

Remarks at the University of California San Diego Commencement Ceremony in La Jolla, California,
June 14, 1997

Thank you very much. Thank you. Well, ladies and gentlemen, the first thing I would like to say is that Coleen spoke so well, and she said everything I meant to say—[laughter]—that I could do us all a great favor by simply associating myself with her remarks and sitting down.

I would also like to thank Dr. Anagnostopoulos for reminding us of the infamous capacity of faculty members to be contrary with one another. [Laughter] Until he said it, I hadn't realized that probably 90 percent of the Congress once were on university faculties. [Laughter]

Let me say to Chancellor Dynes and President Atkinson, to the distinguished regents and faculty members, to the students and their families and friends who are here today, I'm honored to be joined by a number of people who reflect the kind of America that Coleen Sabatini called for: Senator Barbara Boxer and Senator Dan Akaka from Hawaii; your Congressman, Bob Filner; Congresswoman Maxine Waters, the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus; Congresswoman Patsy Mink; Congressman Jim Clyburn; Congressman John Lewis, a great hero of the civil rights movement; Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald; Congressman Carlos Romero-Barcelo from Puerto Rico; your Lieutenant Governor, Gray Davis; the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater; of Labor, Alexis Herman; of Veterans Affairs, Jesse Brown; of Education, Dick Riley; our distinguished Ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson; our distinguished Administrator of the Small Business Administration, Aida Alvarez, the first American of Puerto Rican descent ever to be in a Presidential Cabinet. I would like to ask them all to stand, along with the members of the White House staff who are here, including Thurgood Marshall, Jr., whose father has a college named for him at this great university. Would you please stand?

And I can't help but noting that there's another person here that deserves some special recognition—University of California at San Diego class of 1977—a Filipino-American woman who became the youngest captain of the Navy and my personal physician, Dr. Connie Mariano. Where is she?

I want to thank you for offering our Nation a shining example of excellence rooted in the many backgrounds that make up this great land. You have blazed new paths in science and technology, explored the new horizons of the Pacific Rim and Latin America. This is a great university for the 21st century.

Today we celebrate your achievements at a truly golden moment for America. The cold war is over and freedom has now ascended around the globe, with more than half of the [p.877] people in this old world living under governments of their own choosing for the very first time. Our economy is the healthiest in a generation and the strongest in the world. Our culture, our science, our technology promise unimagined advances and exciting new careers. Our social problems, from crime to poverty, are finally bending to our efforts.

Of course, there are still challenges for you out there. Beyond our borders, we must battle terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the prospect of new diseases and environmental disaster. Here at home, we must ensure that every child has the chance you have had to develop your God-given capacities. We cannot wait for them to get in trouble to notice them. We must continue to fight the scourge of gangs and crime and drugs. We must prepare for the retirement of the baby boom generation so that we can reduce that child poverty rate that Coleen talked about. We must harness the forces of science and technology for the public good, the entire American public.

But I believe the greatest challenge we face, among all those that Coleen talked about, is also our greatest opportunity. Of all the questions of discrimination and prejudice that still exist in our society, the most perplexing one is the oldest, and in some ways today, the newest: the problem of race. Can we fulfill the promise of America by embracing all our citizens of all races, not just at a university where people have the benefit of enlightened teachers and the time to think and grow and get to know each other within the daily life of every American community? In short, can we become one America in the 21st century?

I know, and I've said before, that money cannot buy this goal, power cannot compel it, technology cannot create it. This is something that can come only from the human spirit—the spirit we saw when the choir of many races sang as a gospel choir.

Today, the State of Hawaii, which has a Senator and a Congresswoman present here, has no majority racial or ethnic group. It is a wonderful place of exuberance and friendship and patriotism. Within the next 3 years, here in California no single race or ethnic group will make up a majority of the State's population. Already, 5 of our largest school districts draw students from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups. At this campus, 12 Nobel Prize winners have taught or studied from 9 different countries. A half-century from now, when your own grandchildren are in college, there will be no majority race in America.

Now, we know what we will look like, but what will we be like? Can we be one America respecting, even celebrating, our differences, but embracing even more what we have in common? Can we define what it means to be an American, not just in terms of the hyphen showing our ethnic origins but in terms of our primary allegiance to the values America stands for and values we really live by? Our hearts long to answer yes, but our history reminds us that it will be hard. The ideals that bind us together are as old as our Nation, but so are the forces that pull us apart. Our Founders sought to form a more perfect Union. The humility and hope of that phrase is the story of America, and it is our mission today.

Consider this: We were born with a Declaration of Independence which asserted that we were all created equal and a Constitution that enshrined slavery. We fought a bloody Civil War to abolish slavery and preserve the Union, but we remained a house divided and unequal by law for another century. We advanced across the continent in the name of freedom, yet in so doing we pushed Native Americans off their land, often crushing their culture and

their livelihood. Our Statue of Liberty welcomes poor, tired, huddled masses of immigrants to our borders, but each new wave has felt the sting of discrimination. In World War II, Japanese-Americans fought valiantly for freedom in Europe, taking great casualties, while at home their families were herded into internment camps. The famed Tuskegee Airmen lost none of the bombers they guarded during the war, but their African-American heritage cost them a lot of rights when they came back home in peace.

Though minorities have more opportunities than ever today, we still see evidence of bigotry, from the desecration of houses of worship, whether they be churches, synagogues, or mosques, to demeaning talk in [p.878] corporate suites. There is still much work to be done by you, members of the class of 1997. But those who say we cannot transform the problem of prejudice into the promise of unity forget how far we have come, and I cannot believe they have ever seen a crowd like you.

When I look at you, it is almost impossible for me even to remember my own life. I grew up in the high drama of the cold war, in the patriotic South. Black and white southerners alike wore our Nation's uniform in defense of freedom against communism. They fought and died together, from Korea to Vietnam. But back home, I went to segregated schools, swam in segregated public pools, sat in all-white sections at the movies, and traveled through small towns in my State that still marked restrooms and water fountains "white" and "colored."

By the grace of God, I had a grandfather with just a grade school education but the heart of a true American, who taught me that it was wrong. And by the grace of God, there were brave African-Americans like Congressman John Lewis, who risked their lives time and time again to make it right. And there were white Americans like Congressman Bob Filner, a freedom rider on the bus with John Lewis, in the long, noble struggle for civil rights, who knew that it was a struggle to free white people, too.

To be sure, there is old, unfinished business between black and white Americans, but the classic American dilemma has now become many dilemmas of race and ethnicity. We see it in the tension between black and Hispanic customers and their Korean or Arab grocers; in a resurgent ~~anti-Semitism~~ even on some college campuses; in a hostility toward new immigrants from Asia to the Middle East to the former communist countries to Latin America and the Caribbean—even those whose hard work and strong families have brought them success in the American way.

We see a disturbing tendency to wrongly attribute to entire groups, including the white majority, the objectionable conduct of a few members. If a black American commits a crime, condemn the act. But remember that most African-Americans are hard-working, law-abiding citizens. If a Latino gang member deals drugs, condemn the act. But remember the vast majority of Hispanics are responsible citizens who also deplore the scourge of drugs in our life. If white teenagers beat a young African-American boy almost to death just because of his race, for God's sake condemn the act. But remember the overwhelming majority of white people will find it just as hateful. If an Asian merchant discriminates against her customers of another minority group, call her on it. But remember, too, that many, many Asians have borne the burden of prejudice and do not want anyone else to feel it.

Remember too, in spite of the persistence of prejudice, we are more integrated than ever. More of us share neighborhoods and work and school and social activities, religious life, even love and marriage across racial lines than ever before. More of us enjoy each other's company and distinctive cultures than ever before. And more

than ever, we understand the benefits of our racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity in a global society, where networks of commerce and communications draw us closer and bring rich rewards to those who truly understand life beyond their nation's borders.

With just a twentieth of the world's population, but a fifth of the world's income, we in America simply have to sell to the other 95 percent of the world's consumers just to maintain our standard of living. Because we are drawn from every culture on Earth, we are uniquely positioned to do it. Beyond commerce, the diverse backgrounds and talents of our citizens can help America to light the globe, showing nations deeply divided by race, religion, and tribe that there is a better way.

Finally, as you have shown us today, our diversity will enrich our lives in nonmaterial ways, deepening our understanding of human nature and human differences, making our communities more exciting, more enjoyable, more meaningful. That is why I have come here today to ask the American people to join me in a great national effort to perfect the promise of America for this new time as we seek to build our more perfect Union.

Now, when there is more cause for hope than fear, when we are not driven to it by some emergency or social cataclysm, now is [p.879] the time we should learn together, talk together, and act together to build one America.

Let me say that I know that for many white Americans, this conversation may seem to exclude them or threaten them. That must not be so. I believe white Americans have just as much to gain as anybody else from being a part of this endeavor—much to gain from an America where we finally take responsibility for all our children so that they, at last, can be judged as Martin Luther King hoped, not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

What is it that we must do? For 4½ years now, I have worked to prepare America for the 21st century with a strategy of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and an American community of all our citizens. To succeed in each of these areas, we must deal with the realities and the perceptions affecting all racial groups in America.

First, we must continue to expand opportunity. Full participation in our strong and growing economy is the best antidote to envy, despair, and racism. We must press forward to move millions more from poverty and welfare to work, to bring the spark of enterprise to inner cities, to redouble our efforts to reach those rural communities prosperity has passed by. And most important of all, we simply must give our young people the finest education in the world.

There are no children who—because of their ethnic or racial background—who cannot meet the highest academic standards if we set them and measure our students against them, if we give them well-trained teachers and well-equipped classrooms, and if we continue to support reasoned reforms to achieve excellence, like the charter school movement. At a time when college education means stability, a good job, a passport to the middle class, we must open the doors of college to all Americans, and we must make at least 2 years of college as universal at the dawn of the next century as a high school diploma is today.

In our efforts to extend economic and educational opportunity to all our citizens, we must consider the role of affirmative action. I know affirmative action has not been perfect in America—that's why 2 years ago we began an effort to fix the

things that are wrong with it—but when used in the right way, it has worked. It has given us a whole generation of professionals in fields that used to be exclusive clubs, where people like me got the benefit of 100 percent affirmative action. There are now more women-owned businesses than ever before. There are more African-American, Latino, and Asian-American lawyers and judges, scientists and engineers, accountants and executives than ever before.

But the best example of successful affirmative action is our military. Our Armed Forces are diverse from top to bottom, perhaps the most integrated institution in our society and certainly the most integrated military in the world. And more important, no one questions that they are the best in the world. So much for the argument that excellence and diversity do not go hand in hand.

There are those who argue that scores on standardized tests should be the sole measure of qualification for admissions to colleges and universities. But many would not apply the same standard to the children of alumni or those with athletic ability. I believe a student body that reflects the excellence and the diversity of the people we will live and work with has independent educational value. Look around this crowd today. Don't you think you have learned a lot more than you would have if everybody sitting around you looked just like you? I think you have. [Applause]

And beyond the educational value to you, it has a public interest, because you will learn to live and work in the world you will live in better. When young people sit side by side with people of many different backgrounds, they do learn something that they can take out into the world. And they will be more effective citizens.

Many affirmative action students excel. They work hard, they achieve, they go out and serve the communities that need them for their expertise and role model. If you close the door on them, we will weaken our greatest universities and it will be more difficult to build the society we need in the 21st century.

Let me say, I know that the people of California voted to repeal affirmative action with [p.880] out any ill motive. The vast majority of them simply did it with a conviction that discrimination and isolation are no longer barriers to achievement. But consider the results. Minority enrollments in law school and other graduate programs are plummeting for the first time in decades. Soon, the same will likely happen in undergraduate education. We must not resegregate higher education or leave it to the private universities to do the public's work. At the very time when we need to do a better job of living and learning together, we should not stop trying to equalize economic opportunity.

To those who oppose affirmative action, I ask you to come up with an alternative. I would embrace it if I could find a better way. And to those of us who still support it, I say we should continue to stand for it, we should reach out to those who disagree or are uncertain and talk about the practical impact of these issues, and we should never be unwilling to work with those who disagree with us to find new ways to lift people up and bring people together.

Beyond opportunity, we must demand responsibility from every American. Our strength as a society depends upon both—upon people taking responsibility for themselves and their families, teaching their children good values, working hard and obeying the

law, and giving back to those around us. The new economy offers fewer guarantees, more risk, and more rewards. It calls upon all of us to take even greater responsibility for our own education than ever before.

In the current economic boom, only one racial or ethnic group in America has actually experienced a decline in the income: Hispanic-Americans. One big reason is that Hispanic high school dropout rates are well above—indeed, far above—those of whites and blacks. Some of the dropouts actually reflect a strong commitment to work. We admire the legendary willingness to take the hard job at long hours for low pay. In the old economy, that was a responsible thing to do. But in the new economy, where education is the key, responsibility means staying in school.

No responsibility is more fundamental than obeying the law. It is not racist to insist that every American do so. The fight against crime and drugs is a fight for the freedom of all our people, including those—perhaps especially those—minorities living in our poorest neighborhoods. But respect for the law must run both ways. The shocking difference in perceptions of the fairness of our criminal justice system grows out of the real experiences that too many minorities have had with law enforcement officers. Part of the answer is to have all our citizens respect the law, but the basic rule must be that the law must respect all our citizens.

And that applies, too, to the enforcement of our civil rights laws. For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has a huge backlog of cases with discrimination claims, though we have reduced it by 25 percent over the last 4 years. We can do no much better without more resources. It is imperative that Congress—especially those Members who say they're for civil rights but against affirmative action—at least give us the money necessary to enforce the law of the land and do it soon.

Our third imperative is perhaps the most difficult of all. We must build one American community based on respect for one another and our shared values. We must begin with a candid conversation on the state of race relations today and the implications of Americans of so many different races living and working together as we approach a new century. We must be honest with each other. We have talked at each other and about each other for a long time. It's high time we all began talking with each other.

Over the coming year, I want to lead the American people in a great and unprecedented conversation about race. In community efforts from Lima, Ohio, to Billings, Montana, in remarkable experiments in cross-racial communications like the uniquely named ERACISM, I have seen what Americans can do if they let down their guards and reach out their hands.

I have asked one of America's greatest scholars, Dr. John Hope Franklin, to chair an advisory panel of seven distinguished Americans to help me in this endeavor. He will be joined by former Governors Thomas Kean of New Jersey and William Winter of Mississippi, both great champions of civil rights; by Linda Chavez-Thompson, the ex [p.881]ecutive vice president of the AFL-CIO; by Reverend Suzan Johnson Cook, a minister from the Bronx and former White House fellow; by Angela Oh, an attorney and Los Angeles community leader; and Robert Thompson, the CEO of Nissan U.S.A.—distinguished leaders, leaders in their community.

I want this panel to help educate Americans about the facts surrounding issues of race, to promote a dialog in every community of the land to confront and work through these issues, to recruit and encourage leadership at all levels to help breach racial divides, and to find, develop, and recommend how to implement concrete

solutions to our problems—solutions that will involve all of us in Government, business, communities, and as individual citizens.

I will make periodic reports to the American people about our findings and what actions we all have to take to move America forward. This board will seek out and listen to Americans from all races and all walks of life. They are performing a great citizen service, but in the cause of building one America, all citizens must serve. As I said at the Presidents' Summit on Service in Philadelphia, in our new era such acts of service are basic acts of citizenship. Government must play its role, but much of the work must be done by the American people as citizen service. The very effort will strengthen us and bring us closer together. In short, I want America to capture the feel and the spirit that you have given to all of us today.

I'd like to ask the board to stand and be recognized. I want you to look at them, and I want you to feel free to talk to them over the next year or so. Dr. Franklin and members of the board.

[Applause]

Honest dialog will not be easy at first. We'll all have to get past defensiveness and fear and political correctness and other barriers to honesty. Emotions may be rubbed raw, but we must begin.

What do I really hope we will achieve as a country? If we do nothing more than talk, it will be interesting, but it won't be enough. If we do nothing more than propose disconnected acts of policy, it will be helpful, but it won't be enough. But if 10 years from now people can look back and see that this year of honest dialog and concerted action helped to lift the heavy burden of race from our children's future, we will have given a precious gift to America.

I ask you all to remember just for a moment, as we have come through the difficult trial on the Oklahoma City bombing, remember that terrible day when we saw and wept for Americans and forgot for a moment that there were a lot of them from different races than we are. Remember the many faces and races of the Americans who did not sleep and put their lives at risk to engage in the rescue, the helping, and the healing. Remember how you have seen things like that in the natural disasters here in California. That is the face of the real America. That is the face I have seen over and over again. That is the America, somehow, some way, we have to make real in daily American life.

Members of the graduating class, you will have a greater opportunity to live your dreams than any generation in our history, if we can make of our many different strands one America, a nation at peace with itself, bound together by shared values and aspirations and opportunities and real respect for our differences.

I am a Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist, and I'm proud of it. But my life has been immeasurably enriched by the power of the Torah, the beauty of the Koran, the piercing wisdom of the religions of East and South Asia—all embraced by my fellow Americans. I have felt indescribable joy and peace in black and Pentecostal churches. I have come to love the intensity and selflessness of my Hispanic fellow Americans toward la familia. As a southerner, I grew up on country music and country fairs, and I still like them. [Laughter.] But I have also reveled in the festivals and the food, the music and the art and the culture of Native Americans and Americans from every region in the world.

In each land I have visited as your President, I have felt more at home because some of their people have found a home in America. For two centuries, wave upon wave of immigrants have come to our shores to build a new life drawn by the promise of freedom and a fair chance. Whatever else they found, even bigotry and violence, most of them never gave up on America. Even African-^[p.882] Americans, the first of whom we brought here in chains, never gave up on America.

It is up to you to prove that their abiding faith was well-placed. Living in islands of isolation—some splendid and some sordid—is not the American way. Basing our self-esteem on the ability to look down on others is not the American way. Being satisfied if we have what we want and heedless of others who don't even have what they need and deserve is not the American way. We have torn down the barriers in our laws. Now we must break down the barriers in our lives, our minds, and our hearts.

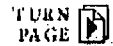
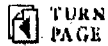
More than 30 years ago, at the high tide of the civil rights movement, the Kerner Commission said we were becoming two Americas: one white, one black, separate and unequal. Today, we face a different choice: Will we become not two but many Americas, separate, unequal, and isolated? Or will we draw strength from all our people and our ancient faith in the quality of human dignity to become the world's first truly multiracial democracy? That is the unfinished work of our time, to lift the burden of race and redeem the promise of America.

Class of 1997, I grew up in the shadows of a divided America, but I have seen glimpses of one America. You have shown me one today. That is the America you must make. It begins with your dreams, so dream large; live your dreams; challenge your parents; and teach your children well.

God bless you, and good luck.

Note: The President spoke at 10:47 a.m. at Rimac Field. In his remarks, he referred to Coleen Sabatini, associated student body president; Georgios H. Anagnostopoulos, chair, academic senate, Robert C. Dynes, chancellor, and Richard C. Atkinson, president, University of California San Diego.

Source: United States. Executive Office of the President, Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Week Ending Friday, June 20, 1997 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 33:876-882



3/8/00 11:00 am
Gottheimer/Halperin

**PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON
VIDEOTAPED REMARKS TO ANNUAL DINNER OF
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL
MARCH 10, 2000 (to be played in New York March 12)**

I am pleased to address the annual dinner of the National Council of Young Israel [and to thank you for honoring me with your "Man of the Year" award.]

Since 1912, [domestic]

Your organization has also worked for a secure and prosperous State of Israel. I'm pleased that with your support, the relationship between the United States and Israel today is stronger than ever. I have been fortunate to travel to Israel four times as President and to build close bonds with Israeli leaders and citizens. And this year my Administration is determined to help forge a just and lasting peace that will strengthen Israel's security and give all its children the chance for a prosperous future. For 52 years, Israel has been our strong democratic partner, the Israeli people our dear friends. America will always stand proudly by Israel's side.

[closing]Shalom.

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SCHEDULE PROPOSAL

January 28, 2000

P1:56

ACCEPT

REGRET

PENDING

TO:

Stephanie Streett

FROM:

Mary Beth Cahill *mbc*

REQUEST:

To accept the 'Man of the Year' Award and address the 88th Annual Dinner of the National Council of Young Israel.

PURPOSE:

To be honored by the group and to speak about domestic and foreign policy priorities for the remainder of the Administration.

BACKGROUND:

The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI), founded in 1912, serves as the national coordinating agency for nearly 150 orthodox congregations comprised of nearly 25,000 member families throughout the United States and Canada.

Originally created to combat the wave of assimilation by providing a palatable synagogue experience that was user friendly to newly arrived immigrants and their subsequent generations, NCYT's goal is to broaden the appeal of the traditional community synagogue as the central address for Jewish communal life by providing educational, religious, social, spiritual and communal programming.

DATE AND TIME:

March 12, 2000, flexible between 6:00pm and 9:00pm.

DURATION:

30 minutes

LOCATION:

Sheraton New York, New York City

PARTICIPANTS:

1000 rabbis and lay persons from across the country.

OUTLINE OF EVENT:

TBD.

PRESS/MEDIA:

TBD.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Chaim Kaminetsky, Chairman of the Board, NCYT

CONTACTS:

Debi Mobile 65157

Debi 65157

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Take into
your



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November 23, 1999

Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20533

Dear Mr. President:

It gives me great pleasure to request the honor of your presence at our 88th Annual Dinner In the Sheraton New York Hotel and Towers, New York City, on Sunday, March 12nd, 2000, at 6:00 PM. At that time we wish to present you as the National Council of Young Israel's "Man of the Year" for the many times you have proven to be a true friend to the American Jewish community and the State of Israel. You will be the leader of a select group slated for honors with the participation of their family, friends and associates, as well as statesmen, dignitaries, Rabbis and lay people from across the US. Attendance can be 1,000 guests.

National Council of Young Israel is the home office for 150 synagogues across North America and provides many informational and coordinating services for over 25,000 member families. During the 20th Century, the Young Israel movement has developed one of the finest youth programs for Jewish children in the United States, touching the lives of five generations of youngsters. In addition, we are involved in many health, education and social programs for those in need from all age groups.

Deepest thanks for your cooperation and may you continue to enjoy good health and happiness.

Sincerely,

Chaim S. Kaminitzky
Chairman of the Board

ISRAEL: 20 KING GEORGE STREET (HEICHAL SHLOMO), P.O.B. 7306, JERUSALEM • PHONE: (02) 623-136 • FAX: (02) 623-1363

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ROUTING SLIP

DATE	3/27/00
FROM	Stephanie Burson
Assistant to the President and Director of Presidential Scheduling	

File Regret

Comments _____

SUBJECT: To accept the "Man of the Year" Award and address the 88th Annual dinner of the Nat'l Council of Young Israel.

Kris Balderston _____

Lisa Berg _____

Samuel Berger _____

Sidney Blumenthal _____

Chuck Brain _____

Charles Burson _____

Mary Beth Cahill ☒

Maria Echaveste _____

Terry Edmonds _____

George Frampton _____

Laura Graham ☒

Nancy Hernreich _____

Mickey Ibarra _____

Ben Johnson _____

Joel Johnson _____

Neal Lane _____

Ann Lewis _____

Mark Lindsay _____

Bruce Lindsey _____

Joe Lockhart _____

Sean Maloney _____

Capricia Marshall _____

Thurgood Marshall Jr. _____

Minyon Moore _____

Bob Nash _____

Beth Nolan _____

John Podesta _____

Steve Ricchetti _____

Bruce Reed _____

Dan Rosenthal _____

Rozensky/Emrich ☒Dori Salcido ☒

Patti Solis-Doyle _____

Doug Sosnik _____

Gene Sperling _____

Carrie Street ☒

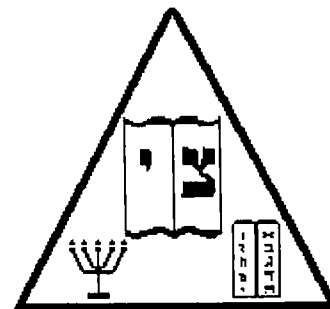
Karen Tramontano _____

Loretta Ucelli ☒

Melanne Verveer _____

Debi Mohyle ☒Final
Draft

National Council of Young Israel



The National Council of Young Israel

"The aims and purposes of the organization shall be to foster and maintain a program of spiritual, cultural, social and communal activity towards the advancement and perpetuation of traditional Torah-true Judaism; and to instill into American Jewish youth an understanding and appreciation of the high ethical and spiritual values of Judaism and demonstrate the compatability of the ancient faith of Israel with good Americanism.

The organization shall promote cooperation among the constituent branches now existing and which may hereafter be formed, establish a close bond of kinship to the end that their individual and common problems may more easily be solved, and act as the federated and central body for the Young Israel Movement so that its influence as a force in Jewry may be felt and recognized in America and the world over."

(From the Preamble of the Young Israel Constitution)

The National Council of Young Israel (NCYI), **founded in 1912**, serves as the national coordinating agency for nearly 150 orthodox congregations comprised of nearly 25,000 member families throughout the United States and Canada.

NCYI also serves as a resource to its sister organization in Israel, entitled Yisrael Hatzair - the Young Israel Movement in Israel, encompassing over 50 synagogues. Originally created to combat the wave of, assimilation by providing a palatable synagogue experience that was user friendly to newly arrived immigrants and their subsequent generations, the goal of NCYI is to broaden the appeal of the traditional community synagogue as the central address for Jewish communal life by providing educational, religious, social, spiritual and communal programming. This is accomplished by rendering services through our various departments such as:

- **Synagogue Support Services**
- **Youth and Young Adult Activities**
- **Development and Special Projects**
- **Young Israel Council of Rabbis**
- **Kashruth Services**
- **Eretz Yisrael Commission**
- **Synagogue Endowment Fund**

- **Political Action**
- **Women's League**
- **Rabbinic Training and Placement**
- **Lay Leadership Development**
- **Senior League**
- **University Campus Kosher Dining Clubs**
- **Various Publications (Viewpoint Magazine, weekly Divrei Torah Bulletins, etc.)**

The National Council of Young Israel, located at 3 West 16th Street in Manhattan, is a not for profit service organization, as defined by our 501 (c) 3 status. **Mr. Chaim S. Kaminetzky** serves as NCYI's National President; **Rabbi Pesach Lerner** is NCYI's Executive Vice President.

NCYI is a **grass roots organization** which takes its direction from its lay leadership, including the national board, delegates from each branch synagogue, branch rabbis and presidents, and the NCYI Professional Staff. Members are strongly encouraged to participate in national programs such as National Convention, annual national banquet, rabbinic and lay leadership conferences, political missions to Washington, D.C. and various rallies.

The National Council of Young Israel - A piece of American Jewish history

To appreciate the role of the Young Israel movement in North America, one must understand the circumstances which led to its creation in 1912 and the forces and events which have influenced its subsequent development. For today's religious Jews, the conditions under which American Jewry lived during the early decades of this century are almost unimaginable. Because practically all jobs required work on Saturday, **Shabbos observance was rare and typically required extraordinary sacrifice.**

The primary aspirations which most Jewish parents held for their children were for economic success and acceptance in American Society. Jewish education **was very low** on their list of priorities, and as a result, was usually rudimentary, at best. Orthodox synagogues were exclusively Yiddish-speaking and dominated by an Eastern European atmosphere. American-raised Jewish youth who wandered into these synagogues typically found themselves shut out completely. Thus it was not surprising that most Jewish youth of the era generally avoided the synagogue, attending only when required by family custom. Although intermarriage was relatively rare, the loss of young Jewish hearts and minds to Jewish belief and practice as we understand it today was almost universal in that era. It was in this environment that Young Israel was founded by a group of 15 progressive and visionary young men and woman.

Its first activities were Friday night lectures, in English, on a variety of topics of Jewish interest. Three years later, the group formed a "Model Synagogue" with innovations designed to attract American raised, English speaking Jewish youth. To broaden the appeal of synagogue services to even the poorest in the community, **Young Israel banned the acceptance of payment in return for any synagogue honor.**

Young Israel envisioned itself as much more than just a place for prayer services. It became and continues to serve as the base and center for a diversified movement,

providing programs and services addressing a broad range of social, educational and recreational needs as well as traditional Jewish observance.

Standing on the threshold of the 21st century, the Young Israel movement remains loyal to the ideas and ideals of its visionary founders. The National Council of Young Israel is the only Orthodox synagogue movement that requires the minimum halachic standards of a machetza, none accessibility of shul parking facilities on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and that the shul's officers be shomer shabbos. Thus, through its **142 branches** across North America - from New England to Phoenix, from Montreal to Houston, and over **50 branches** throughout Israel through Yisrael Hatzair, the Young Israel movement in Israel, **a Young Israel shul represents the definition of Orthodoxy which we share in common.** Today, the National Council of Young Israel is in the forefront of meeting the needs and representing the views of its over 25,000 member households, through its Youth and Young Adult Department, Synagogue Liason Services, Women's League, and so much more. Meeting the challenge of enhancing Torah observance and community needs continues to dominate the ongoing agenda of the National Council of Young Israel.

For more information, please contact **Rabbi Aaron S. Tirschwell**, Director of Synagogue Services, in the NCYI office.

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The Ethnic NewsWatch, January 9, 1998

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The Ethnic NewsWatch

Forward

January 9, 1998

SECTION: Vol. CI; Pg. 1**LENGTH:** 960 words**HEADLINE:** Talk of Mergers 'Twixt Orthodox**BYLINE:** Kessler, E.J.**BODY:**

Talk of Mergers 'Twixt Orthodox

NEW YORK -- The unprecedented cooperation among American Orthodox groups to defend the religious status quo in Israel -- the "Am Echad" movement that is sending 75 Orthodox leaders to lobby in the Jewish state next week -- is prompting talk that Orthodox synagogue organizations might see an eventual across-the-board merger.

The first to merge, many think, will be the pre-eminent Orthodox synagogue organization, the 1,000-congregation Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, and the 149-congregation **National Council of Young Israel.**

"I have long maintained that, in this day and age, when there are mergers in business and we have a fiduciary responsibility to people, we would better serve our community by effecting a merger," said the president of the Orthodox Union, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, although he acknowledged that intermittent talks on the matter have foundered. "(Young Israel was) concerned about the disparity in size, that because we were so large compared to them, that it wouldn't be a true merger," he said, adding that, in his view, "the ideology and theology" of congregations in both groups are the same.

Merger talk was echoed by a sociologist of Orthodoxy, Samuel Heilman. Explaining that the Orthodox had dropped to 6% to 7% of the American Jewish population in the 1990 Jewish Population Survey from 12% to 15% in the survey of 1971, he asked, "If you have a lot of institutions and few people, what's the need for having separate institutions?" Pointing to the recent cooperation, he said he could envision a merger that would span from the Orthodox Union to the charedi organization, Agudath Israel of America. "There's a shrinking middle," he said of Orthodoxy, "which is true for Judaism in general."

That, however, is not the opinion of Young Israel. "It's not going to happen," said Young Israel's executive vice president, Rabbi Pesach Lerner. "Our board doesn't want it and our professional staff doesn't want it."

◀ The 86-year-old organization, once on the decline, has been given a new lease on life under its

current leadership, Rabbi Lerner and national president Chaim Kaminetzky. The group, which claims to represent 25,000 people, has signed up eight new congregations in the last year and recently went into the kosher certification business by becoming the agent for an established private mark, Star K (see related story, Page 8). With a budget that has grown 50% in the last five years, to \$1.5 million, Young Israel has been touting itself as "the premier synagogue service organization in the Orthodox movement" and as a bulwark against the inroads of Orthodox feminism, such as women's prayer groups and the new quasi-Rabbinic "congregational interns."

The revival of Young Israel, which started as a modernizing movement in the first decade of the century for young Orthodox who wanted American-style synagogue decorum and sermons in English instead of Yiddish, represents another instance of the turn to the right in Orthodox. The movement has survived by carving out a niche for itself as a bridge between the modern Orthodox world that draws its inspiration from Yeshiva University and that of the "black hat" yeshivas aligned with Agudath Israel; Young Israel rabbis, increasingly, come from both, as more and more charedi yeshiva heads encourage their students to take up the pulpit. A recent Rabbinic training conference drew participants "from all the yeshivas...from the fully black, to YU: Torah Va'daath, Lakewood, Mirer," said the president of Young Israel's Council of Rabbis, Yaacov Feitman, ticking off the names of the great academies of the fervently Orthodox world. Rabbi Lerner estimates that only a third of current Young Israel rabbis are ordained by Yeshiva University.

For the Orthodox Union, however, Young Israel can fairly be described as a thorn in its side. While officials of both organizations try to downplay the fact, the groups are in competition: for member congregations (although some shuls belong to both), for advertising dollars for their publications, for support for their dinners and now for the kosher business; the Star-K mark competes with the Orthodox Union's kosher mark, the ubiquitous "OU."

Rabbi Lerner zealously defends Young Israel's independence, pointing to its "standards," which he claims the Orthodox Union does not match: every Young Israel synagogue has a "kosher" barrier between the men's and women's sections of the synagogue, closes its parking lot on the Sabbath and holidays and requires officers to observe the Sabbath. "We all have our niches," he said. "We should be busy serving our niches instead of trying to take over somebody else." He noted that the synagogue where the executive vice president of the Orthodox Union, Rabbi Raphael Butler, was until recently rabbi had joined Young Israel, adding, "I believe that the Orthodox community is getting a lot more bang for their buck here."

The director of communications for Agudath Israel, Rabbi Avi Shafran, dismissed talk of an across-the-board merger, calling the Am Echad group "an ad hoc coalition." The sharp tongues of some members of Aguda's Council of Torah Sages certainly mitigates in that direction; one, Rabbi Elya Svei, recently called the president of Yeshiva University, Rabbi Norman Lamm, a "hater of God" for supporting a compromise on the Israel conversion issue, rhetoric Aguda did not disavow.

None of this deters Dr. Ganchrow. "A merger with the Orthodox Union would allow the to improve their services and work for the clal," he said. "The fact that there's so many Young Israel congregations active in our movement shows that there's no contradiction. There will be a merger, it's only a matter of time."

ETHNIC-GROUP: Jewish

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: April 8, 1998

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The Ethnic NewsWatch
Jewish Week, The

September 17, 1999

SECTION: Vol. 212; No. 17; Pg. 25**LENGTH:** 1015 words**HEADLINE:** Making A Name In The Five Towns: Already embracing a similar philosophy, Hewlett congregation hopes affiliating with Young Israel will help build membership.**BYLINE:** DuBow, Jodi Bodner**BODY:**

Making A Name In The Five Towns: Already embracing a similar philosophy, Hewlett congregation hopes affiliating with Young Israel will help build membership.

JODI BODNER DuBOW

JEWISH WEEK CORRESPONDENT

What's in a name? Plenty, officials at Congregation Ahavat Yisrael in Hewlett will tell you.

With an eye toward increasing its membership, the Orthodox congregation of more than 100 families soon will become the 149th Young Israel in North America.

"We voted to affiliate with the **National Council of Young Israel** for two reasons," explains the president, Sam Bogarsky. "To be identified as part of the Young Israel community is like a neon sign. It's an excellent merchandising tool, as it means you stand for Young Israel standards - values we share. We're hoping it will help us attract new members.

Though the congregation believes the Young Israel identification holds the key to its future, the synagogue will maintain its Ahavat Yisrael moniker, "because that's what we're about," Bogarsky says, "love of Israel." Young Israel is well known, too, for its Zionist outlook.

The other reason? "Young Israel devotes a lot of time to their youth," he says, "which we certainly intend to do, as that's our future."

Under the guidance of its new rabbi, Heshy Blumstein, the Young Israel of Hewlett/Congregation Ahavat Yisrael will offer youth groups for Shabbat and holiday programming, among other ventures.

Though synagogue officials conducted an extensive search upon learning that founding Rabbi Abraham Mandelbaum was retiring after 14 years, Rabbi Blumstein was a walk down the stairs away. He serves as executive director of the girls' yeshiva day school, Reenas Bais Yaakov, located

in the small, shiny red brick building at Piermont Avenue and Broadway distinguishable by its odd facade.

The 40-year-old father of nine has held two Young Israel pulpits in his native Brooklyn, and directs Gateways Seminars, an outreach program for Jews of all streams.

"Anyone who comes will be embraced by our shul," says Rabbi Blumstein, who was welcomed to the shul on Saturday with a kiddush in his honor. "We're proud that we're a traditional shul that believes in Torah from Sinai, and all 613 mitzvot will be studied here. But if someone doesn't feel comfortable, we'll show them how they can fit in until they do feel comfortable. Any Jew will be welcome with open arms.

"Though we're in the middle of New York, we're creating an out-of-town community feeling. Everyone wants to be part of a community."

The hope is that the community will grow by drawing on the surrounding areas of Hewlett, Old Woodmere, East Rockaway and Hewlett Bay Park and enticing young couples to move into the area. The closest Young Israel, the Young Israel of Woodmere -- the second largest in North America with more than 650 family members -- is about a half-mile away.

"All these neighborhoods have tremendous potential," says Bogarsky, who lives in Hewlett and mentioned the presence of the Stella K. Abraham HALB high school for girls in Hewlett Bay Park as another lure.

The future potential of the synagogue is world's apart from its humble origins -- meeting in the basement of Hewlett resident Nathaniel Lazan.

"About 30 of us broke away from the Hewlett-East Rockaway Jewish Centre, a Conservative congregation," Lazan recalls, "because we wanted a more traditional davening. We davened in my house for 18 months, then bought property in East Rockaway, and then four years ago we bought the building we're in now."

"We were a sociological phenomenon," says Rabbi Mandelbaum. "Our founders were not Orthodox, but they didn't feel comfortable being too liberal either. The mixed seating didn't bother them, but some of the other changes taking place in the congregation did, so they broke away.

"We were somewhat atypical -- an Orthodox shul in a relatively unobservant area -- attracting all types of Jews who felt comfortable in a Modern Orthodox setting."

It is this open-door philosophy the congregation hopes to maintain as a Young Israel.

"We want the Young Israel name because people instantly recognize it as a level of observance within their parameters," Lazan says, "while at the same time we want to define our own version of being a warm and open congregation."

"Young Israel is like Baskin-Robbins: It's a trademark name," says Rabbi Aaron Tirschwell, associate executive director and director of synagogue services for the **National Council of Young Israel**. "With shades of differences, there are the same standards in every Young Israel, so you always know what you're going to get."

Among the standards in the NCYI constitution: a mechitza meeting the height requirement of the Young Israel council of rabbis; executive officers must be strictly observant; and the parking lot be closed on Shabbat and holidays.

"They also need to be in sync with the Young Israel movement," says Rabbi Tirschwell, "which is to maintain the time-honored Torah standards of the Orthodox community and to spread that as far as possible.

"If you look in the phone book and see Congregation Ahavat Yisrael, you don't know what it is. But if you see Young Israel, you know exactly what you're getting."

Young Israel of Hewlett is entering its one-year engagement period, customary for a fledgling branch. About 10 to 15 Young Israels have been added in the past five years, with others pending.

"Sometimes we don't allow them to join because they don't meet our standards," says Rabbi Tirschwell, "and sometimes they walk away from us. But in this case I think it's a good match."

So does Jana Brooks. A resident of Hewlett for the past year and a half, she and her husband, Saul, have three young children who attend the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway.

"It feels like a different shul already," she says. "The rabbi has great energy and his excitement is felt."

"The congregation wasn't growing, though it wasn't for lack of spirit. Now we feel there's hope."

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ETHNIC-GROUP: Jewish

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: January 16, 2000

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