Demographic Studies of Jewish Communities in the United States: A Bibliographic Introduction and Survey

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Introduction

Coinciding with America’s Bicentennial celebration in the decade of the 1970’s has been the pronounced surge of ethnic consciousness and pride among the country’s minority groups. For worldwide Jewry, such self-awareness has always been present—an intrinsic part of a long, proud and often tumultuous history. However, in the United States, there is an ever-growing concern for examining the Jewish experience in the specific context of the American milieu—for enumerating and analyzing problems, and for reflecting on the future direction and prospects of this nation’s six million Jews. Students of American Jewry who have devoted themselves to these questions have long sought a demographically comprehensive and systematic treatment of the subject from a broad, national perspective. Although efforts in that direction have borne fruit, perhaps the major source of information about Jews in the United States remains a myriad of community studies and surveys of Jewish populations conducted primarily by or for local Jewish organizations and having essentially local or regional concerns as their underlying motivation or generating force. The findings of selected reports appear from time to time (in the American Jewish Year Book, for example), but no
bibliographic guide to them as such has ever been prepared. In part, this may be explained by the mimeographic format and restricted circulation of much of this material. However, the increased demand for ethnically-related sources in our libraries and schools makes it imperative that we learn more about this wealth of primary data on the Jews of America. This essay and bibliography represent a modest introductory effort to that end.

From the standpoint of categorization, these studies are characteristic of “demography” in both the narrow and broader senses of the term. Narrowly defined, demography is the quantitative study of human populations using censuses, vital statistics, and sample surveys to measure and analyze the basic processes of human birth, death, population movement, and population growth. The primary concern here is with population structure—that is, the age, sex, and marital composition of the population. However, a wider definition encompasses the treatment of demographic variables in their social contexts as well as their biological contexts, and considers socio-economic characteristics such as language, religious belief, education, occupation, and income in their own right or in relation to factors such as birth rate, death rate, and migration.¹ The reports and surveys discussed here consider some or all of these demographic factors as they are manifested in individual Jewish communities around the country.

Beyond their demographic focus, however, there are certain distinctions among the many existing studies. As noted, most of these reports are produced by or for Jewish federations and community organizations—bodies concerned with fund raising, planning and coordinating services, and even occasionally directly administering local projects and programs. Thus, while a few surveys are undertaken simply for the purposes of general information or community enlightenment, many more are geared towards very specific community planning needs. This explains why many of the studies concentrate on a given aspect of Jewish community life such as family services, health care, recreational and educational

facilities, pre-school programs, services for children or the elderly, vocational training, community center development—or a combination of these concerns. Many studies, incorporating opinion surveys in their analyses, seek to identify individual and group perceptions of economic and political issues, the extent of personal religious commitment or conviction, attitudes towards intermarriage and conversion, relations with non-Jewish neighbors, anti-Semitism, and similar themes. In terms of methodology, these reports reflect a broad spectrum of types: many, particularly those prepared after the 1940's, employ accepted scientific methods for the compilation and analysis of data, while others present what are little more than rough estimations or projections. The difference depends upon such things as the manner by which the sample population is selected, the quality and training of the interviewers and analysts, and the care with which the mass of findings is interpreted.

The mixed quality and varied objectives of these demographic surveys and the reluctance of scholars to draw national conclusions from local or regional data have been contributory factors in the quest for a study of America's Jewish population undertaken from a national perspective. It is generally conceded that scholarship in this area has been hampered by the absence of a single authoritative source of information on American Jewry. Because of the doctrine of church-state separation in this country, the United States decennial census counts have never included a question on religion, although they do contain valuable data on mother tongue, country of birth, and country of origin. For some time, the closest thing to a national view was data collected by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in a voluntary survey of some 35,000 households in 1957—and tabulations of these data first made public a decade later. More recently, there has been the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds' National Jewish Population Study (1973-75), a series of sample survey reports dealing with

various aspects of Jewish life in the United States. The NJPS is considered a major step forward in the goal of learning more about the condition and attitudes of Jews in contemporary American society.

Nonetheless, it seems fair to argue that, in their totality, surveys of local communities and populations still represent the greatest depth of available information on the Jews of America. It is hoped that this bibliographic introduction can serve as the basis for a more complete and comprehensive inventory of all that has been produced in this area. More importantly, a useful purpose would be served if a means for systematically and regularly monitoring the research efforts of local Jewish organizations could be devised so that a continuing awareness of newly-published reports may be achieved.

Bibliography

The bibliography which follows is divided into two parts: Part 1 is a selected listing of related or ancillary writings which would interest readers of the community surveys. Thus, for example, Horowitz (1961), Rosenwaike (1963 & 1974), and Seidman (1962) discuss the various demographic techniques which are used for making estimates of the Jewish population; R. Goldstein (1967) and S. Goldstein (1971) present national composites of the Jewish population based essentially upon the local studies; Massarik’s article (1966) deals with the manifold intellectual and practical problems of doing research on American Jewry. Part 2 consists of the population surveys themselves. The listing is not a comprehensive one but includes a representative selection of some eighty or so titles which have appeared within the last thirty years, principally in the 1950’s and ’60’s. Communal or social histories, broadly ethnographic treatments, and personal accounts in which the presentation of demographic data is of secondary concern are omitted.

1 See part 1 of the bibliography which follows for further details of the NJPS.
While many of the community population studies are more or less readily available—in large research collections such as that of the Library of Congress or the New York Public Library, for example—still more are not obtainable even in major libraries. Perhaps the major source for these reports is the library of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York City. The library does not seek to maintain a comprehensive collection as such but gathers whatever is sent by the local federations and whatever is discovered through sources such as the Jewish Telegraphic Agency’s weekly *Community News Reporter*. The library’s holdings are, for the most part, recorded, and a catalog, with entries arranged geographically (including both the United States and Canada), is available.¹

**Part I: Related and complementary works**


The *AJYB* includes a regular feature on “Jewish Population in the United States” (by Alvin Chenkin) which breaks down the Jewish population by region, state and local communities with 100 or more Jews, and also includes occasional articles on “Jewish Population Studies in the United States” which review the demographic data presented in community population reports.

The *AJYB* also contains a directory of local community organizations which, in almost all instances, are affiliated with the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. Most of the community studies cited in this bibliography have been sponsored by these Council affiliates.


Under the direction of Dr. Fred Massarik, this constitutes the first comprehensive national study made of the American Jewish population. The *NJPS* was based on a sample of 25,000 Jewish households chosen so as to be representative
called the “informal community” over a span of time. Irving L. Goldberg’s “The Changing Jewish Community of Dallas,” *American Jewish Archives* 11 (April, 1959), 82–97, is an example of largely personal reflection on Jewish life and attitudes.

¹ I am grateful to the council’s librarian, Ms. Susan Grossman, who discussed the library’s holdings and made the collection available in the midst of preparations for a move.
of the total U.S. Jewish population: The sample included communities of all sizes and in all parts of the country, with random samplings to include Jews not on any organizational lists as well as those who were.

The Study's various parts include the following: "Demographic Highlights" (no date, 29pp.); "Methodology" (n.d., 42pp. + appendices); "National and Regional Population Counts" (Dec., 1974, 6pp.); "Mobility" (May, 1974, 6pp.); "Intermarriage" (n.d., 18pp.); "Jewish Community Services" (June, 1975, 11pp.); "Jewish Identity" (Dec., 1974, 18pp.); and, "The Jewish Aging" (1973, 5pp.)


This study's data are "indicative of selected trends and characteristics of American Jews during the past twenty years. The sources utilized here have been the available population studies of local Jewish communities" (Preface, p.ii.) The study treats nativity, marital status, intermarriage, occupational status, secular education, religious education, congregational affiliation and organizational affiliation.


The author discusses community population studies under the heading of "sources and limitations of data," and goes on to evaluate the existing status and future prospects of the Jewish community in the United States through an analysis of the group's demographic structure. He considers the factors of population size and growth, mortality, fertility, marriage and family, intermarriage, population distribution, suburbanization, migration, generational change, age composition, education, occupation, and income.


The author describes and evaluates techniques used for Jewish population estimates, among them the master list approach, the Jewish-names method, birth and death rate techniques, interpolation from census data, sampling, and the Yom Kippur or school-attendance method. The last of these is recommended as most effective for a study of New York City's Jewish population.

The writer discusses obstacles to systematic empirical research on the American Jew, namely: the lack of relevant census data, problems in arriving at an operational definition of Jewishness, the relatively high level of socio-economic well-being of the American Jewish community, the absence of organizational commitment to abstract research as opposed to fund-raising for various causes, and the personal identity conflicts of American Jewish scholars.

Empirical and retrospective levels of analysis are considered and a "research plan that facilitates the design of sampling surveys of Jewish populations by the use of the distinctive Jewish names device" is proposed.


These essays should be read in conjunction with the NJPS Reports themselves. Massarik and Chenkin (1973) review the NJPS sampling survey, then present basic demographic and socio-economic data and findings on intermarriage emerging from the study. Massarik (1974) presents the over-all estimates for the 1970 Jewish population derived from the NJPS and discusses the distinction between 1.) the population in Jewish households (defined as having at least one Jewish person), and 2.) the number of Jews in such households.


This volume includes population studies of Jewish communities, undertaken during the 1930's, which may be compared to later ones cited in the bibliography which follows in Part 2. The cities covered include Trenton, Passaic, Buffalo, Norwich and New London (a comparative study), Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. An essay by the editor discusses "methods of gathering data on the Jewish population" (pp. 1-9.)


The author describes a technique for converting Yiddish mother tongue statistics (from the 1970 U.S. census) into a portrait of the geographic distribution of the Jewish population within an American metropolis. He then applies the technique to four specific metropolitan areas—the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSAs) of Washington, D.C., Baltimore, St. Louis, and Cleveland—and evaluates the resulting estimates.
For a study on the reporting of the Yiddish mother tongue at earlier censuses, see Rosenwaike's "Utilization of Census Mother Tongue Data in American Jewish Population Analysis," *Jewish Social Studies* XXXIII (April/July, 1971), 141-59.


The author discusses the application of census tract data to the study of Jewish populations and provides an illustration by presenting some characteristics (residential concentration, etc.) from the 1935 census of Hamilton County, Ohio (Greater Cincinnati), which tabulated religious affiliation by race for small areas. Data are also presented on the Jewish populations of Cleveland, Boston, and San Francisco.


Both of these bibliographies, international in scope of coverage, include works dealing with local communities in the United States. Also pertinent here is Schmelz's essay in the 1970 volume, "A Guide to Jewish Population Studies" (Part I, pp. 13-94), which discusses sources, methods and limitations of Jewish demographic research.


The authors analyze mortality rates by sex, age and socioeconomic class among Jews as compared with the general population. The statistical techniques employed are discussed in a special section on methodology.


This essay is based on data obtained in reply to a 1948 poll made by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds of its member agencies, data on other communities obtained in the years since 1949, comparable data on the total white population of those cities for which Jewish data were available, and comparisons with the demographic information in Sophia M. Robison's *Jewish Population Studies* (NY: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943.)
The author discusses the merits and disadvantages of various survey techniques, then considers the following demographic elements: age composition, sex ratios, marital status, family size, fertility, economic status, secular education, and internal migration and length of residence. (Cf. Seligman's article in the same volume, "The Jewish Population of New York City: 1952" (pp. 94-106), which considers many of the same demographic factors.)

Part 2: The Community surveys


As previously suggested, the demographic factors treated in these population studies vary from report to report; therefore, in the interest of brevity and to avoid repetitiveness, individual annotations will not itemize all the variables for which data or analysis are provided. The major areas of concentration have been noted elsewhere and may be summarized as follows:

Population structure—size of population; age distribution; sex ratios.
Population change—births; deaths; fertility; life expectancy; migration.
Nationality—ancestral history; citizenship; language.
Residence—home ownership and value; residential history; geographical distribution.
Occupational structure—employment; career patterns; income structure.
Education—level of educational attainment; secular education; religious education.
Marital patterns—family size and composition; intermarriage.
Identity and opinion—"Jewishness" and religious philosophy (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, etc.); attitudes toward intermarriage and conversion, topical issues, communal involvement, Israel, other faiths.
Organizational affiliation—synagogue attendance; organizational participation.
Community services—Jewish organizations and agencies; social service programs.


Through census data and interviews, the author presents socio-economic data and an analysis of attitudes towards Jewishness and Jewish-Gentile relations as manifested by second-generation Jews in the community.

A sophisticated analysis which employed a marketing and opinion research firm to establish a data bank with 900 crosstabulations relating dozens of individual and household characteristics.


Based upon data obtained from a sample survey conducted in 1965. Cf. Yona Ginsberg's book on Mattapan, a suburb of Boston, cited below.


A useful appendix, "How the Data in this Report Were Gathered and Prepared," is included on pp. 159–64.


This survey constitutes the Synagogue's 12th Annual Report. For comparative purposes, the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds' library also has Reports number one, three, and five through ten.


This report deals with findings on case-work services, social service programs, Jewish education, fund-raising, and the responsibilities of the Albany Jewish Community Council as a central planning and coordinating agency.

Two other studies by the C.J.F.W.F. in this period, somewhat broader in scope, are: Community Studies of Albany, Camden, New Britain (1953, 82 pp.) and The Jewish Population of Port Chester, New York—1950; a Demographic Study (Ben B. Seligman and Walter P. Zand, consultants; 1950, 31 pp.)


See also an earlier study by the Minneapolis Federation—Work Book for Community Self-Survey of Social, Cultural and Recreational Needs and Service, 1958.

A report on the smaller Jewish community of St. Paul, Minnesota (10,000 Jews as opposed to about 22,000 in Minneapolis), is Arnold Dashefsky and Howard M. Shapiro, The Jewish Community of Saint Paul (United Jewish Fund and Council, 1971, 46 pp.)


Focusing on a community on the southern border of Boston, Massachusetts, this book uses interviews and Congressional sub-committee testimony to gauge community perceptions of a “changing” neighborhood. Census and school reports provide data on housing, income, and other demographic factors.


An analysis of Jewish fertility patterns based on the results of a sample survey of the Jewish community of Providence, R.I. The author examines fertility differentials by socio-economic status and religious “trends” (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform.)

A multifaceted report based upon a sample survey conducted between October and November of 1966.

See also this author’s “Completed and Expected Fertility in an American Jewish Community” (Springfield), in: *Jewish Social Studies*, 33 (April/July, 1971), pp. 212-27.


An analysis of Jewish mortality data in St. Louis by age (compared with the total white population), by principal causes of death and by major types of accidents.


The author provides an estimate of the Jewish population using the death certificate method—a tabulation of Jewish deaths from the records of Jewish undertakers and based upon death rates established by census data.


The book examines general and Jewish population trends in the New York metropolitan area (the City’s five boroughs plus Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties) and describes the geographic distribution and socio-economic characteristics of the Jewish population in this region. See Appendix A: “Technical Note on Methodological and Data Limitations,” pp. 82-91.


This report presents the results of a sample survey conducted in this upstate New York city. Reports by various agencies on facilities and activities in another upstate community are gathered in a publication entitled *Self-Study of the Jewish Community of Utica, New York*, prepared by that city's Jewish Community Council (1948, 82 pp.)


Cf. a study on another, somewhat smaller Massachusetts Jewish community—*The Jews of Worcester: a Population Study*, prepared by the Worcester Jewish Federation (1958, 14 pp.) (Lynn's Jewish community numbers 18,800; Worcester's 10,000.)


This community has been the focus of continuing analysis; see also the following reports: Sophie M. Robison, *The Jewish Population of Trenton, New Jersey, 1949: a Demographic Study* (New York: Office for Jewish Population Research. 1949, 49 pp.); and Richard S. Sterne, *A Demographic Study of the Jewish Population of Trenton, New Jersey and Vicinity* (Trenton: Jewish Federation of Trenton. 1961, 48 pp.)

For a report on the area just south of Trenton, see Charles F. Westoff, *Population and Social Characteristics of the Jewish Community of the Camden Area, 1964* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Jewish Federation of Camden County. 1965, 100 pp.)


For an earlier study prepared by the Federation, see Esther Be'kenstein, *Report on the Jewish Population of Metropolitan Chicago* (1959, 51 pp.)


This work can be considered both a social history and a demographic study. Of particular interest here are chapters six and seven which contain data on the Jewish inhabitants of this New York community during the 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's.

Massarik, Fred. "Basic Characteristics of the Greater New York Jewish Popula-


This study follows up two previous ones on the Los Angeles area prepared by Massarik for the Jewish Federation—Council of Greater Los Angeles: A Report on the Jewish Population of Los Angeles (1959, 42 pp.) and, a study with the identical title, published in 1953 (127 pp.)

The author is responsible for many scientifically-oriented demographic surveys of Jewish communities in California. See the following...


This is one report in two series of reports on the Jews of Detroit done by Mayer. Among other titles, there are the following, all prepared for the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit:


Estimate of the Numbers and Age Distribution of the Detroit Metropolitan Area: 1956. 1959. 1 v.


Studies by Mayer on cities other than Detroit include the following:

Columbus Jewish Population Study: 1969. Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Jewish Welfare Federation, 1970. 2 v. in 1. (This is the title from the title page. The cover reads "The Jewish Community of Columbus, 1970: A Population Survey by Dr. Albert Mayor" (sic).)


This area of Florida has a Jewish population of 25,000. See also two brief reports on much smaller communities in Tampa (pop. 7,000) and Jacksonville (pop. 6,000): Tampa Jewish Welfare Federation, Study of the Jewish Population of Tampa, Florida, Tampa: the Federation, 1958, 8 pp.; and, Jewish Community Council (Jacksonville), All About Us! (Jacksonville Jewry is Counted [1954 Census]), Jacksonville, Florida: the Council, 1954, 16 pp.


For a brief yet broader and more recent study of another Indiana city, see: Jewish Community Council of St. Joseph County, Indiana, The Jewish Popula-
tion of South Bend—Mishawaka, Indiana: a Demographic Study, 1961. (Title on the cover: We See Ourselves.) South Bend: the Council, 1961, 44 pp. (Indianapolis has almost 11,000 Jews—South Bend about 2,800.)


See also the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds' The Jewish Population of New Orleans, Louisiana—1953: a Demographic Study (New York, 1954, 47 pp.).


This report is derived from the author's Ph.D dissertation entitled "The Jewish Population of Chicago, Illinois: Size and Distribution as Derived from Voters' Lists" (University of Chicago, 1949, 144 pp.)


Similar surveys by this author sponsored by the American Jewish Committee have been carried out in Baltimore, Maryland (1963), Kansas City, Missouri (1961), and Southville, Memphis, Tennessee (1959).


Cincinnati has Ohio's second largest Jewish population (30,000; Cleveland has 80,000, Columbus 13,000.) For reports on some of the smaller communities, see the following:


This report covers Passaic and Bergen counties in northern New Jersey.


Through questionnaires and interviews, this study investigates the results of suburbanization on the Jewish inhabitants of three New Jersey communities in Essex County: the Caldwells, Verona, and West Orange. (Essex is south of Passaic and has 95,000 Jews.)

See also Our Life in Our Time (on Newark, New Jersey), prepared by the Jewish Community Council of Essex County (Newark, NJ: the Council, 1948. 22 pp.)