Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity.* New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983.

The question of the ethnic identity, or lack of it, of the various groups that make up the population of the United States is a controversial and much-discussed issue. Steven M. Cohen's sociological study of the developments and transitions of Boston Jews from the first to the fourth generation provides answers to many of the questions commonly asked about American Jews and the nature of their ethnic identification. Though the study is limited to one large urban area, there does not seem to be any reason to doubt Cohen's claim that it is representative of American Jews at large.

The author presents his findings, based on surveys and questionnaires, in a remarkably balanced and objective manner, thus leaving it to the reader to draw his own conclusions. The facts, however, are interesting enough, and they seem to point to a steady and ongoing detachment of American Jews from their original, Oriental-European heritage. This is caused by the increasing generational distance from Europe, the social and geographical mobility of the Jews and the changes in their family life. The result has been to bring about a general modernization and secularization of a group which was extraordinarily cohesive and orthodox during the era of immigration. However, though the traditions of the first generation have been weakened and diluted, other factors have been at work which have preserved lines of continuity. According to Cohen, modern Jews, while striving to become integrated into American society, have also felt a need to pay heed to "survivalist impulses" which have led to their innovating "new modes of Jewish identity and community." (p. 25) These consist mainly of the modern versions of Judaism: Reform, Modern Orthodoxy and Conservatism, and political affiliations such as liberalism and pro-Israelism.

The upward social mobility of American Jews has been nothing less than phenomenal. By 1975, over 95 per cent of the fourth generation had a college degree, and over 42 per cent of the third generation were employed as professionals, i.e. doctors, lawyers etc. One result of this increase in education and affluence has been the geographical dispersion of Jews in the most recent period. They, like many other Americans, have moved to the Sunbelt in large numbers, to communities with few or no Jewish neighborhoods and traditions. There has also been an increase in divorce and single-person households among Jews. All of this has made for a diminishing sense of ethnic identity among them, though it may be that, in time, Jewish institutions and organizations will emerge also in the new areas of settlement.

American Jews have abandoned or modified the ways of their forefathers, but they continue to stand out as a group with distinct features. Though they have higher rates of divorce, adultery and intermarriage than before, showing the influence of the mainstream society, the Jews still have a considerably lower frequency of the above-mentioned traits than the general population. What can be loosely called Jewish morality seems to survive, and Jews continue to associate mainly with members of their own group. Politically they are solidly for Israel, though quite a few among them may be critical of certain of the country's policies. They are also mainly liberal and vote for the Democratic Party, although an influential group of conservative Jewish intellectuals has gathered around the journal *Commentary* and is working for a general change in Jewish-American political attitudes toward the right side of the spectrum and the Republican Party.

Though they are liberal on most issues, American Jews support defense spending as much as other Americans, probably because of their fears for Israel's security. However, this commitment to Israel is basically political and does not indicate any renewal of religious practice. Generally speaking, Jewish ethnic cohesion today is more a question of a common commitment to certain moral, cultural and political values than adherence to dogmatic faith and strict observance of traditional rituals. In other words, Jews tend to modernize, to assimilate, like most ethnic groups in the United States, yet at the same time they want to preserve their Jewish identity to the extent that they can feel comfortable with it. Traditional Zionism, for example, which commands all Jews to settle in Israel, is a political movement which is rejected by most American Jews.

Cohen's book presents a complex picture of the factors that influence Jewish identity in America, and he refuses to make any predictions about its future. Assimilationist and survivalist tendencies are both at work at the same time, and the results of the sociological investigations are mixed. Besides, there may be other factors not covered by the investigations which may contribute to a continued persistence of Jewish identification. In short, Jews may continue to feel and even behave like Jews in some respect although traditional Jewish behavior such as ritual practice and affdiation with synagogue and Jewish organizations is declining. These are some of the indicators used in the surveys. The process of assimilation, one might say, seems to move at a slower pace among American Jews than among many other groups, for well-known historical and cultural reasons. To argue that it is moving along in spite of everything is one possible way of interpreting

Cohen's findings. His book is very precise in its definitions and carefully and lucidly written. It is a most reliable and useful introduction to the study of the religious and political identity of American Jews today.

Helge Normann Nielsen University of Trondheim