

I. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CHANGES  
IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE DURING THE 20th  
CENTURY

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OPENING SESSION  
SATURDAY EVENING  
JUNE 7, 1930

The Opening Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Social Service convened at 8:40 P. M., at the Temple Ohabei Shalom, Brookline, Mass., Mr. Louis E. Kirstein, President of the Associated Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, Mass., presiding.

THE CHAIRMAN: The meeting will please be in order. Rabbi Abrams will deliver the invocation.

Rabbi Abrams offered the invocation.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen: On behalf of the Jewish community of Boston, I wish to extend a hearty welcome to you, the delegates and guests of the Twenty-ninth National Conference of Jewish Social Service.

We deem it a privilege to act as hosts to you during the next few days. We in Boston have a profound respect for professional social workers. Personally, I have repeatedly stressed the vital importance of your profession in our community life. Social life has become increasingly complex. Specialized training and technical equipment are now needed to cope with the very problems which, but a generation ago, we and our fathers had the audacity to attack as untrained volunteers.

We meant well and we did our best. But now with the growth of industry and all the social problems it has brought, with the increasing urbanization of life, particularly in America, it would be the essence of hardihood for the volunteer layman, no matter how well-intentioned, to attempt to deal with such problems as family welfare, the care of dependent and delin-

quent children, various health services which must be provided in every modern community, the organization of neighborhoods and community centers, and the education of our youth in the traditions of our people. All these are highly specialized fields in which we expect you to be the leaders and to ask us to help only where we may properly be of help.

I hope that your conferences in Boston will lead to even higher levels of professional standards and to the improvement of the scientific aspects of your work.

While you are here, I hope you will also have some time for diversion. A local committee, under the acting chairmanship of Mrs. I. K. E. Prager, has arranged a modest program of hospitality. If there is anything in addition you would like to see or do, I am sure we will be only too glad to arrange it.

To those of us who are concerned with the future of American Jewry, no subject of more vital importance could have been chosen for the discussion this evening than the one that your committee has designated, namely, "The Social, Economic and Cultural Changes in American Jewish Life During the Twentieth Century."

We, the Jews of America, are confronted with a double responsibility. First, we must develop adequate programs for coping with the social problems arising from the rapid changes in what is, perhaps, the most dynamic country in the world. A great deal has been said in recent years about the social and individual maladjustments arising from the ever-increasing mechanization of modern life. Some people contend that the machine has enslaved us; others, that it has eliminated drudgery from work and has made possible a richer life. Whatever may be the ultimate merits of modern industrialism, it seems clear to all of us that its immediate effect has been to create certain maladjustments.

In the second place, we Jews in America have been catapulted by forces arising out of the World War to the position of world leadership in Jewry. What is our responsibility as world leaders and how can we best discharge that responsibility with regard to programs of rehabilitation in Eastern Europe and in Palestine?

A discussion of what has happened in American Jewish life during the past thirty years should, at least, give some perspective as a basis of evaluating trends and shaping policies for these two major responsibilities during the coming years of Jewish life in America.

It is against an exceedingly romantic background that the speakers tonight tell their stories. The stage of their play is the United States of the twentieth century, the century which witnessed our coming of age as the leading industrial nation of the world; our transformation from a rural to an urban people; from an insular power to a world empire; from a debtor nation to the creditor nation of the world, enjoying the largest home market known in modern civilization and yet beginning to reach overseas for outlets for a production that is rapidly surpassing the capacity of domestic consumption. It is against this background that the speakers tonight will tell us what has been happening to a small segment of Americans—to four million Jews out of a total population of over one hundred and twenty million.

The first speaker is Mr. A. W. Rosenthal, President of the National Association of Jewish Community Center Secretaries. He will discuss the "Cultural Changes in American Jewish Life During the Twentieth Century." Mr. Rosenthal.

## CULTURAL CHANGES IN AMERICAN JEWISH LIFE DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A. W. ROSENTHAL

Considering the task allotted to a contemporary ex-president, of writing the history of America in 500 words, I do not fare so badly when I am asked to describe in about 100 words for each year the cultural changes in American Jewish life these past thirty years.

It may be of interest to mention that this is the 30th anniversary of the first meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Charities in April, 1900. Perhaps, no other phase of Jewish communal life in America has been as outstanding in the past three decades as the cooperation of our charitable endeavors, their philanthropic insight and the solidarity engendered thereby that has transcended religious differences.

If I have included data which has its rightful place in the papers of my colleagues, its repetition gives weight to the good judgment of my choice. I am sure that much more of value which belongs in my presentation will be included in their offering.

### II

The work of a few leaders in any day or generation is not the estimate of the value of the contributions that a community makes to the general weal. Labors of unnoted hundreds and thousands make possible the achievement of large results. Men and women of our faith have contributed to our country's art, drama, music, letters, journalism, sciences, works of education, its benevolence, commerce, industry, finance, jurisprudence and statesmanship. They have given their all to make enduring the virtue of liberty and the preservation of the Union. They have given their all to preserve for future generations the Hebraic and the American ideals of freedom, justice and equality.

### III

Let us step back to the threshold of the 20th century and