

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier*, A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society, by MARSHALL SKLARE and JOSEPH GREENBLUM, The Lakeville Studies, Volume I (New York, London: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1966).

*Reviewed by Ben Lappin*

In the study *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier*, Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum bring us a familiar but nevertheless revealing story. It is not a very happy story but by this time we have become used to the hard fact that there is more to Jewish survival than a kind of panicky search for the misplaced guarantee of group continuity that seems to have disappeared from under our very eyes.

Although this is a piece of thorough-going research, at the same time the word "story" is perhaps not inappropriate as a descriptive term of the work. For the most part the reader is too occupied with Lakeville's Jews and their efforts to take meaning out of their heritage to be overly aware that a body of empirical data is in fact being processed by social scientists.

At the outset the authors make the point that Lakeville was chosen

not primarily to give us a picture of the contemporary Jewish scene; they were especially interested in searching out a locality comprised of people who are likely to be encountered in the American Jewish community of tomorrow. They found such a locale in the posh suburban enclave of Lakeville (a pseudonym for the actual locus of the study) among whose twenty-five thousand residents there are some eight thousand Jews. Thus, events as they are revealed in Lakeville embody an element of predictability about Jewish identity on the suburban frontier.

By all counts the Jews of Lakeville have made it. Median total family income is over eighteen thousand dollars and going up. The rate of social mobility is very high and so is the level of secular education. They are avid patrons of the arts and a wide variety of cultural enterprises. Moreover they are by no means newcomers to the Amer-

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ican scene. The substantial proportion of descendents reaching into the third and fourth generation attests to the fact that acculturation to the larger environment has proceeded over a longer period in Lakeville than is customary for the American Jew living in most of the nation's communities.

These achievements have come at a price and the price as might be expected, is in terms of Jewish identity. The over-reaching result is an uneven development in which the Lakeville Jew emerges as a sophisticate in the mainstream of American life and something of a babe in the woods when he ventures toward his Jewish origin. Indeed in their diverse attempts to give circumscribed meaning to their life as an identifiable group, the Jews of Lakeville seem at times to be acting out some baffling existential parody heavily impacted with nonsense. This is epitomized in the Alice-in-Wonderland observation of a deeply-alienated respondent who is a member of the Lakeville Temple which caters to a membership with a minimal interest in Jewish identity. Says this woman, "I think most members of the congregation don't want to be Jewish but want to give their children more than they had, and this is closest to nothing they can dream up."

Although this statement comes from an individual with an extreme assimilationist outlook, it is not altogether unreflective of the ambivalence felt by Lakeville's Jews as they attempt to bring into harmony their role as influenced by the surrounding Christian secular world and their position as carriers of the

Jewish tradition. The interplay of these two pressures has produced something in the nature of an "iron law" for the maintenance of ritual practice although, in fact, it seems to operate in the other areas of Jewish identity in the suburbs.

Thus, as the authors point out, the highest degree of retention will occur when a ritual can be recast in modern forms, its practice does not call for ghettoization or marked difference from the general life style, is in harmony with the larger community's religious outlook, is child-centered, and finally is observed annually or at most, during infrequent intervals. In the light of such limiting criteria, it is no surprise to learn that there has been a sharp decline in the matter of keeping up religious observances. Nor has the marked slack in sacramentalism (i.e. ritualism) been taken up by a deepened concern with religious and moral precepts of a specifically Jewish nature. By and large, the Lakeville Jew equates his unique religious values with humanistic generalities of a universal character.

Yet within the confines the Jews of Lakeville have set for themselves, they do evince an active concern with their ethnic roots. They are staunch synagogue affiliates; fully two-thirds of those interviewed belong to congregations. More than nine out of ten families with children over eighteen years of age are past or present members of a local congregation. As may be expected the crucial function of the synagogue is Jewish education of the children. The vast majority of the parents enroll their youngsters in various types of congregational

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schools with a frequency considerably greater than that with which they as children were enrolled.

At the same time, the synagogue as an educational and religious institution carries on in marked detachment from the family. Children bring their education back to homes largely empty of religious commitment or adult Jewish studies. Very little interest is evinced in synagogue services — no more than six percent of Lakeville's Jews regularly attend weekly services as compared with twenty-two percent for the Protestants and seventy-three percent for the Catholics. However, the record of the other two religious groups is closely approximated in the matter of non-religious involvements in congregational life, dealing with buildings and grounds, interfaith work, and the like.

The intensive interest in secular activities extends beyond the synagogue in Lakeville to include the familiar brace of Jewish organizations which offer among other things, scope for participation in health and welfare work, interfaith programs, local and overseas fund raising, and so forth. Prominent among these is, of course, the mustering of financial support for Israel. Generally speaking the Lakeville Jews are pro-Israel but significantly only one percent of the respondents look with favor on aliyah.\*

It emerges that one of the overriding concerns in all of these activities is the pervasive search for friendship. Relationships with non-

Jews, which is of such primary importance in Lakeville is, after all, something formal. For close friendships about nine out of ten of those interviewed search out other Jews—a proportion even higher than was the case with the parents of the present generation. Thus one of the truly distinguishing characteristics of Lakeville's Jews is what Sklare and Greenblum refer to as "associational Jewishness." Whereas the religious ties have slipped considerably when compared with the previous generations, associational Jewishness has, if anything, increased. Within these homogenous circles Jewishness has, if anything, increased. Within these homogenous circles there is surcease from the exacting role of ambassador to the Gentile world that the Lakeville Jew sees himself carrying. The informal friendship group acts in the nature of a safety valve where one does not have to keep up with the drinking patterns of non-Jewish friends, where one can freely crack Jewish jokes, fling about Yiddish phrases and even "kibbitz" once in a while about Gentiles without detracting from the exemplary behavior the rigid ambassadorial role calls into play. As one respondent indicates, relationship with other Jews is something akin to a family feeling free of tension.

Naturally, the Lakeville Jews do not react with uniform interest or involvement to their cultural background; generally speaking, proximity to East European roots, degree of religious observance in the

\* *Jewish Identity in the Suburban Frontier* was completed, of course, before the Six-Day War.

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homes of families of orientation, the strong Jewish upbringing of respondents — all of these factors are positively related to higher levels of Jewish affirmation. But on the whole we get a picture of Jews who in the majority accept as a matter of fact the “legitimacy of Jewish identification” but devoid of a high level of commitment. Be that as it may, the Jewish community of Lakeville would like to hand this reduced heritage down to their children and see it perpetuated by the next generation. But there is a nagging uncertainty in the community about Jewish survival. The concern about inter-marriage is widespread and includes even those with the most assimilationist outlook. Yet the problem remains muted. The parents feel that they can no longer dictate to their children in the matter of choosing a marriage partner. In any event to insist loudly and clearly that their children marry within the fold might seem unduly clannish from members of a community so overwhelmingly integration-minded.

What emerges for the reader is an old picture of a culture being handed down comprised not so much of knowledge, values and practices, as of vaguely conveyed perplexities and concerns. Implicit is the need for tightly knit group cohesion to ensure that all parties are clued in to the subtle, almost evasive content of this inter-generational transaction. In dealing with their children the Jews of Lakeville lack a sense of authority in the matter of shaping their destiny as a group. Their preoccupation with the larger environment is intense and

their attempt at accommodating themselves to it is ceaseless. They seem to work so hard at integration that ironically, the very process of adjustment transforms itself before the reader's eyes into a sort of distinguishing ethnic feature; the Jews appear to be like everyone else in Lakeville — only more so!

The authors eschew the role of judge or critic of Lakeville Jewry. From time to time they draw inferences from the evidence before them or they may point a finger at certain danger signals. For example, they question the viability of group survival based on “associational Jewishness” emphasizing patterns of friendship ties but unilluminated by Jewish ideologies. Nor do they venture beyond the portrait they have given us of what the suburban Jew of the future is apt to look like. Reticence on the part of disciplined scholars to indulge in heavy speculations on their findings is understandable. Thus whether they are genuinely committed to Jewish survival in Lakeville is something the reader must ponder on his own.

What the evidence seems to suggest is that while the Lakeville resident is not denying his Jewish identity, neither is he inclined to become a crusading protagonist for a Jewish renaissance in America. But then, replenishment of the heritage that is being trimmed to suburban specifications may hardly be an assignment for the Jew in Lakeville. This may be a more likely job for an inspired zealot who is not interested in optimum visibility for his Jewishness but determined to make an impact with it on Amer-

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ica's open pluralistic society. Whether such fanatics are appearing at all, who they may be, where they are and what they are doing

might be the subject of further research which could yield useful information of yet another sort.

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*The Making of Ministers*, edited by KEITH R. BRIDSTON and DWIGHT W. CULVER (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964).

*Pre-Seminary Education*, edited by KEITH R. BRIDSTON and DWIGHT W. CULVER (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965).

*The Seminary: Protestant and Catholic*, by WALTER D. WAGONER (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966).

*Reviewed by*  
Charles S. Liebman

These are three books in a growing literature on the subject of theological education and the preparation of professional religious leaders. The books under review are not especially provocative or exciting. They are, however, of interest to anyone with a concern for religious or theological training.

These and similar studies leave the reader with two impressions: First, Christian theological schools are in serious trouble. They attract many students who are both academically unprepared in terms of their pre-seminary education and intellectually mediocre. Most theological schools, themselves, have outdated curricula which are irrelevant to the concerns of the students and to their future roles as religious professionals.

The second impression with which the reader is left is that the Christian community is addressing

itself to its problems. Many of its thinkers and leaders are concerned about the nature of theological training, about the student in the seminary, and about the preparation he is receiving for his future role. The same cannot be said about the Jewish community. As Rabbi Seymour Siegel of the Jewish Theological Seminary has noted: "The hallmark of the Protestant and Catholic seminary today is renewal and change, the hallmark of Jewish seminaries is tradition and continuity." This is at least as true at Yeshiva University as at any other rabbinical training institution. (Most yeshivot of the right make no pretense at training rabbis as distinct from preparing Talmudical scholars).

The problems of rabbinical seminaries are different from those of Christian seminaries. In some cases they are less critical. But this surely does not account for the relative inattention Jewish leaders inside and outside rabbinical schools have

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paid to the nature of rabbinical training. If anything, the analogy here may be drawn with studies of religious parochial and day schools. Both Catholics and Lutherans have engaged in serious, scholarly and expensive studies on the nature of their parochial schools and the impact which parochial school education has on its graduate.

There is no comparable study of Jewish day schools because no one has seen fit to make money available for such a study, and people in positions of responsibility have not articulated the desperate

need for such research. Such studies are unlikely to occur until one of two conditions are met. Either the Jewish community must establish agencies for scholarly research and analysis which are independent of those institutions which have the greatest stake in the Jewish status quo; or the Jewish community in its totality or in its separate parts must concentrate its support on those few leaders who have the imagination and courage to demand a critical self-evaluation of present institutional conditions.

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