



Jews on the Move

Implications for
Jewish Identity

Sidney Goldstein and
Alice Goldstein

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STATE UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK
PRESS

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

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Production by Susan Geraghty
Marketing by Fran Keneston

Printed in the United States of America

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For information, address State University of New York Press,
State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Goldstein, Sidney, 1927–

Jews on the move : implications for Jewish identity / Sidney
Goldstein and Alice Goldstein.

p. cm.—(SUNY series in American Jewish society in the
1990s)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-2747-1. — ISBN 0-7914-2748-X (pbk.)

1. Jews—United States—Migrations. 2. Migration, Internal—
United States. 3. Jews—United States—Identity. I. Goldstein,
Alice. II. Title. III. Series.

E184.J5G636 1995

304.8'089'924073—dc20

95-5830
CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To our grandchildren,
Allison, Penina, Michaela, Nathaniel,
Avi, Asher, and Talya*

*whose commitments to Judaism and migration experiences
will help to shape American Jewry in the 21st century*

FOREWORD

Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity is the first monograph to be published in the series “American Jewish Society in the 1990s,” based on the Council of Jewish Federation’s (CJF) landmark 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. The survey yielded a vast array of statistical data on the demographic, social, and religious characteristics of the Jewish American population. It is being used to provide, in a number of monographs, an in-depth assessment of the major changes and trends in Jewish American life as it approaches the end of the century. To a degree, this monograph series parallels past undertakings by teams of social scientists who analyzed the demographic and social data emanating from United States decennial censuses. A monograph series focusing on the Jewish population is, however, unique. Although a national survey similar in nature had been conducted in 1970, that project yielded comparatively few reports and those were in limited areas of concern.

Recognizing the importance of a comprehensive assessment of the total Jewish American population as the basis for an effective planning agenda, the concept of a national Jewish population survey in 1990 was first considered in 1986 by CJF’s National Technical Advisory Committee on Jewish Population Studies (NTAC). The idea was further promoted the following year at the World Conference on Jewish Demography held in Jerusalem, at which plans were developed for a worldwide series of national Jewish population studies undertaken in or around the decennial year. An American survey was seen as a key component of this series. In 1988, CJF officially agreed to conduct a national Jewish population survey in 1990, parallel to the federal decennial census. ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pennsylvania, was commissioned to conduct the three-stage survey.

In contrast to the 1970 national study, NTAC decided to insure public access to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) data as early as possible and to actively encourage

wide use and analysis. The success of that effort is evident in the large number of analyses that have been completed or are in process. To date, more than 150 items extensively based on NJPS, such as journal and magazine articles, dissertations, and papers for professional meetings, have been written. These encompass such varied topics as aging, apostasy, the baby boom generation, children, comparisons with international Jewry, comparisons with the larger American population, denominations, fertility, gender equality, geography, intermarriage, Israel connections, Jewish education, Jewish identity, life cycle, mobility, occupation, philanthropy, Sephardim, social stratification, and women's roles. A number of these topics are expected to appear as monographs in the series.

From the outset, NTAC envisioned that a number of scholars would independently produce monographs utilizing NJPS data for in-depth assessment of topics having special relevance for the understanding of Jewish life in America. While planning for the various stages of NJPS, NTAC therefore concurrently acted to identify potential monograph writers. Public notices were placed in a variety of academic journals and invitations were conveyed through a network of professionals, both within and outside of Judaic disciplines. Although funds were raised for the data collection, survey execution, and data processing, no financial support was available for subsidizing data analyses, except for a summary report, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey*. Thus, potential monograph writers knew from the beginning that they would be participating on a voluntary basis, dependent on whatever resources they could themselves muster. The dedication of the authors to the completion of their respective monographs is gratefully acknowledged. While drawing on basically the same set of data, authors were free to establish their own analytic categories and to apply their own perspectives in interpreting the data. They were also encouraged to draw not only on NJPS, but also on comparative data from other sources, such as local community surveys.

In selecting authors, efforts were made to insure coverage of key issues and a diversity of topics and to avoid serious overlap in coverage of the same topic. A screening and approval process, in collaboration with the editors at SUNY Press, was administered by the series editors, Dr. Barry Kosmin, Director of Research at the Council of Jewish Federations and Director of the Mandell L. Ber-

man Institute—North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB) at City University of New York Graduate Center; and Dr. Sidney Goldstein, Chair of NTAC and G. H. Crooker University Professor Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Brown University.

Jeff Scheckner, Administrator of NAJDB and Research Consultant at CJF, with the help of the series editors, coordinated the activities of the monograph writers by arranging meetings at which authors discussed technical aspects of the data and their preliminary findings, fielding daily inquiries about the data set, and circulating periodic informational updates. Much of this activity was necessitated by the fact that NJPS is both a large data set with a complex weighting system (see Appendix A) and that definitional issues complicate any analysis of contemporary Jewish populations. The work of the monograph authors was further enhanced through the coordination of a “buddy” system by which other scholars associated with NJPS provided academic peer review to authors at various stages of manuscript preparation.

The intense interest generated by the initial release of NJPS findings has already significantly affected deliberations within the Jewish American community among communal service workers, religious and educational professionals, and lay leaders. At the same time, the results of early reports have elicited considerable attention among those in the larger American community whose interests focus on the changing religio-ethnic composition of the population and the role of religion in America. This series is intended to provide a comprehensive, in-depth evaluation of American Jewry today, some one hundred years since the massive waves of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe began to change the size and character of Jewry in the United States. During the intervening decades, continual change has been the hallmark of the community. The profile of the Jewish population in the 1990s that NJPS delineates both provides a historical perspective and points to the challenges of the future.

Barry Kosmin
Graduate Center, City
University of New York and
Council of Jewish Federations
New York, NY

Sidney Goldstein
Population Studies and
Training Center
Brown University
Providence, RI

January 1995

P R E F A C E

As social scientists with special interests in demography, our research over the past two decades has focussed heavily on two quite diverse populations, the people of China and the Jews of the United States. China, with its 1.1 billion people, has the largest population in the world and is very determined to control growth to insure a better quality of life for its people. By contrast, American Jewry today numbers just under 6 million persons and is much concerned with questions of continuity and identity in the face of low fertility, high rates of intermarriage, and assimilatory tendencies. In both situations, migration has become an important dynamic leading to large scale redistribution of the population.

For us, as scholars, this has presented new challenges and new opportunities: how to assess the extent, direction, characteristics, causes, and effects of population movement in the context of the larger concerns that confront China in the one instance and American Jewry in the other. A major reason why such assessments are so problematic has been a lack of appropriate information on the mobility behavior of either populations. By coincidence, within a few years of each other, both China and the Jewish American community recognized the importance of generating adequate statistics to allow evaluation of the patterns of migration and their impact. And so, this monograph, *Jews on the Move*, parallels research reports that we have prepared on migration and urbanization in China. In both cases, our hope has been that the resulting insights will provide a firmer basis for improving the quality of life of the people who constitute the focus of the analyses.

As committed Jews, we believe that fuller attention to the role of migration in the redistribution of Jewish Americans is a key to understanding the dynamics underlying changes in the structure of the Jewish American community and in levels of individual identity. The research reported in this volume has therefore allowed us to pursue our general scholarly interests in an area which overlaps significantly with personal concerns we have

regarding the future vitality of the Jewish American community. We are grateful for this opportunity because we believe that planning on the basis of the facts rather than on myths and wishful thinking is the best way to cope with the challenges the community faces.

The data for this analysis come from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), sponsored by the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF). In the absence of official census data on religion, this “self-study” of the Jewish population was undertaken to meet the needs of the Jewish American community for a firm, factual basis for assessing its position in the closing decade of the twentieth century and for effective planning for the transition to the twenty-first century. The strong support given to NJPS by CJF’s lay and professional leadership testifies to their concern and foresight in their efforts to maintain a vital Jewish community. We are most grateful to the members of the CJF’s National Technical Advisory Committee on Population Studies (NTAC), which the senior author chaired, for their dedication and arduous work in developing the design of the survey and in insuring successful completion of the field work. The wide use to which the collected data have already been put—in shaping the agenda of discussion within the organized community, in scholarly research, and in planning at the national and local levels—document the value of their efforts as well as those of the ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pennsylvania, and the Mandell Berman Institute of the North American Jewish Data Bank (NAJDB) at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York, which, respectively, had responsibility for implementing the research design and insuring proper processing and distribution of the survey data. Dr. Barry Kosmin, Research Director of CJF and Director of the Berman Institute at NAJDB, Jeffrey Scheckner of the CJF Research Department, and Ariella Keysar, Research Fellow at NAJDB, deserve special mention for the key roles they played at all stages of the research in insuring the highest quality data set and easy access to it.

The richness of NJPS-1990 is perhaps best indicated by the large array of publications and presentations at professional meetings that followed in the years immediately after release of the data set. Concurrently, plans were made for a monograph series designed to exploit in depth a wide range of topics of interest both to the scholarly community and to planners in the Jewish commu-

nity. This monograph is the first in a series to be published by SUNY Press on American Jewish society in the 1990s. We are grateful to SUNY Press (Albany) for agreeing to sponsor this series and to Rosalie Robertson and her successor, Christine Worden, for their help in organizing the series.

Because this is only one of many monographs that will draw on the NJPS-1990 data, a challenge we faced in undertaking this research was to avoid too much overlap with those monographs that will focus on topics closely related to migration. The various monographs are intended to complement rather than duplicate each other. The plan for a monograph focussing on the geography of American Jews, for example, explains why minimum attention has been given in this report to the relation between migration and community size. An ongoing project by Uzi Rebhun at the Hebrew University, comparing the migration patterns revealed by the 1970–71 and 1990 National Jewish Population Studies accounts for the minimal attention given in our assessment to the 1970 statistics. We hope that these complementary reports will soon be available and that interested readers will use them in combination with this monograph.

Our endeavor benefitted greatly from the efforts of a number of persons. At the Population Studies and Training Center of Brown University, Dr. Xiushi Yang helped immeasurably in preparing computer tabulations and statistical analyses of the data, as did Lori Hunter in preparing the graphic material. Irene Gravel was very generous with her time in expertly organizing computer files for the analysis. Following a review system developed by NTAC, Drs. Barry Kosmin (CJF and NAJDB), Sergio Della Pergola (Hebrew University), and Ira Sheskin (University of Miami) served as initial reviewers of the manuscript. We are most appreciative to them for their comprehensive, incisive criticisms; they proved most helpful in preparing the manuscript for external review. We are grateful, too, for the reactions received from three anonymous reviewers selected by SUNY Press; their comments were very valuable in completing revisions of the manuscript for publication. Thanks, too, to Dr. Joseph Waksberg for the special contribution he has made to this and the other monographs in the series by preparing the methodological appendix outlining the study design. To Christine Worden, editor of the series, we are indebted for the care with which she handled the monograph and for seeing it through to publication.

During the years in which the National Jewish Population Study was being planned and the subsequent period when the survey was conducted and our analysis of the migration data undertaken, we became the grandparents of seven lovely children born to our Beth, David, and Brenda and their spouses, Raphael, Sarah, and David. Like many of the individuals represented in our analysis, our children and grandchildren have experienced migration; they currently live in three different states far from our own Rhode Island. Despite their dispersion, we are delighted and grateful that our family ties remain strong, as do our children's and grandchildren's commitments to Judaism. In the hope that this monograph will in its small way contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of change in the Jewish American community and to insuring its continued strength in the decades ahead, we dedicate this volume to our grandchildren. They represent the future; we trust that, as they move through life, they will themselves be dedicated to maintaining a strong Jewish identity and helping others do the same.

CONTENTS

<i>Tables</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Illustrations</i>	<i>xix</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xv</i>
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Theoretical Perspectives	4
Evidence from Past Studies	10
Community Studies in the 1960s	10
The 1970/71 National Jewish Population Survey	15
Community Studies after NJPS-1970/71	17
The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey	24
The Survey Methodology	25
Migration Data in the Survey	28
Analysis Plans	30
Chapter 2 Numbers, Distribution, and Mobility	33
Changing Numbers, 1970/71 to 1990	33
Distribution Patterns	37
Regional Distribution	37
Metropolitan/Nonmetropolitan Residence	47
Migration Patterns	53
Bilocal Residence	63
The Extent of Bilocal Residence	65
Location of Second Home	67
Future Mobility	69
Levels of Future Mobility	70
Probable Destination of Future Moves	77

Chapter 3	The Impact of Mobility on Regional Distribution	81
	Metropolitan Migration	82
	Lifetime Redistribution Patterns	89
	Five-year Regional Flows	100
	Five-Year Regional Interchanges	104
	Five-Year Migration Flows by Jewish Identity	107
	Differing Forms of Mobility	113
	Types of Mobility	114
	Regional Variations in Mobility Types	121
	Mobility Types and Interregional Distribution	128
	Variations by Jewish Identity Categories	130
	The Impact of Redistribution for Jewish Americans	134
Chapter 4	Socioeconomic Differentials	137
	Education Differentials	138
	Occupational Differentials	147
	Employment Status	154
	Marital Status	157
	Overview: Socioeconomic Differentials	170
Chapter 5	Differentials in Jewish Identification	175
	Denominational Identification	176
	Recent Movement	176
	Future Mobility	180
	Migration and Denominational Change	180
	Ritual Practices	184
	Intermarriage	189
	Jewish Education	196
	Visits to Israel	203
	Mobility and Jewish Identity Related	205
Chapter 6	Community Involvement	209
	Organizational Membership	212
	Jewish Organizations	216
	Non-Jewish Organizations	219
	Membership in Relation to Duration	224
	A Multivariate Analysis of Organization Membership	226

Synagogue/Temple Membership	228
A Multivariate Analysis	237
Volunteer Activities	240
Jewish Voluntarism	240
Non-Jewish Volunteer Activities	245
Voluntarism in Relation to Duration	249
A Multivariate Analysis	251
Interrrelations Among Forms of Involvement	252
Interrelations in Jewish Involvement	253
Jewish/Non-Jewish Involvement Compared	261
Philanthropy	266
Recent Migration and Giving	266
Duration of Residence and Philanthropy	270
The Impact of Expected Mobility	274
Relations Between Community Involvement and Mobility	277
Chapter 7 Informal Networks	281
Friendship Patterns	281
Neighborhood Composition	290
Jewish Character of Neighborhood	294
Importance of Jewish Neighborhood	302
Overview of Jewish Milieu	306
Chapter 8 Jews on the Move: Implications for American Jewry	309
Toward a National Jewish Community	309
Who is Mobile?	313
Migration and Jewish Identity/Involvement	317
Theoretical Issues	317
Methodological Issues	318
Mobility and Jewish Identity	319
Community Involvement	320
Informal Networks	323
The Challenge of Mobility	324
<i>Appendix A The Methodology of the National Jewish Population Survey</i> by Joseph Waksberg	333
<i>Appendix B Questions on Migration in the NJPS-1990 Questionnaire</i>	361

<i>Appendix C</i>	<i>Tables Showing Unweighted Number of Cases by Migration Status and Age</i>	365
<i>Appendix D</i>	<i>Construction of Ritual Index</i>	369
<i>Notes</i>		371
<i>References</i>		375
<i>Subject Index</i>		385
<i>Name Index</i>		397

TABLES

2.1	The Jewish Population in the United States, 1970 and 1990	35
2.2	Distribution of Total United States and Jewish Population, by Regions, 1900, 1930, 1971, and 1990	38
2.3	Region of Residence of Population by Jewish Identity	44
2.4	Metropolitan/Nonmetropolitan Residence, by Region: Core Jews and Peripheral Population	50
2.5	Metropolitan/Nonmetropolitan Residence, by Region and Jewish Identity	52
2.6	Five-Year Migration Status, By Jewish Identity	54
2.7	Lifetime Migration Status, by Jewish Identity	57
2.8	Five-Year and Lifetime Migration Status of Core Jewish Adults, by Age	60
2.9	Dimensions of Bilocal Residence: Core Jews and Peripheral Population	65
2.10	Region Where Bilocals Spent Most Time When Away from Home, by Region of Current Residence: Core Jews	68
2.11	Likelihood of Moving in the Next Three Years, by Five-Year Migration Status and Age: Core Jews	72
2.12	Likelihood of Moving in the Next Three Years, by Jewish Identity and Age	76
2.13	Destination of Likely Move by Five-Year Migration Status (Core Jews Who Indicated a Move Was Likely)	78
3.1	Lifetime and Five-Year Migration Status, by Metropolitan/Nonmetropolitan Residence: Core Jews and Peripheral Population	84

3.2	Region of 1990 Residence, by Region of Birth and Interregional Lifetime Migration, U.S.-Born Population: Core Jews and Peripheral Population	90
3.3	Interregional Lifetime Migration Flows of Jews by Religion and Secular Jews (U.S.-Born Only)	96
3.4	Interregional Five-Year Migration Flows: Core Jews (U.S.-Born Only)	102
3.5	Distribution of Five-Year Interregional Migrants, by Regions of Origin and Destination, by Age: Core Jews	106
3.6	Interregional Five-Year Migration Flows, by Jewish Identity (U.S.-Born Only)	108
3.7	Distribution of Interstate Migration Type, by Age: Core Jews and Peripheral Population (U.S.-Born Only)	115
3.8	Distribution of Interstate Migration Type, by Jewish Identity: Total Core Jews and Those Age 25–34 (U.S.-Born Only)	119
3.9	Distribution of Interregional Migration Type, by Region of Birth: Core Jews/Peripheral Population and Jewish Identity(U.S.-Born Only)	122
3.10	Distribution of Interregional Migration Type, by Age: Core Jews and Peripheral Population (U.S.-Born Only)	124
3.11	Distribution of Interregional Migration Type, by Current Region of Residence: Core Jews/Peripheral Population and Jewish Identity (U.S.-Born Only)	126
3.12	Distribution of Interregional Migration at Birth, in 1985, and in 1990, by Region, and Net Regional Change: Core Jews/Peripheral Population and Jewish Identity (U.S.-Born Only)	128
4.1	Distribution by Lifetime and Five-Year Migration Status, by Education and Sex, Age Standardized: Core Jews	142
4.2	Distribution by Five-Year Migration Status, by Education and Sex, Persons Age 25–34: Core Jews	145