

# Estimating the Number and Characteristics of Jewish Residents in Urban Neighborhoods

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ALL Jewish communal organizations have a need for knowledge about the size of the Jewish population and of some of the basic demographic characteristics in the cities which they serve. In a small number of metropolitan areas community surveys have been conducted which have provided valuable information on diverse features of the Jewish population. However, because of the extensive cost involved in mounting such surveys, most communities have not been so fortunate. Those in search of basic information about the size and distribution of the Jewish population would do well to consider data easily available (at minimal expense) from the U.S. decennial census.

Religion, of course, has never been queried in a federal census. However, at the 1970 census 1,593,993 persons gave a response of Yiddish to the question "What language, other than English, was spoken in this person's home when he was a child?"<sup>1</sup> Data on the population reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue, when used in an appropriate manner, can be extremely informative in shedding light on the geographic distribution of the Jewish population within metropolitan communities.

A preliminary technique for converting the Yiddish mother tongue statistics into estimates of the Jewish

population in small geographic areas was described shortly after the release of 1970 census figures.<sup>2</sup> The present availability of detailed results from the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS), which was conducted in 1970-71 (almost concurrently with the national census), makes it possible to refine the earlier technique and to expand its application so as to produce additional types of demographic statistics.

The first section of this paper will describe in full the method that has been developed. In the second section the technique will be applied to a specific community—the metropolitan area containing America's third largest Jewish population, namely Philadelphia.

The series of reports published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census includes figures of native-born and foreign-born persons of Yiddish mother tongue residing in all metropolitan areas and in individual cities of 50,000 and over. Unpublished data at the census tract level are available from Census Bureau computer tapes at various local data processing centers. Census tracts are small areas, usually somewhat homogeneous, averaging about 5,000 residents, into which U.S. metropolitan areas are subdivided for statistical purposes. Only 10 percent of all individuals enumer-

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1970. Detailed Characteristics, United States Summary*, Washington, 1973, pp. 599, app-37.

<sup>2</sup> Ira Rosenwaik, "Estimating Jewish Population Distribution in U.S. Metropolitan Areas in 1970", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2, April, 1974, pp. 106-117.

ated as reporting Yiddish as their mother tongue were under 25 years of age, in contrast with 41 percent of the total Jewish population according to the NJPS statistics.<sup>3</sup> This near-absence of children among those in the Yiddish mother tongue classification makes it preferable to limit the application of the Yiddish mother tongue statistical approach to the adult population. For ease in statistical analysis the census category "25 years and over" is a convenient cut-off and for purposes of simplification is here used as the term for the adult population.

Since counts of native-born and foreign-born persons who reported Yiddish as their mother tongue can be obtained for every census tract in the nation, a procedure is essential that will convert such figures to estimates of the number of adult foreign-born and native-born Jewish individuals. The NJPS estimated the total non-institutional Jewish population residing in households (and excluding a few hundred thousand non-Jews residing in these same households) amounted to 5,370,000.<sup>4</sup> Of this total, 59 percent were estimated to be 25 years of age and over, equivalent to a figure of 3,170,000. This figure is increased to 3,220,000 to allow for at least 50,000 Jews residing in institutions. (A national survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1976 reported a total of 59,290 Jews among 1,550,100 institutionalized

Americans.<sup>5</sup> Published data from the NJPS cross-classify the nativity of heads of households by age. Assuming that within each age group the nativity of all American Jews approximates this distribution, the application of the resultant percentages permits the further subdivision of the estimated 3,220,000 persons 25 years of age and over to an estimate of 2,508,000 of native birth and 712,000 of foreign birth. On the basis of the above figures two factors may be constructed—the first, one that converts the statistics of native-born Jewish population ( $2,508,000/1,155,877 = 2.170$ ); the second, a factor that transforms the census figure of foreign-born persons of Yiddish mother tongue to an estimate of the adult foreign-born Jewish population ( $712,000/422,681 = 1.625$ ). The two estimates representing the foreign born and native born are easily summed to produce a figure for the total Jewish population 25 years of age and above.

At this point, before proceeding to an illustration of the application of the technique, two limitations of the data that can be produced by this method need to be discussed. First, in applying a ratio developed from a national norm to a particular community, some caution is in order. Certainly every Jewish community in the nation does not mirror the national average. In some localities the proportion of Jews who reported Yiddish to be their mother tongue may have been above and in others below the national mean. In a few communities—San Francisco has been given as an example—the proportion of the Jewish population that is of East European origin, and thus of Yiddish-speaking background, is particularly low; hence, applying the national ratios will yield un-

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1970. Final Report, PC(2)-1A National Origin and Language*, Washington, 1973, pp. 21, 31. Fred Massarik and Alvin Chenkin, "United States National Jewish Population Study: A First Report", *American Jewish Yearbook 1973*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 271.

<sup>4</sup> Fred Massarik, "National Jewish Population Study: A New United States Estimate", *American Jewish Yearbook 1974-75*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1975, p. 297.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-23, No. 69. 1976 Survey of Institutionalized Persons, Washington, 1978, p. 79.

derestimates of the Jewish population.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, in places where higher than average shares of the Jewish population have a Yiddish heritage, some degree of overestimate may occur.

The second limitation that has to be kept in mind is that the mother tongue query in the 1970 census was of a 15 percent sample of the population. Thus sampling error needs to be considered. The smaller the size of the Jewish population being estimated, the larger will be the potential inaccuracy. In order to reduce sampling error it is generally desirable to look at data for larger spatial areas—groups of census tracts, for instance—rather than a single census tract.

To illustrate the procedure, data for the area defined by the Bureau of the Census as the Philadelphia Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) will be presented. The area consists of five counties in Pennsylvania (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia) as well as three counties in New Jersey (Burlington, Camden and Gloucester). The only available estimate of the Jewish population at a point close to the 1970 census in this metropolitan area is 350,000.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 shows for the two major components of the Philadelphia SMSA the step by step procedure that has been developed to estimate the adult Jewish population in 1970 in American metropolitan areas (and their subsectors). Columns 1 and 2 contain census data on the native and foreign born Yiddish mother tongue populations respectively. Columns 3 and 4 are estimates of the native and foreign born adult Jewish population obtained by the application of specific factors (2.17) and (1.625) to the Yiddish language counts. The sum of the native and foreign-born adult

Jewish population is presented in column 5. The estimated Jewish population 25 years of age and over in the entire Philadelphia SMSA—211,000—is fairly consistent with the local estimate of 350,000 for the Jewish population of all ages. An assumption that individuals 25 and over represented 60 percent of the total metropolitan Philadelphia Jewish population (as in the NJPS sample) produces an estimate that corresponds well with the local statistics.

Thus reassured that the method produces reasonable figures of the adult Jewish population, details of the distribution within the various demographic components of the Philadelphia SMSA were examined next. Unlike the situation in many smaller metropolitan areas, a majority of the Jewish residents of metropolitan Philadelphia resided within the central city in 1970, rather than in the suburbs. However, the distribution of the Jewish population within the central city (as well as in suburbia) was highly uneven. As in other American cities, in some neighborhoods Jews constituted so large a proportion of the total population that the areas are known as Jewish neighborhoods, whereas other districts had hardly any Jewish residents.

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has subdivided the city into twelve planning analysis sections which in 1970 had populations ranging between 43,000 and 283,000.<sup>8</sup> Nine of the twelve areas had populations larger than 120,000, much larger than appropriate for the usual definition of neighborhoods. Since no definitive subdivision of the entire city of Philadelphia has been produced, this writer grouped various combinations of census tracts into geographical areas approximating

<sup>6</sup> See Rosenwaike, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–116.

<sup>7</sup> *American Jewish Yearbook 1974–75*, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *Socio-Economic Characteristics: 1960 & 1970, Philadelphia Census Tracts*, Philadelphia, 1973.

TABLE 1  
Estimate of Adult Jewish Population Distribution in the Philadelphia SMSA, 1970

Area	Yiddish Mother Tongue, 1970 Census		Estimated Jewish Population 25 years and over		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Native born	Foreign born	Native born (1) × 2.17	Foreign born (2) × 1.625	Total (3) + (4)
Total, SMSA	80,208	22,929	174,051	37,260	211,311
Pennsylvania portion	73,379	21,802	159,232	35,428	194,660
New Jersey portion	6,829	1,127	14,819	1,832	16,651

what knowledgeable Philadelphians currently consider "neighborhoods", utilizing available data sources.<sup>9</sup>

Table 2 shows the estimated number of Jewish adults in each of the twelve planning sections of the city of Philadelphia and in those specific neighborhoods in which at least one-fourth of the total population was estimated to be Jewish by the method that has been presented. Ten such areas are seen in distinct geographic divisions of the city. Four of the ten were in adjacent areas of the northeast quadrant of the city (Oxford Circle, Rhawnhurst, Bustleton and Pennypack-Winchester Park). In each of these neighborhoods more than 50 percent of the population was Jewish. Three Jewish neighborhoods (none with Jewish majorities) were located in the Olney-Oak Lane section (Cedarbrook-West Oak Lane, East Oak Lane, and Logan). The two neighborhoods in West Philadelphia were close to the border with suburban Montgomery County (Wynnefield and Overbrook). The one other area with a considerable Jewish population was Center City, with just over a quarter of the total population Jewish.

<sup>9</sup> The best guide for this purpose was Robert J. McMullin, *The Neighborhoods of Philadelphia*, Office of the Deputy Managing Director for Housing, Philadelphia, October 1975. Also see William W. Cutler III and Howard Gillette, eds., *The Divided Metropolis*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1980.

The data in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that although there are similarities there also are marked differences between the pattern of Jewish settlement in the city and the suburbs. Although a majority of the total population of metropolitan Philadelphia resided in the suburban counties in 1970, only about one-third of the Jewish community lived outside the central city. Except for Montgomery County, Jews formed less than five percent of the adult population in each suburban county. Montgomery County contained the only two townships with important Jewish concentrations: Cheltenham and Lower Merion. These two political subdivisions together contained about two-fifths of all Jews resident in the Pennsylvania suburbs.

Table 3 lists the three suburban locations in which Jews formed at least 25 percent of the total population. The largest Jewish concentration, that in Cheltenham township, borders on areas with high Jewish density in Philadelphia. Similarly in Lower Merion, the major Jewish communities can be considered as spillover from the older Jewish communities across the city line (in West Philadelphia).

The foreign born are a considerably less distinctive sector of the Jewish population in the suburbs compared with the city. However, it is interesting to note that in the most recently built-up section of Philadelphia, the far Northeast, less than 10 percent of the Jewish

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TABLE 2

Estimate of Distribution of Adult Jewish Population by Nativity, by Planning Section and Local Area, Philadelphia City, 1970

Section and Local Area	Jewish Population 25 and Over			Total Population 25 and over	Jews as % of Total
	Foreign born	Native born	Total		
A. Center City	1,597	6,822	8,419	31,536	26.7
B. South Philadelphia	2,005	4,277	6,282	135,211	4.6
C. Southwest Philadelphia	335	788	1,123	52,234	2.1
D. West Philadelphia	5,587	17,686	23,273	156,629	14.9
Wynnefield	3,692	9,346	13,038	20,195	64.6
Overbrook	1,146	5,644	6,790	17,001	39.9
Remainder of section	749	2,696	3,445	119,433	2.9
E. Lower North Philadelphia	717	2,871	3,588	119,792	3.0
F. Upper North Philadelphia	166	521	687	72,201	1.0
G. Kensington	132	638	770	71,611	1.1
H. Roxborough-Manayunk	122	703	825	29,116	2.8
I. Germantown-Chestnut Hill	1,012	5,221	6,233	77,262	8.1
J. Olney-Oak Lane	7,768	22,390	30,158	117,323	25.7
Cedarbrook-West Oak Lane	1,974	9,151	11,125	24,750	44.9
East Oak Lane	1,001	4,828	5,829	13,561	43.0
Logan	2,488	5,219	7,707	20,344	37.9
Remainder of section	2,305	3,192	5,497	58,668	9.4
K. Near Northeast Philadelphia	9,673	38,409	48,082	176,083	27.3
Oxford Circle	5,384	21,576	26,960	31,959	84.4
Rhawnhurst	3,039	10,399	13,438	22,087	60.8
Remainder of section	1,250	6,434	7,684	122,037	6.3
L. Far Northeast Philadelphia	1,797	18,126	19,923	82,913	24.0
Bustleton	848	9,785	10,633	19,719	53.9
Pennypacker-Winchester Park	718	4,164	4,882	8,560	57.0
Remainder of section	231	4,177	4,408	54,634	8.1
Total, City	30,911	118,452	149,363	1,121,911	13.3

TABLE 3

Estimate of Distribution of Adult Jewish Population by Nativity, Suburban Philadelphia Counties in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, 1970

County and Local Area	Jewish Population 25 and Over			Total Population 25 and over	Jews as % of Total
	Foreign born	Native born	Total		
Bucks	502	5,458	5,960	213,459	2.8
Chester	127	1,024	1,151	147,273	0.8
Delaware	886	8,372	9,258	335,008	2.8
Montgomery	3,005	25,927	28,932	354,473	8.2
Cheltenham Township	1,523	8,995	10,518	25,820	40.7
Lower Merion Township	811	6,972	7,783	38,867	20.0
Bala Cynwyd-Merion-Penn Valley	489	4,242	4,731	14,311	33.1
Penn Wynne	211	1,886	2,097	3,761	55.8
Balance of Township	111	844	955	20,795	4.6
Remainder of County	671	9,960	10,631	289,786	3.7
Total, Pennsylvania suburbs	4,520	40,781	45,301	1,050,213	4.3
Burlington	390	3,611	4,001	156,661	2.6
Camden	1,319	10,079	11,398	251,522	4.5
Gloucester	122	1,128	1,250	91,005	1.4
Total, New Jersey suburbs	1,831	14,818	16,649	499,188	3.3
Total, 8 suburban counties	6,351	55,599	61,950	1,549,401	4.0

adults seem to have been of foreign birth, while in two of the older, declining sections, South Philadelphia and Southwest Philadelphia, as well as in the Logan neighborhood (in Olney-Oak Lane), 30 percent or more were born outside the United States. For all of the suburban counties combined, the foreign born are estimated at only 10 percent of the total adult Jewish population. In the eight suburban counties the percent foreign born ranges between 8 and 12 percent. In the largest community in the suburbs, however, that in Cheltenham township, the immigrant percentage is somewhat higher, almost 15 percent.

The ten neighborhoods in which Jews are estimated to constitute at least 25 percent of the population had approximately two-thirds of all Jewish adults living in the City of Philadelphia in 1970. The data for small areas presented here thus clearly reveal there are recognizable concentrations of Jews in certain neighborhoods, a picture resembling previous models of Jewish residential distribution. As in New York, Chicago, and other cities, there are "established" Jewish areas in Philadelphia.

### Conclusion

In summarizing it may be stated that the census provides statistics of a sort that permits the researcher to define the parameters of Jewish population distribution in metropolitan communities in the United States (despite the absence of a question on religious identification). Such statistics can be compiled quickly and inexpensively. The spatial distribution of the Jewish community, however, although highly informative, may be considered as just the framework for the much more detailed analyses that are desired by communal agencies. To properly collect demographic and at-

titudinal information about the publics whom they are dedicated to serve, Jewish community organizations must employ population survey techniques.<sup>10</sup>

### Afterword

Unfortunately the question on mother tongue was dropped from the 1980 census. Thus the ability to use the technique described here is limited to the 1970 census period. Undoubtedly, by the 1980s the size and geographic distribution of many Jewish communities has altered significantly.

At the 1980 census, however, a question on ancestry was asked for the first time of all persons. Rosenthal has provided evidence that in Census Bureau sample surveys querying ancestry (conducted from 1969 on) a large majority of those reporting Russian descent are Jews and that a major proportion of American Jews are included in the Russian origin classification.<sup>11</sup> It appears likely then that a technique, which can be utilized by professionals interested in local Jewish populations, roughly comparable to that presented here can be developed for the analysis of 1980 census data, using information available by census tract on ancestry. The technique will need to be applied with great caution and will not be applicable in metropolitan areas where substantial numbers of those of Russian ancestry are of non-Jewish background.

<sup>10</sup> See David P. Varady and Samuel J. Mantel, Jr., "Estimating the Size of Jewish Communities Using Random Telephone Surveys," *The Journal of Jewish Communal Services*, Vol. LVIII, Spring 1981, pp. 225-234.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Rosenthal, "The Equivalence of U.S. Census Data for Persons of Russian Stock or Descent with American Jews: An Evaluation", *Demography*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (May 1975), pp. 275-290.