Editor's Introduction

Harriet Hartman¹

Published online: 16 March 2018

© Springer Science+Business Media B.V., part of Springer Nature 2018

There's a recurring debate among the editorial board members of *Contemporary Jewry* about the implications of the title of our journal: What does "contemporary" encompass? To what extent do we need historical context to understand contemporary phenomena? To what extent do the lessons of history need to be replayed and reinterpreted for us to understand their implications for the present? As editor, I tend to cast a fairly wide net when considering articles for publication, weighing what can best help us to understand in greater depth our own contemporary present. I seek clues from the past, from cultures I am less familiar with, from methodologies I am less well versed in, and from disciplines that lean toward the interdisciplinary or hard to categorize. You'll find some of this breadth in the current issue. The featured studies encompass quantitative and qualitative studies, cultural studies and historical analysis, case studies and analysis of national census data.

While the first two articles ostensibly both deal with Holocaust education, the lenses used are quite different. Zehavit Gross queries the pedagogy with which Holocaust education is approached and addresses what is at stake when we attempt to universalize its lessons. Certainly the contemporary world experiences enough genocide and attempts at ethnic cleansing to draw parallels and lessons from the Holocaust, but is something lost in doing so? Gross is bound to make you ponder this question deeply. Galia Heled provides a window into how Holocaust education has been implemented in Israel, by focusing on the episodic distribution of one particular author's books, narrowing in on the ways decisions about Holocaust education have been made and why. Both articles show us how in different cultural contexts, different processes and motivations result in different challenges and, ultimately, outcomes.

✉ Harriet Hartman
hartman@rowan.edu

¹ Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ, USA

Maryam Dilmaghani uses historical Canadian census data to focus on the occupational attainment and earnings of Canadian Jews in 1901, 1911, and 1921, compared to other religious groups and among themselves by nativity. This analysis fills in a gap that adds to a foundation for understanding contemporary patterns of labor market attainment among Canadian Jews, and has thus been deemed a relevant and informative piece for *Contemporary Jewry*.

Using a very different methodology, Shaul Bar Nissim provides a historical organizational analysis of the UJA-Federation of New York from 1990-2014, using both historical documents and in-depth interviews with current and former professional and lay leadership as well as leadership of organizations that have dealt with UJA-Federation. Here again we see how the historical context informs contemporary patterns of adapting to changing and uncertain circumstances. This window into a North American philanthropic organization juxtaposes quite interestingly with the window into the Israeli educational system's organization and decision-making, albeit involving slightly different time periods.

Robert Cherry's article, "Jesus and the Baal Shem Tov...", is perhaps the most historical of the articles that *Contemporary Jewry* has published in several years. It suggests some different orientations to ascetic behavior in Christian and Jewish traditions, which Cherry uses to suggest an explanation for a much more modern phenomenon, vaudeville at the beginning of the 20th century, a precursor to the contemporary film and entertainment industry in the United States.

The final article in this issue is by Moti Inbari, who analyzes how Arthur Koestler, the Hungarian-born Jewish journalist and novelist, adopted and subsequently renounced his messianic beliefs in Communism. In his analysis, Inbari uses psychological theories on the consequences of prophetic failure, and the influence of cognitive dissonance on disillusionment and abandonment of a belief system.

These articles all have in common the use of social scientific insight to penetrate their topics and derive implications for contemporary phenomena, though the subject matters and methodologies used vary widely.

This issue of *Contemporary Jewry* concludes with Helen Kim's Research Updates, two book reviews and a list of new books received by Daniel Parmer, book review editor. The books reviewed are *Serious Fun at a Jewish Community Summer Camp: Family, Judaism, and Israel* by Celia Rothenberg and *Who Will Lead Us?: The Story of Five Hasidic Dynasties in America* by Samuel Heilman, immediate past editor of *Contemporary Jewry*.

As always, enjoy the reading!