

Jewish Day Schools in America: A New History
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Abstract:

This history of the modern Jewish day school movement in the United States, the first since 1966, will document and analyze trends and themes since the inception of the modern Jewish day school in the 1920s. In addition to tracing the development, diversification, growth and challenges confronting the day school movement, it will focus particular attention on the ideologies of these schools and the lived experience of students, teachers, school leaders and parents. I plan to use a wide variety of primary sources to shed light on the development of a grammar of modern Jewish day schools (e.g., subject matter, curriculum, calendar, rites of passage, and gender composition of the student body), and will devote considerable attention to how teachers taught and how students contributed to the creation of a distinctive school culture. In an effort to locate the Jewish day school movement within the larger landscape of faith-based schooling in the United States, I will also explore the extent to which the modern Jewish day school was similar to and distinct from other faith based all day K-12 educational institutions. Jews in America traditionally favored the Protestant model of religious education over the Catholic model. Did the growth of day schools signal a realignment or were day schools sufficiently different in orientation and ideology from parochial schools to represent a third way? Finally, I am interested in the influence of market forces on the modern Jewish day school and the extent to which they shaped school policy and encouraged an uneasy marriage between Jewish and conventional, middle class values like self-actualization and a belief in the myth of meritocracy.