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Jewish Studies and the University of Pennsylvania

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In addition, since values are often brought into relief by comparison with different systems, the Jewish value system, which has remained distinct in many fundamental respects and has been a source of wealth and strength for American Jewry. At a time when an overwhelming majority of Jewish youth are attending college, the overall effect of this experience on their loyalty and commitment to their Jewish heritage is clear to Dr. Greenberg.

While many were aware of this situation at the time Dr. Greenberg made his comments, the public revelation of these conditions caused many to stop and take stock.

Recently, however, Dr. Leonard Fein, of Brandeis University, a well-known observer of the American Jewish community, was quoted as saying that the disastrous impact of university education on Jewish youth is now being successfully countered and we need no longer consider the college campus a danger area for American Judaism.

The major factor on which Dr. Fein focused was the unprecedented growth of Jewish studies programs in the universities. Since the Second World War, courses and programs in Jewish studies have been introduced at a surprising rate. While not all courses are of the highest quality, they have succeeded in sending to the universities a growing number of students who are capable of pursuing Jewish studies on an advanced level.

Viewed from this perspective, the increasing interest in Jewish studies reflects the increasing deparochialization of university curricula. Since World War II, scholars on the campus have been broadening the scope of the curriculum beyond the Christian-Western European orientation which characterized American university education until recently. Increasingly, scholars have concluded that non-Jewish civilizations and the non-Christian religions deserve a significant place in the college curriculum.

In addition, spurred in part by the renaissance of Jewish culture in the late 1950s and 1960s, scholars began to correct what they perceived to be a significant gap in Jewish curricula. Thus, on many campuses, the introduction of courses in Jewish studies symbolized the opening of universities to the true nature of a humanistic education.

At the same time, one cannot ignore the widespread interest in Jewish studies and the enthusiasm expressed by students. This phenomenon may be viewed in part as a response to the feeling of rootlessness and lack of purpose which seemed to pervade student populations in the 1960s. Motivated by an often unconscious quest for roots, identity, community, and social existence, college students sought to satisfy their longings in a variety of ways, ranging from the drug culture and counterculture to both Eastern and Western, and to political activism.

The success of Jewish studies programs is evident on the college campus. The growth of Jewish studies programs has led to the creation of new courses and programs in Jewish studies. For example, the College of the Holy Cross has established a new department of Jewish studies, and the University of Pennsylvania has created a new program in Jewish studies.

This is the story of Jewish studies and the University of Pennsylvania. The University of Pennsylvania is home to a thriving Jewish studies program. The program is supported by a variety of resources, including faculty and students, and is committed to the promotion of Jewish studies.

(Continued on Page 6)
Jewish Studies and the University of Pennsylvania (Continued from Page 1)

members of groups often display toward their heritages. This is where the universal goals of the university and the specific goals of the Jewish community coincide.

While the university does not seek to foster commitment to specific cultural heritages, such commitment is not an unlikely result. A serious study of Judaism in a university setting can and does impact awareness and self-awareness of Jewish students. Time and again, Jewish students discover that Judaism is a tradition that merits serious research in ways that they had never anticipated during their early years of Jewish education. They learn that the Jewish heritage is a recognized factor in civilization, deserving careful study at the highest levels of academia, where scholars devote lifetimes to its study.

While the stance of the teacher must remain dispassionate and nonpolemical, there is no denying the existential effect that a careful reading of Isaiah or Pirke Avot, or a direct encounter with the writings of Martin Buber or Franz Rosenzweig, can have on college students. In addition, the role model for Jewish living that the persons of many university teachers of Judaica do much to counteract students' sometimes regrettable inclinations towards Judaism as a viable lifestyle.

This, to the extent that self-understanding and knowledge of the Jewish cultural heritage are prerequisites for a strong Jewish community in the United States, Jewish studies programs can make a valuable contribution toward that end.

THE complex of attitudes and interests surveyed above developed only in recent decades. Until the beginning of the 19th Century, Jewish studies were conducted almost exclusively within the confines of traditional Jewish society. While the methods of history, philology, grammar, and philosophy had been applied to the study of Judaism, such studies were rooted in theological assumptions regarding the sacred character of Judaism. For example, while medieval scholars utilized tools of grammatical and literary analysis in their study of biblical texts, the reverence with which they approached these sacred texts precluded other avenues of inquiry, such as aesthetic appreciation of biblical literature, or the social and intellectual history of ancient Israel.

In the latter part of the 19th Century, a combination of social, political, and cultural factors set the stage for the development of a form of Jewish scholarship in which the tools of critical, historical scholarship were applied for the first time to postbiblical Jewish history and culture. In Germany, the scholars who founded the discipline, known as "Science of Judaism" (Wissenschaft des Judentums), such as Leopold Zunz, Abraham Geiger and Heinrich Graetz, sought to apply to the study of Judaism the same kind of detached, objective critical inquiry then being applied to general history, and thus laid the foundations for a more dispassionate Jewish scholarship.

Throughout most of the 19th Century, however, such critical, historical study of Judaism remained confined primarily to rabbinical seminaries and a few private institutes of Jewish studies in Europe. Despite the hopes of Geiger and Graetz to gain scholarly recognition for Judaism as a legitimate realm of academic endeavor in its own right, the attitude of Western scholarship toward Jews was shaped by Christological assumptions, which viewed Jewish life and culture following the emergence of Christianity as devoid of life and spirit, Judaism having been "superseded" by Christianity. The Talmud was darkly regarded as a secret, anti-Christian tract.

Here and there certain Christian savants devoted into postbiblical literature as a resource for biblical exegesis or for understanding the background of Christianity. Since most of the universities in colonial America had been founded under ecclesiastical auspices, they had from the beginning of

foured courses in Hebrew and biblical studies to their students who were preparing for the ministry. These courses were taught either by non-Jews, such as J.B. Jackson, as Harvard's Judah Monis, whose entrance to the academy was purchased with the abandonment of Jewish affiliation.

This situation began to change near the end of the 19th Century, with the University of Pennsylvania playing a leading role in new developments. Unlike other colonial universities, Penn had been founded (in the mid-18th Century) as a secular university, and, therefore, did not immediately include Hebrew in its curriculum. By 1790, however, Penn had established a professorship of "German and Oriental languages", with "Oriental" referring to Hebrew. It remains unclear whether this was done for humanitarian reasons or as a service to students who planned careers in the clergy, but it is noteworthy that with only seven full-time faculty members in 1790, a place was set aside for Hebrew.

Nearly a century later, increasing interest in the ancient Near East, stimulated by archaeological discoveries in the region, led Penn to establish a department of Semitic languages. In 1886 the appointments of scholars such as the Rev. John Peters in Hebrew and Morris Jastrow, the son of a Jewish rabbi, as professor of Arabic and rabbinical literature formed the basis for what became a continuing program of Judaica within the context of ancient Near Eastern civilization.

Jastrow's course offerings included Apocrypha, Mishna, Talmud and medieval Jewish philosophy. To our knowledge, he was the first Jewish scholar appointed to teach courses in postbiblical Judaism at an American university. Surprisingly, the establishment of Jewish studies on the university level at Penn preceded the opening of such other well-known Philadelphia institutions as Gratz College and Dropsie University by several years.

From 1886 into the first decades of the 20th Century, similar appointments were made at other American universities, such as Columbia, Johns Hopkins, the University of Chicago and Harvard, including such giants as the historian Walter E. Baron and the authority on philosophy, Harry A. Wolfson. Two distinguished scholars who began teaching at Penn in the 1910s and 1920s were Isaac Husik and Ephraim A. Speiser, who, respectively, taught philosophy and Semitic languages and literature.

In more recent years these early greats were followed by such outstanding figures as S. D. Goixin, a leading authority on Gentile literature and Jews in the Islamic world, and Moshe Greenberg, one of the most distinguished biblical scholars. Paced by these men and their colleagues, Penn established an admirable record in Judaica scholarship, a record which helps explain the welcome acceptance of Judaica at Penn today. To cite but a single recent example, more than a score of contributors to the new Encyclopaedia Judaica either taught or studied at Penn.

In the 1930s Speiser, along with the venerable Protestant biblical scholar James A. Montgomery, saw the emergence of an academic program of communal interest in fostering Jewish studies at Penn was the establishment of the Institute of Jewish and Semitic Studies, an organization of college teachers specializing in Judaica, now boasts a membership of several hundred.

TODAY, Jewish studies at Penn embrace numerous aspects of Jewish civilization, which is studied from a variety of academic perspectives. Thus, a student may enroll for courses in Bible, Midrash, Jewish law, kabbalah, Hasidism, Jewish folklore, modern Hebrew, and modern Jewish social and intellectual history, offered by such departments as folklore, history, the law school, religious thought and Oriental studies.

Furthermore, an undergraduate wishing to elect Jewish studies as his or her major may do so within the confines of the university and design an individualized major tailored to his or her own special interests. In addition, graduate students have the option of taking courses in the Jewish department or in one of the departments outside that field.

The study of Jewish civilization is expanding among a number of disciplines reflects the multifaceted character of Jewish civilization. Social, cultural, political and religious dimensions of Jewish life may be studied against the background of the various societies and cultures within which the Jews have lived in the course of their history. The Bible may be studied within the context of ancient Near Eastern, medieval Judaism in the context of Christian and Islamic civilizations and modern Judaism within the context of Western and Middle Eastern civilization. The same subject matter may be approached with the tools of several different disciplines. The broader, more possible perspective is allowed, thereby providing a fuller understanding of the Jewish civilization which has, in the past, marred our understanding of Judaism.

The growth of Jewish studies in American universities in general, as at the University of Pennsylvania, is a subject that deserves much further study and course of such a study, much will be learned concerning the American university and the American Jewish community. One conclusion that can already be drawn, however, is that the future development of Jewish studies programs will greatly enhance university education and American Jewish life alike.