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American Jews constitute the largest Jewish community in the world, but their total number has always been a matter of conjecture because the decennial census has never included a question on religious identity. Over the years, however, social scientists have developed a number of procedures for counting American Jews and estimating the past and present size of the Jewish population; some trends are unmistakable.

Having grown from about 1,000 in 1790 to one million by the end of the 19th century, the Jewish population of the United States increased fourfold by the 1930s as a result of the mass immigration that brought some 3 million East European Jews to the U.S. between 1880 and 1930. This growth raised the percentage of Jews in the total population from only 0.5 percent in 1880 to an estimated 3.6 percent (4.2 million) in 1930. Over the next five decades, curtailed immigration, reduced fertility, and the effects of assimilation and intermarriage considerably slowed this growth rate. By 1985, the Jewish population numbered approximately 5.7 million persons. Because their rate of growth has been much slower than that of the total American population, by 1985 Jews constituted only 2.4 percent of the total population.

The cessation of mass Jewish immigration to the United States not only affected the source of growth, but also the generational composition of American Jewry. Despite the refugee influx after World War II, and the immigration of Soviet Jews, Israelis, and still other refugees in the 1970s and 1980s, more than 80 percent of the Jewish community today is native-born, and half or more of these are third and fourth generation Americans. This means that, except for a relatively small number of immigrants, the American Jewish community must depend demographically very largely on itself to maintain its numbers. It means, too, that the demographic, socio-cultural, and religious future of the community will depend, to a great degree, on how its American born members react to the freedom to integrate spatially, economically, and socially into the larger American social structure.

Marriage and Fertility

American Jews have had the distinction of having smaller families than virtually any other ethnic and religious group in the country. Although convergence in fertility behavior between Jews and non-Jews has been taking place as a result of the more widespread acceptance by non-Jews of the smaller family and their greater practice of family planning, Jews still tend to marry later, desire and expect to have smaller families, be more approving of contraception, and apparently practice birth control more

often and more efficiently than most other groups. In part, these patterns reflect the attitudes and practices of a highly urban, educated, and rational population. Whatever the reasons, the net result is fertility that has undoubtedly gone below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman; this has raised the question of whether the Jewish population faces an actual decline in its total numbers as it moves into the 21st century.

Such a possibility may be enhanced by changing marital patterns, especially if these result in non-marriage. In a recent review of fertility in the United States, Charles Westoff (1986:556) concluded that "it seems unlikely that the trend toward postponement of marriage has yet run its course." Citing the growing independence of women, the costs of marriage, and norms that permit growing numbers of couples to live together outside of marriage, he foresses further increases in average age at marriage rather than stabilization or decline. Whether the current concern with AIDS will lead to changing norms remains to be seen.

Young Jewish Americans still seem to place a high value on marriage and the family. A study of high school seniors showed that about 95 percent of the young Jewish men and women expected to marry, but a very large percentage expected to marry later than non-Jews (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1985). In fact, Jewish young people, like those in the general population, are already postponing marriage, thereby raising serious doubts about whether the high levels of marriage indicated by the expectation data will be realized. Pooled national data documenting actual behavior for the 1960s and 1970s point strongly to a rise in age at marriage for Jews, a reduction in the percent ever married by the time they reached their 40s, and a widening rather than narrowing gap between Jews and non-Jews (Cohen, 1983). In contrast to the 1960s, when 90 percent of Jews age 25-34 were married, only 74 percent in this age group were married in the 1970s. For ages 35-44, the level reached 97 percent in the 1960s but only 91 percent in the 1970s, 5 percentage points below the non-Jewish level.

Supporting these patterns is the evidence from the AJC study of "Jewish College Freshmen" (Rosenfield, 1984). By 1980, when most of the freshmen surveyed in 1971 were already in their late 20s, only 33 percent of the men and 42 percent of the women were married (another 2 and 5 percent had been married and were already divorced). By contrast, among non-Jews 56 percent of the men and 57 percent of the women were married. Interesting, too, is that only about 5 percent of the Jews were already parents compared to one-fourth of the non-Jews. That late marriage and low levels of marriage characterize Jews is also suggested by various community studies. The 1986 MetroWest New Jersey study (Rappeport and Tobin, 1987) found that whereas 68 percent of those now 35-44 had been married by age 25, only 47 percent of those now 25-34 married before age 25. Whether the 30 percent in the 25-34 age group who are not yet married will eventually marry and thereby reduce the non-marriage level to the low of 4 percent now characterizing the 35-44 age group remains to be seen. The 1984 study of Philadelphia's Jewish community (Yancey and Goldstein, 1984) found that as many as 11 percent of the women and 16 percent of the men between ages 31 and 40 had never married.

The national data and those for MetroWest and Philadelphia both suggest that, for a rising percentage of Jews, postponement of marriage may lead for a noticeable number to eschewal of marriage, at least until the end of the reproductive period. Such a delay and possible avoidance of marriage may, in turn, have implications for overall fertility levels, in the absence of any strong trend toward extra-marital fertility among single Jewish women. Moreover, the impact of changing marriage patterns on fertility may be compounded by changing levels of divorce. While divorce is considerably lower among Jews than non-Jews, the proportions of divorced persons and of one-parent households has risen in recent years (Tobin and Chenkin, 1985). For example, in Philadelphia, 6 percent of all women and 7 percent of all men age 31-40 were separated or divorced. A 1985 study of Baltimore found 5 percent of the adults separated or divorced at the time of the survey, compared to under 2 percent in 1968; it also found that of those married, 15 percent had been married more than once whereas in 1968 multiple marriages characterized only 8 percent of the married adults, although some of these remarriages undoubtedly involved widowed persons.

Currently, experts are engaged in considerable debate about whether the fertility of American Jews is or will be sufficiently high to assure replacement (Cohen and Goldscheider, 1984; Goldstein, 1985). All seem in agreement that, at best, Jewish fertility will not exceed the replacement level of 2.1 children per mother. Whether projections of subreplacement levels are accurate depends, however, on the validity of the assumptions made and on whether confidence can be placed in past and recent behavior as predictors of future behavior and in expressions of fertility expectations as reliable indicators of future childbearing. Cohen (1983:118) argued that "on the basis of past experience, it does seem safe to say that the completed Jewish birthrate for today's Jewish parents may remain well below the number needed for replacement." His explanation for such an expectation seems reasonable: "so long as middle-class urbanized Americans experience low birthrates, so will comparable Jews. Jewish birth patterns will generally follow those of the larger society as they have in the past" (Cohen,1983:120).

The data cited by Cohen support this conclusion. Boston's ever married Jewish women aged 25-34 averaged only 1.5 children in 1965; in 1975 Jewish women aged 25-34 averaged only 0.7 children. The national data for Jews, although somewhat higher at 2.1 in the 1960s and 1.2 in the 1970s, pointed in the same direction. Whether the 25-34 age group will raise its fertility substantially as it moves through the final decade of reproduction (age 35-44) remains to be determined.

Cohen and Goldscheider (1984) later argued that it is likely to do so and that it will, in fact, achieve close to replacement levels. Citing data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth (Mosher and Goldscheider, 1984), as well as earlier surveys, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1985) argue that Jewish fertility is likely to remain below that of Protestants and Catholics, but that the 2.1 average expected by the currently and ever married women does not point to below replacement level fertility. They claim that this conclusion is reinforced by the findings that Jews in a 1972 national sample of high school seniors expect about two

children on average and continued to do so in 1979 (Goldscheider and Goldscheider, 1985).

Yet Goldscheider acknowledges that the accuracy of the predictors of replacement level fertility will depend on the proportion of Jewish women marrying. If a substantial percentage of Jewish women do not marry and do not have children outside marriage, the fertility of the married, even if it averages 2.1 children, will not be adequate to replace all the married and unmarried. Moreover, the 2.1 average may itself be too high. For example, a 1985 study of Baltimore (Tobin, 1986) found 12 percent of Jewish women aged 35-44 still childless, and 9 percent of women aged 25-44 expecting to remain childless; a substantial percentage also expected only one child.

Some have speculated that changing family values associated with late stages of the feminist movement are resulting in a greater acceptance of children in the American family in the mid-1980s than earlier and that this may influence Jewish family size as well. But such a conclusion does not seem justified. In 1985, for every 1,000 white women between ages 18 and 24, 463 births had already occurred and a total of 2,079 were expected, again pointing to below replacement fertility levels (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986). The patterns for white women age 30-34, near the end of their childbearing, point even more strongly to below replacement fertility in recent years. By 1985, women of this age had averaged only 1,612 children per 1,000 and expected a total of only 1,979, below replacement. Such low fertility reflects, in part, the rise in childlessness. In 1985, 26.2 percent of all women age 30-34 were still childless, compared to 19.8 percent in 1980. While about half of these women still expected to have a birth, past experience suggests that for a number of them expectations will not be realized. Of the 19.8 percent without children in 1980, over four-fifths were still childless by 1985.

On the basis of such data, Charles Westoff (1986:558) finds "little basis for assuming that the low level of fertility in this country is a demographic aberration." To the contrary, he argues that the basic social forces that underlay the historical decline in fertility--industrialization and development of a service economy, the transition of children from being producers to consumers, universal education, the replacement of traditional values by an ethos of rationality, the changing functions of the family and the improved status of women, and improved contraceptive technology--all point to continuing low levels of fertility. He suggests that, if anything, the greater uncertainty is how low fertility will yet fall. While Westoff fully recognizes that all prognostications are subject to error, in the absence of contrary evidence, his assumptions, like those cited by Cohen (1983) for the Jews, provide forceful arguments against expecting a return to above replacement fertility, particularly among Jews, who have been in the forefront of the fertility decline.

Overall, therefore, these national data and Westoff's observations provide no basis for believing that the recent low fertility of the white population of the United States is likely to shift upward to any significant degree in the near future. Unfortunately, no comparable national time

series is available for the Jewish population. There is no convincing evidence, however, that Jews will deviate from the pattern of low fertility that seems likely to continue among whites as a whole, especially given the patterns of late marriage and high educational levels that characterize the Jewish population (Schmelz and Della Pergola, 1986).

On the basis of the available evidence, I believe that Jewish fertility levels are highly unlikely to forge ahead of those of non-Jewish whites, for whom below-replacement fertility levels are projected. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Jewish fertility will not exceed replacement level in the near future and that, more likely, it will operate at somewhat below replacement. But it needs stressing here that even if fertility is at replacement level, this does not assure maintenance of population size if losses occur concurrently through the effects of high mortality due to an aging population and the impact of assimilation and intermarriage.

Intermarriage

If intermarriage and marital assimilation take place at a high rate, the Jewish group faces demographic losses through both the assimilation of the Jewish partner and the loss of children born to such a marriage. Even if the Jewish partner does not assimilate, many of the children of such marriages may still be lost to Judaism in the absence of extensive conversions of the non-Jewish spouses. Regrettably, there is no fully reliable and recent set of information on the rates of intermarriage and on its impact on identity. The evidence we do have suggests that the level of intermarriage, the extent of conversion, and the impact of conversion and mixed marriage on Jewish identity vary considerably, depending on the size, location, age, and social cohesiveness of a particular community. Despite these variations, virtually every study in recent decades has pointed to rising levels both of intermarriage among young, native-born Americans and of conversion to Judaism. The evidence from quite recent studies suggests, however, that both may have reached plateaus and conversions may even be declining.

Although the overall level of mixed marriage (7 percent) revealed by the 1970-71 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) (Schmelz and Della Pergola, 1983) was not unusually high, the study gave rise to considerable concern through its finding that intermarriage rose sharply from 4-5 percent of those marrying between 1950 and 1959 to 10 percent of the 1960-64 marriage cohort, and to 22 percent of those marrying in 1965-69. However, the evidence from NJPS suggested that a substantial proportion of intermarriages resulted in the conversion of the non-Jew, especially among the younger groups having a higher intermarriage rate. In an even larger number of marriages, the non-Jewish spouse identified as Jewish. Furthermore, a significant proportion of children from such marriages, about half, were being raised as Jews.

In contrast to NJPS's relatively optimistic conclusions regarding the impact of intermarriage, a 1976-77 eight-city study of 446 intermarried couples concluded that intermarriage represented a threat to Jewish

continuity (Mayer, 1983; see also Mayer and Augar, 1987). Although not fully representative of all the intermarried, the evidence pointed to low conversion rates, a low level of Jewish conduct and practice in mixed marriages, a low proportion of children being regarded as Jewish, and most of the children not being socialized as Jews.

Among community studies undertaken since NJPS, rates of mixed marriage continue to vary inversely with age, and are generally higher among younger persons than those reported in NJPS. But the levels continue to differ considerably from community to community. A reasonable estimate seems to be that the average current intermarriage rate for American Jews is between 25 and 30 percent, indicating that about 45 percent of all newly married couples involve a non-Jewish partner. For example, in the Baltimore study (Tobin, 1986), 26 percent of all married persons age 35-44 and 36 percent of the youngest cohort, age 25-34, were not born Jewish; only about 30 percent of non-Jewish partners in the intermarriages of the youngest cohort converted to Judaism. Also important is the evidence that 13 percent of the Jewish partners converted away from Judaism. Significantly, too, less than a majority of the children in households without conversion were identified as Jewish. If rates of conversion are, in fact, declining and if most of the children in such marriages are not identifying as Jews, the impact of intermarriage on Jewish demographics may become more negative than in the past.

The MetroWest New Jersey study (Rappeport and Tobin, 1986) also found a steady rise in intermarriages, from only 6 percent of those individuals married before 1964 to 14 percent of those married in 1975-80 and one-third of those married since 1980. Concurrently, the proportion of intermarried households in which the non-Jewish spouse converted has declined. From a high of 44 percent of all marriages in 1971-74, the percentage converting declined to 27 percent of those marrying in 1975-80 and only 12 percent of those married since 1980.

Because of the limitations in the data on intermarriage, however, these patterns are suggestive at best. We do not yet know definitely if intermarriage leads to a quantitative gain or loss for the Jewish community. Of all items that warrant further research, intermarriage undoubtedly rates among the very highest, and national data are especially needed.

Residential Mobility

At a time when American Jewish fertility has reached what is probably its lowest level, and when intermarriage and assimilation may be threatening the demographic and socioreligious vitality of the community, increasing levels of population mobility and greater geographic dispersion nationally and locally present new threats and new challenges. About three-fourths of all adult Jews no longer live in their city of birth, and one third of all adults have moved within the last 5-6 years. The levels of residential mobility implied by these statistics have serious implications for the national as well as the local communities.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Jews were heavily

concentrated in the Northeast (Goldstein, 1981): In 1930, 68 percent lived in the region. Compared to the general American population, proportionally fewer lived in the North Central (20 percent) and Southern regions (8 percent), and about as small a proportion lived in the West (5 percent). By 1985, the Jewish population was distributed more nearly like the total American population (Goldstein, 1987; Kosmin, Ritterband, and Scheckner, 1987). The Northeast still contained a disproportional share of American Jewry (53 percent), but had declined substantially, as had the percentage in the North Central region (11 percent). Growing percentages lived in the South (19 percent) and the West (17 percent). Since the kinds of education obtained by American Jews and the kinds of occupations they now enter often lead to movement away from family and out of centers of Jewish population concentration, these shifts in regional distribution are likely to become accentuated in the future. The migration effects of changing educational and occupational patterns may be compounded by high marriage age, a lower percent marrying and more divorcing, and low fertility, all of which are conducive to greater mobility.

The Jewish population is being redistributed not only across regions but also within and between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. Jewish residential clustering in a limited number of urban neighborhoods is changing as Jews participate in the general suburbanization movement. Jewish neighborhoods in central city areas and in older suburbs have experienced population decline as newer outer suburbs have grown and as small communities have been formed or grown in outlying areas. Overall, the population has thereby become more dispersed. Although residential clustering will continue in metropolitan areas with large Jewish populations, Jewish population movement must therefore be considered a key variable in any assessment of the future strength of the American-Jewish community. On the one hand, high levels of movement and especially repeated movement may weaken individual ties to local communities and institutions and reduce the strength of Jewish identity, compounding tendencies to high rates of intermarriage and assimilation. On the other hand, the shifts associated with population movement may give smaller communities the density and diversity of Jewish population needed to maintain and possibly strengthen basic institutions essential for group survival and enrichment.

Structural Variables

While size, distribution, and density are critical variables determining the strength and vitality of any segment of the population, a wide range of demographic, social, and economic variables also significantly affects the community's current viability and future survival. Among these, age and generation status have particular relevance for the Jews.

Of all the demographic variables, age is the most basic. Since at least the 1950s, the Jewish population of the United States has had an older age structure than the general white population. U. O. Schmelz and Della Pergola (1983) estimated that by 1980 over 15 percent of America's Jews were aged 65 and over; they projected a rise to 17 percent by the year 2000. Equally significant is the projected sharp increase in the "old

aged" (75 and over) from about 314,000 in 1980 to 414,000 in the year 2000. Beyond the impact on growth rates that the high levels of overall mortality associated with an aged population will entail, aging will pose special challenges for the Jewish community to find the financial resources necessary to cope with increasing needs for health and social services, especially if a noticeable proportion of Jewish aged live below the poverty level.

A major factor affecting the continued vitality of the American Jewish community in the past has been the "transfusions" received through immigration. Now, increasingly third and fourth generation Jews face the American scene without large-scale outside reinforcement. Although this emergent pattern has been somewhat modified in recent decades by the influx of Jews from the Soviet Union, Israel, and Iran, the full extent to which this immigration affects the demographic composition and sociological character of American Jewry, especially at the local level, remains to be documented. These groups may add to the number of Jews or at least compensate some for population declines. However, due either to deficiences in Jewish background and experience or to lack of integration with the organized Jewish community, their numerical contribution may not be matched by contributions to other aspects of Jewish communal life. Despite the influx of Russian and Israeli immigrants, the foreign-born component is clearly decreasing over time. In most communities, the foreign-born now constitute only between 11 and 18 percent (Tobin and Chenkin, 1985).

As noted earlier, the sharp changes in the generational composition of the population suggest that the community's future depends to a great degree on how its third and higher generation members react to the freedom to integrate into the American social structure. Whether trends toward assimilation are being stabilized, reversed, or accelerated, and how the expression of ties to the Jewish community is changing require continuing monitoring and assessment, for their implications both for individual identity and for the strength of the larger community.

Conclusion

Whether American Jewry faces greater assimilation or is transforming itself into a different but still dynamic community is the focus of ongoing debate. In this, its future demographics are a key concern. In combination, the current patterns of low fertility, high levels of intermarriage, lowered residential density, and changing composition can potentially weaken the demographic base of the United States Jewish population. This need not be so. To the extent that Jews retain a comparatively close-knit, ethnic-religious identification within the total society, the potential for continued vitality remains. Stability of numbers or even declining numbers need not constitute a fundamental threat to the maintenance of a strong Jewish community and to high levels of individual Jewish identity, providing appropriate and successful institutional changes are introduced to cope with the changing situation.

A stable or larger population base would certainly make the effort to ensure Jewish identity and vitality easier. Concern with numbers is

especially relevant at the local level, where adequate density of population may be crucial to a viable community. Whether the Jewish community as a whole can do very much to control the changing fertility levels or the patterns of redistribution remains questionable, since these processes very largely reflect reactions to a wide and complex range of social, economic, and normative changes in the larger American society. What is clear is that the community must undertake and maintain fuller and more scientifically sound assessments of the ongoing demographic changes and their implications. Beyond this, it must be prepared, on the basis of such evaluations, to develop new institutional forms designed to meet the changing demographic situation and to mitigate the negative effects of possible population decline and of greater dispersal. Through such steps, the community will help insure that the changes that do occur still allow for a meaningful balance between being Jewish and being American.

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