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American Jewry at Risk: "A Time to Act" and the Prioritization of Jewish Education

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Abstract Twenty-five years after the publication of A Time to Act, by the Commission on Jewish Education of North America (CJENA), we are in a position to evaluate this initiative with historical hindsight. At the time, the commission was heralded as an unprecedented communal undertaking and a signal that after years of perfunctory treatment and neglect by the organized Jewish community, Jewish education was gaining recognition as a vital concern. While accurate, this assessment benefits from contextualization both in the American and the American-Jewish situation of the 1980s and early-1990s. The CJENA and its report mirrored American anxiety during that same period about the state of K-12 education, while initiatives to address systemic weaknesses in Jewish education were concurrent with the spate of reform efforts spawned to address the perceived decline in public education. At the same time, A Time to Act exemplified a more general malaise within the Jewish community about the effects of rapid integration on Jewish ethnic and religious survival. Communal leaders became convinced that Jewish education could stem the assimilationist tide. The CJENA, which was funded by the Mandel Associated Foundations, also presaged a sea change in the funding of Jewish education, particularly the growing impact of mega-donors on the Jewish educational landscape. Among the commissioners were a number of the funders and foundation executives who emerged in the 1990s as formidable players in such areas as summer camping, adult education, leadership training, day schools and heritage tourism. Indeed, the greatest legacy of the Commission may be that it paved the way for the initiatives that followed. If A Time to Act was not a veritable voice crying out in the wilderness, its cri de coeur shaped the leading edge of a broad-based effort of reform and revitalization facilitated by an influx of family foundation funding. And while it is an exaggeration to claim that the commission generated the

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celebrated and fruitful mega-donor collaborations of the late-1990s and early 2000s, including the funding of Taglit-Birthright Israel and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, it undeniably contributed to an environment that placed a premium on such partnerships.

Keywords Education · American Jewish History · History of Philanthropy · Contemporary Jewish Studies

Introduction

When the framers of the October 2015 "Strategic Directions for Jewish Life: A Call to Action" laid out their list of recommended responses to contemporary American Jewish demographic trends, much of it had a familiar ring. With the exception of its head-turning endorsement of government aid to parochial schools, the statement reaffirmed a Jewish communal strategy to prioritize formal and informal Jewish education that harked back to at least 1990 and the publication of *A Time to Act*: *The Report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America*. Then, as in 2015, the demographic challenges included rising rates of intermarriage, Jewish apathy and disaffiliation, and below-replacement-level birthrates. Both documents were endorsed by a religiously and ideologically diverse coalition that included philanthropists and intellectuals, as well as clergy, educators, and communal professionals.

To be sure, *A Time to Act* was a far more ambitious document, the culmination of a three-year blue ribbon commission, while *A Call to Action*, also known as the *Statement on Jewish Vitality*, was approximately the length of a newspaper op-ed piece, and emerged from a more informal study group assembled in the wake of the Pew Research Center's 2013 *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*. However, one of the most striking differences between the two was in their tone. Both conveyed a sense of urgency and alarm. But, whereas *A Time to Act* reflected a spirit of optimism that the Jewish community could marshal its impressive human and financial resources to address the perceived crisis, *A Call to Action* appeared to be born out of despair. "Despite the evidence of deeply disturbing population trends, the community is bereft of any sense of crisis," the framers complained in the third sentence of the document.[1] In the wake of Pew's stark evidence of a shrinking Jewish middle, the reactions seemed to range from Orthodox triumphalism to deluded postmodern-inflected prattle about communal transformation to resigned shrugs. But the main reason for the underwhelming response was the sense that the much-hyped survey was little more than an iterative and banal sequel to the 1990 National Jewish Population Study. If attempts to stiffen communal resolve and thereby spark new life into the continuity crisis were largely unsuccessful, it was because the solutions proposed by the American Jewish establishment, as exemplified by *A Call to Action*, were as old as the perceived problems. After all, *A Time to Act* and the subsequent 1990 National Jewish Population Study were turning 25.

[1] "Strategic Directions for eJewish Life: A Call to Action," *eJewish Philanthropy* (October 1, 2015). http://ejewishphilanthropy.com/strategic-directions-for-jewish-life-a-call-to-action/, accessed on February 12, 2016.

In 1986, philanthropist Morton L. Mandel was a recent convert to the cause of Jewish education, fresh off of an edifying but ultimately disappointing experience attempting to effect change in the Diaspora through the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). Convinced that he would have more impact in North America working through his private family foundation, Mandel gathered together his closest advisers at the offices of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and shared with them his intention to tackle a perceived dearth in well-trained Jewish educators through multi-year, six-figure gifts to the education programs of the three largest Jewish seminaries. The federation’s executive vice-president, Stephen Hoffman, however, was dubious that such gifts would have their desired result. “They will throw it away,” Hoffman insisted. The force of his comment was initially met with shocked silence.[2]

When Hoffman elaborated, he pointed out that the seminaries did not at that time prioritize Jewish education, nor were they guided by overall change strategies. Thus, absent a theory for intervention or direction about how the money should be spent, it was doubtful that the gifts would make a significant impact. Moreover, the foundation itself had no articulated target and no established measuring rod for success. The logic of Hoffman’s objection was inescapable, and it planted a seed in the mind of another meeting participant, the Mandel Foundation’s chief education consultant, Seymour Fox. The Mandel Associated Foundations needed a direction, an articulated set of desired outcomes and a strategy for realizing them. Over the next months, Mandel and Fox, with input from advisers like Hoffman and his predecessor at the federation, Henry Zucker, as well as Jerusalem-based policy analyst Annette Hochstein, drew up a plan to convene a commission of philanthropists, communal professionals, and educators tasked with drawing up a communal agenda for Jewish education and advising the foundation on setting its own priorities in the field. The foundation recruited the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America (JCC), the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) and the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) as convening partners.[3]

The Commission on Jewish Education in North America (CJENA), comprised of 44 individuals representing a wide gamut of institutions and communal interests, and supported by a full-time staff and a group of researchers and policy advisers, met for six plenary sessions between August 1988 and June 1990 and produced *A Time to Act*, a 97-page document combining a state-of–the-field report with analysis and policy recommendations (A Time to Act, 1990). Twenty-five years after the publication of *A Time to Act*, we are in a position to evaluate this initiative with historical hindsight. At the time, the commission was heralded as an unprecedented communal undertaking and a signal that, after years of perfunctory treatment and neglect by the organized Jewish community, Jewish education was gaining recognition as a vital concern. While accurate, this assessment benefits from

[2] Annette Hochstein, interview with the author, January 30, 2014; Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 4, 2014.

[3] Annette Hochstein, interview with the author, January 30, 2014; Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 4, 2014.

contextualization, both in the American and the American-Jewish situation of the 1980s and early 1990s. The commission and its report mirrored American anxiety during that same period about the state of K-12 education, while initiatives to address systemic weaknesses in Jewish education were concurrent with the spate of reform efforts spawned to address the perceived decline in public education. At the same time, the commission and its aftermath exemplified a more general malaise within the Jewish community about the effects of rapid integration on Jewish ethnic and religious survival. Communal leaders became convinced that Jewish education could stem the tide of assimilation.

The CJENA also presaged a sea change in the funding of Jewish education, particularly the growing impact of mega-donors on the Jewish educational landscape. Among the commissioners were a number of the funders and foundation executives who had emerged as formidable players in such areas as summer camping, adult education, leadership training, day schools, and heritage tourism. As it turned out, the Mandel Associated Foundations' North American-based initiatives in the 1990s, most notably its Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), had a decidedly mixed record of success. Indeed, the greatest legacy of the commission may be that it paved the way for the initiatives that followed. If *A Time to Act* was not a veritable voice crying out in the wilderness, its *cri de coeur* shaped the leading edge of a broad-based effort of reform and revitalization facilitated by an influx of family foundation funding. And while it is an exaggeration to claim that the commission generated the celebrated and fruitful mega-donor collaborations of the late-1990s and early 2000s, including the funding of Taglit-Birthright Israel and the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, it undeniably contributed to an environment that placed a premium on such partnerships.

The Mandel-Fox Partnership

In its broad outlines, the Commission on Jewish Education in North America was the brainchild of businessman and philanthropist Morton L. Mandel and educator Seymour Fox. Mandel was co-founder and manager, with his older brothers, Jack and Joseph, of Premier Industrial Corporation, a leading electronic parts and industrial components distributor. In 1953, buoyed by their financial success and inspired by the value of charity that they had learned from their mother, Rose, and despite the family's limited means, the brothers established the Mandel Foundation. By the 1970s, Mort Mandel had become increasingly engaged in philanthropic activities, primarily in his home city of Cleveland, Ohio, but also on the national level and in the State of Israel. His foundation's charitable giving was directed at both Jewish and non-sectarian causes, including the United Way, Case Western Reserve University, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Jewish Community Center of Cleveland, and the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland (Mandel, 2013).

Mandel's interest in Jewish education was a natural outgrowth of his commitment to leadership training, but it developed gradually. Jewish education-related giving represented only 1% of Mandel's North American charitable donations in the 1970s. It grew to 5% in the 1980s and to 23% in the 1990s ("Mandel

Associated Foundation Giving”).[4] Mandel’s commitment to Jewish peoplehood led him to become active in his local JCC and federation, but he always considered Jewish education to be “marginal.” He described his own Jewish education growing up in Cleveland as “a disgrace.”[5] Reflecting a common position among lay leaders at that time, Mandel asserted that federations should steer clear of funding religious organizations, including synagogues and schools, and focus their giving instead on “consensus” causes, such as community welfare, defense, Israel and oppressed Jewish communities overseas. His outlook began to evolve under the influence of Cleveland Jewish Community Federation executive director Sidney Vincent, an early proponent of cooperation between communal service professionals, rabbis, and educators to infuse federations and community centers with Jewish values and ideas. Vincent did not hesitate to castigate the Jewish communal service profession for what he characterized as its historic assimilationist ethos[6] (Vincent, 1979).

Mandel played a leading role in bringing Vincent’s message to the community center movement. In 1981, he was recruited to chair the Jewish Welfare Board [JWB]’s Commission on Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers (COMJEE). This initiative encouraged Mandel and his fellow commissioners to conceive of education broadly as “a lifelong process of acquiring Jewish knowledge, skills, attitudes and values,” and to appreciate that “effective Jewish education takes place not only in the classroom … but wherever the sense of Jewish belonging, understanding, values and responsibility is aroused.” COMJEE’s deliberations established in Mandel’s mind an inextricable connection between Jewish education, Jewish identity, and Jewish continuity (“Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers,” 1984).

A definitive attitudinal turning point came when Mandel became involved in the Diaspora education initiatives of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). As a board member from 1979 to 1988, Mandel was moved by the avowed interest of Israel’s Minister of Education, Zevulun Hammer, and the chairman of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), Arye (Leon) Dulzin, in stemming the tide of “assimilation” in the Diaspora. The men were prepared to invest $10 million from two JAFI funds to shore up Diaspora Jewish education at a time when the reorientation of JAFI from “an Israel-oriented authority to one that is seeking to play a … role in every part of the Jewish world,” even to a modest extent, was highly controversial. Although he was initially astounded by the lack of sophistication that characterized their approach, which amounted to throwing money at various organizations in a process devoid of any template or rationale, Mandel agreed to chair a new standing committee on Jewish education for JAFI, and, in 1984, he convened the First World Leadership Conference on Jewish Education in Jerusalem, which was attended by over 200 Jewish communal leaders and educators from Israel and the Diaspora. Mandel was heartened by Hammer’s recognition, articulated at the conference, that aliyah, or immigration to Israel, would not be a panacea for the problems of

[4] Thank you to Kristen Cherwin for preparing this information and to Jehuda Reinharz for sharing it with me.

[5] Morton Mandel, interview with the author, June 3, 2014.

[6] Barry Shrage, interview with the author, January 5, 2015.

Diaspora Jewry, and also by Israeli president Chaim Herzog's assertion, "Jewish education must be used to ensure Jewish continuity, Jewish survival—which has become seriously endangered by assimilation and intermarriage"[7] (Elazar, 1981; Elliman, 1984; World Leadership Conference, 1984).

Mandel ultimately became frustrated with the political infighting and "thuggery" at the WZO and JAFI and with an entrenched culture that impeded any change efforts. Nevertheless, his experience at JAFI was significant for him in at least two respects: First, it brought him into close contact with Fox, who served as the government representative to the Jewish Agency. Mandel recruited Fox to elaborate his committee's procedure and program. Second, it convinced him of the need to devote part of his foundation's mission to Jewish continuity and education initiatives in Cleveland and North America, more generally[8] (Mandel, 2013).

Mandel first met Fox, then dean of the School of Education at the Hebrew University, through his wife, Barbara Mandel. The two crossed paths in the early 1980s through her work as president of the National Council of Jewish Women.[9] Fox's involvement in Jewish communal life and commitment to education were long-standing. A gifted student whose precociousness and restless spirit led him to reject his immigrant Orthodox upbringing while maintaining great respect for traditional Jewish *lernen* (Torah study), he earned a Bachelor of Hebrew Literature degree and a Jewish Teacher's Certification at Chicago's College of Jewish Studies, where he found a mentor in historian Simon Rawidowicz[10] (Nisan 2005).

Although he continued his studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) and was ordained in 1956, Fox never envisioned himself as a pulpit rabbi. In 1954, he took a hiatus from JTSA and served for two years as director of Camp Ramah Wisconsin, while enrolling in a PhD program in the philosophy of education at the University of Chicago. After ordination, he became special assistant to JTSA Chancellor Louis Finkelstein and, later, dean of the Teacher's Institute. It was then that Fox was introduced to industrialist Samuel Melton and made his first significant foray into fundraising. Fox became the founder of the first research center for Jewish education in the United States, the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education. Eventually, while working at JTSA, he returned to his doctoral work and completed his dissertation under psychologist Bruno Bettelheim and educational philosopher Joseph Schwab[11] (Nisan 2005).

During Fox's formative years, a number of patterns emerged that affected his life trajectory. The first was his penchant for adopting father figures, or "rebbes," which family members interpreted as a response to tensions with his severe and demanding biological father. The mentors to whom he ingratiated himself became objects of emulation and conduits to power, due either to their wealth, position, pedigree, or intellectual prestige. A second was his gravitation toward a life of action rather than

[7] Morton Mandel, Interview with the author, June 3, 2014.

[8] Morton Mandel, Interview with the author, June 3, 2014; Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 4, 2014; See, also, Arbel (2001), p. 211.

[9] Morton Mandel, interview with the author, June 3, 2014.

[10] Aryeh Davidson, interview with the author, August 11, 2015.

[11] Aryeh Davidson, interview with the author, August 11, 2015.

academic study and reflection. Although Fox was gifted and surrounded himself with intellectual giants (including Rawidowicz, Bettelheim, Schwab, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Richard McKeon, and Ralph Tyler), he was always more of a doer than a scholar, preferring administration, program development, and institution building to research and publishing. In fact, he found academic writing to be excruciating.[12]

Finally, Fox chose to devote his energies to the Jewish community, first in the United States, and, eventually, in Jerusalem, where he served for 14 years as head of the Hebrew University's School of Education and founded the Melton Centre for Jewish Education in the Diaspora. His establishment (with WZO general secretary Haim Zohar) of the Jerusalem Fellows program to train Diaspora education leaders, which came at Dulzin's behest and was initially funded by JAFI, impressed Mandel with its innovative approach to leadership education (Holtz, 2005).

It was Mandel's conversations with Fox more than any other factor that convinced him that "the best shot for communities in the Diaspora to survive was Jewish education." Years later, Mandel characterized the revelation as conversionary.[13] On one level, Fox was an unlikely missionary for the cause of American Jewish education. He was a relentless critic of its shortcomings, arguing in 1973, "[The] most urgent problem facing Jewish education today is its lack of purpose and, consequently, its blandness." He warned, "[U]ntil we engage in serious deliberations aimed at rectifying this state of affairs, we cannot even hope to deal with all the other issues that demand solutions" (Fox, 1973). Some of his close colleagues interpreted his relocation to Jerusalem as a vote of no confidence in American Jewish education and the future of the American Jewish community. There is no evidence that in subsequent years Fox modified his dim view. Perhaps he and Mandel were able to commiserate over the yawning gap between potential and reality. They certainly bonded over their common disdain and impatience for the "crude Zionism and paternalism" that typified JAFI.[14]

Crucially, they also shared a belief in the transformative power of leadership that was grounded in an unapologetic elitism. The title of Mandel's memoir, *It's All About Who You Hire, How They Lead… and Other Essential Advice from a Self-Made Leader,* encapsulated a principle that he followed, not only in his business but also in the direction of his philanthropy. Mandel credited management consultant Peter Drucker with sensitizing him to the qualities of superior leaders and encouraging him to identify and nurture individuals with leadership potential at Premier (Mandel, 2013).

[12] Aryeh Davidson, interview with the author, August 11, 2015; Daniel Marom, interview with the author, February 20, 2014. Fox did not complete his doctoral dissertation until 1965, and he published relatively little thereafter. His *Visions of Jewish Education* volume (2003), which he co-edited with Israel Scheffler and Daniel Marom, was decades in the making. According to Marom, Fox's own chapter was delayed by his perfectionism and was ultimately birthed through a process of critical response and editing, supported by Nessa Rapoport.

[13] Morton Mandel, interview with the author, June 3, 2014. Later renamed the Mandel Jerusalem Fellows, the Jerusalem Fellows ultimately became a program of the Mandel Associated Foundations until it was discontinued in 2011.

[14] Lee Shulman, interview with the author, April 10, 2014; Daniel Marom, interview with the author, February 20, 2014.

If Fox's approach to leadership was more intellectual, his growing conviction that Jewish education would only be lifted through a focus on talent meant that he and Mandel essentially spoke the same language and shared a common interest in cultivating generals rather than training foot soldiers (Holtz, 2005). Reflecting on the educational ideas behind Camp Ramah, Fox told interviewer William Novak that elitism was "a necessary consequence of a commitment to excellence." He elaborated: "We believed that if you invested in the right people, they could change the world" (Fox, 2008). A similar approach animated Fox's Jerusalem Fellows program (Shane-Sagiv, 2010).[15]

"We shared a vision to change the world by investing in superior people," Mandel would later write about Fox, echoing Fox's own description of his approach at Ramah. In response to conversations with Fox, he wrote, "I really began to be a fighter for smarter better people with more adequate funds devoted to Jewish education, feeling and concluding way back then that it would lead to a greater likelihood that being Jewish would have meaning to Jews"[16] (Mandel, 2013). Mandel was willing to indulge Fox's intellectualism—more so in the early years of their collaboration—because Fox was at heart an institution builder rather than an ivory tower academic. Fox may have worshipped at the feet of philosopher kings, but he was a political animal.

Tracing the Jewish Continuity Crisis

Even prior to his disenchantment with JAFI, Mandel's increased involvement with Jewish education on an international level reverberated on the home front. When he returned from the 1984 World Leadership Conference on Jewish Education, Mandel challenged Stephen Hoffman at the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland to upgrade Jewish education on the local level in response to what he perceived to be the worrying demographic trend lines.[17] The upshot was the initiation in 1985 of the first local Jewish continuity commission in North America, co-sponsored by the federation and the Congregational Plenum, an organization of Cleveland synagogues, staffed by the then Director of Planning for the Cleveland federation, Barry Shrage, and led by real estate entrepreneur Charles Ratner. The commission and its 1988 report, which recommended the overhaul and repair of the Jewish education system as the key to solving the so-called continuity crisis, became a model for Jewish communities large and small, so that by 1995, scholar Hanan Alexander was able to speak about a "Jewish continuity movement" (Alexander 1997).

Alexander credited Shrage with "probably" coining the term "Jewish continuity." Shrage himself recalled, "As far as I know, it was Mort, plain and simple."[18]

[15] The elitism of the Jerusalem Fellows program was telegraphed, among other ways, in the rigorous selection process, the insistence on a multi-year commitment (without the promise of a degree), the exposure of participants to leading thinkers in the fields of general and Jewish education, and the decision to conduct the program entirely in Hebrew.

[16] Morton Mandel, interview with the author, June 3, 2014.

[17] Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 4, 2014.

[18] Barry Shrage, communication with the author, December 31, 2014.

The term “Jewish continuity” was common parlance in the JAFI Jewish education committee deliberations and at the 1984 World Leadership Conference. According to Dulzin, the term “continuity” was consciously used in addition to “survival” to describe the rationale for the World Leadership Conference, because it implied cultural and spiritual vitality as opposed to mere physical endurance (World Leadership Conference, 1984).

Cleveland’s continuity commission (and, to a lesser extent, the World Leadership Conference) undoubtedly contributed to the popularization of the phrase. But as Marianne Sanua demonstrated in her volume on the American Jewish Committee, its use can be traced at least as far back as the early 1960s. What she dubbed “the first Jewish continuity crisis,” was generated by some early studies conducted by Erich Rosenthal, a Queens College sociologist, and Marshall Sklare, director of the American Jewish Committee’s (AJC) Division of Scientific Research, which revealed below-replacement-level Jewish birthrates and rapidly rising interfaith-marriage rates between younger Jews and non-Jews. The studies were initially published in the *American Jewish Year Book* and *Commentary* magazine, and received sensationalized coverage in a 1964 *Look* magazine story, entitled “The Vanishing American Jew.” Significantly, the statistics were met with genuine alarm by communal professionals and lay leaders, including the AJC’s executive director, John Slawson, and helped to fuel a reorientation of communal priorities from facilitating American integration to encouraging Jewish identification and ethno-religious survival (Sanua, 2007).

From the outset, those involved articulated the presumption that Jewish education was instrumental to fostering “Jewish identity” and, thereby, to promoting continuity. In November 1964, the AJC convened a conference of academics, professionals, and public intellectuals on “Jewish Identity: Here and Now,” organized by the director of its Department of Jewish Communal Affairs, Manheim Shapiro, and facilitated by Joseph Schwab. Among the questions that framed the deliberations was this: “What kind of authentic Jewish culture can be transmitted to ensure Jewish continuity?” (Dawidowicz and Himmelfarb 1967) Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish educators swiftly adjusted the aims, if not the substance, of school curricula and informal educational programs to reflect the zeitgeist (Ackerman, 1969).

For Jewish educators, the turn to identity and continuity was fortuitous in that it propelled Jewish education from a marginal concern to a priority on the communal agenda. To be sure, the transformation did not occur overnight, and lip service did not immediately translate into increased funding. On the national level, by the early 1960s, delegates at the Council of Jewish Federations’ annual General Assembly were routinely passing resolutions like this 1962 declaration: “The strengthening of Jewish education in quality and effectiveness is of the utmost importance to the future of our communities and of Jewry in America.” According to insiders like Vincent and Shrage, many Jewish communal leaders and professionals, despite mouthing the right words, did not appreciate the centrality of education to strengthening identity on a visceral level. Their civil religion was grounded in Holocaust commemoration and support for Israel rather than in Jewish learning (Wertheimer, 1997; Woocher, 1986). This was exemplified by the bewildered

reaction to theologian and philosopher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's address at the 1965 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in Montreal. Heschel called for "a revolution in Jewish life," grounded in a strengthening of Jewish identification through education and spiritual engagement. "Those who attended and those who heard must have been perplexed by this strange man who looked like a Hebrew prophet and who must have sounded to them quite mad," Shrage mused. But, as Shrage pointed out, Heschel's message resonated with the generation of Jewish students who stormed the G.A. four years later to demand that Jewish learning be treated as more than an afterthought (Shrage, 2009).

In fact, the percentage of federation dollars earmarked for Jewish education grew slowly but steadily in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1957, roughly 10 percent of federations' domestic allocations were directed to education. By 1973, the figure had more than doubled to 21.4% ($16.7 million) and grew steadily to 26% ($50 million) in 1984. By far, the greatest beneficiaries of the increase in education funding have been day schools. By 1984, they were receiving roughly half of all federation education dollars (Wertheimer, 1997).

Yet, even as locally directed federation spending on education was growing in the decades prior to the convening of the CJENA, at the expense of human-services institutions like hospitals, elder-care facilities, and vocational-services agencies, critics argued that the shift was too incremental and did not adequately reflect community needs and the changing American Jewish socioeconomic profile. To some extent, the gradual nature of federation-funding reprioritization was a function of the umbrella bodies' consensus-driven decision-making approach. But increased federation funding for education was also restricted in many communities because most Jewish schools operated under synagogue or religious denominational auspices, or, at the very least, were aligned with particular ideological streams. Federations, as a rule, wished to be perceived as nonpartisan (Krasner, 2011). Moreover, even when money was allocated to education initiatives, it often came with the unrealistic expectation that programs would eventually become self-sustaining.[19]

A significant moment on the road to transformation came with the student sit-in at the 1969 CJF General Assembly in Boston. In the immediate term, the students' demands for more Jewish education funding from the social welfare/community chest sector led to the establishment of the underwhelming and short-lived Institute for Jewish Life (IJL). A CJF-sponsored initiative to seed "innovative experiments and demonstrations" that were designed to enliven and enrich the American Jewish scene, the IJL was, ultimately, the casualty of internal CJF politics (Rosenblatt, 1980; Kelner, 2011). Indirectly, however, the 1969 protest helped to spawn CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, under the leadership of Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, which significantly contributed to a change in federation culture with its focus on lay- and communal-leader-directed Jewish education programs. The frustration that was highlighted by the sit-in and the disappointment over the failure of the IJL also helped to stimulate philanthropic giving outside of the federation system for Jewish education and identity-

[19] Barry Shrage, interview with the author, January 5, 2015.

enhancement programming. Rabbi Steve Shaw's Radius Institute, which aimed in part to fill the void created by the folding of the IJL in 1976, served as a capacity-building organization and helped to launch some of the most creative and impactful Jewish educational and cultural projects in late-20th-century American Jewish life, including the Coalition for Alternatives in Jewish Education (CAJE), the National Havurah Committee, the Jewish Student Press Service, the Jewish Women's Resource Center, and the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in New York. As sociologist Shaul Kelner observed, the Radius Institute's cultivation of private philanthropic activity that bypassed federations foreshadowed the ascent of the family foundations as a force in the development and promotion of continuity initiatives (Bayme, 2010; Kelner, 2011).

Inevitably, the increased attention to Jewish education brought into focus its shortcomings. In the postwar years, the dominant setting for formal elementary education was the congregational school. A successor to the interwar communal supplementary school or Talmud Torah, the congregational school typically met for fewer hours per week and offered a less rigorous curriculum. Initially, Jewish postwar migration to the suburbs, where the congregational school model predominated, was accompanied by increased supplementary school enrollment, which heartened rabbis and educators. The mood was far different a decade later, when Walter Ackerman presented a devastating critique of supplementary school education in the pages of the *American Jewish Year Book.* The growing fear of assimilation coincided with a decline in the number of students attending congregational schools—something that could not be entirely explained by the end of the baby boom and the growth of day schools. Ackerman took care to couple his assessment with a warning about the "inherent limitations" of the supplementary schools and the "exaggerated demands" of their critics. But the drubbing continued in the 1970s. Accordingly, educators and communal leaders alike began debating whether the congregational school model as a whole was salvageable. Likewise, they were taking another of Ackerman's recommendations to heart—namely, to explore the potential of alternate models of formal and informal education, for adults as well as children and youth (Ackerman, 1969; Bock 1984; Himmelfarb, 1984; Schoem, 1979).[20]

The impact of the gloom-and-doom forecasts on private, Jewish education-related philanthropy is difficult to reconstruct beyond anecdotal reports. Few studies from the 1980s examined the motivations of donors, and none distinguished between modest contributors and the so-called mega-donors. One trend from that era is clear: Regardless of community leaders' turn to survivalism, Jewish donors were directing an increasing percentage of their money to non-Jewish causes. In 1972, two out of every three philanthropic dollars went to Jewish causes, but, by 1987, that ratio had fallen to less than one to one. Alarm over a 25% decline in the number of donors to federations between 1974 and 1988 was somewhat mitigated by an increase in the total amount of money raised. Younger donors were motivated

[20] Scholars Press published Schoem's dissertation in 1989 under the same title. See also, *Colloquium on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity: Summary Report and Recommendations* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1976). For a critique of Bock and Himmelfarb, see Cohen (1988), p. 94.

less by the "pull of Jewish tradition" and a sense of obligation to the Jewish community, and more by the "social and economic benefits of giving" (Feinstein, 1989; Kosmin, 1988). Writing a decade after the publication of *A Time to Act*, but reflecting on the persistence of the pattern identified in the 1980s, sociologist Gary Tobin drew attention to "the Americanization of Jewish philanthropy," by which he meant this: "[T]zedakah has taken on more of the character of American philanthropy, and will continue to do so, representing less the tradition of the Jews and more the civil tradition of philanthropy in the United States" (Tobin 2001). Employing what Sylvia Barack Fishman has called "coalescence," a reflexive process of merging Jewish and American ideas, "incorporating American liberal values … into their understanding of Jewish identity" (Fishman, 2000), even Jewishly engaged donors were finding ways of squaring their increased generosity to nonsectarian causes with Jewish ethics and social mores.

How the larger trend lines related, if at all, to the giving patterns and motivations of those mega-donors who chose to include Jewish education within their foundations' philanthropic missions is more complicated to parse. It is useful to recall that Mort Mandel, the youngest of the three Mandel brothers, was born in 1921. Likewise, the vast majority of funders who were invited to participate in the CJENA were members of the G.I. and silent generations—that is, they were born before the end of World War II. Thus, if one were inclined to generational determinism, one would expect their giving patterns to be traditional, focused primarily on Jewish causes, shaped by the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, driven by a sense of obligation, and funneled primarily through umbrella agencies like federations and the United Jewish Appeal. But the case of Mandel underscores the danger of neat dichotomies. The Mandel family's charitable giving has historically been directed at non-Jewish civic organizations and higher education, as well as Jewish causes. In the 1970s, for example, 45% of Mandel's giving was directed at nonsectarian charities like United Way. In subsequent decades, his non-Jewish giving declined as a percentage of his total giving, to about one-third, although the total number of dollars grew substantially ("Mandel Associated Foundation Giving," 1970–2000). And, while it is true that Mandel was an active supporter of the federation and Jewish community center movements, his foundation concurrently moved in the direction of direct grant-making and program development. Mandel took to heart Sid Vincent's condemnation of the "pernicious" notion that a survivalist agenda demanded a "turning inward," and that Jewish engagement should come at the expense of "playing our full part on the general communal scene" (Vincent, 1979).

In his concern for Jewish continuity, Mandel certainly reflected the priorities of the classic donors. At the opening plenary of the World Leadership Conference, Mandel told the gathering that he was animated by the "challenge" of safeguarding "the enormous commitment and effort that has been made over the centuries to assure our creative survival." He spoke in personal terms about coming late to the realization that the unprecedented openness of American society rendered Jewish identification voluntary (World Leadership Conference, 1984). He spoke in a similar vein four years later at the opening session of the CJENA. Referring to invitees' almost universal acceptance of the invitation to serve on the commission,

Mandel suggested that it was premised in a shared apprehension about the Jewish future.[21]

His words resonated with many of the commissioners and elicited expressions of support and agreement, even as they resisted the temptation to succumb to despair. Some of the Orthodox commissioners, including Harvard University Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy Isadore Twersky and Yeshiva University Chancellor Norman Lamm, pushed back with the idea that Jewish continuity was not at issue. "We have both metaphysical and historical guarantees for it," Twersky insisted. Rather, the question was, "Who will be in that group that is destined to survive? Will our children and nieces and nephews be in that group that survives?" Most seemed to agree with commissioner Max Fisher, a Detroit businessman and philanthropist, who declared at the first CJENA meeting that the time was ripe to get serious about Jewish education. "All of a sudden something has happened. Priorities of Jewish life have changed. … People are talking about it. So you have the right opportunity to do something about it. It is important to have the right atmosphere."[22] Thus, by the 1980s, Jewish education was acknowledged as a communal desideratum even as educators, communal professionals, and lay people alike expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo and the lack of a coordinated strategy for systemic renovation and renewal. All of this set the table for the work of the CJENA.

America's "At Risk" Decade

While appreciation of the Jewish communal climate is critical for understanding the genesis of the CJENA, it is likewise essential to place it within a wider American context of educational crisis and reform. At roughly the same moment that Ackerman's takedown of congregational education appeared in the *American Jewish Year Book*, journalist Charles Silberman was putting the final touches on his *Crisis in the Classroom*, a lively but alarming book-length report of his Carnegie Corporation study of the education of educators. Silberman's 3½ years of research convinced him that prior to defining and resolving the challenges facing teacher education, Americans needed to clarify the purposes of K-12 education and their expectations for the schools. While he resisted the temptation to scapegoat teachers and administrators for the failings of the American education system, Silberman's portrait was bleak: "Because adults take the schools so much for granted they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are, how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and aesthetically barren the atmosphere, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for children as children" (Silberman, 1970).

[21] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, August 1, 1988, MF-IA.

[22] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, August 1, 1988, MF-IA.

Silberman's book, which was serialized in the *Atlantic* magazine under the provocative title "Murder in the Classroom," ushered in a decade of intense media scrutiny of public education that reflected the sour public mood of the 1970s. In the face of declining SAT scores, persistent achievement gaps between black and white and rich and poor students, teacher unions' resistance to teacher competency testing, and rancorous battles over school desegregation—all playing out as the country was reeling from political upheaval, an energy crisis, and stagflation—Americans' shaken faith in public institutions was extended to the schools (Hipple, 1984).

Accordingly, by the early 1980s, the American public was primed for a jolt to the prevailing educational system. The clarion call came from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, a blue-ribbon commission convened by Secretary of Education Terrel Bell. Its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, identified the enemy as mediocrity and presented the strengthening of academic standards as a matter of national security.

While the report defended the principle of public education, much to the chagrin of President Ronald Reagan's domestic policy advisers, it pronounced the current system a debacle (Guthrie, 2004, *A Nation at Risk* 1983). In 1983 alone, the U.S. Department of Education distributed over 6 million copies of the report worldwide. In retrospect, critics demonstrated that the report's assessment was overstated and its analysis of America's lagging economic performance flawed (Applebome, 1983; Bracey, 2003; Guthrie, 2004; Steadman, 1984). Regardless, *A Nation at Risk* stimulated the creation of a host of state task forces and commissions assessing curriculum, graduation standards, the length of the school day and school year, and teacher qualifications and compensation (Guthrie, 2004; Ravitch, 2000).

For Jewish education, the national atmosphere surrounding *A Nation at Risk* was significant in three respects. First, it helped to stoke the fears of survivalists who were a receptive audience for its message of imminent disaster. National commission member Emeral Crosby, writing in *Phi Delta Kappan*, dubbed the 1980s the "At Risk 80s." From the release of the report onward, he argued, "'[At] risk' became part of the popular jargon. Everything and everybody was said to be at risk. The nation was teeming with at-risk students, at-risk parents, at-risk educators, at-risk legislators, at-risk school board members, and at-risk communities." The rhetoric was tailor-made for the heightened atomic anxieties of the era. American angst was further magnified by the first wave of economic dislocation accompanying the emergence of the Information Age. Popular culture was saturated with apocalyptic themes mirroring a public discourse dominated by hand wringing about real and imagined social ills. In her book *The Way We Never Were*, historian Stephanie Coontz brilliantly diagnosed and exposed the nostalgia trap into which many Americans had fallen, traumatized as they were by "the sky is falling" mentality of the period (Coontz, 2000; Crosby, 1993; Guthrie, 2004).[23]

Researchers and public intellectuals within the North American Jewish community enthusiastically scooped up the "at risk" rhetoric. As they warned about trends ranging from declining Jewish birthrates to rising divorce rates, they appeared to find "at risk" populations of Jews at every turn, from single women in their 30s to

[23] See especially the introduction to the 2000 edition, pp. x–xxxix.

the marginally affiliated (Bayme, 1989; Brodbar-Nemzer, 1984; Schoenfeld, 1984).[24] Not surprisingly, the commission’s senior staff was also taken with the “at risk” label. Adviser Herman Stein even suggested that the first chapter of *A Time to Act* be titled “Jewish Continuity at Risk” (“Senior Policy Advisors Meeting Handwritten Notes,” 1989). While Jewish survivalist fears were already in the air prior to 1983, the tenor of the times surely contributed to the alarmism of the community discourse. It also reinforced the proposition that righting the Jewish educational ship could slow or reverse the tide. All of this helped to generate enthusiasm and expectation for the CJENA.

A Nation at Risk also created an environment where metrics became more central to conversations over educational policy. Indeed, Guthrie and Springer convincingly argued, “The principal policy legacy of NAR was to accelerate a paradigm shift from measuring American education success by resources received to results achieved.” This type of data-driven approach certainly characterized the work of the CJENA and played a role in shaping its recommendations. As Fox and his colleagues lay the groundwork for the commission, the dearth of reliable data about Jewish education in North America became almost immediately apparent. In advance of the first plenary meeting, the CJENA staff was tasked with creating a state-of-the-field report for the commissioners. That document aggregated data from a variety of sources, but it was an admittedly spotty patchwork that left many questions unanswered (“Data on Jewish Education—Draft 4” 1988).

The precedent of *A Nation at Risk* and the reports that followed in its wake convinced Fox and his colleagues that a final report that emerged out of the CJENA would need to be grounded in a more solid research base. In the following months, they commissioned 11 papers that began to fill in the gaps, particularly in the areas of teacher training and professionalization, and community organization and planning for Jewish education, which emerged as central foci of the final report. Studies were also written on synagogue education, informal education, and the connection between education and continuity. The papers were subjected to an internal but rigorous peer review process. Eight were ultimately published, while the others remained internal documents (*A Time to Act*, 1990).

A steady drumbeat from the commissioners, led by businessman and philanthropist David Hirschhorn, Stanford University professor of political science and sociology Seymour Martin Lipset, retired federation executive Robert Hiller, and Jewish Theological Seminary chancellor Ismar Schorsch, convinced the CJENA’s professional staff to elevate the creation of a research base to a central report recommendation. “Research is not a luxury,” Lipset warned at the first commission meeting. Playing to the lay leaders in the room, Lipset called for adherence to standard practice in the business world. He asked this question rhetorically: Would a company make key decisions about innovation, product development, or marketing without research? “Right now we do research on the cheap,” he complained. “We need a research program dedicated to finding out who Jews are and what they

[24] This is a revision of a paper of the same title presented at the 1984 annual meeting of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association, Guelph, Ontario; Leonard Fein, “From the Editor,” *Moment* (October 1984), p. 2.

think." Lipset encountered some resistance from the day school advocates, whose deeply held convictions translated into a clear sense of priorities. "I don't think we have the time or the moral right to wait that long," Lamm declared, concerned that an elaborate research agenda would delay implementation of the CJENA's recommendations and the disbursement of funds. "When a house is burning, you don't hire a consultant to advise on kindling temperatures or a comparative evaluation of which materials are best for extinguishing fires."[25]

Lamm's sense of urgency failed to win over a majority of the commissioners or the professional staff. More resonant at the second plenary meeting was Schorsch's characterization of Jewish education as "a field without a literature." He added this: "A field that does not write is not open to criticism. And without that kind of criticism there cannot be correction and there cannot be advance."[26] The development of a research capacity so as to enable data-driven policy making was raised at subsequent plenary meetings and was highlighted in the final report. In a nod to the growing popularity of outcomes-based education, *A Time to Act* called not only for data collection around program effectiveness, teacher qualifications, competencies, and compensation, but also student knowledge through the implementation of a standardized testing regime (*A Time to Act*, 1990). Even if the latter recommendation was unworkable and effectively dead on arrival, assessment became a major component of the CJENA's successor, the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE). One of the most valuable contributions of the CIJE's monitoring feedback and evaluation project was a series of in-depth studies of Jewish teachers and educational leaders, which utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to shed valuable light on the state of teacher preparation, recruitment and retention, and conditions in the field (Goldring, 1994, 1995).

The educational reform movement spurred by *A Nation at Risk* reverberated throughout the educational system. By 1986, the spotlight had turned to teacher education and professionalization. Two reports were released that year, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century,* from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, and *Tomorrow's Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group*, from a coterie of education school deans from elite research universities. Both helped to frame the conversation with recommendations designed to raise the status of teaching from an occupation to a profession, such as increasing academic preparation, establishing standards, creating a career ladder, and fostering greater cooperation between labor and management and between K-12 schools and universities. Unlike previous teacher education reports, such as those by James Koerner and James Bryant Conant, the Holmes and Carnegie reports had a demonstrable impact on the educational system, as well as the discourse, with dozens of states and institutions inspired to make significant reforms to teacher education. By 1989, more than half the states had changed their teacher certification requirements (Fraser, 2007; Johnson, 1987).

If *A Nation at Risk* helped to create a felicitous environment for the emergence of the CJENA, *A Nation Prepared* had a more direct influence on the creation of the commission and the design of its final report. The initial bridge between the

[25] Audio Recording, CJENA meeting, August 1, 1988; Audio recording, CJENA meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

[26] Audio recording, CJENA meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

Carnegie Forum and the CJENA was Lee Shulman, the Stanford University professor of education who would later serve as president, from 1997 to 2008, of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching[27] (Carnegie Forum, 1986). Fox took note when Shulman became involved with the Carnegie Forum in 1985, and he turned to Shulman for advice while planning the CJENA. When Fox traveled to Palo Alto in 1986 to consult with Shulman, the Stanford professor could not stop gushing about the Carnegie Forum and its report. With its constructive approach, *A Nation Prepared* rectified the Henny Penny tack of *A Nation at Risk*, which was also funded primarily by the Carnegie Corporation. Shulman explained that the Carnegie Forum was worthy of Fox’s attention for at least two other reasons: the composition of its task force and its process. Unlike the Holmes Group, which was comprised entirely of academics, the Carnegie Forum included representatives from government, the business world, and the teaching profession, as well as from schools of education.[28] When Fox explained to Shulman that the CJENA planners were considering a roster of philanthropists and community leaders, as well as practitioners, but that they were concerned about being derailed by a clash of outsized egos, Shulman encouraged him to speak directly with Marc Tucker, the chief writer of *A Nation Prepared* and director of the Carnegie-supported National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.[29]

When Fox met with Tucker, he learned that the procedure and process model adopted by the Carnegie Task Force smoothed interactions between the participants. Tucker, along with Michigan State University professor of education and public policy David K. Cohen and former deputy secretary of the treasury John C. Colman, encouraged Fox to employ a series of operational strategies, including frequent staff interviews with task force members to understand “what made them tick” and “what they would need to make them feel assuaged that they were being heard.” Investing time into frequent check-ins with members allowed staff members to anticipate and manage their concerns. It provided an active conduit for input as the task force’s process unfolded, ensuring that the staff’s work was never disconnected from the thoughts of the task force members. The point was to avoid a situation where members perceived the final report as a departure from their initial ideas. The strategies suggested by Tucker, Cohen, and Colman were integrated into a thorough and exacting organizational and management system that Mandel had designed and deployed in leading previous commissions and task forces, including his initiatives at the Jewish Welfare Board and at JAFI.[30]

[27] Lee Shulman, interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

[28] Chaired by Lewis M. Branscomb, vice president and chief scientist at IBM, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy task force included, among others, United Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker, National Education Association President Mary Hatwood Futrell, New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, former North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, California State Superintendent Bill Honig, and Michigan State University College of Education Dean Judith Lanier. Lanier also served as chair of the Holmes Group.

[29] Lee Shulman, interview with the author, April 10, 2014. While there was no minority report, *A Nation Prepared* included a comments section with a “Statement of Support with Reservations” by Futrell and a “Statement of Support” by Shanker. See *A Nation Prepared*, 117–118.

[30] Lee Shulman, interview with the author, April 10, 2014; Annette Hochstein, communication with the author, July 7, 2015.

Fox and the CJENA staff employed these operational strategies to great effect. Commissioners were routinely interviewed, often in person, prior to each plenary meeting. Shorter check-in calls were conducted between meetings. In addition, commission staff maintained a correspondence with active members and regularly turned to them for expertise and strategic planning. The tightly orchestrated process paid dividends. For example, staff was able to anticipate and manage the commissioners' continued attraction to program-based approaches to strengthening Jewish education. Fox's consultants also emphasized the importance of assembling a strong advisory council and staff that combined practitioner, academic, and policy expertise, advice that he took to heart.

The influence of the Carnegie Forum on the CJENA extended to the report itself. *A Nation Prepared* became a blueprint for David Finn and his daughter, Dena Merriam, the team from the public relations firm Ruder-Finn that was responsible, in conjunction with Fox and Hochstein, for writing *A Time to Act*. Both reports begin by identifying and documenting the contours of a contemporary crisis that is said to jeopardize the society's continued vitality. Both posit education as the social tool critical to societal revitalization, while painting an unflinching portrait of a dysfunctional educational system. Yet they also convey a spirit of can-do optimism by identifying and elaborating a multi-pronged reform plan that promises to deliver an educational system equal to society's challenges.

Beyond adopting the general structure of *A Nation Prepared*, Finn and Merriam closely modeled the executive summary of *A Time to Act* on the earlier report. A side-by-side comparison reveals that the symmetry was maintained almost paragraph-by-paragraph. Likewise, the CJENA's creation of an implementation mechanism, the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, recalled the Carnegie Forum's creation of a teacher-certification body, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Where the reports differed was in their level of specificity. *A Nation Prepared* included some very concrete recommendations, while *A Time to Act*" in contrast, mostly offered generalities, particularly in the areas of professionalization and community support. If the disparity was a function of the decentralized, variegated, and relatively underdeveloped nature of the Jewish education system, it nevertheless rendered many of the CJENA's recommendations nebulous and difficult to achieve. Executing *A Time to Act*'s most specific recommendations—the creation of the CIJE and the lead communities' demonstration projects—presented a different set of challenges that will be discussed below.

Prioritizing Foundational Challenges

Decades later, commissioners recalled the anticipation in the air at the CJENA's opening plenary. Expectations were raised by the broad nature of the coalition that Mandel, Fox, and their team had managed to convene. Indeed, assembling the commission was a deliberate and painstaking process.[31] As the staff compiled and refined the invitation list, consideration was given to such factors as gender, as well

[31] Josh Elkin, Interview with the author, November 7, 2014.

as geographical, institutional, and religious denominational diversity. Even so, the final membership was overwhelmingly male and hailed disproportionately from points east of the Mississippi River and north of the Mason-Dixon line. Religiously and politically, the group was broad, but it eschewed the extremes.

Concerned that lay leaders would limit their attendance at the commission’s plenary meetings if professionals dominated the conversation, a consensus emerged within the inner circle of advisers to strive for a three-to-one ratio of lay and community leaders to professionals and academics. Initially, the thought was to follow the example of the national education commissions and limit participation to approximately 15 commissioners. It soon emerged, however, that political considerations dictated the inclusion of representatives from partnering and other prominent organizations, necessitating the commission’s expansion (“Mandel Initiative,” 1987, 1988). In the end, the commission included 44 members, 11 senior policy advisers, and five staff members.[32] Virtually all those who were invited to participate accepted the offer.

The identification of personnel and community support as the central foci of the commission’s deliberations and its ultimate recommendations was predetermined rather than organic. They were issues of personal importance to both Mandel and Fox, which made them a natural point of departure. Mandel’s modus operandi was to commence commission discussions with a specific “destination in mind,” while allowing “the meeting process to steer us wherever it steers us.” Even if the initial direction were ultimately abandoned, Mandel believed that it was more efficient than an open-ended process. Fox, too, was inclined to proceed in this fashion, which accounted in part for their compatibility and enduring partnership.[33]

In the case of the CJENA, the destination remained fixed, this despite or because of the fact that no consensus action plan had emerged from the initial round of commissioner interviews and the first plenary meeting deliberations. In fact, commissioners suggested no fewer than 26 possible programmatic options. When Fox and Hochstein analyzed the various options, they found that virtually all touched more or less on five general categories: teachers, learners, context, methods,

[32] See appendices A and B of *A Time to Act*, 79–86. The senior policy adviser title was something of a catchall in that it included the commission’s directors, senior researchers, and strategists as well as an advisory cabinet. Aside from Hochstein, who served with Fox as the commission’s chief strategists, the inner advisory circle included Hoffman; executive vice president of the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America Arthur Rotman; Case Western Reserve University provost emeritus Herman Stein; former executive vice president of the Council of Jewish Federations Carmi Schwartz; executive vice president of the Jewish Education Service of North America Jonathan Woocher; and former executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland Henry Zucker. Arthur Naparstek, former dean and professor of social work at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University was recruited as the CJENA’s director. In addition, Fox consulted with Shulman and Cohen; with Michael Inbar, former dean of the faculty of social sciences at the Hebrew University; and with Israel Scheffler, professor of education and philosophy at Harvard University. Staff members included Joseph Reimer, an assistant professor at the Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service at Brandeis University; Mark Gurvis, director of research and social planning at the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland; and Virginia Levi, program director at the Premier Industrial Foundation. Estelle Albeg and Debbie Meline of Nativ-Policy and Planning Consultants provided administrative support in Israel.

[33] Morton Mandel, interview with Annette Hochstein, June 27, 1988, File 1939, MF-IA.

and economics. Nonetheless, they varied in their relative emphases. Some addressed the challenges of Jewish education from the perspective of the clients, while others focused on personnel; some conceived of the landscape in terms of settings, while others concentrated on curriculum and practices; and some took a systems approach while others were convinced that the problems of Jewish education were essentially economic (Fox, 1988). After their research team exposed each option to a cost-benefit analysis and a feasibility study, the pair concluded that, in virtually all cases, successful implementation depended on three enabling factors: adequately trained personnel, community leadership, and financial support. Thus, Fox and Hochstein's analysis reinforced the commission's initial direction.

Commission discussions about personnel tended to expose some basic philosophical differences in approach, which received a thorough airing out at the first and second commission meetings. For example, there were some who believed that the emphasis should be on leadership training, while others focused on "front line educators."[34] Likewise, there were those who felt that transformation would only occur through the influx of new blood into the system, and who wanted to devote money and energy to recruitment and pre-service training. Others insisted that any change process would need to reckon with those who were already in the field, through in-service programs and continuing education. The latter approach had special appeal to supporters of supplementary schools who were skeptical that national educator training programs could have a demonstrable impact on the local level, particularly outside the large Jewish population centers.[35] Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, was the split between those who believed that teacher professionalization would succeed only if the culture around teaching were changed, and those who insisted that the quality of the teaching force was correlated directly to salary and benefits.[36]

There were some commissioners who feared that the focus on personnel, in particular, was too ambitious. The challenges to recruitment, training, and retention were wide-ranging and, in many respects, systemic. As such, they were hardly new and had ensnared earlier generations of would-be reformers. Regardless of whether one was inclined to view the underlying problem as cultural or economic, the fact remained that outside of day schools, most formal and informal education work was part-time almost by design; and, in some communities, it was entirely avocational. Even attempts to cobble together full-time positions by combining a variety of different educational functions typically could not be extended to the rank-and-file teaching or youth worker staff. Advocates of professionalization, who looked to medicine and other helping fields as models, were forced to contend with this

[34] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

[35] Ismar Schorsch interview with Annette Hochstein, April 3, 1989, box 1, folder 10, MF-AJA; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 14, 1989, MF-IA.

[36] Haskel Lookstein to Arthur Naparstek, August 8, 1988, box 3, folder 1, MF-AJA; Jack Bieler to Seymour Fox, October 16, 1988, file 1938, MF-IA; audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, August 1, 1988, MF-IA; audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

obstacle. At the same time, attempts to raise the salaries of day school teachers, however well intentioned, typically led to veritable drops in the bucket.

Among those who made this point most forcefully was Rabbi Yitz Greenberg. “There is a danger that you may choose an area which is so broad that it could absorb all of your funds and indeed that of others without really showing a result at the end,” he wrote to Mandel. Jewish education, he added, “might be a case of ‘less is more.’”[37] In retrospect, Greenberg’s warning was prescient. With the exception of a few bright spots, like the Mandel Teacher Educator Institute (1995) and the Mandel Fellows Program at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Mandel later believed that much of the money that his foundation had devoted to personnel in North America had been wasted.[38] Other commissioners, and certainly the commission’s core staff and advisers, were not blind to the enormity of the tasks related to personnel and community support. One of the complicating factors that concerned the senior policy advisers was the central role that the denominations played in both the training and the employment of educators. “That’s where the kids are,” Joseph Reimer observed in reference to synagogue-based educational programs, but, he added, “the process of change in the denominational world is much slower,” than in other realms. Fox was optimistic that the supposed complacency could be combatted through the introduction of competition into the system (senior policy advisers meeting, 1989). This was a formidable task that one might have expected to be approached by the senior policy advisers with more circumspection. Yet, as Barry Shrage explained, they were “influenced by the zeitgeist” to think and act boldly.[39]

The commission’s agreement to focus on personnel did not demonstrably bring the field any closer to resolving the basic questions that have perennially preoccupied educators in the domains of recruitment, training, and retention, such as how best to train teachers and what teachers need to know.[40] In an effort to educate itself on personnel issues and provide an evidence base for the personnel section of the final report, the CJENA commissioned a landscape study as well as in-depth studies of the professionalization of the teaching profession (Aron, 1990a, b; Davidson, 1990; Markovic, 1990).[41] While these studies made an important contribution to general knowledge and offered a baseline for action, the commissioners’ basic philosophical differences in approach to the personnel question, which were exposed at the plenary sessions, were never resolved. Perhaps, the sense among the senior policy advisers was that there was room for a variety of cuts into the subject. The personnel problem was multifaceted and sufficiently knotty that it would demand multiple interventions that need not be in philosophical alignment.

[37] Irving Greenberg to Morton Mandel, January 3, 1989 (the date is printed mistakenly on the letter as 1988), box 1, folder 7, MF-AJA.

[38] Annette Hochstein, interview with the author, March 23, 2014.

[39] Joshua Elkin, interview with the author, November 7, 2014; Barry Shrage, interview with the author, January 5, 2015.

[40] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

[41] For a full list of CJENA papers, see *A Time to Act,* Appendix C.

Community Action Sites and the Origins of the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education

When the senior policy advisers met following the second plenum, there was agreement on two points. First, they had received a mandate to move ahead with the enabling options, and second, despite the green light, many commissioners remained reluctant to see the commission drop the programmatic options entirely (senior advisers meeting minutes, 1988). For some, including many of the laypeople and professionals, the hesitancy stemmed from a concern that an agenda focused on personnel and community support would not be sufficiently compelling to generate sustainable interest from the American Jewish public.[42] If the notes of caution from seasoned and highly respected community leaders were not enough to give pause to Mandel and his advisers, they were also forced to contend with a persistent drumbeat from various commissioners who believed that their pet educational causes were essential for safeguarding the Jewish future. Day school advocates voiced this conviction unrelentingly, but the partisans of residential camping, university campus work, early childhood education, congregational school reform, media, and technology, plus a host of other causes, were similarly indefatigable.[43]

As early as October 1988, Fox and Hochstein began toying with strategies to address programming in the final report. Initially, they were leaning toward limiting the commission's role to providing a road map for family foundations that were interested in adopting projects grounded in particular approaches or focused on specific settings. Some policy advisers were also intrigued by the possibility of the commission playing a more active matchmaker role between foundations and worthy initiatives (educators meeting minutes, 1988; planning group meeting notes, 1988). By early 1989, staff support solidified around a more ambitious plan: the creation of demonstration projects in a few communities where interventions could be implemented on an experimental basis with an infusion of economic and human resources. While the interventions would focus primarily on personnel recruitment, training, profession building, and retention, they would generate enthusiasm by touching directly on select local settings, like schools, camps, and community centers. The concept was suggested by Elkin at the second plenary and swiftly endorsed by others, including Bennett Yanowitz and Mandell Berman, two of the more influential skeptics in reference to the enabling options. It also won the support of Lipset, who approvingly cited the Rockefeller Foundation's creation of the Johns Hopkins University's School of Hygiene and Public Health in 1916, in response to the Flexner Report, as an example of how foundations could leverage their gifts to

[42] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

[43] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, August 1, 1988, MF-IA; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 12, 1990, MF-IA.

transform an entire field. Demonstration sites, he believed, could be effective levers for change.[44]

Hochstein was already familiar with demonstration projects from her social and public policy consulting work.[45] They also won an endorsement from Arthur Naparstek, dean of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University, and the nominal director of the CJENA between mid-1988 and mid-1990. The model had particular currency in the fields of medicine and public health, but it was also advanced in the 1986 report of the Holmes Group, "Tomorrow's Teachers," which advocated turning proposed professional development schools for teachers and administrators into "demonstration sites" akin to teaching hospitals (Holmes Group 1986). Enthusiasm among the commissioners was not universal. But the concept did somewhat mollify critics like Greenberg, who feared that the enabling options were overly broad. "Part of the primitive and undeveloped nature of Jewish education is that even the good schools struggle alone," Greenberg observed in a letter to Mandel. "With broader gauge funding, there could be cooperation, some integration of experience and achievements and exchange of good experiments from one institution to another."[46]

In time, the proposed demonstration projects or community action sites came to be known as lead communities. Cleveland presented Mandel and the CJENA staff with an archetype. Prior to the establishment of the CJENA, the federation there, led by Stephen Hoffman, was able to coordinate a successful, wide-ranging program to upgrade Jewish education with a combination of community funds and special seed money from the Mandel Foundation and other foundations. Of course, success depended on considerable cooperation between lay leaders and professionals across an array of institutions and organizations. In retrospect, their calculated risk that the Cleveland model could be replicated in other cities turned out to be overly optimistic.[47]

Consultations with Commissioner John Colman, president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and a former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, and Michael Inbar, a professor of cognitive psychology and education at the Hebrew University, convinced Fox and Hochstein of the necessity for an implementation mechanism to design and oversee the demonstration projects (summary of senior staff discussions, 1989). Conceptual planning around the implementation mechanism, which eventually became known as the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE), began in early 1989. Fox and Hochstein drafted a design document that was further developed and refined in response to feedback from commission staff, policy advisers, consultants, and commissioners (Fox, 1989a, b; summary of discussions (in Jerusalem), 1989). As it was described in the final report, the CIJE was to be "a catalytic agent," as opposed to a service agency. It would work through existing organizations and institutions to

[44] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988, MF-IA.

[45] Annette Hochstein, correspondence with the author, December 22, 2014.

[46] Irving Greenberg to Morton Mandel, June 20, 1989, box 5, folder 15, MF-AJA.

[47] Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 4, 2014.

promote initiatives dedicated to addressing problems related to personnel, including professionalization, and the cultivation of community support, both rhetorical and financial. In particular, it would designate the lead communities and assist them in the areas of research and evaluation, program development and fundraising. The CIJE would also help to disseminate, replicate, and adapt the successful experiments pioneered by the lead communities. It would become a clearinghouse for best practices in Jewish education. Finally, it would develop its own programs and initiatives. All of this would be accomplished with a modest staff guided by a board of directors that would include some members of the CJENA, as well as new faces, but it would strive to emulate the commission in its denominational, geographic, and professional diversity (*A Time to Act*, 1990).

Fox and Hochstein elaborated on the rationale and role of the proposed mechanism in their design document. As they devised it, the CIJE would provide "a way to mediate between ideas and implementation." It would be a "change and innovation" agent; a nucleus "guided by vision, together with rigorous work and creative thinking." Borrowing an analogy from industry, they compared the CIJE to "the unit that designs, develops and builds the prototype of a new product, improving upon it until the product works. When problems and issues arise during the process of constructing the prototype, they are dealt with and resolved in the unit. Lessons learned from implementation are absorbed and used to change, adapt and modify the product; the product is adapted to specific local needs, etc." It would also serve as a "full-time catalyst for development efforts for Jewish education," through public relations, the dissemination of best practices, and acting as a broker between projects and potential funders. The extent to which the CIJE's goals, particularly in regard to personnel, would be met through the lead communities, as opposed to internal projects and initiatives, was left somewhat vague, perhaps in recognition of the dynamic nature of the work. They wanted to leave maneuvering room for the future director and the board. Reviewing the planning documents, it is striking, nonetheless, that Fox and Hochstein acknowledged the perils of a "top-down" approach, even as they adopted a change model that relied on a centralized process orchestrated by a new and robust implementation mechanism (Fox, 1989, 1989).

For a process marked by equanimity, the creation of the CIJE stands out for eliciting a fair degree of controversy among the commissioners. Many wondered aloud why Mandel and his team were intent on creating a new bureaucracy rather than working through an existing agency. The obvious candidate was JESNA, the national umbrella organization tasked with the planning and dissemination of models of excellence in Jewish education, and an organizational co-sponsor of the CJENA. Created in 1981 as a successor to the American Association for Jewish Education (and folded in 2013), JESNA was described in its mission statement as an advocate for Jewish education, a catalytic agent, and a driver of educational innovation.[48] At least on the surface, these descriptors were similar to those applied to the CIJE. Indeed, when the CIJE concept was described to JESNA's CEO, Jonathan Woocher, he observed that there was considerable overlap between his

[48] http://www.jesna.org/about-us/over-view/our-mission.

organization’s mission and that of the proposed implementation mechanism. The CIJE sounded like “what JESNA would be doing, were it to have more ample financial and staffing resources.”[49]

The notion of folding the CIJE into JESNA gained traction with some of the commissioners. But Mandel countered that JESNA was not perceived as a truly neutral player on the Jewish education scene. Fairly or not, it was viewed as a tool of the federations and central agencies—agencies that provided the bulk of its funding—and focused primarily on the formal, supplementary education model. An implementation mechanism with a perceived “institutional bias” would fail to win the confidence and support of a wall-to-wall coalition of Jewish groups and organizations, thereby undermining the commission’s goals. Mandel’s argument found allies but failed to generate consensus.[50] Those who supported his position were typically motivated by a desire to keep CJENA’s coalition intact or feared frittering away what appeared to be an uncommon opportunity to advance a reform agenda. They wanted the CJENA or a successor board to maintain control over implementation.

What Mandel did not say publically but shared with his staff were his serious doubts about whether JESNA was sufficiently strong, effectual, and respected to successfully serve as the commission’s implementation mechanism (senior policy advisers meeting notes, 1989). His position was echoed by some of the more savvy lay leaders and communal professionals.[51] At the same time, he and the staff recognized that the implementation mechanism would need to develop a productive working relationship with JESNA and other national service agencies whose work touched on Jewish education (senior policy advisers meeting minutes, 1989). Hard feelings between JESNA and the CIJE could be mitigated, they hoped, by stressing that the latter was not a service agency and that it would focus its energies in areas heretofore unaddressed or under-resourced (senior policy advisers meeting notes, 1989).

‘A Time to Act’

Even as the lead communities plan and the CIJE were taking shape, the staff began working in earnest on the final report. Fox and Hochstein prepared a draft outline and research design in the early summer of 1989, which was revised in response to input from staff and the senior policy advisers. The draft report that they proceeded to write over the course of the fall became the basis for *A Time to Act*. David Finn and Dena Merriam worked on the final report during the spring of 1990 in collaboration with Fox and Hochstein. A nephew of former JTS Chancellor Louis Finkelstein who had close ties to Fox, Finn could write with the knowledge of a community insider.[52]

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[49] Joseph Reimer to Arthur Naparstek, March 16, 1989, box 5, folder 10, MF-AJA.

[50] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 14, 1989; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, October 23, 1989, MF-IA.

[51] Henry Zucker to Arthur Naparstek, May 4, 1989, box 1, folder 10, MF-AJA.

[52] David Finn to Morton Mandel and Seymour Fox, February 17, 1987; David Finn to Henry Zucker, January 25, 1990, box 4, folder 17, MF-AJA; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, February 14, 1990, MF-IA; Finn (2005), 50.

If Fox and Hochstein supplied the report's substance, Finn and Merriam's writing style gave it an air of gravitas. Commissioners wanted the tone of the report to be lofty and aspirational. Longtime Charles H. Revson Foundation president Eli Evans suggested that the commission's staff study previous high-impact commission reports, including Gunnar Myrdal's 1944 study of race relations, *An American Dilemma*, and James Bryant Conant's 1959 report, *The American High School Today*. Evans contended that these and similarly influential studies had two things in common: substance and elevated rhetoric. Commissioners also believed that the audience for the report should be broad, encompassing the general Jewish public, particularly the donor class, including those who were not especially engaged in education-centered philanthropy. "We need a vision" that will capture the American Jewish imagination, agreed Alvin Schiff, executive director of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. Echoing Evans, Schiff contended that successful reports provide a portrait of the present landscape, a vision for a better future, and a roadmap of how to get there.[53]

The commissioners' advice was echoed by the senior advisers and staff, and taken to heart by Finn and Merriam. While Hochstein stressed that the report needed to be concrete and action-oriented, others placed the accent on "vision" (senior policy advisers meeting notes, 1989) Fox's longstanding commitment to a vision-driven approach to education accounted for some of this thrust, and ultimately inspired the Mandel-sponsored Visions of Jewish Education Project in the 1990s.[54] But the emphasis on vision was also a function of the post-cold-war American cultural zeitgeist[55] (Ajemian, 1987; Langford, 2006).

Interestingly, the closest thing that the report had to a vision or mission statement was a one-page declaration entitled, "On the Goals of Jewish Education," which appeared before the preface. It was a slightly reworked formulation of a remark offered by commissioner Isadore Twersky, the Harvard University professor of Hebrew literature and philosophy who was the son-in-law of modern Orthodoxy's spiritual leader and foremost theologian, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and who also served as Boston's Talner Rebbe, scion of the small but storied Chernobyl Hasidic dynasty.

> Our goal should be to make it possible for every Jewish person, child or adult, to be exposed to the mystery and romance of Jewish history, to the enthralling insights and special sensitivities of Jewish thought, to the sanctity and symbolism of Jewish existence, and to the power and profundity of Jewish faith. As a motto and declaration of hope, we might adapt the dictum that says, 'They searched from Dan to Beer Sheba and did not find an 'am ha'aretz!' 'Am ha'aretz,' usually understood as an ignoramus, an illiterate, may for our purposes be redefined as one indifferent to Jewish visions and values,

[53] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 14, 1989, MF-IA.

[54] The project culminated with the publication of Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler and Daniel Marom, eds., *Visions of Jewish Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[55] As the commission was getting underway, President George H.W. Bush was heavily criticized in the media for allegedly belittling the significance of what he derisively called "the vision thing." This criticism resurfaced throughout his presidency and in the midst of his unsuccessful reelection campaign.

> untouched by the drama and majesty of Jewish history, unappreciative of the resourcefulness and resilience of the Jewish community, and unconcerned with Jewish destiny, Education, in its broadest sense, will enable young people to confront the secret of Jewish tenacity and existence, the quality of Torah teaching which fascinates and attracts irresistibly. They will then be able, even eager, to find their place in a creative and constructive Jewish community (*A Time to Act*, 1990).

A call for Jewish literacy was significant as an implicit repudiation of the view that socialization or enculturation alone was the key to identity enhancement. Only an educational program that balanced the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of learning would succeed in fostering a purposeful and deeply rooted sense of collective belonging.

Yet it is significant that the statement's inclusion encountered some resistance. Leading the charge against it was commissioner David Arnow, a grandson of real estate magnate and philanthropist Jack Weiler. A trained clinical psychologist representing a relatively young and liberal demographic on the commission, Arnow objected to the "pejorative connotations" of *am ha'aretz*, as well as Twersky's "excessively spiritual and mystical tone." Reading the statement narrowly, Arnow interpreted it as an endorsement of traditional Jewish study focused on classical texts, to the exclusion of other forms of Jewish education, in both formal and informal settings. He also criticized it for its singular, and presumably traditional, understanding of Judaism. Questioning Twersky's invocation of "the secret of Jewish tenacity and existence," Arnow wondered this: "Is there really one such secret? Is it the same secret for Orthodox and Reform Jews? Is it the same secret for secular Jews?" Arnow, who served as the North American chair of the New Israel Fund, also pointed out that the statement was silent on the role of Israel in North American Jewish life.[56]

If, on a substantive level, Arnow's objection to Twersky's mission statement represented a minority position, it delivered an extra sting, since Arnow represented the voice of the baby boomers on the commission, and because his critique was presented as a rebuke of the commission's process. Far from a consensus document, Fox had unilaterally plucked Twersky's statement from the notes of the first commission meeting and inserted it (slightly revised) into the final report. Twersky's erudition and pedigree earned him respectful—some might say reverential—treatment from Fox. According to one staffer, Fox treated Twersky's formulation as a "revelation." In Fox's view, the mission statement gave *A Time to Act* the imprimatur of a *gadol hador*, a generational leader.[57] But the mission statement's appearance provided confirmation to those commissioners who were inclined to view the deliberations as an elaborately choreographed performance whose outcome was preordained. In their view, while the commissioners were

[56] David Arnow to Morton Mandel, July 25, 1990, box 4, folder 6, MF-AJA.

[57] Fox was sufficiently enamored of Twersky that he later invited the Harvard don to participate in the visions project.

invited to advise and consent, decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of Mandel, Fox, and the senior staff.[58]

Beyond the grumbling over the process and the extent to which the statement reflected an elitist streak or a predisposition toward formal educational settings among the senior staff, the controversy also exposed the limitations of the commission's broad coalition. Arnow's complaints about the perceived narrowness of Twersky's statement provided a springboard for a wider ideological critique of *A Time to Act* for shying away from a pluralistic vision of Jewish life. For Arnow and others, pluralism was not merely a descriptive reality, but a "value," a source of the community's strength and a basis upon which to build a Jewish future. Here, Arnow was giving voice to a post- or trans-denominational trend in American Jewish life, which was exemplified by the establishment, in 1987, of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network.

Jewish pluralism was also the basis upon which the federation and central education agency systems were built earlier in the 20th century. Significantly, however, these agencies had purposely shied away from religious and cultural programming that could be perceived as sectarian. As education bureaus came under federation auspices, they primarily became service agencies, declining to advance a particularistic vision of Jewish life (Krasner, 2011). If, in the latter half of the 20th century, this studied neutrality often translated into little more than a reflexive commitment to Jewish peoplehood, the State of Israel and the preservation of Holocaust consciousness, it ensured cross-denominational cooperation. Champions of pluralism like Arnow and Greenberg believed that the CJENA provided an opportunity to advance an inspirational vision of Jewish life that celebrated pluralism as an intrinsic rather than an instrumental value. To their chagrin, they found that it was constrained by the same forces that had thwarted the architects of the central agencies. The strongest opposition to advancing a pluralistic vision in *A Time to Act* came from Yeshiva University Chancellor Norman Lamm, who decried any effort to introduce "ideological notes" to the report. Revealingly, at one point in the plenary discussion, Lamm conceded, "If what we are doing is pluralism, so be it." But to actually name it as such in *A Time to Act* would jeopardize Orthodox cooperation.[59] Thus, in an indirect way, the controversy prompted by the inclusion of Twersky's statement validated Mandel and Fox's inclination to steer the commission toward the enabling options rather than the programmatic ones. Professionalizing the field, upgrading research and evaluation, and increasing community support for Jewish education were safely non-ideological initiatives that would float all boats without necessarily picking favorites.

Arnow was hardly the only commissioner to raise objections to the penultimate draft of the report. When the draft was presented at the June 1990 plenary, it elicited a degree of buyer's remorse among some commissioners who were disappointed to see their favored programmatic options receive comparatively scant attention. In particular, the emphasis on formal, as opposed to informal settings was pronounced

[58] David Arnow to Morton Mandel, July 25, 1990; notes from David Arnow-Seymour Fox phone conversation, June 22, 1990, MF-IA; Joseph Reimer, interview with the author, March 3, 2014.

[59] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 12, 1990, MF-IA.

and the report had little to say about education prior to and beyond the primary and secondary school years. These imbalances were adjusted somewhat in the final version of the report. But, by and large, the reaction stemmed from lingering disappointment that the prescriptive thrust of the report was confined to the enabling options and a plea for the indispensability of research. There was also continued resistance in some quarters to the CIJE. Mandel reminded the commissioners that the report would not be the final word on Jewish education but rather a call to action.[60]

Impact and Assessment

A Time to Act was unveiled at a closing commission meeting and press conference on November 8, 1990. The argument in the report was simple: The fervently Orthodox community aside, North American Jewry, basking in an unprecedented level of social acceptance, was facing a continuity crisis as it struggled to come to terms with high rates of assimilation and interfaith marriage. Long-term survival could only be ensured through a strong, versatile, and adequately resourced education system, sustained through a professionalized force of teachers and administrators, and driven by research-informed policy and program development (*A Time to Act*, 1990).

The press coverage that the report garnered was generally polite but fleeting (Bleiweiss, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Pickett, 1990; Yudelson, 1990; “Jewish Panel Decries,” 1990). What destined the aptly named report to an extended shelf life was its success at capturing and helping to shape the zeitgeist. Even prior to the report’s release, federations in 10 communities had initiated “continuity commissions,” many of which were focused on overhauling their approaches to Jewish education. The model for these task forces was Mandel’s home city of Cleveland. The Cleveland continuity commission’s report, which was published in 1988, unequivocally posited a linkage between Jewish education and continuity[61] (Alexander, 1997).

Continuity panic reached a fever pitch in the wake of the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), which found a 52% interfaith marriage rate for all marriages involving a Jewish partner over the previous five years.[62] During the fourth plenary, Alvin Schiff quipped that the CJENA needed to create a “Sputnik moment.”[63] He was referring to the U.S. response in the wake of the USSR’s 1957 launching of the first artificial Earth satellite. Not only did Sputnik initiate a “space race” between the superpowers, it spurred Congress to respond to

[60] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, June 12, 1990, MF-IA.

[61] Mark Gurvis to Perry Davis, March 30, 1988, box 4, folder 11, MF-AJA.

[62] The methodology used to arrive at the 52% interfaith marriage rate for 1985-1990 was subsequently criticized. Utilizing narrower criteria for inclusion in the Jewish pool, the 2000-2001 NJPS revised the 1985–1990 intermarriage rate downward to 43%. Nacha Cattan, “New Population Survey Retracts Intermarriage Figure,” the *Jewish Daily Forward* (September 12, 2003).

[63] Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, October 23, 1989, MF-IA.

the (unfounded) public jitters about America losing its technical edge to the Soviet Union by investing unprecedented funds into science, mathematics, and foreign language education, on all levels of the education system, through the National Defense Education Act (Mieczkowski, 2013). With the release of the 1990 NJPS, American Jewry had its Sputnik moment. Sociologists and communal leaders seized on the findings of the 1990 NJPS, which was released in June 1991, about eight months after *A Time to Act*, to argue that the Jewish community was fracturing into two sub-communities; one that related to Judaism as a central force in Jews' lives, and another that considered Jewishness to be peripheral.[64] The survey documented a significant decline in the percentage of Jewish children receiving a formal Jewish education since 1970, when the previous NJPS was conducted. It further posited a correlation between declining rates of formal Jewish education and levels of Jewish communal involvement. As Hanan Alexander and his colleagues explained, the "continuity movement" used the data to postulate that, "Jewish education is the primary factor in determining whether a Jewish individual will identify with either the core or periphery group." They found in *A Time to Act* an off-the-rack diagnosis of the problem and a blueprint for future action (Alexander, 1997). Over the next two years, the report went through three printings, with over 9,000 copies distributed.[65]

Commissioner Sara Lee argued that Mandel and Fox deserved credit for convening the CJENA prior to the publication of the NJPS. They were not merely "jumping on the continuity bandwagon. It showed visionary thinking," she asserted. "They didn't wait for big alarms to go off and for people to start panicking, 'Oh my God, we're losing Jews.'" She added that by shining a light on the weaknesses within the system, the commission had served as a catalyst for change.[66] Others offered a less charitable assessment. If the report had less direct impact than it might have, that was partly because it did not speak to a sufficiently wide audience. While it was accessible, it did not carry an action-oriented message for the general Jewish public, nor did it speak directly to teachers, the backbone of the Jewish education endeavor. The target audiences appeared to be lay leaders, including philanthropists and communal professionals.[67]

But this was arguably a case where the report's chief weakness telegraphed the commission's greatest strength. For Lee and others, who argued that the commission had played a critical role in elevating Jewish education from a third- or fourth-tier communal concern to a top-level priority, mobilizing the donor class and capturing the attention of communal leaders was, in and of itself, a critical contribution. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan here, the medium truly was the message. The most important achievement of the commission, according to this view, was the very fact of its convening. That a roster of 44 leaders—a veritable who's who of North American Jewry—was successfully convened and engaged in a process designed to attract and deploy greater resources for Jewish

[64] See, for example, Heilman (1995).

[65] Annette Hochstein, communication with the author, July 7, 2015.

[66] Sara Lee, interview with the author, October 28, 2014.

[67] Report of meeting between Seymour Fox and Eli Evans, n.d., box 4, folder 16, MF-AJA.

education made a powerful statement that presaged a larger communal reprioritization. As Lee put it, “The attention of the Mandel Foundation was a message to the *machers* [bigwigs] of the Jewish community: ‘Look guys, Jewish education is important.’ ”[68]

The CJENA heralded the entry of mega-donors into the Jewish education field.[69] Prior to the late-1980s, the Fund for Jewish Education, which was established by the oil and gas magnate Joseph Gruss and his wife, the former Caroline Zelaznik, in partnership with the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and the United Jewish Appeal, in 1978, was sui generis (Pace, 1993).[70] Even more modest gifts, like Samuel Melton’s bequests to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, were rare. By 2000, the landscape had been transformed by a small but influential cadre of philanthropists acting through their family foundations, including Sanford and Mem Bernstein, Charles and Andrea Bronfman, Lester Crown, William Davidson, Charles and Lynn Schusterman, Michael Steinhardt, Leslie Wexner, and Mandel himself. Writing in 2001, Jack Wertheimer marveled that Jewish education had lately become “a growth industry, characterized by bold experiments, a great deal of new investment, and the forging of creative partnerships,” a state of affairs that he credited primarily to “Jewish moguls,” sometimes working in partnership with federations and educational institutions, and, on other occasions, striking out on their own (Wertheimer, 2001).[71] As Walter Ackerman observed, these independent foundations could be bolder than central agencies and federations acting alone, because they were not “constrained by their investment in what is” (Ackerman, 1996).

Of course, the growth of private philanthropy in Jewish education should be contextualized in the proliferation of family foundations nationwide in the decades prior to the Great Recession, a trend that has been attributed to the liberalization of tax laws in the 1980s, the “wealth realized during the technology revolution of the mid-late 1990s,” and “flourishing investment markets.” The number of private foundations more than doubled between 1985 and 2004, while “real growth in foundation assets and giving outpaced the number of new foundations that entered the charitable sector.” The greatest growth occurred in the mid-to-late 1990s (Arnsberger, 2008).[72]

Of course, the decision of these mega-donors to include Jewish education among their funding priorities is noteworthy. Adopting an interest-driven approach to their

[68] Sara Lee, interview with the author, October 28, 2014.

[69] Arguably, the trend began in 1987, while CJENA was still in the planning stages, with the inauguration of the Wexner Foundation’s Wexner Graduate Fellowship.

[70] Renamed the Gruss Life Monuments Funds in 1991, it doles out about $15 million annually to bolster yeshiva day school education, by offering grants for building renovations and scholarships, and by augmenting teacher benefit packages.

[71] See, also, Jack Wertheimer, “Jewish Education in the United States: Recent Trends and Issues,” *American Jewish Year Book* 99 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 99–108.

[72] On the impact of the Deficit Reduction Act of 1984 on foundations, see the Internal Revenue Service document, “The Deficit Reduction Act of 1984—Private Foundations and Miscellaneous Provisions,” accessed at: http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopica85.pdf. See also Kathleen Teltsch, “Foundations Held Aided by Tax Bill,” the *New York Times* (July 1, 1984).

philanthropy, these philanthropists largely carved out their own niches, such as heritage tourism, day schools, and leadership training. Some, such as Bronfman and Crown, were at the CJENA table and acknowledged the commission's influence on their later giving. Others were only emerging or were not yet actively engaged in large-scale Jewish philanthropy, and they viewed *A Time to Act* as a starting point and the commission itself as a precedent and an inspiration for mega-donor collaboration. And, even if most commissioners from the donor class disappointed Mandel by declining to extend financial support to the CIJE, many remained open to cooperation on large-scale initiatives when they had aligning interests. Thus, the 1990s witnessed the creation of multi-foundation initiatives, such as the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), the Foundation for Jewish Camp, and Taglit-Birthright Israel. While Mandel was disheartened that the CIJE did not attract more support, he should not have been surprised, given his own foundation's reticence when it came to collaboration. Mandel participated in the early stages of PEJE, but declined to join other initiatives, including Taglit-Birthright Israel. Nevertheless, Mandel's pattern of Jewish education-related philanthropy provided an early example to other givers. His giving to Jewish education in North America skyrocketed from roughly $1.2 million in the 1980s, most of which was spent on the commission itself, to over $17 million in the 1990s. Roughly 23% of Mandel's North American philanthropy was devoted to Jewish education in the 1990s, and one-third of his charitable giving in Israel, over $10 million, was earmarked for education ("Mandel Associated Foundation Giving, 1970–2000"). Only a portion of Mandel's education-related giving in North America was funneled through the CIJE. The foundation gave multimillion dollar gifts over five years to the three leading rabbinical seminaries, the Hebrew Union College, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Yeshiva University, for personnel training. It also was a major funder, along with the Nathan Cummings Foundation, of the Experiment in Congregational Education, a revitalization project that sought to reconceive and revamp the religious school, integrating it into a larger strategic vision for lifelong learning in synagogues and temples. By the late 1990s, the foundation was in the planning stages for a Jewish education research center at Brandeis University.

Many educators and communal leaders anticipated that the CIJE would be an integral force in reversing the tide of assimilation. Indeed, it was conceived as a catalyst, a booster, and a superfund for American Jewish education rolled up into one. Alas, despite a few standout initiatives, the council's record was disappointing. Its marquee program, the Lead Communities initiative, encountered myriad obstacles. While it generated considerable initial interest from Jewish communities across North America, its discernible impact on the three chosen communities—Atlanta, Baltimore, and Milwaukee—was modest, at best.

The ultimate failure of the CIJE should be factored into any assessment of the CJENA. The council was the key programmatic recommendation of *A Time to Act* and Mandel's signature North American Jewish education initiative during the 1990s. While a full accounting of the CIJE must await a future study, insiders point to a few fundamental reasons why it fell short. Some stress weaknesses in leadership. The directorship was a revolving door, and the staff, comprised of

educators and writers, was asked to do the work of community organizers.[73] Others complained about a lack of funds. According to Hochstein, Mandel was terribly disappointed when other philanthropists declined to invest significantly in the CIJE and build it into a superfund for Jewish education. He seemingly could not fathom their lack of enthusiasm, even as their actions mirrored his own limited appetite for collaboration when others were calling the shots. Their anemic support diminished his personal enthusiasm for the endeavor.[74] Still others questioned the top-down change model, suggesting that it was an act of hubris to suppose that a small band of “experts” could land in a community and initiate a systems-wide change process without encountering resistance. A variation of this argument suggests that the CIJE staff modeled its work on the foundation’s experience in Cleveland, failing to recognize the high degree of variability in Jewish communal dynamics.[75]

Reviewing the commission’s records, it is striking that the fundamental pitfalls that doomed the CIJE were predicted by some of the commissioners. Yitz Greenberg, for example, repeatedly warned Mandel and Fox that the CIJE would fail without a $15-$20 million investment, which was far more than Mandel was willing to commit. Rather than attempting to reform the system as a whole, he advised them to invest in a focused project or program. Likewise, Florence Melton, drawing upon her experience inaugurating her adult Jewish education network, the Florence Melton Adult Mini School, cautioned Annette Hochstein that it was “pie in the sky” to assume that communities would be “ready, waiting and willing for us to come to them and say—this is how it’s done.” Of course, it is unfair to write history with hindsight bias. The commission was comprised of 44 strong-willed individuals and boasted a staff and complement of senior advisers that was worthy of a think tank. At times, contradictory advice was proffered, with great conviction, by highly regarded individuals, each drawing upon relevant experiences and skill sets.[76]

More questionable was Fox’s decision to set aside similar critiques emanating from the senior advisers and staff. Arguably, the most curious example was Fox’s marginalization of Naparstek, the commission’s director until mid-1989, who was the strongest advocate for placing the directorship of the CIJE in the hands of an outsider with experience, utilizing intermediary organizations as systemic change agents. Such an approach was unprecedented, even in the general American educational realm, although it had been used with varying degrees of success in spheres such as law enforcement, welfare, literacy, human resources, and public health.[77] Nor did Fox seriously entertain Naparstek’s other suggestions, and Naparstek himself was eased out of the commission’s leadership a few months later,

[73] Gail Dorph, interview with the author, April 10, 2014.

[74] Annette Hochstein, interview with the author, February 23, 2014.

[75] Daniel Pekarsky, interview with the author, May 19, 2014; Barry Holtz, interview with the author, March 10, 2014.

[76] Irving Greenberg to Morton Mandel, January 3, 1988, box 4, folder 20, MF-AJA; Audio recording, Commission on Jewish Education in North America meeting, December 13, 1988; Florence Melton, interview with Annette Hochstein, n.d., c. 1989, file 1939, MF-IA.

[77] Arthur Naparstek, Seymour Fox, and Annette Hochstein, “Minutes,” March 28, 1989, file 1950, MF-IA; Arthur Naparstek to Morton Mandel, April 12, 1989, box 3, folder 10, MF-AJA.

due to tensions with Fox over control of the commission's process and the purse strings. Fox's reasons for disregarding Naparstek's counsel remain obscure and were conceivably based on principle. It is equally plausible that professional friction inured Fox from serious consideration of Naparstek's approach. Likewise, there were further political considerations that probably weighed on Fox's mind. Some colleagues speculate that Fox declined to pursue a heavyweight from the secular world because he feared that a strong and independent CIJE leader in the United States would dilute his own influence. Fox also believed that Mandel would be skeptical about recruiting an outsider. In fact, Mandel hoped that Fox would relocate to the United States to lead the CIJE. But Fox preferred to remain in Jerusalem to set up a center for Diaspora education and to develop an educational leadership institute for Israelis (Shane-Sagiv, 2010). Instead, the CIJE went through a parade of directors between 1990 and 2000, when Mandel shut it down. Only one, Alan Hoffmann, remained on the job long enough to establish a sense of momentum.[78]

Conclusion

A blue-ribbon commission on Jewish education was unprecedented when the CJENA was convened in 1988. No doubt, this was part of the attraction to its funder. The American Jewish demographic trend lines of assimilation and intermarriage shook him up, providing a sense of urgency that allowed him to check his skepticism and act boldly. Convinced that Jewish education was the key to the continuity of the non-Orthodox Jewish community in North America, he zealously committed himself to its advancement and reformation, comparing this endeavor to the quest to cure cancer.[79] Like the fight against cancer, the pursuit of a more inspiring and effectual Jewish education system would be protracted, conducted by myriad teams of researchers and practitioners, with small victories adding up to significant advancements, as well as occasional disappointments.

It was this animating vision that fueled the CJENA, and the spectacle of 44 prominent philanthropists, community leaders, and educators lending their time, energy, and good names to the endeavor created a sense of hope and a belief in the possibility of transformation and renewal. *A Time to Act* provided a counterpoint to the gloom and doom predictions of the demographers, a way forward in light of the 1990 NJPS. It offered a model for future dialogue and cooperation between funders, even if most of the donors on the commission ultimately had little interest or understanding in the CIJE and the lead communities.

If Mandel contributed the sense of urgency; a capacity for bold action; a constellation of beliefs about the key role of leadership, and of evidence-based strategic thinking as a basis for policy; and, the requisite funds to actualize the commission, it was Seymour Fox, aided by Annette Hochstein, who provided the vision and coordination. Despite deciding not to officially own the title of director—

[78] Annette Hochstein, interview with the author, January 30, 2014; Carol Ingall, interview with the author, November 9, 2014; Stephen Hoffman, interview with the author, April 11, 2014.

[79] Morton Mandel, interview with Annette Hochstein, June 27, 1988.

perhaps because he was ensconced in Jerusalem rather than Cleveland—it was Fox who called the shots. As Barry Holtz observed, the twin foci of the commission, personnel and community support, were plucked out of Fox’s time-honored playbook. Influenced by the work of Joseph Schwab, Fox believed that the keys to Jewish educational transformation were human infrastructure and educator-lay leader partnerships. Indeed, one could argue that the entire commission was an exercise in donor and communal leader education of the type that Fox excelled in since his cultivation of philanthropist Sam Melton in the 1960s (Holtz, 2005). Not incidentally, his priorities also corresponded with Mandel’s own thinking, his belief that, “It’s all about who.”

The CJENA was a commencement in the sense that it was both a culmination and an inauguration. It symbolized the shift in emphasis on the communal level from noblesse oblige to self-help. Made possible by a gradual shift in communal priorities, steadily building momentum from the late-1960s, it heralded a decade-and-a-half of innovation, experimentation, and growth, grounded in new philanthropic models and more tactical and synergistic approaches. A measure of the commission’s long-term impact was Wertheimer’s portrait in his 1999 *American Jewish Year Book* survey of Jewish education of a landscape nourished by “new partnerships between the field of Jewish education and other sectors of the larger Jewish community,” and “a new kind of thinking [that] seeks to minimize the diffusion and replace it with something approaching a strategic plan” (Wertheimer, 1999). When Mandel was asked about his goals for the CJENA, in 1988, he exclaimed, “I want to turn the [Jewish education] process on. I want all those water faucets wide open, lots of them, streaming. That’s all I want—that’s the outcome I want.”[80] In this, he was successful. The CJENA was instrumental in the transformation of Jewish education philanthropy.

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[80] Morton Mandel, interview with Annette Hochstein, June 27, 1988.

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