Editor's Introduction

Samuel C. Heilman

Published online: 10 December 2011
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2011

I am pleased to present this special issue on Canadian Jewry, guest edited by Randal Schnoor. Over the years, we have recognized in the pages of *Contemporary Jewry* the importance of this population and provided insights into its uniqueness and the important differences from the much larger U.S. Jewish population to the South. The last time we explored Canada's Jews was in 1982, and the time had come for another look at the situation about thirty years later. As the articles in these pages demonstrate, in spite of the obvious closeness and influence of United States Jewry on Canadian Jewry, Canada's Jews and their experience retain an identity and social situation that is different in sociologically interesting and important ways.

Firstly we begin with a reminder of the important common element. In both countries, in spite of their being a very small proportion of the population, Jews (1.3% in Canada and around 1.7% in the U.S.) have both a cultural and political influence far beyond their actual numbers. That is, both populations demonstrate, although not necessarily for the same reasons, that they have found a way to matter even though they remain a demographic drop in the bucket. Yet as interesting and intriguing as this fact is, the conditions that have led to it as well as the details of how it manifests itself are by no means identical. This issue provides important understandings that tell that story.

The table of contents speaks for itself. It includes articles that offer a broad overview of the past and present, a consideration of Jewishness in Canadian popular culture, particularly on television, a review of the transitions within Canadian Jewry (and in particular the surge in its religious extremes), and a special look at particular Canadian Jewish communities. For those who wonder how matters have changed and what we have that's new to learn, a look at the previous issue on the subject, now available online (as are all our past issues), speaks volumes.

S. C. Heilman (✉)
Department of Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: scheilman@gmail.com

As for the future, readers of our “online first” articles already know that we will take up questions of the impact of Birthright Israel (Taglit), the usefulness of community studies as an alternative to a national study as a tool for understanding demographic change among America’s Jews, and the changing nature of Orthodox women—particularly when it comes to synagogue behavior and activity. These and many other exciting and thought-provoking articles are on the way or already available.

A word about reading *Contemporary Jewry* online. While I know there are some traditionalists among you who continue to prefer to read our journal the old-fashioned way, holding it in your hands and turning the pages, those who have made use of it online will know that there are many advantages in this format that are simply not available in the hard-copy reading experience. Not only can you quickly and easily search our journal and its extraordinary back issues while reading the current or future articles—particularly informative as you peruse this Canadian volume and compare it with the other papers we have published on the subject—but Springer also provides you with a series of related links and quick views to other publications (books and journals) in which subjects related to the article you are reading can be found. For readers, this makes the material in our journal an access point to a far broader and richer store of knowledge. And for those who publish with us, it places your work into a broader framework and means that not only those who read *Contemporary Jewry* will be exposed and alerted to your work. I believe this makes our journal a far better place to put your work and to read.

As we move toward being completely online, both readers and authors will see a far faster turnaround between their research and an ability to present their work to a large audience. This becomes one more attractive aspect of both reading and writing for our journal. We look forward to getting feedback from our readers and encourage you to submit your original work to us. With best wishes for a good read.