In December 2006, AJC issued a pamphlet, 'Progressive' Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism, by Prof. Alvin Rosenfeld of Indiana University, which pointed to specific examples of left-of-center Jewish critics of Israel who went so far as to question the right of the Jewish state to exist, a position that Rosenfeld considered anti-Semitic. Few knew of the publication until an article about it appeared in the New York Times on January 31, 2007, and then it became a focus of public dispute.

A number of discrete issues were debated back and forth, such as inaccuracies in the Times characterization of AJC and of Rosenfeld’s thesis, whether Rosenfeld had erred in lumping together friendly critics of Israel with virulent foes, and whether, as some critics alleged, his real agenda was to push an alleged Jewish neoconservative alliance with the Bush administration and Christian conservatives in support of the Iraq war. The most serious charge was that 'Progressive' Jewish Thought was meant to censor all liberal criticism of Israel by tarnishing it with the label of anti-Semitism. Rosenfeld countered that he could not see how pointing out the anti-Semitic implications of those who wanted Israel dismantled amounted to censorship, and suggested that those making the charge were themselves engaging in censorship by seeking to silence Israel’s defenders.

As 2007 began American Jewish groups were focused on a potentially nuclear Iran whose president made no secret of his intention to destroy Israel. In January, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations prepared for a visit to the Persian Gulf states, where discussions would be held on the dangers the Sunni regimes faced from Shi’ite Iran. The strategy of generalizing the case against Iran reflected fear that American opinion might blame the pro-Israel community for any potential conflict with Tehran, especially at a time when the administration, which was arguing for a hard line, was deeply unpopular. Martin Raffel, associate director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) told the New York Jewish Week (Feb. 9), “It would be a big mistake for us to frame this as an Israeli or Jewish issue.”
If any proof of the need for caution was needed it came from what was already being said about the Iraq war's connection to Jews and Israel. A new biography of former secretary of state Colin Powell quoted him as citing the influence of the “JINSA [Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs] crowd” upon the decision to go to war. After a large January 27 rally in Washington against the war, United for Peace and Justice, the sponsoring group, announced it would join with the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation in a two-day mobilization in June, under the title, “The World Says No to Israeli Occupation.”

Most alarming to pro-Israel groups was the report issued by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, whose members were respected figures in American life. One of the report’s conclusions was that “the United States will not be able to achieve its goals in the Middle East unless the United States deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict.” This assertion not only raised the specter of American pressure on Israel, but also set Israel up as the potential scapegoat for failure in Iraq. Staff members of the study group expressed surprise that reference to Israel found its way into the report, and it remained unclear who inserted it.

A Gallup report released in late February found that American Jews were considerably more opposed to the Iraq war than non-Jews. Drawing together data from 13 polls conducted since 2005, Gallup said that 77 percent of Jews considered the war a mistake, as compared to 52 percent of all Americans. But almost all the mainstream Jewish organizations — fully aware that opposing the war meant challenging the pro-Israel administration — remained noncommittal. The only major Jewish bodies that publicly reflected the majority Jewish view were the Union for Reform Judaism (see below, p. 136) and the National Council of Jewish Women, which adopted an antiwar stance in December. JCPA, the umbrella body for the national agencies and local community relations councils, took no stand on the issue at its plenum in February, although the war was discussed at a sparsely attended evening session.

Iraq was brought up somewhat perfunctorily at the AIPAC Policy Conference in March, the pro-Israel lobby's annual event that drew thousands of activists and hundreds of political figures. Vice President Dick Cheney denounced antiwar resolutions proposed in Congress on the grounds that they undermined the war effort, and Israeli prime minister Olmert, on the phone from Jerusalem, said, “When America succeeds in Iraq, Israel is safer. The friends of Israel know it.” Clapping in the audience was noticeably restrained.

The policy conference paid considerably more attention to Iran — the
recent fear of Jews being blamed for a new war at least temporarily forgotten—and the New York Jewish Week (Mar. 16) aptly headlined its story “Apocalypse Now.” AIPAC executive director Howard Kohr warned that “the Mullahs in Iran are watching Washington very closely... any sign of weakness, any sense that we are willing to take options off the table will be taken as a signal that they can proceed with their plans.” Rev. John Hagee, the pro-Israel evangelical preacher, was greeted by loud cheers when he compared President Ahmadinejad to Hitler. Politicians of both parties, eager to curry favor with the pro-Israel electorate, competed with each other in their denunciations of the Tehran regime, and a section of a bill pending in the House of Representatives that required congressional authorization for any attack on Iran was removed, reportedly because of AIPAC influence.

But critics of the lobby were hardly intimidated. An article in the Economist (Mar. 17) reported: “The Iraq debacle has produced a fierce backlash against the pro-war hawks, of which AIPAC was certainly one. It has also encouraged serious people to ask awkward questions about America's alliance with Israel. And a growing number of people want to push against AIPAC.” Nicholas Kristof, writing in the New York Times in the wake of the policy conference (Mar. 18), wondered why “there is no serious debate among either Democrats or Republicans about our policy toward Israelis and Palestinians.”

Considerable interest focused on billionaire investor and philanthropist George Soros, who, in 2006, had made preliminary moves to set up a dovish alternative to AIPAC (see AJYB 2007, p. 115). An article he published in the April 12 issue of the New York Review of Books, “On Israel, America, and AIPAC,” suggested that he might renew the attempt. Soros charged that AIPAC endangered Israel by encouraging hard-line policies and opposing moves toward peace. But one of his aides told the New York Jewish Week (Mar. 23) that Soros felt he lacked “the necessary standing in the community” to lead an anti-AIPAC.

With Soros apparently out of the picture, reports surfaced of a possible merger between three dovish groups, Americans for Peace Now, Israel Policy Forum, and Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, to form a unified pro-peace lobby. Those involved said that this was not an attempt to fight AIPAC, but rather to present an alternate voice. The immediate goal was to raise $10 million from current donors to the three groups and from outside sources, including Hollywood figures and young liberal Jews. Insiders began humorously referring to the hypothetical lobby as the J Street Project, as the letter J was not a street name in Washington.
A two-day conference at Queens College, April 22–23, explored the question, “Is It 1938 Again?” The choice of speakers was well-balanced, including such figures as retired Commentary editor Norman Podhoretz and Conference of Presidents executive vice president Malcolm Hoenlein, who argued that the threat posed by Iran and by politicized Islam was comparable to the Nazi menace, and others, such as Princeton University political scientist Michael Walzer and journalist Leonard Fein, who felt that the threat was overblown. The event drew a standing-room-only crowd, evidence that the situation was of grave concern to the heavily Jewish community near the campus.

With all the attention being given to Iran, it came as something of a surprise when, in May, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice departed from the administration's previous passivity on the Israeli-Palestinian front and announced a new push to arrive at a peace settlement. While it remained unclear whether and how hard the U.S. planned to prod Israel into concessions, pro-Israel groups took notice.

The Rice initiative coincided with preparations for the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War of 1967, the conflict in which Israel gained control over the territories in dispute. With strong AIPAC backing, both houses of Congress passed a nonbinding resolution on June 5 hailing Israel’s 1967 victory and praising Israel's administration of an “undivided city of Jerusalem for the past 40 years, during which Israel has respected the rights of all religious groups.” It also reiterated calls for the administration to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, a step that presidents had consistently favored rhetorically but avoided carrying out.

The resolution came in for criticism from dovish Jewish groups for failing even to mention the possibility of territorial compromise—specifically, the likelihood that East Jerusalem would become the capital of a Palestinian state. Five days later, June 10, the previously planned demonstration against Israeli occupation of the West Bank, sponsored by United for Peace and Justice and the U.S. Campaign to End Israeli Occupation, took place in Washington. Organizers asked participants to refrain from anti-Jewish language so that critics would not be able to impute anti-Semitism to the anti-occupation cause.

The very next day Hamas began its takeover of Gaza, and completed it three days later. PA president Abbas created a separate Fatah-led government on the West Bank. Both Prime Minister Olmert, visiting President Bush in Washington, and AIPAC publicly supported U.S. aid to Abbas’s Palestinian Authority. But the pro-Israel community worried about possible U.S. pressure on Israel to grant Abbas concessions in
order to strengthen his position in the intra-Palestinian struggle. And while Jewish leaders understood that Abbas was preferable to his rejectionist opponents, some felt that he had proven too weak to make a difference, and that Israel would have no choice but to negotiate with Hamas.

During the summer, Jewish attention to Middle East policy questions was temporarily diverted to the discussion of a potentially damaging book, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. Its publication in August came as no surprise, as the authors had laid out their arguments in an article that appeared in 2006 (see AJYB 2007, pp. 117–18). The book, like the article, claimed that an “Israel lobby” made up of Jews and others stifled dissent in order to secure a stranglehold on American policy in the Middle East, which it used for what it saw as the benefit of Israel, against the interests of the U.S. and, ultimately, of Israel itself. Mearsheimer and Walt included chapters on the alleged role of the lobby in getting the U.S. to attack Iraq and on what they saw as its current push to have American force used against Iran.

The book presented the Jewish community with several daunting challenges. Although carefully avoiding even the appearance of anti-Semitism, it seemed to resurrect the old canards that Jews were guilty of dual loyalty and that they controlled events from behind the scenes. It also reiterated in stark and explicit terms the thesis that the pro-Israel community bore guilt for the unpopular Iraq war, and that it was trying to do the same in Iran, the latter charge virtually forcing Israel’s advocates to pull their punches in addressing the threat from that country.

The first published critique of Mearsheimer and Walt was actually in the bookstores before their book was. *The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control* was written by ADL national director Abraham Foxman in response to the 2006 article that preceded it (and to Jimmy Carter’s 2006 book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*), on the assumption that the book would mirror the article. Foxman concentrated on *The Israel Lobby*’s use of classic anti-Semitic motifs, denied that he or his organization had engaged in suppressing free expression, affirmed the right of interest groups to lobby in a democracy, and demonstrated that the government figures who initiated the Iraq war were not Jewish.

Subsequent reviews of *The Israel Lobby* were almost uniformly negative, reiterating Foxman’s points and adding others. The two most telling criticisms of Mearsheimer and Walt were, first, that they did not inter-
view anyone associated with AIPAC or other pro-Israel groups and thus were unable to describe exactly how the lobby managed to impose its will on the government, and second, that they left out of their account the strong cultural and political affinity that so many Americans felt for Israel, which was far more central in explaining American concern for its well-being than the operations of a lobby.

But *The Israel Lobby* quickly made the best-seller lists, and Mearsheimer and Walt drew large audiences as they traveled the country promoting it. What impact the book had on public opinion was unclear. In October, the ADL released the results of a poll showing that 31 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that “Jews are more loyal to Israel than America.” While Foxman considered that figure “very troubling,” it was down somewhat from the last time the question was asked, in 2005.

The other object of Foxman’s ire, Jimmy Carter, also resurfaced in October. Having drawn cheers from Brandeis University students when he spoke before them earlier in the year (see below), Carter hoped to repair relations with the organized Jewish community, and invited leaders of Jewish organizations to meet with him about the Middle East situation. Only the Reform movement’s Religious Action Center (RAC) and four small left-of-center organizations sent representatives. Foxman, explaining why he stayed away, told the *Forward* (Nov. 2), “I didn’t want to be used.” And at a closed-door meeting that he requested with Jewish members of Congress, Carter received a hostile reception and was urged to apologize for his book.

News that the U.S. planned to host a Middle East summit in Annapolis in late November raised—not for the first time—considerable perplexity in the Jewish community over whether the Bush administration was just going through the diplomatic motions or whether this was a serious initiative to move toward peace, and if the latter, how much Israel would be asked to concede. Prime Minister Olmert’s domestic political problems weakened his diplomatic leverage, and this added to the mood of skepticism. David Harris, the AJC executive director, told the *New York Jewish Week* (Oct. 26), “We’re watching the way things unfold, and we don’t want to see expectations race ahead of realities.”

As the summit date neared, the administration strongly signaled that it was serious about Annapolis. Addressing the General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities (UJC) on November 13, Secretary of State Rice said “failure is not an option” since “what is at stake is nothing less than the future of the Middle East.” Sensitive to this mood of urgency,
AIPAC, in a gesture of conciliation, gave tacit approval to a congressional letter favoring an increase in aid for the PA, prompting Sheldon Adelson, a major giver, to chastise the pro-Israel lobby. Informed that Israel had no objection to the aid, Adelson told the JTA, “If someone is going to jump off a bridge, it is incumbent upon their friends to dissuade them.”

The hard-line Zionist Organization of America, hoping to counter the Jewish community’s growing acceptance of a renewed peace process, asked the Conference of Presidents to insist on Fatah revising certain anti-Israel clauses of its constitution as a condition for negotiations, but the move fell through when Israel indicated that it did not take that constitution seriously.

The issue that aroused the greatest fears among American Jews wary of Annapolis was the fate of Jerusalem. Taking the lead in this battle was a new Coordinating Council for Jerusalem, made up primarily of Orthodox groups and led by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (OU), which had a long record of opposition to dividing the holy city. More surprising was the involvement of Agudath Israel, the non-Zionist, haredi Orthodox organization that had previously confined its public statements to religious and educational matters, but now said it was “deeply pained and concerned about the prospect of Israel relinquishing parts of Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty.” Upon his arrival in the U.S. for the summit, Prime Minister Olmert infuriated the Orthodox by denying them a voice in the decision, saying: “the government of Israel has a sovereign right to negotiate anything on behalf of Israel.”

When the negotiators met at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis on November 27, two small, rival groups of Jewish demonstrators rallied outside, one calling for a united Jewish Jerusalem and the other for advancing the peace process. The agreement that resulted—a promise of direct American involvement in monitoring compliance with the “road map” in the hope of concluding an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal by January 2009—elicited little enthusiasm from American Jews, as it sounded very much like earlier deals that went nowhere.

American Jewish misgivings were illustrated by the actions of the Conference of Presidents. As reported in the Forward (Nov. 30), the conference issued a statement saying that the Annapolis summit “can be a significant step toward launching meaningful, bilateral negotiations.” Yet it also hosted the Orthodox mayor of Jerusalem, who adamantly opposed ceding control of any part of the city. Israel Policy Forum president Seymour Reich complained, “I am troubled by the invitation,
because there is a perception that he came to undermine Annapolis, and the conference should not have given him a platform.”

AJC’s annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion, released in early December, confirmed both a continuing pessimism about prospects for peace and a growing Orthodox–non-Orthodox divide over specific issues. Only 37 percent of the sample thought that a time might come when Israel and its Arab neighbors would live in peace, and 82 percent believed that the Arab goal was “not the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel.” Forty-six percent overall favored the creation of a Palestinian state as compared to just 20 percent of the Orthodox, and while 58 percent of American Jews opposed compromise on the status of Jerusalem in the context of an overall Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the figure jumped to 77 percent among Orthodox respondents.

Iran came to the top of the Jewish agenda again at the end of the year. Weeks after a Zogby poll showed more than two-thirds of American Jews (as compared to a bit more than half of all Americans) in favor of attacking Iran before it went nuclear, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) stated with “high confidence” that Iran had jettisoned its nuclear-weapons program in 2003. Unlike Israeli officials who outright rejected the NIE conclusion, both the Conference of Presidents and AIPAC sought to convince the U.S. government that a tough line against Iran was still warranted even under the new findings. They noted the NIE’s assessment that uranium enrichment was continuing, and that could be used for the production of bombs.

THE CAMPUS

The importance of securing the pro-Israel allegiance of college-age Jews was underlined in a new survey, Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and their Alienation from Israel, published in early September. Researchers Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman traced a consistent pattern: the younger the age group, the lower the degree of attachment to Israel. And they ominously predicted, “Insofar as younger Jews are less attached to Israel, the inevitable replacement of the older population with younger birth cohorts leads to a growing distancing in the population overall.”

Could anything be done to counter the trend? For some time the organized pro-Israel community had faced a dilemma on college campuses, whether to encourage and fund only programs that echoed the positions
of the Israeli government, possibly alienating those with different views, or to back other initiatives as well, even at the risk of enabling criticism of Israeli policies. The problem arose again in 2007.

As the year began, a group of eight philanthropic couples who gave charitable grants through UJA-Federation of New York to causes of their choice declined to renew a $30,000 grant it gave in 2006 to the Jewish Student Press Service for publication of New Voices, a Jewish campus magazine. The decision was made when the givers discovered that New Voices included pieces critical of mainstream Israel advocacy, for example, questioning the Birthright Israel program.

Also in January, the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC), a group of 31 Jewish organizations dedicated to building pro-Israel sentiment at colleges, debated whether to exclude the Union of Progressive Zionists, active on about 60 campuses, which sometimes sponsored visits by former Israeli soldiers who belonged to Breaking the Silence, which opposed Israeli actions in the territories. The Zionist Organization of America urged ousting the union unless it severed ties with Breaking the Silence, but the proposal was defeated unanimously by the ICC’s nine-member executive committee on January 19.

Other serious problems arose on campus for Israel advocates. On January 23, former president Jimmy Carter appeared at Brandeis University to promote his recent book Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid, which condemned Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, comparing it to the old South African separation of the races, and alleged that pro-Israel elements enjoyed disproportionate leverage in formulating U.S. Middle East policy (see AJYB 2007, p. 117). As the visit came soon after the Central Conference of American Rabbis canceled a planned visit to the Carter Center in Atlanta (see below), and 14 Jewish members of the center board resigned to protest the book, many wondered why Brandeis, a Jewish-sponsored university, was giving the former president a forum.

It turned out that the school administration had invited Carter to debate Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz, but Carter insisted on appearing alone, and a faculty-student committee invited him to do so. University president Jehuda Reinharz, who was on a fund-raising trip, did not come, a fact that seemed to distance the institution even more from the invitation. After a brief presentation, Carter answered prescreened questions for about 45 minutes. He won over the large audience with charm and humor, even conceding that a passage in his book that seemed to justify terrorism was sloppily phrased and would be corrected.
He received two standing ovations. Dershowitz made an appearance after Carter left and sought to punch holes in arguments that Carter made in his book.

Reactions to the Carter appearance varied widely. The position taken by the university and shared by much of the faculty and many students was that the event was a successful example of academic openness to all viewpoints. Others, however, noting the prescreening of questions, the refusal to have a face-to-face debate, and the banning of protests or even posters, charged that openness was precisely what was lacking. Meanwhile, some major givers to Brandeis, already unhappy about earlier actions by the university (see AJYB 2007, pp. 118–19), were reportedly so upset at Carter’s appearance that they contemplated withholding their gifts. And according to an article that appeared in the student newspaper, the Brandeis administration was seeking to prevent the appearance on campus of other controversial speakers on the Middle East.

In June, Lee Bollinger, president of Columbia University, condemned a threatened boycott of Israel by British academics, challenging its advocates with the words, “add Columbia to the boycott list.” Jewish groups, which had had their differences with Bollinger over alleged anti-Israel bias by Columbia professors and the 2006 appearance of Iranian president Ahmadinejad on campus, applauded him. AJC issued a statement praising his “deep understanding that this is a watershed moment for academic freedom which requires firm action.” Bollinger told the New York Jewish Week (June 15) that he was surprised that no other American university presidents had denounced the planned boycott.

Pro-Israel advocates received another piece of good news that month, De Paul University’s denial of tenure to Norman Finkelstein, who, orally and in print, had denounced Israel for crimes against the Palestinians and accused Jewish organizations of exploiting the Holocaust for financial and political purposes. Many — and no one more vociferously than Alan Dershowitz — had charged Finkelstein with shoddy scholarship, but Finkelstein claimed he was the victim of pro-Israel forces. The university said that the decision to deny tenure was made on academic, not political, grounds.

Another tenure dispute was resolved at Barnard College in the fall. Abu El-Haj, an assistant professor of anthropology, was the author of Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society, which argued that Israelis, who had no historical connection to the land of Israel, misused archaeology to invent a Jewish past in the area and suppress Palestinian roots there. Two online petitions, one
pro-tenure and the other anti-tenure, each gathered well over 2,000 signatures. Tenure was granted on November 2.

\textit{Jewish Continuity}

\textbf{Research}

Questions raised about the accuracy of the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) and the likelihood that no decennial survey would be attempted in 2010 left the field open for a variety of research methodologies. Several studies appeared during the year that had significant implications for American Jewish demography.

Issued in early February, \textit{Reconsidering the Size and Characteristics of the American Jewish Population}, conducted by the Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University, suggested an upward revision of the low number of American Jews, 5.2 million, found by the NJPS. On the basis of the combined responses of Jews to over 30 national surveys, the researchers came up with a Jewish population of over six million, and, if all people of Jewish parentage were included, 7.5 million. The NJPS, in their view, had undercounted young adults and those less Jewishly affiliated.

Published around the same time, \textit{A Tale of Two Jewries}, prepared by Prof. Steven M. Cohen for the Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation, analyzed the differences between in-married and intermarried Jews. Cohen found the in-married far more involved in Jewish life, leading him to suggest that “intermarriage does indeed constitute the greatest single threat to Jewish continuity today.” Predictably, this aroused the ire of advocates of outreach to the intermarried. Ed Case, who ran InterfaithFamily.com, told the \textit{New York Jewish Week} (Feb. 9) that such denigration of mixed-religion families only served to push them further away from Jewish life.

Another research report, put out in December by Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, took direct issue with Steven M. Cohen. \textit{It’s Not Just Who Stands under the Chuppah: Jewish Identity and Intermarriage} found that the in-married/intermarried gap shrank considerably when the degree of Jewish involvement of the Jewish partner was factored in. This suggested that the fact of intermarriage was less significant than Jewish education for both spouses. More support for this thesis came from research done in Boston by the city’s Combined Jew-
ish Philanthropies, which found that 60 percent of intermarried families were raising their children as Jews, and that their Jewish profile differed little from that of in-married families.

Cohen, together with Ari Kelman, published a survey in May, *The Continuity of Discontinuity*, sponsored by the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation, that took an optimistic view of young-adult, unmarried Jews. While that age cohort was, to a great extent, alienated from organized Jewish life, Cohen and Kelman found that many had created their own semi-formal Jewish groups dedicated to Jewish culture, literature, social action, and music. There was even a published, regularly updated guide to such activities, *Slingshot*. The authors also noted that federations and other establishment Jewish bodies were beginning to accommodate the needs of this age group.

**SEEKING SOLUTIONS**

As the social scientists argued, American Jews interested in enhancing Jewish identity supported many different strategies.

One was the experience of spending time in Israel. In February, the Adelson Family Charitable Foundation—casino mogul Sheldon Adelson was the third richest American, according to *Forbes*—pledged an annual $25-million gift to Birthright Israel, which Birthright estimated could double the number of young American Jews it brought to Israel each year. The foundation stated that it would continue to provide this amount so long as other funders maintained their contribution levels.

Jewish education was widely considered another potent means of strengthening Jewishness. Two important studies of Jewish education appeared in the spring. Brandeis's Cohen Center released *The Impact of Day School: A Comparative Analysis of Jewish College Students*, commissioned by the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education. Surveying over 3,000 day-school graduates, it found that such schools were successful not only in buttressing Jewish identification, but also in preparing students for university life. And *Recent Trends in Supplementary Jewish Education*, prepared by Prof. Jack Wertheimer for the Avi Chai Foundation, pointed to innovative programs being introduced in these educational settings.

A new element entered the educational picture in 2007, the prospect of Jewish charter schools, which some viewed as a threat to the day schools. The first such charter school, Ben Gamla, in Hollywood, Florida, began operation in late August. Publicly funded, it was open to children of any
or no religion. The school did not teach Judaism, but offered instruction in Hebrew language and secular Jewish culture, along with the standard public-school curriculum. Peter Deutsch, its founder, hoped to set up 100 more such schools around the country. But while he and his backers saw this as a way of bringing Jewish instruction to thousands of children whose parents would never consider day school—either because of cost or ideology—others worried not only about possible violations of Church-State separation, but also that the charter schools would draw students who might otherwise attend day schools.

Many considered Jewish summer camps potent agents of Jewish identification since campers were immersed in a Jewish environment 24 hours a day. In May, a donor who wished to remain anonymous gave $15 million to the Foundation for Jewish Camping. From this money, families that were sending children to a Jewish camp for the first time could receive up to $1,250. The donor also included an incentive provision: local federations would have to match whatever funds were disbursed. Soon afterward the San Francisco-based Jim Joseph Foundation granted $11.2 million for families sending children to Jewish camps in the western part of the country, $1,800 for each first-time camper and $1,000 for each second-year returnee. Another $11 million was channeled to Jewish camping through matching programs initiated by the Harold Grinspoon Foundation.

A number of innovative suggestions for revitalizing the Jewish community came from businessman and philanthropist Scott Shay, in his book Getting Our Groove Back: How to Energize American Jewry. Among them were a ceremony renewing bar/bat mitzvah every 18 years following the original celebration; lowered day-school tuitions; earlier marriage, more children, and communal funding for childbearing by single women; conversion of children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers; and reconstituting Conservative Judaism as a “broad tent” rather than a denomination.

Others looked for even bolder, more innovative solutions to the challenge of maintaining Jewish continuity. In late August, the Samuel Bronfman Foundation hosted some 40 leading Jewish thinkers and communal professionals from the U.S. and abroad for three days of study and conversation in Park City, Utah. The theme was “Why Be Jewish?” At the conclusion of the program, the foundation said it would continue the effort through an ongoing Bronfman Vision Forum. And in October, the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Foundation announced a search for “The Next Big Jewish Idea.” The winner would receive a two-year faculty ap-
pointment at Brandeis University with a six-figure salary, enabling him or her to work on a book setting forth the “Idea.”

**Religion**

Perhaps the most widely reported story about American Judaism in 2007 was the work of three prominent Jewish media figures—Michael Lynton, chairman and CEO of Sony Pictures; Gary Ginsberg of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation; and Jay Sanderson, CEO of the Jewish Television Network—who compiled a list of the “Top 50” American rabbis and got *Newsweek*’s Website to post it on April 2. Admittedly unscientific, the rankings heavily favored males, residents of the West Coast, and people with national reputations, reflecting the biases of the Hollywood executives who initiated the project. Both those rabbis who made the list and those who did not downplayed its significance.

If some rabbis were getting positive publicity, many synagogues were not. “Going, Going, Gone” was the title of a Stewart Ain article in the *New York Jewish Week* (Sept. 14) about non-Orthodox congregations across the country that were hemorrhaging members and having difficulty paying fixed costs such as salaries, upkeep, mortgage, and insurance. Dues were already at record levels and further increases would only drive away more members. In some communities mergers between synagogues had become financially necessary. Ain quoted a new survey conducted by STAR (Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal) noting that 12 percent of rabbis believed that the affordability of Jewish life was the most serious problem facing American Jewry, up from 5 percent in 2006.

The search for a “magic bullet” to revitalize the synagogue could take unusual forms. In his “On Religion” column in the *New York Times* (Nov. 3), Samuel G. Freedman reported on Synagogue 3000, an organization dedicated to invigorating synagogue life, and its attempt to replicate the success of the Christian mega-churches. Of particular interest to the group’s leaders was Saddleback Church in California, where Rev. Rick Warren preached before thousands of rapt listeners each Sunday. Ron Wolfson of Synagogue 3000 told Freedman that, as strange as it sounded, “Jews need to be more quote unquote evangelical.”

Another potential challenge to American Judaism was the sudden proliferation of well-publicized books denigrating religion as destructive and advocating atheism, such as Richard Dawkins’s *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris’s *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and Christopher Hitchens’s
God Is Not Great. One might have thought, under the circumstances, that Humanistic Judaism, the small movement that practiced a form of the religion that did not acknowledge a supreme being, would gain a new lease on life. In fact the Humanists, badly shaken by the sudden death of their longtime leader, Rabbi Sherwin Wine, in July (see below, p. 722), seemed uncertain of their future. Sociologist Steven M. Cohen explained the apparent paradox in the Forward (Oct. 19) by noting that American Jews did not need to become Humanists, since God was not central to American Judaism anyway. He said, “Most Jews . . . affirm a nominal belief in God, but God doesn’t play a major role in their thinking about what it means to be a Jew or even a good person.”

A study issued toward the end of the year, Emergent Jewish Communities and Their Participants, lent scholarly credence to the view that American Judaism was likely to become increasingly postdenominational. Sponsored by Synagogue 3000, the Synagogue Studies Institute, and Mechon Hadar, it found at least 80 “independent” congregations across the country with e-mail lists of close to 20,000 people, almost all of them in their twenties and thirties. A similar preference for blurring denominational boundaries could be discerned on the rabbinic level: the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation announced it would fund a five-year joint rabbinic-training program for Reform and Conservative seminarians, and the nondenominational rabbinical school at Hebrew College in Boston was poised to graduate its first class in 2008.

But it no sense were the Jewish denominations on the verge of collapse. Not only were those 20,000 names on e-mail lists a drop in the bucket compared to the numbers formally associated with established congregations, but the institutions representing the denominations involved themselves in a much broader range of activities, and far more deeply, than the small, independent groups.

Reform Judaism

In 2005, the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), which represented some 900 synagogues, became the first major Jewish body to criticize the American administration’s policies in Iraq and to call for a “clear exit strategy” (see AJYB 2006, p. 102). By early 2007 some elements within the URJ, citing poll evidence of widespread opposition to the war among American Jews, wanted the organization to denounce administration policy even more explicitly, along the lines laid out by the much smaller 140-
member Association of Rabbis for Jewish Renewal, which, in January, denounced the planned “surge” in Iraq and called for a “firm timetable for ending the military presence of U.S. forces in Iraq.”

The Reform movement’s Commission on Social Action recommended such a statement in February, and the URJ set up a special Website providing congregations and their members material for debating the issue and giving feedback. A vote on the statement was scheduled for the March 12 meeting of the URJ executive committee. Despite sharp public opposition from the Republican Jewish Coalition (RJC) and some pro-administration executive committee members, the resolution passed overwhelmingly. Movement leaders expressed gratification that Reform had maintained its position at the forefront of what they considered a “moral” cause.

Reform also continued to play its traditional role in support of progressive domestic causes. It advocated federal funding for stem-cell research and, quoting Maimonides, spearheaded a lobbying effort to raise the minimum wage from $5.15 to $7.25 an hour.

The movement was very active on Israel-related matters. In January, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), which represented 1,500 Reform rabbis, canceled a tour of the Carter Center that had been scheduled for March as part of the group’s annual conference, held this year in Atlanta. The decision was intended as a rebuke to Carter for his book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,* which, according to CCAR’s president, had an anti-Israel and anti-Jewish effect.

Twice during April the Reform movement protested actions by Israeli Orthodox rabbis. The first instance was a statement by former Sephardi chief rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu attributing the rise of Nazism in Europe to the “sin” of Reform Judaism, and the second was the refusal of local rabbis in the town of Hod Hasharon to allow a Reform rabbi to offer a public prayer at Yom Hazikaron (Memorial Day) ceremonies honoring Israel’s fallen soldiers. Reform was also highly critical of a vote in the Israeli Knesset in July restricting the sale of Jewish National Fund lands to Jews, which was designed to override a court decision barring such discrimination (see below, p. 295). Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the URJ president, called the legislation undemocratic and pointed out that Jews would be justly outraged should any country seek to ban Jews from buying land.

In 2007, American Reform for the first time emphasized aliyah, immigration to Israel, as a priority. This was not simply expressed in abstract terms. The Association of Reform Zionists of America announced—in cooperation with the municipality of Modi’in—a package of financial
incentives for Reform families that would move in to the town, located between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, which already had a functioning Reform community.

Yoffie set off a storm of controversy in September by accepting an invitation to address the annual conference of the Islamic Society of North America. In his talk Yoffie denounced anti-Muslim prejudice in the U.S., including racial profiling, and attributed the situation to Americans’ “profound ignorance” of Islam. Yoffie also called for greater Muslim-Jewish dialogue and joint backing for a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians. While the URJ justified Yoffie’s appearance at the conference with the claim that the Islamic Society had renounced violence, others, including David Harris, executive director of AJC, noted that the organization had been named as an unindicted co-conspirator in a major terrorism trial. Undeterred, Yoffie announced a new initiative to encourage dialogue on the local level between Reform synagogues and mosques.

History was made as the year began when Barbara Benioff Friedman assumed the post of board chair of Hebrew Union College (HUC), Reform’s rabbinical and cantorial seminary, thus becoming the first female chair of any major American Jewish seminary. In a move that was not as well received, HUC closed down its New York Kollel, which had provided extremely popular adult education classes for 12 years. The decision was made for financial reasons.

On religious issues, the Reform movement continued to innovate in a number of areas. The appointment of Debbie Friedman, the popular singer and songwriter, to teach at the HUC School of Sacred Music in the fall was widely seen as the final victory of the folk-song style—some derisively called it “campfire music”—over traditional cantorial chanting in Reform congregations. In August, the URJ issued a new edition of its resource manual for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Jews that contained not only liturgy for same-sex unions and divorces and a “coming-out” prayer, but also two new blessings to be recited when transitioning between genders. Also in August, Rabbi Richard Address, director of the URJ Department of Jewish Family Concerns, suggested in the pages of the Forward (Aug. 17) that intimate relations with a third party entered into while a spouse suffered from Alzheimer’s should not be considered adultery.

At the same time, elements of the Reform movement—particularly many young people—sought at least a partial return to tradition. “Reform Youth Flexing Their Ritual Muscle” was the headline in the New
York Jewish Week (Aug. 10) for a story about Kutz Camp, the Reform summer camp in upstate New York. Reporter Debra Nussbaum Cohen recounted what happened at evening services on the Fourth of July, when a noticeable number of campers—around a quarter of the total—walked out on the jazz-inflected prayers and organized their own more traditional evening service. Upon further investigation Nussbaum Cohen learned that “a small but growing number of campers and young faculty” wore “yarmulkes or tzitzit, even tefillin along with prayer shawls.” One camper had perfected “shuckling,” rocking back and forth during prayer. There were even “rumblings” about switching the “kosher-style” camp cuisine to kosher.

The pull of tradition was hardly confined to the camper generation. No less a Reform personage than Rabbi Yoffie, in the same December biennial address that urged outreach to Muslims, called for revitalization of Reform Shabbat observance, specifically urging the restoration of the Saturday morning service to prominence and making Shabbat a full, 24-hour experience. “In the absence of Shabbat,” Yoffie declared, “Judaism withers.” Another, less traditional feature of the biennial was a prayer service modeled on Rick Warren’s Saddleback mega-church in California, complete with five-piece band (see above, p. 134).

Conflict between avant-garde and traditional forces in Reform had been festering for some time over the question of whether rabbis should perform marriages between Jews and non-Jews, and it burst into the open in June with the resignation of Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin from The Temple in Atlanta, one of the largest Reform congregations in the nation. Salkin said that one important reason for his decision was “a synagogue culture that had become accustomed to rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings,” something that he refused to do.

Many other rabbis agreed that this had become a serious problem for the movement, and the CCAR had in fact set up a task force to study it two months before Salkin resigned. The official CCAR position was against officiation, but rabbis were given autonomy to decide the matter for themselves, and it was believed that some 40 percent of Reform rabbis performed intermarriages. Even though the institutions of Reform Judaism instructed synagogue search committees not to question rabbinic candidates about their attitudes on this question, many did anyway, and automatically eliminated the applications of non-officiators from consideration. At the same time, rabbis who did perform intermarriages complained that their more traditional colleagues looked down upon them,
and organizations that stood for greater outreach to interfaith families urged the CCAR to alter its official policy of discouraging officiation.

A new Reform prayer book, the first in 32 years, was released in the fall, and it reflected all the complexities of a movement that, the New York Times reported (Sept. 3), “is growing in different directions simultaneously.” The prayer book, Mishkan Tefilah, featured gender-neutral language, took into account the presence at services of interfaith families, and provided four versions of the prayers ranging from traditional (even affirming the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead) to atheist.

A second Reform publication came out soon afterward, The Torah: A Women’s Commentary. Sponsored by Women of Reform Judaism, it was the subject of a scholarly panel discussion at the annual joint meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion in November.

**Conservative Judaism**

2006 had been a year of significant change for the Conservative movement in two respects. First, its Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) approved each of two competing resolutions on the religious status of homosexuals, one affirming the old restrictions and the other liberalizing them and opening the door for ordination of openly gay and lesbian rabbis as well as rabbinic officiation at same-sex unions. Second, Arnold Eisen, a Stanford University academic who was not a rabbi, was chosen chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the major Conservative rabbinical school (see AJYB 2007, pp. 128–30).

The year 2007 was far quieter for the movement as its institutions and members gradually absorbed and began to address the implications of these momentous decisions. As the year began JTS sent out a confidential, eight-part survey to Conservative rabbis, cantors, educators, and lay leaders to gauge the impact of the change in the religious status of homosexuals, and, more broadly, to discover what they thought of the movement’s direction and prospects. The survey was completed and returned by 5,583 people.

Sociologist Steven M. Cohen, who directed the project, reported the results in early February. Solid majorities in each category of respondents said they favored JTS adoption of the liberal CJLS opinion; among the rabbis 68 percent backed such a step and 28 percent opposed it. Canadian Conservatives were noticeably less enthusiastic about the change
than those living in the U.S., 82 percent of the rabbis north of the border opposing it (see below, p. 326).

Yet even many who approved the movement's new stance were uneasy about its possible consequences. About half of all respondents doubted whether it conformed to Jewish law, and a majority of the lay and professional leaders considered the CJLS issuance of more than one opinion about the status of gays a source of confusion. Other potential danger signals were that about a third of respondents did not like the long-term "move to greater liberalization," 42 percent of the clergy felt that the changes on the subject of homosexuals "blur the boundary between Conservative and Reform Judaism," and 83 percent of the rabbis and rabbinical students thought they "widen the gap between Conservatism and Orthodoxy." Yet the perception of a sharp turn to the left was complicated by strong majorities opposing two practices associated with Reform, rabbinic officiation at mixed-religion marriages and adoption of patrilineal descent, the recognition of children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers as Jews (New York Jewish Week, Feb. 2).

Two Conservative seminaries, buttressed by the findings of the survey, quickly opened their doors to gay and lesbian students. First out of the gate was the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, part of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. In early March the school accepted its first two openly gay students, a man and a woman. By the end of the month the JTS rabbinical school—whose new dean, appointed in January, had coauthored the CJLS opinion permitting the ordination of homosexuals and officiation at gay unions—announced that it too would admit students "without regard to sexual orientation," even extending the application period to enable more to seek admission. But the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary, the movement's school in Israel, did not go along. Its dean, Rabbi Einat Ramon, told the Forward (Mar. 30) that the traditional heterosexual family was fundamental to Judaism and that "in Israel the movement has to be consistently Halakhic, otherwise it will unite with the Reform movement."

Realizing that implementation of the new approach would not be simple, Conservative institutions set up mechanisms to ease the transition. Chancellor Eisen said that JTS would convene forums on integrating gays and lesbians into seminary life, and that faculty had been requested to speak about the matter to their classes. The Rabbinical Assembly (RA), the movement's rabbinic body, created a committee to examine what exactly same-sex commitment ceremonies entailed and to what extent Jewish divorce law applied to such unions.
Conservative leaders were virtually unanimous in their positive assessment of how the movement had addressed the issue. All constituencies had been consulted, decisions had been reached through appropriate procedures, and — confounding the pessimists — no schism had ensued. “I’m hoping that the whole process that surrounded the decision will revitalize the sense that Conservative Judaism is a living organism,” said Eisen. But Rabbi Joel Roth, a leading traditionalist scholar who had resigned from the CJLS in protest, pointed out that the movement still retained the traditional position on homosexuality as a valid Conservative option along with the new permissive view, and warned that Conservative Judaism would suffer severely if those adhering to the old heterosexual standards “no longer feel they have a place in the movement.”

Great, perhaps unrealistic, expectations accompanied Arnold Eisen’s assumption of the JTS chancellorship. For some time the Conservative movement had suffered from declines in numbers, fund-raising, and morale as its pragmatic and nonideological form of Judaism that had thrived in mid-twentieth-century America lost much of its appeal to younger Jews in more religiously polarized times. How would the new chancellor reverse the downward spiral?

In his inaugural address delivered September 5, Eisen noted that in the course of numerous visits to Conservative communities around the country he saw great enthusiasm and energy, causing him to reject any notion that the movement was in decline. But equally evident was confusion over what Conservative Judaism stood for. Eisen believed that the answer was the concept of mitzvah, Divine commandment. He did not plan to tell Jews which commandments they were required to perform, but would rather have rabbis “facilitate and guide a grassroots conversation about mitzvah” so that Jews could thrash out among themselves “what obligates them; what they feel responsible for; what engages them . . . .” JTS, he announced, would begin with a pilot program in ten synagogues.

Eisen’s diagnosis of Conservative Judaism’s ills and his proposed cure were by no means uncontested, as others suggested different approaches. Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, in a widely noted article in the spring issue of Conservative Judaism magazine, argued that the primary conflict that had to be bridged was theological, between Conservative Jews who viewed Scripture as God’s word and those for whom it was a human product, and unless a way were found to reconcile the two the movement could split. Prof. Jack Wertheimer, who had recently stepped down as JTS provost, wrote in the September issue of Commentary that emphasis on traditional Jewish practice and learning remained the key to Conservative survival.
The movement’s problems were set aside for a least one day, December 9, when the Center for Jewish History hosted a daylong conference on the legacy of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who taught at JTS from 1945 until his death in 1972. Most of the speakers concentrated on Heschel’s social activism, although Eisen’s presentation stressed the Judaic roots of his passion for justice and delved into his sometimes rocky career at JTS.

ORTHODOX JUDAISM

One rather obscure news item late in the year epitomized Orthodoxy’s great American success story. In November, when U.S. Supreme Court justices announced the appointment of their new clerks, both of Justice Antonin Scalia’s choices were not only kippah-wearing Orthodox Jews, but they had Hebrew first names, Moshe Spinowitz and Yaakov Roth. Roth told the Forward (November 23), “I think it’s sort of a coincidence. Things just sort of worked out that way this year, but it is 20 percent of a minyan.” Given the history of anti-Jewish discrimination at the higher levels of the legal profession until at least the 1960s, and the tiny proportion of Orthodox Jewish lawyers, the fact that these appointments went almost unnoticed indicated how seamlessly Orthodox Jewry had integrated into elite American circles.

However, another aspect of Orthodoxy’s success triggered great interest from the media in 2007, along with some trepidation. The New York Times, during the course of the year, ran four long feature stories about burgeoning Orthodox communities in the New York area, in each case noting problems their growth had caused. In its February 18 issue it recounted how the Orthodox, “the fastest-growing group in town,” had taken political control of Teaneck, New Jersey, leaving “bad feelings.” On May 17 the Times informed its readers of a new Orthodox presence in Waterbury, Connecticut, complete with synagogue, yeshiva, and kosher butcher, but also with complaints to the zoning commission about the yeshiva dormitories and “a sudden rash of vandalism and robberies” of Jewish homes. Tensions between blacks and the exploding Orthodox Jewish community of Lakewood, New Jersey, attracted the Times’s attention on December 10. And the Satmar Hasidic community of Kiryas Joel, in Orange County, New York — according to census figures, the fastest growing municipality in the state — was the subject of a December 16 article about alleged harassment of a woman living there whose dress was not modest enough to suit local Hasidic authorities.
The battle over the future of Modern Orthodoxy continued. Rabbi Marc Angel, who retired after serving as rabbi for 38 years at Congregation Shearith Israel (the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue) in New York City, shocked many when he charged that Modern Orthodoxy had jettisoned its “modern” character. In an interview with the New York Jewish Week (June 22), Angel accused it of “slipping over the line to a cultic superstitious kind of religion.” During his years in the rabbinate, Angel noted, Orthodoxy had become more “insular,” shunning “innovative thought” and relying increasingly on “so-called authorities.” He announced the creation of a new body, the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, “to foster an appreciation of legitimate diversity within Orthodoxy.” Subsequent critical letters to the editor took two forms, one denying the shift that Angel perceived and the other justifying it as a return to a more authentic Orthodoxy.

The controversy over American Orthodox conversions, begun in 2006 when the Israeli Chief Rabbinate announced it would no longer accept those performed by rabbis not on an “approved” list (see AJYB 2007, p. 126), escalated. The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the Modern Orthodox rabbinic organization, at its annual convention in the spring, discussed proposed new conversion guidelines that would, it was hoped, gain approval from the Chief Rabbinate and thus avoid the situation of American converts having their Jewish identity challenged in Israel: the convert would commit to belonging to an Orthodox synagogue within walking distance, observing Shabbat and kashrut, and sending children to an approved Orthodox day school for 12 years. Rabbi Angel and others denounced the plan for subordinating the American rabbinate to the Israelis and depriving individual rabbis of their traditional autonomy in performing conversions.

The RCA called a press conference for April 30 to announce an agreement with the Chief Rabbinate that would entail the establishment of some 20 regional conversion courts across America that would act according to the new guidelines, but it was canceled when the Israelis were quoted as insisting that in order for their conversions to be accepted, American rabbis would have to pass a test given in Israel. Yet another complication arose in September, when Israel’s Interior Ministry announced even more stringent criteria for acceptance of foreign conversions (see below, pp. 291–92). Rabbi Shlomo Amar, the Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel, arrived in the U.S. in October for talks with the RCA about the conversion issue. The substance of the discussions was not disclosed, but the RCA said it was going ahead with its plan for regional courts.
The National Council of Young Israel, a network of about 150 Modern Orthodox synagogues across the country, took steps that gave credence to Angel’s complaint about a turn to the right. In an August 1 memorandum sent to all member congregations, the council prohibited its branches from holding or sponsoring women’s prayer groups and megillah readings, barred women or converts from serving as synagogue presidents, and stated that any movement synagogue looking to hire a rabbi would first have to get authorization from the National Council, which would examine his scholarly and ideological credentials—a requirement clearly intended to block the hiring of anyone with unconventional views.

Ironically, the most explosive challenge to Modern Orthodoxy in 2007 came not from those who considered it insufficiently Orthodox, but from someone within its own ranks who thought it insufficiently modern. On July 22, the New York Times Sunday Magazine carried an article titled “Orthodox Paradox” by Noah Feldman, an Orthodox man who had graduated from the elite Maimonides day school in Boston, went on to Harvard and Oxford, and was now a professor at Harvard Law School. Feldman claimed that Maimonides had left pictures of him and his Korean girlfriend out of a published class reunion photo taken in 1998, and subsequently refused to publish news about their marriage and later family events he sent to the school’s alumni bulletin.

For Feldman these snubs symbolized the underlying flaw of Modern Orthodoxy: its inability to accept intermarriage in today’s open society gave the lie to its fundamental claim, that one could be both a faithful Orthodox Jew and a modern American. For good measure, Feldman cited other examples of unethical and even violent teachings of Orthodoxy that its modern exponents had not eliminated. Even though it later emerged that there had been no deliberate cropping of the reunion photo—Feldman and his then-girlfriend did not appear because they were standing on the far edge of the group, outside camera range—his charges provoked considerable debate within the Orthodox community over whether Modern Orthodoxy was indeed a contradiction in terms (if so, perhaps more insular Orthodoxy was the answer) and over the specific issue of whether intermarriage, which today no longer necessarily implied abandonment of the tradition, should be treated more leniently by Orthodox Judaism.

Far angrier than Feldman was writer Shalom Auslander, whose best-selling memoir Foreskin’s Lament denounced Orthodox Judaism in no uncertain terms. Raised in a strict Orthodox manner, Auslander, now no
longer observant, still could not shake the cruel God he was educated to believe in. His book, both religiously blasphemous and bitingly funny, was reportedly read surreptitiously by many Orthodox Jews.

One common criticism of Orthodoxy, its treatment of women, drew considerable attention during the year. In February, the tenth annual conference of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) stressed the agunah problem, the plight of women whose estranged husbands refused to grant a Jewish divorce, thus preventing them from remarrying. A rabbinic conference on the matter scheduled for November 2006 in Israel had been canceled by the Chief Rabbinate at the last moment (see AJYB 2007, pp. 263–64), and some of the JOFA speakers advocated more militant tactics, but no consensus emerged on strategy. JOFA did run a multipage ad on the subject, “A Call to Action for Rabbis and the Orthodox Community,” in Jewish newspapers in early March, signed by hundreds of people, asking, “Does Anybody Hear? Does Anybody Care?” and demanding “an end to this injustice—a disgrace for every Jew who adheres to Halakhah.”

Action was taken in November against a rabbi who was said to aid men in remarrying without giving their first wives Jewish divorces. Led by a number of well-known Orthodox scholars, RCA rabbis picketed the rabbi’s Brooklyn yeshiva to publicize his actions. The rabbi eventually appeared and told reporters that the charges against him were untrue.

Another theme voiced at the JOFA conference was the anti-feminist effects of the year that most Orthodox young women spent studying in Israel after high school. Emily Shapiro Katz, who taught American students in Israel for six years, decried the tendency of the Israeli schools to stress standards of modesty in dress over academic achievement, place rabbinic faculty on a higher pedestal than female teachers, and treat the very word “feminist” as a threat to Orthodoxy.

Complaints raised in 2006 about conditions at the large Agriprocessors kosher slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa (see AJYB 2007, p. 125), multiplied in 2007. In late March, 23 workers at the plant filed a class-action suit against the company claiming that workers were not compensated for time spent preparing for work and cleaning up. In early May hundreds of workers walked out for several hours after management notified all workers—many of whom were believed to be in the U.S. illegally—that they had to supply social security numbers. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) released yet another video in July, recorded in May, this one showing substandard conditions at a Nebraska kosher slaughterhouse owned by the same man who owned Agriproces-

A major event in the intellectual life of American Orthodoxy was the publication of *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, by James L. Kugel, for many years professor at Harvard University and now teaching in Israel, who identified himself as an Orthodox Jew. Opening up to an Orthodox audience the explosive question of whether reconciliation was possible between the traditional Jewish understanding of the Bible as God’s word and modern critical approaches, the book surveyed each book of the Bible, comparing old and new ways of understanding.

The future paths of the two largest American Hasidic communities were largely dependent on lawsuits. 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, the headquarters of Chabad (Lubavitch), had been contested ground since the death of the movement’s last rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in 1994. The basement synagogue where the rebbe had prayed was controlled by the local Chabad community, which believed that Schneerson had not actually died and would soon emerge as the messiah. Suing to wrest it away was the official global Chabad organization, which held possession of the building above. It ran a sophisticated network of Chabad branches around the world and publicly rejected the view that the rebbe was the messiah. In March a state judge ruled that the case should go to trial.

The long-running feud between two sons of the late Satmar rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, over the succession (see AJYB 2007, p. 126) was apparently settled by the New York State Court of Appeals in November. Under terms of the decision, the younger son, Rabbi Zalman Teitelbaum, was expected to retain control of the main Satmar community in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, while his older brother, Rabbi Aaron Teitelbaum, would run the satellite Kiryas Joel community upstate.

The Organizational World

Presidents Conference

In April, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the umbrella body for 52 national Jewish organizations,
chose June Walker as its new chair. Walker, national president of Hadassah, the women’s Zionist organization, would be the second woman to chair the conference. She was believed to be among those who had complained in the past about the conference leadership’s lack of consultation with member organizations.

UJC

United Jewish Communities (UJC) was formed in 1999 in an effort to streamline American Jewish philanthropy and make it more effective through a merger of the Council of Jewish Federations, United Jewish Appeal, and United Israel Appeal. Almost from the outset UJC was the object of criticism from many quarters, and contributions and donor bases of federations continued to decline. A UJC memo dated March 16, 2007, reflecting ideas put forward at a meeting of lay and professional leaders, recommended major restructuring. The four “pillars” of UJC’s work—Campaign/Financial Resource Development, Israel/Overseas, Human Services and Social Policy, and Jewish Renaissance and Renewal—would be dissolved, and an office in Israel would play a major role in attracting philanthropy from outside the U.S.

At UJC’s annual General Assembly in November, held this year in Nashville, the focus was on attracting younger givers who often felt that federations did not reflect their concerns or interests, and on the growing number of major donors who preferred to set up their own “boutique” charities geared to their personal interests rather than donating to federations. Many of the federations had devised mechanisms whereby contributors could direct money to their particular favorite causes via federation channels.

The 3,500 General Assembly attendees barely had time to return home when reports circulated that the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, the fourth largest federation, was withholding its UJC dues on the grounds that its dues allocation did not reflect its community’s loss of Jewish population, and that the South Palm Beach Federation was also requesting a cut in its designated dues.

AIPAC

The federal case initiated in 2004 against former AIPAC staffers Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman, charging them with passing classified information to unauthorized persons, continued on into 2007. In March, of-
ficials of three Jewish organizations, following the policy of distancing such organizations from the two accused men, turned down requests to testify for them. Defense attorneys had hoped that testimony about the attendance of these officials at a meeting with an administration figure would show that exchange of government information was routine in Washington, and thus that Rosen and Weissman did nothing illegal.

The April 2 Wall Street Journal carried a biting critique of the government’s actions by Dorothy Rabinowitz. This prosecution, she wrote, “had brought new life to the obsessed,” feeding charges of a pro-Israel conspiracy to control U.S. policy. Rabinowitz detailed how weak was the case against Rosen and Weissman, and warned that a conviction would raise the possibility “for countless others to face trials in the future, for newly invented crimes unearthed by willing prosecutors.”

Better news for the defense came later that month, when Judge T.S. Ellis III, who would preside over the trial, ruled that any evidence produced by the government would have to be open to the public.

WJC

Stung in 2006 by proof of significant financial irregularities (see AJYB 2007, p. 123), the World Jewish Congress went through more tribulations in 2007. In March, President Edgar Bronfman dismissed his longtime trusted associate, Israel Singer, for allegedly taking money that did not belong to him. This firing raised the question of whether Singer should continue as president of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany, especially as a new scandal surfaced in early May about questionable payments to a Singer confidant in connection with the March of the Living program, funded mainly by the Claims Conference. Singer announced in June that he would not be a candidate for reelection as conference president when his term expired in July.

Edgar Bronfman resigned as WJC president in May, and on June 10 WJC delegates elected Ronald Lauder — the cosmetics heir who had been an ambassador, president of the Jewish National Fund, and chairman of the Presidents Conference — as the new president. He received 59 votes, easily defeating Mendel Kaplan of South Africa, who got 17. Matthew Bronfman, Edgar’s son, ran unopposed for the position of chairman. In August — as new WJC lawsuits were announced to reclaim money from Singer — Lauder announced the appointment of Michael Schneider as general secretary, the top WJC professional position. Schneider had pre-
viously served as executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

**ORT**

Tensions among the various national components of ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation and Training), which ran a network of technical and vocational schools in Israel and elsewhere, affected ORT America. ORT Israel separated itself from World ORT in 2006. While the Israelis said this was because they were getting insufficient funding and could get more by striking out on their own, ORT America, fearful that its donors would now be approached by ORT Israel, informed its supporters that donations to ORT Israel were not tax deductible, and charged that the Israeli body lacked financial transparency. In January, World ORT announced it would fund Israeli schools directly, without going through ORT Israel. ORT America denied ORT Israel the use of the “ORT” trademark to fund-raise in the U.S., causing ORT Israel to sue in an American court, arguing that ORT had become a generic name that could not be restricted. In Israel, meanwhile, ORT Israel sought to bar World ORT from using the name, and a Haifa court ruled in April that the dispute should be mediated.

**Culture**

The disproportionate number of Jews who excel in intellectually demanding fields—a subject that had attracted numerous attempts at explanation—received renewed attention in the April issue of *Commentary*, which featured “Jewish Genius” by Charles Murray. Already controversial as the author of *The Bell Curve*, which argued that intelligence had some basis in genetics, Murray noted that Jewish IQ scores were higher than others, and suggested that factors in Jewish history, such as the centrality of Torah study for men and the development of the Talmud, “intertwined” Judaism with “intellectual complexity,” so that males of inferior intelligence were marginalized and eventually left the fold. Murray’s thesis was harshly criticized by some other social scientists for racial stereotyping.

A significant new reference work appeared as the year began, a new edition of *Encyclopedia Judaica*, meant to replace the first edition published in 1972. Many of the old entries were updated, and new ones, reflecting
changes in the Jewish world and advances in scholarship, were included. This was true not only for specific facts, people, and institutions, but entire themes were vastly expanded, such as the role of Jewish women. In addition, while the 1972 version was oriented toward Israel, the second edition gave far more space to Diaspora matters.

Two important Jewish cultural institutions announced major changes in 2007. What had been called the National Foundation for Jewish Culture dropped the word “National” from its name and approved a new strategic plan aimed at making the foundation “THE destination for those interested in culture as a vehicle for exploring Jewish experience.” Elise Bernhardt, the president and CEO, also hoped to triple the foundation’s $3 million endowment over five years. And the National Yiddish Book Center, located in Amherst, Massachusetts, broke ground for a new facility that would include an educational center, student center with kosher kitchen, performance hall, and book repository with space for up to 500,000 volumes.

A most unusual daylong conference took place in New York on April 29, sponsored by Nextbook, entitled “What’s He Doing Here? Jesus in Jewish Culture.” Exploring—and disagreeing about—the place of Jesus in Jewish tradition were well-known academics, rabbis, and writers. In the Forward (May 4), Nextbook editor Jonathan Rosen explained, “A one-day conference devoted to a marginal figure in Judaism who nevertheless is a central figure to much of the world had a kind of logic to it.”

Lawrence Grossman