The Americanization of Jewish Education

WALTER I. ACKERMAN

IN A FEW YEARS FROM NOW THE AMERICAN Jewish community will have occasion to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the opening of the first Jewish school in this country The minute-book of Congregation Shearith Israel of New York notes that

> on the 21st of Nisan, the seventh day of Pesach (1731), the day of completing the first year of the opening of the Synagogue, there was made *codez* (consecrated) the Yeshiba called Minhat Arab [1]

That school was the harbinger of the network of Jewish educational agencies which is today an integral part of American Jewish life It set in motion a process which will soon have completed two and a half centuries of uninterrupted educational activity That is an impressive record by any standard—and even more so when one remembers that we are speaking of programs of education voluntarily developed and maintained by a relatively small minority group, working without the support of legal action or the benefit of governmental financial aid

It is perhaps significant that few attempts have been made to view the growth and development of Jewish education in this country from the perspective of its interaction with particular currents in American intellectual and social history and their effect on the evolvement of the Jewish school The standard histories of American Jewish education devote much attention and detail to administrative and organizational structure at the cost of careful examination of the peculiar tone and temper of Jewish schools in America and their relationship to specific factors in the experience of the wider community that is the United States [2] One can, of course, find in these histories passing reference to some of the major components of the Jewish American experience—i e, the successive waves of immigration and the attendant problems of dislocation and adjustment, the complications of a minority-majority relationship, the fact and fiction of the separation of Church and State the consequences for Jewish education of a system of free and compulsory public education, the continuous upward social and economic mobility of the Jews, the shift of the centers of Jewish population from the cities to the suburbs—but one is hard put to locate a careful tracing

1 As given in A Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City* (New York Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918), p 449

2 A good example of this sort of history is to be found in J Pilch, (ed) *A History of Jewish Education in the United States* (New York American Association for Jewish Education, 1969)

WALTER I ACKERMAN *is chairman of the department of education at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer Sheva, Israel*

of these and other less obvious, perhaps, but equally influential factors, through the various levels and structures of Jewish education It is even more difficult to discern efforts which seek to comprehend Jewish education in the light of its adoption of American conceptions of the nature and character of the child and the patterns of schooling required for life in a modern, democratic society This is unfortunate, not only because the historical record is thereby left wanting and incomplete but, also, because we are thus deprived of a richer and deeper understanding of the patterns of teaching and learning in the Jewish school

The picture that is generally presented is of an embattled group of a few dedicated and lonely men struggling to create a system of schooling in the face of indifference and hostility from both within and without the Jewish community It is difficult to avoid the impression that the workings of Jewish schoolmen are conceived less as the striving towards the attainment of specific goals than as a series of stubborn retreats and determined holding actions inspired by an ideal that they know is really beyond reach The continuous lowering of the level of academic demand and the consequent erosion of the quality of achievement which seem to characterize Jewish education in the United States are comprehended, not as the result of specific decisions of a particular time and place—decisions which actually were choices made from among a variety of alternatives—but, rather, as the inevitable outcome of the meeting and the clashing of Jewish interests and the claims of American society

Like all reproductions of reality, the portrait here described reflects a large measure of truth But, again, as in all reproductions of reality, there is in it no small measure of distortion The movement away from the idea of *lamdanut* which was the hallmark of the Eastern European yeshivah had struck roots in Jewish life long before there was any significant Jewish community in America The inroads paved on the Jewish mind by secularism were mapped without the aid of the American public school When the *parnassim* of Congregation Shearith Israel contracted in 1762 for a teacher " to keep a public school in the Hebra, to teach the Hebrew language, and translate into English, also to teach English Reading, Writing and Ciphering"[3] they were following a pattern of combining religious and secular studies which had a long and respectable currency among the Jews of Spain German Jews who came to this country at a later date brought with them the knowledge of the educational practices introduced by David Friedlander and the adherents of Reform Judaism who followed in his wake[4] Their sense of Amer-

3 L Gartner, *Jewish Education in the United States A Documentary History* (New York Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1969), p 42

4 M Eliav, *Hahinukh Hayehudi B'Germania B'Yemai Hahaskalah V'Haemancipazia* (Jerusalem The Jewish Agency, 1960)

ica served only to strengthen the view that traditional Jewish education was no longer a relevant model and that religious studies must be subordinated to the secular learning The adoption of a catechismal mode of study in the schools which they founded here was an import from their native land that was calculated to provide a knowledge of Judaism compatible with full participation in the life of the broader society[5]

It is difficult to find evidence, either in the Colonial period or in the later nineteenth century, of a uniquely American conception of Jewish education The reasons behind the absence of such a notion are, it seems to me, fairly clear The struggle for emancipation and equal rights, which was such a powerful factor in the development of new forms of schooling, first in Western Europe and then later in Eastern Europe, had no counterpart in the United States The leaders of the American Jewish community of those earlier periods were, on the whole, foreign-born and without any particular expertise or sophistication in education or related disciplines It would be asking too much to have expected them to abandon the patterns of education with which they were acquainted in their native land and to replace them with educational institutions and programs which responded to the complicated and intricate relationship between their religious traditions and the new society of which they were now a part Nor, it seems, was there any great need or demand for them to do so Surely, Jews who left the settled centers of Jewish life in Europe at that time to grapple with the uncertainties of existence in a still developing country could not have been terribly concerned about the Jewish education of their children An observer from abroad quite properly described both the existing situation and the ready acceptance of its limitations among American Jews of the time (1860) when he noted that " . it is clear enough that men of great learning will never rise among the Jews of America "[6] Isaac Mayer Wise's conviction that " the education of the young is the business of the State, and the religious instruction is the duty of the religious bodies"[7] set boundaries for Jewish education, both in form and content, which were quite acceptable to most Jews in America

The conscious design of a program of Jewish education fitted to the fabric of American life is the product of a later period in American history The setting and framework for it was provided by the unparalleled influx of Eastern European Jews at the end of the nineteenth century and during the first two decades of the twentieth The specific

5 J Petuchowski, "Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of the Emancipation," in A Altman, (ed) *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History* (Cambridge, Mass Harvard University Press, 1964), pp 47-64

6 Israel Benjamin, *Three Years in America*, tr by Charles Reznikoff (Philadelphia Jewish Publication Society, 1956), Vol 1, p 83

7 Gartner, *Op cit*, p 86

occasion was the attempt to organize the New York Kehillah;[8] and the architects were Samson Benderly and the men who worked with him at the Bureau of Jewish Education of the Kehillah. A fortuitous combination of circumstance and personality created the conditions necessary for a conception of Jewish education different from that which had obtained until then. A series of factors were here involved in a delicate interplay: a Jewish community now large enough in both numbers and resources to support a system of Jewish education; a significant number of Jews who were deeply concerned about the Jewish education of their children, the presence of a cadre of experienced teachers and principals who had been involved in the innovative educational work of the *Ḥeder Metukan* and the early Zionist movement in Russia, and, perhaps most important, a group of young men, either born, or largely raised, in the United States, who were prepared to train themselves for careers of professional service in Jewish education.

The work of these men, first guided and inspired by Benderly and then carried on independently, not only created an administrative and organizational foundation of Jewish education in this country, but, also, developed an intellectual and social ambience which even fifty years later remains the dominant characteristic of Jewish schools in the United States. Their plans and programs carry a distinctively American imprint; indeed, I think it fair to say that their efforts reflect a conscious attempt to meld, if not to impose, certain aspects of American life and thought with the raw material of the Jewish tradition. The temper of this effort is captured in the observation that

> The American Jew has accepted both the scientific method and the modern conceptions of Democracy for his educational endeavors in this country. ... He is endeavoring to continue the best in his educational traditions with the best of modern American education. ...[9]

This amalgam of the Jewish and the American is more, of course, than an operational base for the development of a system of schooling; it is, in the final analysis, a prescriptive formula which seeks to define a particular kind of Jew.

The decision of the Executive Committee of the New York Kehillah in 1910 to establish a Bureau of Jewish Education in that city marked a turning point. In some circles, at least, it represented the acceptance of the idea that Jewish education was neither a matter of charity nor the private preserve of a few self appointed "authorities" best left to their own ways, but, rather, an essential service which all members of the community had the right to expect and demand—a service financed

8 A. Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), especially chapters 5 and 6; N. Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1966).

9 Dushkin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 140-41.

by the community and directed by its duly appointed representatives whose authority stemmed from their training and competencies. The Bureau was to be not just another partisan educational agency but, rather, a central communal office that would provide educational services and guidance to disparate elements of the community at the same time as it coordinated and organized activities that were beyond the power and ability of any one group to undertake and carry out

The Third Annual Convention of the Kehillah, in 1912, strongly endorsed the principle of communal responsibility for Jewish education and defined the Bureau as an agency "above all parties in Judaism"[10] It was part of Benderly's special genius to realize that the fragile notion of community responsibility for Jewish education depended for its acceptance upon the translation of the concept into the language of practice During the years of his work as director of the Bureau he gathered about him a group of young men whose talents and zeal were charged and pointed by his own charisma and dedication The most prominent of the group—known in the folklore of Jewish education as the "BBs" (Benderly's Boys)—were Isaac Berkson, Samuel Dinin, Alexander Dushkin, Emmanuel Gamoran and Leo Honor *

All five of these men bear the stamp of a particular time and place They were born around the turn of the century, the children of immigrant parents, those who were born in Eastern Europe came here early enough in life to be considered American; they were all educated in the public schools of New York City, received what may be called a "modern" Jewish education, attended City College and the then newly established Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and did graduate work at Teachers College of Columbia University In time, each of them held key posts in the expanding network of educational activities conceived and directed by Benderly Their later careers placed them in positions of determining influence in American Jewish education Berkson, who ultimately became a professor of philosophy at City College, was for many years a lecturer at the Jewish Institute of Religion and influenced a generation of Reform rabbis Dinin was the long-time Registrar of the Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary and could count among his students many who were to become teachers and principals, rabbis, and professional workers in Jewish communal affairs Following World War II he became director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Los Angeles and was there instrumental in the founding of the University of Judaism, the West coast school of the Seminary, of which he is today a Vice President Dushkin's work spanned Palestine, Israel and the United States In this country, he was to become director of the Jewish Education Committee of Chi-

10 Dushkin, *Op cit*, p 115
* Gamoran and Honor are no longer living

cago and then of the reorganized Bureau in New York He has only lately retired from the faculty of the Hebrew University Gamoran was, for years, the director of the Commission on Jewish Education of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and in that capacity gave shape and form to the educational program of the Reform movement Honor was to become director of the Board of Jewish Education in Chicago, succeeding Dushkin in that post, as well as director of the College of Jewish Studies in that city He spent the last decade of his life as Professor of Jewish Education at Dropsie College in Philadelphia

Of particular interest for our purposes here are the doctoral dissertations of four of the five men mentioned As indicated above, all of them did their graduate work at Teachers College, at that time the most influential and prestigious school of education in the country In the fifteen years between 1918 and 1933 those dissertations appeared in book form and were thus made available to a wider public[11] These volumes, together with the writings of Benderly and Honor, represent the first serious attempt to develop a theory of Jewish education suited to the American scene As such, they serve as background and guide to the work of the authors as practicing educators Whatever the distance which separates their achievements from their aspirations, it is safe to assume that the ideas expressed in their written works were crucial in the determination of the objectives which they set for Jewish education

It is not difficult to locate the group at specific points on the spectrum of both Jewish and American life and thought of the time—although some of them might cavil at the bifurcation seemingly implied in such a separation of the two sources of their inspiration As Jews they identified with the Zionist idea and it was the concept of peoplehood which gave meaning to their adherence to the traditions of Judaism As Americans the group placed itself firmly within the liberal camp of the time and many of the slogans, mottos and credos of that particular view appear and reappear in their writings Clearly, both the Jewish and American elements in their thought and actions drew support from one another

The task confronting Benderly and his colleagues, at least as they understood it, was to provide a justification for the continued existence of the Jews as an identifiable and functioning group in the United States, determining the means best suited to insure that existence, creating a program for the vehicle, and developing the tools whereby that program could function in effective fashion Each step in the process meant

11 The works referred to here are I Berkson, *Theories of Americanization* (New York Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1920), S Dinin, *Judaism in a Changing Civilization* (New York Bureau of Publications Teachers College, Columbia University, 1933), A Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City* (New York Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918), E Gamoran, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education* (New York MacMillan Co, 1924)

coming to terms with, or even opposing, some existing position or institution in either the Jewish or American community Their moving principle, that Jews had the right, or even the obligation, to perpetuate a distinctive way of life, challenged a deeply rooted American conviction, that the best interests of both the immigrant and his new country demanded that he divest himself of all of his old customs and manners and replace them with the language, traditions, values, and hopes and aspirations of white Protestant America

Many of the ideas which were later elaborated and refined by his younger colleagues found their first formulation in the reports on the work of the Bureau that were prepared by Benderly He could posit the principle that Jews "are a people and have the right to exist as such" and that "Our aim should be the growth and development of a normal Jewish life in harmony with modern civilization "[12] The instrument most capable of achieving that goal was, in his view, "a system of Hebrew schools which our children can attend after their daily attendance in the public school "[13] Such a system of "double education" presupposes a Judaism which is "a resultant on the one hand of all the forces that played their part in the Judaism of the past, and on the other hand of all the forces that are playing their part in the life of the modern man and woman "[14] It is preferable to either the parochial school or programs of religious instruction in the public school because "What we want in this country is not Jews who can successfully keep up their Jewishness in a few large ghettos, but men and women who have grown up in freedom and can assert themselves wherever they are "[15] These schools should be housed in safe, modern and attractive buildings, the curriculum "should be simplified and coordinated with the public school curriculum" and the material presented "so interesting and stimulating as to get the response of even tired children "[16] The successful implementation of this idea of Jewish education required the availability of a pool of properly trained "Hebrew teachers who devote themselves exclusively to Jewish education"[17] out of the knowledge that their efforts would be supported by the production of appropriate texts and other educational materials and services and rewarded by an adequate economic return

Two aspects of Benderly's work and thought were to have especially significant consequences for the development of Jewish education in future years—his commitment to the afternoon school as the normative

12 S Benderly, "Jewish Education in America,' *Jewish Exponent*, January 17, 1908, reprinted in *Jewish Education*, 20, No 3, (Summer, 1949) 80–86

13 Ibid

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

17 Ibid

institution of Jewish education in this country, and his conception of the Bureau as an instrument for the "standardization" of the work of Jewish schools

The preference given to the afternoon school over the "parochial" school was obviously more than a matter of form alone It was a severe circumscription of the parameters of formal Jewish education, which meant the abandonment of the ideal of the learned Jew of traditional Judaism It would, of course, be fatuous to argue that the growth of the afternoon school was due solely to Benderly and his colleagues or that they were unaware of the lowering of the standards of learning, which was the inevitable consequence of their choice It is reasonable, however, to suggest that while their position was derived from a considered analysis of the implications of the confrontation between Judaism and life in twentieth century America, it inadvertently gave support to those elements in the Jewish community for whom convenience was more important than ideology and who were content with something less than an intensive Jewish education for their children The repudiation of the "parochial" school, or day school as it later came to be known, clearly offended those who sought more than the afternoon school could promise It was, morever, a view which extended beyond the boundaries of disinterested debate—the positions of influence in the hierarchy of Jewish education that were held by Benderly and his co-workers gave their opinions considerable weight Intentionally or not, they provided backing for those whose opposition to the idea of the day school expressed itself in the refusal to allocate communal funds to that type of school and, thus, impeded its growth and development

Benderly's commitment to the afternoon school stemmed from his perception of the public school as a crucial factor in American life—"the bed rock bottom upon which this country is rearing its institutions "[18] His position on this issue was not, however, without its practical considerations This is evident from a statement prepared by a group of principals whose afternoon schools were affiliated with the Central Board of Talmud Torahs, and who, under Benderly's direction, were attempting to formulate the aims, contents and methods of Jewish education Despite its limitations, the afternoon school was desirable because it would not isolate Jewish children from their non-Jewish age-mates; it was financially within the means of the community, and would save the Jewish community from accusations of separatism and even of disloyalty to America [19]

A similar concern is expressed by Dushkin when he writes, that we

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18 *Bulletin No 1* (Bureau of Jewish Education, Jewish Community of New York City), reprinted in *Jewish Education*, 20, No 3 (Summer, 1949) 110

19 *A Brief Survey of Thirty-one Conferences held by Talmud Torah Principals in New York City* (New York Bureau of Jewish Education, 1912)

"must develop schools which will preserve Jewish life in this country, without interfering with America's cherished plan of a system of common schools for all the children of all the people."[20]

It was Berkson, however, who provided the most sophisticated theoretical justification for the afternoon school. The influence of John Dewey, his mentor at Teachers College, is easily discernible in Berkson's line of reasoning. He begins with an examination of the nature of democracy, then moves to the argument for the rightful place of minorities in a democratic state, and concludes with a consideration of the form of schooling most appropriate for the maintenance of minority cultures in such a society. A state is democratic when "... there is a progressive consideration of uniqueness, a multiplicity of diverse possibilities, a growing awareness of man's interdependence."[21] It follows, therefore, that the "plain role of democracy is to strive toward tolerance, to permit the minority group to be active even to the point of exasperation"[22] in its attempts to perpetuate the group heritage. There is, however, a sensible limit beyond which a minority group may not go because democracy also demands that

> As long as the community contains a variety of forces, all of these must be permitted to play upon the child. Otherwise the child is subjected to a process which amounts to indoctrination, his horizon would be limited by a prearranged and delimited and delimiting education, that is, by an education parochial in outlook as it is in name.[23]

Parochial education is undemocratic because it

> segregates children along lines of creed. The essential element of having the various elements of the population, during the formative period of childhood, associate with their neighbors with whom they are destined to live together as American citizens remains unfulfilled.[24]

A minority group which is intent on preserving its identity must "... create a school system complementary to the public schools, correlated with them and yet adequate for perpetuating the life of the community which it represents."[25]

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20 Dushkin, *Op. cit.*, pp. 21, 137–138.

21 I. Berkson, *Theories of Americanization* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1920), p. 39.

22 Berkson, *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., pp. 160-161.

25 Berkson, *Op. cit.*, p. 172. Compare the statements of Berkson with Dewey's observation that "... education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession. ... it is the office of school environment to balance the various elements in the school environment and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born and to come in living contact with a broader environment. A democracy ... is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." (J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* [New York: The Free Press, 1966], pp. 9, 20, 87).

It is, I think, as important to attend to what Berkson is here doing as it is to understand what he is saying He offers a definition of democracy, that is to say, of what America should be, which is to become the standard by which the behavior of Jews is to be determined and judged Jews who reject that standard are, of course, acting contrary to the best interests of the country in which they live and, by inference, prejudice the continued existence of the group of which they are part Judaism, the behavior of Jews, is defined, not in terms of its own normative principles, but, in no small measure, by precepts imposed from without In pleading the case of the afternoon school in this manner Berkson is developing a principle which declares that where the interests of America and Judaism conflict—as is the case when one weighs the advantages and disadvantages of public schools and parochial schools —the interests of America must take precedence Whatever the logic of the position, its implications are clear the Jewish school conceived in this fashion is faced with the impossible task of transmitting a culture whose imperatives and needs are by definition subordinate to those of the larger society Jewish education, then, is not complementary but, really, of only secondary importance

Berkson's view of the Jewish school expanded into the idea that only the preservation of its culture could justify the continued existence of a minority group In that process the school was the central agency, but it was part of a larger scheme which addressed itself to every age group of the community In describing the work of the Central Jewish Institute, which he directed and which served him both as model and laboratory, Berkson notes that

> It addresses itself not to child alone, nor to any one age of the population, but regards every member of the family as its patron In fact, it looks upon the family as a whole rather than the individual as its unit of work It is a Community House endeavoring to serve the neighborhood in every way it can The Jewish center must carry on activities which make for the physical and social well being of the people who live in the neighborhood [26]

The conception of the school as the focal point of a more comprehensive educational effort addressed to every age group of the community placed Berkson and his fellows well within the main stream of liberal and progressive thought and practice of the period Progressive American educators of the time saw as their role the development of a school system capable of eliminating from American life those elements which obstructed the fulfillment of the promise inherent in the democratic ideal [27] Progressive Jewish educators understood their role to be that of fashioning a school system which was capable of creating a new

26 Berkson, *Op cit*, pp 181, 189

27 R Hofstadter, *Anti Intellectualism in American Life* (New York Alfred A Knopf, 1963), p 363

Jewish society, suited to the conditions of life in America The centrality assigned to the school by both reflects the deeply held conviction that education was a major factor, indeed, the single most important one in the process of social reconstruction The concomitant importance attributed to the child bespeaks the influence of the then burgeoning child study movement and its credo that "if society is to be remade one must above all look to the regenerative contribution the child is capable of making ..."[28] Even if somewhat less hyperbolically, many shared Francis W Parker's assurance that "The child ... is the climax and culmination of all God's creation" and together with him could say "I await the regeneration of the world from the teaching of the common schools in America"[29]

The school as a community center—or the community center built around the activities of the school—as described by Berkson had its parallel in the "social center" movement in American education A Wisconsin state law of 1911 had authorized school directors to establish "evening schools, vacation schools, reading rooms, library stations, debating clubs, gymnasiums, public playgrounds, public baths and similar activities" Seventeen other states had introduced such "wider use" legislation by 1914[30] Drawing from the experiences of the settlement houses of the time, notably the work of Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago local school boards began to view the school as "the wheel upon which all other activities turn" and to proclaim that "education does not consist merely of book learning" The school was to become a "neighborhood center for every sort and variety of community activity, it would be a meeting place, public forum, recreation house, civic center, home of all formal and informal education"[31] The school perceived in this way was the focal point of a concerted effort to Americanize the newly arrived immigrant and to improve the quality of neighborhood life

The idea of a communal Jewish school as propounded by Berkson and his colleagues, with all of its similarities to the public school social center, implied a great deal more than is immediately apparent from a description of its activities It is inspired by a conception that was most completely formulated in the writings of Mordecai Kaplan, which asks that Judaism be understood as more than a religious creed The shift from the synagogue to the school as the pre-eminent focus of Jewish communal activity is both the fact and symbol of the comprehension of Judaism as a culture which embraces a broad range of views together

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28 Ibid

29 F W Parker, *Talks on Pedagogics* (New York, 1894), pp 3, 450

30 E R Stevens, "Social Centers, Politics and Social Efficiency in the Progressive Era," *History of Education Quarterly* (Spring 1972) 16–33

31 L Cremins, *The Transformation of the School* (New York Vintage Books, 1964), pp 74–75

with all manner of activities For Berkson, the synagogue was too narrow a place to encompass the wide variety of activities which were a legitimate expression of Judaism [32]

The dominant role assigned to the community center in the cultural life of the Jews was not without opposition from within the Jewish community Aside from those whose religious scruples obliged them to oppose the transfer of the hegemony of the Jewish community to what was in their eyes a profanely secular institution, there were others whose reading of the American scene led them to conclusions quite different from those of Berkson and his adherents The model of the Christian churches and the seemingly more sympathetic acceptance in America of ethnicity expressed in religious terms supported those Jews who remained committed, in theory if not always in practice, to the centrality of the synagogue in Jewish life The efforts of those dedicated to a community theory of education, thus, ran counter to the expanding synagogue movements and the subsequent ordering of Jewish education along congregational lines In time, the community school became, not a comprehensive institution which embraced all sectors of the Jewish community, but just another school which competed with others for its share of communal resources The structure of Jewish education as we know it today in America, reflects, as did Berkson's proposals in his time, a particular understanding of the American ethos

The individual school described by Berkson was only a link in the system envisioned by Benderly when he undertook the directorship of the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York In describing its aims and activities, he asks, "How was the Bureau to make use of its funds in a way not only to bear fruit for the present, but to help lay the foundation of a stable system of Jewish education in New York City?' [33] The answer was that

> After careful deliberation the Trustees determined to spend half of the fifty thousand dollars on the standardization of existing Talmud Torahs and the other half on new work and organization The only question to be decided was the method of standardizing Talmud Torahs The problem of standardization is twofold Standardization aims, on the one hand, to raise the educational side of the school to a high level, and on the other hand to regulate the finances of an institution [34]

In order to carry out all of the programs and activities required to achieve "standardization" the Bureau was organized into departments, each with a specific function Finance, Investigation, Collection and Attendance, Propaganda, Standardization, New Schools, Extension Work, Preparation Schools, Teachers, and the Department of Out of Town

32 Berkson, *Op cit*, pp 104–105
33 Benderly, *Op cit*, p 96
34 Ibid

Schools[35] It is clear that the Bureau and its relationship to the schools affiliated with the central office was patterned after the public school system

Benderly's idea of a "standardized" system of schools operating "efficiently" and "economically"—the choice of his words is important—bears the imprint of a dominant motif in public education of the period Precisely at that time, the theories and methods of "scientific management" were being hailed as the panacea for the ills of the public schools In 1911, the Board of Education of the City of New York commissioned Paul Hanus, a leading figure in the scientific management movement, to conduct a survey of the city's schools, the 1913 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education featured a major article on scientific management, and, in that same year, the annual conference of the National Education Association devoted a considerable portion of its deliberations to the subject

The interest in scientific management, with its emphasis on economy and efficiency, stemmed from several factors—the emergence of the business man as a new, American hero and the accompanying aura surrounding the methods of the business world, the rising costs of maintaining a system of public education committed to serving an ever growing number of students over longer periods of time, and the heightened demands for programs of vocational education to provide "practical" job-oriented alternatives to the "impractical" traditional high school curriculum anchored in the classics[36]

The gospel of efficiency decreed that the work of teachers would result in a vastly improved "product" if school administrators would but apply the principles of management already proven successful in business and industry "A school system would remain inefficient unless it prepared a precise statement of goals, delineated the tasks it would perform, and trained supervisory personnel capable of coordinating and maintaining a high level of productivity by its workers"[37]

It would not be at all difficult to trace a line from the paradigm of scientific management to the scheme of organization of the Bureau as conceived by Benderly That the ideas and principles of scientific management and their application in the field of education were more than casually known to Benderly and his colleagues and helped shape their understanding of the tasks which confronted them is evident from a statement by Dushkin which introduces his survey of Jewish education in New York City

35 Ibid , pp 108–109
36 R E Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago Phoenix Books, 1961), especially chapter 1
37 F Bobbitt, "The Supervision of City Schools Some General Principles of Management Applied to the Problems of City School Systems," *Twelfth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Bloomington, Ill , 1913) Part 1 7–8

> During the past two decades, the education profession has been developing a scientific technique of study . . . No longer occupied with general discussions of methods and principles, but rather with detailed and, in so far as possible, objective methods of analysis . . . *it is essential for the development of Jewish education in this country, that the method of study which has proven of so much worth in general American education* be applied also to the work of the Jewish school (italics mine).[38]

Scientific management was more, however, than a matter of extended form and organization alone. Coupled as it was to the concept of social efficiency, an idea rooted in the meliorism of Social Darwinism, it served as a basis for the determination of curricular content as well. Guided by the Spencerian notion that the purpose of education was the facilitation of the adjustment of human character to the ever-changing demands of daily living, curriculum experts began to look to the characteristic activities of adults, as determined by the studies and surveys of sociologists, as the criterion for the subject matter in school programs. The admission of a particular topic into the curriculum was dependent on proof of its value and worth in the day-to-day life of the society which the graduate would enter. Proponents of this view could demand that

> Every subject . . . present itself at the bar of competent opinion and plead for itself. One of the first questions asked will be "Does it function?" . . . Every subject is up for discussion, for examination, for acceptance or rejection.[39]

One can here draw an interesting progression from the proposal to adopt the community center idea to the purposes of Jewish education, through the pattern of administrative and supervisory organization suggested for Bureaus of Jewish Education, to the specific curricular programs created for the Jewish school. The thrust of this evolution is in the direction of a progressively greater impact and influence of American institutions and ideas on the process of Jewish education—from the periphery of that effort as expressed in its external forms to its core as delineated in substantive curricula. The authority of functionalism is clearly apparent when Honor says that "We must formulate a conscious aim in the teaching of Jewish history, and answer for ourselves the question 'Why do we teach this subject to our pupils'?" and, in reply to his own question, he responds ". . . we believe the teaching of Jewish history must prepare the American Jewish child for the struggle of adjustment confronting him in this country. . . ."[40] Gamoran moves beyond the limits of one subject matter area and establishes the criterion of functionalism as one of the controlling ideas in the determination of all curricular content.

38 Dushkin, *Op. cit.*, 145–146.
39 W. L. Feller, "On Reconstructing the Curricula of Secondary Schools," *Educational Review* (June 1914) 46–47.
40 A. Gannes, (ed.) *Selected Writings of Leo L. Honor* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1965), p. 258.

> the criterion of functionalism ... serves not only to call attention to the extent of present usage, but by emphasizing the Jewish people as a living, changing being causes the curriculum-maker to observe carefully present-day Jewish life in order to fulfill in his curriculum present-day Jewish-needs[41]

The idea of functionalism as used by Gamoran is part of a broader view, drawn from Dewey, which conceives of the aim of education as "the continuous and progressive socialization" of the child. Schooling, as a concrete embodiment of educational purposes, should concern itself with "the progressive identification of the individual's own interests with those of the group."[42] The aim of Jewish education, therefore, is to "socialize" the child into the Jewish people. The curriculum of the Jewish school should provide the Jewish child with the competencies, knowledge and skills necessary for him to be able "... to participate intelligently and effectively in the life of the ethnic group ...."[43] The Jewish group, however, does not exist in isolation and its values and distinguishing characteristics are susceptible to the modifying influences of the larger society of which it is a part. The Jewish school, in consequence, is a vehicle for the

> adjustment of group values to American life and to the present *zeitgeist* and curricular detail must reflect the criteria of universalization, a scientific outlook on life, a democratic outlook on life and functionalism.[44]

Neither Gamoran nor his colleagues were, of course, the first Jewish educators to sense that changing circumstances dictated adjustments in programs of Jewish education. Indeed, Gamoran's own sensitivity to the need for change is rooted in the precedents which he cites in his history of Jewish education. Clearly, the innovations in both the form and content of Jewish education introduced in western and eastern Europe in the nineteenth century were responses to the altered circumstances of life in that time and in those places. What does, however, distinguish

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41 E. Gamoran, *Changing Conceptions in Jewish Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1925), Book II, pp. 91–92.

There is some irony to be found in the fact that the title of Gamoran's book was taken from the book *Changing Conceptions of Education* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1909) by Elwood Cubberly, then a dominant figure on the American educational scene. In that book, Cubberly called for the obliteration of ethnic and national differences in favor of his version of Americanization—"These southern and eastern Europeans are of a very different type from the north European who preceded them ... their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life. ... Our task is to break up their groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order and popular government, and to awaken in them reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth" (pp. 15–16).

42 Gamoran, *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

43 Ibid., p. 100.

44 Ibid.

them from the men whose work and thought we are dealing with here is the *systematic* attempt of the latter to understand the society around them, their search for philosophical principles which would serve as guidelines in the ongoing formation of that society, and their use of Jewish education as an instance in the application of those principles The work of Jewish educational reformers in nineteenth century Europe was only rarely informed by the generative power of a comparable conceptual framework The task in which our subjects were engaged was as much an analysis of America as it was an inquiry into Judaism In determining what Jewish education should be they were also declaring what America might be

The process I have sketched above is graphically illustrated in Dinin's published doctoral dissertation In the preface he writes

> This book is an attempt to explain coherently the current theories of Jewish survival and their implications for Jewish education, to determine which of these theories is most compatible with the democratic principles of the United States and with the historic identity of the Jewish people, and to see how the curriculum of the Jewish school and the philosophy of Jewish education may be reconstructed in the light of the demands of a democracy, a modern changing civilization, changing conceptions in religion and nationalism, and modern educational method and theory[45]

True to his promise, Dinin engages in a wide-ranging description and analysis of the then current theories of Judaism and Americanism His critique leads him to conclude that the circumstances of life in the twentieth century demand a reconstruction of the social order and the drawing up of a new conception of Judaism The road leading to the promise of a new Judaism as part of a reconstructed society begins in the school

Dinin draws on the theories of William H Kilpatrick, of Teachers College, and the assumptions of the "radical" educational progressives of the time to enter an eloquent plea for a new type of Jewish school As envisioned by Dinin, such a school would recognize the needs of the individual child and provide him with those purposeful activities which are the prerequisites of growth Education as growth is not the mastery of subject matter "with little or no present meaning for the child" but is the development of the student's potential capacity to function actively and effectively in the reconstruction of the social order The achievement of a new order, however, requires a vision, socialization is an empty phrase unless those responsible for the conduct of schools know "what we are going to socialize the child into" Jewish education, therefore, must "have a notion of the Jewish civilization we want to build in this country We must have a notion of the type of world in which

45 S Dinin, *Judaism in a Changing Civilization* (New York Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia Univ 1933), p v

this civilization is to function, before we can begin building the new Jewish civilization"[46]

The internal logic of Dinin's theoretical construct led him to develop a curriculum which was substantively different from the one proposed by Berkson and Gamoran While all three were clearly influenced by Mordecai Kaplan and subscribed to the view of Judaism as an embractive entity responding in a variety of ways to changing circumstances, only Dinin seems to have attempted to translate that concept into the practical language of a school curriculum The curricula suggested by Berkson and Gamoran are quite traditional in form and may best be characterized as subject-matter oriented—Hebrew, Bible, History, Customs and Ceremonies, etc.

Dinin, by contrast, attempted to relate the idea of Jewish life as an evolving process to the conception of the child as a developing organism The curriculum is, for him, an instrument to create for the child those opportunities and experiences which make use of knowledge to develop the skills and attitudes deemed necessary for him to cope with his own development and the claims of a constantly changing environment The stuff of which the curriculum is constructed is drawn from the culture of the Jews in all its variety and richness The project method, which distinguishes Dinin's curricular proposals, is intended to permit the child the full play of his many interests and propensities The process of teaching and learning is thereby transformed into a joint activity of teacher and student where the former serves as a recourse for the inquiries of the latter[47]

While some Jewish schools did attempt to apply the principles proposed by Dinin in the development of their curricula, the record rather clearly shows that the more conventional models of Berkson and Gamoran were those more widely copied Like their counterparts in public education, Jewish educators spoke more progressively than they acted

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Fifty years and more have passed since the publication of the earliest of the books we have discussed here Much has happened to Jews and Americans since then, and the world which our authors tried to comprehend no longer exists That fact, however, should not dim our ap-

46 Ibid, p 199 It is instructive to compare Dinin's remarks with a statement by George S Counts, a leading educational reformer of the time, who charged American schools with the responsibility of leading their students into a new society by providing them with an educational program which faces "squarely and courageously every social issue, come(s) to grips with life in all its stark reality, establish(es) an organic relation with the community, develop(s) a realistic and comprehensive theory of welfare, fashion(s) a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny (George S Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order* [New York, 1937])

47 For the full description of the curricular proposals discussed here see Berkson, pp 195–205, Dinin, pp 198–211, Gamoran, pp 140–173

preciation of what they were trying to do not deter us from an assessment of what they achieved

One cannot help but admire the verve and conviction which they brought to their task Surely it was no small thing for a group of bright and talented young men to have ignored the blandishments of promising careers in any field of their choosing and to have opted, instead, for the uncertainties of the then non-existent profession of Jewish education Much of what they believed, did and said guided two generations of their successors, and Jewish education in America today still bears the imprint of their thought and effort It was they who, along with others, championed the cause of community education and, despite the fact that events beyond their control channeled the development of Jewish education into a different direction, their advocacy led to the acceptance of the proposition that the organized community bears a responsibility, fiscal and otherwise, for all forms of Jewish education They were among those who forged the hallmarks of a profession—training, licensing procedures, a literature and associations of practitioners

A careful reading of their work discloses that their passion for the Jewish people and its survival was paired with a pragmatic sense of the obdurate facts of life in modern America Berkson, for instance, doubted that more than 10% of American-born Jewish children would ever display that particular allegiance and loyalty to the group and its mores which he considered essential for meaningful Jewish existence in a democratic society The sadness of realism jangles in his observation that " the type of adjustment demanded in the democratic countries in which the Jews live provides for only a limited and doubtful perpetuation "[48]

No one, of course, can convincingly prove that education for the continued survival of a minority group can develop in a vacuum which ignores the push-and-pull of the majority culture One can, however, question whether the assessment of the wider society and its tolerances is accurate and whether the assumptions which frame the pattern of accommodation between the two are valid If the achievements of Jewish education in America owe much to the efforts of our company, then some of its failures and shortcomings must also be attributed to them It is perhaps true that the sheer effort and energy required for the creation of the institutions of Jewish education in the United States leave little opportunity for a penetrating examination, or philosophical inquiry if you will, of the essential nature of the enterprise We pay the price of that neglect, even as we attempt to refine the institutions and seek to make the machinery more efficient

Education, in its most fundamental sense, and as differentiated

48 Berkson, *Op cit*, pp 116–117

from schooling or training, is the expression of a sensibility to a standard and represents the attempt of a society to mould the character of its members in accordance with an ideal That ideal is not only a statement of what man ought to be, it is also the criterion which determines the materials and methods used to make him that way

I would suggest that Jewish education, except in Orthodox quarters, both in the period we have been discussing and in our own time, has not been informed by such an ideal One can argue with some cogency, I believe, that, until such an ideal is articulated, efforts at the "improvement" of Jewish education will remain little more than patchwork mechanics which only fall short of any serious mark Jewish education as conceived of by those whose work we have been discussing here is a means for the survival of the Jewish people With all of its legitimacy as a guiding principle, the idea of survival is not a sufficiently fundamental or basic idea on which to build a program of education It has led to a situation in which the goals and methods of Jewish education are more determined by the passing fads and fancies of American life than by a clearly accented standard rooted in Jewish culture and its traditions The determination of ends and means is imposed from without, a process which thwarts organic growth from within the culture

When Berkson writes that "the central idea in Jewish life is Torah" one anticipates a statement flowing from the observation which addresses itself to the question of man's nature and the purpose of his life as a Jew In its stead, Torah is defined as

> a word of many connotations ranging from the usual designation of the Pentateuch to the whole spiritual life it is Jewishness, the spiritual life and Godliness The idea of Torah has been broadened to include cultural and aesthetic values as well as those which popular usage identifies as religious [49]

That, of course, is a definition so broad as to make impossible the derivation of any principle of selection or discipline

A similar criticism may be directed against Gamoran's criteria for the determination of curricular content Beginning with the observation that the aim of Jewish education is "continuous socialization" and that "this socialization implies the preservation of the group,"[50] he concludes that the curriculum should stress the group values which will contribute to the achievement of that goal Those values, however, must be adjusted to "American life and the present Zeitgeist" if the aim of group survival is to be fulfilled The *paideia* of the Jews in America is, thus, by definition formed by forces totally extrinsic to the culture from which it ought to grow

49 Berkson, *Op cit*, pp 100–101
50 Gamoran, *Op cit*, p 78

The attitudes of Benderly and company, as well as those of their successors, toward the child and the day school, are illustrative of the consequences of the assumptions outlined above The significance attributed to childhood and the high hopes pinned to the work of the elementary school, a position directly drawn from American life as I have tried to show, is a significant turning point in the history of Jewish education Despite the romanticization of the *heder*, the fact is that, historically, the center of gravity in Jewish education was the yeshivah, the school of higher learning The focusing of the educational efforts of the Jewish community on the child and the elementary school resulted in an unconscionable neglect of other sectors of the population, and was a denigration of the intellectual effort and capability required for a true understanding of Judaism The word is the major art form of Judaism, its proper appreciation is vouchsafed only to those who have reached a certain level of intellectual maturity

The opposition to the day school was born of a similar bending under the weight of American life The pressure from without was able to impress itself because it met no counterforce in a definitive standard drawn from Judaism Given the significance of knowledge in the Jewish scheme of things it is difficult to understand the alacrity with which American Jewish educators accepted as normative the supplementary school and its insuperable limitations The theoretical justification offered in support of that type of school and its implications for practice and procedure forms the line of separation between Jewish modernists and those Jewish educators who, like their Catholic counterparts, were unwilling to subvert the imperatives of their tradition by appeal to the demands of political theory or the implication of sociological fad

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The relationship of Jews to America is an ongoing process whose configurations assume a bewildering variety of forms I have tried here to describe and analyze some aspects of that interaction and their consequences for Jewish education The picture is, of course, far from complete but I hope that it will contribute to that understanding of the past which is a precondition for dealing with the problems of the present