

Ambivalent Jew

Charles Liebman in Memoriam

Intermarriage in America
*The Jewish Experience
in Historical Context**

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Anthropologists teach us that “endogamy, the practice of marrying someone from within one’s own tribe or group, is the oldest social regulation of marriage.”¹ Certainly, it is a very old regulation within Judaism. The Bible, in the book of Deuteronomy (7:3), warned Jews not to intermarry with the seven nations surrounding them. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, we are told, the Israelites themselves pledged to uphold God’s law that “we will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.”² The sages subsequently expanded the meaning of “peoples of the land” to embrace people of *all* lands and nations, and insisted that Jews may only marry among themselves.³ The resulting taboo against intermarriage is one of the strongest and most deeply rooted taboos in Judaism—and understandably so, for

* The subject of intermarriage interested Charles Liebman both as a social scientist and as a Jew. Characteristically, he held strong views on the subject, and did not hesitate to express them, even in circles where they proved unpopular. But he never permitted his personal views to cloud his scholarship. The article that follows, prepared originally for a conference, would doubtless have benefited from Charles’s comments; he was a brilliant critic and reader, generous with his time and unsparing in his criticisms. I dedicate the article to Charles Liebman’s memory.

¹ “Marriage,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th ed., 1991), vol. 7, 871.

² Nehemiah 10: 31 (New Jewish Publication Society translation).

³ Maimonides, *Laws of Forbidden Sexual Relations*, 12:1; *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. 12 (1972), 167.

intermarriage hindered the transmission of faith and culture from one generation to the next (which was seen as one of the family's main responsibilities) and even more basically it threatened the character and preservation of the Jewish group as a whole.

Important as it is for Judaism, however, endogamy is by no means a universal value in the world at large. Many tribal societies championed exogamy, often dependent on the capture of foreign women. Among more developed societies, the mixing of peoples is, in the words of Paul Spickard, "one of the great themes of world history." He shows that exogamy is especially prominent in the American past. "People came to America from all over the world," he writes. "They bore every conceivable color, religion, and national heritage." Over time, he concludes, many Americans "socialized and mated with people who were not like them."⁴ Indeed, as early as 1782, the French-born author and agriculturalist known as J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur, described an American as a "strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country." He pointed to a "family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations." "Here," he concluded, optimistically, "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."⁵

Crèvecoeur's optimistic vision posed a considerable challenge to Americans intent on preserving their ancestral heritage, and most especially to Jews. His reading of America, while by no means universally agreed upon, pointed to a yawning gap between mainstream American values concerning marriage, and Jewish marital values. While non-Jewish Americans of the day often married out and some, like Crèvecoeur, found positive value in the mixing of peoples, Judaism promoted in-group marriage as a supreme value and considered the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew to be a major transgression, akin to treason. Americans championed the individualistic ideal of robust choice in marriage, and privileged the goal of romantic love; Judaism championed the communitarian ideal of continuity and companionship through marriage, and privileged the goal of marrying within the group.

This tension between "modern" American values in marriage and "traditional" Jewish ones is a theme that runs all the way through the American Jewish experience from the very beginning. Indeed, far from being a new community challenge, as so many believe, intermarriage is actually one of American Jewry's oldest concerns, dating all the way back to 1656 when one of America's first known Jews, Solomon Pietersen, married a local Protestant and raised his daughter in her mother's faith.⁶ From then onward, intermarriage has served as something of a

⁴ Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 4; see also Robin Fox, *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), esp. 54–76, 175–239.

⁵ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1957 [1782]), 39.

⁶ Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 216–217, 1226.

barometer of intergroup relations in America; the two rise and fall in tandem. Periods marked by growing interreligious harmony witness growing amounts of intermarriage; periods marked by burgeoning interreligious hatred see intermarriage rates fall. Estimates of Jewish intermarriage in the colonial period range from ten to fifteen percent of all marriages, with men intermarrying more frequently than women, and those living far from their fellow Jews more likely to marry out than those who lived near them. Available statistics leave many questions unanswered. Still, the numbers are far lower than for some other religious groups of the day. New York City's French Huguenots, to take an extreme case, experienced an intermarriage rate between 1750 and 1769 that exceeded 86 percent!⁷ The entire subject of intermarriage raised thorny questions that American Jews continue to confront to this day. How to respond to intermarriages? How to respond to intermarrieds who sought to maintain their Jewish ties? How to promote in-group marriage without damaging social ties to non-Jews? How to survive in an American religious environment that was becoming increasingly open and competitive?

Colonial Jews offered few firm answers to these questions and mostly dealt with intermarriages on an ad hoc basis. For example, when Phila Franks married the wealthy Huguenot merchant Oliver DeLancey in 1742, her pious, grief-stricken mother, Abigail, withdrew from the city and in traditional Jewish fashion resolved never to see her daughter again, "nor Lett none of ye Family Goe near her." Phila had violated a taboo, disgraced her parents, and deserved, so her mother believed, to pay the price, as a deterrent to others. Phila's father, Jacob Franks, however, demurred: "Wee live in a Small place & he is Related to ye best family in ye place," he explained, and tried to promote reconciliation.⁸ The two divergent approaches—deterrence and reconciliation—reflected opposite worldviews. Mother considered Jewish group preservation to be the highest value, and advocated excommunication. Father took account of local conditions—the small number of available Jews, the desire for peaceful relations with non-Jewish neighbors—and sought to promote reconciliation. These two approaches, the one rooted in Jewish tradition the other shaped by modernity and the conditions of American life, typify responses to intermarriage throughout American Jewish history.

As a rule in early America, intermarried Jews did sooner or later drift away from the Jewish community, but exceptions to this rule were not shunned, as they might well have been elsewhere. David Franks continued to maintain close social and economic ties to Jews. Benjamin Moses Clava was buried as a Jew. Samson Levy and Michael Judah had their non-Jewish children ritually circumcised. Ezekiel Solomons, Heineman Pines, John Franks, Barnet Lyons, Uriah Judah, and David Franks, all of them intermarried, numbered among the twenty original founders of

⁷ Malcolm H. Stern, "The Function of Genealogy in American Jewish History," *Essays in American Jewish History* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1958), 85; Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 1232; Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 187.

⁸ *Letters of the Franks Family (1733–1748): The Lee Max Friedman Collection of American Jewish Correspondence*, ed. Leo Hershkowitz (Waltham: American Jewish Historical Society, 1968), 116–125.

Shearith Israel in Montreal.⁹ In each of these cases, a Jewish tradition that was uncompromising on the subject of intermarriage clashed with colonial society's more indulgent social norms. Caught between two realms that they strove mightily to keep separate, colonial Jews vacillated. Once again, Jewish law and American life proved difficult to reconcile.

In the wake of the American Revolution, amidst the heady atmosphere of freedom characteristic of that era, intermarriage rates between Jews and Christians rose sharply. According to Malcolm Stern's careful calculations, 28.7 percent of all known marriages involving Jews between 1776 and 1840 were intermarriages, almost twice the rate that he calculated for the colonial period.¹⁰ As before, this was a sure sign of Jewish social acceptance, particularly since many Jews intermarried without themselves converting. Nor was intermarriage confined to those remote from Judaism. In one remarkable case, in 1806, Abraham Hyam Cohen, the son of (and assistant to) Mikveh Israel's *hazan*, fell in love with a Christian woman, Jane Picken, who was converted to Judaism without an ordained rabbi being present and after only a brief period of preparation. (Years later, in the midst of a serious illness and after the death of her beloved youngest son, she returned to the Episcopalian Church and separated from her husband.)¹¹ The marriage demonstrates that even within the world of the synagogue individual freedom was triumphing over the demands of Jewish tradition and law. As a young immigrant woman named Rebecca Samuel explained in 1791, in a letter to her parents in Hamburg, in America "anyone can do what he wants. There is no rabbi in all of America to excommunicate anyone."¹²

Rebecca Samuel assumed, as Abigail Franks did and as some Jews do to this day, that intermarriages could be thwarted by strong communal action, such as excommunication. In fact, however, the determinants of intermarriage are far more complex. Sociologist David M. Heer has enumerated four central factors that are particularly relevant to understanding intermarriage, not only among Jews but among all peoples. They are: (1) the relative availability of suitable marriage partners; (2) the barriers and punishments imposed by the group upon members who do intermarry; (3) the difficulties that other groups impose upon outsiders wishing to marry into them; and (4) the relative attractiveness of potential alternative part-

⁹ Stern, "Function of Genealogy," 85; Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 1232; Sheldon J. Godfrey and Judith C. Godfrey, *Search Out the Land: The Jews and the Growth of Equality in British Colonial America, 1740–1867* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 294, n. 14.

¹⁰ *AJA* 19 (November 1967): 142–143.

¹¹ Edwin Wolf 2nd and Maxwell Whiteman, *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975), 237–238; Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769–1976: Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 53–55; Raphael J. Moses, *Last Order of the Lost Cause: The Civil War Memoirs of a Jewish Family from the "Old South,"* ed. Mel Young, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 24–25.

¹² Jacob R. Marcus, *American Jewry: Documents Eighteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1959), 52.

ners.¹³ In early America, where (a) suitable marriage partners were few, (b) the relative attractiveness of non-Jews was high, and (c) the difficulties imposed upon Jews wishing to marry non-Jews were very few, it is little wonder that the intermarriage rate soared. The real wonder, keeping in mind that the intermarriage rate for French Huguenot was 86 percent, is that the Jewish rate of intermarriage was not higher. Presumably, Jewish resistance—barriers and punishments that threatened intermarrieds, as well as positive Jewish efforts to promote endogamy—explain this difference.

The arrival of rabbis in America, beginning in 1840, focused new attention on the subject of intermarriage. All of the great Jewish religious figures of the period condemned the religious laxity that they saw as the cause of Jewish-Christian marriages. Both Traditionalists, like Isaac Leeser, and Reformers like David Einhorn, insisted that the Jewish “calling” or “mission” demanded that Jews marry among themselves. Einhorn, remembered as a “Radical Reformer,” was as uncompromising on intermarriage as the very Orthodox Rabbi Abraham Rice. “To lend a hand to the sanctification of mixed marriage,” he famously wrote, “is . . . to furnish a nail to the coffin of the small Jewish race, with its sublime mission.”¹⁴

One of the most interesting analyses of intermarriage in early America was penned by the New York Jewish lay leader, Simeon Abrahams, writing in the Jewish periodical *The Occident* in 1845. Abrahams understood that intermarriage was a “natural consequence” of the “liberality” of America’s laws that allowed the Jew to “mingle and associate with persons of different religious beliefs in social and friendly intercourse and business pursuits.” The problem, he believed, was that the barriers and punishments meted out to the intermarried were not strong enough. “They are allowed,” he complained “to remain in good standing in the various congregations and societies to which they formerly belonged, as if they had committed no wrong,” and often their children, were “introduced into the community of Jews without their having become regular proselytes.” His own proposed solution to the problem was as simple as it was radical. “In order to infuse a wholesome fear in the minds of the young,” he urged his fellow Jews “not to permit any of those who have married out . . . to have any part or share with us in the religious rites or services of our ancient and holy religion.” Even “in case of their death,” he insisted, “no special notice should be taken of them.” He understood that “this may be considered severe punishment,” but feared that there was no choice, lest Jews disappear and become “a matter of history but not of reality.”¹⁵

Abrahams’s harsh proposal failed to win acceptance, and his prophecy concerning American Jewry’s disappearance did not come to pass. In fact, available evidence sug-

¹³ David M. Heer, “Intermarriage,” *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephen Thernstrom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 514–515.

¹⁴ Moshe Davis, “Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry: Historical Background to the Jewish Response,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 10 (December 1968): 180–181.

¹⁵ Simeon Abrahams, “Intermarrying With Gentiles,” reprinted in Abraham J. Karp, *The Jews in America: A Treasury of Art and Literature* (New York: Hugh Later Levin Associates, 1994), 83–85.

gests that intermarriage rates dropped and stayed fairly low for the next century. David Heer's analysis again helps us to explain why. First, the onset of Jewish immigration initially from Central Europe and then from Eastern Europe increased the availability of suitable marriage partners. Second, immigrant Jewish "anti-goyism" coupled with burgeoning antisemitism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries meant that Jews and Christians found one another unattractive; each looked upon the other as a living representative of his or her stereotype. Third, non-Jews also came increasingly to practice endogamy—motivated in no small part by prejudice—so that the people among whom Jews lived proved as reluctant to countenance intermarriage as Jews were. Intermarriages did still occur, and the intermarriage theme remained prominent in literature, and later in film. But such data as we possess confirms that the actual rate of intermarriage dropped to remarkably low levels. Julius Drachler's study of intermarriage in New York (1908–1912) pegged the intermarriage rate among Jews in that city as 1.17 percent (approximately the rate of interracial marriages at that time). Barnett Brickner's analysis of Jewish-Christian intermarriages in Cincinnati (1916–1918) placed the rate there at 4.5 percent.¹⁶

Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy's investigation of interreligious marriages in New Haven over an eighty year period (1870–1950) demonstrates that Jews were not alone in marrying among themselves. Most of that city's citizens, she found, married within their faith. In 1870, for example, Catholics married Catholics in 95.4 percent of all cases. As late as 1950 the rate of in-group marriage among New Haven Catholics remained 72.6 percent. The comparable figures for Protestants and Jews were 70.34 percent and 96.1 percent respectively. Kennedy's studies have been criticized, but her central insight—subsequently publicized and extended by Will Herberg—is correct. Most Americans, through the 1950s, married people of their own kind. Notwithstanding melting pot rhetoric, endogamy in America was the rule. Jews were simply more endogamous than their Protestant and Catholic neighbors.¹⁷

From a Jewish point of view, this had very important ideological implications. It meant that American culture—the norms and expectations of society—reinforced Jews' own traditional sense that out-marriage was wrong and in-marriage was right. Jews and Gentiles, sometimes for the same reasons and sometimes for differ-

¹⁶ Julius Dressler, *Intermarriage in New York City* (New York, 1921), 43; Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy Klein, *The Jews of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, 1989), 9, 20 n. 28.

¹⁷ Ruby Jo Kennedy, "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage Trends in New Haven, 1870–1940," *American Journal of Sociology* 49 (1944): 331–339; idem, "Single or Triple Melting Pot? Intermarriage in New Haven, 1870–1950," *Ibid.* 58 (July 1952): 56–59; Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960 [1955]). For critiques see Ceri Peach, "Ethnic Segregation and Ethnic Intermarriage: A Reexamination of Kennedy's Triple Melting Pot in New Haven, 1900–1950," in Ceri Peach, Vaughan Robinson and Susan Smith, eds., *Ethnic Segregation in Cities* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); and Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), 232–235.

ent reasons, promoted the same end: endogamous marriages. This cultural support for in-group marriage goes far to explain why American Jewish intermarriage rates remained as low as they did through the 1950s. Nationwide, during this period, the intermarriage rate for Jews was estimated (based on data collected by the United States census in 1957) at 7.2 percent.¹⁸

Evidence of rising Jewish intermarriage rates began to accumulate in the 1960s. Pioneering studies by Erich Rosenthal demonstrated that intermarriage rates for Jews in the small Jewish communities of Iowa and in the medium size community of Washington DC were substantially larger than 7.2 percent. He calculated the rate of current intermarriage as 42.2 percent in Iowa and 17.9 percent in Washington DC. In a prophetic article analyzing this and other data, the pioneering Jewish sociologist Marshall Sklare predicted that the subject of intermarriage, hitherto largely ignored by the Jewish community, would in time emerge as a central issue in American Jewish communal life. Intermarriage, he warned, cast "into doubt American Jewry's dual ideal of full participation in the society and the preservation of Jewish identity."¹⁹

Subsequent developments proved Sklare right. The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey declared, in its widely-publicized *Highlights*, that "in recent years just over half of born Jews who married, at any age, whether for the first time or not, chose a spouse who was born a Gentile and has remained so." The result, it continued, is that "since 1985 twice as many mixed couples (born Jewish with Gentile spouse) have been created as Jewish couples."²⁰ Critics of the survey argued that it exaggerated the rate of intermarriage; instead of 52 percent they claimed, the rate was more like 41 percent.²¹ Even so, this represented a five-fold increase in thirty years, and the 2000–01 National Jewish Population Study indicated that the 41 percent intermarriage had in the intervening years risen to 47 percent.²² At this rate, mixed Jewish-gentile households will soon outnumber Jewish ones.²³ All of this explains why intermarriage has become an issue of central concern to the American Jewish community. The community's very survival seems to be at stake.

Jewish experts usually explain the rising rate of Jewish-Christian intermarriage on the basis of developments internal to the Jewish community, such as assimilation, an imbalance in the sex ratio, geographical dispersal, and the fact that the majority of young American Jews are now three or more generations in America and far removed from the stigma that was attached to intermarriage in Europe.

¹⁸ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Interreligious Marriage in America," *The Intermarriage Crisis: Jewish Communal Perspectives and Responses* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991), 2; Marshall Sklare, *Observing America's Jews* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 236.

¹⁹ Sklare, *Observing America's Jews*, 234–247, esp. 245.

²⁰ Barry A. Kosmin, ed., *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1991), 14.

²¹ Steven M. Cohen, "Why Intermarriage May Not Threaten Jewish Continuity," *Moment* 19 (December 1994): 95; see the responses in the April 1995 issue.

²² *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000–01* (New York: United Jewish Communities, 2003), 16.

²³ *Jerusalem Report*, 5 September 1996: 26–27.

Keeping in mind Heer's analysis, however, we need also to look at factors external to the Jewish community. What we find is that American marital patterns themselves have changed dramatically in recent decades, so much so that marriages across religious and ethnic lines are now the norm in the United States, not the exception. Swedish, Norwegian, German, Italian and Irish Americans—all, according to 1980 census data, experience intermarriage rates in excess of 60 percent. Even among Catholics, intermarriage rates among young people have soared, exceeding 50 percent. Comparable Protestant data would be meaningless given the movement's size, but it is surely revealing that in one cohort studied, 69 percent of young Methodists married non-Methodists, 70 percent of young Lutherans married non-Lutherans, and 75 percent of young Presbyterians married non-Presbyterians. In the much smaller Greek Orthodox Church, by the early 1990s, fully two-thirds of all marriages involved a partner who was not Greek Orthodox, leading the laity to proclaim: "the battle against intermarriage is over. The focus now must be on how to retain the non-Greek spouse and the children of the intermarried." Asian Americans and African Americans likewise witnessed dramatic upswings in intermarriage. "Nearly half of recent marriages for U.S. born Asian-Americans have been to non-Asian White Americans," according to an account, published in 2002, while marriages between blacks and whites multiplied seven-fold between 1960 and 1993. Popular attitudes, meanwhile, kept pace with these changes. Acceptance of intermarriage on the part of Americans rose dramatically as the twentieth century wound down. Whereas in the 1950s American culture proved strongly supportive of endogamy, today Jews and others who seek to promote in-group marriage face a cultural mainstream that legitimates and even celebrates intermarriage as a positive good. To oppose marriages between men and women of different ethnicities, faiths, and races seems to many people to be unAmerican and racist.²⁴

Jews themselves have been heavily influenced by these cultural trends. A 1995 demographic study in Boston reveals that only 30 percent of Boston Jewish adults in 1995 expressed great concern about recent increases in intermarriage in the United States. Fully two-thirds of Boston's unmarried Jewish adults, according to the same survey, do *not* consider it very important that a future spouse be Jewish.²⁵

²⁴ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Interreligious Marriage in America," in *The Intermarriage Crisis*, 1–6; Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 59ff., 344; Stanley Lieberson and Mary C. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1988), 173, 225; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 333 n. 58; "Intermarriage," Orthodox Christian Laity, www.ocl.org/intermar.htm; Statistical Assessment Service, www.stats.org/newsletters/9708/interrace2.htm; Michael Rosenfeld and Byung-Soo Kim, "Between Families: On the Independence and Intermarriage of Young Adults in the US," available as preprint on www.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Rosenfeld+Kim%20November%202002.pdf; "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends" www.sistahspace.com/nommo/ir25.html.

²⁵ Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, *Community Report on the 1995 Demographic Study* (Boston: Combined Jewish Philanthropies, 1997), 28.

Some believe, on the basis of this data, that the American Jewish community is doomed to extinction. Like the Huguenots, or for that matter the Jewish community of the island of Jamaica, America's Jews will, according to this scenario, disappear in a few generations into the mainstream. Others believe that a vigorous communal response can stem the tide in one of two ways: either (1) by discouraging intermarriage through education and other programs aimed at "Jewish continuity," or (2) by mitigating the effects of intermarriage through conversion of the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism.

Only future historians will be able to evaluate which of these scenarios proves correct. What is important for our purposes is to understand the challenge that intermarriage poses not only to Jews, but to all American minority group members who seek to preserve their separate identity, believing that their faith and heritage should be perpetuated. Ultimately, the very qualities that make American society desirable to minorities—its tolerance, its liberal tradition and its emphasis on individual rights and privileges—are the same qualities that promote marriage across ethnic and religious lines. Indeed, the more minority group members win acceptance as equal and desirable fellow citizens, the more likely they are to lose their distinctive identity through marital assimilation. Recognizing this, American Jews, have since colonial days forged a communal policy on intermarriage that combines deterrence and reconciliation. They have preached endogamy and have attempted in various ways to maximize the chances that their offspring will marry within the faith, even as they have been willing to forgive children who make other choices. For a long time that strategy seemed to work perhaps because American culture—not necessarily for the best reasons—reinforced the message that young people should marry "their own kind." Intermarriage rates, as a result, remained within bounds, and Jews deluded themselves into believing that they could, at one and the same time, be part of American society and apart from it, integrated socially while marrying among themselves.

Today, as we have seen, this situation has changed completely. The question, as we contemplate a culture that accepts and even advocates intermarriages, is whether endogamy-based minority groups can continue to survive in contemporary America, particularly if they choose to disperse themselves among the mainstream. During the twenty-first century, the American Jewish community will test this question as it seeks to promote its "continuity agenda" in the face of contemporary culture and its seductions. The results bear careful watching, for even as they determine American Jewry's future, they will also furnish vital lessons concerning the viability of America's minority groups and the changing nature of American society as a whole.