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Shoshana Cardin Remembered for Enormous Impact

MAY 18, 2018

BY CONNOR GRAHAM AND JTA

Shoshana Cardin, a Baltimore philanthropist who was the first woman to chair her city's Jewish federation, the national umbrella body of the Jewish federation movement and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, died on May 18. She was 91.

In the course of her life, she helped Russian Jews immigrate to Israel, fought Israeli legislation that would have given power over conversions to the Orthodox rabbinate, and became the first woman to lead many prominent Jewish organizations.

Cardin's entry on the website of the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame points to her achievements: "Clearly, her example as an active participant in her efforts to make her community, country and world a better place for all of us challenges each of us to help in achieving those worthwhile goals. She has been a tireless worker for human rights, women's rights, education, Jewish spirituality and culture, and the state of Israel."

Cardin was born Shoshana Shoubin in Tel Aviv on Oct. 10, 1926. Her family immigrated to the United States while she was still a baby and settled in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in East Baltimore.



([HTTP://JEWISHTIMES.COM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2018/05/CARDIN_ROTATOR.JPG](http://jewishtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cardin_Rotator.JPG))
(STU ZOLOTOROW)

After studying for three years at Johns Hopkins University, Cardin earned a bachelor's in English from UCLA. She married Jerome Cardin, first cousin of U.S. Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), in her early 20s, and raised four children, Steven, Ilene, Nina and Sanford, while pursuing a career in public service.

"Shoshana Cardin clearly understood the value of community and civic involvement, and left a long record of engagement and philanthropy not only close to home, but across the country and around the world," said Sen. Cardin in a prepared statement. "Shoshana was also a woman of intellect, involvement and tremendous personal dedication to significant causes who effectively spoke truth to power on their behalf. She will be missed."



([HTTP://JEWISHTIMES.COM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2018/04/CARDIN_SHOSHANA2.JPG](http://jewishtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CARDIN_SHOSHANA2.JPG))
SHOSHANA CARDIN AT HER HOME OFFICE IN PIKESVILLE.

Cardin's emergence as president of the Federation of Jewish Women's Organizations of Maryland in the early '60s coincided with the beginning of the American Jewish community's involvement in the civil rights movement. Cardin used her platform then and throughout her career to advocate for the Jewish community, women's rights and to draw attention to racial inequality in the United States.

One of Cardin's daughters, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, told the JT Tuesday that as a child she "thought all mothers were like my mother."

It wasn't until she went to college in 1971 and attended consciousness-raising groups that she really grasped her mother's exceptionality.

"These young women would sit around and talk about their role models," she said, "and I didn't understand why they were choosing other people than their mothers. That's when I realized I was living with someone who was probably not like everyone else."

By the 1980s and early '90s, Cardin became the first woman to lead half a dozen Jewish organizations. Her titles included chair of the board of Associated Jewish Charities of Baltimore (now The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore), president of the Council of Jewish Federations, chair of the National Council of Soviet Jewry and chair of the United Israel Appeal.

During Cardin's tenure as chair of the National Conference for Soviet Jewry, she met with Rudolf Kuznetsov, the emigration officer in the former USSR who was responsible for containing nearly 11,000 refuseniks. As a result of those negotiations, thousands of Soviet Jews were granted freedom.

Daniel Rubin, the chairman of that organization, now called the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry, said, "Shoshana was an inspirational Jewish leader in all walks of Jewish life, but especially for us at NCSEJ. From the very beginning, she was a cornerstone of the movement to free Jews from the USSR. Shoshana will be missed by all of us, but the example she set in her leadership and activism will serve as a guiding light and allow us to continue to do our work long into the future."

In a statement released by the Jewish Federations of North America, the organization said that Cardin "challenged presidents, prime ministers and Soviet premiers to do better. ... Shoshana Cardin was an inspiration to generations and will be dearly missed."



([HTTP://JEWISHTIMES.COM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2017/03/SNAPSHOT.JPG](http://jewishtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/snapshot.jpg))

SHOSHANA CARDIN, JONATHAN KOLKER AND FOUR

OTHERS AT THE ASSOCIATED'S ANNUAL MEETING, 1985. (COURTESY OF THE JEWISH MUSEUM OF MARYLAND, 1995.189.5)

In the fall of 1988, during Cardin's CJF presidency, she played a critical role in unifying the Jewish community's leadership in opposition to proposed changes in Israel's Law of Return. The change would have altered the law to require that all conversions be approved by the Orthodox rabbinate. It was ultimately withdrawn in the face of overwhelming pressure from American Jews.

Later, Cardin headed the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations at a time when the umbrella body was working to secure Israel's position with the U.S. administration, a task complicated by President George H.W. Bush's struggle to maintain good relations with the Arab partners in his international campaign to oust Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

She was conference chair when, in 1991, Bush offered what she described as a heartfelt apology for making statements that were perceived by the Jewish community to be a direct attack on the pro-Israel lobby.

The Associated posted a statement on its Facebook page May 18 that read, "The officers, board of directors, staff and our agencies mourn the passing of our friend and colleague, Shoshana S. Cardin. A true icon in the Jewish world, Shoshana embodied the Jewish tenet, kol Israel arevim ze la'ze, all the Jewish people are responsible for one another. May her memory be a blessing for her family and for our entire community. To her family, friends and many admirers, we extend our deepest sympathies."

Cardin's death came not only just before Shabbat, but Shavuot. Nina Beth called the weekend a "bittersweet family- filled Shavuos."

"We were very proud of her," she said, "and we are proud that we could share her with the world."

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