JEWISH AMERICANS
Three Generations in a Jewish Community

SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN AND CALVIN GOLDSCHEIDER

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968
xvii + 274 pp. $3.50 paperback, $5.95 clothbound.

In the United States, Jewish communal organizations have a long tradition of commissioning periodic community surveys. This tradition is sustained by the need for demographic data and the "social survey" movement. Because Jewish national organizations are among the groups that oppose the enumeration of religion in the decennial population census, local community surveys under private auspices are sponsored to fill the demographic gap. At the same time, social work and religious organizations use this opportunity to determine any unmet needs in case work, group work or religious education.

The book under review is based on such a survey of the Jewish community of Greater Providence, Rhode Island, where Goldstein served as research director and Goldscheider as research associate. In the book the original data have been rearranged to serve two purposes that transcend the original survey design. One purpose is to generalize from the Providence data for the country as a whole, the other is to measure the extent of acculturation and assimilation.

Because two-thirds of American Jews reside in the New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas, the Jewish community of Providence with 19,000 people is not representative of the Jewish population of the country. Jewish communities of this size located in the middle or far west possibly will show a greater

degree of assimilation. The authors are, of course, aware of the difficulty of erecting such a large structure upon so slender an empirical base and have, wherever possible, buttressed their work with findings from other studies. However, they are forced to adopt a defense mechanism by which they first describe these limitations, then minimize their significance and proceed to state their substantive findings.

The attempt to use the survey data for specifying the extent of acculturation and assimilation of the Jewish group within American society is not very successful. It appears that the authors are ideologically committed to the so-called "triple-melting pot" theory, which was first formulated by the social philosopher Will Herberg in the mid-1950's. It holds that the three major religious faith groups, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish, have equal status at the some time that their religious institutions and social organizations are separate. To a sociologist interested in the dynamics of intergroup relations this phase is but one of three: namely that of separate but unequal status that has preceded the current phase and that of integration, which may follow it.

This ideological stance can influence the research design. If one is committed to the Herberg thesis one is likely to focus one's attention on aspects of the *organized* religious community rather than on those of disorganization, leakages and assimilatory processes. That the authors have done the former will become evident in a review of their findings on Jewish intermarriage.

The author's report that of all couples represented in the Providence sample 4.5 per cent were intermarried. This finding is consistent with the results of similar surveys conducted during the past three decades. All such surveys were based on so-called master lists; i.e., compilations of Jewish families known to be affiliated with Jewish religious, philanthropic and social organizations. The first Jewish communal survey ever to move beyond the so-called master list and to tap a cross-section of the total population of a metropolitan area more than doubled the level of intermarriage that would have been obtained by sole reliance on a master list. This occurred when Stanley Bigman designed a sample survey for the

Greater Washington, D.C. area in 1956. If Bigman had relied only on the master list, the intermarriage rate would have been a mere 5.2 per cent as compared with 12 per cent as derived from the total sample. In the light of the Washington findings any subsequent survey should, if assimilatory tendencies are to be within its scope, be designed in the Washington manner.

The authors contend that conflicting evidence is found concerning the extent of Jewish intermarriage. They themselves have contributed to the confusion in two ways. For one, they have failed to separate marriage formation data based on marriage licenses in Iowa and Indiana from family status data based on censuses and surveys. Moreover, it appears that their definition of intermarriage varies from the one most commonly employed, namely that only such couples are considered to be intermarried where conversion to the faith of the partner has not taken place.

It is well known that American Jews have improved their socio-economic position in the past 60 years very rapidly and very substantially. Evidence indicates that effective birth control and the acquisition of professional skills through prolonged exposure to formal education have been the two most significant devices for their spectacular rise. The question arises whether the low fertility pattern is an expression of specifically Jewish values or a response to a particular social situation, a response that might well be emulated by other groups faced with the problem of inferior status. Goldstein and Goldscheider make a very strong plea for viewing the pattern of the fertility of the Jews as a response to their minority position, "with perceptions of discriminations and feelings of insecurity, and without full acceptance in the non-Jewish world." However, it appears that this view contradicts their own empirical findings: "Third-generation Jews, secure in their middle-class backgrounds, with college educations and in high white-collar occupations, participated in the post World War II baby boom. They had large families, married earlier, and adopted early family formation patterns . . ." (p. 237). This empirical finding is in line with this reviewer's and Ronald Freedman's earlier investigations, which found no special "Jewish" factor in the prevailing fertility

pattern. Rather, urban residence, educational background and occupational status fully explain current fertility levels.

The authors come to the conclusion that increasing acculturation and assimilation does occur with successive generations with the result that "the suburban Jewish population [has a] consistent pattern of greater assimilation into the majority community. This is reflected by higher intermarriage rates, in greater non-membership in synagogues, higher rates of non-identification with one of the three religious divisions, lower synagogue attendance, . . . higher affiliation with non-Jewish organization. . . ." (p. 230). If a survey of the *organized* Jewish community comes to such conclusions, it stands to reason that the actual extent of assimilation is far greater. It is hoped that future surveys of American Jewish communities will be designed in such a fashion that the full extent of assimilatory tendencies can be measured.

ERICH ROSENTHAL