

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

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Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

2007

Volume 10



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Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, *Index to Jewish Periodicals*, *Journal of American History*, and *Journal of Southern History*.

Southern Jewish History acknowledges with deep appreciation grants from the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation of New York and the Gale Foundation of Beaumont, Texas.

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ISSN 1521-4206

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A Shtetl in the Sun: Orthodoxy in Southern Florida

by

Edward S. Shapiro

Although South Florida's Jewish population is the third largest in the Western Hemisphere, exceeded only by that of New York and southern California, it has been largely ignored by historians of American Jewry.¹ This is particularly true for the area's Orthodox Jews who have been doubly orphaned by historians, first because they live in South Florida and second because they are Orthodox. Less than ten percent of the Jews of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties are Orthodox, but those who are exert disproportionate influence. Orthodox institutions as well as businesses catering to the Orthodox have been established throughout the tri-county area during the past several decades, and few major centers of population lack an Orthodox presence. Particularly during the winter, dozens of lectures, classes, and fundraising events are directed at the Orthodox population. In December, menorahs erected by the Orthodox are on display throughout South Florida, and Lubavitch Hasidim even light a menorah at half-time when the Miami Dolphins football team is playing at home during Hanukkah. Despite their minority status, the Orthodox are among the most dynamic elements within the religious life of South Florida Jewry.²

Approximately fifty thousand Orthodox Jews live full-time in South Florida. In addition, tens of thousands are present part of the winter as snowbirds or tourists. These include over one thousand *haredim*. The *haredi* men, with their black coats, and the *haredi* women, with their long dresses and wigs, add a colorful element

to 41st Street in Miami Beach, where they frequent the kosher restaurants, kosher food stores, and a shop selling wigs. (Another wig store for Orthodox women is in North Miami Beach.) The *haredi* have included Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky, and the spiritual leaders of the Satmar, Bobover, and other Hasidic groups, among the most prominent figures in American right-wing Orthodoxy. Indeed, South Florida has become, next to Jerusalem, the major tourist destination of America's Orthodox. Even Orthodox Jews from Europe, including Moshe Rosen, the late chief rabbi of Romania, have wintered in South Florida.

A high birthrate has increased the area's Orthodox population. This birthrate is one element of demographic vitality within the tri-county area where there are many retirees, and the average age of Jews is far higher than in the rest of the country. Since the 1960s South Florida also has been one of the major American destinations for Jewish immigrants, and today it has the most polyglot Jewish population in the nation. In no other region has immigration played such an important role in the growth of the Jewish population. Beginning in the 1960s, South Florida became a popular destination for immigrants from Latin America, Israel, other Middle Eastern countries, and the former Soviet Union. These immigrants often had little prior experience with other variants of Judaism besides Orthodoxy, and many tended to equate Judaism with Orthodoxy, although generally they were not religiously observant themselves. They were the targets of Orthodox outreach efforts, particularly those of Lubavitch. Consequently, some of the immigrants identified with Orthodoxy only after settling in South Florida.

Orthodox immigrants, along with other newcomers to South Florida, have been attracted by the region's pleasant climate and an economic boom, which has transformed Miami into one of America's major ports as well as an important banking and legal center. South Florida especially appealed to Jews in the Northeast. This was particularly true for veterans of World War II, beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill of Rights, and the children and grandchildren of the immigrant generation. Many of these were professionals who

found employment in law and accounting firms or opened medical and dental practices. These migrations, both foreign and domestic, increased the area's total Jewish population from 9,000 in 1940 to 250,000 by 1975 and to over 600,000 by 2006. Among these newcomers were Orthodox Jews who were attracted to South Florida for the same reasons that enticed others. By the 1980s, however, the Orthodox population of South Florida had itself become a magnet, attracting additional Orthodox Jews who wanted to live where there was a sizable Orthodox presence with viable Orthodox institutions.³

Demographic and Economic Mobility

The Jewish population of South Florida also dispersed. In the 1940s it was concentrated in a few neighborhoods in Miami and Miami Beach in Miami-Dade County. Economic development and the building of numerous retirement communities in Broward and Palm Beach counties pulled the geographic heartland of South Florida Jewry northward. By 2006 there were more than twice as many Jews in Broward County (234,000) and Palm Beach County (256,000) than in Miami-Dade County (113,000). By the 1990s Palm Beach County had by far the highest percentage of Jews of any American county.⁴

Although the center of Orthodoxy in South Florida has remained Miami-Dade County, particularly Miami Beach, settlements have sprung up throughout the area. Many new synagogues were established in the more northerly Broward and Palm Beach counties, and the American Orthodox congregation with the fastest growing membership during the 1990s was the Boca Raton Synagogue in Palm Beach County. Orthodox Jews also moved south of Miami. Prior to the 1960s the region encompassing Kendall-Coral Gables-Homestead largely consisted of citrus, dairy, and horse farms. By 2007 it was densely populated and had five Orthodox synagogues.⁵

American Orthodoxy, both in South Florida and elsewhere, was transformed in the later half of the twentieth century. Although prior to World War II there were Jews in America, primarily immigrants, who were Orthodox both in ideology and

*Beth Jacob, 301 and 311 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach.
The first Jewish congregation founded (1927) on Miami Beach
was Orthodox. It disbanded in 2005. Beth Jacob's first synagogue (left)
was built in 1929. In 1936 Beth Jacob built a larger synagogue (right).
Both historic buildings now house the Jewish Museum of Florida.
(Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida.)*

practice, they were conscious of being a beleaguered minority and were pessimistic that their children and grandchildren would remain Orthodox. These true believers were outnumbered by those for whom Orthodoxy simply involved institutional affiliation. The latter belonged to Orthodox synagogues, although their lifestyle and religious observance did not conform to traditional Orthodox practice. As the immigrant generation most familiar with eastern European Orthodoxy passed on, the ranks of the so-called "fellow traveling" Orthodox diminished. They were replaced by "card carrying" true believers, who had been educated in Orthodox schools and identified with Orthodoxy on the levels of both practice and ideology. Fellow-traveling Orthodox Jews remained,

particularly among the elderly, but they were a diminishing minority.

American Orthodoxy also was transformed by the arrival after World War II of tens of thousands of European Orthodox Jews. They came not as immigrants to the United States but as refugees from persecution, and they sought not to acculturate into American society but to re-create the Orthodox world they had known. As they prospered in the United States, they established European-type yeshivot, *kollelim*, and other Orthodox institutions all the while, disdaining the compromises with modernity made by the Orthodoxy that they encountered in America.⁶ They and their descendants, some of whom settled in South Florida, were partially responsible for the much-discussed movement of Orthodoxy to the right during the latter half of the twentieth century. This move was manifested in the hardening of attitudes toward non-Orthodox religious movements, an emphasis on the study of Talmud as the be-all of Jewish learning, the raising of kashrut standards, a pervasive religious one-upmanship, and an incessant divisiveness over what constitutes authentic traditional Judaism. This divisiveness is exhibited in the *Kosher Map and Guide*, which is distributed for free at Jewish gift stores, kosher restaurants, and other places where Orthodox Jews congregate in South Florida. The 2004–2005 edition featured the names of the rabbinic organizations certifying the kashrut of the restaurants listed, as well as a disclaimer from the map's publisher, a rabbi, that the map "cannot assume responsibility for the kashrus of any establishment or product or accuracy of any information contained therein."

Sociological and Historical Paradigms

For much of the twentieth century, the dominant paradigm of sociologists and historians regarding American Orthodoxy was that Orthodoxy was an anachronism destined to disappear with the passing of the immigrant generation and the maturation and acculturation of their children and grandchildren. "As a result of the pressures, the training, and the rewards offered by American society at large," the sociologist Herbert Gans wrote in 1956, "traditional Judaism has ceased to be a living culture for the

second-generation Jew. Parts of it, however, have remained active in the form of habits or emotions; they are now providing the impetus for a new 'symbolic Judaism' still in the process of development."⁷ Scholars predicted that, because of the openness of American society and Orthodoxy's own retrograde character, Orthodoxy would shrink to a small group of religious sectarians located on the lower rungs of the American social and economic ladder. For the rest of American Jews, it would have only "symbolic" value.

This pessimistic view of Orthodoxy was a theme of two of the most important books on American Judaism written by sociologists in the 1950s: Nathan Glazer's *American Judaism* and Marshall Sklare's *Conservative Judaism*. Glazer described Orthodoxy as incompatible with middle-class respectability. Orthodoxy's future lay with those whom he described as a "particularly backward and archaic group of Jews." Sklare said in a much-quoted statement that "Orthodox adherents have succeeded in achieving the goal of institutional perpetuation to only a limited extent; the history of their movement in this country can be written in terms of a case study of institutional decay." For American Jews, Sklare concluded, "Orthodoxy bears the stigma of the 'ghetto.' They feel that Orthodox procedures are out of keeping with the type of behavior expected of the middle class, that Orthodoxy will not raise their status among fellow-Jews of higher social position, and also that Orthodoxy will not help to improve Jewish-Gentile relations." The future of traditional Judaism in America, Sklare concluded, lay not with Orthodoxy but with the more dignified and higher-status Conservative Judaism.⁸

Historians also assumed that Orthodoxy's future was bleak. This is exhibited in the most famous historical analysis of South Florida Jewry, Deborah Dash Moore's 1994 volume, *To the Golden Cities*. This book, as noted on its jacket, purported to tell the story of the creation and growth of fresh and dynamic Jewish communities in the golden cities of Miami and Los Angeles. Here, Moore argued, Jews had supposedly reinvented themselves and created "a new consensus on the boundaries of Jewish life and what it means to be Jewish. . . . Today these sun-soaked, entrepreneurial

communities have become part of a truly American, self-confident style of Judaism." This consensus, however, had no place for Jews less interested in "Pursuing the American Jewish Dream," the subtitle of Moore's book, than in perpetuating traditional Jewish values, practices, and institutions. According to Moore, Jews joined synagogues in the golden cities "not due to the weight of tradition or any collective compulsion," but rather because "each one saw personal meaning in the act." Although *To the Golden Cities* discusses at length politics, Zionism, efforts to combat antisemitism, and Jewish summer camps, it virtually ignores Orthodoxy and Orthodox Jews, even though by the 1990s there were flourishing Orthodox communities in both cities.⁹

The book's chapter on Jewish religious life, "Seeking Religious Roots," discusses three Miami synagogues: Temple Emanuel, a Conservative congregation, also known as the Miami Beach Jewish Center, on Washington Avenue at 17th Street; Temple Beth Sholom, a Reform congregation off 41st Street in Miami Beach; and Temple Israel of Greater Miami, a Reform congregation in Miami proper. All three had enterprising rabbis and innovative programs directed at filling the spiritual and social needs of "The New American Jew," the title of the book's last chapter. The congregations cultivated "the search for personal meaning to be found through experience and an emphasis on an individual's voluntary affirmation," traits which Moore believed characterized the spiritual longings of Miami's Jews. The three Miami rabbis discussed in *To the Golden Cities*, Irving Lehrman of Emanuel, Leon Kronish of Beth Sholom, and Joseph Narot of Temple Israel, "saw the promise of a frontier society—its openness, venturesomeness, and willingness to tolerate innovation." These rabbis "offered a personalized path to Jewish fulfillment to the engaged minority seeking religious roots."¹⁰

Certainly the popularity of Lehrman, Kronish, and Narot indicated that they had correctly gauged the thinking of their congregants. But the "engaged minority" of Jews in South Florida "seeking religious roots" had other options besides these three congregations. Rabbis Phineas A. Weberman and Abraham Korf had settled in Miami Beach three and a half decades before the

publication of *To the Golden Cities* and had been busy building Orthodox institutions since then. For much of this time Weberman, the chaplain of the Miami Beach Police Department, was the leading non-Hasidic Orthodox rabbi in Miami Beach, while Korf directed a growing Lubavitch presence in the area.

For Moore, Orthodoxy, which valued tradition, law, and community, was incongruous in settings where Jews esteemed experimentation, entrepreneurship, and individualism. While *To the Golden Cities* mentions the movement of Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth Sholom away from Orthodoxy, it does not discuss the pre-1994 growth of Orthodoxy including the establishment of literally dozens of Orthodox synagogues and prayer rooms in both cities. The book notes the founding of the Los Angeles branch of the Jewish Theological Seminary, but not the creation in Los Angeles and Miami of a network of Orthodox day schools. It relates the postwar migration of Jews from the Northeast to Miami and from the Middle West to Los Angeles, but not the immigration of traditional Jews from Israel and Latin America to Miami and from Iran to Los Angeles, or that Orthodox texts written in Spanish could be purchased in stores on 41st Street in Miami Beach and their counterparts written in Farsi were available in stores on Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles.

The historian Stephen J. Whitfield, a leading authority on Florida Jewry, also questioned whether Orthodoxy or, for that matter, any other form of Judaism, could flourish in the Sunshine State. Judaism, he said, could not thrive in a culture where “the quest for self-satisfaction” and the “glorification of joy” had been elevated into art forms. Whitfield termed the Judaism of Florida “post-Orthodox,” and noted that the first Orthodox synagogue in the state was not established until the twentieth century. Miami Beach’s first two Orthodox congregations were established in the 1920s, and the first synagogue building housing one of them did not open until the ill-starred year of 1929. Miami’s Jews, Whitfield wrote, attended religious services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but rarely at other times, and they expected their rabbis to be adept at socializing, but not to be scholars or to put many demands on their congregants. These Jews, Whitfield concluded,

*Kosher World supermarket, Miami Beach.
 One of many stores on 41st Street that caters to an
 Orthodox clientele. Nearby is the Sushi Hut Chinese Cuisine,
 Pita Hut Glatt Kosher restaurant,
 Torah Treasures Judaica Store, and Alisa's Wigs.
 (Courtesy of the Jewish Museum of Florida, Miami Beach.)*

“had uprooted themselves to live in south Florida well after the impact of Americanization had been registered, long after the acids of modernization had corroded the integral *Yiddishkeit* of their ancestors.”¹¹

But if the Judaism of Florida was “post-Orthodox,” how can one explain the fourteen Orthodox synagogues in Miami Beach, nine in North Miami Beach, six in Aventura, and three in Hollywood; sixty kosher restaurants in Miami Beach, North Miami, North Miami Beach, Aventura, Broward County, and Boca Raton; and five *mikvaot* in Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, Hollywood, and Kendall listed on the *Kosher Map and Guide*? Admittedly some of these synagogues were simply glorified prayer rooms, and some of these restaurants were holes in the wall. But it is not their

quality but their quantity that is significant. Indeed, the growth of Orthodox Judaism in South Florida has been so rapid that the map has had to be updated regularly, and within a year the statistics on the 2004–2005 map were out-of-date.

By 2006 there were not six Orthodox synagogues in Aventura but eight, and not five *mikvaot* in Miami-Dade County but nine, with another four *mikvaot* in Broward County.¹² Forty-five years earlier there were only two operational *mikvaot* in the entire state, one in Jacksonville and the other in Miami Beach.¹³ Orthodox schools and *eruvim* experienced the same growth.¹⁴ In 1960 there were only two Orthodox schools in Florida, both in Miami Beach. In 2006 there were six Orthodox elementary day schools and seven Orthodox high schools in Miami-Dade County, with another half dozen Orthodox schools in Broward and Palm Beach counties. This growth is perhaps best illustrated by the Bais Yaakov school in North Miami Beach. This right-wing school for girls opened in 1988 with five students. Today it has four hundred, all of whom come from Orthodox families.¹⁵ In 1960 there was no *eruv* in Florida. There are now at least four in Miami-Dade County as well as others in Broward and Palm Beach counties. In 1960 no store in the entire state sold *glatt kosher* meat, and only one sold non-*glatt kosher* meat. Today dozens of stores in South Florida provide *glatt kosher* meat. In 1960 there was no reliable kosher bakery in South Florida, nor was *cholov Israel* milk sold anywhere in Florida. Now there are at least seventeen bakeries in South Florida under reliable kashrut supervision and *cholov LC Israel* milk is readily available throughout the three counties.¹⁶

Pre- and Post-Orthodoxy

“Pre-Orthodox,” not “post-Orthodox,” better describes the Judaism discussed by Whitfield. This state was largely due to the newness of Miami and Miami Beach and of its Jewish communities. Miami had only 170,000 full-time residents in 1940, and Miami Beach, which was incorporated only in 1915, had 35,000. Of these 205,000, about 8,000 were Jews. After World War II, however, the area’s general and Jewish population boomed. By 1960 it

*Examining the eruv
in Miami Beach, 1984.
Rabbi Phineas Weberman,
right, with colleagues check
out the line marking the
eruv on the boardwalk.
(Courtesy of the Jewish
Museum of Florida,
Miami Beach.)*

had 140,000 Jews, and this was the sixth largest concentration of Jews in the nation, just behind Boston.¹⁷

This “pre-Orthodox” condition also explains the success of Lubavitch Hasidim in the region. In contrast to the major cities of the Northeast and Middle West, South Florida did not have an Orthodox community of synagogues, yeshivot, and other institutions dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Lubavitch movement was able to partially fill this religious vacuum, and, in the process, it has become more influential in Florida, particularly in South Florida, than elsewhere in the United States. Its impact has been particularly strong in Palm Beach County, where by 2007 there were ten Lubavitch synagogues. Six decades earlier the city of Palm Beach in

Palm Beach County was an exclusive watering hole for the Protestant ascendancy, and some of its hotels, most notably Henry Flagler's The Breakers, discouraged Jewish patronage. Since 1998 the Lubavitch have held a menorah-lighting ceremony in Palm Beach marking Hanukkah, the holiday symbolizing Jewish resistance to pagan values. This ceremony takes place a short distance from The Breakers and only a few blocks from Worth Avenue, the city's legendary and exclusive shopping mecca.¹⁸

Lubavitch's emphasis on outreach to the nonreligious was well-suited for its missionary work among Jews in what was essentially a religious *tabula rasa*. Since 1960 when Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the head of Lubavitch, sent Abraham Korf to South Florida, Lubavitch has become a pervasive presence. By 2007 it had over 117 schools, synagogues, *mikvaot*, and study centers in the state. These included five elementary day schools, two high schools for girls, two high schools for boys, one rabbinical college, one post-high school seminary for girls, and a *kollel* where for a couple of years young married men study the Talmud and Hasidic texts. Today there are Lubavitch synagogues in Coral Gables, Lauderhill, Jupiter, and Wellington where thirty years ago there were few Jews, much less Orthodox Jews. The Lubavitch, however, comprise only a small minority of the Orthodox of South Florida. More important are the modern Orthodox communities in places such as Hollywood, Miami Beach, and Boca Raton.¹⁹

The development of Orthodoxy in Boca Raton has been particularly noteworthy. In 2005 Rabbi Kenneth Brander of the Boca Raton Synagogue, a centrist Orthodox congregation, recounted the recent history of his community. "Twelve years ago there were no kosher butchers or bakeries up to Orthodox standards. Now there are a plethora of restaurants and their number keeps growing. Twelve years ago, we had a small day school that didn't go through all the elementary grades. Now there are 375 kids in the lower school, 150 teens in the high school, and a new elementary school being started. The growth has been unbelievable."²⁰

Sociological Correlations

The correlation that mid-century sociologists posited between Orthodoxy, on the one hand, and poverty and lower social status, on the other, lost its plausibility with the rapid ascent of the Orthodox in South Florida and elsewhere up the social and economic ladders. This upward Jewish mobility was not, of course, restricted to the Orthodox. Jews in general experienced rapid economic and social ascent. Historians and sociologists differ as to the reasons for this, but they agree that this mobility is one of the great success stories of American history. Orthodox mobility is particularly noteworthy because of the obstacles that an Orthodox lifestyle places before economic success, such as not working on the Sabbath and the cost of parochial education.

While poor Orthodox remain in South Florida, they are not present in great numbers. No longer are the Orthodox Jews of South Florida first-generation and working-class. They are, particularly of the "modern" or "centrist" variety, largely college-educated and professionals. As a result, Orthodox Jews are playing an increasing role in the economic, social, and political life of South Florida. One prominent example is the Rand Eye Institute, one of the most important facilities of its kind in South Florida. It was founded by a member of the Boca Raton Synagogue, and his name adorns the synagogue's main sanctuary. South Florida also has a number of wealthy Orthodox builders and entrepreneurs.

This socioeconomic transformation of South Florida Orthodoxy was reflected in the demise of Miami Beach's kosher hotel business, which catered to tourists from New York and other northern cities. Prior to the 1970s, dozens of hotels on the beach provided three kosher meals daily for their patrons. This business went into decline during the late twentieth century, and then disappeared entirely in the twenty-first with the closing of the last holdouts, the Crown and the Saxony. The newly affluent Orthodox did not want to stay in second-rate accommodations. Many were able to purchase expensive houses and condominiums, often selling for well over a half million dollars, on the ocean in Miami Beach or inland in Hollywood, Boca Raton, and other Orthodox enclaves. With this new market in mind, upscale apartment hous-

es installed Sabbath elevators to attract Orthodox residents. These elevators, which stop automatically on the Sabbath, enable Orthodox residents and their guests to use them without violating the prohibition of pushing electrical buttons. Sabbath elevators are now common in the high-rise apartment buildings of Miami Beach's "millionaires' row." The elevators have a symbiotic relationship to the Orthodox. Orthodox residents insist on Sabbath elevators, and, once in place, the elevators attract more Orthodox residents. When an apartment house has attracted a critical mass of Orthodox residents, the next step is to open a room for daily religious services. There are at least a dozen of such apartment-house synagogues along the ocean from Miami Beach to Hallandale, frequented almost exclusively by Orthodox worshippers.

Paralleling the decline of the kosher hotel business has been the emergence of successful kosher takeout establishments in Miami Beach, North Miami Beach, Aventura, Boca Raton, and elsewhere in the three-county area. The customers of these businesses are mainly Orthodox. The demise of the kosher hotels meant that Orthodox snowbirds were now responsible for their own meals. This provided a clientele for takeout kosher food, particularly for the Sabbath. And, as is true elsewhere, kosher takeout food became more popular in South Florida because of the increasing number of Orthodox women with full-time jobs. Takeout food helps Orthodox women balance their work and home responsibilities.

Another result of the collapse of the kosher hotel business and the large number of Orthodox women working outside the home has been an explosion in the number of kosher restaurants in the three-county area. Fifty years ago these restaurants could have been counted on the fingers of one hand. Today there are at least seventy such establishments, ranging from pizza and falafel joints to luxury restaurants serving meals costing well over seventy dollars each and offering an abundant selection of fine kosher wines and liquors. Some of these eateries provide takeout food as well as offering the sacred South Florida custom of early bird specials. While not all of the customers of the kosher

*Eilat Cafe, 6853 SW 18th St., Boca Raton.
Kosher restaurant with a picturesque setting.
(Courtesy of Jordan Polevoy and Evan Shapiro, Boca Raton, FL.)*

restaurants are Orthodox, it is their patronage that determines their success and failure.

One upscale kosher eatery is Prime Eighteen, one of four kosher restaurants in Aventura within a radius of 120 feet. Prime Eighteen seeks to appeal to a sophisticated, well-traveled, and affluent clientele, who presumably will appreciate its cosmopolitan menu as well as the fact that it is strictly *glatt kosher*. Its menu includes “grilled speragus” [*sic*], teriyaki steak skewers, spaghetti pomodora, sushimi sushi, hamachi scallion sushi roll, and roasted sea bass. A relative of mine who had recently flown to South Florida noted that his airplane ticket on JetBlue had cost less than one of the restaurant’s entrees.²¹ The menu of Grill Time in North Miami Beach is equally varied. It offers Thai beef salad, beer-battered onion bread, sweet and spicy chili chicken, salmon Provencal, grilled Chilean sea bass, Korean steak, Gaza strip steak, Hawaiian

tropical rib eye, Malaysian beef steak, Hungarian goulash, and roasted Asian lamb. Other kosher restaurants in South Florida specialize in Thai, Chinese, French, Italian, Yemenite, and Moroccan cuisine.²²

Such restaurants are indicative of an Orthodox population sufficiently prosperous to afford such food and urbane enough to appreciate it. American-born Orthodox are more attracted to the new kosher cuisines than their immigrant ancestors. These restaurants reflect the extent to which the Orthodox of South Florida have assimilated the mores of American society in which patronizing expensive restaurants has been an important part of urban, upper-class behavior for over a century. Eating out is also a religiously acceptable nighttime activity for Orthodox Jews, who do not belong to country clubs or frequent night clubs where non-kosher food is served and what they perceive as immodest behavior is condoned. Going to restaurants thus fills a social void.

The phenomenon of upscale kosher restaurants is, of course, not unique to South Florida. In September 1989, the *New York Times* discussed several such restaurants in an article titled "Kosher Cooking: Goodbye Derma, Hello Sushi." The article quoted Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald of New York City's Lincoln Square Synagogue. "The Orthodox consumer has become a lot more affluent. While they are giving more to charity, they have also acquired a taste and curiosity for the finer things in life." One restaurant mentioned by the *Times* was Levana in New York City. There customers could dine on venison, chicken rolled in pecans with black trumpet mushrooms, and mahi-mahi. Another was the Madras Palace, also in Manhattan. This kosher Indian restaurant served rava masal dosai (wheat crepes filled with potatoes, onions, and nuts) and gobhi masala curry (cauliflower curry). The *Times* also mentioned Giuseppe Goldberg's, a restaurant in Miami Beach's Sans Souci Hotel, which offered Italian dishes such as linguini puttanesca.²³ The February 1997 issue of *Hadassah Magazine* also discussed several upscale kosher restaurants in New York City offering a variety of cuisines besides high cholesterol chopped liver, derma, beef *flancken*, pastrami sandwiches, and brisket. One woman quoted by the magazine said, "For the first

time in my life I can feel like anyone else. I can eat kosher Persian, Indian, Middle Eastern, French, Japanese. Now if we only had a good kosher Mexican restaurant." She could have satisfied this craving in several restaurants in South Florida.²⁴ A decade later the same magazine noted, "Kosher French restaurants established by recent émigrés from France serve everything from cassoulet to feather-light crepes in the shopping centers that line South Florida's boulevards."²⁵

Synagogues and Universities

The Orthodox synagogues of South Florida are as diverse as its kosher restaurants. There is a synagogue for virtually every major ethnic group and for every version of contemporary Orthodoxy. These include four Sephardic synagogues in Aventura attended by immigrants from North Africa and their offspring, a Bukharan synagogue off 41st Street in Miami Beach, and a Russian Lubavitch synagogue in Sunny Isles. Large modern Orthodox congregations in Miami Beach and Boca Raton as well as small *haredi* congregations in Miami Beach and North Miami Beach include synagogues of several other Hasidic groups besides the Lubavitch.

Orthodoxy also now has a presence in higher education in South Florida. In the early twenty-first century, a group of Orthodox benefactors established the Collegiate Learning Experience (CLE), which funded the salary and living expenses of an Orthodox rabbi at the University of Miami. It was modeled on a program instituted by Jewish philanthropists for students at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The responsibilities of the Orthodox rabbi at the University of Miami include providing Sabbath hospitality, organizing religious services, and teaching religious classes. It was hoped these would make Orthodox students feel more at home in Coral Gables. (The Hillel Center at the University of Miami also provides activities for Orthodox students.) The CLE later established a similar program at the Biscayne Bay branch of Florida International University in North Miami Beach, where a significant number of Latin American Jewish students are enrolled. Representatives of Lubavitch also

Boca Raton Synagogue, 7900 Montoya Circle.

BRS, as it is known, is a modern Orthodox congregation with about 600 members.

Besides the sanctuary, the synagogue has a social hall, an education complex, and a mikvah.

(Courtesy of Jordan Polevoy and Evan Shapiro, Boca Raton, FL.)

engage in outreach directed at local college students, often in competition with the CLE.²⁶

Sixty miles north of the University of Miami, the Hillel Center at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, home to almost two thousand Jewish students, sponsors a kosher cafe. "We have some students who actually only eat kosher and they can't eat on campus right now," said a Hillel representative shortly before the cafe opened in January 2007. Stacy Volnick, the director of the university's business services, noted that the eatery was part of an attempt to diversify the campus's food choices. "What we're trying to do is have our food service operation reflect the diversity of our students and this is just the start of that goal."²⁷

In 2006 Touro College, an Orthodox educational conglomerate headquartered in New York City, opened a branch in Miami Beach. For readers of *To the Golden Cities*, it is ironic that the

college rents space in the building housing Temple Emanu-El. Seventy students from South Florida enrolled for that year's fall semester, taking undergraduate courses in business management and administration, psychology, and Judaic studies, and graduate courses in education. Literature for the college did not advertise the fact that it is an Orthodox institution. A college brochure simply states that with the founding of Touro College South, Touro College "continues to realize its vision of intellectual growth under Jewish sponsorship." This is in keeping with the college's mission statement that describes it as "an independent institution of higher and professional education under Jewish sponsorship," that aspires "to strengthen Jewish life and perpetuate the Judaic tradition on the college campus, and to contribute to the building of a better society for all through educational opportunities."²⁸

This growing Orthodox presence did not go unnoticed by the state's politicians, particularly by Republicans who shared the conservative social agenda of the Orthodox. Politicians courted them, and a symbolic Orthodox presence became common at local and state political gatherings, such as inaugurations and dedications. Orthodox political efforts met with mixed success. They were unable to halt the advance of the homosexual rights movement in South Florida, unsurprising considering the many homosexuals living in the Miami area, particularly in South Beach, a part of Miami Beach. Orthodox leaders were more successful regarding gender issues. In the early 1980s, they joined with other groups in defeating a renewed attempt in the state legislature to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.²⁹

The recent experience of Orthodoxy in South Florida, as well as that of Orthodoxy nationally, confirms the unpredictability of history, the difficulty in accurately forecasting social trends, and the need for skepticism when confronted with seemingly plausible sociological and historical paradigms. Few would have predicted in 1960 that a vibrant Orthodox community would emerge in this land of sun and fun. By 1994, however, it was already clear that Orthodoxy was not a fringe and dying phenomenon in South Florida. While Moore stated that the

born-again Jews of Miami were presented with “new possibilities for the American Jewish future,” one of these possibilities was not new at all. Rather, it was the opportunity to create a traditional Jewish life in the midst of the “leisure, freedom and security” of this new garden of *yidn*.³⁰

At first glance there appears to be nothing distinctive in the sociology and history of South Florida to account for this Orthodox revival. Orthodoxy has been sufficiently flexible to adapt to such diverse geographical settings as Vilna, Jerusalem, Casablanca, London, Paris, and Brooklyn. Today there are vibrant Orthodox communities in snowbelt Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago, as well as in Sunbelt Atlanta, Phoenix, and Houston. One could have assumed that Orthodoxy would flourish in South Florida simply because of the critical mass of the area’s Jewish population. On the other hand, one could also have presumed that those inclined to Orthodoxy would have avoided South Florida because of its hedonistic lifestyle. If the story of Orthodoxy in South Florida proves anything, it is that geography is not destiny.

NOTES

¹ The surveys of Jewish population in the United States published annually by the *American Jewish Year Book* have the figures for South Florida and metropolitan Los Angeles running neck-in-neck if Orange County and Long Beach are included in the total for Los Angeles. The data for Orange County is a very rough estimate. The slighting of Florida Jewry by American Jewish historians is reflected in two important recent works on American Judaism: Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York, 1993) and Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, 2004). Florida is not listed in the index to Sarna’s book, and it is mentioned only once in the index to Wertheimer’s volume. This single reference is to a sentence on page 54 where Wertheimer notes the strength of Conservative Judaism among the retired Jews of South Florida.

² For the percentage of Orthodox Jews in South Florida, see Ira M. Sheskin, “Ten Percent of American Jews,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Andrea Greenbaum (Hanover, NH, 2005), 14. The sociologist Samuel C. Heilman recently estimated the Orthodox population of South Florida to be c. 45,000. Heilman, *Sliding to the Right: The Contest for the Future of Amer-*

ican Jewish Orthodoxy (Berkeley, CA, 2006), 65, 327. The phenomenon of Orthodox influence disproportionate to their numbers is seen elsewhere. "The number and proportion of Orthodox Jews is quite small," four sociologists recently wrote. However "the denomination may be significant not only for its members, but for the impact it has on the religious patterns and norms of the non-Orthodox community." They also claimed that, based on Jewish population studies, the percentage of Orthodox Jews in the Miami area was smaller than in the metropolitan areas of Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington, D.C. This is difficult to believe. Bernard Lazerwitz, J. Alan Winter, Arnold Dashefsky, and Ephraim Tabory, *Jewish Choices: American Jewish Denominationalism* (Albany, NY, 1998), 21, 39–40.

³ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 292. Sheskin, "Ten Percent of American Jewry," 3–7.

⁴ Kimberly Miller, "Kosher Cafe to Open on FAU Campus," *Miami Herald*, January 3, 2007. For the decline of the Jewish population in Miami Beach, see Abby Goodnough, "For Shtetl by the Sea, Only a Few Fading Signs Remain," *New York Times*, April 3, 2007. For the increase of the Jewish population in Boynton Beach in Palm Beach County, see Erika Pesantes, "Boynton Area Top Draw for Jewish Residents," *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, April 1, 2007.

⁵ The Real Jewish Directory, Inc., *The Florida Jewish Directory* (Boca Raton, FL, [2007]). This 200-page annual contains advertisements for stores selling items of Jewish interest and lists the names and addresses of the synagogues, *mikvaot*, restaurants, Jewish schools, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish institutions servicing Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties.

⁶ For the important role of the Holocaust generation in American Orthodoxy, see Heilman, *Sliding to the Right*, chap. 1.

⁷ Herbert Gans, "American Jewry: Present and Future," *Commentary* 21 (May, 1956): 415.

⁸ Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago, 1st ed. 1957; rev. ed. 1972), 144–147 (pages cited are from 1972 edition). Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (Glencoe, IL, 1st ed. 1955; rev. ed. 1972), 43, 73 (pages cited are from 1972 edition). Both Glazer and Sklare modified their pessimism regarding Orthodoxy in the new editions of their books. Sklare wrote, "Unaccountably, Orthodoxy has refused to assume the role of invalid. Rather, it has transformed itself into a growing force in American Jewish life. It has reasserted its claim of being *the* authentic interpretation of Judaism." (464–466) For a critique of Glazer's analysis of Orthodoxy, see Edward S. Shapiro, "The Missing Element: Nathan Glazer and Modern Orthodoxy," *American Jewish History* 77 (December, 1987): 260–276, reprinted in Edward S. Shapiro, *We Are Many: Reflections on American History and Identity* (Syracuse, NY, 2005), chap. 10. Other statements of Orthodoxy's bleak future include Abraham J. Karp, "The Conservative Rabbi—'Dissatisfied but Not Unhappy,'" *American Jewish Archives* 5 (November, 1983): 255; Howard W. Polsky, "A Study of Orthodoxy in Milwaukee: Social Characteristics, Beliefs, and Observances," in *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York, 1958), 25–35; and Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York, 1964), 262–267. For Orthodoxy's refusal to roll over and die, see Chaim I. Waxman, "From Institutional Decay to Primary Day: American Orthodox Jewry Since World War II,"

American Jewish History 91 (December, 2003): 405–441; M. Herbert Danziger, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism* (New Haven, 1989); Samuel C. Heilman and Steven M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago, 1989); Sarna, *American Judaism*, 290–306, 326–327; Wertheimer, *A People Divided*, 114–136. Waxman spoke of an Orthodox “renaissance” (414) and the “coming of age of Orthodoxy in American society” (419), while Wertheimer’s chapter on Orthodoxy is titled “Orthodoxy: Triumphalism on the Right.” Certainly there has been a revival of Orthodox morale, even though the percentage of American Jews identifying with Orthodoxy declined during the last half of the twentieth century.

⁹ Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York, 1994), 263–266. The book has only two sentences on the growth of Orthodoxy, both of which discuss Los Angeles (265).

¹⁰ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 122, 270. For another view of Kronish, see Henry A. Green, “Leon Kronish: Miami Beach’s Twentieth-Century Prophet,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 162–178; Green, *Gesher Vakesher: Bridges and Bonds: The Life of Leon Kronish* (Atlanta, 1995).

¹¹ Whitfield, “Blood and Sand: The Jewish Community of South Florida,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 46–48. Had it existed when he wrote these words, Whitfield could have pointed to the World Erotic Art Museum on Washington Street in Miami Beach, founded by a woman who had grown up in an Orthodox home in Newark, New Jersey. She waited until her husband died before opening its doors in October 2005.

¹² The eight Orthodox synagogues in Aventura in 2006 are about the same number as were in the entire state of Florida in 1960. Aventura was swampland in 1960.

¹³ For *mikvaot* in Broward County, see Phyllis Steinberg, “Ancient Jewish ‘Mikvahs’ Get New Technology,” *Palm Beach Jewish Journal*, November 28, 2006.

¹⁴ *Eruvim* have become pervasive within Orthodox communities in the United States.

¹⁵ For day schools, see Susan Meimand, “Jewish Education in South Florida,” in *Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 192–194.

¹⁶ Phineas A. Weberman interview conducted by author, December 7, 2006; Abraham Korf interview conducted by author, December 7, 2006.

¹⁷ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 25–26.

¹⁸ Larry Luxner, “The Jewish Traveler: Palm Beach,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 2007, 48. The Orthodox Palm Beach Synagogue, which is not a Lubavitch institution, is located two blocks north of The Breakers. As Luxner notes, “Its prominent Star of David seems to mock those early developers who sought to exclude Jews from the city.” *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹ Abraham Korf to author, December 29, 2006.

²⁰ Linda Brockman, “Jews of Boca Raton,” in *The Jews of South Florida*, ed. Greenbaum, 118.

²¹ Prime Eighteen, which opened in 2006, was preceded by another elegant eatery, Prime Grill. The menu of Prime Grill included duck salad appetizer and short ribs empanadas.

²² Rabbi Menashe Klein, in the tenth volume of his responsa collection, *Mishneh Halakhot* (Brooklyn, 1987), 62–64, warned Jews not to eat at such restaurants because it was forbidden to walk in the ways of the gentiles. This included eating non-Jewish foods and at non-Jewish type restaurants, even if they were kosher, because this could lead to assimilation. “In my opinion it is forbidden to enter restaurants that have non-Jewish names and non-Jewish styles of cooking and food which is given non-Jewish names. It is also forbidden to participate in weddings and other affairs where this style of food and drink are served.” Judging by the popularity of such restaurants and the popularity of sushi at weddings and other Jewish celebrations, Klein’s advice has been ignored. The China Bistro, an upscale restaurant in Aventura, not only features such specialty drinks as watermelon martini, lime cosmo, and mai tai, but it also offers its kosher patrons imitation crab wontons, imitation calamari, Asian paella (“A combination of three fish, imitation ‘crab’ and ‘shrimp’ stir-fried with vegetables and a splash of white wine served with a saffron rice”), and imitation shrimp and crab tempura sushi rolls.

²³ Dena Kleinman, “Kosher Cooking: Goodbye Derma, Hello Sushi,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1987. It is suggestive that Lou G. Siegel’s, which was founded in 1917 and was the only traditional kosher restaurant mentioned by Kleinman, folded in the 1990s. “It’s a delicate balance,” an executive at Lou G. Siegel, said. “It’s the ‘boiled beef flanken’ customer that made Siegel’s the tradition it is, and we’re not willing to let that go. Yet at the same time, we want to open our doors to the younger, more food-conscious consumer.” Evidently the restaurant was unsuccessful. For a discussion of Le Marais, a kosher steak house, and Hasikara, a kosher Japanese restaurant, both in Manhattan, see J. Walman, “Sushi and Cigars: Kosher Dining Goes Mainstream,” *Forward*, July 5, 1996.

²⁴ Joan Nathan, “Kosher and Classy,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 1997, 28–32.

²⁵ Sara Liss, “The Jewish State of Florida,” *Hadassah Magazine*, February 2007, 27. A photo accompanying this article shows a traditional Cuban Jewish family eating Cuban-style foods in the family sukkah.

²⁶ Professor Jeffrey Shoulson, University of Miami, interview conducted by author, December 26, 2006.

²⁷ Miller, “Kosher Cafe to Open on FAU Campus.”

²⁸ <http://www.touro.edu/general/mission.asp> (accessed December 21, 2006).

²⁹ Phineas A. Weberman interview conducted by author, December 26, 2006.

³⁰ Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 275.