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CHAPTER 36

THE AMERICAN JEWISH PRESS

JONATHAN D. SARNA

"JEWISH newspapers," reporter Debra Nussbaum Cohen once observed, "are the Rodney Dangerfields of journalism. Not getting any respect but providing an incredible service that everybody depends on."¹ Since their emergence in the first half of the nineteenth century, Jewish newspapers have helped to shape religious community, tied far-flung American Jews together, and kept them informed. Indeed, the establishment of Jewish newspapers marked a critical turning point in the community's history. Subsequently, at key moments in the community's evolution, new "must read" periodicals regularly appeared. Yet, the history of Jewish journalism in the United States also represents, for long stretches of time, a sad saga of decline. As independent newspapers became dependent and critical voices were silenced, Jewish newspapers became harder to respect—more indeed like Rodney Dangerfield.

Like newspapers generally, the Jewish press both shapes and reflects its times. It serves as a barometer of communal highs and lows, of aspirations and insecurities alike. This is an opportune moment to take the measure of American Jewish journalism, for the field stands at something of a crossroads. On the one hand, the economic crisis has hit the American Jewish press with particular force, closing some newspapers entirely and resulting in painful cutbacks to others. On the other hand, the quality of Jewish journalism has markedly improved in recent decades, and thanks to new technologies more people are reading the fruits of Jewish journalism than could in the past. For American Jewish journalists, this is, at once, the best of times and the worst of times. For a historian, it is a propitious time to look back.²

THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH JOURNALISM

The history of Jewish journalism dates back to seventeenth-century Amsterdam, then a center of Jewish printing. Traditionally, the *Gazeta de Amsterdam* (1675) was considered the first Jewish newspaper; more recently it has been argued that the paper was only printed *by* a Jew, and that the first paper published *for* Jews was Amsterdam's *Dinshtagishe un Fraytagishe Kurant*, published in Yiddish in 1686–87.³ From its earliest beginnings, then, Jewish journalism has never been easy to define. What is it that makes a newspaper Jewish? Though some would point to the religion of the publisher, insisting that the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are Jewish, and others insist that to be Jewish a newspaper must appear in a Jewish language (Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, etc.), here we define a Jewish newspaper by its intended audience. A Jewish newspaper centrally addresses Jewish readers and their interests.

In the United States, the earliest newspaper with a Jewish name was not, by this definition, a Jewish newspaper. *Cohen's Gazette and Lottery Register* (1814–30), published by Jacob I. Cohen, Jr., was published by a Jew and may have been read by Jews, but it primarily addressed those who invested in lottery tickets. It was, in essence, a gambling sheet.⁴

A journal of a different sort, the *Jew* (1823–25) is more difficult to characterize. It carried a subtitle explaining that it was “a defense of Judaism against all Adversaries” and took aim, principally, at the American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews, a Protestant missionary group. While the *Jew* presaged one of the major functions of every vernacular Jewish newspaper—defending Jews—it did not principally address Jewish readers and their interests. Notwithstanding its title, it was more of an antimissionary sheet than a Jewish newspaper.⁵

Jewish newspapers that truly addressed Jewish readers and their interests emerged in the 1840s—not only in the United States but also in England, France, Germany, and elsewhere. Some seventy new Jewish periodicals emerged worldwide during that decade. Jewish scholars often explain this simultaneous worldwide emergence of Jewish newspapers on the basis of the 1840 Damascus Affair, when Jews in that city were falsely charged with ritual murder. Persecution, they contend, brought home to Jews the importance of sharing information and working together to defend Jewish rights at home and abroad.⁶ Technological changes that drastically cut the cost of both printing and paper, however, also strongly stimulated the emergence of Jewish newspapers. The family newspaper, the Christian religious press, the Penny Press, and the semipornographic so-called flash press (“male weeklies”) all emerged at about the same time as the Jewish press, and all responded to the same technological changes and possibilities. Where previously newspapers were expensive and focused on the business and political elite, beginning in the 1830s more affordable mass journalism emerged.⁷

The appearance of the *Occident* in April 1843 serves as an appropriate starting date for this new kind of Jewish journalism in the United States. Focused squarely

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on Jewish readers and their interests, the *Occident* was edited by Isaac Leeser, reader (*hazzan*) of Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia and the most significant Jewish traditionalist religious leader of his day. Leeser understood the power of the printing press—he published some 100 titles of various kinds—and sought to harness that power to strengthen Jewish life. He was influenced by a range of factors, including the development of national Jewish periodicals in Europe, the desire to unify far-flung American Jewish communities, the emergence of newspapers as instruments of Jewish enlightenment, and, most immediately, the need to respond to a missionary journal published in New York titled the *Jewish Chronicle* (not to be confused with the distinguished London Jewish newspaper of the same name).

Publicly, Leeser described his journal as an “advocate” for Jewish interests (the full title was the *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*), and its announced aim was “diffusion of knowledge on Jewish literature and religion”—in other words, communal defense and Jewish education, two principal aims of Jewish journalism forever after.⁸ To carry out these aims, the *Occident* published news from American Jewish communities and from abroad (often reprinted from foreign Jewish publications), as well as sermons, editorials, historical articles, book reviews, innovative policy proposals, religious philosophy, and controversial (or apologetic) articles leveled against missionaries and other enemies of the Jewish people. He admitted into his paper many writers with whom he disagreed, sometimes debating with them in footnotes, and he also published many invaluable primary documents. Especially in its early years, he saw his as the newspaper of record for the American Jewish community, and he opened its pages to a wide range of contributors, including non-Jews interested in Jewish matters. In effect, he created a Jewish “print community,” an antecedent of today’s “virtual community.” He informed Jews, defended Jews, and linked them one to another.⁹

The *Occident* was a high-quality, well-designed publication, and it remains a magnificent historical source, one of the finest journals that the American Jewish community has ever produced. Nevertheless, there were significant limits to what it was prepared to print. “On no account can our pages become the vehicle for violent denunciation or unfounded aspersion,” Leeser wrote in his introductory remarks, and he naively urged readers “never to send us any thing which may require contradiction or amendment in a future number.”¹⁰ Although he understood that controversy and error were unavoidable, he hoped to project an image of Jewish consensus—a projection of the community as he wished it to be, rather than as it was. In this, he adumbrated a problem that has long plagued the field: a tension between the Jewish journalist as a reporter of news and the Jewish journalist as a shaper of community. In Leeser’s case, this explains why he mostly closed his columns to divisive debates over slavery and the Civil War. He feared that such debates would be harmful to Jewish consensus. But, as events demonstrated, self-censorship comes at a price: Jews who sought to debate the hotly contested issues of slavery and union had no regular Jewish forum in which to do so.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF JEWISH JOURNALISM

The success of the *Occident* generated a spate of new journals on the American scene, published in diverse locations including New York, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and San Francisco.¹¹ Already by the 1850s, the movement in American Jewish journalism, as in American journalism generally, was away from all-embracing national newspapers and toward local or regional papers that were more narrowly focused and more circumscribed in their ambitions and aims. Most of these newspapers were weeklies, not monthlies like the *Occident*, and were modeled on American religious and family newspapers, rather than highbrow journals. As a result, their format was different from the *Occident*'s. They looked like broadsheet daily newspapers and they aimed to entertain, as well as inform; one, for example, published chapters from a serial novel weekly on its front page.

In New York, the first significant Jewish newspaper to be published was the *Asmonean*, edited on business principles by a (failed) New York Jewish businessman named Robert Lyon. The *Asmonean*, America's first Jewish weekly, was livelier, bolder, and much more diverse in its subject matter than other nineteenth-century American Jewish newspapers. It billed itself as "a family journal of commerce, politics, religion and literature devoted to the interests of the American Israelites." It represents a model of American Jewish journalism not seen again, at least in English, until contemporary times: a journal for American Jews but by no means limited to Jewish subject matter.¹²

The *Asmonean* lasted for nine years (1849–58), until Lyon's death, but the absence of a follow-up suggests that most English-speaking American Jews conceived of Jewish journalism in more restrictive terms. Just as American Jews compartmentalized their lives into secular and Jewish realms, so too did their newspapers.

A quite different direction was followed by the first Jewish newspaper in Cincinnati, now the oldest continuous Jewish newspaper in the United States. The *Israelite*, founded in 1854 and renamed the *American Israelite* in 1874, was published by the pioneer of American Reform Judaism, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise. It was the first American Jewish newspaper committed to advancing a particular ideology and unafraid of controversy in defense of that ideology. Wise wrote with a lively pen and cultivated an engaging, often biting, journalistic style. From his first issue, he waged war against "error, superstition, prejudice, ignorance, arrogance, hypocrisy and bigotry in whatever shape or form they may fall under our notice."¹³ This made his newspaper much more entertaining than the *Occident* and gained it a wide national readership. As long as Wise was alive, it was recognized as his semiofficial organ representing the Reform Movement in American Judaism.¹⁴ Although the *American Israelite* lost this mantle after Wise's death and steadily deteriorated into a run-of-the-mill local newspaper, a pattern had been set. Many subsequent, movement-sponsored periodicals followed, representing different streams of Judaism, as well as political movements such as socialism and Zionism. In the best cases, the same idealism, energy, and commitment that underlay a movement found reflection in its journal.

THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE JEWISH PRESS

Another model beginning in this period was the foreign-language Jewish newspaper. Several appeared even before the Civil War, *Sinai* and *Die Deborah* being the most famous, both published in German. Later, the Yiddish daily *Forward*, edited by Abraham Cahan, became one of the most influential and widely read foreign-language newspapers in the United States, one of no fewer than 104 Yiddish periodicals of different sorts to appear in the United States prior to 1905. Significant Jewish newspapers were also published in Hebrew, Ladino, and, more recently, Russian.¹⁵

Some foreign-language newspapers aimed at a highbrow readership, drawing chiefly upon intellectual émigrés, while others catered to a more popular readership, women in particular. Either way, the foreign-language Jewish press was generally far less compartmentalized than its English counterpart. It offered its readers both secular and Jewish news, as well as features. The foreign-language press was also much more focused on issues of immigration, Americanization, and developments in the old country than the Anglo-Jewish press. Several nineteenth-century American Jewish newspapers, notably the *Jewish Record*, published in Philadelphia, actually printed foreign news in German and domestic news in English.

Foreign-language Jewish newspapers tended to be bolder and more critical of America and American Jewish life than their English-language counterparts. Immigrants were understandably more comfortable protesting against America's ills in their native tongue and likely enjoyed the security of knowing that their words would impact only a select and sympathetic audience: those with whom they shared a common language. Hebrew-language journals, written for the elite who studied the "holy tongue," were particularly prone to be critical. Their writers could assume that they wrote for "Jewish eyes only," unlike writers for the Anglo or German-Jewish press who might be read by non-Jews as well.

THE AMERICAN HEBREW

By the late nineteenth century, a large native-born generation of American Jews had come of age, many of them the children of Central European immigrants. Raised on American newspapers, this "rising generation" had a different journalistic standard than its predecessor—its English prose was livelier and less Germanic, its interests broader, its journalism (like that of the *New York Times*) less personal and more highbrow. In addition, some of these young people differed ideologically from their parents. They sought to revitalize and deepen the religious and spiritual lives of American Jews, to strengthen Jewish education, and to promote pride in being members of the Jewish people.¹⁶ In November 1879, nine of these young Jewish revivalists, maintaining strict anonymity, probably because

none of them had yet reached the age of thirty, established a New York newspaper titled the *American Hebrew*. "Our work," they explained in their first issue, "shall consist of untiring endeavors to stir up our brethren to pride in our time-honored faith."¹⁷ Since the paper sought both to "serve the future historian" and "to be sought by the best classes of non-Jews," it took pride in its broad coverage of Jewish life and in the amount of original material that it published. It set new standards in American Jewish journalism and reached out to a broad range of Jewish and non-Jewish writers. For decades, long after it had passed out of the original owners' hands, the *American Hebrew* stood as the foremost Jewish newspaper in the United States.¹⁸

DOWNWARD SLIDE

Even as the *American Hebrew* set a new standard, Jewish journalism as a whole, particularly during the interwar years, deteriorated. Many, including the well-known Jewish leader Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, began to deride them as "weaklies." The proliferation of local Jewish newspapers across the United States was partly responsible for this downward slide. While probably unavoidable given the local character of American journalism generally, local Jewish newspapers, especially those outside of major population centers, could not attract the kinds of contributors that a national newspaper could, and their goals became proportionately more modest and consensus oriented. Primarily, they sought to convey information, promote local communal involvement, and if necessary defend Jews against their enemies. This changed the focus of much of Jewish journalism away from the national issues that dominated the leading Jewish newspapers and toward a much narrower local-oriented journalism with a strong component of boosterism.

In addition, financial pressures led to the deterioration of Jewish newspapers. Most proved unable to break even, especially in smaller population centers, and they came to depend on financial backers. Beginning in the 1940s, in cities like Philadelphia, the local Jewish Federation stepped in to cover the annual deficit. Inevitably, this financial dependence affected the ability of local Jewish newspapers to remain independent. In Philadelphia, according to one study, criticism of federation-supported Jewish agencies, and even widely available negative news concerning these agencies, stopped appearing in the Jewish newspaper once it became subsidized (or in some cases, found mention only long after news was widely available elsewhere).¹⁹ In smaller communities, even independent editors found that they dared not alienate subscribers, investors, or advertisers, so they played it safe. "There is not one editor of a quality Jewish newspaper that has not had a serious clash with a Federation director," Neil Rubin, editor of the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, wrote in 2004. "In Atlanta, I was regularly threatened with

withdrawal of Federation advertising funds—some \$50,000 a year—were coverage not favorable.”²⁰ Faced with the choice of having a bland Jewish newspaper or no Jewish newspaper, most editors understandably chose the former. They justified their journalistic compromises as necessary to keep their local Jewish newspapers alive.

Finally, anti-Semitism, particularly in the period between the wars, had a chilling effect on the Anglo-Jewish press. As fear stalked the Jewish community and conditions for Jews deteriorated domestically and abroad, newspapers became frightened of controversy, scandal, or other news that reflected badly on the Jewish people, and they worked all the harder to promote an image of consensus and sobriety, lest they unintentionally play into the hands of Israel's enemies. While there was no shortage of intracommunal controversy or scandal during this era—witness the fierce debates over Zionism, the tactical debates over how best to respond to anti-Semitism, or the many scandals connected with Prohibition violations—these were not by and large reflected in the Jewish weeklies. Even anti-Jewish violence, such as regularly occurred in Boston in the 1930s and early 1940s, only rarely found mention in the press. Jewish leaders apparently persuaded the publisher of Boston's *Jewish Advocate* that writing about such violence would stir up trouble and make the situation worse.²¹

OTHER SOURCES OF JEWISH NEWS

Once again, then, the press exercised considerable self-censorship. It did so with the best of intentions, believing that it served the larger interests of the Jewish people. The result, however, was a loss of credibility. Those who sought accurate and reliable Jewish news increasingly turned elsewhere. For years, many Jews read the Yiddish Press or in some cases the Hebrew Press, which, as noted, felt less constrained than the English-language weeklies; they were a much better and more accurate source of news. Other Jews subscribed to national Jewish magazines, which displayed more vibrancy than the local weeklies and did open their pages to debate. One thinks of *Menorah Journal*, the *Reconstructionist*, *Jewish Frontier*, the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, *Commentary*, *Midstream*, and many others.

Indeed, the number of English-language national periodicals proliferated in the twentieth century. There were a grand total of four such periodicals in 1900: one for “Young People” (*Young Israel*), one for “the Jewish Religious School and Home” (*Helpful Thoughts*), one for Hebrew Union College students and alumni (*Hebrew Union College Journal*), and one, the *Menorah*, the official organ of the Jewish fraternal organization, B'nai B'rith. A century later, by contrast, more than sixty such periodicals regularly appeared, in addition to magazines for schoolchildren, catering to the widest array of ideologies and interests. Jews dissatisfied with local Jewish

newspapers, who wanted more serious and in-depth analyses, had, as a result of this exponential growth, many alternative publications.²²

American Jews also turned to other sources for reliable news, including the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), founded by Jacob Landau in 1917, to provide world Jewry with news from the European war fronts from a Jewish point of view. Its cable service, set up in the 1920s, soon became the dominant provider of worldwide Jewish news for most American Jewish weeklies, improving the quality and range of their coverage. More than 400 newspapers (Jewish and general) subscribed to the JTA by 1925. Later, during World War II, JTA distinguished itself with revelations concerning the fate of European Jewry under Hitler during what is now known as the Holocaust. Following the war, it broke trailblazing stories concerning the persecution of Jews living behind the Iron Curtain. JTA greatly improved the Jewish press's coverage of international and national events. Given their growing reliance upon this source, however, Jewish newspapers came to share a certain uniformity of perspective: what the JTA produced, they published. This was especially true of news from Israel. Moreover, as a Jewish-sponsored agency, the JTA faced some of the same tensions that local weeklies faced: its commitment to journalistic *detachment* on the one hand and its very strong *attachment* to the Jewish community on the other hand.²³

The *New York Times* also became increasingly influential within the American Jewish community. Purchased by Adolph Ochs, the son-in-law of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, in 1896, it consciously paid special attention to news of Jewish interest both because of its Jewish ownership and because Jews made up a substantial percentage of its New York readership. In return, Jews rightly or wrongly came to perceive the *New York Times* as the ultimate authority on substantial news stories of Jewish interest. The *New York Times*, in reporting such stories, generally sought to project an air of objectivity. Its owners deeply feared being perceived as "too Jewish." During the Holocaust, partly for these reasons, it played down reports of anti-Jewish atrocities. Influenced, some believe, by the assimilationist tendencies of its owners, the paper also opposed the creation of the state of Israel.²⁴

AMERICAN JEWISH JOURNALISM'S GOLDEN AGE

The last third of the twentieth century witnessed tremendous improvements in American Jewish journalism. The best newspapers became bolder, more probing, and more critical. Their coverage of Jewish life broadened. More journalists in the Jewish press boasted degrees from journalism school and sought to bring the lessons they had learned there to religious and community papers. Beginning in 1980, the professional organization of Jewish journalists, the American Jewish Press Association (founded in 1944), encouraged these advances through a program of

competitive Rockower Awards for Excellence in Journalism (the "Pulitzer Prizes" of American Jewish journalism), which came to include such categories as "excellence in commentary" and "excellence in comprehensive coverage or investigative reporting."²⁵

The aftermath of the Watergate scandal in the United States (1972–74), which raised the status of journalists and crowned them as guardians of American values, encouraged these developments. Jewish students, like their non-Jewish counterparts, were also influenced by the era's crusading "new journalists" who integrated literary techniques, passion, and advocacy into their writing. Jewish student newspapers, beginning in the late 1960s, ventured into subjects ignored by the mainstream press (such as the priorities and economics of the Jewish community) and, in 1970, established the Jewish Student Press Service (JSPS) to share and disseminate their "underground" work. Many JSPS writers eventually made their way into mainstream Jewish media, which they proceeded to transform. But publications like *New Voices*, founded by JSPS in 1991, as well as *Zeek* and *Heeb* and the website "Jewlicious," offered young outsiders in the Jewish community continued opportunities to make their voices heard.²⁶

The rising affluence of America's Jews also helped journalism in this era. Advertisers seeking to appeal to the upscale Jewish market brought new funding to some Jewish newspapers, notably the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, allowing them to hire more and better journalists, to publish in-depth and investigative stories, and to become bolder and more independent. The field of Jewish journalism, as a result, looked more promising than at any time since World War I.

In 1990, the association that had produced the famed Yiddish-language *Forward* established an English-language weekly, the *Forward*, as an independent national Jewish newspaper under the editorship of Seth Lipsky, formerly a distinguished editor at the *Wall Street Journal*. The paper set new standards in Jewish journalism and pioneered extensive critical coverage of Jewish culture and the arts. It quickly won respect in mainstream journalistic circles, and many of its young reporters went on to achieve fame (and in some cases fortune) in the mainstream press—continuing a long tradition of the Jewish press serving as a "minor league" for excellent journalists (Daniel Schorr is a prime example, and more recently Jeffrey Goldberg) who later graduated into the "major leagues." Three years later, partly in an effort to compete, New York's long-running newspaper, the *Jewish Week*, hired editor Gary Rosenblatt away from the *Baltimore Jewish Times* with a mandate to improve the paper's quality. The revamped paper promised "to build and strengthen Jewish community while championing an aggressive and independent press" and declared that its "first loyalty is to the truth."²⁷ Between them, these two newspapers in America's largest Jewish community broke many significant stories in the 1990s, providing coverage of such formerly taboo subjects as the compensation packages of Jewish communal leaders and sexual abuse by rabbis. The JTA, emboldened by these developments, likewise became edgier in this period, introducing more critical coverage into local Jewish newspapers across the country that carried its stories.

THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES— RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Yet just as hopes for a new “golden age” of American Jewish journalism rose, technology—the same force that made possible mass journalism in the first place—now conspired to shatter those hopes. With the rise of the web, the circulation of traditional newspapers (general and Jewish alike) fell precipitously. Young people increasingly looked online for the news they wanted. As a result, the average age of Jewish newspaper readers rose—so much so that one editor quipped that the average age of his readers was now “dead.”

In addition, and even more seriously, advertising declined. Indeed, some of the traditional profit centers of the Jewish newspaper, such as classified ads and singles ads, migrated almost completely to the web. Why pay to sell used items in the Jewish press when one can sell them for free on eBay? Why advertise publicly for a mate when membership in J-Date (or one of its clones) is so much cheaper, more private, and more efficient? Large-scale advertisers, too, shifted their attention to the web; increasingly, they discovered, that was where their prime customers were. As a result, Jewish newspapers, like their secular counterparts, watched their revenues plummet.

In time, many Jewish newspapers developed websites of their own. Most sites made their stories available to the public without charge, the industry mantra being that “information wants to be free.” This increased the readership of Jewish newspapers and opened them up to young readers, but at a cost that was difficult to recoup. Even if they brought in new online ads and paid subscriptions, websites could not make good the losses in overall circulation and advertising.

The economic downturn of 2008 further battered Jewish newspapers. Many that had received subsidies from Jewish federations saw those funds reduced. Revenue from advertising and circulation declined even further than before. As a result, several Jewish newspapers either shifted to the web or, as in the case of the *Las Vegas Jewish Reporter*, went out of business entirely. Others, following the lead of the *Boston Jewish Advocate*, dispensed with paid national and international content from the JTA and focused exclusively on local community news, hoping thereby to pare costs and to draw in readers interested primarily in reading about themselves and their neighbors.

The impact of online technology also has had some highly positive implications for Jewish journalism. For one thing, Jewish journalists have never enjoyed so many readers as they currently do. Even a local story can “go viral” and reach millions of people. The offerings available to consumers of Jewish journalism have, in addition, become far more diverse. Readers no longer need to confine themselves to their local Jewish newspaper. Now the online reader can easily peruse a range of Israeli news websites, religious and antireligious Jewish websites, and websites of Jewish newspapers and organizations across the globe.

Significant online newsletters and magazines also bring Jewish news daily to the inboxes of those who want them. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency, reborn as JTA: The Global News Service of the Jewish People, sends out a free daily newsletter read

by thousands of subscribers. It also aggregates articles from other sources that it believes informed Jews should read. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs similarly distributes an online "daily briefing" focused on Israel and the Middle East, aggregating news and opinion from many sources. An online daily Jewish magazine named *Tablet* is among the most exciting developments in Jewish journalism in recent years. Handsomely subsidized by Keren Keshet, it employs state-of-the-art graphics and some of the finest young Jewish journalists and writers currently at work and produces a daily fare of provocative features and widely read cultural articles on Jewish life. Another subsidized web publication, *Jewish Ideas Daily*, aims at a higher-brow level with a focused daily essay and additional links for those who seek to learn more.

Whether these online Jewish journals ultimately crowd out their print cousins remains to be seen. Currently, the most prestigious of them, *Tablet*, is heavily subsidized, while those that are independent, like JTA, live hand to mouth. The *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, the largest Jewish newspaper outside of New York City, is experimenting with a mixed model, influenced by studies of "niche journalism," that is attracting attention. It produces a lively newspaper, featuring multiple conflicting voices on controversial issues and racy lifestyle articles ("Tiger Wood's #1 Whore, Rachel Uchitel, Is Jewish. So What? And Heading to Playboy. Maybe."²⁸), as well as a website with blogs and other features not found in the print publication and a glossy monthly magazine that extends the newspaper's reach. It expects to cover the bulk of its budget through advertising and looks to philanthropic donations to cover the rest. Should the model succeed, editors of other Jewish journals seem sure to follow suit.²⁹

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

In the meantime, journalists in the Jewish press face central questions that will shape the field's future.

First, what is the mission of Jewish journalism? Is its mission primarily to inform? To educate? To defend? To entertain? To support one or another Jewish ideology? To promote community and continuity? Or something else? To insist, as many do, that its mission embraces all of the above is to beg the question, what happens when two or more of these missions come into conflict?

Second, what are the responsibilities of Jewish journalism? Should the "good of the Jewish people" (or of the local Jewish community, or of the state of Israel) be the highest goal? Or should "truth" be the highest goal? What should be done when, as happens all too often, these goals come into conflict? Which should be sacrificed for the other?

Third, what are the community's responsibilities toward the Jewish press? Should it subsidize it? Control it? Set the bounds of who may and who may not be

heard? In an era of scarce resources, should a Jewish newspaper (print or online) be a community priority at all? Or should communities simply encourage individuals who want Jewish news to go out and pay for it on their own?

Finally, what compromises should a Jewish journal be prepared to make to ensure its survival? Should it seek private or communal support? How much independence should it be prepared to sacrifice in return for such support? What red lines must it refuse at all times to cross?

These are not easy questions. Nor are Jews alone in confronting them. Parallel questions, indeed, face religious and ethnic-based journals of every kind. Yet for Jewish journalists to escape being known as the "Rodney Dangerfields of journalism," these issues, even if not fully resolvable, cannot be avoided. They define both what Jewish journalism is and what it might become.

NOTES

1. Luke Ford, "Debra Nussbaum Cohen," http://www.lukeford.net/profiles/profiles/debra_nussbaum.htm (accessed July 19, 2010).

2. The literature on this subject to 1983 is reviewed in Robert Singerman, "The American Jewish Press, 1823-1983: A Bibliographic Survey of Research and Studies," *American Jewish History* 73 (June 1984): 422-44; see also Robert Singerman, *Jewish Serials of the World: A Research Bibliography of Secondary Sources* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); and Robert Singerman, *Jewish Serials of the World: A Supplement to the Research Bibliography of Secondary Sources* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2001).

3. Joel Cahen, "Amsterdam, Cradle of the Jewish Press?" *Proceedings of the Symposium on the Jewish Press: Why? Past, Present, Future* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad, 1985), 17-23.

4. Extant numbers of this journal are available in the American Periodical Series, reel 93. On Cohen, see Isaac M. Fein, *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971), 22-24.

5. The *Jew* is now available on Google books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=fx4A AAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=jackson+the+jew#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed July 19, 2010). For its history, see George L. Berlin, "Solomon Jackson's the Jew: An Early American Jewish Response to the Missionaries," *American Jewish History* 71 (September 1981): 10-28.

6. Baruch Mevorah, "Ikvoteha shel 'alilat Damesek behitpathuta shel ha'itonut hayehudit bashanim 1840-1846, ['Effect of the Damascus Affair Upon the Development of the Jewish Press']; *Zion* 23-24 (1958): 46-65; Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics and the Jews in 1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 404-5.

7. Frank L. Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 260 Years: 1690-1950* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 206, 215-326; William E. Huntzicker, *The History of American Journalism*, Vol. 3, *The Popular Press 1833-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1999); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 125-33; Patricia Cline Cohen

and others, *The Flash Press: Sporting Male Weeklies in 1840s New York* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

8. Naomi W. Cohen describes early American Jewish newspapers as "Pioneers of American Jewish Defense." See her article by that title in *American Jewish Archives* 29 (November 1977): 116–50.

9. The best study of Leiser, including his newspaper, is Lance J. Sussman's *Isaac Leiser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995). On the origins of the *Occident*, see Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Impact of Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions on American Jews," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd Endelman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 242–43. The journal's first number is reprinted with an introduction in Abraham J. Karp, *Beginnings: Early American Judaica* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975).

10. *Occident* 1 (April 1843): 5.

11. Listings of nineteenth-century American Jewish periodicals may be found in *American Jewish Year Book* 1 (1899–1900): 271–82; *Jewish Encyclopedia* 9: 616–40; and Robert Singerman, *Judaica Americana: A Bibliography of Publications to 1900* (New York: Greenwood, 1990): 931–1070.

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