

THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT MEANT IN JEST...

It is a serious attempt by the **National Jewish Outreach Program** to alert concerned Jews to the perilous condition of Jewish life in America. Only by mounting a major outreach offensive of positive and joyous Jewish experiences, can we hope to save the millions of American Jews who have become increasingly estranged from their heritage. For additional copies of this publication, send \$2.00 per copy (\$1.50 each for 10 or more) to: **National Jewish Outreach Program**, 485 Fifth Ave.—Suite 212, New York, NY 10017, or order by phone using Visa or Master Charge — call (212) 986-7450.

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AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE ENDS:

DEATH OF ONCE-VIBRANT COMMUNITY CALLED SHOCKING!

by I. M. Atzav

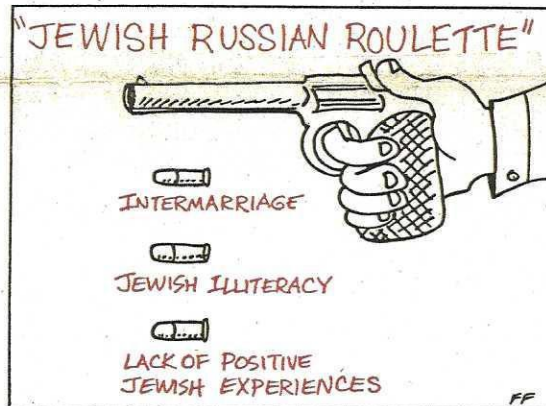
American Jewish history came to a tragic conclusion yesterday when the **National Jewish Congress**, the last major Jewish organization in America, closed its doors. Martin Steinberg, President of NJC, announced on Friday that as of June 30, 2025, the organization would terminate its activities. The National Jewish Congress was formed when the major Jewish organizations which flourished in the 20th century ceased operations and merged into a single national organization.

"It's absolutely shocking," said Elan Shine, a sociologist and leading expert on assimilation and intermarriage. "American sociologists have long feared the demise of American Jewish communal life, but none of us foresaw the rapidity with which it would happen."

Since the early 1990's large numbers of American Jewish organizations have discontinued operations as their memberships aged and young Jews failed to replace them. "We hoped young Jews would be attracted to Jewish organizational life because of the vital nature of our work," said Steinberg of NJC. Among the activities he enumerated were immigrant absorption in the United States, support for the State of Israel, Holocaust memorials, Jewish child care, care for the aged, Jewish community and cultural centers, Jewish hospitals, and defense from anti-Semitic activities. "We thought to ourselves, what could be more noble or more inspiring to our young people than these causes?" "But," said Steinberg, "Young Jews were totally swept away by American concerns, and largely indifferent to

Jewish concerns."

Steinberg solemnly described how difficult it was to inspire young Jews to get involved in Jewish philanthropic endeavors. "The magic just wasn't there for them, as it had been for their parents and grandparents," said Steinberg. "The blandishments of America were just too great, and Jewish concerns couldn't begin to compete with mainstream American culture."



Who's To Blame?

Steinberg refused to point a finger or ascribe blame. But, referring to the ubiquitous studies of Ameri-

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TERMINAL JUDAISM

An Analysis

by Chaim Churban

Students of American Jewish life around the world are asking themselves: How did it happen? Where did American Jewish leadership go wrong? How did one of the greatest Jewish communities of all time come to such a rapid, dramatic and dismal end?

Less than 50 years ago, the American Jewish community took pride in its outstanding sons and daughters, Henry Kissinger, Barbra Streisand, Paul Simon, Steven Spielberg, Woody Allen, Barbara Walters, Arthur Goldberg, Ed Koch, and even an Orthodox Jewish senator, Joseph Lieberman. But today, with the closing of the National Jewish Congress, organized American Jewish life ceases. Gone are the B'nai Briths and Hadassahs, the Jewish Welfare Board, and even the United Jewish Appeal.

"We were able to effectively document the decline of Jewish life in America, but we seemed unable to do anything about it," said Prof. Sandra Friedman, professor of Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University until it closed in 2015. "In 1977, when Elihu Bergman of Harvard's Center for Population Studies predicted that by the year 2076 there would be no more than 1,000,000 Jews and possibly as few as 10,000 Jews left in America, his study was ridiculed. But now it is obvious that

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THE YOUNG JEW OF THE 90'S

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An Analysis:

Terminal Judaism

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his prediction and his statistical analysis were only too prescient." As early as 1990, surveys showed that 600,000 American Jews, fully 10% of the Jewish population, were practicing religions other than Judaism. Friedman calculates that there are fewer than half a million identifying Jews left in America, and the number is rapidly shrinking.

Causes of the Collapse

Students of American Jewish life are busily searching for reasons for the collapse of this once-vibrant community. Most scholars say it is impossible to point to any single turning point as the "nail in the coffin" of American Jewry.

"It wasn't a single major event, but rather a confluence of small events, each of which contributed to the ultimate extinction of Jewish life in America," said Stefan L. Kahan, a major American Jewish sociologist. "It wasn't Brandeis University's decision to serve pork and shrimp in the cafeteria, or USJES's insistence on retaining the services of an intermarried executive to lead its Kesser Foundation, or the decision of the Reform movement to acknowledge patrilineal descent, which sealed the fate of American Jewish destiny," said Kahan. "But when you put it all together, and multiply it by thousands of individual Jewish communal decisions, which progressively ate away at the body of Jewish tradition — that clinched the demise of Jewish life in America."

While most students of American Jewish life subscribe to the so-called "degenerative theory" as the cause of American Jewish decline, two important contributing factors are often singled out: Diversion of funds to other important causes, and the lack of Jewish education which led to widespread devaluation of Judaism.

"It was like the shoemaker's children who had no shoes," said Hal Sonnenshein, the Executive Director of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Institutions, which closed its doors in 2017. "We were raising billions upon billions of dollars for the State of Israel, for Jewish social welfare, for resettling the Jews of the Soviet Union, for rescuing Ethiopian and

Syrian Jews. While we expended extraordinary efforts on our brothers and sisters of far off lands, we effectively abandoned our own sons and daughters in America." Sonnenshein pointed out that there was no question that funds were desperately needed for the worldwide rescue efforts. But somehow American Jews lost perspective and failed to establish proper priorities to ensure an American Jewish future. So, maintains Sonnenshein, when the last of the generation of traditional Jewish philanthropists, who gave millions each year to the UJA, died in the late 1990's, none of their children were disposed to continue their family's Jewish philanthropic tradition.

Sonnenshein points out that ironically the Jewish community was left, as Jewish tradition says, "bald on this side and bald on that side," there was no money left to nurture the next generation of Jewish givers, and there was no longer any money left for Jewish rescue and support for Israel. "Had we known then what we know now," says Sonnenshein, "we would have declared a series of emergency campaigns to raise funds for the intensive education of young Jews and for the development of Jewish identity."

Decline of Jewish Education

The final issue of *Commenting*, which ceased publication in the fall of 2010, records the farewell address of Jason Butcher, Executive Director of United States Jewish Educational Services. Dr. Butcher recalls with depressing clarity the decline of American Jewish education. "It was already obvious by 1990 that the American Jewish educational establishment was in shambles. From 1965 through 1990, there was a precipitous decline of 300,000 children enrolled in afternoon Hebrew and Sunday schools, but it never became a cause celebre. A dozen Carmelite nuns opened a convent in Auschwitz, and that ironically was front page news for weeks, and a cause of Jewish communal concern for years. But intensive Jewish education just couldn't evoke a serious reaction from American Jewish leaders. They basically ignored the monumental crisis

in Jewish education. Federation leaders regularly paid lip service to Jewish education: "Superfund!" "Megafund!" All sorts of hype! But even the largest federation in America, the New York area federation, contributed only \$90.60 per child annually for Jewish education. And that was at a time in the early 1990's, when New York Federation raised record amounts of money!

publicly acknowledged in 1990 in the *New York Times* that 600,000 American Jews had converted out of Judaism, there was absolutely no reaction. The report of the North American Jewish Population Study that over one million American Jewish children were being raised as non-Jews or with no religion at all, was virtually ignored.

"We were raising... billions of dollars for the State of Israel, for resettling and rescuing Jews... while we effectively abandoned our own sons and daughters in America."

Mr. and Mrs. Gruss fought valiantly to make a difference. But without the general support of communal leadership, even a hundred Grusses couldn't have made a difference."

A Leadership of Denial

In the final analysis, "a community that lost its way" is how to best describe the late American Jewish community. Jewish leadership just refused to accept the reports that the Jewish community was stricken with a terminal illness. Denial was rampant. Ironically, all one had to do was open the society columns on Sunday and Monday to clearly see what was happening. Jewish leaders unabashedly announced their children's intermarriages on the *New York Times* society pages. Even experts on the Holocaust and executives of Holocaust memorial museums prominently announced their children's marriages in churches. This irony was unacknowledged. Jewish organizations regularly sanitized the statistics of Jewish defection. Charles Silberman and other Jewish sociologists spoke of the "golden age" of American Jewish life. But, when it was



The community's leadership in the late 20th century was a leadership of denial. It was a community founded on illiteracy, and led by well-meaning people who had little basic Jewish education. In over 3,300 years of Jewish history not a single Jewish community was able to survive the challenge of Jewish illiteracy. American Jews thought they could beat those odds. Sadly, history was repeated. The golden age of American Jewry went the way of the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry. But unlike Spain, it was its own undoing. ■

American Jewish Life Ends

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can Jewish life, conducted during the last half of the 20th century, he noted that, "It was as clear as day why we were losing our young Jews. Most young Jews just never had any positive Jewish experiences to excite them about their Jewishness. And they were absolutely illiterate about their Judaism. They really never had a chance to survive as Jews."

Steinberg suggested that while American Jewish leaders were well aware of the disenchantment of the young, most major Jewish organizations seemed unwilling or unable to do anything about it. "We often discussed the need to inspire young Jews in America," said Steinberg. "But every time we seriously considered any plan to reach out to the disaffected and unaffiliated Jews here, we were always diverted by the needs of Jews elsewhere. There was always a crisis — a war in Israel, a miraculous immigration from Russia, the rescue of Jews from Ethiopia and Syria, which shifted our attention and our resources. By the time we realized that a whole generation of young Jews had little or no connection to Jewish life, it was too late to retrieve them."

Victims of Success

American Jews first settled in

North America in 1654, and developed one of the most remarkable and successful communities. Most early Jewish immigrants were Sephardim, who settled in major urban centers. Haym Salomon, the financier of the Revolutionary War, was one of the early American national heroes. Later, German-Jewish immigrants established some of the most highly regarded institutions in America: the Warburgs, the Seligmans, the Lehmanns, the Loebes, the Strauses and the Guggenheims. But Jewish life in America truly blossomed into its golden era after World War II, when Eastern European Jews and their descendants started playing major roles in every arena of American life: science, medicine, law, literature, finance, education, politics. Over 25% of American Nobel prize winners were Jewish. Indeed, the theme most often repeated by students of American Jewish sociology is that American Jews were victims of their own success.

While small pockets of Orthodox Jewish life still survive in some major urban areas, this year, 2025, and the closing of the National Jewish Congress, will undoubtedly be acknowledged as the historic end of Jewish communal life in America. ■



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The **National Jewish Outreach Program (NJOP)** is an independent, non-profit organization which reaches out to unaffiliated Jews with the hope of winning them back to Jewish life through positive and joyous Jewish experiences. Founded in 1987 by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, the National Jewish Outreach Program has already reached over 100,000 unaffiliated Jews (as of 10/92).

Editorial:

A Meaningless "Never Again"

In the late 20th century, "Never Again" served as a powerful clarion cry which resounded throughout the international Jewish community. Rabbi Meir Kahane utilized the slogan effectively to gain visibility for the Jewish Defense League. This did not stop mainstream Jewish organizations, which normally eschewed association with the JDL, from adopting "Never Again" as a Jewish national rallying cry, in fact a sacred oath, never to allow Jews to be defenseless victims of hatred and persecution.

Unfortunately, what most Jews failed to realize was that the greater enemy was internal, not external. Throughout Jewish history, far more Jews have succumbed to the blandishments of assimilation than have been victims of all holocausts, executions, expulsions and pogroms combined. Persecutions notwithstanding, were it not for assimilation, there would be today over 100 million Jews in the world, not 13 million.

What became increasingly obvious is that, for American Jews, "Never Again" was not so much a slogan against the death of Jews, but rather an outcry against the "method" of extermination — by violence. Otherwise, American Jews would never have allowed the "silent Holocaust" to ravage the Jewish young people, without putting up a battle. Had Jewish defense organizations, which fastidiously reported every anti-Semitic incident, held press conferences for every synagogue defacing, and demanded face-to-face meetings with world leaders of countries with anti-Semitic histories, expended only a fraction of that energy battling American Jewish assimilation, "Never Again" would not be the hollow slogan it has tragically come to be today.

Editorial:

"Final Exit" for America's Jews

In the early 1990's, *Final Exit* a book which offers practical and technical advice to those who seek to terminate their lives, became a controversial best-seller.

The year 2025 marks the "final exit" for America's Jews, and the final edition of our newspaper. However, we would like to leave on a more positive note.

We urge all Jewish communities the world over not to repeat our errors. We implore you to "choose life," by considering the following:

- 1) **Intensive Jewish Education** - Make certain that you and your children obtain the most intensive Jewish education possible. You can't overdose on Jewish knowledge, and remember that you never outgrow your need for Jewish education. In an open, pluralistic society, especially in a society where Judaism is a minority culture, make certain your children attend intensive Jewish schools, and don't be afraid of being too parochial or separatist. Eventually it all balances out and produces a normal, well-educated, highly identified Jewish person.
- 2) **Positive Jewish Experiences** - Provide yourself and your children with positive, joyous Jewish experiences. Choose your place of residence by selecting an active and inspiring synagogue with a history of effective spiritual leadership, and outstanding educational offerings.
- 3) **Ritual, Ritual, Ritual** - Being a Jew is a skill which needs to be mastered. The most effective way of mastering the art of being a Jew is by practicing Jewish rituals. Three thousand years of Jewish history prove conclusively that rituals work to ensure Jewish survival. Celebrate the Shabbat, keep a kosher home, attend synagogue regularly, practice honesty in business and in all aspects of life, do acts of kindness and charity. Reinforce all of the above with study, study, study.

A Jewish Profile:

The Young Jew of the 90's

by Ayn Tikvah

It was the 1990's. The decade of yuppiehood had come to an abrupt and painful end. The junk bond market had collapsed. Jewish organizations were cutting and consolidating, trying desperately to deal with the serious recession of the early 1990's.

A spiritual awakening was taking place in America. Catholics and Protestants were returning to the religious fold, but Jews were walking away from their Judaism in record numbers. A small number of American Jews saw Israel and aliyah as an answer. Several thousand young Jews enrolled in outreach programs which networked across America and Canada. But, while virtually every report conducted at that time indicated that young American Jews of the early 1990's were interested in finding out about their Jewish roots, very few avenues of opportunity were available to them.

American Jewish life was hermetically sealed. Synagogues were foreboding, looked upon as places which suckered money, providing

Newsweek magazine in July 1991 summed up the American Jewish reality: "Most American Jews try to get through life with no more knowledge of Judaism than what a 13-year-old can master for his bar mitzvah. In today's America, that is not enough wisdom or commitment to maintain a durable identity as a Jew."

By the middle of the final decade of the twentieth century, congressional leaders realized that half of the reputed 4.8 million identified Jews in America were unaffiliated, that young Jews had virtually no Jewish identity, and were not concerned with Jewish life in America or in Israel. Jewish political contributions declined precipitously, and AIPEC, the most powerful American Israel lobby, lost its impact. From 1995 to the year 2000, American financial support for Israel evaporated. The American Jewish political base was in ruins.

Killed By Kindness

Historically, maintaining one's identity as a Jew has always been more difficult during periods of abundance

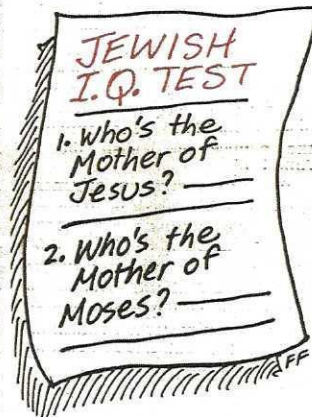
"By the time we realized that a whole generation of young Jews had little or no connection to Jewish life, it was too late to retrieve them."

painfully little spiritual inspiration. Jewish educational institutions were woefully ineffective. Afternoon Hebrew schools were, for the most part, an unmitigated disaster. Moshe Rosenfeld, one of the leaders of the Jews for Jesus movement, was reported as saying, "If I had the money, I would pay to send every American Jewish child to an afternoon Hebrew school, because it has proven to be the greatest turnoff to Jewish life. After the Hebrew school experience, these Jews are easy prey for our Jews for Jesus missionaries."

No Intensive Education

For most young American Jews, Day School education was just not an option. Jewish parents had been prejudiced into thinking that intensive Jewish education was too parochial and narrow. Despite the fact that Day School graduates went on to prominent positions of leadership in industry, government, finance and law, the attitude constantly promoted by most major American Jewish organizations to their members, was that Day School education was narrow and not in consonance with the democratic spirit of America. Consequently, the average young American Jew of the 1990's was largely ignorant of Jewish life. Most had never seen Jewish rituals performed, and often felt that Israel was a racist totalitarian country.

By the late 1990's, there were pitifully few grandfathers and grandmothers able to show their grandchildren how to light Sabbath candles and how to recite the kiddush over the wine,



than in periods of adversity. Young American Jews were "killed" by kindness in America. But, the net result was no different from the periods of brutal extermination and mass murders. "When Pharaoh asked Moses, 'Who will be leaving Egypt?,' Moses responded, 'We will leave with our young and with our old,'" said Rabbi Saul Leibowitz, the last President of the long-defunct American Commission of Rabbis. "Tragically, we have no young Jews today. And as soon as we old timers go, so will Jewish life in America!" ■

The American Holocaust

by Solomon Hasof

"Holocaust" is a word which evokes tremendous emotion.

In the 20th century, Holocaust was generally associated with the organized demonic efforts of the German Nazis to destroy world

Jewry. During the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's, Holocaust fever swept America. More books were published on the Holocaust than on any other Jewish topic. The average Jewish American child knew

of Hitler and Eichmann, but could not identify Moses, Aaron or Abraham.

Holocaust study centers were opened in universities throughout America. Jews who were totally ignorant of the ABCs of Judaism, enrolled in intensive courses analyzing the most obscure details of the European Jewish Holocaust. Jews who had never opened a Bible, were often thoroughly familiar with the works of Hilberg and Dawidowicz. Jews who had never read a book of Jewish philosophy, became totally conversant with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the autobiography of Rudolph Hoess.

Holocaust memorials were built in every major city in America and Canada. Some cities, like Los Angeles, had two or three Holocaust memorials. By the early 1990's, 19 Holocaust memorials were built, and 36 research centers or libraries of Holocaust study had opened. Over one billion dollars in capital expenses were allocated for Holocaust memorials. Monies poured in, as if the spigot would never close. Billions were being spent on Holocaust memorials, but only pennies on Jewish education.

The plethora of Holocaust memorials conveyed a

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Orthodoxy In America

The Embattled Remnant

by Chasida Haredi

"Remnant philosophy" has long been a controversial theory of Jewish survival. "Remnant philosophy" maintains that throughout Jewish history, after every major decline in Jewish life, only a very small minority of committed Jews survive to rebuild.

In America, in the year 2025, only small pockets of Orthodox Jewish life remain. But even the most committed Jews are finding it difficult to survive.

In the late 1900's and the early 2000's, while the Conservative and Reform movements in America were experiencing rapid decline, American Orthodoxy appeared to be flourishing. By the year 2000, much of the Conservative movement's committed laity had vanished, and Conservative rabbis were unable to "hold the fort" for the few traditionalists left in the movement. Similarly, while the Reform movement claimed ever-growing numbers of adherents, American Jewish Reform life had become so populated by non-conversionary intermarried couples, that Reform synagogues lost much of their Jewish character. Soon after, the Conservative and Reform movements merged, becoming for the most part, a movement serving intermarried Jews and their spouses.

"One of the great tragedies of my life, has been my duty to preside over the Department of Synagogue Liquidation, which we have had to establish at the Union of American Reform Congregations," said Eli Schneider, the last remaining staff member of the UARC, which closed its portals in the year 2020. "We thought 'patrilineal descent' would be a way of strengthening Jewish life in America, but it definitely backfired, resulting in thousands of non-Jews who had married Jews, no longer

feeling the need to convert to Judaism, further weakening the Jewish fabric. We really had the best of intentions. We were wrong."

Orthodoxy on the Roll

By the late 1980's it looked like American Orthodoxy was on a roll. There was a strong movement to the right. Thousands of Orthodox Jews were engaged in intensive Jewish study. Daf Yomi, the daily page of the Talmud study, was an idea whose time had come. Rabbinic schools were overflowing. American Orthodoxy was feeling its oats, with record numbers of children enrolled in intensive yeshivot and young adults vying for places in intensely competitive high schools and post-high school study programs. The diversity of Kosher food products, and kosher eateries, was mind-boggling. American Orthodoxy was also becoming affluent; not a few Orthodox names appearing on the Forbes 400 list. Many traditionally oriented non-Orthodox philanthropists were also contributing huge sums to Orthodox causes. New yeshivot and advanced Talmudic programs were

springing up throughout the country. Extravagant buildings were built. Formerly impoverished yeshiva students were now luxuriating in state-of-the-art study halls. Dozens of schools were building multi-million dollar edifices. Additional millions upon millions of dollars were sent to schools in Israel, where young American Orthodox Jews went to study for several years. Tens of millions of dollars were spent annually on Glatt Kosher Passover vacations. Women's wigs were selling for over \$2,000, featuring the latest hairstyles. By the late 1980's, until the onset of the recession, Orthodox Jewry felt that it was no longer dependent upon non-Orthodox Jews for financial support, and often alienated them with pronouncements denouncing non-Orthodoxy.

The Decline of Orthodoxy

By the mid-1990's the wheel of fortune had turned, and Orthodox Jewish leaders were back on the streets with their hats in hand, once again trying to collect funds from non-Orthodox sources. Be-

cause of Orthodoxy's failure to draw non-Orthodox Jews closer to tradition, these fundraising efforts were often in vain, and American Orthodoxy went through one of its most wrenching financial crises. Thousands of "young" men, who had spent decades in full-time study at intensive Jewish Kollel facilities, were no longer able to count on the broadhanded support of their families. Because of the recession, the reliable and generous contributions of well known leaders simply evaporated. By then there were thousands of 2nd and 3rd generation Kollel families with absolutely no means of support. In many instances, because of lack of secular education or vocational preparation, young people were unable to go out to earn a living and provide for their burgeoning families. Kollel families became a major financial drain on those Orthodox Jews who were gainfully employed.

Despite the fact that by the early 1990's, Orthodox Jews were contributing over \$1 billion annually toward Jewish education for their children and for the support of Orthodox Jewish charities, the financial requirements became too great to bear. Teachers, who had been teaching without compensation for months, were forced to leave the schools. Kollel institutions began to close. Young families who refused to compromise their religious lifestyle or to find gainful employment, chose instead to move to Israel to continue their intensive Torah studies.

America began to decline as a Torah center. Orthodox communities began to amalgamate, as smaller and weaker Orthodox Jewish communities were forced to close down. Morasha Publications, the publishers of the JudaicScroll translation Torah books, which had sold millions of volumes during the late 1980's and early 1990's, was forced into bankruptcy. Torah University closed its Jewish teachers program, and its school for novice students. The financial burden of maintaining their famed medical, law and business schools became too great to bear, leading them to separate from the university, to function as independent educational institutions. Torah University's rabbinic seminary went into a major decline. Only a handful of students remain in the rapidly crumbling main center.

American Orthodoxy - the great hope for Jewish survival toward the end of the 20th century - was left gravely weakened. A remnant, waiting to be redeemed. ■



The American Holocaust

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subliminally destructive message to young Jews: Being a Jew means being a victim. There is no joy in surviving as a Jew. Ironically, funds which were desperately needed to reach out to alienated Jews, were used to further alienate Jews.

By the early 1990's, questions were being raised about the efficacy of spending the enormous sums on Holocaust memorials, duplicating projects which already existed



"I was able to raise tens of millions of dollars for dead Jews... but people just wouldn't respond to our efforts to ensure a Jewish future for the living!"

elsewhere. The Holocaust centers in Washington, D.C., New York, and Los Angeles each claimed uniqueness, each professing to emphasize positive aspects of Jewish life.

By the second decade of the new millennium, the Holocaust centers were forced to undergo a transformation, ironically, becoming memorials to American Jewish life. Rabbi Aron Elyon, whose Samuel

Weinberg Center had, by the early 1990's, become the most successful and fastest-growing Jewish organization in America, recalled his intention to create a Holocaust center which would inspire young Jews to want to live as Jews. After spending 50 million dollars on building the martyrs museum, he was forced to close down the Yeshiva which was associated with the Holocaust center, because of

lack of interest, enrollment and financial support. "I was able to raise tens of millions of dollars for dead Jews," said Elyon, "but people just wouldn't respond to our efforts to ensure a Jewish future for the living!"

The American Jewish Holocaust was in full bloom. American Jewish leaders steadfastly refused to acknowledge that ignorance and indifference destroy Jews as effectively as ovens and gas chambers; that the net result of a spiritual holocaust is exactly the same as a physical holocaust — no Jews!

Mournfully, American Jews learned that lesson only too late. ■

Enough Is Enough!

Jewish life in America must not be allowed to end in tragedy — you can make the difference!

Find out what you can do by joining our vital efforts. Call or write:



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