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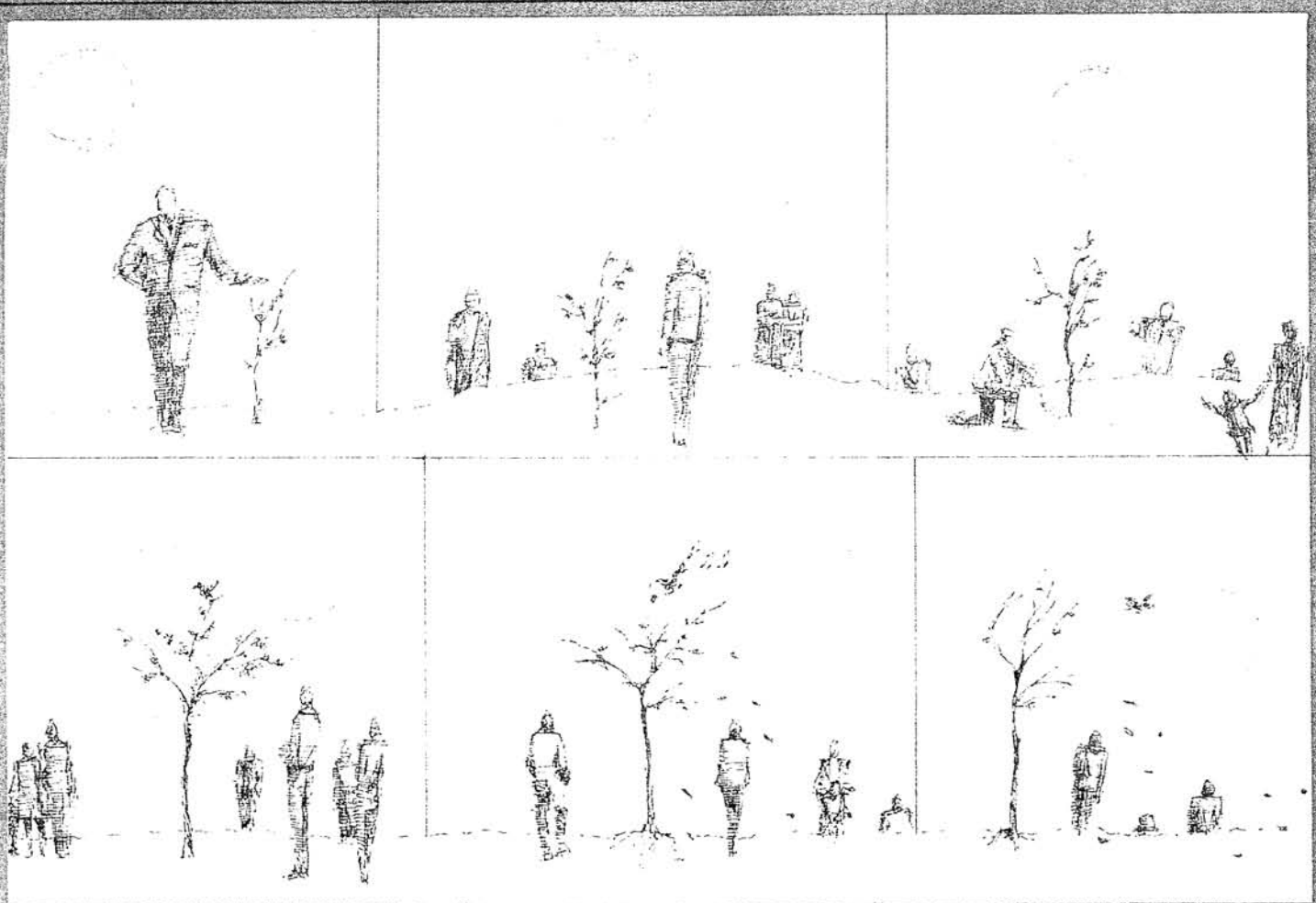

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A DREAM

This is the story of the Institute For Jewish Life, created in the early 1970s to alter the course of American Jewry – an institution that may soon be no more than a footnote in history

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BALTIMORE Jewish Times

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A DREAM

BY GARY ROSENBLATT
Editor

"If, as we now believe, our community may be on the verge of an exciting, perhaps even historic new chapter, then the purpose of our work becomes clear: it is nothing less than to convert the 'may' into the 'will,' to convert possibility into probability, to convert, as might be said, dreams into facts. And, once that is seen as the mandate, the question becomes not whether we are obliged to respond, but how."

—From the report by the Task Force on Jewish Identity, June 14, 1971

This is the story of a dream that became a reality for a short time in the early 1970s. It was a dream "to set in motion a major new effort, dealing with the realm of identity and spirit of the Jewish community in North America . . . a move toward preservation and renewal of the Jews and of Jewish life . . . a landmark move to reshape our Jewish community life."

It was known as the Institute For Jewish Life, and if you have never heard of it you are not alone. Few today remember it. But when it was born,

Cover Art By Kathe Scherr

amidst all the heady rhetoric and calls for $100 million to endow it, there was a sense of drama and excitement that the organized Jewish community had not seen before and will likely never see again. It was perceived by many as the panacea for all of the ills of American Jewish life, from education to intermarriage, an organization to "develop, guide and commission innovative projects—both locally and nationally—that would serve as new models of enrichment to the Jewish community." It brought together for the first time secular communal leaders, activist students and alienated intellectuals, all dedicated to bringing about a Jewish Renaissance.

The dream lasted five years. And by the end, even some of its most ardent supporters were calling for its demise, saying it should not continue as "a sham," a shadow of what it was meant to be.

The problems the Institute For Jewish Life faced are still with us today and shed light on the dynamics of power, on how funds are raised and priorities set, how local and national Jewish goals differ and are resolved, and how the Jewish community responds to creativity and challenge.

Some now look back on the experiment as a success, "a venture in creativity," while others call it noble but doomed to failure, a dream that went awry in the stages between rhetoric and reality. The Institute For Jewish Life was the major response of organized American Jewry to the challenge posed by assimilation, the failures of Jewish education and the quest for new ways to improve the quality of Jewish life.

This, then, is the story of the life and death of an institution created to alter the course of American Jewry—an institution that may soon be no more than a footnote in history.

Part One: The Vision

"As with most institutions, it took a crisis to set in motion the train of events which brought the Institute For Jewish Life into being . . ."

—From the Task Force Report

It was as close as the organized American Jewish community has come to revolution. Or, as *Newsweek* reported, "an unprecedented challenge to the traditional goals of the Jewish Establishment." It took place in Boston in mid-November, 1969.

America was in the throes of nationwide campus unrest. There were protests, demands, sit-ins, takeovers, riots; the causes ranged from the Vietnam War to open admissions.

The Jewish community was not immune to the general climate of unrest. Indeed, a small but articulate and vocal group of concerned young people were calling for sweeping changes within the American Jewish Establishment, symbolized and embodied by the Council of Jewish Federations, which establishes the priorities of the hundreds of community charities in the U.S. and Canada and raises hundreds of millions of dollars for Jewish domestic and overseas needs.

The Concerned Jewish Students, as they called themselves, were seeking more democracy within organized Jewish life and funding. They wanted the Federations to become more sensitive to Jewish values—in short, to become more Jewish.

They perceived of their elders in the Federations as wealthy, well-meaning but misguided people who knew and cared more about Wall Street than Ben Yehuda Street or Zion Square.

Steve Shaw, now a pulpit rabbi in New Jersey and a key national Jewish activist, was a leader of the student movement then and says his involvement began after he experienced an epiphany of sorts.

"I was a 26-year-old rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1969, and I remember sitting in class one day, looking out the window and suddenly realizing that students were 'in' now and that they wouldn't be much longer. That's the moment I became an activist."

Shaw and several of his close friends had been stirred by the Columbia University riots the spring before. The Columbia campus was only a few blocks from the Seminary, but in terms of academic freedom and fervor, Shaw and his classmates felt they were light years away from Morningside Heights.

Adopting the tactics of the student radicals and scaling them down to their level, a few of the Conservative seminarians began making demands on the administration of the Seminary regarding course requirements. At first the administrators scoffed at the proposals but, Shaw recalls, "when we told them we would go to the *New York Times* with our complaints, they caved in immediately."

He and his colleagues sensed that the time was right for more important confrontations. They had had some success confronting the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York over priorities and they knew that the annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations—*the* event of the year in Jewish communal life—was soon to take place in Boston. They decided it was the perfect setting to dramatize their cause and their demands.

The General Assembly has long been a unique ritual of American Jewish life, the closest forum the community has to a congress. Each year during the second week of November, some 2,000 delegates representing more than 200 local Federations around the country, gather to discuss the next year's agenda. It is the site where Federation executives and wealthy lay leaders discuss major problems, establish national priorities, record financial recommendations, and groom and train future Jewish leaders.

Since the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) is the only publicly accountable national body supervising large sums of money collected by Federations across the country—the 1969 budget was $263 million—its annual convention has always been attended and monitored by interested observers. They know that its decisions and recommendations set the pattern for the disbursement of the American Jewish philanthropic dollar, though it should be noted that CJF can only recommend and not enforce allocations from the local Federations.

The CJF leaders were worried. The student group was threatening to picket and disrupt the convention.

The General Assembly's agenda is carefully planned months in advance and there are rarely any surprises. The scores of sessions and workshops on local and national fundraising, social problems and key issues of the day are fine-tuned and go smoothly. Even the votes on allocations and resolutions are worked out long before the convention takes place, in keeping with the basic tenet of faith of Jewish communal life: consensus and the avoidance of conflict.

Most Jewish organizations, and certainly the Council of Jewish Federations, operate in this fashion, as described by Dr. Daniel Elazar in his classic study, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry.* "By and large, [the established] patterns of decision making involve a quiet allocation of resources according to the hierarchy of interests of the various community leaders, with emphasis on establishing and preserving an acceptable status quo," says Elazar. "Changes or innovations are introduced on an incremental basis only, so as to raise as little controversy as possible. People working together over a long time learn how to cater to each other's interest in this regard almost intuitively. Anyone who challenges this pattern and creates 'controversy' by so doing is likely to experience rejection . . ."

If raising new issues or questioning recommendations at a G.A. is considered "radical" by community leaders, how would they characterize picketing by hundreds of students and the disruption of sessions?

That was what Steve Shaw and his group of Concerned Jewish Students were wondering with a good deal of excitement as they planned their tactics. Several weeks before the G.A. they discovered that they had an ally on the "inside," for Gordon Zacks, a wealthy Ohio businessman and chairman of CJF Young Leadership, was planning to make a keynote address at the convention criticizing the Establishment and calling for a reordering of priorities stressing Jewish education. Through a mutual friend, Prof. Leonard Fein of Brandeis, Shaw got in touch with Zacks to coordinate their efforts.

"I had been asked to give my vision of the agenda for the 1970s," Zacks recalled, "and I had been working on that speech for over a year. The student group had been making independent efforts to address the G.A. on their grievances and had been rejected. I promised that I would get them on the platform, and I did."

The CJF leaders were worried. The student group, comprised primarily of Brandeis and Jewish Theological Seminary students and graduates, was threatening to picket and disrupt the G.A. In an effort to avoid a confrontation and placate the students, CJF professionals offered them a Saturday-afternoon session at the G.A. on "College Youth: A Challenge To The Organized Jewish Community." But the students insisted on a prime-time forum before the entire convention. Finally, through Zacks's intervention, the CJF leaders agreed to allow a student spokesman to address the delegates at a luncheon session on Thursday afternoon, November 13.

By now, the Boston G.A. has taken on almost mythic proportions, a classic showdown between militant students and their stuffy elders. But that is an oversimplification.

"There was a tremendous sense of uptightness at the G.A.," Gordon Zacks remembers. "The delegates didn't quite know what to expect." Arriving by bus from New York and joined by Boston area activists, the student group peacefully picketed outside the Sheraton Boston Hotel, headquarters for the G.A., carrying signs reading, "Don't Let Us Perish," "Soviet Jewry Will Be Redeemed," and "Support For Jewish Education Is Support For Israel."

Leaflets handed out to the delegates demanded greater Federation subsidies to Jewish day schools and afternoon Hebrew schools "that attempt to introduce meaningful innovations," and for educational research, raising salary levels of teachers in Jewish schools, upgrading Hebrew teachers' colleges, financing adult education programs and chairs on Judaica on college campuses, providing support for B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations and Soviet Jews, and a role in making Federation-policy decisions.

But the big moment came on Thursday afternoon when the students' representative was to address the entire G.A. For that crucial role, Steve Shaw, the chief coordinator of the protest, had chosen his former roommate at the Seminary, Hillel Levine.

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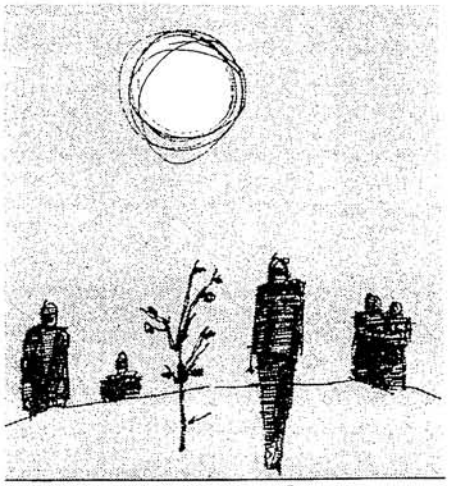

INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH LIFE

"Hillel Levine is a prophet," says Dr. Bernard Reisman, a Brandeis professor who has known Levine for more than a decade. "He issued the clarion call in 1969, he was the most radical member of the subsequent Task Force and to this day he can't trust anyone in the Establishment—and maybe he's right."

It was Levine who went to the Soviet Union as a young graduate student in the 1960s and came back an activist for Soviet Jewry long before there was such a movement. He spoke out for the Falashas a full decade before their plight was widely known. And he crystalized the problems of the Institute and predicted its demise at a time when it was new and relatively successful.

HILLEL LEVINE:
from gadfly to academic.

A native of Flushing, New York, he attended day schools, received his undergraduate training at Queens College and Hebrew University in Israel and was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1969, having studied with Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel in a special program for four years. He became a teaching member of the first chavurah, *Havurat Shalom near Boston, while attending graduate school in Jewish history and sociology at Harvard.*

Today, Levine is associate professor of religion and sociology at Yale and is not involved in Jewish organizational life at all. "I haven't found a satisfactory platform for myself in the Jewish community," he says wistfully. "If I did, I'd be back." He is deeply unhappy with organized Jewish life in this country. Says one close friend: "Hillel has no patience; it's his best and worse quality."

That day in Boston, the wiry, curly-haired young man who stood before some 2,000 of his elders sought to blend passion with restraint in his message. He had been asked to sit on the dais and eat with the delegates at the luncheon session prior to his speech, but had refused. He wanted to maintain his position as an outsider, he later explained, and they had tried to co-opt him. He wanted a sense of drama to build as he was called into the room and made his way to the platform. He succeeded. "The air was so filled with tension you could cut it with a knife," a delegate remembers.

"It is said," Levine began, "that when the Messiah comes, he will turn the hearts of the fathers to children and the hearts of children to the fathers. In this age, one can understand how this might be his most difficult task."

Thus the tone was set for a speech that is still talked about by those who heard it and reprinted widely for those who were not there.

> "At the outset, I must make one point clear. I am not a part of this convention; neither was I nor any young person asked to speak at this time. I stand here with a mandate from my friends hoping that what I say expresses the opinion of many other young Jews, but I stand here because of pressure that we exerted upon the planners of this conference to permit us to address you directly. Knowing that we were given this opportunity only through threats of a disruption, you might dismiss us as children of our times, bored with the battle of the campus and looking for a new stage upon which to play our childish pranks of doubtful morality. But we see ourselves as more than children of our times; we see ourselves as children of timelessness. We see ourselves as Jews who know that when one has an urgent matter to bring to the attention of the community, even the reading of the Torah in the synagogue may be disrupted. We see ourselves as your children, the children of Jews who with great dedication concern themselves with the needs of the community, the children of Jews who bring comfort to the afflicted, give aid to the poor, who have built mammoth philanthropic organizations, who have aided the remnants of the Holocaust, who have given unfalteringly to the building of Israel, who give more per capita to charity than any other group in America. We are your children and affirm this, but, to paraphrase the Rabbinic aphorism, we want to be not only children—*banim*—but also builders—*bonim*. We want to participate with you in the building of a vision of a great Jewish community. It is when we think of this that we become dismayed with the reality of American Jewish life which we cannot reconcile with what you have taught us to cherish."

Levine spoke of young people "disenchanted with the crass materialism of the larger society," young people who sought to turn their concerns inward to the Jewish community but could find no inspiration "in the multi-million-dollar Jewish presence of suburbia."

Calling Jewish education a "step-son of organized Jewish philanthropies," Levine asserted that the priorities of the philanthropies "favor a greater mobilization of resources to combat one crack-pot anti-Semite than to deal with the Jewish illiteracy of millions of Jews."

He deplored philanthropic support for hospitals, camps and community centers "deficient in Jewish education" and warned that "identities are based on ideologies and experiences and neither can be offered by Jewish swimming pools and game rooms."

Levine cited statistics showing the low priority in funding given Jewish education (14 percent of the total budget), half the sum given to community centers and youth services "of low Jewish content."

Levine told the delegates of an important Federation leader in New York who, with great sincerity, attempted to show just how concerned the Federation was about Jewish students. " 'We have 256 agencies in this city where a Jewish student can have his appendix removed and a mental hospital where he can be committed. We truly care about Jewish students.' "

Said Levine: "This concern I do not for a moment doubt. But it is not our neuroses nor our ruptured appendices that we wish to share with you. It is our vitality, our enthusiasm, our vision that we wish to share."

He closed by calling for radical changes in the structure and goals of the CJF rather than cosmetics or rhetoric. "We don't want commissions on youth; we don't want your organizations, organizations which have no meaning to us . . . We want to convert alienation into participation."

Challenging the fundraisers' religious integrity, he demanded a new policy requiring all organizational leaders to prove their Jewish commitment by participating in Jewish studies, and he insisted that students, rabbis and scholars be put on the board of local Federations. "We will not be pacified, co-opted or compromised with vague resolutions," he concluded. "We want action and not delay."

For a moment there was silence, then loud applause from the delegates and a feeling of relief and enthusiasm. One delegate later observed that it was as if the students found themselves prepared to knock down a door that was open to them. "Much to the credit of Levine and his group—and the clear evidence of their deep Jewish commitment and concern—the delegates reacted to the presentation with a sense of admiration and amazement that these young people cared so deeply about Jewish values," says Gordon Zacks. "The protestors were welcomed like *chaverim* [friends] after that and there was a great, positive feeling."

"I was worried about a reaction like that,"

says Levine a decade later. "I felt that maybe I hadn't been tough enough."

While Levine's speech is best remembered from that fateful G.A.—*Newsweek's* full-page story on the affair was entitled "Hillel vs. the Elders"—it was actually Zacks's address that planted the seeds of the Institute For Jewish Life

Gordon Zacks has always been a maverick within the Jewish Establishment. A wealthy, hard-working businessman who has given and raised millions of dollars for Jewish philanthropies, he has a reputation for restlessness, moving from cause to cause.

Just about all that is remembered of Zacks's lengthy address at the Boston G.A. was one magical figure—$100 million—that he called for in establishing a national foundation for developing Jewish identity. In truth, the figure could just as well have been one billion or ten million because its intent was to dramatize the need for large sums of money to be directed toward Jewish education and culture.

Zacks's was an articulate, impassioned address which struck many of the same chords of protest that Hillel Levine had made. Noting that Federation is doing a "good job" of helping Israel and Jews in need in the U.S. and around the world, he declared that "we have failed to mobilize Jewish brainpower and Jewish financial power to creatively and effectively assure the survival of a qualitatively meaningful Judaism in a free and open American society."

Zacks cited the failure of Jewish education, describing its condition as "scandalous" and asserting that the leadershp has produced Americans rather than Jews. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this is obviously *not* what we want. We want our children to conceive of themselves as Jews who happen to be Americans—not Americans who happen to be Jews."

He called for a radical change in the Federation decision-making process, focusing on effectiveness rather than efficiency, and bringing young people, committed Jews and scholars into the mainstream of the operation.

His central proposal: "To halt the erosion of Jewish identity and create a viable growing sense of positive Jewish identity in America in the shortest span of time, I urge the creation of an independent National Foundation For Developing Jewish Identity."

"Our challenge is unmistakably clear, our responsibility awesome," Gordon Zacks told the 1969 General Assembly. "I am confident of the future."

This Foundation, he said, "must have financing on a scale completely beyond anything we now have for such programs," and could "combine and greatly expand the work of some of the existing organizations now struggling with these purposes with inadequate resources. It must impact upon the quality of American Jewish life in the same manner that Foundations have impacted upon medicine in this country."

Zacks said this Foundation should "undertake research projects to develop bold, exciting, innovative approaches in Jewish education," develop programs for families, college students and provide seed money for "exciting new experiments in Jewish education and living."

He closed by urging the delegates to pass a resolution calling for a task force "to design a program for implementing the creation of such a Foundation." Said Zacks: "Our challenge is unmistakably clear, our responsibility awesome. I am confident of the future."

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The point is still argued over whether or not the Institute would have ever been created had there not been a student protest. CJF professionals maintain that internally, the Federations were moving toward action, that a CJF committee on Jewish education established in 1966 and another on college youth begun two years later would have led to changes along the lines proposed by the student activists. They maintain that the protest simply "dramatized the need."

Many others disagree, suggesting that without the impetus from the outsiders, under the scrutiny of national media attention, the Federations would never have undertaken any bold action on their own.

In any event, the practical result of the protest and the Levine and Zacks speeches was for the delegates to enthusiastically approve Zacks's call for the creation of a task force and to vote to give college students and faculty members a central role in the determination of policies and programs in Jewish educational and cultural activities.

The die had been cast, the events set in motion, and expectations around the country soared. Says a bitter Hillel Levine today: "The G.A. and its outcome were immediately declared 'a turning point in American Jewish history.' It was as if everyone was expecting the immediate arrival of the Messiah to save American Jewry from its failings."

Almost half of the Institute's projects involved Jewish education and inspiring innovative ways of reaching youngsters.

Part Two: The Process

"The American Jewish community calls for experimentation and innovation. The Institute For Jewish Life has been designed to answer that call."

—Irving Blum, June 1, 1972

It took two years, and a hundred meetings in 38 communities with more than a thousand people—later termed with pride the greatest consultation effort in the history of the American Jewish community—before the Institute For Jewish Life was created. Some say that by the time it opened its doors, it was doomed to failure, that it had been stripped of power and autonomy even before it began. Indeed, some of its most ardent supporters on the Task Force On Jewish Identity, as it was known, argued against its creation.

The Task Force was a uniquely broad-based group. Among its 45 members were rabbis, scholars, and representatives of the student activists in addition to Federation professionals and wealthy lay leaders. Its success, the very fact that it was able to come up with a proposal agreeable to all factions, was due primarily to the efforts of one man, its chairman, Irving Blum.

INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH LIFE

A Baltimore businessman who had distinguished himself in numerous local leadership posts, from president of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation to president of the Associated Jewish Charities and Welfare Fund, Irving Blum possessed a rare combination of pragmatism and idealism.

"When the movement arose to establish a new approach to Jewish identity, Irv Blum stepped in and rose to the challenge," says a former staff member of the Institute who has little

IRVING BLUM: had he lived . . .

admiration for most Federation lay leaders. "He was ideally suited for the role. He understood the need to reach out to young people, he understood the need to be innovative and bold, and he also knew how to deal with the powers that be in the Jewish community to get things done."

Blum was himself a power in the community on the national scene. Described a a man of intellect, warmth, leadership and compassion, he chaired the Task Force and was able to convince skeptical Federation executives to back its recommendations to create the Institute. He was the Institute's first chairman and he shepherded it through its early difficulties. In 1972, he was elected president of the Council of Jewish Federations, the highest post for a layman in the Jewish community.

Of the scores of people affiliated with the Institute, none is spoken of so warmly and so admiringly as Blum. Tragically, Irving Blum became gravely ill shortly after the Institute For Jewish Life was created. He died on August 11, 1973. More than any other single individual, Blum was responsible for the creation of the Institute. Virtually everyone interviewed for this report agreed that, had he lived, its history may have been very different.

Under Blum's leadership, the Task Force set out to answer such questions as: "What kind of effort should the community as a whole make to meet the challenge of qualitative continuity and growth? What things needed to be done that were not already being done effectively in existing frameworks? What new instrumentality, if any, would be required?

"Would the contemporary North American Jewish community rise to the challenge of creating and vitalizing a cultural, educational and religious civilization that would sustain a meaningful and enriched Jewish life? What creative and imaginative response to these imperative challenges would be undertaken? Would the communities commit themselves, as never before, to the vitally necessary process of developing a Jewish life of high quality and deeply inherent value in the face of attenuating identification?"

That at least was the way the CJF, in its overblown style of jargon, described the central issues. On a far more practical level, many of the Task Force meetings and consultations around the country found Blum attempting to convince local Federation executives to support a new innovative institution even if it would not produce immediate results for their community.

There was also strong opposition to any new institution from directors of existing Jewish organizations. The most vocal opponents were men on the Task Force like Isaac Toubin of the American Association for Jewish Education (AAJE) and Harry Barron of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. They felt that rather than spending vast sums of money to create a new institution, the community would be far wiser to give their own existing, financially-strapped agencies the money and let them put it to good use. And despite assurances to the contrary, they feared that a new agency would become permanent. More unneeded competition.

Even those who fought for the new funds sympathized with these opponents. "Here was Isaac Toubin, heading the AAJE, which was always begging for money," recalls one Task Force member, "and he was simply saying, 'You want new programs in Jewish education? Great. We're the experts. Give us the money instead of throwing it away on some new bureaucracy that's supposed to solve everything.'"

On the other extreme were the students and academics, the counterculture group, the outsiders. They wanted a totally autonomous institution that would not be subject to CJF funding, bureaucracy and pressure. And in the middle were the CJF professionals who wanted to establish the new institution as a direct arm of CJF. As Leonard Fein, then a professor at Brandeis and a member of the Task Force pushing for complete autonomy, put it, "It was only natural for us to want to set up an institution that would not be a replica of, or worse, dependent on, the existing system. And it was only natural for the CJF people to want to expand the scope of their identity and set up this new institute as a department of their organization."

The motive of the CJF in these and subsequent dealings is not clear. Critics say that at best the CJF sought to co-opt the enthusiasm for a new institution, to not only hop on the bandwagon but to lead it. At worse, they say, the CJF tried consciously to undermine the effort, thus ensuring its failure. But would an organization responsible for raising and distributing hundreds of millions of dollars have wasted its time by becoming involved in a project it did not wish to see succeed?

The CJF leaders saw themselves as practical, business-minded people who knew how to raise and spend money effectively.

When one speaks of the CJF and its motives at the time, one is basically speaking about a single individual. True, the lay president was Max Fisher, the wealthy and influential Detroit businessman and Republican activist, but the real power lay with a mild-mannered, soft-spoken man who served as the executive vice president of the CJF for many years, Philip Bernstein.

In an organized Jewish community that runs by consensus, Phil Bernstein is the acknowledged, consummate Jewish Professional. Even his toughest critics begrudgingly concede his skills. "Phil Bernstein is the best negotiator, summarizer and compromiser I've ever seen," said one. "He never shouts, he hardly argues. But he gets his way. He's a genius."

Under Bernstein's leadership—he retired several years ago—the CJF grew to become the most powerful organization in American Jewish life,

PHIL BERNSTEIN:
the process is the product.

dominating virtually all aspects of community activity. It is run like a large corporation, with committees and studies and reports and bureaucracy. Everyone agrees it runs extremely well, though some question where it is going.

"The CJF doesn't plan, it just functions," says one academic, "and that's a reflection of the way Phil Bernstein operated."

On a personal level, Bernstein is an extremely pleasant and unassuming man who sees his role chiefly as a facilitator. It is hard to find someone in the organized Jewish community who feels he knows Bernstein's own motives and goals. What is known is that he believes in the System. As he explains: "Process is terribly important. It's very much a part of the product."

Together, the process and the product merged to produce, in June of 1971, the Task Force's recommendations to the CJF. It called for "a new instrument" to be known as the Fund For Jewish Life and set up initially on an interim basis, with a limited life span of six years, after which it would be reevaluated.

The Fund would be concerned "solely with making possible innovative experiments and demonstrations, and developing new models" and would be sponsored by the CJF. The Fund would be structured "in a way that insures its full flexibility of action on the one hand, and its accountability on the other," according to the report. How?

"Flexibility should be guaranteed through assured financing for the initial life of the Fund and through a highly distinguished board and staff. Accountability should be guaranteed by regular reports to the CJF, by having the programs proceed under careful monitoring and evaluation by the board (elected by the CJF) and by the staff, and by feedback to the communities during the six-year life span, so that mid-course corrections can be achieved."

The work of the Fund would "range across the total fabric of Jewish life." The emphasis would be on developing and funding "action projects in local communities" and using existing agencies whenever possible. An essential criterion in the selection of projects would be "the potential for replicating what is attempted, if successful, in communities across the continent."

In narrowing down the major areas of concern for the Fund to deal with, the Task Force cited the Jewish family and educational influences and programs. The report emphasized the "great risk of failure," and listed ten items the Task Force was *not* proposing—a move to clarify its intent and allay fears of a new super-agency created to compete with existing agencies or drain off funds from them. The new Fund would *not* be: a blank check; a permanent institution; an organization that would duplicate or compete with existing organizations; an agency that would review other organizations; or a panacea.

The structure of the Fund called for it to be governed by a 40-person board of distinguished people, selected for their individual qualifications; an executive committee of about 10, chosen by the board; and a small staff of about four or five of "the highest competence" to initiate and evaluate project proposals, help design them, put them into operation and encourage other organizations to replicate the successes.

As for the crucial issue of financing, the Task Force was defensive in requesting $4.5 million, an average of $750,000 annually over the six-year span. "It is far less than the $100 million urged on the Assembly in 1969," the report said, adding that the sum represented only slightly more than one-tenth of one percent of the $4 billion American Jews will spend for Jewish purposes during that time, "an investment to help assure that there will be a viable Jewish community in the future."

The Task Force responded to the resentment voiced by local communities unwilling to contribute to the Fund by pointing out that "most of the national funds would be used locally, for testing projects in communities," and asserting that "unless the program is assured of the required finances . . . it should not be undertaken at all."

The report was submitted to the board members of the CJF. They rejected it. They responded with a scaled-down version of their own.

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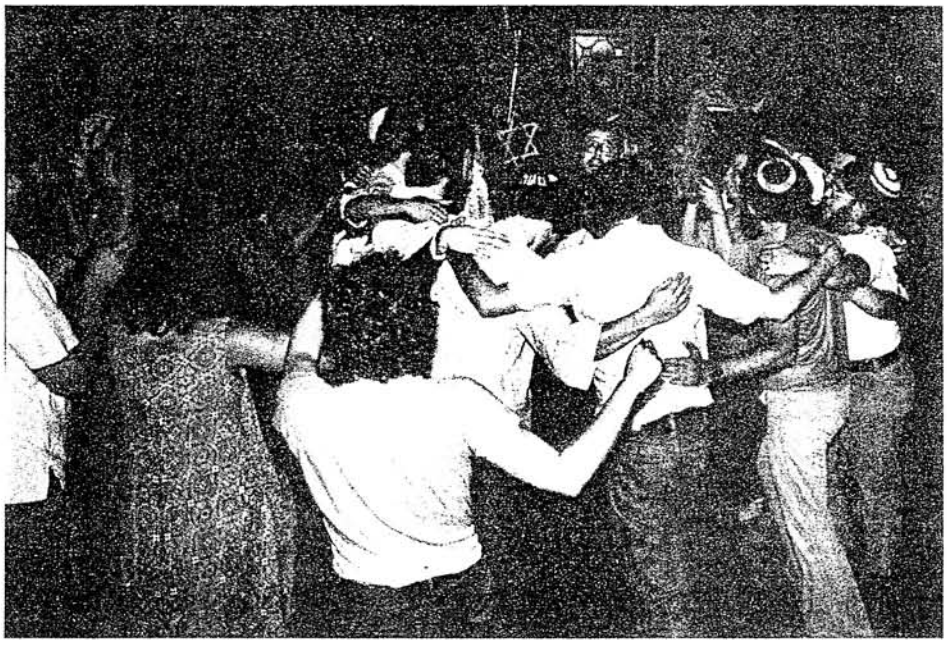
The CJF proposal called for a Fund that would be given half the time and a third of the money that the Task Force had requested. Three years rather than six years, with $250,000 annually rather than $750,000. Further, the CJF recommended that the Fund be a department of the CJF. This counterproposal came back to the Task Force for an ultimate decision on its part.

Participants remember the Task Force debate as particularly tense. Everyone realized that the years of activity leading up to this point were on the line, that this was a critical turning point: to reject the CJF report and risk the time and effort to come up with yet another plan, to accept the CJF plan and submit to its authority, or to seek compromises between the two proposals.

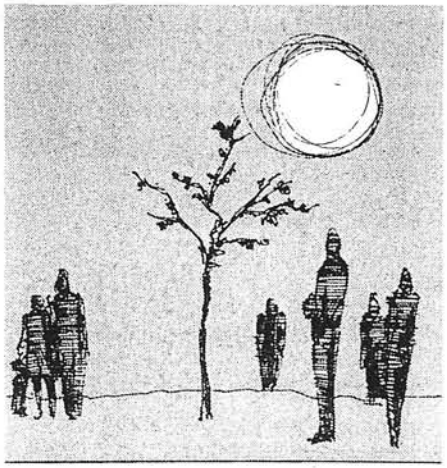
"The three main issues we debated, and really had been debating all along, were the location, the budget and, most importantly, the autonomy of this new institution," says Leonard Fein, who is now editor of *Moment* magazine. "Some of us insisted that it not be in New York. We wanted to avoid the old CJF bureaucracy, and symbolically we wanted a location other than CJF headquarters. For the budget we had wanted $1 million a year, lest it would be doomed from the outset and people would say it was a bad idea rather than that there wasn't enough funding. And most importantly we wanted this new institution to be set up independently of the CJF and this was the focus of the most vigorous debates."

When Fein speaks of "we" he means the counterculture group, the activists, the non-Establishment people on the Task Force—the rabbis, academics and young people.

Actually, their three key points were one and



The Chavurah spirit permeated a number of Institute activities, including the funding of a study to incorporate Chavurot into synagogue life.



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the same: independence from the Federation.

Those advocating an autonomous body felt that any organ of the Federation system could not possibly be successful. They felt such an institution should not be subjected to the same type of annual-funding scrutiny and results-oriented evaluations that other agencies of the community face. This was to be a risk, an experiment, a vehicle to plan for the future. It needed vision, time and money. It needed to be nurtured rather than pressured for immediate results, they argued.

"Once you're part of the CJF, you're emasculated," Gordon Zacks contends. "You're a totally dependent child."

The CJF officials countered that it would be irresponsible for them to create an institution, endow it with vast sums of community-raised money and then just let it do what it wanted. There must be accountability, they felt.

The CJF leaders saw themselves as practical, business-minded people who knew how to raise and spend money effectively. They tended to view the academics and students as, at best, well-meaning but naive outsiders who knew little about the workings of the real world and, at worst, rebellious young Turks out to overthrow the system.

The counterculture intellectuals saw it differently, of course. They felt their mission was holy. They saw themselves (and indeed they came to call themselves) as the New Jews, with not only a knowledge of Judaism but a spiritual commitment to its ideals. They saw the Establishment as made up of Jewishly ignorant and insensitive businessmen whose vision of the Jewish community extended no further than the sum of its funds.

In a sense, it was, as Hillel Levine had described it, a generational clash, the fathers against the sons.

These differences played themselves out in the Task Force meetings all along but compromises were made on both sides, thanks largely to Irving Blum, and it finally came down to the one crucial session taking up the CJF's scaled-down counterproposal.

"I argued against creating this new fund," says Leonard Fein. "I felt that we would be funding something that could not work and that, further, would sour everyone on such an idea for years to come."

Others argued that it was better than nothing and that additional funds would be raised once people saw how successful the new venture was.

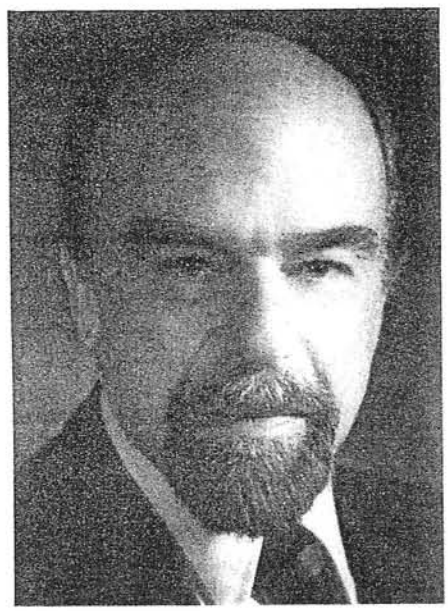
The debate grew heated and the outcome was uncertain until one man rose to make a compromise suggestion. The speaker was Leon Jick, a Brandeis professor who had kept a low profile up until that point. "Then I got up and made my fatal compromise," he recalls almost a decade later with a wry grin. For he did not know at the time that his involvement would lead to his becoming a key figure in the life of the Institute—as its first director—an experience he admits now was "traumatic."

With his bald head, trim, pointed beard and piercing eyes, Leon Jick looks like Lenin and is, in many ways, a revolutionary in his own right. He gave up his position as a Reform rabbi to enter academic life and he was the founder and first president of the Association of Jewish Studies, a national body of university faculty members in fields of Judaica. The Association has grown enormously in its 12 years of existence.

Jick served as dean of Brandeis from 1969 to 1971, a period of great student unrest, and is director of the Lown Center of Contemporary Jewish Studies at the university, but his biggest challenge came about when he was chosen to become the first director of the Institute For Jewish Life.

He is outspoken and direct, and has little patience for those who cannot grasp ideas. Some say it was a fatal mistake to cast him in the diplomatic role of director of the Institute, while others feel his willingness to do battle for his ideas helped give the Institute whatever independence it did have.

Leon Jick is still bitter about his experience as director. Until now he refused to discuss it publicly. But in a three-hour interview at his Brandeis office last winter, he poured out his thoughts and emotions on the subject because, he said, he wanted the full story to be told.



LEON JICK:
a traumatic experience.

Leon Jick's "fatal compromise" called for establishing the new institution for three years, starting at $350,000 the first year and adding $100,000 to the budget each of the next two years, with $750,000 allocated for the fourth year if a final evaluation justified its continuation. The new institution would be a division of the CJF rather than a department, thus giving it a bit more independence. "Basically, I argued that we should try to get our foot in the door. I felt it was too important an opportunity to waste," he says.

The Task Force approved Jick's proposal and, in its final report to the CJF, added that "beyond the financing of Federations, a total amount of $900,000 will be sought over the first three years from foundations and other sources with prior Federation approval of approaches in any community to such sources."

In November, 1971, the General Assembly of the CJF approved the recommendation of the Task Force. The new venture would not be autonomous or permanent. It would be project-oriented, not a think-tank. It would have $1.35 million, not $100 million. But the Institute For Jewish Life was to be a reality.

Part Three: The Reality

"We are only a 'David' of an Institute sent to engage a 'Goliath' of a problem."

—Leon Jick, November, 1972

Once the Institute was created, attention focused on who would head its staff. Many Federation leaders wanted Sidney Vincent, the highly-respected executive director of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland. A member of the Task Force and a man of intellect, culture and sensitivity, Vincent was known as "the golden boy" of the Federation world and seemed a natural for the job.

But the anti-Establishment element wanted one of their own. It was here that Hillel Levine played a key role in jockeying for Leon Jick to be offered the post. The activists favored Jick not only because he was one of their own but because he was a fighter and they felt he could stand up to the CJF pros.

"I was on leave from Brandeis that year writing a book and Irv Blum, Phil Bernstein and Hillel Levine began to pester me about taking over this new institute. I had no idea what would be involved. To me it was like becoming an astronaut."

Jick agreed to meet with Blum and Bernstein in Baltimore to discuss the job. "They were very persuasive, very seductive," says Jick. "I insisted on taking it for two years only and for remaining in Boston and they finally agreed to allow the Institute to be set up there."

The Institute For Jewish Life formally began operation on May 15, 1972, with its headquarters in Wellesley, Massachusetts, a distinctively academic address. Immediately, Jick realized that pressures and expectations were sky high. "The Jewish community wanted results yesterday." Just two weeks after opening,

A project to preserve deteriorating Yiddish films was an indirect offshoot of the Institute's Jewish media service.

the Institute held its first board meeting and the evening was, says Jick, "a shocker."

The board was comprised of 73 diverse and distinguished people—an expanded version of the Task Force—including Abraham Joshua Heschel, Chaim Potok, Elie Wiesel, Federation directors, lay leaders, graduate students and housewives. Max Fisher, then president of the CJF, called it "one of the most distinguished panels of Jews ever assembled."

For his small staff, Jick had hired Daniel Margolis, former director of Camp Ramah, as assistant director and Robert Lapidus, former program director of the Boston University Hillel, as administrative assistant. An advisory council of five part-time consultants was comprised of Leonard Fein, Sidney Vincent, Walter Ackerman, dean of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, Irwin Shaw, executive vice president of the Detroit Jewish Community Center, and Herzl Spiro, a professor of psychiatry at Rutgers University. (Spiro was soon replaced by Bernard Reisman, of Brandeis.)

Dr. Heschel, the revered professor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, set the tone for that first meeting when he used his opening remarks to make an impassioned speech calling on the Institute to either dedicate itself to training Jewish teachers or close its doors. "There were 50 generals there and everyone had a speech ready, filled with demands and criticisms," Jick recalls with a shudder. "I had been in the job for about a week and already we were getting creamed from all sides.

"The open hostility from the heads of other Jewish agencies who were on our board was incredible. Of course you could say it was wise to have them on the board, that it's a way to resolve conflicts, but it's also a way to make sure that nothing gets accomplished.

"Looking back now, one of the things that doomed us to failure was the inordinately inflated expectations of everyone, and that became evident that very first meeting."

Still, Jick says Irving Blum was "masterful" in the way he controlled the meeting, "and by the end of the evening, I felt that we were on the road, that there was a sense of positive excitement."

Jick and his small staff got down to work that summer and fall. Word had gone out that the Institute was seeking project proposals and some 50 were submitted from around the country those first few months. The staff reviewed them and sought to come up with ideas of their own. They narrowed down their list of major areas on which to concentrate: rebuilding Jewish family life, developing experimental models for Jewish educational (in its broadest sense) programs, utilizing the media, using Israel as a resource, and developing and enriching communal leadership.

In November, 1972, six months into the first year of operation, Jick made a rare appearance at a CJF General Assembly in Toronto to present a report on the work of the Institute and caution against unrealistic expectations. Noting that in creating an organization to enrich the quality of Jewish life, the CJF's "aspiration was clear but the implementation was vague," Jick said that moving "from intention to action is always problematic," especially when the objective is intangible. "There were few precedents that could be invoked: there were no guidelines to follow; the magnitude of the problem was bewildering and the mandate for action, with all due credit to the General Assembly, was circumscribed."

Jick outlined the newly-established guidelines and procedures for projects, called for support and patience, and stressed that "we are only a 'David' of an Institute sent to engage a 'Goliath' of a problem. Our financial resources are meager, our human resources are modest, and our budgeted funds are hopelessly inadequate."

Indeed, of its allotted $350,000 budget for the first year, more than a third of the money went for personnel salaries, and about $58,000 went for expenses, leaving $139,000 targeted for project funds. At the end of the first year, the official deficit for the Institute was $81,000 and money—or the lack of it—had become an issue of bitter contention.

The CJF had assigned each Federation a sum to help subsidize the Institute, based on the size of the Federation and its community. The CJF is not empowered to demand the money, only to request it, and a number of the smaller local Federations were not cooperating.

Leon Jick has a word for this lack of local Federation involvement with national concerns—he calls it "shtetlism" and he says it is "one of the most devastating weaknesses in American Jewish life."

According to Jick, local Federations cannot see beyond their own community's interests. "It's a sense of total localism, narrow-mindedness and provincialism," he asserts. "They can only ask, 'Well, what is your program going to do directly for us here in Omaha or Detroit, or wherever?' " Citing the example of training Jewish teachers, he asks, his voice rising, "How can any one community train Jewish teachers? It's a national problem and it requires a national response. But the local communities still react the same way they always have.

"And that's why our *shvitz* houses are the best," he said, referring to Jewish Community Centers. "But in terms of our educational enterprises on the college campuses, it's horrible."

Jick is not alone in his criticism. Others interviewed agreed that this is a key, ongoing problem in the Jewish community and one in which no real progress has been made. Daniel Elazar, in his *Community and Polity*, notes that the local affiliates vs. the national office is a "perennial conflict."

There were other problems as well. The Institute faced a dilemma as to how specific it should be in its proposals. If it was specific in describing what it hoped to do, existing agencies in related fields felt threatened. "There was hardly a project considered by the Institute that was not attacked on the ground that it belonged in the domain of some other national organization," Jick said. But if the Institute failed to spell out specific projects, it opened itself up to accusations that it was asking communities for a blank check for unspecified purposes. Further, when the Institute involved itself with projects outside the scope of existing agencies, it was attacked on grounds that it was not an operating agency and should not undertake projects which could not be readily assigned to existing agencies.

"I had no idea what would be involved," says Leon Jick. "To me it was like becoming an astronaut."

In May, 1973, Hillel Levine wrote a private letter to Jick evaluating the situation to date. He noted that funding was "sluggish," relations with existing agencies were touchy, and that the CJF was still making major decisions

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despite the fact that the Institute had its own staff and board.

"Leon," he wrote, "you may not agree with my analysis but I know there is an apprehension and hope that you share with me. The apprehension is that the failure of the Institute will make any similar effort in the future infinitely more difficult, and strengthen the hands of those who say that what is, is what should be. The hope is that the Institute coming along at this auspicious moment will draw together the talents and the resources of the American Jewish community to make it a vital and creative community."

That letter expressed the mood of Jick and his staff as well at the time, aware of the problems while hopeful that they could be resolved. Looking back, Jick says that things "went relatively well" that first year. He was on the road, visiting important cities to try to drum up support and enthusiasm for the Institute and find creative people to initiate project ideas. It was during the first year that most of the Institute's projects were begun.

"The whole idea was for us to provide seed money to local community projects," says Jick. "The community was supposed to take the initiative and we would work with them. One big problem was communication and replication—how to tell other communities about what was working well and how to get others to try it."

The Institute staff saw its work calling for creative endeavors rather than public relations promotions, which they said was in the realm of the CJF staff. But the CJF staff viewed the Institute as another national organization responsible for its own PR. Despite various attempts to get the two staffs to coordinate their efforts and divide the promotional work, little was accomplished.

Then there was the money shortage. Gordon Zacks, who was to head an effort to raise $900,000 in private money for the Institute, was unsuccessful. He says that "this type of fund-raising was negated by the way the Institute was set up under Federation control." People came to realize that the notion of raising huge sums from individuals and foundations was a pipe dream.

At the June, 1973, board meeting of the Institute, Zacks made a motion that the entire three-year CJF pledge of $1,350,000 for the Institute be viewed as funds available and that the Institute not be restricted by cash on hand. The motion was tabled. Leonard Fein then moved that "this board inform the CJF of its intention to resign unless the commitments of $1,350,000 from local communities be guaranteed." Hillel Levine seconded the motion, but it, too, was tabled.

About three dozen local and national projects were selected for Institute support that first year, most of them allocated $5,000 or less and requiring matching grants from the local communities. Two of the biggest still exist today. One was establishment of Fellowships in Jewish Educational Leadership (FIJEL), modeled after Danforth Fellowships in which young people were given monies to train for careers in Jewish education. It today survives as a function of the American Association for Jewish Education. The other major effort was the creation of a national Jewish media service to serve the audio-visual needs of the entire American Jewish community. It subsequently was incorporated by the National Jewish Welfare Board.

All told, the Institute For Jewish Life received, over its four-year life span, 161 formal project applications, and 44 were actually funded: 21 in the category of Jewish education, 10 in family and youth, nine in community organization and leadership education, four in Israel education and cultural resources, three in arts and media, and three miscellaneous; $687,520 of Institute funds were involved in these project grants. They were matched by other contributions totaling $1,267,623.

Among other projects the Institute funded: adult education experiments and curriculum innovations; short "trigger" films to help initiate group discussions; two projects dealing with encouraging family Sabbath observance in the home; studies to explore the role of *chavurot* (or fellowships) within the synagogue and look into the question of communal responsibility for working with intermarried couples.

It was during that first year that Irving Blum, the chairman and champion of the Institute, was struck by an illness that not only took his life but, many say, spelled the beginning of the end for the Institute.

"We were hanging in there, doing fairly well. Then came the Yom Kippur War and things were never the same."

Leon Jick recalls with bitter irony that the only Institute meeting which a healthy Blum attended as chairman was the very first, in June, 1972. By November, when the General Assembly met in Toronto and named him president of the CJF, Blum was there but too ill with a kidney disease to leave his hotel room.

When it became clear that he was unable to continue serving as chairman, a replacement was sought. Obviously it was a vital position and the transition was to be of the utmost importance. Who could fill Blum's shoes?

The counterculture group proposed Gordon Zacks, but he was considered too flighty by some of the CJF professionals. "They said he lacked tact but we felt the real reason was that they were afraid they couldn't control him," says Jick.

It was soon after this episode that Gordon Zacks began growing less involved with the Institute. Some say he was embarrassed by his inability to make good on his commitment to raise big money and that he was insulted at being passed over for the chairmanship. Others say he realized the Institute was on its way down and he decided to move on to other ventures.

The CJF picked a chairman, a Detroit businessman who had been on the board of both the Institute and the original Task Force but who had not been particularly active on either.

To this day, just how and why Hyman Safran was picked remains a mystery, though several people suggested he was appointed at the request of his friend Max Fisher, also of Detroit, to ensure that the CJF could control the Institute.

As if to underscore how little an impact he ultimately had, hardly anyone interviewed, including people intimately involved with the Institute, could remember Safran's name.

"Hy Safran is a sweet, kind man who had no business being chairman and who seemed to sense that himself," one board member remarked. "He was in over his head. He was a local Federation lay leader with no real qualifications for this kind of job."

Says Leon Jick, expressing the way many others felt: "By choosing someone like Safran, the CJF seemed to be saying, 'We don't care about the Institute anymore.'"

There were other problems surfacing. The level of the proposals the Institute was receiving from local communities was not of the caliber it had hoped for. And while the Institute staff wanted to fund more cultural projects, the CJF was insisting that they stick to those directly dealing with local agencies and communities.

"Still," says Jick, "we were hanging in there, doing fairly well. Then came the Yom Kippur War and things were never the same. It totally changed the priorities and interests of the American Jewish community, with more monies going for emergency needs in Israel."

The downward spiral became more rapid. After the war, Jick began to look for a replacement. He had planned from the outset to return to academic life after two years as director. Now he was sure he had made the right decision, but he wanted to find "someone strong" to succeed him.

Sidney Vincent was approached. So was Daniel Elazar. But the Institute was only assured of one more year of existence, and it was difficult finding a qualified person to take on a new job that might end in a year.

At around the same time, Hyman Safran quietly stepped down as chairman of the Institute. CJF officials admit he was a disappointment. "He didn't provide much leadership," said one, citing financial problems on Safran's part that did not allow him to devote more time to the Institute.

Enter Jerold Hoffberger. "Here's another great irony," says Leon Jick. "A few of us were looking for a strong advocate who could carry

out Irving Blum's legacy to follow Safran as chairman. We felt the logical choice would be Blum's brother-in-law, 'Chuck' Hoffberger. But he was not to be the saviour of the Institute. In fact, he became the undertaker."

Jerold Hoffberger, more commonly known as Chuck, acknowledges that much of his involvement in Jewish philanthropic causes grew out of the love and admiration he had for his brother-in-law, Irving Blum.

JEROLD HOFFBERGER: don't look back.

Hoffberger, a vigorous, outgoing Baltimore businessman of 61 who recently sold the Baltimore Orioles and a large brewery, says he was "never a politically active Jew, but my family had been involved in the humanitarian aspects of Jewish life for many years and I followed that route." He has been president of the Associated Jewish Charities and Welfare Fund in Baltimore and chaired the boards of scores of Jewish organizations on the local, national and international scene. In 1975, he assumed the presidency of the Council of Jewish Federations, the position Irving Blum held when he died two years earlier.

Hoffberger's style is direct and forceful. Critics say he viewed the Institute as a businessman would. They say he saw that it was costing a lot of money and producing few tangible results, so he was ready to let it end. He maintains that he fought to keep it going but that his role was that of "a servant, not a master" of the Federations and it was their decision to terminate the Institute.

Stung by charges from critics that he let Irving Blum's legacy wither and die, Hoffberger's eyes flash and his voice rises as he responds: "People shouldn't make assumptions about the motivations of others." He called the charges "vituperative and intemperate."

Hoffberger is a man of action, and his philosophy, regarding the Institute and in general, is pragmatic: "I believe in the art of the possible," he says. "If I looked back on things with regret, I'd never go forward."

By 1974, the Institute's bloom was fading. Personalities and circumstances combined to alter the mood.

Jerold Hoffberger was now the chairman and he made two controversial decisions early on. One was to move the Institute to CJF headquarters in New York. The Institute staff refused to move, fighting for a degree of semi-autonomy in Boston which was largely symbolic. Hoffberger was adamant and made the move a personal campaign, maintaining that it was far more practical to have the Institute more closely coordinated with the CJF and its staff.

"Leon Jick operated without significant input from Federations," he says now. "I'm not that type of person. I feel you have to involve leaders in the program, and I tried to bring closer cooperation with the Federations." In the end, the Institute did move to New York. But a new staff had to be hired; old staff just wouldn't leave Boston.

To head the new group, Hoffberger was instrumental in hiring a young Reform rabbi named Ken Roseman, who had been dean of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. He took over as director on July 1, 1974. "Roseman was a complete unknown, out of left field," said one board member. "People were saying that the CJF had pulled another Safran out of the hat."

"That was the end," says Leon Jick, "not just for me but for the Institute as I knew it. Roseman was to be a caretaker. From then on the Institute didn't adopt a single new project."

"I believe in the art of the possible," says Jerold Hoffberger. "If I looked back on things with regret, I'd never go forward."

Ken Roseman, now a pulpit rabbi in the Midwest, sees things differently. He says that CJF was honest in telling him at the outset that the job would probably only last two or three years. And he says he supported the move to New York. "It was simply easier to operate there and contact people. We did undertake a few new projects and we were very active in trying to find permanent homes for projects that had been started."

This was a turbulent time for the Institute. A new chairman, a new director and staff, a new location. And a crucial evaluation got under way after two years of operation to help determine the fate of the program once its initial three years were up.

That task was given to Dr. Arnold Gurin, who often evaluated agencies for the CJF and its constituents. He undertook his study in the spring of 1974 so that the General Assembly vote in November could be based on his findings and the subsequent CJF board recommendations.

Gurin's report summarizes many of the inherent tensions and problems built into the structure of the Institute, and points out its severe limitations of time and funding. He also notes early on that the climate of the Jewish community was not what it was when the Institute was created and that a post-Yom-Kippur-War Israel looms as a far more urgent cause than "enriching the quality of American Jewish life."

Gurin credited the Institute with having produced "some notable achievements,' not the least of which was to define its own purposes and concentrate on a few specific areas.

His major criticism, based on conversations with dozens of people involved, concerned the "relationships between the Institute and national organizations on the one hand and the local communities on the other." Inadequate consultation and planning, work duplication, failure to meet local needs, poor visibility and promotion—the charges were certainly not new.

Asserted Gurin:

> "It seems to me inescapable that the very establishment of the Institute involved an implied criticism of the present functioning of various Jewish organizations—indeed, of the Jewish community as a whole. This issue was papered over in the establishment of the Institute in an effort, obviously, to create an atmosphere of cooperation among the various organizations involved. However, it does not seem that the organizers of the Institute had a clear strategy for achieving change within ongoing organizations. It was expected that somehow the Institute would be able to generate proposals for innovation and have them incorporated within the work of the existing organizations. What was lacking was an analysis of how much change was really being sought, what the propensities for change might be in the various areas to be affected, and what mechanisms could be organized that would lead to change.
>
> "As far as I can see, the staff of the Institute did not have a strategy for change either. It was clear from the beginning that the Institute was not to become an operating agency and, therefore, could not become involved in continuing responsibilities for implementing its innovative programs. The Institute staff, apparently, put its emphasis on defining the innovative ideas and demonstrating their feasibility, without having worked out the relationships that would be necessary to transfer such

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programs eventually to agencies that would be ready to carry them out."

The resulting clashes and misunderstandings, then, were inevitable.

According to Gurin, the need for the Institute, or at least its work, remained urgent; but urgent or not, local Federations had little inclination to provide further funding. "Any plan that is projected must therefore be clear, specific and convincing," he suggested.

His report called for greater cooperation and coordination among agencies and sharpening the focus of the Institute. He concluded that "the needs for which the Institute was created continue to require priority attention" and that "the Institute has undertaken some promising approaches which have not had an adequate test."

Finally, Gurin said that the conditions "should be established for a proper test," through stability in staff and financing, for an experimental period. If this were not feasible, he recommended that the Institute be disbanded.

Gurin's report was well received by the Study Committee that commissioned it. In August, 1974, they met and voted unanimously to recommend to the CJF that the Institute be given a minimum of five more years beyond the original three-year period of July 1, 1975.

On September 15, 1974, the CJF board reviewed the Gurin Report and the Study Committee's recommendation and came up with several options of its own, ranging from (Option A) continuing the Institute for five more years as suggested to (Option C) letting it terminate after adding one more year to the original three-year plan.

Other options included reexamining the roles of the American Association for Jewish Education (AAJE), the National Foundation for Jewish Culture (NFJC), and the Institute, with an eye toward some kind of merger; and continuing the Institute on a permanent basis as a department of the CJF.

By a vote of 28-15, the board voted to recommend to the communities for action by the General Assembly in November Option C, terminating the Institute after one additional year. It also voted to explore the possibility of an Institute/AAJE/NFJC merger.

The latter task was assigned to Sidney Vincent of Cleveland, who did a thorough job. But few today remember his report. "It was undertaken when the Institute was beginning to wind down and this was seen as an effort to deal with what happens next," Vincent says. "But the pace of events was so fast that by the time I completed my report, it was too late."

Vincent called for a stronger coordination among the three organizations if not an outright merger, but as he readily admits, "the report had no impact."

Meanwhile, the showdown vote on the fate of the Institute took place in Chicago at the General Assembly in November. The debate was long and spirited—extraordinary for a usually bland G.A. Some of the Institute's strongest supporters pushed for five more years, but others, like Gordon Zacks and Leonard Fein, argued that the Institute be put out of its misery and allowed to die immediately.

"I was for euthanasia," says Zacks. "I felt the Institute had become a sham and should be ended, quickly."

But the G.A. approved Option C to extend the program an additional year, through June 30, 1976. And so the Institute ended quietly, long after the furor was spent. As Leonard Fein observed, "The tragedy of the Institute was that when it finally died, nobody even missed it."

Part Four: The Record

"This summary report indicates reassuringly the creativity of American Jewry."

Jerold Hoffberger, from the introduction to 'Venture In Creativity'

Much credit has been given the Institute for its role in helping to fund the original *Jewish Catalog*, which eventually became one of the best-selling Jewish books ever published. The funding was negligible ($4,500) but the three young editors were given the grant at a crucial time and it helped make possible the preparation of the manuscript and its publication.

Ideally, that's what the Institute was all about: to provide the few dollars that could help and inspire creative people to achieve nationally significant successes. Unfortunately, it rarely happened that way.

One of the larger and more controversial Institute allocations ($20,000) went for the establishment of the National Jewish Conference Center in New York, which was created to bring laymen in contact with academic and professional Jewish leaders. The Center is headed by Dr. Yitz Greenberg and has expanded its scope, though it is still viewed as an institution that has not yet crystalized its goals.

Then there are the misses and near-misses. Funding for the National Jewish Theater helped lead to a production of "The Wall," whose results were artistically and financially disastrous. A major plan of the Institute had been to develop a high-quality national supplement for Jewish newspapers but the project never came to fruition. A Jewish media service was originally conceived as a far more sophisticated and elaborate program to deal with not only cataloguing but producing media material. And a University Without Walls adult education project was to be a large-scale effort allowing for either seminars in various locations or home study.

A comprehensive summary of each of the projects funded is included in the CJF's final, official report on the Institute For Jewish Life. It is entitled "Venture In Creativity" and to read it, one might conclude the Institute was an unqualified success. Only toward the end of the 30-page report comes hints of the controversies and problems that plagued the Institute. There is reference to unrealistic expectations and demands, and a warning that "progress occurs step by step." Three years plus the additional fourth year were, the report concludes, "too short a time to design, test and obtain definitive results in new experimental programs." But overall, the report's tenor is that the Institute was a bold experiment on the part of the Federations and that "its imprint has been left in a variety of areas."

That is a far cry from the tone of the original final report written by Ken Roseman, the Institute's second director, whose blunt, critical study was shelved by the CJF staff, who rewrote and sanitized his work. The original Roseman report now rests in the files of the Institute, which are kept at the American Jewish Historical Society Library on the campus of Brandeis in Waltham, Massachusetts.

The lengthiest section of Roseman's evaluation deals with the structure of the Institute, how it operated, why it had difficulties, and includes recommendations for the future. He asserts at the outset that the Institute was a direct response to the student demonstration at the 1969 G.A. in Boston rather than a thrust from within the Federations. "The fact that this movement depended on outside stimulation appears to reflect a weakness of long range planning" by Federations, Roseman wrote, referring to the Institute as "imposed" on the Establishment.

He contends that the purposefully vague definitions given the Institute and its goals proved to be harmful since it became extremely difficult to objectively evaluate its accomplishments.

Roseman also points out the inherent tension of the Institute–CJF relationship and suggests that CJF should have either assumed direct functional responsibility for the Institute or granted it complete autonomy, including the right to raise funds independently.

Roseman's original report was shelved by the CJF staff, who rewrote and sanitized his work.

Criticizing Federations for faults on a variety of levels, from the organizational to the spiritual, Roseman says CJF did not fulfill its public relations tasks for the Institute, that Federations and their staff lacked "Jewishness," and that they did not help put an end to interagency rivalry. Roseman said he was "con-

tinuously disheartened and dismayed at the number of hours and dollars wasted and promising projects suspended because of bureaucratic infighting and jealousy." He cited cases of an agency executive who forbade his staff to attend an Institute-Jewish Media Service Seminar on the creative use of the media because "it is not politic to work with the Institute," and other agency executives who worked to subvert Institute funding both locally and nationally.

Institute staff also came in for criticism. Roseman said that some of the staff members acted smugly and condescendingly toward Federation professionals. "At the very minimum," he wrote, "we have to face ourselves squarely and admit that we did not do a very good job in developing positive communications and relations with Federations."

Roseman pointed out that in the interests of *shalom bayit* (maintaining communal peace), "the Institute itself was created, partly because no one would publicly challenge the agencies which were not adequately filling the needs and because no one could demand and/or fund the rebuilding necessary *within* the present structure. Therefore, the strategy of adding a superstructure to existing agencies was adopted, rather than openly confronting the need to seek their revitalization and renewal." He recommended regular, automatic, independent evaluation of agencies.

Finally, he asserted that the Institute's very existence "deliberately challenged the status quo and threatened those vested interests who had become comfortable with modest achievements, static programming and limited new perspectives of thought." Controversy is seen as harmful and disruptive to Federations, he stated, and anything which could detract from their goals was "almost by definition undesirable." His final recommendation was for the CJF and the Synagogue Council of America to bring the "fundamental question" of Jewishness into the open, "discuss it in depth and develop strategies for coping with it."

The CJF, not surprisingly, was displeased with Roseman's report. Charles Zibbell, associate director and chief liaison with the Institute, wrote in a memo to Roseman that the entire section of structure "diminishes" the report. "You can write an article like this for a journal of Jewish opinion," he said, "but I don't believe it belongs in a final report. It begins with a myth and ends with a set of personal opinions."

Phil Bernstein's response offers some insight into his style and methodology. Rather than dashing off an angry note to Roseman dismissing his evaluations, Bernstein wrote a 14-page, single-spaced letter to him, responding point by point in an effort to counter what he considered to be inaccuracies in the report.

Bernstein suggested that the Institute should be characterized as neither a failure nor a success and that criticisms of the CJF staff and their Jewishness was "entirely out of order." And he insisted that it is a myth to claim that the Institute grew out of the student uprising.

Bernstein acknowledged that while the Institute sought to deal with "the entire perspective of Jewish life," the Federations viewed it more narrowly. They felt it was only designed to help them "and other activities were regarded as extraneous . . . and therefore viewed critically." He also observed that a key problem for future efforts was "the need to integrate Research and Development with on-going service operational organizations—those organizations must be tied in to the experiments themselves."

Good points, but they did not appear in the final report.

Says Roseman: "The staff wanted to make a full analysis of the Institute and see why it wasn't successful. The CJF simply wanted a report on the Institute's achievements. They didn't want me to get into the leadership role of the CJF or the interplay of agencies or the Institute's relationship to CJF. I wrote what I felt was an honest evaluation but I fully expected Phil Bernstein's response. He said it was inappropriate and he took it out of my hands."

Roseman says that if he were to write a final report today, it would not be so filled with frustration. "I have no personal bitterness," he says. "It was a source of great satisfaction. You can't look back. But I think the American Jewish community ought to feel frustrated about what happened. The Institute should have been continued and there's still a need for it, but its most important legacy was intangible—it was making people aware of Jewish priorities and needs."

Part Five: The Future

"When it is time to work for the Lord, disregard the traditional structure."

Psalm 119:126

The Institute For Jewish Life was not the first attempt by the Establishment to mount a national Jewish cultural effort.

In 1958, the General Assembly of the CJF voted to create an agency that would heighten Jewish culture, and two years later the National Foundation For Jewish Culture was established as an autonomous organization.

Marshall Sklare, the prominent Brandeis sociologist, was one of several people involved with that venture who drew parallels to the later experience of the Institute.

"I went through the birth of the National Foundation," he says, "and at that time the CJF was casting about to keep up with the demands of some key lay leaders for Jewish cultural and educational activities. There are those who feel that the CJF staff lacked the commitment and sensitivity to create such an institution, and they undertook it to look like they were on top of things."

Sklare credits Salo Baron, the historian, with diagnosing the problems with the National Foundation early on. "We served on the Academic Advisory Committee, and Prof. Baron got up at a meeting and said the Foundation was a huge waste of time and that we should all get up and leave, that the longer we were involved, the more dangerous it would become because we were lending legitimacy to a project that was not serious."

Says Sklare: "Everything I saw indicated a lack of commitment by the CJF."

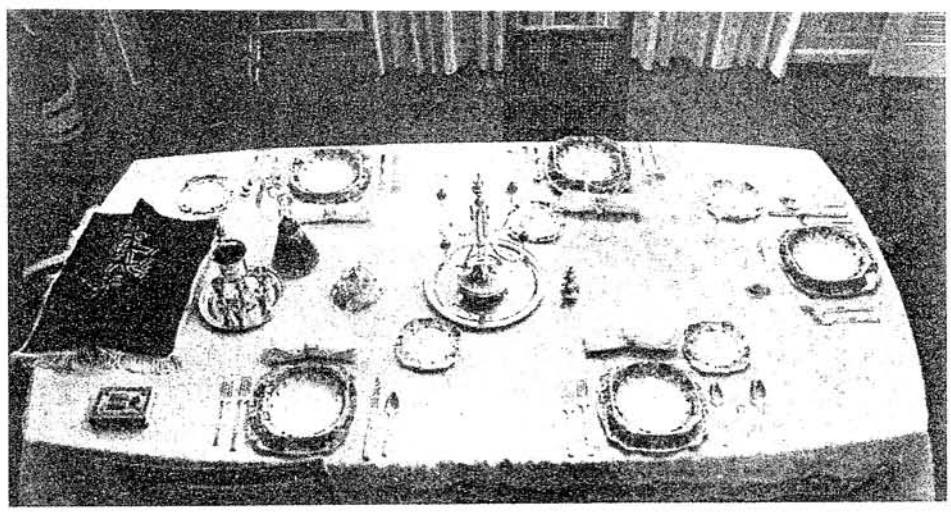
The concept of the National Foundation was sound. At the time there were about ten existing organizations involved in Jewish culture, including the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Jewish Publication Society, Leo Baeck Institute and the American Jewish Historical Society, which wre asking Federations for allocations. The idea was to create a central body that would have clout, hire its own staff to do sophisticated fund-raising, and then distribute funds to its affiliate agencies.

The understanding was that the CJF would support the Foundation, thus cutting out duplication in funding requests and giving cultural organizations a central address.

Judah Shapiro, the Labor Zionist leader who died several months ago, was hired as the first director of the National Foundation and recalled the experience with bitterness. "It's part of the CJF tradition to do the heroic and the dramatic at their General Assembly, like creating this new venture, and then not following through. I was the chairman of the original study committee and when the plan was presented in San Francisco, the delegates stood and cheered. But that's where the excitement ended. The CJF hasn't got the power to make the local Federations pay up. The question is: Do they even try?

"I was the director—that meant I was the chief *shnorrer* (Yiddish for beggar). By far the largest part of my time was spent trying to raise money. At the beginning it was a great venture and I was totally committed, but it was always hand-to-mouth. They had talked about raising millions of dollars and then they gave us $180,000 to give out. It was a joke."

Shapiro says the CJF "would've loved for



Two projects of the Institute dealt with encouraging families to celebrate Shabbat at home.

INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH LIFE

the thing to work, they were very pious about Jewish education and culture, but the source of funding was the most serious problem. The CJF started it but they never stayed with it."

Harry Barron of the National Foundation sees similarities between the Institute and his organization. "In both cases there was great initial excitement about what was going to be done. Expectations were totally unrealistic and unfair. And of course the great sums of money never materialized."

The parallels are plainly evident. The lessons to be learned from these experiences are not. Everyone interviewed offered a post-mortem on the Institute. They ranged from Phil Bernstein and Jerold Hoffberger's assessment that it was, despite its problems, a successful experiment, to charges that it was deliberately undermined by the CJF. But there were no good guys vs. bad guys here; instead, there were different factions, each with a common goal of improving Jewish life, but with diverse, often conflicting, visions of how best to achieve that goal.

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The final accomplishment of the Institute was greater than the sum of the projects it funded. Some were successful, others were not, but the Institute heightened an awareness of the problems facing the American Jewish community and created an atmosphere of concern and commitment to deal with those problems in new ways. It helped the organized community focus on the transmission of Jewish heritage and the soon-to-become-cliched "quality of Jewish life." "The Institute helped encourage a trend that was more powerful than anyone thought," observes Leonard Fein. And Phil Bernstein sugests that "even the most serious skeptics would agree that the Institute sharpened a new sensitivity."

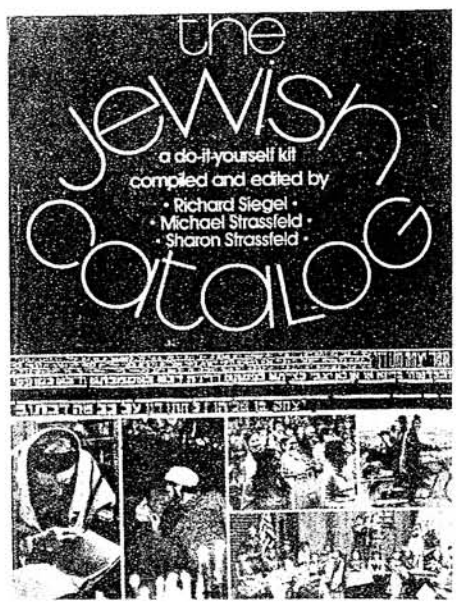
In the last decade we have seen a growth of the kinds of alternative, counterculture and/or spiritual innovations, within and outside of the organized Jewish community, that the Institute was nourishing. Federation has become more sensitive to the kinds of priorities the Concerned Jewish Students were calling for in 1969. Jewish education is Number One on the national agenda today. Federation attracts more young people more observant people, to its work. The General Assemblies now celebrate rather than tolerate Shabbat. Alternative groups, in areas ranging from Jewish education to philanthropy, have emerged and grown, sometimes challenging, sometimes working with the Establishment.

One could argue that these changes were more a product of the '60s than the Institute, but its funding of creative projects, its search for innovation—its very existence—helped raise the communal consciousness, though in ways not readily measured.

Still, the experience of the Institute, and the National Foundation and others, begs for a fresh perspective. We must come to realize that our strength as a community—organization and structure—is also our weakness. The truth is that the CJF does many things extremely well, raising hundreds of millions of dollars and servicing the needs of the community. But creating and supporting organizations designed specifically to spur innovation is not one of the CJF's strong points. And how could it be? The fact is that under the present system no umbrella organization like the CJF could sponsor an independent agency and give it a free hand without regard to accomplishments and accountability. Under the present system.

"I hate to think that the net answer is that we're a barren community and that it's futile to come up with new ideas," says Harry Barron. "I don't believe that, but I also feel that just stirring people up with gimmickry is wrong. There are no quick, easy answers to the long, slow process of improving Jewish education in the broadest sense. When I see how little knowledge Jewish college kids have today, I see how grievously unsuccessful we've been."

Perhaps it is time to question the unquestionable, to reassess the way we have done things up until now, to challenge the notion that conflict is always dangerous and consensus always wise. For years the model of consensus has been a hallmark of the Jewish community because it ensures unity, but there are those who say that rule should no longer apply. Charles Liebman, the author of *The Ambivalent American Jew,* maintains that neither the Holocaust nor the State of Israel can save American Jewry. "I think American Jewry has to have a real notion of what Jewish survival means," he says. "Judaism has to be meaningful to us. But this necessarily means that there are going to be differences of opinion among American Jews and among Jewish organizations about the content and meaning of Jewish life." He suggests that "in our desire to achieve consensus and unity around the notion of survival, we have a tendency to dilute or silence voices within the community that speak to a particular program for survival. I think the time has come within American Jewish life to let these differences emerge, indeed to even cultivate them."



Perhaps the most well known accomplishment of the Institute was giving a grant to the young editors of the Jewish Catalog, which went on to become a best-seller. The grant was for $4,500.

Sidney Shapiro, whose job it is to give away money, puts it this way: "Consider for a moment that Judaism is a product you're trying to sell. You raise millions of dollars a year and you give that money to Israel and to Jewish causes around the world.

"Good. But you've got to sell the new market, you've got to reach the youth in order to keep in business. You've got to come up with fresh ideas, new approaches. If you were running a real business, you'd spend at least five percent of your income a year on Research and Development, creative thinking.

"But do Jewish organizations do that? No. They realize they're losing business, losing customers from the next generation, people they need in order to survive. But the Jewish Establishment creates an atmosphere in which alternatives, innovation, fresh ideas are stifled.

"The powers that be are more concerned with holding on to that power than with future survival. I don't want to hurt them, I want to help them. But what they're doing is suicide."

Shapiro is executive director of the Levinson Foundation, based in Springfield, Massachusetts, which seeks to fund groups that challenge the effectiveness of the distribution of power and resources in the Jewish community. *Lillith* magazine, the Chavurot, the Jewish student movement and the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education are among the groups that have received financial aid from the Levinson Foundation.

Many of those who were involved with the Institute For Jewish Life say the lesson they have learned is that such a venture could not have worked, and cannot work today, with community funding. Says Bernard Reisman, who was a consultant to the Institute: "The Federations were being asked to pay for a living, breathing, built-in critique of their own shortcomings. It just can't work that way. You need private money and the freedom to take risks."

Yitz Greenberg, whose National Jewish Conference Center was established in part from an Institute For Jewish Life grant, says his Center concentrates on the areas of leadership education and policy planning and seeks to link the new generation of Jewish academics, rabbis and communal professionals with their lay counterparts. He adds that he has learned from the problems of the Institute. "Our aim is to provide direct services, create a constituency, narrow our goals and stick to them.

"The failure of the Institute was one of the great tragedies of our time," he maintains.

"There's still a desperate need for renewal, a need still not being met."

Steve Shaw, who coordinated the Concerned Jewish Students protest in Boston, is now director of the Radius Institute (which funded the research for this article) and is still involved in confronting the Jewish Establishment. According to its literature, the Radius Institute seeks "to stimulate interaction among outstanding humanists, social scientists, religious thinkers and communal leaders, and explore the implications of their work for contemporary Jewish life and values." It also provides funds and matching grants to alternative Jewish groups and projects.

Shaw points out that "the generation of the '60s is now programming for the American Jewish community in the '80s. In that sense, I suppose, we've taken over. But the saddest part is that the Jewish community hasn't found the way to involve and harness the energies of countless good people who are turned off by the organized Jewish community. How many Hillel Levines are there out there?" he wonders.

Today, Hillel Levine combines his Jewish and professional interests in one of the areas the alternative groups of the '60s made a prime focus of their concern—Jewish studies. Levine helped create a major in Jewish Studies at Yale and this fall became its first director of undergraduate studies. He divides his time between teaching a course on Jews in the modern era and working to coordinate courses in the many disciplines that contribute to Jewish studies.

Still, Levine bemoans what he calls his "loss of militance" in battling the Establishment. The man who once functioned as a gadfly to many organized Jewish groups now says he just can't take it any more, and is no longer active in Jewish organizational life. But many of the alternative groups and movements set in motion by the '60s (and in part by the Institute For Jewish Life itself) persist, giving the final words of Levine's General Assembly speech in 1969 a special force: Levine had warned his elders that if they failed to respond to student demands, he and his young friends would be forced "to do it ourselves.

"It would take us longer and be more difficult, but we have already begun. The processes which have been set into action will not come to a stop."

Will not come to a stop because the need for them remains. Despite the major strides made over the last several years, there are still, every day, Jewish youngsters being turned off by Hebrew school, college students drifting away from their tradition through ignorance and lack of interest, young families raising children with little Jewish identity, would-be synagogue-goers turned off to sterile services.

Says Levine today: "There is definitely a need for the Institute For Jewish Life in the very *pupik* of the community." The need *is* there, if not for the Institute itself, then for independent, creative bodies that could help focus attention on some of the same problems that led to the establishment of the Institute For Jewish Life.

Thr original Task Force report of 1971, which recommended the creation of the Institute, pointed out the urgent need to "nourish a Jewish society" and "develop a ground of Jewish living" to ward off alienation and assimilation.

The report concluded: "The question becomes not whether we are obliged to respond, but how."

Today, a decade later, the "how" remains unanswered. ✡