

Jews in American Society

BY SYLVIA ROTHCHILD
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A galaxy of social scientists, representing more than twenty universities, including scholars, students and Jewish professionals met at Hebrew College to examine the pressures, tensions, successes and failures of American Jewry.

The Bi-Centennial Year of American Independence was commemorated by the presentation of papers by Milton Himmelfarb, a contributing editor of COMMENTARY, Professors Benjamin Halpern of Brandeis University, Alfred Kutzik of the University of Pennsylvania, and Jacob Neusner of Brown University. The discussants included Professors Nathan Glazer and Michael Walzer of Harvard University, Professor Marshall Sklare of Brandeis University, and Professor Paul Ritterband of the City University of New York.

The papers combined historical perspectives with the examination of the unfinished business of both the general American Jewish community and its scholars and spokesmen.

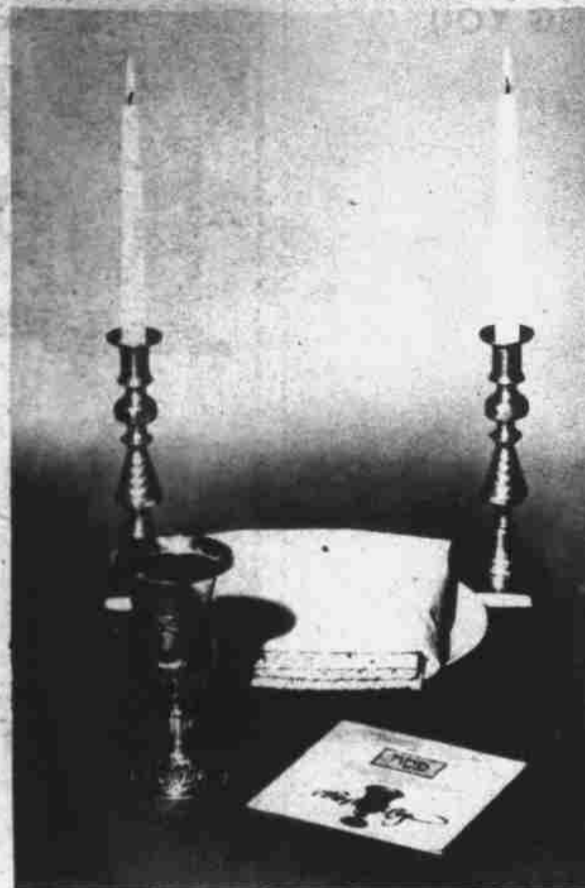
Alfred Kutzik, reading excerpts from his paper on "The Structure of the American Jewish Community," offered his evidence that Jewish identification and survival were not primarily based on the family and the synagogue as Marshall Sklare and others have maintained; but more dependent on the Welfare Agencies, now in disrepute among the leaders of Jewish intellectual and social life.

Professor Benjamin Halpern, in excerpts from his paper "The Jew and his Environment: Pressures and Tensions," presented an overview of the history of violence in America.

America, he maintained, was one of the few nations who gave the Jews the chance to emerge from the isolation imposed upon them by European anti-semitism. It was one of the few places where they could find alliances with other groups and feel that Jewish interest was identical with the liberal order of society.

Professor Halpern, however, suggested that American Jewry would have much to gain from the European pattern of social organization. European Jewish communities have traditionally had their own corporate organization within the larger community. The dues they paid supported their communal organization. Leaders were elected. Jews who wished to leave the official community could formally leave. There could be official rather than self-appointed leaders for the community. Domestic issues could be coordinated. Jews would be in a far better position to defend themselves in times of controversy.

Though Professor Halpern was convinced that "non-Jewish Jews" should be able to separate themselves officially from the



THE UNITED JEWISH APPEAL HAS CREATED A SPECIAL PASSOVER PROGRAM ENTITLED "THE FIFTH CUP". A BOOKLET WITH A SPECIAL TEXT DESIGNED TO BE INCORPORATED INTO THE SEDER SERVICE. THE LITURGY DRAMATICALLY PROCLAIMS THE NEED FOR PERSONAL REAFFIRMATION OF HOPE AND COURAGE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

organized Jewish community, Milton Himmelfarb reported that the "non-Jewish Jews" in academic and intellectual circles were becoming less non-Jewish than they used to be.

Professor Neusner, reporting on "Jewish Learning in America" took a less self-congratulatory view of the state of Jewish scholarship. He described both the seminaries and the university departments of Judaica as "inadequate, antiquated...too personalized and lacking in consensus." He complained of the lack of discipline and focus.

Professor Paul Ritterband buttressed the Neusner thesis by describing the relatively recent development of specialized American university studies.

The exchanges between scholars were candid and critical. Professor Michael Walzer suggested that the conflicts between Jews were often deeper and more strident than those between Jew and non-Jew. Nathan Glazer responded with anxiety to the contradictory Jews who want to be universalists when it suits them and Jewish when that seems more opportune.

The sophisticated and responsive audience seemed more open to new possibilities, more secure and more hopeful about the Jewish future than their academic colleagues.

Land of Plowshares

(By Rose E. Matzkin, Nat. Pres. Hadassah)

NEW YORK -- The image of Israel throughout the world, from the early days of the Palestine yishuv, was of farmer-pioneers who converted a land of sand and stone into a wondrous agricultural oasis. A land where waves of immigrants -- some broken refugees from terror, some young vibrant idealists -- became heroic nation-builders.

However, because Israel has been in a state of siege since its independence, another image has also grown up -- that of a para-military state where practically every able-bodied citizen is a militiaman and where tanks and guns are featured in parades along with its magnificent roses and oranges.

But Israel will never allow the sword to replace the rose, the orange and the kibbutz in its public stance or in the public mind.

At this Passover season, as we review the ancient flight to freedom and the meaning of the Exodus, we remind ourselves and the world that the dream that inspired the Jewish people was the ideal of a peaceful land of milk and honey and not of conquest. And even today, despite constant threats to its survival, Israel has been true to that vision:

Almost 31 per cent of its national budget is allotted to Health, Education, Housing and Welfare -- a larger proportion than the U.S. This figure is 50 per cent more this year than for 1973-74. What clearer confirmation is there that Israel reveres the plowshare and abhors the sword?

Passover
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