Jewish Communal Affairs

THE CELEBRATION OF ISRAEL'S 50th anniversary, a highlight of 1998, was colored by continuing tension between many American Jews and the Israeli government over Israeli-Arab peace-making efforts and the issue of religious pluralism in Israeli society. The year also saw a historic merger of the two major American Jewish fund-raising bodies, a move intended to restructure Jewish philanthropy for the 21st century.

The Peace Process

The year opened with a harsh reminder of the split within the American Jewish community over the direction of Israeli policy under Prime Minister Netanyahu's Likud government. On January 6 the Smithsonian Institution announced that it was canceling a lecture series, "Israel at Fifty: Yesterday's Dreams, Today's Realities," that had been planned for the spring. The series, which was to have been cosponsored with the dovish New Israel Fund (NIF), had come under heavy criticism from Americans for a Safe Israel, a pro-Likud organization, as well as a number of political figures and Jewish newspapers, for allegedly favoring the Palestinian side both in the topics for discussion and the list of speakers. NIF executive director Norman Rosenbaum called the cancellation "Jewish McCarthyism," a charge picked up by *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis (January 12), who blamed it on "a small band of American Jews who want to intimidate into silence those in the community whose political views they dislike."

Prime Minister Netanyahu—whose government had refused American calls for further redeployment from the West Bank on the ground that the Palestinians had not fulfilled their pledges under the Oslo accords—was scheduled to arrive on January 19 for talks in Washington, and his champions and detractors in the American Jewish community competed for control of American public opinion. The Israel Policy Forum (IPF), which had released a survey in October 1997 showing that most American Jews backed American policy and favored pressure on both Israel and the Palestinians to move the peace process forward, ran an advertisement in major newspapers supportive of the American administration's peace policy—and implicitly critical of Netanyahu—that called the U.S. government "an honest and effective broker." But the IPF's attempt to convince other organizations to sign on to a letter to President Clinton expressing these sentiments found little support. Meanwhile, the *Middle East Quarterly*, edited by peace-process skeptic Daniel Pipes, published the results of a poll claiming to show that 65.3 percent of American Jews opposed U.S. pressure on Netanyahu, with only 23.7 percent favoring such tactics.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the umbrella organization whose mission is to articulate a consensus of the Jewish community, was able to agree only on sending a letter to Clinton complaining of the persistence of anti-Jewish propaganda in the Palestinian media, urging the extradition from PLO-controlled areas of terrorists who had killed Americans, and requesting the release, on humanitarian grounds, of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard. Alarmed at the news that Clinton planned to show his displeasure with Netanyahu by limiting their meeting to a session in the Oval Office—with no public dinner or even "working lunch," no joint news conference, and no invitation for the Israeli prime minister to stay at Blair House, the official government guest quarters—leaders of the Presidents Conference met with Clinton and his top Middle East advisers just hours before Netanyahu's arrival and urged him not to foster the perception that U.S. policy was turning hostile toward Israel. Clinton responded, according to the *Forward* (January 23), that while there was no intention to pressure either side, the administration was losing patience. Emerging from the meeting with the president, Presidents Conference executive vice-chairman Malcolm Hoenlein said that "reports about an administration cold shoulder during this trip aren't true."

Upon his arrival, Netanyahu proceeded to exasperate Clinton and the organized Jewish community, first, by breaching protocol and meeting with Newt Gingrich, the Republican Speaker of the House, prior to seeing the president, and, second, by taking his case directly to evangelical Protestant leaders, who were both hostile to the American president and deeply distrusted by mainstream American Jewry. Not only did the prime minister address an enthusiastic rally of the National Unity Coalition for Israel, a politically conservative and predominantly evangelical group, but he also held a private meeting with the Rev. Jerry Falwell and other Southern Baptist leaders, who promised to mobilize "about 200,000 evangelical pastors" to "use their influence in support of the state of Israel and the Prime Minister." A number of Jewish leaders told reporters—though not for attribution—that Netanyahu had blundered, offending President Clinton and insulting the Presidents Conference by his attention to the evangelicals. One of the few leaders willing to comment on the record, David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, was more judicious: "Israel needs support from a broad range of the American public, this [evangelical] community included, but if it's inordinately focused on this community alone, it's going to raise some questions" (*New York Times*, January 21).

As it turned out, Netanyahu's session with Clinton went unexpectedly well. Apparently encouraged by indications that Israel was serious about further withdrawals if the Palestinians made reciprocal moves toward peace, Clinton publicly acknowledged that "Israel has to make its own decisions about its own security," and in a meeting with Yasir Arafat later that week Clinton stressed the need for the Palestinians to do more to control terrorism.

But when Secretary of State Madeleine Albright followed up these Washington meetings with a visit to the Middle East at the beginning of February and

found that the parties were as far apart as ever, she publicly chided both sides, renewing the internal debate in the American Jewish community over Israel's stance. There was a new "battle of the polls." The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA, previously known as the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, NJCRAC), released a survey at its annual plenum in February indicating that 70 percent of a sample of 6,800 affiliated Jews in 14 American communities wanted pressure on both Netanyahu and Arafat to move toward peace. This poll, however, made no claim to being scientific. In March the American Jewish Committee issued its own annual scientific survey of American Jewish opinion and came up with rather different results: 69 percent said that the United States should pressure Arafat, but only 45 percent favored pressure on Netanyahu. The AJC poll also showed rising pessimism in the American Jewish community about the chances for Middle East peace.

Rumors spread that the U.S. administration, frustrated at the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock, was about to set forth its own detailed plan for the next stage of Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, an eventuality that many anti-Likud American Jews welcomed, but one that pro-Netanyahu opinion viewed as unacceptable "pressure." One sign of the administration's intentions was the welcome President Clinton extended to Ehud Barak, the leader of Israel's opposition Labor Party, who visited the White House and Capitol Hill in late February. His warm reception by the president was in striking contrast to the way Netanyahu had been treated in January. In fact, sources claimed that Clinton had unveiled to Barak the general outlines of a proposed American plan to break the peace-process deadlock, including the extent of the suggested next Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Barak reportedly responded that the Israeli public would welcome such an American initiative so long as it was not put forward as an attempt to "pressure." Speaking to the Presidents Conference after his session with Clinton, Barak asserted that a U.S. proposal to move negotiations along should not be interpreted as pressure.

To counteract Barak's encouragement of administration policy, in early March Netanyahu sent senior adviser David Bar-Illan to lobby the Republican-controlled Congress against the imposition of pressure on Israel. Pro-Netanyahu American Jewish leaders also hoped the growing Monica Lewinsky scandal would weaken the president sufficiently to discourage any new Middle East initiatives.

The Presidents Conference, buffeted by contending American Jewish forces, voiced an ambiguous consensus position on March 2. "We believe strongly," said conference president Melvin Salberg, "that preconditions, or conditions imposed, as in the past, will not find success." He did not indicate whether the public announcement of an American plan constituted the imposition of conditions. But Howard Kohr, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the pro-Israel lobby, publicly accused unnamed State Department officials "of promulgating a so-called American plan and then using pressure tactics to try to coerce Israel into accepting it."

Kohr's outright attack on her department brought Secretary of State Albright's

patience to an end. On March 27 she initiated a conference call to the Presidents Conference, speaking to some two dozen Jewish leaders. According to an unofficial transcript of the call obtained by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (*JTA Daily News Bulletin*, March 31), Albright insisted that the administration was committed to Israel's security and asked these American Jewish leaders to help convince the Israeli government that the American initiative—not a "plan," she said, but merely a "set of ideas"—was in Israel's best interest. "I have to tell you, in all honesty," she went on, "we are coming to the end of the road here. . . . One of the options is to let them deal with each other and for us to walk away."

War of Letters

Not bound by the Presidents Conference's need to negotiate an internal Jewish consensus, AIPAC needed only four days to get the signatures of 81 U.S. senators on a letter sponsored by Senators Joseph Lieberman (D., Conn.) and Connie Mack (R., Fla.) highly critical of the administration. The letter opposed publication of any proposed U.S. plan for the Middle East, since such publicity would constitute pressure on Israel, and it would be "a serious mistake for the United States to change from its traditional role as a facilitator of the peace process to using public pressure against Israel." A somewhat milder letter sponsored by Rep. Eliot Engel (D.,N.Y.) attracted the signatures of 150 members of the House. An important element in the AIPAC campaign was a series of three "action alerts" to its members around the country stressing the importance of contacting their legislators and convincing them to sign. So convincing was AIPAC in lobbying for these letters that some legislators signed even after being urged not to by Ambassador Dennis Ross, the chief U.S. negotiator in the Middle East.

AIPAC's rush to criticize administration policy was questioned by some leaders of the Presidents Conference who agreed with AIPAC on the substance of the issue. For one thing, they argued, AIPAC had not consulted with the Presidents Conference until the two letters were already being circulated. For another, where was the hard evidence that the president and secretary of state were planning a strategy of pressure? Was it wise to antagonize an administration that was basically friendly to Israel? Might the administration retaliate against Israel? Was it not damaging to AIPAC's future credibility for it to react so explosively to a danger that was not clear and present? AIPAC's Howard Kohr brushed aside these qualms. "The issue of U.S. pressure is far from imaginary," he said. "People are pushing the President to go off course to a dead end."

Meanwhile, the Israel Policy Forum, which favored a more aggressive American role, initiated its own letter supportive of the administration, sponsored by Rep. Sam Gejdenson (D., Conn.) and signed by 31 House members. Dovish American Jewish leaders were quick to note that, for all of AIPAC's success with non-Jewish legislators, 15 of the 24 Jewish members of the House signed the Gej-

denson letter; furthermore, four of the ten Jewish senators refused to sign the Lieberman-Mack letter, and two of them—Carl Levin (D., Mich.) and Dianne Feinstein (D., Cal.)—wrote their own letters of support to the administration.

This undignified "battle of the letters" publicized splits in the Jewish community that had previously been kept from public view. "Jewish Groups Go to Capitol Squabbling Among Themselves," was the headline in the *New York Times* (April 7). Hopelessly divided over whether to applaud or criticize the administration, the Presidents Conference first decided to ignore the Lieberman-Mack letter, but then reversed gears and thanked the 81 senators for speaking up for Israel, while also notifying the administration that its efforts to achieve Middle East peace were appreciated. The administration, meanwhile, impressed by AIPAC's clout and worried that the Republicans might use the issue of "pressure" on Israel to appeal to Jewish voters, held off on unveiling any new plan. The political wisdom of such an approach was underscored by a *New York Times* poll (April 26) showing that 58 percent of Americans sided with Israel in the Middle East conflict—up ten points in one year—while support for the Palestinians remained at 13 percent.

But the easing of American demands for progress toward peace proved temporary. Early in May, after the failure of two days of U.S.-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian talks in London, Secretary Albright suggested passing over interim matters and jump-starting final-status talks—on such crucial issues as permanent borders, Jerusalem, settlements, and Arab refugees—at a Washington summit. Once again, Albright hinted at what might happen if this did not work: Washington would "reexamine" its approach to the Middle East peace process. Since Arafat had quickly assented to a summit, and at least one American precondition for the summit—Israel's commitment to a 13.1 percent withdrawal from West Bank territory—was opposed by Netanyahu, her warning was clearly aimed at Israel.

Nevertheless, at a May 6 meeting of the Presidents Conference, when a motion was put forward to criticize the administration publicly for pressuring Israel, chairman Salberg did not allow it to come to a formal vote. Two days later the *New York Times* quoted an unidentified U.S. government official as suggesting that the administration would give Israel a "reprieve"; the connotation that Israel was guilty of criminal behavior outraged the organized Jewish community. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton added to the perception of pressure on Israel by telling a group of Arab and Jewish young people that it was in the long-term interest of the Middle East for the Palestinians to have their own state.

These events had an effect: on May 11, just five days after taking no action on the matter, the Presidents Conference voted 27 to 3 to issue a public statement about its concerns over U.S. policy, to communicate these concerns via a letter to the president, and to seek a meeting with him. While acknowledging that the conference encompassed a variety of views on the substance of the peace process, the public statement announced "full agreement that the Israeli government alone

must make the difficult decisions affecting Israel's security." And alluding to Mrs. Clinton's remark, the statement urged President Clinton to make clear that a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence was unacceptable.

While there was to be no summit, Netanyahu did visit the United States May 13–17 for a round of public appearances marking Israel's 50th anniversary—including the Salute to Israel parade in New York and the AIPAC policy conference and American Jewish Committee annual meeting in Washington—as well as a number of private meetings. Once again, Netanyahu spent much of his time with congressional Republicans, seeing them as a counterweight to the administration. In his speeches, the Israeli prime minister stressed the ongoing friendship between his country and the United States, and reminded his audiences that the administration was on record in support of the proposition that only Israel could make decisions about its security. Coming at a time of American Jewish concern about U.S. "pressure," Netanyahu's visit struck a deep emotional chord. The enthusiasm with which he was greeted gave the impression that American Jewish opinion had turned sharply in a hawkish direction. One AIPAC activist told journalist J. J. Goldberg, "There's been a big sea change. . . . You can see it on people's faces. . . . This administration has been sending out trial balloons to see what the Jewish public will put up with. Finally it struck home and kind of woke Jews up. Bibi had the guts to stand up, and Americans appreciate that" (*New York Jewish Week*, May 22).

It was, indeed, at the AIPAC policy conference that the new American Jewish hard line was most evident. A proposed policy statement opposing a fully sovereign Palestinian state was ultimately rejected because it seemed to leave the door open to a less than fully sovereign state, and a clause denouncing Holocaust denial by Palestinian leaders was overwhelmingly adopted. Hisses greeted Martin Indyk, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs, when he brought up Palestinian grievances against Israel under the Oslo accords.

Pro-administration Jewish groups, insisting that this tilt to the right did not really reflect bedrock American Jewish sentiment, ascribed it to an understandable but temporary reaction to the clumsy and undiplomatic official statements of the week before. But the president and secretary of state seemed to have gotten the message, and, in the wake of the Netanyahu visit, the administration, for the second time in 1998, backed away from anything resembling "pressure." In a letter to the Presidents Conference, President Clinton wrote: "At no time have I given an ultimatum to either party. Decisions concerning Israel's security, and on the peace process, must be made by Israel."

Months passed with no sign of movement toward peace in the Middle East. Moreover, looming large on the horizon was May 4, 1999, the date set by the Oslo accords for a final peace treaty. What might happen if that day came with no resolution of the stalemate, no one knew. Ironically, each side of the Israeli political spectrum put part of the blame on American Jews. Natan Sharansky, the famous refusenik now serving as Israel's minister of industry and trade, visited the

United States in July and declared that President Clinton tended to pressure Israel because he was surrounded by Jewish advisers sympathetic to Peace Now. The next month brought Israeli Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, who blasted AIPAC at a meeting with its staff for "becoming an extreme right-wing organization." He was especially upset about its role in the letter of the 81 senators to the president, which, he felt, harmed the chances for peace by restricting the administration's room to maneuver.

September 13, 1998, marked the fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Principles signed by Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat on the While House lawn. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) marked the event by publishing a 52-page report on alleged Palestinian violations of the agreement. But over 400 supporters of the peace process gathered in Washington that day to hear Leah Rabin, widow of the assassinated prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, and other speakers. Organizations participating included the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements, Americans for Peace Now, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the New Israel Fund. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of Reform Judaism's Religious Action Center, expressed the hope that "somehow, the new spirit all of us felt five years ago this day can be regenerated and dispel the current gloom." Assistant Secretary of State Indyk represented the administration. To the surprise of dovish Jewish leaders who had gathered at the White House for a pre-rally meeting with administration officials, President Clinton walked into the room and spoke to them at length about the status of the peace process. The Jewish leaders, in turn, told him that the great majority of American Jews supported the Oslo accords and a strong U.S. role in bringing peace.

Wye Conference

After considerable prodding from President Clinton, in October Prime Minister Netanyahu suddenly reversed course. Protecting his right political flank through the appointment of Ariel Sharon as foreign minister, he flew to the United States to confer with Yasir Arafat, King Hussein of Jordan, and President Clinton at the Wye Plantation conference center in Maryland. The key provisions of the agreement they finalized on October 23 called for a phased Israeli withdrawal from 13 percent of the West Bank and agreement by the Palestinian National Council to renounce clauses in its charter calling for the destruction of Israel, to confiscate illegal weapons, and to reduce the Palestinian police force.

While the mainstream Jewish organizations applauded the agreement, some that had previously backed Netanyahu felt he had ceded too much. At the November 1 dinner of the Zionist Organization of America, Dore Gold, Israel's UN ambassador, endured some heckling when he explained why Israel signed the agreement, and one of the honorees charged that Netanyahu "gives strength and credence to a morally bankrupt, lame-duck U.S. president." There was also some criticism—not confined to hawkish circles—of an American pledge to allow the

CIA to be used to monitor Palestinian compliance, a proposal that had reportedly played a crucial role in gaining Netanyahu's assent to the whole package. Might not the CIA wink at Palestinian violations in order not to threaten the success of this Clinton-sponsored agreement, thus allowing the agency to become a tool in pressuring Israel once again? Republican congressional leaders, briefed by the Zionist Organization of America and other Jewish groups suspicious of administration intentions, promised to investigate this proposed new CIA role.

Three Orthodox rabbis, faculty members at Yeshiva University, attacked the Wye agreement on the basis of their interpretation of Jewish law. In a newspaper ad in the November 1 *New York Post*, these rabbis claimed that handing over any land to the Palestinians endangered Jewish lives and was therefore against Torah. While the opinion of these three rabbis would ordinarily have been ignored, the fact that Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated by an Orthodox Jew imbued with their ideology raised fears of further violence. After attracting considerable publicity, however, their stand was roundly repudiated by mainstream Orthodox leaders.

Whether or not Israel was keeping its pledges under the Wye agreement became the next bone of contention for the American Jewish community. Just two weeks after the agreement was signed, Americans for Peace Now released a list of examples of Israeli noncompliance, while expressing agreement with a State Department report that the Palestinians had largely kept their side of the bargain. Morton Klein, ZOA president, charged that the APN report "whitewashes Arafat."

As agreed at Wye, President Clinton traveled to Gaza on December 14 to witness personally the Palestinian revocation of charter provisions calling for the destruction of Israel. While the revocation went as planned, and Clinton did not pressure Netanyahu to proceed immediately with the next stage of redeployment, the American president's public remarks in Gaza alarmed Israelis and American Jews. Clinton said that he had spoken to Palestinian children whose fathers were in Israeli jails, and Israeli children whose fathers had been killed by Palestinians, and that both brought tears to his eyes—as if there was some moral equivalence between Palestinian terrorists and Israeli victims. Further, the president mentioned the "dispossession and dispersal" of the Palestinian people and talked of their "legitimate rights," which was widely understood to mean a Palestinian state. ZOA president Morton Klein called this "the most pro-Arab speech ever given by an American president," and leaders of AIPAC, the Presidents Conference, and the Anti-Defamation League criticized Clinton's talk. A number of the other mainstream Jewish organizations ignored the president's remarks and focused instead on the positive news of the changes in the Palestinian charter.

The four-day bombing of Iraq, which took place the week after Clinton's return from the Middle East, drew virtually unanimous praise from the Jewish community—including a public statement of support from the Presidents Conference—because Iraq was viewed as an implacable enemy of Israel. If anything,

Jewish opinion, as reflected in editorial comment, would have preferred even stronger measures, including the ouster of Saddam Hussein.

Fifty Years of Israel

Israel's 50th anniversary evoked a flood of American Jewish comment about Israel's role in the lives of American Jews. Some writers stressed the Jewish state's positive contributions to American Jewry. Few went as far as Charles Krauthammer (*Weekly Standard,* May 11), who argued that a still-vulnerable Israel had become so vital for the survival of Diaspora Jewry that Israel's liquidation would mean the end of the Jewish people. More common was the sober expression of satisfaction that the Jewish state, with all its faults, had achieved the Zionist dream of creating a "normal" Jewish society, while simultaneously strengthening Jewish morale, culture, and political clout in the United States.

Others emphasized growing tensions between Israel—perceived as increasingly bellicose toward its neighbors and theocratic and undemocratic in relation to its own citizens—and the overwhelmingly liberal American Jewish community. "Is Israel Still Good for the Jews?" asked a *New York* magazine cover story (April 27). "A Family Feud? Americans Troubled by Shifts in Israel," was the headline in the *International Herald Tribune* (April 29). And the *New York Jewish Week*, in its review of the Jewish year (September 18), called American Jewish-Israeli relations "A Love Affair Gone Stale." At a scholarly conference at the City University of New York in May, only Dore Gold, Israel's ambassador to the UN—the sole nonacademic on the program—expressed optimism about relations between the two Jewish communities, while all the scholars who spoke—Israelis and Americans—agreed that the gap was widening.

In March and April the *Los Angeles Times* and the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* conducted an ambitious poll comparing the attitudes of American and Israeli Jews on a wide variety of issues. From the data it was clear that the distancing of American Jews from Israel coexisted, paradoxically, with a striking affinity between the views of the two communities. True enough, only 58 percent of American Jews felt close to Israel, a decline of 17 percent over ten years (the decline was even steeper in the under-40 age bracket). But the two Jewries supported the peace process and objected to the Israeli Orthodox establishment in Israel in roughly similar percentages, and even levels of religious observance of Israelis and American Jews were not all that different.

Israel-Diaspora relations were the overriding theme of the Council of Jewish Federations' General Assembly (GA), held in November. For the first time ever, in recognition of the 50th anniversary, the GA took place in Israel. Some 3,000 delegates attended from the United States and Canada. Many of the public sessions addressed aspects of the Israel-Diaspora relationship, and a variety of practical suggestions were put forward to bridge the divisions, such as philanthropic partnerships between communities, heavily subsidized trips to Israel, and

face-to-face connections between members of the same profession in the two countries. At the close of the GA, Israeli and North American participants signed a "covenant" affirming belief in God, "respect for the infinite value of human life," Jewish peoplehood, and the duty to "repair the world." Many who were there suggested that the long-range significance of this GA for American Jews was the suggestion of an equal partnership between Israel and Diaspora, replacing the outmoded model of Israel as primarily an object of Diaspora philanthropy.

Religious Pluralism

The sharpest American Jewish complaints about Israel—surpassing even the criticisms of Netanyahu's peace policy—were over the question of religious pluralism in Israel. Since the very legitimacy of American non-Orthodox movements seemed to be at stake—some 85 percent of affiliated American Jews belonged to them—the issue struck much closer to home than the debate over what percentage of West Bank land should be given to the Palestinians.

January 31, 1998, was the deadline for Israel's Ne'eman Commission to come up with a compromise solution for the performance of conversions in Israel that would be acceptable to all branches of Judaism. If no such arrangement proved possible, looming in the background was, on one side, an Orthodox-sponsored Knesset bill that would codify in law the previously informal Orthodox monopoly on conversions, and, on the other side, pending court cases brought by the non-Orthodox movements that could put a judicial end to the Orthodox monopoly.

Agudath Israel of America intensified its Am Echad (One People) media campaign for the conversion bill and against the Ne'eman Commission, arguing that even the secular founders of the Jewish state had recognized that only Orthodox law, the sole universally accepted criterion, could keep the Jewish people united, and that non-Orthodox American versions of Judaism had proven to be way stations on the road to assimilation. A 75-person American delegation brought this message to Israel in early January. But American Orthodoxy was hardly monolithic. Shvil Hazahav, a group of modern Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders, endorsed compromise in the name of Jewish unity. And a delegation from the transdenominational New York Board of Rabbis came to Israel to lobby for the Ne'eman Commission and against the conversion bill. Speaking in the name of 800 New York area rabbis—225 of them Orthodox—this group cited its own experience of fruitful interdenominational cooperation as an example of what pluralism might accomplish in Israel.

The Ne'eman Commission presented its recommendations on January 23, a week ahead of schedule. It provided for Reform and Conservative rabbis to participate together with their Orthodox colleagues in conducting classes for conversion candidates, but left the Orthodox in charge of the actual conversion procedure. Israel's chief rabbis pointedly refrained from endorsing this

compromise—indeed, they were quoted as heaping abuse on non-Orthodox Judaism—and that seemed to confirm Reform and Conservative suspicions that Orthodox rabbinical courts were unlikely to approve converts prepared by the projected pluralistic conversion classes. A proposed alternative to the Ne'eman recommendations, dubbed a "technical solution," that would split the secular and religious dimensions of Jewish identity and allow non-Orthodox converts the former but not the latter, elicited little enthusiasm.

Finance Minister Yaakov Ne'eman, chairman of the commission, met with the Presidents Conference in New York early in February. Expressing frustration with both sides, he blamed American Jewry for exporting its internecine strife to Israel. The Orthodox, said Ne'eman, must appreciate that the willingness of non-Orthodox members of his commission to leave the actual conversions in Orthodox hands signaled a "new attitude" of respect for Jewish law. And the Reform, he went on, must understand the abhorrence with which traditional Israeli Jews viewed such innovations as patrilineal descent, gay marriage, and rabbinic officiation at intermarriages. Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch, executive director of the Association of Reform Zionists of American (ARZA), noting that the Israeli Reform movement did not endorse any of these practices, accused Ne'eman of Reform bashing.

Adding to the sense of moral outrage in non-Orthodox leadership circles was the partial release, on January 30, of the results of a poll commissioned in Israel by the Orthodox Union. Contrary to OU expectations, attitudes were so surprisingly positive toward Reform and Conservative Judaism—43 percent, for example, were willing to accept more than one conversion standard—that the responses to ten of the 16 questions were suppressed. Commented the Reform movement's Israel Religious Action Center, "A modern-day Balaam, the Orthodox Union, set out to curse the Reform and Conservative movements and wound up blessing them instead."

A few days later the Israeli Chief Rabbinate approved part of the Ne'eman Commission recommendations—that all conversions be performed by Orthodox rabbis—and it promised to set up more conversion courts. But the rabbinate was still silent about the other component of the deal—the joint conversion classes. Asked if an Orthodox court would convert someone trained in such a class, Ashkenazi chief rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau responded diplomatically: "Each person will be judged as an individual." Yet the rabbinate's silence was generally interpreted as rejection, given the fact that the Chief Rabbinate Council simultaneously issued a statement denouncing those "trying to shake the foundations of the Jewish religion," which surely meant the non-Orthodox movements. The two major Orthodox groups in the United States—Agudath Israel and the Orthodox Union—expressed satisfaction. Ammiel Hirsch of ARZA reacted angrily, calling for the total disestablishment of Orthodoxy in Israel and its replacement by complete equality for all forms of Judaism. His Reform colleague Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), an-

nounced that his movement would press ahead with its legal challenges to the Orthodox monopoly. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, was more cautious. Calling for "patience and persistence" in what would surely be a long struggle, Epstein expressed the fear that American Jews might distance themselves from Israel over this issue.

But since the Chief Rabbinate had not explicitly rejected the Ne'eman formula, those elements in Israel desperate for a solution to this vexing issue acted as if the commission proposals were still alive, an assessment the *New York Times* (February 15) said could only be reached by dissecting "with a fine Talmudic scalpel." Prime Minister Netanyahu actually congratulated the chief rabbis and joined 71 other Knesset members in a petition supporting implementation of the commission's recommendations. Reassuring Conservative rabbis who were in Israel for their international convention, Netanyahu said, "I am not willing to give it up." President Ezer Weizman explained to another skeptical group of visiting American rabbis why the Ne'eman process was continuing: "It's your problem that it started, and now we have to solve it."

If, in many Israeli minds, the Ne'eman recommendations were going to make the conversion problem disappear even without official endorsement by the Chief Rabbinate, that message did not resonate in the United States. The UAHC's Yoffie, arguing that the absence of chief rabbinical sanction meant the end of the Ne'eman compromise, called the Israeli government's claim to the contrary an outright fraud. Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive director of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, agreed that it was a fraud, but suggested that it might become "a fraud for good purposes" if the Israeli government proceeded to set up the joint conversion panels, and the chief rabbis, even without any official acquiescence, simply passed the word to the judges of the religious courts that these conversion candidates should be evaluated leniently.

At the Jewish Council for Public Affairs plenum in February, a seemingly innocuous resolution hailing Israel's 50th anniversary got caught up in the pluralism debate. Sponsored by Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization, it lauded Israel's "guarantee of the social, political, religious, and cultural rights" of all of its people. Bernice Balter, executive director of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, objected that this was "not true. There is no equality of Judaism in Israel." David Luchins, representing the Orthodox Union, compared her statement to the UN resolution equating Zionism and racism. After considerable debate and negotiation, the wording was changed, praising Israel's "commitment" to "the pursuit of the social, political, religious and cultural rights of all its citizens."

Funding Issue

In March new fuel was added to the fire. The previous September, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) and the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) had responded to complaints by the non-Orthodox movements about the paucity of funding for

their operations in Israel by announcing a special fund-raising drive for religious pluralism in Israel. Now, six months later, instead of the $30 million that had been projected, only $6.3 million had been pledged. When officials from the fund-raising agencies explained the difficulties in translating a national commitment onto the level of the individual federation in a system based on local autonomy, Conservative and Reform leaders retorted that the national UJA-CJF had not given the matter sufficient priority. By the end of August the total of pledges had reached $10.5 million, but the religious movements had still not received any of the money.

Through the spring, Reform and Conservative leaders continued to complain that, absent chief rabbinical support, the Ne'eman compromise was insufficient. Bobby Brown, Netanyahu's Diaspora affairs adviser, countered by pointing to what the Ne'eman plan had accomplished, turning Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel "from small, marginal groups into full-fledged partners," despite the chief rabbis. In fact, Netanyahu had reinforced this shift personally by visiting American Reform and Conservative synagogues for the first time since assuming office. But when the non-Orthodox made it known that they would not wait to see how the joint conversion system would operate, but would press ahead in the courts for legal recognition—the immediate issue was a pending suit by Conservative converts asking for Jewish status—Brown warned, "If they want confrontation, that's what they'll get." Visiting the United States in May, Brown was more specific: a court decision upholding religious pluralism could easily induce the religious parties to revive the conversion bill in the Knesset, codifying in law the Orthodox monopoly on conversions.

Sure enough, plans for the introduction of the conversion bill were begun in early June. All the work of the Ne'eman Commission seemed to have gone for naught, and non-Orthodox American Jews were once again up in arms. The Reform movement resolved to press forward with its court cases despite the threat of a conversion bill. But the Conservative movement was divided. While its Israeli leadership agreed with their Reform counterparts, Jewish Theological Seminary chancellor Ismar Schorsch sought to avoid confrontation by freezing the litigation until the joint conversion system had a chance to get off the ground.

Championing Reform's hard line on equal religious rights in Israel, UAHC president Yoffie lashed out against both organized Orthodoxy and UJA-Federation for blocking the movement toward pluralism. Accusing the Israeli chief rabbis of poisoning relations between the movements in the United States, he claimed that extremist pressures on American Orthodoxy had pushed its more liberal wing to cut ties with the liberal movements and even to support a "ghetto Judaism" that seeks to wall itself off from the outside world (*New York Jewish Week*, July 24). As for the fund-raising establishment, in Yoffie's eyes it had become a tool of the Israeli government, attacking Conservative and Reform leaders who wanted to use the Israeli court system for redress. Yoffie charged that a decision at the June meeting of the Jewish Agency executive to table a resolution opposing a conversion bill and supporting the legal struggle of the non-Orthodox

movements had been made under Israeli government pressure. What galled Yoffie the most was that the leading American fund-raisers who, he felt, had succumbed to the pressure, were themselves Reform and Conservative Jews. In July, dissatisfied with UJA-Federation's allocations to Reform and angry about its failure to push for religious pluralism, the Reform movement announced its own fund-raising drive earmarked for its Israeli operations. In an open challenge to the establishment fund-raisers, Reform rabbis were urged to make appeals for "this bold, new campaign" on the High Holy Days from their pulpits. UJA-Federation leaders, however, for whom the unity of the campaign came before any other consideration, accused Reform of biting the hand that fed it, since the established fund-raising system, they claimed, had contributed significantly to the growth of all the movements in Israel.

A special task force set up by the nation's largest local Jewish fund-raising body—UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York—to examine how to handle the pluralism question gave Reform little cause for comfort. The task force report, issued in September, advised reversing the pro-pluralism position that the federation had taken in December 1997. Noting that individual members of the task force endorsed an end to the Orthodox monopoly in Israel, the report nevertheless recognized that a pro-pluralism stand was interpreted by the Orthodox as siding against all of Orthodoxy in a debate the Orthodox considered internal to Israeli politics. And in order for UJA-Federation to continue to function in the name of the entire New York Jewish community, it "should not promote a particular ideological position with respect to pluralism." But the disappointed spokespersons for Reform and Conservative Judaism countered that there was no way that the fund-raising establishment could really remain neutral: not taking a position was, in effect, taking a position in favor of the status quo, if not on the theology of conversion, then on continuing to deny civil rights in Israel.

In October detailed plans were announced for the February 1999 opening of the first joint conversion institute in Beersheba. It would be run by a seven-member board, five Orthodox, one Reform, and one Conservative. Representatives of both the latter movements announced that their movements were reluctant participants, hoping for the best even though the lack of endorsement by the chief rabbis meant that the arrangement was far from what had originally been intended by the Ne'eman Commission.

As it happened, the delicate compromise represented by the conversion institutes was soon jeopardized by Israeli courts. In November the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Reform and Conservative Jews could not be barred from serving on local religious councils. These bodies, which supervise the provision of religious services to their communities, had until then only included the Orthodox. And in late December a Jerusalem district court ruled that individuals converted in Israel by Reform or Conservative rabbis should be registered as Jews in the population registry. These and two other judicial rulings against the religion-state sta-

tus quo—one freeing kibbutz economic activities from the legal restrictions on Sabbath labor, the other questioning the draft exemptions of yeshivah students—elicited outrage from the Orthodox parties in Israel and their supporters in the United States.

As the year ended, Orthodox forces in the Knesset were seeking to circumvent both the religious councils and conversion decisions through legislation. On December 28, the Knesset passed the first reading of a bill (three readings are needed for passage) requiring members of religious councils to pledge to obey rulings of the Chief Rabbinate. In addition, a bill codifying the Orthodox monopoly on conversions in Israel, which had already passed one reading in 1997, was reintroduced. Since Prime Minister Netanyahu had recently called for new elections in the spring, Reform and Conservative leaders in the United States worried that Israeli politicians desperate for votes might make pledges to the religious parties to back the measures that would undermine the court decisions.

The prospect of having their victories in court nullified by the Israeli legislative branch drove the American Reform and Conservative movements to issue a joint statement at the end of the year warning Knesset members that they were "about to make a terrible personal political mistake" if they voted for the Orthodox-sponsored bills. While the institutions of the Reform and Conservative movements, as nonprofit organizations, could not engage in political activity, this was a clear threat that wealthy non-Orthodox American Jews might withhold their contributions to the political campaign funds of Israeli politicians—a source of money which, in the past, had provided most of the funding for Israeli election campaigns.

Denominational Developments

The bitterness of the Orthodox–non-Orthodox polemics on the Israeli scene continued to poison denominational relations in the United States. Indeed, the palpable anger of the Reform and Conservative movements about the situation in Israel spilled over into unusually harsh anti-Orthodox stereotyping in the United States.

Both Eric Yoffie, UAHC president (Reform), and Ismar Schorsch, JTS chancellor (Conservative), publicly castigated Orthodoxy for its narrow-mindedness. Yoffie called it "ghetto Judaism" because it allegedly obligated its followers "to avoid any but essential contacts with the general society," and this, he wrote—impugning Orthodox patriotism—constituted "nothing less than a betrayal of America" (*New York Jewish Week*, July 24). Schorsch, in one of his widely distributed weekly columns on the Torah portion, attacked Orthodoxy for insisting on an ever more stringent interpretation of Jewish law, the "quantification of piety," propounding the idea that "there are no questions but only answers," and attempting to set up "hermetically sealed ghettos."

In contrast, the sectarian Orthodox Agudath Israel, previously a major source

of barbed rhetoric against the non-Orthodox denominations as well as against the modern Orthodox, toned down its criticisms in 1998. The decision to do so reflected sensitivity to the negative reactions that greeted earlier statements that seemed to question the Jewishness of the other denominations and cast aspersions on modern Orthodox leaders. Indeed, intemperate rhetoric could hurt Orthodox fund-raising. The Sapirstein-Stone-Weiss Foundation, administered by the owners of American Greeting Cards—a major source of funding for numerous Orthodox causes—announced in 1998 that it would no longer help institutions that fomented divisiveness in the Jewish community. The statement specifically cited remarks at the 1997 Agudath Israel convention castigating Yeshiva University president Norman Lamm for his support of the Ne'eman Commission recommendations as an example of such divisiveness. Taking the high road, Agudath Israel interpreted its campaign early in the year against religious pluralism in Israel as matching "the non-Orthodox leadership's aggressive outrages with our own aggressive outreaches" (*Jewish Observer,* January). And at its annual convention in November, Agudath Israel resolved to make the improvement of relations with other sectors of the Jewish community a priority.

Moderated rhetoric, however, did not imply any relaxation of the Orthodox opposition to any activity that might even resemble Jewish religious pluralism. Such opposition was especially noticeable, since it was so unexpected, within modern Orthodoxy, and it impelled philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, in a speech at Yeshiva University in October, to charge Orthodoxy as a whole with "moral self-centeredness." Thus the Orthodox Union (OU) refused to participate in "Shabbat Across America," a project to encourage Jews of any or no denomination to observe the Sabbath—even though 148 Orthodox synagogues took part—because it might seem to condone non-Orthodox forms of Sabbath observance. The OU also declined to be part of Jewish Web/Net Week, linking over 600 Jewish Web sites—even though a number of Orthodox and even hassidic institutions participated—since that, too, might appear to associate the OU with non-Orthodox Web sites. The president of the Rabbinical Council of America, the modern Orthodox rabbinic body, turned down an invitation to participate in a joint study session with non-Orthodox rabbis at the Council of Jewish Federations' General Assembly. This attitude extended even to high school basketball in the New York City area, where Conservative Solomon Schechter schools, seeking to play against other Jewish schools, were rebuffed in their attempt to join the league of Orthodox yeshivas. One Orthodox principal explained that he wanted his students to associate only with those "who share our philosophy of Judaism."

There were, to be sure, efforts by nondenominational bodies to counteract the forces of division. The Wexner Foundation, which provided funding for graduate work in the rabbinate, Jewish education, and other Jewish communal fields, sponsored joint Torah study sessions for its fellows and alumni of all the movements. The American Jewish Committee had an ongoing interdenominational women's group that met regularly throughout the year for study and conversa-

tion, and in November AJC announced that it would make intermovement dialogue a national program priority.

Upon his inauguration as president of the interdenominational New York Board of Rabbis in late March, Rabbi Marc Schneier (Orthodox) announced an ambitious plan for the creation of a national interdenominational rabbinic organization out of the roughly 30 local boards of rabbis across America. With the religious pluralism issue in Israel driving the denominations apart, Schneier intended this new body to play the mediating role that had been performed by the lay-constituted Synagogue Council of America till its collapse in 1994. The responses from both Orthodox and non-Orthodox were lukewarm: among the Orthodox, the sectarians opposed any cooperation with non-Orthodox rabbis, while the modernists preferred behind-the-scenes cooperation that would not get them into trouble with their Orthodox peers; and the non-Orthodox feared that yet another American rabbinic body could complicate the Reform and Conservative struggle for recognition in Israel. Still, 28 rabbis held a planning meeting with Schneier in May.

Hoping to generate a wave of public enthusiasm for a national rabbinic body by dispelling the prevailing pessimism about the future of interdenominational ties, Schneier's New York Board of Rabbis issued a report, "Unity in Diversity: A Vision of Rabbinic Cooperation," in September. This summary of activities around the country noted such programs as interdenominational study groups, combined community *hakafot* on Simhat Torah, a pluralistic conversion institute in California, and a variety of "unity" proclamations—some initiated by local federations—signed by a cross-section of community rabbis. But just as some observers began to talk of Schneier—not entirely in jest—as a potential chief rabbi of America, doubts were raised about his unity report. Not only, it seems, were some of the descriptions of cooperation exaggerated, but the exclusion of divisive phenomena gave an unrealistically rosy picture of the situation. "The big picture," commented Rabbi Irving Greenberg, a veteran of the interdenominational scene, "is that there's less cooperation and communal activity and willingness to do things together than there's ever been."

As if to prove just how difficult it would likely be for Schneier to navigate the shoals of intermovement cooperation, his own New York Board of Rabbis committed a serious faux pas by scheduling an interfaith service on behalf of the poor for September 9, at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Reform rabbi heading the board's interfaith committee was simply unaware that Orthodox rabbis would not pray in a church, and an embarrassed Rabbi Schneier, who said he had not been told of the plan in advance, announced that neither he nor any other Orthodox rabbi would attend. None did.

Orthodox Judaism

Despite criticism from other sectors of the community for its exclusiveness and failure to accept the legitimacy of plural versions of Judaism, American Ortho-

doxy continued to flourish in 1998. It could seriously claim to be retaining the loyalties of a far higher percentage of its young people than the other movements. Its numerical clout was increasingly respected by American business—as was clear from the proliferation of new products with kosher certification, including, for the first time, some made by Nabisco. And the respectful, almost awed reaction of the media and the public to the measured and anguished denunciation of President Clinton's behavior uttered on the Senate floor on September 3 by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D., Conn.), which clearly arose out of his Orthodox Jewish values, highlighted the moral credibility of Orthodoxy at its best.

It was the more sectarian Orthodox who felt most secure about their future, buoyed by extrapolations from recent Jewish population surveys purporting to indicate that, within a few generations, the sectarians' high birthrate and low attrition rate would make them the overwhelming majority of American Jewry. Such a perception was reinforced by recognition from the most eminent of the secular media. The *New York Times Magazine* (November 15), in its special issue devoted to forms of "status" in America, included only one specifically "Jewish" form of status. "For Orthodox Jews," it related, status means "studying, studying and more studying" of the sacred texts—even at the sacrifice of career and creature comforts—exactly the sectarian role model.

Agudath Israel, the primary institutional expression of sectarian Orthodoxy, experienced a smooth transition of leadership following the death of Rabbi Moshe Sherer, the president of the organization, in May. Over the course of a half century, Rabbi Sherer had transformed it from a marginal group to a potent religious and political force. In November Agudath Israel announced that the lay presidency and the executive authority—which had been combined in Sherer's hands—would now be divided. A member of the organization's Council of Torah Sages, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, known as the Novominsker Rebbe, was the new president, and a three-man executive committee would be in charge of day-to-day operations.

Modern Orthodoxy continued to suffer from defensiveness and low morale as its own institutions came increasingly under sectarian influence. A telling example of the trend was Yeshiva University's handling of the award of an honorary degree to Yaakov Ne'eman "for service to the Jewish people" at a convocation for YU's recent rabbinic graduates held in March. Although YU president Norman Lamm had endorsed the Ne'eman Commission proposals for solving the conversion crisis in Israel, the school did no advance publicity about the award to Ne'eman, for fear of antagonizing Orthodox sectarians. Even so, some senior rabbis on the faculty heard about the planned award and boycotted the event.

Another sign of the erosion of modern Orthodoxy was the spread of sectarian tendencies even among Orthodox American Sephardim. A major theme at the national convention of the American Sephardi Federation in May was the loss of the traditional spirit of religious tolerance in the Sephardi community and

its replacement by a narrower worldview inculcated in Ashkenazi-controlled schools.

One factor encouraging the movement to the "right" among Orthodox young people was the widespread practice of high-school graduates spending a year or more at Israeli yeshivas, from which they often returned antagonistic to modernity, hostile to religious pluralism, and committed to sectarian Orthodoxy. Gary Rosenblatt, editor of the *New York Jewish Week,* publicized the new term for this phenomenon: "flipping" (August 21). A good number of the "flipped" young people rejected a college education, and some who did not insisted that the secular university accommodate to their Orthodox sensibilities. A lawsuit filed by five (later four) Orthodox students against Yale University for not granting them exemptions from the requirement of living on campus in mixed-sex dormitories—which, they said, conflicted with their religious beliefs—drew widespread attention, including a *New York Times Magazine* article, "Yeshivish at Yale" (May 24). When a U.S. district court ruled in Yale's favor in August, the students appealed.

Despite the movement toward separatism in the Orthodox community, countervailing tendencies survived. A three-day conference in Israel in mid-October, sponsored by, among others, the modern Orthodox Bar-Ilan University, the religious kibbutz movement, and the Israeli alumni of Yeshiva University, featured leading Israeli and American modern Orthodox thinkers addressing the challenges of modernity. The publication of Irving Greenberg's *Living in the Image of God: Jewish Teachings to Perfect the World* provided the general reader with a sharp critique of the rightward trend in Orthodoxy. And two relatively new modern Orthodox organizations continued to function: the Orthodox Caucus sought to counteract what it saw as Orthodoxy's neglect of the ethical component of Jewish tradition, while the more broadly focused Edah, which advertised itself as having "the courage to be modern and Orthodox," ran ads favoring the Ne'eman Commission recommendations.

Unquestionably, the issue with the greatest potential to reinvigorate modern Orthodoxy was the religious role of women. Indeed, so heated was the intra-Orthodox debate over feminism in 1998 that predictions of a denominational split over the issue came from both the sectarian Orthodox camp and from some of the modernists.

The second International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy, held February 15–16 in New York City, attracted some 2,000 people, double the attendance of the previous year. The program gave evidence of the strides made by the movement. This time, unlike the inaugural conference, some mainstream modern Orthodox rabbis consented to speak, as did the noted Israeli halakhic authority Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, two heads of women's seminaries in Israel, and a Lubavitch woman. And while in 1997 discussion of the prospects for ordination of women was considered too controversial to be on the program, in 1998, with two women already employed as "rabbinic interns" in New York synagogues, a session was devoted to the subject. Another sign that Orthodox feminism had

become less defensive was a panel of non-Orthodox feminists providing their perspectives on trends in Orthodoxy. While Amit, the Orthodox women's Zionist organization that had officially cosponsored the first conference, withdrew its endorsement this time, many Amit members were in attendance.

One topic prominent on the conference agenda—how to help the *agunah*, the "chained woman" whose husband refuses to grant her a Jewish divorce—generated controversy throughout the year. Since Halakhah dictates that only the husband may initiate a divorce, the *agunah* problem, in the eyes of many, epitomized Orthodoxy's male bias. In 1996, 88-year-old Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, who had been a leading modern Orthodox rabbi in the United States and then served as chancellor of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, joined with some other rabbis in initiating a new *bet din*—religious court—to deal with such cases. Using the assumption that cruel or abusive behavior on the husband's part reflected character traits existing already at the time of the marriage, this court annulled the marriages on the grounds that the wife would never have agreed to marry had she known the truth about her husband. She was now free to remarry.

By early 1998 this *bet din* had quietly annulled some 100 marriages, but the generally favorable attention it received at the Conference on Orthodoxy and Feminism in February generated criticism from several quarters. Arguing that annulments can be effected only if there is definite proof that information about the husband had been withheld at the time of the marriage, Agudath Israel declared all acts of the Rackman court invalid; the Young Israel Council of Rabbis called it "heartless and foolish" to "lull unfortunate women into the illusory impression that they are free to remarry"; and even the rabbinical court sponsored by the moderate Rabbinical Council of America and the Orthodox Union called the court's reasoning "incorrect." In June, 31 mainstream Orthodox rabbis, several of whom were prominent supporters of Jewish feminism, signed onto a statement declaring that, since there was no halakhic basis for the court's actions, no Orthodox rabbi would officiate at the remarriage of any woman freed through these "annulments." Even after an extensive *New York Times* article about the controversial court (August 13) triggered a two-page advertisement in the *New York Jewish Week* in which the court provided a point-by-point explanation of its operations (August 28), the solid wall of rabbinic opposition remained.

As if the issues of feminism and the *agunah* problem did not pose enough of a challenge to Orthodoxy, a well-publicized lawsuit in November opened up another contentious issue of concern to women. Chani Lightman of Long Island sued two local rabbis, charging that they had breached confidentiality by telling her estranged husband, in the course of a custody battle, information about her religious behavior that she had revealed to them in private conversation. As the year ended, one of the rabbis had been found guilty and fined but was appealing the verdict, and the other was awaiting trial. As lawyers, other rabbis, and the Orthodox laity debated whether the two rabbis had acted appropriately, many women saw the case as one more example of male rabbinic bias.

CHABAD-LUBAVITCH

The Lubavitch hassidic sect, whose leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, died in 1994, continued to be wracked by controversy. Although the demise of the childless Rebbe left the group without a leader, Lubavitch centers around the world, which had always operated with considerable autonomy, continued to thrive, enlisting the allegiance of many previously unaffiliated Jews. Yet the exact status of the dead Rabbi Schneerson in the eyes of his followers aroused sharp dispute.

In January, Prof. David Berger—an Orthodox rabbi and the president of the Association for Jewish Studies, who had previously complained that many Lubavitchers believed that the dead Rebbe was the messiah—charged that the Rebbe was now actually being worshiped as a god. All such idolators, he went on, should be cast out of the community. After Berger's pronouncement, the Agudath Israel broke its silence on the issue with a long and heavily footnoted article in the March issue of the *Jewish Observer* that largely confirmed Berger's analysis. On February 19, the Central Committee of Chabad-Lubavitch Rabbis issued a statement condemning as un-Jewish "the deification of any human being" as well as "conjecture as to the possible identity of the Moshiach (messiah)," and stating that the late Rebbe would not have wanted his followers to have a "preoccupation" with identifying him as the messiah. But Lubavitch messianists, seizing on the wording of the statement, noted that only "preoccupation" was criticized, not belief, and beginning on the fourth anniversary of the Rebbe's death, they held a four-day "Moshiach Congress" in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. And a *New York Times* reporter (June 29) discovered that many Lubavitch schools ended daily prayers with the chant, "Long Live the Rebbe, King Moshiach, for ever and ever."

CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Through the year, the Conservative movement was subjected to intense analysis. One of the outstanding Jewish publication events of 1998 was the release of *Tradition Renewed,* an erudite two-volume collection of scholarly essays on the history of the Jewish Theological Seminary, edited by its provost, Jack Wertheimer, which demonstrated the central role of the Conservative rabbinical school in shaping American Judaism.

Wertheimer was also responsible for another publication (actually released at the very end of in 1997) that suggested weaknesses in the movement. *Jewish Identity and Religious Commitment* consisted of eight essays analyzing data from a 1995–96 survey of Conservative Jews in North America. Consistent with trends toward "spirituality" in the broader society, belief in God was evidently on the upsurge, with young Conservative Jews far more likely than their parents to consider God an important element of their Jewishness. Yet there were signs of ero-

sion of Jewish group identity: fully 65 percent of adolescents who had recently become bar or bat mitzvah considered it acceptable to marry a non-Jew. And the data called into question the long-term efficacy of conversion as an antidote to intermarriage—at least in the Conservative movement. In families where one spouse had converted to Judaism, while levels of observance resembled those in nonconversionary families, 61 percent of the oldest married children had married non-Jews, as compared to 29 percent of oldest married children of in-married families.

By 1998 the three-year-old institutional rift between the New York-based JTS and the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles had been healed, with JTS now viewing the newer school as a partner rather than a competitor. Ideologically, however, the Conservative movement still struggled over the perennial "hot" issues of gender, homosexuality, and intermarriage.

A new edition of the Conservative *Sim Shalom* prayer book for Sabbath and festivals appeared in 1998. Seven years in the making, it broke radically with tradition by replacing "sexist" language with gender-neutral terms—modifying masculine references to God and including the names of the biblical matriarchs along with the patriarchs. It also removed, rather than just rephrased or reinterpreted, as in earlier prayer books, liturgical mention of the ancient sacrifices. Some of the more traditionalist rabbis in the movement objected that the modifications destroyed the connection between the wording of the prayers and the language of Scripture, but the critics were clearly in the minority. A new *Rabbi's Manual* published by the Rabbinical Assembly, after ten years of deliberation, showed a similar sensitivity to gender equality. In addition, this rabbinic handbook for life-cycle events, heavily influenced by the popular quest for spirituality in everyday life, included prayers for such milestones as "retirement, a special birthday, when a young person goes off to college, and when a child goes to sleepaway camp for the first time" (*New York Jewish Week,* October 23).

The continuing resistance of Conservative institutions to the religious legitimization of homosexuality confronted mounting criticism. Members of the popular B'nai Jeshurun Synagogue in New York City—including such celebrities as Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Bella Abzug, and Debra Winger—petitioned the congregational board to omit from its annual membership form the option of donating money to the JTS scholarship fund, so long as the seminary continued to bar open homosexuals from its rabbinical program. After meeting with JTS officials in April and failing to secure a change in policy, the congregational board agreed to the petition and cut off funding.

Meanwhile, the Conservative hard line against accepting homosexuality showed signs of weakening in California, where two prominent rabbis—Elliot Dorff, rector of the University of Judaism and vice-chairman of the movement's Committee on Law and Standards, and Bradley Artson, a congregational rabbi—argued both the justice and the inevitability of Conservative acceptance of gay

relationships. And a Conservative rabbinical court in Northern California went so far as to sanction rabbinic officiation at "covenants of amity" between same-sex partners, a move repudiated by the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism. But the RA soon had to confront another aspect of the issue when one of its members, Rabbi Benay Lappe, publicly stated that she was a lesbian. Rabbi Seymour Essrog, RA president, told a reporter, "We don't want to go on any witch hunts" (*Forward,* November 6).

The place of the intermarried in the Conservative movement appeared to pit the official rabbinic authority of the movement against grass-roots sentiment. The Committee on Law and Standards—made up primarily of scholars—ruled overwhelmingly that a Jew married to a non-Jew was disqualified from holding any position in a Conservative synagogue or school in which that person could be viewed as a role model for other Jews. This elicited reactions of dismay from some Conservatives active on the local level (*JTS Magazine*, Fall), who considered the decision narrow-minded and discriminatory. United Synagogue executive vice-president Rabbi Jerome Epstein responded that the actual application of the decision to individual cases remained in the hands of the local rabbi.

JTS chancellor Ismar Schorsch issued several controversial statements during the year. In July he urged elimination of the traditional three-week mourning period (a regimen that few Conservative Jews practiced anyway) prior to the Tishah b'Ab fast that commemorates the destruction of the two holy temples in Jerusalem. His rationale was that excessive emphasis on the tragedies of Jewish history encouraged "an abiding angst over insecurity and a messianic zeal to right past wrongs." In September Schorsch became the only prominent Jewish leader in the country to call for the resignation of President Clinton because of the Monica Lewinsky affair. That same month the annual JTS High Holy Day advertisement in the *New York Times* dealt with gun control, and when critics wondered why the seminary had departed from its tradition of highlighting Jewish themes appropriate to the season, Schorsch said he was "thrilled with the timeliness and punch" of the new ad. Also in September Schorsch publicly singled out for opprobrium Jews who owned sports teams for not supporting Jewish education.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's congregational body, sought ways to reinvigorate the Conservative synagogue, which was suffering from falling membership and a perceived apathy among young people. A management-consulting firm was hired to examine the operations of the United Synagogue. Synagogue 2000, a joint program with Reform congregations, experimented with unconventional services to attract adult attendance, and Stephen Wolnek, the new president of the United Synagogue, called for tripling the amount of money spent on informal Jewish education for Conservative youngsters. Whether such measures would be enough to reinvigorate the movement was an open question. In a widely discussed article on the weaknesses of Conservative Judaism (*Commentary*, September), Reform rabbi Clifford Librach suggested

that declining numbers and the movement's "continuous tilt and drift to the Left" could bring about an eventual merger with Reform—a scenario that Conservative leaders vehemently denied.

Reconstructionist Judaism

True to its history as a pioneer on the frontiers of Jewish life, the Reconstructionist movement issued the 66-page "Boundaries and Opportunities: The Role of Non-Jews in Jewish Reconstructionist Congregations," the first set of recommendations on this topic produced by any of the Jewish denominations. The product of a task force appointed in 1994, it addressed the reality that 30 percent of Reconstructionist congregants under the age of 40 were part of interfaith households, and that about a quarter of Reconstructionist rabbis officiated at intermarriages, a practice that was still officially discouraged by the movement. The guidelines suggested that non-Jews be allowed membership if they were not active participants in another religion, and that children of mixed marriages be admitted to religious school so long as they were not receiving instruction in another religion. The report also recommended that non-Jews not perform Jewish rituals of a public nature—such as being called to the Torah or leading the services—and not serve as synagogue officers.

Like the Conservative movement, Reconstructionism also published a manual for rabbis, but, in keeping with the movement's democratic spirit, it presented the rituals of Jewish life as suggestions rather than laws, and was designed to be used not only by rabbis but also by lay people interested in creating their own rituals. Produced in loose-leaf format so that material for new types of occasions might be added, the manual addresses feminist concerns—including blessings for lesbian marriages—and sacralizes the most up-to-date life-cycle events, with prayers for surrogate mothers and sperm donors.

Although small in absolute terms—fewer than 100 congregations encompassing some 12,000 households—leaders of the movement announced that membership was growing at a rate of 15 percent a year, which made Reconstructionism, they said, the fastest growing denomination. In May the movement held a "Future Search" conference to ponder the direction of Reconstructionism. On the agenda were locating the resources for further expansion, integrating spirituality and social justice, and developing a clear ideological vision.

The galleys of a new Reconstructionist prayer book for the High Holy Days were distributed at the biennial convention of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation in November. As in the previous prayer books produced by the movement, references to a chosen people and to the ancient sacrifices were eliminated, and language about God was gender-neutral. A notable topic of discussion at the biennial was the establishment of a Reconstructionist presence in Israel, where an office had already been set up and meetings planned with Israelis who might be interested in the nondogmatic form of Judaism offered by the movement.

Reform Judaism

Reform continued to be pulled from the left and from the right, between the forces pressing for accommodation to the norms of American culture and those calling on the movement to reclaim major elements of the Jewish tradition.

1998 was supposed to be the year that the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) finally decided whether to approve of rabbinic officiation at ceremonies celebrating same-sex unions. The movement had gone on record two years earlier in favor of civil marriage for homosexuals, and an unknown number of Reform rabbis were already performing ceremonies of commitment or actual "marriages." A CCAR Committee on Human Sexuality, convinced that the time had come for Reform to join Reconstructionism in removing discrimination against gays and lesbians as a matter of civil rights and simple justice, was proposing a resolution to the entire organization that, while not mentioning the word marriage, would affirm the "sanctity" of same-sex unions. Some suggested that it was just a matter of time before the Conservatives followed suit.

A vocal opposition countered that what is expressly forbidden by Scripture, while perhaps licit when viewed from a modern perspective, could hardly be sanctified. Furthermore, opponents argued, the proposed policy statement would place intolerable pressure on rabbis who, as a matter of conscience, could not officiate at these ceremonies, and would spill over into similar pressure to perform intermarriages. But the most potent reason against passage was the dire prediction from Reform leaders in Israel that approval of the resolution would provide further ammunition to those Orthodox groups seeking to deny recognition to Reform by charging it with radical rejection of the tradition. The opponents also noted that, since their movement was based on the principle of rabbinic autonomy, any individual Reform rabbi was always free to officiate as he or she saw fit, even without the resolution. By an 8 to 2 vote, the CCAR Responsa Committee ruled against the resolution, which, the majority feared, "would break so sharply with the standards of religious practice maintained by virtually all Jewish communities" that it would push Reform "toward the margins of our people."

Debate grew heated in the months leading up to the June convention of the CCAR. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the UAHC, initially expressed support for the resolution, but soon stopped responding to the media and referred questioners to the CCAR. To head off a nasty floor fight, some rabbis suggested sending the resolution back to committee, while others favored passing both the resolution and the majority decision of the Responsa Committee, even though the two were directly contradictory.

In the end, the issue was removed from the agenda of the June convention. Reform rabbis were urged to study the arguments on both sides of the issue, which would be revisited in 1999. This compromise was generally viewed as a victory for the opponents of homosexual unions. But proponents predicted that approval was just a matter of time, and more than 500 rabbis signed their names to a state-

ment declaring that they had performed, or would be willing to perform, ceremonies for same-sex couples.

The CCAR convention did discuss another controversial matter—patrilineal descent. In 1983 the Reform movement had sought to encourage the Jewish identification of the children of intermarriage by declaring that children of Jewish fathers—not just of Jewish mothers—might be considered Jews if they performed "appropriate and timely public acts of identification" with Judaism. After 15 years, complaints that some Reform rabbis—especially outside the United States—refused to accept the ruling, and confusion about just which "public acts" were required, impelled the movement to study the impact of the decision. A special task force reported that 81 percent of Reform rabbis made use of the patrilineal standard, the bulk of them interpreting "acts of identification" as Jewish life-cycle events or involvement in the synagogue, with about a third of the rabbis insisting that the "acts" had to occur in childhood. The task force recommended replacing the "patrilineal" nomenclature with "equilineal descent" so as to emphasize the gender equality inherent in the policy, and strongly urged the adoption of clear guidelines defining those "acts of identification" required for children and those for adults, with the aim of insuring that no Reform rabbi would question the Jewishness of any Jew affiliated with Reform.

The Reform movement's Jewish Literacy Initiative, announced by UAHC president Eric Yoffie in 1997, moved into high gear in 1998. Each issue of *Reform Judaism* magazine listed, described, and presented excerpts from significant Jewish books, and study guides were available to encourage subscribers to read the books. In addition, classic Jewish texts were made available for group study, as were tapes and cassettes teaching how to chant the Torah and weekly summaries of the Torah portion—provided via Internet—for use by families.

But there were limits to Reform's return to tradition. A draft of a new statement of Reform doctrine, "Ten Principles for Reform Judaism," was circulated in the fall in the expectation that it would be acted upon at the 1999 CCAR convention and become the new guiding program of the movement. The document explicitly renounced the centrality of modernity characteristic of classical Reform and replaced it with a more traditional view of Judaism, specifically the ritual practices ordained in the Torah that had been abandoned by the great majority of Reform Jews. To be sure, these rituals were not presented as binding, but as ways to enhance one's Jewish spirituality. They included observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws, the traditional fasts, and even immersion in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) for women after menstruation. As if this were not radical (or reactionary) enough, the document also endorsed the traditional biblical account of revelation.

The document triggered a massive outcry—the *Forward* dubbed it the "Cheeseburger Rebellion"(November 27)—from rabbis and especially lay people, for whom Reform by definition meant ethics and excluded serious attention to ritual. The winter issue of *Reform Judaism* devoted considerable space to arguments

pro and con. Rabbi Richard Levy, CCAR president and the guiding force behind the new principles, explained that they were meant to supply people with "the knowledge and permission to experience more ways of living a holy life." Hunter College professor Robert Seltzer, however, warned that emphasis on ritual could turn Reform into "Conservative Judaism Lite." But the Levy-Seltzer debate in the magazine was overshadowed by the cover photo of the bearded Rabbi Levy wearing a yarmulke and reverently kissing the fringes of his prayer shawl, an image so fraught with premodern associations that one rabbi told the *New York Jewish Week* (December 4) that "people freaked out."

Rabbi Levy agreed to tone down some of the emphasis on ritual in the document and strengthen references to Reform's traditional inclusiveness and its ethical thrust. But as the year ended, most observers doubted that even a more moderately formulated "Ten Principles" would be accepted by the movement.

Jewish Continuity

Most leaders of the Jewish community had been convinced for some time that the major threat to American Jewish life came, not from those who hated Jews, but from a culture so accepting that it eroded Jewish distinctiveness. "It is no longer rape that threatens us," said John Ruskay, chief operating officer of New York UJA-Federation, "but seduction" (*New York Times*, December 12).

The seduction was evident on many levels, politics and popular culture among them. At a September 11 White House prayer breakfast, President Clinton expressed remorse and repentance for the Monica Lewinsky affair by reading aloud from the Jewish High Holy Day prayers. Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of the Reform movement, who was sitting next to the teary-eyed First Lady, was touched that the president, "at a moment of crisis," would "turn to the Jewish prayer book for inspiration." A few months earlier, on May 14, millions of television viewers tuned in to the final episode of *Seinfeld*, the vaguely "Jewish" situation comedy that was the most widely watched show in America. "The Jews have arrived," commented Rabbi Harold Schulweis.

The question of what priority to give outreach programs to the intermarried and unaffiliated, a debate that had wracked the community since the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey revealed accelerating intermarriage, receded in 1998, with proponents of outreach seemingly the winners. While arguments for the rival "inreach" approach—calling for primary attention to those already somewhat connected to the Jewish community, and insisting on maintaining the traditional negative evaluation of intermarriage—could still be heard, most federations and a number of the most influential Jewish family foundations were putting hundreds of thousands of dollars into projects aimed at attracting Jews who were either outside the organized community and/or married to non-Jews.

Attention was increasingly focusing on plans for the 2000 Jewish Population Survey, which was expected to cost $3.6 million, one-third of it to come from the

federations and the rest from private donations. Several controversial issues surfaced during the year in regard to the survey. Although it was deemed essential to repeat questions from the 1990 survey so as to establish a trend line, many communal leaders called for adding new questions that would probe issues of Jewish identity, and some funders sought the inclusion of questions of particular interest to them. More explosive was the complaint by some demographers that the 1990 survey's 52 percent intermarriage rate was exaggerated, since the percentage was calculated by counting as Jewish many non-Jewish families where one spouse had once been a Jew, or had a Jewish parent.

As plans for the year 2000 proceeded, two new studies gave added credibility to a pessimistic vision of the American Jewish future. In an April survey of American Jewish opinion conducted for the *Los Angeles Times*, only 21 percent of the sample said they would marry only a Jew, 57 percent believed that religion made no difference in choosing a spouse, and 58 percent would not object to their children marrying out of the faith. A report released in October of American Jewish identification, conducted by Prof. Steven M. Cohen for the Jewish Community Centers Association, had equally serious implications. While younger American Jews differed little from their elders when measured by the religious dimensions of Jewish identity, Cohen found that ethnic Jewish attachments were drastically eroding: far fewer young Jews than older Jews believed it important to marry a Jew, felt an attachment to Israel, or had close friends who were Jews.

Interest in Jewish day schools as a potent force for Jewish continuity increased in 1998. In a series of clever full-page ads in Jewish newspapers, the Avi Chai Foundation highlighted graduates of day schools, as knowledgeable in Jewish culture as they were in the arts and sciences, attending Ivy League colleges, and contended that a day-school education was "the one cause" whose support guaranteed the survival of all other worthwhile Jewish causes. It was clear, however, that the expansion of existing day schools and the launching of new ones had created a shortage of qualified personnel. As noted in a front-page story in the *Forward* (May 8), entitled "Day Schools Start Scrambling Over Educators of Top Quality," there were 48 openings for executives of Jewish educational institutions around the country, and some schools, despairing of finding Jewish educators, were hiring non-Jews for administrative positions.

Lack of funds remained a serious problem for the day schools. A study released by the Conservative movement in January gave new evidence of how hard it was becoming for middle-class families to afford day-school tuition and strongly suggested that many more youngsters would attend if greater financial aid were available. At its annual plenum, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs passed a resolution asserting that day schools promote Jewish continuity and that their students should continue to receive constitutionally acceptable government benefits. In fact, the JCPA came within 40 votes of approving "charitable choice," whereby sectarian organizations might receive government funds for nonsectarian activities—Jewish day schools, for example, for their secular programs—despite tra-

ditional Jewish qualms over church-state entanglement. The closeness of the vote may have reflected shifting sentiment in the broader society. A poll conducted in June by the Gallup Organization found, for the first time, a bare majority of Americans favoring government aid for tuition in private and sectarian schools.

So long as judicial interpretation continued to bar direct government aid, advocates of funding for day schools focused their efforts on the Jewish federations. The efforts of George Hanus in Chicago were particularly noteworthy: the creation of endowment funds in the city's 14 day schools, and the commitment by federation to match 10 percent of those funds. The ultimate aim, said Hanus, was to provide free day-school education in Chicago. A National Jewish Day School Scholarship Committee, organized by Hanus in 1997, sought to have every federation in the country accept the principle that the community was responsible for providing all Jewish children with a day-school education, and urged every American Jew to bequeath 5 percent of his or her estate to a day school. But none of the other major federations emulated the Chicago model, and day-school advocates in several communities charged anti-Orthodox bias: since the schools were popularly associated with the Orthodox, the argument went, resentment against the Orthodox position on religious pluralism in Israel was being translated into inadequate levels of funding for day schools.

Though it drew the most attention, the interest in day schools was just one expression of a broader concern about programs for young Jews, which included informal Jewish education as well. The Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), the coordinating body for local boards of Jewish education, published a report charging that the 13–18-year-old population was being neglected by the community. Indeed, two studies appearing in 1998 indicated the positive impact that Jewish youth groups could have on teenagers. A survey of the alumni of Hadassah's Young Judaea programs found that an astounding 95 percent of those who were married had Jewish spouses, and that even among those under age 40, only 9 percent were intermarried. Meanwhile, the Orthodox Union released the findings of a study of alumni of its National Conference of Synagogue Youth, financed by the Lily Endowment. Of those who started out in public schools, 80 percent had found their way to yeshivas and day schools; moreover, only 2 percent of all alumni had intermarried, and 94 percent of those who started out Orthodox remained in the fold, contrasting sharply with the less-than-one-third Orthodox retention rate within American Jewry as a whole. In December, reflecting this same renewed interest in youth groups, the Reform movement authorized the expenditure of over half a million dollars to reinvigorate its North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY).

Jewish camping—which, unlike school or youth groups, enabled participants to "live Jewishly" 24 hours a day—was another form of informal Jewish education that had the potential to awaken the Jewish consciousness of teenagers. In fact, many prominent rabbis and Jewish lay leaders could testify that it was their early camp experiences that laid the groundwork for their later Jewish involve-

ment. In 1998, with many of the Jewish summer camps, religious and secular, filled to capacity, the Wexner Foundation launched a study of how philanthropy might best aid Jewish camping, and a New Jersey couple, Robert and Elisa Spungeon Bildner, set up a Foundation for Jewish Camping, to help camps rebuild and expand to accommodate more youngsters.

Trips to Israel, widely considered a potent way to energize the Jewish feelings of young people, received a boost in 1998 from the Birthright Israel project, the brainchild of philanthropists Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt. First unveiled in February, the plan was to give every Jew in the world aged 15–26, as a "birthright," the opportunity to visit Israel for ten days. The total cost was estimated at $300 million. Bronfman and Steinhardt pledged $5 million each, federations were urged to contribute, and by summer the Israeli government had agreed to contribute $1 million out of its own budget. "Our hope," Steinhardt told the *New York Times* (November 16), "is that the trip to Israel will be another rite of passage of Jewish life." But critics pointed out that young Jews were not even taking advantage of heavily subsidized trips to Israel that were already available, and that time spent in Israel, while certainly valuable as part of a serious Jewish educational or cultural program, was no panacea for the problem of weak Jewish identity.

The plethora of strategies to strengthen the Jewishness of young people reflected the community's frustration at its seeming inability to determine an effective policy. That same frustration lay behind the UJA-Federation decision late in the year to elevate its rhetoric: it announced plans to replace the three-year-old North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity with a National Commission on Jewish Renaissance.

Holocaust-Related Developments

Fascination with the Holocaust showed no signs of abating. It was the subject of two successful movies—the tragicomedy *Life Is Beautiful*, and the thriller based on a Stephen King story, *Apt Pupil*—and two remarkable books: *I Will Bear Witness*, the English translation of the first volume of the diary of Victor Klemperer, a Jew who lived through the Nazi years in Germany, and Yaffa Eliach's *Once There Was a World*, a detailed recreation of the author's hometown of Eishyshok, Poland, destroyed by the Nazis. Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, well on the way toward its goal of videotaping interviews with 50,000 survivors around the world, issued a CD-ROM for use by schools containing 80 minutes of interviews, along with an interactive timeline and map. Even politicians got into the act, with both critics and defenders of President Clinton invoking "lessons" of the Holocaust during the impeachment controversy, and New York senator Alfonse D'Amato, in his unsuccessful bid for reelection against a Jewish opponent, running a TV ad of an elderly Holocaust survivor thanking him for helping her get restitution money.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum marked its fifth anniversary in April. In some respects it had surpassed the hopes of its founders. The museum had become a major Washington tourist attraction. Of the 10 million visitors since the opening, more than 7 million were not Jewish, and one million were school-age children. A museum-sponsored survey of public attitudes showed that 77 percent of Americans had heard of the museum and 66 percent wanted to learn more about the Holocaust. In an effort to reach out beyond the capital, the museum arranged traveling exhibits and announced the imminent opening of a Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies for the training of a new generation of Holocaust scholars.

Yet the political entanglements that inevitably come with federal sponsorship involved the museum in a series of controversies. In January, high-level State Department officials who were on the museum council urged museum director Miles Lerman—a presidential appointee—to arrange an official tour for Yasir Arafat. Lerman extended the invitation, but when museum director Walter Reich objected, Lerman—without consulting other council members—withdrew the invitation, only to extend it once again when criticized for snubbing Arafat, who was, after all, Israel's negotiating partner. Arafat declined the invitation. Lerman blamed Reich for giving him bad advice, and Reich resigned. His replacement had still not been named when the year ended.

During early 1998 a coalition of Jewish groups brought together by museum chairman Lerman engaged in talks with the Polish government about the removal of crosses that had been placed at the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. In April Rabbi Avi Weiss of New York, a well-known activist, charged Lerman with "selling out Auschwitz" by allegedly negotiating a secret deal that would allow crosses to remain. Weiss went so far as to organize a public demonstration against Lerman on Holocaust Memorial Day outside New York's Temple Emanu-El, where Lerman was participating in the annual Holocaust commemoration. In July the museum announced that its coalition of negotiators had been on the verge of agreement with Poland to remove a 23-foot cross from the site, but that a provocative call by a World Jewish Congress official for the area's "extraterritoriality" had caused the Poles to back out.

Further embarrassment came to the museum in June. Holocaust scholar John K. Roth—a non-Jew—was appointed to head its new Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies when it opened in August. But a *Los Angeles Times* article Roth had written in 1988 came to light in which he compared the platform of Israel's far-right Moledet party to the ideology that led to *Kristallnacht,* and the Palestinians to the German Jews under Hitler. Roth expressed regret for having written the offending piece. Virtually all the noted academics in the field of Holocaust studies followed the lead of Elie Wiesel in defending Roth's record, and the *New York Jewish Week* (June 12) accused ZOA president Morton Klein, who was calling for Roth's resignation, of "Jewish McCarthyism." But just as the museum council was voting overwhelmingly to reaffirm Roth's appointment and de-

nouncing "character assassination" against him, two members of Congress notified Miles Lerman that there was documented proof of additional provocative statements by Roth over the years: that Ronald Reagan's election was comparable to Hitler's assumption of power; that the treatment of America's poor was similar to that of the Jews in Nazi Germany; that the Soviet and American systems were analogous; and that Israeli warfare and PLO terrorism had elements in common. Roth resigned, insisting nevertheless that he had been the victim of "distorted allegations."

The status of Holocaust studies as an academic discipline came under question when Harvard University proved unable or unwilling to fill a $3 million chair in the subject endowed by philanthropist Kenneth Lipper. Some of those involved said that there was no candidate of sufficient stature, while others suggested that the chair was not filled due to controversy between those favoring an expert in Nazi history and those wanting someone familiar with the Jewish sources. Yet a third group questioned whether it was appropriate for Harvard to have an endowed chair dedicated to the story of European Jewry's destruction when there was no chair teaching modern Jewish civilization, the culture that was destroyed.

Questions of restitution continued to occupy the Jewish community. As the year began, Swiss banks were seeking a "global settlement" of all claims by Jews who said that the banks were withholding money they or their families had deposited before the war. The deadline for the agreement was March 26, the day that the financial officers of American states and localities were to meet to decide on sanctions against Switzerland. An American Jewish Committee survey revealed how seriously American Jews viewed the matter: more than two-thirds of the sample believed that the Swiss government was being uncooperative, and 53 percent said they would support sanctions and boycotts. The three largest Swiss banks came up with a proposal in time, and talks were arranged with Jewish organizations and the survivors' lawyers to iron out the details. But the talks deadlocked in June when the Swiss, claiming that the value of the dormant accounts was not as high as previously thought, offered $1.25 billion to settle all claims, far less than had been expected. As the states and municipalities again raised the possibility of sanctions, and the Swiss countered that the World Jewish Restitution Organization had not yet distributed any of the $200 million they had already contributed to a humanitarian fund, the Jewish organizations and the lawyers of the survivors bickered with each other over strategy. "Jewish Groups Fight for Spoils of Swiss Case," was the front-page headline in the *New York Times* (November 29).

Meanwhile, the disposition of artworks stolen by the Nazis became another point of contention. Two such paintings by the Viennese artist Egon Schiele were part of a temporary exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Heirs of the prewar Jewish owners demanded their return, but the museum, arguing that it should not be held responsible for researching the provenance of every painting it showed, sought to send them back to Austria. Manhattan Dis-

trict Attorney Henry Morgenthau prevented the museum from shipping the paintings, pending resolution of the legal issues.

The federal government involved itself in the restitution question. In February Congress passed the Holocaust Victims Redress Act, which called on all governments to make sure that confiscated artworks were returned. And the State Department, in conjunction with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, hosted the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, November 30–December 3. Forty-seven nations and numerous nongovernmental organizations were represented. Both the State Department, anxious not to strain bilateral relations with other countries, and the Jewish organizations, worried that anti-Semitic stereotypes could be reinforced if the legacy of the Holocaust were identified too closely with money, spoke of restitution only in generalities. Much of the discussion centered on what Elie Wiesel called "moral restitution," the need to educate the world about the lessons of the Holocaust.

The Great Merger

The desire of American Jewish philanthropists for greater control over where their contributions went remained strong in 1998. According to an investigative report in the *Forward* (March 6), organizations of "American Friends" of specific Israeli cultural, educational, and medical institutions were actually raising more money, in the aggregate, than the UJA. Family foundations were becoming an increasingly popular way of giving money, both domestically and for overseas Jewish causes, outside the UJA-Federation system; the Jewish Funders Network—which brought together such foundations—had 260 members in 1998, up from 222 the year before. (See "Current Trends in American Jewish Philanthropy," by Jack Wertheimer, in the 1997 AJYB.)

The call for more localized control of the philanthropic dollar was heard in the federation world as well. Barry Shrage, president of Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, circulated a memo in January urging that federations be encouraged to choose which Israeli projects to fund, rather than transferring the money to the United Israel Appeal and thence to the Jewish Agency for allocation in Israel. (In fact, the percentage of philanthropic funds going to Israel through the standard route had already declined to the point where the Jewish Agency claimed to be on the verge of bankruptcy.)

Shrage's view had serious implications for the "partnership" that had been devised in 1997 between the Council of Jewish Federations and the United Jewish Appeal. The federation world was eager to turn that partnership into a full merger, in the expectation not only of greater efficiency but also of tighter federation control over funding. Advocates of aid to Israel and other overseas Jewish communities, however, wanted to go slow on the merger, fearing that if Shrage's stance won out, the funding of overseas needs would have to rely on the vagaries of local federations. Their fears were not unfounded: a study commis-

sioned by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs found that, while 58 percent of the leaders of American Jewish organizations wanted federations to increase their support of local Jewish causes, only 40 percent favored more money for Israel and other overseas causes.

In June, CJF and UJA (along with the United Israel Appeal) merged their offices, moving into a new joint headquarters in New York City. At a retreat held in a Chicago suburb in July, CJF and UJA leaders agreed in principle on a full merger, but three matters remained unresolved: whether federations should be required to set aside specific percentages of their funds for overseas aid, whether to bring Jewish groups who were outside the federation system—primarily the religious organizations—into the governance structure of the merged body, and who would be its chief executive officer. Another meeting, held in September in Washington, failed to answer any of these questions.

The Pollard Case

Since 1987, Jonathan Pollard had been serving a life sentence for passing classified American documents to Israel, a punishment that many American Jews considered disproportionate. Although President Clinton had already twice refused to commute his sentence, the Conference of Presidents launched a campaign to win Pollard's release. In a letter to Clinton in February, the conference argued that the life sentence was excessive compared to the punishments meted out to other spies, and that both "compassion and justice" were grounds for a commutation. Israeli authorities sought to buttress the campaign for Pollard by publicly admitting, for the first time, that he was not engaged in a rogue operation but had been spying for Israel. Prime Minister Netanyahu, echoing the Conference of Presidents, called on Clinton to release Pollard on humanitarian grounds.

At the Wye talks in October, Prime Minister Netanyahu asked for the release of Pollard as part of the projected agreement, and indeed the final accord was held up for several hours when Netanyahu insisted on bringing Pollard back to Israel with him. In the end, Netanyahu had to be satisfied with a promise that the president would carefully examine the case for clemency. Opinions differed over whether Netanyahu, after being rebuffed, had brought up the issue again at the last minute for domestic political reasons, or whether Clinton had indeed agreed to free Pollard only to switch course on the insistence of his intelligence officials. As the Conference of Presidents prepared yet another letter to the president supporting commutation, Clinton asked for recommendations from the defense and intelligence establishments.

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN

Jewish Culture

DESPITE DARK TALK IN the American Jewish community about a crisis of Jewish "continuity," American Jewish culture in 1998 continued to flourish. Difficult as it is to identify a Jewish "core" or essence among activities as diverse as music and cooking, literature and politics, humor and science, there can be little doubt of a significant Jewish presence in these and other forms of cultural expression in the United States. Furthermore, although what has emerged has at times reflected the differences between popular and "high" culture, it has also, perhaps more notably, appeared in forms that link the two. Indeed, this interface between levels of culture seems almost as characteristic a feature of American-Jewish cultural achievement as the American-Jewish connection itself.

Among books published during 1998, an important example of the connection between high and popular culture appeared in the unusual assembly of memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies that can be grouped under the common heading of personal history. Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the founding of Brandeis University (still, as it was originally, the one secular Jewish university in the United States), three biographies appeared of figures both nationally known and prominent in the early history of Brandeis. Thus, the "lives" were told of *Irving Howe* by Edward Alexander, of *Max Lerner* by Sanford Lakoff, and of *Ludwig Lewisohn* by Ralph Melnick (volume one of two). Still another—more recent—Brandeis professor, the sociologist Morrie Schwartz, is the main speaker in the best-selling account of *Tuesdays with Morrie*—a record of conversations which the volume's author, Mitch Albom, recalled from the year of his visits during Morrie's fatal illness. Reaching in a different direction, the first of a two-volume biography of Abraham J. Heschel by Edward Kaplan and Samuel Dresner appeared. Heschel, almost 30 years after his death, has established a claim as the most influential Jewish theologian in the United States during the 20th century.

The proliferation of personal memoirs and autobiographies was still more notable than the more scholarly and distanced writings of biography. These ranged from Stanley Ely's self-described growing up *In Jewish Texas* to David Klinghofer's *The Lord Will Gather Me In*—the account of his journey from secular liberalism to Orthodoxy and an editorial position on the conservative *National Review*—to Susi Bechhofer's autobiographical narrative, which begins with the discovery that secreted behind her Welsh Baptist adoptive parents was a Jewish mother who had died in Auschwitz. Another variation on the theme of identity crisis figures in Stephen Dubner's *Turbulent Souls*—the story of his belated discovery that his ostensibly Catholic parents were converts from Judaism and then of his own return to it. A number of fiction writers also turned their hands to

this form of personal history, examples being Grace Paley's *Just as I Thought* and Max Apple's *I Love Gootie: My Grandmother's Story*. The proliferation of autobiographical accounts by groups as well as by individuals has been sufficiently extensive to lead to their collection in anthologies: so, for example, *Growing Up Jewish*, edited by Jay David, and *Daughters of Kings: Growing Up as a Jewish Woman in America*, a series of individual narratives written by members of the Radcliffe Institute and edited by Leslie Brody.

Viewed in social terms, such accounts seem less significant in the writing than in the large readership they have attracted. When the history of the self that is described is so clearly affected by its socially contingent character—in this case, Jewish identity as it emerges in an American context—it is reasonable to conclude that those narratives express deep-seated interests of their readers as well as of their authors.

Other, in some ways even more compelling books could be found on the boundary of these examples of personal narratives. One of the most widely reviewed books of the year was *Kaddish*, in which Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of the *New Republic,* traces the contours of a year in which he said Kaddish for his father; he here combines the form of a memoir with historical references to the evolving tradition of saying Kaddish.

The historian Vera Schwarcz's *Bridge Across Broken Time* compares the roles of memory in Jewish and Chinese culture through the lens of the author's own history in which those two traditions became interwoven.

It seems more than likely that one effect of Holocaust memoirs, testimonies, and histories (which continued to have substantial additions, as in the Yale historian Peter Gay's *My German Question* and in Yaffa Eliach's *There Was Once a World*) has been to stimulate other similar but non-Holocaust writings. Perhaps spurred on by the "postmodern" emphasis on originality, increasing numbers of authors have come back to the one subject on which they are the exclusive authority—namely, their own views of themselves. But even taken together, these causes would not explain the emphasis on personal or group memory without the additional pressure that a concern about the future adds to the weight of the past—and the question that then arises of how to constitute a "self" in the present. The title of a book by Alan Dershowitz provides an apt formulation of the elements brought together in this tension: *The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century*.

And of course, as fiction often imitates life (perhaps only more so), there also the turn to personal history was evident. Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist* filled in still another sector of that author's Balzacian map of American Jewish life in the past half century—the 33rd book of Roth's own library, which he began in 1959 with *Goodbye Columbus*. Norman Mailer published a literary analogue to an artist's "retrospective" exhibition in *The Time of Our Time*, an anthology of excerpts from his novels and nonfiction writing over the long career that began explosively with his World War II novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, first published

50 years earlier when Mailer was 25. Among younger writers, the recent visibility and strength of the Orthodox community, reflecting both the Ba'al Teshuvah ("return") movement and the tendency toward more stringent observance within parts of Orthodoxy, seem to have become a significant subject for fiction. So, Allegra Goodman's first novel, *Kaaterskill Falls,* won a place among the finalists for the National Book Award with its depiction of life in an Orthodox community in the Catskills. The principal character in Elizabeth Swados's *Flamboyant* is an Orthodox school teacher who finds herself attracted to, and then entangled with, a drag queen. These follow a sequence of earlier best-selling novels situated on the line between Orthodoxy and the world beyond it by Chaim Potok, as well as the popular series of detective novels by Faye Kellerman, whose detective is led both to Judaism and to the solutions of crimes that come his way by the Orthodox divorcee whom he marries in the course of the series.

Notable in translation from the Hebrew during the year were two novels by the Israeli author, Aharon Appelfeld—*The Conversion*, and *The Iron Tracks*; the latter takes an unusual turn in Appelfeld's continuing journey back to the Holocaust as a subject with its focus on a calculated act of revenge by a survivor. Another outstanding Israeli writer, A. B. Yehoshua, turns much further back in history—foreshadowing the present in the first millennium C.E., with his novel *A Journey to the End of the Millennium.*

A conference on "Writing the Jewish Future," held in California (at Stanford and Berkeley) in February, brought together a number of writers from the United States, including Cynthia Ozick, Chaim Potok, and Grace Paley, but also Appelfeld and Joshua Sobol from Israel, Dan Jacobson from England, and Victor Perera from Guatemala.

A variety of books appeared on aspects of Jewish history and philosophy and culture, again spanning the range from popular to scholarly. Perhaps the most unusual among these was the best-selling *The Gift of the Jews* by Thomas Cahill—the second stop in that author's ecumenical tour of extraordinary cultural contributions after his *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. From the direction of popular therapy and advice books came *The Ten Commandments* by the "conservative" psychologist, Laura Schlesinger (writing together with Stewart Vogel, the rabbi of her congregation); Schlesinger now appears in public as a social and ideological balance to her "liberal" counterpart, Dr. Ruth (Westheimer). "New Age" writing continued to elaborate its Jewish connection in works like Rodger Kamenetz's *Stalking Elijah* and Tirzah Firestone's *With Roots in Heaven.* Toward the scholarly end of this spectrum, a number of important books appeared in the traditional fields of Jewish studies. These include Arnold Eisen's *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, winner of the newly initiated Koret Book Prize in Jewish Philosophy and Thought—an analysis of contemporary Judaism in terms of practice rather than the frameworks of belief more typically regarded as the basis for such analysis; and *Engendering Judaism* by Rachel Adler, which makes a substantial contribution to the growing development of feminist themes in Jew-

ish religious and philosophical thought. (Three $10,000 Koret Institute Book Prizes—in Jewish literature, history and biography, and philosophy and thought—are now to be awarded annually, running parallel to the National Jewish Book Awards.)

The American Jewish presence in academic and scholarly fields of the humanities and the natural and social sciences—in significantly large proportions among faculties of the preeminent private and public universities—has by now come to be taken for granted even more than had its earlier absence. There have as yet been few studies of how this opening of the academy to Jewish students and faculty affected the shape of learning within the academy itself. Susanne Klingenstein's 1998 book on *Enlarging America: The Cultural Work of American Literary Scholars, 1930–1990,* which follows her earlier study of *Jews in the American Academy: 1900–1940*, suggests the lines along which such broader analyses might move. Specific directions followed in several 1998 works provide a concrete view of the evidence and questions that this project would address. Thus, for example, it seems clear that the important subject of slavery for American history has had significant contributions from American Jewish scholars—including Stanley Elkin's early invocation of the Holocaust as a basis for comparing the respective responses of the two groups of victims, extending to the more systematic writings of Herbert Gutman and Herbert Klein, the statistical measurements of Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*, and David Brion Davis's sweeping studies and comparisons of New World and classical slavery. This body of work, which collectively is quite fundamental to the current study of slavery, was enhanced in 1998 by two significant additions. One of these—Eli Faber's *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade*—is explicitly related to American Jewish history in its description of the (as Faber views it, very limited) role of Jews in the slave trade. The other work is a comprehensive—and, in several reviewers' estimate, "revolutionary"—analysis of stages and varieties in the institution of American slavery, which is more often conceived of as homogeneous; this, in Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone*.

The Cultures of Humor and Cooking

Perhaps more than any other expressive form, humor bridges the divide between popular and high culture, which may account at least in part for the decision of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture to establish a national award in American Jewish Humor. The winner of the first award, celebrated at a December dinner in New York City, was Alan King. The choice of Elie Wiesel to present the award further attests to the convergence, or even confusion, of quite different forms of cultural memory and creativity. The award itself was a useful reminder of both the extent and variety of American Jewish humor—in live performance, in radio and television, in film, on stage, in literature, comic strips, and other venues.

Food and cooking are central markers of cultural expression and examples of the forms that undercut the distinction between popular and "high" culture. Certainly Joan Nathan's 26-part PBS television series on "Jewish Cooking in America" during the year was addressed to an audience of diverse backgrounds and tastes—as had been her best-selling cookbook published under the same title in 1994. That the "genre" of Jewish cookbooks itself has an American history may come as something of a surprise, but the tradition reaches back at least as far as *Jewish Cookery*, by Esther Levy, published in Philadelphia in 1871, followed in Chicago in 1889 by *Aunt Babette's Cookbook*.

The spread of retail food certified as "kosher" has also emerged as a cultural as well as a religious phenomenon. (On this count, 1998 may be recalled as the year of the Oreo—with the largest selling cookie in the United States winning kosher certification.) The growth in kosher food sales is perhaps more notable inasmuch as only about two million of the 7.5 to 10 million regular purchasers of these products are estimated to be Jewish; the other three-quarters of the total—including about three million Muslims—choose them for other religious reasons or because they are lactose-intolerant and want reliably nondairy products, because they are vegetarians who want a guarantee that no meat products are used in the food they buy, or for more general reasons related to quality. However it is explained, the market for kosher foods has grown over the past four years at a rate of 12 percent a year. On the order of 45,000 products are now certified as kosher—up from 1,750 just 20 years ago, with the average supermarket stocking 13,000 of them. "Kosherfest," the kosher-foods trade fair, brought together some 370 different exhibitors in its now annual appearance in New York.

The opening in New York's Shea Stadium during the 1998 baseball season of a *Glatt* kosher food stand selling hot dogs, knishes, and felafel thus reflects both general acculturation (with baseball itself part of this) together with an internal shift in the Orthodox community's observance of religious standards that has raised the bar another rung from the once generally acceptable category of simply "kosher." The 40-odd kosher restaurants in Manhattan alone represent at least a fivefold increase in the past decade. A related development, also with implications for the general question of acculturation in all sectors of the American Jewish community, is the significant expansion in the celebration of Jewish holidays—especially Passover, traditionally a gathering of the family at home—in hotels and resorts and on cruise ships; many of the venues chosen for these are in ever more distant places (Hawaii, Cancun, Banff, the Bahamas), in hotels certified kosher specifically for the occasion.

Holocaust-Related Developments

In the United States, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., remained a principal focus of Holocaust-related activities. During the year, it reached the figure of ten million visitors since its opening in 1993 (with the esti-

mate at least constant and perhaps even growing of more than 50 percent non-Jewish visitors). In addition to the research for which the museum provides facilities and fellowships through its Research Institute, it also serves as a forum for regular lectures and for a number of international conferences. Perhaps the most significant in 1998 among the latter was the conference, cosponsored by the State Department and attended by representatives of 44 countries, on "Holocaust Era Assets." Clearly, the moral, legal, and political issues posed by the existence of such assets are both substantive and substantial, but there is also discomfort over the danger that analysis of the Holocaust should be in terms of economic costs and compensation. The museum itself was troubled during the year by turmoil resulting in the forced resignation of its director, Dr. Walter Reich, over a controversial invitation and then dis-invitation to PLO chairman Yasir Arafat to visit the museum; this was followed by the withdrawal—for quite different reasons—of the newly appointed director of the museum's Research Institute, Prof. John K. Roth, primarily related to criticism of statements in Roth's writings about political developments in Israel and the United States. The balancing act forced on the museum by the sometimes conflicting expectations of its several sponsors and constituencies (the U.S. government, the presidentially appointed council of the museum, the Jewish community, individual donors, the public at large) has posed dilemmas since the earliest stages of its planning that, with its present structure, are unlikely to be resolved. The evident accomplishments of the museum seem all the more notable in light of this.

It is of considerable interest that several Americans are playing significant roles in Holocaust institutions in Germany. Probably the single largest cultural issue there during the year concerned the erection of a national Holocaust memorial, with the first round of entries in the design competition set aside as too controversial. In the second round, a design by American Jewish architect Peter Eisenman was selected, but was then challenged during national elections by the Minister of Culture-to-be, Michael Naumann. He proposed that the memorial should be a building housing the survivor video-archives now being assembled on an international scale under the auspices of Steven Spielberg. Spielberg himself, already celebrated for three World War II films—*Schindler's List* in 1993, *Saving Private Ryan* in 1998, and *The Last Days* in 1999—had become enough of an international icon to appear on the front cover of *Stern*, the large-circulation German news weekly.

The new Jewish Museum in Berlin (opened in January 1999) will have a supervisory role over the memorial once it is constructed. The new museum's director, Michael Blumenthal (one-time secretary of the U.S. Treasury), and its chief curator, Tom Freudenheim (formerly an administrative officer of YIVO and before that of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington) are German-born American Jews who escaped the Nazis; the architect for the new and dramatically unusual building is Daniel Libeskind, born in Lodz but also an American citizen. Early on in the planning for the Holocaust memorial, the German government

took the unusual step of including in the five-person national commission appointed to judge the competition the American-Jewish scholar and author James Young.

A Holocaust import from Europe made its mark this year. *Life Is Beautiful*, the Italian film written, directed, and acted in by Roberto Benigni, created a considerable stir—evoking both plaudits and negative criticism—through its quasi-comic depiction of a family deported to Auschwitz, where the father attempts to shield his young son from the camp's brutalities by pretending with the boy that the camp's "activities" are part of a game.

I Will Bear Witness, an edited translation of the first section of the diary previously published to acclaim in Germany, by Viktor von Klemperer, was a notable addition to the memoir literature of the Holocaust. The author is a professor of literature who, even as a convert from Judaism to Protestantism and with a non-Jewish wife, escaped deportation only in the confusion of the days after the fire-bombing of Dresden where he lived.

Cultural Cycles and Sites

The spread across the United States of annual cultural events, celebrated at approximately the same time in communities coast to coast, has become an analogue in cultural terms to the expectations and regularity of the religious holidays. National Jewish Book Month (November) has now led to book exhibits and "National Book Weeks" offering lectures and readings in communities across the country, from the major metropolitan areas to much smaller ones, far from urban centers. A similar phenomenon is the Jewish Film Festival, also organized in numerous communities, usually between late January and mid-March. This is not to be confused with the Israel Film Festival, which made its 14th annual appearance in New York City and Los Angeles, with showings there of full-length films, television films, documentaries, and experimental films.

The new building for the Center for Jewish History, which was completed during 1998 and formally opened on January 3, 1999—located near the lower end of Manhattan's Fifth Avenue—brings under one roof four significant institutions of Jewish culture: YIVO, the American Jewish Historical Society, the Leo Baeck Institute, and the Yeshiva University Museum. The combined collections of these individual agencies represent the single largest Jewish archival site outside of Israel, including more than a half million volumes and 100,000,000 documents. The proximity of the new center to the New York University Skirball Center for Jewish Studies adds to the potential impact of this new entity.

The National Yiddish Book Center, located in handsome quarters (opened in 1997) in Amherst, Massachusetts, continued its work as a collection and distribution center for Yiddish books (in these functions, in fact, it serves as an international center, with both its collections and distributions extending beyond the United States). Beyond this, it has introduced innovative programs for repro-

ducing Yiddish books as well as programs and courses in Yiddish and Yiddish culture. The center's project of "digitalizing" up to half of the 40,000 individual titles estimated to constitute the sum of Yiddish books ever published—a process which would then enable the center to "publish" any individual digitalized title on demand—continues apace; this project received added impetus during the year when the center became the beneficiary of a substantial grant from the Steven Spielberg Foundation.

Continued efforts in the American Jewish theater centered mainly in New York, but spread elsewhere as well (to the Long Wharf in New Haven, the Northlight and the Steppenwolf in Chicago, and the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles). *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in its revised version, continued to draw large audiences in its New York venue; there, too, the Folksbiene's *Zise Khaloymes* (with English translation), Mandy Patinkin's *Mamaloshen,* and Avi Hoffman's *Too Jewish Two* were most immediately directed to Jewish audiences. Two other plays with an ostensibly broader reach—*Visiting Mr. Green,* about the relationship between two Jewish men, and *Chaim's Love Song*, about the relationship between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman—clearly drew on Jewish themes and idioms.

With the introduction of "cyberspace," the very notion of cultural activity confined to physical structures or centers is undergoing dramatic change; the appearance in the United States of a variety of Web sites and "lists" related to Jewish studies and Jewish culture has increasingly become a phenomenon to reckon with—a new source of communication and potentially of community. The "H-Judaic" list, dedicated to historical, religious, philosophical, and cultural topics in Jewish studies recently entered its tenth year, with about 2,000 members or correspondents and arguably a still larger public reached by its spin-off Web sites.

At least three of these Web sites are related to topics concerning the Holocaust; other sites range in their topics from Kabbalah to the Daf Yomi to Judeo-Maghrebi literature—almost always free and open to anyone who is interested. The National Foundation for Jewish Culture maintains on the Web a continually updated calendar and review of current Jewish cultural events occurring across the country. Such sites, wherever they originate, are international in the novel sense that no more effort (or time) is required to participate in them from 6,000 miles away than locally. The effects of such proximity and of the medium more generally for cultural exchange may still be indeterminate, but there can be little doubt of the long-range potential for encouraging the establishment of communities with quite different structures from the older and more familiar ones.

The 50th anniversary of Israel's Independence in May 1998 was celebrated with relatively little fanfare in the United States. This unexpected development reflected at least in part the muted Jubilee celebration in Israel itself, stemming from organizational disagreements there about how the Jubilee should be celebrated, and from social and political strains that intensified during the year in more general aspects of the relationship between the American Jewish community and Israel.

Notwithstanding such tensions, the relationship between the American Jewish and the Israeli Jewish communities remains a basic and in some ways increasingly important factor in the social and cultural thought and expression of both. Israeli authors—principally, Aharon Appelfeld, David Grossman, Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua—continue to draw substantial audiences both for their books in translation and for their personal appearances and lectures. That Israeli authors have more of a presence in the United States than American Jewish authors—and American Jewish culture more generally—have in Israel is undoubtedly related to the larger tradition of Israeli attitudes toward Diaspora communities.

Exhibitions of Israeli art continue to appear in the major venues of Jewish art in the United States; so, for example, "After Rabin: New Art from Israel," shown at the Jewish Museum in New York City. The "Silk Paintings" of Israeli artist Chaim Kirkell were among the eight exhibitions mounted simultaneously by the Yeshiva University Museum. The Israeli singer Chava Alberstein turned to Yiddish rather than Hebrew themes in her CD "The Well," which she recorded with the "American" Klezmatics.

One way of visualizing in a single sweep the diversity and inventiveness of American Jewish culture is by sampling the topics of conferences and other types of gatherings that took place during the year. In addition to those cited above, there were conferences on the History of the Catskills, Babylonian Jewish Research, and "In Search of Ourselves: The Power of Jewish Women" (by the New York City Hadassah). And then there were the (often by now annual) conferences of the Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, the Council of American Jewish Museums, and the 8th International Conference on Jewish Medical Ethics; the five-day "KlezKamp," in its 13th annual gathering (featuring both Klezmer performances and scholarly reports on the science of "klezmerology"); the "Kosherfest," also by now an annual exhibition and advertising opportunity for the manufacturers (and retailers) of kosher foods; and the Association for Jewish Studies (with 1,600 members, mostly Jewish studies faculty at American colleges and universities) in its 30th annual meeting in Boston.

The highly touted Hollywood film *The Prince of Egypt* may have led to disappointing box-office receipts, but the fact remains that an animated film (in earlier terms, a feature-length cartoon) based on the biblical life of Moses still had box-office receipts of more than $100,000,000 in the first several months after its release. The historical cogency of the film's focus on the "Hebrews" rather than "Jews" may have reflected an intended distancing effect, and the film had some commercial precedent, as in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*. Furthermore, it is unclear whether its large audiences were drawn to the film because of traditional associations with the subject, because they knew little about it but wished to know more, or for reasons having nothing to do with the biblical account at all.

In looking back, we find 1998 closing the parentheses of a number of significant obituaries (19??–1998). The year witnessed the deaths of such diverse con-

tributors to American Jewish as well as to American and in some cases international cultural history as Alfred Kazin—a founder of the field of American studies through his path-breaking literary genealogy *On Native Ground*, and author as well of the striking memoir of his own Brownsville youth, *A Walker in the City*; the comedian Henny Youngman (English-born) whose "Take my wife. *Please*," has yielded the distinction of an entry in Bartlett's *Book of Quotations*; the distinctive national political figures of Bella Abzug and Abraham Ribicoff, each of whom shifted the policies of their (Democrat) party at least a measurable length; the world-renowned mathematician Andre Weil of the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton (brother of the philosopher Simone Weil, who died in England during World War II), an emigré from their native France; Jeffrey Moss, one of the creative forces in developing and sustaining the television program "Sesame Street," which in English and translated into numerous foreign languages and shown on television screens worldwide has been favored by generations of children and their parents since its inception; Sid Luckman, who went from an undergraduate career at Columbia to an unlikely future as star quarterback for the professional Chicago Bears football team; the popular novelist Jerome Weidman; and a central figure in the development of modern American dance, Jerome Robbins. If there is little likelihood of identifying common themes or meanings among these figures and their accomplishments, it would be no less arbitrary to ignore what was common in their histories and aspirations. As it would also be a failure not to recognize in their works a creative urge and energy that found for itself a fertile ground—fertile in part despite and even perhaps because of the friction their efforts sometimes encountered. Such generalities about the past offer no assurance for the future, but in themselves they say something significant about the present.

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