

**Was It the Demography?: A Reassessment of
U.S. Jewish Population Estimates, 1945-2001**

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Abstract

National Jewish population surveys in the United States provide comprehensive data and insights about the Jewish community's development. Controversy accompanied the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) since inception and through release of the final report. This paper focuses on the plausibility of Jewish population size—namely, a decline since 1990—as estimated from the 2001 NJPS. While the size of the U.S. Jewish population is difficult to ascertain, growth momentum reached its peak around 1990, followed by moderate decline. Population aging and a decline in the wish to identify as a Jew underlie a decrease in the Jewish population. In retrospect, the 1957 Current Population Survey and 1990 NJPS probably better represented the total Jewish population, while the 1970 NJPS and 2001 NJPS better covered the more Jewishly identified sections. NJPS 2001, in any case, is an important and usable source.

Large-scale national Jewish population surveys conducted periodically in the United States provide a comprehensive inventory of data and insights about the community's main development paths and patterns. Beyond the specific themes investigated, research plays a leading role in portraying "the state of the nation" and in providing, if not foundations, at least an anchor to collective identity and imaginary inside and outside of the Jewish public. Given these broad implications in the context of an ongoing spirited debate about continuity and change among American Jewry (Rosenberg Farber and Waxman, 1999; Cohen and Eisen, 2000; DellaPergola, 2000; Liebman, 2001; Goldscheider, 2002; Verbit, 2002), it could have been expected that the 2000-01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) would spark controversy. Indeed, controversy accompanied this major study from its inception, increasing after publication of the preliminary results in October 2002 and—following the high-profile postponement of its release on the eve of the 2002 UJC General Assembly—the issuing of the final report in September 2003.

Fundamental disagreements emerged in the organized Jewish community and among research specialists regarding the management of NJPS and the quality of its data. Actually, the questions at stake involved far broader facets of the delicate relationship between the Jew-

ish institutional system and scientific research. Since the launching of NJPS 2001, much has been written on these themes, mostly in the form of editorials and Op-Eds in the Jewish and general press (e.g., DellaPergola, 2003a; Goldberg, 2003; Saxe and Kadushin, 2003; Sheskin, 2003). However, a systematic discussion of the major issues revolving around the NJPS data description (Kotler-Berkowitz et al., 2003) and analysis in historical perspective is still to come.

This paper focuses on one basic issue: the plausibility of Jewish population size—namely a population decline since 1990—as estimated from the 2001 NJPS, in the context of the chain of factors that may or may not have determined the apparent demographic changes. Such evaluation cannot be limited to reviewing the NJPS findings only, but calls for an assessment of the major determinants of Jewish population change over the last several decades. Not less significantly, we need to review NJPS in comparison with the main sources of data on U.S. Jewish population since the end of World War II, trying to evaluate what part of the results may reflect actual population changes and what part may stem from variations in the quality of data. In this paper, we shall discuss whether and to what extent the results of various major national data sets can be reconciled over a span of several decades. While trying to ascertain whether or not we should address NJPS 2001 as another contribution to the mainstream of American Jewish social research, the main question we ask is: Was it the demography that determined the apparent Jewish population decline between 1990 and 2001, or was it data quality?

Conceptual and Operational Determinants of Jewish Population Size and Change

How many Jews live in the United States may not be the most important statistic to emerge from national population studies such as the NJPS (Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.*, 2003) or the American Jewish Identification Survey (AJIS) (Mayer *et al.*, 2002), both undertaken in 2001, but the statistic's importance cannot be underestimated. At any given time, population size is a synthetic indicator of an array of different demographic and sociocultural determinants and trends. In this respect, quantitative measures do not provide more than a broad descriptive container whose contents need to be enriched by additional qualitative evidence for both analytical and planning purposes. Nonetheless, numbers are important because they may unveil the basic dynamics of growth, resilience, or decline among the group investigated in historical perspective, and the nature of mutual relationships between the Jewish group and society's majority or other minorities in comparative perspective.

U.S. Jews constitute a particular case of the general class of sub-populations whose total size is intensely affected by both biological-

demographic and cultural-identificational variables and who respond to three operational mechanisms or components of change: (a) how many newborn babies are identified with the given group by their parents over a certain period of time and how many die from within the same group over the same period; (b) how many persons identified with the group immigrate into the country and how many emigrate over the same period; and (c) how many join the given collective, no matter by what procedure, and how many sever their links with the given collective.

The preceding argument assumes a significant amount of continuity over time in terms of both composition of the investigated population and rules for its definition. Indeed, while the definitional criteria of Jewish populations can be demonstrated not to have been constant in long-term historical experience (Cohen, 1999; Corinaldi, 2001), a basic assumption widely shared by past historians and social scientists—first among them demographers—was a relatively coherent frame of reference transcending space and time (Herman, 1977). Population characteristics in a given locale at a certain point of time could generally be explained in the light of demographic and identificational trends occurring over an earlier time span locally or elsewhere, in the case of international migrations.

A more recent orientation in the scholarly debate has attempted to emphasize less such spatial-temporal continuity—inherently related to genealogy—giving more attention to changes in the local environmental circumstances. In general terms, relativist or post-modernist arguments have questioned the real or imaginary roots of corporate ethnic identities (Anderson, 1991), and have related them to myths that, while sometimes weakly tied to historiographic evidence, may nonetheless gather significant momentum and relevance. This perspective stresses a group's ability to shape, invent or reinvent its own sense of personal and collective belonging and solidarity regardless of fixed constraints provided by the observation of past behaviors or attitudes. A similar argument applied to the study of Jewish community identities calls for the need to constantly redefine basic terms of reference, such as the boundaries and contents of Jewishness. Perceptions of the ultimate gist of Jewish identification tend to shift from a more conventional past notion of Jewishness as a mode of *being* intimately related to a given set of beliefs and behaviors, to Jewish identification as expressed through connecting, traveling, and journeying, or even surfing and zapping—meaning eclectic, selective, subjective reconstruction of the subject matter and its meaning (Horowitz, 2002; Dencik, 2002; Cohen and Eisen, 2000). The notion of historical continuity tends to lose relevance facing the pressure of new needs and new norms inherent in contemporary culture and society.

An important definitional predicament is associated with these changes of context and contents. The paradigmatic “Who is a Jew?” question constitutes an ever-elusive issue in the field of Jewish population studies, in the long term and, particularly, in recent years. A major problem in Jewish population estimates available in the literature, whether by individual scholars or by Jewish organizations, is a lack of coherence and uniformity in the definitional criteria followed (DellaPer-gola, 1992).

The study of Jewish populations may rely on *normative* or on *operational* definitions of the target population. *Halachah* (Jewish rabbinical law) provides a clear and authoritative normative definition of who is a Jew. Even alternative definitions stemming from the adoption of patrilinearity in the attribution of a Jewish identity, while admittedly inconsistent with traditional halachah, remain in the domain of normative definitions. However, for empirical research purposes, it is not possible to undertake the stringent controls involved in ascertaining each individual’s Jewish identity according to such technical criteria. Therefore, Jewish populations usually are identified in censuses or surveys through operational criteria, such as the more or less accurate proxies offered by simply pre-coded variables like *religion* or *ethnic origin*, or based on indirect and rougher information on countries of origin (Rosenthal, 1975) and the like.

One important complicating factor in contemporary definitions is the increasing frequency of intermarriage. Intermarriage provides the major context for the growing number of individuals whose Jewish identification is one among several possible ancestries. Moreover, such personal Jewish identities may become the object of controversy between different religious or legal authorities. Consequently, many individuals do not know whether or when to identify as Jewish or prefer not to, regardless of their eligibility according to some objective criterion. Others who know about their own Jewish identity do not deem it mutually exclusive with other religious or ethnic identities. This may conflict with the normative assumption that Jewish identity is incompatible with other religious identities.

To appropriately appraise Jewish population trends one needs to address the broadest possible definition of the collective. Yet, to make the study of any finite population meaningful and worthwhile, we need working definitions. Definitions imply certain standards, the alternative being an amorphous approach unable to generate analytic conclusions of any sort. It is therefore essential that data collectors allow for wide and flexible analytic opportunities to data users who within the broadest possible initial definition may later decide on specific definitional typologies according to their own assumptions and research goals.

Jewish population definitions for the purpose of empirical research long have followed operational rather than normative paths. The concepts of “core” and “enlarged” Jewish population were developed for analytical purposes in order to disentangle the cluster of Jews and non-Jews who share their daily lives in the same households, and to trace virtual boundary lines where in reality such group boundaries have become increasingly flexible, porous and interchangeable (DellaPer-gola, 2003b). The *core Jewish population* concept includes all those who, when asked, identify themselves as Jews or, if the respondent is a different person in the same household, are identified by him/her as Jews, and those of Jewish parentage who are identificationally indifferent or agnostic but do not formally identify with another religious group. The *enlarged Jewish population* concept also includes all other persons of Jewish parentage who are *not* Jews currently (or at the time of investigation) and all the additional non-Jewish members (spouses, children, etc.) in mixed religious households. In addition, the Law of Return, Israel’s distinctive legal framework for the acceptance and absorption of new immigrants, awards immediate citizenship and other civil rights to all current Jewish new immigrants and to their Jewish or non-Jewish spouses, children, and grandchildren, as well as to the spouses of such children and grandchildren. Unfortunately, much recent research has confused these various definitional concepts. It should be noted that an *enlarged Jewish population* may be growing while the respective *core Jewish population* is declining.

A great amount of latitude hence characterizes the definitional solutions adopted in sociodemographic research, with obvious consequences for the ensuing population counts. Today, normative formulations persist at one extreme of the Jewish definitional continuum, such as in Israel’s Law of Return, where “a Jew is who was born of a Jewish mother or was converted (in Hebrew: *nitgaiyer*) and does not belong to another religion” (Corinaldi, 2001). Such definition carries important practical implications in the daily life of Israel society and its relationship to world Jewry. It does not only follow normative guidelines but also assumes Jewish identity to be mutually exclusive with other identities. Within the operational limits of social scientific research in the United States, definitions have tended to evolve from the straightforward question “What is his religion?”, and its “Jewish” modality (U.S. Census Bureau, 1958), through the several multivariate ideal constructs devised for the 1990 NJPS (Kosmin *et al.*, 1991), reaching increasingly more nuanced solutions in the NJPS 2001. In the latter survey, at least in the version initially processed and circulated by UJC, “a Jew is defined as a person whose religion is Judaism, OR whose religion is Jewish and something else, OR who has no religion and has at least one Jewish parent or a Jewish upbringing, OR who has a non-

monotheistic religion and has at least one Jewish parent or a Jewish upbringing” (Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.*, 2003). It is important to note that such definition is neither normative nor mutually exclusive with being identified with other groups. These criteria were strongly supported by the sponsoring institution (UJC) as better responding to cognitive and policy planning needs vis-à-vis their perceived constituency. NJPS 2001 therefore operated based on a broadly conceived Jewish population definition, relying on non-dichotomic classification criteria and therefore allowing for a large number of intermediate categories of uncertain resolution. Such definition not only was operational in nature but also supposedly reflected particular servicing considerations. At the extreme end of this ongoing definitional transformation, no consistent criterion may be left besides the purely subjective and willingness of people to identify themselves with the given group at a given point in time.

In such a fluid conceptual context, a derived question transcending the strictly technical issues concerns the relevance of demography as a useful tool in the appraisal of U.S. Jewish population, and of Jewish and other sub-populations generally. If a population can be born, die, resurrect itself, or be targeted essentially as the expression of social propensities or organizational needs at a given time and place regardless of historical identification, comparing populations and population change over time and across space lose significance. Jewish population continuity and discontinuity may become decreasingly connected with demographically traceable patterns, and increasingly a function of cultural, political or budget-related tides, fashions or propensities. The consequences for Jewish social scientific research and for social research in general are complex. Some would argue that the highly voluntaristic patterns of identification of contemporary Jewish populations make unfeasible any attempt to quantify the number of Jews locally, or globally (Schnapper, 1987). Even if one rejects this position, Jewish population figures and estimates should always be taken as orders of magnitude, surrounded by variable and sometimes significant margins of error. While reflecting improvements and corrections, Jewish population estimates highlight the increasing complexity of the sociodemographic and identificational processes underlying the definition of Jewish populations; hence, estimates of their sizes. This is made even more complicated by growing international and internal migration, which often lead to double counts of people on the move. Consequently, the analyst has to come to terms with the paradox of the *permanently provisional* character of Jewish population estimates (DellaPergola, 2002).

A related question is whether American Jewish population and identification trends should be interpreted primarily in the framework of American society, or as part of a global configuration of Jewish commu-

nities. While the obvious answer is both, conclusions drawn about the same sociodemographic and sociocultural patterns according to either perspective can be quite different. Significant assimilation and erosion from an internal perspective can at the same time appear as significant distinctiveness and resilience from an external perspective. Another question is whether the criteria used to define the U.S. Jewish population should be the same or different as criteria used to define Jews in other countries. Some exceptionalism provided by the general societal context—in this case American—normally should be expected to be found in the analysis of Jewish social patterns at the substantive level. However, were we to make the assumption that the *definitional criteria* themselves should take into account American exceptionalism, the implication would be that Jewishness has become a subsidiary attribute of “Americanness,” and therefore cannot really be compared across the gamut of Jewish populations and communities worldwide (see the conceptual discussion in Horowitz, 2002).

In the light of these concerns—actually worthy of far deeper elaboration than feasible here—the central theme of this paper needs to be reformulated: Under what circumstances can we reconcile Jewish population sizes and characteristics emerging from various national data sources, in light of definitional or other cultural intervening factors? Should the 2001 NJPS data be read as part of an unfolding process of sociodemographic change among American Jewry, or as an unrelated one-time shot in the history of Jewish population research? And perhaps more fundamentally, what can demography contribute in the ongoing debate about NJPS 2001?

Local vs. National Sources for U.S. Jewish Population Estimates

As appropriate to a country where there is separation of Church and State, U.S. population censuses never have addressed the question of religion (Good, 1959). For the most part, the Jewish community has opposed the inclusion of such a question in U.S. censuses. Nonetheless, a significant research tradition has developed concerning the size and characteristics of religious groups. Jews in particular have been scrutinized through a variety of direct and indirect research techniques (Robinson, 1943; Seligman, 1950; Goldscheider, 1982; Cohen, Woocher, Phillips, 1984; Winter and Levin, 1984; Schmelz and DellaPergola, 1984; Ritterband, Kosmin, Scheckner, 1988; Goldstein, 1989; Schwartz, Scheckner, Kotler-Berkowitz, 2002).

Over time, if we disregard indirect estimation methods, national Jewish population estimates in the United States were obtained through two basic approaches. One was the systematic compilation and summation of local population estimates periodically collected by local Jewish communities and federations. The other was independent data-collec-

tion efforts at the national level at one time or another. Both approaches have significant precedent and comparability, reflecting the research initiatives of Jewish organizations and, to some extent, general public agencies.

There clearly are advantages and disadvantages to both national and local studies. First, in term of relevance, both approaches are significant as each captures relevant data though different dimensions of the corporate community and its relationship with the broader social context. Local studies can claim greater proximity with the subject matter, while national studies are conducted at a distance by people who may not understand significant local peculiarities. Local studies are conducted by a variety of investigators and organizations, with different methods, and one may assume (or hope) that any mistakes will not become cumulative. National studies are conducted with one common methodology, and in case of bias, mistakes cumulate nationally. On the other hand, national studies have the advantage of standardized definitions and research methods, which local studies lack, and are clearly superior in capturing one central feature of American society: a high volume of internal migration and geographical mobility (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1996). Frequent permanent or temporary passages of individuals from one locale to another do not only affect geographical distributions but also Jewish identificational patterns; hence, nationwide counts of Jews.

In the following we shall review some of the major findings in the assessment of U.S. Jewish population size, while at the same time noting some of the strengths and weaknesses of the various sources available.

Local Jewish Population Estimates

The tradition to determine the number of Jews in the U.S. materialized primarily through the yearly publication of detailed population estimates in the *American Jewish Year Book* (AJYB) issued by the Jewish Publication Society and the American Jewish Committee (in recent years the AJCommittee has become the sole publisher of the AJYB). The AJCommittee indeed attributed great prominence to U.S. Jewish demography in its yearly publications, which comprised some of the best overviews of the subject matter and its implications (*e.g.* Seligman, 1950; Goldstein, 1981). Since the end of World War II (our period of concern here) yearly estimates were based on compilations of data gathered through a wide network of local sources. Some of these local data, mostly for larger Jewish communities, reflected the results of local Jewish population surveys. A serious problem with national estimates derived from a conglomerate of hundreds of local estimates is that the

national estimates lack a common basis of definitional and methodological premises.

To provide a recent example, if we refer to the total U.S. Jewish population estimate of 6,155,000 reported in the 2003 AJYB (The Editors, 2003), about 80% of this total figure reflected people covered by local population surveys, but the remaining 20% depended on local non-survey sources (often in small areas) whose reliability cannot be evaluated (Table 1). A useful synopsis prepared by Sheskin (2001) and subsequent updates indicate that by 2002 the baselines for local population estimates were spread over more than 20 years. A total pool of 48 community surveys, excluding repeated surveys of the same locality, could be divided into three time periods. Of the total 80% of current U.S. Jewish population thus covered, 34% derived from community surveys executed about at the time of the 2001 NJPS, and therefore were quite updated. Another 32% reflected studies undertaken in 1993-97, and a further 14% were based on studies of 1982-92. Demographic and identificational changes that occurred between the time of data collection and the 2001 NJPS were not incorporated in estimates that covered the majority of the national total.

Table 1
U.S. Jewish Population Estimates
by Type and Year of Source, 2002

Year of last survey	Number of Surveys	Total Households	Total Persons	Core Jews	% Core Jews
Grand total				6,155,000	100.0
No survey				1,203,400	19.5
Total surveys	48	2,349,342	5,756,750	4,951,600	80.5
1998-2002	19	986,273	2,486,800	2,115,300	34.4
1993-1997	20	959,267	2,262,500	1,958,500	31.8
1982-1992	9	403,802	1,074,450	877,800	14.3

Source: adapted from Sheskin (2001), The Editors (2003).

Other significant problems with drawing national totals from compilations of local population estimates, besides the time lag mentioned above, include:

- (a) *Definitions of target population in local surveys.* Most, but not all, surveys refer to a “core” Jewish population concept, but sometimes they adopt an “enlarged” population concept. A few

of the AJYB estimates for U.S. areas covered by surveys originally reported “enlarged” data including the non-Jewish members of households.

(b) *Coverage of target population definitions.* Different positioning and contents of screeners and subsequent questionnaire modules tend to produce variation in Jewish population definitions and size.

(c) *Bases for population estimates.* The respective qualities range between excellent to very poor. The minimum request should be that the local estimates published in the AJYB are accompanied by a quality rating (*e.g.*: A to D) based on year of the baseline figure, quality of the baseline, and intervening (if any) adjustments.

(d) *Sampling techniques.* Sampling frameworks include Random Digit Dialing (RDD), Distinctive Jewish Name (DJN) lists, Jewish community lists, and snowball lists—gauged expanding from an initial roster of informants. The completeness, accuracy and updating status of these lists is open to questioning.

(e) *Data collection techniques.* These include telephone or face-to-face interviews. Choice of respondent within the household—selective or all-inclusive; based on rigorous predetermination or not—may affect the results.

(f) *Response rates.* These tend to be quite different, reflecting variability in research designs and techniques, or even the capacity of fieldwork organizations.

(g) *Questionnaire contents.* Different surveys use different questionnaires and unavoidably do not systematically cover the same topics or ask identical questions for the same topic. This affects the possibilities of data evaluation and comparisons.

(h) *Residential eligibility definitions.* Reflecting frequent seasonal mobility within the U.S., this likely generates double counts of individuals with more than one residence (*e.g.* snowbirds).

(i) *Handling of mobile people.* According to the 2001 NJPS, as many as one-fifth of the households changed their city of resi-

dence in the five years prior to survey, and one-half of them across states. Some of these mobiles have a greater chance of being included in more than one frame for sampling.

(j) *Handling of bi-local populations.* Typically, college students can be reported at both home and study residences.

(k) *Geographical boundaries of localities and regions.* Possible overlaps exist in tangential suburban areas in surveys conducted in neighboring metropolitan areas.

(l) *Geographical catchment areas.* Inconsistencies may occur between federation areas, Standard Metropolitan Areas, or local authority boundaries.

(m) *Criteria for estimating missing parameters.* In the absence of detailed individual data, estimates drawn from household numbers mostly for smaller communities may rely on erroneous assumptions. One example is the now clearly obsolete multiplier of 3 Jewish members per household still often assumed by local sources.

(n) *Criteria for assessing local change.* In the absence of hard data, local pride may cause sources in growing communities to report on growth, and in dwindling communities not to report decline.

(o) *Authorship of survey reports.* Finally, besides variable professional skills, ranging between top scholars to unknown surveyors, a possible “author effect” may reflect different disciplinary training, policy perspectives and agendas, possibly turning up with non-comparable conclusions even when based on similar findings.

The national Jewish population totals derived from local estimates and reported in Table 1 indeed appear quite discombobulated. The figure initially reported by the AJYB for the number of U.S. Jews in 1945 was 4,770,000, relying on a 1936 Census of Religious Bodies that had evaluated the total Jewish population at 4,770,647 (Engelman, 1947). In subsequent years, the AJYB reported estimates alternating periods of stability and years of moderate or more sudden change. From 1946 to 1953, the reported estimate was 5 million, then it started to grow and in 1960 passed the 5.5 million mark. Total U.S. Jewish population figures above 6 million first were reported during the early 1970s, and then

after downward corrections were made following the 1970 and 1990 NJPS studies (see AJYB issues relating to 1997 and subsequent years). Since the creation of the North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB) in 1986 as a joint venture of CJF-UJC (Council of Jewish Federations-United Jewish Communities) and the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York (currently at Brandeis University), local Jewish population survey compilations and estimates were centrally handled at NAJDB. Following release of the 2001 NJPS results, publication of an alternative national Jewish population estimate based on the compilation of local Jewish population estimates was temporarily discontinued (The Editors, 2003).

National Jewish Population Studies

Major national Jewish population studies periodically have been undertaken in the United States. We briefly review here the main technical characteristics of major surveys based on significant numbers of Jewish cases (see Table 2 for a synopsis of the main parameters). We do not refer to the many instances of general national surveys that include Jews as part of a relatively small total sample, such as NORC-GSS or similar surveys. The latter studies, while important in a general comparative research perspective, do not allow for detailed insights on the Jewish group because of the limited possibility of detailed processing based on few cases and high sampling variability. All of the following databases rely on sample techniques and their results therefore are subject to sampling variability and errors.

(a) *The 1957 CPS.* A sample survey of the U.S. civilian population was undertaken in March 1957 as part of the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. This was the only instance in which a question on religion was included this periodical survey. The sample was spread over 330 sample areas comprising 638 counties and independent cities. A total of about 40,000 dwelling units and other living quarters were designated for the sample, and completed interviews were obtained from about 35,000 households (a response rate of over 87%). Of the remainder, 1,500 were households for which information could not be obtained, and the rest were vacant dwellings or others not to be enumerated. In the survey, subjects voluntarily answered the question "What is your religion?" Of all persons 14 and older in the survey, 96% reported a religion. The estimating procedure involved the adjustment of weighted sample results to independent estimates of the civilian non-institutional population in the United States (U.S.

Census Bureau, 1958). Jews represented 3.2% of total adults. Assuming a Jewish household size 10% smaller than the national average, Jewish households would comprise about 3.5% of total households, or 1,225 respondents out of a national sample of 35,000. Assuming an average Jewish household size of 2.95, the survey would cover 3,614 individuals in Jewish households. The total Jewish population aged 14 and over was estimated at 3,868,000, and after allocation of 1,107,000 children below 14 in households where both head-of-household and wife were reported to be Jewish, and 38,000 Jewish children out of a total of 64,000 children in households where only one of the spouses was reported to be Jewish, a total estimate of 5,013,000 obtained (Glick, 1960).

Table 2
Synopsis of Main National Sources of Data on U.S. Jewish Population
1957-2001

Parameter	CPS	NJPS	NJPS	NJPS	AJIS
Full name of study	Current Population Survey	National Jewish Population Study	National Jewish Population Survey	National Jewish Population Survey	American Jewish Identity Survey
Year	1957	1970-71	1989-90	2000-01	2001
Sponsor	U.S. Census Bureau	Council of Jewish Federations (CJF)	CJF	CJF – United Jewish Communities (UJC)	The Graduate Center of the City University of New York
Sampling stratification	Counties	Jewish density areas	Census divisions	Jewish density areas	Census divisions
Identification of respondents	National sample	Partly Jewish lists, partly random area sampling	Random Digit Dialing (RDD)	RDD	RDD
Data collection technique	Face to face	Face to face	Telephone	Telephone	Telephone

Table 2
Synopsis of Main National Sources of Data on U.S. Jewish Population
1957-2001 (cont.)

Jewish population definition	Based on respondent's religion	Based on four-question screener	Based on four-question screener	Based on four-question screener	Based on four-question screener
Jewishness resolution	Dichotomic	Dichotomic	Dichotomic	Non-dichotomic	Dichotomic
Total interviews	35,000	5,750	125,813	>175,000	50,282
Net sample size: Jewish households	1,225	5,750	2,441	4,523	1,668
Total individuals in Jewish households	3,614	17,135	6,514	10,403	4,337
Total survey response rate	87%	79%	24%	28%	18%

(b) *The 1970-1971 NJPS* (for brevity: 1970). The first full-scale national Jewish population study was sponsored by CJF and was directed by Fred Massarik and Bernard Lazerwitz. Respondents were located through a combination of Jewish community lists and area probability sampling. For eligibility, the respondent had to provide an affirmative reply, for himself and/or for one or more household members, to one or more of the following questions: (1) Was person born Jewish? (2) Is person Jewish now? (3) Was person's father born Jewish? (4) Was person's mother born Jewish? Answers to these questions could be exclusively yes or no. A total of 5,750 face-to-face interviews were completed, 2,950 of them from lists and 2,800 from area sampling (Massarik, 1974). The response rate was 79%. At an average household size of 2.98, 17,135 individuals in Jewish households were covered by the survey. The Jewish population was estimated at 5,370,000, not inclusive of at least 50,000 persons in institutions. Including non-Jewish household members, an enlarged total population of 5.8 million obtained.

(c) *The 1989-1990 NJPS* (for brevity: 1990). This major survey also was sponsored by CJF and was advised by a National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) directed by Sidney Goldstein, with Barry Kosmin Research serving as director on behalf of CJF. The survey was based on a national RDD sample. Fieldwork was handled by ICR, a Pennsylvania company. Over the course of a year, 125,813 Americans were screened to determine the Jewish qualification of their households in 1990. This resulted from the answers provided to any of four screening questions: (1) What is your religion? (2) Do you or anyone else in the household consider themselves Jewish? (3) Were you or anyone else in the household raised Jewish? (4) Do you or anyone else in the household have a Jewish parent? Answers to these questions could be exclusively yes or no. Following this first stage, 5,139 households qualified. The response rate to the initial screener interview was about 50%. Of the households potentially identified as Jewish, 2,441 households were traced and contacted again and completed interviews at a total survey response rate of 24%. The total of individuals in the households finally covered was 6,514. Due to this multi-stage procedure, there were some inconsistencies in the identification of eligible households and in their willingness to participate at each stage. The estimating procedure involved weighting the total sample of 125,813 screened responding households to match the most current U.S. Census Bureau esti-

mates of basic demographic characteristics (Kosmin *et al.*, 1991; Goldstein, 1992; Goldstein and Kosmin, 1992; Waksberg, 1996). The core Jewish population, inclusive of Jews with no religion and Jews by choice, as well as 100,000 Jews in institutions, was estimated at 5,515,000. Of these, 4,210,000 were born Jews whose religion was Judaism, 185,000 were converts to Judaism/Jews by choice, and 1,120,000 were born Jews with no religion. The total number of Jews and other persons of Jewish origin was estimated at 6,840,000. The total number of individuals in 3.2 million qualified Jewish households (including gentiles) was estimated at 8,200,000, including 500,000 households without any current “core” Jew.

(d) *The 2000-2001 NJPS* (for brevity: 2001). This survey was again sponsored by CJF, later UJC, and advised by a National Technical Advisory Committee chaired by Frank Mott and Vivian Klaff, including senior researchers and Jewish community planners, among them a former president of the Population Association of America and a former deputy director of the U.S. Census Bureau. On behalf of UJC, Jim Schwartz and later Lawrence Kotler-Berkowitz served as research director, with Lorraine Blass project manager. The survey was based on a national stratified RDD sample. The United States was divided into seven strata based on pre-survey estimates of Jewish population density, with sampling probabilities proportional to Jewish density in each stratum. Fieldwork and initial statistical evaluation was handled by Roper-ASW, a New York company. Over 175,000 households were screened for possible inclusion based on four questions: (1) What is your or other adult’s religion, if any? (2) Do you or other adult have a Jewish mother or a Jewish father? (3) Were you or other adult raised Jewish? (4) Do you or other adult consider your/him/herself Jewish for any reasons? Answers to these questions included options other than yes or no—or, in other words, allowed a non-dichotomic resolution to Jewish population definition. Such screening criteria were known from the start to produce results not strictly comparable with the 1990 NJPS. This modified research design reflected an explicit mandate by UJC management to the NTAC following a redefinition of service policies by the sponsoring organization and a rejection of the “core-enlarged” Jewish population conceptual definition. The final unweighted sample included 4,220 Jewish respondents and 303 people of Jewish background (PJB), for a total of 4,523 Jewish households; 625 non-Jews of Jewish background; and 4,027 non-

Jews, for a total of 9,175 respondent households. The 4,027 non-Jewish households were interviewed for a National Survey of Religion and Ethnicity (NSRE) to collect data necessary for weighting and thus estimating the size of the Jewish population, and to provide comparative data to Jews and PJBs on socio-demographic topics. The total survey response rate was 28%. At an average household size of 2.3, the total number of individuals in Jewish households covered was 10,403. Weights were directly or indirectly estimated and applied to the original data to adjust for the number of telephone lines in the household, and to bring sample household and respondent data to U.S. Census totals for sampling strata, age, gender and region (Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.*, 2003). Following claims of excessively low respondent rates, selective population undercounts, and other inappropriate procedures during and following the fieldwork, the NJPS was subjected to independent professional scrutiny. It was concluded that while handicapped by several methodological shortcomings such as low response rates, inconsistent survey coverage of relevant sub-populations, and loss of documentation, the study stood within the range of professionally acceptable research standards and biases (Schulman, 2003). The total Jewish population was estimated at 5.2 million, including over 100,000 persons in institutions; of the total, 4.3 million were identified as more Jewishly connected and 800,000 as more weakly identified Americans of Jewish background. Respondents from the former group were administered a long-form questionnaire; respondents from the latter were administered a short-form questionnaire. The total number of Jews and non-Jews of Jewish background was estimated at 6.7 million. The total of individuals in 2.9 million households with at least one Jewish member was estimated at 8.7 million.

(e) *The 2001 AJIS*. The fact that while a major national survey was being undertaken (the NJPS) an alternative source of data should be developed is an emblematic indicator of the charged atmosphere that prevailed at the time of the NJPS. There were three stated or implicit rationales for AJIS and the related American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS): (1) a quest for a study conducted at least nominally with a methodology identical to that of the 1990 NJPS, unlike the 2001 NJPS; (2) an analytic focus on secular Jewish identification, which some maintained was not adequately covered in the NJPS design and questionnaire; (3) a desire by the AJIS private sponsors to take

major social research out of the responsibility and control of a major Jewish community organization such as UJC. AJIS was based on a national RDD sample. Fieldwork was handled by ICR, the same company that did the 1990 NJPS. Out of all successful contacts, a total of 50,238 respondents agreed to be interviewed. After a series of screening questions quite similar to those of NJPS 1990, 1,668 respondents qualified to be included in a survey of American Jewish households. The response rate was 18%. With an average household size of 2.6, the total number of individuals in households covered was 4,337. The whole screening and actual survey interviewing was conducted in one stage (Mayer, Kosmin, Keysar, 2002). The estimated core Jewish population, inclusive of Jews with no religion, Jews by choice, and Jews in institutions, was 5,340,000. Of these, 3,460,000 were born Jews whose religion was Judaism, 170,000 were converts to Judaism/Jews by choice, and 1,710,000 were born Jews with no religion. The total of Jews and others of Jewish origin was 7,690,000. The total of individuals in all households surveyed, including those without any current "core" Jew was 9,740,000, excluding the institutionalized population. These latter data (and not those of the 2001 NJPS) conceptually match the figures reported above from the 1990 NJPS.

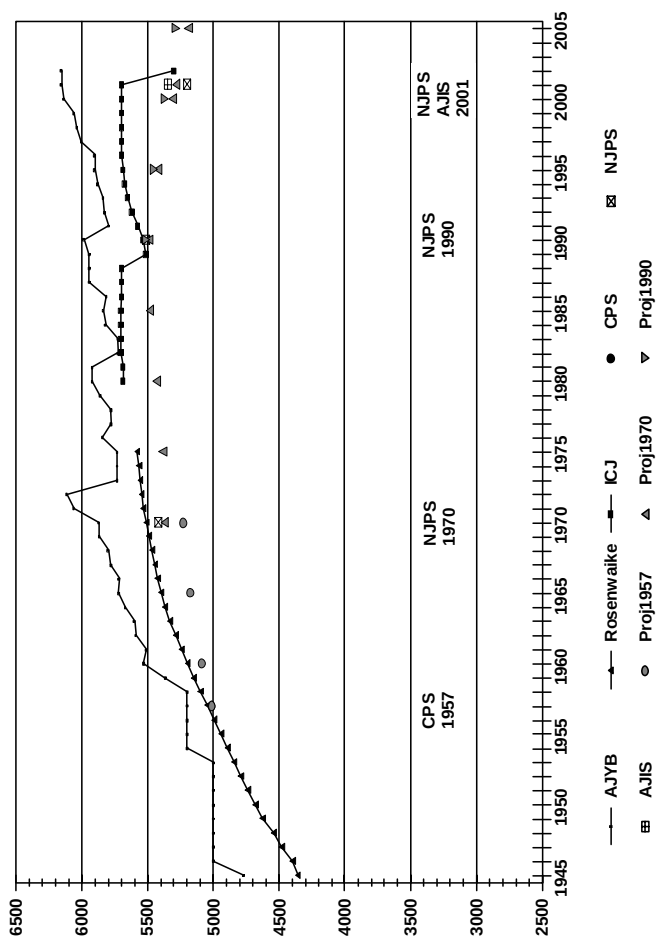
One problematic feature emerging from Table 2 is the decreasing rate of response achieved in major Jewish population studies, which does not augur well for the future of survey research.

Independent Assessments of Jewish Population Size

Besides the major databases and summations just reviewed, there have been several attempts to review critically the available evidence in the light of a more systematic approach to population research. Some of these efforts deserve attention, and the results are summarized in Figure 1.

Dr. Ira Rosenwaike, a specialist on the demography of aging at the University of Pennsylvania, produced a synthetic attempt to reconstruct the unfolding of U.S. Jewish population in the light of available data and some hypotheses about each determinant of population change (Rosenwaike, 1980). His critique of the national data, obtained from the conglomerate of local estimates, brought him to suggest somewhat lower data, beginning with 4,359,000 in 1945, and growing to 5,581,000 in 1975 through a gradual slowing of the pace of growth. These estimates did not take into account the 1970 NJPS.

Figure 1: U.S. Jewish Population Various Estimates (Thousands), 1945-2005



Note: AJYB = American Jewish Year Book; ICJ = Institute of Contemporary Jewry; CPS = Current Population Survey; NJPS = National Jewish Population Survey; AJIS = American Jewish Identity Survey; Proj1957 = Projection based on CPS 1957; Proj1970 = Projection based on NJPS 1970; Proj1990 = Projection based on NJPS 1990.

Beginning with 1980, under the general direction of Roberto Bachi, demographers at the Hebrew University's Institute of Contemporary Jewry (ICJ) took responsibility for the elaboration of the annual Jewish population estimates for each country in the world published by the AJYB (for the background and initial articles of the series still under way, see Schmelz, 1969; Schmelz, 1981a; Schmelz and DellaPergola, 1982). Yearly estimates were thus suggested for the United States, independent of other sources—specifically, the national estimates also published in the AJYB by the NAJDB. The initial figure of 5,690,000 reflected an assessment of 1970 NJPS results (Massarik, 1974; Lazerwitz, 1978; Schmelz, 1981b) and subsequent population trends. In the following years an effort was made to evaluate each component of possible population change, resulting in cautious increases tending to zero population growth. These estimates were periodically reduced, reflecting the results of 1990 NJPS and the 2001 NJPS and 2001 AJIS, respectively, and the consequent determination of new population baselines. The ICJ estimated a Jewish population increase of 185,000 between 1990 and 2000, as against 621,000 according to NAJDB. On the eve of NJPS 2001, the ICJ U.S. estimate stood at 5.7 million.

Population Projections

In addition to these year-by-year accountancy exercises, a further way to arrive at Jewish population estimates at various dates is to take a known baseline and undertake a population projection by detailed age and sex groups. Some of these projections are reported here, initially ignoring the impact of international migration and only focusing on the effects of age-sex specific birth and death rates. Figure 1 displays results of a projection of the 1957 CPS results to 1970; a projection of 1970 NJPS data up to 2005; a similar projection of 1990 NJPS data; and the original total estimates from the 2001 NJPS and 2001 AJIS. The NJPS data discussed here include both the more strongly connected (Jews) and the more weakly connected (PJB) individuals among the total sample, and rely on the data weighting procedures originally suggested by the UJC Research Department (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2003).

Demographic projections, besides detailed initial population distributions, require a set of assumptions concerning the expected level of fertility and mortality (and migration) in subsequent years. The impact of international migration will be discussed below. In the present set of projections, we assume a life expectancy at birth gradually increasing from 67.5 for men and 71.7 for women in 1957-61, to 76 and 80, respectively, in 2000-04. These estimates reflect known patterns from available Jewish and general research on mortality levels in the U.S. (Goldstein, 1986; Rosenwaike, 1994).

“Effectively Jewish” total fertility rates—a measure of the average number of Jewishly identified children expected to be born to a woman assuming indefinite continuation of age-specific fertility levels observed in each period—were 2.80 in 1957-62, 2.49 in 1962-67, 1.92 in 1967-72 (DellaPergola, 1980), and were posited at 1.5 thereafter. The latter figure tends to be significantly and downwardly affected by the growing frequency of out-marriages and by the tendency of a large proportion of the outmarried households not to choose a Jewish identification for their children. According to NJPS 2001, the total average number of children born to Jewish women aged 40-44 was 1.86 (Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.*, 2003). However, among Jewish respondents less than 50 years old, 3% of the children of the in-married and 53% of the children of the out-married were not being raised Jewish resulting in a total of 27% of total children (Barack Fishman, 2004). Factoring the Jewishness of children into a completed family size of 1.86, an estimate of 1.36 obtains. The already mentioned 1.5 total fertility estimate is thus likely to represent an overestimate, but will nonetheless be kept here as the basis for our projections in the light of the consistent evidence about low U.S. Jewish fertility over the last decades (Mott and Abma, 1992). One consideration is that a higher proportion of the children of Jewish women are raised as Jews, compared with the children of Jewish men who out-marry.

As shown in Figure 1, projected Jewish population estimates (without migration) run from an earlier to the next baseline. Quite importantly, the estimates attained for the later date generally seem to match sufficiently well the results obtained through fresh data collection. In 1970, the projected estimate from a 1957 baseline of 5,013,000 would be 5,226,000, versus an actual NJPS 1970 estimate of 5,370,000 (without persons in institutions). The difference between the actual and projected estimates is 2.8%. It should be mentioned that we estimated the 1957 five-year group age-sex Jewish composition by splitting a number of broader age groups within each sex out of the somewhat less detailed data originally published (U.S. Census Bureau, 1958 and 1968; Goldstein, 1969). In 1990, the projected estimate from a 1970 baseline of 5,370,000 would be 5,491,000, versus an actual NJPS 1990 estimate of 5,515,000—a difference of 0.4%. In 2001, the projected estimate from a 1990 baseline of 5,515,000 would be 5,367,000, versus an actual NJPS 2001 estimate of 5,035,000 (without persons in institutions)—the actual data being 6.2% lower than the projection. Interestingly, if we project the 1970 NJPS to 2001, a better fit is obtained with the actual 2001 data than is obtained by projecting the 1990 NJPS data—5,282,000, or a difference of -4.7% between the actual and projected results.

Comparative Evaluation of Jewish Population Size

When comparing these various data sets and results, a gap typically emerges between national Jewish population estimates primarily derived at the local and at the national level. Four times in the last 50 years nationally derived total Jewish population figures turned out to be lower than the available sum of local Jewish population estimates: on the occasion of the 1957 CPS, followed by the three NJPSs of 1970, 1990 and 2001, as well as the 2001 AJIS. Four times out of four looks like a pattern indeed. This can be construed by the supporters of the local estimates approach as evidence that national studies provide underestimates of the real demographic situation. The symmetric argument can be provided by supporters of national data-collection efforts that the sum of local Jewish population data significantly overestimates the real population size. Yearly independent assessments of U.S. Jewish population size, specifically the ongoing ICJ series, consistently fall between the high of local data compilations and the low of periodical national surveys and projections based on those surveys (see Figure 1). Stretching these projections for another short period to 2005 enhances the impression that the Jewish population in the United States reached a peak around 1990 and subsequently began to diminish.

In the light of this evidence, the purported decline in the number of American Jews between the 1990 and 2001 NJPSs clearly may not be an absolute truth due to the margins of error that are inherent in any statistical survey and to NJPS particularly. But population decline definitely looks like a possibility in the light of longer-term Jewish demographic trends. Due to immigration during the 1990s, U.S. Jewry actually should have increased by about 250,000, to over 5.7 million, even assuming zero population growth. The fact that the reported NJPS total Jewish population (with people in institutions) was 5.2 million points to an even larger gap between the expected and the actual. The suspicion of significant undercounting in the 2001 NJPS thus would seem plausible. A useful independent check obtains through another nationwide survey: The AJIS found 5.35 million Jews in the United States in 2001, a figure also considerably lower than the 1990 NJPS estimate. As already noted, there were significant conceptual and methodological differences between NJPS and AJIS, but both provided independent, large-scale, representative efforts to portray U.S. Jewry. The consistency of findings among these two surveys cannot be attributed to consistent technical biases. One may conclude that at least part of the apparent recent reduction in U.S. Jewish population size seems to reflect the actual interplay of demographic and identificational variables and is not only an artifact of survey inadequacies.

Reconciling Age Composition across Subsequent Surveys

A review of the changing age composition of U.S. Jewry offers an opportunity for a more in-depth study of patterns of demographic continuity and change reflecting the birth rate, international migration, and retention within a Jewish definitional framework. Age-specific comparisons also provide important evidence to the search for inter-survey consistency or inconsistency. Figure 2 compares the age distributions of U.S. Jews in 1957, 1970, 1990, and 2001, according to the four major sources of data (see the more detailed discussion below).

The 1957 CPS offers a snapshot of American Jewry at the height of the baby boom era. The rapid growth of the child cohorts reflects primarily the relatively high and growing Jewish Total Fertility Rates, which reached a peak of 2.80 around 1955, versus a peak of 3.50 among total U.S. whites around 1960 (DellaPergola, 1980). We also note that the baby boom to some extent constituted an echo effect of the large cohorts born in the years just before and after World War I, before the Great Depression. Interestingly, that earlier period of demographic expansion occurred at a time of very rapid contraction in Jewish fertility levels. The average number of children born to foreign-born Jewish women aged 45 and over declined from 7.2 in 1910 (vs. 5.7 among total U.S. immigrant women), to 3.8 in 1940 (the same as among total women) (Grabill, Kiser, Whelpton, 1958). The post-World War II baby boom probably started a little earlier among Jews than among total whites, and peaked earlier at a level equivalent to 80% of the total white maximum.

The subsequent baby bust years are well-documented in the 1970 and 1990 NJPS data. The “fat” baby-boom cohorts move to the right in the Figure 2 displays and are substituted by “leaner” cohorts. In 1990, a baby boom echo effect appears, but the 2001 data show it to have been short lived and of modest import. The size of relevant birth cohorts is not at all comparable with that of the parental cohorts, because unlike during the late 1940s through the early 1960s, the mechanical effect of large parental cohorts was not accompanied by an actual fertility increase during the 1980s and 1990s.

Another feature emerging in the 2001 data is a significant leveling-off of the original baby boom cohorts. This “disappearance” can be related to a declining willingness to identify as Jewish even by the loose definitional criteria of the 2001 NJPS, or to special problems of survey coverage among those specific age cohorts—or, most likely, a combination of both causes. The fading away of large older cohorts and their substitution by smaller younger cohorts, possibly accompanied by identificational attrition among younger adults, in any case constitutes the underlying mechanism of Jewish population stagnation or decline.

Figure 2: U.S. Jewish Population by Age, 1957-2001

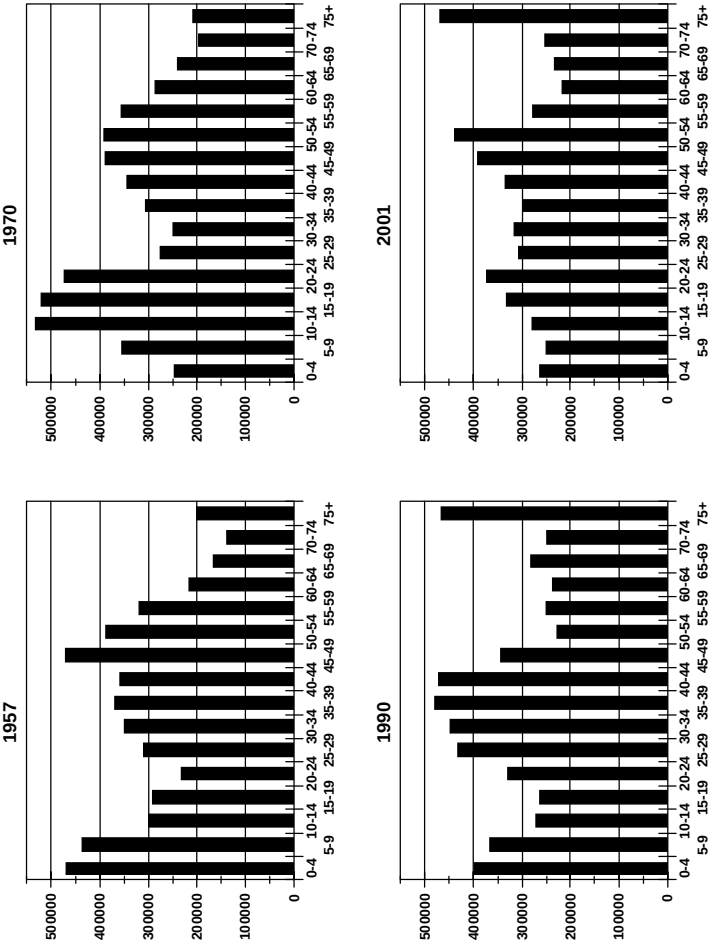


Table 3
U.S. Jewish Population, by Age, Actual and Projected (Thousands)^a 1957-2001

Age	1957 Actual	1970 Projected (1957)	1970 Actual	% Diff. Actual- Projected 1970	1990 Projected (1970)	1990 Actual	% Diff. Actual- Projected 1990	2001 Projected (1990)	2001 Actual	% Diff. Actual- Projected 2001(90)	2001 Projected (1970)	% Diff. Actual- Projected 2001(70)
Total	5,013	5,226	5,370	2.8	5,491	5,515	0.4	5,367	5,035	-6.2	5,282	-4.7
0-4	468	310	246	-20.7	322	398	23.8	250	264	5.9	224	18.0
5-9	436	360	355	-1.4	352	366	4.1	264	251	-5.2	254	-1.4
10-14	299	431	532	23.6	329	272	-17.5	383	280	-27.0	311	-9.9
15-19	292	466	520	11.6	272	263	-3.0	380	332	-12.7	349	-4.8
20-24	233	377	473	25.3	244	329	35.0	285	373	30.8	336	11.0
25-29	310	284	276	-2.8	352	431	22.5	256	307	19.7	281	9.1
30-34	350	262	250	-4.7	525	448	-14.7	309	316	2.5	238	32.8
35-39	370	249	306	23.1	512	479	-6.3	412	297	-27.9	317	-6.3
40-44	359	324	344	6.3	463	470	1.6	439	335	-23.7	496	-32.4
45-49	470	349	389	11.5	268	344	28.5	465	390	-16.0	509	-23.4
50-54	388	341	391	14.7	239	229	-4.0	467	439	-6.0	478	-6.7
55-59	319	370	357	-3.5	285	250	-12.3	355	278	-21.7	284	-2.1
60-64	216	399	286	-28.2	308	237	-23.0	225	217	-3.5	217	-0.3
65-69	166	282	240	-14.9	325	283	-13.2	212	234	10.4	244	-4.0
70-74	138	211	196	-7.0	291	249	-14.5	208	253	21.4	255	0.2
75+	200	210	207	-1.5	405	466	14.9	456	469	2.8	497	-5.6
Median	36.6	37.4	35.5		38.4	37.6		41.6	41.5		43.3	

^a Minor discrepancies due to rounding. Projection data without international migration.

The same trends are examined in greater detail in Table 3 and in Figures 3, 4, and 5, with an eye both to the substantive changes in population composition and the succession over time of different data sources of unequal quality and each with its own idiosyncrasies. Each of the three figures compares detailed age compositions at an initial date and then at a later date both for population projections from that initial date and data obtained by new research. Comparisons are shown for 1970 vs. 1957; 1990 vs. 1970; and 2001 vs. 1990. One general conclusion that applies to the three comparisons is that whereas the actual age compositions at each period's beginning and end are quite different, the projected and actual data at period's end appear relatively more germane. If we take a difference of more than 20% between the actual versus projected cohort sizes as a standard of clear inconsistency, then out of a total of 16 five-year cohorts, five fall out of range in 1970 (three on the high side, meaning the actual numbers are bigger than the projected ones, and two on the low side); five cohorts in 1990 (four on the high side and one on the low side); and six cohorts in 2001 (two on the high side and four on the low side). Interestingly, if we address a projection from NJPS 1970 to NJPS 2001, the correspondence with NJPS 2001 is much better than in the case of the NJPS 1990 projection: Only three age cohorts fall out of a range of error of plus-minus 20% (one on the high side and two on the low side).

The overall conclusion is that allowing for gradual improvements in health standards and life expectancy, and recalling that these comparisons do not take into account immigration to the United States, the actual survey data seem generally in line with an assumption of persistently low Jewish fertility and its consequences for Jewish population size and structure. Moreover, since the data in Figures 3 to 5 do not make allowance for net international migration, which should produce visible population increases, this suggests that a counteracting determinant of population decrease is at work. For our analytical purposes, this can be termed identificational *assimilation* or *erosion*.

More detailed inspection of Figures 3 to 5 and Table 3 reveals some inconsistencies. As compared to the 1957 CPS projected data, the 1970 NJPS obtains a particularly large excess of people aged 10-14 (born 1955-60), 20-24 (born 1945-50), and 35-39 (born 1930-35). Twenty years later, the 1990 NJPS displays an underestimate of the expected number of people 30-34 (born 1955-60), and 55-59 (born 1930-35). This suggests that in the 1970 NJPS those cohorts may have been overestimated in the first place. In the 2001 NJPS, the same 1955-60 cohort (now aged 40-44) emerges again as one of the most underestimated compared to the projection of NJPS 1990. That points either to the survey's inability to reach members of this specific age cohort, or to a continuously declining propensity of its members to identify Jewishly, or both.

Figure 3: U.S. Jewish Population by Age 1957 Actual, 1970 Projected (1957) and 1970 Actual

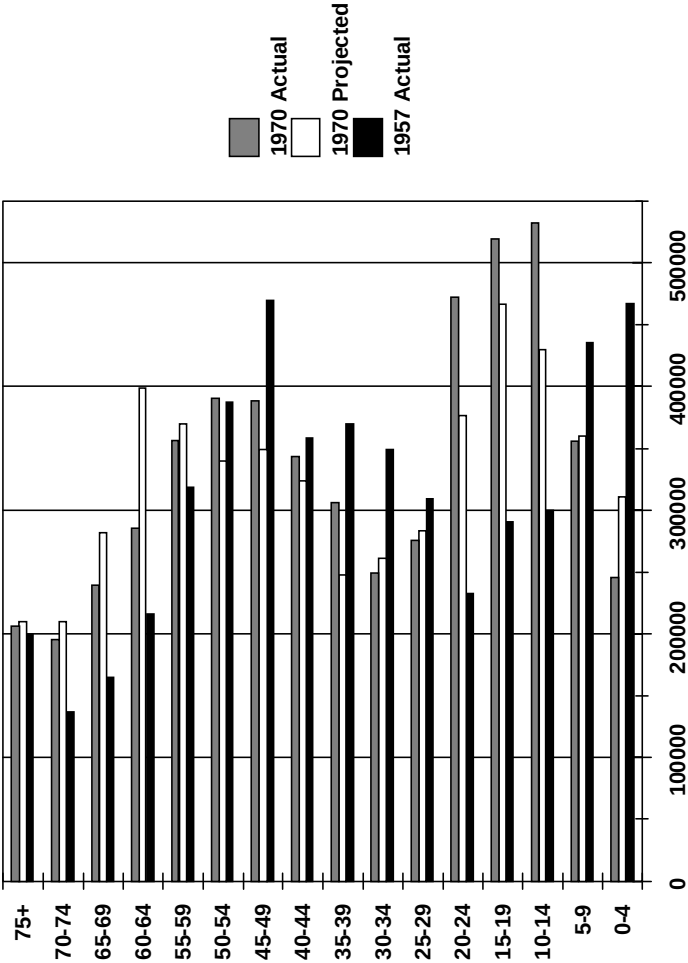


Figure 4: U.S. Jewish Population by Age 1970 Actual, 1990 Projected (1970) and 1990 Actual

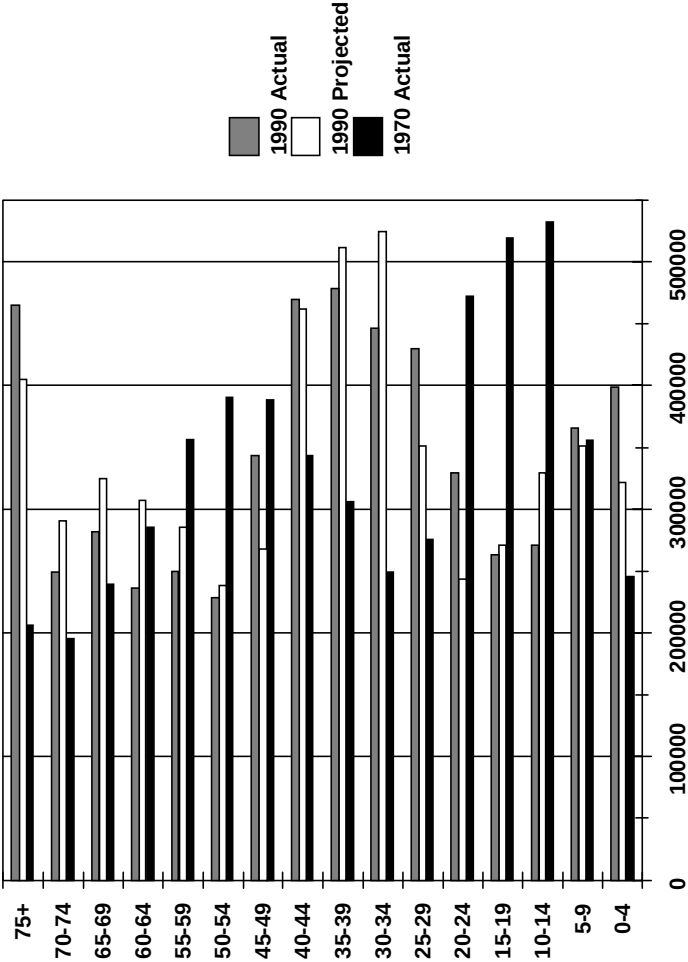
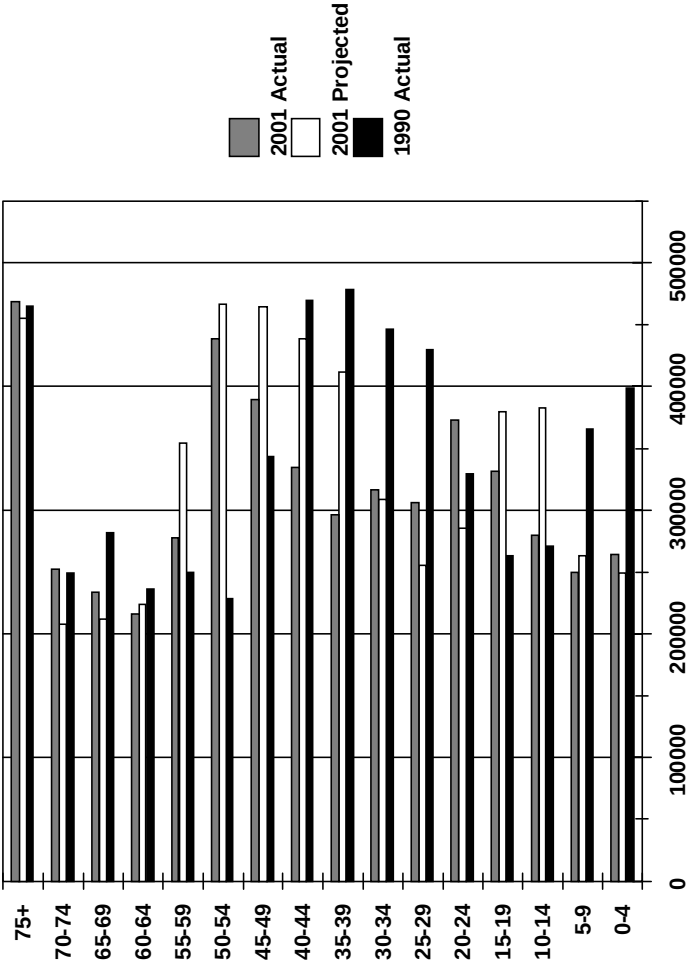


Figure 5: U.S. Jewish Population by Age 1990 Actual, 2001 Projected (1990) and 2001 Actual

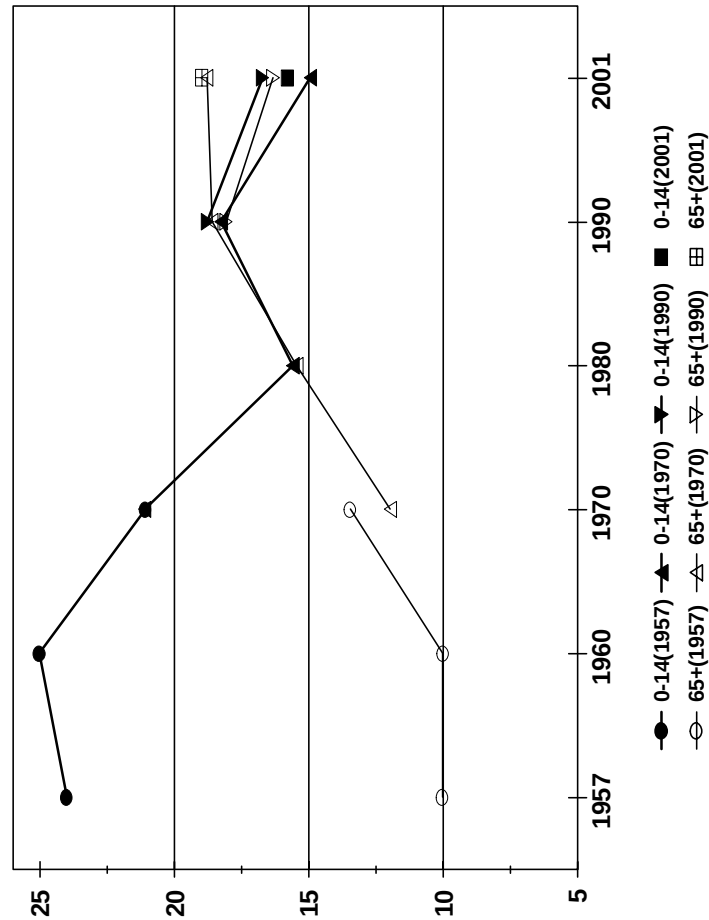


The slightly younger cohort born 1960-65 and aged 35-39 in 2001 also would appear to have been significantly undercounted, while it apparently had been overcounted in NJPS 1990 vs. the projected figures from 1970 NJPS. Other undercounts in 2001 possibly matched by overcounts in 1990 involve the 10-14 and 55-59 age groups (born 1986-91 and 1941-46, respectively). In contrast, apparent overcounts of a cohort at a later date matched by apparent undercounts of the same cohort at an earlier date involve those aged 20-24 in 1990 (born 1965-70), and those aged 20-24 and 70-74 in 2001 (born 1976-81 and 1926-31, respectively).

These examples illustrate a certain imperfection in the correct matching of detailed age data when moving from one data source to another. The apparent alternation of overcounts and undercounts cannot be too surprising in view of sampling errors, but also in view of the different methods and response rates of different surveys. A further cause of inaccuracy is the lack of an exact time reference point for most of the surveys, most of which are conducted over a period of one year or more. In spite of these limitations, the coherence of the overall picture allows the reader to draw conclusions about the major thrust of demographic trends with sufficient degree of confidence. Based on 16 age cohorts, the average absolute magnitude of inaccuracy when matching actual and projected cohort data (Table 3) results as follows: 1970 vs. 1957, 12.5%; 1990 vs. 1970, 14.9%; 2001 vs. 1990, 14.8%; 2001 vs. 1970, 10.5%. Overall, when matching actual vs. projected age data the NJPS 2001 degree of accuracy does not look exceptional in comparison with the previous two national surveys of 1970 and 1990.

Figure 6 summarizes the main gist of the preceding discussion by comparing the total percent share of the 0-14 and 65+ age groups between 1957 and 2001. Data reflect actual survey results and projections. The clear outcome of an aging population translates into a reversal of the relative predominance of the percent of children versus the percent of the elderly. A relatively young Jewish population in the late 1950s and early 1960s turned into a relatively elderly one by 1990, and significantly so in 2001. These findings again confirm the fairly good consistency of different survey data spread over 44 years in portraying the demographic development of U.S. Jewry. The 2001 age configuration for the first time displays a higher percent of persons aged 65+ than below 15. The median age of U.S. Jews rose from 36.6 in 1957 and 35.5 in 1970 (vs. 27.9 among the total U.S. population in 1970) (Glick, 1974), to 41.5 in 2001 (vs. 35 for the total U.S. population). Such an age configuration foreshadows further aging and population decline over the next several years, unless very significant changes occur in levels of Jewish fertility, international migration, or Jewish identificational retention.

Figure 6: U.S. Jewish Population at Ages 0-14 and 65+ (Percent) 1957-2001



International Migration

The population data and estimates reviewed so far only partly account for international migration. Figure 7 and Table 4 indicate levels of Jewish migration to the U.S. as reflected by various data sources. These comprise data and estimates concocted from a variety of institutional sources, such as HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) for Jews from the former Soviet Union or the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice (INS) for Israelis (HIAS; Campbell and Lennon, 1999), as well as retrospective analyses from the 1990 and 2001 NJPSs. Data on migration to Israel (*aliya*) also are presented for reference (Israel CBS). The 2001 NJPS estimated numbers of immigrants are based on the actual figures for male and female Jewish respondents, and on an assumption of a similar number of immigrants among non-respondent Jewish household members.

There has been significant variation in the volume of Jewish immigration to the U.S. since 1945, and especially between 1957 and 2001. Following relatively low initial levels of variation of only a few thousand per year, immigration increased during the 1970s, especially from the Soviet Union, decreased again during the 1980s, and significantly grew during the first half of the 1990s. These fluctuations primarily reflect variations in Jewish emigration opportunities and circumstances in the countries of origin, but also variable quotas of admission into the United States. A constant inflow of Jewish immigrants came from the (former) Soviet republics, but also from Israel, Iran, South Africa, Latin America, and other countries. With regard to the volume of Jewish emigration from the United States, it is apparent that it corresponded only to a small share of the volume of immigration. While Israel probably was the main country of destination, there is some indirect evidence that emigration to other countries followed patterns of growth and contraction similar to those of *aliya* to Israel (DellaPergola, Rebhun and Raicher, 2000).

The NJPS 2001 international migration data compare quite well with other data sources. The somewhat lower NJPS data can be explained by their relating to the more restricted “core” definitional concept (in its 2001 version), as against the “enlarged” population concept of Jews and their non-Jewish family members reflected in immigration data such as those from HIAS. NJPS 1990 data could not yet catch the emerging migration exodus from the FSU, which actually began at the end of 1989.

Once we add estimates of the immigration input to the population projections already presented in Figure 1, we obtain the upgraded estimates in Figure 8. The alternative preferred here was to allocate the cumulative net impact of immigration as assessed through the 2001 NJPS. One interesting pattern emerges out of the generally good fit

Figure 7: Estimates of U.S. Jewish Immigration and Aliyah Various Sources, 1957-2000

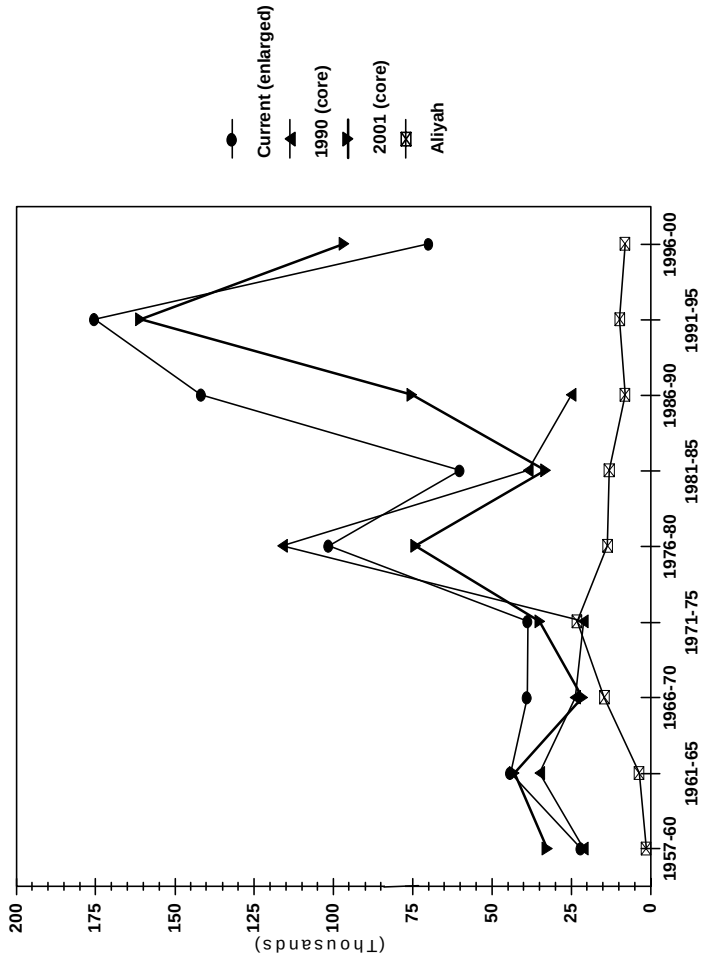


Table 4
Estimates of U.S. Jewish International Migration
1957-2000

Year	Current estimates^a	1990 NJPS core Jewish population	2001 NJPS Jewish respondents	2001 NJPS Total estimate^b	Aliyah to Israel^c
1957-60	21,900	21,200	16,300	32,600	1,400
1961-65	44,300	35,000	21,500	43,000	3,700
1966-70	38,900	23,700	10,700	21,400	14,500
1971-75	38,800	21,200	17,500	35,000	23,200
1976-80	101,400	116,100	37,100	74,200	13,500
1981-85	60,000	38,700	16,500	33,000	13,000
1986-90	141,700	25,000	37,600	75,300	8,100
1991-95	175,200		80,400	160,900	9,800
1996-00	70,000		48,300	96,600	8,200

^a Sources: Diamond (1977); HIAS.

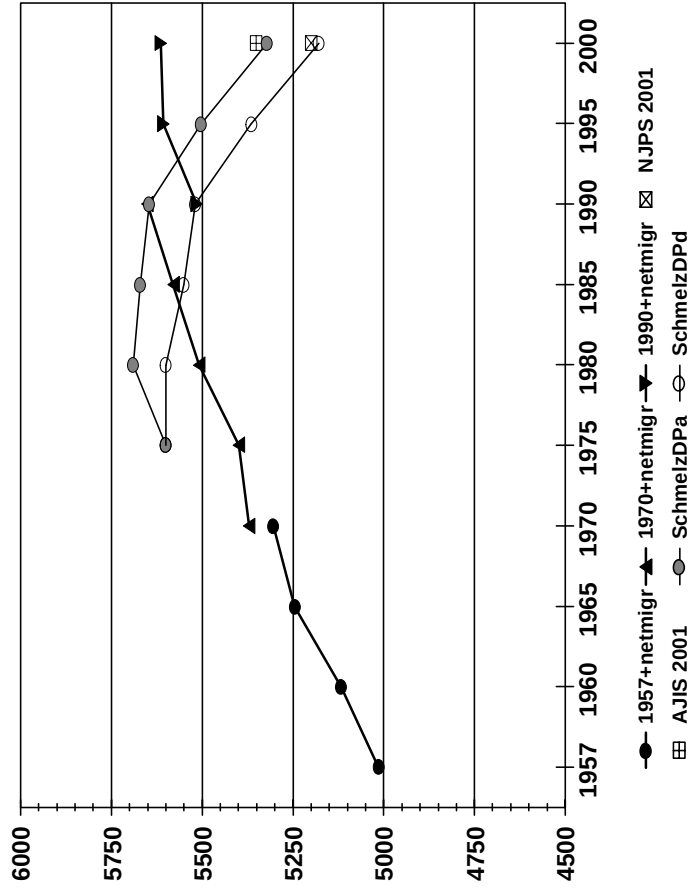
^b Assumes total immigrants to be twice the number of immigrant respondents.

^c Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

between the various estimates and projections of Jewish population size adjusted for migration. The 1970 NJPS original figures and subsequent projections with net migration look somewhat higher than an ideal line that would connect the 1957 and 1990-based series of estimates. One explanation might be that the 1970 NJPS slightly overestimated the U.S. Jewish population. This is not implausible if we recall that NJPS 1970 partly relied on random sampling and partly on Jewish lists, whereas the 1957 CPS used a random national sample, and the 1990 NJPS was the Jewish survey that more than others stressed a purely random sampling procedure.

One additional piece of information appended to Figure 8 is derived from an earlier set of Jewish population projections by ICJ researchers, based on a 1970 NJPS baseline extended to 1975 (Schmelz and Della-Pergola, 1983). Of the eight different scenarios that originally were obtained according to different assumptions of fertility, international migration, and assimilation, the two suggesting intermediate population levels are displayed in Figure 8. The highest and lowest population estimates expected by these eight scenarios for the year 2000 were 5,571,000 and 4,639,000, respectively. The two intermediate scenarios were "A: low fertility, moderate assimilation, moderately positive

Figure 8: U.S. Jewish Population Various Estimates (Thousands) 1957-2001



Note: 1957+netmigr = Projection based on 1957 CPS plus migration estimate; 1970+netmigr = Projection based on 1970 NJPS plus migration estimate; 1990+netmigr = Projection based on 1990 NJPS plus migration estimate; NJPS = National Jewish Population Survey; AJIS = American Jewish Identity Survey; SchmelzDPa = Schmelz and DellaPergola (1983), model a; SchmelzDPd = Schmelz and DellaPergola (1983), model d.

migration balance,” with 5,321,000 people (SchmelzDPa model in Figure 8), and “D: stronger assimilation, moderately positive migration balance, somewhat higher fertility” with 5,178,000 people (SchmelzDPd model in Figure 8). In reality, international migration happened to be stronger than had been predicted, but Jewish fertility turned to be weaker. Assimilation, as reflected by rising rates of out-marriage, actually increased as predicted. It is intriguing to find that despite these forecasting imperfections, these two intermediate scenarios ended by falling exactly on the target determined by the 2001 higher AJIS and lower NJPS estimates.

Concluding Remarks and Further Reflections

When the author of a New York Times Op-Ed piece announced that “the [NJPS 2001] false population decline must be corrected before it further sours communal discourse” (Goldberg, 2003), was the intention to castigate an incompetent and unusable survey or to cast doubt on the possibility that Jewish population in the United States might ever decline? Beyond the skirmishes in the American Jewish and general media about the quality or even legitimacy of NJPS, our preceding analysis suggests a number of conclusions for sociodemographic research and Jewish community policies.

First, inasmuch as American Jews still constitute not only a cultural construct but also a population, it is appropriate to apply demographic concepts and tools to assess them. The evidence indicates that while the absolute Jewish population size is difficult to ascertain with exactitude and probably falls within a range of variable sizes depending on the quality of available data, the momentum of growth reached its peak around 1990. What has followed since and is bound to follow in the foreseeable future is moderate population decline (see also the independent assessments in Klaff, 1998; DellaPergola, Rebhun, Tolts, 2000). The continuous stretching of the definitional criteria for inclusion notwithstanding, the reduction in the number of Americans who are willing to identify as Jews or persons of Jewish background seems to be predictable and real. This conclusion is not another version of the “lachrymose theory of Jewish history” (Rawidowicz, 1986; Goldscheider, 2002), but a straightforward consequence of demographic dynamics cumulated over several decades. Following the continuous and accelerating rise in the median age of American Jews, there is hardly any doubt that the number of Jewish deaths in the U.S. is now higher than the number of newborn children whose parents impart them with a Jewish identity (of any sort). Consequently, the effectively low Jewish birth rate reflects more the consequences of marriage patterns and frequent religious heterogamy than a fertility level significantly different from the peer non-Jewish population (Phillips, 1997; Waite, 2002; Kotler-Berkowitz *et al.*,

2003). It is also true, on the other hand, that U.S. Jewry is not one homogeneous block. Among its different constituencies one discerns patterns of growth among the relatively small Orthodox sector of the population and patterns of contraction among other population sectors (DellaPergola and Rebhun, 1998-1999).

Besides population aging, a second factor in Jewish population decline is a blurring of the wish to identify as Jews. In the 2001 NJPS, the surveyors assessed 4.3 million Jews and another 800,000 persons of Jewish background. It surely was a mistake not to ask more questions about the Jewish identity of the representative sample of these 800,000 more weakly identified respondents. Answers might have revealed some interesting links between some of the marginally identified at the Jewish community periphery and persistent patterns of Jewish identity, as indeed was the case with the 1990 NJPS (DellaPergola, 1991). It may be assumed, however, that in most instances a lackluster response would have been received in 2001. It therefore can be argued that the survey's partial disregard of the identificationally weaker cases actually created an overly Jewish communal profile based on the respondents.

Even if part of the apparent Jewish population decline reflects undercoverage, it seems plausible that those less eager to participate in a survey sponsored by a clearly identifiable Jewish organization include a disproportionate share of the more weakly identified. Jewish survey response is, among other things, an indicator of Jewish identification. Our discovery of the unique patterns of declining identification and/or undercounting among the 1955-60 cohort calls for the formulation of analytic hypotheses about the underlying causal determinants. The specific combination of period and lifecycle circumstances experienced by this particular cohort may conceivably have affected both its identification patterns and its availability for in-depth interviewing. A follow-up study particularly designed to investigate this specific population group might provide interesting clues that could help evaluate NJPS 2001 as well as previous surveys.

Cross-comparisons should be undertaken between regional sub-totals obtained from the sum of local studies and from NJPS 2001. They should not be limited to simple population totals but extended to characteristics such as age, major indicators of Jewish identification and, most significantly, measures of migration within the United States. After performing these tasks, we will be in a better position to evaluate the respective merits of NJPS 2001 in comparison with other local and national Jewish population studies.

The present overview clearly has stressed the unequal quality of the available databases. NJPS 2001 cannot escape its own share of critiques, and probably also the need for some statistical adjustments as against the originally published data. However, it would be a serious mistake to

focus exclusively on one source. A broader historical prospective on the data is needed to better understand not only the substantive issues, but also the respective strengths and weaknesses of various data sources. At the end of our overview, it may be possible to infer that the 1957 CPS and the 1990 NJPS were more broadly representative of the characteristics of the total U.S. Jewish population, whereas the 1970 NJPS and the 2001 NJPS (at least as assessed through the initial procedures for data-weighting) tended to be somewhat more representative of the more Jewishly identified sections. NJPS 2001, in any case, belongs in the family of important, legitimate, and usable sources.

Of course, an intriguing question is what our findings imply for the future of Jewish population research in the United States. The substantive answer cannot be separated from a few additional reflections stemming from the experience with NJPS 2001. These reflections involve several sensitive aspects in the research-oriented and public domains. Topics calling for evaluation extend well beyond the technical quality attained in the 2001 study, its validity on methodological grounds, its comparability with other studies, and the credibility of its main conclusions—namely, an apparent reduction in Jewish population size and assessments of its underlying causes. Frank discussion, sincere introspection, and clear directives for the future are necessary concerning: (a) the need for substantial investments in research as a basis for Jewish community planning and management; (b) the significant amount of resources invested in the 2001 NJPS by an American Jewish community facing other competing needs; (c) the ability of the organized Jewish community to withstand objective scrutiny of its own trends and characteristics and to learn from scientific research; (d) the role of the United Jewish Communities as the central pillar of the American Jewish community, and hence the leading body responsible for major research and policy investments; (e) the analytic goals and contents to be preferred for systematic community studies, namely the respective merits and complementarity of qualitative vs. quantitative research orientations, and of sociodemographic vs. policy-oriented research; (f) the professional competences and decisional autonomy of the panel of investigators designed to design, supervise, and direct the study; (g) the policy conclusions to be drawn following research, and the new investments needed to translate understanding of the facts into community programs; (h) the mechanisms and tools of policy decision-making facing possible gaps between the results of systematic research and existing pre-conceptions among public opinion makers or lay leaders; (i) the issue of the relationship, and sometimes conflict of interests, between research-sponsoring organizations and the community of professional investigators.

The last of these topics deserves special attention, as it seldom has been discussed in the framework of Jewish studies. Researchers, or at least some among them, depend in their work on resources provided by sponsoring organizations. The mode of operating of the sponsor-researcher relationship and the amount of independence available to investigators may critically affect the results of research; indeed, it crucially shaped the unfolding of the 2001 NJPS. This and each of the other abovementioned items are worth detailed consideration well beyond the purposes of this article.

One important lesson to be drawn is that a keen and systematic reconsideration of what went right and what went wrong with NJPS 2001 is necessary, along with a serious and careful reading of its results. In particular, all those concerned should be ready to consider the two following propositions: (a) the emerging long-term demographic trends challenge the assumption of continuing and level population growth or stability among U.S. Jewry; (b) the complications in defining, identifying, and reaching the Jewish constituency for research purposes now have approached the limits of the possible. Short of acknowledging these two facts, NJPS 2001 may have offered the last opportunity for the scholarly profession, for the U.S. Jewish community leadership, and for the public at large to have at their disposal such a large-scale and complex tool for factual assessment and policy planning.

Acknowledgments

The author was a member of the National Technical Advisory Committee of the 1990 NJPS and 2001 NJPS. Research for this paper was conducted at the Division of Jewish Demography and Statistics of the A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The author thanks his colleagues Uzi Rebhun, Mark Tolts, Dalia Sagi, Beny Anderman, and Judith Even for invaluable help and advice. David Marker, Vivian Klaff, and two anonymous reviewers provided useful suggestions to this paper.

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