Jewish Communal Affairs

American Jews and Israel

As the year began, Israel prepared for an election on February 6 pitting the incumbent prime minister, Ehud Barak of the Labor-led coalition, against Likud candidate Ariel Sharon. With Barak's peace plans apparently dashed by the failure of the Camp David talks in the summer of 2000 and the onset of a bloody new intifada that entered its fourth month in January 2001, Barak nevertheless kept negotiations going with the Palestinians in the hope of a last-minute deal. But the Israeli opposition was not idle, scheduling a massive demonstration for January 8 in Jerusalem. While officially nonpartisan, the event was called to protest the idea, allegedly being contemplated by government negotiators, of giving the Palestinians some form of sovereignty over parts of the city, including—so it was rumored—the Temple Mount.

Natan Sharansky, well-known in the U.S. from his days as a Soviet refusenik and now working for the Sharon campaign, came to the U.S., and met on January 3 with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations—the high-profile umbrella body for American Jewry on issues related to Israel—to ask it to endorse the demonstration and participate in it. A number of the conference's constituent organizations objected to involvement in what they saw as a matter of internal Israeli politics, and the lack of consensus meant that the conference could take no official action. Nevertheless, Ronald Lauder, the conference chairman, attended the Jerusalem demonstration and was a featured speaker. Noting that he spoke only in his individual capacity, Lauder nevertheless claimed that he was "representing millions of Jews throughout the world" in opposing the division of Jerusalem. Reporting the story, the Israeli press described Lauder not simply as an individual Jew, but as chairman of the conference or as an "American Jewish leader."

About a dozen of the 54 member organizations of the Conference of Presidents—echoed by Labor leaders in Israel—expressed outrage that Lauder had, in effect, used the aura of his leadership position to take sides in an Israeli election. A spokeswoman for Lauder commented that he "is deeply concerned about the peace and security of Israel, and surely no one would seriously suggest he be muzzled on a vital issue he has cared
about his entire life. In fact, remaining silent would be a greater cause for criticism.” Upon his return to the U.S., Lauder spoke at another rally against dividing Jerusalem, this one at New York’s City Hall.

The Conference of Presidents met on January 31 and overwhelmingly approved new limitations on the prerogatives of its chairman, who, from now on, “in public remarks, should reflect policies already determined through the conference consensus,” and “should refrain from speaking in his/her individual capacity, or in the capacity of volunteer or professional head of a member or other organization on issues related to the conference agenda.” Backing for this resolution came even from organizations that supported Lauder’s stand on the unity of Jerusalem, since they too recognized that an unfettered chairman, no matter what his ideological bent, endangered the effectiveness of the conference.

A side effect of the Jerusalem demonstration and Lauder’s participation was the revelation of fissures within American Jewry over the future of the city. Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, writing in the New York Times (Jan. 24) argued that “the holiest of cities” was so vital to “the Jewish soul” that it should not even be discussed in negotiations for at least 20 years. But in a letter responding to Wiesel (Jan. 26), Rabbi Charles Kroloff, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR, the organization of Reform rabbis) argued for sharing the city since it “has become a central symbol for Arabs.” And while Arthur Hertzberg, a Conservative rabbi and academic, felt that a “deal” on Jerusalem could be “the best hope that we have for an historic breakthrough,” Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, who was Orthodox, insisted that holding on to the entire city “is what we mean by our pledge not to forget Jerusalem” (New York Jewish Week, Jan. 12, 26).

The Lauder incident also sparked the first of several controversies that the Reform movement would have with Israeli officials over the course of the year. The most outspoken critic of Lauder’s participation in the Jerusalem demonstration was Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the organization of Reform synagogues. Asked about Yoffie’s objections, Ehud Olmert, the mayor of Jerusalem and one of the primary sponsors of the demonstration, told a reporter that Reform Judaism was “an insignificant minority that is meaningless when it comes to Jerusalem.” Yoffie countered that Olmert seemed to be ignorant of the fact that American Reform was “by far the largest group of any organized body of Jews on this continent,” to which Olmert responded that Yoffie should stick to religion, since, “if you are in politics, then we are in a different ball game and we can talk in a different way” (Forward, Jan. 19).
After Sharon defeated Barak overwhelmingly on February 6, the *New York Times* reported that American Jewish liberals, who were pro-Labor, felt that it was the Palestinians, by rejecting the Barak peace offer and launching the intifada, who had elected Sharon. Rabbi Yoffie told the *Times* reporter that his normally liberal Reform constituents felt “enormous anger” at Yasir Arafat. Yoffie nevertheless announced that the Reform movement would speak out against the new government if Sharon expanded West Bank settlements or did anything else to undermine chances for peace. Commenting on Sharon’s belligerent image in the U.S., Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents, said: “There is a lot of demonization of Sharon, particularly in the media. The American Jewish community will work with him.”

Ronald Lauder, meanwhile, buoyed by Sharon’s victory, indicated that he did not feel bound by the recent Conference of Presidents resolution limiting the public expression of his personal political opinions. Saying that he was encouraged by the new prime minister’s pledge not to divide Jerusalem, Lauder asserted that he would not hesitate to criticize Sharon if he went back on that promise.

With a new Israeli government in place, Israel and the organized American Jewish community put into operation a high-powered media campaign to counter Palestinian claims that Israel was a brutal aggressor. The Israeli foreign ministry hired Howard Rubinstein Associates, a major New York public-relations firm, to place Israeli spokespeople on TV news shows and to provide media professionals with material giving Israel’s perspective on the news. In a separate project to bolster American Jewish enthusiasm for Israel that had started months before the election, the Conference of Presidents, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and other Jewish bodies worked with a team of American consultants and pollsters who conducted focus groups around the country. Some who were privy to the early findings reported widespread apathy among younger American Jews about Israel, and ignorance of some of the basic facts about the Jewish state.

The national Jewish groups also commissioned a survey of the attitudes of American Jews and the broader American public about the Middle East conflict, and the results, released in March, had a calming effect on an anxious pro-Israel community. Asked if their view was closer to that of Israel or that of the Palestinians, 51 percent of the sample of Americans identified with the Israeli position and just 11 percent with the Palestinian (among Jews, the breakdown was 83 to 2). The Palestinians were considered “more at fault” for the situation by 42 percent of the Americans, 14 percent blamed the Israelis, and 30 put the onus on both equally.
(among Jews, 70 percent blamed the Palestinians, 5 percent the Israelis, and 16 percent both). Yet, media images of the intifada had made an impact: 54 percent of the Americans surveyed (37 percent of the Jews) believed that Israel overreacted in shooting at Palestinian stone-throwers.

It was against the backdrop of these poll numbers that Ariel Sharon arrived in Washington, in mid-March, for his first meeting as prime minister with President Bush and congressional leaders. By all accounts, things went well, Sharon’s moderate demeanor and restrained words doing much to belie his hard-line reputation. Sharon also addressed the policy conference of AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the key pro-Israel lobby, along with Secretary of State Colin Powell. Sharon said that Jerusalem would remain united under Israeli sovereignty and that Israel would not “negotiate under the threat of violence,” but drew a distinction between terrorists and their supporters, on the one hand, and the bulk of the Palestinian people, on the other, who, he felt, wanted peace. The most controversial words at the AIPAC conference came from Elie Wiesel, who castigated anyone “who uses their Jewishness as a context to attack or condemn Israel.” Though Wiesel did not specify whom he had in mind, the audience assumed that he was referring to American Jewish pro-peace groups that publicly criticized Israeli policy in putting down the intifada.

The United Jewish Communities (UJC), the umbrella organization of the local Jewish federations, under criticism for failing to pull off any mass national pro-Israel event since the onset of the intifada the previous September, launched an “Israel Now Initiative” aimed at “repositioning Israel in the hearts and minds of North American Jewry.” A closed-door meeting of federation heads in April resulted in a decision to stage rallies in New York City and Los Angeles on June 3, when Prime Minister Sharon was next expected in the U.S. This immediately brought complaints from the people planning the annual New York City Salute to Israel Parade, scheduled for May 20, who feared that the UJC activities just two weeks later would hurt support for the parade. As it turned out, Sharon postponed his visit till the end of June. The UJC plan for rallies was shelved until the fall, and the events of September 11 would turn this into an indefinite postponement.

Frustrated at the cancellation of the rallies and at the vacuum of Jewish leadership that they felt it demonstrated, a number of New York congregations, led by Rabbi Avi Weiss, went ahead with their own pro-Israel rally at the Israeli mission to the UN on June 3. Weiss explained the rationale: “Let’s just get people into the street. I just don’t think we can wait
four months.” The rally drew some 10,000 people, and one of the speakers was Rudy Giuliani, the city’s mayor.

Another key component of the UJC’s Israel solidarity plan, worked out in the spring, was a massive program of visits to Israel by American Jews that would, it was hoped, reenergize the American Jewish-Israeli bond. These trips would build upon the Birthright Israel initiative, launched by a small group of philanthropists in late 1998, that had already provided the “Israel experience” for hundreds of Jewish college students, free of charge (see AJYB 2000, pp. 212–13; 2001, pp. 227–28). Early in the year, federations were gearing up for a large increase in applicants for Birthright Israel, and, in April, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, who had recently resigned as president of Hebrew Union College (HUC), was appointed Birthright Israel’s executive vice president.

But an already uneasy security situation in Israel deteriorated rapidly, beginning with the May 18 suicide bombing at a Netanya shopping mall that killed five, and one began to hear, more and more, of American Jews canceling their plans to visit. Then, on June 1, came the atrocity at the Tel Aviv Dophinarium disco, where 21 were killed and some 120 injured. The next day, Rabbi Eric Yoffie announced, in the name of the UAHC, that all of the Reform movement’s summer youth trips to Israel for 2001 were canceled. “Our religious and Zionist commitments run deep and are well known to all,” Yoffie explained, “but this movement never uses other people’s children to make a political or ideological point.”

This decision proved controversial. Knesset member Tommy Lapid, whose anticlerical views usually aligned him politically with Reform, compared the cancellation to “a rabbi announcing that the synagogue will be closed for Yom Kippur on account of the High Holidays” (Forward, June 15). The Reform movement in Israel expressed deep resentment, fearing that the move would only reinforce the common Israeli stereotype that Reform did not sympathize with Zionism—a perception encouraged as well, Reform Israelis said, by the movement’s meager financial support for its congregations in Israel. Charles Bronfman, chairman of the UJC and one of the founders of Birthright Israel, declared: “I would hope that all trips continue! The terrorists must be taught that we are no chicken kind of people.” Rabbi Yoffie explained that many youngsters had dropped out of the programs already, and that families of those remaining were insisting on “security provisions that we felt we could not in good conscience provide.” He said he was “bewildered by the intensity and vitriol of the response.”

The heated controversy over the cancellation of the Reform program
drew attention away from significant statements about the Middle East situation that Yoffie enunciated at the same time. Acknowledging that the generally dovish Reform movement had “been wrong about Palestinian intentions,” he publicly condemned Yasir Arafat and his followers for supporting terror and encouraging anti-Semitism. At the same time, Yoffie called on Israel to freeze settlement construction in the territories. “Occupation involves acts of degradation and cruelty,” Yoffie said, “and Israel’s occupation has been no different.” Critics questioned why, if Arafat had now proven himself to be an unrepentant terrorist, he should be rewarded with an Israeli settlement freeze.

Also in early June, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein spearheaded a protest movement against the way the New York Times reported the news from Israel. Pointing out numerous instances of what he considered anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian bias, Lookstein proposed that “every reader who is fed up” should suspend his or her subscription, and not buy the paper on the newsstand, from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur (New York Jewish Week, June 15). Several weeks later, at Lookstein’s request, the executive editor of the Times met with him about the matter. The editor acknowledged that several of the rabbi’s complaints about specific articles were valid, but he attributed inaccuracies in the paper’s coverage to simple “mistakes” rather than to bias. Lookstein, for his part, was gratified that “someone is listening” at the Times, but said that his ten-day boycott plan was still in effect.

As American Jewish sentiment shifted increasingly rightward with the continuation of Palestinian violence, organized American Jewry experienced some discomfort when the Bush administration did not seem to see things in the same light. To be sure, the Zionist Organization of America was virtually alone within the Jewish community when it called, in July, for cutting off all U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority until the violence stopped. But in August, AIPAC publicly called on the American government to cease its “even-handed” criticism of both sides, and instead issue a public condemnation of Yasir Arafat.

September 11 only heightened Jewish anxieties. The American administration announced its plan to create an international coalition against terror, a step that was surely, in theory, in Israel’s interest. In practice, however, it raised the possibility of pressure on Israel to make diplomatic concessions so as to induce the Palestinians and the Arab nations to join the U.S.-led venture, and from Israel’s perspective, these putative partners in antiterrorism were themselves sources of terror. For many American Jewish leaders, another unfortunate aspect of the situation was the need
to cancel the long-delayed national pro-Israel demonstration that the UJC had planned for September 23 in New York City. Both security considerations and a reluctance to press Israel's case at a time of America's national mourning made the cancellation unavoidable.

In the weeks after September 11, reports circulated that the administration was going to affirm support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and on October 2 the president himself confirmed this, stating as a condition that such a state must recognize Israel's right to exist. AIPAC immediately criticized the plan, which, it said, would "reward, rather than punish, those that harbor and support terrorism." Mortimer Zuckerman, the new chairman of the Conference of Presidents, described the policy initiative as "very short-sighted and erroneous," since it would send the message that "if you attack America, you'll get something." However, some 50 other American Jews signed a letter to the president, prepared by the Israel Policy Forum, endorsing his policies against terror and for Middle East peace; among the signatories were several who held prominent positions in the American Jewish community. On October 4, Prime Minister Sharon called on the U.S. not to "appease the Arabs at our expense" and invoked the memory of the appeasement of Hitler in 1938. The administration immediately termed his remarks "unacceptable," and Sharon withdrew the comparison.

On October 30, Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, attracted headlines with a speech in Jerusalem calling on Israel to "put the moral high ground back where it belongs." It could do so, he felt, by stopping military operations against the Palestinians and simply drawing a line of separation between Israel and the Palestinian areas, even if that meant dismantling settlements.

Several public-opinion polls conducted toward the end of the year—Newsweek, Harris, Gallup, and Zogby International—indicated that, whatever its geopolitical ramifications, the events of September 11 had increased pro-Israel feeling in the U.S. and depressed even further the already negative opinion that Americans had of the Palestinians. And before the year ended, the administration too moved toward a more unambiguously pro-Israel stance. On December 13, two days after Israel severed all contact with Yasir Arafat, President Bush told a delegation of top Jewish leaders—invited to the White House to celebrate Hanukkah—that Arafat was to blame for the violence.

Throughout the year, however, the Jewish community was haunted by the sense that it was losing the battle in one crucial arena—the college campus. Reports from many parts of the country indicated that Pales-
tinian and other Arab/Muslim students were knowledgeable about Middle East issues, committed to their cause, and well organized. In contrast, despite efforts by Hillel and other Jewish organizations to mobilize pro-Israel sentiment, many Jewish students appeared to be ignorant and apathetic, and some even espoused the Palestinian viewpoint. To some extent, this was one part of a much larger problem: the erosion of distinctive Jewish identity.

**Keeping Jews Jewish**

The widespread perception that many young Jews did not feel very Jewish had been agitating the community for some time, and research findings released in the fall seemed to justify a sense of foreboding. “Jews Turning from Judaism” was the somewhat sensational headline in the New York Jewish Week (Nov. 2), reporting on the American Jewish Identity Survey, the work of sociologists Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin, and Ariella Keysar. They found that the number of Jews who identified with a religion other than Judaism had more than doubled in one decade: while 625,000 individuals who were of Jewish parentage or ethnicity espoused other religions in 1990, the number was now 1.4 million. Furthermore, another 1.4 million said they were secular or had no religion. Comparison with members of other religions yielded additional startling information: only 15 percent of American adults described themselves as secular, but 72 percent of people of Jewish background did, including 42 percent of those who said they were Jewish by religion.

It was surely serendipitous that, soon after release of the study, Dennis Ross, the Clinton administration’s Middle East envoy, was appointed to head a new campaign to strengthen Jewish identity worldwide, sponsored by the Jewish Agency for Israel. In the U.S., while the numbers cited by the three sociologists were new, the problem was not, and several strategies were already in place aimed at promoting Judaism.

One approach was liturgical innovation aimed at young adults. At Sinai Temple, a Conservative congregation in Los Angeles, for example, Rabbi David Wolpe’s monthly “Friday Night Live” drew 2,000 Jews, most of them unmarried, by providing an abbreviated prayer service, guitar and keyboard music that “inspires clapping and cheering,” and a “spiritually uplifting” speech by the rabbi (Forward, Jan. 19). In communities where the local rabbi was not as forthcoming, young adults often broke away from the established synagogue to form their own informal prayer groups, opting for an eclectic mélange of practices associated with different denominations that, they felt, enhanced spirituality.
Some Jews seemed to resonate to Buddhist-style meditation in Jewish guise—minutes of silent contemplation followed by the utterance of words from the Hebrew prayers. "Meditation," reported the New York Jewish Week (Feb. 2), "is rapidly moving from the margins of Jewish life into the heart of the mainstream." Such practices were proliferating in congregations and at schools, Jewish community centers, retreats, and private gatherings, often under the influence of the Jewish Renewal movement. Proponents noted that now, unlike the situation in years past, Jews of a meditative bent did not have to face an either/or choice between synagogue and ashram, but could practice a truly Jewish form of mysticism.

Beyond the sphere of Jewish worship, innovative Jewish voices sought to prove to young Jews that Jewishness was relevant to their secular lives. The leading exponent of this approach was Rabbi Irwin Kula, president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL). Building on research that showed that "being Jewish" was important to most American Jews even as Judaism was becoming less important in their daily lives, Kula convened a two-day conference in mid-January for some 50 leading figures in science, business, culture, and religion. The aim was to find ways—"markers" was Kula's term—to make unaffiliated Jews "understand that many of their most basic acts are informed by their Jewish heritage." The search for such markers, he noted, should be done with a "non-judgmental attitude" (Forward, Feb. 16).

A good example of finding Jewish meaning in a secular calling was provided by Shawn Green, the slugging outfielder and cleanup hitter for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Green announced that he would not play on September 26, Yom Kippur eve, even though his team was locked in a close pennant race. Green was doing this, he said, "partly as a representative of the Jewish community, and as far as my being a role model in sports for Jewish kids." His manager, a Catholic, had no complaints, saying, "This is about family and religion, and I'm not one to stand in the way of that" (New York Times, Sept. 9).

Whether a Jewish marker could be found in every endeavor was put to the test by the November issue of Playboy. "Miss November" was a 20-year-old Jewish woman, Lindsey Vuolo; the magazine printed pictures taken at her bat mitzvah, along with more recent and more revealing photos. Makor, the popular singles mecca on Manhattan's Upper West Side, hosted a dialogue on December 19 between Vuolo and Rabbi Shmuel Boteach. The rabbi, whose book, Kosher Sex, had been excerpted in an earlier issue of Playboy, argued that posing nude was against Jewish values. However, another rabbi, Bradley Hirschfeld, vice president of CLAL, felt that posing for Playboy could be interpreted as a positive Jewish
marker. He told the popular Internet site beliefnet.com that “a beautiful Jewish body that’s actually being fantasized over by millions of men” was “a real step forward” for American Jews.

The seemingly inexorable proliferation of Jewish-Gentile marriage and the growing acceptance of its inevitability continued in 2001, but not without one energetic attempt to buck the trend.

The high level of acceptability that intermarriage had achieved among American Jews—about half believing that opposition to such marriages was racist—had been amply documented in the American Jewish Committee’s Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion 2000 (see AJYB 2001, pp. 226–27). The American Jewish Identity Survey, using the same methodology employed by the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, found an over-50-percent intermarriage rate for American Jews over the 1990–2001 period. It also showed that the proportion of Jews married to non-Jews had risen from 28 percent to 37 percent over that time, and that 80 percent of single Jews living with someone had a non-Jewish partner.

The number of books published in 2001 on the subject of mixed-married families was another way to gauge the extent of the phenomenon and also the degree of fascination with it. There were, to begin with, The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration, Suddenly Jewish: Jews Raised as Gentiles Discover their Jewish Roots, and The Interfaith Family Guidebook: Practical Advice for Jewish and Christian Partners. For readers of an academic bent, there was Common Prayers: Faith, Family, and a Christian’s Journey Through the Jewish Year, in which the eminent Harvard theologian Harvey Cox described what it was like to be married to a Jewish woman, raise a Jewish son, and celebrate Jewish holidays, even while remaining a Christian. Perhaps the most surprising publication on the topic was Building the Faith: A Book of Inclusion for Dual-Faith Families, a pamphlet put out by the Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs—an arm of the Conservative movement, which itself maintained strict policies against intermarriage.

Yet another straw in the wind was the palpable relaxation of the old Jewish tension over the “December Dilemma.” Whereas Jews had historically felt great discomfort about public manifestations of Christmas in America society since they made Jews feel less than fully American, the perceived secularization of the holiday, along with the growing number of Jewish-Christian households, had minimized the problem. Even Jewish children celebrating Christmas in such homes, one researcher told the Forward (Dec. 21), “don’t see it as a dilution of their Judaism . . . but see it as obeying the commandment to honor one’s parents.”
An attempt at a counter-movement began on February 20, when a coalition of some 25 rabbis, communal leaders, and academicians convened at the headquarters of the American Jewish Committee. The group issued a statement reasserting the traditional norm that Jews should marry Jews, pledged to work to "shape the communal climate" in line with that standard, and advocated conversion efforts when intermarriage did take place. Predictably, the new coalition drew expressions of scorn from some who viewed intermarriage as unstoppable and who believed that talk of conversion alienated the non-Jewish partner. Sociologist Egon Mayer, founding director of the Jewish Outreach Institute, called the initiative "ludicrous" and "comical." Edmund Case, who ran an Internet site for mixed-religion families, complained that implying that intermarriage is bad "will only exacerbate the rejecting experience and feeling of lack of welcome that many interfaith families identify as obstacles to their Jewish affiliation."

The debate soon precipitated a battle of research findings. Much of the intellectual force behind the efforts of the anti-intermarriage coalition came from the conclusions contained in Jewish and Something Else, a report prepared for the American Jewish Committee by Prof. Sylvia Barack Fishman of Brandeis University. Based on quantitative data and extensive work with focus groups, Fishman found that parental expectations for their children to marry Jews often did have the desired effect, suggesting that intermarriage was hardly inevitable. Also, Fishman discovered that it was very rare for children in mixed-religion households—even where they were nominally being raised as Jews—to have an unambiguous Jewish identification.

Edmund Case countered that Fishman, a member of the nascent anti-intermarriage coalition, had allowed her bias against mixed-religion families to distort her findings, a charge that she vehemently denied. The Jewish Outreach Institute, which operated on the premise that widespread intermarriage was inevitable and that the Jewish community could only accommodate itself to the phenomenon, published its own study of the attitudes of the intermarried. It indicated that programs of outreach to them were often successful in increasing Jewish awareness and participation. The questionnaire did not ask about attitudes toward conversion of the non-Jewish partner.

9/11 and American Jewry

The terrorist acts of September 11—two hijacked planes flown into the World Trade Center in New York, another into the Pentagon in Wash-
ington, and a fourth crashing in Pennsylvania—killed more than 3,000 people. These surprise attacks traumatized all Americans, but the impact on Jews had two unique aspects. First, Osama bin Laden’s Muslim terrorists represented the same ideology that lay behind the Palestinian intifada that had killed hundreds of Israelis over the previous year. And second, Jews were not randomly distributed across the U.S. An overwhelmingly urban people, almost 1.5 million of them—some 32 percent of all American Jews—lived in the New York area, the prime target of the atrocity. Indeed, one of the first ambulances to reach the site of the Twin Towers was from Hatzolah (Hebrew for “rescue”), the Orthodox emergency medical service.

In the immediate aftermath, synagogues held special prayer services and Jewish schools struggled to address their students’ sudden feelings of vulnerability. Rabbis and therapists spoke of having to counsel Holocaust survivors who suffered from flashbacks of that earlier exercise in inhumanity. As the High Holidays approached, the rabbis strove to strike the appropriate note in their sermons, and synagogues and other Jewish institutions worked feverishly to beef up security, fearing further attacks, this time aimed specifically at Jews. Simhat Torah, the holiday marking the annual completion of the reading of the entire Torah, celebrated in many Jewish neighborhoods with dancing in the streets, came out this year on October 9–10; the dancing was moved indoors due to safety concerns. Meanwhile, families of Jews who were missing lived in Jewish limbo, unable to sit shivah (the traditional seven-day mourning period) and come to terms with their loss until proof of death was forthcoming (Orthodox rabbis approved the use of DNA evidence). At a November 5 conference for rabbis held at Yeshiva University in New York, Rabbi Tzvi Weinreb, the incoming president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU) and a professional psychologist, pointed out that conventional forms of therapy were insufficient in this case. He advised his colleagues to help people “recognize there is evil in the world. Real evil” (New York Times, Nov. 18).

The Jewish community also experienced a significant upsurge in open manifestations of American patriotism, as the stark recognition of Islamic terrorism as the common enemy brought to consciousness the previously taken-for-granted affinity between Jewishness and Americanism. Significantly, there were no attempts to tally up the number of Jewish victims as a separate and distinct category. In November, the American Jewish Committee issued a “Thanksgiving Haggadah” that melded Jewish tradition with the quintessential American holiday; it included the question, “Why is this Thanksgiving different from all others?” American pa-
triotism was notable even in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods of New York, places where Jews had sought to keep apart from American cultural influences, doing without TV and reading no secular literature. Now, hundreds of American flags could be seen affixed to the houses and stores of these Jews, just as in other parts of the city.

Jewish philanthropy was deeply affected by September 11. A number of national and New York Jewish organizations immediately established special funds to help the victims and their families, and a month after the attacks an estimated $4 million had been collected. But this created complications for the regular fund-raising campaigns of these groups. UJA-Federation of New York sought to surmount the problem through a fund that would help all victims of terror, and thus support programs in Israel as well as cover 9/11 aid, though this did not sit well with some donors. Another difficulty confronting the charities that used mass mailings was that many people refused to open letters from addresses they did not recognize, for fear of anthrax infection. There was also considerable controversy over whether it was ethical for Jewish fund-raising appeals to exploit fears of terrorist attacks.

Denominational Life

Strife and Cooperation

A period of several years of public civility between Orthodox and non-Orthodox American Jews was broken with the publication of the February issue of *Moment* magazine. In it, Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for the Orthodox organization Agudath Israel of America, had a message for “sincere and dedicated Conservative Jews”—“Their movement is a failure.” While careful to acknowledge that Orthodoxy too had its faults, Shafran pointed to changes within Conservative Judaism—he specifically mentioned the ordination of women and the growing acceptance of homosexuality—that, he felt, effectively detached the movement from Halakhah, the Jewish legal tradition. Conservative Judaism, therefore, could no longer fulfill its original aim, “to inspire Jews to Jewish observance.” Shafran claimed that that was why only 29 percent of Conservative Jews bought kosher meat, just 15 percent considered themselves Sabbath observers, and, according to data collected by the Conservative movement, a majority of its youth saw nothing wrong with marriage to a non-Jew.

Conservative leaders were outraged, especially since Shafran himself
had often taken issue with critiques of his own brand of Judaism and called them “Orthodox-bashing.” The major Conservative organizations issued a joint statement describing Shafran’s article as “shameful” and his viewpoint that of “fundamentalists.” Not challenging Shafran’s data on halakhic laxity and instead attributing the movement’s difficulties with Jewish law to “an honest struggle,” the Conservative statement pointed to other areas of Jewish life where the movement could claim greater success: “synagogue affiliation, communal involvement, Jewish study, and social action.” Shafran also received criticism of a tactical nature from within his own right-wing Orthodox constituency: many complained that while the positive exposure of non-Orthodox Jews to Jewish observance could win Orthodoxy many new adherents, attacks like that of Shafran on non-Orthodox movements only generated animosity. For his part, Shafran expressed just one regret about the article—that he had allowed the editors of Moment to change his suggested title, “Time to Come Home,” to the far more incendiary “The Conservative Lie.”

The tables were turned in the fall, when Orthodoxy complained that it was being maligned. In the days following September 11, with registration under way for elections to the 2002 World Zionist Congress (WZC), Rabbi Uri Regev, a prominent leader of Reform Judaism in Israel, addressed the Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Cleveland. According to a report in the Cleveland Jewish News (Oct. 12), he urged his audience to register with Arza, the World Union of Reform Judaism, for the WZC elections, and thus strengthen religious pluralism in the Jewish state and break the Orthodox monopoly. The reporter described Regev as drawing “a chilling parallel between Islamic and Israeli religious extremists.” He said, “if we don’t learn from the September 11 loss of human lives, we haven’t learned anything.” Orthodox leaders vehemently rejected the implied comparison of Muslim fundamentalism to Orthodox Judaism. Avi Shafran, for one, argued that, unlike the Islamic haters, Orthodox Jews “love all Jews.” Regev responded that he had not suggested any equivalence between Muslim and Jewish fundamentalism, but only noted the dangers of incendiary rhetoric within any religion. The reporter who wrote the story admitted that she had embellished her account of Regev’s remarks, but this did not mollify his outraged critics.

Despite the doctrinal and political barriers that still evidently divided Orthodox from non-Orthodox, an interdenominational forum on Jewish law entitled “The Contemporary Study of Halakhah: Methods and Meaning,” held to mark the 125th anniversary of Hebrew Union College (HUC), the Reform seminary, took place peacefully in New York on March 18–20. At the forum, Orthodox rabbis from Yeshiva University
appeared on scholarly panels together with their Conservative and Reform counterparts. While the sectarian Orthodox of Agudath Israel did not participate, their spokesman, the same Avi Shafran, said he was encouraged “to read that the Reform movement recognizes Halakhah and its study as vital to the perpetuation of Jewish life.”

One specific interdenominational clash of a local nature—sports competition between Jewish high schools in the New York metropolitan area—reached a resolution of sorts. Concerned that allowing non-Orthodox schools into the existing Orthodox yeshivah league might lend legitimacy to their interpretations of Judaism, a majority of yeshivah principals voted, on February 5, to bar the three Solomon Schechter high schools—affiliated with the Conservative movement—from participation. In May, however, stung by the negative publicity their ban had evoked, the principals reversed themselves and welcomed the Schechter schools on condition that there would be no cheerleaders and that “female athletes wear pants that extend below the knees and T-shirts as opposed to tank-tops” (Forward, May 25). Furthermore, in league meetings the Conservative schools would not have a vote on any matters of a religious nature.

Orthodox Judaism

It was clear, in 2001, that for all of its attempts to achieve isolation from cultural trends it considered destructive, American Orthodoxy could not completely escape them.

Women’s issues received considerable attention. At the beginning of the year, the OU and the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA)—respectively the primary lay and rabbinic Modern Orthodox bodies—announced approval of new guidelines to streamline and standardize rabbinical court procedure in handling Jewish divorces. The aim was to make it more difficult for men—who, under Jewish law, had the power to withhold such divorces, preventing their former wives from remarrying—to use extortion and blackmail in such cases.

In May, Sharona Margolin Halickman, 27, was appointed “spiritual mentor” at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, an Orthodox synagogue in New York City. While not functioning officially as a rabbi, Halickman, who had been one of the two first Orthodox female “congregational interns” (see AJYB 2001, p. 240), would be teaching, counseling, and delivering sermons. This was believed to be the highest-level synagogue position ever attained by a woman in Orthodox Judaism.

Another barrier to women’s participation in Orthodox life was shat-
tered in the fall, when Rabbi David Silber, dean of the Drisha Institute, a school of advanced Jewish studies for women in New York City, had women lead certain parts of the prayers and be called up to the Torah at the Orthodox High Holy Day services that the school sponsored. Although there were rabbis who felt that Jewish law theoretically sanctioned such practices, they had never before been implemented by the Orthodox in the U.S.

In May, two separate conferences for Jewish women took place in New York City, each drawing several hundred participants. The meeting of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) focused on how Jewish feminist mothers could help their daughters negotiate gender issues in Judaism. Meanwhile, a group of more traditional Orthodox women who did not consider themselves feminists—brought together by the Jewish Renaissance Center—discussed the tensions between running an observant home and the pressures of the workplace. This concern was a clear indication that American socioeconomic trends were affecting even the most insular bastions of Orthodoxy, as the *New York Times* noted earlier in the year (Jan. 4) in an article headlined, "Working World Grows for Orthodox Women: New Field and Strict Judaism Coexist."

Another sign that Orthodox Jews were not immune from societal trends was the large and growing phenomenon of unmarried Orthodox adults. A daylong conference on the subject held in Queens, New York, on November 18 drew an overflow crowd of singles and their worried parents to discuss what was, from the standpoint of Jewish tradition if not from the perspective of contemporary American mores, a "problem." Rabbi Yoel Schonfeld, the host of the conference, declared: "The singles situation has reached crisis proportions. Young women and men are just not getting married at the rates they should be."

Even the longstanding traditional taboo on homosexuality, rooted in the Bible, came under question. In October, a new film, *Trembling Before God*, opened in New York City. It depicted the lives of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews, sensitively portraying their guilt and anguish about violating a cardinal principle of Jewish law while also showing their abiding commitment to live traditional Jewish lives and be part of the Orthodox community. Several local Orthodox rabbis were so moved by the film that they arranged for screenings at their synagogues, followed by discussions. Not all sectors of Orthodoxy, however, were prepared to reassess traditional views about homosexuality. In March, the National Council of Young Israel, an important network of Orthodox synagogues, honored "Dr. Laura" Schlesinger, a convert to Judaism and a politically conserv-
ative media personality, despite protests from many who were appalled by her public description of homosexuality as “deviant” and a “biological error.”

The phenomenon of young Orthodox “dropouts,” teenage boys and girls who stopped attending school and became involved in petty crimes and drug use (see AJYB 2000, p. 224), was getting more attention. The winter issue of Viewpoint, the organ of the National Council of Young Israel, featured a “Family and Teen Resource Guide” for help with a host of problems—“behavioral and learning disorders, anorexia, bulimia, kids thrown out of yeshivahs, kids using drugs, abusing alcohol, teens disaffected from their religious upbringing, kids on the street.” The editor noted, “one can hardly pick up a Jewish publication without reading a myriad of articles on the topic.” The Forward (Aug. 17) reported that in the previous 18 months “at least a dozen new drug and crime prevention programs were launched for Orthodox teens in the New York City area alone.” The Jewish Sentinel, a New York newspaper, devoted a cover story (Mar. 23–29) to “Dope Yomi: Drug Abuse Rises among Orthodox Teens”—a play on daf yomi, the “daily page” of Talmud study.

The second biennial conference of Edah, the movement seeking to revitalize Modern Orthodoxy, took place February 18–19 in New York City, with some 1,200 in attendance. The theme was “The Quest for Holiness.” In contrast to the tensions surrounding the first conference in 1999, which came under heavy fire from more insular sectors of the Orthodox community (see AJYB 2000, pp. 225–26), this year’s conference drew little notice outside its own constituency. Edah now boasted its own Web site and scholarly journal, and two of its leaders, Rabbis Saul Berman and Avi Weiss, had founded a new Modern Orthodox rabbinical school, Chovevei Torah, that drew students from both Yeshiva University and the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary.

In March, Dr. Norman Lamm, 73, announced that he was stepping down as president of Yeshiva University, the flagship educational institution of Modern Orthodoxy, after 25 years. “I didn’t want to be carried out feet first,” he told the New York Times (Mar. 14). Taking over an institution that was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1976, Lamm had transformed Yeshiva into a thriving university with a large and constantly growing student body. He set his retirement for August 2002, giving the university more than a year to search for a successor. Almost immediately, however, observers warned that the serious erosion of Modern Orthodoxy in recent years might make it difficult to locate qualified candidates who were both erudite Talmudists and seasoned academicians, and that ad-
ministrative responsibilities might have to be divided. Lamm, aware of the problem, gave a public address in November in which he cautioned against splitting the leadership of the institution in two, one rabbinic and the other academic.

At the start of 2001, the OU was still reeling from the findings of a special commission that investigated charges of physical and emotional abuse allegedly committed over the course of three decades by Rabbi Baruch Lanner, a long-time outreach worker for its National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY). The commission substantiated many of the allegations and also found that other people associated with NCSY and OU had known about the abuse and ignored it. The overall findings were contained in a 54-page document that was made public in December 2000, while a longer, 331-page report that went into considerable detail was seen only by top OU officers (see AJYB 2001, p. 241).

On January 19, 2001, Rabbi Raphael Butler resigned as executive vice president of the OU. Before assuming that post Butler had headed NCSY from 1981 to 1989, and had thus been Lanner’s long-time supervisor. Butler explained his resignation as an attempt “to prevent the divisiveness and rancor that threaten the mission of the OU.” Sources close to the situation indicated that pressure from the RCA, the rabbinic body closely aligned with the OU, induced Butler to leave. In September, Rabbi Tzvi Weinreb, a pulpit rabbi and psychotherapist from Baltimore, was named to replace him. Meanwhile, a grand jury in Monmouth County, New Jersey, handed down a criminal indictment against Rabbi Lanner for alleged abuse committed while he was principal of a day school there.

On June 16–17, thousands visited the grave, in Queens, New York, of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the late rebbe of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidim, to mark the seventh anniversary of his death. Despite the continuing lack of any successor to the childless rebbe, the movement was accelerating its outreach work; it claimed a 40-percent increase in the number of Chabad institutions worldwide since their leader’s passing.

In Orthodox circles outside Lubavitch there was mounting alarm over reports that many in the sect viewed the late rebbe as the messiah who would soon be resurrected, and that some even identified him as God. Nevertheless, there was considerable reluctance about raising the issue in public. The first to overcome this inhibition had been David Berger, a rabbi and Jewish historian at Brooklyn College, who convinced the RCA to issue a denunciation of such messianism in 1996 (see AJYB 1997, p. 198). In 2001, Berger published a book, The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference, that set out the evidence that great
numbers of Lubavitchers were messianists; pointed out the allegedly heretical implications of such a view; denounced the passivity of mainstream Orthodoxy about the situation; noted the use that Christian proselytizers were already making of the doctrine of a resurrected messiah; and urged practical steps to isolate the messianists from the Jewish community. Berger's book drew criticism, however, from defenders of Lubavitch—some charging that he had wildly exaggerated the number of messianists in the movement, others citing Jewish sources that, they argued, spoke of a messiah who would indeed rise from the dead.

**CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**

In his annual spring "state-of-the movement" address, delivered in Jacksonville, Florida, Chancellor Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary claimed that Conservative Judaism was largely responsible for the renaissance of Jewish education in America. He stressed the large number of Conservative-led day schools on the elementary and secondary levels—both those officially affiliated with the movement and "community" institutions largely supported and attended by Conservative Jews—adult-education programs, and early-childhood education.

Early in the year, the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism published *Four Up*, the findings of a study it commissioned on Jewish high-school students whose parents were affiliated with Conservative congregations. A unique feature of the report was that it was longitudinal, following the paths of the same young people whose Jewish identity had been studied in 1995, at bar/bat mitzvah age. Only half of the respondents had continued their Jewish education in their high-school years, and, overall, the teenagers were less observant and attended synagogue less regularly than when previously surveyed. Nevertheless, an impressive 43 percent said they hoped to become more observant in the future. Those teenagers who attended day school, Hebrew high school or Jewish summer camp, and those belonging to Jewish youth movements, tended to view being Jewish as more important to their lives than those without such involvements.

In late January, Conservative women rabbis—there were over 120 of them—held their first group meeting since 1994. It was closed to outsiders and the press. According to accounts given by some participants afterwards, the rabbis discussed such matters of mutual concern as their sense of isolation in the rabbinate and remnants of opposition to egalitarianism in the movement. The latter included their perception that they
were paid less than their male colleagues and that congregations were reluctant to grant maternity leave, and the movement's refusal, on grounds of Jewish law, to grant women rabbis the authority to sign and witness Jewish legal documents, such as divorce decrees.

A major breakthrough for Conservative women occurred in February, when Judy Yudoff, of St. Paul, Minnesota, was elected president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the movement's lay body. Yudoff thus became the first woman, volunteer or professional, to head either the lay or rabbinic arm of Conservative Judaism.

In late summer, the Conservative movement found itself in a nasty wrangle over Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. More than 30 Conservative rabbis in Israel, including some top leaders of Masorti Judaism (the Israeli Conservative movement), belonged to Rabbis for Human Rights, a dovish interdenominational group that publicized what it viewed as human-rights violations of the Israeli government. Ten other Masorti rabbis in Israel, led by Rabbi Avraham Feder, publicly called on them to sever that affiliation, arguing that the human-rights body was "bringing comfort and aid to the enemy" and "betraying and undercutting Israel's harsh and terrible struggle."

A new Bible commentary, *Etz Hayim*—the first to be officially commissioned by the Conservative movement and the first to embody its ideology—was published in the fall, and Conservative synagogues across the country ordered thousands of copies. The volume contained three sections, each edited by noted scholars and writers: an exposition of the literal meaning; a compendium of moral insights on the text drawn from the Talmud, midrash, and later commentators; and an explanation of how contemporary Conservative authorities have applied the Bible to current issues. Other features of *Etz Hayim* were a modern English translation, a heavy feminist influence, and acceptance of the findings of academic scholarship on the Bible. *Etz Hayim* drew criticism on two fronts. The Orthodox, predictably, cited its use of biblical criticism as proof that Conservative Judaism had severed all ties to tradition. At the same time, some non-Orthodox readers with a spiritual bent, complaining of scholarly overkill, doubted that a volume so academic would deepen the Jewish lives of many rank-and-file Conservative Jews.

**Reform Judaism**

Reform Judaism filled two top leadership positions in 2001: Rabbi David Ellenson was named president of Hebrew Union College (HUC), the movement's seminary and graduate school, and Rabbi Uri Regev be-
came executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), the global network of Reform synagogues based in Jerusalem. Ellenson, a long-time professor at HUC and an expert in the history of Jewish law and theology, had been raised as a traditional Jew and had close ties with leaders of the other movements, leading many observers to predict that his appointment would improve interdenominational relations. Regev, in contrast, who was appointed to head the WUPJ in December, had not long before been quoted in the press as comparing the fundamentalism of the Israeli Orthodox establishment to that of the Muslim perpetrators of September 11, though he claimed that his comments had been misinterpreted (see above, p. 234). The *Forward* reported (Dec. 7) that “Rabbi Regev is likely to continue to find himself in the middle of the pluralism tug of war between Reform and Orthodox.”

In 2001, Reform became the first Jewish religious movement to implement a strategy to deal with Jewish population mobility. With an estimated 10,000 Reform Jews moving to new locations each year and clear evidence of very low Jewish affiliation rates for those who are new to a community, the movement’s new “Synagogue Match” program provided a Web site for anyone to enter a new address and other personal information, and receive a list of three Reform synagogues within 25 miles of his or her new home. In addition, the three synagogues would be notified about that individual.

In 2000, the Reform movement had officially endorsed rabbinic officiation at same-sex unions (see *AJYB* 2001, pp. 236–37). Consistent with this position as well as with its overall posture of support for gay rights, on January 5, 2001, the Joint Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism responded to a Supreme Court ruling allowing the Boy Scouts of America to exclude gays by urging synagogues to stop sponsoring Boy Scout troops, and calling on individual Reform Jews to remove their children from the Boy Scouts. Several Reform rabbis, including Rabbi Paul Menitoff, executive vice president of the movement’s Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) had already turned in their Eagle Scout badges in protest.

Reform’s leading role in championing the equality of homosexuals was underlined as well by the publication of *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation*, a collection of reminiscences by 18 of these rabbis, the great majority of them Reform. The book made clear that the proportion of lesbians within the female rabbinate was markedly higher than within the general female population. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the UAHC, commented, “the publication of the book per se is not dramatic news. ... The fundamental issue here was a decision of our movement many years
Considerably more controversial was a decision by the Reform Rodeph Sholom elementary day school in New York City to cancel Mother’s Day programs because the activities might harm the “emotional well-being” of students who were part of “different family make-ups.” The New York Post cover story was “School Kills Mother’s Day,” and, on the “Tonight Show,” host Jay Leno ridiculed the decision. Rabbi Robert Levine of Rodeph Sholom explained the school’s policy: “children who, for whatever reason, have no mother should not have to sit in class while cards are being made for the mothers of others.”

The interest in Jewish ritual that had been growing within Reform found expression in new voluntary guidelines for conversion, developed over the previous four years, which were overwhelmingly approved at the CCAR convention in June. Rabbis were urged to recommend to candidates the traditional elements of conversion that Reform had discarded in the 19th century—circumcision for men (drawing a symbolic drop of blood for those already circumcised), examination of the convert by a three-rabbi panel, and ritual immersion in a mikveh. The CCAR also recommended that rabbis have prospective converts pledge to join a synagogue, maintain a Jewish home, and raise future children as Jews.

At the same time, the CCAR’s Responsa Committee, which issued Jewish legal opinions for the movement on an advisory basis, decided that intermarried Jews might serve as teachers in Reform Hebrew schools. This conflicted with the view of the Conservative movement, which barred the practice. While the Conservatives did not want their children coming into contact with religious role models who did not embody the traditional Jewish commitment to endogamy, the Reform committee, acknowledging a shortage of qualified educators, declared that a teacher’s “Jewish depth and family life” was more important than the religious identification of his or her spouse. “Mixed marriages,” it stated, “may be evidence that an individual is not the sort of Jew we want as a religious-school teacher, and then again it may not. Each case must be judged on its own merits.”

Organizations and Institutions

Conference of Presidents

The choice of a new chairman for the Conference of Presidents—the most visible American Jewish umbrella body—was heavily influence by the controversy at the beginning of the year over the personal involve-
ment of the outgoing chairman, Ronald Lauder, in Israeli politics (see above, pp. 221–22). The more dovish constituent organizations of the conference did not want to choose another Likud sympathizer who might circumvent the new rules restricting the chairman’s freedom of political expression and make statements that went beyond the conference consensus. The leading contender, Mortimer Zuckerman, honorary president of the America-Israel Friendship League, was suspect on this score since, as publisher of the *New York Daily News* and *U.S. News & World Report*, he had never been shy about expressing his personal opinions on the Middle East, and they seemed very close to the position of the current right-of-center Israeli government. Another problem that had been raised about a Zuckerman chairmanship in earlier years—his wife was not Jewish—had apparently been solved by the breakup of the marriage.

On April 19, the conference’s seven-member nominating committee approved Zuckerman (six voted for him, the seventh abstained). The four Reform groups that belonged to the 54-member conference announced their opposition on the grounds that Zuckerman said he would not stop writing editorials in his own name. On May 4, the Reform faction circulated a letter to the other member organizations detailing its objections, but on May 23, the full conference elected Zuckerman with only six votes against him—and those six then blocked a motion to make the choice unanimous. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the UAHC president and Zuckerman’s most vocal critic, said that he would be monitoring the new chairman’s statements carefully.

**United Jewish Communities**

The two-year-old United Jewish Communities (UJC), product of a merger between the Council of Jewish Federations, the United Jewish Appeal, and the United Israel Appeal, still seemed plagued by a lack of focus and low morale. Charles Bronfman, stepping down as founding chairman in November, urged the UJC to bring younger people into leadership positions, work more closely with private family foundations, and adopt a democratic system of decision-making without worrying about alienating big givers. The new chairman was James Tisch, previously the president of New York UJA-Federation. Tisch was president and CEO of Loews Corporation, which owned the Lorillard Tobacco Company, and he was chosen over the objections of anti-smoking activists. Replacing Stephen Solender as UJC president and CEO in June was Stephen Hoffman, who had been president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland.
Controversy had long plagued the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., as ideological battles raged over how “Jewish” the federally sponsored museum should be, and personality conflicts led to turf wars (see AJYB 1999, pp. 195–96; 2000, pp. 217–18). Now, with the incoming Bush administration noncommittal about whether it would renominate Rabbi Irving Greenberg—a Clinton appointee—as museum chairman, the sparks began flying again. Journalist Ira Stoll, in a Wall Street Journal op-ed (Dec. 29, 2000), cited statements Greenberg had made in an address to the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities the previous November that seemed to suggest that some Israeli soldiers may not always have acted with proper restraint in responding to the new Palestinian intifada. Greenberg’s exact words were: “it is entirely possible in my judgment that they overreacted, and in that overreaction killed people unnecessarily.” Greenberg believed that this constituted “a serious violation of the Jewish ethic of power.”

In Stoll’s eyes, such an assertion marked Greenberg as a leftist critic of Israel, and Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), immediately called on Greenberg for a retraction. Greenberg, for his part, said that his talk to the General Assembly had been a ringing endorsement of Israeli policy and that Stoll had taken one phrase out of context. Greenberg called the charge against him “the equivalent of a forgery, a complete misrepresentation of what I said.” And Greenberg believed there was more to the story, telling the New York Jewish Week (Jan. 12): “The people who have been attacking the museum needed a new angle. Pinning this image as a left-wing anti-Zionist on me would be the capstone of their indictment against the museum.”

Given Greenberg’s long record of support for Israel, this tempest would have subsided quickly had a new and even more embarrassing charge not surfaced in February: Greenberg was one of the prominent Jews who had written to President Clinton requesting a pardon for fugitive financier Marc Rich, a pardon granted on January 20, Clinton’s last day in office. Worse, Greenberg’s letter, dated December 11, 2000, had been on museum stationery. Greenberg explained that he believed that Rich deserved the pardon because of his extensive philanthropic works, but acknowledged that it had been a mistake to use museum stationery for correspondence unrelated to the museum, and he apologized.

The controversy simmered, with Greenberg’s critics adding the pardon to the earlier remarks about Israel to suggest a pattern of politicizing the
museum, and Greenberg’s supporters arguing that the most the man was guilty of was naïveté. Rumors flew that all the old, unresolved conflicts over the museum were fueling the fight: Greenberg had detractors who perceived him as an ineffective manager and as having a too parochially “Jewish” vision for the museum. In early April, a letter was hand-delivered to Greenberg at a Detroit airport. Signed by 17 current and former members of the museum’s council, it charged that Greenberg’s letter in support of Rich had caused serious damage to the museum, and that only his resignation could put matters right. In a counter-letter, 35 of the 65 members of the council urged Greenberg to stay on the job.

Two weeks later, the two sides declared a truce. The museum council unanimously passed a resolution calling it a “mistake” for Greenberg to have written the letter on museum stationery, accepting an apology offered by Greenberg, and pledging to work together under the rabbi’s leadership. On April 18, Greenberg and the council hosted President Bush at the museum, and the next day the president delivered a moving address at the U.S. Capitol in commemoration of Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day). Bush was still not saying whether he would appoint a new museum chairman.

Anti-Defamation League

Abraham Foxman, the long-time national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and one of the most prominent and powerful American Jewish leaders, was also tarred by the Rich pardon, and his role in it proved to be far more central than that of Greenberg. Rich had known Foxman for years, claimed to hail from the same East European town, and had donated large sums of money to the ADL. By Foxman’s own admission, he not only wrote Clinton to pardon Rich, but it was he who had first suggested the “pardon strategy” to Rich’s associates in February 2000. Foxman denied, however, that Rich’s donations had “bought” his support (*Forward*, Mar. 30). There were calls for Foxman’s resignation, including one from *New York Times* columnist William Safire, who accused the ADL head of “ethical blindness.” But Foxman, acknowledging that helping Rich had “probably” been a mistake, refused to step down.

Toward the end of the year, Foxman made headlines again. On December 22, he summoned David Lehrer, the ADL’s highly regarded Los Angeles regional director, to New York headquarters, and fired him. Jewish leaders on the West Coast who had worked with Lehrer over the years
expressed shock at the move. Foxman gave no explanation, but some observers suggested that the dismissal represented an attempt to maintain tight central control over the organization's regional directors.

**American Jewish Congress**

The American Jewish Congress, historically the most left-leaning and activist of the Jewish defense organizations, moved closer to the center of the political spectrum in 2001. "The great causes, injustices, and threats that drove previous generations to organize and speak out are largely absent from our society today," said AJCongress president Jack Rosen in October. The organization, he explained, would henceforth deal with "modern concerns" that emanate "from the values Jews embrace today." Several staff changes were made, with political moderates and conservatives replacing old-line liberals. Two important local chapters refused to accommodate to the shifts and seceded, amalgamating with other like-minded Jews in their communities to form independent, left-leaning groups: In Boston they called themselves the Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action, and in Philadelphia, the Progressive Zionist Alliance. Two years before, in 1999, a similar split had occurred in Los Angeles, leading to the formation of the Progressive Jewish Alliance there.

**World Jewish Congress**

In December, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), which had become preeminent on issues having to do with Holocaust compensation, underwent a significant leadership shakeup. Israel Singer, the secretary general, said he would be stepping down, as would Elan Steinberg, the executive director. The new secretary general was Avi Beker, an Israeli, and he would run the organization from there. Edgar Bronfman, the billionaire philanthropist who was WJC president and footed the bill for 15–20 percent of its budget, was rumored to be contemplating retirement within the next two years. Bronfman indicated that he saw the erosion of Jewish identity as the greatest threat to the Jewish future, leading some to speculate that the WJC might shift its focus in that direction.

**Lawrence Grossman**