

NECROLOGY  
MARSHALL SKLARE  
(1921–1992)

JONATHAN D. SARNA  
Brandeis University

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Marshall Sklare, the founding father of American Jewish sociology and for many years America's premier sociologist of the Jews, was born in Chicago on October 21, 1921 and died in Newton, Massachusetts on March 1, 1992. Until his retirement, in 1990, he served as Klutznick Family Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Sociology at Brandeis University.

Sklare was a third generation American, the grandson of immigrants from the area of Kovno in Lithuania, and the son of a businessman. He attended Chicago's College of Jewish Studies, as well as Northwestern University, graduating from both in 1943, and he then went on to pursue a Master's degree in Sociology (1948) from the University of Chicago. In 1953, he earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from Columbia University, where he worked, primarily, under the guidance of Seymour Martin Lipset.

Sklare's dissertation dealt with Conservative Judaism, and was published under the title *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (1955, 1972, 1985). The volume pioneered the sociological study of American Judaism and introduced methodologies and paradigms of enduring significance. Its insightful portrayal of the Conservative movement's strengths and weaknesses, and its analysis of the movement's place in the history of American Judaism shaped all subsequent scholarship in the field. In a memoir written just prior to his death, Sklare recalled that one leading Conservative rabbi took him aside shortly after the book was published and rebuked him. "Young man," he said, "how dare you tell the truth about Conservative Judaism!" Sklare took the rebuke as a compliment, and often recalled it with pleasure.

Sklare could not obtain a faculty position in American Jewish sociology — there were no such positions to be found — so he

went to work at the American Jewish Committee's Division of Scientific Research, which he eventually directed. There he oversaw a wide range of short and longterm studies of American Jewish life, and he pioneered the scholarly study of Jewish identity, co-authoring two pathbreaking works: *The Riverton Study: How Jews Look at Themselves and their Neighbors* (1975) and the Lakeville Study entitled *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society* (1967, 1979). He also edited *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, (1958) the first of what would be four notable anthologies in American Jewish sociology, that, together, defined the field's parameters and brought to a wider audience the most important scholarly monographs produced by students of American Jewish life. Finally, during these years Sklare produced a series of widely-discussed articles, mostly published in *Commentary*, that helped to explain the American Jewish community to itself. These articles probed beneath the surface of the American Jewish community, and pointed to issues, like the burgeoning rate of intermarriage, that would, before long, become Jewish communal priorities.

In 1966, Sklare left the American Jewish Committee for academia. He taught at the Yeshiva University, and at Princeton Theological Seminary, and completed an important synthetic work on American Jewish life, *America's Jews* (1971), published as part of a series devoted to the study of ethnic groups in comparative perspective.

In 1969, Sklare came to Brandeis University, first as a Visiting Professor and then as a full professor in the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. His appointment paved the way for Brandeis to emerge as a leading center of Contemporary Jewish Studies and it broke new ground in the field of Jewish Studies as a whole. So far as can be determined, this marked the first time that the sociological study of American Jewry achieved recognition as a legitimate university discipline, and the first time that a sociologist of the Jews had ever been appointed to a chair at an American university.

Sklare inspired numerous students during his two decades at Brandeis, and oversaw a number of significant dissertations. He also laid the groundwork for ongoing research into American Jewish life by conceiving and then directing what is now the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, the first research center devoted to the scholarly study of Contemporary American Jewish life. In recent years, he had been working on a full-scale sociology of the American Jewish community, as well as a retrospective volume of his selected essays with an autobiographical memoir and new introductions.

*Jonathan D. Sarna*