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AUTHOR Brumberg, Stephen F.
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ABSTRACT

The Bureau of Jewish Education, founded in 1910 as part of the Kehillah (Jewish Community) of New York City, had a seminal and lasting influence on the education of Jews in America. The New Jewish Educators trained at the Bureau stressed the cultural breadth and historical depth of Judaism while emphasizing that Jewish education was supplementary to and compatible with modern American public school education, a viewpoint that went unchallenged until the founding of the Orthodox and Hasidic day schools in the 1950s and 1960s. At the turn of the century, the two major waves of German and East European Jewish immigrants who were engaged in the process of assimilation into American culture feared the loss of Jewish religion and culture. The New Jewish Educators advanced a bicultural alternative to total assimilation into the majority culture based on two separate school systems that would support a complementary Jewish culture and would attract and hold American Jewish youth. Between 1915 and 1938 Bureaus were started in many major cities and resulted in the founding of Hebrew Teachers Colleges in Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, and Baltimore to train modern professional Jewish educators. Forty-seven footnotes are included. (FMW)

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**DESIGNING AN EDUCATION FOR LIFE IN TWO WORLDS:
THE FOUNDING OF THE BUREAU OF JEWISH EDUCATION
OF NEW YORK CITY**

by

STEPHAN F. BRUMBERG

**Professor of Education
Brooklyn College, CUNY**

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DESIGNING AN EDUCATION FOR LIFE IN TWO WORLDS: THE FOUNDING OF THE BUREAU OF JEWISH EDUCATION OF NEW YORK CITY

What is being expressed [in the virulent opposition to my novel] is a discomfort with a plural identity...and what I am saying to you--and saying in the novel--is that we have got to come to terms with this. We are increasingly becoming a world of immigrants, made up of bits and fragments from here, there. We are here. And we have never really left anywhere we have been. (Salman Rushdie, quoted by Michiko Kakutani in an article related to Satanic Verses, (N.Y. Times, 2/23/89, p. C18.)

I. Introduction

The enormous wave of East European Jewish immigration to the United States in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century generated outspoken demands for their "proper" education. The established American community, in fear of seeing its culture undermined, diluted and "mongrelized," responded in part by mounting a movement, spearheaded by the public schools, to Americanize immigrants.¹

Within the Jewish community, differences in goals among competing groups led to conflicting educational programs aimed at the new immigrants. The settled, established American Jewish community, largely of German background, founded an array of programs geared to rapidly Americanize their recently arrived co-religionists.² Settlement houses, social service agencies and educational institutions organized by this community were intended, in large part, to bring about rapid assimilation.

For their own part, East European immigrants attempted to transplant to American soil traditional Jewish educational institutions and practices in an effort to recreate aspects of their old world religious culture and to counter pressures to unreservedly convert to

American lifeways.³ The majority of Jewish immigrants, however, appeared to neglect the Jewish education of their children as they went about the tasks of coping and surviving in a strange, harsh world.⁴

In the years preceding the Great War many leaders of the rapidly growing, heterogenous and contentious Jewish community of New York City tried to resolve conflicting views of the "mission" of Jewish education and, at the same time, extend the opportunity for such education to the mass of Jewish children. The most ambitious effort to define American Jewish education and to expand educational opportunity was the creation, in 1910, of the Bureau of Jewish Education. The Bureau was a part of the Kehillah (Jewish Community) of New York, founded in 1909, itself a landmark effort at community-building among the disparate Jewish communities of New York City, the city which had become home to the largest Jewish population of any city in the world.⁵ The founding of the Bureau, the mission it defined for Jewish education, the people it recruited and trained and the curriculum and instructional programs it designed, would have a seminal and lasting influence on the education of Jews in America.

The search for the proper education for Jews in America goes back to the earliest Jewish settlers. Jewish education was critical to the transplantation and survival of Judaism as a religion and the Jews as a distinct community. The nature of such education was critical to the accommodation of Jews as individuals and as a community to an emerging American culture and society.

For its part, as American culture became more established and establishment, it was defined and transmitted to "newcomers" by an emerging American public school system. We need briefly to review the history of Jewish education in America and the relationship

of Jews to American education, in order to understand the creative and synthetic efforts of the people who tried to create the "new Jewish education."

II. Early Stages of the Education of Jews in America⁶

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Jews were largely responsible for both the Jewish and general education of their own children. The first Jewish settlers to North America were Sephardim from the Caribbean who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654. They encountered many restrictions on their religious and educational activities, which were carried on in the privacy of their own homes.

Throughout the colonial period education in America was considered a private function, not a public responsibility. Instruction in religious and in general subjects were inseparable in the public imagination and thus it was common practice for each church to provide religious and secular instruction to the children of its congregants. Further, churches in the colonial period, especially in towns of ethnically heterogeneous populations such as New Amsterdam-New York, tended to be religious-national institutions (Dutch and Dutch Reform, English and Anglican, Scots and Presbyterian, German and Lutheran, etc.). Thus the early association of the education of Jews with the City's Jewish congregation, Shearith Israel, was within the established religious-national-educational pattern.

During the colonial period and well into the 19th century, education was not considered to be a Jewish communal responsibility as was the founding and maintenance of a synagogue or a cemetery. Parents were expected to provide for their own children's education (the general American practice of the period) by engaging a tutor or sending

them to fee-paying private schools for general studies as well as Jewish instruction. Some congregations, however, did make provision for the education of impoverished children.

The earliest period of Jewish settlement in America left few "institutional" legacies to later Jewish immigrants. However, several significant precedents were established, many of which persist to the present. Most significant, Jewish education had to mold itself to the American environment. It tacitly acknowledged the primacy of general studies and came to accept the time schedule of American education. Jewish education was adapted to fit within time not otherwise pre-empted by general studies, and English became its language of instruction.

There was a general acceptance that secular (or general) studies and religious studies were divisible and instruction for each could be offered in different institutions. Jews came to accept non-sectarian schools which eventually allowed Jewish children to prepare for full economic and political participation in American life. Jewish education was closely correlated with prevailing American educational practices, pedagogical and philosophical.

Elementary levels of Jewish learning came to be accepted as adequate. The American Jewish community came to rely almost exclusively on immigration from Europe to provide individuals with "higher" Jewish learning.

Early experience suggests ambivalence regarding a congregation's role in the education of its young. In the earliest years of Jewish settlement most communities were small and functioned as single congregations. Even so, education was perceived as a parental rather than a congregational function. And as the number of Jews increased with successive migrations, and communities became more heterogeneous--ethnically, religiously, economically and politically-- it became even more difficult to foster the concept of Jewish communal responsibility for the Jewish (or secular) education of all its children.

Finally, the part-time and supplementary nature of Jewish education contributed to the low status of the Jewish teacher. And, since instruction was confined to the elementary level, the requirements for entering the field were minimal. This had a severe dampening effect on efforts to improve the quality of Jewish instruction and to raise the status of instructors.

III. Arrival and Establishment of German Jews, 1820-1870s

Askenazic Jews from German lands started arriving in the U.S. in appreciable numbers in the early nineteenth century and rapidly surpassed in size the small but long settled and well assimilated Sephardic community. When few in number they shared religious and educational institutions with the Sephardim. But as their community grew they established congregations and schools to perpetuate their concepts of Judaism and to practice their own "minhag" (traditions).

The great educational innovation of the German Jewish community was the establishment of congregational day schools which offered secular and religious studies. These schools were opposed by the settled, American-born Jews who had largely been assimilated into the lifeways of American society. B'nai Jeshurun, New York City's first Ashkinazic synagogue founded in 1824, was the first to organize a day school (1842), which survived for five years. It was followed by three other German congregations whose schools lasted well into the 1850s. Day schools were also founded in Cincinnati and Philadelphia. But by the early 1870s, the once burgeoning Jewish congregational day school movement had collapsed.

The 1840s and early 1850s was a time of rapid growth in the German Jewish population. It was also an era during which there was virtually no provision of public education in N.Y.C., America's largest Jewish community. A public board of education was not created in the City until 1842, relatively late in the movement to establish common schools in the United States. Most schools in N.Y.C. were still church-related and the "free schools," run by the Public School Society, a philanthropy organized early in the 19th century to provide instruction to the City's poor, had a decidedly Protestant cast.

German Jews arriving at mid-century lacked the resources to hire private tutors or to pay for middle-class private schools which, in any event, were considered too Christian in character. Nor were they willing to send their young to Christian charity schools where the level of instruction was minimal and classes enormous (the Public School Society used the monitorial system where one teacher oversaw instruction of several hundred children and employed student "monitors" to do most of the direct teaching). German Jews were also concerned with providing Jewish studies to their children which, for obvious reasons, were not available in the City's established Christian schools. Congregation sponsored day schools, which spread some of the costs of education among all congregants and which offered secular and religious studies, thus met a real need of the immigrant German Jewish community. These schools, it should be added, all became coeducational, with girls accounting for about one-third of enrollments.

The establishment of a number of congregational day schools did not, however, constitute of "system" of Jewish education. There were efforts made to coordinate activities but they all ended in failure. With schools based in a congregation, institutional particularism and loyalties ultimately rose to the surface and inhibited inter-institutional collaboration. Even when the Jewish population seemed adequate to support intensive

educational efforts, especially beyond the most elementary levels of instruction, existing institutional affiliations balkanized the community, no one segment of which was capable of the required effort nor command adequate resources.

The constant immigration of Jews from many lands to N.Y., Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and later to the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys insured an increasingly heterogenous and transient population and made the process of building community-wide organizations arduous and never-ending. Especially with regard to education, the larger and more heterogeneous the community, the less likely one school program--encompassing religious and secular instruction, would be acceptable to all.

Private Jewish day schools, unattached to congregations, also arose in this period, some of which remained in operation until the end of the century. But for the majority of Jewish parents, private school fees were beyond their means.

The public schools, which developed rapidly in N.Y.C. in the late 1840s and 1850s were attractive but the persistence of strong Protestant Christian influences (in textbook content, prayer, Bible readings and holiday celebrations) dissuaded most Jews from sending their children, and most Catholics as well. Catholics strongly objected to the curriculum's anti-Catholic biases, and the required Bible readings from the King James version.⁷ In the 1850s, however, changes in New York State's Education Laws addressed many of the concerns of Jewish parents. In 1855 local boards were granted the power to choose instructional materials. At the same time, reading from the Scriptures was made discretionary. As a result, overt Christian religious influences were considerably diluted. These changes, coupled with the demise of the monitorial system of instruction, were sufficient to win over many Jewish parents who enrolled their children in record numbers.

Jewish parents seemed prepared to accept the divorce of secular and religious instruction for their children, a step most Catholics seemed unwilling to take. Thus while Jews reacted favorably to secularization of public education, Catholics were not prepared to split religious from general education. As a result, Catholics continued to develop their own parochial school system, while Jews rapidly abandoned congregational day schools. Before the end of the 1850s all seven of New York City's congregational schools had to close their doors for lack of students.

The demise of the day school was not universally lamented in the Jewish community. By this time many German Jews were already assimilated into the American world and there was growing concern that Jewish day schools served as a wall between the Jewish and Gentile communities. The movement of Jewish youth to the public schools, it was believed, would hasten the full incorporation of Jews into the American mainstream. Henceforth, Jews would be Americans in nationality and Jews in religion.

The separation of nationality and religion was an important aspect of mid-nineteenth century Reform Jewish thought and served to permit, and perhaps to encourage, the division of education between two agencies: public schools for secular studies and Jewish schools for supplementary Jewish religious instruction.

The rapid demise of most Jewish day schools created the need for supplementary schools to provide "Jewish" instruction. Some synagogues started afternoon (after-school) programs, but the most common form of supplementary instruction was the Sabbath or Sunday school, which experienced rapid growth among the growing number of Reform congregations.

The first Sunday school was organized by Rebecca Gratz in 1838 at Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel, fashioned after the Protestant Sunday school which originated

in the same city at about this time. It was understood and accepted by proponents of Sunday schools that they could only offer limited instruction. But the development of Reform religion, which stressed Judaism as a universalistic religion rather than a particularistic religious lifeway, permitted a pairing down of the curriculum. Hebrew was generally excluded, as was the study of all classical texts except for the Bible in translation. The ethical monotheism of Judaism was stressed, especially in the resounded tones of the prophets. Acknowledging time limits and poorly prepared volunteer teachers, catechisms of the Jewish religion were prepared and published for use in the Sunday schools.

While Jews with even modest means had several educational options available to them, religious and secular, there was little or no provision for the Jewish education of the children of poor Jews. The opening of a Christian mission school on New York's lower east side in 1864 spurred the established Jews to act. Eleven congregations met and organized the Hebrew Free School Association, which opened Hebrew Free School Number 1, a day school teaching general and Jewish subjects, in 1865.⁸

There were many in the community, however, who strongly opposed separate day schools for the Jewish poor, preferring that they be educated in the American public school.⁹ As a result of persistent opposition, School Number 1 was closed in 1872. Additional Hebrew Free Schools were opened starting in 1866, but all were supplementary schools offering Hebrew and religious instruction, with attendance at public school an enrollment prerequisite.

IV. Arrival of East European Jews

East European Ashkenazic Jews began arriving in small number after the Civil War. Many were unhappy both with the level of ritual observance and the quality of Jewish education. In N.Y. some of the more observant, who rejected the Hebrew Free Schools both in terms of its subject matter and its religious spirit, gravitated to Rabbi Pesach Rosenthal's Talmud Torah which he had founded in 1857 to promote Torah learning and to provide assistance to impoverished youth. Yiddish served as the language of instruction and the school, while a supplementary program, focused on traditional learning of Torah and Talmud.¹⁰

Established Jews opposed the Talmud Torah because its goal was to sustain East European religious practices and lifeways. They supported a Jewish education which facilitated assimilation: Americanization, vocational preparation and cultural refinement.

East European Jews also established chederim in an effort to establish educational institutions just like those they had known back home. Rabbis of small congregations (or opportunistic religious entrepreneurs) gathered together 40 to 50 children after public school to learn mechanical reading of Hebrew, Sidur, Chumash and Mishnah. Hundreds of chederim were in existence in N.Y.C. by 1890.¹¹

In 1886 New York's first yeshiva, Etz Chaim, was organized which eventually evolving into Yeshiva University.¹² But while East European Jews struggled to establish institutions that mirrored European practices, and which they felt were needed to sustain Judaism in America, established Jews continued to expand their mission-social work efforts among the growing population of immigrant poor. The Down-Town Sabbath School is an

example of such outreach efforts. Organized in the early 1880s by Mrs. Minnie Louis as a charitable venture of the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El, it became the Louis Down-Town Sabbath School in 1884, expanded to daily technical-vocational instruction for girls in 1887, and, passing through several changes, became the Hebrew Technical School for Girls in 1899. (Eventually the program was absorbed by the N.Y.C. Board of Education.) Religious education, in effect, was displaced by what was considered the more pressing need for assistance in adapting and accommodating immigrants to America.¹³

The Hebrew Free School, whose enrolments had grown to over 5000 by 1899 and which was one of the three constituent agencies amalgamated in 1889 to form the Educational Alliance, was forced to disband due to lack of financial support. Responsibility for religious instruction for the children of impoverished Lower East Siders, especially of girls, was ostensibly assumed by the Alliance. By the turn-of-the-century the Alliance had been converted from an administrative coordinating "shell" into an institution in its own right which had absorbed the missions of its founding agencies.¹⁴

The Educational Alliance had become the prime institution through which established Jewish philanthropy sought to assist and transform East European immigrants. By the turn-of-the-century New York City had become the largest Jewish city in the world, and would become the residence to over one and one-half million Jews by 1920. A substantial majority of New York's Jews had arrived within the past generation from Eastern Europe and lived in densely settled ethnic enclaves. It was the goal of the Alliance to Americanize these immigrants, integrate them into America, and thereby "dissolve the ghetto." Its extensive educational and social programs, however, were directed toward secular learning and rapid assimilation rather than to Jewish studies and maintenance of traditional lifeways, including halachic (religious legal) observance.

By the end of the 19th century settled American Jews had come to embrace American culture and lifeways. The newly arrived immigrants were at the initial stage in their climb into America. They wished to preserve some remnants of old world ways and beliefs and wished to establish a form of Jewish education consistent with their vision of Judaism, the lifeways of Jews and the place of Jews in America. Thus the clash was not just between the "minhag" of American Jews and newcomers, nor differences in halachic interpretations, but a confrontation of old settlers, many native-born, at home in their new world, and greenhorns recently cut from their ancestral mooring, seeking to find a new equilibrium in a radically altered environment.¹⁵

Many established Jews viewed the Jewish education of immigrants as part of a larger strategy to transform immigrants: modernize, secularize, Americanize, "enlighten" religiously, train in contemporary occupations, tutor in English, encourage the shedding of "oriental" beliefs and lifeways, and, in so doing, facilitate their rapid and successful integration into American society. Settlement houses and mission schools would play a role, but enrollment of the children of immigrants in American public schools was critical to their design. The public schools, simultaneously, were perfecting their curricula and practices to transform greenhorns into the model of Americans. Jewish education was to complement that effort.¹⁶

The education of Jews in Eastern Europe had functioned for centuries as a means of transmitting Jewish beliefs and lifeways to the young of the community. Traditional Jewish education showed signs of change in the second half of the nineteenth century under the reinforcing influences of the Haskalah (The Jewish Enlightenment), urbanization and industrialization.¹⁷ But for most Jews education was perceived as "conserving" lifeways rather than transforming them. In the New World, however, the established

Jewish community wished to employ Jewish education as an agent of social "transformation." Immigrant Jews clearly were not unalterably opposed to change. Their changed behaviors in America testified to their ability to alter old lifeways in order to adapt to their new environment. Many, in fact, neglected or abandoned traditional religious practices (whether by choice or the force of necessity or both is impossible to determine). But for those who sought to retain their religion, their "minhag" and the traditional educational practices which supported it were compartments of their lives to which they were least open to change.

From the very beginning, however, East European Jews (whether religiously orthodox or negligent) accepted changes in secular studies and overwhelmingly accepted the public schools for the general education of their boys and girls. In part because of compulsory education laws (even though poorly enforced), the absence of established Jewish day schools acceptable to traditionally observant Jews, the lack of immigrant community cohesion and organization necessary to establish a day school which offered traditional religious studies and simultaneously could satisfy state education laws, the strong encouragement and direction of the established Jewish community and their social agencies to enroll children in public school, the lack of negative associations regarding the public schools (as had been the case with government education in Russia), the high reputation of many urban school system, the participation of Jews in the Public schools¹⁸ and a strong desire on the part of immigrant parents and children to learn the language and lifeways of their new land, Jewish children attended public schools in record numbers. In 1917 in N.Y.C. 277,000 Jewish children were enrolled in the City's public schools and less than 1,000 in Jewish day schools.¹⁹

Immigrant parents in this period allowed the public schools to take responsibility for their children's secular education, for preparing them for an unknown American adult future. They themselves took responsibility (or for many, neglected) their children's religious education, choosing old world practices with which they were familiar. Cheder or private tutor (what one Jewish educator referred to as a "peddler melamed") would provide the skills and knowledge deemed necessary to fulfill the role of adult Jew.²⁰ They assumed that traditional beliefs and practices could be learned in traditional ways.

The children of immigrants, however, lacking Old World consciousness and affective associations, did not always wish to recapitulate the lifeways of their parents. Jewish education, presented in Old World garb, purveyed by a peddler melamed or cheder rav, could only prepare them for a world they wished to escape.²¹ Thus in N.Y.C. in 1917 when virtually all school aged Jewish children were enrolled in public school, less than one-fourth were receiving any form of Jewish education.²²

The challenge to Jewish educators was to present a desirable adult Jewish world which was compatible with life in America and in which the young would want to participate. The child who could be attracted to a Jewish school had been changed by the public school. The schools gave children American personae and helped to shape their interests and values. Secular school experiences also shaped their image of what a school was and how it functioned.²³ They created in the minds of the children a model of "teacher" and of teacher-student relations, and legitimized "women" as teachers. They instilled a firm belief in the education of girls and made English the functional language of the children. Yiddish became a language to shed, not one to perfect and not a medium of learning. Schools also advanced a set of standards regarding dress, personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness, and established models of school building design.

V. The New Jewish Education

Modern Jewish education, as it began to take form early in the twentieth century was indelibly shaped by the mass encounter of immigrant Jewish children with the public schools. The new Jewish educators accepted from the outset the desirability of devising a complementary relationship with the existing schools, accepting American pedagogy, epistemology and institutional forms and, for most of instruction, using English as the instructional medium. Alexander Dushkin, one of the bright young men attracted to the field, spoke of the need to "professionalize" the Jewish school, in large part by adopting the philosophy and practices of American schools.

Education in general has within the last decade made remarkable strides towards becoming a profession. Based upon scientific principles, which are capable of objective proof, it has been evolving a definite communicable technique....It will be the task of the younger men and women who will be entering the field of Jewish education to apply these principles of scientific instruction and management and this professional attitude to their own work.²⁴

In a very real sense the new Jewish educators set about to make Jewish education American style education with Jewish content, the aim of which was to insure the continued presence of the Jewish people in America.

Sampson Benderly (1876-1944), the father of modern Jewish education in America, was born in the Levant, raised in Safed, and studied medicine in Baltimore, where he first became professionally involved with Jewish education. Called to N.Y.C. in 1910 to organize the Bureau of Jewish Education as part of the recently founded Kehillah

(Community) of N.Y.C.,²⁵ he set forth the Bureau's agenda in a letter to Dr. Judah Magnes, the Kehillah's president.

On the one hand, we must Americanize, in the higher sense, every Jew in this country, infusing into him the spirit of self-reliance, fair play, and social cooperation; and on the other hand, we must build up the structure of Jewish life, so as not only to enable ourselves to hold our own, Jewishly speaking, but also to become an indispensable element in the progress of the country.

As the great public school system is the rock bottom upon which this country is rearing its institutions, so we Jews must evolve here a system of Jewish education that shall be complementary to and harmonious with the public system.²⁶

Dr. Benderly, along with Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983), founding head of the Teachers Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, set out to identify the best and brightest college men of the day, and attract them to the field of Jewish education. The challenge they placed before their recruits was nothing less than the survival of the Jews as a people and Judaism as a religion in America. Dushkin, their first disciple, writing in the first issue of Jewish Teacher, argued that teachers would be directly involved in resolving

the fundamental problem in the creation of a wholesome Jewish life in America--the problem of identifying the Jewish child with the Jewish people, of attaching him in loyalty to it, and of effectively transmitting to him its traditions and ideals. Education has probably never meant as much to the preservation of any group life, as Jewish education means at this moment to the continued life of our people.²⁷

Jewish education, as conceived by Benderly, Kaplan and their young charges was to become the moving force in transforming immigrants and their children into modern, enlightened members of a reconstructed Judaism in America. Their education was not intended to recreate Old World Judaism by limiting itself to the transmission of traditional

knowledge and beliefs. Nor was it the education championed by established Jews in the late 19th century which had as its primary goal the rapid assimilation of immigrants into American society. The new Jewish educators sought to prepare Jewish children for life in two worlds, both modern and compatible with each other, but each clearly defined. The task of the Bureau was to define a Jewish education which would attract and integrate Jewish youth into a vital American Jewish community, but which was intellectually and socially compatible with the dominant American culture.

Kaplan, for one, saw the Jewish and public schools as mutually compatible and reinforcing. Public schools would induct Jewish children into American culture and strengthen their affective ties to it. The Jewish school, to insure the continuance of the Jewish community, had to assume as its great mission the bonding of Jewish children to their inherited cultural community.

The interest that a community has in establishing a school arises from its desire to perpetuate itself, and to have its life continued through those whom it educates....No educational undertaking, therefore, can be properly estimated unless measured by the standard which this social function implies. In religious education the purpose to be served by the school is fundamentally that of integrating the individual child into the life of the religious community, so that through him the religious community might continue to live. Without making the perpetuation of the religious community a conscious end, the instruction given is bound to degenerate into a series of goody-goody lessons, given to the child with the expectation of stirring up in him some vague emotions about right conduct and without doing anything to relate those emotions to any definite phase of the environment.²⁸

The Jewish school was not just to supplement the public school, which did not attend to the spiritual requirements of children, and which neglected fundamental moral instruction. As Kaplan argued, its goal was

to adjust the child to a phase of existence which lies altogether outside of the province of the secular school. While the latter should aim to prepare the child for life in the general community, the religious school should aim to adjust him to the life of the religious community into which he was born.²⁹

The proper relationship with public education was crucial to the New Jewish Education, down to the practical but crucial issue of scheduling. Judah Magnes, speaking in the fall of 1917 before the InterDenominational Committee, a group promoting religious education in N.Y.C., reported that

We are grateful to America that we have the opportunity here of giving our children weekday religious instruction. The time schedule of the public schools, meeting as they do but five days in the week and dismissing the children in the early afternoon hours, gives us the chance of taking our children to ourselves after school hours. Our people are enthusiastic devotees of the public schools. They feel that in the public schools they are brought into direct touch with the essence of American life. They feel that it is an advantage to them rather than a disadvantage not to have the state purse or the attendance officers behind them in fostering religious education. For the religious education of the Jews is an entirely voluntary enterprise. We have no ecclesiastical authority that can compel us to engage upon it, and we are satisfied too, that the State is not behind us with its whip to force us to teach religion.³⁰

The "time" sharing feature of the public-Jewish schools relationship was critical to the success of the New Jewish Education. Without "time" in the afternoon and on the weekend, it was impossible to present the extensive Jewish curriculum, including history, the arts, culture, language and religious studies, and to include the social and cultural experiences needed to put these learnings into practice. It is no wonder then that the Bureau of Jewish Education and the New Jewish Educators strongly opposed a major public education reform of its day in New York City, the Gary Plan. The plan called for an all-day school program which incorporated academic and practical learning into a 9-5

schedule, and would have effectively ruled out an after-school Jewish supplementary education program. Given the mission assigned to Jewish education, Sunday school alone was inadequate. As Isaac Berkson, another of Benderly's "boys" who was President of the Jewish Teachers' Association, argued

Anything which interferes with the classification and grading in the Jewish schools...affects not only the finances but undermines also the possibility of solving the fundamental question of proper adjustment between the secular and the Jewish education of the American-Jewish child.³¹

In no small part due to Jewish opposition, the Gary Plan was abandoned in New York City.³²

The Gary Plan was used by some to argue for Jewish parochial schools as the only viable solution for Jewish education.³³ But the New Jewish Educators were adamant in their support for the public schools and for separation of secular and religious studies. In light of the heterogeneous population of America, Kaplan argued that

The foundation for a mutual understanding between Catholic, Protestant and Jew can only be laid in a carefully planned school system where provision is made that none of the religious communities shall be hampered in its efforts to have its children come into the full possession of their spiritual inheritance. So far the difficulties besetting the adjustment of religious education to a democratic system like ours have not even begun to be met. Surely, no good can come to our institutions from such complete segregation of the children of one faith from the children of another as the parochial system of the Catholics calls for. In a country like ours, where, on the one hand, complete amalgamation, whether urged or enforced, would be tantamount to the highest form of social tyranny and intolerance, and where, on the other hand, complete segregation is a menace to the peace and progress of the land, partial segregation must be reckoned with and recognized as legitimate, and must constitute the basis of all our planning in matters educational.³⁴

New Jewish educators needed two school systems teaching and providing "authentic" cultural experiences because their goal was biculturalism, not full assimilation into either the American or Jewish worlds.

The Jewish world into which the young were to be incorporated was not the traditional religious culture of Eastern Europe and its focus on Torah and Talmud. The Jewish world of the New Jewish Educators was to be represented by Cultural Zionism, a modern enlightened Judaism, proud of its classical civilization, but aware of itself as a cultural force in the contemporary world, a culture that embraced Hebrew as its living language.³⁵ The Cultural Zionists, strongly influenced by Ahad Ha'Am, and by the worldwide rise in nationalism and the movement for the self-determination of peoples, perceived the possibility of a Jewish renaissance under liberal democratic regimes. Here was an opportunity to merge the best of modern western and Jewish thought and practice. Some of the New Jewish Educators were both Cultural and Political Zionists, and saw their efforts to cultivate modern Jewish culture on American soil as a temporary expedient, awaiting the day when it could be transplanted to Palestine.

The New Educators saw the need to raise Jewish self-esteem among the children of immigrants, to instill positive ethnic consciousness and to increase their level of Jewish knowledge, especially modern Hebrew. They also understood the need to create authentic opportunities to participate in a wholesome, modern Jewish life. Their programs reinforced modernization efforts in the public schools and settlement houses, but ran counter to Americanization goals.³⁶ The intention of the New Jewish Educators was not to facilitate complete assimilation of Jews into American society, retaining only a limited self-contained religion. They wished to nurture a Jewish cultural life in America, parallel to and

compatible with American culture, and to teach Jewish youth how to participate in both to the mutual enhancement of each.

The New Jewish Educators were not opposed to religious instruction and included study of religion in their curricula. But their real interests were more broadly directed at Judaism as a civilization--with a history, a culture, a language and a religion. They hoped to offer community-based education, serving all segments of the Jewish population--all religious denominations (then crystalizing into separate institutional organizations), secular Jews, politically radical Jews, Yiddishists, Nationalists and Zionists. Their intention was to strengthen community-wide allegiance and to raise ethnic consciousness, rather than to reinforce halachic practices.

The Bureau of Jewish Education was the institutional manifestation of the New Jewish Education.³⁷ Through it Benderly and his disciples intended to raise the relevance and quality of Jewish instruction, increase the distressingly low proportion of Jewish children receiving Jewish education, and support "modernization" of the Jewish community in America.

The Bureau stressed the responsibility of the entire community for Jewish education, a corollary to the mission of Jewish schools to insure the survival of Judaism in America. Individual religious denominations, ideological schools, and political philosophies, if they each offered their own programs, would divide and segment the Jewish community. What was needed was a Jewish "common school" to serve all factions, to promote a sense of "k'lal Yisrael," (what Solomon Schechter referred to as "catholic Israel") and to transmit the cultural and historical knowledge and religious practices common to all Jews.

Lacking the financial resources to found a supplementary school system of its own, the Bureau chose to work in and through N.Y.C.'s eight largest Talmud Torahs

(community and not congregational-based schools).³⁹ They worked to improve the efficiency of these schools and to rationalize their finances. The model of organizational effectiveness and efficiency that they regularly alluded to was the New York City school system, with its strong centralized administration headed by a powerful superintendent, a common and well elaborated curriculum, and professionally oriented senior officials.

The Bureau's staff devoted attention to improving and enhancing the Jewish school curriculum, especially by promoting the Direct Method of Hebrew language instruction ("Ivrit b'Ivrit") then gaining ground in such cities as Baltimore and Detroit. They also worked on producing materials related to modern Jewish history, contemporary Jewish events, and the Jewish arts.

Benderly worked at recruiting a corps of talented college educated men and women to the field of Jewish education. The original disciples of Benderly at the Bureau and Mordecai Kaplan and Israel Friedlaender at the Jewish Theological Seminary represented a whole host of prominent twentieth century Jewish educators. In addition to Dushkin and Berkson, they included Emanuel Gamoran, Albert Schoolman, Israel S. Chipkin, Bernard Brickner, Rebecca Aronson Brickner, Samuel Dinin, Jacob Golub, Leo Honor, Mordecai Solters, David Rudavsky and Samuel Citron.

The recruits were educated at both the Teachers Institute of the Seminary and Teachers College, Columbia University. At the Seminary they were imbued with the mission of Jewish education, Cultural Zionism, and the zeal and intellectual acumen of Kaplan, Benderly and Friedlaender. At Teachers College they were exposed to the new American progressive education of such professors as John Dewey and Edward Thorndike. At Teachers College men such as Dushkin, Berkson and Gamoran carried out dissertations on topics which provided the intellectual, historic and halachic rationale for the New

Jewish Education. Dushkin reviewed the history of Jewish education in New York City and studied contemporary demographic conditions within which Jewish education was to be planned, Berkson provided a philosophical justification and model of a bicultural America, and Gamoran researched changes in theological and pedagogical practices in Judaism over the millennia.³⁹ The people at the Bureau had an abiding faith in rationalism, and believed that potent socio-cultural forces could be controlled and changed by means of conscious planning. They combined a love of social science with a firm belief in social engineering.

Kaplan, while sharing many of the intellectual biases of Benderly and his "boys," harbored reservations regarding the direction that professionalized Jewish education was taking. He questioned Benderly's attitude toward Judaism as a "religion." Benderly, Kaplan recorded in his Diary, clearly reflected the philosophical leanings of his ideological mentor, Ahad Ha'Am, whose conception of Judaism was

wanting in appreciation of the indefinable religious longings and aspirations. It borders so closely on the clap trap [illegible word] practical efficiency schemes that Carlyle so vehemently condemns in his "Signs of the Times." It is this spirit that has taken possession of the men [in the Bureau] and I have found them strange[ly] unresponsive to the deeper appeals of Judaism, so that I have often wished that these men were drawn into the seminary where, while the religious spirit is lacking, it is at least not pooh-poohed as is the case in nationalistic circles.⁴⁰

Kaplan lamented that the best of the Bureau men were directed to Teachers College and the doctorate and not to the Seminary and a rabbinical degree. In the privacy of his Diary he questioned the very heart of Benderly's Two Worlds argument.

The whole scheme of Dr. B., I believe is based upon a fallacy, viz that it is feasible to maintain distinct Jewish groups in the Diaspora that shall unite in themselves two coordinate cultures of a national character. In my opinion this can not possibly be realized. It can only have a short lived existence among the recently arrived immigrants and in their children, but not in the

third generation. Only by giving Jewish culture a distinctively religious significance in the true modern sense of the term is there any hope of Jewish education being built up in this country. This means that only by maintaining the synagogue and vitalizing it by means of the Hebraic movement can the Jews hope to survive here as a distinct group. Only those, therefore, who will give a religious interpretation to Jewish culture will be entrusted with the care and supervision of Jewish education.⁴¹

Kaplan believed that the future of Jewish education would be tied to congregations and not to "community-based" non-denominational schools such as Talmud Torahs. Hence it would be best for Jewish educators to be rabbi-educators.

Instead of this [Benderly] urges them to work for the Doctor's degree in Columbia, expecting that when one of them will swoop down on an out of town Jewish community as Dr. So and So the Jewish populace will be so overwhelmed that he will have no difficulty in carrying out his educational plans.⁴²

Kaplan, however, acceded to Benderly's plans, since he saw Benderly as "the most positive force in Jewish life to-day."⁴³ But he stood ready to chance if another dynamic leader should come along. Kaplan was then 33 years old. As he matured and gained greater confidence, he took his own lead and embraced a different model of two civilizations: the secular modern civilization represented by America, and the evolving religious civilization of Judaism. His life's work became the elaboration of his concept of Judaism as a civilization and devising practical institutions to enable Jews to live in both the American and Jewish worlds.⁴⁴

The need to put Jewish learning into practice, to demonstrate that Judaism was a living culture, accorded exceedingly well with Dewey's pedagogical philosophy of "learning by doing." The American educated professionals which the Bureau recruited and trained were to serve as living models of ideal Jewish life in the contemporary age. They were

the pioneers who would demonstrate the strength, vitality and value of a bicultural world, of the inestimable value of Judaism as a living religion and dynamic culture, and of Judaism's real potential for enhancing American life.

The active New Jewish Education went beyond the classroom to weekend social events and retreats, to clubs and organizations, to vacation programs and, perhaps its most innovative creation, the Jewish summer camp. Jewish camping featured learning and living a modern Jewish life, including the arts in a Jewish context, intellectual study, learning and using modern Hebrew, and ritual observances. In 1919 Albert Schoolman, then director of the innovative Central Jewish Institute (a supplementary Jewish school and social center serving N.Y.C.'s Yorkville community), founded Camp Cejwin, assisted by Dushkin and Berkson and with the support of Rabbi Kaplan. Cejwin is still an active camp, as is a second camp founded by the same group in 1922, Camp Modin. Eventually all Jewish denominations and most secular branches of the Jewish community organized camps to put abstract learning and theorizing into life practice.

VI. Conclusion

The Kehillah of N.Y.C. failed at the time of the First World War.⁴⁵ The Bureau of Jewish Education, an institution set within the Kehillah, was able to continue in a succession of institution forms, but its ambitious goals had to be greatly scaled back. The young people it had recruited and trained could not be retained and New York's loss was to become American Judaism's gain as they scattered across the nation, helping to establish and run City Bureaus of Jewish Education. Between 1915 and 1938 Bureaus were started in Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis,

Cincinnati, Saint Louis, Buffalo, Los Angeles, Essex County (N.J.), Washington, D.C. and Omaha. An important outgrowth of several Bureaus was the founding of Hebrew Teachers Colleges in Chicago, Cleveland, Boston and Baltimore to train modern professional Jewish educators. They propagated the ideas of the New Jewish Educators, stressing the cultural breadth and historical depth of Judaism, and reinforcing Jewish education as supplementary instruction, complementary to and compatible with modern public school education. Not until the growth of modern Orthodox and Hasidic day schools in the 50s and 60s was the supplementary nature of Jewish schooling vigorously challenged.⁴⁶

The New Jewish Educators tried to confront a classic problem which has faced each major wave of Jewish immigration, and, for that matter, all immigrant groups. Arrival of a group and its initial struggle to establish a beachhead in America, is followed by a period of accommodation and then a period of gradual assimilation. At least since the middle of the nineteenth century, education, especially the public school, has facilitated the intergenerational movement into the American cultural mainstream and away from the community's ancestral culture. In the case of Jewish immigration to America, the distinct "waves" caused an overlapping of periods or phases. At the turn-of-the-century Jews of German background were well on their way to assimilation. East European Jews were split between new arrivals and early accommodators. Established Jews were generally committed to facilitating the movement of East European Jews through a speedy accommodation and into assimilation.

In the relatively open political, social and economic environment encountered in the United States, with children attending public schools and learning American lifeways and allegiances, one would anticipate assimilation of immigrants into the established culture.

Hence the fears on the part of those who valued Judaism as religion and civilization that Israel would be lost in the new promised land.

The New Jewish Educators advanced an alternative to complete assimilation: two worlds, two cultures, and separate school systems to support each. They readily acknowledged the reality of a dominant American culture. But they believed they could create institutions and an educational program to support a complementary Jewish culture which would attract and hold American Jewish youth. This culture would not be at odds with America, but would enrich the nation. As Israel Friedlaender argued, the American community

can not be indifferent to this community, whether its Jewish population, by preserving and cherishing the great traditions of its past, shall add a distinct contribution to the spiritual treasury of the American Nation, or whether, by losing its identity, it shall merely become a colorless and hence valueless addition to the number of its inhabitants.⁷

Today many who see themselves as Americans and as Jews and who successfully participate in both worlds, are able to do so because of the New Jewish Educators' pioneering efforts to create a viable bicultural society. Their lives and their work demonstrated the value of cultural diversity to the American nation.

Footnotes

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2. Selma Berrol, Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914 (NY: Arno Press, 1978) and "In Their Image: German Jews and the Americanization of the Ost Juden in New York City," New York History V.43, n.4 (Oct. 1982): 417-433; Stephan F. Brumberg, Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant-Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1986), especially chaps. 4, 5 & 6; Jewish Women's Congress, Papers at the Jewish Women's Congress: held at Chicago, September 4, 5, 6 and 7, 1983 (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894, 170-186); Moses Rischin, The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914 (Cambridge, MA: 1962); Maxine S. Seller, "The Education of Immigrants in the United States: An Introduction to the Literature." The Immigration History Newsletter, V. 13, n.1 (May 1981):1-8.
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- 1969); Jonathan Sarna, ed. and Trans., People Walk on Their Heads. Moses Weinberger's Jews and Judaism in New York (NY: Holmes & Meier, 1982).
4. Samson Benderly, "The Fundamental Elements in the Solution of the Problem of Jewish Education in America," The Jewish Teacher, V.1, n.1 (Jan. 1916):17-27; Alexander M. Dushkin, Jewish Education in New York City (NY: Bureau of Jewish Education, 1918):145-163; Mordecai M. Kaplan & Bernard Cronson, "A Survey of Jewish Education in New York City (1909)," reprinted in Lloyd P. Gartner, ed., Jewish Education in the United States (NY: Teachers College Press, 1969):118-126.
 5. Arthur A. Goren, New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment, 1908-1922 (NY: Columbia University Press & Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970).
 6. Information on the history of American Jewish Education was drawn from the following sources: Berman; Brumberg, Going to America; Dushkin; Israel Friedlaender, "The Problem of Jewish Education in America and the Bureau of Education of the Jewish Community of N.Y.C.," in Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year Ending June 30, 1913, V.1, (Wash., D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914): 365-393; Goren; Hyman B. Grinstein, The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York, 1654-1860 (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945); Honor; Pilch; Byron L. Sherwin, Contest and Content: Higher Jewish Education in the United States: Spertus College of Judaica - a Case Study (Chicago: Spertus College of Judaica Press, 1987), part I; Henry Skirball, "Isaac Baer Berkson and Jewish Education," [doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1977]; Nathan Winter, Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society (NY: New York University Press, 1966).
 7. Diane Ravitch, The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973 (NY: Basic Books, 1974).
 8. Dushkin, chapt. II; Hebrew Free School Archives, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, N.Y.C.
 9. Brumberg, Going to America, 64-65.
 10. Pilch, chapt. 2.
 11. Gartner, "The Jews of New York's East Side"; Sarna, for an orthodox rabbi's pessimistic view of Jewish education in N.Y.C. in the 1870s and 1880s.
 12. Gurock, chapt. 2.
 13. Papers at the Jewish Women's Congress; Julia Richman, "Women Wage-Workers: with Reference to Directing Immigrants," in Papers of the Jewish Women's Congress, 91-107.

14. Philip Berkowitz, "The Hebrew Free School Association and the Educational Alliance, 1879-1907," (a course paper presented to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 1964, typescript); David Blaustein, "From Oppression to Freedom. How the Hebrew immigrant is taught his first lessons in American liberty at the Educational Alliance, a place of organized opportunities." Charities (April 4, 1903); S.P. Rudens, "A Half Century of Community Service: The Story of the New York Educational Alliance," American Jewish Yearbook, 1944-45, 73-86.
15. In a confidential memorandum to his fellow members of the Board of Trustees of the Educational Alliance, Israel Friedlaender discussed what their organization ought to do to help the new immigrants to regain their balance, many of whom suffered from a loss of "psychic equilibrium." Felix Warburg Papers, American Jewish Archives, Box 170.
16. Brumberg, chapt. 5.
17. Jacob Salmon Raisin, The Haskalah Movement in Russia (Phil.: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913); I.J. Singer. The Brothers Ashkenazi [a new trans. by Joseph Singer; intro. by Irving Howe] (NY: Bantam Books, 1981).
18. The noted philanthropist, Jacob Schiff, who was held in high esteem by the immigrant community, was a member of the N.Y.C. Board of Education in the 1880s, and was followed by a succession of influential Jewish Board members, including his son-in-law, Felix Warburg, a key member of the Board in the years preceding the First World War.
19. Figures calculated from the data contained in Dushkin, 145-163. For a discussion of the public school's emerging "curriculum of transformation," see Brumberg, chapt. 8.
20. Joseph.
21. For scenes depicting the life of the cheder student, see Henry Roth, Call It Sleep (NY: Bard Books, 1964) and Samuel Ornitz, Haunch, Paunch and Jowl, an Anonymous Autobiography (NY: Boni and Liveright, 1923).
22. The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917-1918 (2nd ed.). (NY: The Kehillah (Jewish Community) of New York City, 1918), 347-366.
23. Stephan F. Brumberg, "In the Shadow of the 64-Room Schoolhouse: Attendance of Jewish Immigrants in the Public Schools," The Pedagogical Reporter, V.35, n.4 (Oct. 1984):30-33.
24. Alexander M. Dushkin, "The Profession of Jewish Education," The Menorah Journal, V.3, n.2 (April 1917):177.
25. Goren, chapt. 5

26. Winters, 200.
27. Jewish Teacher, V.1, n.1 (Jan. 1916):1.
28. Mordecai Kaplan, "The Function of the Jewish Religious School," The Jewish Teacher, V.1, n.1. (Jan. 1916):8-9.
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32. Dushkin, "The Profession of Jewish Educator," 95-96; see the introduction to Randolph S. Bourne, The Gary School's [introduction and annotations by Murray and Adeline Levine] (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1970).
33. Berkson, 188.
34. Kaplan, "The Function of the Jewish Religious School," 7.
35. For a general discussion of Cultural Zionism and its relation to Political Zionism, see Arthur Hertzberg, ed., The Zionist Idea. (NY and Phil.: Meridian Books and the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960).
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37. See Goren, chaps. 5 and 6.
38. "Meeting of the Special Committee of the [Jewish] Teachers Institute," May 8, 1910, and "Minutes of Conference of Representative Officers of Talmud Torahs, and Special Committee of Teachers Institute," Jan. 20, 1910, both in the Felix Warburg Papers, Box 159, American Jewish Archives.
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40. Mordecai M. Kaplan, Dairy [Feb. 24, 1913-May 3, 1959] handwritten. Original in the collection of the Library of the Jewish Theological Society of America. [Also available in microfilm]; October 4, 1914, 94.
41. Kaplan, Dairy, 95.

42. Ibid., 95-96.
43. Ibid., 96.
44. See, for example, Mordecai M. Kaplan, Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life (originally pub. 1934) (Phil.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).
45. Goren, chapt. 10, 11.
46. Jeremiah J. Berman, "The Return to the Jewish Day School," Conservative Judaism (Jan. 1951); James Bleiberg, "The Debate Over Day School Education in Reform Judaism: A Historical Study." [a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1982]; Fred Massarik, "Trends in U.S. Jewish Education: National Jewish Population Study Findings," American Jewish Yearbook, 1977; 240-250; JESNA Trends (Spring 1986), pub. by The Jewish Education Service of North America, Inc., N.Y.C.
47. Friedlaender, "The Problem of Jewish Education in America and the Bureau of Education," 393.