

# The Sephardim of the United States: An Exploratory Study

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WESTERN AND LEVANTINE SEPHARDIM • EARLY AMERICAN SETTLEMENT •  
DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY • IMMIGRATION FROM LEVANT •  
JUDEO-SPANISH COMMUNITY • JUDEO-GREEK COMMUNITY • JUDEO-ARABIC  
COMMUNITY • SURVEY OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM • BIRTHRATE • ECO-  
NOMIC STATUS • SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION • HISPANIC  
CHARACTER • SEPHARDI-ASHKENAZI INTERMARRIAGE • COMPARISON OF  
FOUR COMMUNITIES

## INTRODUCTION

**I**N ITS MOST LITERAL SENSE the term Sephardi refers to Jews of Iberian origin. *Sepharad* is the Hebrew word for Spain. However, the term has generally come to include almost any Jew who is not Ashkenazi, who does not have a German- or Yiddish-language background.<sup>1</sup> Although there are wide cultural divergences within the

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*Note:* It was necessary to consult many unpublished sources for this pioneering study. I am especially grateful to the Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City, for permitting me to use minutes of meetings, letters, and other unpublished materials. I am also indebted to the Synagogue's Sisterhood for making available its minutes.

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<sup>1</sup>See Cecil Roth, "On Sephardi Jewry," *Kol Sepharad*, September-October 1966, pp. 2-6; Solomon Sassoon, "The Spiritual Heritage of the Sephardim," in Richard Barnett, ed., *The Sephardi Heritage* (New York, 1971), pp. 1f; Abraham Levy, *The Sephardim: A Problem of Survival* (London, 1972), pp. 9f; José Faur, "The Sephardim: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *The Sephardic World*, Summer 1972, pp. 5-6.

Sephardi world, common liturgy and religious customs constitute underlying factors of unity. Thus, whether a Jew traces his background to Africa, Asia, or the Sephardi communities of Europe, he may still feel part of Sephardi Jewry.

Jews also may be classified as Sephardim if they have been culturally assimilated into the Sephardi fold and consider themselves to be Sephardim. To define the group only on the basis of genetics or lands of origin is inadequate; it is essential to broaden the definition to include cultural behavior and identity.

Sephardim of all backgrounds live in the United States. The majority are of Turkish and Balkan origins; their mother-tongue was Judeo-Spanish. There is also a large group of Syrian Jews of Arabic-speaking background. Other segments of the Sephardi population have come to the United States from various parts of Africa, Asia, and Western Europe.

Because Sephardi communities in different lands developed under differing cultural and historical conditions, it would be more proper to speak of Sephardi cultures than of one monolithic Sephardi culture. Each group has had unique experiences and has made contributions to Jewish and general civilization. Each group deserves to have its own historians and researchers. However, for the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to delineate certain general cultural characteristics of several major Sephardi groups in the United States. In his book, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews*, Professor Mair José Benardete describes two strains of Sephardim: the Western Sephardim and the Levantine Sephardim.

### *Western Sephardim*

The Western Sephardim are descendants of ex-Marranos who returned to Judaism and established communities throughout Western Europe—in such places as Amsterdam, Bayonne, Bordeaux, Hamburg, London, Paris. Their communities were characterized by pride, wealth, culture, and grandeur. Benardete draws on the description by Ezra Stiles, then president of Yale University, of the colonial American Sephardi merchant Aaron Lopez to indicate the general qualities of these Sephardim. According to Stiles, Lopez “did business with the greatest ease and clearness, always carried about a sweetness

of behaviour, a calm urbanity, an agreeable and unaffected politeness of manners.”<sup>2</sup>

The Western Sephardim formed an aristocracy within the Jewish world. Eminent not only for their social graces but also for scholarship and cultural contributions, they were the envy of many non-Sephardi Jews. One striking example of the attempt of Ashkenazim to emulate Sephardim is found, oddly enough, in tombstone inscriptions in Leghorn. The ex-Marranos carried their *hidalguism* to their cemeteries, adorning their tombstones with lavishly engraved artwork, as well as with poetry written in Spanish. Ashkenazi Jews who tried to imitate their Sephardi brethren in life also tried to imitate them in death, and a number of their tombstones bear Spanish inscriptions.

Western Sephardim migrated to the New World in the hope of finding and cultivating opportunities for economic advancement. They settled in such places as Curaçao, Surinam, St. Thomas, Jamaica, and Recife. In 1654, as we shall see later, they began to settle in North America. For various reasons the Western Sephardim have dwindled in number and influence, so that today very few congregations of this tradition still enjoy a vibrant existence.<sup>3</sup>

### *Levantine Sephardim*

In the course of the century beginning with the persecutions of 1391 and closing with the expulsion of 1492, Spanish Jews who refused to convert to Catholicism left their homes and settled in more tolerant lands. They migrated to Turkey, North Africa, as well as points in Europe, where they established significant communities and produced extraordinary literatures in Judeo-Spanish and Hebrew. The Jewish world has not really been fully aware of the importance of their cultural contributions. Scholarly research into their history has begun only recently.

The Judeo-Spanish Sephardi communities in the Levant suffered a gradual cultural erosion, which began in the latter part of the 17th century. The Shabbetai Zevi debacle, Turkey's economic decline, and

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<sup>2</sup>Mair José Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (New York, 1952), pp. 44–45.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43; see also bibliography at the end of this article for works dealing with Western Sephardim.

low cultural standards of the general population, all contributed to the disintegration of Sephardi life. To be sure, Levantine Sephardim have made significant contributions to Jewish life up to our own day; but the masses drifted into relative ignorance. Thus the cultural influences most instrumental in shaping modern Levantine Sephardim have been folk qualities. The Sephardi's sense of poetry, music, and aesthetics has been shaped by his rich Judeo-Spanish heritage. His view of the harmony between religion and secularism and his love of the joys of life have been inherited from his Levantine Sephardi ancestors.

The Sephardim who lived in Arabic lands and who spoke Judeo-Arabic were influenced by their cultural milieu. They established well-organized, tightly-knit communities and produced rabbis, poets, and thinkers. Many of these Jews developed a keen sense of business, trade, and barter.

The Sephardim of Asia and Africa were strongly affected by the French-language schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which brought Western education to thousands of their young and imbued them with the desire to advance academically. Although some Sephardi Hispanicists have objected to the Alliance's stress on French, the fact remains that its schools served a valuable and needed purpose. Many Sephardim who have advanced in American society owe much of their success to their early training in Alliance schools. The most notable individual who came from the Alliance to work with the Sephardim in the United States was Nissim Behar (1848–1931).<sup>4</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY

### *Early Settlements*

The history of the Jewish community of North America actually begins with the founding of Congregation Shearith Israel in New Amsterdam in September 1654. Most of the twenty-three refugees

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<sup>4</sup>See David N. Barocas, *Albert Matarasso and His Ladino* (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, Inc., 1969), p. 56; Benardete, *op. cit.*, pp. 169–70; *La America*, February 13, 1914, p. 2; October 13, 1916, p. 3; *Jewish Charities*, June 1914, p. 28; Z. Szajkowski, "The Alliance Israélite Universelle in the United States, 1860–1949," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Vol. 39, June 1950, pp. 406–43.

from Recife, Brazil, who founded the congregation were of Spanish and Portuguese descent, and they were the ones who set the communal organization patterns and synagogue customs. Other communities developed later in Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, Charleston, and Montreal. All were Spanish and Portuguese, stemming from the ex-Marrano or Western Sephardi tradition.

It is a widespread myth that Jewish immigration to the American colonies was overwhelmingly Sephardi. The fact is that relatively many Ashkenazim also came during this period, working with the Sephardim to build Jewish life on American soil. In New York, for example, the Ashkenazim outnumbered the Sephardim by 1730, the year the first synagogue building was completed on Mill Street. While the synagogue was under construction, the Sephardi Moses Gomez presided over the community in the first half of 1729, and the Ashkenazi Jacob Franks in the second half.<sup>5</sup> The often-repeated claim that the Sephardim looked down on the Ashkenazim is not borne out by the facts. On the contrary, the two groups got on surprisingly well together in spite of original cultural differences. They cooperated in every area of Jewish life. Marriages between Sephardim and Ashkenazim were extremely common.<sup>6</sup>

Students of the Spanish and Portuguese settlements in North America often have underplayed the profound Sephardi cultural influence on the Ashkenazim. It has been stated that because of widespread Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriages, "the resultant mixture, often miscalled Portuguese, was really more Ashkenazic than Sephardic."<sup>7</sup> The final determination of what makes a community Sephardi or Ashkenazi is based on culture rather than genetics. So long as the Spanish and Portuguese culture predominated in the community

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<sup>5</sup>David de Sola Pool, *The Mill Street Synagogue* (New York, 1930), p. 50.

<sup>6</sup>See Samuel Kohs, "The Jewish Community," in Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews: Their History, Culture and Religion* (New York, 1955), Vol. 2, p. 1275, who claims that German Jewish immigrants "were not too cheerful about the welcome they were receiving." Yet Ashkenazim served as officers in the various Sephardi synagogues, and from available evidence it seems that the two groups cooperated reasonably well. Hyman Grinstein, *The Rise of the Jewish Community of New York* (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 166, states that the "so-called Portuguese Jews . . . felt superior to and disliked the Ashkenazim," but notes on the very next page that Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriages were so common that, after a short time, "there were virtually no real Portuguese left."

<sup>7</sup>Grinstein, *ibid.*, p. 167.

it could be accurately described as Sephardi, even if all its members were of Ashkenazi origin.

The dominant role of Sephardi culture in Colonial America, therefore, justifies calling the early communities Spanish and Portuguese, even those where Ashkenazim actually outnumbered Sephardim. The Sephardim had pride in themselves as well as in their ancestry. They had ability in commerce. They had the traditional Western Sephardi *savoir faire* and social flexibility. At their best, they could adapt admirably to American life and still retain their distinctive Sephardi Jewish tradition. As happened in other communities where Western Sephardim met Ashkenazim, the Sephardim in America prevailed in the cultural sphere. Since Ashkenazim admired the cosmopolitan and enlightened Sephardim, they attempted to become Sephardim—and very often succeeded.

That Sephardi culture more than descent determined the Sephardi character of the early communities is well demonstrated by the history of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal. In the 1760s Jewish settlers began to arrive in that Canadian city. Of those whose names we find in the synagogue's early records, nearly all were of non-Sephardi origin. The earliest minutes of the congregation, dated 1778, established the structure of the community according to Spanish and Portuguese custom. A *parnas*, *gabay*, and a *junto* of three elders served as leaders. Yet not one of the seven men who signed the minutes had a Spanish or Portuguese name. The same was true of the thirteen men who signed the congregation's by-laws in 1778.<sup>8</sup> Thus it is obvious that what influenced these men to establish a Spanish and Portuguese synagogue was not their own descent, which was either completely or partly non-Sephardi, but their cultural attachment to the Sephardi ways.

The strong influence exerted by the Sephardim on the Ashkenazi settlers accounts for the survival of the three remaining Spanish and Portuguese synagogues in North America: Shearith Israel in New York City, Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, and Shearith Israel in Montreal, each of which has long had a high percentage of non-Sephardi members. They could never have survived unless Ashkenazim were attracted to Sephardi culture. Ashkenazim *wanted* to be part of the

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<sup>8</sup>Solomon Frank, *Two Centuries in the Life of a Synagogue* (Montreal, 1968), pp. 28, 32.

Sephardi community. And this would explain why, between 1654 and 1825, Shearith Israel in New York was the only Jewish congregation, a fact that has troubled some historians.<sup>9</sup>

Being Sephardi in outlook, the communities were quick to adapt to their new society. Western Sephardim were receptive to the forces of secularism; they did not isolate themselves in self-imposed religious ghettos. Thus Gershom Mendes Seixas, the famous minister of Shearith Israel in New York (1768–1816), not only showed enthusiasm for science but was known also to quote from the New Testament. Because of his receptivity to matters not strictly religious or Jewish, some students today wonder about Seixas' "Orthodoxy."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Jacob Rader Marcus likens Seixas to Israel Jacobson, founder of Reform Judaism. Marcus makes a point of Seixas' "insistence on Western dress, decorum, dignity, and an increasing use of the vernacular."<sup>11</sup> And yet, all these characteristics were common to Western Sephardi religious leaders long before Seixas was born. Certainly he was influenced by his American milieu; but his Sephardi roots must not be forgotten.

Though they made many significant contributions to Jewish and American life,<sup>12</sup> the Spanish and Portuguese communities gradually diminished in influence. Assimilation and intermarriage cost them some losses. The comparatively large immigration of Ashkenazi Jews in the early 19th century engulfed the old Sephardi communities. Ashkenazim founded synagogues and institutions of their own. To be sure, they borrowed ideas from their Spanish and Portuguese predecessors, but there could be no doubt that the Sephardi influence decreased with each new shipload of Ashkenazim. As the Ashkenazi immigration began to skyrocket, there was not time for the Sephardi

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<sup>9</sup>Grinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>J.R. Marcus, *Handsome Young Priest in the Black Gown* (Cincinnati, 1970); reprinted from *HUC Annual*, Vol. 40–41, 1969–70), pp. 43, 49.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup>The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York, for example, founded, or helped found, such institutions as Mt. Sinai and Montefiore hospitals, the traditionalist Jewish Theological Seminary, and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Members of the community were among the founders of the New York Stock Exchange. The Hendricks family developed the copper industry in America. For more information, see David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York, 1955); Maxwell Whiteman, *Copper for America* (New Brunswick, 1971).

synagogues to absorb the newcomers. There simply were too many arrivals for the Spanish and Portuguese communities to cope with; the immigrants needed their own communal organizations.

At the same time, there was so little Sephardi immigration that the few remaining Spanish and Portuguese congregations must have felt that they were being overrun. They tenaciously clung to their synagogal customs and rituals, fearful that without such rigor the entire *minhag* would collapse.

When Sephardi Jews from the Levant began to come to the United States in the early 20th century, the old Sephardi institutions felt new hope. The *Shearith Israel Bulletin* (New York) of February 1912 recorded: "The great increase in the number of Sephardic Jews in America is a happy guarantee of the survival and spread in the United States of the ancient *minhag* of our Congregation." Now, for the first time in a century, Sephardi culture in America had the opportunity to grow and spread. But these Levantine immigrants, though authentic bearers of the Sephardi tradition, were mostly poor and uneducated, and the question was how they would adjust to conditions in America.

### *Levantine Jewish Immigration*

In the course of the 19th century, the Sephardi communities of the Levant began to absorb Western ideas. The Alliance Israélite Universelle established a network of schools throughout the Oriental Sephardi dispersion so that modern French education was reaching an increasing number of young people. The result was a slowly developing undercurrent of discontent with the established modes of life. In particular, the have-nots began to seek new opportunities for economic and social advancement; the old mode of life offered nothing but a future of hard work and poverty.

As Western education spread, and as Levantine businessmen on their travels became aware of modern ideas and attitudes, a subtle change in thinking occurred in the Sephardi communities. More and more of the Sephardim became imbued with the modern spirit of progress and were ready to seek out opportunities in other lands. To be sure, the majority remained in the Old World, but their attitudes too were undergoing transformation. They realized that their long-standing cultural isolation was coming to an end, that their communities were going to face demographic as well as ideological changes. A new era had begun.



The progressive among the Sephardim urged the youth to study in Western schools and to advance academically. Since the economic and intellectual opportunities in the existing communities were usually limited, ambitious Sephardim set their visions on new worlds. They would migrate. They would become wealthy. They would send money back to the Old Country, or perhaps they would even return some day to their hometowns to live in luxury. Though some Sephardim migrated to various places in Europe, Africa, and South America, by far the greatest number was attracted to the promise of the United States.

In the history of Sephardi migration many incidents revealed the transition from the traditional to the modern milieu. One anecdote serves to illustrate the tragicomic element in Levantine Jewish life at the turn of the century.<sup>13</sup> On the Island of Rhodes, an ancient and illustrious Sephardi community of about 6,000 persons, lived a man named Jacob Aroghetti. He avidly campaigned for emigration to America, claiming that only in this way could the people progress. He made plans for himself and a group of followers to settle in Seattle, Washington, where a small group of Sephardim was already established. But when he bought the tickets he asked for passage to Washington, not bothering to specify the city, Seattle. As a result, he and his group landed in Washington, D.C. After a hopeless search for his Seattle Sephardi friends in Washington, D.C., Aroghetti finally realized his mistake. He was discouraged from traveling across the country, and settled in New York City where he became a leading figure in the Sephardi immigrant community.

The Sephardim were not the first people from the Levant to come to America. Hundreds of non-Jewish Greeks and Slavs had preceded them by a generation. When the earlier immigrants sent news of America back to the Levant, the Jews probably learned of the opportunities the new land offered. Also, some Sephardi merchants had visited the United States to attend various expositions.<sup>14</sup> Young Sephardi bachelors were most apt to believe the glittering reports about America. Those who ventured to the New World sent letters back home, often enclosing money. The fame of America loomed larger and larger.

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<sup>13</sup>In personal conversation with Dr. Maurice Amateau, who was born in Rhodes and presently lives in New York.

<sup>14</sup>Benardete, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

The changes in the *Zeitgeist* which led to an increased interest in migration among the Levantine Jews brought a steady stream of immigrants to the United States. The total number was not large. According to figures derived from the records of the United States Commissioner General of Immigration, 2,738 Levantine Sephardim came to the United States between 1890 and 1907.<sup>15</sup> The figure reported by the Hebrew Immigrant Shelter and Aid Society (HISAS, later known as HIAS) was somewhat higher.<sup>16</sup> Soon, however, events militated for a rise in Levantine Sephardi immigration.

In Turkey, the 1908 revolt of the Young Turks, which aimed at securing constitutional government, created hardships for many Jews. The institution of compulsory military service, for the first time also for Jews in the Levant, made it more difficult for the men to support their families and interfered with religious observance. The disruptions of life in a country torn by revolution, the Turko-Italian war, as well as natural disasters such as a fire and earthquake, contributed to the insecurity of the country's Jews.<sup>17</sup> During the 1912-13 Balkan war against Turkey, the Sephardi communities in the belligerent countries were ravaged. When defeated Turkey ceded territory to the Balkan allies, the latter began to battle among themselves for the distribution of the newly-won territories. In July all-out war involved Rumania, Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. A treaty at Bucharest ended the war in August 1913.

When peace came, the tragically worsened conditions of Levantine Jewry became apparent. Poverty was rampant. Constantinople and Salonika were crowded with refugees from the war zone. Besides, the allies imposed economic measures which proved injurious to the Jews. Major cities of Sephardi settlement, such as Monastir, Janina, Castoria, Kavala, and Andrianople, were severely hit by the wars. The Jews of Bulgaria were forced to appeal to European and American

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<sup>15</sup>Louis M. Hacker, "The Communal Life of the Sephardic Jews in New York City," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. 3, December 1926, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>David de Sola Pool, "The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States," *Jewish Charities*, June 1914, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>David de Sola Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," *AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK*, Vol. 15 (1913-14), pp. 209-10; Benardete, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

Jewry for help. It was estimated that 200,000 Jews in European Turkey were poverty-stricken.<sup>18</sup>

The troubles for the Jews in the Levant were not to subside with the end of the Balkan wars. It was not long before World War I engulfed them. Jacques Magid, HIAS representative in Constantinople, reported in February 1920 that there were hundreds of persons in and around Constantinople who had relatives in America and who were in dire need of aid. A second HIAS report supported his statement.<sup>19</sup> Magid was asked to prepare a list of the needy so that "a reasonable amount of money" might be spent to relieve their condition.

It was to be expected that many Levantine Sephardim decided to leave their homelands. According to United States government figures, 10,033 of them entered the United States between 1908 and 1914. Immigration lessened during World War I, but between 1920 and 1924 another 9,877 came. In 1925 the figure was drastically reduced to 137 persons as a result of new quota restrictions. But Levantine immigration had begun to slacken considerably earlier, after the adoption of a temporary measure in 1921.<sup>20</sup>

### *Distribution of Population*

According to government figures, a total of 25,591 Levantine Sephardim entered the United States between 1899 and 1925.<sup>21</sup> The actual figure was somewhat higher because a number of Sephardim no doubt were counted as non-Jewish Turks, Greeks, Syrians, and others. Various estimates of the number of Sephardim in the country and of their concentration in New York City are as follows:

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<sup>18</sup>"The Balkan Wars and the Jews," AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, Vol. 15 (1913-14), pp. 186-206. See especially, pp. 189-95.

<sup>19</sup>*Minutes of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society*, February 10, 1920, p. 91. See also minutes for July 28, 1920, p. 128. Microfilms available at Yivo Institute, New York City.

<sup>20</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 34. The increased immigration was due not merely to the Balkan wars, but as said before, also to a growing desire for economic and social betterment. See AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK, Vol. 15 (1913-14), p. 431; HIAS Minutes, *op. cit.*, December 13, 1921, p. 249, note a drop in Levantine immigration.

<sup>21</sup>Hacker, *ibid.*

Year	U.S. Total	New York City
1913	9,000 <sup>a</sup>	80 to 90 per cent <sup>b</sup>
1916	32,000 <sup>c</sup>	vast majority
1926	50-60,000 <sup>d</sup>	at least 40,000
1930		45,000 (Spanish-speaking) <sup>e</sup>
1941		25,000 (Spanish-speaking) <sup>f</sup>
1946	55,000 <sup>g</sup>	40,000
current	100,000 <sup>h</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>Jewish Charities, March 29, 1913, p. 11.

<sup>b</sup>Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," *op.cit.*, p. 212; the *American Hebrew* (December 12, 1913, p. 190) figure of 15,000 seems to be exaggerated.

<sup>c</sup>In an unpublished talk to the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, New York, November 1916, Cyrus Adler estimated some 30,000 Levantine Jews, most of them Ladino-speaking, had immigrated since 1907.

<sup>d</sup>Hacker, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>e</sup>Max Luria, "Judeo-Spanish Dialects in New York City," in J. Fitzgerald and P. Taylor, eds., *Todd Memorial Volumes* (New York, 1930), Vol. 2, p. 7. If Greek- and Arabic-speaking Jews were to be included, the New York figure would be 50,000-60,000, and the U.S. figure some 80,000-90,000, or more.

<sup>f</sup>Barocas, *op.cit.*, p. 64; Matarasso's estimate appears to deal only with Spanish-speaking Sephardim.

<sup>g</sup>Joseph Papo, "The Sephardic Community in America," *Reconstructionist*, Vol. 12, October 20, 1946, p. 13.

<sup>h</sup>This figure appears in brochures published by the Yeshiva University Sephardic Studies Program. There may be many more if children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages were included.

Although there are some serious discrepancies, all estimates agree that by far the largest group of Sephardi immigrants settled in New York City. Estimates for 1913, 1916, and 1926 seem more reliable than later figures, mainly because the bulk of the Sephardim at that time were immigrants, and immigration figures, though not completely accurate, were available. Therefore the Sephardi population could be reasonably accurately established without having to guess at rates of natural increase. In later years, with the increase of American-born Sephardim, estimates were less likely to be accurate. The present estimate of 100,000 is no more than a guess; it may be much larger, but probably is not smaller.

The Sephardi immigrants can be classified into three major groups having distinct cultural characteristics and mother tongues. The great majority spoke Judeo-Spanish and came from Turkey and the Balkan

countries. Of the two smaller groups one was Greek-speaking and the other, largely from Syria, Judeo-Arabic-speaking. There was also a trickle of Levantine Ashkenazi immigration. Thus even within the ranks of Levantine immigrants there was diversity of language and culture.

By Western standards most Sephardi newcomers were uneducated and unskilled, and poorly prepared to meet the challenges of America. They encountered their first problem on Ellis Island, even before entering the United States. A lead article in the national Judeo-Spanish weekly *La America*, June 9, 1911, complained that Jews from Turkey were having real difficulty with American immigration officials. These Jews were not familiar with American immigration laws and did not know how to answer the questions put to them. Thus some poor frightened immigrants were detained for weeks before setting foot in this country. Others were actually sent back to Turkey. In an effort to help, *La America* printed American immigration regulations in Judeo-Spanish.

Many Sephardi immigrants were saved from deportation by American Jews. In the fall of 1916 some recent arrivals from the ports of Salonika and Kavala were in serious difficulty because they had diseases which, according to the provisions of immigration laws, barred them from entering the United States. Because deportation to their war-torn homes endangered the lives of these Jews, HIAS persuaded Beth Israel and Montefiore hospitals to admit them as patients.<sup>22</sup>

When the Sephardi Jews finally were admitted, they found themselves in complete isolation. Of course, all immigrants needed a period of adjustment; but Sephardim were more severely handicapped than Ashkenazim because the American Jewish community did not quite know what to do with them. All its immigrant facilities were geared to Yiddish-speaking Jews. What was to be done with several thousand Spanish-, Greek-, and Arabic-speaking people? Who could even understand them?

The burden of responsibility naturally fell on the one existing Sephardi congregation in New York, the ancient Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue Shearith Israel. HIAS helped by establishing an Oriental Bureau, and other individuals and groups also became

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<sup>22</sup>HIAS Minutes, *op. cit.*, October 10, 1916, p. 113.

involved. But, as we shall see later, attempts at assisting the Sephardim were less than successful.

In the early stages of Sephardi immigration—and of Ashkenazi as well—attempts were made to settle the newcomers outside New York City. The theory was that they would develop better in less unwieldy groups than those in New York. The scatter program would also ease the burden of New York Jewry. Thus, in 1907, the Industrial Removal Office, a Jewish organization begun as part of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, sent a number of Levantine Sephardim to Seattle, Gary, Cincinnati, Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland. The New York *Kehillah*, the communal organization of the New York City Jews, established Sephardi colonies in Glenham, N.Y., and Raritan, N.J.<sup>23</sup>

Yet despite all these attempts, perhaps as many as 90 per cent of the Sephardim settled in New York, on the Lower East Side and later also in Harlem. In 1914 other Sephardi communities were in Seattle (about 600), San Francisco (100), Atlanta (100), Rochester (90), and Portland, Ore. (80). Smaller communities were found in Chicago, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, and Montgomery.<sup>24</sup>

Since most of the Sephardi immigrants spoke Judeo-Spanish, it was believed that they would more easily adjust in Spanish-speaking countries, and that they therefore should be encouraged to settle in Latin America. Dr. David de Sola Pool of Congregation Shearith Israel, who was also chairman of the Oriental Committee of its Sisterhood, considered such proposals. The Oriental Committee of Congregation Mikveh Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue of Philadelphia, apparently also considered this possibility. HIAS explored living conditions in Cuba. Some Sephardim were indeed sent to Latin American countries; but the overwhelming majority settled in the United States.<sup>25</sup>

The adoption of the 1924 Immigration Act, which embodied the national origins quota system, led to the sharp curtailment of the main

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<sup>23</sup>Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," *op. cit.*, p. 212.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>*Minutes of the Oriental Committee of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, October 13, 1914, pp. 43–44; December 11, 1916, p. 95. See also, Mark Wischnitzer, *Visas to Freedom* (New York, 1956), p. 68; Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community*, (New York, 1970), p. 69.

sources of Jewish immigration. The Levantine immigration in particular was almost completely choked off.<sup>26</sup> *La America*, October 17, 1924, published "A New Chapter of Sephardi History in America," by its editor M.S. Gadol, who reported that many Sephardim were going to Cuba in the expectation of being permitted to enter the United States a year or so later. This, Gadol stated, would not be possible in view of the strict quota law. He felt that Sephardim in the United States, whose numbers would no longer be replenished by new waves of immigrants, now had to rely on their own resources to create viable communities.

### *New York City Community*

In the midst of the many thousand Yiddish-speaking immigrants on the Lower East Side, a relatively small community of Sephardim led an insular life. In the early days, the language barrier cut them off almost entirely from the Ashkenazim. And within the Sephardi community, those speaking Spanish, Greek, and Arabic were separated from each other as well. Even in matters of religion the Sephardim and Ashkenazim formed distinct tribes. Variations in ritual, synagogue liturgy, and pronunciation of Hebrew enlarged the gulf separating them. The Sephardim really had no choice but to form their own community; they were far too uncomfortable in an Ashkenazi setting.

The story goes that the first Sephardi settlers simply were thought not to be really Jewish by the city's Ashkenazim, for their names, language, appearance, and mannerisms were strange. In light of such cultural differences, Sephardim naturally tended to develop separate communities.

Some New York Ashkenazim at first thought that the Sephardim could be integrated into the general Jewish community, but this idea was immediately rejected as impossible. It would have been not only impossible; it would have been a mistake to try to strip the Sephardim of their identity. Dr. Pool argued that the Sephardim would advance

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<sup>26</sup>*Minutes of the Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel, The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in the City of New York*, Vol. 9, March 4, 1924, p. 267, records their resolutions against proposed immigration quotas, which were submitted to Congressmen serving on the House Immigration Committee.

more readily if allowed to have their own synagogues and schools, and to function in a milieu that was comfortable and natural for them; that, in time, they would become Americanized socially while maintaining their own distinctive Sephardi ritual, a development that was to be desired.<sup>27</sup> Some twelve years later, Hacker, too, discussed the isolation of the New York Sephardim which, he said, was caused by religious, linguistic, and psychological distinctiveness.<sup>28</sup> As a result they established their own institutions: not only synagogues and Talmudé Torah, but also grocery stores, restaurants, and cafés catering to Sephardi taste and eating habits.

As a matter of fact, the coffee houses became a source of contention between the Sephardi immigrants and the American Jewish establishment. Only the male Sephardim frequented them while the women remained at home with the children. After the day's work the men would go to the café, their only outlet for recreation and social intercourse, and their one escape from the bleak tedium of daily life. They would sip Turkish coffee, tell jokes, gossip, complain, discuss politics, read the Judeo-Spanish papers, laugh, cry, and dream. The coffee house, a regular feature of the communities in the Levant, had always been popular with the working people and always unpopular with the rabbis.<sup>29</sup> The Sephardi cafés in New York were no exception to this rule.

As a Sephardi rabbi, Dr. Pool felt keen responsibility for the welfare of the new group of Sephardim. He considered the coffee house a bad influence, condemning it as the enemy of progress, a place of idleness, gambling, and other undesirable activities. However, his words had little influence on reducing patronage of the cafés. Indeed, lay leaders among the Levantine Jews avidly defended them.<sup>30</sup>

Like all Sephardim, the Levantine Jews had a strong sense of pride. They were particularly proud of their ancestry, of their historic Sephardi names. They therefore did not like to feel that they were a "problem." Neither did they consider themselves to be part of the

<sup>27</sup>Pool, "The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States," *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>29</sup>See for example, M. J. Israel, *Shenoth Yamin* (Smyrna, 1867), pp. 10b, 56a.

<sup>30</sup>Pool, "The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States," *op. cit.*, p. 16; "The Levantine Jews in the United States," *op. cit.*, p. 218. See Joseph Gedelecia's defense of the coffee houses in *Jewish Charities*, June 1914, p. 29.



lower classes, although they were poor. This pride—which sometimes bordered on stubbornness—made them even more of a problem than they otherwise would have been. Traditional methods of aiding immigrants were seldom effective with them. They resented charity and violently opposed any person or group attempting to help them in a conspicuous manner.

Maurice Hexter, conducting a study of the Cincinnati Sephardi colony in 1913, asked the assistance of Maír José Benardete, who later became a recognized Sephardi scholar. Recalling his work with Hexter, Benardete, commented: “It was not a very comfortable feeling to have, as the thought dawned upon my boyish mentality, that the small tribe in the cheapest section of the sooty city by the muddy Ohio River, was presenting difficulties to the charitable agencies of the Ashkenazic Jews who were by comparison numerous and prosperous.”<sup>31</sup> But it was a fact. How could aid be given to Levantine Jews if they hindered those who wanted to help?

Again and again Levantine spokesmen insisted on their self-dependence. Again and again they asked their would-be benefactors to treat them with respect. They were not beggars. They quickly gained the reputation of being people who would not appeal to local charities except in the most urgent cases, and they rarely appealed a second time.<sup>32</sup> As Dr. Cyrus Adler summed it up: “The Oriental Jews unless they be decrepit, blind or maimed ask and take no charity, and to maintain themselves no work is too hard.”<sup>33</sup> According to Hacker, the Sephardim “consider themselves a people apart; they are ‘Spanish Jews’ with a distinct historical consciousness and, often, an inordinate pride.”<sup>34</sup>

No doubt the Levantine immigrants created a serious problem for American Jewish agencies. Delegates from two Sephardi organizations, the Ahavath Shalom Society of Monastir and the Union and Peace Society, who attended a meeting of the New York *Kehillah* in February 1911, told the gathering in no uncertain terms that not even

<sup>31</sup>Benardete, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>32</sup>Pool, “The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States,” *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup>Address to the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, New York, November 27, 1916, as recorded in its Minutes. See also Pool, “The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States,” *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

one member of their societies would need communal assistance during the coming year; that they themselves could handle any problems that might come up.<sup>35</sup> The Sephardi community approved of this stand. At a conference of Jewish social work leaders, Joseph Gedelecia, a Levantine Jew of Ashkenazi origin, admitted that the immigrants were a problem to the American Jewish establishment, but he added that the latter did not know how to cope with the situation properly. Defiantly he exclaimed: "But it is a problem you do not understand. When the Yiddish Jews go to Turkey, they, too, are a serious problem there."<sup>36</sup>

In view of the barrier existing between the Jewish social service agencies and the Sephardi Jews, Dr. Pool advised local federations and charities not to assist the Levantine Jews unless asked to do so. He also suggested that, whenever possible, aid should be given to the Sephardim through their own organizations.<sup>37</sup>

Although in the early days of the Sephardi settlement misery and poverty prevailed, the future held promise. The overwhelming majority of the Sephardim were unskilled, struggling, and working long hours as candy peddlers, bootblacks, cloakroom attendants, waiters, and the like. Many sold fruits and vegetables. But it was not long before they began to rise economically. They were careful to save money and, in time, bootblacks became owners of shoe-repair shops; fruit vendors opened grocery stores; candy salesmen bought candy concessions in movie theaters, and some went on to buy the theaters as well.

Sephardi children went to public schools; some went on to college. On June 8, 1917, *La America* reported that Jack David Hananiah, who had come from Smyrna, received a dentist's diploma; he was the first of New York's new Sephardi colony to enter that profession. Soon there there were also Sephardi doctors and lawyers. As early as 1914, Joseph Gedelecia boasted that New York's Sephardi community had eighteen doctors, three lawyers, sixty teachers, four professors, and various civil engineers and manufacturers. Several of the Sephardim amassed large fortunes, as, for example, the Schenazy brothers who were cigar manufacturers. Although Gedelecia's statements may have

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<sup>35</sup>*La America*, February 17, 1911, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>*Jewish Charities*, June 1914, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup>Pool, "The Immigration of Levantine Jews Into the United States," *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

been somewhat exaggerated, they were nevertheless indicative of the upward mobility of the community.<sup>38</sup> The economic progress continued with each succeeding generation, so that today the Sephardi community is relatively comfortable.

A serious problem of New York's Sephardim since their arrival early this century has been disunity. They formed societies, and even social clubs, based for the most part on geographical origin. Thus there were two clubs of Syrian Jews, one for those from Damascus and the other for people from Aleppo. Greek-speaking Jews formed Ahavah veAkhvah Janina and Tikvah Torah. The Spanish-speaking community had, for example, the following organizations: Ahavath Shalom for Monastir Jews; Hesed veEmet for those from Castoria; Mekor Hayyim for those from the Dardanelles; Yeshu'a veRahamim for Rhodes Jews; Hayyim veHesed for those from Gallipoli; Etz Hayyim for those from Smyrna, and Ezrath Ahim for those from Rodosto, Silivria, and Tchorlu. A progressive group of Turkish and Moroccan Jews formed the Union and Peace Society whose official language was English. The Progressive Oriental Society was composed mostly of Ashkenazim from Turkey. And as the Sephardi population increased, the number of these groups multiplied.

In 1912 twelve congregations of Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews held High Holy Day services. Most of them had originated as benevolent and self-help societies.<sup>39</sup> In 1926, Hacker reported, the Sephardim had a number of small, struggling synagogues: eight on the Lower East Side, three in Harlem, and three in Brooklyn. They also had some thirty-six burial and mutual-aid societies.<sup>40</sup>

In the intervening years, there had been several major attempts, as well as a host of minor ones, to achieve unity among the New York Sephardim.

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<sup>38</sup>*Jewish Charities*, June 1914, p. 29. For statements of the poor conditions in the early days see *La America*, November 25, 1910, p. 2; David de Sola Pool, "A New Communal Need," *Jewish Charities*, March 29, 1913, p. 11; David N. Barocas, *Broome and Allen Boys*, (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, Inc., n.d.), p. 6. For statements of early progress, see *La America*, January 21, 1916, p. 2; Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> *La America*, January 5, 1912, p. 2; Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>40</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

## FEDERATION OF ORIENTAL JEWS

Since none of the Sephardi societies was large enough to support adequate schools and synagogues or to provide enough social and cultural services to serve the many needs of the entire community, Sephardi leaders urged the groups to unite into a central authoritative organization.<sup>41</sup>

Early in 1912 it seemed as though unity was about to be achieved. *La America* of March 22, 1912, carried a front-page article by Gadol announcing the consolidation of different societies into the Oriental Jewish Federation of America. The Federation of Oriental Jews, as it came to be known, did not really solidify itself until December 1913. At a Federation-sponsored mass meeting held on December 7, the Sephardi leadership announced their intention to found a "self-supporting Ladino community where all the emigrated Jews from the Orient may find themselves 'at home.'"

Funds for community institutions would come from an annual fee of \$12.00 to be paid by each Federation member for the support of religious schools, a social house, an employment bureau, and a "spiritual adviser." The meeting unanimously adopted a resolution which underscored the desire for financial independence: "Be it hereby resolved, that it is the sense of this meeting, that in the future, any organization or individual applying for funds for Oriental Jews, are doing so against the expressed wishes of our people and against the principle that, henceforth, we intend to carry on our own work without outside assistance."<sup>42</sup>

This resolution irked the non-Oriental individuals and groups who had taken up the cause of these newcomers. The Oriental Committee of the Sisterhood of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York felt insulted and outraged. It left the Federation, and stated in its letter of resignation that it intended to take full control of the Uptown Talmud Torah in Harlem, thus severing all official cooperative ventures with the Federation of Oriental Jews.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup>*La America's* editor, M.S. Gadol, often called for such unity; see for example the issue of January 12, 1912, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup>*American Hebrew*, December 12, 1913, p. 190. See also issue of December 19, 1913, p. 220.

<sup>43</sup>Sisterhood Minutes, December 17, 1913, pp. 9-11.

For all its grand plans, however, the Federation did not succeed. It was little more than a loosely connected union of various small, independent societies, made powerless by each group's insistence on autonomy. If any member-society disapproved of a project, the Federation could proceed only at the risk of resignations.

Recognizing the impotence of the Federation as then constituted, Gadol ultimately turned against it. He argued that the Sephardim needed a central community organization with a community house. He reported some progress toward this end in 1916.<sup>44</sup> *La America* announced, in its issue of July 6, 1917, the election of a provisional committee to establish a democratic Sephardi community. A month later (August 3), the paper outlined the functions and scope of the community. On October 12 *La America* invited everyone to a meeting two days later, at which the "Sephardi Community" was to be officially founded. This attempt, too, was abortive.

During the years of these early struggles for unity, the question of appointing a *haham* (chief rabbi) for the Sephardi community was often discussed. As already mentioned, the Federation of Oriental Jews advocated such a move. *La America* dealt with the issue as early as January 25, 1913. Dr. Pool discussed the matter with Dr. Judah L. Magnes, the head of the New York *Kehillah*, and it was agreed that Shearith Israel would be given charge of the finances in order to employ a chief rabbi<sup>45</sup> who, it was hoped, would achieve unity in the community.

When the Federation learned that non-Oriental groups were interested in a *kolel*—a community with a chief rabbi and a governing body of responsible lay leaders—it refused to go along with the idea.<sup>46</sup> A letter from Magnes to Gadol, published in *La America*, June 9, 1916, expressing the *Kehillah's* frustrations, said in part: "I regret to

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<sup>44</sup>*La America*, March 17, p. 2; March 31, p. 4; July 28, p. 2; August 25, p. 2; December 8, 1916, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Sisterhood Minutes, November 24, 1913, p. 2; December 11, 1913, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup>Trustees Minutes, Vol. 8, January 24, 1914, p. 455; Sisterhood Minutes, May 19, 1914, p. 37. A letter dated May 20, 1914, from Mr. Mayer Swaab, Jr. of Shearith Israel to Dr. Magnes of the *Kehillah* complains that though Shearith Israel had agreed to pay \$500 to start a *kolel* under the auspices of the *Kehillah*, the Federation of Oriental Jews refused to cooperate. Swaab attacked the leaders of the Orientals as being destructive to the welfare of their community. See also David de Sola Pool, "Report of the Committee on a Progressive Policy in the Congregation," April 22, 1927, p. 7 (in possession of New York Congregation Shearith Israel).

say that it is not possible for me to keep up with the difficulties and controversies that seem to disturb the Oriental or Sephardi Jewish community. I do sincerely hope that some way may be found of bringing about greater harmony and more united activity on behalf of the Jewish cause." The community was to remain without a chief rabbi until 1941.<sup>47</sup>

#### SEPHARDI JEWISH COMMUNITY OF NEW YORK, INC.

In 1924 another major effort was made by New York's Sephardim to establish a central communal institution, this time the Sephardi Jewish Community of New York, Inc. This organization had little success, as Louis Hacker reported. It, too, was based on the local societies, not on the community as a whole. In 1926 it had approximately \$6,000 in its treasury, but no definite program for which to spend the money.<sup>48</sup> Still, Dr. Pool called it "a stable and responsible organization."<sup>49</sup> It purchased a community house on 115th Street and seemed to be heading in the right direction. But in time, this organization, too, disintegrated; it lacked vigorous leadership and broad vision. And, as the Sephardi population moved from Harlem, the Community collapsed.

#### UNION OF SEPHARDIC CONGREGATIONS

The problem of Sephardi unity was not confined to New York City. Numerous small colonies of Sephardim were scattered throughout the United States, each existing as an island. The Sephardim in America had no focal point, no recognized organization which could spur their activities and development.

The need for guidance in religious matters was particularly acute. Each synagogue had its own prayer book, so that there was no uniform Sephardi liturgy. Jewish education was sorely inadequate. Sephardim

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<sup>47</sup>*The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, 1942), Vol. 8, p. 586, states that, until 1941, Dr. Pool was "the sole spokesman for Sephardic Jewry in the U.S. representing both the newer arrivals from the Levantine countries and the Sephardim who had lived for many generations in the English-speaking lands." However, he never officially held the post of chief rabbi.

<sup>48</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup>Pool, "Report. . .," *loc. cit.*; also *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, February, 1927, p. 7.

were not producing religious leaders and teachers. Dr. Pool envisioned the establishment of the Union of Sephardic Congregations to deal with the many problems of Sephardi synagogues. In 1928 committees of Shearith Israel in New York met with representatives of Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia and Shearith Israel of Montreal, and these three ancient congregations took the lead in founding the Union. Sephardi congregations throughout the country responded to the call and the Union was born.<sup>50</sup>

The Union's main accomplishment was the publication of Sephardi prayer books, translated and edited by Dr. Pool. It also held a number of conventions, but these seldom spurred constructive actions. (At the May 1949 convention held at Shearith Israel Dr. Pool deplored the failure of so many New York congregations to send delegates.) It asked that promising young men be sought for Sephardi rabbinic training; that Jewish education receive top priority; that Sephardi synagogues adopt a uniform *minhag*.<sup>51</sup> But the Sephardi Jews, as a whole, had no interest in such matters. In the course of time, the Union of Sephardic Congregations has become relatively inactive.

#### CENTRAL SEPHARDIC JEWISH COMMUNITY OF AMERICA, INC.

The last attempt at unity was made by Rabbi Nissim J. Ovadia, born in Turkey and recognized as a scholar and leader by the Sephardim in Europe. Shortly after his arrival in the United States in 1941, he succeeded in his effort to establish the Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America, Inc., at a meeting in May of Sephardim of all language backgrounds. Although the organization was concerned mainly with New York City, its membership included Sephardim of other cities as well. Rabbi Ovadia served as chief rabbi until his death in August 1942, at the age of 52.<sup>52</sup> Rabbi David Jessurun Cardozo, then assistant minister of Shearith Israel, began to work with the community; he helped organize its women's division, together with

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<sup>50</sup>Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, January 5, 1928, p. 411; April 3, 1928, p. 430; November 12, 1928, p. 462; May 7, 1929, p. 487; Pool, "Report. . .," *op. cit.*, p. 9; *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, May 2, 1929, p. 2; May 25, 1930, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup>Annual report of Union of Sephardic Congregations, 1948; report of Union's convention, May 21-22, 1949.

<sup>52</sup>See *Kol Sepharad*, Vol. 4, July-August 1967, p. 22; *The Sephardi*, September 30, 1943, pp. 1-3; May-June 1945, pp. 3-4; March-April 1952, pp. 3, 9-10.

Mrs. Mazal Ovadia and Mrs. Acher Touriel. Rabbi Isaac Alcalay became the community's chief rabbi, a position he continues to hold today.

The Central Sephardic Jewish Community of America set itself important goals. It worked to maintain Sephardi tradition in worship; to give religious education to the young; to deal with immigration problems; to Americanize Sephardi immigrants as quickly as possible; to find employment for Sephardim; to provide social welfare; to create a Sephardi *Bet Din*, an authoritative rabbinical court. It also sponsored cultural and social programs.

The Central Sephardic Jewish Community seemed to have a real chance of succeeding. In September 1943 it launched a bulletin, *The Sephardi*, whose purpose, its first issue stated, was "to awaken the Sephardi masses to the necessity of a united Sephardi community throughout the Western Hemisphere." It appeared intermittently until 1957, when it ceased publication.

In December 1944 Joseph M. Papo, a trained social worker, was appointed the Community's executive director.<sup>53</sup> This was a felicitous move; for, if the organization was to succeed, it needed trained, able professionals. John Karpeles was hired as director of youth activities. In 1946 the community's Youth League<sup>54</sup> had four chapters: in the Bronx, on Lower East Side, in New Lots, and in Sheepshead Bay. Papo initiated a census of New York's Sephardim to determine the condition of Sephardi life, but this was never completed. The Community's post-war activities aiding Jewish survivors of World War II depleted its financial resources.<sup>55</sup>

However, despite its initial structural strength, today the Community does not receive the support it needs. Its Women's Division does much constructive work, but it has had difficulty recruiting younger members. Perhaps the main reason for the Community's weakness is that the younger generation is not vitally interested in its survival. The young Sephardim did not have a good religious and Sephardi education and, as they married and moved into new neighborhoods which often

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<sup>53</sup>Joseph Papo, "The Sephardic Community of America," *Reconstructionist*, Vol. 12, 1946, pp. 13-14; *The Sephardi*, March 1945, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup>See *The Sephardi*, March 1946, p. 6; June 1946, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup>*The Sephardi*, March 1945, p. 7; May-June 1945, p. 7.



had no Sephardi synagogues, they lost their interest in the Sephardi community.

#### RELATIONS BETWEEN NEW AND OLD SEPHARDIM

The old Sephardi congregations, most of their members being of Ashkenazi or mixed Sephardi descent, were relatively affluent and certainly quite Americanized. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York occupied a grand building on the corner of Central Park West and Seventieth Street. It saw the influx of poor, unskilled, seemingly uncouth Levantine immigrants as a significant challenge, especially since the two groups shared little except a common past in Spain centuries ago. Still, considering their many differences, there was relatively little conflict between them. Many of the Levantine immigrants attached themselves to Shearith Israel with singular devotion, and there has been truly remarkable harmony between them and the old Sephardi families.

To be sure, relations between the affluent and the poor were not always completely cordial, and there were misunderstandings. Some of the old-line Sephardim apparently felt uneasy because the new immigrants called themselves Sephardim. They were afraid the term would fall into disrepute, and they urged that the newcomers be called "Orientals." HIAS acceded to a request that it change the name of its Sephardi Committee to Committee on Oriental Jews.<sup>56</sup>

The immigrants at first accepted the new designation, but later came to resent it deeply as a slur against them. The impression had been created that the Sephardim were noble and rich, while the Orientals were ignorant and poor. As one Ashkenazi leader once said to M.S. Gadol, the Sephardim were those who belonged to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, while the immigrants were nothing but "Orientals" and "Ladinos."<sup>57</sup> The irony was that many of the immigrants who were pure-blooded Spanish-speaking Sephardim were called Orientals, while Shearith Israel members who were Ashkenazi and of mixed blood were considered the true Sephardim. Realizing that

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<sup>56</sup>Sisterhood Minutes, January 28, 1914, p. 16, and March 9, 1914, pp. 26-27; HIAS Minutes, February 10, 1914, p. 3; February 15, 1914, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>*La America*, October 13, 1916, p. 3; see also issues of October 29, 1915, p. 2; November 3, 10, 17, and 24, 1916, all p. 2; July 5, 1918, p. 4.

the immigrants resented being called Oriental and Levantine, the Spanish and Portuguese establishment eventually abandoned these designations.

Shearith Israel felt a moral obligation to help the newcomers, but its outstanding efforts were not always recognized or appreciated. The Sisterhood established an Oriental Employment Bureau. And, maintaining that the "Oriental brethren, proud though poor, ask of us only an opportunity for honest employment," *Shearith Israel Bulletin* in March and April 1912 appealed to members to help them find jobs, especially the kind that would not involve the violation of the Sabbath.

Dr. Pool made every effort to make the immigrants feel at home. Thus, at a meeting in February 1912 to which the leaders of Shearith Israel invited some fifty of them, he stressed that they and the members of the congregation shared the same Sephardi customs. But one of Shearith Israel's ladies made a speech which, though well-intentioned, hopelessly missed the essential needs of the newcomers. Among other things, she said she would see to it that Sephardi girls learned to play the piano and to speak pure Castilian Spanish instead of their Judeo-Spanish—skills that were far removed from the practical needs of the immigrants. Gadol therefore felt that Shearith Israel's promises were empty; rather the newcomers needed a first-rate Talmud Torah. If Shearith Israel could help establish one, this would be a real service. The congregation rose to this challenge and later announced plans for such a school.<sup>58</sup>

The old Spanish and Portuguese group soon became deeply involved in every phase of the immigrants' welfare. Shearith Israel often was asked, and very rarely refused, to give financial aid and to lend religious articles to new Sephardi synagogues.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>*La America*, February 16, 1912, p. 3; February 23, 1912, p. 1; March 1, 1912, p. 1. For a general picture of Shearith Israel's relations with the Sephardi immigrants, see David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World* (New York, 1955), pp. 43f.

<sup>59</sup>For some dealings involving Shearith Israel and the Sephardim, see Trustees Minutes, Vol. 8, May 1, 1906, p. 294; December 6, 1910, p. 384; October 19, 1914, p. 474; November 5, 1914, p. 475; January 5, 1915, p. 479; February 2, 1915, p. 481; Vol. 9, October 5, 1915, p. 6; November 15, 1915, p. 8; April 4, 1916, p. 16; May 22, 1916, p. 20; October 16, 1916, pp. 26–27; April 1, 1919, p. 99; May 6, 1919, p. 101; June 13, 1922, p. 207. See also Sisterhood Minutes, December 6, 1913, p. 384; December 17, 1913, p. 8; May 19, 1914, pp. 38–39. *La America*, on January 30, 1914 reported one of many cases of death among the immigrants in which Shearith Israel conducted burials at no cost. The earliest cases are recorded in Trustees Minutes, November 9, 1908, p. 343; April 8, 1909, p. 349; May 3, 1910, p. 373.

Since 1909 Shearith Israel had been conducting free Holy Day services in its auditorium for the needy, most of whom were Oriental Jews. Gadol, who attended such "overflow services" in 1913, found that 90 per cent of the worshipers were middle-class Turkish Jews, and he argued that they should have been permitted to occupy empty seats in the main synagogue. Gadol felt that the congregation was degrading the immigrants by asking them to go to the services in the auditorium downstairs, and he urged Turkish Jews to stay away from the "overflow services" and attend their own synagogues.<sup>60</sup>

Gadol's charges clearly illustrate Shearith Israel's frustrations, for no matter what it did for the newcomers, it was attacked in the Judeo-Spanish press. What did Gadol and his sympathizers actually want? But if Gadol was fanatical and more than unfair in his charges, his attitude made some sense: he did not want immigrant Sephardim to become accustomed to taking charity. If they relied on the "overflow services," they would never make an attempt to build their own synagogues, to stand on their own feet. While Shearith Israel was giving temporary help, it was not, thought Gadol, teaching the Sephardim to become independent, to plan for stable synagogues of their own.

However, Shearith Israel continued its free services until 1924, when the trustees decided to stop the practice. In a letter to Mortimer Menken, then president of the congregation, Dr. Pool argued against the move which, he thought, would undermine the gradually improving relations between Shearith Israel and the Oriental community. It would give rise to mistrust and antagonism among the Oriental Jews and "representative and influential members of the Oriental Jewish Community, such as Mr. [Jack] Barkey, Mr. [Victor] LaHana, Mr. John H. Levy and Mr. [Edward] Valensi, [who] have joined our Congregation." The free High Holy Day services were reinstated in 1927.<sup>61</sup>

Shearith Israel invited members of the Sephardi colony to attend other services and programs it conducted. This, too, led to controversy at times. A particularly unfortunate incident occurred on Sukkot of

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<sup>60</sup>*La America*, October 17, 1913, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup>Pool, "Report. . .," *loc. cit.* Excerpts of Dr. Pool's unpublished letter to Mr. Menken, dated November 25, 1924, are printed with the permission of Mrs. David de Sola Pool. Interestingly, *La America* criticized Shearith Israel for canceling its free services—after a long history of agitating against them.

1924, when visitors, some of them new Sephardim, were barred from the synagogue's overcrowded *succah*. Again, Dr. Pool pacified Mortimer Menken, who was close to losing patience with the immigrants, by writing: "We should be prepared to forego much for the sake of harmony and peace, for the sake of the broader interests of our own Congregation, for the sake of the welfare of the Oriental Sephardi community, and more especially for the sake of their American-born children who can so easily be lost without our friendship and solicitude."<sup>62</sup> Had this not been Shearith Israel's general approach, relations between the old and new Sephardi communities would have been disastrous. The congregation ultimately won the friendship and admiration of most of the Oriental Sephardim, who now are counted among its most active and generous leaders.

#### SETTLEMENT HOUSE

The Sisterhood of Shearith Israel, in particular, dedicated itself to helping the newcomers. In the early days of immigration it operated a Neighborhood Settlement House on the Lower East Side which emphasized the need of the Sephardim to become Americanized. The Sisterhood gave parties, put on plays, and arranged all kinds of celebrations. Independence Day in 1912 saw a gathering of some 500 guests; music was supplied by the Fourth of July Committee of the City of New York. The Sisterhood distributed to each guest the text of the Declaration of Independence and an especially prepared Judeo-Spanish translation of it (perhaps the first in American history).<sup>63</sup>

The Neighborhood House also had its own synagogue, Berith Shalom. In return for regularly attending services at that synagogue, worshipers and their families were offered, in March 1914, associate membership in Shearith Israel at a charge of fifty cents per month. This

<sup>62</sup>*La America*, October 17, 1924, p. 7; Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, October 23, 1924, p. 289; Minutes of joint meeting of Trustees of Shearith Israel, the Sisterhood, and Berith Shalom, December 2, 1924, pp. 2-3.

<sup>63</sup>See *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, September 1912, p. 15. The Sisterhood often sponsored Purim celebrations, serving free dinners to all guests. Unfortunately, Gadol's bitterness led him to condemn the Sisterhood even for such generous parties. See *La America*, March 20, 1914, p. 2; April 3, 1914, p. 2. Other information dealing with various celebrations may be found in *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, March 1912, pp. 6-7; *La America*, March 8, 1912, p. 2; June 28, 1912, p. 1; March 8, 1918, p. 3.

entitled them to all services granted or performed by the synagogue, including the use of a section in its Long Island cemetery. Membership privileges, however, were limited to eleven months a year (excluding the High Holy Day season) and were withdrawn for boys after their eighteenth birthday. The plan was warmly received by many downtown Sephardim.<sup>64</sup>

By 1912 the Neighborhood House dedicated itself exclusively to the needs of the Sephardi immigrants. The difficult task of giving leadership to the Berith Shalom worshipers and of maintaining harmony between Shearith Israel and the synagogue was successfully performed by Reverend Joseph de A. Benyunes. He was a humble and good man, a member of the old Spanish and Portuguese community. Social workers, club directors, Talmud Torah teachers, and other trained personnel were engaged to direct other activities.

#### NEED FOR JEWISH EDUCATION

Responsible individuals and groups within the Sephardi colony continued to advocate Americanization. English classes were held, and immigrants were strongly urged to study and apply for American citizenship. Indeed, the desire to Americanize was so strong among the younger Sephardim that there was fear the new generation would be lost to Judaism.<sup>65</sup> The Sephardim now desperately needed high-quality Jewish educational programs to maintain the young people's interest in their heritage. But no such schools existed, and the resultant loss to the religious sensibilities of both the Sephardi and general Jewish communities is immeasurable. The Sephardim were busy establishing themselves and had neither time, resources, nor the will to establish good schools. And now, several generations later, neither time, resources, nor will can fully compensate for what has been lost forever.

Reverend Benyunes did all he could to preserve the Sephardi heritage by working with the Sisterhood's downtown and uptown

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<sup>64</sup>For a record of these events, see Trustees Minutes Vol. 8, March 8, 1914, p. 459; March 16, 1914, p. 461; April 7, 1914, p. 461; May 25, 1914, p. 465; July 1, 1914, p. 469. At a meeting on October 23, 1916 the Trustees abolished the special associate membership.

<sup>65</sup>*La America*, November 25, 1910, p. 2; August 4, 1911, p. 1; December 29, 1911, p. 1; July 21, 1916, p. 2. See also Sisterhood Minutes, December 22, 1913, p. 14.

religious schools. But the problems with these and other Sephardi Hebrew schools were manifold: inadequate staffing, lack of discipline and organization; erratic attendance of students; antiquated curricula.<sup>66</sup>

#### SEPHARDI CLUBS

The Sisterhood's Neighborhood House, for its part, sponsored clubs to keep the young involved in Jewish life. The Jewish Friendship Circle, founded in January 1914, was the first organization of this kind for Sephardi children. The members had parties, put on dramatic performances, played games and had other activities. Arrangements were made for children to attend camps during the summer months.<sup>67</sup> Benyunes worked with this group as well as with the Society of Helpful Women, which was also designed to strengthen religious observance among the Sephardim.<sup>68</sup>

As the programs expanded, the old Neighborhood House became inadequate and facilities were twice moved to larger quarters: to Orchard Street in 1913 and to Eldridge Street in 1916.<sup>69</sup>

The boys who had outgrown the services of the Settlement House founded their own clubs, such as the Alba and the Sephardic Progressive. In 1918 young Sephardi men in Harlem founded the Filo Center Club, which is still in existence. Other clubs for the Judeo-Spanish were the Zenith, Sunray, and much later, the Abravanel Square Club. The Greek-speaking Jews met at the Athenian Club. The Broome and Allen Boys, one of the Judeo-Spanish groups still

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<sup>66</sup>Sisterhood Minutes, November 24, 1913, p. 2; December 11, 1913, p. 5; January 28, 1914, p. 18; March 9, 1914, p. 29; November 16, 1914, p. 49; December 21, 1914, p. 53; January 26, 1915, p. 57; October 6, 1915, p. 69; January 24, 1916, pp. 79f; February 8, 1916, p. 82; April 11, 1916, pp. 86-88; December 26, 1916, p. 98. See also *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, January 31, 1924, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup>*La America*, February 13, 1914, p. 2. Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, December 12 (p. 188) and 25, 1921, p. 190; October 17, 1922, p. 220. Barocas, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Sisterhood Minutes, *op. cit.*, January 28, 1914, p. 19; March 9, 1914, p. 27; March 15, 1915, p. 61, all deal with the problem of rowdiness at the Neighborhood House clubs.

<sup>68</sup>Sisterhood Minutes, January 28, 1914, pp. 18-19; December 21, 1914, pp. 52-53.

<sup>69</sup>Trustees Minutes, November 14, 1910; Sisterhood Minutes, *op. cit.*, November 24, 1913, pp. 2-3; *La America*, December 5, 1913, p. 2; *Shearith Israel Bulletin*, March 15, 1914, p. 45; Barocas, *The Broome and Allen Boys*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

functioning,<sup>70</sup> undertook as its permanent task to provide needy children with summer camp vacations. This they did in recognition of the help they received from the Sisterhood when they were boys.

#### COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

Relations between Shearith Israel and Berith Shalom showed signs of improvement in 1923, largely due to the efforts of Henry S. Hendricks, Berith Shalom's president and an outstanding leader of Shearith Israel. In March Berith Shalom added to its name "of Shearith Israel." The *entente cordial* lasted until the spring of 1925, when Berith Shalom dropped its formal association with its mother congregation.<sup>71</sup> By this time, the community was largely self-sufficient. Many of the Sephardim had been in America for a decade or more, so that the initial problems they had faced as immigrants were rapidly disappearing. There no longer was a valid reason for remaining under the wings of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.

In his famous report of 1926,<sup>72</sup> Louis Hacker spoke of the changing character of the Sephardi community. He pointed out that the Sisterhood's Neighborhood Settlement House was steadily losing influence as Sephardim were moving away from from the Lower East Side. No new immigrants requiring its services were arriving. But while the Sephardim no longer needed welfare, they continued to need spiritual and cultural guidance; for this they lacked proper leadership.

Indeed, the last years of the decade and the early 1930s were a period of transition for the Sephardim of New York City, as well as for the other communities in the United States. The first American-born generation was old enough to marry. The old clubs were breaking up. Neighborhoods were changing. This was the beginning of a new era in Sephardi history in the United States.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Barocas, *ibid.*, pp. 1, 12-15.

<sup>71</sup>*Shearith Israel Bulletin*, February 2, 1923, p. 2; Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, November 17, 1924, p. 291; November 25, 1924, p. 296; December 2, 1924, p. 297. A letter dated November 20, 1924 from N. Yohai of Berith Shalom to I. Phillips Cohen, clerk of Shearith Israel, deals with the problems between the two organizations. For the formal break, see Trustees Minutes, Vol. 9, June 3, 1925, p. 310. For later attempts to improve relations, see Pool, "Report. . .," *op. cit.*, pp. 6f.

<sup>72</sup>Hacker, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>73</sup>Barocas, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

*Sephardi Communities Outside New York City*

The small Sephardi communities scattered throughout the country shared a common development. The problems of one could, with changes of names and places, serve as a fairly accurate description of the problems of all. The difficulties plaguing the New York Sephardim were those of the Sephardim in Seattle, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Rochester, Indianapolis, and elsewhere.

In his 1913 study of the Sephardi colony in Cincinnati,<sup>74</sup> Maurice Hexter counted 219 immigrants with 27 American-born children and three Russian-Jewish wives. Most of the families came from the Dardanelles, a minority from Salonika. Their language and culture isolated them from the rest of the community. Attempts at Americanization had not yet been successful, and Hexter urged that the Sephardim be encouraged to become citizens. They were at the bottom of the economic ladder, working as peddlers, petty salesmen, unskilled workers, shoemakers, tailors, waiters. Of the fifty families in Cincinnati, forty-three lived in tenements. Many took in boarders or lodgers to supplement their meager incomes. Hexter noted that here, too, "their social centers are two pernicious poolrooms and coffee houses." As in New York, little progress was made in Jewish education.

Just as the New York Sephardim were fragmented into groups based on geographic origins, so were several other, much smaller, communities. Thus Jews from the Island of Rhodes, always eager to maintain their own synagogues and benevolent societies, established separate organizations in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. The Atlanta community split into two factions in 1912, but reunited two years later. Seattle, with only some forty Sephardi families in 1910, had two distinct religious groups and three mutual-aid societies. To this day, it has two Sephardi synagogues; one for those originating on the Island of Rhodes, and the other for those from the Turkish mainland, particularly from the Marmara littoral. The Rhodes Jews also maintain their own synagogue in Los Angeles.

Sephardi communities with sizable groups of different geographic

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<sup>74</sup>Maurice Hexter, "The Dawn of a Problem," *Jewish Charities*, December 1913, pp. 2-5.



origins usually had to struggle for unity. But, as in New York, they seldom achieved more than moderately peaceful coexistence. They organized no cultural or educational institutions of their own, except synagogues and mediocre Hebrew schools. Even fairly united communities, which usually were small in size, did not properly plan for cultural and spiritual survival.<sup>75</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the number of Sephardi congregations in the United States. Some are too small and others too new to be known. The *Diary and World-Wide Directory of Sephardic Congregations*, published annually by Shearith Israel in New York, lists a total of thirty-six. Though this listing is not complete, it is doubtful whether there are more than fifty or sixty. A few of them are growing and expanding, but many are stagnant and some are on the verge of dying. While, at present, nostalgia still ties the Sephardim to their past, this will no longer be true in a generation or two.

### *Sephardi Cultural Endeavors*

One of the bright spots in the intellectual history of the Sephardim in the United States is the Judeo-Spanish press. *La America* began publication in 1910 as a national weekly. It closed down in 1923. Besides Sephardi news, it printed provocative editorials, historical essays, poetry, and fiction. Reading *La America* is an exciting experience even today; one is stirred by the vigorous and perceptive intellect of its editor, M.S. Gadol.

Other national Judeo-Spanish publications were published later: *La Boz del Pueblo*, *El Luzero Sephardi*, *La Luz*, *El Progreso*, *El Emigrante*, and *La Vara*. *La Vara*, which appeared from 1922 until February 1948, was by far the most important and popular. Its circulation rose from 9,000 in 1926 to 16,500 in 1928.<sup>76</sup> In a 1924 series of articles, *La Vara's* editor, Albert Levy, called for the publication of a daily Sephardi newspaper,<sup>77</sup> pointing to the need for such a cultural organ. The idea never became reality. On December

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<sup>75</sup>Helen Shirazi, "The Communal Pluralism of Sephardi Jewry in the United States," *Le Judaisme Sephardi*, January 1966, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>Harry Linfield, *Communal Organization of the Jews in the United States*, 1927 (New York, 1930), p. 175.

<sup>77</sup>*La Vara*, August 29, 1924, p. 4.

14, 1923, *La Vara* announced the establishment of the Sephardi Publishing Company on Rivington Street. It was not possible to determine the extent of its activities. When *La Vara* ceased publication, the Judeo-Spanish press in America came to an end.

Various Sephardi societies also issued publications, some written in Judeo-Spanish but most in English. Among them were *The Sephardic Bulletin*, an English-language Zionist paper of the late 1930s;<sup>78</sup> *The Progress*, the newspaper of Seattle's Sephardim, 1934–35;<sup>79</sup> *El Ermanado*, an annual published by the Sephardic Brotherhood of America.

*The Sephardic Home News*, a monthly newsletter with a national circulation of about 10,000, is published currently under the editorship of Dr. Joseph Dalven. (It is the organ of the Sephardic Home for the Aged in Brooklyn, established by Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish and Greek backgrounds. The Home, founded in August 1951, is the only institution of its type created by and for Sephardim. It has an impressive record of growth and expansion.)

Every Sephardi community put on biblical and historical plays like *Joseph, the Righteous, and his Brothers* and *Dreifus*, written in, or translated into, Judeo-Spanish by Sephardi playwrights for local showing. In Seattle, for example, Leon Behar excelled as both producer and playwright. But this kind of theater no longer exists in the United States.<sup>80</sup>

Within the past decade there has been some creative activity in the American Sephardi communities. In 1964 Yeshiva University established a Sephardic Studies Program. Originally conceived by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, *Haham* Solomon Gaon, and Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of Yeshiva University, the program includes not only academic courses and cultural events but also community service activities. In this area, Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky of Yeshiva has done much to promote unity among the Sephardim. The Sephardic Studies Program also publishes *The American Sephardi*, an annual scholarly journal which circulates in

<sup>78</sup>Levantine Sephardim were Zionists ever since their earliest settlement in the United States. Gadol was a devoted Zionist.

<sup>79</sup>See Marc D. Angel, "'Progress'—Seattle's Sephardic Monthly, 1934–35," *American Sephardi*, Vol. 5, Autumn 1971, pp. 90–95.

<sup>80</sup>See Marc D. Angel, "The Judeo-Spanish Theater of Seattle's Sephardim," scheduled to appear in *American Jewish Archives*, November 1973.

every Sephardi community of North America and is on file in many university Judaica libraries.

In 1969 the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture was incorporated, mainly through the efforts of Professor and Mrs. M. J. Benardete, David Barocas, and Louis N. Levy. It publishes tracts on various phases of Sephardi history and culture. Though the Foundation's impact has been limited because of inadequate staff and financial support, it has created some cultural waves, especially among Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish origin.

Most recently, an organization calling itself the World Sephardi Institute has begun publishing a newsletter, *Sephardic World*. While major support of this group seems to come from Sephardim of Arabic background, the newsletter attempts to reach all Sephardim. On another front, there also has been an attempt to strengthen the American branch of the World Sephardi Federation through the encouragement of the Jewish Agency.

Mention should be made of the interest in Sephardi studies by the Spanish government whose Supreme Council for Scientific Studies established the Instituto Arias Montana de Estudios Hebraicos in Madrid in 1939. The Institute's quarterly journal, *Sefarad*, deals with all phases of Jewish history and culture, but focuses on the Sephardi past. The 1960s also witnessed a revival of the study of general and Hispanic Jewish culture in Spain. The universities of Madrid, Barcelona, and Granada established chairs of Hebrew language, Jewish history, and Jewish literature. An institute of Sephardi studies was established in Madrid. In 1964 a Sephardi center was created in Toledo by decree of the head of state.

The Instituto Ibn Tibbón of the University of Granada, directed by Professor David Gonzalo Maeso, has initiated the publication of *Biblioteca Universal Sefardi* in collaboration with *Editorial Gredos*. So far they have produced several volumes of the *Me'am Lo'ez*, the great Judeo-Spanish Bible commentary, with introduction and notes. The books are printed in Latin letters, not in the Rashi script of the original.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>The first volume in this series was the *Prolegómenos to the Me'am Lo'ez* (Madrid, 1964). See also Iacob Hassan, T. Rubiato, and E. Romero, eds., *Actas del primer simposio de estudios sefardies* ("Proceedings of the First Symposium of Sephardi Studies; Madrid, 1970), 789 p., for the record of a historic symposium in Spain, held in 1964.

### *Syrian Sephardi Community*

In a recent survey of American Sephardim, Hayyim Cohen of the Hebrew University found that, while Jews of Judeo-Spanish origin are scattered throughout the United States, almost all Sephardim of Syrian origin are concentrated in one neighborhood in Brooklyn (there are also small communities in Bradley Beach and Deal, N. J., and in Myrtle Beach, S. C.);<sup>82</sup> that Egyptian Jews, most of whom actually are of Syrian origin, live in the same neighborhood, as do several hundred Lebanese Jews; that Iraqi Jews are found in Queens, Manhattan, and Long Island.<sup>83</sup>

Cohen estimates that some 5,000 Syrian Jews are living in Brooklyn;<sup>84</sup> Syrian leaders, however, put the number at some 20,000,<sup>85</sup> a more realistic estimate. The Syrian Jews maintain a number of synagogues, all of them very well attended.

The Syrian community has risen to relative affluence during its several generations in America. Many of its members are proprietors of retail stores. The number of professionals is rising, though not to the degree found among Judeo-Spanish Sephardim. This is because Syrian Jews are more business-oriented, and fewer attend college.<sup>86</sup>

Of all the Sephardi communities in the United States, the Syrian community of Brooklyn is doubtless the strongest and most viable. Syrians have kept their neighborhood intact. When the young marry, they often choose to settle within the community. Syrians also tend to

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<sup>82</sup>See also Victor D. Sanua, "A Study of Adjustment of Sephardi Jews in the New York Metropolitan Area," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, June 1967, Vol. 9, pp. 25-33; Ben Frank, *American Examiner-Jewish Week*, October 14, 1971, p. 10; *Ma'ariv*, December 27, 1968, p. 16; Helen Shirazi, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup>Hayyim Cohen, "Sephardi Jews in the U.S., Marriage with Ashkenazim and Non-Jews," *Dispersion and Unity* (Jerusalem), Vol. 13-14, 1971-72, pp. 152-53. See also, Ben Frank, "Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian Jews Settle in Brooklyn," *Southern Israelite*, Vol. 47, July 7, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>85</sup>*Jewish Life*, May-June, 1971, p. 55.

<sup>86</sup>For some indications of the cultural characteristics of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn, see Morris Gross, *Learning Readiness in Two Jewish Groups* (New York: Center for Urban Education, 1967).

marry within their own group to a far greater extent than other Sephardim. Inter-marriage with non-Jews is extremely rare.<sup>87</sup>

The Syrian Jews are the only Sephardim who have developed an educational system of their own. They support several day schools attended by an estimated 85 to 90 per cent of all school-age children. The Syrians also have several *yeshivot* for advanced Jewish learning, the largest and most important of which is the Sephardic Institute directed by Rabbi Mosheh Shamah. The Institute is attended by over fifty young men, many of whom are also studying for degrees in colleges or graduate schools. The Syrian community can boast of dozens of rabbis and talmudic scholars who attended its own or Ashkenazi *yeshivot*.

### *North African Sephardim*

Sephardim of North African origin have settled throughout North America. In the United States, they are represented in small numbers in nearly all Sephardi communities. They generally have enjoyed a steady upward mobility educationally, economically, and socially. In Washington, D.C., a group of 250 Moroccan Jews has established its own congregation.<sup>88</sup>

A far greater number of North African Jews settled in Canada, notably in Montreal and Toronto. In June 1967 Professor Jean Boulakia<sup>89</sup> of Montreal estimated that of some 9,000 Sephardim (about 8 per cent of the total Jewish population) living in Montreal, some 7,000 were of Moroccan origin. The rest of the Sephardim came from Tunisia, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Algeria, Italy, Greece, and elsewhere.

Most Sephardim in Canada are French-speaking and are thus separated linguistically from the English-speaking Ashkenazi majority. The Montreal and Toronto communities<sup>90</sup> are plagued by poverty and associated social ills. The new immigrants are having adjustment

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<sup>87</sup>Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 153f.

<sup>88</sup>See article in *Potomac Magazine of Washington Post*, July 26, 1970, pp. 12f.

<sup>89</sup>"Profil d'une communauté," *American Sephardi*, Vol. 1, June 1967, pp. 48-51.

<sup>90</sup>Ben Kayfetz, "The Development of the Toronto Jewish Community," *Tradition*, Vol. 13, Summer 1972, pp. 16-17, briefly discusses the influx of North African Jews to Toronto.

problems similar to those of the Sephardi immigrants in the United States earlier in this century. They too suffer from lack of unity and internal leadership, but the situation seems to be improving.

### SURVEY OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM<sup>91</sup>

Under the sponsorship of the Union of Sephardic Congregations this writer conducted a study of American-born Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish background. Between January and March 1972, a total of 941 questionnaires were mailed. We received a total of 251 acceptable responses from Atlanta, Denver, Detroit, Highland Park (N. J.), Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Montgomery, Portland (Ore.), Rochester, Sacramento, Seattle, and from all parts of Metropolitan New York. (Since all respondents did not answer each question, the totals in the discussion below do not always add up to 251.) It must be remembered that this study does not deal with other Sephardi communities, as, for example, the Syrian.

The survey was essentially exploratory, since there was no way of selecting a truly random sample of American Sephardim. Mailing lists were made available by Sephardi synagogues and organizations, usually with American-born members designated. Questionnaires were sent to every qualified person on these lists, but that excluded many Sephardim who had completely dropped out of the Sephardi fold. At the same time, over 24 per cent (61) of the respondents were not affiliated with Sephardi synagogues and therefore only nominally connected with the community.

Because the questionnaire was sent almost exclusively to Sephardim who were still somewhat tied to the community, the study may be more important than it otherwise would have been. Data on the perpetuation of culture, for example, will have been drawn from Sephardim who were in some way involved in their community. If a

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<sup>91</sup>For helping me obtain lists of American-born Sephardim, I would like to thank Rabbi Michel Albagli, L. Bill Angel, Rabbi Benjamin Aronson, Dr. Irving Benveniste, Rabbi Murray Berger, David Chicorel, Rabbi Solomon Cohen, Rabbi David Glicksman, Rabbi William Greenberg, Rabbi Eli Greenwald, Rabbi S. Robert Ichay, Rabbi Solomon Maimon, Rabbi Arnold Marans, Joseph Papo, Rabbi Myron Rakowitz, and Victor Tarry. I would also like to thank all survey participants for their cooperation.

cultural decline occurred among these, it can be safely assumed that the decline was even greater among those entirely separated from the Sephardi world.

This study takes into account that the survival of Sephardim in the United States involves a two-fold survival—as Jews and as Sephardim having particular cultural characteristics. Sephardim who drift from Jewish life will be lost to the Jewish community altogether. Those who live a Jewish life but adopt non-Sephardi characteristics in place of their own will be lost to the Sephardi community. The continuity of Sephardi life demands then that Sephardim exist as a small minority within a small minority—an awesome task.

At the outset, we must recognize that the social characteristics of Sephardim strongly resemble those of the Ashkenazim. Living in the same open society, both groups have been exposed to similar social forces. Except for groups having maintained closely-knit communities, most middle-class, American-born Jews share a host of characteristics.

### *Birthrate*

The low birthrate among Jews is a well-known phenomenon. But it usually is not known that the Sephardi birthrate, too, is quite low. To be sure, the families of Syrian Jews have been larger than the average American Jewish family.<sup>92</sup> Among Sephardim of Judeo-Spanish origin, however, the birthrate has dropped sharply over the past several generations, a decline reflecting changing ideas and attitudes among Levantine Sephardim under the influence of secular society. Table 1 shows birthrate trends, as derived from the survey data. For the sake of clarity, respondents have been divided into three categories: 1) the 40-years-of-age or older, generally raised in tight Sephardi neighborhoods; 2) the under-40-years-of-age, but still of the second generation, generally raised under more open and prosperous conditions and more strongly influenced by Americanization forces; 3) the third generation, generally raised in middle-class, Americanized families. The birthrate of each of these three groups is compared with that of their parent groups.

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<sup>92</sup>Barocas, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

TABLE 1. BIRTHRATES OF AMERICAN-BORN SEPHARDIM AND THEIR PARENTS

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>Average Family Size</i>
Over 40	137	393	2.9
Parents	137	625	4.6
Under 40			
(2nd generation)	36	96	2.7
Parents	36	207	5.8
Under 40			
(3rd generation)	28	65	2.3
Parents	28	89	3.1

In view of the drop in birthrates, it is doubtful whether Sephardi communities in the United States can depend on natural increase to compensate for cultural defections in order to assure survival. Neither can they depend on an increase by immigration, which is practically nonexistent.

Sephardim have become quite Americanized and more affluent, and it is ever more difficult to hold the new generation in the community. The Sephardi neighborhoods—where one lived within walking distance of most relatives; constantly heard Judeo-Spanish chatter; looked to the synagogue as the center of life, and learned and observed Sephardi customs in the course of living—have almost completely disintegrated. People are moving to the more fashionable suburbs. The young are encouraged to attend college and learn a profession. Broadening interests and mobility have sharply decreased the need for neighborhood activities. And, as neighborhoods cease to be the once strong cultural force, the influence of non-Sephardi social patterns naturally becomes stronger. The result is that some Sephardim completely lose their sense of group belonging.

### *Economic Status*

The survey data indicated that most of the respondents were fairly well-to-do (Table 2). Nearly all who listed incomes of between \$5,000–10,000 were either retired or young people just starting jobs. Of the 214 respondents who listed their occupations only four were unskilled laborers, all being over 40 years old. For employed



Sephardim under the age of forty, the occupational pattern is particularly revealing: businessmen, 53 per cent; professionals, 39 per cent; artists, 5 per cent; skilled laborers, 3 per cent. By contrast the first generation of Sephardi immigrants for the most part had been unskilled laborers.

Table 2. ANNUAL INCOMES OF HOUSEHOLDS

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number of Respondents</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
\$50,000 or more	21	11.4
30,000-49,999	26	14.1
20,000-29,999	29	15.8
15,000-19,999	45	24.5
10,000-14,999	40	21.7
5,000-9,999	23	12.5
Under 5,000	0	0.0
Total	184	100.0

### *Secular Education*

Implicit in these figures is the fact that the level of education among the Sephardim is higher than it was in their parents' generation. Indeed, the Sephardim consider college education almost an essential for their children's future. In response to the question, "Did, do, or will your children attend college?", 203 Sephardim answered yes and only three answered no.

On the other hand, when asked to list their fathers' educational backgrounds, the responses of 139 American-born Sephardim aged 40 and over were as follows: 120 said that their fathers had received less than a high school education; 15 said they graduated high school; 3 that they attended a college, and only one that his father was a college graduate.

The older, second-generation American Sephardim often were poor. Although many attended college, a large percentage dropped out of school to help support their families. For second-generation Sephardim under the age of 40 and for third-generation Sephardim, who generally enjoyed a higher economic status, college was more readily available (Table 3).

TABLE 3. EDUCATION OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Aged 40 and Over</i>			<i>Under Age 40</i>			
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Less than high school	5	5.1	1	0	0.0	0	0.0
High school graduation	42	42.8	24	1	1.5	10	50.0
Some college	19	19.4	8	8	12.5	4	20.0
College graduation	19	19.4	2	33	51.6	5	25.0
Higher degrees	13	13.3	0	22	34.4	1	5.0
Total	98	100.0	35	64	100.0	20	100.0

With college education so prevalent, young Sephardim inevitably are being strongly influenced by the egalitarian spirit on the campus. Because the Sephardi students constitute a small number, they find it hard to maintain themselves as a particular group and therefore mingle freely with fellow students of all backgrounds. Thus, an examination of some of the major sociological features shared by Sephardim and Ashkenazim with the American middle class indicates that many of the Sephardi characteristics have been lost in the course of three generations. The birthrate, neighborhoods, economic condition, and educational background of the modern Sephardi differ radically from those of the immigrant generation. Although signifying material progress, these changes also constitute a serious challenge to the continuity of Sephardi life in the United States.

### *Jewish and Sephardi Education*

As stated earlier, Sephardi survival depends on the strength of the group both as Jews and as Sephardim. Sephardi literature, folklore, customs, language, law, and cuisine are inextricably linked to Jewish sources. Sephardism separated from Judaism is a gross mutation. Because this is so, the survey sought to elicit information that would give a general idea of the state of Jewish education, observance, and belief among Sephardim. The results showed a definite correlation between attachment to Judaism and attachment to Sephardi culture.

A culture can be transmitted only through the process of education. While some immigrant Sephardim had attended good Jewish schools in the old country, many had received no formal Jewish education. But this was compensated by the fact that all lived in an intensely Jewish environment where religion and culture were absorbed in daily living. However, in the United States, formal Jewish education soon became crucial. Children no longer could readily learn religious values and teachings from the people around them. Things had changed. Social and economic pressures in America pulled Sephardim from their old ways.

When the Sephardim came to this country, they found no Sephardi schools for their children. Because they were poor, stubborn, and without adequate leadership, they set up a host of small afternoon Talmudé Torah which, as already noted, were almost always poorly run, poorly staffed, poorly attended. But it was in these schools, which

certainly did not equip them to perpetuate Jewish and Sephardi values, that most second-generation American Sephardim received their Jewish education.

With the rise of the Jewish day school, some Sephardim have chosen its more intensive training for their children, especially in Seattle and, to lesser degrees, in Atlanta and New York. The Sephardim also have access to synagogue schools which, with time, have become better organized and staffed. Still, a growing number of their children either receive no formal Jewish education at all or only go to Sunday school. Among the American-born Sephardim aged 40 and over, about 10 per cent received only Sunday school education or less, while the rest had more intensive schooling. The percentage increased to 15 for those under the age of 40. For the third- and fourth-generation Sephardim, it jumped to nearly 30 per cent, thus indicating a definite rise in the number of Sephardi youths who receive practically no Jewish education.

Even Sephardim who had a good Jewish education did not know enough about their Sephardi heritage. For example, they seldom studied the history of their ancestors in the Levant. They seldom were told of the significant rabbinic and poetic literatures created by the Sephardim of the past four centuries. They were not given a real awareness of their cultural roots, and therefore did not really understand Sephardism.<sup>93</sup> Table 4 indicates a general decline in Sephardi education.

### *Religious Observance*

Although the vast majority of Sephardi immigrants had been observant Jews, the conditions of American life soon brought a relaxation of religious observances. Sabbath observance was often the first to be discarded, since poverty drove immigrants to work on that day. *Kashrut*, too, sometimes was compromised as a result of economic or social pressures. But if the first generation struggled to adhere to ritual, their children were less inclined to do so. This was, of course, also the experience of the Ashkenazim.

Of 219 respondents, 68 per cent (150) reported their homes were

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<sup>93</sup>See Marc D. Angel, "Ruminations on Sephardic Identity," *Midstream*, March 1972, pp. 64-67.

TABLE 4. SEPHARDI ORIENTATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

<i>Extent</i>	<i>Respondents</i>			
	<i>Age 40 and Over</i>		<i>Under 40</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Completely	81	58.3	27	29.6
Somewhat	33	23.7	35	38.5
Not at all	25	18.0	29	31.9
Total	139	100.0	91	100.0
	<i>Children of Respondents</i>			
Completely	19	14.1	8	18.2
Somewhat	54	40.0	18	40.9
Not at all	62	45.9	18	40.9
Total	135	100.0	44	100.0
	<i>Respondents' View of Emphasis on History of Levant</i>			
Great deal	7	4.8	2	2.3
Moderate amount	36	25.2	18	20.3
Very little	52	36.4	38	43.2
None at all	48	33.6	30	34.2
Total	143	100.0	88	100.0

less observant than those of their parents. Eighty per cent of the immigrant generation had kept kosher homes, as compared with only 28 per cent of their children; 95 per cent of the immigrants had at least some special Sabbath observances, as compared to a reported 63 per cent of their children.

Since the synagogue is the only Jewish cultural institution in most Sephardi communities, an attempt was made to establish trends in terms of synagogue attendance (Table 5).

The apparently paradoxical finding that the percentage of men under 40 attending services weekly is higher than of those over 40 can be explained by the fact that 11 of the 17 younger men live in Seattle and are members of observant families. In other cities the rate of weekly attendance is far lower. Also, Table 5 indicates that 17.9 per cent of men under 40 attend only on High Holy Days or not at all, while this is true of only 7.3 per cent of men over 40. The figures also reflect the diminishing stress on synagogue attendance by women in the Sephardi community. A general pattern of less frequent synagogue attendance

TABLE 5. SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Men 40 and Over</i>		<i>Women 40 and Over</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
At least weekly	20	18.4	4	11.1
At least monthly	33	30.3	11	30.6
Only on holidays, special occasions	48	44.0	17	47.2
Only on High Holy Days	7	6.4	3	8.3
Not at all	1	.9	1	2.8
Total	109	100.0	36	100.0

  

	<i>Men Under 40</i>		<i>Women Under 40</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
At least weekly	17	25.4	0	0.0
At least monthly	8	11.9	5	22.7
Only on holidays, special occasions	30	44.8	12	54.6
Only on High Holy Days	8	11.9	2	9.1
Not at all	4	6.0	3	13.6
Total	67	100.0	22	100.0

can hardly be denied. And this means that the only institution on which Sephardi survival now rests is gradually losing its influence.

That Sephardi synagogues are in difficulty is also indicated by data on affiliation (Table 6). The third-generation figures were derived from answers of third-generation respondents (who were also included in the under 40 category) and from the second-generation respondents who listed the affiliations of their adult children. Aside from indicating serious movement away from Sephardi synagogues, the findings imply a sharp decline in synagogue affiliation generally.

The decline in religious observance and affiliation is indicative of the secularization of American Sephardim. While nearly all the immigrants were Orthodox, the American-born generations drifted from Orthodoxy. Of the 47 respondents who are members of Ashkenazi synagogues, 5 (10.6 per cent) belong to Orthodox, 23 (48.9 per cent) to Conservative, and 19 (40.4 per cent) to Reform congregations. Although some chose a particular synagogue for convenience and physical proximity, the majority no longer claim to hold Orthodox beliefs. This is true also of members of traditional Sephardi synagogues. Table 7 analyzes responses to the question,

TABLE 6. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATION

Type	40 and Over		Under 40		3rd Generation	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Sephardi	123	77.4	67	72.8	49	44.6
Ashkenazi	33	20.8	14	15.2	32	29.0
None	33	1.8	11	12.0	29	26.4
Total	159	100.0	92	100.0	110	100.0

TABLE 7. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Belief	40 and Over		Under 40	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Orthodox	32	21.8	18	20.7
Conservative	87	59.2	46	52.9
Reform	22	15.0	17	19.5
Other	6	4.0	6	6.9
Total	147	100.0	87	100.0

“Are your religious beliefs most in harmony with Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform Judaism, or something else?” The data shows that, although there has been movement away from Orthodoxy, most of the Sephardim have not gone all the way to Reform. For the time being at least, reverence for tradition remains a strong force in shaping religious attitudes.

### *Hispanic Character*

A distinguishing characteristic of Levantine Sephardim throughout the past four and a half centuries has been their language. They spoke a tongue known variously as Judeo-Spanish, Judezmo, Ladino, Spaniolit. They thought, spoke, wrote, and sang in this sonorous language. But when they came to America, it was bound to undergo change and decline.

First-generation Sephardim spoke their language regularly because they lived in closely knit communities. They even Hispanicized some English words and used them in conversation. Thus “parkear” meant to park, “drivear” to drive. One of the most peculiar words to enter the language was “abetchar,” meaning to bet, which derived from the

English slang phrase "I betcha." But when their children began to go to public school, English became the dominant language. For the third and fourth generations it has become, for all practical purposes, the only language. Responses from third- and fourth-generation Sephardim indicated that 73.6 per cent could not speak Judeo-Spanish at all. Roughly half of the second-generation respondents thought the disappearance of Judeo-Spanish as a spoken language would be a cultural tragedy; the other half felt that its disappearance was inevitable. About 9 per cent did not care whether or not the language survived.

The third generation of American Sephardim marks a transition in Sephardi history. Many still have nostalgic memories of their Judeo-Spanish heritage. But while most can remember hearing parents, grandparents, and older relatives chattering, singing, and cursing in Judeo-Spanish, they hardly speak it well enough—if at all—to transmit the language to the next generation.

One element of the Hispanic character of Sephardim is their feeling toward Spain. It is often stated that they have a strong emotional attachment to that country for historic and linguistic reasons. The Spanish scholar Federico Castro, romanticizing the Sephardim's love for Spain, wrote that they still reminisce about the old cities of their forefathers with love and emotion, with tears in their eyes.<sup>94</sup> There is no doubt that some Sephardim do feel deeply attached to Spain; but our study indicates that this should not be generalized or exaggerated (Table 8).

TABLE 8. FEELING OF AMERICAN SEPHARDIM FOR SPAIN

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Over Age 40</i>		<i>Under Age 40</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Deep respect and love	6	4.7	2	2.3
More attraction for Spain than other countries	35	27.3	17	19.8
Little or no feeling	82	64.2	63	73.3
Other	5	3.8	4	4.6
Total	128	100.0	86	100.0

<sup>94</sup>Federico Perez Castro, "España y los judíos españoles," in Richard Barnett, ed., *The Sephardi Heritage* (New York, 1971), p. 311.



### *Customs and Foods*

Since many customs are tied to religious precepts, their observance has declined among American Sephardim along with religiousness. About 73 per cent of the 40-and-over respondents indicated they observe Sephardi customs, as compared with 61 per cent of those under 40. The most commonly practiced customs today are related to the Seder and the Rosh Ha-shanah evening meals, and are often observed for nostalgic rather than purely religious reasons.

One of the ancient Sephardi customs has been to name children after living grandparents, often to the dismay of observing Ashkenazim. It has been the cause of many disagreements between the spouses in Sephardi-Ashkenazi "mixed" marriages, but the Sephardi partner usually has prevailed. Of the Sephardi respondents married to Ashkenazim, 79 per cent (89) stated they named or will name children after living grandparents. The percentage is about the same for men and women.

This custom is widely observed today, but often with modifications. For example, if a grandparent has a Spanish or Turkish name, the grandchild will be given an English equivalent. A growing trend is to give the child an English name of one's choice (perhaps with the first letter identical to the first letter of the grandparent's name), while giving him the grandparent's Hebrew name for religious purposes. This type of modification is also common among Ashkenazim.

A major aspect of the folk culture of a people is its cuisine. The so-called "Jewish" foods, such as gefilte fish, tzimmes, or kreplach, were completely unknown to the immigrant Sephardim. "Jewish" food meant something quite different to them. On the Sabbath, for example, Sephardim would eat *huevos haminados* (hardboiled eggs, cooked in water, oil, and onion skin so that they become brown in color); *bolemas* (a turnover filled with spinach or eggplant, and cheese); *borekas* (a pastry filled with eggplant or potato, and cheese).

In the course of time the Sephardi cuisine has been greatly modified and now includes many other dishes, some typically Ashkenazi. Yet, of 234 respondents only 5 stated they never eat Sephardi foods; 124 said they eat them regularly. The others eat Sephardi foods only on holidays or special occasions. Although the under-40 group scored less than those 40 and over, only slightly more than 3 per cent of the

younger group claimed never to eat Sephardi foods. Within the past several years, a number of Sephardi women's groups published Sephardi cookbooks, in Seattle, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. Evidently, cuisine is a strong factor in group identity and pride.

### *Group Consciousness*

As Sephardim mingle with the Ashkenazi majority and with non-Jewish Americans, their group identity is severely challenged. They feel less and less the need to remain within their own group or to perpetuate their group's values and culture. Yet they continue to feel a sense of kinship with other Sephardim. Responding to a query about their feelings when meeting another Sephardi for the first time, 88 per cent of the 40-and-over survey sample and 82 per cent of the under-40 said they felt a special kinship.

Respondents also were asked two highly subjective questions aimed at discovering what Sephardim thought of themselves and their heritage (Tables 9 and 10). The replies to both questions show a somewhat lower degree of group chauvinism in the under-40 group. Negatively expressed, this means that fewer of the younger Sephardim feel that non-Sephardi Jews discriminate against them (Table 11).

In sum, it can be said that, while Sephardi group consciousness has shown a slight decline among the younger generation, most Sephardim—regardless of how much or how little they are steeped in Sephardi culture—feel a special relationship to others in their group. They do indeed take pride in their Sephardi identity.

### *Sephardi-Ashkenazi Inter-marriage*

Almost all Sephardi immigrants of the early 20th century had Sephardi spouses, assuring the perpetuation of Sephardi values and customs in their homes. American-born Sephardim, on the other hand, often chose Ashkenazi mates. Stories of prejudice on the part of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi families against the other, though certainly rooted in fact, tend to be exaggerated. Ashkenazi parents had to be convinced that their children were actually marrying Jews. After all, the Sephardim did not speak Yiddish, did not have "Jewish" names,

TABLE 9. "Do you think Sephardim generally have more self-pride than Ashkenazim?"

Reply	40 and Over		Under 40	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
More	76	52.8	45	52.3
Same	47	32.6	24	27.9
Less	7	4.9	3	3.5
Don't know	14	9.7	14	16.3
Total	144	100.0	86	100.0

TABLE 10. "Do you feel that the Sephardi heritage is generally superior to the Ashkenazi?"

Reply	40 and Over		Under 40	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Superior	71	50.7	39	47.6
About the same	54	38.6	35	42.7
Inferior	1	.7	0	0.0
Don't know	14	10.0	8	9.7
Total	140	100.0	82	100.0

TABLE 11. "Do you feel discriminated against in your contacts with non-Sephardi Jews?"

Frequency	40 and Over		Under 40	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Nearly always	3	2.0	1	1.2
Sometimes	51	33.8	25	28.7
Not at all	97	64.2	61	70.1
Total	151	100.0	87	100.0

and never ate gefilte fish. Sephardi parents, too, were reluctant to give their children in marriage to non-Sephardim. Despite cultural barriers, however, American-born Sephardim and Ashkenazim found that they had much more in common than not. Third-generation marriages of

Sephardim to Ashkenazim are quite common; one might say that they have become the rule, rather than the exception (Table 12).

TABLE 12. BACKGROUND OF WIVES OF SECOND-GENERATION AMERICAN SEPHARDIM\*

Background	40 and Over		Under 40	
	Number	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent
Sephardi	61	58.1	8	15.7
Ashkenazi	40	38.1	35	68.7
Christian	2	1.9	4	7.8
Other	2	1.9	4	7.8
Total	105	100.0	51	100.0

\*The response of women regarding their husbands' background was too small to be meaningful.

The figures for third-generation Sephardim are even more dramatic. They are based on replies of third-generation as well as second-generation Sephardim who listed the spouses of their children (Table 13).

TABLE 13. BACKGROUND OF SPOUSES OF THIRD-GENERATION AMERICAN SEPHARDIM

Background	Number	Per Cent
Sephardi	12	12.8
Ashkenazi	70	74.5
Christian	11	11.6
Other	1	1.1
Total	94	100.0

The figures for the spouses of children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages, though too small to be conclusive, may indicate a pattern. Of the 21 respondents, only 1 was married to a Sephardi, 17 were married to Ashkenazim, and three to non-Jews.<sup>95</sup>

The high rate of Sephardi-Askenazi marriages makes it inevitable that Sephardi culture has been, and will continue to be, subject to changes. All such marriages require compromises by both sides, even

<sup>95</sup>See Hayyim Cohen, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

by the dominant partner. For the Sephardi community this means a decline in Sephardi culture, at least in such obvious manifestations as food, custom, and language. To what extent, then, has Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriage influenced Sephardi life in America?

The findings of the study indicate that Sephardim married to Ashkenazim are more likely to drop out of Sephardi synagogues than are Sephardim married within their group. This is especially true of Sephardi women who marry Ashkenazi men.

There was a total of 61 responses from Sephardim who are not affiliated with Sephardi congregations: three are single; 40 are married to Ashkenazim; 18 are married to other Sephardim. Expressed in percentages, 35.4 per cent of all Sephardim with Ashkenazi spouses, men and women, left the Sephardi synagogue, as compared with 22 per cent of those who married other Sephardim. Of the Sephardim who are married to Ashkenazim but belong to Sephardi synagogues, 20.5 per cent are also members of Ashkenazi synagogues. Dual synagogue membership is held by 6.3 per cent of Sephardim married to other Sephardim. Since the rate of Sephardi-Ashkenazi intermarriage is presently about 75 per cent (see Table 13), Sephardi synagogues are very likely to lose more members. Supportive evidence is the synagogue affiliation of the adult children of Sephardi-Ashkenazi marriages: of 47 respondents, 13 (27.7 per cent) belong to Sephardi synagogues; 18 (38.3 per cent) to Ashkenazi; 16 (34 per cent) to none.

Sephardi synagogues have in fact kept the majority of "mixed" marriages within the fold. A concerted effort to make the Sephardi synagogue meaningful to Ashkenazim, especially to those married to Sephardim, will most probably assure its continued existence. The Sephardi congregation with only Sephardi members is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Sephardi leaders must recognize changes in their community and adjust synagogue planning accordingly. This does not mean adopting non-Sephardi innovations in their services. It is hoped that the beauty and nobility of the Sephardi synagogue tradition will attract many non-Sephardi members, if they are made to feel welcome. Sephardi synagogues will have to make cultural converts: people who will want to be Sephardim though they have little or no Sephardi blood.

Sephardim married to Ashkenazim reported slightly less observance of Sephardi customs, use of Judeo-Spanish, and consumption of Sephardi foods than did Sephardim married to other Sephardim. This

was to be expected. Moreover, there was little difference between the two categories in identification with the Sephardi group. For example, 85.3 per cent of the intermarried claimed to feel a special kinship for a Sephardi in a first meeting; 55.1 per cent believed Sephardim had more self-pride than Ashkenazim; 45.4 per cent thought the Sephardi heritage was superior to the Ashkenazi. As for feeling discriminated against by non-Sephardi Jews, 32.1 per cent stated they did. This surprisingly high figure may be explained as a reaction to the attitudes of Ashkenazi in-laws. One Sephardi respondent commented typically: "My Ashkenazi in-laws don't exactly discriminate against me. But they still have no idea where Salonika is, and they don't think I'm really Jewish."

In the matter of providing Sephardi education for their children, Sephardim married to Ashkenazim fare somewhat worse than those married to Sephardim. But in both cases the level of education is too low.

TABLE 14. SEPHARDI ORIENTATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF SEPHARDIM MARRIED TO ASKENAZIM AND OF THOSE MARRIED TO SEPHARDIM

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Sephardi-Ashkenazi</i>		<i>Sephardi-Sephardi</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Completely	13	12.4	14	18.9
Somewhat	44	41.9	28	37.8
Not at all	<u>48</u>	<u>45.7</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>43.3</u>
Total	105	100.0	74	100.0

Of course, the categories of degree are somewhat vague. Different Sephardim will have different definitions of "complete" or "somewhat." If children study in an Ashkenazi school where they learn Ivrit, some parents may evaluate the orientation as being "somewhat" Sephardi, others may feel it is "not at all" so. Still others think that as long as their children attend a Sephardi Talmud Torah, even though the teachers may not be Sephardim and may know nothing about Sephardi history and tradition, their education is "completely" Sephardi-oriented. However, even with these possible differences in interpretation, the figures fairly accurately reflect the true situation.

### *Four American Communities*

The data considered above reflect general tendencies on a national scale. However, it is also valuable to focus attention on several specific Sephardi communities to detect local deviations from national trends. The communities selected were Metropolitan New York, Atlanta, Seattle, and Portland, Ore. New York has the largest number of Sephardim. Atlanta and Seattle have the most viable Sephardi communities. Portland's small community appears to be on the verge of collapse. The respondents of Atlanta, Portland, and Seattle were almost equally divided between the 40-and-over and the under-40 age groups. In the New York area two-thirds of the respondents were over 40, a fact that must be taken into account in analyzing the data.

#### ROLE OF SYNAGOGUE

A comparison of synagogue affiliation and attendance in these four cities reveals some specific characteristics of each community (Tables 15 and 16).

Atlanta shows the largest percentage of Sephardim belonging to a Sephardi synagogue; it also has the best general attendance record. Although Seattle has more Sephardim who attend weekly, Atlanta has a much higher percentage of those who attend at least once a month (63.9 per cent, as against 47.9 per cent in Seattle). To be sure, the Seattle community has a hard core of faithful synagogue goers; but the majority of the Sephardim attend only on holidays. The community is polarized between observant and nonobservant, much more so than in Atlanta.

The Sephardim in the New York area attend synagogue and are affiliated with Sephardi synagogues much less frequently than those in Atlanta and Seattle. Here the size of the city is an important factor; in smaller communities there is more communal pressure and more need for formal affiliation. In the smaller communities, too, many of the Sephardim are related to each other or originate from the same cities in the Levant. They are, therefore, more apt to join synagogues and feel part of the community.

The Portland Sephardim are not strongly attached to their

TABLE 15. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATION

Type	Atlanta	<i>Per</i> Cent	NewYork	<i>Per</i> Cent	Portland	<i>Per</i> Cent	Seattle	<i>Per</i> Cent
Sephardi	43	89.6	41	66.1	7	50.0	41	83.7
Ashkenazi	4	8.3	13	21.0	7	50.0	7	14.3
None	1	2.1	8	12.9	0	0.0	1	2.0
Total	48	100.0	62	100.0	14	100.0	49	100.0

TABLE 16. SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE

Frequency	Atlanta	<i>Per</i> Cent	NewYork	<i>Per</i> Cent	Portland	<i>Per</i> Cent	Seattle	<i>Per</i> Cent
Weekly	9	19.2	6	9.8	2	14.3	16	33.3
Monthly	21	44.7	7	11.5	5	35.7	7	14.6
Holidays, special occasions	13	27.7	37	60.7	6	42.9	23	47.9
High Holy Days	3	6.4	6	9.8	1	7.1	2	4.2
Not at all	1	2.0	5	8.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	47	100.0	61	100.0	14	100.0	48	100.0

synagogue, and some who do belong are also members in Ashkenazi synagogues.

The same pattern emerged for the adult children of the respondents (Table 17).

TABLE 17. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATION OF ADULT CHILDREN OF RESPONDENTS

Affiliation	Atlanta	<i>Per</i> Cent	NewYork	<i>Per</i> Cent	Portland	<i>Per</i> Cent	Seattle	<i>Per</i> Cent
Sephardi	13	65.0	9	25.7	4	44.4	10	58.8
Ashkenazi	4	20.0	8	22.9	4	44.4	5	29.4
None	3	15.0	18	51.4	1	11.2	2	11.8
Total	20	100.0	35	100.0	9	100.0	17	100.0

Again, the Atlanta Sephardi community is the most successful in holding its young. The New York Sephardim show the least ability to



keep their children in Sephardi synagogues and, indeed, to keep them in any synagogue.

#### RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

A consideration of the religious beliefs of the Sephardim in each of the four communities will do much to explain the difference in religious observance and affiliation. Portland shows an almost even spread in religious belief. New York has a large percentage of Conservatives, but also a fairly sizable percentage of Orthodox. Atlanta is overwhelmingly Conservative. Seattle is more polarized than the other communities, with by far the largest and strongest Orthodox group, but (except for Portland, where the numbers are quite small) also the largest and strongest Reform group. In Seattle, 7 of the 7 respondents who are not members of a Sephardi synagogue belong to a Reform temple. In Atlanta, the ratio is 1 of 4; in New York, 3 of 13; in Portland, 2 of 7.

TABLE 18. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Type	<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>	
	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>NewYork</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>Portland</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>Seattle</i>	<i>Cent</i>
Orthodox	5	10.4	11	18.6	4	30.8	21	42.9
Conservative	37	77.1	38	64.4	5	38.4	15	30.6
Reform	4	8.3	7	11.9	4	30.8	10	20.4
Other	2	4.2	3	5.1	0	0.0	3	6.1
Total	48	100.0	59	100.0	13	100.0	49	100.0

When asked whether their homes are more observant than their parents', Sephardim responded as follows (Table 19):

TABLE 19. "Is your home more observant than that of your parents?"

Degree	<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>		<i>Per</i>	
	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>NewYork</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>Portland</i>	<i>Cent</i>	<i>Seattle</i>	<i>Cent</i>
More	4	9.1	4	7.0	1	7.2	6	13.6
Same	18	40.9	12	21.1	3	21.4	8	18.2
Less	22	50.0	41	71.9	10	71.4	30	68.2
Total	44	100.0	57	100.0	14	100.0	44	100.0

These figures only reflect possible trends, not actual levels of religious observance. Homes considered to be more observant than parents' homes may still be quite nonobservant. Conversely, homes may be less observant than parents' homes, and be quite observant.

Whereas half of Atlanta's respondents said they were at least as observant as their parents, this was not true of the Sephardim in the other cities. Again, Seattle has a higher rate of increased observance than Atlanta; but it also has a more dramatic increase in Sephardim who are less observing than their parents.

#### ADHERING TO SEPHARDI TRADITION

The four communities more or less resemble each other in Hispanic character, with Seattle showing a higher rate of adherence to Sephardi customs than the others.

The Seattle Sephardim had the highest proportion of in-group marriages, about 51 per cent. This compares with 30 per cent for Atlanta, 45 per cent for New York, and 38 per cent for Portland. However, in all cities these are for the most part in the 40-and-over age group.

The Sephardim in the four communities have a strong feeling of kinship with other Sephardim, and a high degree of group identity. Ninety per cent of Atlanta respondents feel a special kinship at the very first meeting with other Sephardim. This is true of 85 per cent of the Sephardim in New York; 86 per cent in Portland; 81 per cent in Seattle.

Tables 20 and 21 indicate patterns of Sephardi chauvinism in the four communities. The data show greater group pride among Sephardim in Atlanta and New York than in Portland and Seattle. There seems to be some correlation between this characteristic of Sephardim and Ashkenazi discrimination against them: where discrimination has been more pronounced, Sephardim have been more inclined to think less of themselves.

As for the religious education of Sephardi children in the four communities, Seattle has the largest percentage (25) in day schools, but Atlanta has the largest percentage (92) attending Talmud Torah at least several times a week. In New York the percentage receiving no Jewish education at all is highest (25). Portland's children generally attend only Sunday school (64 per cent).

TABLE 20. "Do you feel that the Sephardi heritage is generally superior to the Ashkenazi?"

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>			
		<i>Cent</i>	<i>NewYork Cent</i>	<i>Portland Cent</i>	<i>Seattle Cent</i>			
Superior	25	54.4	31	53.5	7	50.0	16	34.8
About the same	19	41.3	23	39.6	6	42.9	22	47.8
Inferior	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.2
Don't know	2	4.3	4	6.9	1	7.1	7	15.2
Total	46	100.0	58	100.0	14	100.0	46	100.0

TABLE 21. "Do you think Sephardim generally have more self-pride than Ashkenazim?"

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>			
		<i>Cent</i>	<i>NewYork Cent</i>	<i>Portland Cent</i>	<i>Seattle Cent</i>			
More	29	60.4	38	64.4	5	35.7	19	39.6
About the same	12	25.0	13	22.0	6	42.9	18	37.5
Less	1	2.1	2	3.4	2	14.3	3	6.3
Don't know	6	12.5	6	10.2	1	7.1	8	16.6
Total	48	100.0	59	100.0	14	100.0	48	100.0

TABLE 22. "Do you feel discriminated against in your contacts with non-Sephardi Jews?"

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>	<i>Per</i>			
		<i>Cent</i>	<i>NewYork Cent</i>	<i>Portland Cent</i>	<i>Seattle Cent</i>			
Nearly always	0	0.0	2	3.3	0	0.0	1	2.0
Sometimes	15	31.3	13	21.3	5	35.7	21	42.9
Not at all	33	68.7	46	75.4	9	64.3	27	55.1
Total	48	100.0	61	100.0	14	100.0	49	100.0

Of all the Sephardi communities in the United States, Seattle has produced by far the largest number of rabbis and religiously-educated laymen. Almost every year a few Sephardi students leave for other cities to continue their studies at *yeshivot*. Six have been ordained in the past few years, and three of them are rabbis in Sephardi synagogues.

Students who want advanced Jewish educations must leave Seattle because the city has no *yeshivah* high school or theological seminary. And since some of the *yeshivah* students choose to go into the rabbinate or Jewish-education fields, they seldom return to their native city for lack of positions, as well as for other considerations. Despite this drain of talent, the Seattle Sephardi community has the strongest core of religiously educated and committed Jews of any other in the country.

### Conclusion

If there is no reversal in the trends indicated by our data, no viable Sephardi communities may be left in the United States in two or three generations from now. Clearly, synagogue buildings alone cannot insure the survival, let alone growth, of Sephardi culture. Sephardim must establish good schools of their own, or insist that existing day schools teach more about the Sephardi past. They must also create meaningful cultural institutions—Sephardi theaters, newspapers, libraries. They must encourage their youth to pursue higher Jewish education and, if necessary, provide financial incentives to promising students. It is to be hoped that these efforts will strengthen religious observance, and wipe out the widespread ignorance of Judaism and Sephardi Jewish tradition. Unless this can be accomplished now, the Sephardi heritage will be lost.

## APPENDIX

Readers wishing to study Sephardi history and culture will find it helpful to refer to the following works:

### JEWISH LIFE IN SPAIN

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| KATZ, S., <i>The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul</i> (Cambridge, 1937).       |  |

## THE MARRANO AND EX-MARRANO COMMUNITIES

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- See also the voluminous writings of Abraham Galante.

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- ARMISTEAD, S., and SILVERMAN, J., *The Judeo-Spanish Chapbooks of Jacob Abraham Yoná* (Berkeley, 1971).
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