Rosh Hashanah, with the Consul of Israel also in attendance and seated on the bimah [platform]. The service is led by knowledgeable laymen, and certain of the old stratifications persist: one man, for example, introduces himself to me as the "gabbai sheni"!  

Over the course of the next few decades, the Patronato’s roof began leaking and the building became riddled with termites. Skeletal remains of dead birds that had fallen from nests in the rafters lay on the floor of the main sanctuary. According to one estimate made in the late 1980s, the building needed $50,000 just for basic repairs. The congregational leadership felt it would be prudent to remove the Torah scrolls from the ark to prevent damage to them. The Patronato, suffering severe budgetary problems, sold a part of the community-center section of the building to the government in 1981.

The Sephardi Jews of Havana also suffered a dramatic depletion of numbers. Chevet Achim, now defunct, was still an active congregation when Gendler visited:

A large converted house serves as the setting for an energetic, vigorous and highly vocal Sephardic service quite winning in its wild way. Women were seated separately, above and behind the men, with a total attendance of perhaps seventy-five people, including some youths. Various male members of the congregation ascended the bimah to shout out verses from the Yom Kippur piyuttim [liturgical poems], the rest of the congregation responding with resounding counter-shouts. One old member of the congregation was in general charge of the davening and led the duchaning [priestly benediction] as well, and here as elsewhere one saw an entirely lay-directed service of some power and conviction.

The congregation was located in old Havana, and Sephardim who had moved to the suburbs generally preferred to attend the Centro Sefaradi, where about 150 worshipers came to services on Rosh Hashanah. As the two Sephardi congregations lost more and more members, there was talk of merging Chevet Achim and the Centro Sefaradi, and this was slowly accomplished over several years. Eventually one service was held, alternating between the two buildings.

Of the five Jewish elementary schools and one high school that had existed when the community was at its peak, by the time the government took control of the country’s entire educational system, in June 1961, only

the Colegio Hebreo, an elementary school, was still in operation. But it was on the verge of collapse since many Cuban Jewish parents had begun sending their children to the United States through HIAS. After discussions with the authorities, an arrangement was reached whereby the school would be taken over by the government and function as a quasi-Jewish public school. Its student body would be mostly Jewish, and while Judaic subjects would not be part of the curriculum, the Jewish community was allowed to operate a religious school in the building for 90 minutes every afternoon, after the completion of the regular school day. Thus students attending the school could remain in the building after school for religious studies without having to be transported elsewhere, and Jewish children attending other public schools in the city could join them after school.

In 1965, Ben G. Kayfetz of Toronto, a Canadian Jewish Congress staff member, visited Cuba. Having paid an earlier visit in 1962, Kayfetz was in a position to make comparisons. The title of his report, “Cuban Jewry—A Community in Dissolution,” told it all. The remnants of Cuban Jewry, Kayfetz noted, was a “community of ex-’s.” They included ex-comereiantes, ex-fabricantes, “ex-this, and ex-that.” Kayfetz reported that in the old city of Havana, where “hundreds upon hundreds of small shops were huddled next to each other, strung together for miles along narrow sixteenth-century streets,” there were now “far more metal graded shutters covering closed up shops than there are open places of business.” Kayfetz observed, “The traveler, even when he does not speak to Cubans, can feel soon enough that he is in a Revolutionary state of the Marxist stripe.” Kayfetz wrote that “propaganda messages are to be found on all placards and billboards—commercial messages of sales appeal are now obsolete.” Freedom of speech “in the North American and West European sense” was unknown, and the newspapers featured a constant supply of Fidel’s speeches. Signs on every city block announced the existence of the local unit of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR).48

And yet Cuba was the only country in the Communist orbit that continued to permit the existence of a Zionist organization, the Unión Sionista. Kayfetz noticed that right next door to it was the Sociedad Club Arabe (Arab Social Club), which had a large poster of Egyptian president Nasser on the door. Local Jews assured the Canadian visitor that Jews and Arabs got along “quite cordially” in Cuba. Kayfetz noted the termination of large-scale Jewish fund-raising “because of currency reg-

ulations." Previously, the Cuban Jewish community had raised generous sums of money for Histadrut, Youth Aliyah, the Hebrew University, and, in particular, Keren Hayesod. There was such a shortage of money that rumors circulated in Mexico that the Patronato had to sell some of its synagogue benches in order to pay its bills. Vehemently denying this, Patronato board members said that the benches were sold because the decline in members made them unnecessary. Kayfetz wrote that the Jewish community had "been destroyed" but it was "destroyed without any prior or deliberate intention, for no person I spoke to had any complaints as Jews against the Revolutionary government, all acknowledging its fairness and objectivity in dealing with Jewish communal and religious affairs."49

There was only one advantage to the community's drastic reduction in numbers: it was more unified than before. A coordinating committee of all five Havana congregations met every other week, the sites of the meetings alternating between the different synagogues.

Communal Leaders Who Remained

Although most of the Cuban Jewish community's leaders emigrated in the years immediately following the revolution, there were those who stayed to guarantee that the community would at least survive, if not flourish. The key figure was Moisés Baldás, mentioned earlier in connection with his leadership of the Patronato. Baldás, who had a Polish yeshivah background as well as a good secular education and spoke a fluent Hebrew, had come to Cuba in the 1920s as a young man. By 1959 he was a successful businessman and the owner of a seven-story building in the center of Havana that housed a supermarket as well as apartments and his own private penthouse. A 60-year-old widower when the revolution took place, he was known as "Mr. Zionism" of Cuba. The Castro regime nationalized his building but compensated him with a pension and permitted him to retain his penthouse.

Baldás turned his energies to the community, taking a personal interest in every aspect of its affairs, particularly education. Lavy Becker of the Canadian Jewish Congress, reporting on the situation in 1975, identified Baldás as the force behind the Hebrew school, all Zionist activities in the community, the youth choir, the training of new ritual slaughterers and the mohel, and the encouragement of young people to assume leadership roles. Many others have confirmed this perception. Since the government gave him clearance to attend a World Jewish Congress (WJC)

49Ibid., p. 3.
conference in Brussels and a World Zionist Organization (WZO) conference in Jerusalem, Baldás could simply have declined to return, and settled abroad. It was his strong commitment to, and sense of responsibility for, the Cuban Jewish community that kept him from doing this for many years. Becker wrote of Baldás, “because of his good judgment and able leadership, he has achieved the respect of his community and has been a major factor in maintaining a unified, well-balanced and hopeful Jewish community.”

After the government’s decision to break diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973 (see below, p. 52), Baldás’s strong identification with Zionism placed him in an uncomfortable position, and by the late 1970s he felt ready to leave Cuba and retire to Israel. Having made this decision, Baldás began grooming Dr. José Miller Fredman to succeed him as leader.

Miller was a successful maxillofacial surgeon who was born and raised in Yaguanjay, then part of Las Villas province and now part of Sancti Spiritus province. There were three Jewish families there when Miller was growing up, two Ashkenazi and one Sephardi. He told me that “there were some Presbyterians [and] some Baptists in my town, but the majority were Catholic. My family kept the tradition. We were Jews not only because we knew we were Jews but also because the goyim knew we were Jews. We had celebrations of the Jewish festivals among the three families that were there. There were seders every year.” Miller came to Havana in order to attend dental school, and stayed. His second wife, Dalia Gomez, converted to Judaism and became active in the community, serving on the Patronato board and working in the Patronato office. Miller told me that he was surprised when Baldás asked him to consider becoming the next president: “I became the leader of the Jewish community because they had no one else. I had no experience in community leadership—I was a doctor. But I learned.”

As part of his preparation to assume the presidency, Miller attended German classes so that he would be able to understand the Yiddish spoken by many of the old-timers on the board of the Patronato.

Miller was unusual in that he was a highly trained professional who nevertheless stayed after the revolution. “I stayed in the country because I enjoyed living here. Don’t remind me how much money I could have earned in America. I enjoyed living in Cuba very much, and for that reason I’m glad I stayed here. But we all make choices and we have to live with the good and the bad consequences of those choices.” Miller took over the presidency in 1978, and Baldás stayed for about a year and a half

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50 Becker, “Report on the Jewish Community of Cuba,” p. 8
51 Interview with José Miller Fredman, June 2000.
to help with the transition. He then flew to Canada and the United States before settling in Givatayim, Israel. The transition was carried out smoothly and Miller's leadership was accepted virtually unanimously. Miller has provided the Jewish community with strong and visionary leadership during a very difficult period. Margalit Bejarano explains that "the most important point in Miller's leadership is his good relationship with the authorities. He is a good diplomat, who knows how to move among the Cuban leaders, and thanks to his good contacts the community can survive." He was among the first to suggest programs and funding possibilities that have resulted in the remarkable regeneration of the Havana Jewish community.

Abraham Marcus Matterin, director of the Patronato library from its founding in 1953 until his death in 1983, was another important Jewish community leader. He was born in Lithuania in 1916 and arrived in Havana as a teenager. A self-educated journalist, Matterin wrote for Periodico: El Mundo, an influential Cuban newspaper, and was writer and editor for the Jewish periodicals Hebraica and Reflejos, both of which were published in the 1950s. He befriended Cuban writers, painters, intellectuals, and poets, founded the Cuban-American Cultural Association of Havana—an intellectual group that sponsored cultural activities and issued publications—and was regarded as a key bridge between the Jewish community and the broader Cuban society. Among his many friends were Juan Marinello, writer, intellectual, and prominent leader of the Communist Party; Luis Gómez Wangüemert, the editor of El Mundo; Fernando Ortiz, the most respected Cuban historian and anthropologist of his generation; and Nicolas Guillén, the Cuban national poet. Matterin stayed in Cuba because of the intellectually satisfying role he was able to play, even though he was not a member of the Communist Party.

José Dworin left his native Pinsk for Cuba in 1924 with the intention of going from there to the United States and then raising money to bring over his mother and siblings. But he never got to the United States, and in 1930 his mother and two brothers came to Cuba. After the revolution Dworin's clothing factory was nationalized and he made plans to leave the country, but his daughter Adela talked him out of it. He stayed and took a job working for the government. Dworin was one of the founders of the Anti-Tuberculosis Committee, which later expanded into the field of mental health, providing economic aid for Jews who were hospitalized in mental institutions; every Sunday, Dworin and his committee went to

52 Correspondence with Margalit Bejarano, Apr. 2001.
53 The Matterin papers, including most of the Patronato records, are in the archives of the Office of History of the City of Havana.
visit the patients. He was a member of the board of the Patronato until his death in 1971.

His daughter, Adela, was raised as a traditional Jew, and would come to be known as one of the most observant members of the Jewish community. She attended two Jewish day schools that existed in prerevolutionary Havana, the Tarbut School and the Yavneh Institute. At the same time she was active in Hashomer Hatzair, a left-socialist Zionist youth movement, and participated in the youth organization of the Patronato. At the outbreak of the revolution Adela Dworin was a law student, but the University of Havana closed down for three years, and when it reopened the new revolutionary government wanted to decrease the number of law students. As a result, she did not return to the university and never completed her degree. In 1970, she began a long career in the Patronato library. Her responsibilities gradually expanded, especially after Abraham Matterín died.

"Petering Out" in the 1970s

Adela Dworin recalls that even after 1965 there was still a substantial amount of activity in the Jewish community. But from about 1970 onward, "there were really only elderly people coming in, and not very many of those." Lavy Becker, the Canadian Jewish Congress representative who visited Cuba a number of times during the decade, referred to "this once-flourishing community . . . now petering out." In 1975 Becker noted that "all five synagogues in Havana and one in Santiago still function, with regular services and social interaction before and after services." He did point out, however, that on any given Shabbat a total of only 70–80 people attended all of the Havana synagogues, and that these Jews were mostly elderly, almost all over the age of 70. The synagogues supported themselves through a combination of monthly membership dues, rental money they received from the government for the use of their auditoriums, and the sale of Passover products brought in with the help of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

The Havana community had an afternoon Hebrew school with an enrollment of 37 children between the ages of five and eleven, which, as noted above, operated in the "Jewish" public school five days a week for an hour-and-a-half a day. Those 37 students represented slightly more than 40 percent of the 90 children estimated to be in that age bracket in the Jewish community at the time. Not only did the government allow those children who had to come from other public schools to leave early so that they could get to Hebrew school on time, but it also granted the

54 Dworin interview.
Jews of Cuba Since the Castro Revolution

Jewish community the use of two small buses, as well as the necessary gas ration, to transport the children. This was a deviation from the norm in Cuba, where children typically went to the grade school nearest their homes, and therefore would not require bus transportation. Furthermore, Cuban schoolchildren would normally go home for lunch, but the Jewish children attending the “Jewish” school—who were in many cases much farther from home than other students—were provided a lunch by the government in the school building. Becker explained that “since the government nationalized this building [the former Jewish day school]... it may well be that the government considers these concessions a quid pro quo.”

Becker visited the school shortly before it closed. Just prior to the opening of the 1975-76 school year, the government sent Moisés Baldás a letter instructing him that Jewish children should now attend their neighborhood public schools.

Before the revolution, the Havana community had had very active Maccabi and Betar youth organizations. During the first years of the revolution both disappeared, due mainly to the emigration of their leaders and members. But in 1969, the Unión Sionista sponsored a new youth organization.

An important source of inspiration for the Havana Jewish community in the 1970s was its young-adult choral group, where, as Moisés Asís explained, “young people learned a lot of Israeli popular songs in Hebrew, patriotic marches in Hebrew and Yiddish, and traditional Jewish songs in Hebrew.” These activities inspired many young Cuban Jews, said Asís, “despite the strong anti-Israel, anti-Zionism, and anti-religion stand by the Cuban government in those critical years in which any religious believers were banned from universities and from many jobs.” Becker commented that “the level of their music may be low, the repertoire limited, but their joy is unbounded.” The group served an important social function. “This is a program without which these more than 20 young people would have hardly any contact with anything Jewish,” Becker noted.

Led by a violinist who was employed in a restaurant orchestra, the choral group performed on holidays such as Hanukkah, Purim, and Israeli Independence Day, as well as at more solemn occasions, such as a program to commemorate the fall of the Warsaw Ghetto.

It was through this choir that the community found a schoolteacher for its afternoon school—Miss Mercedes Villapol, a Catholic from Spain who would eventually convert to Judaism in Havana. Moisés Baldás encouraged her to join the choral group, where she learned Hebrew and Yid-

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57 Correspondence with Moisés Asís, Mar. 2001.
dish melodies by rote. She later began to study in the adult Hebrew classes, and was then persuaded to take over the teaching of the children. Becker commented, "her whole life these last four to five years is related to Jews and Judaism. It will surprise no one to learn that she now has a strong desire to become a Jewess."^{59}

The government was very generous to the Jewish community in the allocation of meat. In 1975 each Cuban was entitled to three-fourths of a pound of meat every nine days. The government regulated the slaughter of animals and the packaging of meat for sale in government butcher shops so as to maintain equal rationing for all. But the government made special arrangements to enable the Jewish community to prepare kosher meat: the two *shohetim* were permitted the use of one of the abattoirs, and the two kosher butchers were authorized to package the kosher meat.

Before the 1959 revolution, the Cuban Jewish community, like most others in South America, was strongly Zionist, but the interest in Israel and commitment to it gradually lessened over the following decades. The three most important reasons were that the vast majority of the most committed Zionists had left the country; the relationship between Cuba and the State of Israel had deteriorated; and the acceleration of intermarriage meant that even in cases where the intermarried couple affiliated with the Jewish community, the non-Jewish partner had only a weak sense of Jewish peoplehood, and no historical or familial ties with Israel. Interestingly, even though Castro suddenly broke diplomatic relations with Israel in September 1973, his government allowed the Unión Sionista to continue to function, and granted formal permission to hold large public celebrations of Israeli Independence Day in 1974 and 1975. Unión Sionista even remained in operation for three years after the 1975 United Nations "Zionism is Racism" resolution, which Cuba supported. Baldas believed that the authorities were simply unaware that such an organization was still functioning, and when the continued existence of the Unión Sionista came to their attention, they ordered it closed.^{60}

B'nai B'rith Maimonides Lodge also continued to function even though the American Jews who had created the organization had long since left the country. Becker was encouraged by the fact that a relatively young man had succeeded Miller as president of B'nai B'rith. He was a 37-year-old accountant named Luis Szklarz, the head of the department of ferrous and non-ferrous metals and oil in the government foreign-trade office. Another sign that younger people sought identification with the Jewish community was that, in addition to the choral group, about 30

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^{59}Ibid., p. 3.

^{60}Correspondence with Margalit Bejarano, July 2001.
young married people and singles met regularly under the auspices of the Juventud Hebra de Cuba.

The handful of ordained rabbis in Cuba had all left the community years earlier. One of them, Nissim Gambach, lives in Miami Beach to this day.61 There were a number of non-ordained ritual functionaries in the Sephardi community who continued to serve into the early 1980s. These included José Pinto, who was born in Jerusalem and died in Havana in 1984. According to his son, who still lives in Havana, he ministered to the Sephardi community at both Chevet Achim and Centro Sefaradi until 1982.62 Solomon Sussi, born in Turkey, also served the Cuban community until his death in 1986. In the mid-1970s, Baldás hired Isaac Chammah, a learned Jew born in Syria, to teach Torah reading and synagogue skills to Moisés Asis and Jacobo Epelbaum. Epelbaum served as community mohel for a number of years until his emigration in 1979. Asis led services at the Patronato on Friday nights from the mid-1980s until his emigration in 1993. A number of elderly congregants also played key roles in keeping the services running. Of particular note was Jacobo Peretz, who was important for the survival of Chevet Ahim: he ran a bar on the first floor of the synagogue building, the revenues helping maintain the congregation.

Shrinkage of the community meant a shortage of Jewish marriage partners, and the intermarriage rate rose. Since Jewish families had to register for the purchase of Passover products, there are data on intermarriage for March and April 1975. In Havana, there were 430 families containing at least one Jewish member. Of this total, 308 had both spouses Jewish and 122 were composed of intermarried couples. In 26 other locations in Cuba there were a total of 113 Jewish families, of which 53 had two Jewish partners and 60 were intermarried. Thus, of the total of 543 families recorded in this census, 361 consisted of two Jewish partners and 192 were intermarried. The intermarriage rate was much higher—over 50 percent—outside of Havana than in the city, where it was below 30 percent.63

Many of those who identified as Jews were only partly Jewish by parentage. Of the 1,041 individuals affiliated with the Havana Jewish commu-

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62Interview with Alberto Pinto, June 2000.
63The numbers of intermarried individuals varied not only between Havana and the rest of the country, but also between males and females. In Havana, 362 males were of two Jewish parents, whereas 309 females were; 132 men were of mixed parentage whereas 94 were; 46 men were non-Jewish whereas 98 females were. This last number indicates that twice as many Jewish men were married to non-Jewish women as Jewish women were married to non-Jewish men. In the 26 other locations the percentages were even more skewed, with more than three times as many Jewish men married to non-Jewish women as the reverse.
nity, 671 had two Jewish parents, 226 were born of mixed marriages, and 144 were of non-Jewish parentage. The total number of Jews for the rest of the country was 352, 173 of whom had two Jewish parents, 113 were of mixed parentage, and 66 were of non-Jewish parentage. Thus of the total number of 1,393 individuals counted in the census, 844 had two Jewish parents, 339 were of mixed parentage, and 210 had no Jewish parents.

Virtually all of those categorized as without Jewish parentage were married to Jews; since they were part of a family that was receiving Passover supplies, they were seen as being affiliated with the community. Likewise, those of mixed parentage reported in this census were either married to Jews or felt a sufficient degree of Jewish identity to register for the Passover supplies. By 1975, community leaders were well aware of the substantial presence in the Jewish community of people of non-Jewish and mixed origins, many of whom had "shifting identities." They might at one point identify as Jews—such as during the Passover distribution of food—and at other times, such as visits to the non-Jewish side of their families on Christian holidays, identify as Cubans of Catholic background. A number of Jewish leaders suggested that a rabbi or a panel of rabbis visit Cuba to regularize their status, a step that would not be taken till the early 1990s. Meanwhile, these individuals were accepted on their own terms into the community, if they chose to participate. The Jewish population was so small that tolerance and acceptance had become central values. This marked a dramatic change from the more exclusionary attitudes of the 1950s and earlier, when the community had been much larger.

By the late 1970s the community had hit its low point. Bernardo Benes, the prominent Cuban Jew residing in the U.S. who functioned as President Carter’s unofficial emissary to Castro, had begun visiting regularly, and he did what he could to assist the local Jewish community. He recalls: "I was the first Cuban Jew to go back from Miami and meet with the leadership of the Cuban Jewish community, in 1978." The next year, when Benes had to fly in for a one-day meeting with Cuban authorities, he brought with him Rabbi Mayer Abramowitz, the rabbi of the Miami Cuban Jewish community. The first rabbi to set foot in the country in almost two decades, Abramowitz visited three of the Havana synagogues and performed a memorial service at the Jewish cemetery.

That same year, 1979, Rabbi Isidoro Aizenberg visited the country on behalf of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). Born in Argentina and having served a congregation in Caracas, Venezuela, Aizenberg went to each of the Havana synagogues and later described their low level of ac-

64Benes interview.
tivity. Though all five congregations held Sabbath services, and two—Adath Israel and Chevet Ahim—tried to keep up a daily minyan, “a minyan is [a] precious commodity.” The Patronato, which had the largest Sabbath service, could muster “over a dozen men and some women.” In the Centro Hebreo Sefaradi, Aizenberg and his wife encountered “several non-Jewish men and women, who, we were told, regularly and faithfully participate in the weekly Shabbat services.” The United Hebrew Congregation survived “thanks to the unshakable devotion of its elder statesman, Isidoro Stettner,” who “brings together a few people who pray for half an hour from the Union Prayer Book.”

All the congregations were dominated by the elderly, for three reasons. First, no one could be excused from work on religious grounds, and since Saturday morning was part of the workweek, only retired people could attend services without penalty. Second, as was the case elsewhere in Latin America, most Cuban Jews had never been inclined to attend services regularly, and “today’s conditions certainly do not encourage greater attendance.” Finally, there were few Jews who knew how to lead services or read the Torah, and those who could tended to be the very elderly. Sabbath services in all the synagogues were followed by a kiddush, which played a role “far beyond that of any such kiddush in Canada or the U.S.A.” For many of the 50–70 people attending services at the five synagogues, the food served—a roll with a slice of kosher canned meat, a hard-boiled egg, and a piece of pound cake—“represents a daily meal.” Services in Chevet Ahim and the United Hebrew Congregation were held in the main sanctuaries, which were relatively small and provided the only available spaces for prayer. The other three congregations conducted their services in their chapels, since “in reality, there is never—even during the High Holidays—a need to use the sanctuaries.”

Indeed, the congregations were all in the process of deciding how best to utilize their facilities. The Patronato arranged for a government-sponsored theater group to rent its central hall, and, in 1981, the government purchased this part of the building. At the time of Aizenberg’s visit, the Patronato’s officers were in the middle of a debate over whether to rent out the fully equipped kitchen and large “mirror hall,” which had served kosher meals. By 1979, this meal service was no longer operating and the government’s restaurant administration was interested in renting out the space. The officers faced a dilemma. On one hand, they did not use the space and did not need it. On the other hand, they had already rented out a large portion of the building, and turning over an additional

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segment appeared to signify a further step toward the community's demise.

Aizenberg's visit came shortly before the Sixth Conference of Non-aligned Nations, which Cuba was hosting in Havana, and the city was already plastered with slogans, one of which was "contra el sionismo," against Zionism. When the government ordered the closing of the Jewish community's Unión Sionista in June 1978—the only Jewish institution ever confiscated by the authorities, in marked contrast to the government's willingness to allow dwindling congregations to retain large synagogue buildings—the structure was turned over to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), in an obvious attempt to demonstrate Cuban hostility to Zionism and the State of Israel.66

Aizenberg concluded, "During our two-week stay in Havana we witnessed the slow death of a Jewish community. Given the Jewish experience under other Communist regimes, there is little or no hope of reversing this process. Jewish destiny has always been havrutah o mitutah, fellowship or death, and there cannot be such fellowship in today's Havana."67

Many Cuban Jews apparently agreed, for when an opportunity came to leave the country—the Mariel boatlift—a substantial number seized it. In 1980 a group of 12 Cubans charged into the Peruvian embassy in Havana seeking asylum and safe exit from the country. A Cuban guard was killed in the course of the incident. In response to the Peruvian government's refusal to eject the occupants, Castro withdrew the Cuban military guards from outside the embassy. Word spread quickly that the Peruvian embassy was now unguarded, and within 24 hours more than 10,000 Cubans rushed into the embassy. Concerned about the widespread media coverage of the event and anxious to defuse what could be a catastrophic situation, Castro announced that any Cuban who would like to leave the country was free to do so. This caused great excitement in Florida's Cuban community, where plans were immediately made to bring relatives and loved ones from Cuba. American boats sped to pick up the thousands of Cubans who chose to emigrate. About 125,000 eventually left, most from the port of Mariel west of Havana, among them some 400 Jews. Those Cubans who reached the United States between April 1980 and September 1981 as part of this boatlift were called marielitos. Castro also used the Mariel boatlift as an opportunity to free himself of some of the most disaffected citizens of the country, releasing criminals from prison, as well as letting out psychiatric cases and other "antisocial" elements, and allowing them to emigrate to the U.S.

Some stigma attached to all the marielitos, and not only because of the association with Cuban misfits. Rosa Levy, a Jew who left Cuba at this time, forbade her children to tell people how and when they got out of Cuba. Levy believed—not without reason—that marielito was a label to be avoided at all costs, explaining: "I have been mentioned [in the community as a possible Communist]. While I was arriving here, the moment that I arrived, they, the first ones [1960 emigrants], mentioned that. It's like you came late because you were a Communist."

But the boatlift was an overwhelmingly positive experience for most participants. Whatever the underlying tensions, Jewish arrivals were greeted by Jewish Cuban Americans and assisted by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation's Resettlement Task Force and HIAS. With the emigration of the Jewish marielitos it was believed that the Jewish population of Cuba (not counting part-Jews or those who had disaffiliated) was now below 800, consisting mostly of the elderly and the hard-core supporters of the regime.

Attempts at Revitalization in the 1980s

Jacob Kovadloff, the American Jewish Committee’s specialist on Latin American affairs, visited Cuba in 1981, 1983, and 1985. On his first visit he found that about 300 Havana Jews were affiliated with one or another of the four synagogues left in the city. However, 831 people registered for kosher-for-Passover meals, which were sent into the country free of charge by the CJC and sold for a small fee by the local Jewish communities. Kovadloff agreed with earlier visitors that "Cuban Jews actually enjoy certain special privileges, such as being able to obtain the special Passover meals, year-round kosher meat and chicken, and fish for Rosh Hashanah and Passover, as well as additional potatoes. Religious services are permitted; but for cultural meetings the community must receive authorization, and this is frequently denied."

Cuban Jews, fearful of spies, would only talk to Kovadloff in private. Nevertheless, one Cuban Jewish leader who preferred to remain anonymous told him, "twenty years after the revolution, we cannot say we are disappearing because of anti-Semitism. Rather, we are disappearing because of attrition." This attrition was particularly severe in the interior of the country. Three months before Kovadloff’s arrival in 1981, the synagogue in Santiago de Cuba closed due to lack of attendance. Its four

68 Bettinger-López, Cuban-Jewish Journeys, pp. 88–90.
69 Interview with Jacob Kovadloff, June 2000.
70 Memo from Jacob Kovadloff to Abraham Karlikow, Apr. 17, 1981, p. 1, American Jewish Committee Archives.
Torah scrolls had been brought to Havana, and community leaders asked Kovadloff to take them to the United States. Government approval was arranged and two of the scrolls were sent to congregations in Miami, one went to Puerto Rico, and one to Israel. The government "is anxious to prove that Cuba is not anti-Semitic, which is true," Kovadloff reported. However, he noted, Jews felt enormous pressure because of the government's anti-Zionism.

José Miller made a number of attempts to interest individual Jews and Jewish organizations outside the country in the Cuban Jewish community. As early as 1985 he proposed that a religious leader be sent from abroad to encourage young Jews to involve themselves in the Jewish community. He told Edgar Strauss, a visiting Canadian, that the community in Cuba was dying for lack of young leaders to replace the older people. The time was right for outside help, since the Cuban government was in the process of changing its religious policies, and Catholic and Protestant groups were rebuilding their communities. Strauss, the Canadian visitor, suggested, "in view of the make up of the Jewish community in Cuba, the rabbi or religious leader going there should not be Orthodox. Too many of the young people are from mixed marriages and uncertain background."\(^{71}\) Alan Rose of the CJC was skeptical, responding, "it will be difficult indeed to find a religious leader to spend time in Cuba, although such a person would be performing a mitzvah."\(^{72}\) (Two years earlier, when Jacob Luski, a Conservative rabbi in St. Petersburg, Florida, who had been born in Havana and lived there with his family until leaving for the United States in 1960, sought to volunteer his services to the Cuban Jewish community, Rose had advised that "it would be a great mitzvah to visit Cuba as a tourist" and do some religious visitations on an unofficial basis. Luski never made it to Cuba, but still hopes to do so.\(^{73}\)

Another impediment to assisting the Cuban Jews was political sentiment in the United States, especially in the Miami area, that entailed "labeling Cubans who have remained in revolutionary Cuba as Communists, Castro-lovers, and traitors to the 'real' Cuba, the Cuba of the past."\(^{74}\) Eddie Levy, the director of Jewish Solidarity, a Miami-based assistance program that helps Cuban Jews, explained, "the people who normally would have been in charge of helping the community there would have

\(^{72}\) Alan Rose to Edgar Strauss, Mar. 26, 1985, ibid.  
\(^{74}\) Bettinger-López, Cuban-Jewish Journeys, p. xl.
been the Cuban Jews that lived in the United States, and for political rea-
sons they have kept apart from doing that, because they were afraid of
the reaction that they would have had from the more reactionary elements
in South Florida.” One woman, a prominent Cuban Jew in the Miami
area, told Levy, “Those Jews had a chance to go when I went, and they
chose to stay behind. As far as I care they could all die of hunger.”

Marcus Kerbel served in a number of capacities for both of the
“Cuban” congregations in Miami. During his time as president of the
Cuban Hebrew Congregation in Miami Beach, Kerbel, too, found great
reluctance on the part of the Jewish Cubans in Miami to help those still
in Cuba live more comfortably there or to come to the United States.
While one reason was the fear of bomb threats from the militants, an-
other concern was that new waves of immigrants would place financial
pressures on the existing congregations. “None of the congregations re-
ceived the Cubans too warmly,” recalled Kerbel. “Part of it was they
couldn’t figure out why there were Jews in Cuba, and, number two, they
put a budget strain on those congregations. I was treasurer of Temple
Beth Moshe [in North Miami], an American congregation, and they look
to the budget.”

Despite the many obstacles, there were some promising developments
in the 1980s. After years of discouraging tourism, the government shifted
policy and began welcoming tourists. Many Jews came to visit, mostly from
elsewhere in Latin America, and they frequently made contact with the
local Jewish community. A number of foreign Jewish communities made
specific donations that helped to set the stage for the revitalization of the
community, such as the gift of la gauguita, a minibus, from the Jewish com-

Cuban-Israeli Relations and the Cuban Jewish Community

Cuba adopted an aggressive anti-Israel policy after the Six-Day War
of 1967 and especially after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This position
gradually softened over the years till the outbreak of sustained conflict
between the Palestinians and Israelis in 2000 undermined much of the
quiet progress that had been made.

The State of Israel began assisting the Cuban Communist government

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75 Interview with Eddie Levy, June 2000.
76 Kerbel interview.
in the early 1960s, with Israeli scientists and engineers providing technical help in a number of areas. For example, farming specialists from kibbutzim affiliated with the left-wing socialist Hashomer Hatzair movement helped Cuba develop its agricultural sector. In addition, several private Israeli companies conducted business in Cuba. Even after the break in diplomatic relations an unofficial relationship between some Israeli business concerns and the Cuban government has continued and even intensified, in marked contrast to the official hostility between the two governments.

In 1966, Cuba invited members of the PLO and other Palestinian military organizations to come to Cuba for advanced training. This set the stage for Yasir Arafat, George Habash, and other Palestinian leaders to pay official visits to Havana. Castro was eager to extend Cuba's military and political influence in the Arab world beyond the Palestinians to Libya, Algeria, Syria, South Yemen, and elsewhere. There have been numerous reliable reports that Cuban military advisors helped train Spanish Basque fighters on Libyan soil, Polisario guerillas fighting against the Moroccan government in Algerian territory, and Communist government troops in South Yemen.

The outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967 came as the culmination of several weeks of growing political tension; Israel's Arab neighbors threatened to destroy the Jewish state, and Israel's preemptive strike in response to those threats was as remarkable as it was decisive. For Fidel Castro, the war offered an opportunity to fulfill his aspiration of playing a leading role among the nonaligned nations by supporting the Arab countries, which were part of the so-called third world. Furthermore, Israel was closely allied with the United States, and supporting the Arab cause would be another way of opposing American interests. Nevertheless, Castro hesitated. He had always maintained good relations with the Cuban Jewish community, and up until this point Cuban foreign policy had been generally sympathetic toward the State of Israel. The Soviet Union had broken diplomatic relations with the Jewish state in the aftermath of the war, which further complicated matters. Had Cuba done the same, it would have appeared as if Castro was mimicking the Soviet line. Therefore, he avoided taking these steps immediately, but instead, while condemning what the Arab side referred to as "Israeli aggression," he placed the bulk of the blame on "American imperialism." Castro did not break diplomatic relations with Israel, and he criticized the Arab countries for their political and military failures.

To be sure, on June 23, 1967, Ricardo Alarcón Quesada, the Cuban ambassador to the UN, gave an incendiary speech criticizing the State of Israel in very strong terms. Alarcón argued that Israel had committed
"armed aggression against the Arab peoples." Even more upsetting from a Jewish point of view, Alarcón described the Israeli preemptive strike as a "surprise attack, in the Nazi manner." Further, he opposed Israel's seeming ambition to annex the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Sinai Desert, "occupied by force of arms." This was the first time that any Cuban ambassador to the UN had condemned Israel in such unequivocal terms.

Alarcón, however, began his speech by declaring Cuba's opposition to any form of prejudice and stating that the Jews as well as the Palestinians deserved peace and justice. The diplomat argued that Cuba "as a matter of principle, [is] opposed to every manifestation of religious, national, or racial prejudice, from whatever source, and also objects to any political proclamation which advocates the destruction of any people or State. This principle is applicable to the Palestinian people . . . unjustly deprived of its territory, as well as the Jewish people, which for two thousand years has suffered racial prejudice and persecution, and during the recent Nazi period, one of the most cruel attempts at mass extermination." Consistent with Castro's own determination, Alarcón put the lion's share of the responsibility on "North American imperialism." "Our position with respect to the State of Israel is determined by [its] aggressive conduct . . . as an instrument of imperialism against the Arab world . . . it is in the context of the global strategy of imperialism that the true meaning . . . of the aggression . . . is revealed . . . The criminal war unleashed by the imperialist government of the United States against the people of Vietnam, with absolute impunity, demonstrates this affirmation, if the experience of Korea, the Congo, and Santo Domingo . . . are not sufficient proof." The Soviet Union had broken diplomatic relations with Israel; all of the Eastern European Communist countries, except for Romania, had done likewise. But Castro's foreign policy priorities were different from those of the Soviet Union: while the Soviet Union felt it was essential to maintain a dialogue with the United States, Castro wanted to stress what he believed to be the American role in the development of conflict throughout the world. Castro had a complex relationship with the Soviet Union. On one hand, he was a close ally, while on the other, he at-

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Cuban diplomats sarcastically called the Soviets "big tailors" because they were "taking measures," trying to look like they were doing things when they actually were doing nothing. In contrast, the revolutionary Cubans prided themselves on being doers.
tempted to maintain as much independence from the USSR as possible. As Susan Eckstein puts it, "Shaped by the Cold War, Castro never became a complete pawn of Moscow . . . he on occasion implemented policies at odds with Moscow's and he manipulated Cold War politics to his country's advantage."\(^81\)

In the years following the Six-Day War, Castro consistently refused to break diplomatic relations with Israel. But a few days before the Yom Kippur War in 1973, he succumbed to pressure. At this point, Castro was the leader of the pro-Soviet element among the third-world countries. In Algeria to participate in a conference of nonaligned nations, Castro was looking forward to refuting the idea, supported by the Chinese, that there were two imperialisms threatening the world, one from the United States and the other from the Soviet Union. Castro spoke for only half an hour, and his speech drew tremendous criticism. The exiled Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia, for one, cited the recent history of his own country as a classic example of how the two imperialistic powers had colluded to destroy countries and nations.

More seriously, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, the Libyan leader, went so far as to state that Cuba had no business belonging to an organization of nonaligned states because Cuba was, like Uzbekistan or Czechoslovakia, allied with the Soviet Union. Qaddafi's verbal attack nearly caused the conference to break up in chaos. Castro needed to make a dramatic gesture to save his reputation as a third-world leader, and so he announced that he had been persuaded to sever diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. Qaddafi rushed over to Castro and gave him a big hug. Granma, the official Cuban Communist Party newspaper, reported that Castro's announcement was greeted with a standing ovation that "seemed to last forever."\(^82\)

There is no doubt that breaking diplomatic relations with Israel was Castro's spur-of-the-moment personal decision, and it caught the Cuban government bureaucracy completely by surprise. But the country's officials and its media quickly fell into line. During the Yom Kippur War that broke out soon thereafter, a contingent of Cuban soldiers actually participated in tank battles on the Syrian side. Cuba portrayed Israel not only as the aggressor but also as having committed atrocities against civilians, particularly Syrians. Cuba became one of the most extreme anti-Israel voices on the international scene, even lobbying against the Egyptian-Israeli peace process and lining up as one of the sponsors of the "Zion-


THE JEWS OF CUBA

Memories of the past...

The Jewish cemetery, Havana.

Building of the once thriving United Hebrew Congregation, closed in 1981.
Services at the Patronato, center of the Jewish revival.

The social hall.

The main sanctuary.
The Centro Sefaradi, interior and exterior views.
Women's organization of Adath Israel.

Adath Israel, the Orthodox synagogue.
Signs of renewal . . .

The recently revived Jewish community of Santa Clara, in Central Cuba.

Alberto Behar of Havana, first native-born Torah reader since the revolution.
Jose Miller Fredman, president of the Jewish community since 1978.

Isaac Gelen, president, B'nai B'rith Maimonides Lodge.

Maritza Corrales Capestany, historian.
JEWISH LIFE TODAY

José Levy Tur, interfaith activist.

Prof. Lourdes Albo, leader of the Jewish seniors club.

Ivan Glaït, JDC director.
A new generation . . .

Young Cuban Jews celebrate Purim at the Patronato.
ism is Racism” resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 10, 1975. The government newspaper called this resolution a “forward step by the peoples of the world” which “left no doubt about the identical imperialist origins and racist structure of the Israeli Zionist regime that is occupying Palestine and the one that is exploiting the black masses of Zimbabwe and South Africa.”

In November 1974, PLO leader Yasir Arafat visited Cuba, where the government gave him a high-level reception and Cuba’s highest decoration, the Order of Playa Girón. In 1975, in his opening report to the Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, Castro strongly attacked Israel as a tool of “U.S. imperialism,” which the American government was using to threaten the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union along its southern flank. The congress adopted a strong statement in support of Palestinian national rights. In December 1975, Castro confirmed reports that Cuban troops had been sent to Syria before the 1973 war, a public demonstration that his anti-Zionism had moved from the realm of polemics into actual military involvement on the Arab side.

On October 12, 1979, in a speech at the UN, Castro claimed that the State of Israel was committing genocide against the Palestinian people, similar to the “genocide that the Nazis once visited on the Jews.” Castro stated that the Palestinians were “living symbols of the most terrible crime of our era,” thus inferring that Israeli crimes against the Palestinians were worse than anything that had been done in Uganda, Vietnam, or Cambodia.

This was certainly a dramatic change in Cuban policy, but Allan Metz has argued that it did not cause Castro any sleepless nights: “Principle may have had nothing to do with the abrupt change in Cuban policy toward Israel. In this respect, he was no different from others who wielded arbitrary power. At any rate, the main reason for Castro’s shift in his policy toward Israel was pure and simple opportunism. And once he embarked on this new policy, he sought to gain as much benefit as possible. Castro proved to be very successful because he bolstered his ambition of portraying himself as a third-world leader while simultaneously gaining the appreciation of the Soviet Union.”

Castro’s new Israel policy made things difficult for Cuban Jews, espe-

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83 Ibid., Jan. 18, 1976.
87 Metz, “Cuban-Israeli Relations,” p. 123.
cially as the turn against the Jewish state coincided with a period of deterioration within the Cuban Jewish community that had nothing to do with the Middle East. In 1975, the Patronato's kosher restaurant closed down, and the "Jewish" public school with its afternoon Hebrew school came to an end. Hebrew classes, instead of being conducted daily, were reduced to once a week, and came close to being stopped entirely. It appeared that the community no longer had the critical mass necessary to sustain a viable Jewish life. Moisés Baldás, the leader of the Jewish community, had worked hard to cultivate good relations between Cuba and Israel, and the turn toward virulent anti-Zionism, coinciding with other danger signals for the Jewish community, made it impossible for him to function effectively as the representative of Cuban Jewry. In 1981, as noted above, Baldás settled in Israel. José Miller Fredman, his protégé and successor, long a supporter of the revolution, had to be particularly careful in presenting his views on Israel and Zionism, since, while the Jewish community looked to the Jewish state as a treasured homeland, the government portrayed it as a tool of Yankee imperialism.

By the late 1980s, there were signs that Cuban-Israeli relations were warming up again. In 1988, Castro was reported to have told Venezuelan Jewish leaders traveling in Cuba that "Cuba has a lot to learn from Israel."88 That same year, an official economic delegation from Cuba visited Israel to study irrigation methods; Israel had pioneered a number of innovative techniques, and this was of great importance to Cuban agricultural specialists who were trying to improve citrus production. Since 1988, Israeli experts have continued to provide technical assistance in this area, in methods of growing other agricultural products, and even in fishing.

These contacts preceded, if only by a short period, the crisis that engulfed Cuba after the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. By June 1990, Cuba had opened unofficial lines of communication with Israel, using the left-wing socialist party Mapam, whose ideology seemed congenial to Cuban socialist principles, as the conduit. Castro's primary concern after the fall of Soviet Communism was the survival of his regime, all other factors taking a back seat. Despite Cuba's acute need for oil in the aftermath of the Soviets' withdrawal of subsidies, Cuba had little to gain politically from a virulent anti-Israel position at a time when Arab countries were beginning to sign peace treaties with Israel.

But Israeli support for the American embargo against Cuba remained a source of tension. In November 1999, the State of Israel was the only country to join with the United States against a UN vote to end the em-

bargo. *Granma*, the Communist Party newspaper, featured the vote on its front page, noting that 157 nations had voted to end the economic embargo. The headline read “The World Against the Blockade,” with a subheading: “Two countries NO: United States, Israel.” Conversely, because of its alignment with the Arab countries, the Cuban government voted against Israel on various issues at the UN.

The question of Cuba’s policy toward Israel was addressed by a delegation from the American Jewish Congress, led by its president, Jack Rosen, in July 1998. The delegation, which said it was ready to “look seriously” into calling for an end to the U.S. economic boycott of Cuba, met with President Castro for a six-hour dinner at the presidential palace. Delegates expressed their disappointment that Cuba was the only country in the Western Hemisphere to vote against rescinding the UN’s “Zionism is Racism” resolution, and Castro responded that he was actually unaware of the position taken by the Cuban delegation at the UN. As it happened, Ricardo Alarcón, the Cuban UN representative who actually cast the vote, was present at the dinner, and, not surprisingly, he did not offer to field the question. Other Cuban officials informally told Rosen that the vote was to be expected, given the fact that Israel voted against Cuba on virtually every matter.

In June 2001, the Cuban government expressed strong support for the Palestinians at a two-day UN-organized regional forum on the Middle East conflict held in Havana and attended by representatives from 45 countries. Cuban foreign minister Felipe Pérez Roque told the forum: “There will be no fair and lasting peace in the region until an independent Palestinian state is proclaimed, with eastern Jerusalem recognized as its capital.” Farouk Kaddoumi, the head of the PLO’s political department, exclaimed, “Cuba has been the Palestinian people’s best friend in our fight for the peace and stability of the Middle East.” Pérez Roque went on to connect Israel’s alleged “crimes” with the political support it received from the United States. “Israel’s killing machinery has been developed and perfected for years thanks to the financial, military and technological aid of the United States, its unconditional ally which shares responsibility for the grave violations of the Palestinian people’s basic human rights.”

Following the forum, President Castro personally led a demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinian people held in the “anti-imperialist” plaza built during the Elián González controversy, directly across from the United States Interests Section on the Malecón (seaside promenade)

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in Havana. A student addressed the approximately 10,000 people with the words: "We want to demand the end of the genocide against our brother Arab nation. Long live the heroic Palestinian people! Long live the Arab people who fight against Imperialism! Socialism or death!" Speakers alternated with poets, singers, and even pantomime artists acting out scenes of violence from the Middle East. Yasir Arafat wrote to thank Castro for his enthusiastic support: "It was with great emotion that we have seen your excellency with the Palestinian flag on your shoulders leading a massive show of solidarity with our heroic people. I consider this show of unbreakable friendship and firmness in Havana as a strong and effective message on the part of a loved international leader who enjoys great world prestige."  

It deserves emphasis that anti-Zionist or anti-Israel policies pursued by the Cuban government in the 1970s, 1980s, and later did not result in any increased local anti-Jewish activity. There remains a great deal of sympathy for Jews among the Cuban people and among government officials, and this carries the seeds for improved relations with the State of Israel in the future.

The Fall of Communism and the New Religious Environment

Soon after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union in 1985 he embarked on a course of reform, and the fallout was immediate. Within a year, virtually all of the Eastern European states had started the long and difficult process of transformation into democracies with free-market capitalism. The final, dramatic conclusion occurred on November 9, 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, followed soon thereafter by the unification of Germany.

With European Communism dying, Castro had to face the loss of his few remaining allies in 1989 and 1990. On December 20, 1989, U.S. forces invaded Panama, and Manuel Noriega's cocaine-financed government toppled almost immediately. On February 25, 1990, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas called an election and were defeated by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Castro took the loss hard, since he had considered Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega not only a political ally but also his "revolutionary son." Ortega's defeat left the Cuban government with no close ideological allies in the entire region.

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92"Arafat agradece el apoyo de Castro," El Nuevo Herald, June 22, 2001. Thanks to Prof. Jaime Suchlicki for faxing me a copy of this article.
There were those who expected the Communist Cuban government to fall just as quickly as those in Eastern Europe. *Miami Herald* journalist Andres Oppenheimer named his 1992 book *Castro’s Final Hour: An Eyewitness Account of the Disintegration of Castro’s Cuba*. The book described the withdrawal of Soviet support, the apparent dissatisfaction even among the highest-ranking politicians and military leaders, the loss of Cuba’s regional allies, and the terrible shortages of almost all consumer goods—a situation of economic stringency that Cubans came to call, euphemistically, the “special period.” Oppenheimer can be forgiven for feeling confident that Cuba had indeed reached “Castro’s final hour,” and he was not alone. *Time* magazine crowed, “Castro’s Cuba—The End of the Dream”; *U.S. News and World Report* wrote about “Fidel Castro’s Last Battle”; while the *New York Times* titled one article, “The Last Days of Castro’s Cuba.” *Newsweek* more accurately described what was going on in the country as “Cuba’s Living Death,” and *Life* magazine titled one report, “Waiting for the end in Cuba.”

With Communism in retreat throughout the world, Cuba has successfully redefined itself and avoided radical political change. One tactic has been the co-optation of previously excluded groups, such as religious believers, a policy that has yielded the added benefit of helping develop relationships with foreign-based programs of a religious nature that provide economic aid.

For more than two decades, the government has gradually increased religious freedom, though the rapprochement between religion and state is both complex and ambivalent. At the same time that the government has been easing the old restrictions on religious activities, Cubans have demonstrated an increased level of interest in religious participation, but there may not be a simple cause-and-effect relationship between the two trends. Jorge Ramirez Calzadilla of the Center of Psychological and Sociological Research in Havana argues that the resurgence of religion in Cuba has little to do with government policy but is in large measure a response to the spiritual and economic crisis brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the economic rigors of the “special period.”

This is a widely held view. Today few Cubans take Communism seri-

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ously, and they are looking for something to believe in. When Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin of the Community Synagogue of Port Washington, New York, visited Cuba during Passover in 1997, he asked some of the university students he met why there was so much interest in religion. "They had one answer," reported Salkin: "Communism is a spiritual failure." 996

Aside from the spiritual vacuum, there are other needs that religion fills. In Cuba, money is scarce; there are no multiplex cinemas, no Disney theme parks, and no shopping malls. Churches and synagogues provide a place to meet, mingle, and be entertained. They offer classes, services, and even festive dinners.97

The Communist government had never banned religious affiliation or activity for the general public, although it was forbidden for members of the Communist Party. Still, since the authorities viewed it with disfavor, many Cubans believed that involvement with a church or synagogue could stigmatize them and stunt their career opportunities. Thus the Cuban Communist Party's repeal of the prohibition on religious involvement for members in October 1991 came as a great surprise. The Cuban constitution was then revised to state that education would henceforth be "secular," rather than "atheistic," as set forth in the previous version. The old Marxist-Leninist philosophical definition of the Cuban state was also excised from the constitution.

In the decades following the 1959 revolution, most congregations of all religions had become accustomed to seeing a steady decline in membership. Many of the most devoted church members, fearful of religious intolerance, left the country in the early years, and those who remained often distanced themselves from religious activity. That is no longer the case. Today, Christian churches are growing exponentially, the number of baptisms jumping from 25,258 in 1979, to 50,979 in 1990, and 62,664 in 1992.98 Although some of the "new faithful" are returning to the churches they were raised in, many are former atheists with no previous history of religious involvement.

The rising fortunes of Judaism have been directly tied to the successes of other Cuban religious groups.

Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba on January 25, 1998, had a profound impact on the whole country. Enrique López Oliva, a professor of the history of religion at the University of Havana for many years and now a

98These statistics were culled from the Amando Pontifica Vaticano.
freelance journalist, emphasized its significance: "Do you remember that John Reed book about the Bolshevik Revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World?* Well, we can call this 'Five Days that Shook Cuba.'" Speaking to hundreds of thousands of Cubans gathered in Plaza de la Revolución for the final Mass of his historic visit, the pope argued that atheism could not be the official ideology of a modern state. Rather, he said, personal freedom was the only way to achieve true justice: "This is the time to start out on the new paths called for by the times of renewal that we are experiencing."

On Sunday, January 25, the pope met with two Cuban Jewish representatives, Dr. José Miller, the community's head, and Abraham Berezniak, president of Adath Israel. After Berezniak and the pope chatted about their Polish backgrounds, the three men discussed Christian-Jewish relations.

In the aftermath of the pope's visit the government set up a committee to decide whether to make December 25 an official holiday, and Castro named Miller and Adela Dworin as members. The fact that two prominent Jews were placed on a panel to decide on the recognition of a Christian holiday, a matter unrelated to the Jewish community, showed how seriously Castro took the opinion of the tiny Jewish minority. Furthermore, it was through participation in these meetings that Miller began to develop a personal relationship with Castro that he would use for the benefit of the Cuban Jewish community.

Then, as part of the new openness to religion resulting from the papal visit, Miller and Dworin invited Fidel Castro to celebrate Hanukkah, in December 1998, at the Patronato. Castro came with Carlos Lage Dávila, one of Cuba's five vice presidents, and Felipe Pérez Roque, considered by many to be Castro's closest confidant outside of his family, who then served as his personal assistant and who today is minister of foreign affairs. Also in attendance were two members of the Central Committee, Eusebio Leal Spengler, the official historian of the city of Havana, and Caridad Diego Bello, head of the Department of Religious Affairs. Castro spoke extemporaneously and at great length on a variety of subjects...

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99 Interview with Enrique López Oliva, June 2000.
101 A photograph of the pope and Berezniak, taken at that meeting, is displayed today at Adath Israel. Berezniak died in April 1998, three months after the papal visit, at the age of 50.
102 Miller interview. In November 1998, at one of the committee meetings, Castro turned to Miller and asked, "What do you think?" Miller responded, "How could I possibly object to a holiday celebrating the birth of a nice Jewish boy?"
related to Jews and Judaism in a warm and informal style. He also asked the audience questions, and paid rapt attention to the answers.  

There had been very little formal contact between Jewish and Christian organizations in Cuba until 1980, when Dr. Kenneth Schulman, a professor of social work at Boston University, introduced Moisés Asis to Adolfo Ham, a Presbyterian minister serving as president of the Ecumenical Council of Cuba. Ham had a special interest in the philosophy of Martin Buber and was very keen on developing a relationship with Asis and with the Jewish community. When the Patronato held a commemoration of the 850th birthday of Maimonides, Ham was invited as one of the speakers. Subsequently, Asis was appointed to be the first Jewish representative on CEHILA, a center for religious ecumenism, and began contributing articles to the Ecumenical Council's *Mensaje* magazine. Today, the Jewish community is a special member of the Ecumenical Council, and its representative on CEHILA is José Levy Tur. There have also been contacts with the National Council of Churches in Cuba. When the Jewish community has a special event, Christian visitors often come as invited guests.

Such interfaith involvement has helped the Jewish community achieve greater recognition in the broader society, especially since the government sometimes calls on representatives of religious groups, including Jews, to help it achieve political objectives. For example, Dr. José Miller traveled to the United States as part of a delegation that included prominent Cuban church leaders to explain why he believed the embargo against Cuba should be lifted.

The relationship between the Cuban Jewish community and the Catholic Church has been growing. The Vatican embassy in Cuba invited the leaders of the Jewish community to attend an event there on the occasion of Pope John Paul's visit, and around the same time the Catholic magazine *Espacios* published an article by Arturo López Levy about Catholic-Jewish relationships, "Tenemos Tanto que Hacer Juntos" (We have so many things to do together). This was the first time that any Cuban Catholic publication had included an article by a Jew. Shortly thereafter, the Dominican Order included the Jewish community—represented by Arturo López Levy—in a roundtable discussion for leaders of different religious bodies to discuss the meaning of the papal visit for religion in Cuba. During Catholic Social Week the next year, in June 1999, Levy was invited to

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make a presentation on globalization and how the religious communities in Cuba might help the country integrate into the world economy. In September 1999, Cardinal Jaime Ortega of Havana visited Adath Israel to hear the blowing of the shofar for Rosh Hashanah 5760. In a pastoral letter, Ortega recounted his visit to the synagogue, referring to the Jews as “his older brothers.” Ortega wrote: “When I say ‘our future’ I am not invoking the Catholic God, rather the only God—Father, creator of all. If we are sons of the same father, then it opens in us these wonderful and complementary truths: all men are my brothers.”

**Outside Aid**

**The Canadian Jewish Congress Assistance Program**

After the revolution, the Jews remaining in Cuba came to feel increasingly isolated. Since, for many Cuban Jews, the distribution of Passover foods was the sole Jewish activity they remembered from their childhood, providing those foods became the primary way of reasserting the Jewish world’s link with Cuban Jewry.

Before the revolution the Jewish community of Cuba had obtained Passover supplies from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), in the United States, but once the two countries severed diplomatic relations this was no longer feasible. In 1961 representatives of the community issued an urgent appeal for help. Since the JDC in New York was unable to provide direct assistance, Moses Leavitt, the JDC executive vice chairman, routed the request to the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). Canada had never broken diplomatic relations with Cuba, and Canadians were not restricted from visiting or conducting business with Cuba. Jack Silverstone of the CJC stated, “Canada has a rather good relationship compared to the Americans. We give quite a bit of foreign aid down there, so we have very good access without difficulty.”

The Canadians needed to obtain a permit from Cuba for permission to import food products for Passover use, and another permit in Ottawa to export the food from Canada. They had difficulty finding shipping space, and at one point it seemed certain that the only way they would be able to send in any goods would be by air. Finally, space was obtained on a boat leaving from St. John, New Brunswick, on March 13, 1961, with a scheduled arrival date in Havana of March 23. Since this arrangement

was made at the last minute, the CJC feared it would not be able to get the matzo and kosher Passover wine to port in time for loading.\textsuperscript{106} But it did, and on April 5 Congregation Adath Israel sent a cable to Sigmund Unterberg of the CJC in Montreal to acknowledge that the shipment had arrived.\textsuperscript{107}

The CJC has continued to send the Passover products annually. Over the years, Edmond Lipsitz, the executive director of the Ontario CJC, was concerned that there might have been difficulties in receiving or distributing the Passover supplies in Cuba.\textsuperscript{108} When he visited in 1987, Lipsitz found that while the Cuban Jewish community had often been uncertain about the arrival dates of the ships, the community had indeed received the food, and, he remarked, "The fact is [that] we are sending more matzo than they need."\textsuperscript{109}

To give an example of the quantity of food shipped and the cost involved, the CJC's Josh Rotblatt calculated the exact expense for 1992. Three thousand pounds of matzo sent at $1.53 Canadian per pound worked out to $4,590. Two thousand pounds of matzo meal were sent at $1.50 per pound, and 3,600 liters of oil at $2.375 per liter. With a thousand cans of tuna at $1.00 a can, 1,500 cans of sardines at $1.82 a can, 240 boxes of tea at $2.95 a box, and 504 jars of horseradish at $2.10 a jar, the total came to $21,636 Canadian. (Not included in the estimate were 840 bottles of kosher wine, 2,500 packages of kosher soup, 600 pounds of powdered milk, and $22,000 for airfreight expenses via Mexico—the food was assembled too late that year to send by boat).\textsuperscript{110} The Jewish communities of Mexico, Venezuela, and Panama have also provided some assistance, as have individual American Jews. Jack Rosen of New Jersey, for example, who owned a private plane, made a number of trips to Havana to deliver Passover supplies.

In 2000, the Cuban government agreed for the first time to cooperate actively in the CJC's annual shipment of Passover goods. Pedro García Roque, Cuba's consul general in Montreal, helped arrange for Cubana, the country's national airline, to ship 4,000 kilograms of kosher supplies

\textsuperscript{107}Comunidad Religiosa Hebrea Adath Israel to Sigmund Unterberg, Apr. 5, 1961, Anglo-American collection 493, Western Union International Communications. The telegram read: "Received matzoth wine good order twenty-eighth paid five thousand five hundred custom tax stop fully satisfied and much obliged your excellent attention stop after Passover will send letters."
\textsuperscript{108}Interview with Edmond Lipsitz, Nov. 2000.
\textsuperscript{110}Josh Rotblatt to Yehuda Lipsitz, Feb. 27, 1992; and "Passover Products for Cuban Jewry," both in Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives.
free of charge, and another 6,000 kilograms at a greatly reduced rate. In previous years the CJC had shipped about 40 percent of the supplies via Cubana at regular airfreight rates, with the rest being sent by ship; in 2000 the Cubana offer made it possible to send the entire shipment by air. The goods left Montreal on March 31, and arrived in Havana the same day, the first time a shipment was received so far ahead of the Passover holiday, which began that year on the evening of April 19. Furthermore, businessman Walter Arbib of Toronto-based Skylink Aviation underwrote the cost of sending the supplies from Havana to the Jewish communities in the provinces by air rather than overland.\textsuperscript{111}

Over the years, the food has not only served the ritual requirements and nutritional needs of Cuban Jews, but has also been of great symbolic significance. Jack Silverstone of the CJC said, “I can’t overestimate the importance of the Passover food order to these folks. For a long time, it was their only connection to Judaism; they just couldn’t get what they needed. They are extremely appreciative of it, and rely on it.” He added, “I almost didn’t realize how important it was until I got down there and they spoke so emotionally about the Canadian connection. It was very touching. When the community got together for seders, that was basically the major Jewish event across the island, and it was important.”\textsuperscript{112}

UJA (UJC) Missions

From spiritual retreats to Internet study groups, American Jewish organizations are harnessing progressively more sophisticated and creative techniques for grabbing and holding the interest of their actual or potential clientele. Missions abroad have become a popular part of an increasingly complex network of informal American Jewish educational projects. Such missions, generally restricted to those who give substantial contributions to the UJA, reinforce the most viscerally felt values of civil Judaism, especially the classical rabbinic injunction that “all Jews are responsible for one another.”\textsuperscript{113}

During the 1990s, Cuba became a popular destination for these missions, as the American government quietly eased certain restrictions on contact with that country. On January 5, 1999, the U.S. announced its first public change of policy, allowing the institution of direct charter flights to Cuba to help facilitate family reunions, reestablishing direct mail con-

\textsuperscript{111}Ron Csillag, “Cuba to help CJC bring in food for Pesach,” Canadian Jewish News, Apr. 13, 2000, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{112}Silverstone interview.

\textsuperscript{113}On Jewish civil religion in the U.S., see Jonathan S. Woocher, Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986).
tact, and legalizing educational, cultural, journalistic, athletic, and religious exchanges. Direct charter flights between New York and Havana began in the fall of 1999, offering travelers an option in addition to the Miami-Havana route. A Los Angeles-Havana flight was inaugurated shortly thereafter.

The new regulations gave added impetus to the work of nonprofit organizations, religious and secular, interested in bringing groups to Cuba, and the flow of United Jewish Appeal (UJA) missions to Cuba intensified. UJA, since reorganized and merged with the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Israel Appeal, is today known as the United Jewish Communities (UJC). Its missions now arrive at the rate of about one a month from many American Jewish communities, including Detroit, San Francisco, Houston, Boston, New York, and, of course, South Florida.114

When UJA began sponsoring missions abroad, almost all were to Israel, the Jewish spiritual homeland, or to Eastern Europe, where the majority of American Jews trace their roots. Cuba is neither of these things. Amir Shaviv, assistant executive vice president of the JDC, explained, "The reason they go to Cuba is because it's a nearby destination that gives you, in a nutshell, the entire scope of Jewish revival of a community that was barred from Jewish life. If you have three days and you want to go somewhere and see what your money is doing, Cuba is the place to go."115 Furthermore, Cuban Jewry seems tailor-made to fulfill the psychological needs of the mission participants: Cuban Jews are well educated and many speak English. They are in the midst of an extraordinary process of Jewish return, which cannot help but inspire American Jews who are deeply concerned about perpetuating their own religious identity. And finally, the economic deprivation that is so evident in Cuba inspires mission participants and convinces them that there is a real need they can help fill. So popular have missions to Cuba become, in fact, that in 1998 the JDC, which has professionals in the country working to revive Cuban Jewish life, felt compelled to ask American Jewish groups "to cut back on the number of visits, which have been somewhat overwhelming for the community."116

114 In truth, the South Florida embarkation point is less obvious than it might appear, since Cuban Americans residing there are subjected to considerable pressure not to visit Cuba so long as Fidel Castro is president.

115 Melissa Radler, "Cuba Emerges as Destination Much Favored by Federations," Forward, Apr. 28, 2000, p. 5.

Stephanie Simon participated on one of these missions. The mother of three young children, Simon had to pass up a number of missions that were offered by the UJA's Young Leadership Cabinet, of which she is a member, because the trips to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Israel ran from ten days to two weeks, far too long for her to be away from her children. But when a four-day mission to Cuba was announced, she jumped at the chance. A reporter interviewed her in her Marblehead, Massachusetts, home shortly after her return from Havana. Simon spoke enthusiastically of the "amazing trip, which changed my life," relating that when she was halfway home from the airport, she suddenly burst into tears from all that she had seen and experienced in Cuba. Simon told of meeting people who walked an hour and a half to get their children to the Sunday morning Hebrew school, and remarked on the joy she felt when watching a performance that the Hebrew school gave. These children sang the same Hebrew songs her own children sing, bringing home the conviction that these could be her children.

She described the poverty of the community, and was immensely excited about the important work that the UJA was doing to alleviate it, saying, "I saw where our Federation dollars go. People here [in the United States] complain about the Jewish Community Center (JCC), or this or that. In Cuba, those dollars are buying milk for children. The funds are purchasing a breakfast and a lunch. This is 60 [sic] miles from the U.S.! These are kids who don’t have enough food to eat.” Participating in Friday night services at the Patronato, Stephanie Simon's mission saw the congregation make the blessing over bread using matzo that was left over from Passover, and then eat a small chicken dinner. The UJA group decided to pool their contributions to provide the congregation with real hallah (Sabbath loaves), as well as chicken, wine, candles, and other products so that the congregation could celebrate Shabbat comfortably. Almost on the spot, the group raised $18,000, enough to sponsor Shabbat dinner for the entire congregation for a year.

Not everyone in the Jewish community supports these Cuban missions. The weekly Forward newspaper, for one, criticized the missions in a front-page editorial in 2000. Directly under the by-now-infamous photo of Elián González being taken at gunpoint from the home of his Miami relatives, the Forward questioned why there were 30 Jewish missions planned for the near future, asking whether the aim was "to help the 600 [sic] Jews trapped in the communist country," or whether “the backers of the

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biggest American Jewish charitable structure emerge with those pressing for a soft line on the communist regime during the twilight years of its dictator, Fidel Castro” instead of “the hard line for which so many have sacrificed so much.”

The “biggest American Jewish charitable structure” meant the United Jewish Communities (UJC), the umbrella organization for local Jewish federations, which, among them, raise approximately $790 million annually for Jewish charitable needs, and the Forward was virtually accusing it of being soft on Castro-style Communism. While the missions were ostensibly apolitical, the Forward believed that they served a political agenda by creating goodwill for the Castro regime and pumping tourist dollars into the Cuban economy. In contrast to many in the Jewish community, the Forward continued to support the economic embargo of Cuba: “This embargo may not have toppled Mr. Castro’s dictatorship, but it has helped stymie his efforts to export his revolution to Latin America. And it has curbed the ability of communist sympathizers, or rank opportunists, to exploit properties the communists seized in Cuba.”

In an accompanying front-page news story, the Forward quoted both defenders of the missions as well as other critics, who contended that the amount of Jewish money spent in Cuba was way out of proportion to the needs of other sectors of world Jewry, such as the large numbers of poverty-stricken Jews living in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. While the Forward, in its editorial, questioned the missions from a politically conservative perspective, the divisions on this issue did not break down along simple liberal/conservative lines.

One important leader of a liberal Jewish organization expressing uneasiness about the amount of Jewish attention and money lavished on Cuba was Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the national body of Reform synagogues. He said, “Realistically, I think we need to acknowledge that this is a small and mostly elderly community, so a sense of proportion might dictate that it might not merit an extensive mission program from the United States.” Conversely, a political conservative, Joshua Muravchik, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, favored the missions, claiming that letting citizens of the free world interact with Cubans has the effect of exposing the latter to democratic ideals, thereby increasing popular pressure on Castro to liberalize his regime. Jewish professionals who sponsored and led the missions Cuba defended them on the practical ground that people increased the size of their donations when they saw where

119 Ibid., p. 8.
their money was going. For example, John Ruskay, executive vice president of the UJA-Federation of New York, said that his organization raised over $75,000 specifically for the Cuban Jewish community as a direct result of a mission to Cuba in 1999.\textsuperscript{120}

**The Professional Medical Educational Project**

The JDC originated during World War I to provide material relief to Jews living in the war zones, and it has a long history of assisting Jewish communities around the world. The JDC played a major role in the revitalization of Jewish life in Cuba in the 1990s; it is universally praised for sending representatives to run services, teach classes, and organize activities. These representatives are JDC community workers from Argentina, who have been granted government permission to enter Cuba and work as resident directors for the program. Based in Havana, they work with Jews throughout the country.

The JDC is funded by the UJC (previously the UJA), as well as by grants from individuals and foundations. There is also a nonsectarian JDC program operating in more than 30 countries, that provides humanitarian aid, particularly for disaster relief. One initiative in Cuba funded in this manner is the Professional Medical Educational Project, which came into being in a roundabout way. In 1992, Dr. José Miller told the JDC that the Havana Jewish community needed a rabbi—they hadn't had one since the early 1960s. The JDC sent Alberto Senderey, a community-development worker, from its Paris office. Seeing the condition of the community, Senderey reported that not only were Cuban Jews desperately in need of spiritual help, but that they were short of food and medicine.

To deal with the medical problem, the JDC sent Dr. Ted Myers, one of its senior medical consultants, to assess the needs of the community in 1994.\textsuperscript{121} Although the Cuban government provides free medical care to all citizens, there was a severe shortage of drugs during the "special period" of economic stringency, and many Cubans could not get the prescriptions they needed. Working together with the JDC, Dr. Rosa Behar and the local Hadassah organization decided to open a private pharmacy in the Patronato that would provide medicines, vitamins, and other medical supplies to anyone needing them.

Jewish Solidarity, run by Eddie Levy in Miami, has been instrumental in supplying the pharmacy. Levy, who left Cuba in the mid-1950s, before

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{120} Radler, "Cuba Emerges as Destination Much Favored by Federations," pp. 1, 5.
\textsuperscript{121} Correspondence with Ted Myers, Apr. 2000.
\end{footnotesize}
the revolution, founded Jewish Solidarity in 1993, during the worst part of the "special period." Since then, his Miami-based organization has imported into Cuba a large amount of food and medicines. He explained the importance of the medical donations not only as vitally needed material assistance, but also as a way of expressing Jewish values and engendering political good will:

They [the Patronato pharmacy] get the credit for it, you know, they're recognized for doing that, plus anybody that needs any medicine in that pharmacy, regardless if they're Jewish or not, and they've got a prescription, it's given to them. It is not only what Judaism is all about, which is to help each other and help in general, but it's also good strategy, because nobody can say in Cuba that the Jews have privilege over all the Cubans, because after all, the Jews of Cuba are Cuban—with a capital letter—Jews. They're not a separate entity, like happened in the Eastern Bloc, in which people were looked at as somewhat different from the rest of the people. In Cuba Jewish people are Cuban, with a religious preference of Judaism."\(^\text{122}\)

According to Laina Richter, coordinator of the nonsectarian medical program in Cuba, the JDC also found that Cuban doctors were "really out of touch with what was going on in the Western industrialized world in terms of the most recent techniques and methods; they didn't know anything about the newest medications and drugs."\(^\text{123}\) Myers therefore established the Professional Medical Educational Project, which sent Jewish doctors from the United States at a rate of about one every two months. The JDC covered the cost of the doctors' travel to Cuba as well as their accommodations, and the individual doctor picked up all other expenses. The approximate total cost per doctor was $2,000. Many of the doctors established ties with the local medical community that they have maintained on their own since the initial visits.

Doctors sent to Havana on the Professional Medical Educational Project work intensively with Cuban counterparts for one week, going on rounds with their Cuban colleagues, helping train local medical students, and giving lectures. As Richter explained the preparation for each doctor's visit, "There would be a dialogue before the doctor went down, to get an idea of what was needed as well as to bring in medical literature that they didn't really have access to. In addition to kind of bringing down their expertise and knowledge, they also brought down literature, and medical equipment and supplies." Although the program was nonsectarian, it did have a specifically Jewish communal component as well: "While they were there, they would spend Shabbat with the Jewish com-

\(^{122}\) Levy interview.

\(^{123}\) Interview with Laina Richter, Mar. 2000.
munity and make connections within the Cuban medical community... and the Jewish community.”

B’NAI B’RITH

In February 1997, B’nai B’rith announced the formation of a Committee on Cuban Affairs, chaired by Elizabeth (Betty) Baer, wife of Tommy P. Baer, B’nai B’rith International’s president. This committee grew out of a B’nai B’rith humanitarian mission in which 32 members of the organization brought medicine, food, and clothes into Cuba. Six of the 32 were Cuban-born, including Michael Mandel, a cantorial student who performed concerts of Jewish songs for the Cuban Jewish community. Richard D. Heideman, then chairing the B’nai B’rith Center for Public Policy, stated,

In keeping with B’nai B’rith’s 153-year tradition of providing aid to Jews throughout the world, we have created this special committee to assist in improving the lives of this isolated community who are in desperate need of even the basic necessities of life... We plan to obtain and send educational and religious materials written in Spanish and sponsor more humanitarian missions. The needs are immense.

In the winter of 1999, B’nai B’rith sent 23 members from its Tri-state, Allegheny/Ohio Valley, and Golden Pacific regions to Havana and Santiago de Cuba. In addition to 2,000 pounds of supplies shipped to Cuba in advance of their arrival, the mission personally delivered 700 pounds of food, Hanukkah toys, Judaica, clothing, and medicine. The group celebrated Hanukkah with the local Jewish community in the city of Santiago de Cuba. One participant reported: “A touching moment occurred when small necklaces containing Moginai David [Stars of David] were distributed to the adults and children of the congregation. Many of us, adults and children alike, wept as we helped them adorn their necks with this precious reminder of their faith. It was an extremely emotional experience and one that we will cherish when we remember our visit.”

Thus began B’nai B’rith’s Cuban Jewish Relief Project, coordinated by Stanley Cohen and carried out in conjunction with the Brother’s Brother Foundation of Pittsburgh and with Eddie Levy’s Jewish Solidarity. It collects clothing, pharmaceuticals, and food products in the U.S., which are then shipped to Cuba via Jewish Solidarity in Miami. The goods are

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124 Richter interview.
consigned to the Department of Religious Affairs in Havana to be given to the Jewish community. In mid-February 2000, for example, the project shipped over 1,600 pounds of antibiotics, vitamins, antacids, children’s medicine, hygienic supplies, high-protein canned goods such as tuna and salmon, and powdered milk.\(^\text{127}\)

**The Renaissance of the 1990s**

In the early 1990s there was a visible revitalization of Jewish life in Cuba. As the regime’s loosening of restrictions on religion encouraged Cubans of all types to discover or rediscover religion, a steady stream of people began to acknowledge Jewish antecedents and seek affiliation with the community.

Primary credit for the revival of Jewish life in Cuba goes to the JDC, whose representatives, sent from Buenos Aires, have educated a new generation of Cuban Jews. Jorge Diener was the first resident JDC director. He was followed by Roberto Senderovitch, who was in turn succeeded by Diego and Laura Mendelbaum. The current directors, Ivan and Cynthia Glait, took over in May 2000.

**Rabbi Szteinhendler**

During the early years of the revival, the JDC brought in numerous other educators as well—rabbis, community workers, volunteers—for short periods of time. Many were from the United States and Canada and spoke English; others were Spanish-speaking Jews from Central and South America.

One of the most influential was Rabbi Shmuel (Samuel) Szteinhendler, a native of Argentina and a Conservative rabbi. During the 1990s, he made several trips a year to Cuba from his congregational base in Guadalajara, Mexico. (About 20 percent of that congregation had emigrated from Cuba after the revolution.) Before his first trip, Szteinhendler had been led to believe that the only Jews left in Cuba were a few old people. But when he arrived in January 1992, sent by the JDC, he witnessed first-hand the incipient revival of interest in Judaism and the potential for communal growth. Szteinhendler conducted services in the Havana synagogues and around the country, and officiated at ritual circumcisions and weddings. He instituted programs of “education, training for religious services, youth activities, cultural activities, holiday services and celebrations,” as well as Judaica lending libraries, Israeli dancing and the-

\(^{127}\)Interview with Stanley Cohen, Apr. 2000.
atrical groups, and distributed prayer books with Spanish translation and transliteration. Szteinhendler also worked with the communities to clean up the Jewish cemeteries and the abandoned sanctuaries and make them usable. He influenced and inspired many. “Rabbi Szteinhendler is our spiritual father. We only see him two or three times a year, but he is always in our minds,” José Levy Tur told a visiting journalist in 1996. Szteinhendler has recently taken a pulpit in Santiago, Chile, and is no longer able to visit as often as he would like.

THE RENOVATED PATRONATO

While the various JDC representatives have worked with Jewish communities throughout Cuba, their primary focus has been the Patronato, and it has emerged as the center of Jewish life in Havana. Not only do Jews come there for services on Friday night and Saturday morning, but they also come to use the computers in the library, to get vitamins and drugs from the pharmacy, and to participate in organizations, clubs, and activities sponsored directly or indirectly by the Patronato. Renovation of the Patronato was initiated by a challenge grant from the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation of Baltimore, Maryland, after members of the Weinberg family visited Cuba. The Scheck family donated money to renovate the community center, and the Zelcer family paid to fix up the prestigious and heavily used Patronato library. A number of Cuban Jews living in Miami made donations through the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, but such aid remains controversial. When the building was dedicated in May 2000—with the Elián González controversy still unresolved—some of the donors declined to attend out of fear that their presence would hurt their communal standing in Miami.

Although the Patronato is constitutionally required to have a 24-member board, the responsibility for decisions falls primarily on a very small group led by the president, José Miller. Adela Dworin, vice president of the Patronato and its librarian, is very active in running the institution, taking many of the American tour groups around to show them the newly renovated sanctuary and relate the history of the congregation. In 1995 the Patronato launched Menorah, a newsletter for the Havana Jewish community. The congregation also sponsors social and cultural groups geared to different age levels. Mácabi Cuba, the youth group for ages 13–30, has helped stimulate and promote the renaissance of Jewish life

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128 Interview with Shmuel (Samuel) Szteinhendler, July 2000.
throughout the country. Guesher (bridge), led by Tatiana Asís, a physician, is for 30–55-year-olds. Simcha, for the over-55 group, is led by University of Havana English professor Lourdes Albo. Each group meets once a month, alternating locations between the Centro and the Patronato, after the kiddush that follows services on Shabbat morning. The groups also go on trips, sometimes outside Havana. The Simcha group runs an exercise program that meets on Mondays and Tuesdays at Adath Israel.

"Collective birthday celebrations" are held every three months, giving special recognition to those whose birthdays fall out during that time span. Lourdes Albo explains: "In its beginnings the meetings were held with only a few participants. Today more than 60 members come to each meeting. It is very meaningful for them to have the opportunity to socialize, share their vivid memories, interests, celebrate their birthdays, go on excursions—in other words, to have a good time with their brothers and sisters of the Cuban Jewish community." In July 1999, the first national camping experience for the Simcha seniors group was held in Aguas Claras, where some 80 Jewish seniors from all over the country gathered for two days. After experiencing Shabbat together, the program continued on Saturday night with a havdalah ceremony, and was followed by an exercise program and an outing to La Cueva del Indio the next day. There were also group discussions on psychological, social, and religious issues.

A number of other Jewish cultural events take place regularly at the Patronato. About eight times a year the Asociación Femenina Hebrea de Cuba (Jewish Women's Association of Cuba) brings together more than 100 women from the three Havana synagogues for dialogues on Jewish issues. The program is led by Rosa Behar, who also heads Hadassah in Cuba. The Patronato recently held an exhibition of paintings by Israeli and Palestinian children that had been created under the auspices of Givat Haviva, an Israeli organization dedicated to furthering Arab-Israeli understanding; the president of the Cuban Arab Federation, Alfredo Deriche, attended the opening ceremonies. There have also been several dance presentations by the Mexican Jewish group Anajnu Ve Atem (We and You), one of which was held at the National Theater as part of Cuba's International Ballet Festival.

A milestone in the resurrection of Jewish life in Cuba took place at the Patronato on Rosh Hashanah 1999, when Alberto Behar chanted from the Torah, becoming Cuba's first native-born Torah reader since the revolution. Diego Mendelbaum, then JDC's representative in Cuba, trained

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"Interview with Lourdes Albo, Mar. 2000."
Behar. Mendelbaum recalled, “When we started, he could scarcely read Hebrew. But he had the desire. We decided on a two-month course of study. In the process, he learned much more than the musical symbols he would need. He studied commentaries and reflections on the Torah. He moved beyond the technique of reading the Torah and investigated the spiritual and emotional meaning contained in each portion. When you hear him read, you can sense his fulfillment.” Behar commented, “While following the text with my eyes, I can see in the scrolls the reflection of my father’s and grandfather’s faces. They are happy that I am maintaining the Jewish tradition.”

Adath Israel

Adath Israel is located in the middle of Old Havana, the area of original settlement in colonial times. This neighborhood is the country’s primary tourist attraction, and with the economy in bad shape, it made sense for Cuba to invest in it. In 1978, a year after UNESCO declared it a world heritage site, the government adopted a plan to renovate the entire area. As part of this project, the Havana Restoration Commission sent architecture student Jorge Herrera to Germany, on scholarship, to study the architecture of German synagogues so that he might develop a plan for Adath Israel. Upon Herrera’s return, he worked with leaders of the congregation on a proposed full restoration of the sanctuary, and also suggested a number of innovative features, such as a frame attached to the roof of the building that could be used for the erection of a sukkah. The government contributed part of the cost for the renovation, with the rest donated by a number of wealthy Orthodox businessmen from Panama, Venezuela, and elsewhere.

The president of the Adath Israel Congregation today is Alberto Zilberstein Toruncha, an engineer, whose father was Ashkenazi and whose mother was of Turkish Sephardic descent. He attended a Jewish day school as a child and his mother was active in the Chevet Achim Sephardic synagogue, but by 1970 she decided to end the family’s public involvement in Jewish activities in order to shield her children from the possible stigma of being identified as “religious.” She nevertheless tried to maintain some degree of Jewish tradition in their home. When Alberto’s own children reached school age, his mother encouraged him to send them to the Patronato’s Sunday school, and the parents became in-


volved through the children. In 1994, leaders of Adath Israel sought him out to become active in their congregation. \textsuperscript{133}

Adath Israel consists of about 120 people who travel there from all over the greater Havana metropolitan area, including Santos Suarez, Alamar, San Francisco de Paula, Santiago de las Vegas, and many other suburbs and towns. Even though it is nominally Orthodox, it differs little from the non-Orthodox congregations in its high rate of intermarriage. \textsuperscript{134} The congregation has a system for awarding extra rations to those who commit to coming to the minyan at Adath Israel, and no other synagogue, a certain number of times per week. Thus Adath Israel is the only synagogue that even attempts to have a daily minyan both morning and evening, and it succeeds about 85 percent of the time—a feat made more difficult by the Orthodox rule that only males can be counted. Friday night attendance is between 65 and 70, with about 35–40 on Saturday morning and 30–35 on Saturday night.

One of the most emotional moments in the revival of Cuban Jewry occurred at Adath Israel in December 1994—its first bar mitzvah in over 30 years. The bar mitzvah boy was Jacobo Berezniak, the son of Abraham Berezniak, Havana's kosher butcher and one of the leaders of the congregation. Beside the regulars, relatives, and friends, the congregation that morning included a 20-person group visiting from the United States and a camera crew that was filming a documentary on Jewish life in Cuba. (The crew was permitted to film because the service was held on a Thursday rather than a Saturday.) The bar mitzvah boy was escorted up to the Torah by his father and the president of the congregation, and he read his portion in what one of the American visitors described as a "steady and competent manner." \textsuperscript{135}

Social, Educational, and Youth Programs

It was mostly affluent American Jewish businessmen who founded the local branch of B'nai B'rith in Cuba in 1943, which, till the revolution, combated anti-Semitism and did philanthropic work. The organization never disbanded after the revolution, but it did little till the early 1990s, when the organization was revitalized as part of the broader Jewish renaissance. A key player in that revitalization was Isaac Gelen, now president of the B'nai B'rith Maimonides Lodge in Havana. As Gelen explained to me, the revived organization had to change its original mission,

\textsuperscript{133} Interview with Alberto Zilberstein Toruncha, June 2000.

\textsuperscript{134} Interview with Salim Tache Jalak, Adath Israel's executive director, Nov. 1999.

since there was now very little anti-Semitism to fight and the members were not in a position to donate the large sums of money necessary for meaningful philanthropy. Instead, B'nai B'rith has expanded its educational activities, meeting monthly with approximately 20 people (out of the 41 official members) in attendance.\footnote{Interview with Isaac Gelen, June 2000.}

Moisés Asís, now living in Miami, founded the community's current one-day-a-week educational program in 1985. Two years later, Rabbi Marshall Meyer, dean of the Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano, the rabbinical school in Buenos Aires, personally recruited Asís for an intensive six-month program to train him for communal religious leadership, and the JDC gave Asís a scholarship for this purpose. He studied not only academic subjects, but also practical techniques such as circumcision. Today, Alberto Meshulam Cohen, a pediatric neurologist, directs the Hebrew school, which is cooperatively sponsored by all three Havana congregations and taught by dedicated volunteers. Approximately 40 children up to the age of 15 attend classes at the Patronato every Sunday morning for three hours. Simultaneously, some 30 people over the age of 15 attend sessions at the Centro Hebreo Sefaradi. The JDC provides two buses that shuttle the participants from their neighborhoods to the programs and back. Over the past two years at least 112 Cuban Jews involved with the Sunday school, teachers and students, have settled in Israel, but new people get involved each year and the school continues to thrive.\footnote{Interview with Alberto Cohen, Mar. 2000.}

Máncabi Cuba has the responsibility for running the Friday night service at the Patronato, and this is one reason that the service is so popular with young people. On Saturdays the Máncabi has meetings devoted to the study of Judaism that stress practical, hands-on activities and the use of creative techniques to communicate the spiritual dimension of Jewish life. Máncabi also sponsors a volleyball team that conducts training on weekday evenings, and each Tuesday night there is a meeting of the Israeli dance group.

Máncabi sponsors two camping experiences during the year, one in March and the other in July, bringing together about 150 young Jews from all over the country. The camp, which lasts for four days, is the only opportunity young Cuban Jews have to experience intensive Jewish living 24 hours a day, including a full Shabbat. Most of these children—up until a few years ago, almost all of them—were from homes where there was no Jewish expression whatsoever; all they knew was that their parents had told them they were Jewish. In August 1999 Cuba hosted a "Pan-
American Camp” in Aguas Claras, Pinar del Rio, with assistance from the Jewish communities of the United States, Venezuela, Panama, Mexico, Brazil, and Nicaragua. Not only was there a strong Jewish educational component to the camp, but the young Cuban Jews had the opportunity to meet and interact with Jews from other countries and to feel that they are part of world Jewry.

Mácaib Cuba, however, is beginning to pay a price for its success: during 1999 it lost two of the most active members of its executive committee. Liver Humaran Maya, a dynamic young leader, received a gala public send-off when he left to study Jewish education for a year at the seminary in Buenos Aires, with the intention of returning to teach in Cuba. As part of his studies, though, he went to Israel to study Hebrew, and decided to settle there; not only would he not complete his training in Buenos Aires, but he would not be returning to Cuba to bolster Jewish education in the community. Dania Martínez Nissenbaum, another member of the executive committee, also left the country, settling in the United States. Both losses came as heavy blows to Mácaib Cuba.

Conversion and Other Denominational Issues

Shortly after the revival of Jewish life began in the 1990s, communal leaders in Havana reached an understanding to promote conversion as the way to formalize Jewish status for those who were of Jewish origin or married to Jews, but who were not Jews according to Jewish law. However individuals who approached the community on their own without either Jewish ancestry or a Jewish partner were not generally encouraged to convert, a reflection of the dominant national/ethnic conception of Jewishness. About 150 conversions have taken place over the last several years, with Conservative rabbis from other Latin American communities performing them. Among the earliest converts were José Miller’s wife and children.

Rabbi Szteinhendler explained how he approached the issue of conversion. “First, we regularized the Jewish status of people who belonged to mixed-marriage families and are active in some way, or at least related, to the community. Secondly, we will go to the mixed marriages and their families who are there but are not related to the community. Third, we regularized the Jewish status of those people who are third generation of some Jewish grandparent. Last, we attended [to] people who had not had any Jewish former relatives.” The process involved intensive consultation with Miller and other communal representatives.

All the cases were accepted first by the local leadership, and then we established a study program that took almost a whole year. People had to participate weekly in study sessions, in the communal activities, in the Shabbat and
holiday services, and meet with me each time I was in the island to have intensive study sessions. The ritual of accepting them as fully Jewish followed the rules of the Committee on Law and Standards of the Conservative/Masorti Movement, which means: men needed to go through Brit Milah [circumcision] and all the people went through mikveh [ritual immersion]. We had, each year, a bet din [religious court] of three Conservative rabbis. The mohel was brought from Mexico to perform the Brit Milah of each one according to Jewish law.\textsuperscript{138}

According to Rabbi Szteinhendler, when Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, visited Cuba in 1994, he made known his acceptance of these conversions.\textsuperscript{139}

In light of the fact that conversions in Cuba were performed under the auspices of Conservative Judaism, it is hardly surprising to find that much of the community has developed formal or informal ties with the Conservative movement. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive director of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, has been the point man for the development of the Conservative movement in Cuba. While this would normally be the responsibility of the World Council of Synagogues, which is the umbrella organization for the Conservative movement around the world, it was decided that the U.S.-based United Synagogue would take responsibility for Cuba and Barbados, because of their proximity to the United States. Also, the United Synagogue's budget could accommodate the extra expenditures involved.

Even though the Patronato and other Cuban congregations are affiliated with the Conservative movement, the form of Judaism that the congregations practice is not completely consistent with Conservative Judaism elsewhere. Epstein explained: “They are Conservative in large part because they are not Orthodox and they want to maintain some tradition. They are not what you could say committed to an ideology that is similar to Conservative Judaism here in North America, and because of what they went through in the Castro regime, they really don’t have a lot of knowledge of Judaism at all.”\textsuperscript{140}

Epstein first visited Cuba in 1997, when he and a number of other Conservative leaders met with representatives of the different Cuban congregations and began a dialogue on how the United Synagogue could help strengthen Judaism in Cuba. The United Synagogue provided Spanish-Hebrew prayer books, and translated and distributed selections from its popular tract series, short essays on aspects of Jewish law, holidays, and

\textsuperscript{138} Szteinhendler interview.
\textsuperscript{140} Interview with Jerome Epstein, Apr. 2000.
prayer. Epstein explains, “We tried to develop a strategy that would make it possible for us to do something constructive without being perceived as ‘the Ugly Yankee.’ ” Epstein recalls, “Most of the people felt badly that they had let their memories fade, in terms of Judaism, and a lot of them were very hungry to get something back again. It was almost as if they felt deprived. Not necessarily of all the ritual elements—they just wanted a connection with God.” In particular, Epstein was struck by the interest the young people showed.\textsuperscript{141}

Originally, the Patronato synagogue had been officially Orthodox, although the congregants were not very observant. It was only at the beginning of the 1990s—when the JDC became involved in the Havana Jewish community—that the nominal Orthodox label was dropped. Jorge Diener, the first JDC representative in Cuba, encouraged all three Havana congregations to affiliate with the Conservative movement. The Patronato was the first to do so, and the Centro Sefaradi followed suit several years later. Nevertheless, the two congregations retain certain religious differences: the Patronato has men and women sitting together and allows women to lead services and read the Torah, while the Centro Sefaradi retains separate seating (without a physical barrier) and does not allow women any leading role in the service.

Adath Israel, still nominally Orthodox, has consistently resisted JDC suggestions to join the Conservative movement. Yet it is not a member of any international Orthodox Jewish organization, perhaps because its membership includes many people who are not Jewish according to Halakhah. Zeiling Mooris, a retired Romanian-born Jew living in England, has made several trips to Havana to help lead services, but his involvement has created tensions. When he first came he expressed a willingness to accept the congregational situation and deal leniently with the questionable Jewish identity of members, but as time went on—and possibly as a result of a felt need to conform to Lubavitch standards—Mooris began to balk at calling up to the Torah congregants who had non-Jewish mothers and who had converted through the Conservative movement. Alberto Zilberstein, the president, had to insist that Mooris either allow these people to participate or “get off the \textit{bimah} [platform] and let us continue with our service.”\textsuperscript{142}

When Chevet Achim closed down, some of the members joined the Centro Sefaradi in Vedado, but many of those living in Old Havana preferred to remain with a synagogue that was close by and so they joined the ostensibly Eastern European Adath Israel. As a consequence of the influx of Sephardim from Chevet Achim, as well as the presence of many

\textsuperscript{141}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142}Zilberstein interview.
spouses from non-Jewish backgrounds, the Eastern European flavor of Adath Israel is far less pronounced today than it was at the time of the revolution. Despite its Orthodoxy, Adath Israel is fully involved with the rest of the community. It participates together with the other two Havana congregations in the joint Sunday programs, the one for children held at the Patronato, and the one for adults held at the Centro Sefaradi. Whenever an issue of concern to the broader Jewish community arises, representatives of the three congregations meet together.

However Adath Israel, like the other congregations, has had to face certain boundary issues. Early in 2000, one congregant who had been raised with virtually no Judaism in his home and had begun to attend services was asked not to come any longer because he was also a regular attendee at a Protestant church. Such syncretistic religious activity is widespread among segments of the Cuban population—many Catholics are also involved in Afro-Cuban religious activities, specifically Santeria—but syncretism has made no inroads in the Jewish community.

As of July 2000, Chabad-Lubavitch had sent a total of 56 missions to Cuba under the auspices of Chabad Friends of Cuban Jewry, headquartered originally in Brooklyn and now in Toronto, and directed by Rabbi Shimon Aisenbach. Each mission is staffed by two emissaries, usually young, unmarried rabbis. For the holiday of Shavuot 2000, Aisenbach sent a young, married couple. Aisenbach commented, "Periodically I have this idea to send a couple as well [as two single rabbis], the reason being simply that the Jewish community should see religious family life."

Chabad-Lubavitch is dedicated to seeing that the Cuban Jews be led down the proper halakhic path, and it is especially alarmed by the high incidence of intermarriage and what it considers halakhically incorrect conversions. Rabbi Aisenbach explained: "‘Who is a Jew’ is definitely a problem that we must take into consideration. Many people identify themselves as Jews who really are not. . . Who are these people and what are they going to claim that they are? They immigrate to Israel and then they are dating your daughter, for example. It brings a lot of confusion. It brings such confusion. People think that it’s just a game, but it’s not a game. It eventually brings confusion and eventually even disaster."

Aisenbach is especially puzzled about Adath Israel, since it is officially Orthodox and at the same time contains a majority of intermarried couples. "Everything is wishy washy there," he says:

For example, that shul itself was built as an Orthodox shul. Even when I came six-and-a-half years ago it wasn’t running like an Orthodox shul. Seventy-five-to-eighty percent were non-Jews, men and women sitting to-

\[143\] All the information about the role of Lubavitch in Cuba is based on an interview with Rabbi Aisenbach, June 2000.
gether. I spoke to a couple of people there and I said, "Listen, at least respect the way the shul was built. It was built as an Orthodox shul." Is it 100 percent Orthodox, are the meals kosher yet? Not yet. For example, there is no kosher meat coming out of the kosher butcher. To make a piece of meat kosher is not a simple thing. Even though I am an official rabbi, I took the exams on becoming a rabbi, I'm not a shohet. In Cuba there are even [halakhically] non-Jews doing shehitah [ritual slaughtering]. Even if they're doing a perfect job, the animal is not kosher. And also the knives are from before the revolution, and obviously almost inevitably there is a problem with them.

Aisenbach wanted to arrange for a shohet to visit Cuba every few weeks, have the meat stored in special freezers, and distribute it to community members. As for the meat people were eating, he said, "its not 20 percent kosher, its not 50 percent kosher, its not kosher meat at all."

Chabad in Cuba also operates a summer day camp where, in addition to sports, the children pray and are taught about Jewish practice. Says Aisenbach, "We feed them and their parents a meal and we go on night trips with them. We printed a 96-page booklet in Spanish with illustrations all about the basic mitzvahs and an entire Yiddishkeit guide." Chabad insists that "every single child in our camp is born to a Jewish mother, and therefore "we don't have many children. There were years it was 20, and there were years it was 17. But as the focus of the camp was Jewish education, a Jewish education belongs to a Jewish child." Seven of the children who have attended Chabad camps over the years have gone on to study at yeshivot in other countries.

Communal Renaissance Outside of Havana

Camagüey

JDC representatives and other Jewish visitors have had a profound impact on this community. Sarah Albojaire, a former president of the Jewish community now living in Miami, states, "They taught us how to sing the prayers; they brought books, gefilte fish—and, most importantly, they taught what we couldn't to our children." Albojaire explains what happened to the Jews of Camagüey. "Years without formally practicing and without any organized services really removed us from Judaism. Most of us, like me, had to marry out of the religion. There were no Jews." 144

Since most of the Camagüey Jews were intermarried, many of those

expressing interest in Judaism were themselves only partly Jewish. In 1995 Rabbi Szteinhendler came to Camagüey to officiate at the conversion ceremonies of 21 people, mostly spouses of Jews and children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, just as was being done elsewhere in the country under similar circumstances. But since then visits from rabbis have been infrequent. In 1999, two boys, ages 10 and 12, were medically circumcised at a hospital in the city. As there was no mohel or rabbi available, a member of the community read the prayers.\textsuperscript{145}

The original Sephardi synagogue in Camagüey, built in the 1920s, closed down after the revolution. On Rosh Hashanah 1998 the 37-family community dedicated a new synagogue building in a whitewashed turn-of-the-century house, connected to a row of homes in the center of the city. It was named Tiferet Israel, the same name as the prerevolutionary synagogue, and was bought for the congregation by Ruben Beraja, who was then serving as leader of the Jewish community of Argentina.\textsuperscript{146}

Merle Salkin, director of education at the Society Hill Synagogue in Philadelphia, made several trips to Camagüey to teach Hebrew to the Jewish community. Salkin's congregation donated $3,000 for the Camagüey synagogue, as well as for prayer books and other ritual items. She explains that after the religious revival began, "people started coming out of the woodwork, asking questions and signing up for conversion classes." As is the case in many small communities, there is one member who has taken the lead and inspired others. In Camagüey, according to Salkin, that individual is Reina Roffe, "the spiritual heart and driving force of Jewish education in the city." Roffe started the first conversion class and developed the curriculum for the synagogue school. She was brought to Kol Ami in Philadelphia in 1999 to learn Hebrew and received intensified training for her work in Cuba. She celebrated her own bat mitzvah at Kol Ami and then celebrated her son Daniel's bar mitzvah in Camagüey shortly after her return to Cuba. Working with Salkin, she has taught adult education classes, including Hebrew, holiday observance, and Jewish symbols.\textsuperscript{147}

\textbf{Cienfuegos}

The 29-member Jewish community of Cienfuegos, even smaller than the one in Camagüey, is held together by a strong-minded, energetic

\textsuperscript{145}Correspondence with Merle Salkin, February 2001.
\textsuperscript{146}Correspondence with Merle Salkin, March 2001.
\textsuperscript{147}Ibid.
woman, Rebeca Langos Rodriguez, a Spanish teacher in a local middle school, who is the community president. Raising her two small sons as Jews although her husband is not Jewish, Rodriguez told a reporter that she would like them to marry Jews but realizes that in Cienfuegos this is unlikely to happen. Since there was only one girl in the community, she asked, "What are we going to do?" She has considered moving with her family to Israel, but her husband doesn’t want to leave his ailing mother. The continued presence of Rodriguez is of crucial importance for the local Jewish community; were she to leave, Jewish communal life would probably fall apart. About once a month Shabbat services are held in Rodriguez’s home, although never with a minyan. Every Saturday the community’s seven children come to her second-floor apartment for Hebrew school. Sometimes the parents stay with the children till the end of the Sabbath for havdalah.

Santa Clara

David Tacher, the president of the Jewish community in Santa Clara, explains that until 1995 the community was virtually inactive. That year, a visitor donated The Jewish Book of Why. A number of local Jews started reading it, and thus began the process of revival. “Families got together to reencounter their roots. There was a revival of interest about being Jewish. At the end, we realized we were lacking; we weren’t practicing our religion. Then, all the community began to celebrate Kabbalat Shabbat services, the blessing of the wine, the bread, then step by step, havdalah, then the first Passover, then learning Hebrew.” In 1996 the Jews of Santa Clara celebrated Purim together for the first time, and, later in the year, commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day.

Tacher explains that the Jews in Santa Clara always knew each other. They had visited the Jewish cemetery and were familiar with the names on the tombstones; they knew which people in town were related to those deceased ancestors, and so there had never been a complete loss of Jewish memory. But there had been no religious activities for years. Now, though, there are seven active families consisting of about 30 individuals. Tacher is not planning to move to Israel. “I have my mother here and she’s sick. She can’t start over; she’s an old woman,” he says. Tacher believes that he can be a faithful Jew in Santa Clara. “If you are Jewish, you

149 Ibid., p. 75.
are Jewish. My mind and heart are in Israel. As long as there is a Jew in Cuba, Judaism will never die in Cuba."\[^{150}\]

**SANTIAGO DE CUBA**

Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in the country, is regarded as the most Caribbean of all Cuban cities. Local residents are proud of the role that the city played in the revolution. Most of the early Jewish settlers came from the Ottoman Empire, though a number of Ashkenazi families from Poland also came before World War II. The Sociedad Unión Israelita del Oriente de Cuba, the Jewish Society of Eastern Cuba, was founded here in October 1924. The community held services in rented quarters until 1939, when a synagogue building was erected. From that time on it was referred to as the Sinogoga de Santiago de Cuba. Two spiritual leaders served the community, one from 1924 until 1943 and the other from 1946 through 1967. The revolution brought a dramatic decline in community activity. Most of the local Jews emigrated, and by 1978 the community had ceased functioning. As the synagogue building was not being used, the remaining Jews gave it to the government.\[^{151}\]

Yet, a small number of Jews in the Santiago area, most of them intermarried, retained some interest in their ancestral faith. At Passover each year the Santiago Jews would gather to receive their Passover packages from the CJC, which were routed through the Havana Jewish community. The regular annual receipt of this aid made a deep impression on the local Jews, showing them that there was a Jewish presence outside of their area and giving them a sense of global Jewish solidarity.

After 15 year of inactivity, the Santiago community revived in October 1993 when Jewish communal activities began to be held on a regular basis in the home of Rebeca Botton Behar. Talks with the government resulted in the return of the original synagogue building to the Jewish community, and a joyous rededication ceremony took place, Rabbi Shmuel Szteinhendler officiating, on July 25, 1995—a date coinciding with the 480th anniversary of the founding of the city.\[^{152}\]

The congregation now has regular Sabbath services and, after the Saturday morning prayers, a kiddush lunch is served for the entire congregation, followed by a class on the Torah portion of the week in Spanish. The community has two Jewish dance groups, one for children and the

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\[^{150}\]Ibid.

\[^{151}\]Margalit Bejarano, interview with Rebeca Botton Behar, as related in correspondence with the author, Apr. 2001.

other for adults. In 1996, a double bar mitzvah was held for two cousins, Robertito Novoa Bonne and Andresito Novoa Castiel, attended by the entire Jewish community. These were the first bar mitzvahs held in the city in almost 20 years.\(^{153}\)

Rabbi Stuart Kelman of Congregation Netivot Shalom of Berkeley, California, has brought several missions from Northern California to work with the Jewish community of Santiago. "There's a certain laxness about kashrut rules," he notes, "about Shabbat, and that is all very understandable, given the fact that they are situated on the edge of the island, and have had no leadership in God knows how many years in that sense. They are a struggling community, and in a way, the Judaism that they practice is the best that they can do."\(^{154}\)

**Operation Cigar, Aliyah, and the Future of the Community**

"Operation Cigar," the clandestine emigration of 400 Cuban Jews, made headlines in October 1999 after the Israeli government confirmed a report that appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* of London. President Castro apparently gave his approval for it in 1994, allegedly soon after meeting with Israeli chief rabbi Lau. Through this operation, the Jewish Agency for Israel, with the help of the Canadian government, arranged for the departure of mostly younger Cuban Jews from Havana through Paris to Tel Aviv beginning in 1995.

Once "Operation Cigar" became public knowledge, a number of theories developed as to why Castro had agreed to it and why it had been kept secret. Some believed that Castro saw the operation as a way to win favor with the U.S. government and bring an end to the economic boycott, or, if that were not possible, at least to induce Israel to drop its support of the boycott. There were also allegations that Israel had paid Cuba between $3,000 and $5,000 per Jew as "compensation" for Cuba's investment in their education. As for the secrecy, Israeli sources claimed that Castro insisted on a news blackout for fear that publicity would cause civil unrest in his country among the many other Cubans who were denied the ability to emigrate. Arturo López Levy, however, has argued that Cuba's reason for maintaining a low profile had less to do with domestic considerations than with a reluctance to offend Arab nations.\(^{155}\)

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154Interview with Stuart Kelman, Apr. 2000.

Whatever strategies lay behind “Operation Cigar,” many Cuban Jewish leaders were quite upset by press descriptions of the emigration as “top secret.” José Miller, for example, was appalled at the implication that this was a Jewish Agency rescue mission similar to Operation Solomon in Ethiopia, in which thousands of Ethiopian Jews were quite literally saved from famine and civil war. Miller stated that, in contrast to that type of dramatic evacuation, the emigration of Jews from Cuba was a voluntary process that occurred over a prolonged period. The individuals involved chose to relocate for economic or social reasons. They were not escaping from cataclysmic events or the imminent threat of violent death.  

All the publicity served to shed light on the actual process of Cuban Jewish emigration to Israel, which had been going on, albeit on a smaller scale, even before 1995, and has continued since. As Israel and Cuba do not have diplomatic relations, the Canadian embassy in Havana represents the interests of the State of Israel. Cuban Jews wishing to emigration must ask for permission from the Cuban government and also fill out a request for immigration to Israel with the consular section of the Canadian embassy. These applications are then sent from the embassy in Havana to Ottawa, and from there the Canadian government turns them over the Israeli embassy, which forwards them to the appropriate government department in Tel Aviv.

Prospective emigrants then have to wait for their exit permits from the Cuban government. While this can take months, there have been no reported cases of any Cuban Jew being turned down (for Cubans seeking to emigrate to other countries, the process can take years). The emigrants leave Cuba in groups, using Cuban exit visas and passports. They travel from Havana to Paris, where they disembark from the plane and go to the Israeli embassy to receive documentation to enter Israel as olim, immigrants. They complete the final leg of their journey on Canadian travel documents.

Recent public attention to the organized aliyah of Cuban Jews has also stimulated interest in their reception in Israel and their feelings about living in the Jewish state. Aside from the usual problems that immigrants face—learning a new language, finding a job—the major complaint is that the aid package available to them, they believe, is the same as that provided to new immigrants from other Western countries, and considerably less than what is given to Jews coming from countries defined as “distressed,” such as Ethiopia, Yemen, Syria, and Iran. The Cuban Jews believe that this is unfair since the government of Cuba, unlike those of

other Western states, takes away the job of anyone applying for an exit visa, Jewish or not, and confiscates all of the property of those who leave except for 20 kilograms of clothing.\textsuperscript{157}

Another source of dissatisfaction stems from unrealistic expectations. Some Cuban Jews immigrate to Israel because, as Jews, it is the simplest way of escaping from the poverty and lack of job opportunities in Cuba. Their ultimate aim, however, is to reach the U.S. They have found, however, that it is extremely difficult to get to the U.S., and many feel trapped in Israel. There is a unique psychological aspect to this frustration as well: Cuban \textit{olim} know that many of their friends and neighbors who settled in Miami have been very successful, and they compare their own situation with those Cubans, not with other Israeli immigrant groups, and they tend to feel shortchanged.

A few among the \textit{olim} have returned to Cuba, and the dissatisfaction of Cubans in Israel may cause other Cuban Jews to think twice about aliyah. However, younger \textit{olim}, especially those with technical skills and proficiency in Hebrew, have integrated successfully into the Israeli economy and are very happy in their adopted country.\textsuperscript{158}

Whatever the short-term problems, the slow but steady emigration of many of the younger Cuban Jews seems destined to siphon off much of the Jewish energy that was generated over the course of the 1990s. Barring dramatic improvement in the Cuban economy, emigration will continue, and since the Jewish community in Cuba will only convert those who have some Jewish ancestry or are married to Jews—virtually all of whom, if they were interested, have already converted—the Cuban Jewish community will shrink in size.

The fate of this tiny community largely depends on what happens to the country. Life in Cuba remains a struggle: the few stores that exist are poorly stocked; almost everything is rationed; very few people have cars, and most of the vehicles on the road are old and in constant need of repair. As for the political situation, Fidel Castro recently fainted in the middle of a speech, underscoring the potential for a sudden change in leadership.\textsuperscript{159} Castro has repeatedly insisted that his brother Raúl, currently the defense minister, is his heir, adding that, "There is not only

\textsuperscript{157}Erik Schechter, "Out of Castro's Frying Pan," \textit{Jerusalem Report}, Oct. 25, 1999, pp. 20–22. In fact the notion that the Cubans are treated as Westerners is a misperception. Since July 1992 Cuban immigrants have received benefits at the level of Soviet immigrants, which is higher than that for Westerners. Correspondence with Margalit Bejarano, Apr. 2001.


Raúl, but a plethora of young people with talent.” Raúl has the loyalty of the military, but is seen as lacking charisma and popular appeal. Other potential leaders include Carlos Lage Dávila, the secretary of the Council of Ministers; Ricardo Alarcón Quesada, president of Cuba’s parliament; and Felipe Pérez Roque, the foreign minister. Jaime Suchlicki, director of the University of Miami’s Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, argues that without Fidel, Raúl will have to establish a joint leadership, but that a swift shift to democracy was unlikely: “They want a smooth passing of power, not another revolution.” The Cuban leadership, Suchliki notes, has carefully studied the Chinese model that would allow for gradual economic change while maintaining tight political control, and this might be the basis for an evolving governmental structure in a post-Fidel Cuba.

Despite the demographic challenge symbolized by aliyah and the uncertainty surrounding the political and economic future, the Jewish renaissance in Cuba is real. Jewish leaders no longer speak with sadness about the “death of a community”; instead, locals and visitors alike talk with excitement about a miraculous rebirth, a testament to the endurance of Jewish identity and faith.

Contemporary Jewish Music in America

BY MARK KLIGMAN

JEWISH MUSIC IN AMERICA has become a growth industry over the past few decades. Over 2,000 recordings of Jewish music are currently available, with close to 250 new releases produced each year. And although most listeners and consumers are aware of only a few performers, more than 400 artists and groups are engaged in creating and performing this music.¹

Beyond the impressive numbers, the Jewish music being created, performed, preserved, and disseminated today in America not only reflects the vast changes that have taken place in American Jewish life, but represents a quintessentially American Jewish phenomenon.

The scope of contemporary Jewish music encompasses a wide range of genres and styles, including music for the synagogue, folk and popular music on religious themes, Yiddish songs, klezmer music, Israeli music, and art music by serious composers. Every sector of the Jewish community—from the most right-wing Orthodox to the most secular—participates in the Jewish music endeavor, creating, performing, and listening to the particular music that meets its taste and needs. Jewish music is sung and performed in synagogues of all sizes and types, in schools, community centers, and summer camps, at organizational conclaves, and in college campus auditoriums or in concert halls as august as Carnegie Hall. Ironically, at a time when Jewish commitment is declining,² Jewish musical self-expression is on the upswing.

Note: The author gratefully acknowledges the following musicians and producers for giving of their time and sharing their knowledge and experiences: Sam Adler, Merri Arian, Judy Bressler, Marsha Bryant Edelman, Rabbi Daniel Freelander, Avraham Fried, Randee Friedman, Rabbi Ya’akov Gabriel, Rabbi Shefa Gold, Jordon Gorfinkel, Yossi Green, Jim Gutman, Linda Hirschorn, Joshua Jacobson, Arthur Kiron, Jeff Klepper, Matthew Lazar, Frank London, Sheya Mendlowitz, Alan Nelson, Mayer Pasternak, Velvel Pasternak, Bruce Phillips, Seth Rosner, Nachum Segal, Lenny Solomon, Robbie Solomon, Andy Statman, Craig Taubman, Izzy Taubenfeld, and Josh Zweiback. Thanks also to Judah Cohen, Marion Jacobson, Arthur Kiron, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Bruce Phillips, and Jeffrey Shandler for reading earlier drafts of this study and offering insightful comments.


To be sure, the creation of Jewish music in America is not a new phenomenon. The period between 1880 and 1940—the golden age of the cantors and the heyday of Yiddish theater and cinema—was a fertile period for Jewish music. But as the children of the last immigrant generation came of age during and after World War II, and Yiddish no longer served as their primary language, a distinctively new Jewish music gradually evolved, a process significantly accelerated by changes in the community after the Six-Day War of 1967. Contemporary Jewish music—which developed at about the same time across the entire spectrum of American Judaism—makes use primarily of English and Hebrew (especially liturgical texts for life-cycle events), not Yiddish. And while Eastern European motifs have not totally disappeared, today's Jewish music employs many elements of popular American music. Thus, members of the postwar generation have developed an American Jewish music, a vehicle that distinguishes themselves from their parents, a new, positive expression of their Jewishness.

Since Jewish music is so diverse, and there is no producer, distributor, or retailer who services the musical needs of the entire community, it is not easy to assess the Jewish musical tastes of American Jewry as a whole. One effort to do so was a poll of listeners' favorite Jewish music artists, conducted in the fall of 1997 by Tara Publications and *Moment* magazine. The poll came up with the following top ten artists, in order of their popularity: Debbie Friedman, Safam, Itzhak Perlman, Klezmer Conservatory Band, Klezmatics, Judy Frankel, Shlomo Carlebach, Kol B'Seder, Craig Taubman, Rebbesoul. This listing certainly reflected the diversity of the Jewish community. Debbie Friedman and Kol B'Seder are active in the Reform movement; Safam and Craig Taubman in the Conservative movement; Shlomo Carlebach—an Orthodox rabbi—is known in a wide variety of settings; Klezmer Conservatory Band and Klezmatics play in concert or community settings, and usually not in a religious context; Itzhak Perlman has been prominent in classical and now klezmer concerts; and Judy Frankel performs Sephardic music. Yet even the broad spectrum represented in this poll is misleading since *Moment* has very few

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4"Readers Choice: Jewish Music Poll Results," *Moment*, Feb. 1998, p. 78. While popularity of artists may not necessarily reflect sales figures, there is no question that, in the non-Orthodox market, the top five artists in this poll sell more recordings than do the others.

5All artists believe that their music is for the entire Jewish community, not just for a specific group. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in detail below, different groups expect a particular type of musical style, texts, and other qualities in the music they listen to. The association of artists or groups with a community is based upon the type of setting where they most commonly perform.
Orthodox readers, and thus solo performers such as Mordechai Ben David and Avraham Fried, and groups such as D'veykus and the Miami Boys Choir, all popular in the Orthodox community, are not represented. Nevertheless, the music of the ten artists and groups at the top of the Moment poll, plus several from the Orthodox community, do represent, more or less, the core of contemporary Jewish music.6 While there are many other noteworthy up-and-coming performers, the present article focuses on the major established artists and groups.

Pertinent concerns for the investigation of contemporary Jewish music that this essay addresses are: the nature of the music; the degree to which older European styles are retained and innovations made; how traditional motifs are made into something "new"; the identity of the new music's creators; the function it plays in Jewish life; and the reasons why it has become a growth industry.

DEFINITIONS

No attempt is made here to define Jewish music. Jewish music is, always has been, and will be, in many different styles, reflecting particular historic periods and geographic locations. Music written by and for Jews in Central or Eastern Europe during the 19th century differs from that of American or Israeli Jews in the 20th century, each being influenced by the music of its environs. Musical style is informed by aesthetic taste, and since this never remains constant, "Jewish" music continually changes and develops. While there may be a set of descriptive musical traits (modes, forms, and styles) that define Hassidic, cantorial, or klezmer music, this applies only for a particular period of time. Today, a wealth of Jewish musical styles allows American Jews to choose the music that expresses a particular dimension of Judaism—be it religious or secular or a combination of both.

The term "community" will often be used in this study to denote a segment of American Jewry that has one or another taste in Jewish music. While there is considerable documentation on the nuances and concerns of each of the main religious streams,7 there is no comparable literature on those who do not affiliate religiously, that is secular or cultural Jews, Yiddishists, and so on. Furthermore, since Jewish identity is complex, the

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7Wertheimer, A People Divided, pp. 95–169.
boundaries between these segments are by no means clear-cut. People who listen to Yiddish and klezmer music, for example, may be religious or secular, while the performers and artists of this music generally do not identify religiously. The characterization of communities throughout this study, then, should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as expressing the traits most commonly found in the music and the artists of a particular group.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Several genres of Jewish music were brought over from Europe in the 1880–1920 period, when over two million East European Jews migrated to the United States:8

1. Cantorial music9 is based on nusach, a Hebrew term denoting melodic phrases traditionally used for leading synagogue worship, in which specific prayers in the liturgy are sung in a particular mode or scale.10 A cantorial virtuoso not only performs the nusach accurately, but is also capable of improvisation and of vocal embellishments that have specific vocal "effects," such as a dret (turn) or kvetch (cry).

2. Yiddish music might derive from either a religious or secular context, with much of the latter coming from the Yiddish theater. Such music reflected the desire of many American Jews to hold on to the Yiddish culture of their birthplaces without any sort of religious commitment.

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10The Jewish prayer mode system uses three primary modes: Adoshem Malach, a major scale with a lowered seventh and flatted tenth; Magen Avot, equivalent to the Western minor scale; and Ahavah Rabbah, a scale with a lowered second and a raised third producing an augmented-second interval typically avoided in Western classical music. For a further discussion see Baruch J. Cohon, “Structure of the Synagogue Prayer Chant,” Journal of the American Musicological Society 3 (1950), pp. 17–32; and Hanoch Avenary, “The Concept of Mode in European Synagogue Chant: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre,” Yuval 2 (1971), pp. 11–21.
3. Klezmer (derived from *k'leizemer*, literally “vessels of song,” the Hebrew term for musical instruments) denotes the music heard at Jewish weddings, bar mitzvahs, and other life-cycle events, as well as the instrumental accompaniment to Yiddish songs in the theater. Much of it was derived from non-Jewish folk traditions of Eastern Europe.

4. Hassidic music, both vocal and instrumental, was produced in the courts of the dynasties of rebbes (charismatic leaders) of the Hassidic movement, which originated in the Ukraine in the late 18th century and subsequently spread throughout Eastern Europe. Joyous and fervent singing characterize the *niggun*, the wordless song sung in the synagogue and at a *tisch* (literally “table,” referring to a gathering with the rebbe).

5. Art music is that which is heard in the concert hall, such as, in Europe, the works produced by the members of the Society for Jewish Folk Music in St. Petersburg. Composers such as Joel Engel (1868–1927), Joseph Achron (1886–1943), and Moses Milner (1886–1953) wrote symphonies, chamber works, and art songs based upon folk melodies and incorporating aspects of the traditional Jewish modal system.\(^1\)

Obviously, sharp lines cannot be drawn between these five genres. Cantors not only sang for the synagogue, they also performed Yiddish songs. Conversely, some of the Yiddish songs depict a *hazzan* (cantor), and may even parody the emotional nature of his singing. In a klezmer performance, the aesthetic of the clarinet player often mimics the *geshray* (wail) of the cantor. The very fabric of the music itself proves the interrelationship: cantorial *nusach* is incorporated into Yiddish songs, klezmer, Hassidic tunes, and art music. When new songs were composed for each genre, more often than not they were written in the traditional modes of Jewish prayer. The clearest way to distinguish these genres, then, is through their use or context: cantorial music— the synagogue; Yiddish songs—folk or theater; klezmer—life-cycle events; Hassidic music—liturgical and paraliturgical occasions; art music—the concert hall.

Yet a sixth musical genre evolved over the first half of the 20th century—Zionist songs in Hebrew, English, and a variety of other languages that focused on the dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Popularized in schools, synagogues, summer camps, and at social events, such music took on much greater significance with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and even more so after the Six-Day War of 1967.

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\(^1\)For further discussion see Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music* (New York, 1954). A noted composer for the concert hall who based some works on Jewish melodies was Ravel; he wrote a setting of the kaddish for voice and orchestra, *Deux Mélodies Hébraïques* (1915).
The Immigrant Generation

The cultural conflict between Jews of Central European origin, who came to the United States in the middle of the 19th century, and the Eastern Europeans, who started coming in large numbers in the 1880s, was expressed in music as well. Beginning in early-19th-century Germany, Central European cantors sought to incorporate a more orderly style of worship modeled on the Protestant church. When Jews from this area came to America, they brought with them the liturgical innovations of composers Solomon Sulzer (1804–1890), Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894), and Samuel Naumbourg (1815–1880). As the Central European immigrants Americanized and became largely identified with the Reform movement, new hymnals and new compositions provided a rich array of music for their synagogues. Abraham W. Binder (1895–1966), along with Isadore Freed (1900–1960) and Herbert Fromm (1905–1995), formulated an American Reform style of music for cantor, choir, and organ in which the choir took a prominent role. In addition, the music of the cantorial line was written out in musical notation and did not consist solely of the traditional nusach passages or rely on the cantor's expertise in nusach. Thus a trained cantor was no longer needed in a Reform temple, only a musician who could read the music.

The newcomers, Eastern European Jews, tended to perpetuate the more emotional sound of their synagogue music, and in their traditional synagogues—all the Orthodox and many of the Conservative—the organ was not employed. Nevertheless, traditional congregations that sought to innovate used the choral music of David Nowakowsky (1848–1921), Eliezer Gerovitsch (1844–1914), and others, which was influenced by the German synagogue composers. The many recordings and surviving radio broadcasts of the great cantors made during the early part of the 20th century have frozen the sound of this musical style in time.

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12 The music of these three composers defined the bulk of the repertoire for many Ashkenazi Jews during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century both in Europe and America. For a clear understanding of their contributions see Geoffrey Goldberg, "Jewish Liturgical Music in the Wake of Nineteenth Century Reform," in Hoffman and Walton, eds., Sacred Sound and Social Change, pp. 59–83.


14 In some synagogue contexts, including traditional synagogues where musical instruments were used without restriction, the cantor would improvise based on nusach: in most instances the accompaniment was also improvised.

15 Some synagogue composers who immigrated to America and based their music on the European tradition were Heinrich Schalit (1886–1976), Frederick Piket (1903–1974), Max Janowski (1912–1991), and Max Helfman (1901–1963).
For the immigrants from Eastern Europe, the synagogue and its class-
rooms could also be the place to hear Yiddish songs and Zionist songs.
At home, families sang all of these as well as zemirot (Sabbath table
songs) and holiday songs, such as those for the Passover seder.

Yiddish songs and klezmer music were a vital part of Jewish life for
these immigrants. New music created for the Yiddish theater, which was
at its height in the 1930s, and for Yiddish cinema, which began in 1930,
was the basis of an industry that included recorded music on 78-rpm
records, live concerts, and the publication of sheet music. Yiddish the-
ater music could be heard not only on the Lower East Side of Manhat-
tan but also in neighborhood theaters in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and in
cities across the United States.\(^\text{16}\)

Yiddish theater and its music expressed the struggles of adjusting to
American life combined with a hopeful message. The music provided a
way to cope, and singing the songs made one feel part of a community
of people all undergoing the same ordeal of acculturation. In cinema and
theater, the songs expressed the full range of Jewish life. Tragedies such
as the sinking of the Titanic and the Triangle Fire of 1913 were the top-
ics of popular Yiddish songs. Song texts portrayed life in “the old coun-
try” in romanticized and idyllic form, while also conveying the horror and
pain of pogroms and hunger.\(^\text{17}\) Musically, composers for the Yiddish the-
ater employed the wide range of styles available to them. Composers
such as Sholom Secunda (1894–1974) and Abraham Ellstein
(1907–1963), both of whom grew up singing in synagogue choirs, incor-
porated the music of the synagogue together with popular American
styles.

Ultimately, the lure of writing or performing for mainstream audiences
led to the decline of the Yiddish theater and its music, relegating klezmer
musicians to performing at simchas (happy occasions such as weddings
and bar mitzvahs), banquets, and social and political functions. During
their early years as immigrants, klezmer musicians formed unions; these
unions, however, dissolved when the desire to work in mainstream settings
became more attractive.\(^\text{18}\) In the 1920s klezmer ensembles adapted to
American ways with the introduction of American rhythms and with
changes in instrumentation: the clarinet became the lead instrument, and
the tsimble (hammer dulcimer) and harmonica (small accordion) fell out
of use. By the 1930s klezmer music began to decline, and the very term

\(16\) Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater* (Syracuse, 1977;


\(18\) James Loeffler, “Di Rusishe Progresiv Muzikal Yunyon No. 1 Fun Amerike: The First
“klezmer” came to have a derogatory connotation, referring to musicians who could not adapt to the American music scene. Those who did adapt assimilated into the musical mainstream, paralleling the assimilation of the immigrant generation in other areas. Parents, now, sought to educate their children in classical music rather than klezmer music. Musicians sought out formal music education, many at elite institutions; thereafter they joined symphonies, played for Broadway theater, and joined American musicians’ unions, not Jewish unions.

*After World War II*

The vacuum left by the decline of Yiddish and klezmer music in the 1940s was filled, first, by music from Israel. In the 1940s and 1950s there were songs of the *Yishuv*, the prestate Jewish community in Palestine, such as “V’ulai,” and songs of the War of Independence of 1948, such as “Hafinjan” and “Shir Hapalmach.” The repertoire later came to include army-troupe songs, the music of professional performers, and the songs of Naomi Shemer and other composers. The practice of singing Israeli songs in American synagogues, camps, and at social gatherings, which spread in the 1950s, accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s as young American Jews looked to Israel as a positive model for Jewish identity, and the songs’ popularity also served as a Jewishly unifying factor. Israeli songs popular in the United States—such as “Bashana Haba’a,” “Erev Shel Shoshanim,” and Naomi Shemer’s “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav” and “Al Kol Ayleh”—exuded yearning for the land and commitment to it, appreciation for the beauty of life in Israel, and the longing for peace. Several song festivals and performing troupes aided in the spread of Israeli folk music. The flow of new musical repertoire from Israel slowed consider-
ably in the late 1970s and thereafter, undoubtedly reflecting the process of distancing between Israel and American Jewry that was taking place.\textsuperscript{24}

The vibrant folk-song revival of the 1950s had a major impact on American culture and subsequently on American Jewish culture. In discussing this period, folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the efforts of entertainer Theodore Bikel and other Jews involved in folk music: “Bikel quickly became a part of the revival scene. While Jewish repertoire may not have been central to the folk song revival, Jews certainly were. They owned and managed clubs and record companies. They were composers, performers, agents, and managers. They were writers and critics.”\textsuperscript{25} Bikel produced his first recording devoted to Jewish songs, \textit{Folksongs of Israel}, in 1955. On the record he sang Jewish melodies to Hebrew and Yiddish texts, in a performance style that was polished and professional.\textsuperscript{26} (Shlomo Carlebach, who began his career under folk-music influence around this time but whose focus was on a spiritual Jewish message, is discussed in more detail below.) The polish of Bikel stands in marked contrast to the insider Yiddish humor of Mickey Katz’s clever musical parodies, which grew out of the frenetic dance music of wedding bands and were widely disseminated in radio broadcasts, recordings, and performances.\textsuperscript{27} Kirshenblatt-Gimblett views these musical parodies as the forerunners of the witty “shtick” of klezmer performers of the ‘80s and ‘90s.\textsuperscript{28} Other entertainers, like Allan Sherman, whose popular \textit{My Son, the Folk Singer} (1962) sold over one million recordings, were able to appeal more broadly to popular American culture.\textsuperscript{29} The musical \textit{Fiddler on the Roof} (1964), based on a story by the great Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem (Shalom Rabinovitz, 1859–1916), was enormously popular and its music appeared on many recordings thereafter.\textsuperscript{30}

Music of the concert hall was also prominent in American Jewish life from the 1940s on. To Jews who valued high culture, the musical expres-
sion of Jewishness in this form was more praiseworthy than the traditional forms of Jewish music, which they deemed second-rate. In fact, the acceptance of Jewish composers and noted performers in the concert hall paralleled the Jews' own growing sense of being comfortably at home in America. The compositions of Ernest Bloch (1880–1959), such as *Schelomo* (1916) and *Avodath Hakodesh* (1933), were regularly performed by American orchestras. Wide critical acclaim greeted symphonic works by Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) — *Jeremiah Symphony* (1943) and *Symphony No. 3 "Kaddish"* (1963) — which consciously made use of Jewish musical themes taken from the traditional Jewish biblical chant, as well as his *Chichester Psalms* (1965), which used the Hebrew text of biblical psalms. For a discussion of Jewish elements in Bernstein see Jack Gottlieb, “Symbols of Faith in the Music of Leonard Bernstein,” *Musical Quarterly* 66, 1980, pp. 287–95; and Geoffrey Fine, “The Vocal Music of Leonard Bernstein: Jewish Applications and Interpretations,” Master’s thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (hereafter HUC-JIR), 1998.

Changes in the institutions of Jewish life had a direct affect on the development of contemporary Jewish music. In the synagogue sphere, the 1950s accelerated the decline of the cantor as musical virtuoso, a trend that had begun earlier in the Reform movement. The era of star performing cantors, such as Yosele Rosenblatt, Samuel Vigoda, and Moshe and David Koussevitzky, came to an end, as the cantor was increasingly seen as a synagogue “professional,” with responsibilities as prayer leader, musical expert, music teacher, educator, pastoral counselor, and administrator. In the 1940s and 1950s cantorial schools and professional societies were established for each denomination; these aided the growth of music in synagogues. Jewish music was disseminated more widely with

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34 The first American cantorial school was the School of Sacred Music at HUC-JIR, founded in 1948; its graduates primarily serve the Reform movement. The Cantor’s Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary, established in 1952, provides cantors for Conservative congregations, and Yeshiva University’s Cantorial Training Institute, opened in 1964, trains cantors for Orthodox synagogues. Each denomination also has its own professional cantorial organization (Reform: American Conference of Cantors; Conservative: Cantors Assembly; Orthodox: Cantorial Council of America), but some cantors belong to more than one organization. The Reform movement invested women as cantors in 1976 and the Conservative movement followed suit in 1987.
the publication of volumes of melodies traditionally sung in synagogues, schools, and at home.\(^\text{35}\)

Thus varieties of Jewish music with roots in European traditions, modified by accommodations to American tastes, were well established by the mid-1960s. But a movement of new Jewish music was about to transform the scene.

**Hassidic Goes Mainstream**

A pivotal development in the 1950s and early 1960s was the recording of noncantorial Jewish music. This began with Benzion Shenker's recording of the music of the Modzitz Hassidic sect, *Modzitzer Melaveh Malka Melodies*, in 1950. Born in 1925 and raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Shenker was a talented singer who, from an early age, performed with some of the great cantors—in 1937, at the age of 12, he appeared in concert with David Roitman, Adolph Katchko, and Eliahu Kretchman.\(^\text{36}\) In 1940 the Modzitzer Rebbe, Shaul Taub, came to America. Shenker developed a personal relationship with the rabbi, one that had a deep impact on him and that lasted a lifetime. Twelve other recordings followed the first, and they included many original songs by Shenker, as well as traditional Modzitz melodies. Two of Shenker's 450 original compositions are regularly sung in many homes on the Sabbath: "Mizmor Le-David" (Psalm 23) and "Aishes Chayil" ("A Woman of Valor"—Proverbs 31:10–31). Both appeared on his *Joy of the Shabbath* album of 1960. In the early 1960s and through the 1970s, David Werdyger, a cantor, also recorded Hassidic melodies. His recordings through the 1970s featured the music of the Gerer, Melitzer, Skulener, Bobover, Boyaner, and Rodomsker dynasties.\(^\text{37}\) Recordings of the music of other dynasties, such as Lubavitch and Munkacs, by a variety of other artists, followed.

The original Hassidic melodies that Shenker and Werdyger recorded exemplify the two styles of Hassidic song: a *stam niggun*, a melody with a

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\(^{35}\) Two important liturgical publications are the *Out of Print Classics* series, published by HUC-JIR in the 1950s, which includes the works of Baer, Birnbaum, Dunajewsky, Gerovitsch, Lewandowski, Naumbourg, Nowakowski, Sulzer, Weintraub, and others; and Gershon Ephros, *The Cantorial Anthology: Traditional and Modern Synagogue Music*, 6 vols. (New York, 1929–1975), which also includes works by various composers. Harry Cooper-Smith, *Favorite Songs of the Jewish People* (New York, 1939) is primarily for home use.


\(^{37}\) Werdyger states that he knew the rebbes of each of these dynasties, was impressed by all of them, and considered it a high honor to lead prayers at their synagogues. David Werdyger as told to Avraham Yaakov Finkel, *Songs of Hope, the Holocaust Diaries* (New York, 1993), pp. 308–14.
regular rhythm used for group singing; and a *deveykus niggun*, a melody that is rhythmically free, most typically sung by one individual, with the goal of achieving a state of spiritual ecstasy. In traditional contexts—such as *seudah shelishit* (the third Sabbath meal, late on Saturday afternoon), *yahrtzeit* (yearly commemoration of a death), or *tisch* (gathering at the rabbi’s table)—both musical styles are used: first a *deveykus niggun* to express feelings of longing, followed by a *stam niggun* to express joy. The Hassidic recordings of Shenker and the others, like the recordings of other types of folk music, generally presented the music in appropriate, unsophisticated folk-style arrangements, but sometimes the orchestral accompaniment and choral arrangements followed a more “classical” musical style.

Another development was the inception of the Hassidic Song Festival in Israel in 1969, a phenomenon that lasted more than a decade. Devoted to the creation of new Jewish music based on liturgical texts, it was actually a contest, consisting of an evening presentation of newly created Hassidic-style songs performed by well-known singers who were not Hassidim. Entries were judged and prizes were awarded. Memorable songs among the winners include: Nurit Hirsh’s “Ose Shalom,” Tsvika Pick’s “Sh’ma Yisrael,” Shlomo Carlebach’s “Od Yishama” and “V’haer Enenu,” and David Weinkranz’s “Y’varech’cha.” Annual recordings and multiple performances by the Hassidic Song Festival troupe in the U.S. helped popularize these songs. Although the music performed was certainly not Hassidic in the traditional sense, the fact that the festival gave prominence to new Jewish music based on liturgy demonstrated that music in popular and folk styles based on Jewish sources could convey an authentic Jewish message.

**Carlebach**

Jewish musical artists of today consider Shlomo Carlebach (1925–1994) the father of contemporary Jewish music. Combining the participatory ease of folk music, the energy of the newly created music from Israel, and the religious fervor of the Hassidic niggun, he succeeded in moving liturgical music out of the synagogue and into a wide range of

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39 Velvel Pasternak interview.

40 Velvel Pasternak’s unpaginated foreword to *The Best of the Chassidic Song Festivals* (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1989). This book has the sheet music for these and other songs.
other settings, including concert halls and night clubs, and used his music to educate and inspire Jews to renew their Jewish identity and discover the beauty of Jewish life. A charismatic and controversial figure, he remained active for over 30 years, until his passing in 1994.41

Shlomo Carlebach was born in Berlin, the son of Rabbi Naftali Hartwig Carlebach (1889–1968), a well-known rabbi. The family moved to Vienna and, when the Nazis took over Austria in 1938, they fled to Lithuania and then the United States, settling in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. He studied in a number of yeshivahs and received rabbinical ordination in 1953. During his student years he developed ties with a number of Hassidic groups and came under the influence of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), who succeeded his father-in-law as Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1951. Carlebach, in fact, at Schneerson's behest, spent two years spreading the message of Judaism on college campuses (Carlebach subsequently severed his ties with Lubavitch, and rarely spoke about this part of his life). In the mid-1950s, feeling unfulfilled as a yeshivah teacher and part-time congregational rabbi in New Jersey, Carlebach began his musical career. Although he had always loved music, Carlebach's yeshivah teachers, considering it a waste of time, discouraged him from pursuing it. He could not read music and had no formal technical training.42 In his own words:

I saw someone playing guitar, and I started learning. I got a teacher, and one day while she was on the phone I started making up a melody and she heard it, said it sounded beautiful, and she wrote it down. Then she said, "Whenever you have a new song, call me and I'll write it down." So a few days later I had a new melody for the wedding song "Od Yishama" and I called her up and she wrote it down. And that's how my career began.43

His first record album, in 1959, Haneshomoh Loch—known in English as Songs of My Soul—was followed in 1960 by Borchi Nafshi. The lyrics were liturgical texts, psalms, and other passages from the Bible, and the melodies were folk-like in their straightforward and easy-to-sing stepwise design. Carlebach, in fact, explained that the melodies came to him first, and only then did he scan the prayer book or the Bible to find the words


to fit them. "Some call me a balladeer, some call me a revivalist—maybe I'm both," he told an interviewer after his first album appeared. The songs were immediately popular and were adopted by Jews of all denominations. Carlebach himself estimated that 90 percent of those who came to hear him perform were not Orthodox. Other recordings followed, including some on the well-known Vanguard folk-music label: *Shlomo Carlebach at the Village Gate*, recorded live, in 1963, and *Shlomo Carlebach in the Palace of the King* in 1965. About his own sudden popularity, Carlebach explained: "After the Second World War, nothing happened in [the] Jewish religious music market. So every niggun [melody] I made up, right away hundreds of people were singing it, because nothing else was happening. It was a major breakthrough." Over the course of his career Carlebach recorded over 25 albums. Some estimate that he wrote close to 1,000 melodies, many of which other singers have performed on hundreds of recordings.

In 1967, together with his twin brother Eli Chaim, Shlomo Carlebach took over the direction of his deceased father's congregation, Kehillath Jacob, on Manhattan's West Side, popularly known as the Carlebach Shul. But he seemed to be forever on the move, performing at folk festivals around the country and appearing on stage with Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, setting up a House of Love and Prayer in the San Francisco area in the late-1960s to reach out to "hippies," and traveling around the world. His first trip to the Soviet Union was in 1970, and there too he inspired many Jews to seek out their heritage. Carlebach performed for many Jewish organizations and before a broad spectrum of Jewish audiences, equally at home in all settings. He was well known in Israel, where he frequently performed for the Israel Defense Force, notably during the wars of 1967 and 1973. Because he lived so much of his life on the road, the image many people have of Carlebach is that of the rabbi with a suitcase of books in one hand and a guitar in the other.

From the standpoint of the development of Jewish music in America, Carlebach's most striking innovation was the blending of Hassidic song

44 Offenbacher, "Interview with a Jewish Minstrel," p. 53.
46 Ibid., p. 37. Others estimate that he wrote some 5,000 melodies, only a relatively small number of which were recorded. See Gitta Schreiber, "Shlomo Carlebach: An Exclusive Interview," *Country Yossi Family Magazine*, Nov. 1989, p. 30. The last recording released during his lifetime was *Shabbos with Shlomo*, recorded in 1993; the recording previous to this was ten years earlier. Shortly after he died a recording entitled *Shabbos in Shomayim* was released. Collections of songs were published prior to his death and after. A recent collection, *The Best of Shlomo Carlebach 1960–1990*, includes 90 songs and 24 stories. These and other recent Carlebach recordings are produced by Jerusalem Star Productions.
47 Brandwine, *Reb Shlomele*, p. 29.
with folk music. As noted above, Hassidic music is typically written either to a religious text or is wordless—a nignun. In Hassidic music, individual sections are repeated one or more times. Also, sometimes the musical modes of different sections of the same song, and their respective rhythms, too, may be quite distinct from each other, thus giving a unique character to each. The major characteristics of folk songs, on the other hand, are easy-to-sing lyrics, regular rhythms, and simple harmonies. Carlebach’s music encompasses both genres. A typical Carlebach song has two related sections, each having a different character, with the lyrics coming from a religious text. The songs are easy to sing and to remember—the melody is instantly familiar, as if the listener has heard it before. Carlebach frequently began a song by quietly whistling the melody. Whistling is not part of any Jewish musical style, but Carlebach made it work. The accompaniment would grow stronger, and then he sang the text. The consistent, steady beat—perhaps reminiscent of the march-like Modzitz melodies that he had absorbed growing up in Williamsburg—along with the warmth and a certain pathos, inevitably induced the audience to join in the singing. In concert, Carlebach’s appeal came not only from the music but also from his charm and magnetic personality. He would intersperse the music with stories, Jewish legends, accounts of his experiences with people, and insights into the Jewish tradition. Communal involvement was essential for him, he said:

I’m never satisfied with my singing. I don’t think I have a good voice. I think my voice is just good enough to inspire people to sing with me. If I would have a gevald [incredible] voice like, let’s say, Moshe Koussevitzky, then nobody would want to sing with me, because then they’ll think they don’t want to miss my voice, but my voice is just good enough to make them sing.

Many of Carlebach’s songs have become standard fare in synagogues, at weddings, and at other Jewish gatherings. So quickly and completely did his music penetrate the Jewish world that many who hear or sing the tunes assume that they are traditional melodies; they have no idea that Carlebach created them. Among the best known are “Am Yisrael Hai,” “Yerushalayim,” “Esa Eina,” “Od Yishama,” “Va Ha’er Eyneynu,” “Ki Mi-Tsiyon,” “U-va’u Ha-Ovdim,” and “Le-Ma’an Ahai Ve-Re’ai.”

Shlomo Carlebach’s legacy was profound. As noted above, though he was an Orthodox rabbi he was among the top ten musical artists in the Moment magazine poll, a great majority of whose respondents were un-

49 Interview with Nachum Segal, July 19, 1998.
50 Brandwine, Reb Shlomele, p. 9.
doubtedly not Orthodox Jews. Considering that his main contributions were in the 1960s and 1970s, his continuing popularity in the late 1990s is noteworthy. Within the Orthodox world, he was viewed with some skepticism during his lifetime because of his apparent affinity with the "hippie" lifestyle. But Carlebach's popularity among the Orthodox rose considerably after his passing in 1994. The Carlebach Shul in Manhattan, which used to have trouble getting a minyan (prayer quorum), is now packed every Shabbat, and many "Carlebach minyanim" or Carlebach-style synagogues have sprung up in Jewish communities throughout the United States and in Israel.  

According to Velvel Pasternak, a publisher and scholar of Jewish music, the key to the Carlebach mystique was his unconventional persona. Although Carlebach was a rabbi, notes Pasternak, had he worn traditional East European rabbinical hat and long black coat, no one would have been interested. "People responded to his melodies and his personality, he had charisma. Melodies as simple as they were became hypnotic. People wanted something different, people didn't want Eastern European music." Jewish radio-show personality Nachum Segal, in contrast, stresses Carlebach's message, remarking that what made him unique was that "Carlebach was there to infuse Jews with Jewish pride."  

Carlebach's music and message provided a model for younger artists, particularly those in the religious denominations—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Robbie Solomon, cantor, songwriter, and performer in the group Safam; Jeff Klepper, cantor and performer in Kol B'Seder; and Avraham Fried, performer in the Orthodox and Hassidic communities, all sang his music in the 1960s and 1970s and then went on to create their own. Today it is taken for granted that Jewish music is an effective vehicle to connect Jews to Judaism, but it is all-too-often forgotten that Carlebach was the first to envision the concept and carry it out. For those who are critical of the commercialized aspects of the Jewish music industry today, another positive Carlebach legacy was that he seemed less interested in making money—he was slipshod about copyrighting his tunes and they were often "stolen"—than in seeking to touch and change

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51 The term "Carlebach minyan" or "happy minyan" refers to a prayer group or synagogue that uses Carlebach melodies and a spirited prayer style for Sabbath services. See Gary Rosenblatt, "The Sound of Prayer," New York Jewish Week, July 17, 1998, p. 7, which sees attempts to incorporate Carlebach melodies as an expression of the quest for spirituality in the 1990s. Cantor Sherwood Goffin, commenting on Rosenblatt's column, pointed out that though Carlebach was innovative, he always kept to the nusach. "Not Just Tunes," ibid., July 31, 1998, p. 7.  
52 Pasternak interview.  
53 Segal interview.
the lives of people, a quality ever more in demand today as American Jewry worries about Jewish continuity. In these ways, the Carlebach legacy lives on.

THE "NEW" JEWISH MUSIC

The Jewish music that came into being in the 1960s and 1970s consciously moved away from Eastern European musical modes, styles, and aesthetics to appeal to the tastes of the younger generation. But the shift was gradual and hardly clear-cut. A comment by folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett about the klezmer revival of the 1970s applies to all forms of the new music: "There is no smooth continuity from yesterday's klezmorim to today's klezmers. There is no dramatic rupture, no simple sequence of life, death, and rebirth, as the term revival would imply. Instead, old and new are in a perpetually equivocal relationship."

As already noted in relation to Shlomo Carlebach, one distinguishing feature of the new music is its new purpose—performance. Previously, American Jewish music was sung or played for particular occasions as part of the fabric of Jewish life in synagogues or for other liturgical and life-cycle events. Even the music that was recorded—cantorial, Yiddish, klezmer, Hassidic—was produced as created for its particular context. The new Jewish music, in contrast, provided performances and recordings in a variety of concert venues. These contexts shaped a type of music that was complex and diverse, and which contributed to the formation of a new kind of American Jewish culture.

Developments in Jewish music, as in other areas of Jewish life, responded to political events as well as changes in American culture. The Israeli military victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 engendered great Jewish pride, inspiring many young Jews to look more closely into the Jewish tradition. America, at the time, was a hospitable place for the recovery of one's cultural roots since the older melting-pot model of acculturation had been replaced by emphasis on ethnic pride, largely as a result of the black-power movement and the rising consciousness of white ethnic groups.

It was in the religious sphere—in all three of the major streams of American Judaism—that a new generation of artists began to introduce new styles and contexts, with the aim, modeled on Carlebach, of cultivating a connection with Judaism through music. The most evident in-

novation across the board was the use of English lyrics, either alone or together with Hebrew texts. The new Orthodox music grew out of weddings and other quasi-religious contexts such as the melave malke (Saturday night post-Sabbath gathering); Reform and Conservative music grew out of camp and synagogue use. Each context had its own imperatives that shaped the creation and development of its music.

Orthodox

The Orthodox world in the 1960s faced a significant challenge: a post-World-War-II generation of Jews—many of them, refugees from Hitler’s Europe, relative newcomers—sought to maintain an Orthodox Jewish life but also wanted to be “modern” and not live in the past. These people were caught between two cultures, and, from a musical standpoint, there was a vacuum. In his memoirs, cantor and Hassidic singer David Werdyger describes the situation at the time from the perspective of Hassidic Jews:

Until the advent of recorded hassidic music and popular frum [Orthodox] singers, the only records available to the Jewish public were those of the great chazzanim [cantors]. Popular entertainment was provided by recordings of the syrupy songs of the Yiddish theater, which flourished on Second Avenue at that time. Often these songs were sung by female ensembles, and in some instances, there was even a women “chazzante.” At frum weddings, “Here Comes the Bride” was invariably played instead of the traditional chasunah niggunim [wedding melodies]. Through music, the spirit of looseness and laxity that was prevalent among the assimilated Jewish youngsters in America was worming its way into the most observant homes.55

Note the disdain for and fear of Yiddish theater, perceived as antireligious, and of American wedding practices, such as the use of “Here Comes the Bride.” There was, then, a strong motivation to create music that would strengthen a commitment to the Orthodox way of life. Werdyger explains how new Jewish music accomplished this aim:

An entirely new panorama of Jewish song was opening up. Yeshivah students and young hassidim eagerly picked up the new tunes, singing them at home and at bar mitzvahs, engagements and weddings. The Wagnerian wedding march was left by the wayside and replaced by meaningful Jewish songs that were chosen by the chossan [groom] and kallah [bride].56

55Werdyger, Songs of Hope, p. 278.
56Ibid. The two most popular melodies played at traditional weddings today are tunes to “Od Yishama,” one of them by Carlebach; both can be found in Velvel Pasternak, The International Jewish Songbook (Owings Mills, Md., 1994), pp. 232–33.
This new Orthodox Jewish music was never intended for use in the synagogue, where traditional liturgical melodies have continued to hold sway. But, as singer Avraham Fried pointed out, there is no longer a market for recordings of cantorial music—what people want are good dance songs and ballads.57

The sheer quantity of contemporary Orthodox Jewish music is staggering, representing at least half of all the Jewish music that is available. The Orthodox music industry, based predominantly in Brooklyn, New York, encompassing performers, songwriters, arrangers, and distributors, has grown significantly over the past 25 years. While few Reform and klezmer, and no Conservative, popular artists are able to make a living from their music, about ten Orthodox musicians support themselves entirely through the creation and performance of new music.58

The simple explanation for this growth is the rising number of right-wing yeshivah and Hassidic Jews who do not listen to popular American music.59 And since activities such as watching television or attending the theater or a movie are also discouraged, their own music is virtually the sole means of entertainment. They listen to it at home, in the car, in the buses and vans that transport groups to school or work, and, for women, while tending the children and preparing meals. Live performances of this music are social events (men and women sitting separately). In short, Orthodox popular music is to Orthodox Jewish life as popular music is to American life, and one has the sense that as American popular music has become increasingly influenced by the drug culture, the counter-message of Orthodoxy’s traditional values has become ever more pointed in Orthodox music.

The growing popularity of the new music has not been accepted without reservation, as the entire phenomenon raises serious issues for the Orthodox community, and there are no historical precedents. Should limits be placed on the use of “non-Jewish” musical styles? Should the goal of the artist be to make money or to inspire people in their Jewish commitment? What can music do for those who are searching to connect to Judaism? Do rabbis have any responsibility to monitor this music? Might

57 Interview with Avraham Fried, July 6, 1998.
58 This estimate refers to popular artists, not to professionals employed as cantors, song leaders, and wedding-band musicians. While Orthodox synagogues in America support fewer than 25 full-time cantors, there are well over 500 professionally employed cantors working at Reform and Conservative synagogues. See Slobin, Chosen Voices, p. xxiii.
59 Mark Kligman, “On the Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music in Brooklyn, New York,” YIVO Annual 23, 1996, pp. 259–93. The term “yeshivah” refers to non-Hassidic, strictly Orthodox Jews. Of course the decision to listen to a particular form of music is ultimately an individual matter, and thus the characterizations in the text are no more than useful generalizations.
there not be dangers in allowing performers who are not rabbis to serve as charismatic role models for Orthodox youth? Clearly, a new dimension has been added to Orthodox Jewish life.

In terms of musical style, the new Orthodox music, while rooted in the past, has modernized way beyond Carlebach to incorporate pop, rock, easy listening, blues, country, and other musical styles. Historian Haym Soloveitchik described the situation:

Rock music sung with "kosher" lyrics was heard at the weddings of the most religious. There had been no "kosher" jazz or "kosher" swing, for music is evocative, and what was elicited by the contemporary beat was felt by the previous generation to be alien to a "Jewish rejoicing" (yiddishe simche). This was no longer the case. The body syncopated to the beat of rock, and the emotional receptivities that the contemporary rhythm engendered were now felt to be consonant with the spirit of "Jewish rejoicing." Indeed, "Hassidic" rock concerts, though decried, were not unheard of.

The rejection of Eastern European musical elements was deliberate, reflecting a broader rejection of what was perceived as outmoded Jewish nostalgia. Here is Yossi Green, composer of over 320 songs recorded on 40 albums by the most successful Orthodox performers, on the subject of klezmer music:

Klezmer music is more of a caricature of what Jewish music used to be. Of course it's very effective, apparently. An instrumentalist can then go ahead and show off his instrument, show off his ability to play. And that really has nothing to do with where Jewish music is today. That's my opinion. I'm in the center—I'm writing most of this music for years... New Hassidic music [his term for new Orthodox music] has definitely replaced klezmer. If klezmer was the downtrodden, stepped-on poor little shtetl Jew's music then this is the music of today for the young, wealthier, more educated, forward thinking Jewish mind... Klezmer is totally Jewish when ours is influenced by Elton John. You listen to "Tanyeh" or "Didoh Bei" and you tell me how beautiful these songs are. It is fresh, it is new. It is the young Jewish person saying, "I'm here, it's the '90s, I'm proud of my Judaism, I'm learning a lot but I'm also having fun—it's allowed and its okay, my kids are having fun, we're relaxing and enjoying ourselves, we're Jewish and we're proud of it."

And, commenting on the use of the Ahavah Rabbah prayer mode, which is based on a scale not used in Western music:

60See, for example, Dovid Sears, "Who Took the 'Jewish' Out of Jewish Music?" Jewish Observer, Jan. 1997, pp. 12–16.
62The lyrics of these two songs, among the most popular composed by Yossi Green and performed by Avraham Fried, are from the Babylonian Talmud. "Tanya" appears on Avraham Fried: We Are Ready! (1988), the text taken from Tractate B'rachot, p. 7a. "Didoh Bei" appears on Avraham Fried: Chazak! (1997), the text taken from Tractate Nedarim, p. 41a.
63Interview with Yossi Green, July 1, 1998.
[This] is a mode where you have to be very careful while using it in the modern music. It's a throwback to a time where people don't want to be. People don't want to live on the East Side with the pickle jars and the tenement buildings. That's what they associated with the old Art Raymond, 20–40 years ago. They don't associate with that, it is not a pleasant memory, it's a memory when things were very bad, when people were very poor and they didn't have things. Music today is about the new, a new spirit.  

The heavy reliance of the Orthodox on rock and pop music for entertainment—forms different from the Eastern European musical traditions conventionally regarded as “Jewish”—is clearly rooted in sociological factors. Barred by ever-intensifying religious inhibitions from participating in the world of non-Jewish culture, the Orthodox Jew appropriates and makes Jewish the music of that culture as a way to feel “modern” without going outside the community.

**Influential Orthodox Figures**

Young Orthodox musical groups began to appear in the early 1960s, among them The Rabbi's Sons, Mark III, Ruach, and Simchatone. Over time, members of these and other groups moved to new groups or became solo artists. Perhaps the most popular was The Rabbi's Sons (each member of the group in fact was the son of a rabbi), which recorded its first album in 1967 and three others thereafter. Clearly influenced by the music of Shlomo Carlebach, the group was noted for its lyric vocal lines in a late-1960s folk idiom, accompanied by mostly acoustic instruments, often in a fast tempo. The group was described as “the Peter, Paul, and Mary of Jewish music in the type of songs they sang and the harmonies.”  

Although The Rabbi's Sons did not last through the 1970s, their influence continued. The group's leader, Rabbi Baruch Chait, formed a new group called Kol Solonika, which incorporated a similar folk style but added a Greek sound and the use of the stringed Greek bouzouki.

This period also saw the rise of several boys' choirs, such as Pirchei and London Pirchei—now known as the London School of Jewish Song. A performer who began singing in the 1960s and is still active today is Jo Amar. His music encompasses a variety of Sephardic styles, Moroccan and Arabic, including both folk songs and cantorial melodies. Amar has produced numerous recordings that remain popular, and he performs frequently in concerts all over the world.

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64Ibid. Art Raymond was the well-known host of New York radio station WEVD.  
65Interview with Sheya Mendlowitz, July 22, 1998.  
66Its first recording, *Kol Solonika: The New Greek Hassidic Sound* (1972), was followed by five others.
In the 1970s a group called D’veykus ("clinging" [to God]) had a significant influence. Its composer, Abie Rotenberg, following Carlebach, wrote songs with liturgical texts that were easy to sing, memorable, and pleasant. Many admirers describe the music as soulful and contemplative. The group’s melodious tunes secured a place in Orthodox life at weddings, in the synagogue, and as zemirot sung at home. Some of the best-known D’veykus melodies are “Lev Tahor” and “Hiney Yomim” (vol. 1), “Kol Dodi” and “Gam Kee Aylech” (vol. 2), “V’Lee Yerushalayim” and “Na’ar Hayiti” (vol. 3), and “Hamalach” (vol. 4). This group did not perform live concerts, but only recorded its music in the studio, marking an important transition whereby recording music became an end in itself, rather than just a means of preserving and disseminating music written for live performance.

Another group that had a significant impact beginning in the late 1970s and through the early 1980s was the Diaspora Yeshiva Band, the name taken from the yeshivah in Jerusalem where members of the group studied. Their contribution was using American folk styles such as rock and blue grass as settings for religious texts. Most members of the band, like the other students at the Diaspora Yeshiva, were ba’alei teshuvah, newly observant Jews, who were steeped in secular American culture and had received their musical training in the United States before adopting Orthodoxy. Their music provided a gateway for other ba’alei teshuvah, as well as for those raised as Orthodox, to experience a contemporary Jewish American music. The melodies were often complex, and the arrangements included virtuoso instrumental playing.

If one person had to be chosen as the most influential figure in contemporary Orthodox music, it would be Mordechai Ben David. The son of David Werdyger (hence the name, Mordechai the son of David), Mordechai began singing at an early age in his father’s concerts and on recordings. With 25 recordings of his own to date, Ben David is one of the most successful solo performers in the field. His first solo album, released in 1974, entitled Hineni, had two important innovations, both of which became precedents for his later albums as well. First, the music was arranged professionally and performed by a full orchestra. Second, the title song had an English text, though it centered upon the Hebrew word hineni, meaning, “I am here” ready to serve God, the response that the

67 Another example of the recycling of personnel is D’veykus singer Label Sharfman, who was also a member of The Rabbi’s Sons.

68 The longevity of this group is remarkable. The first three volumes were recorded in the 1970s, volume four in 1990, and volume five in 1995.

69 Werdyger, Songs of Hope, p. 297
patriarch Abraham gave when God called on him. A quick review of the English-language Jewish spiritual messages embedded at the start of three albums by Ben David follows:

\textit{Hineni} (1974)
So my brother, put your faith in the Above, say "hineni," I am ready, to serve you with love.

\textit{I'd Rather Pray and Sing} (1977)
I don't want a thing, I'd rather pray and sing. I'd rather tell the story of your holiness and glory.

\textit{Just One Shabbos} (1981)
Just one Shabbos and we'll all be free, just one Shabbos come and join with me. Let's sing and dance to the sky, with our spirits so high, we'll show them all it's true, let them come and join us too.

The music of these albums is in a 1970s soft-rock ballad style in which the chorus is more energetic than the verses; when they first appeared, the upgraded arranging standards gave the songs a fresh sound, and many other artists and groups continued these innovations. Just as Carlebach forged a link between folk music and Jewish music, Ben David appropriated an American musical style and a secular idiom and adapted them to fit a Jewish message. Despite the English texts of the title numbers, the majority of the songs appearing on Ben David's albums are in Hebrew. Most of them are original songs written either by Ben David or other songwriters; the rest are songs of Carlebach, Benzion Shenker, and Hassidic dynasties, or are well-known Israeli songs. Ben David performs for a wide variety of Orthodox audiences, but his music is geared mainly to its right-wing segment, popularly known as the "Borough Park community," after the name of a heavily Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood.

Another popular Orthodox singer who began performing in the early 1980s is Avraham Fried. The English title song of his first album, in 1981, \textit{No Jew Will Be Left Behind}, was written by songwriter Yossi Green. Its words, which Fried explains he composed after hearing a discourse by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, state that when the Messiah comes all Jews will go to Israel and no one will be left behind. Fried is indeed a Lubavitcher Hassid living in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and many of his songs incor-

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\textsuperscript{70}For a more detailed discussion of the text of this song see Kligman, "Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music," pp. 268–71.

\textsuperscript{71}The \textit{Hineni} album includes an "Od Yishama" of Carlebach and "Shema Yisroel" of Tzvika Pick. Many of Ben David's albums combine folk, popular, and Hassidic music together with original songs. Some from the late 1980s and 1990s focus on a particular theme, such as holidays or weddings.
porate the messianic message of redemption. Some of the best known are “The Time Is Now” (1982), “We Are Ready” (1988), “Goodbye Golus” (1989), “On Giants’ Shoulders” (1993), and “Don’t Hide from Me” (1995). In much the same way as Ben David, Fried sees the English songs as “a chance to say how I’m feeling at that moment, in my own words, not based on a verse or taken out of psalms.”

Although Fried and Ben David also sing and record songs based on liturgical texts, their English-message songs may well be the most favored by their listeners. At the end of the 1980s Fried introduced songs with a message rather than a traditional text in languages other than English—Aramaic, Yiddish, and Hebrew. The song “Tanyeh,” appearing on We Are Ready (1988), is taken from a passage in the Talmud (B’rachot 7a) relating how Rabbi Yishmael entered the holiest area of the Temple and saw a vision of God. “Aderaba” (“on the contrary”), from a 1991 album by the same name, is based on a prayer written by Rabbi Elimelech, who says, “Let’s see the good points of our neighbors and overlook their shortcomings.” “Shtar Hatnoim,” recorded in 1993 on an album by the same name, compares the wedding contract of the title to the contract between God and the Jewish people. The composer of these three songs, Yossi Green, has taken the format of the English-language message songs and applied it to non-English texts, creating deeply expressive stories or images. The music combines cantorial nusach, Hassidic niggun, and passages with a soothing melodic line, all tied together by an orchestral accompaniment. “Tiher,” on the album Chazak! (1997), recorded by Fried, has been called the most developed example of this song type.

An indicator that Orthodox popular music had entered the mainstream was a concert in January 1988 at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall, a benefit for the Hebrew Academy for Special Children (HASC), featuring Mordechai Ben David, Avraham Fried, and the Sephardi singer Yoel Sharabi. While similar performances had been held at Brooklyn College and Queens College, this was the first concert of Orthodox popular music to take place in Manhattan. Since then, similar benefits featuring Orthodox popular music, for this and other causes, have taken place at

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73 The first three songs come from recordings of the same name; the last two are from Shtar Hatnoim (1993) and Brocha V’Hatzlocha (1995).
74 Fried interview.
75 Green interview.
76 Of course there had been many previous performances of cantorial and Yiddish music in New York City and elsewhere, but they had not been specifically identified with the Orthodox community.
Carnegie Hall, Radio City Music Hall, the Paramount Theater of Madison Square Garden, Nassau Coliseum, Westbury Music Fair, and the Metropolitan Opera House. Outside of New York, such music is performed throughout North America as well as in Europe and Israel, at synagogues, schools, and other locations large enough to hold an audience of several hundred people. Top performers play between 30 and 50 concerts a year. According to producer Sheya Mendelowitz, “There are masses out there that are interested now and it is growing. The younger generation is very much into Jewish music, the market is growing. I don’t even think we’ve touched the tip of the iceberg yet.”

While Orthodox Jews in their 30s and older have grown up with the music of Mordechai Ben David and Avraham Fried, a younger generation is being reached by new performers in their mid-to-late 20s: Shloime Dachs, Sandy Shmuely, Mendy Wald, Yisroel Williger, and Yehuda. Two other performers whose popularity has grown over the last decade are Michael Streicher, with more than ten recordings since 1989, and Dedi, who has recorded four albums since 1993. Kol Solonika and D’veykus remain popular, their music recently transferred to the CD format. Other popular groups include Regesh, which began performing in 1983 and has issued ten albums, the Miami Boys Choir, with close to 20 recordings, active since 1979, and Journeys, a group that has recorded three albums since 1984—a majority of the songs, written in English, are by Abie Rotenberg, who was the composer for D’veykus. Instrumental music has become more common, especially recordings of wedding music such as

77 Mendelowitz interview.
78 Regesh’s “Shalom Aleichem” from Shabbos, vol. 3 (1985), is well known and frequently sung on Friday nights before the Sabbath meal. For a further discussion of Regesh and this song see Kligman, “Creators and Consumers of Orthodox Popular Music,” pp. 277-79.
79 A well-known English song, “Besiyta Dishamaya” (“with the help of heaven”), was recorded by the group in 1984. Emulating Mordechai Ben David’s “Hineni,” “Besiyta Dishamaya” is the only non-English phrase in the song, but that Hebrew title encapsulates its message. Another English song, “We Need You” (1988), addresses the problem of talking during synagogue services. “Meherah,” a frequently heard original song in Hebrew composed by choir director Yerachmiel Begun, appears on the album Klal Yisroel Together (1987).
80 Many of the 28 songs that appear on the three albums are well known, such as “The Place Where I Belong,” vol. 1 (1984), about a Torah scroll that travels from Europe to America; “Teardrop,” vol. 2 (1989), the story of an old woman who lights candles on the Sabbath in grief and despair but is transformed by the magic of the experience; and “Who Am I,” vol. 3 (1992), written for the Hebrew Academy for Special Children’s annual concert, which conveys the message that children with special needs are like everyone else. The acceptance of this song, by the way, marked a milestone in American Orthodoxy’s public acknowledgement of the phenomenon of children with handicaps. Abie Rotenberg also made two recordings with the group Lev V’Nefesh, the first in 1990 and the second in 1998, both consisting primarily of original songs by Rotenberg to Hebrew texts.
Dance with Neginah, Neshoma Orchestra, and What a Wedding. Groups that record instrumental versions of well-known songs are Teva and Project X. Children's music is also popular, and there are numerous groups that record stories and songs with Jewish messages and themes: Uncle Moishy, Country Yossi, 613 Torah Avenue, Mitzvah Tree, Rabbi Shmuel Kunda, and Torah Tots, to name a few.

Modern Orthodox Jews, who do not avoid secular culture and attend concerts and other forms of general American entertainment, do not have the same need to listen only to Jewish music. They are not frequent buyers of Jewish music and there are no groups or artists specifically catering to them. Nevertheless, the group called Shlock Rock would seem to be closer to modern Orthodoxy than to any other group, and its performers come from that community. It has been successful in reaching modern Orthodox audiences—mostly Jewish day schools and National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) conventions—but it also performs in Reform and Conservative venues as well as at Jewish community centers. The writer and director of the group, Lenny Solomon, has completed 20 recordings since 1986.

Shlock Rock is best known for songs that educate and entertain through parody. As anthropologist Elliott Oring has noted, modern Orthodoxy, which more than any other Jewish subgroup seeks seriously to balance the world of strict halakhic tradition with that of secular modernity, is apt to cope with the tension by creating parodies of it. Some examples of Shlock Rock are “Old Time Torah Scroll,” which parodies “Old Time Rock and Roll,” from the album Learning Is Good (1986); “Under the Huppah,” which parodies “Under the Boardwalk,” from the album Purim Torah (1987); “Every Bite You Take,” reminding one to say a blessing after a meal, which parodies “Every Breath You Take,” from the album To Unite All Jews (1989); “All Night Long,” which is about staying up the night of the Shavuot holiday to study Torah and parodies Lionel Richie’s “All Night Long,” also from To Unite All Jews; and “We’ve Got a Strong Desire,” which recounts all of Jewish history in 42 lines and parodies Billy Joel’s “We Didn’t Start the Fire,” from the album Sgt. Shlocker’s Magical History Tour (1991). Lenny Solomon has also written original songs based upon recent events in Israel and New York, such

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as "Keep on Giving," which focuses on charity and helping the homeless and was written for a joint African American-Jewish rally after the 1991 Crown Heights riots. It appears on the album Manual for the Moral Minded (1994). Shlock Rock's primary audience was originally children and teenagers, but this has changed. According to Solomon, "My age group is more of a family audience now. The listeners are still varied, from unaffiliated to Haredi, but the age group is 3 to 13 and their parents and grandparents."83

Other modern Orthodox groups have appeared more recently with distinctive musical styles. Kol Achai ("voice of my brothers"), which has recorded three albums since 1990, consists of three Israeli brothers whose music combines folk and popular styles. Beat'achon (a play on the English "beat" and the Hebrew word for "faith")—three recordings since 1993—is an all-male a cappella group whose music ranges from 1950s doo-wop to jazz and rhythm and blues. Jordan Gorfinkel, a singer for the six-man Beat'achon and its manager, notes that the group does not adhere to any specific Jewish style; rather, it strives for "the same quality music as heard on the radio, but with Jewish values."84

A noteworthy feature of the new Orthodox music is that it is created and performed chiefly by men—but listened to by both men and women. This is because Halakhah considers the voice of a woman singing to be sexually arousing to men, and therefore prohibits men from hearing it (the reverse is not the case). As a kind of musical subculture, however, the Orthodox world has produced female singers who perform their own original songs, as well as songs written by male performers, at concerts exclusively for women, and make recordings as well. Some of the established female performers are Ruthi Navon, Ashira, Kineret, Rochel Miller, Susan Kates, Dana Mase, and Julia Blum. Groups or ensembles of women include A Taste of Music, in Brooklyn, and Tofa'ah, in Israel. Since modern Orthodox Jews tend to be more lenient on the issue of hearing female singers, there are some performers—Shlomo Carlebach's daughter, Neshama, is a good example—who will perform either for all-female audiences or for mixed audiences.85

Ironically, even in Orthodox circles where women's singing voices are not supposed to be heard, the women play an important role in popularizing the music, and it is they who often determine which songs or singers are "in." This is because a primary function of much of the new

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83E-mail message from Lenny Solomon to the author, Sept. 18, 1998.
84Interview with Jordan Gorfinkel, July 20, 1998.
Orthodox music is to accompany dancing at weddings, known as simcha dancing (men and women dance in separate circles, often separated by a partition). Examples of such music are Mordechai Ben David's Yiddish songs "Yidden" (1986) and "Moshiach, Moshiach, Moshiach" (1992), and Avraham Fried's "Dido Bei" (1997). Women, who seem especially to enjoy the dancing, practice on their own time and choreograph group dances to new songs. Many in the Orthodox music industry say that getting a song onto the dance floor at an Orthodox wedding can significantly increase the sales of recordings.86

Finally, despite the proliferation of new music in the Orthodox community and its broad acceptance, there remains an undertone of criticism that the whole enterprise—especially as its musical sophistication takes it ever farther from its simple roots—neglects true spirituality and cares only about making money.87 Some performers are sensitive to this criticism. Avraham Fried, for example, who had a close personal relationship with the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, is careful to balance his popular recordings with more traditional works, such as his recordings of the Yiddish songs of Yom Tov Ehrlich as well as Lubavitch and other traditional Hassidic melodies.88 However Lenny Solomon of Shlock Rock believes the criticism is misguided:

Jewish music is going in the right direction. Music is the language of the people. If they are listening to your music then you are speaking their language and both the performer and the listener can help bring moshiach [the Messiah]—the performer by writing inspired music that helps people get closer to God, and the listener by getting inspired and moving in the right direction. I expect to see Jewish music expand into television, perhaps, at first, music videos here and there, until a station geared to the purpose of reinforcing Jewish identity is established.89

Reform

Music in the Reform community, like that among the Orthodox, emerges from the confluence of Judaism and American life, but the response is different. The synagogue is the primary setting for Jewish ex-
pression among most Reform Jews, and it is there that musicians have directed their efforts to revitalize older Reform music, which, they felt, was too formal and out of date. Today, Reform popular music has significantly displaced the traditional repertoire, despite ongoing resistance, particularly among Reform cantors.

Before the 1960s music in Reform synagogues consisted chiefly of hymns sung by the congregation and compositions sung by cantor and choir with organ accompaniment, using artistic settings of the liturgy by Binder, Freed, Fromm, and others, discussed above. The dominant language was English—the Union Hymnal contains 284 hymns, 280 in English and four in Hebrew. In Reform summer camps sponsored by the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) communal singing at meals and services consisted of a few Israeli and Carlebach songs and lots of American folk tunes, such as “Puff the Magic Dragon,” “Blowin in the Wind,” and “Leaving on a Jet Plane,” and black spirituals like “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” “This Train Bound for Glory,” and “Go Down Moses.” These English songs had a message that resonated with the political, ethical, and humanitarian issues of the 1960s.

Cantor Jeff Klepper, who first attended summer camp in 1968, describes the lack of a tradition of music for Reform youth:

But what was our Jewish music heritage? Well in shul [synagogue] it was Freed and Binder . . . it was nothing to come away with. That was artistic and professional music . . . There was nothing for us in the synagogues in the late ’60s, nothing. Because to be 13, or 14, or 15, to walk into a shul with long hair and to have a choir and, you know, have a cantor singing quasi-operatic music, that frankly wasn’t very good, a style that was totally foreign to us. If there were Jewish melodies in that music we didn’t hear them.

For Klepper and other young Reform Jews in the 1960s and early 1970s, folk singers Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, and James Taylor were important influences:


91Interview with Jeff Klepper, June 16, 1998. The introduction (unpaged) to Jeff Klepper and Dan Freeland, The Kol B’Seder Songbook (Owings Mills, Md., 1996), describes the lack of congregational involvement in synagogue music and the perceived need to encourage participation.
Into the Musical Mainstream
Pioneers of Religious Renewal

Debbie Friedman

Shlomo Carlebach
The Klezmatics

The Klezmer Revival

Klezmer Conservatory Band
Pete Seeger’s music had an ethos to it, and the ethos was everybody sings and that makes it democratic, and it’s anticommercial because you could sit in your living room with a guitar and enjoy the evening in front of the fire singing folk songs. You don’t need to buy the music that Capital Records is trying to get you to buy. You don’t need to buy the teenybopper bubble-gum music. So it’s free, you just sit around with your guitar or your banjo. It was Communist. But it’s great, it worked for us, it totally worked.⁹²

Although generally disdainful of European Jewish music, such as Hassidic niggunim, these young Reform Jews recognized Shlomo Carlebach as an authentic Jewish folk singer. The fact that he, an Orthodox rabbi, was an innovator may have given them license to create a new Jewish music of their own in a folk style.

By the late 1960s, when ethnic pride was intensifying, American Jews embraced Israeli culture as a vehicle for expressing their Jewish identity. According to Rabbi Daniel Freelander, “This ethnic, pro-ethnic, and pro-Israel stuff, combined with the anti-authority stuff of the late ’60s, created the stage for radical change.” ⁹³ Camp songbooks underwent major revisions. There was an increase in the use of Hebrew, more Israeli songs—including some composed by Naomi Shemer and others from the Hassidic Song Festival—and Shlomo Carlebach tunes. According to Freelander, “Our people wanted to hear Hebrew and they wanted to sing Hebrew, so Hebrew becomes a real crucial piece. This is the change from the 1965 songbook, which is almost entirely in English, only a few Yiddish pieces. Yiddish goes out of fashion in 1967.” ⁹⁴ And beginning in the 1970s the English repertoire—the American folk tunes and black spirituals—shrunk dramatically.

It was in the summer camps that Reform young people, Jewishly invigorated by their camp experience, set off a revolution in liturgical music that would eventually transform Reform synagogue services across America. Jeff Klepper relates what happened:

And then we took Reform war-horse melodies and played them on guitar. That was part of the revolution. Which means we stripped them of their choral music, for instance the [Isadore] Freed Hassidic “Mi Chamocha,” ⁹⁵ which was a Hassidic melody, or quasi-Hassidic.... We didn’t have an organ in the woods, there was no place to plug it in and you couldn’t have a piano because a piano was too big to shlep, and you didn’t have Casio keyboards. Since services were in the woods, in a little clearing in the woods a guitar was used. It was portable, it was mellifluous, it was rhythmic. Guitar in my mind is the perfect instrument to accompany worship because it can do everything.

⁹²Klepper interview.
⁹³Freelander interview.
⁹⁴Ibid.
⁹⁵Isadore Freed, Hassidic Service for Sabbath Eve (New York, 1962). The piece was written in 1954.
So there was a certain percentage of music that was taken and everyone brought their pet tunes. People started writing tunes to fill in the gaps for prayers that we wanted.

Thus, the creation of new liturgy was based on need and on the desire for an aesthetically satisfying musical style that was participatory and playable on guitar. Three new musical services reflecting the camp influence were composed in this period: Ray Smolover's *Edge of Freedom* (1967) and *Gates of Freedom* (1970) services, and Michael Isaacson's *Songs NFTY Sings* (1972), later published as *Avodah Amamit*. Debbie Friedman's first recording was a youth service she wrote for high-school students entitled *Sing Unto God* (1972).

The campers, returning home after the summer, wanted their local cantors to sing the new melodies, but the cantors did not know them. The need to preserve and disseminate the camp melodies became evident. According to Freelander,

> In 1972 [the music is] released on albums—record albums. That's a great way of disseminating information because you could mail it all over the country. Notice, it's not written for keyboard; keyboard falls out of favor because organs are the symbols of the Reform they are running away from, the pre-ethnic Reform. Guitar becomes the instrument of choice.

The recordings he refers to are the annual NFTY compilations of melodies popular at camp during a given summer, beginning in 1972. In 1979 Ray Smolover arranged *Songs and Hymns for Gates of Prayer*, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s sheet music helped to spread the popular melodies. In 1987 *Sha'are Shirah* was published, providing at least three versions of liturgical selections for Sabbath services, with the keyboard scoring and chords reflecting the move away from organ-and-choir accompaniment.

Astonishingly, within one decade after Israel's Six-Day War, Hebrew-infused camp music had begun to influence the synagogue liturgy. Choral singing went into decline, and a new Reform prayer book, *Gates*...
of Prayer, published in 1975, reflected the growing desire of Reform congregations throughout the country to sing more of the service in Hebrew. By the 1980s the folk-rock style had become commonplace in Reform worship, except in the oldest, most Classical Reform congregations.

Reaction have ranged from enthusiastic endorsement to disdain. One proponent, Rabbi Freelander, director of programs for the UAHC, argues for the folk-rock style on the basis of its positive effect on the communal experience:

I'm forced to contrast that “high art” [composed synagogue music of the 19th and 20th centuries] with the “popular art” [folk-rock style music] we experience in the large communal song sessions at the conventions of the UAHC, CAJE [Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education], and now even the GA [the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly]. They remind us baby boomers of our youth, singing together at summer camp, on the college campus or at the protest rally. Those were special and spiritual moments these adult communal singing sessions recreate for us. Our souls open up, and we sing familiar sounding melodies and words, and feel comfortably connected once again to our community and our God.¹⁰⁰

Samuel Adler, however, a noted composer and teacher at the Eastman School of Music and Juilliard, is critical of the new synagogue music, which he refers to as “spiritual entertainment.” In his view, supporters of communal singing are eager to blame low synagogue attendance on the traditional music rather than seeing that the fault lies in the decline in familiarity with, and affinity to, synagogue ritual life.

The status of liturgical music in the American Reform synagogue today (and I include here also the handful of large Conservative congregations that emphasize composed music as part of the worship experience) is best described as confused, even chaotic, fueled by ignorance, misinformation, and simple neglect. . . Synagogue music today has thus fallen largely into the hands of the “new traditional composers” who write in a popular style that is pseudo-Jewish, pseudo-pop-American, and pseudo-Israeli. These composers are believed because their style offends no one, challenges no one, and is easy to perform. If this state of affairs continues, the more challenging musical works composed for the synagogue since the 19th century—already rarely heard today—will become museum pieces to be resurrected only for special occasions.¹⁰¹

After noting parallels to conflicts over liturgical music in various Christian denominations, Adler sharply attacks the Hassidic-style or Israeli tunes as "the trademark of the Jewish commercial sacred music norm." Many cantors in the Reform movement share Adler's views, as do some Conservative cantors.

In a number of articles and books, Hebrew Union College liturgist Lawrence Hoffman has explored the conflict in historic depth. Here is how he frames the debate:

Worship is seen more and more as belonging to the people, and demanding, therefore, an engaging musical style that evokes their active participation. By contrast, both cantorial music and art music are incomprehensible to all but very sophisticated worshipers. From the perspective of the cantor, the demand for musical "accessibility" threatens both the age-old internally authentic tradition and the relatively new externally authentic art-music tradition too, since the newest sing-along tunes may lack roots in the synagogue's history and fail the test of refined taste as well.

Since it is the laity that makes decisions in the synagogue, most Reform cantors and composers of music for the synagogue have learned to synthesize the folk and artistic styles and combine them with traditional chants. Reform cantor and composer Benjie-Ellen Schiller describes the situation in the 1980s:

Composers... fuse musical aesthetics with the need for effective congregational worship, sometimes by stressing traditional modes, other times by leaning more or less heavily toward the classical Reform choral genre, or by weaving a simple congregational refrain into a richly textured setting for cantor and choir. Diversity of voice is a concern, too, especially given the rising number of female cantors who require music written in a vocal style appropriate for women.

Schiller notes that while Reform synagogues run the gamut from large temples that use organ and choir to small congregations that do not even employ professional clergy, one common feature is the increasing desire of congregants to participate in worship. Those involved in the training of cantors have developed new techniques and publications to help advance this goal. Music educator Merri Arian, for example, teaches can-

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103 Hoffman, "Musical Traditions and Tension," p. 35.
105 Schiller, "The Hymnal as an Index of Musical Change in Reform Synagogues," p. 209.
106 Some Reform camps have programs to train song leaders, such as one called Hava Nashira, which disseminates repertoire and teaches techniques in leading group singing.
itorial students and song leaders that music needs to be sung with clarity, in a comfortable key, and at a reasonable tempo in order for congregants to join in.\textsuperscript{107}

\textbf{Influential Reform Figures}

Debbie Friedman is by far the most influential performer and creator of contemporary Reform liturgical music, with congregants frequently asking for her songs to be included in Reform services. In her two-and-a-half decades on the scene Friedman has made a lasting impact on contemporary Jewish music. Alone among the performers of Jewish "religious" music, her recordings are included in the inventory of national retail chains—Tower, HMV, and Virgin—and on Web sites like those of Amazon and CDNOW. Her recordings are among the most widely sold in the Jewish market—even beyond the Reform movement—and her songs are commonly included in song sessions for youth and adults at camps and conventions.

Friedman, who grew up in a Reform family, says that her interest in inspiring others to gain a closer connection to Judaism stems from her own need to reconnect to Jewish practices she lost in childhood. After moving from Utica, New York, to St. Paul, Minnesota, her family dropped various Jewish traditions it had observed when living close to her grandparents. "I missed them," Friedman explains, "as I did my grandparents, who lived upstairs from us. I know now that some of what I'm doing is to reclaim what was taken away from me."\textsuperscript{108} Friedman got her start as a song leader at Reform summer camps and at educators' conferences and other adult programs run by the Reform and Conservative movements. Although lacking a cantorial diploma, Friedman served as a cantor in Los Angeles for several years, working extensively with young people in the creation of new prayer services. As her reputation grew, she began performing at concerts around the country.

Like the creators of contemporary music in the Orthodox community, Friedman composes Hebrew songs to traditional liturgical or biblical texts, as well as original English songs. She uses the social-action songs in the folk genre of the 1960s and 1970s as models for her creation of new Jewish songs that communicate a message of engagement with Jewish tradition. Her musical influences are Peter, Paul, and Mary,\textsuperscript{109} Joan Baez, Judy Collins, and Melissa Manchester.

\textsuperscript{107}Interview with Merri Arian, July 22, 1998.
\textsuperscript{109}Peter Yarrow, who has known Friedman for years, says, "Hers is the music of jubilation and confirmation. It is a call to community and commonality that rages against total
Her first album, *Sing Unto God* (1972), was a youth service, which she described as an effort to make prayer accessible. The album, in her words as quoted on the liner notes, “is a new experience in worship that emphasizes through song the importance of community involvement in worship. This music carries a solid message in a simple, easily understood form. It enables those who are willing to join together as a community in contemporary songs of prayer.” The album’s title song is entirely in English, and the other ten songs are either set to Hebrew liturgical texts or to a combination of Hebrew and English. The melodies are easy to sing and to understand, partly because they are repetitive—characteristics that would continue to mark her style in later years.

Friedman is concerned with making Judaism relevant to modern life. Her third recording, *Ani Ma-Amin* (1976), uses the same type of songs and language as her first, but here the songs focus on the concept of Messiah, one that poses serious theological questions that Reform Judaism has struggled with since its inception almost two centuries ago. For Friedman, the Jewish Messiah is not an individual who emerges as a leader of the Jewish people, and does not connote the resurrection of the dead. Rather, it is through the messianic belief that Judaism offers hope for the future and challenges Jews to struggle to make the dreams and visions of a messianic age come true. Friedman’s message and approach in this recording—as in all her work—are notably optimistic.

Like other musical innovators in the Reform movement and their counterparts in Orthodoxy, Friedman has had to respond to critics who claim that her music is not based on Jewish musical tradition:

> Who is my music hurting? I don’t want to compete with anybody. I’m not a great lover of organ music, but I am a great lover of *nusach*. How is writing in our own musical vernacular not an acceptable or legitimate expression of our culture? My music may be uniquely American, but it is rooted in a tradition that is Russian and Hungarian, and influenced by Israel.

Since—her disclaimer notwithstanding—the style of Friedman’s music is clearly the American folk tradition, her reference to its European “roots” perhaps refers to the sentiments it conveys.

Friedman has a remarkable stage presence, and many of her admirers consider her three performances at Carnegie Hall in 1996, 1997, and 1998 as marking the pinnacle of her career. Always encouraging the audience to participate, she also shares stories and relates her own experiences, skillfully drawing the listeners in. The manner in which she seeks darkness and spreads light.” Susan Josephs, “Queen of Souls,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, Jan. 19, 1996, p. 47.

to educate her audiences and engage them in a positive Jewish life has led some to compare her to Shlomo Carlebach. Like him, as well, Friedman’s music blurs the boundary between prayer and song by making prayers singable and songs prayerful. A comment she made on stage at Carnegie Hall is revealing: she told the audience, “Thank you for creating Beth Carnegie.” For Friedman, praying in a synagogue or singing on stage both have the goal of connecting with and uplifting the audience.

Many of her songs have entered the core repertoire of Reform, Conservative, and other Jewish camps. They include the title English songs of the albums *Sing Unto God* (1972), *Not By Might* (1974), and *And the Youth Shall See Visions* (1981), as well as “L’chi Lakh,” “Miriam’s Song,” and “T’filat Haderech,” — a prayer for traveling—all on *And You Shall Be a Blessing* (1989). A number of her Hebrew songs have achieved similar status: “L’Dor Vador” from *Not by Might*, “Im Tirtzu” from *Ani Ma-Amin* (1976), “Im Ein Ani Li” from *If Not Now, When?* (1980), and “Oseh Shalom” from *And the Youth Shall See Visions*. Friedman has also recorded children’s albums, and often performs her compositions “The Alef Bet Song” and “The Latke Song” at her concerts.111

Friedman has acquired a large and devoted audience and has achieved a rare status in contemporary Jewish life. Aside from her undeniable musical gifts, there are two special factors that have helped propel her career. One is her association with the phenomenon of the “healing service,” a liturgical attempt to afford spiritual help to the sick that has become popular both within and outside the Reform movement. Many of the songs on Friedman’s album *Renewal of Spirit* (1995), which includes new songs as well as some from her earlier albums, are taken from her healing service. “Mi Shebeirach,” based on the traditional prayer for the healing of the sick and first recorded on *And You Shall Be a Blessing*, is probably her song that is most often requested in Reform congregations. The other factor is Friedman’s appeal to women, not only as a woman herself but also as a writer and performer of songs that mirror their feelings and concerns. “Miriam’s Song,” for example, has become a staple at special women’s seders at Passover, and not only in the Reform movement.

Daniel Freelander and Jeffrey Klepper have also made important contributions to the revival of Jewish music in the Reform movement. After performing together for several years, the pair began appearing under the name Kol B’Seder in 1975. The influences on their music should by now be familiar—Reform summer camps, Shlomo Carlebach, the Hassidic Song Festival, and Israeli folk music. Their folk influences were Bob

111 Television character “Barney” recorded “The Alef Bet Song,” and used “The Latke Song” in one of his programs.
Dylan, Joni Mitchell, and James Taylor, and the harmonies of the Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, and Peter, Paul, and Mary. In the conviction that "singing empowers the worshiper to own the prayers, to use the melody as a bridge to the sacred," Kol B'Seder has specialized in songs that are Hebrew settings of liturgical passages. Some of their best-known works are: "Shalom Rav," "Lo Alecha," and "Modeh Ani" on the album Shalom Rav (1981); "Oseh Shalom" on The Bridge (1985); and "Mah Tovu" on Sparks of Torah (1989). They have also written several English songs. Once described as the "Lennon and McCartney" of Jewish music, they perform, at most, 25 concerts a year and have completed four recordings that are notable for their high production standards.

There are several other well-known performers in the Reform community. Doug Cotler has recorded five albums—the most influential are Listen and It's So Amazing!—and performs extensively on the concert circuit. Winner of a 1984 Grammy award, he has also served as a cantorial soloist in California. Another is Steve Dropkin, who previously headed Ketzev, a group whose Hebrew and English songs are being increasingly adopted for synagogue use. Julie Silver, like Cotler a cantorial soloist in California, is a relatively new solo performer who writes many English songs. Beged Kefet, a popular group widely praised for its lush vocal harmonies, is composed of eight men and women, most of whom are Reform cantors and rabbis.

Very recently Jeffrey Klepper of Kol B'Seder, in solo recordings such as In This Place: Jewish Songs of Time and Space (1997), has sought to incorporate the free style of Hassidic melodies (niggunim) into his music, arguing that it is a more authentic expression of Jewish spirituality than "using musical idioms from the Beatles or from folk music or blues or whatever." Nevertheless the predominant trend in contemporary Reform music remains the folk-pop style that grew out of experimentation in Reform summer camps in the 1970s, matured with the music of Debbie Friedman and Kol B'Seder in the 1980s, and, despite initial cantorial resistance, became the norm for synagogue services.

**Conservative**

Contemporary Jewish music in the Conservative movement presents yet a different picture. While no particular groups create specifically "Con-

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112 "Introduction," Kol B'Seder Songbook, p. [6].
114 Klepper interview.
servative” music, certain performers do perform in predominantly Con-
servative settings. Safam, an all-male group, has been doing so since
1974, and Craig Taubman, a solo artist, almost as long. Unlike the Re-
form movement, where the camps constituted the seedbed for new music,
the Conservative movement’s network of Ramah summer camps have not
had anywhere near the same musical impact. One reason may have been
Ramah’s emphasis on the Hebrew language. Music educator Marsha
Bryan Edelman describes the 1970s repertoire at Ramah camps as con-
sisting primarily of Israeli and Carlebach Hebrew songs; English songs
were not permitted, and thus the creation of new Jewish music in En-
lish was virtually ruled out. 115

Music for worship in Conservative congregations ranges from solo can-
torial artistry to the folk-style singing of a havurah, the small, informal
fellowship group that developed out of the Jewish youth culture of the
1960s. The traditional style of the golden age of the cantorate is more
common in Conservative congregations than it is in Orthodox or Reform,
though it is waning there as well. Most Conservative congregations sing
“traditional” melodies each Sabbath, the repertoire dating to the first half
of the 20th century and composed by Israel Goldfarb (1879–1967), Max
Wohlberg (1906–96), and Zavel Zilberts (1881–1949). 116 Samuel Rosen-
baum has noted that in most Conservative synagogues congregants
expect to hear the same old prayers sung with the same old melodies,
a familiarity that provides comfort. Inclusion of new music, therefore, is
minimal. 117

The most significant change in Conservative congregations since the
1960s has been the inclusion of Israeli songs at public gatherings and oc-
casionally during the kedushah section of the service—melodies such as
“Erev Shel Shoshanim” and “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav” are the most
common. Generally, though, as in the case of the Orthodox, new music
functions for Conservative Jews as a means of entertainment rather than
worship.

According to the Moment magazine poll, Safam was the second most
popular singing group among American Jews—at least those who read
that magazine. Its members—Robbie Solomon, Joel Sussman, Daniel
Funk, and Alan Nelson—were inspired by the singing of the Zamir

115 Edelman interview.
116 Two publications of synagogue melodies are Moshe Nathanson, Zamru Lo (New York,
1955–1960; reprint 1974), published by the Cantors Assembly; and Velvel Pasternak, Sid-
dur in Song: 100 Prayerbook Melodies (Cedarhurst, N.Y., 1986).
117 Samuel Rosenbaum, “Another New Tune?” in the Cantors Assembly publication,
Chorale in Boston, the home of all four of them (see below, pp. 135–36). Like their hero, Shlomo Carlebach, Safam sings liturgical songs in Hebrew; unlike him, they use electric guitars and sing in rock-and-roll rather than folk style.\footnote{Interview with Robbie Solomon, July 8, 1998.} In their earliest performances, which took place at Jewish organizational functions and youth gatherings, they sang music of Carlebach and the Hassidic Song Festival. After successfully performing some original songs—Solomon and Sussman are the group’s songwriters—they went on to record their first album, *Dreams of Safam*, in 1976. Safam then released nine other recordings at fairly regular intervals: *Safam Encore* (1978), *Sons of Safam* (1980), *Bittersweet* (1982), *Peace by Piece* (1984), *A Brighter Day* (1986), *The Greater Scheme of Things* (1989), *On Track* (1993), *After All These Years* (1995), and *In Spite of It All* (1999), plus four “Greatest Hits” volumes. One component of Safam’s success is the variety of songs they perform and their mix of styles—Jewish elements such as cantorial and Hassidic music stylized in rock, pop, Latin, and reggae rhythms. Today Safam performs some 25 concerts a year in Jewish community centers and synagogues around the country and at events sponsored by federations and by the Conservative movement’s United Synagogue Youth.

Although its repertoire includes both Hebrew liturgical settings and English ballads, Safam is best known for its English songs. The most famous of these is “Leaving Mother Russia,” a song about refuseniks, Russian Jews not allowed to leave for Israel, that appeared on *Safam Encore*. Written at the height of the repression of Soviet Jews, this song became the anthem for the cause (and, as such, was recorded by other artists as well). For three years in a row in the early 1980s Safam sang “Leaving Mother Russia” at mass protest rallies at the United Nations, and since then the group has often sung the song as an encore at its concerts. Other Safam songs with a Jewish political message, geared to issues in Israel and elsewhere, are “Just Another Foreigner” and “Yamit” from *Bittersweet*; “Falasha Nevermore,” from *A Brighter Day*; and “Maranno” from *On Track*. Their song “We Are One,” from *Peace by Piece*, was used on the soundtrack for UJA’s 1991–92 fund-raising video. Safam’s original wedding songs—“My Beloved” from *Bittersweet* and “Dodi Li” from *A Brighter Day*—are widely used for wedding processions and for the newlyweds’ first dance. Their liturgical songs incorporate *nusach*, as in “Yismechu” from *Bittersweet* and “Birkat Halel” from *Sons of Safam*, while they employ a novel use of barbershop style in “Vene’emar” from *Safam Encore*.

Robbie Solomon, who is critical of contemporary Jewish music that tries to be immediately accessible, describes Safam’s music as “intelligent
music for modern intelligent Jews.” The group’s songs and music communicate a synthesis of Jewish and modern values. Musically, there is an affinity to the traditional sounds of nusach, which undoubtedly stems from Solomon’s traditional upbringing, but it is framed in a modern style. As his modern songwriting influences Robbie Solomon names Paul Simon, Billy Joel, and Elton John, and the lush harmonies of Crosby, Stills, and Nash. He also admires the Beatles—like Safam, a four-member male group.119

Craig Taubman, who grew up in the Conservative movement and found his first audiences there, now performs in Reform synagogues and other venues as well. A prolific recording artist, he has released 13 albums of Jewish music—two of them for children—as well as ten commercial children’s albums, not on Jewish themes, on the Disney and Rhino labels. He also writes children’s songs for television and manages to give up to 70 concerts a year. Taubman’s songs—often written as responses to events in his life, from the birth of a child to the death of a relative—are in Hebrew, English, or a mixture of both.120 Frequently, the English portion of the song is not a translation of the Hebrew but stands alone; examples are “Anim Zmirot” and “Shema B’ni” from Journey (1991). Other well-known songs, such as “Shir Chadash” from Encore (1989), combine biblical and rabbinic texts, and English-language ballads such as “Where Heaven and Earth Touch”—from a 1993 album of the same name—articulate his thoughts about liturgical and biblical passages. The musical style ranges from rock-and-roll and pop to adult contemporary music. Taubman sees his music strictly as artistic statements intended for performance, not as songs to be incorporated into synagogue services, with the exceptions of two special services he composed and recorded: Yad B’Yad (1986) and Friday Night Live (1999). Taubman’s recordings for Jewish children, My Jewish Discovery (1995) and My Newish Jewish Discovery (1997), have sold up to five times better than his adult albums. He somewhat sadly explains this stark contrast as a reflection of the non-Orthodox attitude to Judaism: it’s something you go out of your way to teach your children, but it’s not for you.121 As further proof of the same point, Paul Zim, a noted cantor and singer in Conservative circles who has released many albums for adults, has recently turned his attention to recording children’s songs.

Clearly, contemporary Jewish music in the Conservative setting is less developed than it is in either Orthodoxy or Reform, in a sense parallel-

119Ibid.
120Interview with Craig Taubman, July 23, 1998.
121Ibid.
ing Conservatism’s middle position on the denominational spectrum. While Reform Jews, to the left, seek to incorporate new music within the liturgy, Conservative worship—like the Orthodox—is more-or-less fixed and can accommodate only minimal change. And while Orthodox Jews, on the right, who avoid American popular music, need their new Jewish music as a cultural outlet, Conservative Jews, who seek out all types of entertainment, do not have the same need. Performers like Safam and Craig Taubman appeal to a desire among Conservative Jews to listen to Jewish music that inspires and entertains—but these Jews are satisfied with the occasional listening opportunities they get at religious services and those organizational functions that include concerts. The only other viable market for Conservative Jewish music is children, and so it is widely marketed to schools and young families.

Jewish Renewal

The Jewish Renewal movement is an organized effort to experience a “renewed encounter with God” based on meditation and spiritual awareness. The movement seeks “through prayer, study, and action” to “nurture the rebbi-spark in everyone without fearing its emergence in different ways and degrees at different moments in different people; to nurture communities that dance and wrestle with God, that are intimate, participatory, and egalitarian, and that create a ‘field of rebbetude’; and to assist the spiritual growth and healing of individuals, communities, whole societies, and the planet.” Rabbi Ya’akov Gabriel has described it as a non-Orthodox Hassidism.

Renewal has generated a new form of Jewish music. All the participants repeat over and over, in a meditative fashion, simple, easily learned musical phrases. In worship or at concerts, hand-held drums are often beaten to keep the rhythm constant, and the music is coordinated with the bodily movements of dance.

Rabbi Shefa Gold, a Renewal leader, synthesizes a variety of Jewish and non-Jewish elements in her music. While in Israel in 1990 she developed a chanting service that has influenced others—including Debbie Friedman and Jeffrey Klepper—to incorporate melodic and meditative chants in worship. Among Gold’s best-known recordings are Chants Encounters.
(1994) and Chanscendence (1997). Two of her most popular melodies are “Elohai N’shama” from Tzuri (1993) and “Mah Gadlu” from Chants Encounters. Other renewal artists are Linda Hirschorn,125 Aryeh Hirschfield, Yitz Husbands-Hankin, Michael Shapiro, and Ya’akov Gabriel.

Nonreligious Contexts

Yiddish, klezmer, and Israeli music still provide a rich source of musical pleasure both for Jews affiliated with religious life and for those whose connection to Judaism is primarily cultural.

THE KLEZMER REVIVAL

The klezmer revival began in the late 1970s and spread quickly in the 1980s and thereafter.126 Henry Sapoznik, a writer and producer of klezmer, one of the revival’s first proponents, and founder of the group Kapelye, has described his personal journey:

I guess I first thought about it as its own entity around 1975. I had been playing in a bluegrass band, traditional American old-time stuff—everyone in the band was Jewish, of course—and I just had this feeling, why is it that everyone else had their own fiddle music and Jews didn’t?127 He also recalls old-time fiddler Tommy Jarrell saying to him, “Don’t your people got none of your own music?” When Sapoznik was introduced to YIVO’s collection of klezmer music on 78-rpm records, he realized that he, the son of a cantor who sang at Catskills hotels, had heard similar music in the Borsht Belt as a youngster, but that by the 1950s and 1960s the music had become “diluted with self-conscious Israeli and Fiddler on the Roof medleys.”128 For Sapoznik, then, the discovery of klezmer was a rediscovery.

125Linda Hirschorn has recorded three solo albums as well as three with the six-voice female Vocolot.
127Quoted in Dion, “Klezmer Music in America,” p. 4.
For others, it was completely new. Frank London was a trumpet player studying in the Third Stream Music Department at the New England Conservatory during the mid-1970s. Klezmer, he recalls, was simply an interesting musical style to learn: "I was already playing Salsa, Balkan, Haitian, and other musics. Why not Jewish?" He and a few fellow students, picking up klezmer from recordings and by imitation, formed the Klezmer Conservatory Band (he now leads the group The Klezmatics). The band began by playing three songs at a concert; then came other concerts, parties, and eventually recordings and more concerts. London recalls:

I believe that for myself, and many of my peers that I’ve spoke to, our focus was on trying to play the music, trying to play it well, trying to get better on the nuances, and others were saying, “Oh, that’s not why you were trying to do it; you’re carrying on your ancestors’ legacy, you’re reigniting this torch that went out”—they were getting very heavy about this. But no; we were trying to play some music, make some money, and have some fun. Many of the musicians who were doing klezmer music weren’t Jewish, so they weren’t discovering their roots... People ask, “why klezmer?” What many miss is that when I listen to this music, I get aesthetically interested. It cuts through all the shlock, all the shmaltz, all the things about Jewish music that never interested me, all the Israeli music, all the Yiddish theater music, about all that sentimentality. Why klezmer music? Because it’s good, just on it’s own terms.

Since the klezmer tradition had largely faded away, some revival musicians sought out veteran klezmer performers to study with. The recordings of legendary clarinetists Naftule Brandwein (1884–1963) and Dave Tarras (1897–1989) were models for the musicians of the klezmer revival. Andy Statman, for example, klezmer clarinetist and mandolinist, studied with Tarras. In addition, in an effort to preserve and make available the klezmer style of the early 20th century, Henry Sapoznik undertook a project of reissuing the old 78-rpm recordings of the pre-1920 repertoire, which had become the staple of the klezmer revival.

The four revival bands of the 1970s were Klezmorim, Kapelye, Klezmer Conservatory Band, and Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra. The Klezmorim, cofounded by Lev Liberman and David Skuse in Berkeley, California, in 1975, recorded its first album, East Side Wedding, in 1977 and stopped performing in 1988. Liberman has described the music of the

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130Ibid., pp. 41, 43.
Klezmorim as originating "in our early experiments with tight ensemble playing, improvisation, klezmer/jazz fusions, neo-klezmer composition, street music, world beat, and New Vaudeville." Kapelye, formed in 1979, combined klezmer with a variety of Yiddish vocal styles. Starting with a folk sound, the group eventually evolved into an eclectic ragtime-tinged ensemble. Four recordings have been issued: *Future and Past* (1981), *Levine and His Flying Machine* (1985), *Kapelye's Chicken* (1987), and *Kapelye On the Air* (1995). The group performs infrequently today, but its original members have gone on to work with other bands. The Klezmer Conservatory Band "uses a full Yiddish theater orchestra instrumentation to showcase a sound that ranges from big-band hybrid to chamber-orchestral." It has released eight albums and performs frequently in synagogues, Jewish community centers, colleges, and concert halls.

By the late-1980s klezmer music had moved into the commercial mainstream, with groups employing professional managers and recording on major labels in the United States (such as Rounder and Sony) and Germany. Klezmer was "in," and music periodicals and major newspapers featured articles about performers and reviews of recordings and performances. Musically, klezmer changed in the late 1980s as groups moved away from the "revival" approach of mainly performing the traditional repertoire and began creating new music, combining klezmer with pop, jazz, and other styles.

Andy Statman, who has performed and recorded frequently since the mid-1970s, describes his music now not as klezmer but as "an exploration of spiritual music . . . informed by klezmer." Statman, a newly observant Jew who is part of the Hassidic world, goes so far as to claim that his teacher Dave Tarras also viewed klezmer as a spiritual form of music, albeit one performed outside of the synagogue. Two of Statman's

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135 In a textbook on multicultural music in America, the editors single out klezmer as having succeeded in revitalizing a musical genre with "overwhelming enthusiasm," as compared to other, less successful revival efforts. Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen, eds., *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities* (New York, 1997), p. 9.
136 Other groups formed in the U.S. and Europe have adapted klezmer to avant garde, world beat, and roots-music styles. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sounds of Sensibility," pp. 51, 57, sees klezmer as a form of music that was ripe for transformation since it had not been picked up previously, and suggests that the variety of its incorporated styles proves its acceptance.
most successful recordings—*Songs of Our Fathers* with Dave Grisman (1994) and *The Andy Statman Quartet: Between Heaven and Earth* (1997)—consist of Hassidic *niggunim* “filtered through the impression of jazz,” or “the meeting of Hassidic music and late Coltrane,” a reference to the leading jazz musician who also saw his music as a spiritual pursuit. Statman, in fact, has criticized the popular and rock music that is commonplace in the Orthodox and Hassidic communities because it has replaced and marginalized traditional klezmer. Among his many other musical activities, Statman performs for small Hassidic gatherings in an effort to restore the klezmer tradition to that community.

In the mid-1980s, two new klezmer bands became prominent—Brave Old World and Klezmatics. Michael Alpert, vocalist and violinist of Brave Old World, came from Kapelye, while Frank London, the leader and trumpet player of the Klezmatics, had previously played with the Klezmer Conservatory Band.

The founders of Brave Old World felt that klezmer had become too conventional: “concerts were not to be too ‘serious,’ audiences were encouraged to clap along or dance, and easily accessible musical values such as virtuosity, energy, and individual charisma dominated over stylistic authenticity and ensemble musicianship.” Therefore Brave Old World chose to create “new Yiddish music, whose language and forms would be consciously created for the concert stage and a listening audience, but still deeply rooted in Yiddish folk materials.” The group did this through the use of mainly European classical aesthetics. Its three recordings—*Klezmer Music* (1990), *Beyond the Pale* (1993), and *Blood Oranges* (1997)—include both traditional melodies and new Yiddish songs. The latter address contemporary issues: “Chernobyl” on *Klezmer Music*; “Berlin 1990” (about the fall of the Berlin Wall) on *Beyond the Pale*; and “Welcome” on *Blood Oranges*. The group frequently performs in Germany, where it has been able to develop its European style further.

The Klezmatics, who do frequent nightclub performances and reach a broad audience, aim primarily to entertain, but move beyond the playing of nostalgic melodies, weaving together popular and world-music styles, with lyrics on a variety of contemporary social issues. Early recordings—*The Klezmatics: Shvaygn=Toyt* (1988), *Rhythm and Jews* (1992), and *Jews with Horns* (1994)—include their interpretations of the classical klezmer repertoire. An example is their version of Brandwein’s “Der Heyser Bulgar.” While Brandwein’s own recording, on *Naftule*
Brandwein: King of the Klezmer Clarinet, includes several accompanying instruments, the Klezmatics' rendition, on Rhythm and Jews, has the clarinetist accompanied only by percussion.\textsuperscript{141} The group has more recently branched out into a variety of other ventures such as Possessed (1997), which is a score for Tony Kushner’s adaptation of S. An-ski’s The Dybbuk, and The Well (1998), musical settings for Yiddish poems composed and sung by Israeli singer Chava Alberstein.

Klezmer, which the large commercial stores carry under the “world music” category, is extremely popular among young Jews on the political left who do not identify religiously and do not desire to listen to the music produced by the Hebrew-speaking world of Israel and Zionism. Often part of a broader interest in Yiddish culture, it has given rise to such ongoing music festivals as KlezKamp, Buffalo Gap, Ashkenaz, and others, which attract participants of all ages. Klezmer is the musical embodiment of a Jewishness that enables musicians and listeners to be “cultural Jews . . . being Jewish while still being themselves.”\textsuperscript{142} Klezmatics violinist Alicia Svigals explains:

So identifying with Israel was a way for American Jews to assimilate and remain Jewish at the same time. In the same way, fashioning a new Jewish culture in the ’70s, ’80s, and ’90s, which is in harmony with hip and progressive young America, can perhaps be seen as yet another Jewish way to be American, complete with a traditional music scene—klezmer—to mirror its American folk music counterpart.\textsuperscript{143}

\textbf{Israeli Music}

Immigrants to Israel in the first half of the 20th century brought with them the music of their countries of origin while at the same time aspiring to discover or create a uniquely Jewish music in the Jewish homeland. The first model for such an “authentic” Jewish music was that of the Yemenite Jews, which was regarded as having ancient roots. In the 1930s Bracha Zephira, a Yemenite performer, gained wide popularity, collaborating with European-born composers and arrangers in Palestine such as Nachum Nardi (from Russia) and Paul Ben Haim (from Germany) in adapting Yemenite music to folk and artistic styles and then performing and recording these new songs. Other immigrant composers in Palestine, such as Oedoen Partos (Hungary) and Marc Lavry (Latvia), continued

\textsuperscript{141} The Klezmer Conservatory Band includes a more faithful rendition of the piece on In the Fiddler's House (1995).
\textsuperscript{142} Alicia Svigals, “Why We Do This Anyway: Klezmer As Jewish Youth Subculture,” Judaism 47, Winter 1998, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 47.
to work in this direction, creating what came to be known as a Mediterranean style of Jewish music.\footnote{Jehoash Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine, 1880–1948: A Social History* (London and New York, 1995).} This Westernization of Middle Eastern musical features crowded out and marginalized indigenous Middle Eastern music.

Even the huge influx of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants into the new State of Israel after 1948 did not reverse the trend because the dominant Ashkenazi-Labor establishment retained cultural dominance. Things only began to change in the late 1960s with growing Sephardi participation in the political system, culminating in the rise to power in 1977 of the Likud Party, which was heavily supported by Jews of Sephardi background. The legitimacy and encouragement given to Sephardi culture led to a new, integrated musical style, called at first *Musika Mizrachit*, Eastern Music, or *Musikat Ha-Tachana Ha-Merkazit*, Central-Bus-Station Music, referring to its primary location of purchase. It later came to be known as *Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit*, Israeli Mediterranean Music, and indeed it is popular not only in Israel but throughout the Middle East.

The core repertoire uses Hebrew texts, but the music integrates a variety of styles: "Hebrew lyrics commingle with Arabic, Persian, Kurdish and Turkish texts, and Eastern European, Greek, Turkish or Arabic tunes feature local aesthetic markers drawing in Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian listeners."\footnote{Amy Horowitz, "Performance in Disputed Territory," *Musical Performance* 1, issue title "The Performance of Jewish and Arab Music in Israel Today," 1997, p. 50.} A mix of Western and Middle Eastern instruments and musical styles add to this rich hybrid of creative expression. Performers of note include Daklon, Shiri Ben-Moshe, Zohar Argov, and Haim Moshe.\footnote{See Amnon Shiloah and Erik Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Music in Israel," *Ethnomusicology* 27, 1983, pp. 222–51; and Jeff Halper, Edwin Seroussi, and Pamela Squires-Kidron, "Musica Mizrakhit: Ethnicity and Class Culture in Israel," *Popular Music* 8, 1989, pp. 131–41.} Ofra Haza, who came from a Yemenite family and achieved international renown with songs in this genre beginning in the late 1980s, died tragically young in 2000.

American Jews developed an early interest in the music of the Jews in Palestine. A.W. Binder, for example, promoted the singing of folk songs from Palestine in the 1930s, and as Yiddish waned as an active language for Jewish musical expression, Hebrew took its place. A significant repertoire of songs from the 1948 War of Independence and from the subsequent years of building the state became a part of the American Jewish music repertoire. After the Six-Day War of 1967 interest in Israeli music increased, and artists such as Shlomo Artzi, Mati Caspi, Tzvika Pick,
Yehudit Ravitz, and the group Poogy became well known to American Jews in the 1970s. However since Israeli music of this era moved out of the realm of folk music and was difficult to perform, few new songs were added to the American “Israeli song canon.”147 By the late 1970s American Jews were creating their own music and relying less on Israel for new music, perhaps also reflecting a more general distancing from Israel. One sector of American Jewry where interest has remained constant is the Israeli folk-dancing circuit, which often features new music from Israel.

Musika Yam Tikhonit Yisraelit is not widely known among American Jews, and few American Jewish bookstores carry it except for those located in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Israelis. American Jews are much more likely to know the Israeli music of performing troupes like the Hassidic Song Festival and of the veteran popular artists like Shoshana Damari, Yaffa Yarkoni, Yehoram Gaon, and Naomi Shemer, all of whom, even the Sephardim Damari and Gaon, sing in the older style. Chava Alberstein, a performer for over 30 years, with 45 albums recorded by CBS Israel, is well known internationally for her Yiddish and children's songs in addition to her Hebrew repertoire. Dudu Fisher performed the role of Jean Valjean in the musical Les Miserables in London and on Broadway, as well as in Tel Aviv, and performs frequently in a range of musical styles throughout the world. David Broza has released four albums in America with English titles since 1989, and in 1995 he was the opening act for Sting. Noa (Achinoam Nini), who was born in Israel and raised in New York, studied music in Israel. She performs internationally and records an eclectic repertoire.

Other Trends

Jewish choral music has been growing in importance. The pioneer in this area is the Zamir Chorale. Zamir (the Hebrew word for nightingale) began in New York in 1960 with a group of enthusiastic young people who had attended Massad, a Zionist and Hebrew-speaking summer camp. The original director was Stanley Sperber. Zamir’s repertoire in the 1960s consisted of great synagogue choral works of the 19th century as

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147 This determination is based, in part, on an investigation of Israeli songs that appear in Reform (Shireinu: Our Songs, 1997), Conservative (Kol BeRamah, 1996), Orthodox (Shi¬ron Hashulchan, 1993), and Jewish communal (United Jewish Appeal Book of Songs and Blessings, 1993) songbooks, and sheet music publications (Pasternak, The International Jewish Songbook, 1994; The Jewish Fake Book, 1997). Of a total of 140 songs, 41, 30 percent, were common to all. Some of these are settings of the liturgy and are among the best-known Israeli songs. Further research on the transmission and dissemination of Israeli music in America is clearly needed.
well as Zionist and folk songs. Over time its scope expanded to include
the liturgical music of the Italian Jewish composer Salomone Rossi
(ca.1570–ca.1630), biblical oratorios by George Friedrich Handel
(1685–1759), and works by Israeli composer Yehezkiel Braun (b. 1922)
and other composers such as Darius Milhaud (1892–1974) and Stefan
Wolpe (1902–1972). Choral arrangements of folk, Israeli, and Jewish hol-
day songs were also featured. Matthew Lazar, who has directed Zamir
since the 1970s, recalls that the group’s performances in Israel in 1967 and
1970 had a profound effect on his life and on those of many of the singers,
inspiring them to devote their lives to Hebrew music.  

Zamir has had a broad impact. Members of important singing groups
mentioned above—Safam, Kol B’Seder, and Beged Kefet—started out
as members of Zamir. A number of Zamir spin-offs in communities out-
side New York perform regular concerts that have helped train and in-
fluence a generation of musicians. The best known is the Zamir Chorale
of Boston, which began in 1969 under the direction of Joshua Jacobson.
The group gives some 15 concerts each year in concert halls and schools,
has 15 recordings to its credit, and has received numerous awards.  

Zamir, together with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations,
runs the Jewish Choral Festival each summer, as well as youth programs
and a variety of educational and outreach events. The example of Zamir
has led to the establishment of Jewish a cappella groups in colleges
around the country that perform in a variety of musical styles.  

The concert hall continues to be a venue for musical contact between
established Western art forms and Jewish music. As noted above, works
on Jewish themes by Ernest Bloch and Leonard Bernstein long ago found
their place in the serious music repertoire. Since the 1970s, a number of
composers—including Sam Adler, Bruce Adolphe, Michael Isaacson,
Louis Karchin, David Lefkowitz, Michael Rose, Morris Rosenzweig, and

148 Interview with Matthew Lazar, May 6, 1999. In addition to his work for Zamir, Lazar
directs other ensembles and guest-conducts choirs and orchestras throughout the United
States. Among his most highly regarded recordings is Chants Mystiques: Hidden Treasures
of a Living Tradition (1995), featuring Alberto Mizrahi and Chorale Mystique singing Jew-
ish choral music.

149 See www.zamir.org, accessed June 22, 1999. Information also provided by Joshua Ja-
cobson, e-mail communication, June 25, 1999.

150 Judah Cohen, in an e-mail message to the author dated June 24, 1999, lists the most
influential Jewish college a cappella groups as: Pizmon (Columbia/JTS); Magevet (Yale Uni-
versity); Shir Appeal (Tufts University); Manginah (Brandeis); Kol HaKavod (University
of Michigan); and Kol HaLayla, (Rutgers, New Brunswick campus). The first group listed,
Pizmon, was the first, beginning in 1984. Cohen estimates that there are over 25 such
groups in existence.
Bruce Roter—have turned to biblical and other Hebrew texts for inspiration, at times using melodic devices such as cantillation (the traditional melody for chanting the Torah in the synagogue) in their music. Steve Reich’s *Tehillim* (1981) is based on the Book of Psalms, and Mario Davidovsky’s *Scenes from Shir Ha-Shirim* is based on the Song of Songs. Aaron Jay Kernis, who received the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1998 at the age of 38, composed *Death Fugue* for bass-baritone with double bass and percussion (1981) based on Paul Célan’s classic poem about the Holocaust, and the piece is frequently performed at concerts. Composer Sam Adler notes the irony that composers for the synagogue have eliminated traditional Jewish musical elements from their compositions at the same time that young composers writing for the concert hall are more willing to make use of them.\(^{151}\)

Recognized artists of mainstream classical and popular music have also recorded Jewish music; the name recognition of the artists plus the fact that the albums are sold at commercial chain retail stores generally ensure high sales. Jazz saxophonist Kenny G, together with Cantor Bruce Benson, recorded *The Jazz Service* in 1986. Violinist Itzhak Perlman’s 1995 recording, *In the Fiddler’s House*, which features him with the four leading klezmer groups—Brave Old World, the Klezmatics, the Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra, and the Klezmer Conservatory Band—sold over 200,000 copies. Mandy Patinkin recorded *Mamaloshen*, his interpretation of Yiddish songs, in 1997. That same year Barbra Streisand’s *Higher Ground* included Max Janowski’s well-known liturgical setting for “Avinu Malkeinu.”

Sephardic music also has its audience. Performers and groups such as Judy Frankel, Judith Cohen, Voice of the Turtle, and Alhambra perform and record songs in Judeo-Spanish.\(^{152}\) And just as klezmer revival bands achieved a distinct personality through an amalgam of styles, so too Sephardic artists incorporate a variety of European and Middle Eastern elements to create their own musical identity.\(^{153}\)

Then there are “crossover” musicians who are hard to categorize. One is Yossi Piamenta, a rock guitarist called the “Sephardic Santana” by *Time* magazine and the “Jewish Hendrix” by the *New York Times*.\(^{154}\) He plays a blend of rock and Middle Eastern music in a variety of New York

\(^{151}\)Personal conversation with Adler, Feb. 19, 1999.

\(^{152}\)See Seroussi, “New Directions in the Music of the Sephardic Jews.”

\(^{153}\)Gerard Edery and Michael Ian Elias incorporate Sephardic elements in their music, as do new Israeli bands popular in America, such as Ethnix and Esta.

clubs and has also issued recordings. For some, his success raises the question of whether music intended for Jewish spiritual purposes loses its power and authenticity if it travels outside the Jewish community. Another example is the Jewish music corner of Avant-Garde Jazz. Primarily a New York phenomenon, the popularity of this music has been growing steadily, perhaps more outside the Jewish community than within it. Klezmatics trumpeter Frank London and saxophonist Greg Wall have released three albums with the Hassidic New Wave group: Jews and the Abstract Truth (1997), Psycho-Semitic (1998), and Kabalogy (1999). In this music Hassidic and klezmer tunes are stylized and put within the new jazz framework, incorporating pop, rock, jazz, blues, and contemporary classical styles within a single piece. Recordings of Hassidic New Wave, which became known initially through its performances at the Knitting Factory in Lower Manhattan, have sold well.\footnote{Interview with Seth Rosner, Aug. 7, 1998. The Knitting Factory started a sub-label of its record line called “JAM,” Jewish Alternative Music; the first release, A Guide for the Perplexed (1998), is a sampler of several groups, including Hassidic New Wave.}

John Zorn has moved into this arena as well with his Massada project. The eclectic tastes of such musicians, though, certainly push the limits of Jewish music.

**TRENDS AND ISSUES**

Looking to the future, several emerging trends are worth noting. One is the growing influence of Hassidic niggunim and Hassidic lore. This is true among the Orthodox, where the traditional Hassidic goal of cleaving to God through music can now be achieved by listening to a recording without being physically present at a Hassidic tisch. In the Reform world, Debbie Friedman has incorporated texts and stories from Hassidic masters in recent songs—"You Are the One," on her Renewal of Spirit (1995) recording, is based on a prayer by Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav—and Jeff Klepper includes niggunim in his solo album In This Place (1997). Recent Klezmer also owes much to the Hassidic tradition. The Klezmer Conservatory Band includes Hassidic melodies such as "Meron Nign" on the album Dancing in the Aisles (1997);\footnote{This melody was taken from Andre Hajdu, "Le Niggun Meron," in Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre 2, 1971, pp. 109–11 (in French, with recording).} Andy Statman's Between Heaven and Earth is exclusively devoted to Hassidic melodies, as is Frank London’s 1998 release, Niggunim.

Another significant trend in all the religious streams is the push for participatory prayer, in contrast to the older cantor-listener (or cantor/choir-listener) model of worship. Debbie Friedman, once again, is the prime...
example in the Reform community. The growth of B'nai Jeshurun—a synagogue in New York City with spirited Sabbath services attended by over 1,500 people, most of them young, where full participation by everyone is the norm—has become a model for many other congregations in America. And the proliferation of Carlebach-style prayer services indicates that a similar need exists among the Orthodox. Rabbi Sam Intrator, till recently the rabbi of the Carlebach Shul in New York City, explains:

Our individual voices when offered in an authentic, meaningful and free, spiritual prayer provide us with a far greater hope in keeping our people unified than the voices of our leaders with their proclamations and negotiations. . . . Clearly there is a great hunger for energetic leadership in participatory-based prayer. I mean this literally, in terms of the traditional chazan [cantor], but I also offer it as a wake-up call to our policy makers to look more closely at reviving and unifying Judaism.157

The Jewish establishment has already responded. Synagogue 2000, created jointly by the Reform and Conservative movements in 1999, has been experimenting with new forms of worship services that might attract more Jews to the synagogue. And in 2000, alarmed that many Jews were finding their synagogues spiritually uninviting, three wealthy philanthropists founded STAR (Synagogue Transformation and Renewal) to develop and disseminate innovative ideas to make the synagogue an exciting and inspiring place (see below, p. 229).

The efflorescence of new Jewish music has also generated a number of questions, some practical and others substantive.

Whatever else it is, music is also a business—musicians want to perform and sell their music. Both young and veteran artists worry that they are reaching only that limited portion of the Jewish community that goes into Jewish bookstores, or that sees ads placed by distributors and producers in Jewish periodicals. Commercial outlets, after all, carry Jewish music only by nationally known musicians, some klezmer, and Debbie Friedman. The Reform and Conservative communities have the fewest retail-selling venues and the Orthodox the most, which is why Orthodox music is the largest segment of the Jewish music industry in terms of both production and sales.158 Since the mid-1990s the Jewish music industry has sought to reach consumers directly through the Internet. Mayer Pasternak, former marketing director for Tara Publications, says that he can provide over 1,600 titles of Jewish music on the Tara Web site, as com-

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pared to the several hundred titles carried by the average Jewish bookstore. Besides making recordings available, Tara also plays a significant role in the spread of Jewish music through the sale of sheet music, now numbering over 300 items, and books.159

Nevertheless, Jewish musicians all across the spectrum fear that they will soon reach the limit of their popularity, under current means of distribution. That is why leading performers—Avraham Fried, Mordechai Ben David, and Miami Boys Choir (Orthodox), Debbie Friedman (Reform), the Klezmatics and Brave Old World (klezmer)—have been actively pursuing new markets, hoping to cross over to other parts of the Jewish community and even beyond.

In terms of substance, the new Jewish music, as noted several times above, has not lacked for critics. In the Reform world, where so-called "camp music" has become the norm, questions are being asked about the appropriateness of "pleasant, catchy tunes," as Cantor Richard Botton calls them, for conducting solemn prayer.160 Similarly among the Orthodox, as Dovid Sears has suggested, "rock-and-roll tunes, sutured together with Jewish lyrics, and promoted with a vengeance" might not be the best music the Jewish tradition has to offer.161 Such criticism, however, has so far not limited the growth and popularity of the new music in either denomination.

Contemporary Jewish music reflects American Jewry's religious and cultural diversity and also shapes it by staking a claim to a synthesized contemporary Jewish identity. The baby-boomer creators of the music accept, reject, and reshape the Eastern European heritage, showing a younger generation different ways of accommodating Jewish life and ideals to current challenges. Through this music the present looks to the past and the past in reinvented in the present, providing guidance and inspiration as young Jews create their own Jewish destiny in America.

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161 Sears, "Who Took the 'Jewish' Out of Jewish Music?" p. 14. In a supportive response to this article, David Altschuler describes a performance on a Los Angeles Chabad telethon in 1995 that "showed a rocking Chassid shoving a microphone down his throat. Several chubby men in yeshiva garb nearby had sweat rolling down their peyos [side curls], their hands and hips gyrating in all-too-perfect synchronization." "A Call for Civilized Enthusiasm at Simchos," Jewish Observer, Apr. 1997, p. 59.
Clearly, more research is needed in a number of areas. Of particular importance is contextualization—relating contemporary Jewish music to popular and folk music trends, to the musical traditions of other ethnic groups, and to the music of other religions in America. Investigations focused internally should assess the musical repertoire found in songbooks for camps, schools, and various Jewish organizations, and analyze the attitudes of the consumers to find out what the experience of listening to the music and seeing it performed means to them. A clear understanding of the relationship between Jewish music and Jewish identity would constitute a major contribution to the current debate over the future of Jewish life in America.