

Editor's Introduction

Harriet Hartman¹

Received: 14 March 2017 / Accepted: 15 March 2017 / Published online: 27 March 2017
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2017

This issue is a mixture of past and present, continuity and change, in a variety of ways affecting contemporary Jewish life. Befitting our increased sensibilities to political behavior in the United States, we begin with an article analyzing the political divisions among American Jews, based on the 2013 Pew Research Center Survey of US Jews, and relating those divisions to past findings. Denominational preference appears to be the source of the greatest political divisions among American Jews—as it was in the 2016 US elections as well. As the author, Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz, concludes, “US Jews serve as an important case study illuminating the simultaneous existence of political cohesion and political division among sub-national groups” in the United States. The second article focuses on Kurt Lewin, a prominent social psychologist who emphasized the benefits of Jewish education and positive Jewish experiences to foster proud, committed Jews and loyal American citizens, an impact demonstrated by the 94% of American Jews in the 2013 Pew Research Center Survey reporting they are proud to be Jewish, cutting across denominational affiliation, number of Jewish parents, and immigrant status. This in-depth study by Joshua Furman explores the development of Lewin’s theories and principles as they pertain to “group belongingness” of Jewish children. Bringing us further into the twenty-first century, Ari Kelman and colleagues explore the construction of contemporary Jewish identity by analyzing qualitative interviews with post-boomer American Jews, underscoring the importance of social ties for their subjects. It is almost as if they were renewing and extending Lewin’s emphasis on social relationships, as they relate their understanding of their Jewish lives. Kelman and colleagues situate their study in a discussion of Jewish identity research that has preceded their study, noting the continuity and, even more, the change that they uncover in their study.

✉ Harriet Hartman
Hartman@rowan.edu

¹ Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Glassboro, NJ, USA

One of the signs of change in contemporary Jewish life is some Jewish women's wearing of *kippot*. Helena Darwin's study of 576 such women explores the meanings they attach to this practice (often coinciding with the reasons men wear *kippot*) and their motivations for doing so (embracing "equal opportunity" and "equal obligation"). Another sign of change—but on a theme that has been reiterated over many decades—is the increasing number of children of mixed parentage (children of both Jewish and non-Jewish parents). Also drawing on the 2013 Pew Research Center Survey of US Jews, Theodore Sasson and colleagues show that millennial children of marriages between Jews and non-Jews are more likely to have been raised Jewish and to have received formal Jewish education than their counterparts in earlier generations, and are more likely to identify as Jewish in adulthood and practice some aspects of Judaism (again reinforcing Lewin's thesis about the importance of children being raised with a sense of "group belongingness"). Sasson and colleagues discuss the implications of their research for future Jewish demography, and the understanding of "how interfaith marriage is affecting the religious landscape."

These articles represent a rich range of methodologies, from historical research to qualitative interviews to snowball surveys to national representative surveys of American Jews, leaving us to appreciate the unique contributions each approach offers.

Perhaps the biggest change in this current issue of *Contemporary Jewry* is a new section, which I've titled "Controversy and Debate." In it, Ian Lustick analyzes the development of four ways in which Israelis have constructed their understanding of the Holocaust/Shoah, and the implications of these constructions or ethos, which he terms "Holocaustia," for contemporary policies and politics. A provocative essay, his interpretations have generated considerable debate, represented by four comments offered as responses to his presentation, and his last word responding to these comments. Dan Michman and colleagues take issue with the methodology, the scholarship, and the conclusions of the article, offering a detailed critique of the presentation. Jeffrey Kopstein accepts the analysis, but questions the conclusions as they impact on current policies and politics. Avinoam Patt notes the emphasis on elite discourse and its contribution to political culture, and complicates the understanding by asking about the impact of survivors' testimonies and experiences, which became part of public sensibility later in Israeli history than the elite discourse. He also situates the Israeli cultural response as part of the global Jewish response, suggesting commonalities rather than distinctiveness. Yael Zerubavel situates Lustick's presentation within the theoretical framework of memory studies, which emphasize the dynamic and dialogic character of collective memory and engage "in a continuous interplay between the past and the present."

Perhaps the introduction of this new, controversial, section of *Contemporary Jewry* also represents an interplay between the past and the present, as do all of the attempts to relate contemporary—and historical—scholarship to contemporary concerns and collective needs. Whether you embrace this particular iteration of controversy and debate or not, I hope it will be thought-provoking in terms of the ideas presented, the ways in which the scholars reach their conclusions, the impact

of such scholarship on understanding contemporary Jewish life (whether you find it illuminating or misguided—or both), and implications for future scholarship.

The issue is rounded out with Research Updates and two Book Reviews. The research update focuses on the Jewish Women's Archive, itself an interesting interplay between the past (Jewish women's important historical roles, experiences and accomplishments) and the present and future (the documentation and articulation of Jewish women's achievements, for the historians of the future). The book reviews include a review essay by Stuart Schoenfeld of two studies of urban Jewish neighborhoods, Jeffrey Gurock's historical study of *The Jews of Harlem* In New York City, and Iddo Tavory's ethnographic study of the Beverly-LaBrea neighborhood of Los Angeles (my own home town neighborhood!). The juxtaposition of these two neighborhoods as they evolve from the past to the present and the implications for the future of each, make for an interesting review. The second book review starts out discussing a chapter about a new Shoah exhibit of Yad Vashem, and I leave you to determine whether it illustrates any of the constructs Lustick suggests in his essay on "Holocaustia." Leonard Saxe reviews Michal Kravel-Tovi and Deborah Dash-Moore's *Taking Stock: Cultures of Enumeration in Contemporary Jewish Life*. Perhaps it is a stretch, but the presentation of "numbers" raises questions about quantitative and qualitative approaches to understanding contemporary Jewry, which Saxe discusses in his review. Finally, check out the list of books received for your own future reading.

Happy reading—and may this issue foster growth and new understanding and challenges to existing paradigms! Please do join in a conversation on the current issue and this new section, either at <http://forums.coje.org> or on the ASSJ listserv—or send me an email directly, with your comments, concerns, and ideas for future issues of the journal (Hartman@rowan.edu).