Privatizing Jewish Identity

The emphasis on individual self-fulfillment that pervaded American society and that had affected American Jewish life through the 1990s continued unabated in 2000. One of the year’s most important books on American Jewry, The Jew Within: Self, Family, and Community in America, by Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen, made that abundantly clear. Interviewing 50 young-adult Jews around the country who were “moderately affiliated”—neither deeply committed nor totally alienated—and placing their responses in the framework of the findings of survey research, Cohen and Eisen concluded that such Jews were quite open to Jewish identification so long as they maintained the right to define what being Jewish meant to them. Two of the book’s chapter titles told the story: “The Sovereign Self” and “The Retreat of Public Judaism.”

Indicating just how pervasive such individualistic Judaism had become, former New York Times reporter Ari Goldman, in his new book Being Jewish: The Spiritual and Cultural Practice of Judaism Today, presented an “Orthodox” case for such individualism. The book sympathetically described the idiosyncratic practices of Jews who decided for themselves how to express their Jewishness, not as part of an integrated system of religious discipline, but as what felt right for them. For Goldman, a self-identified Orthodox Jew, the vast corpus of Jewish learning and practice provided a kind of smorgasbord of Judaism, from which the individual Jew was free to take and sample what was personally meaningful.

In religious terms, such individualistic Judaism was often characterized as “spirituality,” a term with no simple definition. As Gary Rosenblatt, editor of the New York Jewish Week, put it in a headline (January 14), “Spirituality (Whatever That Means) Is On The Rise.” According to Rabbi Shmuel Boteach, guru of the new Jewish revival and author of Kosher Sex and Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments, “Judaism is the perfect spiritual model for ‘Generation X,’ the ‘X’ representing the confluence of the spiritual and material modalities” (New York Jewish Week, February 25). Michael Lerner, the controversial editor of Tikkun magazine, published a book, Spirit Matters, which argued for a Jewish spirituality that seeks to change the world through social action. “I’m speaking out of the prophetic tradition,” Lerner told a reporter. “What 9-Letter Word Has Been Deleted from Reform Teachings?” asked Lawrence Kushner in the fall issue of Reform Judaism. His answer was, “Mysticism—and it’s time to correct that mistake.” Arguing against the assumption that Reform was by definition rational in
its religious approach, Kushner insisted that Reform Jews could, in principle, be just as immersed in spiritual experience as “Black Hat Orthodoxy.”

Inevitably, the personalization of Jewish identity brought a reevaluation of the entire question of Jewish continuity. Rabbi Irwin Kula, for example, president of CLAL (Center for Jewish Learning and Leadership), argued that what others saw as the erosion of Jewish practice was actually “a sign of the ongoing and healthy transformation of Jewish identity,” since such identity was ultimately a personal matter not subject to objective criteria. Thus there was no Jewish continuity problem, only a reluctance to abandon outmoded definitions of what made a Jew (New York Jewish Week, March 17).

June saw the release of a long-awaited study of the New York Jewish community, Connections and Journeys: Assessing Critical Opportunities for Enhancing Jewish Identity, which also utilized the new, more subjective, approach. Directed by Bethamie Horowitz and sponsored by the UJA-Federation of New York, the survey was based on interviews and focus groups with over 1,500 Jews aged 22–52. Eschewing the standard questions asked on previous similar surveys that measured attitudes and practices associated with Judaism, Connections and Journeys sought to get the respondents to tell the stories of their personal “journeys,” that is, to relate their earlier Jewish experiences and their Jewish expectations for the future. This approach provided a sense of how Jewish identification evolved over a person’s lifetime. Horowitz found that feelings of attachment to Jewishness grew over time, even though Jewish practice tended to decline. Horowitz therefore concluded that Jewish identity “isn’t necessarily declining.” Hailing the study, Jewish communal leaders said they would design programs to assist Jews in their personal Jewish journeys. The 2000 National Jewish Population Survey—not expected to release its results till 2002 (see below, pp. 257–58)—was also said to be using more subjective measurements of Jewishness than had its 1990 predecessor.

Social scientist Charles Liebman launched a blistering attack on the subjective emphasis at the annual meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies in December. Acknowledging the fact that what constitutes Jewishness does evolve over time, Liebman nevertheless charged that the growing tendency to downplay any objective criteria for determining Jewish identity was an unscientific surrender to the assimilationist forces in American Jewish life, and he virtually accused certain unnamed researchers of dishonestly tailoring their findings to fit the optimistic wishful thinking of the bodies that funded them.

Acceptance of Intermarriage

So pervasive was the loss of any objective criteria for defining Jewishness that even marriage to a non-Jew was no longer taken as an act of separation from the Jewish community. On September 23, the front page of New York Times “arts and ideas” section ran a story headlined, “A Little Bad News, a Little Good News.”
There was a big photo of the marriage of Rabbi Roger Ross to the Rev. Deborah Steen, "with rabbis, ministers and priests participating." Under it was a much smaller picture of a band performing music. The caption noted: "A high rate of intermarriage has led Jews to worry about assimilation. At the same time, Jewish culture is undergoing a renaissance, as seen in the popularity of klezmer music." That the marriage of a Jew to a Christian carried no more significance on the negative side than did klezmer's popularity on the positive side was not simply the idiosyncratic take of the reporter: Intermarriage had become a non-issue for most of American Jewry, and, as Cohen and Eisen demonstrated in *The Jew Within*, Jews saw no contradiction between being Jewish and having a non-Jewish spouse.

The year 2000 saw the publication of *What to Do When You're Dating a Jew*, a book by two Jewish women telling non-Jews enough about Jewish foods, holidays, and folkways so they would not embarrass themselves while courting Jews ("If you can hold your own at a Jewish dinner table, you've won half the battle"). Dovetail Institute, an organization for Jewish-Christian families, held a convention in June to talk about the "interfaith" Sunday schools that were sprouting up in many communities. A group called Jewish Family and Life, which had a Web site devoted to the needs of intermarried families, publicly urged the Jewish community to drop the goal of conversion from its outreach programs, and simply to encourage the Jewish involvement of two-religion families. Some mainstream Jewish leaders apparently agreed. Barry Shrage, president of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, one of the largest federations in the country, told a reporter that every case of intermarriage was an "opportunity." Shrage wanted the community to send a message to the non-Jewish spouse: "We have a gorgeous tradition. Come learn with us" (*New York Times*, September 23). New York UJA-Federation funded one program for engaged interfaith couples and another to train counselors to work with such couples. In September, Hillel at New York University announced a Rosh Hashanah workshop for interfaith couples, and Hillel's national headquarters explained that local branches had the leeway to decide such matters on their own.

Clear evidence of the breakdown of the old intermarriage taboo was provided by the American Jewish Committee's annual survey of American Jewish opinion, which was released in the fall. Eighty percent of the sample said that, "interracial marriage is inevitable in an open society." Asked if "it would pain me if my child married a gentile," 39 percent agreed and 56 percent disagreed. While 25 percent felt that converting the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism was the "best response" to intermarriage, 68 percent did not think so. And, in a question that had particular resonance in a year when a Jewish vice-presidential candidate would be challenged on this issue — "Is it racist to oppose Jewish-gentile marriages?" — half of the Jews said "yes" and 47 percent "no." Fully 57 percent of one half-sample and 42 percent of the other half believed that rabbis should officiate at mixed marriages even if non-Jewish clergy was also involved in the ceremony. And yet, reflecting a lingering sense that intermarriage was somehow not good for the Jew-
ish people, over two-thirds of the sample agreed that, "the Jewish community has an obligation to urge Jews to marry Jews."

**Keeping Young Jews in the Fold**

The fact that Jewish identity had come detached from its old moorings and was now very much a matter of individual preference made the community's search for ways of attracting and keeping young Jews' allegiance all the more difficult. Rabbis, educators, communal professionals, and philanthropists did what they could to light the spark of Jewishness—however defined—in as many souls as they could reach.

**The Israel Experience**

The much-heralded Birthright Israel program, first announced by philanthropists Michael Steinhardt and Charles Bronfman in 1998, sought to give every young Jew, as a "birthright," a free ten-day trip to Israel, in the expectation that contact with the Jewish state would strengthen the participants' Jewish consciousness and lead to increased involvement in other areas of Jewish life. By the end of 1999, with other philanthropists and the Israeli government also committed to help fund the initiative, the first group of 6,000 college students prepared to leave for Israel on their winter break.

If the press reports were to be believed, Birthright Israel was a huge success. Interviews with the participants in Israel and, after their return, in the U.S., indicated a surge of Jewish pride, a determination to marry within the fold and create a Jewish home, and even some interest in eventual aliyah. Columnist Leonard Fein captured the widespread euphoria in the title of his piece on the project, "Blown Away by the Power of 10 Days" (*Forward*, January 21). The Jewish media continued to track some of the students after their return to see if the trip had an enduring impact, and the results were generally positive. As more than 1,750 other Jewish students registered for Birthright Israel trips set to depart during spring break or the summer, some observers who had been skeptical about the project in its planning stages admitted their mistake. "Birthright's Surprises are Convincing Some Skeptics," was the headline in the *Forward* (January 21), and one repentant critic wrote a detailed mea culpa, "Birthright Israel: Why I Was Wrong" (*Moment*, August).

In July, the positive impressionistic evidence was buttressed by the findings of a survey, carried out by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, of the short-term impact of the trip. Conducted on-line and over the phone, the survey found that the percentage of participants feeling a strong connection to the Jewish people rose from 40 percent to 60 percent as a result of the trip, and the percentage feeling a strong connection to Israel jumped from 25 percent to 55 percent. A control group, made up of students who had wanted to
Success bred success. In February, UJA-Federation of New York became the first federation to pledge its support for Birthright Israel, contributing $500,000. Other federations followed suit, and by the end of the year local federations had contributed a total of $18 million. In addition, United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of the federations, pledged $52.5 million over five years plus $90,000 for follow-up programs, and Hadassah gave $5 million. Hillel, the Jewish campus organization that handled the actual recruiting and selection of participants, had to hire eight new staff members to work on the project. Richard Joel, Hillel's president, declared: "Birthright Israel has become the strongest arrow in our quiver of engagement." But the unforeseen outbreak of violence in Israel at the end of the year endangered the program, as thousands of students canceled their plans to visit Israel on winter break after the U.S. State Department, on October 24, issued a warning to American citizens to "defer all travel" to Israel and the territories.

**IS THE SYNAGOGUE THE ANSWER?**

In recent years, those who worried about the erosion of Jewish identity had come increasingly to blame the American synagogue, and in 2000 this sentiment received unprecedented public expression. "The real truth," wrote Rabbi Sidney Schwartz, "is that most Jews can't pray. Nor does the contemporary American synagogue offer much help in this regard" (Forward, April 21). Schwartz contended that an exit poll of Jews leaving services would find few affirmative answers to the question, "Have you had a meaningful prayer experience?" Journalist David Margolick admitted: "Going to a synagogue—any synagogue, it seems—is pure torture for me. I literally loathe the experience" (Forward, September 22). Giving voice to the feelings of many young Jews, Margolick complained about the length of the prayers, their unintelligibility, their "excruciatingly repetitious" and "ossified" nature, and the rabbi's "pretentious and banal" sermon. Even the rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary seemed to agree: the regular Friday evening service there collapsed as everyone flocked to a "happy, clappy" Carlebach-style minyan. According to Connections and Journeys, Bethamie Horowitz's report on Jewish identity, while 34 percent of Jews in New York City between the ages of 22 and 52 said that their parents helped them develop a positive Jewish identification, only 5 percent could say that about their congregational rabbis, and 10 percent felt that rabbis had influenced them negatively.

Given the historic centrality of the synagogue in Jewish life, criticism of the institution was greeted with alarm, especially in the Conservative movement, where the problem seemed most acute. Unlike the situation in Reform Judaism, Conservative synagogues retained the long traditional service in Hebrew, but, unlike the Orthodox, relatively few Conservative congregants understood the words or felt that regular prayer was a religious obligation. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, ex-
ecutive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, threw the ball into the court of the federations, arguing that the quality of synagogue life could only be upgraded with increased staffing, and that required more communal funding (Forward, May 19). Chancellor Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary agreed, and, noting that fewer than half of American Jews belonged to a synagogue, urged a public campaign “to aim at defining citizenship in the American Jewish polity by membership in a synagogue” (New York Jewish Week, September 22).

In fact, Synagogue 2000, a joint Reform-Conservative project to revitalize congregational worship, was already receiving federation funding. And Rabbi Sidney Schwartz’s new book, Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue, provided four case studies of synagogues that, each in its own way, succeeded, he felt, in inspiring Jews through intimacy, warmth, and inclusiveness. In September 2000, three philanthropists—Charles Schusterman, Michael Steinhardt, and Edgar Bronfman—launched a new initiative, STAR (Synagogue Transformation and Renewal). These men invited some 150 rabbis and educators from around the country to Chicago for a two-day meeting about the project. Many of those who came were dismayed at what they saw as the philanthropists’ dismissive attitude toward the contemporary synagogue and at Steinhardt’s assertion that non-Orthodox forms of Judaism were “historical accidents,” but critics were reluctant to speak for the record. The philanthropists together pledged at least $18 million over five years in the form of challenge grants for new programs, the hiring of outside consultants, and training programs for rabbis in pastoral skills and business management.

For some, the apparent crisis of synagogue Judaism raised the possibility of promoting secular Judaism as an organized, coherent alternative. To be sure, the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews had existed for some time, but its eighth biennial conference, held in New York in September with some 250 people in attendance, received unprecedented coverage, largely due to the participation of several eminent speakers, including Robert Pinsky, poet laureate of the United States. Secular Judaism was a potent reality in Israel, the Jewish state, and high hopes were expressed at the conference that unaffiliated American Jews who were interested in their cultural heritage but turned off by religion could be convinced to join the movement. With that in mind, the U.S. branch of secular humanist Jews moved its national office from a suburb of Detroit to New York, and hired a new executive director with a strong background in public relations. There was even talk of setting up an institute of secular Jewish learning. Several observers noted, however, that very few of the people at the New York conference were under the age of 50.

Day Schools

For some time, as concern mounted over Jewish continuity, Jewish day-school education—which had been virtually an Orthodox preserve—had become in-
creasingly popular outside the Orthodox community as well. Early in 2000, the Avi Chai Foundation released a national study showing an increase of some 25,000 students in Jewish day schools during the 1990s, with the largest growth in enrollment coming in the non-Orthodox sector. Fifteen new non-Orthodox Jewish high schools were planning to open around the country within the next three years, three of them Conservative and the other 12 nondenominational community schools. The proliferation of day schools worsened an already severe shortage of qualified teachers and administrators at all levels. Eliot Spack, executive director of CAJE (Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education), warned, in August, “Hundreds of Jewish classes will open in September without a teacher.”

In light of the communal focus on day-school education as a potent means for the transfer of Jewish culture to the next generation and the heavy financial burden such schools entailed, many were shocked to hear that the JCPA (Jewish Council for Public Affairs), at its annual plenum in February, voted to oppose, on church-state grounds, government aid to private schools even where approved by the courts, such as for the costs of transportation, textbooks, and special education (see above, pp. 183–84). The motion to oppose such aid—actually a reversal of previous JCPA policy—was proposed by the National Council of Jewish Women and passed 318-259.

The question of how to fund Jewish education was the subject of two conferences later in the year. The American Jewish Committee, which had gone on record, in December 1999, in favor of more communal funding for Jewish education including day schools, hosted a meeting in June. One presenter, Chicago businessman George Hanus, explained his plan for all Jews to leave 5 percent of their estates to Jewish education. However Dr. Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary, insisted that the huge sums necessary were not available from Jewish sources and would have to come from government, and John Ruskay, executive vice president of New York UJA-Federation, agreed that “it is time to seriously reconsider” the traditional Jewish antipathy to government aid for private education. In September, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, made up of major donors to day schools, heard from several experts that no less than $1 billion would be needed for the day schools. Since many of the federations and family foundations were burdened with other responsibilities, several of the speakers suggested that the community would do well to reconsider its opposition to government vouchers.

**Liebermania**

None of the ideas and projects to promote Jewish identity had anything near the impact on American Jews in 2000 as the nomination of a Jew for vice president. As early as March rumor had Senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut on Al Gore’s “short list” for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination. The
possibility that the first Jew to be named to a national ticket would observe the kashrut and Sabbath laws and be publicly identified with Orthodox Judaism served to project internal Jewish debates over Jewish identity into the national arena, and this, in turn, made American Jews even more conscious of them and more anxious about their implications.

All spring and into the summer the media discussed how Lieberman's Orthodoxy would affect his possible candidacy. Few doubted that Lieberman's eloquent denunciation, on the Senate floor, of President Bill Clinton's conduct in the Monica Lewinsky affair, rooted as it was in his Orthodox Jewish worldview, strengthened his moral authority with the voters (though he had, in the end, voted against impeachment), and that his traditional religiosity, criticism of the values of Hollywood, and openness to school vouchers might attract evangelical Protestants and traditional Catholics to support the ticket. But could a Sabbath observer function as vice president, and, potentially, president? Lieberman did not ride in cars, answer telephones, or use electrical appliances on Saturdays. Reporters familiar with his career downplayed the issue, noting that his religious scruples had not interfered with the effective discharge of his Senate responsibilities: He had walked to the Capitol on the Sabbath and cast voice votes, and, where national security or the "needs of the community" were at stake, Orthodox rabbis had granted him leeway to fulfill his public duties.

Far more challenging was the question raised by journalist Philip Weiss, a Jew married to a non-Jew, in a New York Observer column (May 1), entitled: "What Would a Jewish Veep Say about Intermarriage?" Weiss noted that the Orthodox Judaism espoused by Lieberman was not only officially and adamantly opposed to intermarriage, but actually called it a threat to Judaism, barred such couples from its institutions, and treated them as pariahs. In Weiss's eyes this was no different from the racism exhibited by Bob Jones University, which till recently had prohibited interracial dating, and which George W. Bush, the likely Republican presidential candidate, had been criticized for visiting. Weiss's comments received little attention at the time, since a Lieberman candidacy still seemed like a long shot.

On August 7, when Gore indeed named Lieberman as his running mate, the questions previously raised hypothetically suddenly became quite real, and the American people got a quick education in the arcana of Halakhah, Jewish law. The New York Times, in its lead editorial the next day, put the Sabbath issue front and center:

As an Orthodox Jew who does not customarily work on the Jewish Sabbath, Mr. Lieberman may be called upon to explain how he will handle a job that demands full attention 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Mr. Lieberman has already provided an answer. He states that, while he does not carry out political or campaign activities on the sabbath, Jewish law obligates him to perform official government duties demanded of his job. He makes the analogy that Jewish law also obligates a doctor to help a sick patient in such circumstances.
As Lieberman hit the campaign trail after his nomination, the media regularly reported his Sabbath breaks from campaigning and his reliance on fish dinners where kosher meat was unavailable. Meanwhile Barry Freundel, rabbi of the Kesher Israel Synagogue in Washington, where Lieberman and his family were members, became a popular guest on television news shows where he elucidated the intricacies of Jewish law to bemused interviewers and national audiences, repeating over and over, to questioners who still recalled suspicions about clerical authority raised about John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, in 1960, that Lieberman had never requested his guidance, or that of Jewish law, about how to vote on issues of public policy. Virtually lost in the positive media coverage was another attack by Philip Weiss in the *New York Observer* (August 21), charging that Lieberman “wants to lead the people, he just doesn’t want his children to marry any of them.”

Within the Jewish community, Lieberman’s nomination reshaped denominational politics; over the course of the campaign no less than three movements sought to appropriate him.

Many in the modern Orthodox camp saw the nomination not only as a victory for their view of how to preserve Jewish tradition in contemporary America, but also as a long-sought elixir for a movement that had been placed on the defensive by more insular forms of Orthodoxy. Dr. Norman Lamm, president of the modern Orthodox bastion, Yeshiva University, said that “vindication would not be a bad word” to describe the effect of the nomination. “He’s about as modern Orthodox as you can get,” enthused Haskel Lookstein, a prominent modern Orthodox rabbi in New York City. Historian Jonathan D. Sarna agreed, pointing out that Lieberman “is clean-shaven, does not wear a yarmulke full-time, and his wife does not cover her hair. Modern Orthodoxy,” he wrote, “may well be poised for a come-back” (*Forward*, August 11).

Orthodox elements more hostile to modernity reacted with some confusion. There were Orthodox Jews who—anonymously—told the media (most notably the Internet “Drudge Report”) that Lieberman was not really Orthodox because he was pro-choice and supported gay rights, kissed women other than his wife, and was seen drinking water, wearing leather shoes, and campaigning to the sound of live music on the Tish’ah B’Av fast day, when strictly Orthodox Jews refrain from such acts. Agudath Israel, the most important sectarian Orthodox organization, found itself in a quandary. It had worked with the senator in advancing legislation of interest to the Orthodox community, and would surely need his help in the future. Yet the group had drawn severe criticism from those to its right for honoring him at its annual dinner in 1997, and Lieberman’s engagement with the modern world hardly made him a poster boy for Agudath Israel’s sectarian ideology. Agudath Israel nevertheless issued an op-ed claiming that Lieberman’s commitment to Jewish law as immutable marked him as one of theirs. David Zwiebel, the organization’s executive vice president for government and public affairs, denied that Lieberman was modern Orthodox—an ideology
he compared to "a rather slippery fish." "We would do well to get beyond misleading labels," wrote Zwiebel, since the senator espoused "the decidedly old-fashioned values that lie at the heart of traditional Judaism" (Forward, August 18). That same day, however, in the New York Times, Agudath Israel's public-relations director, taking a different tack, was quoted as saying: "He's running for vice president, not chief rabbi. Therefore, there might be some things we would consider not thought out from a religious perspective, but we're not here to critique his religious life."

In fact Lieberman's staff, during the Democratic convention, had sought to head off just such nit-picking by telling reporters that their man considered himself "observant" in his Jewishness rather than Orthodox, and the week after the convention Lieberman had a press aide issue the following statement: "He refers to himself as observant because he doesn't follow the strict Orthodox code and doesn't want to offend the Orthodox, and his wife feels the same way." The candidate himself explained, "Well, I like to think of myself as an observant Jew, because it is broader and it's inclusive." This position was warmly greeted by Conservative Jews who observed the Sabbath while not adhering to Orthodox Halakhah, since they could now see the candidate as a kindred spirit. They also proudly pointed out that Mrs. Lieberman's son from her first marriage was studying for the Conservative rabbinate.

Across the denominational spectrum, Jews speculated about the impact an observant vice president might have as a role model on the Jewish identity of young Jews. Articles appeared in both the Jewish and the general press about the possible positive health benefits of a kosher diet and of complete rest—no driving, no telephone, no television—one day a week. In just one New York Times Sunday issue—September 24—there were three prominent articles, with photographs, about Orthodox Jewish life: the metro section told of the courting habits of young Orthodox Jewish couples who got to know each other by taking walks through the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, the Long Island section described "simcha dancing" classes for Orthodox women, and the entertainment section enlightened readers about the popular daily "unapologetically Orthodox" Jewish radio program, "JM in the AM." Visions of an American vice president and his family attending High Holy Day services, eating in a sukkah, and lighting Hanukkah candles excited the imaginations of rabbis and Jewish educators while at the same worrying many nonobservant Jews—few of whom, however, went public with their misgivings. The Lieberman candidacy was an irresistible topic for sermons, as rabbis held up the senator's principled adherence to religion as a standard for their congregants to emulate. "Lieberman is not campaigning on Shabbat," Rabbi Marc Gellman told his Long Island Reform congregation on Rosh Hashanah, in an obvious attempt to shame them into changing their ways. "He is turning down the pork ribs in Alabama, and if he is elected he is going to walk to the inauguration on Saturday afternoon. Lieberman is a new thing and he marks a new time" (First Things, December).
Matters became far more complicated for Lieberman as the campaign wore on. In the area of public policy, he frightened liberals—including many Jews for whom separation of church and state had an almost religious significance—with a speech on August 27 calling for a greater role for religion in public life. But he was also accused of backtracking on some of the earlier positions that had made him popular with Orthodox Jews and conservative Christians, such as support for school vouchers, doubts about affirmative action, and harsh criticism of Hollywood.

He also got into hot water with his own traditional Jewish community. Lieberman, whose personal pro-choice views were well known, went much further on “Larry King Live” in August, averring that abortion was “a matter of personal judgment. And like everything else in Judaism, ultimately it’s up to each of us to decide what we think is right.” In addition, he changed his mind about supporting a bill backed by Orthodox organizations that sought to prevent assisted suicide by restricting the use of morphine and encouraging aggressive treatment of pain; Lieberman apparently feared losing votes in Oregon, which had approved assisted suicide in a referendum. And on September 15, appearing on the “Imus in the Morning” radio show, Lieberman acknowledged that he skipped the daily benediction in the Orthodox prayer book thanking God for not having made him a woman. Then the host, “shock-jock” Don Imus, sprung on Lieberman the question Philip Weiss had been hammering away at for months: Didn’t Jewish law prohibit intermarriage? Not at all, the candidate replied, “there’s no ban whatsoever,” only the natural desire to “marry within to keep the faith going.”

It was unclear whether Lieberman was indeed ignorant of the halakhic taboo on intermarriage and to what extent his response was prompted by the fear of offending non-Jews and intermarried families less than two months before what was sure to be a close election. Whatever the case, the intermarriage remark aroused disappointment and concern in the Jewish community, coming as it did from a man who had become the symbol of a principled traditional Judaism that was at home in contemporary America—the very antithesis of the blurred Jewish identity often associated with the decision to intermarry. Agudath Israel urged the senator to disavow the impression that he was speaking in the name of Orthodox Judaism, and Mandell Ganchrow, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), commented, “Given that intermarriage is probably the number one problem affecting the Jews today, I don’t know what went through Lieberman’s mind when he said that.” A campaign aide told Rabbi Freundel that the senator had simply made a factual error, and the rabbi commented to the New York Jewish Week (September 29): “Politicians shouldn’t discuss theology, and especially not on Imus.” Lieberman himself said that he would no longer answer questions about Jewish law since he was not an expert. Ironically, Lieberman’s “liberal” statement on intermarriage came out just as Zev Chafets broke the news, in the Jerusalem Report (October 10), that the candidate had praised Shaare
Zedek hospital in Jerusalem, which was guilty, Chafets said, of "religious bigotry" for refusing in-vitro fertilization treatment for intermarried couples—and to make matters worse, Mrs. Lieberman had served as a paid consultant to the hospital till her husband's nomination.

Lieberman's ill- advised remarks on intermarriage made it open season for attacks by fringe Orthodox groups that considered him far too liberal on many issues. On October 5 the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada—the body that had declared non-Orthodox forms of Judaism to be "not Judaism" in 1997—publicly denounced Lieberman's support for gay rights, and specifically mentioned his appearance at a gay-rights event "on the very eve of Yom Kippur." Another group, calling itself Jews for Morality, claimed to have convened a rabbinical panel to excommunicate Lieberman for allegedly falsifying Jewish teachings on homosexuality, abortion, and intermarriage. Yet all of this was soon overshadowed in the headlines by another controversial remark by the candidate on an African-American radio station stating his willingness to meet with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who had a long history of engaging in anti-Semitic rhetoric.

By Election Day, the original Jewish euphoria over the Lieberman nomination was a distant memory, though appreciation for the historic meaning of his candidacy and respect for the man survived more or less intact. The senator's seeming inconsistencies, explained Rabbi Freundel, were due to Lieberman's understanding that he had to subordinate his personal opinions to the views of the presidential candidate. After all, said his rabbi, Lieberman "is not a representative of the Jewish people. He's a senator."

The nation quickly became caught up in the vortex of the disputed election returns in Florida, the state with a pivotal Jewish electorate where Lieberman had spent many days campaigning, and it was not till December 12 that the Supreme Court finally gave the state—and the election—to the Republicans. Previous speculation about what would happen if the Gore-Lieberman team lost now moved to a new plane of reality: With no Orthodox Jewish vice president in the offing, would Lieberman, in 2004, be the first serious Jewish presidential candidate?

Denominational Life

In his book *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry*, Samuel G. Freedman depicted battles in several Jewish communities around the country that pitted "secularist against believer, denomination against denomination, gender against gender, liberal against conservative, traditionalist against modernist." By sheer serendipity, the Lieberman nomination happened just when Freedman's book came out, and it appeared to confirm his key finding, "the triumph of the Orthodox model" of American Judaism, meaning that "against a backdrop of ever-more complete assimilation," the Orthodox were correct in their insistence "that religion binds Jewish identity."

For the first time in many years, however, interdenominational relations were
virtually absent from the American Jewish agenda in 2000. One reason was that the struggle over religious pluralism in Israel, which had long been the focus of denominational battles in the U.S., was far overshadowed by political and military events; even Prime Minister Barak's "civil reform plan," announced in August, which would have gone a long way toward ending the Orthodox monopoly on Israeli Judaism, turned out to be a short-lived political gambit. And there even seemed to be some progress toward religious pluralism in Israel, as the special interdenominational conversion institutes set up in 1998 graduated their first candidates. Another, more ominous reason for quiet on the denominational battlefront in the U.S. may have been that Orthodox and non-Orthodox forms of American Judaism had drifted so far apart that they no longer shared enough in common to fight about.

Reform Judaism

A case in point was the muted, almost pro forma, reaction within Orthodoxy to Reform's acceptance of gay marriage.

At its 1996 convention, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Reform rabbinic body, had gone on record in favor of civil marriage for homosexuals. Also, in accordance with the Reform principle of rabbinic autonomy, an unknown number of rabbis were performing Jewish weddings, often called commitment ceremonies, for them. But a proposal at the 1998 convention for the CCAR to recognize the "sanctity" of same-sex unions aroused opposition from members who pointed out that homosexuality was explicitly prohibited by the Bible and warned that the resolution would hurt the efforts of Reform to gain acceptance in Israel. The issue proved so divisive that the CCAR postponed its consideration (see AJYB 1999, pp. 189–90).

In early 2000, with the CCAR convention coming up in March, the Women's Rabbinic Network, a caucus of female rabbis within the organization, circulated a proposed resolution stating that same-sex unions were "worthy of affirmation" since "committed same-sex relationships between two Jews" could have holy status and "serve as the foundation of stable Jewish families, thus adding strength to the Jewish community." Those supporting the proposal viewed it as a simple matter of human rights. But a group of 12 other rabbis, feeling that such language would violate rabbinic autonomy by making it virtually impossible for any Reform rabbi to refuse to officiate at a same-sex union, suggested an alternative formulation, calling on rabbis "to create welcoming atmospheres for gays and lesbians, doing so in ways they deem ritually most appropriate," but also acknowledging the "diversity of views" in the CCAR about rabbinic officiation.

The resolution that finally passed on March 29 was a compromise, stating explicitly that the CCAR supported its members who "affirmed" the relationship of a "same-gender couple" through "appropriate Jewish ritual," while also supporting those members who did not. After the resolution passed overwhelmingly
by voice vote, many of the rabbis stood and pronounced the shehehiyanu benediction, praising God "for bringing us to this moment." Supporters of rabbinic officiation predicted that the new Reform stand would lead to an outpouring of new, creative liturgies for the solemnization of same-sex unions, while those opposing officiation expressed statisfaction that the words "marriage," "commitment ceremony," and "sanctity" were absent from the document. The Reform rabbinate now became the largest group of American clergy to allow officiation at gay unions.

The reaction from the Orthodox was predictable. The Rabbinical Council of America, the organization of modern Orthodox rabbis, asserted that "Judaism's laws cannot be abrogated by fiat or majority vote," and Agudath Israel placed an ad in the New York Times emphasizing that "Judaism is not a mirror of society's shifting mores." Yet such statements seemed more like standard boilerplate than a call to denominational combat, and the issue faded away quickly. Indeed, despite the fears of some Reform rabbis, the Orthodox establishment in Israel did not use the resolution against Reform in the Jewish state. Rabbi Charles Kroloff, president of the CCAR, noted, "We do not seem to have appeared on their radar screen. I believe the fear was really overemphasized."

Reform Judaism had to endure a severe embarrassment in 2000. Early in December, the president of Hebrew Union College (HUC), the rabbinical seminary for the Reform movement, abruptly announced his resignation. Earlier that day he had been slapped with a two-year suspension from the CCAR for sexual misconduct that had taken place years earlier, while he served as a congregational rabbi; he did not contest the findings or the penalty. The CCAR had conducted a yearlong, secret investigation before issuing the suspension.

Conservative Judaism

2000 was a year of serious introspection for the Conservative movement, with two books appearing that analyzed, in depth, its current state and future potential: Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and their Members, a collection of essays edited by Jack Wertheimer, and The Conservative Movement in Judaism, by the late Daniel J. Elazar and Rela Mintz Geffen. Sociologist Steven M. Cohen, author of the lead article in the Wertheimer volume, warned that the movement was likely to shrink over time because its membership was skewed toward the elderly: almost a quarter of Conservative synagogue members were over age 65. Noting that younger Jews belonging to Conservative synagogues were more observant and more educated Jewishly than their parents, Cohen recommended that the movement target such intensively committed Jews rather than seek to swell its numbers through outreach to the less observant and to the intermarried.

Although Chancellor Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary announced his disagreement with Cohen's "small tent" strategy—he believed that Conservative Judaism might well prove attractive to Reform and unaffiliated
Jews thirsting for greater spiritual sustenance—the movement had already taken steps to set minimum religious standards and define clear boundaries. In 1998 it had barred intermarried Jews from holding positions where they might be seen as Jewish role models for young Conservative Jews, and in 1999 it had circulated a set of "behavioral expectations" for the movement's lay leaders.

During 2000, Conservative Judaism focused on its educational and camping programs. Chancellor Schorsch unveiled an ambitious plan for the development of a new early-childhood curriculum that would "saturate the youngsters in Jewish vocabulary, music, and ritual." And the network of Ramah summer camps, which encompassed seven overnight and four day camps, for the first time included with its application form a notice that only Jews according to Halakhah would be accepted as campers and hired as staff. Ramah officials noted that this had always been the policy, but that the Reform movement's acceptance of Jewish status through patrilineal descent, as well as the fact that many romances that began at Ramah led to marriage, made it necessary to introduce a formal rule ensuring that only those who were Jewish by the standards of the Conservative movement would be at these camps. One outraged intermarried parent, speaking at the United Jewish Communities (UJC) General Assembly in November, compared Ramah's ban on patrilineal Jews to the American government's decision in 1939 to turn away the ship St. Louis, which was carrying Jewish refugees from Germany, dooming the passengers.

This insistence on maintaining the patrilineality barrier separating it from Reform was evident, as well, in the expulsion of Congregation Ner Tamid of Bloomfield, New Jersey, from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. The congregation had been formed in 1980 through a merger between a Reform and a Conservative synagogue, and had maintained affiliation with the synagogue bodies of both denominations. Its current rabbi was ordained by the Reform movement, many members were intermarried, and patrilineal children were recognized as Jews. Explaining that the situation of this synagogue had only recently come to his attention, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue, asserted: "The congregation must determine whether it wishes to remain a Conservative congregation and figure out a strategy to bring itself into line with the standards of the Conservative movement." Ner Tamid's rabbi, however, wanted to maintain its dual Reform and Conservative affiliations in such a manner "that the standards of the Conservative movement would not apply to us in the same way," and he went on to predict that unless it, too, adopted the patrilineal standard, Conservative Judaism was "going to be driving people out of their synagogues."

The increasing self-assertion of West-Coast Jewry and the strains this created in the management of national Jewish organizations had been evident for a number of years, and they affected the Conservative movement in 2000. In January, the United Synagogue fired the officers of its Pacific Southwest regional board, sent two representatives to close the region's office in Encino, California, and had
its lawyers try to freeze the region's bank accounts. One regional executive committee member called this “a Gestapo tactic, like storm troopers came in and tried to seize everything.” Unlike the United Synagogue's other regions, whose synagogues paid dues directly to the national organization, which in turn allocated funds to the regional offices for programming costs, the Southwest region had retained significant financial autonomy, receiving dues payments directly from the local synagogues. The national body claimed that Southwest owed it $85,000, but a California judge ruled against the national office. The Rabbinical Assembly, the denomination's rabbinic organization, intervened with a resolution calling on both sides to resolve the issue peacefully.

**Reconstructionist Judaism**

Reconstructionism, the movement founded on the basis of Mordecai M. Kaplan's vision of Judaism as an all-encompassing civilization, continued to be the most liturgically innovative denomination, releasing a new Passover Haggadah that included an Arab Palestinian woman's description of her family's displacement from its home by the State of Israel. In response to criticism from other Jewish quarters, Rabbi Joy Levitt, one of the editors, explained that the Haggadah sought to convey the truth that Israel had achieved its freedom in a morally “complicated” way.

Institutionally, the movement faced a dilemma brought on by its success. What drew many Jews to Reconstructionism was the democratic, egalitarian structure of the small-group congregations. However membership was growing rapidly, and more space was needed—more than a quarter of the approximately 100 Reconstructionist congregations were in the process of purchasing or constructing a building, or had launched building campaigns. But Reconstructionists were eager to avoid the temptation of “selling” honor to the highest bidder by naming rooms after the biggest givers and putting up plaques inscribed with their names, a practice that they felt had hurt the moral standing of the other movements. At a series of two-day workshops for rabbis and lay leaders on the “Torah of Money,” participants shared ideas on how congregations might raise adequate funds without creating a hierarchy of prestige linked to wealth.

**Orthodox Judaism**

In a talk he delivered early in the year, Rabbi Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, criticized the tendency within his own modern Orthodox community to cave in to the demands of more sectarian groups. “We've become very, very nervous about doing exactly what I think is right,” he said. “It's, to my mind, crazy.” There was evidence of such nervousness quite close to home. The Jewish Center, a synagogue in Manhattan where Lamm himself had served as rabbi for many years, elevated its associate rabbi to the senior position in 2000,
and he immediately announced an end to social dancing at the annual synagogue dinner and to bat mitzvah girls reading from the Torah on the synagogue premises (the practice had never been allowed in the sanctuary itself). At Lamm’s own Yeshiva University, the first student in the institution’s history to win a Rhodes Scholarship reported pressure from students and faculty members to turn down the opportunity to study at Oxford since the secular environment and lack of time for serious Talmud study might have a negative effect on his spiritual life. And Touro College, which competed with Yeshiva for Orthodox male students seeking a rigorous program of religious studies together with a college degree, announced the establishment of a new branch, Lander College, in Queens, New York, and hired for its faculty some former Yeshiva professors. Touro’s president said that there would be no tension between the religious and secular faculties at the new college—implying that such tension existed at Yeshiva and that the new college was therefore more authentically Orthodox.

The single most controversial issue, by far, for modern Orthodoxy was the religious role of women: Those on the Orthodox right charged that feminism had gone too far, and those on the left argued that much more had to be done. This pattern played itself out in 2000 in the area of women’s Talmud study, something considered off limits in Orthodox circles a generation earlier. Responding to student demand to emulate the Drisha Institute in New York and several institutions in Israel, Yeshiva University announced a two-year full-time graduate program in Talmud for women, with $18,000 annual stipends, leading to a certificate. More traditionalist Orthodox elements, including some rabbis on the Yeshiva faculty, denounced the move as a step toward the ordination of female rabbis.

The strides already made by Orthodox women made the front page of the New York Times (December 21). The article traced “the small but steady revolution that is redefining the role of women in Orthodox Judaism.” Women were having bat mitzvah ceremonies, participating in women’s prayer groups, reading from the Torah, becoming Talmud scholars, and, quite possibly—the facts were unclear—receiving private rabbinic ordination. In fact, the two young women hired as “rabbinic interns” by Orthodox synagogues in New York in 1997 both left their jobs in 2000 and were not immediately replaced. Nevertheless, the two rabbis who had hired them declared the experiment a success and said that they were on the lookout for other qualified women to fill these positions.

The third International Conference on Feminism and Orthodoxy was held in February in New York, drawing some 1,800 people. Those who had been to the earlier conferences noted that the tone at this one seemed calmer and less strident, perhaps reflecting the findings on Orthodox women and feminism reported at the conference by Brandeis University sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman from a study she carried out for the American Jewish Committee. The report spelled out the changes that feminism had already made in Orthodox life, and noted that improving the breadth and depth of Jewish education for women remained a high priority for many modern Orthodox women. Yet the younger women were far
more cautious than their mothers' generation about any change in the status quo that might go beyond the bounds of Halakhah, and had relatively little interest in participating in women's prayer groups, let alone in becoming rabbis. More surprisingly, the young women showed little enthusiasm for activism on behalf of agunot, women whose husbands refused to give them a Jewish divorce and thus kept them from remarrying. (The day after the conference, a number of rabbis on the faculty of Yeshiva University issued a statement urging the use of a prenuptial agreement to head off the problem.)

Modern Orthodoxy was badly tarnished by scandal in 2000. In an investigative report entitled "Stolen Innocence" that appeared in its June 23 issue, the New York Jewish Week charged that a charismatic rabbi employed for almost 30 years by the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), the outreach arm of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), had physically and emotionally abused several young men and women under his charge. Once the article appeared, others came forward claiming that they too had been victims, and the newspaper printed several more articles on the subject. Though the rabbi maintained his innocence, the OU announced that he had voluntarily resigned, and in early July the organization named a special eight-member commission, made up of prominent people outside the OU, to investigate how the organization could have allowed the alleged abuse to go on for so long, and to recommend steps to make sure that nothing like it would happen again. Completion of the commission report was announced on December 26. A 54-page "short" version, made available to the public, confirmed many of the charges against the rabbi and recommended radical changes in the organization's management. It also noted that the rabbi was allowed to continue his harassment for years because of "the failure of certain members of the OU and NCSY leadership to take action." The details, presumably including names of those who had turned a blind eye to the problem, were contained in a larger, 331-page report, which was seen only by top OU officers.

In the world of sectarian Orthodoxy, the big news in 2000 was a rabbinic ban, issued in Israel, on the use of the Internet, which the rabbis termed a "terrible threat" to Judaism. Those who needed to use the Internet for work could get special permission from the authorities. Of course, there was no way to monitor what went on in people's homes, so that the ban was really little more than moral exhortation, and Orthodox organizations that utilized the Internet for religious outreach, such as Chabad-Lubavitch and a number of yeshivahs, were unlikely to comply. In the United States, Agudath Israel announced its support for the ban—it did not have a Web site of its own—as did the National Council of Young Israel, which did have a Web site.

The sectarian Orthodox community had been repeatedly embarrassed in recent years by the involvement of people associated with it, if only by the way they dressed, in various criminal activities. In the year 2000, for example, several Hasidic young men (one judge referred to them as "young yeshivah boy after young yeshivah boy") were convicted of smuggling the drug Ecstasy (New York Times,
March 29). Both keynote addresses at the annual convention of Agudath Israel, in November, hammered away at the "desecration of God's name" such behavior generated.

**American Jews and Israel**

Already on January 4, the internal American Jewish split over Israel's peace policies was evident to all. About 40 Lubavitch Hassidim arrived that day in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, where they were joined by a delegation from Americans for a Safe Israel and by students from a Jewish school near Washington. They assembled to protest the talks taking place there between President Clinton, Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, and Syrian foreign minister Farouq a-Shara that were thought to be leading to a virtually full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights that had been captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War. The protesters shouted, "We will not move from the Golan," explaining to reporters that abandonment of the heights would leave Israel's northern border vulnerable. Some, addressing Barak, chanted, "Traitor, go home!"

The primary battleground for American Jewish activists was not Shepherdstown but Congress, which would have to appropriate the money to pay for any deal—including a large military-aid package for Israel to help offset its strategic sacrifice in the north. Estimates ran as high as $17 billion, and AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the primary pro-Israel lobby, was already at work trying to convince lawmakers that such a huge outlay was a good investment for ultimate Middle East peace. Americans for a Safe Israel, on the other hand, which took upon itself the task of convincing Congress not to vote the money, told legislators that the real cost could go as high as $100 billion, that the funds would come out of the social security payments of senior citizens, and, since the Syrians could not be trusted to keep their word—they were, after all, on the State Department list of states sponsoring terrorism—the money would be wasted.

Although the talks at Shepherdstown broke up without reaching agreement, the controversial issues remained on the table. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the umbrella group that spoke for the Jewish community on Israel issues and that generally arrived at its positions on the basis of a consensus of its members, decided to include a "fact-finding" visit to the Golan as part of its annual program in Israel, scheduled for the third week in February. Even though some of the more dovish constituents of the conference feared that a tour of the Golan, which would surely include conversations with the Jewish residents, might be interpreted as support for Israel's continued control, the fact that the prime minister's staff helped arrange the itinerary convinced the conference leadership that the Golan visit would have no negative repercussions.

By March Congress was again the focus of the internal Jewish debate over
Syria, as the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) sought the signatures of senators and representatives on a letter opposing all aid to Syria so long as the regime supported terrorism and spread anti-Semitism. The letter was designed to forestall any plans to appropriate money for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, some portion of which would go to Syria. AIPAC, the powerful pro-Israel lobby, urged lawmakers not to sign a statement that could become an obstacle to a settlement. But as it became evident that Syria would not budge from its maximalist position on a Golan withdrawal and that no deal was in sight, the funding question became academic.

The Israeli government, rebuffed on the Syrian front, resumed negotiations with the Palestinians, and American Jewish attention turned to what would surely prove the most difficult issue, Jerusalem. On January 19 some 300 Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist rabbis signed a statement drafted by the Jewish Peace Lobby declaring that “the pursuit of both peace and justice requires that, in some form, Jerusalem be shared with the Palestinian people.” Jerome Segal, who had founded the lobby in 1989 to advocate Israel-PLO talks, acknowledged that more than 800 rabbis who had been asked to sign had refused. Segal explained that the purpose of the statement was to remove the taboo from discussions of sharing the city. “Jerusalem,” he noted, “is still kind of viewed as the third rail of Israeli politics, with the right claiming that the left will redivide Jerusalem and the left saying that is a lie” (New York Times, January 20). A week later the Rabbinical Council of America and the Rabbinical Assembly—the Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical bodies—responded with a rare joint statement, asserting that Jerusalem was “the united and indivisible capital solely of the State of Israel” and that only Israel, in negotiations with the Palestinians, “should determine conditions for peace.” Even though other dovish organizations declined to endorse the Peace Lobby’s statement on the grounds that prematurely stating a willingness to divide Jerusalem might undercut Israel’s bargaining position, the Charles R. Bronfman Foundation and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, two leading Jewish family foundations, helped fund a study by the Harvard University Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution that called for two states, with Jerusalem the shared capital of both.

If the idea of sharing Jerusalem was still not open to public discussion in the American Jewish mainstream in February, Jewish leaders were surprised to find mixed signals from Israel about Jerusalem’s status. During its visit to Israel that month, a Conference of Presidents delegation was subjected to criticism from Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert for not more forcefully pressing the U.S. government to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a step that would go a long way toward defining Jerusalem “as an undivided capital.” Prime Minister Barak told the Americans: “Jerusalem, undivided, under our sovereignty, the capital of Israel, period. That is our position.” However, as members of the delegation pointed out, the Barak government, following in the footsteps of its predecessors, had instructed American Jewish leaders not to oppose the regular waivers of con-
gressional legislation that President Clinton had used to avoid moving the embassy. Furthermore, at the very time that the Conference of Presidents was in Israel, cabinet members from Barak’s own party were publicly stating that moving the embassy would endanger the peace talks.

On May 22 Barak visited the U.S. to attend AIPAC’s annual policy conference. He also fit in an appearance at a dinner for Israel Bonds and meetings with the Conference of Presidents and the strongly pro-Barak Israel Policy Forum. His government had just decided to turn over Abu Dis and two other Jerusalem neighborhoods to the Palestinian Authority, to the dismay of those in Israel and the U.S. who feared that this was a precedent for the division of the city (Barak would later block the transfer in response to Palestinian violence). On May 15, the week before his arrival, Americans for a Safe Israel and local rabbis organized an anti-Barak rally in Brooklyn that drew about 100 people, and protesters also picketed Barak’s appearance at the Israel Bonds dinner.

Meanwhile, Morton Klein, president of the ZOA, demanded the resignation of National Security Adviser Samuel (Sandy) Berger. In a speech on May 21 at Tel Aviv University Berger said that violence on both sides “is both the curse and the blessing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for the tragedy that awaits in the event of inaction also constitutes the greatest incentive for immediate action.” Klein claimed that Berger had called Palestinian violence against Israelis a “blessing.” Berger explained that the quote was taken out of context and that he was actually calling for a solution to the conflict so as to end the violence. When the administration backed Berger, the ZOA placed ads in Jewish newspapers the week of June 9 featuring the picture of an Israeli killed by Palestinians and asking how this could be called “a blessing.” The ad urged readers to contact the White House and their congressmen to call for Berger’s ouster. But the mainstream Jewish groups refused to follow the ZOA’s lead, with Anti-Defamation League (ADL) national director Abraham Foxman and the leaders of Reform Judaism chiding Klein.

In late May, Natan Sharansky, Israel’s interior minister, publicly called on Prime Minister Barak not to make contemplated concessions to obtain a peace agreement, and, receiving no satisfaction, Sharansky leaked details about the Israeli-Palestinian talks to the media. The information, which was indeed an accurate blueprint of the American initiative that would bring Barak and Arafat to Camp David, called for Israeli annexation of settlement blocs in the territories with compensation from Israeli land for the Palestinians; the dismantling of Israeli settlements outside those blocs; acceptance of the right, in principle, of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, even though few would actually be allowed to return; and Palestinian sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. In return, the Palestinian Authority was to announce a final end to the conflict.

Sharing Sharansky’s fears about the magnitude of the concessions, 30 American Jewish leaders signed an open letter to the prime minister that appeared in
American Jewish and Israeli papers at the end of June. Quoting extensively from Sharansky himself, the letter focused on the alarming possibility of "redividing" Jerusalem with no provisions for the security of its Jewish residents, "surrendering crucial territory" — including "92-95% of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza," "uprooting" thousands of Jews from their homes in the territories, and permitting "an unspecified number of Arabs from abroad to settle within Israel." Among the signers were not only leaders of Orthodox organizations and anti-peace-process groups, but also the chairman and four members of the AIPAC executive committee (the chairman's AIPAC affiliation was not mentioned in the letter), a past executive director of AIPAC, two past chairmen of the Conference of Presidents, and the national campaign chair of Israel Bonds. Publication of the letter caused something of a sensation since it appeared to break the long-standing rule that American Jewish leaders—especially those associated with mainstream organizations—did not publicly criticize the policies of the Israeli government.

The names of the AIPAC leaders on the letter indicated how seriously Barak's peace initiatives had alienated many in the American Jewish mainstream. AIPAC's constitution required support for whatever government was in power in Israel, but Gerald Charnoff, the executive committee chairman who signed the letter, explained, in an interview with the Forward (June 23), that it appeared to him—as it did to Sharansky—that Prime Minister Barak was running his own foreign policy without even consulting his colleagues: "I was very concerned that a consensus was not being built within the duly elected government to support these initiatives." AIPAC was quick to distance itself from the letter, a spokesman commenting, "This letter is totally outside the bounds of AIPAC policy. It was never officially presented to either the executive committee or the board." AIPAC also called for, and received, Charnoff's resignation as chairman of the executive committee. AIPAC explained that this was not because he signed the letter, but because his interview with the Forward violated the lobby's rule that only AIPAC's designated spokesman might speak to the press. A week later, Neal Sher, the former AIPAC executive director who had signed the letter, asked that his name be removed from it on the grounds that "people will use this to lobby against Israel and against the peace process."

The Jewish world and American political circles were still abuzz about the letter when, in early July, the administration announced that Barak and Yasir Arafat were coming to Camp David for a summit with the American president. The Israel Policy Forum quickly collected over 350 signatures on an open letter to the arriving Prime Minister Barak with the message: "The Overwhelming Majority of American Jews Support This Peace Initiative." A note at the bottom pointed out that among the signatories were "six former chairpersons of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, over two dozen executive committee members and officers of AIPAC, as well as numerous current and past presidents, chairpersons and high-level officials of almost every other lead-
ing American Jewish organization” (Forward, July 14). On the other side, American for a Safe Israel, accompanied by four opposition member of the Israeli Knesset, continued to lobby Congress — focusing especially on the Republican members — to oppose funding any deal that entailed what it saw as unilateral Israeli concessions.

The breakup of Camp David on July 25 did not heal the fissures within the American Jewish community. While the prospect of substantial Israeli concessions as part of a peace treaty was no longer imminent, reports, vague as they were, of just how much Barak had been willing to concede on the issue of Jerusalem confused and upset many Jewish leaders, who for years had taken the Israeli government at its word that an undivided Israeli Jerusalem was not open to compromise. To be sure, the ideological left and right of American Jewry reiterated their standard positions, Americans for Peace Now applauding the “paradigm shift” toward power-sharing in the city, and the Zionist Organization of America aghast that Barak “would betray his solemn commitment.” But since the Israeli government had not announced any official change in its Jerusalem policy, neither did the Conference of Presidents, whose executive vice president, Malcolm Hoenlein, declared, “The position of the Jewish community remains the same as it always has been — a unified Jerusalem, the capital of Israel,” though he added: “Ultimately, it’s up to the government and people of Israel to make decisions about their sovereignty and future.” This incontrovertible point — that only Israel’s elected government had the authority to conduct its affairs — convinced other American Jewish leaders not to protest Barak’s generous offers on Jerusalem. Abraham Foxman, the ADL national director, commented, “if this is what it would take to bring a final settlement, I think most Israelis and the American Jewish community would swallow and say, okay.” That American Jews seemed satisfied to leave things up to the Israelis was evident in early September, when not only Barak but also Natan Sharansky, who had resigned from the government in protest, received enthusiastic receptions in separate appearances before the Conference of Presidents in New York.

On September 14, however, the Jerusalem issue heated up once more when Martin Indyk, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, stated in a public speech that, “there is no solution but to share the Holy City. It is not, and cannot be, the exclusive preserve of one religion, and the solution cannot come from one side challenging or denying another side’s beliefs.” Likud leaders in Israel, seconded by the ZOA in the United States, asked for Indyk’s recall. One week later, on September 21, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright indeed took action against him, suspending Indyk and canceling his security clearance because he had allegedly mishandled classified information. Several theories circulated regarding the Indyk affair: his ouster was orchestrated by pro-Likud forces in America and their Republican allies in Congress; he was the victim of security paranoia in the wake of several embarrassing cases of leaks; or it was anti-Semitism (Indyk was Jewish). In any case, the ambassador was soon reinstated, his security clearance intact.
Around the same time back in the U.S., an American Jewish leader also got himself into trouble for injudicious remarks about Jerusalem. In what he thought was an off-the-record talk to a Jewish audience in New Jersey, Malcolm Hoenlein called on American Jews to oppose any attempt to compromise Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem. As the top professional at the Conference of Presidents, Hoenlein was supposed to back the policies of Israel’s government, which clearly had accepted the principle of compromise. When his words became public, Hoenlein explained that he had presented the anti-compromise position as his own personal point of view, and that, in any case, this still happened to be Israel’s public position. Some member organizations of the conference wanted to question Hoenlein about his behavior, but the matter was soon overshadowed by the outbreak of new violence in Israel and the territories at the end of September.

The new situation in Israel (see below, pp. 494–501) affected American Jews in different ways. For those who had been skeptical of Barak’s diplomacy, Arab violence following soon after Yasir Arafat’s refusal to accept generous Israeli concessions at Camp David confirmed their suspicions that the Palestinians had no intention of making peace and would not rest until Israel was destroyed. In fact, some even voiced relief at the developments, in the expectation that Israel would reverse its conciliatory negotiating position or that a major shift in Israeli public opinion would bring a right-wing government to power. The pro-peace groups, in contrast, were heartbroken by the bloodshed and kept hoping—with gradually diminishing confidence—that somehow the peace process could be gotten back on track. Some on the left blamed Likud leader Ariel Sharon, whose walk on the Temple Mount seemed to have been the irritant that set off Arab violence.

The mainstream Jewish organizations concentrated on interpreting Israel’s side of the story to the U.S. government, the American public, and especially the media, which showed pictures of seemingly helpless young Palestinians being confronted, and in some cases gunned down, by heavily armed Israelis—the most dramatic example of which was the videotape of 12-year-old Muhammad al-Dura being shot in a crossfire in Gaza. Another alarming development was the quick mobilization of Arab American groups in many cities in support of the uprising. On October 3 the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) arranged a conference call for leaders of Jewish communities around the country to try to coordinate a response.

As it became clear that the violence was not likely to end soon, American Jewish opinion turned sharply against the Oslo peace process, and the New York Times (October 11) ran a story headlined, “Among U.S. Jews, a Deep Pessimism Takes Hold.” The ADL, which had previously supported Israel’s peace diplomacy, ran ads saying “Chairman Arafat has made it clear to the world—he prefers violence to peace. Prime Minister Barak: unfortunately today you still have no partner for peace.” The American Jewish Congress, which had been even more dovish than the ADL, took out a full-page ad in the New York Times (November 12) reversing its stand, stating: “It takes a big organization to admit it was wrong.” At-
tacks on Jews outside of Israel led some American Jewish leaders to speak of a religious war: Stephen Solender, president of the United Jewish Communities (UJC), told reporters that the violence in Israel was just one part of a global anti-Jewish onslaught, and Ronald Lauder, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, called for an international "Jewish summit" (it was never held).

Underlying the brave rhetoric, however, was a widespread sense that American Jewry was failing to fulfill its historic role as defender of the Jewish state. People still remembered the outpouring of Jewish support for Israel at the time of the 1967 Six-Day War and thereafter, and the contrast to the present situation was profound.

It took two full weeks from the start of the violence for the Jewish community of New York to organize a mass rally for Israel, a delay reportedly due to differences between Jewish groups over whether the message should include opposition to the peace process. The rally, cosponsored by the Conference of Presidents and the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York and held on October 12, drew mostly opponents of Oslo, a total of some 15,000 people, according to the New York Times (the crowd booed one speaker, Hillary Rodham Clinton). Many of the demonstrators were day-school students bused in for the occasion. A pro-Palestinian rally the next day drew about the same number of people. Other signs of American Jewish weakness included cancellations of tens of thousands of scheduled trips to Israel and the apparent inability or unwillingness of Jewish college students to defend Israel on campus against the verbal attacks of highly motivated Arab American student groups.

Some observers attributed this distancing from Israel to the perception that the Jewish state in 2000, unlike the case a generation earlier, was a regional power whose continued existence was not in danger. Others considered it just one example of a broader phenomenon, the erosion of Jewish identity among younger American Jews. Yet a third view, one voiced by many Jewish leaders who insisted on anonymity, was that the community could not be effectively mobilized in the absence of clear signals from Prime Minister Barak.

American Jewry hoped it would finally get such signals at the UJC's annual General Assembly, held this year in Chicago in November. Due in large part to the crisis in Israel and the opportunity to hear about it from Prime Minister Barak in person, a sell-out crowd of 6,000 registered. Those expecting to get simple marching orders, however, were disappointed. Despite the minimal consultation with American Jewish organizations that characterized his administration, Barak declared: "We derive great strength from knowing that we in Israel are not alone"; while saying several times that there was no alternative to peace, he placed blame for the violence solely on the Palestinians; and in the face of the concessions he was known to be offering on Jerusalem, he insisted on a "Jerusalem broader than it has ever been in history." Barak was warmly applauded. The day after his speech, opposition leader Ariel Sharon and Natan Sharansky addressed the General Assembly and attacked the Barak government's strategy.
The year ended with more manifestations of American Jewish demoralization, confusion, and division. Seeking to counter the precipitous decline in tourism to Israel, the Conference of Presidents planned an ad urging Jews to travel to Israel. Four member organizations of the conference—American for Peace Now, the Labor Zionist Alliance, the National Committee for Labor Israel, and the Jewish Labor Committee—refused to endorse the ad because its reference to Jerusalem as the “eternal and undivided capital” of Israel might undercut Barak’s ability to negotiate a compromise on Jerusalem. Malcolm Hoenlein, responding for the conference, said, “this is standard language used all the time that does not preempt anyone’s negotiations.” Meanwhile, an ad opposing Israeli renunciation of sovereignty over the Temple Mount, sponsored by the ZOA—an organization that the American Jewish mainstream had viewed as extremist till the breakdown of Camp David—managed to get the endorsement of five former chairs of the Conference of Presidents as well as the top leaders of the Orthodox and Conservative movements.

Organizations and Institutions

Jewish Philanthropy

United Jewish Communities, the merged entity encompassing the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal, and the United Israel Appeal that officially came into existence in 1999, was still a work in progress a year later. One controversial issue was financial. The primary reason for the merger was to cut costs, and yet the administrative expenses of the merger process itself came to $11 million, far more than anticipated. In the spring, leaders of local federations complained about UJC’s proposed $41.7-million budget for operating expenses, a sum that the large-city federations were being asked to pay.

Furthermore, the merger seemed to have no positive impact on federation campaigns. According to a study released in May and published in the Chronicle of Philanthropy, while the 400 largest American charities increased their private support by an average of 16 percent in 1999, the 15 most successful Jewish federations grew by only 4.3 percent. Observers generally attributed the poor showing to the preference of young donors to target their giving, often through the medium of private and family foundations, to specific causes that interested them rather than to a multipurpose charity such as a federation. Evidence that this was true came from the extraordinary fund-raising success of more narrowly focused Jewish organizations. The federations had for some years sought to respond to the new philanthropic mood by creating mechanisms for donors to target their money for their preferred causes under the federation aegis, and the UJC had set up a Trust for Jewish Philanthropy that was expected to do “matchmaking between the funders and doers.”
Throughout the five years of negotiations that resulted in the creation of the UJC, agencies involved in relief for overseas Jewish communities—primarily the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)—had warned that the emerging new system, largely controlled by the federations, would tend to concentrate on domestic needs at their expense. Indeed, in 2000 the JDC complained that its allocation had been slashed and that it might be forced to curtail some of its activities, such as the provision of food to elderly Jews in the former Soviet Union.

A major selling point of the new merged entity was that it could mount a nationally coordinated strategy for motivating young Jews to rediscover Judaism: One of the UJC’s four “pillars” was Jewish renaissance and renewal. In February 2000, Jonathan Woocher, president of the Jewish Educational Service of North America (JESNA), was named to head it.

A long-simmering dispute in the Jewish community over the relative priorities of Jewish and general philanthropic causes found public expression in early April at the tenth annual conference of the Jewish Funders Network, the umbrella organization for private Jewish family foundations. The theme of the keynote session, “Saving the Whales: Is it Jewish Funding?” was addressed by Dr. Jack Wertheimer, the Jewish Theological Seminary provost, and Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement’s Religious Action Center. Wertheimer bemoaned what he considered the hugely disproportionate share of the Jewish charity dollar—some two-thirds—that went to nonsectarian causes. He charged that even many who gave hefty sums to Jewish institutions gave far more to non-Jewish organizations, and calculated that if each Jewish philanthropist simply divided his or her giving equally between Jewish and general needs, the basic requirements of Jewish life could be adequately funded. Saperstein, on the other hand, asserted that Judaism gave a high priority to social justice and that Jewish philanthropy for nonsectarian causes also helped gain political allies for the Jewish community. The publicity the Wertheimer-Saperstein debate gave to the issue of Jewish funding priorities ensured that it would be noticed outside the community: journalist Michael Massing, writing in the liberal magazine American Prospect (November 6), complained that Jewish philanthropy had already turned far too parochial, “retreating into a narrow tribalism.”

JCPA

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), formerly known as NJCRAC, was the umbrella organization of national Jewish bodies and local community-relations councils. In 1999 federation leaders from New York and Chicago had sharply criticized the JCPA for allegedly focusing on issues tangential to core Jewish interests. In September 2000 the JCPA reached an agreement with its funding body, the UJC, whereby the JCPA would withdraw from the realm of policy formulation and concentrate on providing services to the UJC, its member fed-
erations, and the community councils. In August, Hannah Rosenfeld was named as the new professional head of the JCPA in place of Lawrence Rubin, who had retired.

Conference of Presidents

The criteria for membership in the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the 54-member umbrella body that served as the voice of American Jewry on issues relating to Israel and the Middle East, came up for discussion in 2000. There were, apparently, no written bylaws that defined a "major" organization, though, in response to criticism, the conference had drawn up membership criteria that included bona fide memberships, democratically elected officers and boards and "a commitment to the continuity of the Jewish faith." As the year began, Meretz USA, allied with the left-of-center Israeli party by that name, was smarting from the rejection of its membership application. In July the conference's membership committee recommended downgrading the status of three members to "associate" status: the Labor Zionist Alliance, the National Committee for Labor Israel, and the Women's League for Israel. The fact that Meretz USA and two of the three other groups were affiliated with the Israeli left led some to allege that the conference was biased toward the political right, a charge vehemently denied by conference leaders. The full conference, in any case, did not take action on the committee's recommendation.

Holocaust Museum

In January, President Clinton named Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg as the new chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and its museum in Washington, D.C., replacing Miles Lerman, who had resigned. The choice of Greenberg, an Orthodox thinker who had written extensively about the theological implications of the Holocaust, was greeted with virtually unanimous approval, and it was widely hoped that the museum, under his stewardship, would successfully balance the particularistic Jewish significance of the Holocaust with its universal lessons for mankind.

Center for Jewish History

After years of anticipation and planning, the Center for Jewish History formally opened in October 2000 in New York City. This "Jewish Library of Congress" brought together in one building five institutions that had previously operated in separate locations: the American Jewish Historical Society, the American Sephardi Federation, the Leo Baeck Institute (focusing on the history and culture of German Jewry), the Yeshiva University Museum, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (dealing with Yiddish-speaking, East European Jewry). Each
retained its independent board, budget, and staff. The facility, which cost $50 million to buy and renovate, was believed to contain the largest collection of Jewish archival material outside Israel.

**Forward**

In its April 28 issue, the English-language *Forward* newspaper announced that Seth Lipsky was resigning as editor. It was common knowledge that the resignation was not voluntary, and much of the rest of the staff left with him. During the ten years he had edited the weekly paper, Lipsky had made it perhaps the liveliest and certainly the most controversial Anglo-Jewish organ in the U.S., with unparalleled coverage of Jewish cultural developments, a neoconservative editorial slant, and a willingness to criticize the establishment that sometimes verged on sensationalism. These latter two qualities eventually did Lipsky in, as his *Forward* antagonized both the old-line left-of-center Jewish labor groups that still controlled the Forward Association, and the Jewish leaders that the paper pilloried. The fact that the paper lost about $2 million a year also played a role. In June, veteran journalist J.J. Goldberg, whose outlook was likely to coincide with that of the Forward Association, was named to replace Lipsky.

_Lawrence Grossman_