A Club Joined:
Jews and Yale from 1980
Through the Present

IHELG Monograph
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University of Houston Law Center/Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance (IHELG)

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IHELG has as its purpose the stimulation of an international consciousness among higher education institutions concerning issues of higher education law and the provision of documentation and analysis relating to higher education development. The following activities form the core of the Institute's activities:

- Higher Education Law Library
- Houston Roundtable on Higher Education Law
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- Publication series
- Study opportunities
- Conferences
- Bibliographical and document service
- Networking and commentary
- Research projects funded internally or externally
Yale Scholar to Present IHELG’s Sanchez Lecture on the History of Jewish Discrimination at Ivy League Schools

The UH Law Center’s Institute for Higher Education Law & Governance will present the ninth George I. Sanchez Lecture on Wednesday, October 25, 2000 at 7:00 p.m. at the Jewish Community Center’s Kaplan Theatre. Dr. Dan Oren, Professor of Psychiatry at Yale Medical School will give his talk, Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale, based upon his book of the same name. The George I. Sanchez Lecture Series attracts nationally prominent scholars from the field of higher education.

Although Yale University’s seal includes words in Hebrew commemorating the ancient Israelites, the relationship between Jews and Yale has been uneasy at times. Oren’s presentation examines the college life of Jews at Yale from the first Jewish graduate in 1809 to the present time, while drawing comparisons to the Jewish experience at other elite colleges and universities and to the experiences of other minorities at Yale.

Oren used both archival records and interviews with numerous graduates of Yale to document the saga of Jews at the university. During Yale’s early years, the Jews who attended were too few to cause concern. By the twentieth century, however, prejudices against Jews intensified. “Jews did not fit into the club-like atmosphere that pervaded Yale—where diversity was unwanted,” said Oren. Jewish discrimination at the ivy-league school was so common that officially sanctioned publications referred to “The Jewish Problem.” An annual report from the Board of Admissions of Yale University, 1944-45 read, “The Jewish problem...continues to call for the utmost care and tact...The proportion of Jews among the candidates who are both scholastically qualified for admission and young enough to matriculate has somewhat increased and remains too large for comfort.”

Oren’s colleague, Thomas Bergin, Sterling Professor Emeritus of Romance Languages said, “Oren’s scrupulous survey of an area hitherto unexplored in Yale history is illuminating and instructional not only for the Yale family but for all academic societies.”

Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale (Yale University Press) was nominated for the Albert J. Beveridge Award in American History, the Laurence L. Winship Book Award, the Bancroft Prize, the John Hope Franklin Publication Prize of the American Studies Association, the Melcher Book Award, the American Academy of Religion’s Awards for Excellence, the National Jewish Book Award in the category of Jewish History, the National Historical Society Prize, and the Merle Curti Award in Intellectual History.

Date: Wednesday, October 25, 2000
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Jewish Community Center’s Kaplan Theatre
CLE: 1 hour of participatory CLE

The University of Houston Law Center
Institute for Higher Education Law & Governance
A Club Joined: Jews and Yale from 1980 through the Present

Dan A. Oren

George Isidore Sánchez,¹ Mexican-American leader and professor, son of Telesfor and Juliana Sánchez, was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on October 4, 1906. Both of his parents' families had been in New Mexico since early colonial days. He would become the father of Mexican Studies in this country with his major work Forgotten People. His master's thesis at the University of Texas was one of the earliest studies to question the use of standardized tests for Spanish-speaking children. During the 1930s Sánchez had fought a heroic battle for equalization of school funding and had won major battles in this area. In Texas he continued his fight for equal educational opportunities for Mexican-American children through organizations and the courts. Throughout his life Sánchez fought against standardized tests, segregation based on nonproficiency in English, and other discrimination against Hispanic schoolchildren. It is in his honor, that I am delighted to have this opportunity to tell another story of an ethnic group finding its way in America.

Much of history is a tale of broad forces that sweep through time. An equally critical part is a story of human relationships that wrestle with each other and with those forces. I wish to emphasize that I did not write a history of Jews at Yale, though that is certainly part of its story. It was consciously a history of Jews and Yale. It was titled and remains Joining The Club² to emphasize that it was a study of a societal
relationship and ultimately a study of human relationships, many successful and some failed.

There are some sad chapters to the story—stories of ugly discrimination. American history, like any nation's history, is not perfect. Discrimination is part of the history of humanity, and part of the history of our country. You can pick your region of the country and pick your ethnic or minority group and you will find a history of bigotry. But that is not the focus for this essay. Because prejudice is easy. Here I wish to concentrate upon how prejudice was overcome and where did breaking such barriers lead. How did our predecessors overcome it? For perhaps learning from their good deeds, will help us follow in their footsteps.

In addressing questions of prejudice, elitism, and the mission of a College and a University, the story of Jews and Yale is in some ways unique, but in more ways it is a focal point to consider broader questions that many groups and many institutions have faced. And a story that challenges us to confront the human tendency to judge too quickly that at times confounds us all.

Why is the Yale story of interest beyond the confines of New Haven, Connecticut? For one, Yale's tale is microcosmic, and what happened in along the banks of the Long Island Sound happened in other degrees in other universities in the land. Beyond that Yale's commitment dating back to its 1701 chartering by the Connecticut Assembly to educating youth for service in Church & Civil State has led it to mold a disproportionate share of the nation's leaders. In the 2000 election campaign, three of the four leading candidates were in some part products of Yale: Joseph I. Lieberman
(B.A. 1964, LL.B. 1967) was the Democratic vice-presidential nominee; Republican vice-presidential Candidate Richard Cheney spent his Freshman College year at Yale; and the Republican Presidential Candidate and winner was George W. Bush (B.A. 1968). As these pages are written four of the six most recent U.S. presidents held Yale University degrees: Gerald R. Ford (LL.B. 1941), George H. W. Bush (B.A. 1949), Bill Clinton (J.D. 1973), and George W. Bush. It is no stretch of imagination, therefore, to consider that social patterns that predominated at Yale might have national repercussions.

Elitism and ranking were part of the Yale fabric from its earliest days. In Yale’s first years, a student was ranked by the college administration throughout his undergraduate career. This assignment of position was largely based on the wealth and social status of the student’s family. According to historian Brooks Mather Kelley, the ratings had far more impact than a mere Social Register: “Once the class members were ... ranked, a student took that place in everything he did: his seat in class, chapel, commons, and all else was fixed by it. . . . He had to act out his ranking every day of his college life.” In the nineteenth century, as business and corporate interests displaced the ecclesiastical core of Yale, the prominence of social selection grew with the creation and rise of fraternities and senior societies, such as Skull and Bones and its rival Scroll and Key. Meanwhile, academic life found itself unable to compete with athletic and social life on the campus.

For Jews this would become an issue in the first decades of the twentieth century, just after anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe had led Jewish immigration to the US to rise dramatically. With a significant population who saw college as the ticket out of
immigrant ghetto life, Connecticut Jews flocked to Yale, so that by 1920 approximately ten per cent of the undergraduates were Jews. In the context of increasing xenophobia nationally, and alarmed by the rapid rise in Jewish numbers that a relatively open admissions policy had allowed, Yale students and officials instituted discriminatory policies in the 1920s. One senior society (Elihu Club) voted in 1911 to deny recognition to Jewish students on campus. Following Harvard's lead, college admissions officers secretly instituted a policy of "Limitation of Numbers of Jews" that created informal quotas using limitations by geography, psychological tests, and personal interviews designed to limit Jews and other "undesirable" types.

From where did the good emerge to combat racist trends at Yale. To some degree the horrible racism of World War II gave those opposed to racism strength to advocate. One prominent example was Yale Law Professor Eugene V. Rostow. Appealing to America's need to be at its strongest regardless of people's race or creed, Rostow privately confronted Yale's President Charles Seymour and called for the end of discriminatory quotas at that time employed in Yale's medical school. Such private eloquence was strengthened by national calls for anti-discrimination laws:

We must realize that in our time the need for trained men is so great, and our national resources of ability and character so limited, that the community can no longer afford the waste of allowing a poor student to displace a good one.

Any such controversy is likely to be especially acute over the medical schools. In the last twenty years, great progress has been made in raising the standard of medical training. But in admissions what our medical schools have all done is to accept the commercial-country-club criteria of the American Medical Association....Unworthy standards have prevailed in the selection of candidates for admission to this restricted circle. Our practice of having a quota is a shocking anomaly, unworthy of Yale, or any other American university. To the extent that medical schools pass over applicants of superior professional
promise, they attack the standards of medical science and medical care for the community at large.

This is an issue of direct concern to every member of the Yale family. I urge that in this regard, Yale should fully satisfy its own values, and base its admission policy on educational and professional criteria alone. This is the only possible standard for a university which aspires to serve the American community.5

The postwar veteran students were also keen to change discriminatory practices. Having spent some years risking their lives for democracy, the ex-soldiers were older, maturer, more vocationally oriented, and less interested in the games of college life than previous generations of students had been. They were also often unwilling to tolerate at Yale the discrimination that they had fought against abroad. Many were idealists. Some joined liberal or leftist organizations; others protested against bias of any kind. Many participated in the widespread informal and formal discussion groups that emerged to consider discrimination. Most shared an uncommon enthusiasm for learning and reminded the university of its prime purpose: educating students. The national picture was the same. A Fortune magazine survey called the national college class of 1949, with more than two of every three members a war veteran, the best, most mature, most responsible, and most self-disciplined group of college students in American history. By any standard it was a formidable group. For Jews the most significant impact that the veterans had at Yale was in opening up the social pyramid controlled by the secret societies, the arbiters for undergraduate prestige. The veterans broke down society restrictions by race and religion (sometimes meeting great resistance on the part of elder society alumni). For example, undergraduate William Sloane Coffin Jr.'s 1949 class of Skull and Bones tapped two Jews (Thomas Guinzberg and Victor Frank) and a black
Levi Jackson. A dozen years later Coffin would be University Chaplain and march alongside the Rev Martin Luther King to open national doors for all groups. At home in New Haven Coffin would challenge Yale's administration to honor American democratic ideals and end racial and religious discrimination in admissions.

On the national front, the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957 placed further pressure on national institutions of higher education to train the country's most talented to serve the nation. Under such potent pressures that were thought to challenge the country's entire style of life, including such language from the nation's chief physicist that Sputnik had the potential to mean "doom" for the United States, Yale and other leading universities began to emphasize scholarship and the quest for learning with a new vigor and they began to admit more students who would take advantage of such opportunities.

In the previous decades when nativism had thrived on campus, many of the most prominent of Yale undergraduates had no inner dislike or hatred toward Jews or blacks or the poor; they simply had a profound lack of interest in the lower class groups. This form of prejudice simply and instinctually led many of the campus upper class to ignore the lower class because, as one elite undergraduate of the 1930s put it, "we thought they had nothing to offer." Similarly, most of the men who until the 1960s directed women away from positions of leadership and responsibility had no hatred or dislike of women; to them, the idea of women as leaders was simply inconceivable. In essence this same callousness underlay the barriers that handicapped people found throughout the nation until the 1970s. When architects and city planners designed
sidewalks lacking easements to the street and buildings with high steps that lacked entrance ramps, few of them had any deep-seated prejudice against people in wheelchairs. But the narrow confines of tradition had previously instructed these molders of society that handicapped people could not manage for themselves. In many generations and in many forms the benign failure to imagine the potential of others proved as virulently exclusive as any form of blatant bigotry. This mindset was vigorously undone in the 1960s and 1970s.

1980-2000

Only the most prescient of science fiction writers could have anticipated how different the world of 2000 would be from that in 1980. The terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001 would have strained the imagination of even those prescient science fiction writers.

Certainly predicting the outcome of 1980 at that year’s beginning would have been futile. President Jimmy Carter could not have anticipated that his uncertain handling of the nascent hostage crisis in Iran would cost him the White House and that Ronald Reagan’s promise of “morning in America” would offer an antidote to national malaise. In a year when Mt. St. Helens would suddenly erupt in Washington State, few could have imagined that an event of cataclysmic magnitude was to be part of that year in the Yale-Jewish relationship as well.

Some of the seeds of the explosion had been planted the year before. Limited by a lackluster economy and a struggling fund-raising Campaign for Yale, one of President
Giamatti’s first challenges in 1978 had been to rein in the university’s deficit spending left over from the Brewster years. Giamatti quickly appointed former Law School Dean Abraham S. Goldstein to serve as his provost and chief academic officer in wielding the ax of inevitable budget cuts and controls. Unfortunately, the partnership would not last. As Henry Rosovsky had anticipated in turning down the Yale presidency in 1977, no institutional leader would win a popularity contest in this climate. The *Yale Daily News* was also determined to make its mark by exposing waste in the tight financial climate. In a venomous set of articles on Yale financial management that began in April 1979 the *News* published a harsh article entitled: “DeLaney Kiphuth: Odd Jobs under Fancy Title,” in which the paper argued that the “Special Adviser to the President on Athletics” did little to justify his Yale salary. It made for gripping copy, but in the still relatively small community that was Yale, the attack was cruel and unfair. Smelling scandal in an era of supposed financial restraint, within two weeks the paper then turned its attention to Goldstein and detailed a litany of charges of seemingly wasteful expenditures in renovating the university-owned home that Provost and Mrs. Goldstein were set to occupy. When Goldstein saw that no public questioning concerned similar expenditures on renovating the university-owned home provided to the President, and when Goldstein perceived that his boss was avoiding defending him, Goldstein resigned his administrative post in 1979 and resumed his Yale Law School professorship.

The historical record and subsequent interviews with all the leading principals suggest that Goldstein’s resignation came about largely because of the failed personal
relationship between Goldstein and Giamatti. Neither man was particularly known for compromise. Giamatti, whose simultaneous mark of character and tragic flaw was his great difficulty in separating his persona from his person, could not find a way to work with Goldstein. There is no evidence that the Jewish identity of Goldstein, however, played any role in their break.6

Unfortunately, the controversial resignation of the first Jew to reach high office at Yale took place at the same time that documentary evidence began to surface revealing anti-Jewish feeling at Yale in the 1920s and confirming the long-speculated rumors of anti-Jewish feeling and limitations. Just a few years before, the Nixon tapes had stripped the nation of illusions about the nature of leadership, even of democratically elected power. The letters found in the Yale archives would have similar repercussions in New Haven. “Smoking gun” documents with such raw emotion were simply unknown to the public at Yale or elsewhere in what had previously been the rarefied world of American academe. For those who were becoming privy to the Yale historical record in 1980, the temples of higher learning and the open playground called Yale could never again be seen in the same light. An innocent, romantic view lay shattered. The 1979 resignation of the Jewishly identifying provost thereby carried a confusing message to some Jews on the campus. Was the scandal merely office politics? Was it evidence of administrative corruption? Or, to use Watergate terminology, was the Jewish “tax-collector” being made a scapegoat of budget-cutting tensions and being hung out to twist in the wind? No public data were available then to address such
speculations. Among those considering such implications was Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, Director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation at Yale and Yale's Jewish Chaplain.

Meanwhile, Wolf had decided that the time had come for him to leave Yale. He had accomplished almost all that he thought he could and the "grim pre-professionalism" that Kingman Brewster had criticized at Yale earlier in the decade wore on him. By and large, Wolf felt that the newer students in 1980 lacked the political fervor that for him was the breath of life, telling a reporter that: "The freshmen and sophomores are extremely attractive and charming, but they're...preoccupied with personal needs and they're unimaginative about larger ethical issues." In his characteristic way, such a provocative statement about his own flock challenged those dedicated students who did volunteer on behalf of the underprivileged or who did pursue political agendas that went far beyond themselves. But in depicting the vast majority of Yale students of all backgrounds in that era, he was on target.

He was also increasingly disenchanted with Yale. Working out of a cramped, dismal, basement office, Wolf felt that a respect for the Jewish religious tradition should have earned the Hillel office more dignified surroundings. Wolf saw Yale's accommodations as half-measures when full ones were called for. Moreover, in the Spring of 1980, the Baccalaureate service of Commencement weekend, the most religious remaining component of collegiate ceremony, was broadened to include for the first time in history a priest and a rabbi alongside the Protestant minister in its proceedings. Rather than fully appreciating the historic significance of the move, Wolf allowed himself to be galled by a callous Yale College dean who accused Wolf of
"Balkanizing" the ancient ceremony. Early in A. Bartlett Giamatti's tenure as Yale president (1978-86), when a selection committee had met to appoint a new associate chaplain for the university, a further evolutionary step had also been taken. At that committee's first meeting it took the revolutionary step of deciding to consider non-Protestant as well as Protestant applicants. Wolf, however, was disturbed that no Jew had been placed on the search committee until he complained.⁹

He was also feeling that the most important peer relationships he had striven for at Yale had failed. Wolf had not connected with President Giamatti and his administration in the way he would have hoped. He was especially unhappy with a Jewish faculty who displayed little interest in Jewish life. This displeasure had grown from the cold reception that he had encountered upon his arrival in New Haven in 1972. In private conversation, Wolf recalled that early on, a Jewish faculty couple stopped by his home to visit. On that occasion Wolf asked the couple why he seemed to be so isolated from so many Yale Jewish faculty. The professor's wife suggested to Wolf that he host a party in his own honor and introduce himself by inviting Jewish faculty. Wolf thought this amazing. Normal standards of hospitality dictated that established members of a community invite a newcomer, especially an incoming leader, to a welcoming reception. But in New Haven tables were turned. Hurt by being ignored, Wolf, unlike his predecessor Rabbi Israel, never proved eager to play middleman to the Yale Jewish faculty. Without anyone stepping in to bridge the faculty-rabbi gap and neither Wolf nor the faculty sufficiently motivated to seek rapprochement on their own,
an atmosphere of noninterest therefore grew from both sides.\textsuperscript{10} By the Fall of 1980, Wolf had given up hope on all fronts at Yale, and was ready to move on.

He did not leave quietly. A man who could be playful, wise, and loving, Wolf also loved to tweak “the Establishment.” On September 19, 1980 he gave his final \textit{Kol Nidre} sermon to a packed congregation in Yale’s Battell Chapel on the holiest night of the Jewish calendar. Wolf spent the first moments of that sermon reading a portion from the 1920s era correspondence of Yale deans criticizing Jews. He suggested that the prior behavior had residual importance, in particular stating that Yale of 1980 had apparent difficulty in welcoming Jewish styles and persons, as well as other minorities into intimate circles of influence and power. He cited the seemingly shabby way that Abraham Goldstein had been treated by the press and by his fellow administrators during the events that had led to his resignation a year before. Wolf then lashed out (for the bulk of his sermon) at his primary unhappiness with the Yale community: a Jewish faculty that he felt had little demonstrable interest in Jewish life. What, he wondered, was the value of becoming accepted by the majority culture in a national institution if one gave up one’s cultural or religious identity in the process.

The issues that Wolf raised were complex. Yale in that era could be a very lonely place for anyone whose upbringing, values or patterns of behavior did not place them in the mainstream. Graciela Trilla (B.A. 1979) would later recall her isolation as a Latino student who felt the campus severely lacking in “support, advice, attention, empowerment, leadership, mentoring, role modeling, counseling, and sense of community at Yale for minorities.”\textsuperscript{11} Even in an era when discrimination against
minorities would have been unthinkable, the alienation of being a minority at Yale was very real for those whose personal insecurities might have inhibited their involvement with the majority culture or for those whose value systems might have conflicted with certain aspects of the majority culture. Of course, the strain of minorities finding security within the majority culture were not unique to Yale or to universities.

The *Yale Daily News* coverage following Wolf’s sermon provided a powerful example of the ability of a newspaper to skew the news. A sermon that focused on challenging Jews to return to their roots was publicized as being all about Yale as a hostile place toward Jewish identity. Controversy quickly spread to the pages of the local and national press. For his own part, Wolf was slow to correct some of the erroneous impressions that had first been published. Some Jewish faculty were deeply offended by what they read of the sermon in the newspapers. Some of the publicly identified Jewish faculty, however, were quite supportive of Wolf’s contentions regarding their fellow teachers.\textsuperscript{12} The provocative sermon and the publicity that followed were far from the “good form” valued in the Yale ethos. Yet the frustration that Wolf voiced reflected a wound that could no longer be left to fester. Despite the evoked pain, the past could not be rewritten. Issues of ethnicity and racial identity and Yale’s mixed legacy would have to be confronted. For Yale to grow it would have to make peace with its past and go out of its way to build a demonstrably more inclusive future for outsiders of all sorts.
HEALING THE WOUNDS

Yale administrators were determined to demonstrate the next year that it was proud of its diverse community and that they would not tolerate challenges to that ideal. For Giamatti, Wolf’s charges against the University were initially rejected, but clearly heard, and clearly taken as charges against him personally. He would do all he could to demonstrate that Yale was no longer a place where conformity was required or suppression of personal identity was the ticket to success. Well beyond Wolf’s sermon, undoubtedly, the increased sensitivity that emanated from the Yale administration was reflective of the diversity of backgrounds of its most influential members, who included Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, and descendants of English, German, Irish, Italian, and Russian immigrants. In an act of healing, President Giamatti chose Rabbi Laurie Rutenberg in May 1981 to serve as the new assistant university chaplain. Later the same year, reminding the Yale community of the university’s commitment to equal opportunity in education and employment and the creation of a racially integrated community, another significant step was taken. Five “human relations counselors,” of varied races, religions, and sexes, were appointed to offer counseling and to investigate charges of racial or sexual harassment or unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, or handicap. These counselors did not have the power to change prejudices of the mind, but the formal grievance programs that they administered were engaged to redress actions of prejudice. Further, the forceful standards and discussion concerning discrimination may have urged thinking members of the Yale community to reconsider their own residual biases. Certainly, this openness
encouraged many new expressions of personal identity. Though the guidelines did not then specifically include sexual orientation, they had a similar impact on homosexual students. Writer David Leavitt (B.A. 1983) would later recall that at Yale in this era, "being gay was not only socially acceptable, it was trendy."15

Some also attributed the accelerated enhancement of a Judaic Studies program at Yale that year to the fallout from Goldstein’s resignation and Wolf’s sermon. Giamatti declared then that a Judaic Studies program was a demonstration that Yale was committed to being “what it says and much of America thinks it is as a university.”16 So Giamatti further salved a wound. He also committed Yale towards supporting fund-raising by the Jewish community so that it could have a spiritual space of its own—as Protestants and Catholics had long enjoyed as a result of their own efforts. By the time the first edition of this author's book Joining The Club: A History of Jews and Yale was endorsed by Giamatti and published by the University’s own academic press in early 1986, Giamatti was confident that doors were fully open at Yale for Jews, as Jews, and that the process of discussing nonmeritocratic exclusion was irrevocably opening doors for people of all backgrounds at Yale with the talent and drive to succeed. He took pride in his stance and was proud for Yale. Such confidence was justified.17

Within the Jewish community, members began to address their own establishment of boundaries. Rabbi Bernard Och served a six-month term as acting Hillel Foundation Director and quickly confronted the Jewish religious denominations with their own self-imposed isolation. For centuries worldwide, Friday night dinners had been the quintessential Jewish meal of the week in Jewish families. Of those Yale
Jewish undergraduates who observed some communal form of the Sabbath, Orthodox students ate their Friday night meals in the basement Kosher Kitchen on Crown Street, Conservative students ate in their own residential colleges, and Reform students (the “Chavurah”) migrated as a group from one residential college fellows’ lounge to another—all eating in different spaces at different times. Och wondered what kind of a community could Yale’s Sabbath-marking Jews create if they could not bring themselves to dine at the same table once a week. To the credit of student leaders such as Scott Cantor (B.A. 1981), Jordan Lurie (B.A. 1984), Deena Cohen (B.A. 1984) and others, they recognized Och’s wisdom at once and put denominational differences aside in order to share a weekly meal. In the broader Jewish world outside, where tensions between different Jewish denominations sometimes ran high, the communal experience at Yale was a refreshing contrast. This simple move was a key factor in leading many of these Jewish students to feel part of a common entity.18

Healing steps also took place in the process of trying to find a permanent replacement for Rabbi Wolf. Again with Rabbi Och’s encouragement, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform students joined together in serving on the search committee led by law professor Robert Cover. The Orthodox involvement was particularly meaningful in light of Orthodox students previously having little connection with Yale Hillel. The committee’s choice of Rabbi James Ponet (B.A. 1968) came easily. Possessed of an almost electric energy and charisma, in the committee’s eyes Ponet seemed certain to generate positive responses from students.19 His being a Yale graduate was similarly important. Wolf had felt the outsider; the committee’s hope was that Ponet would more
easily feel at home. More importantly, the hope was that his being of Yale would facilitate the commitment to Yale that would be needed to create a secure presence for a Jewish organization. His own life story allowed him to connect with students and faculty of all degrees of religious persuasion. Born in a Reform Jewish family as James Podnetsky, he changed his name so that he would arrive at Yale College in 1964 as Jim Ponet. At Yale he had first distanced himself from Judaism, later recalling that “if there were other Jewish students in Timothy Dwight College, I had nothing to do with them. The fact that they were Jewish made them too familiar to deal with.” Nonetheless, he found religion while in college and was graduated from Yale to attend rabbinical school. With his wife and partner Elana Ponet, he became the glue in helping Yale Jews become a community rather than just a collection of individuals. Often sacrificing their private space and time, the two Ponets opened their Hillel-owned townhouse at 35 High Street to students, to alumni, to faculty, to townspeople week after week, year after year. Ponet’s devotion to his students, faculty, and alumni and his determined commitment to the Yale campus despite years of discouragement in fund-raising and bureaucratic battles would pay off in the later development of a Yale home for Jewish life. The creation of a community out of his home laid the foundation for a formal building as merely a concrete extension of what already was beginning to exist in spirit.20
BUILDING A CENTER

Recalling their own sense of isolation as undergraduates some older Jewish alumni from the 1920s and 1930s feared that building a Jewish center on campus would lead to self-segregation. Rabbi Ponet would successfully counter this charge and earn financial support from Jewish alumni by repeatedly and successfully demonstrating that segregation of Jews would not be an issue, because Jewish students already took full part in Yale life. From year to year, for example, one might find a Jewish student with a skullcap walking out of Scroll and Key, another without skullcap as coxswain of the crew, a Jewish student as publisher or editor of the Yale Daily News, and yet another coordinating the Big Brother/Big Sister volunteer program in the New Haven community. The building of a center, Ponet argued, would allow the students the same dignity and fulfillment on the spiritual side of their lives as in other aspects of their lives. Reinforcing their religiosity would reinforce their commitment to serving the world at large. A novel and major function of the building would also be to share Jewish life with the rest of the University.21

Jewish faculty, too, Ponet could argue had begun to emerge and he enlisted their support. It had once been the case at Yale and other elite universities that “someone who had wanted to be considered an intellectual would have been reluctant to express any personal interest in religion.”22 Ponet found increasing numbers of individual faculty who would involve themselves with Jewish life alongside their scholarly interests.
Ponet wisely complemented his own strengths with those of Donald J. Cohen (M.D. 1966), Director of the Yale Child Study Center and Professor of Psychiatry. As Chair of the Friends of Yale Hillel at the beginning of the 1990s, Cohen brought unstoppable optimism and organization to the effort to build a Jewish building on campus. His willingness to identify publicly as a Jew emboldened other Jewish faculty to feel more comfortable in expressing their own identification. His psychological understanding would also prove beneficial. Having learned the psychotherapist’s art of containing the anxiety of interpersonal processes within himself and thereby preventing the inevitable challenges of life from dooming success, Cohen was able to marshal his faculty and fund-raising leadership group to dwell on their goal. While he absorbed recurrent doubts that would crop up, his Hillel Board would remain focused on success, and not just be “a complaint that we don’t have a building.” Cohen also brought a useful psychological awareness of human motivations that proved critical in overcoming the many bureaucratic obstacles that would crop up in gaining approval from the University for the new Hillel to occupy a space on the main campus.

“Everyone has dark motives within them, but in the end, everyone wants to do the right thing and be part of something good,” Cohen recognized. He relentlessly promoted the idea to Jew and non-Jew alike that permitting the Jewish community to raise the funds and build its own space at Yale was the right thing to do, was an inevitable aspect of modern American life and, most importantly, would be good for the University. Cohen’s successful navigation through Yale bureaucracy was aided by the warm
support of Yale President Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., Yale Vice President Michael Finnerty, and Presidential Advisor Henry Broude.\textsuperscript{23}

By 1990 any notion that Jews were not active and fully-accepted players in University life would not only have been absurd, but also decades-old ancient history. Major donors to the general funds of the University by then included Jews such as Frederick Rose (B.E. 1944), the Cullman family, and Richard Rosenfeld (B.A. 1963). Rose himself had been excluded as a Jew from the fraternities and senior societies as an undergraduate, but had loved Yale enough that he would later serve as founding chairman of its alumni association and include among many other gifts, a donation to the University of the former DKE fraternity building that would serve as home of the Alumni House.\textsuperscript{24} On the campus Sidney Altman in 1989 had completed a term as Dean of Yale College and won a Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his work describing catalytic properties of ribonucleic acid. As an active member of the Hillel Board, and in 1994 its Chair, Altman was a visible symbol of someone who was engaged in Jewish life, was a full, active, and forceful contributor to Yale University life, and was a valued contributor to the world. In this environment, it was only natural that Yale would recognize such commitment to the University and facilitate the Jewish community’s attempts to construct its own home on campus.

The absence of such a facility at Yale was a growing anomaly of which Jewish students and alumni had become acutely aware. Harvard, Princeton, and many other leading universities had centers of one sort or another for Jewish life by this time. The hope of assuring survival of Jewish life in America was another critical motivation. For
example, Eugene Rostow advocated such a building in 1991 when he noted that “more and more American Jews are drifting away from their moorings and ceasing to be Jews, either in the religious or moral sense.” Rostow and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (B.A. 1964, LL.B. 1967) served as National Honorary Co-Chairs for the effort. Annual panels at alumni reunion weekends from 1991 through 1995 allowed Jewish alumni to reflect on the limits and genuine accomplishments of the past and form a consensus to erect a building on behalf of the Jewish community. Following his participation in the first such panel in 1991, Alan Slifka (B.A. 1951) became engaged in the process that would lead to dedicating the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life as a memorial to his father in the middle of Wall Street on the Yale Campus. Other donors were won over by the determination of development officer Robin Golden (B.A. 1979) or became loyal to the effort through Ponet’s critical persistence in staying with the quest, year after year, and living his devotion to the community.

Groundbreaking for the Slifka Center occurred on May 30, 1993 and its doors opened the following year. Harold Roth (M.Arch. 1967), who had been drafting plans for such a space since at least 1963, designed the building. The award-winning facility intentionally was open and welcoming to attract all through its doors, understated so as not to risk charges of ostentatiousness or profligate spending, and had limited overt religious symbolism that would make it overly sectarian. But there were Hebrew letters on the entrance column, Jewish texts and religious items on display throughout, and a kosher kitchen at its core. On the Sabbath and other times its public spaces became chapels.
Its earliest years succeeded beyond its founders’ dreams. Ponet’s promise that the building would support both Jewish identification and sharing Judaism with the larger Yale community was kept. Hundreds of students, Jewish and a good number non-Jewish, would flock to the Friday night Sabbath dinners to take part in the festive atmosphere. The lunchtime food was so satisfying and available in such quantity that the men’s lightweight crew took their regular lunchtime meals there for a time! Meeting space nurtured Jewish interest of students and faculty and New Haven Jewry, and general voluntary efforts of Yale groups of all sorts.

At the century’s end, the Hillel Foundation at Yale formally took on the name of the building that sheltered it. Guided by the cooperative work of Ponet, Orthodox Rabbi Michael Whitman, the newly-honored Sterling Professor of Child Psychiatry Donald Cohen, Eric I. Beller (J.D. 1978), Dr. Bernard Lytton, and others, the kosher kitchen housed within the building legally became a corporate part of the Slifka Center as well. Simultaneously, and in recognition of all that Yale itself had achieved, Judge Howard M. Holtzmann (B.A. 1942, J.D. 1947) provided an endowment to the university to support the Jewish chaplaincy.

CHAI SOCIETY

Perhaps a sign of the Jewish community's successful full integration into campus life was the inevitable fact of intra-communal tensions developing. A sign of the Slifka Center's limitations was reflected in the creation of a separate Jewish organization that initially offered itself in some ways as a rival: the Chai Society. In 1997 graduate student
Oliver Ben Karp and Lubavitch Rabbi Shmully Hecht founded "Chai" in order to create a less institutional and more salon-like atmosphere that would primarily attract elite Jewish and a small number of elite non-Jewish undergraduate and graduate students on campus. Taking the tack that the Slifka Center was primarily serving Jewish students who were already comfortable identifying themselves publicly as Jews, Karp and Hecht drew on the Yale studentry's natural passion for elitism and club-joining and created, by definition, an elite private club on campus for spirited "conversation" concerning the issues of the day. Thanks in large part to the boundless energy and the determination of the two young men to prove that they could successfully reach out to non-affiliated Jewish students on campus, and thanks in no small part to Hecht's charm, within four years Chai boasted a large membership and was supporting several start-up businesses that they hoped would boost the New Haven economy. In bold celebration, surely like nothing ever in American university history, in Spring 2001 the Chai Society held a formal founding dinner in the grand ballroom of the Yale Club of New York, hosting hundreds of Jewish Yalies, some non-Jewish Yalies, dozens of chasidic rabbis looking to tap into to the Yale "old-boys" network, and the spirited entertainment of the Yale Precision Marching Band. Donations from New York jewelry executive Benny Shabtai and from Yale alumni allowed the society to purchase a house on Crown Street. Support from Darrell Ross (B.A. 1969), who became Chairman of Chai's Board of Governors in 2001, allowed the group to contemplate further real estate purchases in New England and expand their effort to other American campuses.
Supporters of the society praised the group’s many thoughtful discussions, its engaging Rabbi and its clear capacity for bringing in Jewish students who otherwise were reluctant to participate in Jewish campus life. The well-attended Friday night Sabbath dinners—indeed all functions of the Society—were strictly kosher and fully consistent with the most traditional Jewish rituals. A number of students found Hecht’s inspiration and the Chai Society to be their critical connection to bring them into a life of traditional Judaism. Detractors raised concern whether alcohol was too much at the core of the society or whether the Chai society’s network-building efforts would reinforce anti-Jewish canards of conspiracy. The group's rapid growth and vibrant membership testified to its success; its membership's active engagement in the political campaigns on behalf of two non-Jewish members and its other business activities raised questions about the latter. Only time would tell.\textsuperscript{29}

**THE APPOINTMENT OF LEVIN**

The appointment of economist and Dean of the Graduate School Richard C. Levin (Ph.D. 1974) as Yale President in 1993 was almost anticlimactic from a Jewish perspective. It is too soon to be able to make more than the most cursory and likely myopic historical judgments about the Levin era, the first eight years of which were a time of prosperity for Yale and unprecedented wealth for America. By the time of his appointment, Jews had already served as presidents at several other Ivy League universities, including Dartmouth, Princeton, Columbia, and the University of Pennsylvania and there was little sense of dramatic change occurring.\textsuperscript{30} Levin noted
that his being Jewish showed Yale to be the meritocracy it should be. In office he would affirm his Jewish background in a modest, sincere, and authentic way. A Jew’s occupying the Yale presidency in 1993 may also have been less momentous than it might once have been because the job of being a university president, and for that matter the Yale president, no longer carried the same stature or national moral force that it once had. Whereas A. Whitney Griswold and Kingman Brewster, Jr. had graced the cover of *Time* magazine in their day, and A. Bartlett Giamatti’s profile could be found in the *New York Times Magazine*, those days were over. Already by the 1980s, university presidencies nationwide were losing some of their prestige as leaders became more like cogs, albeit chief cogs, in institutions that were acting more like corporations and less like cohesive communities.\(^{31}\) No university president commanded a bully pulpit any longer, and if Levin or any contemporary had tried to claim such a podium, it is unclear how many people would really have listened. Indeed, despite the Yale prosperity that Levin had the fortune of managing in the wealthy America of the late 1990s, he would be criticized by one young historian for a tendency to appear more as a technocrat or “chief financial officer” than as a leader in the world of ideas and inspiration.\(^{32}\)

But perhaps this was more a matter of appearances than reality. A Stanford graduate, Levin brought a California-tempered openness and geniality to set a new example for leadership style at Yale. His rhetoric may not have reached the heights of historian Griswold, lawyer Brewster, or literary master Giamatti, but Levin’s actions seemed to set their own meaningful mark of distinction. Inspired by the ethos of social
justice taught in his Reform Jewish upbringing, Levin firmly steered the university to take increasing and meaningful interest in improving the economic and social conditions of New Haven—whose economic survival became increasingly dependent upon the university as the large industries of the town collapsed.\textsuperscript{33}

On the legal front, in 1997 the Levin administration had to confront a Jewish issue that reached the pages of the national press. A handful of ultra-Orthodox Jewish undergraduates (the “Yale Five”) charged the university with unlawfully requiring them to live on campus during their freshman and sophomore years. Their position put them at odds with many. Yale College officials were frustrated, since they were trying to adapt their policies to accommodate the stated religious needs within the confines of dormitory life. Other observant Orthodox students at Yale felt that these students were implying that their own Jewish practices were not authentic. Even Rabbi Michael Whitman, a peaceable Orthodox rabbi skilled at building bridges between different groups of people—and hired by the Hillel Foundation to support the traditional Jewish community at Yale—was left unable to serve in his hoped for role as mediator due to the four students unwillingness to negotiate with him. The college based its arguments on its view of residential life as a key to the identity of a Yale College education, and keeping freshman and sophomores on campus allowed Yale to play some role \textit{in loco parentis}. Yale undermined its own arguments in this respect, however, by repeated misjudgments of student enrollment in the 1970s through 1990s. Frequently, students who wished to live in the residential colleges found themselves forced to live off-
campus or in ad hoc spaces. Meanwhile, the university demanded that these four students conform to the rules.

Ostensibly, the sexual behavior and dress code in the dormitories posed a threat to these students and draws attention to several meritorious questions: Does the ideal Yale College education require students to have common dormitory experiences? Does a College that demands a common residential experience have an equal obligation to make sure that in fact it has enough rooms available to assure that experience for all who do want it? Did the sexual activity in the dormitories of the late twentieth century create an environment that vigorously challenged those who were uncomfortable with the behavior? The answers to such questions are not simple. Defining and then wrestling with sexual mores is a challenge faced by virtually every human and culture on Earth. The questions raised by these students are not uniquely Jewish questions and might well have resonated with students of all sorts throughout the college, thereby serving as a focal point for intelligent discussion between an institution and its constituents. The students failed to realize that the essence of a successful relationship, whether it is between individuals or between individuals and an institution, is the art of resolving inevitable differences and the determination to do so. Many disinterested parties on campus were disappointed that the students had chosen to abandon Yale's tradition of discourse and internal resolution of disputes and to seek court resolution instead. With no persistent effort that might lead to mutual growth and respect, the students broke off their discussion with Yale and transferred the matter into Federal
Court, where their case was dismissed in Yale's favor. The United States Supreme Court declined to review the matter.\textsuperscript{34} 

As Yale celebrated its Tercentennial—commemorating its founding in 1701—Levin committed the University to "globalization," consciously expanding its reach to recruit (and offer financial aid) to the best and brightest students from around the world. In a world where terrorists committed to the destruction of civilization intruded upon peace in the U.S., Levin committed the University to offering its enlightening motto of "Lux et Veritas" and the democratic values it had always upheld (even if once and still at times imperfectly practiced) to the world.

**AFTERWORD**

It was in a book published by Yale's own university press, written by Mario T. Garcia, entitled *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity* that I learned much about George Sánchez.\textsuperscript{35} Sánchez spent most of his adult life in the University world, first at the University of New Mexico, then at the University of Texas. He fought against discrimination against Hispanic schoolchildren and was a hero of American education, fighting for equal opportunities for Mexican-Americans. I had promised to focus on heroes devoted to equal opportunity and Sánchez was one of them. The battles that he fought with determination occurred in parallel all around this country. I think that our institutions and our country are all the better for them. I have no doubt that he would be proud of all of us who talk about such difficult issues, even if we can't always solve them. For the university ideal is all about asking hard questions and all about shining
light on spaces where Truth struggles to emerge from ambiguity. When those hard
questions can be asked and are addressed, then the dark moments of times gone by can
be seen as a difficult chapter in the past, but only as a chapter in a story filled with
progress and promise. To the extent that history is a tale of human relationships,
fulfillment of that promise lies in the hands of each one of us.

1 Portions of this essay were delivered on October 24, 2000 as the ninth George I. Sánchez Lecture at the
University of Houston Law Center Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance.

2 Many of the sources uncited within this essay can be found in Dan A. Oren, Joining The Club: A History of

3 All academic degrees identified refer to Yale University.


5 Eugene V. Rostow to Charles Seymour, May 9, 1945, Folder 807, Box 94, Charles Seymour Presidential
Papers, Yale University.

6 Some of the pertinent Yale Daily News articles regarding the resignation of Provost Goldstein are Andy
Abraham Goldstein, “Resignation Letter,” Yale Daily News (May 2, 1979); Yale Law Faculty, “Letter to the
Georges May to author, Oct. 6, 1980; Chauncey, Interview; A. Bartlett Giamatti, Interview, Feb. 16, 1983;
Abraham S. Goldstein, Interview, Dec. 1, 1982; Horace Taft to author, [Dec., 1980]; Wilkinson, Interview,
Sep. 16, 1982. Gaddis Smith provided the perspective on Giamatti’s persona in his Fall 1998 DeVane
Series lectures on the twentieth century history of Yale.

7 Then a first-year medical student, the author presented details of his research in progress at a Hillel-
sponsored lecture on Jan. 25, 1980 and shared some of the 1920s correspondence with Rabbi Wolf. Dan A.
Arnold Jacob Wolf to the New Haven Jewish Federation (Feb. 15, 1980), both in the files of the author.


24 Given DKE’s history and Rose’s Jewish background, he took a special pleasure in purchasing the DKE building for the benefit of all of Yale. Letter from Frederick P. Rose to author, Mar. 6, 1986; Frederick P. Rose, Interview, May 14, 1986.


27 The presence of Yale President Howard Lamar and Yale President-Designate Richard Levin at the groundbreaking was heartwarming and surrealistic for Jews in attendance who were looking for a sign of having a full part in the Yale world. Levin’s leading the Hebrew “Sheheheyanu” prayer at the ceremony and later singing a Hebrew song “Hiney Ma Tov” (how good and pleasant it is) at the dedication meal after the ceremony had a similarly symbolic meaning. See Bruce Fellman, “A Home of One’s Own,” *Yale Alumni Magazine* 59 (Nov. 1995): 32-39.


32 Indeed, despite the Yale prosperity that Levin had the fortune of managing in the wealthy America of the late 1990s, he would be criticized by one young historian for a tendency to appear more as a “chief financial officer” than as a leader in the world of ideas. Garry Reeder, “A Challenge to President Richard Levin,” *Yale Daily News* (Nov. 9, 1998), p. 8.

33 Levin correctly noted that Kingman Brewster, Jr. had similar interests in social justice that derived from Brewster’s own very different personal background. Richard C. Levin, Interview, July 25, 2000.
