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# Commentary

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## **Park Forest: Birth of a Jewish Community: *A Documentary***

04.01.51 - 12:00 AM | [Herbert J. Gans](#)

*Herbert J. Gans presents here a documentary account of the gestation, birth, and infancy of a new Jewish community in the United States of today. Though this is obviously a special kind of setting—a newly built middle-class housing project—it is also possible that it throws considerable light on the character of the present interest of American Jews in Judaism, Jewish education, and Jewish community life, as well as on the kind of “Jewish content” that seems to them appropriate for the needs of their children and themselves. Mr. Gans originally began to study Park Forest as a subject for a master’s thesis on political participation and apathy; intrigued by the special role and problems of the small group of Jews in Park Forest, he returned, with the help of a grant from the College of Jewish Studies of Chicago, to study them by questionnaires, interviews, and observation.*

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In November 1949, the author of this article completed a study of the Jews of Park Forest, Illinois. The study had one especially intriguing aspect: under its very eyes—in the midst of answering questionnaires, as it were—Park Forest’s Jews gave birth to a young, awkward, but unmistakable Jewish community. It was an entirely natural birth, and the witnessing of it was an illuminating introduction to some of the whys and wherefores of Jewish life and of present-day Judaism in America.

Obviously Park Forest is not Flatbush or Scarsdale or Detroit—so undoubtedly there are limitations in what it has to teach us. On the other hand, when we think of the present composition of American Jewry—which is by and large second generation, mostly business and professional in occupation, and overwhelmingly middle class—perhaps Park Forest is not so atypical after all. What we can see happening there may be chiefly different from what is occurring in other locales only in being more visible and accessible to the student. Park Forest may thus turn out to be a by-no-means unrepresentative Jewish neighborhood in today's rapidly changing American scene. Here, in any case, is what happened, and how.

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Park Forest is a garden-apartment housing project located thirty miles south of Chicago. The project, privately developed, was started in 1947, when the Chicago housing shortage was at its height. The first tenants moved in on August 30, 1948, and for two years they continued to come in as new sections of the village were completed. By November 1949, there were 2,000 families—nearly 8,000 people—renting garden apartments at \$75 to \$100 per month. One hundred and forty-one of these families were Jewish. Of these, about thirty had not been in the village long enough to have relations with the other Jewish families; another fifteen were “mixed marriages,” with both husband and wife having rejected any identification as Jews; and the remainder, approximately one hundred families (including a few mixed marriages), 5 per cent of the project, formed a fledgling “Jewish community.”

In Park Forest the accent is on youth; the project naturally attracted the people most sorely pressed for housing: veterans with children. The men average thirty to thirty-five years of age, the women somewhat less (anyone over forty is generally considered old). Most of the men are at the beginning of their careers, in professional, sales, administrative, and other business fields. (Only four of the men interviewed owned their own businesses.) Although not long removed from the GI Bill of Rights, they were in 1949 already earning from \$4,000 to \$10,000 a year—most of them perhaps around \$5,000. Few of the men, and few of the wives even, are without some college experience, and educationally, the Jews as a whole stand even higher than the rest of the Park Forest community. Ninety per cent of the Jewish men interviewed have college training, 60 per cent hold degrees, and no less than 36 per cent have graduate degrees.

The Jews of Park Forest dress as do the other Park Foresters, enjoy similar leisure-time activities, read the same newspapers, look at the same movies, hear the same radio programs—in short they participate with other Park Foresters in American middleclass culture. They observe few traditional Jewish religious practices; the village's isolation from synagogues and kosher food shops has probably discouraged observant Jews from becoming tenants, and brought problems to those few who did.

Not only do Park Forest Jews live like other Park Foresters, they live with them. Whereas most American cities have “neighborhoods” dominated by one ethnic group or another—in atmosphere and institutions if not

in numbers—this is not true of Park Forest. Most Park Foresters live in what are called “courts”—*culs de sac* surrounded in circular fashion by twenty to forty two-story garden apartments. Each “apartment” is actually a house, built together with five or seven others into a single unit. Privacy is at a minimum and each court is almost an independent social unit. Many of the Park Foresters find all their friends in their own court—but this is not the case with the Jews. The Jewish families are scattered all over the village, and only rarely are two Jewish families to be found in adjacent apartments. Yet in just one year, a Jewish community consisting of informal groups of friends, a B’nai B’rith lodge, a National Council of Jewish Women chapter, a Sunday school, and even a Board of Jewish Education had emerged.

How did this happen?

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From the very beginning it seemed to be important to Jewish Park Foresters to “recognize” whether or not any of their neighbors were Jewish. And the widespread labeling, in America and Europe, of certain Mediterranean-Armenoid facial features as “Jewish,” plus the monopolization of certain surnames by Jews, has resulted in a stereotypical formula of recognition, used by Jews and non-Jews, which is accurate more often than not.

One early resident related: “I saw Mrs. F. in the court a couple of times . . . I thought she looked Jewish. With me, there’s no mistaking it. Then someone told me her name, and I went up to talk to her. Finally we talked about something Jewish, and that was it.”

“Jewish mannerisms” were also used to establish, or at least guess at, the other person’s Jewishness. “The woman across the street, her actions were typical New York, so we recognized them as Jewish immediately . . .” People very skillfully explored each other through conversations, attempting to discover whether the other person was Jewish or not, and offering clues to their own Jewishness. “She’s been told I’m Jewish, and I know she’s Jewish, we haven’t discussed it, but she uses Jewish expressions she wouldn’t use in front of other people.” Others turned the conversation to favorite foods: “It was a slow process, we told them what kind of food we like, corned beef, lox . . .” Sometimes there are no symbols or formulas which can be applied, and people find out by accident: “I asked before Passover if they wanted macaroons, and we found out.”

Many Jewish Park Foresters had known each other previously, had mutual friends or acquaintances elsewhere, or bore introductions from mutual friends to “go look up so-and-so when you get to Park Forest.” The people with such previous contacts, however loose these may have been, quickly established friendships and often became “charter members” of social circles which then attracted strangers. In this respect, the Jews differ sharply from other Park Foresters, most of whom knew no one and had no “introduction” to anyone when they arrived in the village. (Even in cities as large as New York and Chicago a surprisingly large number of Jews know or know of each other, because there are relatively few groups which they join, few temples which they can belong to, and few neighborhoods in which they choose to live.)

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Barely had this informal network of friendships and acquaintances sprung up among the first Jews moving into Park Forest (it did not, of course, preclude friendships with non-Jewish neighbors—though these, as we shall see later, were rather different in quality from the friendships with Jews), when two formal Jewish organizations were set up—a chapter of the B’nai B’rith and a chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women. Both enrolled only about forty members—those who, for various motives and reasons, were “organization-minded,” and those, especially women, who had no Jewish neighbors and wanted to meet Jews from other parts of the village.

Both almost immediately found a purpose: “doing something” about the Jewish children of the growing Park Forest community. And through them steps were soon taken to establish the single most important Jewish institution in Park Forest: the Sunday school.

By June 1949, less than a year after the first residents moved in, the chapters of the B’nai B’rith and National Council of Jewish Women were already fairly well established. Eighty-six Jewish families were now living in the rapidly growing project. Passover had come and gone; the handful of Jewish people who observed it in the traditional way had banded together to order *matzos* and all the trimmings from Chicago. The men who had organized the B’nai B’rith lodge and now formed its ruling clique had begun to talk of a congregation. Some of them were “Jewish professionals,” men who make their careers within the American Jewish community; others were men who had been active in big-city Jewish affairs and whose social life had been oriented around a congregation and its activities. But it was generally agreed that Park Forest’s prime problem was a Sunday school for the forty-odd eligible children then in the village, and for the others who were to come.

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The B’nai B’rith leadership met one evening and sketched out the organization of a Sunday school as part of a congregation—Reform or Conservative, it was not yet clear—to be established in the village. At a meeting with a delegation of women from the Council, however, the latter refused to help organize a congregation, insisting that what Park Forest needed was a Sunday school now, and a congregation later, perhaps. One man said of the women: “They don’t care for Jewish values, but they recognize that they are Jewish and they need a Sunday school because the kids ask for it . . . . They want a nonsectarian school.” The women, on the other hand, accused the men of trying to take over the community for their own political ambitions, of wanting a “Jewish Community Incorporated.”

Eventually a steering committee of four men and four women was formed to proceed with the organization of a Sunday school. While the administrative organization and the budget were being prepared, largely by the men, the school’s curriculum was left to a young Chicago rabbi who had become interested in Park Forest. Quite unexpectedly to some, he supported the women in their rejection of a congregation, and formulated

instead a Sunday school that would involve the parents in their children's Jewish education: "As we train the children," he told the parents, "you will have to train yourselves . . . . You'll have to move toward a community center and a synagogue eventually . . ." The parents' major contribution would be to prevent such inconsistencies as would be apt to arise from not practicing at home the content of the Sunday school curriculum.

At a meeting of parents there was a sharp reaction to the rabbi's plans. A large number of those present objected to the curriculum proposed; they wanted a "secular" Sunday school, one which would teach the child *about* Jewish traditions, but which would not put pressure on the parents to *observe* these traditions in the home. For the reasons that they did not want a congregation, they did not want a school that would involve them either. The committee resigned and a new committee was formed.

But exactly what type of "Jewish content" should be brought into the school, and how? The new committee did not have sufficient Jewish background to set up any kind of Jewish curriculum, secular or otherwise, and called for aid from a Jewish professional family that lived in Park Forest, the husband a group worker, and his wife a trained Sunday school principal. The group worker was finally successful in devising a formula that reconciled the two sides, and the basis of the reconciliation is revealing: "The children will not be taught that parents have to light candles; the children will be informed of the background of candles . . . . We're teaching the child not that he must do these things, we just teach him the customs . . . . Why, we even teach them the customs of the Negro Jews . . . and that the customs have been observed for many years, and are being modified."

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In "yankee city's" Jewish community<sup>1</sup> the conflict over the synagogue was between generations, the foreign-born and the first-generation American. In Park Forest, where almost everyone is native-born, the conflict over the Sunday school was of a different nature: it was between those who wanted what may be called an *adult-oriented* community and those who wanted a *child-oriented* one.

The adult-oriented community is the traditional (but not necessarily Orthodox) one whose activities are focused around its congregation of adults, and in which the role of the children is to become Jewish adults and assume an adult role. The men who wanted a congregation, with its Sunday school, were thinking of such an adult Jewish community, training its children for eventual membership in the organized Jewish group. In a child-oriented community, the community's energy is focused almost exclusively around the children, around their problems and needs as Jewish children—but, of course, as the adults see these needs. Thus, the women wanted a school for the children and, as became clear, not one that would involve the adults in Jewish community life.

The focus of Park Forest's problem—and conflicts—lies in the family. The Sunday school, much as other Jewish institutions, is recognizably an ethnic rather than a religious institution—more correctly, an American reaction to an ethnic situation—which transmits ethnic behavior and identity; the Jewish home, however, is run by American middleclass behavior patterns. The women feared that the contradictions between the

traditional Jewish home, whose features are now incorporated in the Sunday school curriculum, and the American home, which embodies their primary present-day values, would lead to family tensions. So, although they wanted their children to learn about traditional Jewish life, they did not want it brought home.

The situation in Park Forest, then, is that many parents reject involvement in the cultural-religious aspects of the Jewish tradition for themselves as adults, while they demand that their children involve themselves to the extent of learning about this tradition, without, however, getting so involved as to wish to practice it. The fruit of this might well be a Judaism that ends rather than begins with Bar Mitzvah.

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Why, however, did the parents want the children to go to Sunday school at all?

First, and quite important, was the fact that the children, in contrast to the parents of Park Forest, having found their friends within the court without concern for ethnic origin, would see their non-Jewish friends leave for school on Sunday mornings. As one mother explained: "Our kids want to get dressed up and go to church too. The Sunday school [the Jewish one] will give them something to do." A few children were actually sent to the Protestant Sunday school a couple of times, but the overwhelming majority of the parents found this intolerable, so the pressure from the children was translated into parental demand for a Jewish Sunday school.

Second, and this is perhaps the more important reason, the parents wanted to send their children to Sunday school because they wanted to make them aware of their ethnic identity, to acquaint them with Jewishness through Jewish history and customs. (Quite frequently, this explanation was complemented by the qualification, ". . . so that later he can choose what he wants to be." The notion that the Jewish child would have a choice between being Jewish or not Jewish, a decision he would make in adolescence or early adulthood, was voiced even by parents who admitted their own continuing confusion as to how to act, and as to the identity they had and wanted to have.)

But why become aware of ethnic identity and of "Jewish customs"? Because parents want their Jewish identity explained to their children, often as a *defense* against hardships they might run into because they are Jews. Representative of this rather widespread sentiment was the comment: "A Jewish child, he's something different, he's never one of the boys in a Gentile group, even if he's the best guy, he's one of the outsiders, the first to get abused, and if he doesn't know why, it's going to be a shock. It's part of his training, the Sunday school, he needs it."

A number of parents of six- and seven-year olds were particularly clear in their hopeful expectation that Sunday school would supply the children with answers about their identity. It seems to be at that age that questions first develop in the children's play groups as to what they are, in terms of religion or nationality. Sometimes the children are stimulated by a remark made in school or kindergarten, sometimes by something overheard in parents' conversation. One child may thus discover that he is Protestant, and that there are also Catholics and Jews. He brings this information to the group, which then tries to apply these

newly discovered categories to its members. Soon the children come home and ask their parents what they are, and are they Jewish, and perhaps even “Papa, why do I have to be Jewish?” Here the Sunday school is asked to come to the rescue. One father reported of his son now in Sunday school: “He can probably tell me more than I can tell him.”

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It is not only the Sunday school that is child-oriented. The entire community shows itself child-oriented: during the first fourteen months of existence, the largest part of its organized adult activities was for the children. B’nai B’rith nearly collapsed because its leadership was drawn off into the task of establishing the Sunday school; and after the school had been set up, the lodge immediately went to work on a Chanukah party which it hoped to make an annual event. Even among those who wished to found a congregation, a goodly portion explained they wanted it exclusively for the sake of the children: “I don’t believe in praying . . . in God . . . I want it for my son and daughter. I want them to know what it’s like. I have had the background . . . I remember I enjoyed it at the time.”

The Jewish holidays have become perhaps the chief mechanism of teaching and reinforcing Jewish identity. All the “happy” holidays—Pesach, Purim, Sukkoth, and Chanukah, especially the last—are emphasized and made into children’s festivals. At Chanukah time 1948, when the Park Forest Jewish community consisted of less than twenty families, the problem of Chanukah versus Christmas first presented itself to Jewish parents. A year later, the problem loomed so large in everyone’s mind that people discussed it wherever they gathered. The women’s Council devoted its November meeting to “Techniques of Chanukah Celebration,” that is, techniques of competing with Christmas.

By late November, the non-Jewish friends of the Jewish children are eagerly awaiting Christmas and Santa Claus. Naturally, the Jewish children are inclined to join in these expectations, and ask their parents for Christmas trees. In 1948 and 1949, the parents acted quickly. One mother explained: “The F.’s had a big menorah in their window, that was very fine, maybe I’ll do the same next year . . . I could put my little menorah up there, I could wire it, is that O.K., we could have different color lights—no that’s too much like Christmas.” Another parent said: “My child wanted a Christmas tree and we talked her out of it . . . I make a fuss about Chanukah to combat Christmas, I build up Chanukah and she appreciates it just as much.”

Other parents told how they decorated the menorah, and even the entire house, and used electric candles instead of wax ones. They tried hard to emphasize and advertise Chanukah to the child, and at the same time to exclude the Christmas tree and its related symbols from his environment. Parents were very bitter about the Jewish families who displayed Christmas trees. “In our house we do certain things, and in other Jewish houses they don’t, and the children ask questions . . . It’s very confusing . . .”

In the process of making a children’s holiday in December (or sometimes in November) just as good as the Christian one, the parents’ adult participation in the holiday is forgotten, and Chanukah, more than any other holiday, becomes completely child-oriented. In this, ironically, the fate of Chanukah closely resembles that of the American Christmas, which has tended to be transformed from a solemn religious festival to a day of

delights for children.

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Meanwhile, the adults were not nearly so lavish in providing for their own needs as Jews.

Park Forest has a number of families, either Reform or mildly Conservative, whose social life before moving to Park Forest took place largely in or near the congregation of their choice. Some of these people did not hesitate long before joining a wealthy congregation in Chicago Heights—especially those whose own income and social position were more or less equal to that of the Heights community. In addition there are a number of families, probably less than ten, who have maintained enough of the traditional system of religious attitudes and ritual practices to be called Orthodox or Conservative. They favor the establishment of a congregation, preferably Orthodox or Conservative, in the village.

But for the remainder, the large majority of the Jews, religious institutions and practices play no role. Of forty-odd families interviewed, more than half reported that they observed no customs or holidays, and had not attended synagogues or temples “for years.” Ten reported attending High Holiday services only; seven attended on High Holidays, some other holidays, and a few Friday evenings during the year.

For the majority of Park Foresters, the problems of traditional observance (such as the kosher home) or of attending religious services simply do not exist. They spend Friday nights as others do in Park Forest, entertaining, or going out occasionally when Saturday is not a workday for the man of the house, or staying at home if it is. Saturdays are reserved for work around the house, shopping, visiting, and taking care of the little things suburbanites have no time for during the week.

There are, however, two religious patterns which are still being observed, not universally but by many. First, as has been indicated, there are those holidays and traditions that concern the children. Second are those aspects of death and birth that relate the Jew to his parents. Several of the men remarked matter-of-factly that they were not interested in religious observances, but added just as matter-of-factly, “except of course *Yortzeit*” (anniversary of the death of a parent). Another said: “The only thing we did—at my son’s birth we had a rabbi at the circumcision, mostly for my wife’s parents, they would have felt bad.” (Circumcision is probably all but universal. As for Bar Mitzvah, as yet there are almost no children as old as thirteen.)

Some people celebrate the Jewish holidays by spending them with parents or in-laws, not as religious holidays but as family get-togethers. One woman explained, jokingly: “I believe Rosh Hashanah should be two days, Passover too, for practical purposes. One day we go to his family, the other to mine.”

There have been some attempts to establish the beginnings of a religious institutional system in Park Forest. In January 1949, when the Jewish population did not exceed twenty-five families, the group already had a rabbi-substitute, a gregarious “Jewish professional” who roamed through the Jewish community and from his Conservative background ministered to occasional religious needs. “Someone needed Hebrew writing on a tombstone, they were told to call me, someone else wanted *Yizkor* [prayer for the dead] or *Yortzeit* services,

they called me. . . .”

Before Rosh Hashanah 1949, two men, one an early comer, the other just arrived, tried independently to set up a *minyán* (minimal group of ten) for the High Holidays. Since communication between Jewish tenants in the older courts and the newer ones had not yet been established, these men never knew of each other’s attempts. Both were unsuccessful. Various groups have talked sporadically about setting up a regular congregation.<sup>2</sup> Most interesting in this demand for a congregation is the reason given by many supporters: “They’ll have more respect for us, to show that we have arrived, that we’re not merely a bunch of individuals.”

The “they” referred, of course, to the non-Jewish neighbors. This congregation movement was thus born not entirely of a religious impulse, but of one which attempted to demonstrate the solidarity and respectability of the Jewish community to the rest of Park Forest. Significantly enough, the area of Park Forest in which this congregation movement sprang up was populated by a large number of small-townners and Southerners who from the first indicated that they did not think favorably of Jews.

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Uninterested as Park Foresters may be in “the Jewish heritage,” they are nevertheless very much Jews. Clearly and unmistakably, that is, they remain both matter-of-factly and by conscious design, members of identifiably Jewish groups. This Jewish group may be another Jewish couple with whom they spend much of their time; it may be a regular and more or less stable group which gathers, in full or in part, almost every weekend and on special occasions. These groups make up the informal Jewish community, the “spontaneous” community that did not require professionals and organizers to be created.

For the most part, this informal community exists at night. In the daytime, when only housewives and the children inhabit Park Forest, the Jewish housewife participates in the general court social life. She interrupts her household duties to chat with a neighbor, while “visiting” over a morning cup of coffee or while watching the children in the afternoon. In most cases, there is no distinction here between the Jewish and the non-Jewish housewife; they belong together to the bridge and sewing clubs that have been established in many courts. There are a few courts in which religious or ethnic cliques of women have formed, and where “visiting” is restricted to such groups. In most courts, however, there are few ethnic distinctions in daytime social life. This applies even more to the men when they participate with other men in court life on weekends (and occasional evenings) through athletic teams and poker clubs. As one of the women observed: “The boys are real friendly. I imagine they don’t think about it [ethnic distinctions] but the women have different feelings. Women have little to do; they talk about it in the afternoons.”

At night, however, in the social relations among “couples,” the Jewish husband and wife turn to other Jews for friendship and recreational partnership. As one person summarized it: “My real close friends, my after-dark friends, are mostly Jewish; my daytime friends are Gentile.” Of thirty Jewish residents who listed the names of Park Foresters they see regularly, ten named only Jews; ten named mostly Jews, and one or two non-Jews; ten named a majority of non-Jews or only non-Jews. And many of the people who named both Jews and non-Jews pointed out, like the person quoted above, that their most intimate friends were Jewish.

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There are, of course, all types of friendship circles in this informal Jewish community. One of the largest groups is made up predominantly of older, well-to-do Park Foresters, many of them previously active in big-city Jewish congregations and groups. Most of these men are employed by business or industry, or in the non-academic professions (medicine, dentistry, law, engineering). A second group consists largely of young academic intellectuals (research scientists, teachers, writers) and their wives. A third is made up of people who have only recently emerged from lower-middle-class Jewish neighborhoods, and are just exploring, with occasional distaste, the life of the middle- or upper-middle-class American Jew. And there are many others.

It is easy to explain the tendency to find friends in one's own group, even when this takes one from one's own front door, as it does in Park Forest. As the Park Foresters say, "It's easier being with Jews"—it is psychologically more accommodating, and there is less strain in achieving an informal, relaxed relationship with other Jews: "You can give vent to your feelings. If you talk to a Christian and say you don't believe in this, you are doing it as a Jew; with Jewish friends you can tell them point blank what you feel."

The in-group attitude, and the anti-out group feeling that often goes with it, are expressed most frequently at the informal parties and gatherings where the intimate atmosphere and the absence of non-Jews create a suitable environment. Often these feelings are verbalized through the Jewish joke—which generally expresses aspects of the Jew's attitude toward himself, his group, and the out-group—or through remarks about the *goyim*. At parties that are predominantly Jewish, it is of course necessary to find out if everyone is Jewish before such attitudes can become overt.

One man, who had been converted to Judaism in his twenties, when he was married to a Jewish girl, became disturbed, at an informal party, over a discussion of how to inculcate Judaism into the children, "and keep them away from the *goyim*," and felt it time to announce that he had been until a number of years ago a member of a Christian denomination. The declaration broke up the party, and upset many people. After that he felt: "From now on, they'll be on their guard with me, they've lost their liberty of expression, they don't express themselves without restriction now. At a party, if anybody says something, everybody looks to see if I've been offended and people are taken into a corner and told about me." This man has adopted the Jewish religion, is bringing up his children as Jews, and has been more active than the average person in Jewish community life. Yet he is no longer a member of the Jewish in-group, although he remains a member both of the Jewish community and his smaller Jewish group. In his presence, the group sheds the informality and intimacy of the in-group, and is "on guard."

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There are many Jewish Park Foresters who reject these in-group attitudes as "chauvinistic," and when asked about their friends, are quick to reply that they do not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews in choosing friends. Yet as one said: "The funny thing is, most of our friends are Jewish even though we say we don't

care.” And to quote another: “I think we should try to have friends that aren’t Jewish. I don’t like the fact that all my friends are Jewish.”

But these Jewish Park Foresters, too, feel that they differ from the majority of the non-Jewish Park Foresters—and not only because their friends are Jews. The focus of these feelings of difference was summarized by one person: “I have a friend who is not Jewish who told me how fortunate I was in being born Jewish. Otherwise I might be one of the sixteen to eighteen out of twenty Gentiles without a social conscience and liberal tendencies; he is cruel and apathetic . . . . Being Jewish, most of the Jews, nine out of ten, are sympathetic with other problems, they sympathize, have more culture and a better education; strictly from the social and cultural standpoint a man is lucky to be born a Jew.”

These feelings have a basis in Park Forest reality. The Jews are distinguished by a feeling of “social consciousness,” by concern over political and social problems, by a tendency toward a humanistic agnosticism, and by an interest in more “highbrow” leisure activities: foreign films, classical music, the fine arts, and in general the liberal intellectual-aesthetic leisure culture of America, and perhaps the Western world. There seem to be proportionately more Jews than non-Jews in Park Forest who participate in this culture. Jews who seek other people with whom they can share these attitudes and interests tend to find other Jews. This culture—which includes an important proportion of Park Forest’s Jews—itself is largely devoid of Jewish content, and the Jews who come together in it would seem to do so not primarily because they are Jews but because they share a culture. When Jewish problems are discussed by these people (and they are discussed), they are seen from a generalized world view, rather than from an in-group perspective.

Just as Jews form a large proportion of those interested in “culture,” they form a large proportion of those interested in the self-government of Park Forest, and in other local activities. Although in November 1949 the Jews made up only 9 per cent of Park Forest’s population, eleven of thirty-seven candidates in the first two village elections were Jewish. All but one member of the first Board of Education, and half of the original six-man Board of Trustees that runs the village, are Jewish. The community newspaper was started by a group of women many of whom were Jewish; the American Veterans Committee and the local affiliate of the Democratic party were organized with the help of a number of Jewish men.

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If for a moment we take a broader view and consider non-Jewish Park Forest, we discover that the Jewish community is only one of three quite similarly organized ethnic-religious groups. Both the large Catholic group (close to 25 per cent of the village population is Catholic) and the smaller Lutheran one also consist of a religious body, men’s and women’s social organizations, and a more or less extensive informal community. The two Christian groups, unlike the Jewish one, are organized primarily for adult activities, but also emphasize the Sunday school. Both communities developed much more quickly than the Jewish one—largely because there was much less internal disagreement as to what to do and how to proceed—and both were in 1949 already engaged in building programs. The Catholic and Lutheran groups are primarily religious bodies (although they are in part ethnic groups), and have fewer members who reject the group

culture. Those who do reject it can quite easily “resign” and become part of the large amorphous body of Americans not strongly identified by religious or ethnic group, something that is much more difficult for the Jew.

In its first year, the Jewish community was very sensitive to the problem of anti-Semitism. Just as every newly arrived tenant would try to recognize other Jews, he would also try to discover the attitudes of non-Jewish neighbors toward Jews. This led quickly to the sprouting of a grapevine which transmitted actual cases, suspicions, and imagined occurrences of anti-Semitism throughout the Jewish community, and sometimes dominated conversation among Jews. A number of people complained strongly that there was a great deal too much talk about anti-Semitism.

Actually, there has probably been very little anti-Semitism in Park Forest. In the interviewing, which covered thirty-five of the fifty-five courts occupied by November 1949, only seven people from seven different courts mentioned incidents they considered to be anti-Semitic. For the most part, these were cases of exclusion, Jewish women (and sometimes children) being left out of some formal and informal activities of the Christian members of the court. There are a number of courts where Jewish and non-Jewish women have split off into separate cliques. It would perhaps be surprising to expect these rather traditional forms of segregation to be absent, especially since Park Forest harbors so many people from different parts of the country, including small-town people from regions generally not friendly to Jews. And one must always ask how much this segregation results from the tendency, described above, of Jews to seek each other out as friends. And it seems certainly true that if anti-Semitism played any role in the formation of the community, it was the fear and expectation of anti-Semitism rather than actual experience of anti-Semitism in Park Forest, on the part of either children or parents.

On the other hand, there are many “liberals” in Park Forest, so that friendly and unquestioned social mixing of Jews and non-Jews is perhaps more common here than elsewhere. This spirit is perhaps typified by an incident that occurred early in the life of the village. A door-to-door salesman asked a non-Jewish resident to point out the Jews in the court because he did not want to sell to Jews. The next day the company was requested not to send any more salesmen to the village.

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Park Forest is a new and growing community; it has changed since this study was made, and will continue to change in the future as its present tenants are replaced by others or decide to stay and settle down. Nevertheless, the Jewish community has already become oriented around a number of elements which are not likely to change.

Whereas their parents were not only socially “clannish” but culturally different from their non-Jewish neighbors, the adult Jews of Park Forest are “clannish” but culturally not very different. (Or, rather, their cultural distinctiveness, when it exists, is not along Jewish lines.) Their adjustment to American society and their present status can be described as one of cultural assimilation and continued social distinctiveness. Thus, the Jews of Park Forest remain an ethnic group, albeit different from the parental one.

It is this feeling of Jewish togetherness, to sum up, which provides the impetus for child-orientation, for the parents' insistence on a Sunday school, their transformation and use of the Chanukah holiday, and the unending attempt to indoctrinate the child with a sense of Jewishness.

It is noteworthy that whereas in most cultures the transmission of the group's *esprit de corps* is carried out unconsciously through the children's imitation of, and partial participation in, adult activities, in Park Forest this transmission has become conscious, has become indoctrination—without the parents accepting for themselves the things they are passing on. This no doubt affects the very process of transmission, the thing transmitted, as well as the way the child receives it. Nevertheless, the transmission does take place. Child-orientation is the mechanism that would seem to guarantee the existence of the ethnic group for another generation, even when the adult carriers of the group's culture are ambivalent about it, or have rejected it. So long as Judaism is the curriculum for teaching and transmitting Jewishness, the traditional behavior patterns will be studied, discussed, and taught. However, the high cultural assimilation of the group makes improbable the incorporation of traditional Jewish elements into the rules of daily life.

A major force in the development of the Park Forest Jewish community has been the "Jewish professional," who so far has been the spearhead, "the catalytic agent," as one called himself, in the process of community formation. It was Jewish professionals who helped bring the Jews together, ministered to their early religious needs, started the men's social organization, tried to organize a congregation, helped in forming the Sunday school, resolved the crisis that resulted, and have since supervised Jewish education in the village.

The Jewish professional is a new man on the Jewish scene. He is not a rabbi, but a leader of adults, a youth worker, a teacher, a fund-raiser, a social worker, a contact man, a community relations director, etc. The Jewish professional may not have special training in how to start a Jewish community, but he is expert at being Jewish, something other Park Forest Jews are not. Sometimes this expert Jewishness is a part of his background, and his reason for becoming a professional; sometimes it is the result of a desire to work in the Jewish community, among Jews rather than non-Jews. Sometimes the expert's Jewishness may be only a career, and the professional's activities in these organizations are for him a means of advancing in his career. Whatever his motives, however, the Jewish professional, rather than the rabbi, would seem to have taken over the initiatory role and the largest part of the work of creating the formal Jewish community. In the informal community, his influence is much smaller.

A final factor for an understanding of the Park Forest Jewish community is the sexual division of social labor that takes place within it. The Jewish informal community is based on the Jewish woman. It is she who generally inaugurates and stimulates acquaintances and friendships, who founds the social circles and sets their pattern and content. She has in addition the opportunity of establishing all-female groups which reinforce the groups of couples. Most of the men seem to lay less emphasis on ethnic association, and although there are some all-Jewish male groups, male activities are more likely to take place in groups which more or less ignore ethnic distinctions. Perhaps that is why the B'nai B'rith lodge has been less successful than the women's group in uniting its membership into an active and developing organization. The larger concern of the women with Jewish education, and their more intense interest in the Sunday school, obviously arise from the fact that the women generally have the major role in bringing up the child. In general, the women live a greater part of their life within the Jewish group, and are more concerned with it and about it

than the men. In Park Forest, and presumably in communities like it, they seem to be the most influential element in determining the nature of “Jewish” activities. At a somewhat later stage these activities may be handed over to the men.

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As to how representative the events and processes that took place in this one Jewish community are, the writer would not be able to hazard a guess, and certainly his study, of a single community and not comparative, would throw little light on this question. But his impression is that it is very unlikely that they are unique to Park Forest. Perhaps in other American Jewish communities these developments are masked by the fact that the group is not so distinctively limited to young married couples with one or two children as it is in Park Forest. In all of them, however, it would seem reasonable to suppose that developments such as have been described must play an increasingly important role in the future Jewish community life in America. Certainly, it would not be claiming too much to suggest that the Park Forest Jewish community offers much illustrative and prophetic material as to the next major stage in the process of Jewish adjustment to American society: the stage in which it is the relations between the second and third generations, both American-born, not the relations between a foreign-born first and a native-born second generation, that are the crucial ones.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> W. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups* (Yale University Press, 1945).

<sup>2</sup> In November 1950, after the completion of this study, a congregation was finally organized.

## About the Author

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