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New Research Finds 20% of Jewish America Is Ethnically and Racially Diverse

Study shows the increase in diverse Jews mirrors the changing racial and religious character of America

San Francisco -- (September 8, 2005) New research debunks the commonly held view that America's Jews are a monolithic people of exclusively white European ancestry. In their new book, *In Every Tongue* (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, \$25, 251 pages) noted scholar Gary A. Tobin and co-authors Diane Tobin and Scott Rubin show that American Jews are a multiracial people -- perhaps the most diverse people in history.

Of the nation's 6 million Jews, roughly 1.2 million, or 20 percent, consist of African-American, Asian-American, Latino, Sephardic (of Spanish and Portuguese descent), Middle Eastern, and mixed-race Jews. This minority within a minority is growing, and has the potential to change the traditional debate over the future of American Jewish life. Prior estimates of the size of this community of Jews ranged between 10 and 14 percent.

"The Jewish people began at the intersection of Africa, Asia, and Europe. We are simply becoming who we have always been," said Diane Tobin. The authors uncovered overlooked groups among the Jewish people, including:

- Latinos reclaiming their Jewish roots, 500 years after the Spanish Inquisition – who view themselves not as “converts” but as “reverts” to Judaism.
- Long-established communities of African-American Jews in many cities, such as Chicago and New York, with their own institutional structures.
- In addition, nearly 1 million diverse Americans closely connected to Jews – spouses, children, parents, siblings -- many of whom practice some Jewish customs and identify with Jewish issues.

Over a four-year period, the Tobins and Rubin conducted over 200 personal interviews and focus groups, collected original survey data on more than 1,000 people from over 300 households in 36 states, and visited numerous communities of diverse Jews to observe and understand their institutional structures.

The authors found that some diverse Jews feel isolated from their racial and ethnic communities as well as from the Jewish community. Despite this challenge, they identify strongly with both communities.

“People from a broad range of backgrounds find Judaism a comforting home, and they do not feel they have to choose between their racial, ethnic, and religious identities simply because they are part of the Jewish people,” said Rabbi Rigoberto Emmanuel Viñas, a New York-based Orthodox rabbi of Cuban descent.

The research also shows that, while many people believe that genetic heritage (being born of a Jewish parent) is the only way to join the Jewish people, conversion, adoption, and intermarriage are significant ways in which people of all races become Jewish.

“More than ever, people in America are crossing boundaries and redefining race and religion,” said Gary Tobin. “The changing American Jewish people are a reflection of America as a whole.”

The book, available from Amazon.com, includes a foreword by Africana and philosophy scholar Lewis Gordon of Temple University, a photo essay, and a detailed summary of the methodology for the Institute's research.

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research produced the book as part of a broad community-building effort to help the American Jewish community and Jews around the world recognize and reach out to ethnically and racially diverse Jews. The Institute, based in San Francisco, is an independent, non-partisan think tank, and provides innovative research and pragmatic policy analyses to Jewish and other communities around the world.

About the authors:

Dr. Gary A. Tobin is president of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research and is also director of the Leonard and Madlyn Abramson Program in Jewish Policy Research at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. He earned his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley. He was the director of the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University for fourteen years. Prior to joining Brandeis, Dr. Tobin spent eleven years on faculty at Washington University, St. Louis. Dr. Tobin has worked extensively in the area of patterns of racial segregation in schools and housing.

Diane Kaufmann Tobin is the associate director of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research. She manages the projects of the Institute and produces the publication series. She is the co-author of *Jewish Family Foundations*. Ms. Tobin is currently the director of the *Be'chol Lashon* project.

Scott Rubin is a senior research associate at the Institute for Jewish & Community Research. He has been involved in several other projects with the Institute, including, *Opening the Gates: How Proactive Conversion Can Revitalize the Jewish Community*. He is also working on a biography of philanthropist Harry Weinberg.

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