



Jordan Magidson
Curriculum Guide
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In Our Image: A look at how Jewish Identity has changed in America

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The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines identity as “The set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.” While it is a hope that each person will walk out of this class with a stronger sense of their individual identity, this course is about Judaism’s identity in the United States. In this course, we will look at the identity crisis that American Judaism is currently facing. In the last 30 years American Jews have undergone a shift—from “other” to “majority”—that has left us asking four important questions:

- How do American Jews remain "Jewish" in America's open and relentlessly secularizing society?
- How do others’ perceptions of us as Americans change how we see ourselves as Jews?
- With these constantly shifting views of our identities, will American Judaism survive, and if so, in what form?
- What role has American popular culture taken in aiding and hindering Jewish identity in America?

We will learn that as we try to determine who we are, both as Jews and as Americans, we are continuously internalizing others’ perceptions of us. These cultural symbols, images and stereotypes of Jews (created by and about us) are key components of our identity formation. These stereotypes take on new meaning for men and women, gay and straight, working class and middle class, in changing the way we perceive ourselves. Identities and perhaps most especially Jewish identities are not static. They are constantly in production and subject to constant change and revision. It is these practices of Jewish identity construction that we will explore as we trace the role of others’ perceptions of us in these practices. Finally, we will also explore the implications of new conceptualizations of Jewish identity

In this class, we will explore representations of Jewish life, culture, and religion in American popular culture. We will analyze the different ways in which Jewish identity and culture have been (mis)represented in American film, television, music and art. Studying these representations will provide insight into how American society has positioned Judaism and Jewish culture, and how Jews have sought to position themselves within the dominant culture throughout the last decades of the twentieth century.

In the book *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Pop Culture*, the author, Paul Buhle, writes that he is “joined to the largest question of Jewishness” because “various Jewish creators of popular culture have given shape to my imaginative impulses since age five or six if not before”. (6) In this class, we will learn that like Paul Buhle, everyone, both Jew and non-Jew, are responsible for the formation of the Jewish identity in the United States, as we are all shaped by different political movements, eras, and outside impetuses.

We will also look at Jewish identity formation through the lens of popular media. This media will be an important tool in this class not only because of the familiarity of the lens for our youth, but also because of its persuasive impact on our entire culture. In an age where people rent more movies than check out books, we are providing the students with subject matter that they feel comfortable with. More importantly, popular culture, even its basest form, generally acts as a mirror of society. It is through popular media that we are able to see how the American Jewish identity crisis is being played out—both the challenges and the re-creation of liberal American Judaism that is arising from this dilemma. We will be able to literally *see* what others think of us, as well as how we present ourselves which will provide a base for analyzing how these perceptions are then manifesting themselves in the “real world”.

This course is intended for high school students in their last years of high school—either eleventh or twelfth grade. By the time they have reached this grade, they have decided to continue their Jewish education beyond Bar or Mat Mitzvah and Confirmation. By making this decision, most likely on their own, they have made a statement that their personal Jewish identity holds some importance in their lives. While they have already begun to form their own identity, it has been done in their parents’ homes, under their parents’ guidance. It is at this time that these young adults are beginning to solidify their own identity just as they are also at a point of leaving their homes for the first time.

Who they are, both as Americans and as Jews will be put under a microscope by peers, professors and most importantly themselves during this time. It is important for them to examine what it means to be an American Jew, how that is played out in larger society, and how their own identity then affects the larger group.

For these reasons, the curriculum will be based on the following enduring understandings:

- 1.) Identities are both culturally constructed and historically embedded.
- 2.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.
- 3.) The shift from a priority of religion in Jewish identity to an identity that is pervasively secular is changing the face Judaism in America.
- 4.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.

Enduring Understandings:

- 1.) Identities are both culturally constructed and historically embedded.
- 2.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.
- 3.) The shift from religion as a priority in the formation of Jewish identity to an identity that is pervasively secular is changing the face Judaism in America.
- 4.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.

Unit Understandings

Unit 1: Defining Jewish Identity in America: Are we American Jews or Jewish Americans?

- 1.) American Jewish identity is continuously evolving and changing.
- 2.) American Jewish identity has, at least, been partly constructed through popular culture

Unit 2: Jewish stereotypes at work

- 1.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.
- 2.) Stereotypes are prevalent in our everyday lives and affect our perceptions of people.
- 3.) Stereotypes are used in films to move the story along and to help audiences relate to the characters

Unit 3: Self-Representation and Self-hatred: A disappearing American Jewish identity

- 1.) Jews, too can be anti-Semitic, and when they are, what surfaces is a latent insecurity that arises from the humiliation of centuries of oppression.
- 2.) Jews have often had confusing and conflicting feelings about what it means to be both a Jew and an American, that have lead to extreme efforts to fit into American culture in a variety of ways.
- 3.) Self hatred can develop when one’s sense of self and ethnic identity is not clearly understood or developed and as one tries to find one’s place in the larger American society

Unit 4: The Vanishing American Jew?

- 1.) Assimilation creates anxiety across multiple generations that are increasingly unanchored from any sense of cohesive identity.
- 2.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.

Unit 5: Documenting Jewish Identity

- 1.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.
- 2.) Identities are both culturally constructed and historically embedded.
- 3.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.

Curricular Goals

- 1.) To provide students with an understanding that Jewish Identity is constantly evolving and adapting to and becoming part of the larger American society.
- 2.) To provide students with an understanding that as Jews in America, we are not only open to, but we are also susceptible to the effects of stereotype and hatred, and that has, no matter how negative, had part in shaping our identity in the United States.
- 3.) To give students a foundation in the beginning to think about how they fit into American culture as a Jew.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Explain how Jewish identity has been constructed in the United States.
- 2.) Give examples of different factors in identity construction from movies, television shows, drama, photography and magazines.
- 3.) Analyze different modes of popular culture to determine how the actors, authors, directors, producers, photographers, etc. have tried to face the question of what it means to be Jewish in America.
- 4.) Reflect on how the students see themselves as Jews living in America.
- 5.) Integrate their own thoughts and feelings about what it means to be a Jew in America with the texts that were learned.

Expressive Outcomes

There will be three major components of assessment and reflection. The first mode of reflection will be the student journals. In the majority of the lessons, students will answer prompts dealing with that day's topic. Inspired by the movie *Freedom Writers* you should assure your students that everything they write in their journals is personal, and you will not read them unless you are asked to.

The second mode of reflection will be a class blog. Students will post posters, movie reviews, reflections and other writing samples on the blog that are relevant to the topic of Jewish American Identity. If there are other things, such as photographs they take during the year, commentary on any movies, music, television shows, etc that they have seen outside of class, but are relevant, they should feel free to add them to the blog.

The third mode of reflection is creating a class documentary answering the question "What does it mean to be a Jew in America in the twenty-first century?" The class will be divided up into groups of 4 to 5 to work on different segments of the documentary. They will film segments on subjects covered in class, such as identity construction, stereotyping, self-hatred, the evolution of American identity in America, where American Jewish identity is heading, as well as their own reflections on the subject. Students will use both "primary" footage (that is, footage that they have filmed themselves) and "secondary" footage (clips from movies/television shows, magazine and newspaper articles).

After the documentary is finished, students will invite parents, family members, friends, clergy, other classes and other members of the community to attend a premier of their documentary. Each group will present their process, and afterwards there should be time allowed for questions and answers.

Dear Teacher,

I, like many of our teenagers, am a couch potato. I love movies, television, reading, and perusing the latest magazines. What I began to notice through all of my watching and perusing is that Jews are everywhere. They are in sitcoms, dramas, they are in the news, they make the news, they are even on soap operas now (and I don't just mean the O.C.). Jews have pervaded American popular culture.

But the Jews we knew from years gone by, the Rachel Greene's and the Jerry Seinfelds, have moved over for a different kind of Jew. We see Jews facing tougher issues regarding their own Judaism: issues such as intermarriage, Christian-Judeo relationships, and most shocking and most important...their Jewish identity.

In this curriculum guide I attempt to look at the idea of changing Jewish identity through this lens that we are all so familiar with. But media is not only a mirror in this case, reflecting (or even distorting) our own image, but rather, it also plays a role in how and why our identity is changing. We always read in the news, or hear on television how young girls and boys are overly influenced by the images they see in magazines and in the movies. Body image, gender and sexuality issues, clothes, and more are all influenced by what they (and we) see on TV and in the magazines. Jewish identity isn't any different. Images of the stereotypical Jew can be funny and comforting, but they can also be harmful to our sense of self-worth. It is these issues that will be dealt with.

I have given you a lot of material here. You may not get through it all. Many of the lessons I have created can take multiple class periods, especially the ones which involve watching movie and television clips. I have not specified how much of a given show you should watch, and rarely have I specified which scenes. I leave that to your discretion. Make sure that you preview each film or TV show before you show it to your class. Although there are a few instances where you will be unable to avoid showing your students strong content, you will be better prepared for their reactions if you are aware of what is coming.

One more important note: Some of these works use strong language and deal with strong issues. I don't believe that any of it is superfluous or for shock value. While this class is geared toward high school seniors (who will all presumably be over the age of 17), I am providing you with a template of a parent letter and "permission" slip for the students to sign with their parents. This is a courtesy to the parents, and to ensure them that the film their children are watching has a purpose.

Jordan Magidson

Movie Viewing Permission Slip

Dear Parents,

This year in the course *In Our Own Image: A look at how Jewish identity has changed in America*, we will be viewing movies, television shows, and photographic documentation as well as reading articles, plays and magazines that speak to the issue of Jewish identity in the United States and the components that both construct it and affect it.

Each movie and television show has been selected and chosen because they address the issues that we will be discussing in class, such as stereotyping, self-hatred and the fate of American Jews. While each movie and television show has been carefully considered, many of these movies and TV shows are R rated and use strong language or have strong content. The media chosen all play an important part in American culture, Jewish culture and most importantly American Jewish culture.

Although this course is only open to 12th graders, we may have students who have not yet turned 17 years of age. If your child is over the age of 17, we still encourage you to fill out and return this permission slip to the religious school. We are all partners in our children's religious school education, and as such, it is our aim to help you be involved and aware of what is happening in the classroom.

Thank you,

Teacher signature

Director of Education Signature

I give permission for my child

To watch the movies and television in the course *In Our Own Image: A look at how Jewish identity has changed in America*.

My child is ___Over the age of 17 ___Under the age of 17 | Birthdate:

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Unit 1: Defining Jewish Identity: Are we American Jews or Jewish Americans?

Understandings

- 1.) American Jewish identity is continuously evolving and changing.
- 2.) American Jewish identity has, at least, been partly constructed through popular culture

Goals

- 1.) To help students understand the ways in which American Jewish identity has been constructed.
- 2.) To help students understand the ways in which popular culture has played a role in constructing our group identity.
- 3.) To help students think about the positive and negative factors that go into identity construction.

Essential Questions

- 1.) What is identity?
- 2.) How is identity constructed?
- 3.) How is American Jewish identity different from Jewish American identity?
- 4.) What effect has popular media had on American Jewish identity?
- 5.) How does larger group identity affect our personal identity?

Unit Overview

Lesson 1: What is identity? What ‘goes into’ ones’ identity?

Lesson 2: What is American Jewish identity?

Lesson 3: Jewish American identity vs. American Jewish identity—is there a difference?

Lesson 4: Stars of David—How American Jewish identity plays a role in popular culture?

Lesson 1: What is identity? What 'goes into' ones' identity?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Define identity
- 2.) List different factors that help construct identity
- 3.) Create an identity map to help students determine constructs of their own identity

Materials

- Flip chart
- Writing materials
- Student journals

Activity

Write "identity" on the board and ask the students to brainstorm its meanings. Ask each student to create an "Identity Map" which depicts all the components that make up their own identity, including the varied roles they play. Show students how to create their maps by putting a circle on the board and writing "Me" in the center. Then, draw lines out from the circle and write words such as "loyal," "artist," "daughter," etc.

Divide the class into small groups and ask students to share their maps with each other. Ask them to discuss the following questions:

- 1.) What 3 words would you choose which you believe best describe yourself?
- 2.) Why do those words accurately describe you?
- 3.) What 3 words would your family or friends use to describe you?
- 4.) How accurate are others' descriptions of you?
- 5.) Did being Jewish play a role into your identity? If not, why not? If so, how much of a role does Judaism play into your identity?

Journal entry

Explain to students that this year they will be keeping journals where they can write reflections and thoughts on the topics that will be discussed and learned throughout the year. For the most part, their journals will be private. Let them know that you will be happy and honored to read their journals, but you will never do so without being invited to first, unless you explicitly tell them so first.

For their first journal entry, students will answer the following prompt: What does it mean to "construct" identity? What factors have helped construct *my* identity?

NOTE TO TEACHER: You may want to explain to the class the set up for the rest of the course. After Unit 1, the topics center on subjects of stereotyping, self-hate and the fate of American Jewry. The rest of the lessons will be centered on television/movies, and Jewish portrayal in popular culture.

Lesson 2: What is American Jewish identity?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Define American Jewish Identity
- 2.) Identify different factors that have helped construct American Jewish identity?

Materials

- Chart paper
- Writing materials
- *Jewish Identity in America* by Abraham Fox

Activity 1

Distribute 10 or more post-its to each student. Ask students to write the following:

- At least 3 religious components that make up Jewish identity
- At least 3 cultural components that make up Jewish identity
- At least 3 ethnic components that make-up Jewish identity.

Assign each factor a different space in the classroom, and as students finish this task, ask them to post their post-its in its designated space. (For example, all religious components will be posted on the board, and so on.)

Divide class into three groups. Assign each group to one set of post-its. Ask each group to categorize the post-its, at first silently. They can then discuss their final decisions and name each group. Each group should discuss the following:

- Is there much variety?
- Are any of these components specific to American Jewry?
- If so, what makes them specific components of American Jewry?
- Are there any components that are not listed here that you would add?

Bring the class back together for a class discussion. Focus on the last two questions.

Activity 2

Distribute copies of *Jewish Identity in America* by Abraham Fox. Either ask students to read article quietly or read article as a class.

Discussion

- 1.) What is the article about?
- 2.) Do you agree with Yair Sheleg's stance?
- 3.) Does Sheleg have the right to judge American Jewry?
- 4.) What do you think are the biggest issues facing American Jewry?

Journal entry

Students may either answer question 4, or respond to the following prompt: What is my Jewish identity? What influences how I see myself as a Jew?

Lesson 3: Jewish American identity vs. American Jewish identity—is there a difference?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Differentiate between Jewish American identity and American Jewish identity
- 2.) Examine Jewish identity in America through photography
- 3.) Gain insight into American Jewish identity.

Materials

- *Jews America: A Representation* Photographs by Frederic C. Brenner
- *Shalom Y'all* Photographs by Bill Aron
- *The Jewish Identity Project: New American Photography*
- Art criticism protocol

NOTE TO TEACHER: The question that we are asking our students to both ask and answer in this lesson is whether or not there is a difference between Jewish American Identity and American Jewish Identity, as well as whether this distinction affects the way that we view ourselves as Americans and Jews in the United States. An *American Jew* is defined as a person who identifies themselves as Jewish first, and then as an American. In other words, the "Jew" in *American Jew* is the noun while the "American" is the adjective. A *Jewish American* therefore would identify themselves first as an American, and then as a Jew. Both viewpoints are valid, and perhaps they are fluid, and one's

Journal entry: (5 minutes)

Write the following quote by Pablo Picasso on the board: *My mother said to me, "If you become a soldier, you'll be a general; if you become a monk, you'll end up as the Pope. Instead, I became a painter and wound up as Picasso."*

Although this quote is obviously about personal identity, ask the students to think about what one can discover about identity through art. Can they identify things that have happened to them or activities they participated in which helped them learn more about themselves? Can they think of any examples of things that have happened to Jewish Americans that helped Jews find their place in America?

Activity 1 (35 minutes)

Now that students have thought about the connection between art and identity, they'll look at two photographs that deal with identity. Begin by modeling the process of photography analysis with the class as a whole. Later, students will repeat this process using a photo of their own choosing. Choose a photo from among the photographs by Bill Aron, Frederic Brenner or the Jewish Identity Project. Before you begin, explain that both Aron and Brenner, as well as the Jewish Identity Project sought to document the lives of American Jews, capturing aspects of their lives that make them both Jewish and American. In this activity, they will be looking to determine which plays a greater role in the subjects' lives, their Judaism or their Americanism.

- 1.) What is the subject of this photograph?

- 2.) What is the photographer's perspective? How close is the photographer to the subject? Are you looking down at the subject? Up?
- 3.) Is the subject clear or blurry? What do you think is the intention behind the photographer's choice?
- 4.) Besides the subject of the photo, what other objects appear in the picture? Are these objects natural or man-made? How is the subject interacting with these objects?
- 5.) Is the photograph dark or light, or both? Is it naturally lit, or did the photographer use artificial light?
- 6.) What do you think the photographer is saying about herself in this picture? What do you see in the picture that supports your opinion?
- 7.) What do you think the photographer is trying to convey about the subject? What do you see that supports your opinion?
- 8.) Is this a photo of an American Jew or a Jewish American? What do you see in the photograph to support your opinion?
- 9.) How does the photograph make you feel?
- 10.) Do you like or dislike it? Why?

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4, and they will try out the analysis on their own. Provide them with a variety of different photographs from the three photographers. They should answer the analysis questions from the previous step. Distribute copies of the analysis protocol to each group.

Presentations (20 minutes)

Each group will present their work to the class. Compare and discuss the different answers to question #8.

Discussion

- 1.) Describe the difference between the two identities?
- 2.) What were their criteria for determining which pictures represented American Jews and which represented Jewish Americans?
- 3.) Ask if anyone feels comfortable sharing with the class which group they fall into, and why.

Homework

Ask students to photograph their lives during the next week, focusing on the aspects of their lives that represent the aspects of their lives that truly make up their identity. Stress the importance of bringing in the photographs when you next meet, because they will be needed for the activity.

Photography Analysis Protocol

Directions: In your group, choose one photograph from the collection provided to you. Study the photograph and answer the following questions as a group.

- 1.) What is the subject of this photograph?

- 2.) What is the photographer's perspective? How close is the photographer to the subject? Are you looking down at the subject? Up?

- 3.) Is the subject clear or blurry? What do you think is the intention behind the photographer's choice?

- 4.) Besides the subject of the photo, what other objects appear in the picture? Are these objects natural or man-made? How is the subject interacting with these objects?

- 5.) Is the photograph dark or light, or both? Is it naturally lit, or did the photographer use artificial light?

- 6.) What do you think the photographer is saying about herself in this picture? What do you see in the picture that supports your opinion?

- 7.) What do you think the photographer is trying to convey about the subject? What do you see that supports your opinion?

- 8.) Is this a photo of an American Jew or a Jewish American? What do you see in the photograph to support your opinion?

- 9.) How does the photograph make you feel?

- 10.) Do you like or dislike it? Why?

Lesson 4: Stars of David—How American Jewish identity plays a role in popular culture?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Evaluate how Judaism plays an important role in the lives of American Jews
- 2.) Connect how Judaism bridges one’s personal identity to the larger group identity.

Materials

- Excerpts from
 - *I am Jewish: Personal Reflection Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl* edited by Judea and Ruth Pearl
 - *Stars of David: Prominent Stars Talk About Being Jewish* by Abigail Pogrebin
- Photographs from homework assignment
- Poster board
- Other art supplies
- Writing supplies
- Student Journals

Activity 1

Divide class into groups of three to five. Distribute a different excerpt from either *I am Jewish* and/or *Stars of David* dealing with the idea of Jewish identity, or what it means to be Jewish to them.

Excerpts from

- Steven Spielberg (*Stars of David*)
- Larry King (*I Am Jewish*)
- Sarah Silverman (*I Am Jewish*)
- Shia LeBoeuf (*I Am Jewish*)
- Natalie Portman (*Stars of David*)
- Jeremy Pivens (*Stars of David*)

In groups, students should read their excerpt. After reading the text, groups should discuss how Jewish identity plays a role in the lives of the personality they were given. They should also discuss how the person’s Jewish identity was constructed or fostered, and how they exhibit their Jewish identity today.

Once they have discussed their excerpt, groups should prepare a short presentation of their findings for the class. Presentations can take the form of a short skit, a summary of what they read and their discussion, a poem, a dance, etc.

Journal entry

Have students answer the following prompt: “I am Jewish because/when...”. While this may remain private, encourage the students to write something that can be used for their next activity.

Activity 2

Explain to students that one of the projects that they will be working on during the year is a class blog. This blog will contain art work, movie reviews, their own reflections, etc. Their first post will be Jewish Identity posters. Their posters should be collages illustrating the notion of American Jewish identity. They will include:

- The photographs they took during the previous week.
- Either their “I am Jewish” statements, or short cited excerpts from *I am Jewish* or *Stars of David*
- Drawings
- Pictures/Quotes from Jewish magazines
- Anything else. The posters should remain fairly flat so that they can easily be scanned.

Resources

Lesson 1

Foxman, Abraham H. "Jewish Identity in America." *Haaretz*. July 27, 2007.

Lesson 3

Aron, Bill. *Shalom Y'all*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2002.

Brenner, Frederic. *Jews/America/A Representation*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishing, 1996.

Chevlowe, Susan. *The Jewish Identity Project: New American Photography*. Los Angeles: The Jewish Museum, 2003.

Lesson 4

Pogrebin, Abigail. *Stars of David: Prominent Stars Talk About Being Jewish*. New York: Broadway Books, 2005.

I am Jewish: Personal Reflection Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl edited by Judea and Ruth Pearl. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004.

Unit 2: Jewish Stereotypes at Work

Understandings

- 1.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.
- 2.) Stereotypes are prevalent in our everyday lives and affect our perceptions of people.
- 3.) Stereotypes are used in movies to move the story along and to help audiences relate to the characters

Goals

- 1.) To provide students with the opportunity to begin thinking about how they define the traits that make them Jewish and where these characteristics come from.
- 2.) To offer students a space to confront stereotypes made about Jews.

Essential Questions

- 1.) What is a stereotype?
- 2.) Where do stereotypes come from?
- 3.) What stereotypes are there about Jews?
- 4.) Are the stereotypes about Jews true?
- 5.) Do you think that people think of Jews differently because of these stereotypes?
- 6.) Do you think that Jews think about other Jews differently because of stereotypes?

Unit Overview

Lesson 1: The Psychology of stereotypes: What is a stereotype? Why do people stereotype?

Lesson 2: What role does the media/popular culture play in transmitting stereotypes?

Lesson 3: What are the Jewish stereotypes?

Lesson 4: The Jewish American Princess: Does she still exist?

Lesson 5: The Jewish Mother: Is she really *that* overbearing?

Lesson 6: The Jewish Man: Are they all doctors, lawyers or executives?

Lesson 7: How do stereotypes really work?

Lesson 8: Are we all just stereotypes of ourselves?

Lesson 1: The Psychology of stereotypes: What is a stereotype? Why do people stereotype?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Create their own definition of what a stereotype is
- 2.) Explain why people stereotype
- 3.) Identify common stereotypes they hold
- 4.) Analyze how commonly held stereotypes shape their perceptions of others

Materials

- *The Psychology of Stereotypes* by John Stossel and Kristina Kendall
- *Where Bias Begins: The truth about stereotypes* by Annie Murphy Paul
- Butcher paper
- Markers

Activity 1

Ask students to complete the following form. They should not put their names on their papers. :

- a. What I know about Mexicans:
- b. What I know about African Americans:
- c. What I know about Asians

Collect papers and redistribute them (the goal here is that each student receives a different person's paper). Ask students to read them aloud. Record the stereotypes on the board.

Discussion:

1. Are these stereotypes true of all African Americans, Mexicans, and Asians?
2. Do they accurately describe some? If so, can you generalize to include all people? Why not?
3. How do assumptions made about a group affect your behavior toward others?

Activity 2

Divide students into two groups. Give group one the article *The Psychology of Stereotypes* and give group two the article *Where Bias Begins: The truth about stereotypes*. In their groups students will read their articles and discuss the following questions:

- 1.) How do stereotypes develop?
- 2.) Why do people stereotype?
- 3.) What was the most surprising part of the article?
- 4.) Do you believe that stereotypes play such a large role in our lives?

Place students into pairs, with one person from each group. Ask students to summarize their article for their partner. Ask them to consider the following questions:

- 1.) Were there any similarities between the two articles? What were they? What were any differences between the articles?
- 2.) How has reading these articles made you more aware of the way you stereotype others?
- 3.) What are some ways in which we can prevent ourselves and others from stereotyping others?

Conclusion

Now ask students to help define the word “stereotype.” Explain that when we make assumptions about an entire group of people, those assumptions are referred to as stereotypes. When assumptions and stereotypes influence our attitudes, we may find that making a fair judgment about an individual or something is difficult. This influence on judgment is called a “bias.” Take another look at the adjectives recorded and hold a class discussion around the following questions: Do these adjectives describe stereotypes? How can they be unfair or hurtful?

Lesson 2: What role does the media/popular culture play in transmitting stereotypes?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Assess the dangers of stereotyping
- 2.) Evaluate the media's role in conveying and creating stereotypes
- 3.) Determine how much of their own perceptions have been shaped by popular culture

Materials

- Student journals
- Vogue April 2008 cover
- Clips of one or more of the following:
 - *Dawson's Creek*
 - *10 Things I Hate About You*
 - *Mean Girls*
 - *Clueless*
- Movie clips
 - Blondes (suggestions: *Legally Blonde*)
 - African American (Suggestions: "*The Boondocks*", *Star Wars: Phantom Menace*—Jar Jar Binks)
 - Arabs: (Suggestions: *Star Wars: Phantom Menace*—Watto, *American Dreamz*)
 - Italian: (Suggestions: *The Sopranos*)
 - LGBT: (Suggestion: *Sex and the City*, *The Birdcage*, *Kissing Jessica Stein*)
- Articles
 - Blondes: *She's Having a Blonde Moment* by Karen Thomas
 - African Americans: *Spike Lee slams "same old" black stereotypes in today's films* by Susan Gonzales
 - Arabs: *Arabs in Hollywood: An Undeserved Image* by Scott J. Simon
 - Italian: *Italian American* from Wikipedia.org
 - LGBT: *Dishy Delight: Steven Cojocar, A Glamour Boy in TV's Post-Gay Embrace*
- Teacher/Student stereotypes chart
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projectors
- Stereotype tracking chart

Introduction

Hold up the cover of Vogue magazine's April 2008 cover (Lebron James and Gisele Bundchen)

Discussion:

- 1.) Tell me about the people in this picture.
- 2.) What message does this picture convey?
- 3.) How does this picture portray African American men and White women?
- 4.) How are perceptions of different races and genders affected by mass media?
- 5.) Can you think of any movies, television shows or magazines you have seen recently that utilize stereotypes? Do you think that that use of stereotypes in mass media can be harmful or beneficial? Why or why not?

Activity 1

Ask students to brainstorm television shows and movies that feature teachers and students. List their answers on the board. Show one or more clips from the following films/shows: *Clueless*, *Dawson's Creek*, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *Miss Guided*, *Mean Girls*. Distribute the Teacher/Student Stereotypes chart and give students twenty minutes to complete the chart and write a brief overview. Once students have completed their charts, take up their answers as a class. Ask students to brainstorm the issues that are encountered by characters in the school-based television programs they watch. Do these issues reflect their own lives? Of the clips that students have watched, which do they believe most accurately represent teachers and students, and which least accurately represents the lives of teachers and students? Why?

Activity 2

Divide students into 5 groups. Each group will be given a different group: African-Americans, Arabs, Italians, Blondes, LGBT. Other stereotypes may be used. Each group will also receive the Wikipedia article, a news article and a movie corresponding with their stereotype. Groups should read their articles and watch clips from the movies.

Discuss:

- 1.) How accurately does this movie (or movies) represent the group you are studying?
- 2.) Does the portrayal of the group conflict or support your previous understanding of them?
- 3.) How much affect has this movie and other movies like this had on society's perception of this group?
- 4.) Can you think of any movies, television shows or other forms of popular media that conflict with this portrayal?

Students will then present the common stereotypes of their group, as well as how the movie they viewed propagated those views and their answers to the discussion questions to the rest of the class. If there is time they may wish to create a "movie poster" or write a movie review to be included in their presentation which argues against the propagation of their stereotype.

Conclusion

Have students answer in their journal: Have you ever made a snap judgment about someone based on a stereotype? Where did you learn this stereotype? Would you change your behavior/thoughts in the future?

Homework

Distribute the chart labeled "Mass Media Stereotyping Survey". During the following week, ask students to keep a record of any examples of popular media they see (movies, television shows, magazines, music, music videos, etc.) that stereotype based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so on. For each example that they observe, they should fill out the chart accordingly. Students should bring the chart with them to the next class.



Portrayal of Students and Teachers in Movies and Television

1.) What are some of the generalizations made about students and teachers?

Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Male Students	Female Students
“Popular” Teachers	“Popular” Teachers	“Popular” Students	“Popular” Students
“Unpopular” Teachers	“Unpopular” Teachers	“Unpopular” Students	“Unpopular” Students

- 2.) Most of these movies/shows come from the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Do you think the stereotypes of teenagers and teachers have changed at all?
- 3.) What are the important issues faced by teenagers according to the entertainment industry? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 4.) Which of these clips most accurately portray teachers and students? Which least accurately portray students and teachers? Why?
- 5.) What messages about students/teachers/school do these stereotypes convey?

Mass Media Stereotyping Survey

	Television Show/Movie 1	Stereotype(s) portrayed	Television Show/Movie 2	Stereotype(s) portrayed	Television Show/Movie 3	Stereotype(s) portrayed
Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						

Lesson 3: What are the Jewish stereotypes?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Identify Jewish stereotypes
- 2.) Explore ways in which Jewish stereotypes are portrayed in popular culture

Materials

- Flip chart
- Markers

Introduction (10-15 min)

Ask students to share their findings from their week long survey of popular culture in their lives.

- 1.) Was any particular race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation stereotyped the most? Why do you think that this group targeted the most?
- 2.) Was there a genre of popular culture that tended to utilize stereotypes more often than others? Why do you think that this genre used stereotypes more?
- 3.) How did this assignment make you more aware of stereotyping in mass media?
- 4.) Were you surprised by the amount of stereotyping you witnessed?
- 5.) Why do you think writers, directors, producers and so utilize stereotyping? Are there other ways to convey these things (character development, story development) without stereotyping?

Lesson (30-35 min)

Ask students to name three to five different “Jewish groups” (this could be denominations such as Orthodox, Reform, Reconstructionist etc., but it can also include—or perhaps even should focus on the stereotypical Jewish groups such as Nice Jewish Boy, Jewish Mother, Jewish American Princess, Hollywood executive, Lawyer/Doctor, Neurotic Jewish male/female).

Prepare five large sheets of paper (flip chart paper). At the top of each sheet, write the name of one of the groups that the students named.

Divide the class into five groups and supply each student in the class with a marker. Give each group one of the five sheets of paper. Ask them to list as many stereotypes that are commonly used to describe the category of people written at the top of paper. Give students three minutes to complete the exercise. Emphasize that students should list stereotypes that they have heard, not ones that they necessarily believe to be true.

When they are finished, rotate the sheets of paper between groups so that each group works on a new sheet. Have them add any unlisted stereotype adjectives. Rotate every three minutes until every group has worked on every sheet.

Post the sheets in class where everyone can see them and give students five minutes to read the sheets.

Discussion

- 1.) How do the stereotypes recorded by the class make you feel?
- 2.) What do you notice about the stereotypes listed? Be aware that the students may have listed good and bad adjectives, many stereotypes for different groups, or the same stereotypes for different groups.
- 3.) Where have you seen these stereotypes portrayed? Television programs, movies, magazines, books?
- 4.) How are some of the Jewish stereotypes positive? How can even these positive stereotypes have a negative effect?
- 5.) How do these media stereotypes of Jews affect the way that Jews perceive Jews? What about the way non-Jews perceive Jews?
- 6.) Do you think that other people treat Jews differently because of Jewish stereotypes?

Journal entry (10-15 min)

Ask students to answer the following prompt in their journals: Think of a time when someone has stereotyped you because you are Jewish? How did it make you feel? Where do you think they got these perceptions of you? How did you respond?

Lesson 4: The Jewish American Princess: Does she still exist?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Define the Jewish American Princess
- 2.) Explain how the concept of the Jewish American Princess effects the way that non-Jews and Jews view Jewish women

Materials

- *The Return of the JAP* by Alana Newhouse
- *Peering Behind the JAP Label* by Jessica Cone
- *Princess Bitch: The Public Perception of the Aligned* by Jill Gregory
- *Jewish American Princess* (Documentary) by Ian and Jacqueline Davis
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student journals

Journal entry

Students will answer the following question in their journals: Write about an experience when you were called a JAP. Why do you think you were called a JAP? How did it make you feel? If you could respond to that person right now, what would say to them? If you have never been called a JAP, write about an experience when you called someone a JAP, or even thought to yourself that another person was a JAP. Why did you think that person was a JAP? What do you think that person would like to say to you?

Activity 1

Divide class into three groups. Supply each group with one article. Students will read story assigned to their group. Consider the following questions:

- 1.) What is a JAP according to the article?
- 2.) How is the term JAP anti-Semitic?
- 3.) How is the notion of the JAP a myth?
- 4.) What does it mean to reclaim the notion of being a JAP?

Hold a panel discussion about the topic of “What is a JAP? What does it mean for a American Jewish woman to be called a JAP?” Ask each group to choose one member to act as a representative on the panel discussion. As the teacher, you will be the moderator/questioner. Those students who are in the audience may also ask questions. Ask students the following questions:

- 1.) Who is a “JAP”? What makes someone a JAP?
- 2.) When did the notion of “JAP” develop?
- 3.) How has the “JAP” changed over the years?
- 4.) What is the new image of the JAP?
- 5.) Is it okay to consider yourself a JAP? Has the term been reclaimed?
- 6.) Does calling a woman a “JAP”—even as Jew—send a bad message to both Jews and non-Jews alike?

Activity 2

Show the documentary *Jewish American Princess*. During the movie students should take notes on the main “characters”, the aim of the movie, any scenes they think are worth mentioning (funny, upsetting, ironic, sentimental), as well as their impressions on the documentary.

The students will then write a review of the movie. In order to write a movie review, they will need to include the following information: They need to include the name of the movie, who wrote it, the setting, the main characters, and a short summary of what happened in the movie. They also need to write how they felt about the movie and why they felt that way. The review will be posted on the class blog.

Lesson 5: The Jewish Mother: Is she really *that* overbearing?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Define the “Jewish mother”
- 2.) Explain how the Jewish mother stereotype affects the way that non-Jews and Jews perceive the Jewish woman.
- 3.) Determine if there is a difference between the Jewish mother and the non-Jewish mother
- 4.) Evaluate their own perceptions of the Jewish mother and determine where that perception came from.

Materials

- Media clips
 - *Kissing Jessica Stein*
 - *New York Stories*
 - *Keeping Up with the Steins*
 - *Everybody Loves Raymond*
- Articles
 - *What’s in a Stereotype* from the Jewish Standard
 - *Jewish Mother, R.I.P* by Alana Newhouse
 - *Battling Stereotypes of the Jewish Mother* by Dr. Paula Hyman
- Books
 - *You Never Call! You Never Write!* By Joyce Antler
 - *The Yiddisher Mama* by Marine Winston-Macaulay
 - *25 Questions for the Jewish Mother* by Judy Gold
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals

Journal Entry

Students will respond to the following prompt: Have you ever felt that your mother is overbearing? Does your mother ever lay on the guilt? Is your mother obsessed with you marrying a Jewish boy/girl? Write one funny, embarrassing, exasperating story about you and your mother, grandmother, aunt...

Activity 1

Show students clips from *Kissing Jessica Stein* (Choose any scene with Jessica and her mother, one suggestion is the scene at the beginning with Jessica, her mother and her grandmother at Yom Kippur services) and *Keeping up with the Steins* (choose any scene with the grandmother, perhaps one of the scenes planning the Bar Mitzvah, such as the meeting with Benjamin, Benjamin’s parents, the grandmother and the party planner or dinner with Benjamin, his parents, and his grandmother).

Discussion

- 1.) How do movies and television shows tend to stereotype Jewish mothers?
- 2.) What are some other stereotypes of the Jewish mother?
- 3.) How do these stereotypes develop?
- 4.) Are these stereotypes funny, offensive, a little of both?

- 5.) What message do these stereotypes convey about Jews to other Jews? What about non-Jews?

Show students clips from *Everybody Loves Raymond* and *New York Stories*.

Discussion

- 1.) What were some of the differences between the Jewish mothers and the non-Jewish mothers?
- 2.) What are some of the similarities?
- 3.) How has the Jewish mother stereotype pervaded larger society?

Activity 2

Divide students into three groups, these will be their expert groups. Distribute copies of *What's in a Stereotype? Jewish Mother R.I.P.*, and *Battling the Stereotype of the Jewish Mother*. Students will read the articles thoroughly. In their temporary "expert groups" will discuss the main points of their article and to rehearse the presentations they will make to their jigsaw group. Ask students to answer the following questions:

- 1.) What are the characteristics of a Jewish mother?
- 2.) How did the stereotype develop? How has it changed since "coming to America?"
- 3.) Is there any truth behind the stereotype?
- 4.) Are there any alternatives to this stereotype?
- 5.) What are some of the contradictions of the Jewish mother stereotype?
- 6.) How have movies and television publicized this stereotype?
- 7.) How do the stereotypes of other minorities' mothers compare with Jewish mothers?
- 8.) What are the two kinds of Jewish mothers?
- 9.) How does this stereotype make us as Jews feel? Is the Jewish mother stereotype as comfortable for us as Jews today?

Place the students into jigsaw groups. Each jigsaw group should include at least one person from the expert group. Each "expert" will present her or his article to the group. Since many of the articles have similar themes, some of the answers may overlap; instruct students to focus on question 9.

Activity 3

Have students write a short 3 minute (2-3 pages) scene in a play, including scenic directions and dialogue, between a Jewish mother and her child. This scene should use humor and stereotyping to help tell their story. Students should also strive to integrate their dialogue into the action of the scene. Rather than have characters deliver speeches, for example, let them talk while they are moving or doing something that will add visual interest to the scene. If students need a prompt for their scene, provide them with jokes and excerpts from *25 Questions for a Jewish Mother*.

Lesson 6: The Jewish Man: Are they all doctors, lawyers or executives?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) List the different stereotypes of the American Jewish male
- 2.) Define the “nice Jewish boy”
- 3.) Determine how the stereotype of the Jewish male affects how others treat Jew

Materials

- Film Clips
 - *Portnoy’s Complaint*
 - *New York Stories* or *Annie Hall*
 - *Keeping the Faith*
 - *Keeping Up with the Steins*
 - *The O.C.*
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Jewish stereotype list

Activity 1

Write “Nice Jewish Boy” at the top of the flip chart paper and ask them to describe the characteristics of the “Nice Jewish Boy” and record student responses. (Note: Begin by directing the question to the boys. The girls can then be encouraged to respond. If the answers are slow to come, ask them to discuss the topic in pairs, then share with the class.)

Discussion

- 1.) What does it mean to be a “Nice Jewish Boy”?
- 2.) Where does this stereotype come from?
- 3.) How is this a positive stereotype of Jewish men? How is it a negative stereotype?
- 4.) What are some other stereotypes of Jewish males? How might these stereotypes conflict with each other?
- 5.) How does this compare to the stereotypes of Jewish females?

Activity 2

Distribute Jewish stereotype list to students. Explain to students that you will play 5 different clips from different movies and television shows. During each clip, students should check which Jewish male stereotype is portrayed in each clip.

Discussion

- 1.) Which stereotype was the most prevalent in the clips shown? What message does that convey to America?
- 2.) Why do you think that Jewish males in the movies prefer or are drawn to non-Jewish women?
- 3.) Are the images that are portrayed of Jewish males positive or negative? How might Jewish men be portrayed more positively?

Jewish Stereotypes

- Desire to amass wealth
- Larger than average noses
- Collusive, schemers
- Communist revolutionaries
- Lawyers, accountants, businessmen, bankers and Hollywood producers
- Over-analytical, self-defeating and discontented
- Above average natural comedic talent
- Affinity for whining
- "Controls" all aspects of the media
- Commonly has brown curly hair and glasses
- Annoying
- Frugal
- Wear yarmulkes
- Ugly
- Cheap
- Cunning and attempting to control the world
- Talented violinists/chess players
- Associated with Jewish guilt
- Hairy
- Bad with tools
- Eat Chinese food for dinner every Sunday night

Lesson 7: How do stereotypes really work?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Recall major American Jewish stereotypes
- 2.) Demonstrate how American Jewish stereotypes are used in mass media
- 3.) Deduce the effects of mass media on American Jewish stereotypes
- 4.) Create a movie/television show/documentary/etc. proposal featuring Jewish characters
- 5.) Predict the affect of their proposal on American Jewish society and on larger society

Materials

- Paper
- Pencils
- Poster board
- Markers/pastels/crayons/paint

Activity

Divide the class into four groups. Explain to students that they will take on the role of television producers who are creating a new movie/television show/documentary/etc. In order to sell their series to a network or movie studio, they must either create an outline of their series or a description/rationale of their movie or offer network/studio executives a "sneak peak" at a scene from an episode/movie. Their television show/movie can be a drama or a comedy. It can play on stereotypes, or it can attempt to counter stereotypes and offer a realistic portrayal of Jews.

The Television show/movie proposal will contain the following:

- An introductory page with the background to the plot, the desired target audience, the tone, and setting.
- The goals of the show/movie
- An overview of the main characters, including names, ages, photos and/or physical description, background, personality, and how his/her character fits into the overall plot. *(The goal is to create a believable character that audiences will relate to.)*
- An episode guide of the first five episodes or the story ark for the movie.
- In addition, students will create a script for a scene from one of their episodes or from their movie (no more than five minutes in length) which will be presented to the class.
- Movie/Television show poster to illustrate your pitch
- Using the information in the proposal and their poster, each group will pitch its proposal to the rest of the class, including performing their scene.
- After each group presents, the class will ask questions and give suggestions to the groups

Homework

Ask students to watch one of the "Jewish" movies that we have viewed in class in full. Due to the large number of movies that are being released that feature/star Jewish characters, they can also be given the option of going to see a new movie. When they come to class next week, they should be prepared to write a movie review. (Note: Make sure that there will be a variety of movies viewed. If a group of students want to watch the same movie, just ensure that the whole class isn't watching the same movie)

Lesson 8: Are all just stereotypes of ourselves?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson students will be able to

- 1.) Define stereotype threat
- 2.) Explain what stereotype threat is
- 3.) Debate the reality of stereotype threat
- 4.) Predict the affects of stereotype threat
- 5.) Judge the ways in which stereotypes affect Jewish identity

Materials

- *Steele discusses “Stereotype Threat”* from The College Street Journal
- Student journals
- Writing materials

Activity 1

Distribute article *Steele Discusses “Stereotype Threat”*. Divide students into two groups. Each group will read the article. One group will then take the stance of agreeing with Steele, the second group will take the stance of disagreeing with Steele. Debate should conform to the following:

- Affirmative position group presents 3 debate points with supporting examples. (3 minutes)
- Negative position group asks questions about the affirmative points. (1-2 minutes)
- Negative position presents 3-4 debate points with supporting examples. (4 minutes)
- Affirmative position cross-examines negative points. (1-2 minutes)
- Affirmative position offers first rebuttal (2 minutes)
- Negative position offers first rebuttal (3 minutes)
- Affirmative position offers second rebuttal (1-2 minutes)

Discussion after debate:

- 1.) Did anyone disagree with the side you were one? What did you disagree with?
- 2.) Can anyone think of any examples from other racial/religious groups that face stereotype threat?
- 3.) Why is stereotype threat an issue?

Activity 2

Students will write a movie review on the movie they watched during the week. This review will be posted on the blog. Students should be given the option to write the movie reviews in groups, pairs or individually. The movie review should include:

- Title, Director, Stars
- Summary of movie
- Critique
 - Their opinions
 - How Jewish stereotypes are used in this movie
 - Are these positive or negative stereotypes and what message does this film convey to society?
 - Is stereotype threat a factor?

Resources

Lesson 1

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Lesson 2

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Lesson 4

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Newhouse Alana "The Return of the JAP." *The Boston Globe*. 13, March 2005. www.boston.com. 2008.

Lesson 5

Antler, Joyce. *You Never Call! You Never Write!* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

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Newhouse Alana "Jewish Mother, R.I.P." *The Forward*. 1 June 2007.
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Lesson 6

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Keeping the Faith. Dir. Edward Norton. DVD. Perfs. Edward Norton, Ben Stiller, Jenna Elfman. 2000. Buena Vista. 2000.

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Lesson 8

"Steele discusses "Stereotype Threat." *The College Street Journal*. 24 September 2004. <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/092404/steele.shtml>. 2008

Unit 3: Self-Representation and Self-hatred: A disappearing American Jewish identity

Unit Understandings

- 1.) "Jews, too can be anti Semitic, and when they are, what surfaces is a latent insecurity that arises from the humiliation of centuries of oppression." From *The Jewish American Princess and Other Myths: The Many faces of Self-hatred*
- 2.) Jews have often had confusing and conflicting feelings about what it means to be both a Jew and an American, that have lead to extreme efforts to fit into American culture in a variety of ways.
- 3.) Self hatred can develop when one's sense of self and ethnic identity is not clearly understood or developed and as one tries to find one's place in the larger American society

Goals

- 1.) To help students consider and evaluate the different coping mechanisms used by Jews as a result of their minority status.
- 2.) To provide students with an understanding of the effects of both the positive and negative stereotypes that are used to describe Jews and the impact these may have on a person's self-esteem.
- 3.) To make students aware of the threat of self-hatred and to provide them with techniques to deal with these feelings.

Essential Questions

- 1.) What is anti-Semitism?
- 2.) What is self-hatred?
- 3.) How does self-hatred develop?
- 4.) How do we identify self-hatred in ourselves or others?
- 5.) Is Jewish humor healthy; when can it be an expression of self-hatred?
- 6.) Can Jews speak differently to each other than to non-Jews?
- 7.) In what way does American culture cause self-hatred among minorities?
- 8.) How has Jewish self-hatred changed the face of Jewish identity in America?
- 9.) Do we need to give up our Jewishness in order to be good Americans?
- 10) Has the need to be accepted changed our collective Jewish identity?
- 11) Is changing our Jewish identity a symptom of self-hatred?
- 12) Do we accept the negative things we hear about Jews?
- 13) What is our own perception of what it means to be Jewish in America? Is our view a healthy view?

Overview of Unit:

Lesson 1: What is self-hatred and why does it exist?

Lesson 2: Jewish self-hatred

Lesson 3: Jewish Jokes: Funny or harmful?

Lesson 4: Hiding out in America

Lesson 5: Going to the Extreme: Looking at Believer

Lesson 6: Conclusion and review

Lesson 1: What is Self Hatred?

Lesson 1: What is self-hatred and why does it exist?

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Students will define self hatred and compare it to anti-Semitism.
2. Students will explain how self-hatred develops
3. Students will give examples of self-hatred

Materials

- Student's journals
- Article on Self-Hatred
- Paper

Set Induction

Ask students to draw a self portrait of themselves in their journals. This drawing will be private therefore artistic abilities will not be an issue. Each student can draw their own portrait based either on what they see when they look in the mirror, or how they believe that others see them. While physical traits are certainly part of this self-portrait, explain to students that we want the *whole* person, and therefore should find ways to include personality traits, interests, and other important aspects of themselves into this self-portrait.

Follow-up discussion questions to be discussed in pairs.

1. How did you incorporate your personality into your self portrait?
2. What Jewish issues were included in your self-portrait? Were these positive or negative expressions? Why?
3. What was the most difficult thing about drawing your self-portrait?
4. Was there one trait that you had a difficult time expressing?
5. What traits did you include in your portrait? What traits did you not include? How did you make your decisions?
6. Was this a comfortable or uncomfortable assignment? Why or why not?

Activity 1

Read the article "Self Hatred and Borderline Personality Disorder". Depending on the size of the class the students may read this article together or divided into groups.

Discussion Questions

- 1.) Why and how does self-hatred develop?
- 2.) What are some common examples of behaviors that suggest feelings of self-hatred?
- 3.) Are minorities more likely to feel self-hatred? Why or why not?
- 4.) What are examples of minority self-hatred? What are the differences between low self-esteem and self-hatred?
- 5.) (This answer to question 5 should be answered privately in the students' journals)
Have you ever felt a sense of self-hatred? If yes, what was the experience and were you able to overcome it? Do you know anyone else that seems to experience self-hatred?

Activity 2

Students in their small groups should come up with a definition of self-hatred. Each individual group should share their definitions with the class. As a group, the class should agree on one definition of self-hatred.

Lesson 2: Jewish Self-hatred

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Students will be able to discuss why some Jews feel self-hatred
2. Students will be able to give examples of different ways in which Jews exhibit self-hatred
3. Students will be able to judge whether they have ever felt embarrassment about being Jewish

Materials

- Film clips
 - *Dirty Dancing*
 - *Driving Miss Daisy*
 - *School Ties*
- Articles
 - *Love, Hate and Jewish Identity*
 - *Kike Like Me*
 - Introduction to *The Wicked Son: Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred and the Jews*
 - *Hate and Hypocrisy: What is behind the rare-but-reoccurring phenomena of Jewish anti-Semites?*
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals
- Poster board
- Paint/crayons/markers/etc....

Activity 1

Watch clips of *Dirty Dancing* (any scene(s) contrasting the Jewish patrons vs. the non-Jewish workers), *Driving Miss Daisy* (Scene showing Jews holding lavish Christmas parties to fit in) and *School Ties* (Scene where character hides all of his Jewish paraphernalia).

Discussion

- 1.) Did these Jewish characters exhibit feelings of self-hatred? If so, how?
- 2.) If a person hides that he or she is Jewish, is that a form of self-hatred?
- 3.) Has your view of self-hatred changed? Why or why not?
- 4.) What are examples of Jewish self-hatred
- 5.) (Question 5 should be answered privately in journals. You may even wish to wait until the end of class to have students answer this question.) Have you ever been embarrassed to be a Jew? If so, what was the experience? If not, why do you think you have never experienced this?

Activity 2

Class needs to be divided into four groups. Each group will be given an article and will need to do the following:

- a. Read the article and summarize the article
 - a. List the theme of the article and two or three major arguments made by the author.
- b. Evaluation of the article
 - a. Overall reactions to the article—agree or disagree with the article. Did anything make them uncomfortable?
 - b. Was the entire group in agreement? If not, where did group members disagree?
- c. Create a poster for the article. If this article/excerpt was going to be turned into a movie or documentary, what would the movie's poster look like? The poster can illustrate the themes, arguments or even the students' reactions to the article through the use of color choice, tag line creation and so on).
- d. Presentation. Each group will present their article to the rest of the class. This can be done in one of two ways: 1) each group will be given an equal amount of time to present their article to the entire class, or 2) separate class into four groups. Include one member of each original group in the new group. This is referred to as a jig saw.

Conclusion

Conclude with a “whip around” – each student is asked to say one or two words describing their reactions to the day's lesson.

Lesson 3: Jewish Humor—what’s funny and what’s just hateful

Objectives

1. Define what is funny and what is offensive to us
2. Examine why humor is important for Jews
3. Differentiate between jokes that are funny and jokes that are harmful
4. Discuss when humor might be an expression of self-hatred

Materials

- Student Journals
- Jewish Jokes printed on large white paper
- Article *Sarah Silverman: A Jewish comedian delivers bigotry with a smile.*
- Clips of Sarah Silverman (The Sarah Silverman Show, Jesus is Magic, or any stand-up)
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector

Set Induction (5-10 minutes)

Ask students: “Who knows any good Jewish jokes?” Ask each student to state where they heard the joke before they share it with the class.

Discussion

- 1.) What made these jokes funny?
- 2.) Did any of these jokes make you feel uncomfortable? Why?
- 3.) Did the subject matter make a difference? Did the source make a difference?
- 4.) Would you share these jokes with only your Jewish friends or would you also tell your non-Jewish friends these jokes?
- 5.) Why do you think humor is important to the American Jewish community?

Lecture briefly (5 minutes)

Jewish humor has always been a part of American Judaism. In the middle part of the twentieth century, Jews on the East Coast often traveled to the Catskills, to family camps not so different from what we saw in Dirty Dancing where one of the nightly activities included comedy shows. Today, many of the comedians, sitcoms, and comedies that we watch on television or at the theater star or are about Jews. We are a pretty funny people. How many people here have sat around joking with their friends or family about how mom always nags? Or how grandma always tries to feed you? We joke about what’s in our lives, and I am not going say that that isn’t funny. Because it often is. But, there is a difference in joking with your friends about what it means to be Jewish and then trying to cover up a sense of inadequacy through humor. What we are going to today is try to tell the difference between being funny and using humor to assuage whatever sense of self-hatred we might feel.

Activity 1 (15-20 minutes)

In this lesson we want to have the students differentiate between Jewish jokes that are humorous and Jewish jokes that are offensive and/or contain hateful themes. This lesson should not suggest that Jewish humor in general is a form of self-hatred. On the contrary, there is much to be proud of regarding the long Jewish American tradition of humor. It can also, act as a coping mechanism for dealing with uncomfortable situations. However, students should recognize that some humor can be degrading and even hateful. We want the students to leave the class with a sense of pride about Jewish humor while recognizing that there can be a line between what is funny and what is obscene.

There are several ways in which this activity can be completed

- 1.) Create a series of Jewish humor Talmud pages. In the center of each large piece of paper the students should write a Jewish joke. Some pages should contain jokes that are offensive and others that are non-offensive. Ask the students to take turns reading each joke aloud. After doing this, pass each sheet around and have the students write comments about each joke on each piece of paper. The students should ask the following questions: a.) is this a Jewish joke? Why or why not? b.) Is this joke offensive? Why or why not? Commentary should include personal reactions and/or feelings to the jokes. In addition, they should respond to other students' comments.

- 2.) Concept Attainment. Divide students into small groups of two to four students per group. Provide each group with a concept attainment worksheet. (I have given you a worksheet with two columns, one for humorous Jewish jokes and one with offensive Jewish jokes, but you may want to add a third column that includes "questionable Jewish jokes" or "offensive but not hateful" jokes). Students will have to determine and list the theme of the jokes contained in each column. Have each group discuss the questions at the bottom the page.
 - a. What are the differences between the jokes in each column?
 - b. List your reactions to the jokes in each column?
 - c. Would you share any of these jokes with your non-Jewish friends?
 - d. Why do you think that Jews would repeat the jokes in column A?

- 3.) Inductive thinking. Have students work in groups of two to four students. Give each group 15-25 slips of paper, each with a Jewish joke on it (a mix of varying degrees of offensiveness). Have students put them into different categories:
 - a. Jokes they find humorous. What are the criteria that make these jokes funny? What makes these jokes Jewish?
 - b. Jokes they find offensive. What are the criteria that make these jokes offensive? Are these Jewish jokes? Are the offensive jokes funny? Would you tell these jokes to your parents; Jewish friends; Non-Jewish friends?

- c. Jokes that fall in a gray area can be placed in a third category. What are the criteria that make these jokes “gray”?
- d. Have students discuss as a group the following questions?
 - i.) What criteria did you use to determine whether a joke is funny or offensive?
 - ii.) Were you surprised by classifications selected by your classmates?
 - iii.) Do you believe that people who tell offensive jokes may feel some form of self-hatred or low self-esteem about their Jewishness?

Lesson (15-20 minutes)

Read the article about Sarah Silverman, and watch a short clip of her comedy act. Afterwards discuss as a class.

- 1.) Why do some people find Sarah Silverman funny? Do you?
- 2.) Is her humor Jewish or is she just a Jewish comedienne?
- 3.) Why do you think that she uses such offensive humor?

Conclusion (5-10 minutes)

Have students write in their journals about a time that they used humor to cope with something that they were unhappy or uncomfortable about. If they have a Jewish example, that would be best, but it does not have to be. Ask the students to think about whether they believe they have ever used humor to compensate for low self esteem. If so, did the humor help them cope?

Directions: Read the jokes in each column. What do the jokes in each column have in common? After you have determined this, give each column a title.

Column A _____

Column B _____

<p>Q: How many Jews can you fit in a Volkswagon Beetle? A: 54. Two in the front, two in the back, and 50 in the ashtray</p>	<p>Q: Why do Jewish Mothers make great parole officers? A: They never let anyone finish a sentence.</p>
<p>Q: Why did the Jews wander in the desert? A: Someone dropped a shekel.</p>	<p>A Jewish boy comes home from school and tells his mother he's been given a part in the school play. "Wonderful. What part is it?" The boy says, "I play the part of the Jewish husband." The mother scowls and says, "Go back and tell the teacher you want a speaking part."</p>
<p>Q: How do you start a Jewish parade? A: You roll a penny down the street?</p>	<p>A young Jewish man calls his mother and says, "Mom, I'm bringing home a wonderful woman I want to marry. She's a Native American and her name is Shooting Star." "How nice," says his mother. "And I have an Indian name too," he says. "It's 'Running Deer' and I want you to call me that from now on." "How nice," says his mother. "You should have an Indian name too, Mom," he says. "I already do," says the mother. "You can call me Sitting Shiva"</p>
<p>Q: What's the difference between pizzas and Jews? A: Pizzas don't scream in the oven.</p>	<p>Short summary of every Jewish Holiday: They tried to kill us, we won, so let's eat.</p>
<p>Q: Why are Yankee dollars green? A: Because the Jews pick them before they're ripe.</p>	<p>Q - How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb? A - (Sigh) Don't bother, I'll sit in the dark, I don't want to be a nuisance to anybody.</p>

After you have given each column a title, discuss the following questions with your group:

- a. What are the differences between the jokes in each column?
- b. What were your reactions to the jokes in each column?
- c. Would you share any of these jokes with your non-Jewish friends?
- d. Why do you think that Jews would repeat the jokes in column A?

Jewish Jokes

Morris was telling his friend Mendel a joke, "Mandelbaum and Rosenstern were talking one day..."

Right away, his friend, Mendel, interrupts him,

"Always with the Jewish jokes! Give it a rest! Why do they always have to be about Jews? Don't you know some jokes that aren't about Jews!"

So he starts again, "Okay, Hashimoto and Suzuki were talking one day at their nephew's Bar Mitzvah..."

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Four old college friends were having coffee. The first, a Catholic woman tells her friends, "My son is now a Priest. When he walks into a room, everyone calls him Father'."

The second Catholic woman chirps, "My son is a bishop. Whenever he walks into a room, people call him 'Your Grace'."

The third Catholic crone says, "My son is a Cardinal. Whenever he walks into a room, he's called 'Your Eminence'."

Since the fourth woman, a Jewish lady, sipped her coffee in silence, the first three women give her this subtle "Well...?"

So she replies, "My son is 6' 6".. he has plenty of money...broad square shoulders...terribly handsome... dresses very well...tight muscular body... no stomach bulge... wears only the most expensive suits... and whenever he walks into a room... women gasp, 'Oh, my God...!'"

~~~~~

The Prime Minister of Israel sits down with Arafat at the beginning of negotiations regarding the resolution of the conflict. The Prime Minister requests that he be allowed to begin with a story. Arafat replies, "Of course."

The Prime Minister begins his story: "Years before the Israelites came to the Promised Land and settled here, Moses led them for 40 years through the desert. The Israelites began complaining that they were thirsty and, lo and behold, a miracle occurred and a stream appeared before them. They drank their fill and then decided to take advantage of the stream to do some bathing -- including Moses. When Moses came out of the water, he found that all his clothing was missing.

"Who took my clothes?" Moses asked those around him.

"It was the Palestinians," replied the Israelites--"

"Wait a minute," objected Arafat immediately, "there were no Palestinians during the time of Moses!"

"All right," replies the Prime Minister, "Now that we've got that settled, let's begin our negotiations."

~~~~~

Saddam Hussein had a dream and called President George W. Bush to tell him about it.

"I had a dream about the United States. I could see the whole country and over every building and home was a banner," said Saddam.

"What was on the banner?" asked Bush.

"LONG LIVE SADDAM HUSSEIN!!" answered the Iraqi President.

"I am so glad that you called", said President Bush, "because I, too, had a dream. In my dream, I saw Baghdad and it was more beautiful than ever, totally rebuilt, and over every building and home was a big, beautiful banner."

"What did the banner say?" asked Saddam.

"I don't know," answered Bush, "I can't read Hebrew."

~~~~~

The Harvard School of Medicine did a study of why Jewish women like Chinese food so much. The study revealed it is due to the fact that WonTon spelled backwards is "Not Now".

There's a big controversy on the Jewish view of exactly when life begins. In Jewish tradition, the fetus is not considered viable until after it graduates from medical school.

Q: Why don't Jewish mothers drink?

A: Alcohol interferes with their suffering.

Q: Have you seen the newest Jewish-American Princess horror movie?

A: It's called "Debbie Does Dishes."

Q: Why do Jewish Mothers make great parole officers?

A: They never let anyone finish a sentence.

A Jewish boy comes home from school and tells his mother he's been given a part in the school play. "Wonderful. What part is it?" The boy says, "I play the part of the Jewish husband." The mother scowls and says, "Go back and tell the teacher you want a speaking part."

Q - Where does a Jewish husband hide money from his wife?

A - Under the vacuum cleaner.

Q - How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb?

A - (Sigh) Don't bother, I'll sit in the dark, I don't want to be a nuisance to anybody.

Short summary of every Jewish Holiday: They tried to kill us, we won, so let's eat.

A young Jewish man calls his mother and says, "Mom, I'm bringing home a wonderful woman I want to marry. She's a Native American and her name is Shooting Star." "How nice," says his mother. "And I have an Indian name too," he says. "It's 'Running Deer' and I want you to call me that from now on." "How nice," says his mother. "You should have an Indian name too, Mom," he says. "I already do," says the mother. "You can call me Sitting Shiva".

Q: What's the difference between pizzas and Jews?

A: Pizzas don't scream in the oven.

Q: Why are Yankee dollars green?

A: Because the Jews pick them before they're ripe.

Q: Why did the Jews wander in the desert for forty years?

A: Because someone dropped a twenty-cent piece.

Q: Why do Jews have such big noses?

A: Because air is free.

Two Jewish businessmen meet in the street.

"Oy, Abraham, I'm sorry to hear about that fire at your warehouse".

"Ssh!" hisses the other, "It's not till next week".

Q: What's the definition of a queer Jew?

A: A Jew who likes girls more than money

Israel Moses, living in New York, married a Black woman. One day their boy came home from school very disturbed.

"What's the matter, son?", asked Israel.

"Am I a Black or a Jew?"

"What's the problem?", asked his father, "You can be both".

"No," said his son, "you see, a boy at school has got a radio he's selling for five dollars, and I don't know whether to bargain with him or to mug him!"

Q: How many Jews can you fit in a Volkswagon Beatle?

A: 54. Two in the front, two in the back, and 50 in the ashtray

Q: How do you start a Jewish parade?

A: You roll a penny down the street?

Lesson 4: Hiding out in America

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Analyze the identity crisis felt by Jews in a primarily Christian society
2. Examine the transformations made by assimilated Jews
3. Determine different ways Jews have coped with feelings of inferiority

Materials

- Play *Last Night of Ballyhoo*
- Alfred Uhry Interview with Charlie Rose (On YouTube.com)
- *Remembering Prejudice, of Another sort*, the New York Times
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals

Activity 1

Prepare to watch the play either by reading the Alfred Uhry interview on Charlie Rose or read *Remembering Prejudice, of Another sort*.

Discussion

- 1.) How would you describe Alfred Uhry's experience with Judaism growing up?
- 2.) Did anything he say surprise you?
- 3.) In what ways can you relate to his experiences? How has your life differed from his?
- 4.) Having read this article/watched this video, and learning a little about Uhry's life, what predictions do you have about the play?

Activity 2

"Bibliodrama". Using the style of bibliodrama, read excerpts from *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. Assign different students parts. Make sure to include everyone by changing the parts several times throughout the readings. At several different spots, stop the students from reading, and ask them questions. Any student may answer the question, but they will need to stay in character, and answer your questions from the first person point of view.

Discussion

- 1.) Did any of the characters say things that surprised you? If so, what?
- 2.) Did any of the characters exhibit self-hatred? What did they do?
- 3.) Why do you think they behaved in the ways they did?
- 4.) Why do you think that Alfred Uhry wrote this play?

Journal Entry

Write a journal entry, from the first person point of view of Joe and explain your feelings about the Levy/Freitag family.

Lesson 5: Going to the Extreme—The Believer

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Students will identify reasons why people feel self hatred
2. Students will try to make sense of different expressions of self-hatred
3. Students will examine/critique/judge Danny Blaint's decisions

Materials

- *The Believer: Confronting Jewish Self-Hatred* by Henry Bean
- One of the following articles (Found in *The Believer: Confronting Jewish Self-Hatred*)
 - *Self-Criticism in Public* by David Kraemer
 - *Jewish Self-Hatred and the Believer* by Sander Gilman
- *Television/Radio; In a Skin Head's Tale, a Picture of Both Hate and Love* by Leslie Camhi (New York Times)
- *The Believer* directed by Henry Bean
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals

NOTE TO THE TEACHER: This is a long and emotional lesson. In may be necessary to continue the lesson in the sixth session. By doing so, you will also give students the chance to watch more of the movie.

In addition, because of the content of this film, and its rating, you will need to send home permission slips for those students who are under the age of 17.

While homework is not usually successful in a religious school, you may want to consider sending the articles home with your students. This will also allow for more time in-class to watch the movie and to discuss their reactions.

Set Induction

Write quote on the board or overhead projector

Let me put it this way. Do we hate them because they push their way in where they don't belong? Or do we hate them because they're clannish and keep to themselves? Because they're tight with money, or because they flash it around? Because they're Bolsheviks, or because they're capitalists? Because they have the highest IQs, or because they have the most active sex lives? Do you want to know the real reason we hate them? Because we hate them. Because they exist. Because it's an axiom of nature that just as man longs for woman, loves his children, and fears death, he hates Jews. There's no reason. If there were, some smartass kike would try to come up with an argument, try to prove us wrong. And of course that would only make us hate them more. In fact we have all the reasons we need in three simple letters: J-E-W. Jew.

Ask students: "Tell me about the person who said this. What kind of person says this? Where is such a person raised? Who raises them?"

After a few answers, tell students that this was said by a Jewish character in the movie *The Believer*. It's based a true story, of a man in the 1960s who belonged to the KKK, and was outted as a Jew by a New York Times reporter.

Lesson

Watch scenes from the *Believer*. This may be a difficult movie for the students to understand and cope with. Allow time for students to talk about their reactions afterward. Instead of having a set list of questions, you may want to just allow students to talk about their feelings/thoughts about the movie, as well as share your feelings.

Pass out excerpts of one of the four articles (though you may choose to use all three and have students do a jigsaw.)

- 1.) What was Henry Bean's inspiration/reason for making this movie?
- 2.) What is the message of the movie?
- 3.) What can we learn about Jewish self-hatred from *The Believer*?
- 4.) What caused Danny's sense of self-hatred? What caused Danny's change of heart?
- 5.) List one key point in the article

Conclusion

Have students answer one of the following prompts in their journal:

- 1.) Why did Henry Bean title his film *The Believer*?
- 2.) If you were Danny's mother/father/friend (from Hebrew school)/teacher, what would you say to him?
- 3.) If you were Danny, what would you be thinking when you were in the synagogue with the other skinheads? What would your fears be? What tensions would you be feeling?

Homework

Ask students to interview a parent, grandparent, other family member, family friend, clergy member, etc. about their experiences as a Jew in America (it would work best if the person was 40 or older). Students should focus on the changes the interviewee has seen in American Culture and American Jewish society.

Lesson 6: Conclusion

Objectives

1. Students will examine the different causes of self hate
2. Students will critique one of the films/plays/clips that we have watched or read in class
3. Students will express their reactions and thoughts on the subject of Jewish self-hatred
4. Students will reflect on the effect that self-hatred has had on American Jewish identity formation

Materials

- Articles from the additional resources
- Student journals
- Papers, pens

NOTE TO TEACHER: You may use the beginning of class to conclude any last activities from lesson 5.

Activity 1

Class Blog. Students will create an entry for the class blog reflecting on the past unit. They may do so in a number of different ways.

- a.) Write a critique of one of the major works we watched or read (The Sarah Silverman clips, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *The Believer*). They should include any background information that may be useful to the reader; a summary of the work; how this work may be a reflection of Jewish self-hatred; their opinion on whether or not it is a reflection of self-hatred with support.
- b.) Compare/Contrast the three different forms of expressions of self-hatred that we discussed in class, explaining the varying degrees of these different expressions, and citing examples from the movies we watched, the articles and play we read.
- c.) An art project (which will be scanned and posted on the blog) with a written explanation of how this illustrates the idea of self-hatred.
- d.) One of their own choosing which will be approved by you.

Resources

Lesson 1

Mahari, A.J. "BPD: A Recipe For Self-Hate?" Suite101. April 2000.
http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/borderline_personality/37168. 2008.

Lesson 2

Dirty Dancing. Dir. Emile Ardolino. DVD. Perfs. Patrick Swayze, Jennifer Grey, Jerry Orbach. 1987. Artisan. 2003.

Driving Miss Daisy. Bruce Beresford. DVD. Perfs. Jessica Tandy, Morgan Freeman. 1989. Warner Home Video. 2003.

Lee, Felicia. "Vexing Questions of Jewish Identity." *New York Times Online*. 17 December 2007. www.nytimes.com. 2008.

Levitas, Daniel. "Hate and Hypocrisy: What is behind the rare-but-reoccurring phenomena of Jewish anti-Semites?" *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Winter 2002.
<http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=73>. 2008.

Mamet, David. *The Wicked Son: Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred and the Jews*. New York: Schocken, 2002.

Sacks, Jonathan Rabbi. "Love, Hate and Jewish Identity." *First Things*. 77 (November 2007). <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9711/articles/sacks.html>. 2008.

School Ties. Dir. Robert Mandel. DVD. Perfs. Brenden Fraser, Matt Damon, Chris O'Donnell. 1992. Paramount Home Video. 1999.

Lesson 3

Austerlitz, Saul. "Sarah Silverman: A Jewish comedian delivers bigotry with a smile." *My Jewish Learning*. www.myjewishlearning.com. 2008.

Sarah Silverman Program. Cre. Sarah Silverman. DVD TV. Perfs. Sarah Silverman. 2007. Paramount Home Studio. 2007.

Lesson 4

Alfred Uhry Interview with Charlie Rose (On YouTube.com)

Urhy, Alfred. *Last Night of Ballyhoo*. New York: Dramatist Play Service, Inc. 1997.

Witchel, Alex. "Remembering Prejudice, of Another Sort." *New York Times*. 23 February 1997. www.newyorktimes.com. 2008.

Lesson 5

Bean, Henry. *The Believer: Confronting Jewish Self-Hatred*. New York: Thunder Mountain Press, 2002.

Camhi, Leslie. "Television/Radio; In a Skin Head's Tale, a Picture of Both Hate and Love." *New York Times*. 17 March 2002. www.newyorktimes.com. 2008.

Gilman, Sander. "Jewish Self-Hatred and the Believer." *The Believer: Confronting Jewish Self-hatred*. Ed. Henry Bean. New York: Thunder Mountain Press, 2002.

Kraemer, David. "Self-Criticism in Public." *The Believer: Confronting Jewish Self-hatred*. Ed. Henry Bean. New York: Thunder Mountain Press, 2002.

The Believer. Dir. Henry Bean. DVD. Perfs. Ryan Gosling, Billy Zane, Summer Phoenix. 2001. Palm Pictures. 2004.

Unit 4: The Vanishing American Jew?

Understandings

- 1.) Assimilation creates anxiety across multiple generations that are increasingly unanchored from any sense of cohesive identity.
- 2.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.

Goals:

- 1.) To provide students with an understanding that while Jews have primarily been accepted into the larger American society (or maybe because of it) Jews often feel that they are still a part of the out-group.
- 2.) To help students understand the ways in which American Jews reconcile being both American and Jewish.

Essential Questions

- 1.) How is Jewish identity in America changing?
- 2.) How do Jews reconcile being both American and Jewish?
- 3.) How do Jews approach being both members of the “in-group” and the “out-group”?
- 4.) Is the American Jew vanishing?
- 5.) What does it mean to be an American Jew?

Unit Overview

Lesson 1: Summary of Jews in America

Lesson 2: One director’s viewpoint

Lesson 3: The New Jewish faces of Television

Lesson 4: Being a 21st century HEEB

Lesson 1: Summary of Jews in America

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Students will be able to summarize the Jewish Experience in the latter half of the twentieth century.
- 2.) Students will reflect on the affect of the Jewish experience in America.
- 3.) Students will predict the future of American Jewry.

Material

- *The Jewish American* (PBS documentary)
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals
- Post-its
- Writing materials

Activity 1

Ask students to take out the interviews they completed for homework during the last week. Have students write changes on post-it notes (1 “change” per post it). These changes should concern changes in the way their families practiced Judaism, were treated by non-Jewish Americans, their perceptions of their place in American culture, their views of Judaism and so on. Ask half the students to post their post-its on one wall, and ask the other half to post them on the opposite wall.

Divide the class in half and ask each group to categorize the post-its silently. When they have finished they may discuss their choices and answer the following questions:

Discussion

- 1.) What were their criteria making grouping the changes this way?
- 2.) What were the biggest changes for Jews in the Unite States?
- 3.) What impact do you think this had on American Jewish identity?

Activity 2

Show students clips from the *Jewish Americans*. Focus on clips featuring events from the 1950s or 60s until today.

Discussion

- 1.) What were some of the changes that this documentary depicted?
- 2.) What reasons did the documentarians give for the changes?
- 3.) How have some of the major events in modern American history helped shape Jewish identity in America?

Activity 3

Ask for student volunteers to play key Jewish people in American history and have a panel discussion. Key American Jewish people can include Abraham Joshua Heschel, Bob Dylan, Allan Ginsburg, Adam Sandler, Joe Lieberman, Barbra Streisand. While these volunteers are learning about their person, ask half of the class to write questions that they can ask these people based on their lives, and how their experiences shaped their identities as American Jews. Ask the

other half of the class to write questions to your panelists dealing with contemporary issues that are of concern to high schoolers. Choose one person to be the moderator.

Ruth Joan Bader Ginsburg (born March 15, 1933, Brooklyn, New York) is an Associate Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. Appointed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, she is considered to be one of the Court's two most liberal justices.

Having spent 13 years as a federal judge, but not being a career jurist, she is unusual as a Supreme Court justice for having spent the majority of her career as an advocate for specific causes, as a lawyer for the National Organization for Women (NOW) and an in-house counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. She served as a professor at Rutgers University School of Law and Columbia Law School and a federal judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. She is the second woman and the first Jewish woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court. In 2007, *Forbes* magazine rated her as the 20th most powerful woman in the world, and as the most powerful female lawyer in the world.

Avraham Joshua Heschel was descended from preeminent European rabbis on both sides of the family.^[1] He was the youngest of six children. His siblings were Sarah, Dvora Miriam, Esther Sima, Gittel, and Jacob.

After a traditional yeshiva education and studying for Orthodox rabbinical ordination semicha, he pursued his doctorate at the University of Berlin and a liberal rabbinic ordination at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. Heschel later taught Talmud there. He joined a Yiddish poetry group, Jung Vilna, and in 1933, published a volume of Yiddish poems, *Der Shem Hamefeyrosh: Mentsch*, dedicated to his father.^[2]

In late October 1938, when he was living in a rented room in the home of a Jewish family in Frankfurt, he was arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Poland. He spent ten months lecturing on Jewish philosophy and Torah at Warsaw's Institute for Jewish Studies.^[3] Six weeks before the German invasion of Poland, Heschel left Warsaw for London with the help of Julian Morgenstern, president of Hebrew Union College, who had been working to obtain visas for Jewish scholars in Europe.^[4]

Heschel's mother and two sisters were killed during World War II. He never returned to Germany, Austria or Poland. He once wrote, "If I should go to Poland or Germany, every stone, every tree would remind me of contempt, hatred, murder, of children killed, of mothers burned alive, of human beings asphyxiated."^[5]

Heschel arrived in New York City in March 1940. Heschel married Sylvia Straus on December 10, 1946, in Los Angeles. Their daughter, Susannah Heschel is a Jewish scholar in her own right. During the 1960s, he became very involved in the Civil Rights movement.

Bob Dylan (born Robert Allen Zimmerman, May 24, 1941) is an American singer-songwriter, author, musician, poet, and, of late, disc jockey who has been a major figure in popular music for five decades. Much of Dylan's most celebrated work dates from the 1960s, when he became an informal chronicler and a reluctant figurehead of American unrest. A number of his songs, such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "The Times They Are a-Changin'",^[2] became anthems of the anti-war and civil rights movements. His most recent studio album, *Modern Times*, released on August 29, 2006, entered the U.S. album charts at #1, making him, at age sixty five, the oldest living person to top those charts.^[3] It was later named Album of the Year by *Rolling Stone* magazine.^[4]

Adam Richard Sandler (born September 9, 1966) is an American comedian, a Golden Globe-nominated actor, musician, screenwriter, and film producer. After becoming a popular *Saturday Night Live* cast member, he went on to star in several Hollywood feature films that grossed over US\$100 Million at the box office.^[1] Though he is best known for his comedic roles, such as in the films *Billy Madison* (1995), *Happy Gilmore* (1996), and *Big Daddy* (1999), he has also had success in romantic and dramatic roles, such as in the films *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), *Spanglish* (2004), and *Reign Over Me* (2007).

Joseph Isadore "Joe" Lieberman (born February 24, 1942) is a United States Senator from Connecticut. Lieberman was first elected to the United States Senate in 1988, and was elected to his fourth term on November 7, 2006. In the 2000 U.S. presidential election, Lieberman was the Democratic candidate for Vice President, running with presidential nominee Al Gore, becoming the first Jewish candidate on a major American political party presidential ticket. He and his running mate won the popular vote, but failed to gain the electoral votes needed to win the heavily controversial election. Lieberman ran for re-election to the U.S. Senate while he was also Gore's running-mate, and he was re-elected by the voters of Connecticut.^[1] He attempted to become the Democratic nominee in the 2004 Presidential election, but was unsuccessful.

Barbra Streisand (born April 24, 1942) is an American two time Academy Award-winning singer, film and theatre actress. She has also achieved some note as a composer, political activist, film producer and director. She has won Oscars for Best Actress and Best Original Song as well as multiple Emmy Awards, Grammy Awards, and Golden Globe Awards.

She is considered one of the most commercially and critically successful female entertainers in modern entertainment history and one of the best selling solo recording artists in the US, with RIAA-certified shipments of over 71 million albums. She is the highest ranking female artist on the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) Top Selling Artists list.^[1] She has sold approximately 145 million albums worldwide.^[citation needed]

Irwin Allen Ginsberg (June 3, 1926 – April 5, 1997) was an American poet. Ginsberg is best known for the poem *Howl* (1956), celebrating his friends of the Beat Generation and attacking what he saw as the destructive forces of materialism and conformity in the United States at the time.

Lesson 2: One director's point of view

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1. Students will compare and contrast Jewish identity in two movies about Jews in the 1950s.
2. Students will interpret the reasons behind Levinson's choices in characterization, subject and handling of different Jewish dilemmas in these two movies.

Materials

- *Avalon*
- *Liberty Heights*
- *Liberty Heights Fails to Solve Levinson's Jewish Problem* by David Edelstein
- Laptops, television/DVD players, personal DVD players, projector
- Student Journals
- Writing materials

Activity 1

Show clips of *Avalon* and *Liberty Heights*. Include scenes that contrast the Jewish identities of the characters in these films (for example Rosh Hashanah dinner with the Kurtzmans vs. Thanksgiving dinner with the Kayes).

After you have shown several clips, distribute the article *Liberty Heights Fails to Solve Levinson's Jewish Problem* by David Edelstein. Have students work in groups of threes and fours to answer the following questions:

- 1.) We know the Kurtzman family was Jewish, but how do we know that the Kaye family was?
- 2.) What are the differences between the two families in these two films?
- 3.) What are the similarities, if any?
- 4.) What is Levinson's "Jewish problem"?
- 5.) How did he try to resolve it?
- 6.) Why does Edelstein think Levinson was unsuccessful?
- 7.) Do you think Levinson was successful? Why or why not?
- 8.) We don't know if Levinson's own Jewish identity changed in the 10 years between he made these two films, but if we were to assume that it did, how did it change from 1991 when Levinson made *Avalon* to 2001 when he made *Liberty Heights*?

Journal Entry

Ask students to respond to the following prompt:

Pick one character from either of the films we watched today. How would this character respond to the question: "What does it mean to be Jewish in the United States?" (They should respond in the first person.) They should then, from the point of view of the first character, try to project what another character (from the same movie) thinks it means to be Jewish in the U.S.

For example, a student picks Ben Kurtzman from *Liberty Heights*. The journal entry may look like: What I think it means to be Jewish in the U.S. is...my grandmother, who was born in Poland probably thinks it means...

Reading Questionnaire

Directions: Read the article *Liberty Heights Fails to Solve Levinson's Jewish Problem* by David Edelstein. Then answer the following questions in your group.

- 1.) We know the Kurtzman family was Jewish, but how do we know that the Kaye family was?

- 2.) What were the differences between the two families in these two films?

- 3.) Were there any similarities? If so, what were they?

- 4.) What is Levinson's "Jewish problem"?

- 5.) How did he try to resolve it?

- 6.) Why does Edelstein think Levinson was unsuccessful?

- 7.) Do you think Levinson was successful? Why or why not?

- 8.) We don't know if Levinson's own Jewish identity changed in the 10 years between he made these two films, but if we were to assume that it did, how did it change from 1991 when Levinson made *Avalon* to 2001 when he made *Liberty Heights*?

Lesson 3: The New Jewish Faces of Television

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Identify prior knowledge of issues facing American Jewry
- 2.) Give examples of how Jews deal with issues they face.
- 3.) Compare different reactions to concerns of American Jews

Materials

- *For Producer of Hit Show The OC Jewish Background Is Fertile Ground* by Richard Asinof
- *Wait, Larry David is Jewish?* by Zack Luck
- *The O.C.*
- *Curb Your Enthusiasm*
- *Arrested Development*
- Laptops, television/dvd players, personal DVD players, projector
- Reading Questionnaire
- Jewish Issues chart
- Writing materials
- Student Journals

Today, we are going to look at some of the important issues facing American Jewry as they are portrayed on television. In the late 70s, characters on television were first beginning to be identified as Jews. Bernie Loves Bridgette, Welcome Back Kotter and Taxi all featured “out” Jews. Although there was a lull in the 1980s, by the 90s and certainly the beginning of the twenty-first century, Jewish characters, especially in sitcoms, were everywhere. While in many of the shows such as Seinfeld, Friends and Will and Grace, the characters’ Judaism does not play an important role in the progression of the story, that changed by the early twenty-first century. All of a sudden shows like Curb your Enthusiasm, Arrested Development and the O.C. were dealing with important issues, sometimes even a character’s Jewish identity.

Set Induction (10 minutes)

Have students form groups of four or five and hand out questionnaire about issues facing American Jewry. Tell students they have 5 minutes to list as many issues or dilemmas that American Jews may face, drawing on what they know or heard about American Judaism (from television, movies, news, songs, parents, grandparents, what they have learned in religious school, what they have heard their friends say, etc.) Instruct students to choose one person to be the recorder for the group.

When the allotted 5 minutes is up, ask students to report on their findings. Make a master list on chart paper to post in the room for reference throughout the period.

Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Hand out the articles *For Producer of Hit Show The OC Jewish Background Is Fertile Ground* by Richard Asinof and *Wait, Larry David is Jewish?* by Zack Luck. Students can read these

articles on their own or with a partner. They should answer the questions on the Articles Questionnaire.

Now that you have read two articles about at least two of the shows we will be viewing, we are going to hold off on discussing the articles until after we are finished with all three clips.

Activity 2 (30 minutes)

We are about to watch three different clips from The O.C., Arrested Development, and Curb Your Enthusiasm. While you are watching these clips, I want you to be thinking about the things we have been discussing all year long: Identity (what makes up these characters' identities. Are they religious Jews, are they cultural Jews?), Stereotyping (Are the characters stereotypes of Jews? Do they stereotype others? Are they stereotyped by others in the show?), Self-hatred (How do they feel about being Jewish?), And how they fit into the larger American society. Do they identify mostly as Jews or primarily as Americans? You will also want to pay attention to the relationships they are in, conflicts they may be having, and anything else that jumps out at you. The first scene we are going to watch is a clip from Curb Your Enthusiasm where Larry accidentally interrupts a conversion of a Jew to Christianity. While you are watching, make sure you are filling out your charts....The second clip you are about to see is from an episode of Arrested Development where George Sr., while in prison "finds" Judaism...The last clip we are going to see is from the Passover episode of The O.C.

NOTE TO TEACHER: You may also wish to play (or instead of) one of the many "Chrismakkuh" episodes of the O.C., as that is what they are known for.

When all three clips have been shown, bring the class together for a class discussion:

- 1.) What were the issues that these Jewish characters faced the most?
(Possible answers: Intermarriage, Christian-Jewish relationships, Assimilation)
- 2.) How did each of these shows deal with these issues?
- 3.) How did these different characters deal with their own Jewish identity?
- 4.) Next we will discuss children. You are all of you are years away from having children of your own, but children played an important role in *Arrested* and *The O.C.* How necessary do you think it is for the parent's sense of Jewish identity to have children who are Jewish? For example, if one of you were to tell your parents you wanted to be a Buddhist, do you think your parents would be upset and would it impact their Jewish identities?
- 5.) What do the treatment of these issues on popular television shows tell you about the importance of these issues to Jews in America?
- 6.) Have these episodes changed the way you think about any or all of these issues?
- 7.) What effect do you think these issues have in the construction of American Jewish identity?

Journal entry (5 minutes)

I want you to take the next couple minutes to write in your journals answering this question: What is an issue that you are facing that may have an effect on your Jewish identity?

Article Questionnaire

Directions: Read the articles *For Producer of Hit Show The OC Jewish Background Is Fertile Ground* by Richard Asinof and *Wait, Larry David is Jewish?* by Zack Luck. The answer the questions.

- 1.) What are the differences between *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*?

- 2.) What accounts for the differences between *Seinfeld* and *Curb*?

- 3.) What was one of the main issues dealt with in *Seinfeld*?

- 4.) What are some of the main issues dealt with in *Curb*?

- 5.) How is stereotyping used in both *Seinfeld* and *Curb*?

- 6.) What are some of the issues facing the characters of *The O.C.*?

- 7.) How does Judaism play an important role for Josh Schwartz? How is that translated into the show?

- 8.) What are the implications of Chrismakkuh?

American Jewry Dilemmas

	Character and Dilemma or Question faced by them	How the dilemma was resolved	What are the implications for the characters American Jewish Identity?
Curb Your Enthusiasm			
Arrested Development			
The O.C.			

Lesson 4: Being a 21st Century HEEB

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- 1.) Assess *HEEB*'s treatments of American Jewish identity?
- 2.) Compare and contrast *HEEB* to *American Jewish Life Magazine* and *Reform Magazine*
- 3.) Express their views of the future of American Jewish identity

Materials

HEEB Magazine (several different issues)

American Jewish Life Magazine (several different issues)

Reform Magazine (Several different issues)

Writing materials

Activity 1

Allow students time to peruse the *HEEB Magazine*, *American Jewish Life Magazine*, and *Reform Magazine*. They should have plenty of time to read several articles. They may want to take notes while doing so on the following questions:

- 1.) What demographic group is this magazine geared toward? What makes you think so?
- 2.) What subject matters are dealt with in these magazines most often?
- 3.) How does each of these magazines deal with Jewish American identity?
- 4.) Which magazine was most attractive to you or would you like to read on a regular basis? Why?

Activity 2

Ask students to write an article on "The Changing face of Jewish identity in America" as though they were writing it for *HEEB* magazine. They should use examples from the previous weeks, for example, using examples from the *Liberty Heights* vs. *Avalon* debate or the three examples of American Jewry in 21st century television. These articles will be posted on the class blog.

Resources

Lesson 1

The Jewish Americans. Dir. David Grubin. DVD. David Grubin Productions. 2008.

Lesson 2

Avalon. Dir. Barry Levinson. Perfs. Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lou Jacobi, Elizabeth Perkins. 1990. Columbia Tri-Star. 2001.

Edelstein, David . "Liberty Heights Fails to Solve Levinson's Jewish Problem." *Slate*. 25 November 1999. <http://www.slate.com/id/56558>. 2008.

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Lesson 3

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The O.C. Dir. Cre. Josh Schwartz. DVD TV. Perfs. Peter Gallagher, Benjamin McKenzie, Adam Brody, Rachel Bilson, Mischa Barton. 2003. Warner Home Video. 2005.

Lesson 4

HEEB Magazine. Editor Joshua Nueman.

American Jewish Life Magazine Editor Benyamin Cohen

Reform Judaism Magazine. Editor Rabbi Daniel Freeland

Unit 5: Documenting Jewish Identity

Understandings

- 1.) The change of Jews as “other” to “majority”/“white” in American society generated an identity crisis, for Jews as Jews and as Americans and it continues to drive us to reconstruct what it means to be an American Jew.
- 2.) Identities are both culturally constructed and historically embedded (Brenner, 1996).
- 3.) The way that “Others” (non-Jewish Americans) view us as American Jews affects the formation of Jewish identities.

Goals

- 1.) Provide students with an opportunity to synthesize and assimilate the lessons they learned about the factors that effect changing Jewish identity in the United States.
- 2.) Provide students with an opportunity to create their own commentary on Jewish identity.

Essential Questions

- 1.) How can I, and those around me, reconcile being both Jewish and American?
- 2.) How have the identities of those around me been constructed?
- 3.) How much of an effect does the media have on our identities?
- 4.) Are the stereotypes we see in the media reflective of who we are as Jews?
- 5.) Do we feel a part of larger society?
- 6.) How do we deal with not being part of the in-group?
- 7.) Do we think that American Jewry is disappearing?
- 8.) Does American Jewish identity need to change/adapt in order to survive?

Unit Overview:

Part 1: Introduction to “Documenting Jewish Identity”

Part 2: Movie premier

Objectives: At the end of this unit, students will be able to

- 1.) Explain issues facing Jewish identity in America.
- 2.) Explain the views of American Jewish identity made by members of the Jewish community.
- 3.) Examine how the different factors that effect Jewish identity in America aides in shaping identity.
- 4.) Assimilate different factors that both create and affect American Jewish identity.
- 5.) Reflect on their experiences in the class.

Materials

Writing materials

DVDs, photographs, articles, etc used during the course of the class

Video camera

Computer with movie editing software

Lesson 1: Introduction to “Documenting Jewish Identity”

This is a project based unit. In the previous four units, students have learned about different factors that have affected a continually changing American Jewry and how mass media has played a role in both shaping identity and reflecting our own self-perceptions. We will now ask the students to try to answer the question of their Jewish identity using film as their mode of expression.

This course ends with a student-made documentary on American Jewish identity: how it has been constructed, how it has and is changing, and the factors that contribute to its adaptations. You may want to provide a more narrow parameter to guide the students in this larger project, such as focusing on your particular synagogue, or by highlighting the opinions of Jewish high school seniors in your area (from different synagogues and movements).

In this unit, there are two parts listed. It will be up to the teacher to decide how many lessons to devote to the three stages of making this film. The first stage is the pre-production. It is here that the students will determine which segments they want to work on, brainstorming interview questions, and deciding which clips and examples they want to use.

The second stage of this project is the production period. It is at this point that students shoot the background information, interviews, their reflections and opinions, etc. The final stage in the process is the editing process. If there are parents/congregants in your community who have experience in film editing, it would be a wonderful opportunity to invite them into your class to help with this section. If not, there are simple computer software programs that can be downloaded. How much or how little the students will be involved in this last stage will be up to the teacher.

The final part of this unit will be presenting the students’ documentary to the parents (and the larger congregational community if you so choose). The students should be prepared to share their reflections of the process with those who attend the film premier.

Documentary guidelines

- 1.) Introduce students to the documentary project. Explain to the students that they will be working in small groups to create one larger class documentary. Each group will be responsible for one segment of the film.
- 2.) Divide students in groups of 3-5. Either assign students, or allow them to choose, which segment they will be responsible for. The segments will be based on the topics discussed in class. If there are topics not discussed in class that the students wish to cover, open up this possibility. Topics may include:
 - a. Identity—both how one’s personal identity is constructed as well as the dichotomy of being both Jewish and American in the U.S.
 - b. Stereotyping
 - c. Self-hatred
 - d. The fate of American Jewry
- 3.) The minimum requirements for the documentary include:
 - a. Background information on their given topic
 - b. A minimum of three interviews from people of varying ages and gender.
 - c. A minimum of three clips from different television shows that exemplify their topic. Clips should represent both sides of an issue (e.g. If the stereotyping group

is choosing to show three clips, one clip should exemplify negative stereotypes and one should exemplify positive stereotypes.)

- d. Any photographs or news/magazine articles, etc. that they think are important.
- e. Any work that they may have done, or wish to do (e.g. skits, movie posters, poems)
- f. Their own commentary on the subject.

NOTE: You may want to contact professors from the local university who work in the Jewish studies department to ask if they would be willing to be interviewed for the project.

- 4.) Have groups brainstorm the different aspects of the segment they plan to cover. The more time they spend planning, the easier it will be when they get to the second stage.
- 5.) Groups should hand in project proposal answering the following questions:
 - a. What shots will be included in their segments (i.e. what interviews, other material) in the proper order.
 - b. Answers to the following questions:
 - i. Why is this issue important to the documentary
 - ii. How does this impact them? The local community? The Jewish community?
 - iii. What are their opinions and feelings on the issue?
- 6.) Have students brainstorm questions they can use during the interviews.
 - a. Clear, concise questions void of bias
 - b. Do not ask questions with yes or no answers.
 - c. Ask clarifying questions.
 - d. Allow interviewee time to answer the question.
- 7.) Shoot segment.

NOTE: You may want to suggest to students that they shoot parts of their documentary when they are not in religious school in order to move the

- 8.) Editing documentary together.
- 9.) Reflection. Have students answer the following questions. These questions will help students prepare for the presentation:
 - a. How does the final project differ from what you expected?
 - b. What challenges, in any of the stages, did you face? How did you address these challenges?
 - c. How have our feelings on the subject either remained the same or changed during the creation of the documentary?
 - d. What did you learn from those people you interviewed?

Guidelines for documentary

- 1.) In groups of 3-5 you will work on one of the following topics.
 - a. Identity—both how one’s personal identity is constructed as well as the dichotomy of being both Jewish and American in the U.S.
 - b. Stereotyping
 - c. Self-hatred
 - d. The fate of American Jewry

If there is a topic your group would like to address that is not on this list, ask if this is something that could be included in the documentary.
- 2.) The minimum requirements for each segment includes:
 - a. Background information on the given topic
 - b. A minimum of three interviews from people of varying ages and gender.
 - c. A minimum of three clips from different television shows that exemplify the topic. Clips should represent both sides of an issue (e.g. If the stereotyping group is choosing to show three clips, one clip should exemplify negative stereotypes and one should exemplify positive stereotypes.)
 - d. Any photographs or news/magazine articles, etc. that you think are important.
 - e. Any work that you may have done, or wish to do (e.g. skits, movie posters, poems) that you would like to share.
 - f. Your own commentary on the subject.
- 3.) Brainstorm the different aspects of the segment you plan to cover. The more time you spend planning, the easier it will be when you get to the second (production) stage.
- 4.) Hand in project proposal answering the following questions:
 - a. What shots will be included in your segments (i.e. what interviews, other material) in the proper order.
 - b. Answers to the following questions:
 - i. Why is this issue important to the documentary?
 - ii. How does this impact you? The local community? The Jewish community?
 - iii. What are your opinions and feelings on the issue?
- 5.) Brainstorm questions you can use during the interviews. Questions should be:
 - a. Clear, concise questions void of bias
 - b. Do not ask questions with yes or no answers.
 - c. Ask clarifying questions.
 - d. When you arrive at the interview stage, allow interviewee time to answer the question. Do not be afraid of silent time while interviewee is thinking.
- 6.) Shoot segment.

- 7.) Reflection. Answer the following questions. These questions will help you prepare for the presentation:
- a. How does the final project differ from what you expected?
 - b. What challenges, in any of the stages, did you face? How did you address these challenges?
 - c. How have our feelings on the subject either remained the same or changed during the creation of the documentary?
 - d. What did you learn from those people you interviewed?

Part 2: MOVIE PREMIER

To conclude the year, invite parents, clergy, other classes, and others from the larger congregational community to view the class' documentary. You, along with the director of education and the students may want to write a short "press release" for the Temple bulletin and the local Jewish paper.

Students may want to create invitations to send to parents, family members, friends, etc. informing them of the premier date. You may also wish to have students make movie posters that you can hang in religious school and congregational bulletin boards advertising the time and date of the premier. After the premier, all students may keep their own posters as a souvenir.

Before the documentary is shown, ask each group to prepare answers to the following:

- 1.) Each group should explain what they did to prepare to shoot their segment of the documentary.
- 2.) What were the biggest challenges you faced in doing this project? How did you overcome these challenges?
- 3.) What were the biggest successes you had in doing this project?
- 4.) Share a short, personal reflection.

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Jewish Identity in America

By Abraham H. Foxman

National Director of the Anti-Defamation League

This article originally appeared in *Haaretz* on July 27, 2007

Yair Sheleg in "The Dilemma of American Jews" (*Haaretz*, July 18) speaks to critical issues facing the American Jewish community but gets them wrong.

As has been said many times, the great challenge facing Jews in America is maintaining Jewish identity. Sheleg agrees with this but the context in which he presents the subject is out of whack and reflects an outdated model. Sheleg posits the dilemma facing Jews as one of integration and acceptance by the surroundings versus preservation of Jewish identity. He talks as if Jews are still unsure about their acceptance in America and that as a result they run from their Jewish identity so as not to jeopardize that acceptance. To back up this thesis, he cites numerous examples, such as the fact that campaigns against mixed marriages are dismissed and that far greater donations from the community go to general causes than Jewish ones. Sheleg also notes that Jews oppose government subsidies for Jewish education, which he attributes to the greater importance for Jewish self-image to be part of the liberal camp than to reinforce Jewish identity. Furthermore, he claims that the fact that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) did not sing "Hatikva" at its national conference is an indicator that Jews are terrified of "dual loyalty" charges and thus it affects their behavior.

In a way I'm tempted to say that the challenges facing American Jews are greater than Sheleg describes because the issue of Jewish continuity stems not from insecurity, as he alleges, but rather from a level of comfort and apathy in society. I am not suggesting that there are no insecurities in American Jewish life. There surely still are. However, the dominant reason why Jews are not maintaining their Jewish identity is not that they are escaping their Jewishness but rather their indifference to it in an open and welcoming country.

American Jews give the bulk of their donations to hospitals, cultural institutions and universities because they are fully part of American society. It's a natural development both in terms of having impact on the general culture and for receiving plaudits for the effort. Philanthropy to Jewish institutions, of which there is also a lot, does not offer the level of prestige and fame that comes with giving to the other institutions. That's a price of acceptance, not rejection.

Questions may have been raised over "Hatikvah" not being sung at AIPAC. Yet it hardly signifies wider Jewish fears about dual loyalty. American Jewish support for Israel in every sense - financially, politically, emotionally, publicly - is as strong as ever. This is the case even as people like John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt and Jimmy Carter seek to intimidate Jews by accusing them of controlling American policy against the interests of their own country. Again, Sheleg is overstating the insecurity factor.

As to Jewish opposition to government funding for religious education: There is a lively debate on this subject within the community. However, it is a misunderstanding to suggest, as Sheleg does, that opposition reflects a distorted self-image or that being part of the liberal world is more important than reinforcing Jewish identity. It is, rather, a product of an understanding that Jewish life in America is unique, as British historian Paul Johnson noted, exactly because of church-state separation. Moreover, those who oppose funding fear that the freedom and comfort level of American Jews will be eroded if the wall of separation is eviscerated.

The challenge of maintaining Jewish identity in America does not come from Jews worrying about their place in America. That was true in years past. Today, it comes from a sense that in a free country, being Jewish may not be significant to them. This apathy or indifference is what leads to intermarriage and distancing from the community.

In sum, Sheleg is right to worry about Jewish continuity. It is a problem we all worry about, even in Israel. It is the draw of America, not the fear of it, that makes the challenge very different from the one Sheleg articulates. In many ways, it is even a more difficult challenge. As tough as it is to rouse the community in the face of fears, it is even more so in the face of indifference. Identifying the problem correctly is the first step to solving it.

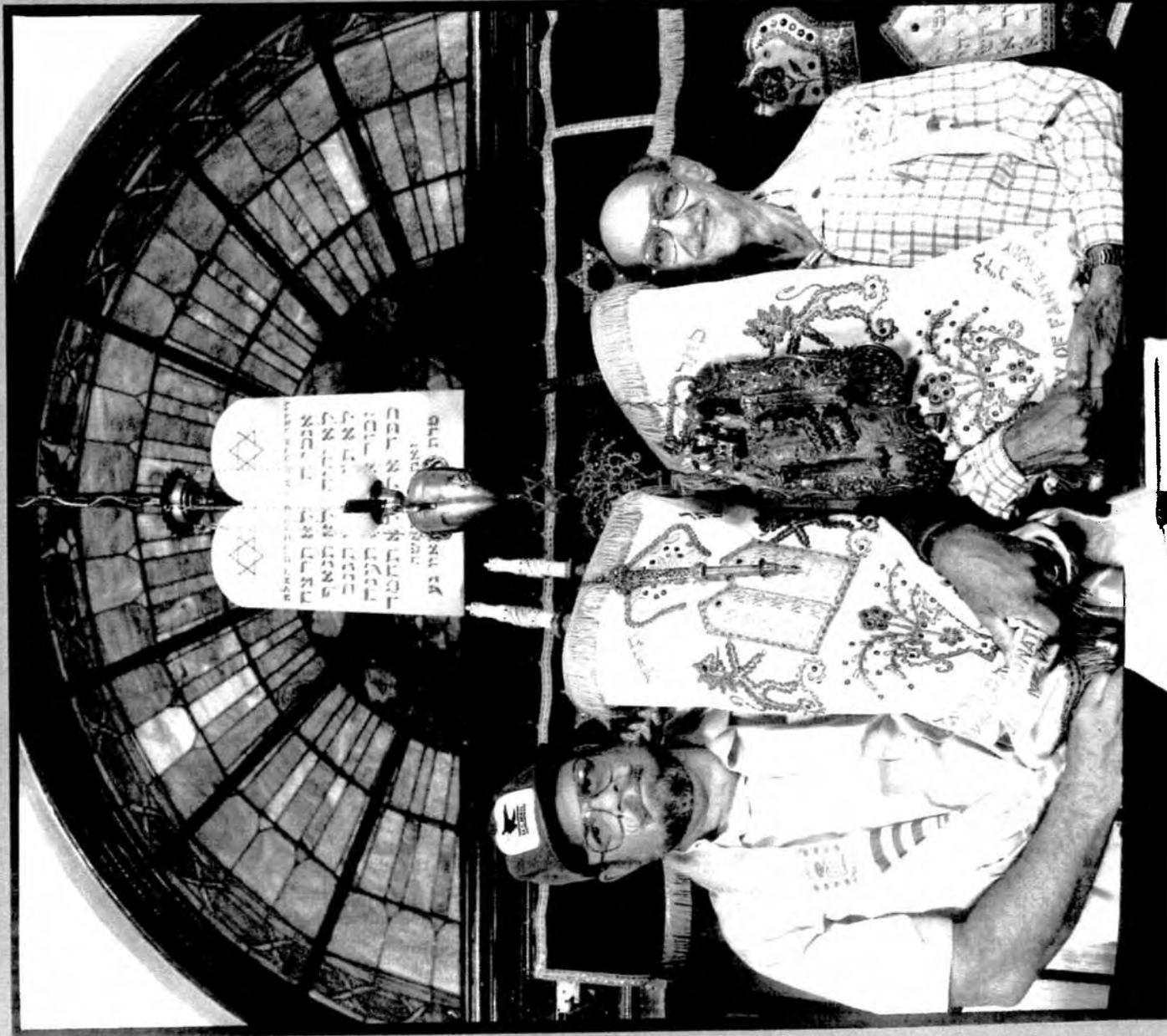
Abraham H. Foxman is national director of the Anti-Defamation League and author of "The Deadliest Lies: The Israel Lobby and the Myth of Jewish Control," to be published by Palgrave Macmillan.

The Anti-Defamation League, founded in 1913, is the world's leading organization fighting anti-Semitism through programs and services that counteract hatred, prejudice and bigotry.



New Orleans, Louisiana.
Sandra Jaffee and her late husband Alan founded Preservation Hall in the early 1960s to showcase the South's legendary musical heritage. Located in the heart of the French Quarter, it stands as an important landmark for Dixieland Jazz.

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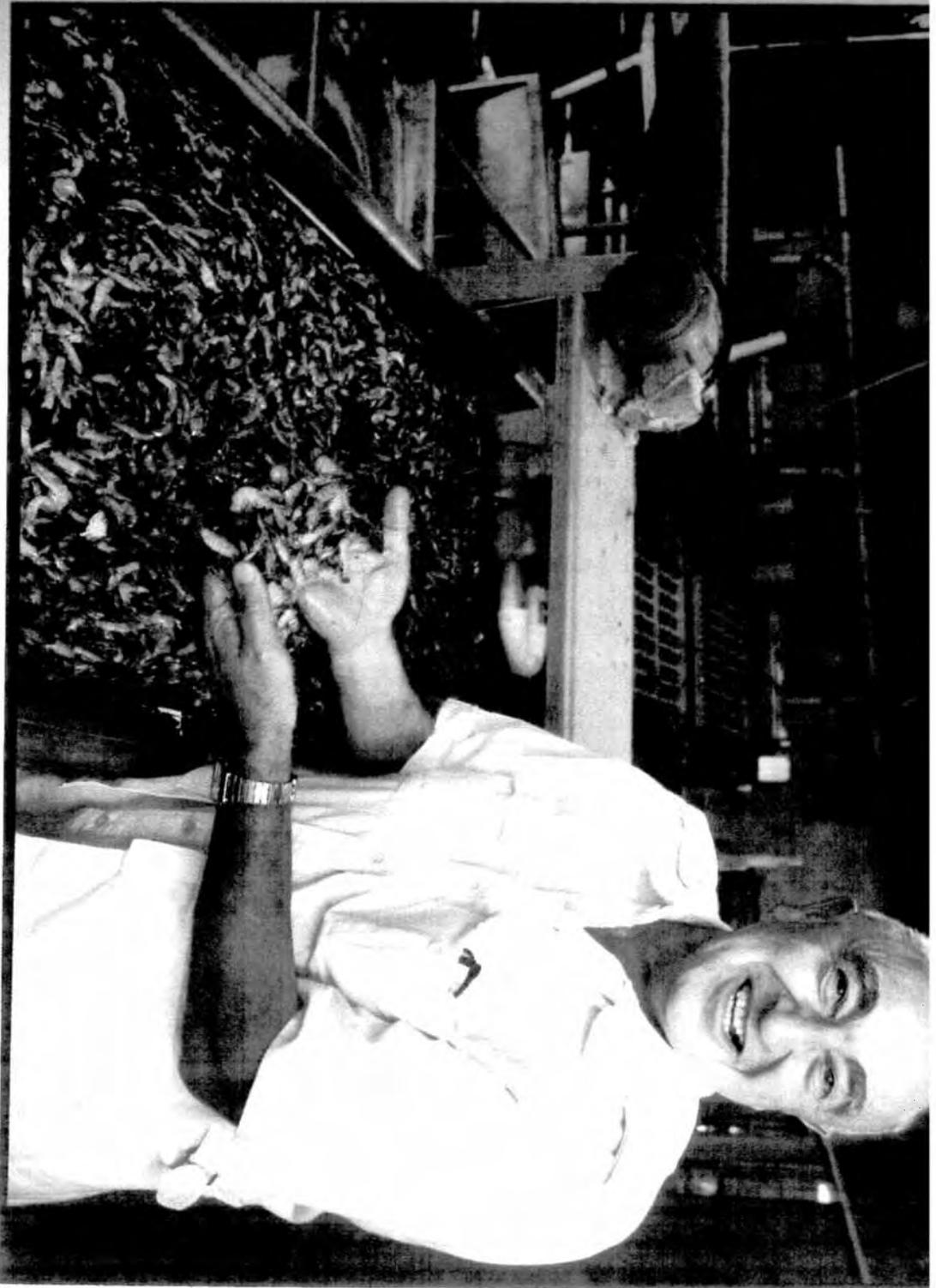
Joe Martin Erber
and His Uncle, Meyer
Gelman. Greenwood,
Mississippi. Congregation
Ahavath Rayim is the last

"V up be th Y c a a J

"My grandfather had a shoe store and manufactured shoes. He volunteered for the Confederate Army and they wouldn't take him. Said they needed him more as a cobbler to make shoes than they needed him to fight. They could get people to fight, but they didn't have anybody else to make shoes."

MORTIMER COHEN, Montgomery, Alabama





Michael Shackleton. New Orleans, Louisiana. Born in Russia, Michael Shackleton originally worked in the grocery business in New York after immigrating to this country. Dissatisfied with New York, he moved to New Orleans and became involved in the wholesale shrimp business.

he had sold them. He could see their shoes under the trees.

DOTTY LONDON STELTMAN, Hattiesburg, Mississippi



Henry Friedman and Son at Friedman and Sons, Franklin, Louisiana. On the main street in Franklin, this store is now run by the second- and third-generation owners.

"If I had known how much people were going to like my schnecken I wouldn't have had to sell shoes."

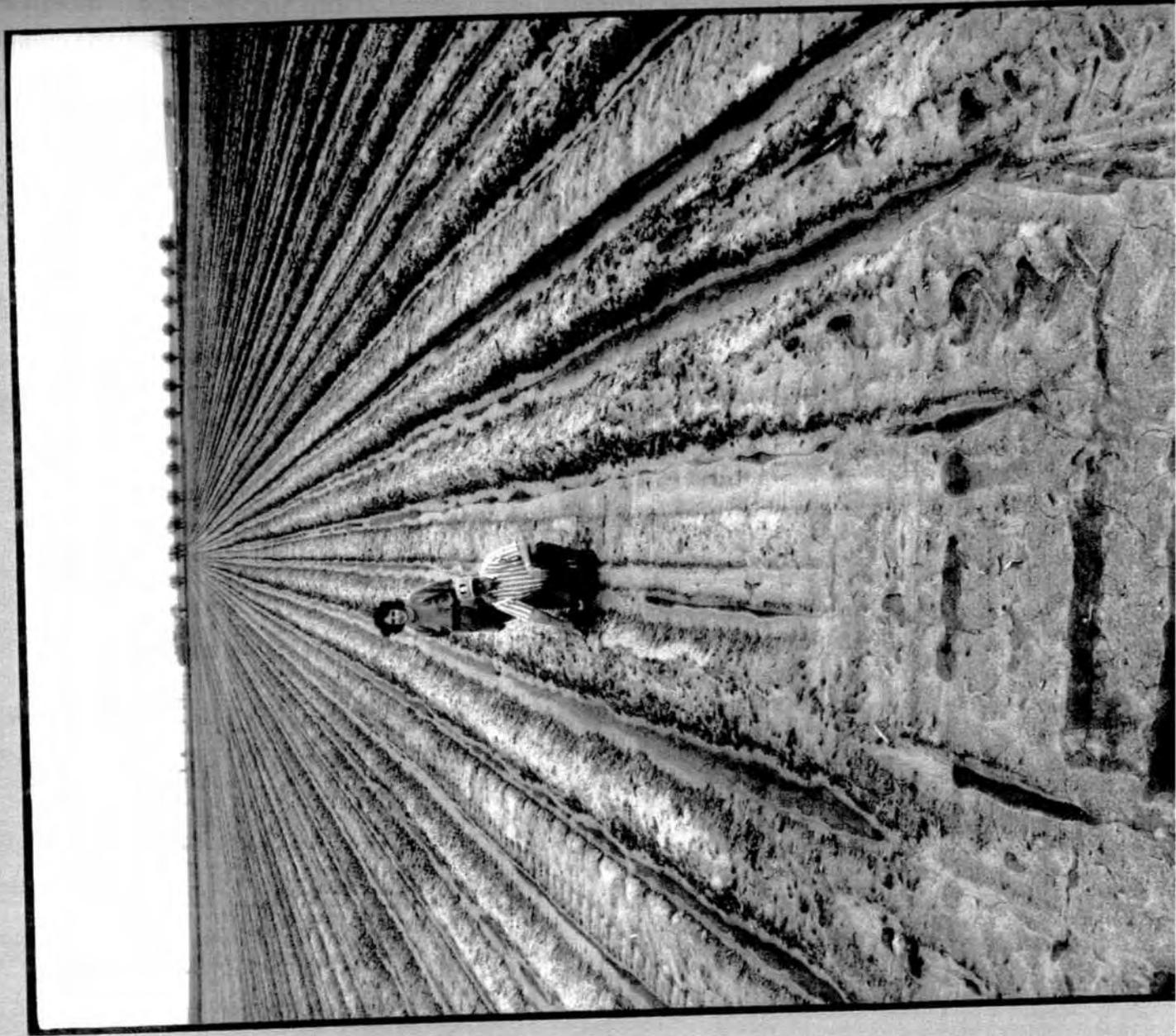
DELORES LOEB, Mobile, Alabama



"If I had known how much people were going to like my schnecken I wouldn't have had to sell shoes."

DELORES LOEB, Mobile, Alabama





**Ben and Betty
Lee Lamensdorf.**
Cary, Mississippi.
The Lamensdorfs
grow cotton, wheat,
and pecans in the
rich Mississippi Delta
farmland. Betty Lee's
Russian grandfather,
Morris Grundfest,
who began as a peddler
and later became a
prosperous merchant,
owned the first

"I was the 'delivery boy.' I went to Memphis and took everybody's order and brought back the meats and the perishable foods. The matzo, the flour, the potato starch, and all that, we would ship by bus or by train because we couldn't put it all in a car. Don't you remember the wonderful smoked goose legs that we got from Cincinnati!?"

BESS SELIGMAN, Boca Raton, Florida, formerly of Shaw, Mississippi



Bagel Break,
Agudath Israel,
Montgomery, Alabama
Bagels and cream cheese
are served during a
religious-school break
even in Alabama.

Shalom Y'all

Images of Jewish Life in the American South



Where bias begins: The truth about stereotypes

Discusses automatic or implicit stereotyping. Information on a test which aims to reveal a person's hidden biases; Information on an experiment which showed a person's predisposition to prejudice; Theory on the source of bias.

By: [Annie Murphy Paul](#)

Psychologists once believed that only bigoted people used stereotypes. Now the study of unconscious bias is revealing the unsettling truth: We all use stereotypes, all the time, without knowing it. We have met the enemy of equality, and the enemy is us.

Mahzarin Banaji doesn't fit anybody's ideal of a racist. A psychology professor at Yale University, she studies stereotypes for a living. And as a woman and a member of a minority ethnic group, she has felt firsthand the sting of discrimination. Yet when she took one of her own tests of unconscious bias. "I showed very strong prejudices," she says. "It was truly a disconcerting experience." And an illuminating one. When Banaji was in graduate school in the early 1980s, theories about stereotypes were concerned only with their explicit expression: outright and unabashed racism, sexism, anti-Semitism. But in the years since, a new approach to stereotypes has shattered that simple notion. The bias Banaji and her colleagues are studying is something far more subtle, and more insidious: what's known as automatic or implicit stereotyping, which, they find, we do all the time without knowing it. Though out-and-out bigotry may be on the decline, says Banaji, "if anything, stereotyping is a bigger problem than we ever imagined." Previously, researchers who studied stereotyping had simply asked people to record their feelings about minority groups and had used their answers as an index of their attitudes. Psychologists now understand that these conscious replies are only half the story. How progressive a person seems to be on the surface bears little or no relation to how prejudiced he or she is on an unconscious level--so that a bleeding-heart liberal might harbor just as many biases as a neo-Nazi skinhead.

As surprising as these findings are, they confirmed the hunches of many students of human behavior. "Twenty years ago, we hypothesized that there were people who said they were not prejudiced but who really did have unconscious negative stereotypes and beliefs," says psychologist Ick Dovidio, Ph.D., of Colgate University "It was like theorizing about the existence of a virus, and then one day seeing it under a microscope."

The test that exposed Banaji's hidden biases--and that this writer took as well, with equally dismaying results--is typical of the ones used by automatic stereotype researchers. It presents the subject with a series of positive or negative adjectives, each paired with a characteristically "white" or "black" name. As the name and word appear together on a computer screen, the person taking the test presses a key, indicating whether the word is good or bad. Meanwhile, the computer records the speed of each response.

A glance at subjects' response times reveals a startling phenomenon: Most people who participate in the experiment--even some African-Americans--respond more quickly when a positive word is paired with a white name or a negative word with a black name. Because our minds are more accustomed to making these associations, says Banaji, they process them more rapidly. Though the words and names aren't subliminal, they are presented so quickly that a subject's ability to make deliberate choices is diminished--allowing his or her underlying assumptions to show through. The same technique can be used to measure stereotypes about many different social groups, such as homosexuals, women, and the elderly.

THE UNCONSCIOUS COMES INTO FOCUS

From these tiny differences in reaction speed--a matter of a few hundred milliseconds--the study of automatic stereotyping was born. Its immediate ancestor was the cognitive revolution of the 1970s, an explosion of psychological research into the way people think. After decades dominated by the study of observable behavior, scientists wanted a closer look at the more mysterious operation of the human brain. And the development of computers--which enabled scientists to display information very quickly and to measure minute discrepancies in reaction time--permitted a peek into the unconscious. At the same time, the study of cognition was also illuminating the nature of stereotypes themselves. Research done after World War II--mostly by European emigres struggling to understand how the Holocaust had happened--concluded that stereotypes were used only by a particular type of person: rigid, repressed, authoritarian. Borrowing from the psychoanalytic perspective then in vogue, these theorists suggested that biased behavior emerged out of internal conflicts caused by inadequate parenting.

The cognitive approach refused to let the rest of us off the hook. It made the simple but profound point that we all use categories--of people, places, things--to make sense of the world around us. "Our ability to categorize and evaluate is an important part of human intelligence," says Banaji. "Without it, we couldn't survive." But stereotypes are too much of a good thing. In the course of stereotyping, a useful category--say, women--becomes freighted with additional associations,

usually negative. "Stereotypes are categories that have gone too far," says John Bargh, Ph.D., of New York University. "When we use stereotypes, we take in the gender, the age, the color of the skin of the person before us, and our minds respond with messages that say hostile, stupid, slow, weak. Those qualities aren't out there in the environment. They don't reflect reality."

Bargh thinks that stereotypes may emerge from what social psychologists call in-group/out-group dynamics. Humans, like other species, need to feel that they are part of a group, and as villages, clans, and other traditional groupings have broken down, our identities have attached themselves to more ambiguous classifications, such as race and class. We want to feel good about the group we belong to--and one way of doing so is to denigrate all those who aren't in it. And while we tend to see members of our own group as individuals, we view those in out-groups as an undifferentiated--stereotyped--mass. The categories we use have changed, but it seems that stereotyping itself is bred in the bone. Though a small minority of scientists argues that stereotypes are usually accurate and can be relied upon without reservations, most disagree--and vehemently. "Even if there is a kernel of truth in the stereotype, you're still applying a generalization about a group to an individual, which is always incorrect," says Bargh. Accuracy aside, some believe that the use of stereotypes is simply unjust. "In a democratic society, people should be judged as individuals and not as members of a group," Banaji argues. "Stereotyping flies in the face of that ideal."

PREDISPOSED TO PREJUDICE

The problem, as Banaji's own research shows, is that people can't seem to help it. A recent experiment provides a good illustration. Banaji and her colleague, Anthony Greenwald, Ph.D., showed people a list of names--some famous, some not. The next day, the subjects returned to the lab and were shown a second list, which mixed names from the first list with new ones. Asked to identify which were famous, they picked out the Margaret Meads and the Miles Davises--but they also chose some of the names on the first list, which retained a lingering familiarity that they mistook for fame. (Psychologists call this the "famous overnight-effect.") By a margin of two-to-one, these suddenly "famous" people were male.

Participants weren't aware that they were preferring male names to female names, Banaji stresses. They were simply drawing on an unconscious stereotype of men as more important and influential than women. Something similar happened when she showed subjects a list of people who might be criminals: without knowing they were doing so, participants picked out an overwhelming number of African-American names. Banaji calls this kind of stereotyping implicit, because people know they are making a judgment--but just aren't aware of the basis upon which they are making it.

Even further below awareness is something that psychologists call automatic processing, in which stereotypes are triggered by the slightest interaction or encounter. An experiment conducted by Bargh required a group of white participants to perform a tedious computer task. While performing the task, some of the participants were subliminally exposed to pictures of African-Americans with neutral expressions. When the subjects were then asked to do the task over again, the ones who had been exposed to the faces reacted with more hostility to the request--because, Bargh believes, they were responding in kind to the hostility which is part of the African-American stereotype. Bargh calls this the "immediate hostile reaction," which he believes can have a realeffect on race relations. When African-Americans accurately perceive the hostile expressions that their white counterparts are unaware of, they may respond with hostility of their own--thereby perpetuating the stereotype.

Of course, we aren't completely under the sway of our unconscious. Scientists think that the automatic activation of a stereotype is immediately followed by a conscious check on unacceptable thoughts--at least in people who think that they are not prejudiced. This internal censor successfully restrains overtly biased responses. But there's still the danger of leakage, which often shows up in non-verbal behavior: our expressions, our stance, how far away we stand, how much eye contact we make.

The gap between what we say and what we do can lead African-Americans and whites to come away with very different impressions of the same encounter, says Jack Dovidio. "If I'm a white person talking to an African-American, I'm probably monitoring my conscious beliefs very carefully and making sure everything I say agrees with all the positive things I want to express," he says. "And I usually believe I'm pretty successful because I hear the right words coming out of my mouth." The listener who is paying attention to non-verbal behavior, however, may be getting quite the opposite message. An African-American student of Dovidio's recently told him that when she was growing up, her mother had taught her to observe how white people moved to gauge their true feelings toward blacks. "Her mother was a very astute amateur psychologist--and about 20 years ahead of me," he remarks.

WHERE DOES BIAS BEGIN?

So where exactly do these stealth stereotypes come from? Though automatic-stereotype researchers often refer to the unconscious, they don't mean the Freudian notion of a seething mass of thoughts and desires, only some of which are deemed presentable enough to be admitted to the conscious mind. In fact, the cognitive model holds that information flows in exactly the opposite direction: connections made often enough in the conscious mind eventually become

unconscious. Says Bargh: "If conscious choice and decision making are not needed, they go away. Ideas recede from consciousness into the unconscious over time."

Much of what enters our consciousness, of course, comes from the culture around us. And like the culture, it seems that our minds are split on the subjects of race, gender, class, sexual orientation. "We not only mirror the ambivalence we see in society, but also mirror it in precisely the same way," says Dovidio. Our society talks out loud about justice, equality, and egalitarianism, and most Americans accept these values as their own. At the same time, such equality exists only as an ideal, and that fact is not lost on our unconscious. Images of women as sexobjects, footage of African-American criminals on the six o'clock news,--"this is knowledge we cannot escape," explains Banaji. "We didn't choose to know it, but it still affects our behavior."

We learn the subtext of our culture's messages early. By five years of age, says Margo Monteith, Ph.D., many children have definite and entrenched stereotypes about blacks, women, and other social groups. Adds Monteith, professor of psychology at the University of Kentucky: "Children don't have a choice about accepting or rejecting these conceptions, since they're acquired well before they have the cognitive abilities or experiences to form their own beliefs." And no matter how progressive the parents, they must compete with all the forces that would promote and perpetuate these stereotypes: peer pressure, mass media, the actual balance of power in society. In fact, prejudice may be as much a result as a cause of this imbalance. We create stereotypes--African-Americans are lazy, women are emotional--to explain why things are the way they are. As Dovidio notes, "Stereotypes don't have to be true to serve a purpose."

WHY CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG?

The idea of unconscious bias does clear up some nettlesome contradictions. "It accounts for a lot of people's ambivalence toward others who are different, a lot of their inconsistencies in behavior," says Dovidio. "It helps explain how good people can do bad things." But it also prompts some uncomfortable realizations. Because our conscious and unconscious beliefs may be very different--and because behavior often follows the lead of the latter--"good intentions aren't enough," as John Bargh puts it. In fact, he believes that they count for very little. "I don't think free will exists," he says, bluntly--because what feels like the exercise of free will may be only the application of unconscious assumptions.

Not only may we be unable to control our biased responses, we may not even be aware that we have them. "We have to rely on our memories and our awareness of what we're doing to have a connection to reality," says Bargh. "But when it comes to automatic processing, those cues can be deceptive." Likewise, we can't always be sure how biased others are. "We all have this belief that the important thing about prejudice is the external expression of it," says Banaji. "That's going to be hard to give up." One thing is certain: We can't claim that we've eradicated prejudice just because its outright expression has waned. What's more, the strategies that were so effective in reducing that sort of bias won't work on unconscious beliefs. "What this research is saying is that we are going to have to change dramatically the way we think we can influence people's behaviors," says Banaji. "It would be naive to think that exhortation is enough." Exhortation, education, political protest--all of these hammer away at our conscious beliefs while leaving the bedrock below untouched. Banaji notes, however, that one traditional remedy for discrimination--affirmative action--may still be effective since it bypasses our unconsciously compromised judgment.

But some stereotype researchers think that the solution to automatic stereotyping lies in the process itself. Through practice, they say, people can weaken the mental links that connect minorities to negative stereotypes and strengthen the ones that connect them to positive conscious beliefs. Margo Monteith explains how it might work. "Suppose you're at a party and someone tells a racist joke--and you laugh," she says. "Then you realize that you shouldn't have laughed at the joke. You feel guilty and become focused on your thought processes. Also, all sorts of cues become associated with laughing at the racist joke: the person who told the joke, the act of telling jokes, being at a party, drinking." The next time you encounter these cues, "a warning signal of sorts should go off--'wait, didn't you mess up in this situation before?'--and your responses will be slowed and executed with greater restraint."

That slight pause in the processing of a stereotype gives conscious, unprejudiced beliefs a chance to take over. With time, the tendency to prevent automatic stereotyping may itself become automatic. Monteith's research suggests that, given enough motivation, people may be able to teach themselves to inhibit prejudice so well that even their tests of implicit bias come clean.

The success of this process of "de-automatization" comes with a few caveats, however. First, even its proponents concede that it works only for people disturbed by the discrepancy between their conscious and unconscious beliefs since unapologetic racists or sexists have no motivation to change. Second, some studies have shown that attempts to suppress stereotypes may actually cause them to return later, stronger than ever. And finally, the results that Monteith and other researchers have achieved in the laboratory may not stick in the real world, where people must struggle to maintain their commitment to equality under less-than-ideal conditions.

Challenging though that task might be, it is not as daunting as the alternative researchers suggest: changing society itself. Bargh, who likens de-automatization to closing the barn door once the horses have escaped, says that "it's clear that the

way to get rid of stereotypes is by the roots, by where they come from in the first place." The study of culture may someday tell us where the seeds of prejudice originated; for now, the study of the unconscious shows us just how deeply they're planted.

Stereotypes

[History

In the 1890-1920 period Italian Americans were often stereotyped as being "violent" and "controlled by the Mafia". [23] In the 1920s, many Americans used the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, in which two Italian anarchists were wrongly sentenced to death, to denounce Italian immigrants as anarchists and criminals. During the 1800s and early 20th century, Italian Americans were one of the most likely groups to be lynched. In 1891, eleven Italian immigrants in New Orleans were lynched due to their ethnicity and suspicion of being involved in the Mafia. This was the largest mass lynching in US history.^[5]

Present

To this day, Italian Americans are frequently and unfairly associated with organized crime, and New York in the minds of many Americans, largely due to pervasive media stereotyping, a number of popular gangster movies (such as *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*) and television series such as *The Sopranos*. A Zogby International survey revealed that 78 percent of teenagers 13 to 18 associated Italian Americans with either criminal activity or blue-collar work. A survey by the Response Analysis Corp. reported that 74 percent of adult Americans believe most Italian Americans have "some connection" to organized crime. [24]PDF (90.1 KiB) Italian Americans still report some workplace discrimination and harassment. (see Anti-Italianism)

However, the National Italian American Foundation, the National American Italian Association and other Italian American organizations have asserted that the Mafia in the United States have never numbered more than a few thousand individuals, and that it is unfair to associate such a small minority with the general population of Italian Americans. Further, a majority of Italian Americans hold white collar jobs, including many distinguished positions in business, academia, the arts, medicine, and public service, as well as possessing advanced degrees.

She's having a blonde moment

By Karen Thomas, USA TODAY
The Dumb Blonde.

Even after 30 years of feminism, she just won't go away.



Pop star Jessica Simpson talks to reporters during a visit to a Chicken of the Sea conference last week.

By Sandy Huffaker, Getty Images

Pop culture's latest incarnation: singer Jessica Simpson, the flaky, flaxen-haired star of MTV's *Newlyweds*. She's known for her now famous garblings — "Is this chicken? ... or is this fish? I know it's tuna, but it says Chicken by the Sea." Or wondering aloud whether buffalo wings are made from buffalo.

What started as a quick target for the tabloid press and radio shock jocks has grown to a guilty national pleasure. Simpson's zany antics have even spawned a new term — "pulling a Jessica" — that is being used by commentators on CNN.

Simpson is the latest in the "proud" dumb-blonde tradition: She joins such icons as Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe, Suzanne Somers' Chrissy on *Three's Company* and Anna Nicole Smith. Carol Channing made a career out of playing a dumb blonde. "I didn't have to be bright," she said in an interview in *Ladies Home Journal* in 1955 "All I had to do was be blonde."

It's working for Simpson. Last week she met with execs from Chicken of the Sea, who are courting her as a new spokesblonde. The just-wrapped 10-week run of *Newlyweds* was such a reality-TV hit — the show follows Simpson, 23, and her husband, Nick Lachey, 29 — that a new season started taping Sunday.

Of course, men have long equated blondes and dimwittedness with sexiness. Howard Stern said of Simpson: "I don't care if she's dumb. That only makes her hotter." Even Simpson's mother defends the loopy image, telling *Us Weekly* that if "dumb" worked for the likes of Lucille Ball and Goldie Hawn, it can work for Jessica, too.

Dumb blondes are here to stay.

"It's a stumper why 'dumb blonde' won't go away," says Barnaby Conrad, author of *Martini, Cigar and Blonde*, a series of books about the bachelor good life. "Maybe it's true."

In our post-feminism world, he theorizes, it's "more acceptable to be a ditz blonde."

Even Ph.D.s have studied dumb blondes. A British survey in 1999 found that people rate platinum blondes as less intelligent than their darker-haired counterparts. Beit Ariela, Tel Aviv's public library and cultural institution, held a symposium on dumb blondes in 2002. Just this summer, an Australian grad student won a grant — \$17,000 a year for three years — to get to the root of the dumb-blonde myth.

The original dumb blonde, by most accounts, was the childlike gold-digger Lorelei Lee, the protagonist in Anita Loos' 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Lorelei's motto: "A girl with brains ought to do something else with them besides think."

Since then, blondes have been the target of widespread and paradoxical ridicule — that whole worship/disdain thing. And bad jokes. (Did you hear about the blonde who spent 20 minutes staring at an orange juice can? It said "concentrate.")

That negative image hasn't changed the fact that blonde is the No. 1-selling hair dye. And because only 9% of U.S. women are natural blondes, that's a lot of peroxide. As Dolly Parton famously noted, she's not offended by "all the dumb-blonde jokes because I know I'm not dumb."

"I'm also not blond."



Acclaimed filmmaker Spike Lee criticized the way African Americans are portrayed in films and on television during his Feb. 21 visit to Yale. His latest film, "Bamboozled," is "about the power of images and how they hurt," he told the more than 200 students who listened to Lee talk in the Calhoun College dining hall.

Director Spike Lee slams 'same old' black stereotypes in today's films

A new "phenomenon" has emerged in film in recent years, in which an African-American character is imbued with special powers, filmmaker Spike Lee told a student audience during a campus visit on Feb. 21.

But this new image is just a reincarnation of "the same old" stereotype or caricature of African Americans as the "noble savage" or the "happy slave" that has been presented in film and on television for decades, contended Lee.

During a master's tea with an audience of more than 200 students in the Calhoun College dining hall, Lee cited four recent films in which there is a "magical, mystical Negro" character: "The Family Man," "What Dreams May Come," "The Legend of Bagger Vance" and "The Green Mile." In the latter film, Lee noted, a black inmate cures a prison guard of disease simply by touching him; in "The Legend of Bagger Vance," a black man "with all these powers," teaches a young white male (played by actor Matt Damon), how to golf like a champion.

The film director, who frequently inspired the laughter of his audience as he peppered his talk with expletives, was unreserved in his criticism of this new characterization of blacks, posing to his audience the question: "How is it that black people have these powers but they use them for the benefit of white people?"

Noting that "The Legend of Bagger Vance" takes place in Depression-era Georgia, a time when lynching of blacks in the South was commonplace, Lee stated, incredulously, "Blacks are getting lynched left and right, and [Bagger Vance is] more concerned about improving Matt Damon's golf swing!"

"I gotta sit down; I get mad just thinking about it," continued Lee, standing before his audience wearing a black leather jacket. "They're still doing the same old thing ... recycling the noble savage and the happy slave."

Lee said his latest film, "Bamboozled," a controversial satire dramatizing the popularity of a modern black minstrel show, deals precisely with such misrepresentations of African Americans. "It's about how film and television have been used to denigrate certain groups of people," commented the director. "It's about the power of images and how they hurt."

While he acknowledged a rise in the number of African-American actors and noted that such film stars as Will Smith and Denzel Washington can now command more than \$20 million per movie, Lee said that the television and film industries think they "just have to have black people on the screen, and don't care about the images."

In order for the characterizations of African Americans on television and film to change, he told his audience, blacks need to achieve positions of power in those industries, where they can have some control over the images

that are produced.

Saying that he never watches the African-American-gearred BET network, which he described as "terrible," Lee noted that there are few television programs on any network where young black children can find positive influences. "I don't know what you can tell [young children] to watch to see African American scientists at work," he said. "The majority of African American males think they have to be a rapper, play ball or sell drugs. They have very limited options."

Since the release of his critically acclaimed first film "She's Gotta Have It" in 1986, Lee has confronted the issue of race in all of the 15 films he has done since then. His 1989 movie "Do the Right Thing," about urban racial tensions, earned him an Oscar nomination for best screenplay, and Lee was nominated for a Best Director Oscar for his 1992 film "Malcolm X." In 1998, his film "4 Little Girls," about the racially motivated bombing of a Birmingham, Alabama church in 1963, was nominated for a Best Documentary Feature Oscar.

This year, Lee noted, not one African-American person has been nominated for an Academy Award for a major role in a film or its making. Asked how blacks can improve the chances of such recognition, Lee said, "It's a waste of time trying to strategize how to get on a list. Why validate them [the Academy Awards]?" He noted that in spite of the acclaim he received for "Do the Right Thing," the film was not nominated for an Academy Award in 1989; that year, "Driving Miss Daisy," about the relationship between an elderly white woman and her black chauffeur, won the award for best movie.

One of his own goals as a filmmaker, Lee told his audience, is "to portray different images of black people." He has long hoped to make a film about baseball legend Jackie Robinson but has been unable to get financing for it. He said he is currently thinking about doing a movie about boxer Joe Louis.

Lee spent most of his hour-long visit answering questions from members of his audience, sometimes challenging students to defend their arguments in support of certain films and other times asking them about their own opinions on the subjects they raised. During his talk, he also staunchly denied that he was anti-Semitic, a charge made against him after the release of "Mo' Better Blues," in which Jewish businessmen exploit black musicians, and for the content of some of his other films.

"If you have any character that's Jewish who's not 100 percent angelic, you're anti-Semitic," Lee said sarcastically. "I refuse to be put in that straitjacket." He went on to describe how Michael Jackson had to re-make a song with the word "kike" in it, but noted the white rap singer Eminem has never been stopped from using derogatory lyrics in his songs to describe women and homosexuals. Furthermore, he said, in the last episode of "Seinfeld," the characters were seen burning a Puerto Rican flag, and no one was critical of their actions.

"We [African Americans and other minorities] still don't have power," Lee averred, adding, "You're not going to see the Star of David in any television show or movie; it's just not gonna happen. But we can burn the Puerto Rican flag on the last episode of 'Seinfeld.'"

-- By Susan Gonzalez

Why Hollywood Owes Me Money

by
Laila Lalami

Stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in American movies is a common practice. And Jackie Chan's latest U.S. release, "Operation Condor," is no exception. But rather than try to raise public awareness by explaining to whomever will listen that this practice is not only morally wrong but also potentially harmful to a large American minority, I'd like to ask for royalties.

Yes, royalties.

After all, Hollywood has made money off of Arabs bombers, billionaires, and belly-dancers for half a century. It is time that they start passing some of those earnings on towards the population that has given them so much inspiration and has been the source of so much financial prosperity. Since I now intend on demanding my fair share of the stereotyping business, I would like to help prospective screenwriters, producers and directors in their efforts by offering my 12-step guide to making a successful Arab-bashing movie.

Step 1: The villains must all have beards. This is a very crucial step and absolutely cannot be skipped.

Step 2: They must all wear keffiyehs, regardless of where they are from. It is usually sufficient to have a few characters wear a black-and-white checkered scarf around their heads, but more of an effect can be achieved if your villains also use it to mask their faces. (Fezzes can also be used as headgear, but be aware that they do not have as much of a dramatic effect.)

Step 3: Naturally, all the villains must speak broken English and be rude in their manner.

Step 4: They must all have easily recognizable names like Ali, Abdul or Mustapha. It is not necessary to have any more than these three names, because you will probably not need more than two or three speaking parts for the villains. The rest of the Arab characters in your movie can simply be called Terrorist #1, Terrorist #2, Terrorist #3 and so forth, as their roles will be limited to brandishing their fists, AK-47s, or the Koran, depending on the situation.

Step 5: They should all smoke. No ashtrays are needed, because your villains can put out their cigarettes in someone's hand.

Step 6: Find a reason for them to have or steal nuclear weapons. This is the first major part of your plot. It is not necessary to go into detail about how they managed to steal the weapons, as most of the story is really about how to get them back before the bad Arabs blow someone up. See Step 7.

Step 7: Have them threaten to blow something up. Great care must be used in the threat scene. The danger must be clear and immediate. It is best if an innocent protagonist is directly and unknowingly a target of the terrorist attack. In all cases, you must make it clear that the motive has to do with holy war.

Step 8: Have a prayer scene. This follows directly from Step 7. If unsure what the procedure for prayers is, include enough kneeling and prostrating to make it all look believable. Besides, the only ones who would know what the actual prayers look like are the world's one billion Muslims, and none of those count as your target demographic anyway.

Step 9: If your movie is set in a plane, do not worry, because you can still have the protagonists pray in the aisles.

Step 10: Never, ever cast a woman as part of the group. If you must, she should be entirely veiled in black, and she should preferably be mistreated by the other Arabs. Another possible use of a woman character is as a belly dancer.

Step 11: It is most useful to have the villains scream "Die, infidels" before the final confrontation. You will find that your audience roots for the hero even more after such a scene.

Step 12: When all steps are completed, have your hero kick some Middle-Eastern butt. Everyone will cheer and go home happy, and you can sit back and watch the money roll.

That's where I come in.

As far as I know, mine is the only 12-step guide to surefire comic relief and financial success at the expense of a minority. I expect that it will be of great use to screenwriters in this town, and hope to start receiving my royalty checks soon.

Dishy Delight

Steven Cojocarú, a Glamour Boy in TV's Post-Gay Embrace

(The Washington Post | April 19, 2003)

By Hank Stuever

NEW YORK--Where did this Steven Cojocarú come from and what does he want with us?

One thing has dawned clear for him: "I know exactly what I am to the 'Today' show -- I'm the monkey," he says, meaning J. Fred Muggs, the chimpanzee who appeared on "Today" with original host Dave Garroway. "It's 50 years later and I am the new monkey. That is not a great discovery. It's obvious." (More charitably, he has also called himself "the Cousin It of America's favorite TV family.")

Cojocarú's hyperactive, dishy, every-Thursday appearances on "Today" are ostensibly constructed around a light and snarky chat about style and movie stars and handbags and shoes and scents and necklaces and models and, as often as not, Jennifer Lopez's southern hemisphere.

Along with his unpredictable antics and florid designer wardrobe, Cojocarú (co-jo-CARE-oo) also appears to transmit, in the most unintentional and subtle of ways, a more modern message of post-homosexuality to "Today's" 6 million or so viewers. He is somehow stepping over the barbed wire that tripped up most of television's ancestral effetes, from Liberace to center-square Paul Lynde to diet guru Richard Simmons.

And the message is this: You're gay? Big duh. Now tell us what Reese Witherspoon puts in her hair.

Or the message is this: If anyone out there still has a problem with gay, they are unhip beyond repair. (Plus they're not very nice. See: Scalia, Antonin . . .)

"The world has become Mayberry to me," Cojocarú says. "I didn't know how people would accept me, or even if. To have been so ostracized, to have been called 'freak show,' and 'alien' and 'weirdo,' and 'what-are-you?,' to go through all that. I took comfort in being a freak show. I was nervous about ["Today"], more comfortable in my own little corner being the Marilyn Manson of fashion. And now it's like, not only am I accepted, for the first time in my life, I'm being embraced."

Late on a Friday morning, a freshly powdered and cheerful Cojocarú glides Gucci-booted into the empty lobby bar of the Peninsula Hotel on Fifth Avenue, and he's the will-o'-the-wisp as interpreted in Bowie-esque glam-rock fashion terms: He's wearing a brand-new buttery suede Roberto Cavalli jacket over a spangly-bangly \$200 T-shirt by the same designer, and his flared vintage jeans -- vise tight through the hips -- have been mended near the crotch with a small square that reads "Kiss My Patch."

Off camera, he is but half a chimp and more a man -- a five o'clock shadow has a way of Flintstoning beneath his foundation makeup. He is speaking in a calm, beautifully low voice, businesslike and less jangled-seeming than his TV persona. He has about 85 front teeth. (He's a confessed whitening-strip addict.) He simply will not admit to being 40, but he is, after a spat with gossip columnists last month who nailed it down. He has warm, brown eyes; his long, blond-hued bangs (expensive okra hair conditioner!) twitch with each gently affected blink of his eyelashes.

It was "Today" host Matt Lauer who first referred to Cojocarú as "Cojo," and perhaps this was a straight man's harmless defense mechanism. It was as if pinstriped, guy's-guy Matt had reasoned that, if he could just nickname this alien visitor from Planet Nelly (Cojawhojew? Kajagoogoo?), it would be more palatable for the viewers, who are accustomed to a more regulating

breakfast bran.

The first time Cojocarú appeared on "Today," in 2000, they had asked him to pinch-hit, live, from a Paris runway show. Almost as soon as he was on the air, Cojo wisecracked that he and supermodel Naomi Campbell had shared a hairdresser that morning, and Naomi was judged to be far less maintenance. (Cojocarú had his hair blown out flat and straight at a beauty salon on the morning of his bar mitzvah in the mid-1970s, and he has never looked back. Hair prep, a lifelong obsessive-compulsion, takes him an hour or two each day.)

Lauer tried to keep things focused on matters couture: "Did you see anything feminine?" he asked.

"Only the men backstage," Cojocarú deadpanned.

Katie Couric, rolling with the oddballitude of this new correspondent, remarked that Cojocarú looked like Prince, the rock star. Cojo swooned. He and Katie were instant gal pals.

Show, Don't Tell

More of pop America also seems ready and willing to gal-pal, in a sense, with Cojo: In addition to his weekly People magazine column (he's the West Coast style editor), ABC hired him to do live commentary from the red carpet at the Academy Awards last month, before the Iraq war curtailed the pre-show. Cojo decided to save his venom for another, less somber year; after all, he apprenticed in evil dis-craft at E!, under the tutelage of Joan Rivers.

He has also written a new ultra-light autobio, "Red Carpet Diaries: Confessions of a Glamour Boy," about his journey from ostracized suburban kid to . . . well, to what heights exactly remains to be seen.

What is seen in the Cojocarú ascension, by discerning viewers, is that Matt Lauer now has no problem holding a handbag and making jokes at the expense of his own sense of macho, something it's hard to imagine happening 10 or more years ago. (Cojo and Bryant Gumbel? Tom Brokaw? It's difficult to envision.)

Lauer and "Today's" gastrically bypassed weatherman Al Roker are now conversant in Donatella Versace and Jimmy Choo, and the world is a little bit gayer. When Cojo visits, jokes fly about almost anything, including Lauer's chest hair. When Roker and Lauer dressed themselves in near-drag as tiger trainers Siegfried and Roy last Halloween, Cojocarú came on dressed in anti-drag, as Matt Lauer.

"Oh, look," he said, pointing to Roker's get-up. "It's Marilyn McCoo."

In the post-gay worldview, these unscripted moments can resonate better than anything cooked up by advocacy groups or the fictional, token-gay realms of "Will & Grace" or "Six Feet Under." In a clownish way, Cojocarú is a revolutionary, making good on the circa-1988 gay pride chant of queer, here, and used to it.

Smart, covert gay banter is taking over, without crossed signals or viewer protest. Cojocarú, who says there is no boyfriend or partner in his life, pretends -- on air and perhaps a smidgen for real -- to have a crush on Lauer (who is happily married). Lauer appears comfortable with this, under a safe sheen of mock hetero horror. Couric and news anchor Ann Curry turn into a giggly Betty and Veronica during all this.

"He's bold and fearless and that's what I love about him," Curry says, one recent morning after a "Today" taping, before she shipped out to the war. "The hair, the tight jeans, the flippancy. He's doing all these things you think would never happen on TV, and yet people in middle America feel very comfortable with him. He brings a terrific sense of humor to what he does -- this constant, self-effacing point of view, and you can't help but be charmed by it." (Lauer wasn't available for comment on the Cojocarú phenomenon.)

Ann Lewis, a producer at E! who first discovered Cojocarú when she co-created and produced "Access Hollywood," said she was always hard up for a fashion writer who could "really pop, really come across" on TV. "Steven is exciting and so quick on

his feet it makes your head spin," Lewis says. "Our show was on at 7:30 at night, when people are stirring their pasta, having dinner. He just has this way of being outrageous, but also okay. He doesn't have an agenda, but holy cow, he loves what he does.

"And, by the way, he's pretty dead-on about what he says when it comes to what the stars are wearing."

Cojocaru has never said anything publicly about being gay. "Isn't it obvious what I am?" he says, batting aside all theories about anything but fashion. "Would I even have to say it?" He stays away from gay politics. In "Red Carpet Diaries" he doesn't mention his sexuality or love life at all, describing himself (repeatedly) as freak, weirdo, alien and different.

Scott Seomin, the Hollywood spokesman/watchdog for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, gives Cojocaru a big thumbs-up for "having coffee and cereal with millions and millions of people who clearly find him nonthreatening and likable," however:

"Would I have liked Steven to at least mention in his book that he's gay [or] tell that part of his life story? Absolutely. It an important part," Seomin says. "Of course people figure it out as they're drawn to watching him. But that doesn't mean they should stay ignorant about it."

Curry recalls a recent morning when Queen Latifah was a "Today" guest, "and Matt was saying, 'The Queen is here,' and then he added, 'No, not that queen,' meaning Steven. What I think is amazing is how [Cojocaru] transcends being gay. He's just there, and some people in the gay community think he's too out there.

"There's just no choice but to love him," she says. "He was picked on as a kid and made fun of and yet he emerges as this sweet guy. It sends a message out there: If you can accept Steven Cojocaru, you can accept anybody."

Cojocaru believes he's still learning to accept himself. "All of this happened so organically," he says. "Matt and Katie just suffer the fool. They get it. . . . I think to walk around and talk about gay-gay-gay would just . . . trivialize what I am. Better to just be it and not talk about it."

An Epiphany

His parents, Amelia and Benjamin Cojocaru, emigrated from communist Romania to Israel, then to the outskirts of Montreal, where Steven describes himself as a lonely kid, who spent the bulk of his teen years in his bedroom poring over celebrity and fashion magazines.

"People meet my parents and say, 'No. No. This could not have come from these two sweet, normal people,'" Cojocaru says. "On one level, my parents are horrified by all of this. They are products of communism, the bleakest system of censorship you can imagine, where you lock the doors, you never talk to the neighbors, you never say anything. And here they have this son who is a loose cannon.

"But on another level, they are Jewish parents, so there's a pride you can't even put words to, a coming-out-of-your-skin pride. Now they have this pseudo celebrity [status] back home. They are milking it like there's no tomorrow. My mother doesn't have to wait at the salon for a pedicure. She is Madonna when she walks in there. My parents have become the Ben and J. Lo of the Cavendish Mall."

Cojocaru has an older sister, Anisa ("the Jewish Heather Locklear," he calls her, in highest homage), who did not share his childhood passion for clothes and Hollywood.

But his mother did: An accomplished seamstress for hire, Amelia Cojocaru would mend the Chanel separates and Halston gowns of the suburban upper crust, and regale her 5-year-old son with stories of Elizabeth Taylor and Jackie O. She also kept trashy novels under her bed-- "Sidney Sheldon, 'The Happy Hooker' by Xaviera Hollander," he says. "You know, the classics."

Mother and son would comb through discount dress racks at the mall together when Cojocaru was a teenager. Mick Jagger was

his childhood hero -- "The only person I wanted to be like when I was in high school," he says. "Unfortunately, Mick Jagger didn't happen to attend my high school."

The kids laughed at him and called him names on the day he showed up wearing wide-legged "elephant" pants in fifth grade. (Three years later, he says, everyone wore them.) It seems only one set of people hung out with Steven Cojocarú: popular girls, the adolescent equivalent of movie stars or Katie Couric. He advised the girls on everything, especially fashion.

He worked three jobs through his time at Dawson College and Concordia University in Montreal, and wrote fashion blurbs for small, local papers. He and a friend talked their way into press credentials to the Grammy Awards in 1987; they drove down to Los Angeles intending to stay a few days. Cojo watched the rock stars -- dressed badly, dressed wildly, dressed expensively -- and knew he wasn't going back to Canada. At a backstage news conference, Barbra Streisand looked out into the flashes, pointed at him, and took his question ("Is it true that you're thinking about recording 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow?") and he considers this moment divine.

He wasn't listening to her answer, but here is what he heard: " 'Move to L.A., bubbeleh.' "

He did, passing through a series of shabby apartments. Among many dreary jobs, he was hired to forge the autographed photos of "Night Court" sitcom actor Richard Moll. He read the actor's fan mail and pretended it was all for him.

Role Models

While Cojocarú stylizes the American Mayberry, the post-gay landscape is far from figured out.

The politicized left is adrift and stalled on the biggies (gay and lesbian marriage, adoption, military, Boy Scouts, etc.), while gay neocons keep insisting the civil rights movement is cooked and ready to serve.

Every few months there's another academic conference on subjects like "gay shame" and "gay identity." Social linguists right now are obsessed with the genetic and/or cultural origins of "gay accent" (or "GA"), the noticeable lilt in many gay men's voices that can be detected across languages, ethnicities and continents.

Reality television and news programs have been a boon to GA research, because television's nonfictional gay men are detectably gay, whether the man is out or not. The television homosexual is most often the style adviser and fixer, eager to revise his surroundings or to gossip. Cable has unleashed a troop of gay-seeming men who make over hair, redecorate rooms and monitor red-carpet arrivals. They talk about themselves a lot, except they never talk about being gay.

"I'm really of two minds about what's going on here," says Robert Verdi, the co-host of the Discovery Channel's "Surprise by Design" and himself an out man and fashion cognoscente. Verdi, with his shaved head and East Village sensibility, sports a far simpler screen persona than Cojocarú. (Verdi's GA is mid- to high-range; therefore, Cojo is off the charts.)

"Where are gay men on national television with opinions on politics, war, family, or anything besides the length of a skirt or the height of a heel or the color of a wall?" Verdi wonders. "If people in Peoria think this is the only contribution or way that gay men lead their lives, as self-deprecating fashion lovers, then it's unfair to the larger community."

Verdi, while admiring of Cojocarú's success and noting that "he's really a nice person," can't help but wonder if he, Cojocarú and others aren't perpetuating a stereotype. "I think we're at some early stage, like with any marginalized group or minority on TV," he says. "Example -- without 'Good Times,' there could never have been an Oprah Winfrey."

Says GLAAD's Seomin: "It's important that we have [gay] fictional characters, like what Eric McCormack" -- a married, straight actor -- "does on 'Will & Grace,' but it's just as important to have Steven Cojocarú, a real person, who is really comfortable about what he is. . . . Just let him be. There are lots of little boys out there who are being called sissies. It's good for them to see a sissy who can be buddies with Matt Lauer and become famous and get paid very well."

The return of the JAP

By Alana Newhouse | March 13, 2005

BEFORE PARIS HILTON made a career of flaunting her daddy's money, before Carrie Bradshaw transformed Manolo Blahnik from a shoe into a *raison d'être*, even before Madonna unabashedly asserted herself as a Material Girl, there was the Jewish-American Princess. First identified in postwar America, the JAP was a girl lavished with the best in life—from the top of her professionally straightened mane of hair, to the nose job she got for her 16th birthday, to a wardrobe of designer clothes and the most expensive shoes money could buy. The entitled, shallow JAP may have been sexually frigid, but as a stereotype she proved remarkably promiscuous, spreading quickly and burrowing deep in the national psyche.

By the 1980s, the JAP had gone from being a quirky ethnic sketch to the presumed identity of nearly every Jewish woman, a trend that reeked of anti-Semitism and misogyny. Galvanized by a slew of incidents at college campuses—including anti-JAP graffiti, "Biggest JAP on Campus" contests, and housing ads that warned "No JAPs"—Jewish feminists and other community leaders launched a successful campaign to scour the term from public discourse. "There is nothing funny about a put-down of Jewish women that has become a generic term for materialism, self-indulgence, loudness and so on," Francine Klagsbrun, editor of the bestselling "Free to Be... You and Me," was quoted as saying at the American Jewish Committee's Conference on Current Stereotypes of Jewish Women in 1987. "We are eating away at our own community."

Now, just in time for the 50th anniversary of Herman Wouk's "Marjorie Morningstar"—which, along with Philip Roth's "Goodbye, Columbus," is widely viewed as one of the earliest references to the stereotype—the JAP is back. Only this time, the term isn't an insult but an ironic badge of honor.

Last fall, the New York Post reported that The Style Network was casting for a show called "JAP Squad," which, according to a network executive's email quoted by the Post, was to star "girls who know where to go in NYC for the best deals, who know the nail salons, the bakeries, the spas...." (After protests from Jewish groups, the show's producers said they were looking for a better title. Maybe "Jew Eye for the Goy Guy"?) Rachel Factor, a Japanese-American actress who converted to Judaism, is entertaining audiences nationwide with her one-woman play, "J.A.P." And in May, Doubleday will publish "The J.A.P. Chronicles," a novel by Isabel Rose about seven wealthy Jewish women who reconnect at their camp reunion.

"To call yourself a JAP is to wink at yourself," says Rose. "We're saying it's OK to be Carrie Bradshaw. Carrie Bradshaw is JAP-py."

Carrie Bradshaw, however, is not Jewish—but that hardly seems to matter anymore. Something has shifted over the past decade or so, as Jewish culture and mainstream pop culture have become ever more enmeshed, generating what is now a pretty loopy time for us young Jewish women. Gwen Stefani is on MTV singing a hip-hop version of the anthem from "Fiddler on the Roof" and The New Republic describes Madonna in her Kabbalah class diligently saying the grace after meals that we often skipped out on in our Hebrew School days (probably to listen to Madonna tapes in the girls' bathroom). Thirty-six years ago, the very WASPy Ali McGraw was cast as uber-JAP Brenda Patimkin in the film version of "Goodbye, Columbus"—and she played her kind of WASPy. These days, the Jewish Sarah Jessica Parker is cast as the ostensibly non-Jewish heroine of "Sex and the City." And she plays her pretty.

This month, *Heeb* magazine, a cheeky glossy aimed at Jewish 18-to-34s, features a spread of conspicuously non-Jewish models dolled up as "JAPs"—tiaras, Louis Vuitton bags, the requisite cup of Tasti D-Lite frozen dessert—wryly proposing that you don't even have to be Jewish to be an American Princess.

"The consumerist element that was criticized in the JAP has now been embraced by American society," says Riv-Ellen Prell, author of "Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men" (2000). "JAPs were the designated narcissists in the 1970s, but now we no longer feel shame about all being narcissists."

To some, JAP is just the latest slur to be embraced as a means of self-empowerment, much the way gay culture adopted "queer" and African-Americans use the n-word. JAP's comeback may signal a new era in identity politics, one in which Jewish women, feeling victorious after battling the double burden of misogyny and anti-Semitism, peel away many aspects of the old stereotype—the snobbishness, the dependency on daddy's Amex, the sexual frigidity—and keep... well, the shoes and the Chanel.

"It's a classic structure of integration," says artist and critic Rhonda Lieberman, who has engaged with the stereotype in works like "Chanel Hanukkah," which used fake Chanel handbags and lipsticks to create a menorah. "You reject certain early parts of your background and then, when you're grounded, you can revisit those things and-through choice-decide whether or not you want to reclaim them."

But not everyone thinks the revival of the stereotype is harmless fun. Given the noxious ideas about Jews and money, many feel uneasy about making the celebration of consumerism into a Jewish affair.

"There should be a distant early warning signal that warns us of incipient anti-Semitism when Jews are ineluctably connected to money and privilege, as is the case often with the JAP stereotype," said Susan Weidman Schneider, editor in chief of *Lilith* magazine, the Jewish feminist publication that spearheaded the earliest journalism about the stereotype beginning in the 1970s.

"We all negotiate the world through shorthands," said Prell, who, along with Lieberman, will be a panelist at an April 12 symposium in Chicago titled "The JAP: Star Turn for a Stereotype?" sponsored by Nextbook, an organization aimed at promoting Jewish culture. "We can try to have control of them, but my own sense is that we have to be careful because they can so easily get out of our control. We're playing with fire."

But for some of the neo-JAPS, the consumerism was wrapped up with their experience of Jewish culture.

"The Jewishness was the dressing up for the bar mitzvah, not the [religious] services," Lieberman, the artist, said, describing how she felt growing up. For a while, she said, she tried to strip her Jewish identity of the focus on appearances, but eventually realized that this too was unsatisfying.

"I soon discovered that questioning this taboo was the key to integrating parts of my experience and my self that threatened to cancel each other-and me-out," she said, in a speech on the subject. "Not to reconcile them, but to let them coexist, honoring and appeasing each one."

In the end, this may all come around, as issues of cultural importance often do, to Barbra. In one of the sharpest episodes of "Sex and the City," Carrie wonders aloud why Mr. Big chose another woman over her. Suddenly she's reminded of "The Way We Were," the classic 1973 movie in which the neurotic, curly-haired (read: Jewish) character played by Barbra Streisand loses her man to a simpler, straight-haired (read: WASP) woman. Carrie belts out the movie's theme song, and a hybrid personality emerges that is at once Jewish, smart, complicated in the best way, and unembarrassed by sartorial fetishes. Though Mr. Big might not have understood it, Carrie did. For some women today, that's more than enough.

Alana Newhouse is the Arts & Culture editor at the Forward.

Peering Behind the JAP Label

By Jessica Coen

Fri. Jun 10, 2005

At first glance, Isabel Rose, the author of a new novel dedicated to skewering the Jewish American Princess, strikes you as exactly what she professes to mock: Tiny, well dressed, 10 minutes late and drinking from my glass of pinot grigio, she seems a perfect (albeit red-haired) JAP stereotype.

I've been sitting at the crowded restaurant bar, waiting, and when Rose bustles in, she immediately suggests we go elsewhere. She grabs my unfinished glass of lunchtime wine, takes a swig and bounces out the door. I gather my things and scramble to keep up with her energy, which already has propelled her out to the sidewalk, where she's waiting for me.

As Rose and I walk to a nearby diner in the Tribeca section of New York City, I try not to be overwhelmed by her lively attempts to take control of the conversation: Where am I from? Where did I go to school? What other jobs have I had? She's asking a lot of personal questions, and I begin to feel like I did in college, when the JAPpy girls would grill me to see whether or not I was one of them. Rose was sizing me up, checking out my Jewish credentials, seeing whether my JAP card was gold or platinum.

However, I was prepared for this sort of interaction. Rose is the author of "The J.A.P. Chronicles," a surprisingly emotional first novel that deals with the reunion of seven women who, 17 years prior, were bunkmates at a tony Reform summer camp. As such, I expected Rose to be the sort of woman who would have spent the summers of her youth at a tony Reform summer camp and then, 17 years later, write a fictionalized version of the experience. On paper, Rose isn't that different from the JAPs in her book, and she'll flat out tell you (with a hint of pride) that she's a JAP herself. The daughter of prominent Manhattanites (a wing of the American Museum of Natural History bears the family name), Rose was raised on New York City's Upper East Side and spent her summers at the exclusive Tripp Lake Camp. She attended The Dalton School, Yale University and received a Master of Fine Arts from Bennington College. She's from the right family in the right neighborhood and went to the right school. She is effectively a Jewish mother's dream come true.

But not so fast. There's much to Rose that sets her apart from her stereotypical counterparts. At 37, she's divorced, a single mother (her daughter, Lily, is now 3 years old), a lounge singer and a screenwriter, having penned the script for "Anything But Love," a movie musical in which she also starred. So while Rose will laughingly admit that she's spoiled, and even tell you where she bought her 4-inch platform shoes, she isn't exactly the type you'd expect to be crawling around Bergdorfs or Boca.

Rose says "The J.A.P. Chronicles" is not based on anyone in her life, and the characters are hardly as one-dimensional as any JAP stereotype. The novel's protagonist, Ali Cohen, is a Lower East Side filmmaker who has a Catholic boyfriend, a baby on the way and a chip on her shoulder after a childhood spent as an outcast. One is immediately inclined to assume that Ali is Rose's alter ego; in the novel, Ali has come back to the camp to film a documentary, just as Rose documents a fictional return to the world of her youth.

Of all her book's characters, Rose concedes that she relates to Ali the most. "I always felt like a slight outsider," she said. "I think, though, that had more to do with the intensity of my imagination than it did with whether I was picked on or not accepted.... I had a writer's view of things, and that ability to stand outside yourself — it can make you pass judgment, but it makes us [as writers] able to find truths or bring things to light."

What, then, is Rose trying to bring to light? Frankly, when my copy of "The J.A.P. Chronicles" arrived in my hands, I didn't quite know what to think. I turned it over and over in my hands as if it were some strange, girlish artifact. The book's pink cover — featuring a curly-haired woman hidden behind a pile of pastel-colored shoeboxes — does little to alleviate the effects of a title that evokes some very clear-cut images: sweet 16 rhinoplasties, luxury SUVs and the latest designer bag.

As a half-breed who grew up in a home where we lit the menorah dangerously close to the Christmas tree, I've always had a strange relationship with JAPs and, moreover, the culture of Jewish women. The very word JAP recalls my experiences with elitist women who determined that I wasn't really Jewish enough, culturally or otherwise, and thus treated me with disdain. When I confess this to Rose, she's sympathetic and laughs about JAP provinciality. Nevertheless, I continue, whether we use JAP affectionately or facetiously, those three letters carry with them quite a stigma — within the tribe and beyond. Why would she want to associate her work with a single-syllable loaded gun?

Over her Cobb salad (which, of course, was served with the wrong dressing — so she assertively initiated a trade with my balsamic), Rose addressed her use of JAP. "I feel very strongly about it. When I first heard that word — this was back when I was a teenager, the age that my characters started camp — I was incensed." Her eyes are wide as she continues, growing increasingly emphatic and passionate with every word. "It was so offensive, and that was a word that was leveled at us. I think that terms that outrage — I use n**** as an example — that's what happened with the word JAP. You empower yourself with a word that someone else wants to call you in an effort to disempower you. I think the term has been reappropriated."

Fair enough — but does a book with a cover that screams "GIRLY BEACH READ!" and "SPOILED JEWS AND THEIR SHOES!" really help to reappropriate much of anything? When confronted with "The J.A.P. Chronicles," the average bookstore browser might take one look at the novel and pass immediate judgment based on one very stereotyped image and those three little letters. "I think they marketed that [summer book angle] really hard.... Not that I'm ungrateful. But beneath that, I really deal with some tricky issues and I'm hoping that people will get past the first few chapters [and see that] these [characters] are women who are suffering in their lives, desperately." And she's right. The book's cover and early pages are at odds with what follows; the casual writing style and chick-lit marketing do little to indicate what "The J.A.P. Chronicles" is actually about: seven women searching for their identities, dealing with very real difficulties and trying to live their lives within the framework of their culture. It's not fluffy material, and it's not necessarily Jewish, either — it's really the state of modern women, for better or for worse.

Fri Jun 10, 2005

Princess Bitch: The public perception of the maligned

by Jill Gregorie

A girl walks in the room with that confident swagger, wearing a pair of Maonolo Blahniks and an authentic Prada bag, sporting recently manicured nails and highlighted hair. She speaks loudly in a thick downstate accent, holding a cell phone in one hand, and adjusting her headband with the other.

The image of the Jewish American Princess—or JAP—has come a long way since Natalie Wood's portrayal of an upper middle class Jewish woman in the 1955 movie *Marjorie Morningstar*. Today, "JAP" has taken on a whole new meaning, especially here at the University at Buffalo, where students' definitions of the term have sparked a longstanding battle between the usually downstate girls whom it labels, and those from upstate who see themselves as vastly different.

"They travel in groups and all wear sweatpants, obnoxiously long wife-beaters, Northfaces, side ponytails, overly tan skin, and big sunglasses," said sophomore legal studies major Amanda Sebring—who hails from Western New York—of the stereotypical JAP.

"JAPs are stuck up, snobby, cliquy, stupid, and materialistic," said junior English and communications major Samantha Boltax. "They have no substance, and I would know since I went to high school in Great Neck with hundreds of them." Some people, like freshman communications major Rachel Anderson, go as far as avoiding any contact with perceived JAPs at all. "If I see them in an elevator, I always wait for the next one."

"It's never good to stereotype, but it's as if there's a giant cookie cutter somewhere popping these girls by the dozen," said junior international studies major Jack Niejadlik. "They all look the same across the board—every single one."

While some take the label with the grain of salt and treat it as a harmless joke, others find it offensive—especially the girls who are the butt of the joke. "What makes a JAP any worse or better than any other girl?" asked junior business major Mike Rosenstein.

"People have a very visual view of what a JAP is, but every girl downstate looks like that. It's a very unrealistic expectation," said senior theater and English major Donna Graham. "You have two opposite groups of people—upstate and downstate—that are terrified of being judged and that makes them even more judgmental. I'm a JAP, and just because I carry a designer bag, that doesn't make me a bad person."

The label becomes a problematic when people use the JAP image to define Jewish girls in general and perpetrate anti-Semitism. The stereotype can lead to misconceptions about a whole group of people. At UB, it's not uncommon to hear JAP jokes—"What does a JAP make for dinner?" "Reservations."—or to see groups such as "People in Favor of Building a Wall Around Long Island to Separate it From the Rest of the World" and "Shut the Fuck Up Long Island Girls" on Facebook.

When asked about what he thought about JAPs, sophomore business administration major Brock Darrah admitted, "I would definitely not date one—they're all bitches." Junior environmental design major Derek Baker agreed, confessing, "I could never date a JAP girl because they drive brand new cars and mine's a beater. I go to monster truck shows and I'm sad because they're crushing better cars than I have."

This rabid back and forth at UB begs a larger question to be asked—how much of the JAP-hating is simply the product of different cultures mixing, and how much of it is fueled by pop culture?

JAP terminology and ideal reaches well beyond the confines of the academic spine. The popular clothing store Urban Outfitters ran into trouble in early 2004 when they began selling T-shirts that were emblazoned with the phrase "Everyone loves a Jewish girl" surrounded by dollar signs and purses. After

receiving a letter from the Anti-Defamation League, Urban Outfitters yanked the shirt from their production line after the first batch completely sold out.

In spite of the backlash against it, many are embracing the term as a symbol of high society. The label is now being used to describe such idols as Madonna and Sarah Jessica Parker, who are known for their chic clothes and high-class nature. Many typically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) celebrities are celebrating their style and refinement via the term JAP. The label is being reclaimed by women who are city-wise and know their way around shops and spas regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds.

A Jewish artist, Rhonda Lieberman, has engaged in such works as "Chanel Hanukkah," which featured fake Chanel bags and lipsticks to create a menorah. At first, she found it difficult to accept the emphasis on appearance she felt growing up in Jewish culture. After a while, however, she admitted, "I soon discovered that questioning this taboo was the key to integrating parts of my experience and myself that threatened to cancel each other—and me—out. Not to reconcile them, but to let them coexist, honoring and appeasing each one."

Whether people embrace the label JAP as the chic answer to today's cosmopolitan woman, or use it as a term to deride an entire ethnic group, it has ingrained itself on pop culture's consciousness. As Graham suggested, much of the stereotype lies in ignorance, and the only way to combat this is to break out of one's cultural barriers and see these girls as more than just a term, but as people as well.

The Jewish Mother:

IS SHE OR ISN'T SHE, AND WHO IS SHE?

“The Jewish mother.” Never has one tiny adjective evoked such a firestorm. Make a speech in front of any Sisterhood meeting and play a little word association. Wear protective gear. A barrage of answers will tumble out among reverberating all-knowing laughter: “Loves her kids—to death!” “Always with the food!” “She won’t *take* a ‘no.’” “Oy, the *guilt*!”

And then, as the titters subside, slowly other associations emerge: “Kids come first.” “Smart.” “Funny.” “Determined.” “Cares.” “You can count on her.” And . . . “I miss her.”

There you have it. The core. The essence of a peculiar conundrum that Jewish mothers and their children have been facing for the better part of the last one hundred or so years, as many of these mamas have left their small European towns (shtetls) to come to the Golden Land.

As one of “the chosen people,” whose history is one of oppression, exile, and calamity, the modern Jewish mother is faced with the problem of imparting our heritage while ensuring that our children “make it” in the secular world. The balance is often, in the words of Teyve, “as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.” It requires the balance of a ballet master teaching Jewish practices while helping the child comprehend the death of 6 million; teaching values, pride, courage, and activism or *tikkun olam* (our responsibility to try and heal the world) in a world where millions would like to see the extermination of our homeland. And the ultimate landing is to raise children who are unafraid and proud to be Jewish.

Can we *be* all those things?

But more, do we *want* to be all those things?

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A "JEWISH MOTHER"?

Lora Essman, the delightful, funny mother of comedian/actress Susie Essman, who's currently barbing with great success as the foul-mouthed wife of Larry David's wimpy agent on *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, has just called me, out of breath. It seems she just got off a bus with twenty-five Hadassah women.

"I don't know if there's a Jewish mother," she says, then quickly talks about the ladies on the bus. "The Jewish mother I know is a well-educated woman, a social worker, a psychologist. [Mrs. Essman is a linguist and former college teacher.] Every mother of my class and education level is the same. We share the same values. We all get something from our backgrounds . . . a certain style." Clearly, Mrs. Essman sees a commonality, a familiarity she shares with her companions. And then . . .

"When my friends and I get together, we're all in our seventies and eighties, we all say, 'My daughter she did this and this—she married this one, she's dating this one, I told my daughter not to do this or that' . . . and we all say *don't tell the daughter!* Then we talk about Bush."

We have it! We see the highly educated, often hysterical, classy lady who isn't about to buy into a stereotype "morph" as the conversation continues into one of the classical traits we associate with Jewish mothers.

THE JEWISH MOTHER: "IS THERE OR ISN'T THERE?" AND WHY THE HESITATION TO ADMIT IT?

"There's *probably* a 'Jewish mother,'" says Melanie Strug, mother of Kerri Strug, who made Olympic history in 1996, when, with torn ligaments, she nailed her final vault, landing the gold for the U.S. Women's Gymnastic Team. Mrs. Strug, a determined, child-first mother, then goes on to describe the "probably."

"She over cares, over worries, is very concerned about the kids . . . making sure they get a good education, a happy social life. Mom does everything for the kids."

Dr. Burt Strug, her husband, adds:

"Did you mention obsessive-compulsiveness?"

"In the minds of others a Jewish mother can be either a very nurturing, supportive, enriching woman or the opposite, a martyr, a nag, who demeans," offers Rabbi Yocheved Mintz.

"Some think of her as overbearing, a yenta," adds Dr. Ruth Gruber, who saved countless lives during the Holocaust and whose life was made into the film, *Heaven*.

"But the women I see around me are not. I love the truth and beauty about Judaism. [The Jewish mother] is warm, takes pictures with her heart. There's something about being Jewish that comes from the heart, the soul, the *nesbunna*."

These women are setting the record straight. They have to. In only decades we've gone from revered to needing a team of image consultants. There was a time Sophie Tucker singing "My Yiddishe Mama," or Yiddish theater star Boris Thomashefsky—who could slip a tribute to "mama" into *Hamlet*—reduced audiences to heaving, sentimental sobs.

No more. Over the years, we've watched media characters such as Fran Fine, Rhoda Morgenstern, Paul Buchman, Jerry Seinfeld, and Grace Adler, among many, virtually scouting places in Boca, not in tribute, but to get rid of their kvetching (whining), interfering, critical, loudmouth but "funny" moms—oh, who they love.

Today, nourishment is portrayed as forced feeding, while succor and family sacrifice has become "suffocation."

And Jewish mothers are supposed to accept this brutal image? *Feh!* These are the daughters of shred moms! Women trying to survive in poor Eastern European towns, who, shlepping Sabbath candles, were running, running, running—from pogroms, starvation, and death camps—some sacrificing their lives, holding their religion and their children close. They often bribed their way to a new land, using chutzpah, smarts, grit—to make it here and to keep

their families whole and Jewish, so their children would do better, and therefore add to the world, and give them *nakbes* (pride).

"Is there a Jewish mother? Definitely," says Dr. Myrna Hant, visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Women at UCLA. "There is truth in stereotype, but do you want to say I'm a Jewish mother and have others formulate a whole litany of who you are? The modern Jewish woman isn't like this."

"We are stereotyped incorrectly as overbearing, unable to cut ties with children, unable to see beyond the limited family. This does Jewish women a great injustice," says Rabbi Shira Stern, who has a pastoral counseling practice. Rabbi Stern (the daughter of Isaac Stern) adds, "There are any number of ways of expressing Jewish motherhood. And yes, there are women who let their children actually cross the street without holding their hand—once they have the skill."

"I have one, a Jewish mother," says critic, and syndicated conservative radio talk-show host, Michael Medved. "I do try to avoid the term as it evokes unpleasant stereotypes which are mostly wrong," though, he admits, "any doable stereotype has some basis in reality."

**"THE TIME TO MAKE UP YOUR MIND ABOUT
PEOPLE IS NEVER, AS PHILLIP BARRY
WROTE IN THE PHILADELPHIA STORY. YOU
THINK YOU KNOW SOMEONE, YOU DON'T.
WHEN YOU STEREOTYPE THEY BECOME
UNKNOWNABLE. IT'S LAZY."**

—Joanna Gleason, actress/director,
daughter of Monty Hall

"How many Jewish mothers spend their evenings in smoky clubs saying obscenities, and then the next day drop the kids off at Hebrew School?" says comic Judy Gold, a Jewish lesbian mother of two boys.

So much for "stereotypes."

STEREOTYPES: A NEW APPROACH

Stereotypes! The very word calls up an odious Stepford image. A plaster mold, fixed, from books, TV, and film that "defines" who we are. A Jack Klugman nose, a Sylvia Fine finger in frozen Sara Lee, a Helen Seinfeld having an attack over her son's libido during . . . shhh *Schindler's List*.

Jackie Mason, who became a hit with his show *The World According to Me*, has taken the "stereotyping" heat. But he's the first to defend it by saying, "If I were Margaret Mead, they'd call it anthropology."

It's a great sadness that this negative, unbalanced stereotype is a dangerous cheat turning many a Jewish mother away from claiming many of the magnificent characteristics we *do* share. Just as many Italians are offended by perceptions that all are members of organized crime, some Jewish mothers are faced with similar feelings of outrage. So much so that many of us gag at the very term, "Jewish mother." After all, who wants to be typed as Sylvia Fine?

So, naturally, while the Jewish people I interviewed were able to name characteristics, they were reluctant to "stereotype."

Is the answer to deny there is such a phenomenon as "The Jewish mother"?

No. Just as each individual group shares belief systems, attitudes, and values, I believe we do as well. PC aside, each religion and culture, whether Italian, Irish, or the Zoa tribe, all hold commonalities that not only bind them together, but are also evident in their thinking and behavior.

But the question remains, how do we bridge the gap between the loathsome cartoon cut-out image and the very real characteristics that we, as part of a great tradition, share?

I came up with a solution (at least for me). I call it *ethno-typing*. "Ethno-typing" allows us to treasure our uniqueness as a group and as individuals without falling into the trap of carbon copying all Jewish mothers.

Ethno-typing also carries with it no positive or negative judgment. Like an examination of any ethnic group, it allows us

to look at our history, our biology, our values and characteristic traits, without prejudice or the quick sound bite.

Another “proof” that the ethno-type exists is *tribalism*. We Jewish mothers are marvelous at “recognizing” one another. In my own vast experience with the matter, we “get each other.” And if in doubt, we may fish like Ahab, or at the very least, wonder “Is she Jewish . . . ?” *Not that it matters*, but . . . it does; it affects the way we communicate and shorthand our feelings.

Many of us simply feel a little more comfortable, safer, and freer with those with whom we share a common background—including a history of *tsuris* (trouble). A simple example is the use of what we call Yiddish—thanks to Leo Rosten. If our background is Eastern European, our mothers and grandmothers spoke Yiddish. Language is a critical component of culture and bonds us.

Even today, non-Yiddish-speaking Jewish mothers all understand some basic Yiddish and the Americanized version, Yiddlish. Find me a Jewish mother who doesn’t understand the universal cry, “Oy!” (There could be trouble here.) “Oy vey!” (It’s getting worse.) And “Oy gevalt!” (Forget it altogether.) And most understand the myriad of words we have for luck and personalities—good and bad—and pepper “mazel,” “chutzpah,” and “shlemiel” (among more dastardly Yiddlishisms) into our conversation with another member of “the tribe.”

“Jewish women are vital,
you can pick them out in a crowd.”

—Dr. Myrna Hanf

“There is something that feels comfortable when I’m with other Jewish mothers,” says Zora Essman, mother of comedian Susie Essman. “I feel the difference, the sharing of experience.”

Although actress Julie Cobb, daughter of actor Lee J. Cobb and Yiddish theater star Helen Beverley, was not raised in a traditional Jewish family, and has married “out,” she relates that

now that she’s dating a Jew, she’s experiencing new feelings. “It’s a cellular knowing, a humor, a sensory feeling that goes deep,” she says. “It’s in the DNA. It’s *sachel* (understanding, common sense, smarts), passion. I think it’s possible that [in my past relationships] I may have been holding back a little.”

It’s in the DNA!

Four Jewish mothers who lived 1,000 years ago in Europe are the ancestors of 40 percent of all Ashkenazi (Central and Eastern European) Jews alive today! This remarkable finding was reported by an international team of researchers in 2006. Dr. Doron Behar of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology and geneticist Karl Skorecki, with worldwide collaborators, sampled DNA from 11,452 people from sixty-seven populations. The researchers found that the mtDNA of some 3.5 million of the 8 million Ashkenazi Jews in the world (among 13 million) can be traced back to only four women carrying a distinct mtDNA, which was virtually absent in other populations. Behar and Skorecki’s team refers to this phenomenon as a “founder effect”—when one or a small number of people have a huge number of descendants. “What the study also shows,” Behar said, “is that Jewish mothers are highly valued for a good reason. This I could tell you even without the paper.”

Tribal pride intact, we take on the whole of us, carrying that pride—and humiliation—to all Jews. When Son of Sam, David Berkowitz, was finally captured after his spree of serial murders, I recall my own mother saying, “Thank God, he was adopted!” It seems thousands of Jewish mothers were also sighing with relief, including comic Judy Gold’s mother.

“My mother is one of those Jewish women who think that Jewish people are perfect,” says Judy Gold. “Like when they

picked up David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, I thought she was going to have a heart attack. She called me two days later and left a message: 'He was adopted. Talk to you later.'"

We also share the *nukkes* and the inclusiveness when a Jew "makes it" or "breaks through." Decades ago it was John Garfield, then Tony Curtis. I heard it growing up. "Did you know Tony Curtis's real name is Bernie Schwartz?" And "Lauren Bacall was raised right near here!" Einstein, Bernard Baruch, Arthur Miller, Neil Simon, Sid Caesar, all were stars—Jewish stars. Their inclusiveness fascinated and delighted our mothers. Hey, they were family.

The late great playwright Wendy Wasserstein claimed that while her mother wasn't religious she harped on Jewish pride. In *Stars of David*, she reported her mother knocking on the television when someone came on, to tell her he was one of us. "She told me Barry Goldwater was one of us."

————— ☆ —————
GRANDMA MARKOWITZ, AN IMMIGRANT, WAS HAVING TROUBLE GETTING ACCUSTOMED TO THE STRANGE WAYS OF THIS NEW COUNTRY, BUT SHE WAS EXTREMELY PROUD OF THE AMERICANIZATION OF DAVID, HER GRANDSON. ONE AFTERNOON, DAVID BURST INTO THE HOUSE, YELLING: "BUBBE! THE YANKEES WON TODAY!"

"AZOI (REALLY?!)" SAID GRANDMA.
 "SO TELL ME, IS THAT GOOD OR BAD FOR THE JEWS?"

————— ☆ —————

Fribalism does not only carry a community feeling, but an all-encompassing one that fuels our maternal mission.

SO WHO THEN ARE WE? AN OVERVIEW OF THE ETHNO-TYPE

We're not wallflowers, according to Michael Medved. "She knows values and insists her children share them, live them. She treasures tradition. The keeper of the family welfare . . . that's her purpose in life," he says, adding, "She's romantic, educated, very up on the latest trends, cognizant of what's going on in her world around her, and how it affects the family. She's thrifty, but not opposed to spending, even extravagantly on her children, if it will further their position in life. Her waking hours are spent figuring out ways to make her child and husband more successful and she will sacrifice."

SACRIFICE: THE FAMILY: KIDFIRST COMES FIRST!

The Jewish mother will stand by her child, under all circumstances. Her love is constantly available and unswerving. No shlep is too much of a sacrifice. Both historically and religiously, the children have been the Jewish mother's *job*.

Melanie Strug, for example, describes her home when the children were growing up as a "cafeteria." As they were all involved in athletics, she was *forever* shlepping. "I picked one up at six, got another at seven, got another at eight," she says. "Our home life was centered around the kids. I'm a Jewish mother in the sense that the children came first."

"She resides in Brooklyn," joked Binyamin Jolkovsy, editor in chief of Jewishworldreview.com. "But she's selfless, puts her children above herself, sees her role as nurturer and molder of character and conscience. That's how the Jewish mothers in my environment are and I hope each and everyone lives up to that 'stereotype.'"

"Driven!" adds Dr. Eileen Warshaw. "Our careers come second, if it's good for the children."

Sacrifice and exceptional commitment to children is echoed by Orthodox author, lecturer, and feminist, Blu Greenberg, who proudly talks of her five children and nineteen grandchildren.

"She's me. She's very sensitive, compassionate, feely, huggy, kissy," says Jody Lopatin of Romanian ancestry, who, in addition

to raising four children, was head mistress of an Orthodox Danish preschool. "But she's also sturdy, very strong, a mother hen who will protect her children—and anyone else's children."

And this devotion often knows few bounds. The Jewish mother ethno-type is not "minimalist." Children are not merely given opportunities, but are often pampered, to bring joy to both mother and child.

"Who puts a child in costume on a plane and privately buys out a candy store for the *passengers* to give to your five-year-old so she won't miss trick or treating?" laughs educator, political bigwig, and CEO of Rayburn Musical Instruments Company, Rona Ginott, describing a trip to Italy during Halloween. "I valued making life happy for my kids. I was gratified when that happened. I wanted to experience Halloween with my child."

And where is the Jewish father in all this? Despite media mocking, many are strong, involved, and share their wives' vision for the children. My own father was such a man. Yet . . . I understand the old joke "I decide the big things, like who should be president and how to achieve world peace. My wife decides the little things, like where we should live, and how we're raising the kids." This still exists in some Jewish families.

"The Jewish woman doesn't even pretend her husband is the boss. Italians and Greeks do. If mommy's not happy, nobody's happy," quips Mallory Lewis, daughter of Shari Lewis.

"She is the glue that keeps the family together and makes it successful. The Jewish mother is very committed to her children and has her foot up her husband's butt."

—Dr. Eileen Warshaw, executive director
of the Jewish Heritage Center of the Southwest

"Your husband is secondary to our role as mothers," says Rona Ginott. "I did whatever I had to, to help my child first."

"Kids come first . . . even before the husband."

—Dr. Burt Strug

"We did expect the kids to do well," says Melanie Strug. "My husband was working all the time. Moonlighting so our kids could have the best education, private schools, training—whatever they needed," she adds.

The majority of Jewish fathers no longer spend their days studying Talmud, which formerly gave them status within the Jewish community. Instead, *today's* status and a father's contribution is *gelt* (money) and *power*, making the money and the "connections" within and outside of the community to further his child and his family. NOTE: There are those within the Jewish community who don't necessarily see this change from spiritual to financial status as a good thing.

Annoyed and backburnered at times, these men usually take enormous pride in their wife's indefatigable spirit and commitment to their children.

What of the rest of family? Important, yes. Especially to support the survival and success of the children.

"Kerri visits her older sister once a month, and lives minutes from her brother. We're a very close family," says Melanie Strug. "If Kerri's air-conditioning unit doesn't work she calls her brother."

Commitment to family may be sacrosanct, but peace and harmony? That's another matter. Our ethno-type often includes what, to outsiders, may seem a peculiar scene. In my own family, there was the odd coexistence of absolute loyalty and constant kvetching about various family members. For example, there was the spendthrift who couldn't pay his mortgage, but wore silk underwear. And the "rumor-spreader." Then there was the family "matriarch" who redecorated our house, then invited guests to live-in it—while my mother was out shopping. And who could

forget the miser who ordered half the menu, stuck you with the check—and took home the leftovers.

All families have them, but the Jewish mother talks, debates, and argues—sometimes fiercely. These family fightin' words might put a scare into many non-Jews. To the Jewish mother "letting it out," then coming together in passionate forgiveness, is perfectly normal. And even with a litany of complaints, she'll still expect the group to rally for celebrations, holidays, and deaths. This dichotomy has been the fodder of Jewish humor for years.

☆
**MR. MANDELBAUM: "WHY DON'T THE LEADERS OF
 THE WORLD REALIZE THAT NATIONS CAN SOLVE ALL
 THEIR PROBLEMS IF THEY JUST DECIDE TO LIVE
 TOGETHER LIKE ONE BIG FAMILY?"**

☆
MRS. MANDELBAUM: "BITE YOUR TONGUE!"

Rich Mrs. Schwartz bought herself the most expensive co-op in New York for her and her daughter. Then she invited her exclusive friends to come see. When they got to the ballroom, her visitors gasped over the exquisite antique table that ran from one end of the room to the other. "And in this room," she said, "I can entertain our entire family from Brooklyn—God forbid!"

STUDY, MAMALAI! HOW SWEET IT IS!

Education, particularly Jewish education, is not only a mantra that is deeply embedded in Jewish history and tradition, but also a celebration! It was a religious expectation for young boys in the shtetl, but it also represented the very future of Judaism—a way to

keep the boys and girls who also learned the rudiments and were drilled by mama in her Jewish duties as *baleboste* (housewife) safely in the fold.

Picture it. A nineteenth-century mama, weeping with joy, dressed in little more than rags, carrying her six-year-old son in a prayer shawl, along with an apron filled with cake, honey, nuts, and raisins, for his first day of cheder (school). After his first "aleph" (the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) the goodies are given out, with the child of the hour at the head of the line to celebrate his special day—the start of his formal learning.

Such an occasion! One that set the Jewish community apart. When 90 percent of the world was illiterate, the typical Jewish male over six was learning to read and write, often in at least three languages, including Hebrew, Yiddish, or Ladino.

Early on, while the men were studying, *someone* had to inspire, support, keep kosher, light candles, raise the children with values, milk the cows, earn a living, and make sure the house didn't collapse! Like Rachel, wife

of the great Rabbi Akiva who sacrificed when he left for years to study Torah, the Jewish mother sees education as a sacred obligation—and revels in the *na'akes*, the pride of raising learned children.

"Listen, Mr. Your Honor.

I should admit now, I don't believe in capital punishment."

"Madam," the judge ex-

plained, "this is not a murder

trial, it's a civil lawsuit. Mrs. F. is

suing her husband because he

used the entire \$15,000 she was

saving to pay for her children's

education to play the horses."

"Mr. Your Honor . . . about

capital punishment. In this

case, I could be wrong."

"25,000 miles! My wife

drove a total of 25,000

miles—back and forth—

from Coolidge to Tucson so

our son could study for his

bar mitzvah," described Sig

Lieberman, a former Arizona

mayor with pioneer roots.

"This is the sacrifice she

made to keep the children

involved in Judaism."

"I was a permissive mother," says Dr. Ruth Gruber, who sent both her children to Reform Sunday School. "But I was always very concerned about education. Education is what counted, never a car, a lethal instrument!"

"My brother had to travel two hours to get to an all boys Jewish school," says Harry Leichter, creator of the over 5,500 Jewish Web sites, www.Haruth.com and the *Schmooze News*.

Today, the dedication to education remains of prime importance, but there has been a shift to secular learning, representing a critical cultural change. Once the learned Jewish scholar was prized; now however many assimilated Jewish mothers look to the professions more than religious accomplishment—as status and success, or "making it," in the New World.

**"TO ME, SCHOOL WAS MOST IMPORTANT.
I THOUGHT YOU CAN'T MAKE A CAREER
OUT OF GYMNASTICS."**

—Melanie Strug, mother of Kerri Strug,
who, in addition to Olympic Gold, holds a BA in
communications and a master's degree from Stanford

"Homework! If one of my girls missed a day of school, there I was," chuckles Rona Ginott, "shlepping in the snow, the rain to get it for them. Heaven forbid they should miss something!" All that shlepping worked. Her oldest daughter is a Harvard graduate and attending Yale Law School and her younger sister is not far behind.

"I scanned into my computer my son's brilliant report cards and am happy to mail them to anyone who asks. Education is the most important thing in our family," says Mallory Lewis.

Does this dedication work in the secular world? You bet. There are more Jewish doctors than Jewish children on work release.

According to Dr. Bruno Halioua, author of *Meres Juives des Hommes Célèbres (Jewish Mothers of Famous Men)*, about 12,000 of France's 150,000 physicians (8 percent) are Jews, whereas

Jews make up only 1 percent of the country's overall population of 60 million.

"We got to talking about our mothers," he said. "And I realized that most of my Jewish colleagues . . . got into medical studies because we were prompted to do so by our mothers. It's the same all over for the children of Jewish immigrants—medicine or law!" laughs Dr. Halioua. "I think that is the secret of Jewish mothers, in giving not only love like all mothers, but tremendous self-assurance to their children."

As the 2,000-year-old man, Mel Brooks claimed to be the first Jew to study medicine at the big medical cave. (It took a week.) His mother, he said, was the first one in history to coin the phrase "This is my son, the doctor."

EXCELLENCE!

"You're absolutely certain your progeny is perfect!"

—Mallory Lewis

Alright. OK. Sure, Jewish mothers have wildly different MOs. Whether she's the "'A' is good, now, let's talk A-plus" sort, or as Rona Ginott calls it, "a facilitator," who sets the tone by example and opportunity, the pursuit of excellence is part of our ethno-type.

"I was raised with the compulsion to do the best!" says Dr. Gruber. "Why didn't you get 100? I was asked, if I got a 99."

"I could do no wrong," says Theodore Bikel. "According to my mother, I was a genius!" He adds that this particular characteristic was not always helpful. Though his mother was supportive of his performing, the truth is, her expectation of perfection "was wrong . . . we all do wrong."

"The desires for high achievement are . . . characteristics that are disproportionately common in the Jewish community," says Michael Medved.

Although Jews represent one-fourth of 1 percent of the world's population, we have won over 20 percent of all Nobel Prizes awarded since its inception in 1901, and yes, some, like Rosalyn Sussman Yalow, have been Jewish mothers.

This hope, vital to the Jewish mama's spirits, is often met with an equal opposite reaction: Never (OK rarely) "satisfied," excessive worry, and protection.

I DON'T GET (MUCH) SATISFACTION, OR . . . THE KVETCH

There's a correlation between the *expectation* of excellence—and satisfaction. While the Jewish mother takes great pleasure from a child's success, with the bar set high, true satisfaction is not easy to come by—or to hold onto. A history colored by adversity, apprehension, exile, and fear of being sandbagged by "the evil eye," brings with it the constant expectation of disappointment. Many of us rain on parades—in advance. Better we should expect the worse—so when the rain comes, we've already put up the umbrella.

"[The Jewish mother] finds something wrong . . . with everything," remarks Judy Gold. "If we're leaving for a trip tomorrow, she'll say: 'Tomorrow! There'll be the worst traffic in the world!' If you suggest brunch . . ." "Go *out* for brunch? It's too crowded. No one's going out." (Now, that's some logic.)

Neil Simon is a master at portraying this ethno-typical characteristic. In his *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, the mama sends her son out for a quarter pound of butter twice a day. Why not a half pound? "Suppose the house burned down this afternoon? Why do I need an extra quarter pound of butter?" she explains.

Even God is not immune.

A Jewish mama and her little girl walked along the beach when a gigantic wave rolled in and swept the child to sea.

"Oh, God," lamented the mama, her face toward heaven.

"This is my only baby! The love, the joy of my joy! Please God! Bring her back to me and I'll go to synagogue and pray every day!"

Suddenly, another gigantic wave rolled in and deposited the girl back on the sand safe and sound.

Mama looked up and said, ". . . she had on a hat. . . ."



THE RABBI WAS GIVING HIS USUAL SERMON, AND SENT THE CONGREGATION HOME WITH A REQUEST.

"OUR SYNAGOGUE IS COLLECTING GOODS FOR THE NEEDY. PLEASE BRING ANYTHING YOU HAVE IN YOUR HOMES YOU CAN SPARE."

SUDDENLY A MOTHER OF FIVE CALLS OUT:

"EXCUSE ME, RABBI, BUT DOES *TSAURIS* COUNT?"



A classic story socks a double whammy . . . listen. Yankele finally got married, although his mother wasn't thrilled with his choice, Elsa, a "smart-nik" therapist, who his mama thought had too much control over Yankele. On his birthday, she bought him two ties, one striped, one plaid.

"Oy, which to wear!?" worried Yankele when going to Mama's. He finally decided on one.

"I see, you're wearing the striped one," said Mama. "What . . . ? The plaid you don't like?"

So when he visited the following week, Yankele, to make peace, wore *both* ties.

When his mama saw this, she grabbed her head between her hands and sobbed, "Oy! See . . . ? I always knew, eventually, that wife of yours would turn you meshugge [nuts]!"

WHAT? ME WORRY: HIGH ANXIETY—MAMA'S LAW

And what fuels the pessimistic “kvetch”? In a word, worry. “Jewish mothers . . . we assume the worst,” says Blu Greenberg.

“Jewish mothers suffer
from terminal anxiety.”

—Judy Gold

Forget Murphy's Law. Chances are his real name was Murphosky and his mama taught him: “If anything can go wrong, it will.”

“*What if . . .*” That's my wife, Ruth,” chuckles Harry Leichter, creator of the *Schmooze News*, www.schmoozenews.com. “She'll figure out every single thing that could possibly happen. ‘*What if . . .*’ the children don't get a Jewish education? *What if . . .* we move to Minneapolis and have to drive six hours to take the kids to Hebrew school? *What if . . .* we move to Montana? Maybe there's a shul in Montana?” She's a worrier . . . money, bills, the kids, parents. The ‘what if . . .’ is an analysis of every possible scenario.”

I can still remember my late mother's face, peering out of a window at 1:00 a.m. if I wasn't home from a date. She gave me “the basic silent look” for two days, which I suppose she felt was equal to her two hours of suffering.

I'm a worrier. When my son was two, his pediatrician wrote on his chart: “MOTHER: LUNATIC,” which could be due to the fact that I thought a hernia in a two-year-old might be malignant. It's in the DNA. The ethno-type no doubt contains a W-strand—for Worry. The *kinder* (children) are not only our cultural future, but a projection of ourselves—especially for the more extreme ethno-typical mother, who re-stapled the cord. And this constant “worry” has become our lead media stereotype “for the laughs.”

Yet, “worry and pessimism is a product of our history,” explains Rabbi Felipe Goodman. And God knows we've had a lot to worry about during our 5,000-year history.

“I worry,” reports Julie Cobb, superb actress, much like her parents, Lee J. Cobb and Yiddish theater and film star Helen

Beverly. “I'm taking a Kabbalah class with my twenty-two-year-old daughter, yet I worry about everything. Is she happy? Is she safe? What's she eating? Is she exercising?”

AND SPEAKING OF FOOD . . . ESS, MY CHILD!

Food . . . the universal expression of love, is particularly important for a culture that has gone without. The Jewish mother is usually not happy unless she's feeding—*somebody*. Where food was scarce mama often sacrificed to make sure the *kinder* could eat. As newspaper editor and comic Laurie Cohen, who's in a constant battle over food and weight, says, “I always heard children are starving in Europe!” And of course, they were.

The preparation and serving of food in Judaism—obeying kosher dietary laws—is critical spiritually, and this responsibility falls to the Jewish mother, as we'll see later. Even today, when food is available and Kosher Lite, or picking and choosing from the Laws (if at all), is practiced by many Jewish mothers, still, the very *offering* remains a sign of hospitality and most of all, a capable *baleboste* (homemaker).

“The Jewish mother is incapable
of not offering food to everyone
who walks in the door.”

—Mallory Lewis

The fabulous Jewish author, feminist, and scholar, Blu Greenberg, agrees. “In that sense, I'm a Jewish mother. Food. It always was important my children should not go hungry.”

“My mother's from the school that the minute you walk in the house you have to eat,” said Susie Essman in a 2003 interview, describing her mother, Zora. “She asks, ‘What can I get you?’ and if I say, ‘Nothing,’ the question just continues.”

“One Thanksgiving, there were only six of us, and she had two twenty-pound turkeys—plus brisket. Not to mention the eight

sides and fifteen pies and cakes. And halvah. I went onstage that night to do stand-up and I just read the menu from her dinner.”

When I spoke to mama Zora, she had a slightly different take on the matter. “My kids don’t know this part of me . . . a lot of it is, but it’s really not me. The fact is, I do make two turkeys on Thanksgiving but . . . I’m trying to please everybody . . . one likes this dressing, another likes that dressing. My children say I have a brisket under my skirt . . . not me.”

“Ess ess ess!” quips Harry Leichter. “My mother made me pregnant with all the food she gave me. She wanted to make sure I was healthy. She cooked steaks for me every day, even though she worked an eighteen-hour day. On weekends, there were seven courses.”

The remarkable thing about my mother is that for thirty years she served us nothing but leftovers. The original meal has never been found. This oft-repeated hilarity was said by the late Calvin Trillin.

My own *bubbe* was the Empress of the Leftovers. She loved seltzer, which years ago was delivered in those marvelous blue or clear bottles that spritzed. When she came to visit, we noticed an odd pattern. There were eight or nine half-filled glasses of water in the fridge. Since she couldn’t put the unused seltzer back—she *sared* it. She wondered where the bubbles went till her dying day.

☆
MOLLY AND JENNY RAN INTO EACH OTHER AT A DELI. “I HELD ONE FANTASTIC DINNER PARTY LAST NIGHT,” SAID MOLLY. “I HAD OVER MY SONS, THEIR WIVES, AND MY SEVEN GRANDCHILDREN. I HAD SO MUCH FOOD THAT WHEN THEY WALKED TO THEIR CARS, THEY WERE DOUBLED OVER.”

WITHOUT MISSING A BEAT, JENNY ANSWERED,
“FROM YOUR HOUSE THEY COULD WALK?!”
☆

PROTECTION . . . OK, OVERPROTECTION

“They all have contact with their children every single day.”

—Judy Gold, comedian

“When Kerri was in Texas, I went every couple of weeks to Houston. She’s my best friend,” says Melanie Strug. “I talk to her almost every day, as well as my older daughter.”

Love and protection were partners in shtetl survival when life was brutal and enemies abounded. The two are still partners, and yes, there are moms who are comfortable with spacc, but the Jewish mother has a long memory, and often feels if a little involvement is good, a lot may be better. The tie between mother and child has been so historically intertwined that even now, letting go to some of us feels a little like letting go of ourselves. When it goes too far, the result can be overprotecting—or smothering. And of course, it can even be hysterical.

“My mother called just a couple of years ago to remind me not to sleep on my stomach because she said she heard on the news that sleeping on the stomach is the number-one cause of sudden infant death,” says Amy Borkowsky, comedian and creator of two volumes of the hit comedy CD and book, *Amy’s Answering Machine: Messages from Mom*. Using real messages from her mom, Amy Borkowsky became a comedy hit.

If you take kidsfirst, add worry, along with a dollop of heavy sacrifice and involvement, you get more connections than Sprint.

“When I was seven, I was once two hours late for dinner. My mother attached an egg timer to my belt. When it went off, that was when I went home,” laughs Judy Gold, who is keeping the worry/protection tradition alive. “Once, when I had to be at an audition, I asked one of my son’s teachers to walk with him and bring him home at six. Nothing at 6:15. By 6:20, I’m walking the streets hysterical! I called the head of the school, freaking out! They finally got home at seven. They were playing Game Boy. Here, I was going crazy assuming the worst.”

“Phone Home” wasn’t invented by E.T. (But no doubt Steven Spielberg heard it somewhere.)

"She has a map with pins so she can trail us," chuckles Harry Leichter, describing his mother-in-law, when he and his wife are traveling. On normal days, "She wants the kids (now early boomers) to check in twice a day. If we're not home by five, she asks 'where were you?' She wants to know exactly where we are at all times. And if we don't call her, she'll call us."

Like a Jewish Mrs. Claus, somehow, the Jewish mother "knows" if her kids have been naughty or nice. The intimate relationship gives the Jewish mama what she believes is special insight bordering on mystical powers—and if not? Logic.

THE REINS . . .

Control is a natural consequence of worry. Keeping tight reins was a role that was vital in shtetl life, where, as outsiders in a hostile world, religious tradition and survival was constantly threatened—and even the *kinder* understood the roots, often viewing mom as a majestic figure.

Esther suspected hanky-panky between her son Gerald and his roommate, Debby, though Gerald denied it. After one visit, Gerald noticed the gravy ladle was missing, so he sent "mama" a letter: "Dear Mama: I'm not saying you did take the ladle, I'm not saying you didn't. But the fact remains it's been missing since you were here."

Mama answered: "Sonny: I'm not saying you do sleep with Debbie, I'm not saying you don't. But the fact remains, if she were sleeping where she belongs, she'd have found the ladle already."

"Strong personalities and opinions!" says Mexican-born Rabbi Felipe Goodman, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Shalom, in Las Vegas, when describing Jewish mamas. "They want the best for the people they love and will stop at nothing. They'll also tell you to put on a sweater when *they're* cold."

"Rigid," offers actress/singer, Laimie Kazan, who drew raves for her Mama role in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

"She's domineering, but then you can also call the Jewish mother an aggressive survivor."

When these women came to America, however, the very traits that meant survival in the shtetl community were seen as "neurotic," especially when the youngsters who were "insiders" became desperate to move "out" into a world of freedom—including freedom from Mama's control. Disharmony between mother and child developed rather suddenly, and pain was the result, which provided fodder for both humor—and shrinks.

"SHE WAS ALWAYS VERY CONTROLLING AND I WAS TRYING TO REBEL. SHE TOLD ME TO PRAY TO GOD . . . I WENT TO THE WINDOW AND PRAYED TO GIVE ME PEACE. [SHE DID] TELL ME TO WEAR CLEAN UNDERWEAR—IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT."

—Dr. Ruth Gruber

"[My mother] was a mixture of lovable, but she was more tyrannical than she'd like to believe," says the versatile actor/singer Theodore Bikel. "She devoted herself to being overly protective of me to the point where after she died, she 'kept' family away from me which was eminently disturbable."

IT COMES FROM LOVE, OR DON'T FEEL GUILTY

I'm hiding under my desk, but . . . hey, it came up—once or twice. Of course not all Jewish mothers operate using manipulation and guilt (other people do it too). But face it. A large dollop of sacrifice, even when seen by the children as love, can be a mega-guilt-producer.

While the environment may have changed, the shtetl impetus to sacrifice for the *kinder*—if not for food, then for private schools, dancing lessons, college, or making a lavish bar mitzvah or wedding—persists as part of our kids' first ethno-type.

Yet, the flip side, especially when "sacrifice" is no longer equated with survival or Jewish values, is guilt. And in our brave new world, the benefactors are not always thrilled with the price.

"My parents come on the phone: 'What size is your dining room? I'm thinking of getting you a dining set. We ordered it for ourselves, but we'll see if the guy can drop it off to you from Florida to Arizona—and we'll live with the old one,'" describes Laurie Cohen, newspaper editor and comic. "Then, my mother tells me to 'run get measuring tape.' I don't have one. 'OK, so go get a ruler. Go the store, get a ruler, then come right home and call us.'" Oy!

The most famous example is the classic, oft-repeated Mike Nichols, Elaine May routine, "Mother and Son," where his mother claims to have waited by the phone for three days, near fainting from hunger, because she didn't want her mouth to be full when her son called. Even his explanation that he was busy sending up the Vanguard led her to kvetch, "it's always something."

"What is the other side of the mother's bountifulness?" poses Dr. Myrna Hant. "The major obligation of the child is to bring *nakhles* [joy] to his mother . . . it is the epitome of life's goodness. Defining success in the shtetl, as success in any culture, is complex and dependent upon many factors. Certainly, for the daughter success [was] defined as marrying well, being an efficient and skillful housekeeper . . . conducting a Yiddish *boyz* [Jewish house] . . . keeping harmony in her family . . . being the mistress of a beautiful household, a real *balebozte*. For a boy, success [was] defined as scholarly prowess in Jewish studies."

HIGH INTENSITY AND HUMOR . . . "MAMALA, CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

Jewish mothers make lousy mimes. Boom! Passionate, open, with both a natural and trained flair for the verbal, you know where she stands and how she feels. Always. About most everything. And there's an excellent chance you'll hear it over and over again.

Jewish mothers are also funny. Yes, I believe funnier than many other ethno-types. (Think Swedish.)

She's born into a religious tradition of Talmudic argumentation, honed by *mama-loshen* (Yiddish), the ultimate language of feeling, humor, wit, irony, misery, judgment, triumph, and intensity—she's "out there." She's vocal. She's passionate. And she's sharp.

So Who Then Are We? An Overview of the Ethno-type 25

Recall the scene in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* in split screen. Alvy Singer, having dinner with his girlfriend's "proper" (if not insane) non-Jewish family, as he compares it with his own—a wild madding free-for-all. The volume alone is an ad for Miracle Ear, as his family argues, yells, and debates.

I chose this scene because, despite Allen's exaggerated portrayal, I've rarely seen a quiet Jewish home—especially over food. Some of the most enjoyable moments of my life were over the family dinner table listening as the adults talked, argued, and laughed. The Jewish mother has flair and drama, whether in agony or ecstasy.

Of course not all Jewish mothers are kvetchers or hollerers, but the ethno-type is high verbal—in praise, in criticism, in advice—in doing laundry, or yes, even in organizing a labor strike. As you will see in ensuing chapters, the other side of "out there" also spirits determination and a fearlessness to express opinions that go beyond "sweaters" and "clean underwear."

"WORLD, CAN YOU HEAR ME?" ACTIVISM, COMMUNITY, PHILANTHROPY

Our religion and our cultural tradition instructs us to be change-makers. *Tikkun olam* is our responsibility to try and heal the world. And not just within the world of the Jews, but injustices to all peoples. Silence to the persecution of others is not an option for the Jewish mother.

"Responsibility and commitment are deeply indebted in the Jewish notion covenant," says religious feminist author Blu Greenberg. "We take this responsibility and partnership with our children."

In the pursuit of justice or fairness you'll rarely find the timid. If the Jewish mother is demanding and sometimes "loud" or outspoken, she's a fighter. She's out there shaking up "the system."

My paternal grandmother, a Russian immigrant to Canada, was legion. She fell in love with a much older widower with two children. Despite disapproval from her family, she leaped from a window and hopped on a horse, and the two lovers took off.

Within ten years or so, she had four more children, and she, too, was widowed and without funds while still in her twenties. Not only did she raise all the children, she ran a farm, took in sewing, was a magnificent cook, provided shelter and food for family from the old country, and still found time to work with a Jewish girls club. When a store raised the price of milk by a penny, she led a strike—and won.

“What a mouth she had on her!” says the family.

Her name was Manya and she died before I was born. As is the custom, I was named for her and take great pride in this amazing woman. Her unsung story is one of millions of typical Jewish mamas of her day—and today.

History is rife with examples of the Jewish mother, acting on her beliefs with almost unprecedented chutzpah! These attributes of strong verbal skills, courage, an acute sense of values, and determination have given rise to some of our most influential civic leaders, activists, and feminists—from Biblical Jewish mothers to pioneers, to modern-day Yentls such as Bella Abzug, Blu Greenberg, Betty Friedan, Barbra Streisand, Rabbi Bonnie Koppell, and Susan Weidman Schneider. These are but a few Jewish mothers, among many, who have changed the world, as well as our view of the Jewish woman.

WHOSE LIFE IS IT, ANYWAY?

Does the ethno-typical Jewish mother live through her children? Some do, not all. But as the *kinder* was the shtetl mother’s job, the buck stopped with her. If you were a CEO and your company explodes, are you not shamed? Blamed? And so it was with the Jewish mother. Her children were her bailiwick, and her “success” judged naturally by the success of her effort.

This is not exclusive to the Jewish mother. Even a Trump shleps his offspring on the air as his “true apprentices” and rarely fails to mention their education at Wharton.

“Many do live vicariously through their children. . . . It’s for them,” says Dr. Eileen Warshaw. “I feel it was the same way in the shtetl. They felt the child’s success or failure would reflect on themselves.”

Comic-singer-impressionist painter Marilyn Michaels had her maternal hands full. She was the daughter of Jewish entertainment royalty as the child of the late famed cantores, Fraydele Oysher and Metropolitan opera basso, Harold Sternberg, and niece to the legendary cantor and Yiddish star, Moishe Oysher.

My son and I attended her son’s birthday party when he was four or five. Grandma Fraydele was there. This tiny woman with the booming voice “encouraged” the boy to sing, which he finally did: “God Bless America.” Grandma’s response? “That you call singing?! Who’s gonna applaud for that?” Marilyn gave me a withered look.

LETTING GO

Giving up the job of raising, advising, and being involved is not an easy task for any mother, but for one who is kidfirst it’s a tough balancing act—knowing when and how to hold on—and when to tape our mouths shut.

“The Jewish mother feels her job isn’t done even after death. You’re never too dead to be a Jewish mother.”

—Mallory Lewis

“You’re there for them when they’re struggling, when they’re adolescents,” says Zora Essman. “Then you have to let go. It’s hard to do. It’s hard not to say when to brush your teeth.”

Yet, despite the jokes and complaints, many adult children, while “protesting” overprotectiveness, nevertheless are grateful for the ongoing support and love they receive.

"Five years ago I was having some medical problems," says actress Joanna Gleason, who's married to Chris Sarandon. The couple has four children between them. "I was sleepless, agitated. I called my mom at 2:00 a.m. She's at my house in three minutes flat. She climbed into bed with me, and later cooked." Her mother, Marilyn, is still all about support for her grown children, a fact Joanna fiercely admires and emulates. "My mother is a Jewish mother, totally. Like all the women in my family, she's a maven in a crisis, a self-possessed talented woman, a nurturer. We all behave the same way . . . protective, focused, and we keep a benign distance. We know when to push, when to let go—and how to make our children feel safe."

Of course not all mamas, particularly several generations ago, were quite so educated on the art of letting go. My maternal grandmother, Bella, was Polish. She met my grandfather, Alec, a Russian, while he was on the run from the Russian Army with my infant mother. (So, who wasn't?) Leaving their families behind, they got to America in the 1920s through bribery and boozing the border guards. She was one tough, critical, controlling mama but then, she had to be.

When my mother married, grandma had to take backseat. During one decision-making discussion, she ventured her opinion. My father disagreed and explained patiently that now he and mom would make their own decisions. Shocked at being outsourced, Grandma screamed: "OY!!! I'm no longer the Cap'n, I'm only the Foist Mate!" Anchors oy vey!

THE ETHNO-TYPE: A MARVELOUS MYSTIQUE

The Jewish mother: loving, nurturing, sacrificing, child-centered, bossy, verbal, tribal, overfeeding, hilarious, protective, "out there," an activist—a woman whose background has been molded by religion, tradition, unbearable hardship and loss, and hope. All of these are the Jewish mother, but interpreted by each of us in our own unique way. Where we stand on the continuum varies, but almost all share most of these cultural traits and hope to pass them on to our children as part of our great legacy.

CHAPTER 2

From My Yiddishe Mama to the Yiddishe Yenta:

HOW COULD THIS BE—AND WHY?

In seventy or so years, our complex, multidimensional, ethnotype Jewish mom has gone from love songs in praise to a sitcom insult. She's the butt of every joke, the cause of every neurosis, the one who poohs on her children's parades, hacks through emotional borders, manipulates to gain her own ends, and is as sensitive as roadkill.

Jewish women, just like all women, have grown through education, feminism, and power. We have had the opportunity to be ourselves with far greater freedom and recognition than ever before.

Yet oddly, today, the Jewish mother is still portrayed as the most negative *caricature* of the shtetl mother.

As Jewish males predominated in TV and film, a great deal of our image has been manufactured by them and whether directly or indirectly, we have become the negative by-products of assimilation.

MEDIA: LOOKING BACK . . .

In the 1940s and 1950s we got a glimpse of the Jewish mother through the incomparable Gertrude Berg, as Molly Goldberg, in what many consider the first true sitcom. The show, which started on radio, then moved to television, targeted the cultural differences between immigrant parents and their new-world children. During the show's thirty-year run, the Goldbergs,

like many immigrant families, "moved on up" from a New York tenement, to the Bronx, and finally to Connecticut.

Molly, buxom and benevolent, was the family fixer, who, in her Mollyisms, or cracked Yinglish, used common sense, wisdom, and compassion as her tools to advise her family—and anyone else in her orbit. Through Berg's highly skilled writing and performance, every show revealed a love for mankind and acceptance of human behavior. She was likeable and personal with her audience and reflected the trials, hopes, and patriotism of many immigrant groups of her time—but in a nonthreatening way, which was acceptable to postwar viewers of many religions and races.

So much for positive ethnic images. After *The Goldbergs* ended in 1955, Jewish women mostly disappeared on air for two decades. The babies had boomed, many leaving generations between themselves and the shtetls. As families ran from their ethnic city streets to "melt" into suburbia—and the Land of Assimilation—the Vanilla families took over. The Nelsons, the Cleavers, the Andersons, and the Stones reigned in Main Street, USA, representing the generic American family archetype.

Then, in the 1970s came Rhoda Morgenstern (played by non-Jew Valerie Harper), Mary's best gal pal on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. When *Rhoda* spun off, enlarging the role of her Jewish mama, Ida Morgenstern (Nancy Walker), the change from warm-hearted shtetl mom started. The turbulent 1960s that pitted parent against child while bringing new world abundance to the Jewish mother became a part of prime-time TV, film, and books. The result was a reinvention of the Jewish mother, who, born or raised in America, was portrayed as a mélange of nurturing and devouring, manipulative, pushy, judgmental, demanding, insufferable—and "loving." The message was clear: Children were locked in mama-prison and their attempts to break out brought the laughs. Big ones.

As second bananas, the Jewish mother proved the perfect foil for their "long-suffering" children in shows such as *Mud About You*, *Seinfeld*, *Will and Grace*, and *The Nanny*.

Sylvia (Rence Taylor), Fran Fine's mother in *The Nanny*, is the quintessential pain in the *tuchus* (behind) with her all-consuming interest in: her daughter getting married, food, and greed. Guilt . . . constant one-line guilt, was the MO, as "Sylvia," when thwarted, asked "Fran" to, among other things, feel her for lumps.

More, even her *stereotype* was flawed. Not only was she tasteless and tactless, most attempts at the redeeming moment between mother and child just weren't, well, believable as the formula was objectifying and the quick joke.

In Sylvia's world, for example, greed came before kidfirst. In one episode, when it was thought there was a baby mix-up at the hospital, she was willing to give up her daughter to a classy Black woman—with money.

This would never happen.

**"THE TV STEREOTYPE IS UNFAIR,
EXAGGERATED, UNBALANCED,
EMBARRASSING, RIDICULING, AND
EXTREME," SAYS BLU GREENBERG. "ON
THE OTHER HAND, THEY CAN'T TAKE AWAY
WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED—THE VALUES OF
THE JEWISH MOTHER."**

In *Seinfeld*, there was no attempt at redemption with George Constanza's mother, played by the marvelous Estelle Harris. The same is true of the Jewish mothers (Susie Essman, among others) in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Larry David takes no prisoners in his group. They're all equal opportunity obnoxious, pretentious, paranoics, doomed to view life as universal *mishegoss*, and meet it mouth-on, with their own *Mega-mishegoss*.

The exception (on TV) was *Brooklyn Bridge* (1991), set in the 1950s, that showed Jewish mothering and grand-mothering as bountiful, beloved, and balanced. Sadly, few wanted to watch beyond a few seasons.

Today, the Jewish mother media stereotype has become the prototype for mothers of all stripes.

Mama-bashing is now universal. If these women aren't actually vipers, then many fall into the "Smart Wife Saves Tuchus of Stupid Male" category.

Most notable is Lord of the Wimps, Ray Barone: OK, he's a harmless guy but no hero. Why? Because, he's been "fixed," neutered, by "Everybody [Who] Loves" him. Mostly . . .

Ethnic moms, especially those of Italian descent, such as Marie Barone, are hard hit. Marie sets a new standard for the maternal stereotype as part harridan, part wolf, who acts with a vengeance—that "comes from love." Ray's put-upon wife, Debra, while far more aware, also grows a few unflattering fangs, coming out of most frays with "Wife Knows Best" tattooed on Ray's psyche.

Black moms, on the other hand, have fared better, thanks to Bill Cosby's influence. Claire Huxtable is the very soul of the modern mom, who can balance her law career while raising five children with a firm (if not sarcastic) hand in place. Child-first, this is a professional family with the affluence to provide for their brood. *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times* portray the wise matriarch, who, again, is both peacemaker and the conscience of the family.

Even the WASP mother (the perennial back-seated and obedient June Cleaver) is no longer immune. Jamie Buchman's mom in *Mad About You* evoked trembling in her daughters at the mere thought of a visit. Although she was portrayed as a constantly smiling, "life is good," woman whose MO was steeped in denial, her code-speak was like something out of *Through the Looking Glass*. Will's mother in *Will and Grace*, played by the glorious Blythe Danner, was the consummate stereotype of the WASP mom, who not only *talked* in code-speak, but was concerned with keeping up appearances and was steeped in emotional denial, which she handled through a very proper (and very extended) cocktail hour. (In crime shows, the WASPy mom is often *rich*—and in denial—with a son who has an eye tick and collects flesh-eating moths under mama's radar.)

In *Sex and the City*, though none of the *characters* were born Jewish, and their mothers are not seen on air, whenever they're

mentioned, they usually bring about eye rolls, and trips home are about as welcome as a ring, courtesy of Cracker Jacks.

Yet one can't help but notice, that for all the kvetching about mothers, recent hits have reinvented almost precisely the same ethno-type in their "new" family groups—their friends.

The *Sinfield* "four" are rife with "Jewish mother" stereotypes—without the Jewish mother. Argumentation for one. No debate is too petty. With almost Talmudic logic, the group might be found arguing about the possibility of "over-drying." It's laundry by Talmudic review. While George loathes the "insanity" of his babbling mother, within his new "family" of pals, could he be *more* of the stereotype in high decibel?

Group kvetching forms the core of the comedy. The "we four against the world—which is out to get us," plus the never-ending picayune debates are a close replica of the very traits they loathe in their parents. If you add a few years to the group, they would fit neatly with their mamas—arguing over temperature control, early bird specials, and pens that write upside down.

Will and Grace, along with friends Karen and Jack, form yet another faux "family." The Jewish Grace is not unlike her overbearing, narcissistic, yet charming mother. Will maintains his mother's rather formal rigid, appearances-first stance. Grace, like mama, is all about, well—Grace.

Will and Grace

does have two important distinctions worth mentioning. It is the first prime-time sitcom since *The Goldbergs* to feature a marriage between a Jewish man and woman. When Grace and "Leo" Markus stood under a chuppah to wed, viewers saw a major Jewish character who didn't "trade out" or become the oddball mate, as foil for the more stable WASP, such as Paul and Jamie, Fran and Maxwell, Dharma and Greg, or Rhoda and Joe. Furthermore, the audaciously Jewish Grace is not the primo resident neurotic. Jack and Karen make Grace (even when she's singing) seem almost "regular"—an unusual and positive TV turn.

It could be that the need for “family,” connection, involvement, and intimacy, burdensome as it may be, is still around. Because if we don’t get it, we simply reinvent something like it—and call it “friends.”

Comic films and books in popular culture haven’t treated the Jewish mother—or any mother—much better. While some have been depicted as loving, the majority are harridans in films, for example: *My Favorite Tear*, *Lovers and Other Strangers*, *Meet the Fockers*, *Annie Hall*, *Goodbye Columbus*, *Throw Mama off the Train*, and if you can imagine, Jane Fonda in *Monster-in-Law*.

And in books, there was the breakthrough seller, *Portnoy’s Complaint* (1970), by Philip Roth who, in one passage, describes his mother as a woman who might actually be “too good”—as weeping and suffering, she ground her own horseradish, checked every “crease and seam” in his body, and whose house was so spotless, you could eat off the bathroom floor.

Comedy albums abounded. *How to Be a Jewish Mother* is based on the book by Dan Greenberg who “advises” the Jewish mother to sit with a daughter who is without prospects, and tell her you wish to go into the coffin with a smile on your face . . . so, maybe a professional man may not be so important (after all, her father was in ladies’ buttons); besides, by then, mama will probably be dead anyway.

“On film, a real man has to be dueling, some supremely threatening force, something powerful, primal, and difficult,” says author, film critic, and radio personality Michael Medved. “In domestic dramas, in so many films, novels, and stories involving Jewish men, they are involved in a constant duel with a mother—and you have to make that mother monstrous.”

ASSIMILATION: MAMA-DRAMAS AND THE SONS WHO CREATED THEM

Earlier I wrote of the sons in media who helped shape the negative image of the Jewish mother. How did this transformation from adoration to comic strip occur when these shtetl families came to America? Like most change, it was a process, fueled by

assimilation. In the shtetls, Hebraic traditions, sacrifice, protection, involvement, and making sure the kids were in the fold, were *essential* to keeping the family Jewish, together—and alive. I believe when these mothers came to America, they found themselves “outsourced” as their children wanted to fly and grab a piece of the American Dream and status, which was hard to reconcile with their Jewishness, and their mothers’ expectations.

In the very early days of TV and film, this dual tug was expressed, but Mama was still an adored part of the equation. In the iconic *The Jazz Singer*, a classic story of assimilation, Jack Rabinowitz (Al Jolson) faces a life-changing choice. Does he sing as a cantor on Yom Kippur, or fulfill his duties as “Jack Robin,” the jazz singer? In 1927, Hollywood’s first feature-length “talkie” includes a memorable excerpt between mother and son after his father, the cantor, dies. In the dialogue, Jack promises his mama, that if he’s a success, he’ll move them to the Bronx (a step up), buy her a nice pink dress, and take her to Coney Island.

This critical speech sent Jack and his mother on their way to a new and untried future. One where, for the first time, the son had to take mama by the hand in this alien world. Her role was changing. She was no longer the sure moral center. Now, as a stranger in a brave new world, she was being led by her child—one whose religious values were being usurped by secular values in a fervent desire for acceptance.

“THERE HAS TO BE ALTRUISM TO
REINFORCE EVERY STEREOTYPE. TODAY,
IT’S ABUSED. WE’VE LOST OUR SENSE OF
PERSPECTIVE WITH ASSIMILATION.”

—Binyamin Jolkovsky

The next giant step in the change of image was the development of the Jewish comedian. Within a generation, Jewish sons were honing a new craft and a new view of “mama,” as writers and comics in the Borscht Belt.

What's in a stereotype?

A Jewish kid comes home, excited to tell his mother that he has landed a role in his school's play.

"That's wonderful, bubbeleh," his mother said. "What's the part?"

"I'm playing the role of the Jewish husband," said the boy, proudly.

The mother scowls.

"No, that is unacceptable," she said. "Go back to school and tell your teacher that you want a speaking role."

That is the typical Jewish mother, as portrayed in popular media for the past half-century or so. She's the overbearing, never-satisfied, guilt-provoking, manipulative, self-centered, and nagging pillar around which all Jewish families are built. And there are hundreds upon hundreds of jokes, and gag television and movie characters built upon that stereotype. But where does the stereotype really come from, and how accurate is that stereotype in describing our actual mothers?

"It's unfortunately simple," said psychologist, feminist leader, and author Phyllis Chesler, before reluctantly describing what she perceives as the stereotype of the Jewish mother. "She has emasculated her husband and has smothered with bondage her son in a way that makes him unable to be either tough or to leave home or to truly marry any other woman. In some psychiatric literature, she is also portrayed as overly angry and castrating."

And unfortunately, Chesler said, "stereotypes often have a little bit of truth to them."

The truth behind the Jewish mother stereotype is that when it developed, the Jewish mother in general may have been a bit overbearing with her family out of frustration, said Chesler.

Before the 20th century, most Jews in the shtetls of Europe and the Middle East were poor, and women had to work to help support the family, especially those women who were working to support their Torah-scholar husbands and sons, said Chesler. They were also something of the antithesis to Christian women, who for the most part stayed at home.

"Like women of color, Jewish women in the 19th century were considered too pushy, crude, and not ladylike," said Chesler. "They were all elbows akimbo, not well-dressed, vulgar, and often cheap."

But they were providers, and this carried over to the New World when the Jews started to immigrate to the United States.

Increasingly, as Jews became successful and prosperous here, said Chesler, Jewish women were no longer needed in the marketplace — and at the same time they were told that they could not become rabbis, scholars, or public leaders.

"Imagine the frustration of women with ambition," Chesler said. "To an extent, I think that Jewish mothers who are stay-at-home creatures [exert] their enormous ambition on the small group of people that is their family, and they micromanage.... In some ways, Jewish women were always on the go in the community, but when you take that woman out of the shtetl and you put her in a mini-mansion on Long Island, she may turn out to be hell on wheels."

For the generation of women who just missed out on reaping the benefits of the women's liberation movement, that frustration was exacerbated, said Chesler, and it played itself out, especially in the relationship between the Jewish mother and the Jewish daughter.

As women started to become better educated and were able to pursue careers — not just jobs — mothers became reluctant to let their daughters leave the home geographically or psychologically, said Chesler.

"Mothers became envious. And now you have [according to the stereotype] mothers criticizing their daughters and making daughters feel guilty and ashamed in ways that are equal to and equally treacherous to the kinds of guilt provoked in the son," said Chesler. "So now you have these Jewish mothers who had the same foremothers and ancestors we all have and should have been seen in the same light as they were, as women who spoke with God or who were the great namers of their children.... But now you have comics who make jokes about them and ultimately paint them as JAPs."

But the stereotype wasn't created only by Jewish comedians, said Joyce Antler, whose book, "You Never Call! You Never Write! A History of the Jewish Mother," will be published next year by Oxford University Press.

The stereotype is full of contradictions, and those contradictions reveal much about ideas we hold about Jewish women, Antler, a professor of American Jewish History and Culture and professor of Women's Studies at Brandeis University, told The Jewish Standard.

"It said that she is overprotective and nagging, but also strong and loving. It reveals a lot about Jewish women and their relationships to Jewish men, and a lot about the Jewish family, and a lot about American mothers and gender roles in general," said Antler. "It's not just a story about the Jewish mother. It tells about Jews and all of us."

But it also tells of the perception of the Jewish man, and about the [non-Jewish world's] concern over Jewish power and success. While much of anti-Semitic literature is based on the notion that the Jews control the world's money and media, the Jewish man, according to the stereotype, is emasculated by the Jewish woman.

"The Jewish mother then becomes a way to displace some of that success," said Antler. "It gets very complex."

There is also jealousy behind the stereotype, said Antler, which could explain why that stereotype is so undercutting of the Jewish woman, even in the modern media, said Antler, who wrote "Television's Changing Image of American Jews" and edited "Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture."

And the Jewish mother is a hard stereotype to buck, even as the image of the young Jewish woman has started to change. Witness NBC's "Will and Grace," said Antler. Debra Messing portrays a strong, relatively independent, successful Jewish woman, but the stock image of the Jewish mother lives on. Whenever Grace's mother, played by Debbie Reynolds, makes an appearance, her flamboyance and nagging put Grace on edge.

Antler said that she started looking into the stereotype of the Jewish mother because of something lacking in the approach of those painting the portrait of what is supposedly the typical Jewish woman — respect for the woman.

Even though Jewish women, from Gertrude Berg to Betty Friedan to Wendy Wasserstein, have helped shape the way that Americans think about and deal with women, this ultimately demeaning stereotype

exists, said Antler, who also wrote the book "The Journey Home: How Jewish Women Shaped Modern America."

Juxtaposed with the way that black mothers, for instance, are usually given respect, the way that Jewish women and mothers are stereotyped with mockery is shocking, especially given that even though Jewish mother jokes have become ready-made, formulaic attempts to elicit a laugh, according to Antler, she still feels that "outsiders — and insiders — might admire the JM for her devotion to her kids, even while mocking it. That's why it's complicated."

There are two stereotypes of the Jewish mother, said Shulamit Reinharz, the director of the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis. One of them paints the Jewish mother as the rock of her household, the core, and the heart. And the other holds that she is responsible for the education of her children, especially of her daughters, because the boys went off to get a more formal education. In a slight contradiction to Antler, she said, "I think mothers were respected."

But around World War II, the image of the strong Jewish mother became redefined as "*too* strong," said Reinharz, as can be seen in Herman Wouk's "Marjorie Morningstar," a World War II-era novel about a young Jewish woman's rebellions and decisions about love.

The scene in which Marjorie's mother interrogates her boyfriend, said Reinharz, is "all a part of the assimilation scheme — because she wanted her daughter to marry up, or at least sideways."

Phillip Roth further developed the notion of overbearing Jewish mother, whose needs become paramount, in "Portnoy's Complaint."

But, said Reinharz, the real stereotype of the Jewish mother had a shelf life of only about 20 years and started to die with the women's movement.

Rivka Haut, the director of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, stays away from the stereotype when describing the Jewish mother. "When I think of the Jewish mother, I think of unlimited love, dedication, devotion, and unselfishness and putting aside one's own needs for those of her family, even though in literature there is the caricature of the Jewish mother who is hysterical and suffocating."

But, she said, "I think that it has changed a little, as more and more women become professionals and have lives outside of their children. Women still have their children as their highest priority, but nonetheless they have other demands."

Just look at how the Jewish mother is portrayed on television and on screen these days, said Reinharz. The "perfect" portrayal of the Jewish mother was probably Doris Roberts' Marie Barone in "Everybody Loves Raymond," said Reinharz. She is the perfect guilt-producing, self-centered, nagging Jewish mother — only, even though the real-life Roberts is Jewish, her character is not.

"[The stereotype] has become totally diffuse," said Reinharz. "Now men are old Jewish mothers. But it's not a Jewish thing anymore. It's not even a women's thing anymore."

Instead, there's a new version of the Jewish mother, perhaps close to the one that Barbra Streisand played in the movie "Meet the Fockers." She was quirky, a little self-involved, and "completely sex-starved," said Reinharz, and she was obviously Jewish. "It showed that she was completely independent, and beyond anyone repressing her. Not to say that we are all sex maniacs, but we're not pinned down. We want to have our own lives...."

We don't control our families so much as we are members of our families, because our needs are met elsewhere," she said. "I would say that some people like to think of the joke [version of the Jewish mother], but I just don't think that it means a thing."

Battling Stereotypes of the Jewish Mother

One woman confronts a stereotype to which she herself might be subject--and learns about protecting her children from stereotypes.

By Dr. Paula Hyman

When I was growing up, the last thing I wanted was to be a Jewish mother. Not that I planned to be childless. It was just that I feared that as I acquired children I might also acquire the characteristics of the stereotypical Jewish mother--in particular, a domineering personality and a neurotic over-involvement with my children, a kind of obsession with mothering that American culture found alternatively ludicrous and destructive.

I resolved my "Jewish mother" problem in a double process: first, by becoming a mother myself and, almost simultaneously, by studying the history of Jewish women and the emergence in the past 30 years of the very stereotype of the Jewish mother that had so appalled me. Confronting that stereotype--as well as other unflattering images of Jews, from the Jewish American princess to the materialistic, vulgar, and stingy Jews of anti-Semitic lore--is an important process for Jewish parents.

Protecting & Teaching Our Children

These stereotypes affect us as parents in several ways. Most obviously, we seek to protect our children from them. But we Jewish parents do have to prepare our children for the possibility of anti-Semitic incidents, as rare as they may be in the circles in which we move. And, at a later stage, our children will have to try to understand why Jews have been, for so much of our history, the victims of hatred and the models for denigrating stereotypes.

In my experience, at least, it has always been possible to neutralize the persecution of the Jews or turn the subject into a teaching device about the dark underside of intergroup relations. Hanukkah and Pesach [Passover], after all, do celebrate Jewish triumphs; and it is the opponents of the Jews who can be dismissed for their brutality and intolerance.

More difficult for parents is the way our own reactions to Jewish stereotypes influence our behavior. It is easy to deal with the Hanukkah and Pesach stories; it is even easy to deal with the existence of anti-Semitism. It is far more difficult to come to terms with stereotypes toward which we ourselves feel ambivalent.

The Jewish Mother Comes to America

The "Jewish mother" stereotype is a case in point. It is only in the past generation that the Jewish mother has emerged as a derisive character. In Eastern Europe and in the immigrant centers of America, she was celebrated by her children in song and story. The precipitous decline of her image reflects first and foremost a shift in the criteria for evaluating what makes a good mother.

It is according to middle class, mid-20th-century American standards that the Jewish mother fails to meet the test. At the very least, we must recognize that our acceptance of the stereotype involves a rejection, perhaps unconscious, of traditional Jewish family values in favor of middle-class American norms. Certainly in the case of the authors and comedians who exploited the stereotype, fixation with the faults of the Jewish mother signaled a deep-seated sense of not being fully at home in American society. What better way to compensate (or over-compensate) for this unease than to lay the blame for incomplete assimilation at the feet of their Jewish mothers?

The Jewish mother stereotype arose only in part from the application of American standards to traditional Jewish cultural behavior. It also originated in the social situation of a second

generation of Jewish mothers in America. While they patterned their intense life style of mothering after their immigrant mothers, they lived in an environment that made fewer demands on their time than had their mothers' more straitened economic circumstances.

And there were few acceptable outlets for their energy other than concern for home and children. Paradoxically, the "Jewish" intensity of the mother-child bond may thus have been heightened at the very time when many American Jews were most anxious to feel themselves fully American and least Jewish or immigrant in their behavior. Hence, the extreme sensitivity to neurotic aspects of the Jewish mother.

The Truth Behind the Caricature

The popularity of the particular comic stereotype lies in its recognizable kernel of truth. Eastern European Jewish culture did foster an intense style of mothering, which was reinforced by the physical and psychological insecurity of life in the shtetl [the small-town or village community of Jews in Eastern Europe] and later in the immigrant ghettos. Not only was it a style of mothering appropriate to its surroundings, it also served to equip the children for survival, even for success, in an environment that was often hostile.

Whatever the merits of this mothering style, to a generation of women raised on a combination of popular Freudianism and feminist concepts of self-fulfillment, the "Jewish mother" is hardly a model to emulate. On the one hand, she damages her children, denying them the independence necessary for healthy development, at least as defined by our psychologists. On the other hand, apart from her role as mother, she has no sense of worth, at least as defined by contemporary feminism.

Intellectually and emotionally, then, it is hard for us *not* to accept the partial truth of the stereotype. But it is important to realize that the stereotype is exaggerated and divorced from the cultural context in which our Jewish mothers and grandmothers functioned. In assenting to that exaggeration, we alienate ourselves not only from our past as history but also from our past as a source of cultural continuity.

The stereotype makes us self-conscious: Since we don't want to be "Jewish mothers," we hold ourselves back from the kind of behavior satirized in the caricature. When we find ourselves, despite our best intentions, behaving "just like a Jewish mother," we condemn ourselves for doing so. The stereotype can thus influence our relationship with our children as well as our self-evaluation as parents.

Superwoman: An Alternative Stereotype

Another stereotype that crops up increasingly as the two-career family comes into its own is the "*Eshet hayil*" stereotype, or, in American terms, the superwoman image. The poem "*Eshet Hayil*" ([Proverbs 31:10-31], which many traditional men recite to their wives on Friday night before Kiddush) praises the "Woman of Valor" who is a successful businesswoman, nurtures and feeds her family, sews their clothes, gives charity, and dispenses wise advice.

The question for many of us who are participating in a two-career family is how to provide healthy models for the family work distribution. We are in a time of transition in which we are not satisfied with the roles our mothers played and have not yet fully discovered how to do the thing better. All too often when women decide to embark on a career, it simply means that now, instead of being responsible for the housekeeping, laundry, cooking, clothes buying, and general welfare of their families, they are also responsible for their new careers *and* the housekeeping, laundry, etc.

How does a couple truly share household tasks? How does a couple convey to their child the notion that men and women can share nurturing roles as well as housekeeping responsibilities?

How can we avoid, for ourselves, in our own minds, the Eshet hayil stereotype? Certainly, what we don't want to do is trade in the Jewish mother stereotype for the Eshet Hayil stereotype.

Transcending Stereotypes & Learning From Them

Understanding the sources of the stereotype prepares the way for a reexamination of traditional Jewish mothering, for a liberation of the real Jewish mother from the stereotype. To paraphrase a truism in immigrant history, what the child wants to forget, the grandchild is eager to remember. If the Jewish family has been a source of stability in Jewish life as well as the launching pad for Jewish social mobility, the nature of Jewish involvement with children has been at the center of the family.

Only when the stereotype of the Jewish mother is exposed as the caricature that it is can we recognize and integrate into ourselves the positive aspects of the Jewish mother. Her warmth, her involvement with her children, her ability to convey to them that they are marvelous and special, are talents that we would do well to foster in ourselves. These are characteristics that we can develop even if we reject the limitation of the Jewish mother's role to mothering and choose to combine mothering with a career. They "travel well," whatever our social circumstances.

We are fortunate to live at a time when ethnic and cultural differences are celebrated rather than suppressed. If, as Jewish parents, we are, in fact, more exuberant, more aggressively involved with our children than others, we need not despair. The culture of Jewish parenting is still basically a healthy one in which we take pride and which we can present to the world as a model for others to emulate.

September 24, 2004

Steele Discusses "Stereotype Threat"

Claude Steele

"Stereotype threat" is a problem that pervades American life, according to Claude Steele, an internationally recognized social psychologist and professor at Stanford University who addressed a standing-room-only crowd in Gamble Auditorium Tuesday evening, September 21. In an insightful and engaging talk, Steele maintained that overcoming stereotype threat is key to achieving integration of our society that goes beyond statistics and "allows people to flourish in an integrated setting." Mount Holyoke President Joanne V. Creighton introduced Steele, claiming that "his work has great relevance to how we build a diverse community and society that respect, value, and encourage the development and well being of all of their members."

Steele first outlined the theory behind stereotype threat. His basic premise is that a person's "social identity"—defined as group membership in categories such as age, gender, religion, and ethnicity—has significance when "rooted in concrete situations." Steele defines these situations as "identity contingencies"—settings in which a person is treated according to a specific social identity.

Steele then talked about his findings in many studies that when a person's social identity is attached to a negative stereotype, that person will tend to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype. He attributes the underperformance to a person's anxiety that he or she will conform to the negative stereotype. The anxiety manifests itself in various ways, including distraction and increased body temperature, all of which diminish performance level.

Steele made clear that stereotype threat is not limited to historically disadvantaged groups, and that every person suffers stereotype threat in certain contexts. For example, he cited a study testing stereotype threat among white engineering students. When the white students took a test after being told that Asians typically outperformed whites on that test, the whites performed significantly worse than they would have otherwise.

Noting that the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's ruling against school desegregation in *Brown v. Board of Education* had served to highlight the dismaying lack of progress towards successful integration, Steele credited the United States for dealing with the difficult challenges of integration. He said that while racism exists, stereotype threat is a far more pervasive barrier to a truly integrated society. According to Steele, a person's fear of being negatively stereotyped according to race—whites as racist, blacks as intellectually inferior, for example—creates a general level of discomfort in racially mixed settings.

But Steele's message was not without hope. He stressed that abilities are expandable and that there is no truth to allegations that a particular group lacks a particular capacity. He maintained that stereotype threat would continue as the "default setting" until steps are taken to counteract it. Above all, he urged that, at an institutional level, we must promote "identity safety," implicit efforts to establish that diverse social identities add integral value to a setting.

"Self" is defined as "the identity, character, or essential qualities of any person or thing; one's own person as distinct from others; being uniform or the same throughout..." (Webster's Dictionary - Third College Edition)

Secondly hate implies a feeling of great aversion disgust and or dislike with malice and contempt. Hate results from an intolerance and void of acceptance for difference and for the vulnerability that is part of being human. It also results from the perpetuation of pain that is borderline reality when what "really" hurts is avoided at all cost.

Those with BPD do not have a well-defined sense of "self". They are not sure of their own identities. They search frantically for others to live through and be defined by. Borderlines are not consistent. They are not uniform at all. Borderlines are sitting on a repressed mountain of pain the sum of which they feel compelled to protect themselves from lest they be annihilated by what they actually feel. It is this dissociation from one's inherent vulnerability that is driven by the "self" known to the borderline - the "false self".

Many of those diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) struggle with self-hate. What is that commonly thought to mean? I think that many just identify that they "hate" themselves and leave it there. If you think about it how can a borderline hate a "self" they do not yet know? (or only partially know at best) What I think a borderline hating his/her "self" really means is that he/she hates the sense of false "self" that he/she has been living from in an effort to avoid and with the result of having abandoned and reabandoned his/her true or authentic integrated "self". The borderline hates his/her pseudo "self". False or psuedo "self" thrives on hate, sabotage and the illusion of control which alienates one further from the reality that one's "self" is lost and unknown to him/her.

When I was borderline I thought that I too hated my "self". It is only in hindsight that I realize I couldn't have hated my "self" -- because I did know who I was -- I was alienated and dissociated from my "authentic self". (It took me over 20 years of hard work, tears, agony and pain to find this authentic self) Therefore, when I was borderline and believing that I hated my "self" who I really hated was my "false self"; what I really hated was that I did not know myself. I hated the me that was like my father

(my main abuser). I hated the me that was still living in the past and I hated my inner-child who just would not ignore the pain the way I was able to for so many years. What I most hated, truly, was being an individual without a "self". I was not an integrated whole. I did not have a healthy ego. I was not able to think rationally consistently. I hated who I wasn't. I hated not knowing who I was. I hated the way I punished my "self" over and over for what others did to me. I hated the way I punished others over and over for what the significant others in my childhood had done to me. I hated the way that I projected out on to others what was really going in somewhere inside of my "self" -- the "self" that I was running as fast as I could to avoid; the "self" that I abandoned over and over again by living my life in the lies and the power games and in chaotic codependency instead of finding "ME" and helping "ME" and taking both care and responsibility for "ME". I hated how I tried to rescue others when I really needed to save and rescue my very lost "self".

Borderline Personality Disorder by its very nature is a recipe for self-hate due to the reality that anyone diagnosed with BPD has experienced something in his/her life that interfered with his/her emotional growth, maturation and "self-development". It is the very essence of this loss of "self" -- this most original abandonment of "self" that causes this hate.

So much of borderline "self" harm, I believe, based upon my own experience, has all to do with trying to strike back at those who hurt, abandoned, abused, and or neglected you. When you lash out at your "false-self" you are "them" hurting you all over again and this "false self" has a vested interest in keeping you dissociated from your "authentic self". What stands between you, "false self" that you know and "authentic self" that you long to find is your pain and your need to re-parent yourself and learn how to soothe, nurture and validate all of your reality, past and present.

In order for me to cross the bridge from hating my "false self" to getting to identify, know and love my "authentic self" I had to STOP all forms of "self-harm" and deceit. I had to get honest from the inside out. My "authentic self", led by my inner-child aspect of self,

could not and would not come forth to integrate with me when I was "false self" re-abusing her (me). There was no safety in that. There could be no trust in that. So, I maintain that one must change behaviour first and then one will experience feelings slowly start to change as thoughts change -- but only after one has ceased unhealthy behaviour. If you are waiting to feel better or to know yourself more or to think more clearly before you STOP the behaviour that is generated from your "false self" you will more than likely end up stuck right where you are -- re-cycling through self-harm and re-abandoning yourself over and over all the while only adding to your original pain thus increasing the work that you will have to do in order to get better. Borderlines must learn to re-write their life-scripts. It is by changing behaviour -- in essence by ending the hate that one can then turn the page to a different recipe -- a recipe for self-love, self-understanding, self-acceptance, self-esteem that is found in getting to know one's "authentic self". BPD is a recipe for self-hate because, in the active throes of it, one is living from a false self that is invested in self-destructing. It is this same false self that perpetuates all of the lies and manipulations that keep "upping the anti" until all is lost. Self-hate is a choice to stay attached to all that does not work for you. It is a choice to continue to add to your own pain. It is a choice to continue to invest in the past; invest in those who let you down; failed you; abused you; abandoned you; and, in effect, caused you to lose yourself in the first place.

It may not be your "fault" that these things originally happened to you -- but -- it **is** your responsibility to yourself that you do all that you can to heal your most profound loss -- the loss of your "authentic self". You did not choose to lose your "authentic self" to the original wounds of your youth but you will have to face, take ownership of and responsibility for these wounds now in order to facilitate the reclamation of the **REAL YOU** -- the YOU that exists on the other side of all of your pain. The YOU that you will find when you are able to develop your personality beyond the original damage. Your "authentic self" is the you that you have always been meant to be. It is the you that has roots in your spirit and soul and it is the you that longs to be healthy and whole. It is also the you that has the strength to make it all the way back. Within this "authentic self" that you need to find and identify in order to heal lies a very wounded, hurt, vulnerable and beautiful human being. Come home to your "self". Make a decision to end harming your "self" in anyway, shape or form. You **DO** deserve to know and love yourself and to be known and loved by others!

There is no substitute for the work. Make a decision to do the work and to stick with the work no matter how much it hurts. The alternative, as you likely know, is to continue to hurt yourself (self-harm) which is only adding to your stock-pile of pain, anger and "self" hate.

Sarah Silverman

A Jewish comedian delivers bigotry with a smile.

By Saul Austerlitz

Sarah Silverman is familiar with her detractors. Not only does she know who they are, she has a good idea of what they're going to say about her and her work. They will accuse her of racism, bigotry, and careless stereotyping; they will call her a cheap comic, out for an easy laugh; and they will assail her for her insensitivity. Knowing all this, Silverman's stand-up act nonetheless sticks with tried-and-true material honed by hundreds of years of American bigotry, whittled down into bite-sized bits of casually tossed-off epithets and disparaging comments.

Edgy or Racist?

"Is that an edgy joke, or a racist joke?," Silverman muses during her 2005 concert film *Sarah Silverman: Jesus is Magic* after one particular barrage of anti-Asian humor. Her standup pokes and prods us to think of it as the former, but too often, it edges dangerously close to the latter. Her television show, *The Sarah Silverman Program*, which debuted on Comedy Central on February 1, 2007, meanwhile, softens Silverman. This isn't a "sellout" move; rather, it renders her more palatable to an audience turned off by her insistence on shopworn stereotypes. The stereotypes have not vanished, but they have been stripped of their intent to insult.

With *The Sarah Silverman Program*, Silverman has returned once more to the limelight. Comedy Central's seal of approval and the embrace of viewers who made the show's debut episode the most-watched new program on the channel in years has crowned Silverman the female comic of the moment, and a worthy colleague to Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, Dave Chappelle, and the other luminaries of the Comedy Central universe.

Silverman, born in New Hampshire in 1970, got her start as a writer, penning sketches for *Saturday Night Live* and HBO's *Mr. Show* before moving from writing to acting, taking small roles in films like *Bulworth* and *The Bachelor* while touring the country with her standup. Much like Stewart, Silverman bills herself as a self-consciously Jewish performer in her stand-up, making constant reference to her own religious background in her work. But those references are often tiresomely similar, harping on Jews' penny-pinching ways, their unattractive looks, and their control of the American media. Does dressing up a stereotype with a smile make it less of a stereotype?

There is a certain kind of *shtetl*-via-San Fernando Valley Jewish humor that Silverman (whose sister is a rabbi) enjoys: *Jesus* imagines Jewish women in porn (the word "*tuchus*" makes a prominent appearance) and Silverman hops around the stage like Chelm's village idiot, shouting "*Yeidel deidel deidel deidel*" to prove that Jewish women can be sexy too.

Holocaust Humor

As if to emphasize how transgressive a Jew she can be, Silverman makes repeated use of the Holocaust as a punch line, referring to *Jesus is Magic* as "about the Holocaust, and AIDS, but it's funny, and it's a musical" (actually a fairly accurate description of the film). She mentions her recently deceased grandmother having been a Holocaust survivor, but helpfully points out that she had been in a better type of concentration camp, receiving a vanity tattoo that read "BEDAZZLED."

Silverman is going for the sharp intake of breath followed by shocked laughter, her act seeking to extract chuckles from the unlikeliest of places. But coming some forty years after the heyday of Lenny Bruce, shock is not quite as shocking as it once was, and what Silverman sees as transgressive sometimes comes off as secondhand.

In fact, the only thing that truly seems to incense Silverman is that Jews are willing to buy German luxury cars, even after knowing of those companies' involvement in the Holocaust. The subject comes up in her standup routine during *Jesus is Magic* and in one of the film's left-field musical numbers. She lectures Mercedes for their bad business practices, helping kill off the people who would one day serve as their best customers. The specificity of this joke--which requires more than a copy of "101 Ethnic Jokes" to pull off--is what makes it successful, and the absence of such careful observation makes couplets like "I love you more than bears love honey/I love you more than Jews love money" fall flat.

The Self-Aware Bigot

Silverman's stand-up act plays on the hall-of-mirrors effect she creates. She plays a bigot, but a self-aware one, conscious of the effect each of her jokes will have on her presumably liberal, tolerant, mostly white audience.

By casting herself as simultaneously trotting out hoary ethnic jokes and assailing that same humor's viciousness via the vacuity of her persona, Silverman seeks to render herself immune from prosecution. Her edge is in her racist veneer, and by parading the same tired array of stereotypes, she is reveling in having moved beyond prejudice, congratulating her audiences on being tolerant enough to laugh freely at jokes about unwashed Mexicans. While not

to everyone's taste, Silverman has attracted a dedicated following through her unorthodox material and zest for confrontation--attributes that brought Comedy Central calling.

For Silverman, it is all in the delivery--a point she makes with a single throwaway joke tucked into the credits of *Jesus is Magic*, where her nerdy, socially maladjusted understudy comes out onstage, tells the same jokes in a monotone, and is met with nothing but strained silence. The crudeness of Silverman's approach is benefited by her clean-cut good looks. "Can you believe someone who looks like this just said that?," the twinkle in her eye reads. Silverman is like the 21st century feminine version of that old chestnut of Hollywood comedies--the raunchy child whose job it is to shock the audience with his familiarity with all the gory details of sex.

Now on TV

The Sarah Silverman Program succeeds where *Jesus is Magic* fails because of its grounding in character. Here, Silverman plays an unemployed slob, entirely dependent on her sister Laura, and constantly threatened by the presence of Laura's new boyfriend, whom she fears will steal her place in her sister's affections. Sarah and Laura are joined by their friends Brian and Steve, a constantly bickering gay couple who nearly match Sarah in their quest for eternal slackerdom.

Silverman plays a role not entirely dissimilar from her stand-up's narcissistic, clueless Jewish princess who carelessly offends, but surrounded as she is by a recognizable milieu (upper-middle-class L.A.) and a cast of other characters competing for our attention, she feels less of a need to shock. The comedy emerges from the show's personalities, not from Silverman's desire to push buttons.

Silverman's show files off some of her sharper edges, rendering her dopier, and sillier, than her stand-up persona allows her to be. *The Sarah Silverman Program* presents its protagonist as a slacker Everywoman: "I'm just like you: I live in Valley Village, I don't have a job, and my sister pays my rent." Silverman dials down the Jewish content a notch from *Jesus is Magic*, although she and her sister are still named Silverman, and a mock-serious announcement at the beginning of the first episode warns that "tonight's episode of *The Sarah Silverman Program* contains full-frontal Jew-dity."

Being Jewish means having other people say they're sorry: as Laura's newfound love interest Officer Jay flirtatiously tells her, "I believe the Holocaust was totally uncalled for." The Holocaust is still Silverman's ultimate punch-line (it comes up again in the second episode, when Sarah compares interrupting a Jewish person while she's urinating to saying the Holocaust never happened), but at least here it emerges from the socially awkward character of Officer Jay, perennially at a loss as to what to say.

The Sarah Silverman Program is the most effective presentation yet of the comic's work, in large part because of its kinder, gentler mood. Absent her claws-out, take-no-prisoners brand of comedy, Silverman is set free to be shallower and funnier. There are still a plethora of jokes about Jews, the wisdom of elderly African-American women, and homeless people, but the humor emerges from careful observation, and not a rejiggering of old ethnic jokes. Sarah Silverman gone polite? Not exactly. But the new Sarah is most distinctly an improved comic, and her promising new show offers an opportunity for reinvention, absent the full-frontal hatefulness.

Saul Austerlitz is a writer and film critic in New York

Remembering Prejudice, of a Different Sort

By ALEX WITCHEL

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GROWING UP IN ATLANTA, Alfred Uhry was voted funniest in his class. "I was pretty hard to take," he says now, "putting on skirts and dressing up in gorilla suits. I embarrassed my sister Ann, who was a more successful teen-ager than I was, more normal. I was this weird little boy writing letters to the producers of 'Barefoot in Athens' to get the program. And I would come home and say I got prizes that didn't exist. When I won the Pulitzer, my mother called my sister and said, 'Alfred says he won the Pulitzer Prize.' And Ann said, 'Mother, he's not going to say he did. He really must have.'"

He really did, in 1988, for "Driving Miss Daisy," his first nonmusical play, based on his grandmother, a distinctly less humorous soul. When her grandson wrote her letters, she sent them back corrected. On Thursday, Mr. Uhry's second play, "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," will open on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theater, set in Atlanta once again. A romantic comedy, it takes place in 1939 during the world premiere of "Gone With the Wind." Two female cousins make their plans to attend Ballyhoo, the German-Jewish community's social event of the season; those plans threaten to pull the family apart but end up bringing it together. The play was commissioned by the Cultural Olympiad and the Alliance Theater Company in Atlanta and had its own premiere there last summer, directed by Ron Lagomarsino and starring Dana Ivey, both alumnae of the original "Driving Miss Daisy."

"The division of Jews was the way I grew up," says Mr. Uhry, of German-Jewish origin himself, standing in his kitchen on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, waiting for the coffee to finish. The division he refers to was between the highly assimilated German Jews in Atlanta, who preferred their own company to that of Eastern European Jews, who immigrated to America decades later and who were less assimilated.

"Everyone thinks Jews are all the same," Mr. Uhry says, "but we didn't think so in the South. People were uncomfortable with being Jewish there. The way I was brought up, the best thing to be was Episcopalian. In our temple the music was Christmas hymns. I was brought up with Christmas trees, Easter egg hunts -- and my Jewish face."

Mr. Uhry, 60, continues: "I was interested in writing about a prejudice that for all practical purposes is gone. And I had never seen it written about." The prejudice was so strong, he says, that some German Jews would even call Eastern European Jews "kikes." "When I was growing up the word 'kike' was not bandied around in my household, but they sure said it."

He pours the coffee, offering some to his wife, Joanna Kellogg Uhry, an assistant professor of education at Fordham University, who is tapping at a computer in an adjoining room. "I did the great thing and married an Episcopalian," he says, grinning. The couple have four grown daughters who were raised Unitarian. "We finally have a seder now," Mr. Uhry says. "I went to Israel in 1992, which really woke up in me that it was nothing to be ashamed of. It's embarrassing to admit you're ashamed of being Jewish all your life." He looks uncomfortable. "At the end it was not a prejudice but an ignorance, a hole where the Judaism should be."

He leads the way into the living room, filled with plants, paintings, family pictures and books, settling into the corner of the couch. Mr. Uhry is an earnest man who tries to answer questions completely and honestly. His expression tends toward the yearning. He'd like to be right. He'd like to be liked. He's the kind of man anyone would want as their uncle or their next-door neighbor or even their pharmacist. You can tell him things.

And during the run of "Ballyhoo" in Atlanta, people did. "One man came up and, talking about German Jews, said: 'We were superior. We were better educated, knew our way around better.'" Mr. Uhry shakes his head. "German Jews couldn't make it into any Christian clubs," he says. "But everyone thinks they're better than somebody."

MR. UHRY SPENT YEARS figuring that everyone in the theater was better than he. After graduating from Brown University in 1958, where he says he became "fixated" on musical theater, he came to New York with his writing partner, Bob Waldman, and worked for the composer Frank Loesser, who was also a music publisher.

"We wrote jingles and stuff and a couple of theme songs for TV," Mr. Uhry recalls. "I had a semi-aptitude for writing lyrics but I really didn't like it that much." He found that he preferred updating scripts of old musicals, which he did for the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut. "I loved that job," he says. "I was

making up these old shows that were virtually unplayable." Unfortunately, in the case of "Little Johnny Jones," starring Donny Osmond, the critics also found his version virtually unplayable. He kept on, without much success, while teaching English and drama at the Calhoun School, a private school in Manhattan. The good news was that his book for the Broadway musical "The Robber Bridgroom" earned him a Tony Award nomination in 1976. The bad news was that it was the same year as "A Chorus Line." He lost.

Why did he spend so much time and effort on musicals, anyway? He smiles. "I was brought to New York often when I was growing up," he says. "My father was in the furniture business so he needed to come here and my mother liked the theater. It seemed like heaven to me. Bob Waldman and I met each other the year 'My Fair Lady' opened. The musical as a form was riding high then. But I didn't set my sights high enough. I was shy about my own feelings. Maybe it was partly my Southern upbringing. I never said what I meant, never wanted the spotlight on myself. I wanted to be in the arts, but be invisible in the arts." A goal he was achieving all too well. Did he ever think of chucking it all? Maybe going back to law school? "I think I felt like I didn't want to be bitter," he says. "I thought if it didn't happen for me I'd be a teacher. Now that I think about it, I frankly didn't know what I was missing. I thought, I've got my children, my wife, my health. I was nominated for a Tony. I thought it was enough. I just wanted one last chance to write something."

Around that time, he says, his friend, Jane Harmon, one of the producers of "Ballyhoo," wanted to bring a play to New York that had a white and a black character. "I read it and said, 'I could write a better play than that.' I didn't think I knew how to write a play, actually. All the scenes were three pages long. I was waiting for the song to come. But it always sort of had this light around it. It certainly changed my life."

"Driving Miss Daisy" ran for more than three years Off Broadway, toured nationally and played in 23 countries. In 1990, the film version starring Jessica Tandy and Morgan Freeman won the Oscar for best picture and Mr. Uhry won the Oscar for best adaptation of a screenplay, beating out "Born on the Fourth of July" and "Field of Dreams."

It's almost like getting hit by lightning. He nods. "Wasn't it in 'Broadcast News,' when one of the characters says, 'What happens when your fantasies don't equal reality?'" Though the film of "Driving Miss Daisy" grossed \$143 million worldwide, Mr. Uhry's lifestyle has barely changed. "We've lived in the same apartment since 1963," he says. "We bought our house in Litchfield County, Conn., in the late 60's, but now it has a pool."

He strokes Cougar, a 15-year-old cat, who has cuddled next to him on the couch. She was rescued as a kitten by his youngest daughter who discovered some boys in her class had put him on a stereo turntable and broken his tail. He purrs contentedly as Mr. Uhry pets him.

"I'm glad it all didn't happen earlier," he says. "I think in a way people pretty much get what they want. If you're a kvetch all the time, that's what you like the most. Inside yourself you live the way you want to. And I guess I wanted to do all that stuff more than I wanted to be a writer. If I hadn't written 'Driving Miss Daisy' and been a teacher I would not have been less happy. But I would have been less fulfilled."

Still, talk about pressure. His first and only nonmusical play winning a Pulitzer doesn't leave much room for improvement. He nods. "I was always thinking maybe I just lucked out. But after 'Ballyhoo,' I feel like I did it. I wanted to know myself that I didn't write just one play. I knew it seemed pretty chicken not to write another one. 'Driving Miss Daisy' is not going to happen again."

The reaction to his accomplishments has been predictably mixed. "I found that for a while it was really hard to be with most people. They resented this. They didn't say it but it wasn't comfortable. When I met new people they saw me as this thing instead of just me. I like people who liked me before."

Part of his success comes from his steady work over the last 10 years as a screenwriter. Besides "Driving Miss Daisy," he has written "Mystic Pizza" and "Rich in Love" -- even a version of "The Bridges of Madison County." "The scary part is that after you read the book for the third time it's not so bad," he says, laughing. Among the theater people pleased about his success is Andre Bishop of Lincoln Center Theater, who had been the artistic director of Playwrights Horizons when he decided to produce "Driving Miss Daisy."

Mr. Bishop recalls that the director Gerald Gutierrez brought him the play. "He and Alfred knew each other from Goodspeed," Mr. Bishop says, "and Alfred was a subscriber at Playwrights. He was too embarrassed to bring it to me himself. I read it all in one gulp on my sofa and I thought, 'This thing is just going to work.' It's the only time I've ever known it."

In addition to "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," Mr. Uhry is once again trying a musical. This one is with Harold Prince, called "Parade," based on the Leo Frank case of a New York Jew living in Atlanta, who was wrongly convicted of murder and lynched in 1915.

ATLANTA AGAIN. HE NODS, though he points out that his next movie, for Morgan Freeman, is set in Memphis. "But it's always Southern, and why not?" he says easily. "I'm Southern."

Besides being set in the South, both "Driving Miss Daisy," which explored the 25-year relationship between a Jewish woman and her black chauffeur, and "The Last Night of Ballyhoo" are shaped by the theme of divisiveness.

Mr. Freeman, currently working on a movie in Los Angeles, says that in "Driving Miss Daisy," "the divisiveness is not in the play but in the fabric of the system Alfred is writing about. You can see all the notes but they don't seem to be on the page to me. I was just astounded at how you can pass the written word and hear the music. Alfred is so good with dialogue, and when you're good you don't say everything with words."

Mr. Uhry's father died when he was 18 but his mother is still alive. "She thought I could walk on water," he says fondly. "All that lunacy I did, my mother encouraged me. I was raised around a lot of women. I would play with trucks on the floor and listen to the women talk. And I was always big on social currents, who was hot and who was not. I skipped class all the time. In 11th grade we were reading 'Hedda Gabler' and I said, 'This woman's pregnant.' And the teacher said 'We're not going to talk about that, it has nothing to do with it.' " He shakes his head, amused. 'In the South, what you say isn't as important as the way you say it. It's all layers. Words tend to be a filigree a lot of times."

Mr. Uhry still listens to women; he now has four granddaughters and one grandson, whom he holds in much higher esteem than he did himself as a child. His expression goes from pride to exasperation as the topics switch.

Why? What did he do that was so bad?

"I was just strange," he insists. "Completely unathletic. A little nut."

So, look at him now, a grown-up man. What ever happened to that side of him, all these years later?

He thinks a moment, stroking the cat. "I guess," he says, smiling slightly, "that's the side of me that writes plays."

Southern Jewish Angst as One-Liners

ALFRED UHRY'S "Last Night of Ballyhoo," a comic drama about intra ethnic Jewish prejudice in Atlanta, is set in 1939, and it often feels as if it had been written then. If your mind wanders during the production (and it might), you may find yourself thinking of an alternative cast of actors, all long dead.

Spring Byington, for example, would be just right for the eccentric, slow-minded faded belle; Fay Bainter could be her snappish sister-in-law; Lionel Barrymore, no doubt, would be the droll, avuncular type; and who else but John Garfield for the role of the brash young New Yorker with a social conscience?

It's not that this honorably intentioned play, which opened last night at the Helen Hayes Theater and is directed by Ron Lagomarsino, doesn't have a perfectly competent contemporary cast, which includes the redoubtable Dana Ivey (as the snappish one, of course).

Yet there are many moments when it seems to turn into two-dimensional, scratchy black-and-white before your eyes. You keep waiting for gauzy close-ups of teary faces or for a long mood shot showing a sun rising inspiringly above a speeding train.

This is a play, after all, in which a beaming fellow tells his girl when she asks him about their future: "Who knows, Sunshine? We got a whole lifetime to choose from!"

Other elements, it's true, set off different echoes. Much of the gently barbed, idiosyncratic Southern humor recalls a vintage episode of the television sitcom "Designing Women" (also set in Atlanta). The relationship between the disappointed, socially ambitious Boo (Ms. Ivey) and her fantasy-spinning misfit daughter, Lala (Jessica Hecht), evokes that of Amanda and Laura in "The Glass Menagerie." And Boo, considering a lifetime of thwarted expectations, conjures a whole decade of kitchen-sink drama when she says to her bachelor brother, Adolph (Terry Beaver): "I thought we were going to be happy when we grew up. What do you think happened?" Adolph, for the record, has his own archetypal moment when he suppresses tears over the memory of the young woman he once loved and never spoke a word to.

Mr. Uhry's one previous play, "Driving Miss Daisy," which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988, was a modest masterpiece of obliquely rendered sentimentality and social commentary. Here the author employs much more direct and conventional means that work more blatantly to elicit laughs and tears.

"Ballyhoo" isn't a clumsy work; on its own terms, it's a model of old-fashioned tailoring. And Mr. Uhry has a fascinating and incendiary subject in the self-hatred implicit in the social stratifications among Southern Jews, particularly given that the play is set on the eve of World War II. But the context in which he couches it can feel very treacly.

The Ballyhoo of the title is a big December social event, a series of parties that culminates in a dance at a country club whose membership is limited to the "right kind" of Jews. (That means their forebears came from Germany rather than Eastern Europe.)

The plot springs from the interfamilial rivalries engendered by the festivities, which coincide with the world premiere of "Gone With the Wind" in Atlanta. The hapless, fidgety Lala still needs a date.

Her pretty, self-assured and brainy cousin Sunny (Arija Bareikis) is already invited -- by Joe Farkas (Paul Rudd), a Brooklynite employed at her Uncle Adolph's bedding company -- and she doesn't even care about the dance itself, which she describes, in one of the play's more memorable lines, as just "a bunch of dressed-up Jews dancing around and wishing they could kiss their elbows and turn into Episcopalians."

That the young women are both staying in the house in which Boo and Adolph live with their sister-in-law Reba (Celia Weston), Sunny's mother, makes for confrontational dynamite. Voices will be raised, dresses torn, tears shed and old resentments dragged from the past before the family comes to terms with its hypocrisies.

Mr. Uhry, a native of Atlanta, obviously knows the sociology of the play's world. (And John Lee Beatty's impeccably detailed set is a savvy monument to middle-class majesty.) "Ballyhoo" is by far most interesting in defining the muddled layers of Jewish identity among its characters.

Boo, the arbiter of such matters, amusingly explains why her family is allowed to have a Christmas tree (it's like "a Halloween pumpkin") as long as it doesn't have a star on top.

The desperate, lonely Lala, planning her own novel a la "Gone With the Wind," tries to think of a name for a plantation, something "elegant and pure and Protestant." And when the short-tempered Boo refers to Joe, who is of Russian descent and honors Passover, as a "kike," the word lances the air like a poisoned arrow.

For the most part, however, the play's formulaic nature eclipses its social content, especially in its second act.

The characters are drawn too neatly as sets of temperamental opposites. And under Mr. Lagomarsino's efficient

but unimaginative direction, the actors, who also include Stephen Largay as Lala's fatuous suitor, fare better with the play's comedy than with its more intense emotional moments.

Ms. Ivey is funny indeed, briskly telling her daughter why she didn't get into the right sorority at college. ("I told you to think of some peppy and interesting topics to discuss.") And Ms. Weston brings a winning, distractedly languorous comic timing to observations like, "She makes every stitch of her clothes by hand . . . except, of course, her girdles and her brassieres."

Even these lines have an air of *deja vu*, however. There's no doubting that "Ballyhoo" is a sincere, good-hearted work, but it almost never feels spontaneous. Despite its provocative subject, its form is the theatrical equivalent of comfort food, something for those who like their nostalgia repackaged in the guise of something new.

By FELICIA R. LEE

Published: December 17, 2007

“Are you Jewish?” is a question often lobbed at Jamie Kastner, a Toronto filmmaker and writer. Why do you want to know?, he asks in a film that flings the question back as he moves around the globe — New York, London, Jerusalem, Paris, Berlin — to engage a widely varied cast of characters about the meanings of Jewishness. With the deliberately provocative and potentially offensive title “Kike Like Me,” his documentary is to have its television premiere in this country Monday night at 10 on the Sundance Channel.

The film, which Mr. Kastner wrote, directed and produced, is what he calls “a black comic road movie about identity.” On that road the curly-haired, 35-year-old Mr. Kastner meets friendly Lubavitcher Jews in Brooklyn, who beam as he dons tefillin, boxes containing Scriptural passages, as well as young Arabs in the diverse Paris suburb of Sarcelles who say that if he is a Jew “we don’t like you.” Mr. Kastner asks the young men to consider him as an individual, but they resort to a series of insults.

“It would be a good time to leave Sarcelles before I get a second circumcision,” Mr. Kastner says in one of his frequently sarcastic voice-overs, leaving what had devolved into a shouting match on a sidewalk. Mr. Kastner also interviews the conservative pundit Patrick J. Buchanan (who abruptly ends the meeting) about his views on Jewish neo-conservatives and their ties to Israel. In Israel he chats with A. B. Yehoshua, the novelist and playwright, who rhapsodizes about life there, prompting this voice-over from Mr. Kastner: “I don’t know. I kind of like life in the Diaspora.”

His tone darkens as the road trip ends at the concentration camp museum at Auschwitz. Mr. Kastner wonders if the museum bar serves Manischewitz wine and angrily mutters, “It’s strange to have it preserved here like some kind of movie set for our benefit,” observing the tourists eating as they wander among the death ovens. There is more to Mr. Kastner’s filmed ramble than meets the eye, though, enough to stir up clouds of controversy before it ever reached television screens in this country. Although he tells everyone on the road that he is a Jew, he never says whether he really is Jewish.

If that conceit is not enough, there’s the film’s title, which some people have found objectionable. Mr. Kastner explains it as a play on “Black Like Me,” the 1961 book by John Howard Griffin about a white man who disguises himself as black to examine racism. He also calls it an “ironic wink” at how some elements in Jewish pop culture have appropriated slurs as well as a fair representation of offensive views that are still current. Non-Jews seemed more uncomfortable with the title than Jews, he said.

“I’ve always seen this not as a film for Jews particularly or about Jews but about identity, about what it means to be an outsider,” Mr. Kastner said in a recent phone interview. “There are certain issues for those who are perceived as other. One tries to gauge where the asker is coming from.”

He said of questions about his religion: “Do you want to blame me for Israel? Do you want to set me up with your daughter? So why do you want to know? What is it in yourself, audience, that you are prejudging?” At its premiere in April at the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival in Toronto, the film became the best-attended and one of the most talked about, said Sean Farnel, the festival programming director. It was contentious and divisive, Mr. Farnel said, with the title a starting point for a vigorous debate that drew in the audience, industry insiders and festival programmers.

A long interview with Mr. Kastner in The Jerusalem Report last month concluded that “an informal poll revealed that Jews viewing the film seem to have it figured out,” a reference to Mr. Kastner’s religion. For “Like Me,” Mr. Kastner included scenes from the 1947 film “Gentleman’s Agreement,” in which Gregory Peck plays a Gentile journalist who impersonates a Jew for an article on anti-Semitism. Unlike Mr. Peck’s character, Mr. Kastner said his concept stemmed from being continually asked if he was Jewish because of his looks or his name.

“What kind of time is this to answer that question?” Mr. Kastner says in the film, his first feature-length documentary. He teases the audience with hints about his identity: his circumcision, his attendance at Catholic boarding school, a photograph of his blond mother and one of his dark-haired bride on their wedding day. Mr. Kastner, who has also worked as a newspaper reporter, a television producer and a playwright and director, has steadfastly refused publicly to exit the religion closet. “The people close to me understand what I am doing,” he said, although one Jewish friend, who objected to his tone at Auschwitz, said the film had made it difficult to discern whether he was anti-Semitic.

His films include “Free Trade Is Killing My Mother,” a documentary about globalization, and “Djangomania!” about the fans of the jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt. “Like Me” was seen in June on the BBC’s “Storyville” series and has been shown in several film festivals, including Jewish ones in Toronto and Washington. Ten broadcasters around the world, including those in the Netherlands, Finland and Australia, snapped it up. Only CHUM Ltd., based in Toronto, changed the title, settling on “Jew Like Me.”

No one seemed bothered by the title at the Washington Jewish Film Festival, said its director, Joshua Ford. “I think he’s looking to see where there’s anti-Semitism still,” Mr. Ford said. Mr. Kastner shows that to be a Jew still matters in the 21st century, he added, even though “sometimes his glibness gets in the way” of making that point.

Mr. Kastner, however, was not so glib when asked what his road trip revealed. “The conclusion, such as it is, is depressing, really,” he said. “You’re pinned down potentially to what your worst enemy says you are, given the current state of identity. You become heir to the Auschwitz nightmare or the kid on the street who says ‘dirty Jew.’”

CHARACTERS

Adolph Freitag, a businessman, late 40s
Boo Levy, Adolph's sister, a few years older
Reba Freitag, Adolph's sister-in-law, middle 40s
Lala Levy, Boo's daughter, 20s
Sunny Freitag, Reba's daughter, 20
Joe Farkas, Adolph's business assistant, 20s
Peachy Well, a visitor from Lake Charles, 20s

TIME

December 1939

PLACE

Atlanta, Georgia

The action takes place in Adolph Freitag's house, at the Standard Club, and aboard the Crescent Limited.

A C T
ONE

SCENE ONE

Lights up on Adolph Freitag's house on Habersham Road. It is mid-December 1939. We see a portion of the living room, a hall with stairs leading to the bedroom floor, and a portion of the dining room beyond the hall. The house is vaguely Spanish—stucco with a tile roof, Moorish archways, wrought-iron railings, etc. The furnishings are many and heavy.

Lala Levy is decorating a Christmas tree in a corner of the living room, surrounded by cardboard boxes of ornaments. There are a few strings of Christmas tree lights strung across the furniture. Lala is an unsure, awkward young woman. There is a slightly desperate air about her.

Reba Freitag, Lala's aunt, is on the sofa, knitting a sweater. Reba is in her middle forties, a pretty, vague woman, not quite in synch with everybody else.

LALA (*Singing as she decorates*):

Nooo-eIII

Nooo-eIII

Nooo-eIII

Nooo-elll

Born is the King of Israel!

REBA: Lala?

LALA: Yes?

REBA: I forgot what a sweet singing voice you have.

LALA: Thank you, Auntie.

REBA: Like a little bird.

(Beulah "Boo" Levy enters from the hall, an apron over her sensible housedress. She is a serious woman, about fifty or so.)

BOO: Oh God!

LALA *(Singing)*:

They look-ed up and saw a star
Shining in the east beyond them—

BOO: Lala!

LALA: How do you like the tree so far, Mama?

BOO: Where did that star come from?

LALA: I bought it at Rich's.

BOO: Take it down!

LALA: Why?

BOO: Take it down this minute!

LALA: I like it.

BOO: Jewish Christmas trees don't have stars.

LALA: Why not?

BOO: You know perfectly well why not.

REBA: A star is a symbol of the birth of the Messiah.

LALA: Oh poeey.

BOO: If you have a star on the tree, you might as well go back on down to Rich's and buy a manger scene and stick it in the front yard.

LALA: I'd like that.

BOO: Fine. Then everybody that drives down Habersham Road will think we're a bunch of Jewish fools pretending we're Christian.

REBA *(Knitting away)*: Yes, they will.

LALA: What do you mean? We have a big Christmas tree right here in the front window!

BOO: A Christmas tree is another thing altogether. It's a festive decoration like a Halloween pumpkin or a Valentine heart. Everybody with any sense in their head knows that Christmas is just another American holiday if you leave out all that silly nonsense about Jesus being born. Now take down that star.

LALA: I wish you two could see yourselves!

REBA: Is my hair funny?

LALA: Atlanta is the center of the world tonight and you two are goin' at me over a Christmas tree ornament. We ought to be celebrating.

BOO: Celebrating what, I'd like to know.

LALA: My God, Mama! Clark Gable is less than five miles from this house right this very second.

BOO: And precisely what does that have to do with us?

REBA *(Checking her knitting)*: Drat!

LALA: Tonight is the most important event in the history of Atlanta!

BOO: For Margaret Mitchell, maybe. But not for me and certainly not for you.

REBA: I did something wrong. I'm never going to get this sweater finished in time for Sunny to take back to college!

LALA: Why certainly not for me?

BOO: You have other things to think about.

LALA: What.

BOO: Ballyhoo.

LALA: Ballyhoo is ages away.

BOO: Less than two weeks. And nobody's asked you.

LALA: I don't care!

BOO: I do.

LALA: Then get somebody to ask you! And leave me alone!

BOO: Phone Sylvan Weil in Lake Charles. That's all I ask.

LALA: Mama!

BOO: Well why not?

LALA: Girls don't ask boys to Ballyhoo.

BOO: I didn't say ask him. I said telephone him and after you've chatted for a while, you can inquire about his plans for the holidays—casually.

LALA: I don't care what his plans are for the holidays.

BOO: Of course you do. You and he are good friends.

LALA: We are not good friends. We are acquaintances.

BOO: Acquaintances? What about that house party at Myrtle Beach? And he's certainly all you talked about when you came home from Edith Asher's wedding in Birmingham last month.

LALA: He's all you talked about. "A Louisiana Weil! A Louisiana Weil! Finest family in the South. Weil Weil Weil Weil Weil."

BOO: There is nothing wrong with good bloodlines.

LALA: Maybe—if you're breedin' cocker spaniels.

BOO: I'm sure he's a lovely boy.

LALA: He's not very romantic.

BOO: Well, Lala, let's face it. Clark Gable is probably not going to ask you to Ballyhoo.

LALA: But somebody else just might.

BOO: Who?

LALA: Ferdie Nachman.

REBA: Oh, I wouldn't go around with him if I were you.

LALA: Why not?

REBA: His father picked his nose during his own wedding ceremony.

BOO: What does that have to do with anything?

REBA: I was a bridesmaid. I saw it. Dr. Solomon was just about to say the blessing and all of a sudden out of the corner of my eye, I saw Max Nachman take his index finger and—

BOO: Reba, for God's sake!

REBA: Well—*(She goes back to her knitting)*

BOO: Ferdie Nachman is four years younger than you.

LALA: So what?

BOO: You'd be a laughingstock.

LALA: Sez you!

BOO: Call Lake Charles!

LALA: I've got to get ready to go. *(She starts out of the room)*

BOO: Where are you going?

LALA: To town.

BOO: Town! For what?

LALA: The premiere.

BOO: You don't have a ticket to the premiere.

LALA: I don't care! I'll get to see everything.

BOO: You mean you're planning to go down there and stand out in the street?

LALA: Yes!

BOO: Are you crazy?

LALA: I want to feel the excitement in the crowd! To taste it! To smell it!

REBA: Why would you want to smell a lot of people you don't know?

BOO: She doesn't mean that literally, Reba.

REBA: Oh.

BOO: It's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of—running off downtown by yourself in the dark.

LALA: You don't understand. I have to.

BOO: Have to?

LALA: Yes.

BOO: Why?

LALA: Well, I might as well go ahead and tell you the news.

BOO: What news?

LALA: I'm writing a novel!

BOO: Oh my Lord!

LALA: It takes place in Atlanta during the Reconstruction period and the title is "Though Your Sins Be Scarlet"!

REBA: Well I swan! Good for you!

LALA: But now promise me y'all won't say a word about it to anybody until the publication date is set.

BOO: Publication date! How much of this novel have you written?

LALA: I know exactly how it's going to end, and I thought of the first sentence this afternoon. "From where she sat atop the weathered buckboard wagon, Ropa Ragsdale could see the charred and twisted remains of her beloved plantation."

REBA: Ropa Ragsdale!

LALA: My heroine—short for Europa. I found it in a book of poems. Anyway, that's why I have to go be at the premiere.

BOO: Exactly what is why?

LALA: Well, Mama! Obviously my novel will more than likely be made into a movie. So I need to go and see what all a premiere is like.

REBA: The child has a point, Boo.

BOO: She does not have a point. And I'll thank you to stay out of this. Lala, for the life of me I don't know why you waste your time with all this utter foolishness when you could easily do something so much more constructive.

LALA: Like what?

BOO: Phone that Weil boy in Lake Charles.

LALA: Mama!

BOO: I know what I'm talking about.

LALA: My novel is not foolishness!

BOO: Your novel does not exist and the Weil boy does.

REBA: Your Mama has a point.

BOO: You didn't listen to me up at the University of Michigan and look what happened. You got so humiliated—

LALA: That wasn't my fault.

REBA: It was that awful sorority.

BOO: The fault does not lie with Sigma Delta Tau. You didn't prepare for rush week.

LALA: Mama!

BOO: I told you to prepare some peppy and interesting topics to discuss, and of course you paid me no mind and look what happened. You were rejected.

LALA: I was accepted in A.E.Phi.

REBA: That's true.

BOO: Hah! A.E.Phi! Nobody but the other kind belongs to A.E.Phi and the whole world knows it.

LALA: I don't want to talk about it anymore.

BOO: You'd better. You keep making the same mistakes over and over! Your place in society sits there waiting for you and you do nothing about it.

LALA: Guess what, Mama? We're Jews. We have no place in society.

BOO: We most certainly do! Maybe not right up there at the tip-top with the best set of Christians, but we come mighty close. After all, your great-grandma's Cousin Clemmie was—

(*Here Lala joins in, and they say the next sentence together.*)

BOO AND LALA: The first white child born in Atlanta!

LALA: God knows I've had that information drilled into my skull enough times.

BOO: Then why hasn't it sunk in? Why won't you use your connections and your birthright to make something of yourself instead of mooning over nonsense like tree trimming and movie premieres?

LALA: Only you could manage to ruin Christmas and *Gone With the Wind* in one fell swoop. (*She rushes out of the room and up the stairs*)

REBA (*After a discreet silence*): Poor thing. I think she must be constipated.

BOO: Well, something is certainly the matter with her. I

mean, how hard can it be to pick up a telephone and place a call to Lake Charles, Louisiana?

REBA: Her head is full of that novel she's writing.

BOO: Reba, Lala is no more writing a novel than I am entering the Miss Georgia Beauty Contest.

REBA: Well, she said she was!

BOO: Yes. And last month she said she was making scripts for *Our Gal Sunday* to go on the radio. And before that she said she was becoming an illustrator for *The Saturday Evening Post*! I think she dreams up all that trash just to torture me! Doesn't she know that life is passing her by?

She's the only girl in her crowd not married.

REBA: The Dahlman girl isn't married.

BOO: Well, of course she's not married. How could she be married? She's in Milledgeville in the insane asylum!

REBA: People get married in insane asylums all the time.

BOO: That's jails, Reba. People get married in jails.

REBA: Oh.

BOO: And Babette Dahlman was never in Lala's crowd to begin with.

REBA: She most certainly was.

BOO: What? I ought to know who was and who wasn't in my own daughter's crowd.

REBA: Then how come you invited her to that Easter egg hunt you had for Lala at the club that time?

BOO: That was twenty years ago! They were two years old!

REBA: I don't want to talk about it anymore.

BOO: I blame Lala's whole situation on the red measles.

REBA: Unh-hunh.

BOO: She was the cutest little baby there ever was. She had so many birthday-party invitations in nursery school that I ran out of ideas for presents to give. And then, the first week of kindergarten, she came down with the red measles. The very first week! And of course by the time she was well enough to go back to school, all the popular children

had formed their attachments and no matter how she tried, or I tried for her, she was never able to catch up.

REBA: And she's such a sweet little thing!

BOO: Then why is she so unpopular?

REBA: Well, she gets herself so worked up when she's out in society. I think she scares people off.

BOO: And now this Ballyhoo business.

REBA: Heavens, Sunny doesn't have a date to Ballyhoo either, and I never give it a second thought.

BOO: Sunny has college to occupy her mind. I tell you, Reba, sometimes I can almost hear God sittin' up there in the sky giggling his head off at the joke he played on me.

REBA: I never thought of God playin' jokes.

BOO: Well, what else would you call it? You have a daughter bloomin' like a rose at Wellesley and I have a daughter who snuck home in disgrace from the University of Michigan in the middle of her first term. I was never so embarrassed in my life.

REBA: She said she was homesick.

BOO: And luckily everybody in Atlanta believed it.

REBA: Luckily? It's common knowledge that homesickness is a serious problem in your family.

BOO: It is not!

REBA: What? You were so homesick on your wedding trip that DeWald had to bring you back home from Point Clear five days early.

BOO: That's the silliest thing I ever heard in all my life. DeWald was called home for a business meeting.

REBA: I know that's what you said to everybody, but your mother told me the truth.

BOO: What truth?

REBA: Didn't I ever tell you this? The day before your brother and I married, your mother said to me, "Now, Rebecca, I don't want you making a fool of yourself on your wedding trip and mortifying everybody in the

family like Beulah did." And of course I didn't. Simon and I stayed our full two weeks at Tybee Island.

BOO: Yes. And Simon told Mama what happened on your wedding night. And Mama repeated it to me.

REBA: I don't know what you're talking about.

BOO: Simon told Mama he came to get in the bed with you on your wedding night and you were sitting there with a thermometer stuck in your mouth.

REBA: I felt flushed. I didn't want him to catch anything.

BOO: Talk about making a fool of yourself on your wedding trip!

REBA: What are you doing?

BOO: What do you mean what am I doing?

REBA: Well, look at you. You're just throwing clumps of tinsel at that poor tree. It's supposed to go on strand by strand.

BOO: Thank you. I didn't realize I had the honor of decorating with a tinsel expert.

(Adolph Freitag enters the hall. He is a man in his late forties, soft body, hard mind—a pillar of the business community. He wears a double-breasted suit and a white-on-white monogrammed shirt. He carries a briefcase and the evening paper.)

ADOLPH: Evenin'.

BOO: Evenin', Adolph.

ADOLPH: Tree looks fine.

REBA: Thank you, kind sir.

ADOLPH: Star's a new addition.

BOO: Ain't it grand? Compliments of Lala. Don't worry. We had words about it and it's coming down.

ADOLPH: I like it.

BOO: Oh, Adolph. You do not.

ADOLPH: Sorry. I keep forgetting. You know the inner workings of my mind better than I do. Do I smell noodle soup?

BOO: You smell Brunschwick stew.

ADOLPH: Good. We've got company.

REBA: Company?

ADOLPH: Asked a fulla home from the office.

BOO: You know Louisa's been out sick all week! You could have phoned me.

ADOLPH: We'll manage.

BOO: We will, will we? What time is he coming?

(The front doorbell rings. Adolph admits Joe Farkas, a vigorous young man in his twenties. He has a New York accent.)

ADOLPH: Joe Farkas. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Freitag.

JOE *(Shaking Reba's hand)*: How are ya.

ADOLPH: And my sister, Mrs. Levy.

JOE *(Shaking Boo's hand)*: How are ya.

BOO: How do you do.

JOE: No complaints!

BOO: Is this your first visit to Atlanta, Mr. Farkas?

ADOLPH: He ain't visiting, Boo. He's working for me.

BOO: Since when?

ADOLPH: Few weeks ago.

BOO: I see. *(To Joe)* My brother's real good at separating the family business from the family. He keeps everything concerning the Dixie Bedding Corporation a deep, dark secret. He thinks we're too stupid to understand anything.

JOE: Maybe he's just protecting you.

ADOLPH: Maybe I'm just protecting the Dixie Bedding Corporation.

BOO: You might ask my brother sometimes who worked like an Egyptian slave when the company first started.

ADOLPH: I bet he can guess.

JOE: You were at Dixie Bedding?

BOO: Until I married.

JOE: Oh yeah? Doin' what?

BOO: Probably just about what you're doing now. *(To Adolph)* Am I allowed to know what Mr. Farkas does, or is it too complicated for my tiny brain to grasp?

JOE: Joe, if you don't mind.

ADOLPH: He's gonna do some traveling for me, look in at some of the stores, take care of a few things here.

BOO: I see. My brother obviously has plans for you, young man.

JOE: Joe.

REBA: You surely picked an exciting time to be in Atlanta, Mr. Farkas. *(She catches herself)* Joe.

JOE: Yeah. They were putting up police barricades all over the place downtown tonight. That must be some movie they got there!

REBA: We have tickets for this Sunday afternoon!

JOE: No foolin'!

BOO: What part of New York City are you from, Joe?

JOE: You got a good ear, Mrs. Levy! Eastern Parkway.

BOO: Mmm-hmmm.

REBA: Now I wonder if you know my cousin Nellie Nadler from Charleston. She's married to a man named Charles Himmelfarb and they live at eleven-o-six Madison Avenue. I always remember that because Nellie's birthday is November the sixth. Eleven-six and eleven-six.

BOO: I believe Eastern Parkway is in Brooklyn, Reba.

JOE: Right again.

REBA: Oh.

BOO: He couldn't possibly know your cousin Nellie.

JOE: I don't know her, Mrs. Freitag, but I bet she's a nice lady.

REBA: She is. And she makes every stitch of her clothes by hand, except her girdles and her brassieres.

BOO *(To Reba)*: Reba, I need you in the kitchen.

REBA: Our cook has been home sick all week.

JOE: I hope I'm not causing you too much trouble.

REBA: Oh no!

BOO *(With a look at Adolph)*: None whatsoever.

(Boo and Reba go through the dining room and offstage.)

ADOLPH: Piece of the paper, Joe?

JOE: Thanks.

(Adolph sits in his easy chair and picks up the front section of the paper. He hands the second section to Joe. Adolph opens his section and disappears behind it. The huge banner headline deals with the Cone With the Wind opening. Joe looks at his section of the paper, ill at ease.)

JOE *(After a bit)*: I'm afraid I got a confession to make to ya, Mr. A.

ADOLPH *(Behind his newspaper)*: Oh yeah? What's that?

JOE: I'm a little bit out of my element here.

ADOLPH: Element?

JOE: Um, this *Cone With the Wind* stuff.

(Adolph lowers his paper, peers at Joe.)

ADOLPH: You never read *Cone With the Wind*?

JOE: Um, no. Unh-unh.

ADOLPH: A man after my own heart.

JOE: You didn't either?

ADOLPH: Well, I flipped through a few pages a couple times, but I never could make myself get the hang of it.

JOE: No kidding.

ADOLPH: Don't tell anybody.

JOE: You bet.

ADOLPH: Settled at the Y all right?

JOE: Yessir. Thanks for the tip. Even found a couple guys to play handball with.

ADOLPH: Good.

JOE: 'Course my mom wasn't too thrilled about a nice Jewish boy living at the Young Men's Christian Association.

ADOLPH: Yeah?

JOE: I told her "Relax, Ma. Whaddaya think, they put con- version powder in the tap water?"

(Lala comes down the steps, dressed to go out. Joe jumps to his feet.)

ADOLPH: Joe Farkas, new fulla works at the office. Lala, my niece.

JOE: Good to see ya.

LALA: Hey.

ADOLPH: You off somewhere?

LALA: The world premiere.

ADOLPH: By yourself?

LALA: Honestly, Uncle Adolph! 'Course not! Eugene Selig and Harold Lillienthal both asked me. I couldn't make up my mind which one to pick, so we're all three going together.

ADOLPH: I see. Well, it's too bad Joe didn't know in time. He's a big fan of *Gone With the Wind*!

LALA: Really?

JOE: Your uncle is teasing. Truth is, I haven't gotten around to reading it yet.

LALA: I bet you're the only person in this town who can say that.

ADOLPH: Absolutely.

JOE: Sounds like you got an exciting evening ahead of you.

LALA: Yes.

JOE: The premiere and everything.

LALA: I tell you what. Let's you and I eat here with the folks and then we can go downtown together and see all the celebrities come out when the movie's over.

JOE: I wonder what your two boyfriends would say to that?

LALA: Gene and Harold? Fiddle dee dee! They can just have a date with each other, for all I care.

JOE: Gee, you shouldn't do that on my account.

(Reba, carrying dishes of food, comes into the dining room from the kitchen. She puts the dishes on the table.)

REBA *(Calling)*: Supper's served!

(Adolph puts his newspaper down and walks into the dining room, where he begins to pick from the serving dishes with his fingers. Boo enters with more food. Lala and Joe walk toward the table.)

LALA: I never met a Farkas before.

JOE: Yeah. I seem to be a rare bird down here.

LALA: Is that a New York City name?

JOE: More or less.

LALA: Oh good! You must know all the smart supper clubs in Manhattan.

JOE: Well, truth is, I—

LALA: What's your favorite?

JOE: Never been to one in my life.

LALA: I need to know. I'll more than likely be going to New York very soon.

JOE: No kidding. What for?

(Boo sees Adolph picking at the serving dishes and slaps his hand.)

BOO: Stop that!

LALA: To meet with publishers about the novel I'm writing.

BOO: Oh my God!

ADOLPH: Let's eat.

REBA *(Raising her water glass)*: Welcome to Atlanta, Joe!

(Lights out.)

JOE: What?

LALA (*With reverence*): Habersham Hall! Isn't that beautiful? Habersham Hall!

JOE: Unh-hunh. After your street here.

LALA: I wasn't thinking of it that way, but yes! Of course! This is just about the best address in Atlanta. Did you know that?

JOE: Not really.

LALA: You have only to look at the mailboxes up and down this street and you'll see half the membership of the Junior League!

JOE: Huh!

LALA: I'll have you know that we are the only Jews on Habersham Road except for one house way on the other side of Paces Ferry, where it gets tacky.

JOE: Um, you think your uncle is okay?

LALA: Of course. He's just having what we call his pre-snooze snooze. He does this all the time.

JOE: I'm not surprised if they always feed him like that.

REBA (*From the dining room*): We know good food in this house. Nobody would deny that.

JOE: I sure wouldn't.

REBA: Neither would my Sunny.

JOE: Sonny?

REBA: My daughter.

JOE: Daughter?

REBA: That's right.

JOE: Sonny's a boy's name in my neighborhood.

REBA: Not that kind of Sonny. (*She points straight up*) That kind of Sunny. Because she was born in the middle of a terrible storm.

JOE: I don't get it.

REBA: Well, we certainly couldn't name her Cloudy, could we?

JOE: Um, no. I guess not.

SCENE TWO

When the lights come up again, it is an hour later. Dinner is over.

Reba is making trips on- and offstage from the dining room, clearing the table. Lala and Joe are in the living room. Adolph is back in his easy chair with the newspaper, dozing.

LALA: Do you want to hear it?

JOE: Uh, sure.

LALA: "From where she sat atop the weathered buckboard wagon, Ropa Ragsdale could see the charred and twisted remains of her beloved plantation."

JOE: Good. Real good.

LALA: At first I had "old family home," but I think "beloved plantation" has more charm, don't you think?

JOE: Right.

LALA: Except I need a name for the plantation. Something elegant and pure and real Protestant. (*She thinks a minute*) I think I have it!

(Boo enters the living room, taking off her apron.)

BOO: Louisa just better come back to work tomorrow. That's all I have to say.
JOE: I would've been glad to help, Mrs. Levy. I know my way around the kitchen pretty well.
BOO: You?
JOE: Yes ma'am.
BOO: Who ever head of such a thing?
JOE: Oh, my mom had me and my brothers drying dishes soon as we could stand on a stool and reach the sink.
LALA: That's adorable.
BOO: If you want half your china broken.
JOE: We all cook too. She taught us to make a few staples from the old country.
LALA: Old country?
JOE: Russia, Poland, Hungary. My family came from everywhere.
BOO: Adolph has never crossed the threshold of a kitchen in his life. Except to pick out of the icebox in the middle of the night.
ADOLPH: Ain't I the limit?

(Reba finishes in the dining room and comes into the living room.)

REBA: There. That's all of it.
JOE: Why isn't your daughter here, Mrs. Freitag?
REBA: She's away at school.
LALA: Wellesley.
JOE: Really?
LALA: She got the brains. I got the moxie.
JOE: Oh, a little bird tells me you went to college, too.
LALA *(Suddenly panicked)*: What?
JOE: College.

LALA: College? Who told you about that?
JOE: About what?

BOO: Lala attended the University of Michigan for a short time, but she missed all the social goings-on here so much that home she came.

LALA: Yes. Home I came.

BOO: And we were thrilled to have her.

REBA: Tell me, Joe, will be going up to your home for Christmas?

JOE: No ma'am. My boss there keeps me hoppin' too much for that. But it's okay. My family doesn't celebrate Christmas.

BOO: I see.

JOE: I'll be home for Pesach, though.

LALA: Pesach?

JOE: Passover.

BOO: You remember, Lala. That time we went to the seder supper with one of Daddy's business acquaintances. I believe their name was Lipzin. They lived over on Boulevard or somewhere. You were in the sixth grade. It was very interesting.

LALA: I was in the fifth grade, and I spilled a glass of red wine all over the tablecloth.

JOE: Right. One of us does that almost every year. Part of the ritual.

LALA: You have to sit through one of those boring things every single year? One night of all that ish-kabibble was enough to last me the rest of my life.

BOO: Now, Lala. Be tolerant.

JOE: I sit through two every year. First night at Aunt Sadie's. Second night at home.

LALA: Poor baby!

JOE: Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss either one of 'em for anything in the world.

REBA: Now, they have those in the spring, don't they?

JOE: Yes ma'am. That's right. March or April.
LALA: Good. Then you'll be here for Ballyhoo.
BOO: Lala!

JOE: What's Ballyhoo?

LALA: What's Ballyhoo? Why, Joe! What a question! But of course you are a Yankee!

REBA: The young people come from all over the South.

LALA: Savannah and Chattanooga and Charleston.

REBA: Even Richmond and New Orleans.

JOE: I got it. Like a convention.

LALA: Oh no.

REBA: Not at all like a convention. No name tags, or talks or business meetings of any kind.

LALA: Hayrides and weenie roasts and parties, and, the last night, a dance.

JOE: Don't say!

REBA: It all started in Macon.

BOO: It started in Gulfport.

REBA: I happen to know it started in Macon. Matille Lowenstein was there.

BOO: Of course she was there. She's always there. She lives in Macon.

REBA: A bunch of young people were having a picnic on Matille's sister-in-law's side porch after the second daughter's wedding to that Kriegsauber boy from Chattanooga the summer after the war ended. I believe it was the Fourth of July weekend, and Matille told me they were enjoying each other so much that they decided they would all get together again in Atlanta at Christmastime.

BOO: Matille Lowenstein is a known liar.

REBA: Why, Boo! She was in my confirmation class! She's a lovely girl.

BOO: Matille Lowenstein isn't worth the gunpowder it would take to blow her up. It started in Gulfport after

Mr. Nathan Solomon's ninety-fifth birthday party. It was all his grandchildren and the Rosenheim boys that thought it up.

REBA: It started in Macon.

BOO: Adolph? Adolph? *(She shakes him awake)*

ADOLPH: What?

BOO: Tell this young man where Ballyhoo started.

(Adolph looks at Boo for a minute.)

ADOLPH: What the hell would he care about a stupid thing like that?

LALA: Oh, I think he might care a little. Am I right, Joe?

JOE: Well yeah. It's very interesting.

LALA: 'Specially if you're planning on going this year.

JOE: Going? Oh. Say, it must be gettin' late.

LALA: Silly! It's not even nine o'clock! The movie's still on. We have oodles of time to drive downtown and see the stars come out! And then we can meet the crowd at the Ansley Roof.

JOE: You know, that sounds like a lotta fun, Lala. But I got a train to catch at six-thirty in the morning, so I better call it a night.

LALA: But—

BOO: No, sugar pie. You heard Mr. Farkas. He has a train to catch in the morning and all the important Dixie Bedding Company business to attend to. He really must be going. *(To Joe)* So good to have met you.

JOE: Yeah. Great meal, Mrs. Levy. You too, Mrs. Freitag. 'Night, Mr. A.

ADOLPH: Have a safe trip, Joe.

JOE: So long, Lala. 'Night, all.

(Joe exits. A momentary silence.)

REBA: Well now, never you mind.

LALA (*Trying to stay calm*): Mind? Mind what? I believe I'll go on up to my room and see what's on the radio. (*She goes out into the hall*) Stop looking at me. (*She runs up the stairs*)

BOO: Adolph, that kike you hired has no manners.

(*Lights out.*)

SCENE THREE

In the dark, we hear the voice of a railroad conductor.

CONDUCTOR: Baltimore. The stop is Baltimore. Baltimore coming up!

(*Lights up on a small sleeping compartment of the Crescent Limited, five days later. Sunny Freitag, twenty years old, is alone, reading a book. She is attractive, reserved.*)

There is a knock on her compartment door.)

SUNNY: Yes?

(*Joe enters, wearing a hat and a topcoat.*)

JOE: You Miss Freitag? Sunny Freitag?

SUNNY: Yes?

JOE: Joe Farkas. Pleased to meet you.

(He holds his hand out pleasantly. She shakes it warily.)

SUNNY: I—I don't understand.

JOE: Uncle Adolph asked me to look in on you.

SUNNY: What?

JOE: See if you need anything.

SUNNY: Oh. (A beat) Thank you.

JOE: What?

SUNNY: What?

JOE: What do you need?

SUNNY: Oh. Nothing.

JOE: Because he gave me a little extra cash to give you if—

SUNNY: No.

JOE: Sure?

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: Okay.

SUNNY: Thank you. (She goes back to her book, expecting him to leave)

JOE: What're you reading?

SUNNY: Um, *The Profits of Religion*. Upton Sinclair.

JOE: Upton Sinclair, huh? The glorious unwashed masses and the beauty of the working class. You really enjoy reading this stuff?

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: Eugene V. Debs too?

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: Oh boy!

SUNNY: What?

JOE: I sure didn't peg you for a Communist.

SUNNY: Reading Sinclair and Debs doesn't make a person a Communist.

JOE: You don't know my Uncle Velvel.

SUNNY: Uncle what?

JOE: Velvel.

SUNNY: Velvel?

JOE: Jewish for William.

SUNNY: Oh. Well, I'm not a Communist.

JOE: That's a relief!

SUNNY: I'm a sociology major.

JOE: Wellesley, I know.

SUNNY: Who told you?

JOE: Your family. I work for Mr. A.

SUNNY: Mr. A.?

JOE: Uncle Adolph.

SUNNY: In Baltimore?

JOE: Atlanta.

SUNNY: You don't sound like Atlanta.

JOE: Sorry.

SUNNY: No! I didn't mean—I just—never mind.

JOE: You do.

SUNNY: I do what?

JOE: Sound like Atlanta. It's nice.

SUNNY (Embarrassed): Oh.

JOE: So I happened to be in town here on a little business and Mr. A. said would I mind giving you a look-see in case you needed something. What's the matter?

SUNNY: Nothing.

JOE: Come on.

SUNNY: It boggles the mind.

JOE: What?

SUNNY: I'm a junior at Wellesley with an A-minus average and Uncle Adolph still treats me like a baby.

JOE: Why do you say that?

SUNNY: He doesn't even think I can take a train home by myself.

JOE: Oh, I think he just loves you a lot. And I really did just happen to be in Baltimore. So how come the minus?

SUNNY: What?

JOE: You mentioned your average was A minus.
SUNNY: I had trouble with zoology last year. What was yours?
JOE: Zero. Didn't go. Well, I did, kind of. I went to art school.
SUNNY: Don't they have grades in art school?
JOE: I guess. I was only there for five weeks.
SUNNY: Why?
JOE: My father died. I had to go to work.
SUNNY: Oh no! I'm so sorry!
JOE: Yeah. Well, it was a long time ago.
SUNNY: I hope you kept up with your artwork.
JOE: When I get the chance. I guess you've got a lot lined up over Christmas vacation.
SUNNY: A lot of work.
JOE: So you won't be going to this Ballyhoo thing?
SUNNY: Did Uncle Adolph tell you about that?
JOE: No. Your cousin, Lala.
SUNNY: Really?
JOE: Yeah, and she was dropping plenty of hints.
SUNNY: Hints?
JOE: I think she wants me to take her.
SUNNY: Oh. And?
JOE: I pretty well sidestepped the issue.
SUNNY: You were smart.
JOE: How's that?
SUNNY: Ballyhoo is asinine.
JOE: Yeah? Why?
SUNNY: Oh, you know, a lot of dressed-up Jews dancing around, wishing they could kiss their elbows and turn into Episcopaltians.
JOE: Sounds pretty terrible.
SUNNY: It is.
JOE: Wanna go with me?
CONDUCTOR: (*Offstage*) All aboard! All aboard.

(*Joe moves toward the door.*)

JOE: Word is I'm a good dancer.
SUNNY: I'm not.
JOE: Baloney. I gotta get to work. Think it over.

(*He smiles, leaves. She looks after him.*
Lights fade.)

REBA: And what did she say?
BOO: She said no she was walking up the right driveway because she works for the Arkwrights now.
REBA: How can she work for them when she works for us?
BOO: What is the matter with you, Reba? She doesn't work for us. She quit! That's what I'm telling you.
REBA: Oh. *(She thinks about this for a second)* Why?
BOO: I asked her. I said, "Why?" And she looked me in the face cold as ice and she said, "You know exactly why." And then she said to tell you hey and that she knows she has your red umbrella and she'll get it back to you.

REBA: How sweet.

BOO: Sweet? You'll never see that umbrella again as long as you're walking on this earth! I can promise you that! Louisa is a liar! Standing there in the street right up next to my face and telling me I know why she snuck off and abandoned us. I have no idea in the world what she was talking about!

REBA: Well—

BOO: Well what?

REBA: You did accuse her of stealing pocket change off of Adolph's bureau. I heard you.

BOO: I did no such thing. I merely pointed out to her that the money was missing and inquired politely if she knew what had happened to it.

REBA: All right, then.

BOO: Louisa is probably over there telling the Arkwrights all kinds of stories about us right this very minute. And Mary Grace Arkwright already looks at me like I have horns and a tail! I don't know how I'm ever going to be able to go down the driveway again.

REBA: I think you have to give Louisa more credit. I'm sure she will have something nice to say about your peach ice cream. She's crazy about your peach ice cream.

SCENE FOUR

The Freitag house. It's 8 A.M. the following morning. A pile of wrapped presents is under the Christmas tree, which is now minus its star. The remains of breakfast are on the dining room table, where Adolph sits with his coffee, going over some paperwork. Reba, in a housecoat, is cleaning up.

Boo comes in from outdoors carrying the morning paper, which she hands to Adolph. She appears to be agitated.

BOO: I just saw Louisa.

REBA: Well praise be! I was afraid she would never recover.

BOO: Recover? Hah! She never was sick.

REBA: What are you talking about?

BOO: I saw her when I went down the driveway to pick up the *Constitution*. She was going up the Arkwrights' driveway across the street.

REBA: I don't understand. Why was she doing that?

BOO: That's what I asked her. I said, "Aren't you walking up the wrong driveway, Louisa?"

BOO: Well all I know is that it's four days before Christmas and we'll never find anybody worth having now.

REBA: I suppose.

BOO: We may never find anybody at all, what with Louisa running her big mouth to every single solitary maid, cook and chauffeur riding back and forth to work on the Peachtree Trolley with her.

REBA: Oh, I feel sure we'll be able to find somebody perfectly fine after the first of the year.

BOO: Yes. And you and I are stuck with all the picking up, all the cleaning, all the cooking and all the everything else in the meantime.

ADOLPH (*Calling from the dining room*): Why not?

BOO: Did you say something, Adolph?

ADOLPH: I said, why not? What else do you have to do so much? You ready to go, Reba?

REBA: I'm all dressed but my dress. (*She goes up the stairs and exits*)

BOO: What's the matter with you?

ADOLPH: This Hitler business in Poland. Ain't gonna turn out good.

BOO: Oh stop worryin' about Poland so much and give a thought to your own flesh and blood for a change.

ADOLPH: What are you talkin' about?

BOO: That was a fine something to say to me!

ADOLPH: What?

BOO: That I don't have anything better to do than take care of this house.

ADOLPH: Just speakin' the truth.

BOO: And another thing, I don't see why you have to go running off to meet Sunny at the train. Reba is perfectly capable of finding Brookwood Station by herself.

ADOLPH: I don't have to. I want to.

BOO: You never meet Lala.

ADOLPH: I would if she went somewhere.

BOO: She went to that wedding in Birmingham last month. You make it sound like all she does is lie up there on her bed and listen to the radio.

ADOLPH: You said that. I didn't.

BOO: Lala does plenty. She took that literature course at Agnes Scott last year. She volunteers at Eggleston Hospital when she can. She has that regular Thursday afternoon bridge game.

ADOLPH: Fine.

BOO: Sunny isn't a direct pipeline to the Lord Almighty, you know.

ADOLPH: Who said she was?

BOO: That's how you treat her.

ADOLPH: For God's sake, Beulah! Maybe you forgot how Simon looked after us all when Papa died.

BOO: He had to. He was the oldest.

ADOLPH: Maybe he had to support Mama, but he didn't have to put me all the way through Tech and Lord knows he didn't have to buy you that trousseau you raised such hell over and all that damn sterling silver.

That's when he was just getting Dixie Bedding started and I know for a fact that he didn't have two nickels to rub together. He must've borrowed and squeezed and cut all kind of corners. I know he worried himself sick over his obligations to all of us, and I know that's what landed him in Oakland Cemetery a good twenty-five years ahead of schedule and I'll be goddamned if I have to justify myself to you if I feel like meeting his daughter at the train when she comes home from college.

BOO: You get yourself so worked up. You'll be laying out there right beside Simon if you don't look out.

ADOLPH (*Calling upstairs*): Reba! Hurry it up! We don't want to be late!

REBA (*Offstage*): Right down.

BOO: Adolph! Calm down!

ADOLPH: I want to be there on time. Do you mind?

BOO: I mind how you do Lala. Her Daddy is every bit as dead and gone as Simon is.

ADOLPH: Yeah. Men don't stand much of a chance around here, do they?

BOO: And when I think of how you did him! Here you are fawning over that awful boy from Brooklyn—that Joe person—like he was the crown prince of Denmark and the only brother-in-law you ever had you treated like dirt.

ADOLPH: Beulah! That is not so!

BOO: Yes! You never gave DeWald a Chinaman's chance where Dixie Bedding was concerned. I always got better grades in arithmetic than—

ADOLPH: My God! Don't start bringin' all that—

BOO: Than either one of you. And what good did it do me? I was completely shut out of the business. Completely shut out!

ADOLPH: Did I ask you to marry and stay home! Did I ask you to have a baby? Did Simon? No. You did all that on your own without instructions from your brothers. And as for DeWald—we tried him in the front office. We tried him in sales. We tried him in the factory. You know that.

BOO: Maybe DeWald wasn't as smart as all of us, but he was a good man. And it was a shame how you two did him.

ADOLPH: Some shame! We damn well supported him most of his life.

BOO: Even now you can't say a decent word where he's concerned. It hurts my feelings.

(Reba comes down the stairs, dressed to go out.)

REBA: Do these shoes look funny?

BOO: No.

ADOLPH: Let's go, Reba.

REBA: Bye. *(She exits)*

ADOLPH: Boo?

BOO: What?

ADOLPH: DeWald had beautiful table manners.

BOO: That's more than anybody could ever say about you.

(He exits. After a moment, the telephone rings.)

BOO: Hello? What? This is Beulah Levy. Who is this? *(She listens. When she speaks again, it is with a much friendlier tone)* Sylvan Weil? Of course I know who you are, Sylvan! Your Aunt Ethel and I spent part of a summer together down at Point Clear! Oh, ages ago! Yes, we were just girls. Tell me, Sylvan, does she still have that limp? Well, bless her heart! Why, yes, Lala most certainly is at home. *(She calls in her most musical voice)* Lala! Oh, Lala! Telephone for you.

(Lala enters.)

LALA: What?

BOO *(Sotto voce)*: It's the Weil boy.

LALA: Peachy? *(She takes the phone)* Well, hey stranger. I thought you fell in a bayou or something. Unh-hunh. Peachy! What? You call that good news? I guess so.

Peachy! Okay. Bye. *(She hangs up the phone)*

BOO: Well? What did he say?

LALA: He said to tell you he enjoyed meeting you over the phone.

BOO: What else?

LALA: He's coming to Atlanta.

BOO: I see. When?

LALA: The day before Christmas.

BOO: I knew it! Lala, did Sylvan Weil ask you to go to Bally-hoo with him?

LALA: Peachy, Mama! Everybody calls him Peachy.

BOO: He did, didn't he? He asked you!

LALA: He didn't mention Ballyhoo. He just said he'd be in Atlanta with his parents for the Zacharias'es' golden wedding anniversary party.

BOO: Of course. I should have thought of that. Mr. Ike Zacharias is his great-uncle. His father's mother was a Zacharias from Hattiesburg. Tell me, does he have ugly red hair?

LALA: Yes.

BOO: I was afraid of that. They all do. Weil, we don't have to worry about it. In the great scheme of things, it could be a lot worse. Are you sure he didn't mention Ballyhoo?

LALA: Maybe he doesn't know about it.

BOO: Lala, every Jewish boy in the South with half a brain in his noggin knows about Ballyhoo. You should have brought it up.

LALA: Mama! Do you want me to sound desperate?

BOO: A fact is a fact, daughter. And the fact is it would be a shot in the arm to your situation to be seen at Ballyhoo with a Weil from Louisiana.

LALA: I don't have a situation.

BOO: The subject is closed.

LALA: I can do better than Peachy Weil.

BOO: No you can't.

LALA: I may have other plans for Ballyhoo.

BOO: You do not. Ferdy Nachman is taking little Carol Strauss. Her mother told me at the meat counter yesterday afternoon. *(She picks up the phone)*

LALA: What are you doing?

BOO: I'm going to phone that Weil boy's Aunt Ethel and find out what's what.

LALA: Mama, you haven't been in touch with that woman for thirty years!

BOO: He told me she lives in Baton Rouge now. I wonder if she's married? She couldn't be with that creep.

LALA: Mama!

BOO *(into the phone)*: Operator, connect me with Mrs. Ethel Weil in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

(Lights fade.)

SUNNY: Uncle Adolph!

REBA: Do you think that's possible, Adolph?

SUNNY: He's teasing me, Mama.

REBA: Because higher education can lead to insanity.

SUNNY: What?

(Sunny and Adolph exchange amused looks. He deals another hand, which they play out during the following.)

REBA: Yes. You remember, Adolph. One of the Feigenbaum girls.

ADOLPH: The Feigenbaum sisters! Who could forget?

REBA: They lived on Georgia Avenue just across from the trolley barn. There were seven of them. One more hideous than the next.

ADOLPH: And your mother is being generous.

SUNNY: She was insane because she was ugly?

REBA: Oh no! Not at all! In fact she was the least hideous one.

ADOLPH: There's a compliment for you.

REBA: Viola was her name. Viola Feigenbaum. And she was the smartest, too. At least, she was the only one that went on to college. She attended Peabody Normal.

SUNNY: Peabody Normal?

ADOLPH: In Nashville.

REBA: She was studying to be a teacher. But then she went crazy in the train.

SUNNY: Crazy in the train? What does that mean?

REBA: Well, her Papa put her on the N.C. & St. L. to Nashville so she could start her second year at Peabody Normal and she was as sane as you or I right this minute. Then one hour after they left Terminal Station, she took off every stitch of her clothes and ran up and down the aisle of the day coach naked.

SUNNY: Maybe she was hot.

SCENE FIVE

The Freitag house. Eleven o'clock that night.

Sunny and Adolph are playing gin at a card table. Reba sits nearby, knitting away on her argyll socks. There is a feeling of warmth in the room. Adolph and Sunny play a couple of tricks silently.

ADOLPH: Knock on six.

(He lays down his cards. Sunny does the same.)

SUNNY: No! Three—nine—twenty—that's twenty-three points for you.

(He writes it down.)

I liked it when you used to let me win.

ADOLPH: I never let you win.

SUNNY: Then how come I used to beat you all the time?

ADOLPH: Maybe Wellesley is making you stupid.

REBA: I don't like your tone, Sunny. They had to make an unscheduled stop in Rome to remove the poor thing from the train, rolled up in a tablecloth!

SUNNY: That's awful! What became of her?

REBA: She married and moved to Louisville. Her husband and his whole family never knew a thing in the world about it.

SUNNY: They didn't hear through the southern Jewish grapevine? How is that possible?

REBA: Well, they were the other kind.

SUNNY: Other kind? Other kind of what?

REBA: You know perfectly well what I mean.

SUNNY: Explain it to me.

ADOLPH: Stop teasing your mother.

SUNNY: I'm not teasing. I really want to know.

REBA: East of the Elbe.

SUNNY: What?

REBA: That's how Grandma used to explain it.

SUNNY: What's the Elbe?

REBA: Well, I believe it's a river somewhere.

ADOLPH: Separates Germany from Czechoslovakia.

REBA: Yes. And west of it is us and east of it is the other kind.

SUNNY: But why are they the other kind?

REBA: Well—they just are.

SUNNY: How can you tell?

REBA: The way they look.

SUNNY: That's preposterous. Are you saying you could pick a hundred Jews off the street at random and tell who's what kind just by looking at them?

ADOLPH: Sure. The German Jews would be the ugly ones. I mean the men. And, of course, the Feigenbaum sisters.

SUNNY: It's a lot of mumbo jumbo and you both know it. And don't tell me they talk louder. Nobody talks louder than Aunt Boo.

ADOLPH: That's for sure.

SUNNY: And don't tell me they act funny, either, because—

REBA: Now don't you say one word about your cousin Lala. She does the best she can!

SUNNY: I rest my case. Gin.

(Adolph counts his points.)

ADOLPH: Twenty-four. I let you win.

SUNNY: You just now said you never let me win!

ADOLPH: So I did.

SUNNY: I really beat you then.

ADOLPH: Maybe. But I don't want you to feel good about it.

SUNNY: I missed you, Uncle Adolph.

ADOLPH: Yeah. How's school?

SUNNY: Fine, if you don't count botany.

REBA: You took botany last year.

SUNNY: That was zoology.

ADOLPH: What's the matter with botany?

SUNNY: Field trips! They're freezing!

REBA *(Knitting away)*: Well, I'm knitting as fast as I can!

SUNNY: I see that. Thank you, Mama. I stayed up so late studying for the last quiz that I got all mixed up.

ADOLPH: You did?

SUNNY: Yes. I said that leather grew on trees and rubber came from animals!

REBA: I think I'll go upstairs. *(To Sunny)* 'Night, Sugar. I'm just so glad you're home! 'Night, Adolph.

ADOLPH: 'Night.

(She gets up, starts out of the room, then turns.)

REBA: Isn't it silly! Askin' about rubber animals on a botany quiz!

(Reba exits up the stairs.

Sunny deals out another hand, and she and Adolph play it during the following. She sees Adolph looking at her.)

SUNNY: What?

ADOLPH: I went in your Daddy's office one morning to ask him a question about an ad we were gonna run. I'd say it was about twenty years ago. Anyway, I noticed he slid something he was looking at under a pile of manila folders real quick, like he didn't want me to see. And we talked about the ad a little bit, and all the time I kept looking at that pile of folders, wondering what the hell he was up to. I ever tell you this?

(She shakes her head no.)

So a couple of hours later, he went to the bank. And of course I hightailed it on into his office and I closed the door and I walked over to his desk and I moved the folders and guess what I saw.

SUNNY: What?

ADOLPH: A catalog from Smith, a catalog from Vassar and a catalog from Wellesley. He was researching colleges for you when you were six months old. Wouldn't he be tickled tonight?

(Lala and Boo come into the hall. Boo hangs up her coat. Lala keeps hers on.)

BOO: Hey.

SUNNY: Well, how was the movie?

BOO: Exactly the same as it was the other time.

LALA: Mama, how can you say that?

BOO: Oh, I'm sorry! Did Scarlett and Rhett do something different this time? I must've missed it.

LALA: That's not the point! Nobody can take in a masterpiece in one viewing. I came away with so much more tonight! I could watch it a thousand times.

ADOLPH: Y'know, I believe we're gonna make money out of you yet, Lala.

BOO: What are you talking about?

ADOLPH: The girl is a natural-born usherette.

BOO: Why, Adolph! *(To Lala)* He's joking, sugar. *(To Adolph)* Any calls?

ADOLPH: Calls?

BOO: For Lala.

LALA: Would you relax, Mama? You know Peachy's coming to Atlanta.

BOO: Well, I need to know more than that. I need to know for a fact he's taking you to the dance. And that aunt of his doesn't answer her phone. Why have you still got your coat on? Are you cold?

LALA: No.

(Boo feels her head.)

BOO: Are you catching something?

LALA: I already caught it.

BOO: I knew you weren't lookin' right. Where does it hurt?

LALA: Stop it, Mama. I'm not sick. I feel divine!

BOO: What in the world has got into you?

LALA: Remember in the intermission when you went to the rest room and I waited in the lobby?

BOO: Yes.

(Lala opens her coat and pulls out a 9" by 12" glossy photograph.)

LALA: Look!

BOB: Oh, nobody! How did you get that?

LALA: I was waiting for you to come out of the rest room. And I was looking at the pictures they had over in the corner. Hence: from the mirror. And it looked like they were in frames. But they weren't. They were just slid in slots that looked like frames. So I slid one out!

BOB: I don't see it.

LALA: I know. I slipped it under my sweater and then while you were watching Scarlet shoot the Yankee deserter on the stairs at Tara, I hid it in my coat.

BOB: Historic, hell! We can send her out in crowds to sell post-ers.

BOB: This is not funny, Adolph. It's a crime.

SCARLET: Oh Aunt Boo! The Ladies Grand isn't going to miss one silly photograph!

LALA: How dare you! It is not silly! It's Scarlet in her barbaric dress! It's magnificent!

BOB: Somebody's drivin' up the driveway.

BOB: Oh, my God! It's the police.

LALA: I don't care! It was worth it!

BOB: I feel pretty sure the Atlanta Police Department has better things to do than track down our little picture asper here.

BOB: Who would come driving up here in the middle of the night then?

(*Doorbell sounds. Adolph opens the front door. Joe stands in the doorway holding a briefcase.*)

BOB: I saw the lights on.

LALA: Well, well! Look what the cat dragged in!

BOB: Hey. (*To Joe*) Ma'am. (*To Adolph*) I came right from the station. I brought you those sales figures from Washington.

BOB: Yeah. Thanks. Could've waited till the office tomorrow, y'know.

LALA: Certainly could've!

BOB: Well, I thought maybe you'd *remember* to come to bed to see tonight. And, like I said, I saw the lights.

BOB: Yeah. Trip fine?

LALA: Yeah. I think I took care of everything. (*He rings*) How's our pal Upton Sinclair?

BOB: Oh, he's fine.

LALA: Upton who?

BOB: Nobody you know, Lala.

LALA: I see you got home in one piece.

BOB: Yes.

LALA: How come y'all know each other?

BOB: Uncle Adolph got Mr. Parkas to mail a copy of *Black* fall off the train.

LALA: What?

BOB: Looks like he did a good job. I don't remember.

BOB: How was the rest of your train trip?

BOB: Fine, thank you. I love you, Joe!

LALA: Not bad.

LALA: Seen *Gone With the Wind* yet, Joe?

BOB: No. Not yet.

LALA: It's a dream! Isn't it a dream, Ma'am?

BOB: Dreams don't last four hours.

BOB: (*To Joe*) You've done an awful lot of *traveling* in the past few days. You must be worn out, Mr. Parkas.

BOB: No, I'm fine. I'm used to it. And it's L.A.

BOB: Joe.

BOB: I like the way you say that.

BOB: Certainly late to be entertaining company.

BOB: Why don't you go to bed then!

BOB: I didn't say I was sleepy. I said it was late to be entertaining in the house.

BOB: I oughta be going!

BOO: Good night.

ADOLPH: Don't be silly. We can't send this boy off on an empty stomach! He's been traveling all day. We got any of that angel cake left from dinner?

BOO: Not after you attacked it.

ADOLPH: Course we do. Go on out in the kitchen and cut him a piece, and why don't you fix some coffee while you're at it?

JOE: Sounds good. I mean, if it's no trouble.

ADOLPH: Course it's no trouble.

BOO: Oh really?

SUNNY: I'll do it, Auntie.

LALA: You don't know how to fix coffee.

SUNNY: Yes I do. I make it in the dorm all the time.

LALA: I can imagine what that must taste like!

(Lala and Boo laugh.)

I'll do it, Uncle Adolph.

ADOLPH: Thank you.

(Lala exits. Boo walks out of the room, stops at the bottom of the stairs.)

BOO: Drinking coffee this late gives people gas. *(She goes up the stairs)*

ADOLPH: Come on in, Joe. You'll have to forgive my sister's bad temper. She was looking at Clark Gable for four hours and then she had to come home and look at me. Y'know, Joe, I used to be a travelin' man, just like you. JOE: Don't say!

ADOLPH: When my brother was runnin' the company. Trains were a mess in those days. Windows wide open most of the year. Soot played hell with your collars and cuffs. JOE: Yeah. I can imagine.

(A beat.)

ADOLPH: Well, I think I'm gonna go look over these sales figures. See you in the morning, Joe.

JOE: Yessir, Mr. A.

ADOLPH *(To Sunny)*: And if you do get gas, for God's sake don't let on to your Aunt Boo.

SUNNY: Night, Uncle Adolph.

(Adolph heads up the stairs. Sunny and Joe sit silently for a beat or so.)

SUNNY: Can I ask you something?

JOE: Shoot.

SUNNY: How did you get to Atlanta? And don't tell me you came on the train.

JOE: Actually I drove down. Okay, okay. I was selling mattresses at Macy's Herald Square and they offered me assistant bedding buyer at their store in D.C. and then the store across the street asked me to assistant manager and then that chain got taken over by Dixie Bedding and one day your Uncle Adolph came in to check us over and he hired me to work for him. That answer your question?

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: Can I ask you something?

SUNNY: All right.

JOE: Are you people really Jewish?

SUNNY: Fraid so. A hundred percent all the way back—on both sides.

JOE: Fraid so?

SUNNY: Oh, you know what I mean.

JOE: Yeah. You mean you're afraid you're Jewish.

SUNNY: No. Of course not. That's just an expression.

JOE: Okay. What do you mean?

SUNNY: I don't think I mean anything. It was just something to say. Can we please talk about something else?

JOE: Sure. (*A beat*) Nice Christmas tree.

SUNNY: Thank you.

JOE: Old family tradition, is it?

SUNNY: I've had Christmas trees my whole life, if that's what you mean.

JOE: That's what I mean.

SUNNY: Is there something wrong with that?

JOE: Hey, I'm just trying to get the lay of the land down here. You know, smoke out the local customs.

SUNNY: Everybody I know has a Christmas tree. It doesn't mean we're not Jewish.

JOE: Right. It just means you don't wanna be.

SUNNY: Whether I want to be or not, I am, and there's not much I can do about it.

JOE: Sure there is. For starters you can anglicize your name.

SUNNY: Sunny Friday. Sounds like a weather report.

JOE: Or a striptease artist.

SUNNY: I could call myself Sunny O'Houlihan and everybody around here would still know what I am.

JOE: So what?

SUNNY: It hurts sometimes.

JOE: I know.

SUNNY: No. I don't think you do.

JOE: What do you mean?

SUNNY: I imagine you grew up in a Jewish neighborhood. You were like everybody else. I grew up on Habersham Road.

JOE: Only two Jewish mailboxes and the other one is down at the tacky end of the street where it doesn't count.

SUNNY: You've been talking to Lala.

JOE: Yep.

SUNNY: Well, see? That's all we wanted—to be like everybody else.

JOE: And you are.

SUNNY: Oh no. No we're not.

JOE: Whaddaya mean?

SUNNY: The summer between sixth and seventh grade my best friend was Vennie Alice Sizemore. And one day she took me swimming at the Venetian Club pool. Her parents were members. So we were with a whole bunch of kids from our class and the boys were splashing us and we were all shrieking—you know—and pretending we hated it, when this man in a shirt and tie came over and squatted down by the side of the pool and he said, "Which one is Sunny Freitag?" and I said I was, and he said I had to get out of the water. And Vennie Alice asked him why and he said Jews weren't allowed to swim in the Venetian pool. And all the kids got very quiet and none of them would look at me.

JOE: What did you do?

SUNNY: I got out of the pool and phoned Daddy at his office. When he came to get me all the color was drained out of his lips. I remember that.

JOE: And Vennie Alice?

SUNNY: Oh, her mother called up Mama and apologized. We stayed friends—sort of. Neither of us ever mentioned it again, but it was always there. So believe me, I know I can't hide being Jewish.

JOE: Yeah, so how come you try to camouflage it so much?

SUNNY: Oh, stop it! You think being Jewish means you have to run around in one of those little skullcaps and a long white beard?

JOE: Not in your case.

SUNNY: I'm serious!

JOE: Well, I guess I think being Jewish means being Jewish.

SUNNY: I wish you could've sat in on my comparative religions class last semester.

JOE: Why?

SUNNY: Professor Brainard made so much sense. She believes that all faiths are basically the same with different window dressings.

JOE: Really?

SUNNY: Yes. And I agree with her. I don't think what religion a person happens to be matters all that much in the modern-day world.

JOE: Oh, I think it matters to some pretty important people.

SUNNY: Like who?

JOE: Like Hitler.

SUNNY: No fair. Hitler's an aberration. Let's limit the discussion to human beings.

JOE: Tell you what. Let's drop it altogether.

SUNNY: Why?

JOE: Because I don't want to spend my first date with a pretty girl talking about Hitler.

SUNNY: This isn't a date.

JOE: Not yet.

SUNNY: What do you mean?

JOE: If I'm not mistaken, there's a White Castle right up there in Buckhead.

SUNNY: There is.

JOE: You hungry?

SUNNY: A little.

JOE: Great. Now it's a date!

SUNNY: Joe, I can't just go to Buckhead at this hour of the night.

JOE: Why not?

SUNNY: Mama wouldn't know where I am.

JOE: Leave her a note.

SUNNY: She's asleep.

JOE: Then what's the difference?

SUNNY: I don't do things like that.

JOE: Like what? Eat hamburgers?

SUNNY: I wouldn't feel right. I'm sorry.

JOE: Okay.

SUNNY: I know you're probably used to girls who—

JOE: Who what?

SUNNY: Take more chances.

(He thinks a minute.)

JOE: You think going out with me tomorrow night would be taking too big a gamble?

SUNNY: No, I imagine I can handle that.

JOE: White Castle in Buckhead?

SUNNY: Sure. And maybe a movie first.

JOE: One qualification.

SUNNY: What?

JOE: Not *Gone With the Wind*.

SUNNY: Agreed.

JOE: Good first date.

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: And the second one is going to be even better.

SUNNY: Second one?

JOE: Ballyhoo. We made a deal, remember?

(Lala enters.)

LALA: The g.d. coffeepot boiled over, so it's gonna be a while.

JOE: It's okay. I really oughta go home and get some sleep.

LALA: You two made a deal?

JOE: We did.

SUNNY: Joe invited me to go to Ballyhoo.

LALA: I see.

JOE: However, before you commit to this a hundred percent, there's something you should know about me.

LALA: What?

JOE: I'm not as Jewish as you are.

SUNNY: What are you talking about?

JOE: I have royal Russian blood.

LALA: What?

JOE: There's a story in the family about my great-grandfather and the czarina's grand-niece, or was it my great-grandmother and the czar's third cousin?

SUNNY: Oh really?

JOE: Either way you should know you're going to the movies tomorrow night with part of a prince.

SUNNY: I'll work on my curtsy.

JOE: Yeah. You do that. So, how about it?

SUNNY: How about what?

JOE: Ballyhoo.

SUNNY: Okay.

JOE: Okay! Good night.

SUNNY: Good night.

JOE: Do me a favor.

SUNNY: What?

JOE: Say my name.

SUNNY: Joe.

JOE: I love it!

(He exits. Sunny locks the door after him. She starts turning out various lights during the following. Eventually the room is lit only by the Christmas tree.)

LALA: Well!

SUNNY: What?

LALA: He just barged in here in the middle of the night and made me go to all that trouble in the kitchen for nothing.

SUNNY: The coffee and cake were Uncle Adolph's idea.

LALA: Anybody brought up right would've known not to accept.

SUNNY: I offered to fix it.

LALA: That's not the point.

SUNNY: Oh. What is the point?

LALA: He's a very aggressive person.

SUNNY: Fine. Whatever you say.

LALA: And I certainly wouldn't be seen at Ballyhoo with him.

SUNNY: Luckily, that's a decision you won't have to make.

LALA: Meaning what?

SUNNY: Meaning nothing. I'm going to bed.

LALA: Not even twenty-four hours in the house and you're already lording it over me.

SUNNY: I'm not lording it over you. I'm just tired.

LALA: Poor Miss Wellesley. It must be so exhausting to have to deal with us piddling little inferiors.

SUNNY: I don't think you're inferior.

LALA: Yes you do. You always have.

SUNNY: This is pointless.

LALA: Remember your daddy's funeral?

SUNNY: What?

LALA: Uncle Simon's funeral—all those flowers and all those people—seven hundred I think the newspaper said. Mayor Hartsfield and that congressman and I don't know who all. Remember?

SUNNY: Of course. What about it?

LALA: Remember what I wore?

SUNNY: What you wore?

LALA: Yes.

SUNNY: What is wrong with you, Lala?

LALA: You don't remember. Why should you? Well, I remember what you wore to mine.

SUNNY: What?

LALA: My daddy's funeral. Three months later. Remember?

That sad little biddy chapel with hardly anybody in it. And those pathetic gladiolas in back of the coffin. It was like a mockery of what your father had. And you wore an adorable navy-blue suit. Broad-neck. So were the shoes. The soles weren't even scuffed.

SUNNY: Why would you remember a thing like that?
LALA: Because you wanted everybody to look at you!
SUNNY: I did not!

LALA: Nobody wears a whole new outfit unless they want to be looked at! That was supposed to be my tragedy! You already had yours and you had to have mine too!
SUNNY: That is a terrible thing to say!
LALA: But it's true, and you know it.
SUNNY: I know no such thing.

LALA: Oh come on, Sunny. You've always gotten all the attention. Even from God!

SUNNY: What?

LALA: He didn't give you one Jewish feature and look at me!
SUNNY: That's absurd.

LALA: Look at my hair! Look at my skin! Look at my eyes! Listen to my voice! I try and I try and no matter what I do it shows and there's just nothing I can do about it.
SUNNY: I wish you weren't so hard on yourself.

LALA: Well, you know what? You make it worse.
SUNNY: How?

LALA: You waltz into town for one day and finagle yourself an invitation to Ballyhoo.

SUNNY: My God, Lala! Why do you care so much about Ballyhoo?

LALA: You care just as much as I do.

SUNNY: I do not. I think Ballyhoo is a joke!

LALA: Then why are you going?

SUNNY: You want me to stay home?

LALA: Yes. You say you don't care about it. Stay home.

SUNNY: I will.

LALA: Good.

SUNNY: Fine. *(A beat)* No! I want to go!

LALA: I knew it! Hypocrite!

SUNNY: You are the biggest wet blanket in the world. No wonder nobody wants to take you to Ballyhoo.

LALA: Yes somebody does!

SUNNY: Oh really?

LALA: Yes. Really. And he happens to be a member of one of the finest families in the South!

SUNNY: Who is he?

LALA: You'll see, you'll see what happens when you come crawlin' to Ballyhoo with a pushy New York Yid tryin' to suck up to his boss and I sweep in with someone who belongs there. When I sweep in on the arm of a Louisiana Weil!

(Lights out.)

A C T

TWO

SCENE ONE

The Freitag house. The next morning.

Boo is at her desk doing the accounting. Sunny is studying. Reba is knitting, and Lala is pacing nervously.

BOO: Just call him.

LALA: I can't!

BOO: Why not?

LALA: Because.

BOO: We've got to make completely sure that he's taking you.

LALA: Phone his Aunt Ethel again.

REBA: She did. At quarter past six this morning.

BOO: How come you know so much about my business?

REBA: Because you woke me up, hollering so loud.

LALA: Quarter past six? That's quarter past five in Baton Rouge! How could you phone somebody up at quarter past five in the morning?

BOO: I wanted to make sure she wasn't there, which she wasn't. I can't imagine where in the world that silly woman could be keeping herself!

LALA: I can't either. I don't know why she hasn't been sitting right by the phone for the last thirty years waiting for you to call.

BOO: This is not the moment to run your sassy mouth. Time is of the essence. Will you call Sylvan or will I?

(After a moment, Lala picks up the phone and dials.)

LALA: Operator, I would like to place a long-distance call to Lake Charles, Louisiana. Person to person. To Peachy Weil. Not Miss. Mister. Mister Peachy Weil.

REBA: I didn't know you were allowed to use nicknames on long distance.

SUNNY: Oh, Mama! I do love you!

REBA: What did I say?

BOO: Y'all hush!

LALA: It's ringing! It's ringing!

(Lala listens. Boo hovers.)

No! *(She hangs up quickly)*

BOO: What?

LALA: I got the cook. She told the operator that Peachy's not there. She said he left this morning for Atlanta with his mother and daddy. We'll just have to wait until he gets here.

BOO: Oh no we won't. Move! *(She sits at the phone table, dials)* Operator. Get me the residence of Sylvan Weil Sr. in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Station to station. Weil. W-e-i-l.

LALA: I just told you! They're not there! What is the matter with you?

(Boo waves her away.)

BOO: Hello? Who is this? Well, hey Hattie. Merry Christmas to you. It's Mrs. Beulah Levy. No, I don't believe we do know each other. I'm an old friend of Mrs. Weil's in Atlanta. No, don't trouble yourself writing it down. I'll see her when she gets here. But do me a favor, would you, please? Run on up to Mr. Peachy's closet and see if he took his tuxedo with him. Would you do that for me? Thank you so much!

SUNNY: You're pretty brainy, Aunt Boo.

BOO: Yes. And, believe you me, if I were running the Dixie Bedding Company we'd all be rich by now.

REBA: We are rich, aren't we?

BOO *(In the phone)*: Yes. Yes I'm still here. I see. Sure do appreciate it, Hattie. Unh-hunh. Good-bye. *(She hangs up. Triumphant)* The tuxedo isn't in his closet! And neither are his patent-leather dancing shoes!

LALA: I knew it! I always knew it!

REBA: Good for you, honey.

BOO: You're as good as at that dance, daughter! With the finest escort in the South!

LALA: Yes, Mama! Yes, I am! *(To Sunny)* I told you!

BOO: But what are you gonna wear?

LALA: I don't know, but it's gonna cost Uncle Adolph an arm and two legs. Come downtown with me.

BOO: I have the accounts to tend to, and a pot roast to do.

LALA: Let Aunt Reba! She won't mind!

BOO *(Sotto voce)*: Her pot roast tastes like shoe leather.

REBA: I'm not in Timbuktu, Beulah! I can hear every word you're saying.

BOO: Well, it's the truth.

REBA: Adolph loves my pot roast. He took thirds last time.

BOO: Adolph would take thirds of dog food if somebody stuck it on his plate.

LALA: Please come with me, Mama! You have such good taste in clothes.

BOO: Well. All right. *(To Reba)* Be sure you brown it carefully. On low heat. And for God's sake, stay away from the garlic.

(Boo and Lala start up the stairs.)

LALA *(As they go)*: Regenstein's had a dress in the paper this morning. "A holiday dream of glowing tulle and layered ruffles." What do you think?

BOO: It sounds like a lampshade.

(Boo and Lala exit.)

REBA: I will not stay away from the garlic. Garlic makes a pot roast. And your Aunt Boo knows it.

SUNNY: Then why would she say that?

REBA: Oh, she's just tryin' to make sure mine won't be as good as hers. I know her tricks.

(Sunny and Reba go into the living room, start folding newspapers, plumping sofa pillows, etc.)

REBA: It's a good thing we had babies at home in my day. That's all I have to say.

SUNNY: Why?

REBA: Because if you had been born in the hospital, I'd be 'fraid I brought home the wrong child.

SUNNY: Mama! What do you mean?

REBA: Well I just admire you so much, sugar! And I don't know where in the world you came from. You have so much sense.

SUNNY: Why, thank you!

REBA: And you certainly didn't inherit it from me.

SUNNY: Who says I didn't?

REBA: Well, all I know is if there'd been Ballyhoo in my day,

I would've probably carried on and acted as foolish as Lala. And here you are, perfectly content to stay home and study for your final exams and pay no mind to the whole silly rigamarole. My hat is truly off to you, sweetheart.

SUNNY: Mama?

REBA: Yes?

SUNNY: I am going to Ballyhoo.

REBA: You are! How nice! With who?

SUNNY: With Joe.

REBA: That good-looking boy who works for Adolph?

SUNNY: Yes.

REBA: Well, that's fine! And what are you gonna wear?

SUNNY: I was thinking maybe the blue velvet I wore in David and Virginia's wedding.

REBA: Yes. It's put away in the cedar closet.

SUNNY: I'll go get it out. *(She starts out of the room)*

REBA: You know, I wore blue the first time I went dancin' with your daddy.

SUNNY: Oh, Mama!

REBA: Well, go on up and air out that dress. You wouldn't want to go to Ballyhoo smellin' like a mothball.

(Sunny goes up the stairs; Reba continues with her cleaning.)

REBA *(To herself)*: She is a little bit like me! Thank the Lord!

(Lights out.)

The price tag still hangs from the dress. Lala poses in the doorway to the living room.)

BOO: All right, Adolph. Open your eyes.

LALA: What do you think?

ADOLPH (*After taking in the scene*): Well well well. Scarlett O'Goldberg.

LALA: Mama!

(Boo glares at Adolph.)

BOO: Adolph!

ADOLPH: Very nice, Lala. You'll be the belle of the ball, for sure.

LALA: Oh, Uncle Adolph! You're just saying that!

ADOLPH: No. I mean it. That's quite an outfit!

LALA: I'm so glad you like it. Because it cost a weensy bit more than we planned on.

(Adolph looks at the price tag.)

ADOLPH: It's all right. I can always get a night job.

BOO (*To Lala*): He's just fooling, honey.

ADOLPH: Well, I'll say one thing. You won't have to worry about the boys gettin' fresh. They won't be able to come within six feet of you.

LALA: Oh, God! I never thought of that! What if I can't dance in it!

REBA: Don't be silly. It's a dancin' dress.

BOO: Well, of course it is!

(Boo and Reba start to hum "The Pink Lady Waltz" and Lala starts to waltz about the room. Lala waltzes up to Adolph.)

SCENE TWO

That night. Adolph is asleep in the living room, the evening paper in his lap.

BOO (*Offstage*): Adolph! Adolph!

ADOLPH (*Opening an eye*): What?

BOO (*Offstage*): Close your eyes!

ADOLPH: Kay.

(Adolph goes back to sleep. Boo comes down the stairs.)

BOO (*Calling*): Reba!

REBA (*Offstage*): What?

BOO: You can finish in there later. We're ready.

REBA (*Offstage*): All right!

(Reba comes in from the kitchen.

In a moment, Lala descends the staircase in her formal; the dress is very Gone With the Wind, with a hoopskirt so wide she can barely get down the stairs.

LALA: May I have this dance, sir?

(Adolph looks at Boo, sees there is no way out, and reluctantly starts waltzing with Lala. Sunny and Joe enter.)

REBA: See? I told you! The dress is fine! Sunny, look.

SUNNY: Lala, that's such a pretty dress.

JOE: Yep.

ADOLPH: Can we stop now?

LALA: Why, sir! You dance divinely!

(Lala continues pulling Adolph around the room.)

JOE *(To Sunny)*: Shall we?

SUNNY: I'd be delighted.

(Sunny and Joe start dancing, too, still in their hats and coats. Joe hums loudly and happens to be a wonderful dancer.)

JOE: What's this thing called?

SUNNY: The Purple Lady Waltz, I think.

REBA: The Pink Lady Waltz!

SUNNY: I was close.

(Joe accidentally steps on Lala's dress. She screams.)

LALA: It tore! He tore my beautiful dress.

BOO *(To Joe)*: You do nothing but cause trouble in this house, Mr. Farkas. *(To Adolph)* I hope you're happy! *(To Lala)* Come on. Come on, sugar baby.

(Boo helps Lala out of the room; they begin to go up the stairs.)

(Turning back to the others) You couldn't even let her have her joy for five minutes.

(They exit.)

REBA: It's just a little bitty rip. I'm sure it can be fixed. *(She hurries after them)*

JOE: Geez, I'm sorry, Mr. A.!

ADOLPH: Ah, forget about it.

JOE: I can pay for the dress.

ADOLPH: That's good because I can't. Look, I told you—forget about it.

SUNNY: Aunt Boo just overdramatizes sometimes.

ADOLPH: Sometimes? She's the Jewish Tallulah Bankhead.

SUNNY: You better hush before she comes down here and really lays into you.

REBA *(Offstage)*: Sunny, come up here and see what you think.

SUNNY: Okay, Mama. *(She goes upstairs)*

JOE: Your sister doesn't like me much, huh?

ADOLPH: Nope. She don't like anybody very much, if that's any comfort.

JOE: But me especially.

ADOLPH: Oh yeah? What makes you say that?

JOE: I'm too Jewish.

ADOLPH: You are?

JOE: Come on, Mr. A. You know damn well that's the reason.

ADOLPH: I'm not my sister's keeper. Well, I guess I am my sister's keeper, but I'm not responsible for what she thinks.

JOE: You know, back up in my neighborhood who judges? Who cares? They're just Jews.

ADOLPH: Makes sense.

JOE: They like it. They're proud of it. And they're always trying to claim everybody.

ADOLPH: What do you mean?

JOE: You know, ballplayers, movie stars. Half the discussions around our dinner table were about who is and who's part. My Great-aunt Gussie swears that Franklin Roosevelt's real family name is Rosenfeld.

ADOLPH: Sounds like a good healthy attitude.

JOE: Listen, Mr. A., I gotta talk to you.

ADOLPH: Fine.

JOE: About this Ballyhoo business.

ADOLPH: Is there a problem?

JOE: Yeah. The tickets.

ADOLPH: I gave them to Sunny.

JOE: That's the problem.

ADOLPH: Why?

JOE: I want to pay for them.

ADOLPH: No.

JOE: Then I don't go.

ADOLPH: You don't understand. They were complimentary.

JOE: Yeah, sure.

ADOLPH: Really, they were.

JOE: Why's that?

ADOLPH: I'm a past president of the club. They send me free tickets to everything that goes on there.

JOE: The club?

ADOLPH: Standard Club.

JOE: Country club, right?

ADOLPH: Well, it would be if it was in the country. Right now it's a town club with delusions of grandeur.

JOE: Sounds pretty spiffy.

ADOLPH: I wouldn't say that.

JOE: Jews only?

ADOLPH: You bet.

JOE: No Christians allowed?

ADOLPH: Technically, but the truth is none of 'em would wanna come anyway. They've got clubs of their own, which they won't let us near.

JOE: So this is where all the Jews go.

ADOLPH: Oh no. We're restricted too.

JOE: What do you mean?

(*Adolph looks uncomfortable.*)

ADOLPH: Um, I mean membership is restricted to the well padded. As you can clearly see by the girth of the ex-president. Also well-padded in the monetary sense, of course.

JOE: I guess I'm a long way from joining, huhh?

ADOLPH: Who knows?

JOE: Still I pay my way to this dance or I don't go.

ADOLPH: I have no idea what the tickets are worth.

(*Joe takes out his wallet, hands two bills to Adolph.*)

JOE: This oughta cover it.

ADOLPH: And then some. I must be giving you too much salary.

(*Sunny, coming down the steps, sees the money exchange.*)

SUNNY: Uncle Adolph, are you bribing him to take me out?

ADOLPH: Other way around. He insists on paying for Ballyhoo. How's the great ball-gown tragedy?

SUNNY: All better. Mama saved the day.

JOE: Tell your cousin I'm really sorry.

SUNNY: I did. She forgives you.

JOE: I'm such a klutz!

SUNNY: A what?

JOE: You don't know what a klutz is?

SUNNY: Sorry.

ADOLPH: Means clumsy, don't it?

SUNNY: Is that Yiddish?
JOE: It's not Norwegian.
SUNNY: Uncle Adolph, I'm impressed! I didn't know you spoke Yiddish.
ADOLPH: About five words.
SUNNY: That's five more than me.
JOE: Well, I guess I caused enough trouble around here for one night. I better go. Gotta put in a decent day's work tomorrow.
SUNNY (*To Adolph*): Are you making him work on Christmas Eve?
ADOLPH: You bet.
SUNNY: Scrooge!
JOE: C'might, Mr. A.
ADOLPH: Yeah.

(*Joe touches Sunny's face lightly.*)

JOE: Night, Sunshine.
SUNNY: Good night.

(*Joe exits.*)

ADOLPH: Sunshine?
SUNNY: Yes.
ADOLPH: People call you that?
SUNNY: No. He made it up. He's very imaginative.
ADOLPH: Must be.
SUNNY: And he's such a good dancer!
ADOLPH: I noticed.
SUNNY: And he has such beautiful hands.
ADOLPH: Now that I didn't notice.
SUNNY: So graceful! And so strong! And he's very bright. I mean, don't you think? For someone who didn't even go to college.

ADOLPH: You don't have to sell him to me, Sunshine. I was sold before you were.

SUNNY: Good.

ADOLPH: I probably shouldn't say this. In fact, I know I shouldn't say this, because you're very young and it's basically none of my business, and also it would send your Aunt Beulah to Piedmont Hospital, but I really think you should hold on to this boy. I don't think they come along any finer.

SUNNY: I don't think so either.

ADOLPH: I know Simon would approve.

SUNNY: I do, too. (*A beat*) Uncle Adolph?

ADOLPH: Yes?

SUNNY: Can I ask you something?

ADOLPH: Of course.

SUNNY: Were you ever in love?

ADOLPH: Oh yes.

SUNNY: What was her name?

ADOLPH: I never found that out.

SUNNY: You were in love with somebody and you never found out her name?

ADOLPH: Well, I didn't really know her. She used to ride the same Chatahoochee Avenue Streetcar as I did every morning. First summer I went to work with your daddy.

SUNNY: What did she look like?

ADOLPH: She had beautiful hands. They were little and soft—almost round. She had a pocketbook she held in her lap—with both of those pretty hands. And she had a whole lot of brown hair wound around on top of her head. She was always sitting there when I got on and after a week or two, she'd smile over at me after I sat down. Not every morning, but sometimes. Just the tiniest hint of a smile.

SUNNY: That meant she wanted you to talk to her.

ADOLPH: I don't think so. She smiled at everybody that same way.

SUNNY: I hope you at least smiled back.

ADOLPH: I did. I even smiled first once, but she got embarrassed and looked away, so after that I just waited for her.

SUNNY: And you never spoke to her?

ADOLPH: Sort of. One day when it was real hot, I ran my hand across my forehead and shook my head and she did the same thing back. And I thought we'd just naturally fall into a conversation after that, but then, a couple of days later, I got on the streetcar and she wasn't there. And she was never there again.

SUNNY: What happened to her?

ADOLPH: I have no idea. I asked the motorman, but he didn't even know who I was talking about. Imagine that! A beautiful girl like her—getting on and off of his car every single day and he never even noticed.

SUNNY: And there never was anybody else?

ADOLPH: Not really. I went with some girls, and I suppose I could've married one of 'em, but in the back of my mind I was waiting for somebody like the girl on the streetcar.

SUNNY: She was the love of your life.

ADOLPH: Yeah. And you know why?

SUNNY: Why?

ADOLPH: I never saw her for more than twenty minutes at a time and I had no dealings with her whatsoever.

SUNNY: Stop it. You'd make somebody a wonderful husband.

ADOLPH: Just what I need—another female to live in this house!

(Lights fade.)

SCENE THREE

The Freitag house. Eleven A.M. Christmas Day. The dining room table is set for cake and coffee with the good silver and china. A homemade coffee cake sits on a cake pedestal in the center of the table. All that remains of the Christmas presents are ribbons, paper and discarded boxes.

Boo is putting the living room in order. Reba is standing in the open front door, speaking to someone outside. She holds a red umbrella and a small wrapped gift.

REBA: Thank ya. Thank ya. Thank ya. And don't you be a stranger over here now. Okay bye-bye. And tell all the Arkwrights Merry Christmas. *(She closes the front door, unwraps the gift—a jar of preserves. She comes into the living room)* Look. Isn't this the sweetest thing! Louisa put up watermelon pickles for us. And there's a card. *(She reads)* "Happy Holidays to you and Mr. Adolph and both the girls." I'm sure she means you, too, Boo.

BOO: What do I care? I hate watermelon pickles!

REBA: And see? You were wrong about the umbrella. It's as good as it ever was.

BOO: Put that stuff away. He's coming any minute!

REBA: Well, he's not coming on an inspection tour!

BOO: I don't want him to think we live in a pigsty. The Wells are famous for being meticulously neat. Where's Sunny?

REBA: Up in her room studying.

BOO: Good. I want these children to have privacy.

REBA: From Sunny?

BOO: From everybody.

REBA: All right. I sure hope you don't have a stroke before he gets here.

BOO: How thoughtful of you.

(Reba puts the umbrella in the hall closet. Adolph comes down the steps. He wears a hand-knit argyll sweater-vest.)

REBA *(Touched)*: Adolph! You didn't have to wear that!

ADOLPH: I want to. I love it. Thank you.

REBA: Were you surprised?

ADOLPH: Floored.

REBA: I only worked on it while you were at the office or in my room late at night. I was frightened to death. Boo would spill the beans.

(A scornful noise from Boo in the living room.)

ADOLPH: Well, she managed to contain herself.

REBA: Now I want you to promise me that you'll only wear it when you feel like it.

ADOLPH: I promise.

REBA: Because I can give it to the thrift shop. I wouldn't mind.

ADOLPH: Reba, please! I'm crazy about it.

(Adolph goes into the dining room and picks at the coffee cake with his fingers. Boo notices.)

BOO: What are you doing? Stop that! *(She hurries in and snatches the cake plate away)* Oh God! Oh Goddy!

ADOLPH: It's only a cake.

BOO: It's a kuchen! It's Grandma's kuchen! And you ruined it!

(The front doorbell sounds. Boo sticks the cake back on the table.)

BOO *(Calling in her musical voice)*: Lala! Company! *(Then to Adolph in her regular one)* Go on.

(Adolph opens the door. Peachy Weil enters. He is in his middle twenties—self-important with bright red hair.)

PEACHY *(Sticking out his hand)*: Peachy Weil.

ADOLPH *(Taking it)*: Adolph Freitag. Come on in.

PEACHY: My cousin Harmon says you're a worse golfer than he is.

ADOLPH: That's sayin' a lot. Harmon's pretty bad. You play?

PEACHY: Varsity at Tulane three years running.

ADOLPH: Sorry I asked.

(Peachy follows Adolph to the living room.)

PEACHY: Nice Chanukah bush.

REBA: Lala decorated almost the whole thing by herself.

PEACHY: You the mother?

REBA: The aunt. By marriage.

BOO: Hidey, Sylvan. I'm Beulah Levy.

PEACHY: Good to see ya.

BOO: My! You certainly do take after the Zacharias side of your family! I'd recognize that hair anywhere.

REBA: It's an attention grabber, all right!

PEACHY: Keeps me outta trouble, my mother says.

ADOLPH: And is she right?

PEACHY: Lemme put it this way—what she don't know won't hurt her.

BOO: Now, congratulations are in order, aren't they? Your Aunt Josephine and your Uncle Ike! Imagine—married fifty years!

PEACHY: To one of those two? No thank you!

(Lala comes down the stairs.)

LALA: Well, goodness me! They seem to be lettin' all kinda sa trash into decent people's homes these days.

PEACHY: Hey, Lala.

LALA: Hey? That's what they feed the horses—and the asses.

BOO: Lala!

PEACHY: She always this sassy?

LALA: Me? You oughta hear some of the things Peachy comes out with! He's downright terrible!

BOO: Won't you have some coffee cake, Sylvan?

PEACHY: Does it have nuts in it?

BOO: Pecans. Why?

PEACHY: I'm allergic to nuts. I would die if I ate a pecan.

BOO: Oh, no!

ADOLPH: Well, I wouldn't. *(He goes into the dining room and hacks himself a hefty piece of the kuchen, which he proceeds to eat standing up at the table)*

BOO: Well, you're gonna hafta excuse us. We have a mountain of work to do. Our maid up and quit on us. At this

time of year, too. Did you ever hear of such a thing?

(She pokes Reba)

REBA: Oh, yes! Excuse us!

BOO: I'm so sorry about the pecans! I had no idea!

PEACHY: Don't give it a second thought.

(Boo and Reba go into the dining room, pulling closed the sliding doors. Lala and Peachy are alone.)

LALA: Would you really? I mean, die?

PEACHY: What do you think?

(Peachy looks at Lala, straight-faced, and then he smirks. She laughs.)

LALA: Why did you say that?

PEACHY: Just came out of my mouth. I know. I'm terrible.

LALA: You really are.

PEACHY: My sophomore-year roommate really did.

LALA: Did what?

PEACHY: Have a nut allergy. And somebody put peanut butter in a chocolate cake and didn't tell him.

LALA: What happened?

PEACHY: He died right at the dinner table.

LALA: Oh no! Really?

PEACHY: What do you think?

LALA: Go home! Go home right this minute!

PEACHY: I can't.

LALA: Why?

PEACHY: I have to tell you something. That's why I came over.

LALA: Tell me what?

PEACHY: I can't take you to Ballyhoo tomorrow night.

LALA: What?

PEACHY: I can't take you to Ballyhoo.

LALA: Why?
PEACHY: I have to take somebody else.
LALA: Who?
PEACHY: My cousin Sally Myers—from Columbus.
LALA: Oh. (*A last hope*) Are you making this up, Peachy?
PEACHY: I wish I was. I feel terrible. But there's nothing I can do. They're forcing me.
LALA: Forcing you?
PEACHY: Dad, Uncle Ike, all of them. Sally doesn't know anybody in Atlanta and she's dying to go.
LALA: Can't somebody else take her?
PEACHY: There aren't any other single men in the family. Mother said she was sure you'd understand.
LALA: Did she?
PEACHY: I guess it won't be so bad. Sally's a nifty little dancer.
LALA: Good.
PEACHY: You do understand, don't you?
LALA: I guess.
PEACHY: Good girl. You all right?
LALA: Of course. I'm fine.
PEACHY: Listen, I hate to do this, but I have to ask you something, okay? I don't know anybody else to ask.
LALA: All right.
PEACHY: Should I buy her a white orchid or a purple orchid?
LALA: What color is her dress?
PEACHY: How the hell would I know?
LALA: Then I guess white.
PEACHY: White. Thanks.
LALA: Unless she's wearing black. Then purple.
PEACHY: Oh, I'm pretty sure she won't be wearing black.
LALA: Why?
PEACHY: She's nine years old.
LALA: What?

PEACHY: I swear. My cousin Sally is nine years old.
LALA: Your family is making you take a nine-year-old to Ballyhoo?
PEACHY: What do you think?
LALA: I—I—
PEACHY: Ha ha!
LALA: You're terrible!
PEACHY: Be ready at nine tomorrow night.
LALA: Nine?
PEACHY: Because I'll be here at ten. (*He starts to leave*) What color are you wearing?
LALA: Not black.
PEACHY: Then I'll be sure to get purple.
LALA: You're terrible!
PEACHY: You said it! Bye, sassy ass.

(*He goes out the front door.*)

Boo enters from the kitchen with a piece of chocolate cake.

BOO (*In her musical voice*): Sylvan, I was wondering if I could offer you a piece of—well, where is he?
LALA: He's gone.
BOO: Oh no! What happened?
LALA: Nothing. It's all right. He's taking me to Ballyhoo.
BOO: Well now, you see? And I don't know what you were talking about. He's a lovely boy!

(*Lights out.*)

PEACHY: You bet. It's Europe's problem and they gotta solve it on their own. Right, Adolph?
ADOLPH: I'd say that depends on where your family is.
PEACHY: Well, mine's been in Louisiana for a hundred and fifty years.

(Reba hurries down the stairs.)

REBA: She's ready.

PEACHY: Which one?

JOE: Mine.

(Joe goes into the hall as Sunny comes down the stairs. She is dressed simply but well. She looks great.)

JOE *(Pleased)*: Hi there.

SUNNY: Hi.

JOE: Terrific.

SUNNY: Thank you.

JOE: Sorry about the monkey suit. Nobody told me.

SUNNY: You'll do.

JOE: Messed up on the flowers, too.

SUNNY: I'll manage to survive.

BOO *(Coming down the stairs)*: Here we come, ready or not!

JOE *(To Peachy)*: Prepare yourself, bud.

(Peachy, corsage box in hand, comes out into the hall. Lala sails down the stairs and poses at the bottom.)

PEACHY: Say! I thought this shindig was formal! Why didn't you get dressed up?

BOO: Why, Sylvan! You are a devil!

LALA: I told you, Mama.

PEACHY: I picked you a posey. *(He presents Lala with the corsage)*

SCENE FOUR

The next night.

Peachy and Joe sit side by side on the sofa. Peachy is wearing a tuxedo and holding an orchid corsage in a see-through box. Joe has on a dark suit, no flowers. Adolph is sitting in his customary chair reading the evening paper. Joe breaks the silence.

JOE: Howza' war news, Mr. A.?

ADOLPH: Not good.

JOE: Yeah. I got relatives over there.

ADOLPH: Poland?

JOE: Uuh-hunh. And Russia.

ADOLPH: Well, let's hope for the best.

JOE: Yep.

PEACHY: Let's hope they can dodge bullets.

JOE: Excuse me?

PEACHY: Hey! Easy there, bud! None of this mess is my fault. It ain't even my problem.

JOE: That right?

LALA: Oh! Oh! Look! Two! Two white orchids! *(She holds up the large corsage)*
BOO: Adolph, come see!

(Adolph reluctantly rises and joins the group.)

REBA *(Looking at the young people)*: I wish I had a camera!

ADOLPH: You do have a camera, Reba.

REBA: I do?

ADOLPH: You have Simon's Leica. The one he bought in Germany.

REBA: That? I gave it to the thrift shop last summer.

ADOLPH: That was a very expensive camera.

REBA: I know, but nobody ever used it. What did we need it for? Y'all gonna have to excuse me. I still haven't finished Sunny's sweater! I better get busy. Have fun. I won't wait up.

SUNNY *(To Joe)*: That means she will. 'Night, Mama.

(She goes up the stairs)

ADOLPH: Have fun, y'all.

LALA *(To Sunny and Joe)*: See you there.

(Sunny and Joe exit. Boo pins the corsage and helps Lala into her wrap.)

PEACHY: I forgot. Dorothy says hey.

LALA: Dorothy who?

PEACHY: Dorothy Stein. My cousin Tony's wife.

BOO: From Louisville?

(Peachy nods.)

Lovely people.

LALA: I can't place her. What was her name before?

PEACHY: Beats me. Says she was in your dorm at Michigan.

LALA *(Alarmed)*: Dorothy Wolf? Dotty Wolf from Shaker Heights?

PEACHY: That's the one. Were you in the same sorority with her or something? I know she said it was one or the other—

(Lala faints.)

PEACHY: My God! What did I say?

BOO *(Very calm)*: Nothing. Nothing at all. She didn't eat any dinner is all this is. Plus a little overexcitement. Girls do this all the time. She'll be fine.

PEACHY: She will?

(Lala stirs a bit.)

BOO: I tell you what, Sylvan. Why don't you go on out and warm up the car for Lala? This is a very light evening wrap. I'm 'fraid she'll freeze before y'all get to the club!

PEACHY: Okay, but are you sure she—

BOO: She's fine. She'll be right out. Go on. Go on now.

(Peachy exits.)

LALA: I'm not going.

BOO: Of course you are!

LALA: You don't understand, Mama! Dotty Wolf rushed Sigma Delta Tau with me. And she got in!

BOO: Oh Lord! That was years ago. Maybe she's forgotten about it.

LALA: No she hasn't.

BOO: How do you know that?

LALA: I know Dotty.

BOO: Well, maybe she'll keep quiet out of the kindness of her heart.

LALA: Dotty Wolf? Never in this world. I'm not going! I'm not!

BOO: You've made some very bad decisions about your life. Don't let this be another one.

LALA: Mama! I won't go to Ballyhoo and have people laugh at me!

BOO: If they're gonna laugh at you, they'll do it whether you go or not. At least show a little backbone, for God's sake! We're not weak people! Now you get yourself up and go on out to that car!

LALA: I can't!

BOO: You have to!

LALA: No!

BOO: Well, I guess you're right. Dotty Wolf probably does remember and she probably will tell. And everybody you know will be sayin', "Lala Levy didn't get into Sigma Delta Tau at Michigan. What an awful pill she is!"

LALA: Mama!

BOO: And then they'll say, "Not only that. She had a fit and fell down on the floor in front of that Weil boy and she acted so crazy she couldn't go to the last night of Ballyhoo."

LALA: You are just hateful!

BOO: But I'm right. And pretty soon it'll be "Lala Levy? I don't believe she's been out of that house on Habersham Road for—why it must be twenty years now." Do you see any other possibilities, daughter?

(No answer.)

Well, go on upstairs and work on that radio script. I'm sorry. It's a novel this week, isn't it? Just leave the dress on my bed, sugar. I'll take it back to Rich's tomorrow.

(Lala hesitates a moment, then grabs her evening wrap and exits through the front door.)

(Adolph reenters.)

BOO: I don't know—maybe I should've just let her stay at home.

ADOLPH: Maybe.

BOO: But I don't know how many more chances she's gonna have. She was lucky to get this one.

ADOLPH: Yes.

BOO: You ever stop and think how funny it is, Adolph?

ADOLPH: What?

BOO: That the two of us ended up living together.

ADOLPH: Yeah.

BOO: I never dreamed of anything like this when we were little.

ADOLPH: Me either.

BOO: I thought we were gonna be happy when we grew up.

ADOLPH: Unh-hunh.

BOO: What do you think happened?

ADOLPH: I don't know, Boo. I honestly don't know.

(Lights fade on them.)

JOE: I doubt it.

PEACHY: I mean, what if I grabbed your arm and pulled you off so we could go and take a leak together?

JOE: That's never gonna happen.

PEACHY: Right! My point exactly! *(A beat)* First time at the Standard Club?

JOE: Unh-hunh.

PEACHY: Nice, ain't it?

JOE: It's all right.

PEACHY: Lot better than the Progressive Club, I bet.

JOE: The what?

PEACHY: Progressive Club.

JOE: What's that?

PEACHY: You're shittin' me! How long you been livin' in Atlanta?

JOE: Month or so.

PEACHY: And none of your friends ever took you to the Progressive Club?

JOE: No.

PEACHY: I thought that's where you people went.

JOE: Us people?

PEACHY: The other kind. You know—Russian, Orthodox.

JOE: Wait a sec. Let me get this straight. So the—what-dayacallit—Progressive Club—is where me and the rest of the other kind belong.

PEACHY: Thass right.

JOE: And this one—the Standard Club—?

PEACHY: Us. German Jews.

JOE: German Jews only?

PEACHY: Well, they're startin' to let in a few others because they need the initiation fees. But they try to only take the ones that are toilet trained. At least that's the way my Uncle Ike puts it.

JOE: Sunny knows all this, right?

PEACHY: Knows it? Her uncle's the goddamn past presi-

SCENE FIVE

In the darkness we hear Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are" played by a dance orchestra.

Sunny and Lala enter, followed by Joe and Peachy.

LALA *(Pulling at Sunny)*: Come on. I'm fixin' to wet right through every single one of my petticoats!

SUNNY: Okay. *(To Joe)* Don't go anywhere.

JOE: Not a chance.

LALA *(To Peachy)*: And you! Behave yourself.

PEACHY: Why, whatever can you mean?

LALA *(Calling offstage)*: Patsy! Wait! You won't believe what just happened! *(She drags Sunny offstage with her)*

PEACHY: You know, I never can figure it out.

JOE: What's that?

PEACHY: Girls always go off to pee in groups. Why do you suppose that is?

JOE: No idea.

PEACHY: You think somethin' funny goes on in the ladies' room that guys don't know about?

dent! So you got nothin' to worry about. You'll be treated like a prince tonight.

JOE: Ah, the hell with it.

(Joe exits. Sunny enters, looking for him.)

SUNNY: Joe?

PEACHY: Probably goin' to take a leak. *(Calls after him)*
Don't worry. I ain't comin' with you.

(Lights fade.)

SCENE SIX

The Freitag house. Several hours later. The house is dark, except for a table lamp in the hall.

Sunny enters through the front door.

SUNNY *(Calling offstage)*: I'm in.

(Adolph, in his bathrobe, comes into the dining room holding a refrigerator dish full of fried chicken.)

ADOLPH: Sunny?

SUNNY: It's me.

ADOLPH: I thought you were going to a breakfast after the dance.

SUNNY: I asked Harold Lillienthal to bring me home.

ADOLPH: Harold Lillienthal? Where's Joe?

SUNNY: I don't know.

ADOLPH: What happened?

SUNNY: We were dancing and I excused myself and when I came out of the ladies' room, he was gone.

ADOLPH: That doesn't make any sense. Was he feeling all right?

(The doorbell sounds. Adolph opens the door. Joe comes into the front hall. He is missing his usual buoyancy.)

ADOLPH: Joe! You all right?

JOE: Yeah. Sure.

SUNNY: What happened to you?

JOE: I went for a drive.

SUNNY: A drive?

JOE: Yeah.

SUNNY: Why?

JOE: Seemed like the best thing to do.

SUNNY: I see. Well, good night. *(She starts up the stairs)*

JOE: Yeah. Good night. *(He starts for the door)*

ADOLPH: Anybody want a piece of chicken? Good cold.

JOE: No thanks, Mr. A.

ADOLPH: Shame to let it go to waste. Sunny?

SUNNY: I'm not hungry.

ADOLPH: Seems to me a little snack always enhances a late-night discussion.

SUNNY: We're not having a discussion.

ADOLPH: So I notice, but you should be. *(He starts up the stairs)* Holler, now, if you change your mind about the chicken.

(Adolph exits up the stairs. A little silence. Joe clears his throat.)

SUNNY: What?

JOE: I didn't say anything.

SUNNY: Well, you certainly should!

JOE: Should what?

SUNNY: Tell me what happened!

JOE: I bet you've got a pretty good idea.

SUNNY: I don't! I don't at all! I thought we were having a good time!

JOE: We were. And you're wrong.

SUNNY: Wrong?

JOE: You are a good dancer.

SUNNY: Thank you.

JOE: You're welcome.

SUNNY: Joe, I'm entitled to know what happened.

JOE: Why didn't you tell me?

SUNNY: Tell you what?

JOE: Guys like me aren't welcome at the Standard Club.

SUNNY: Is that what all this fuss is about? For heaven's sake! I don't run the Standard Club!

JOE: You took me there.

SUNNY: I wanted to dance with you. I didn't think it mattered.

JOE: Oh really? You planning on taking a swim in that Venetian Club pool any time soon?

SUNNY: It's not at all the same thing.

JOE: Sure it is. You think I like being where I'm not wanted?

SUNNY: You are wanted! Just about anybody can join the Standard Club these days.

JOE: Great! Is that supposed to make me feel better?

SUNNY: You're making an awful lot over nothing, you know.

JOE: Nothing?

SUNNY: Yes. If you'd said something, we could've discussed it. And I could've explained.

JOE: Yeah? Explained what?

SUNNY: That old other kind business—sure, I grew up in a house full of it, but that doesn't automatically mean I believe it myself. As far as I'm concerned, you and I are on equal footing—in every way possible!

JOE: Spoken like a true Wellesley girl! A believer in Upton Sinclair and a fighter for the underdog! You make me sick.

SUNNY: You make me sick! All this about the way you felt. What about the way I felt? I had everybody in the place looking for you. I've never been so embarrassed in my life.

JOE: Tough.

SUNNY: Men don't abandon girls like that where I come from.

JOE (*Sarcastic southern accent*): Mah deepest apologies, ma'am!

SUNNY: You think this is funny? Of course you do. How could you know any better?

JOE: Wait a minute. How could I know any better?

SUNNY: No! Wait! I—

JOE: Thank you very much. Yeah. Okay. I get it.

SUNNY: We were brought up differently. That's all I mean.

JOE: I know what you mean. You smell like a rose and I smell like a salami sandwich.

SUNNY: I didn't say that. You're not listening to what I'm trying to—

JOE: I'm listening real good and you know what I hear? Jew-hater talk—clear as a bell! Oh yeah, I been hearing that garbage all my life, but damned if I thought I'd ever hear it coming out of a Jewish girl.

SUNNY: How dare you! Storming into this house in the middle of the night and swearing and yelling and accusing me of all kinds of absurd—

JOE: Right! Whyn't you just call me a kike and get it over with?

SUNNY: I think it is over with.

(*Joe walks to the door.*)

JOE: A shaynim donk in pupik.

SUNNY: I don't know what you're saying.

JOE: Thanks for nothing.

(*Joe leaves. Sunny goes up the stairs.*)

The house is quiet. Then the doorbell sounds. It sounds again insistently. And again.

A light in the upstairs hall. Adolph comes downstairs as the bell keeps sounding. He opens the door.

Lala comes into the front hall. She seems even more agitated than usual.)

LALA (*Calling*): Mama! Mama!

ADOLPH: Lala, what is it?

LALA (*Calling*): Mama!

(*Boo, pulling on her robe, rushes down the stairs. Reba, also in a robe, follows right behind her.*)

LALA: Oh, Mama!

(*She starts to cry. Boo embraces her.*)

BOO: Lala! What happened?

(*More tears.*)

BOO: Was it that Wolf girl from Michigan?

LALA: No. Dotty didn't say a word.

BOO: Then what is it?

LALA: Peachy asked me to marry him!

BOO: Thank the Lord! Oh, sugar! (*She starts to cry. Then stops*) Are you sure?

LALA: What do you mean am I sure? Of course I'm sure!

(*Peachy comes into the hall.*)

LALA: She doesn't believe me.

BOO: Is it really true, Sylvan?

PEACHY: What do you think?
REBA: This is such a surprise! When did y'all decide?
PEACHY: We've been talking about it since Thanksgiving.
LALA: We have?
PEACHY: Not you. Mother and Daddy and me.
ADOLPH: Ain't love grand?
BOO: Adolph!
PEACHY: And Daddy said, "Well at least we know what we're gettin' here, all the way back on both sides" and Mother said, "You can have her if you want her. I guess." She was ready to get Grandma Zacharias's engagement ring out of the safe-deposit box for me to bring to Atlanta, but I said let's wait awhile just in case somebody better turns up at Ballyhoo.
LALA: Isn't he awful?
ADOLPH: He certainly is.
LALA: Tell him, Peachy.
ADOLPH: What?
LALA: This is the best part.
PEACHY: I might be interested in movin' to Atlanta and comin' to work with you at the Dixie Bedding Corporation.
BOO: Sylvan! I can hardly believe it! Aren't you thrilled, Adolph?
ADOLPH: What do you think?

(Lights out.)

SCENE SEVEN

In the dark, we hear a conductor's voice.

CONDUCTOR: The station is Wilmington. Wilmington, Delaware, coming up. This station is Wilmington.

*(Lights up on the sleeping compartment of the Crescent Limited. It is two weeks later. Sunny is on her way back to college. She is reading a book.
A knock on the door.)*

SUNNY: Come in.

(Joe enters.)

JOE: Hi.

SUNNY: Hi.

JOE: So. Your mother finished the sweater, huh.

SUNNY: Yes.

JOE: Good for her. Looks nice.

SUNNY: Thank you.
JOE (*Looking at the book*): Upton Sinclair?
SUNNY: Yes.
JOE: Thought so. (*A beat*) So you didn't get your school-work finished over the vacation, huh?
SUNNY: Not quite. Oh.
JOE: What?
SUNNY: Happy New Year.
JOE: Right. Same to you.
SUNNY: Thank you. (*A beat*) What brings you to Wilmington?
JOE: Looking at a bedsprings factory in the neighborhood.
SUNNY: And as long as you were here, Uncle Adolph told you to come down and give me a look-see.
JOE: Yep. Need anything?
SUNNY: No thank you.
JOE: Okay, then. So long.
SUNNY: Bye.

(*Joe turns to leave, then stops.*)

JOE: I lied.
SUNNY: What?
JOE: Mr. A. didn't tell me to come. He doesn't even know I'm here.
SUNNY: Oh.
JOE: The bedsprings factory is in West Virginia.
SUNNY: How did you get to Wilmington?
JOE: Drove.
SUNNY: All that way? You must've gotten up at five o'clock in the morning.
JOE: Three-thirty.
SUNNY: No!
JOE: I didn't want to miss the train.
SUNNY: Oh. (*A beat*) I'm glad you didn't.
JOE: Me too.

SUNNY: Joe?
JOE: Yeah?
SUNNY: What you said—about Jew-hater talk—
JOE: Yeah?
SUNNY: I thought about it a lot, and it's not true. How could it be? It would be like hating myself.
JOE: Unh-hunh.
SUNNY: No! Don't you see? It's only ignorance. I don't know anything. There's just a big hole where the Judaism is supposed to be. But I remembered. I do know some Yiddish. I went to my suitemate's house in Chestnut Hill for dinner once and they said it at the table. Shabait Shallim—something like that.
JOE: It's not Yiddish. It's Hebrew. Shabbat Shalom. It's the blessing you say Friday night.
SUNNY: Shabbat Shalom.

(*Joe smiles.*)

Joe, I should never have taken you to Ballyhoo.
JOE: I asked you, remember?
SUNNY: Yes, but I should have known better. I'm sorry.
JOE: Me too. I didn't need to act like such a jerk.
SUNNY: I don't blame you one bit.
JOE: I miss you like hell!
SUNNY: I miss you too.
JOE: It hurts all the time.
SUNNY: I know.
JOE: So I was hopin' maybe—
SUNNY: Me too.

(*They kiss. A good big passionate kiss.*)

JOE: What's the matter?
SUNNY: What?

JOE: You're crying.
SUNNY: So are you.
JOE: Must be the diesel smoke.
SUNNY: Uncle Adolph told me I should hold on to you.
JOE: Smart man.
CONDUCTOR: (*Offstage*) All aboard! All aboard!
SUNNY: Oh no!
JOE: Don't worry. This is only the beginning.
SUNNY: Of what?
JOE: Who knows, Sunshine? We got the whole future to choose from.
SUNNY: Yes!
JOE: So think of something really good and we'll just make it happen.
SUNNY: Okay.

(*Sunny stands center stage and thinks hard. The lights fade on her.*)

SCENE EIGHT

Lights up on the Freitag house. The Christmas tree is gone. Joe, Adolph, Boo, Reba, Lala and Peachy are seated at the dinner table.

Sunny walks into the scene and lights the Sabbath candles.

SUNNY: Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kidishanu bemitsvotav, vetsivanu l'hadlik neyr
shel Shabbat. Shabbat Shalom.

JOE: Shabbat Shalom.

REBA: Shabbat Shalom.

PEACHY: Shabbat Shalom.

LALA: Shabbat Shalom.

BOO: Shabbat Shalom.

ADOLPH: Shabbat Shalom.

(*The candles shine.*)

END OF PLAY



In October 1965, the *New York Times* received a tip that a young man arrested at a recent Ku Klux Klan demonstration in the Bronx was, in fact, a Jew. His name was Daniel Burros, he was twenty-eight, and lived in Ozone Park, Queens. Until a few months earlier he had been a high-ranking member of the American Nazi Party, but he had left the Nazis in a dispute with their leader, George Lincoln Rockwell, then joined the Klan, where, due to his considerable talents and industry, he quickly rose to become King Kleagle of the organization's New York chapter.

McCandlish Phillips, the reporter that the *Times* sent to interview Burros, was an interesting figure in his own right. An evangelical Christian, a lay minister who neither drank nor swore, Phillips was widely considered the best writer on the paper's city desk. Yet a few years later, and in part because of the Burros case, he would give up journalism altogether and devote himself entirely to the ministry.

The two met at a luncheonette located under the elevated train tracks in Queens. Burros laid out an articulate and surprisingly intellectual anti-Semitic argument. Phillips, after listening for a time, finally asked him how he could believe all this when he was a Jew himself. Burros at first denied it, but, when confronted with evidence (Phillips had proof that Burros's parents had been married in a Jewish ceremony), he told the reporter, "You print that in the *New York Times*, I'll kill you, and I'll kill myself."

The story ran on the front page that Sunday; Burros bought a copy out in Reading, Pennsylvania, where he was visiting Nazi friends. He came back to the house distraught, told them, "The *New York Times* says I'm a Jew." They wanted to talk it over, but Burros was inconsolable. He raced up to his room, put the overture to *Tristan and Isolde* on the stereo and shot himself. Twice. Once in the chest and, when that didn't work, a second time in the head.

Following his death, Jewish groups, readers and even some of the *Times's* own staff criticized the decision to run the story. As a "Jewish newspaper," they felt, the editors should have understood that Burros was disturbed, possibly unstable, and that his threat was real. In response, the paper dispatched two of its rising stars, Abe Rosenthal and Arthur Gelb, to investigate further. They produced a book, *One More Victim*, that portrayed Burros's suicide as a product of Jewish self-hatred in the wake of Nazi genocide (the word "holocaust" was not yet in common usage). Burros, they argued, was a victim of Hitler, not of the *New York Times*.

The book traces Burros's progress from pious Hebrew-school student to rabid neo-Nazi, and the story is unsurprising: as a boy he was fair-skinned with a pug nose and took pride in not "looking Jewish." He went out for the high school football team, lacked talent, but revered the coach, who made casual anti-Semitic cracks, at which Burros dutifully laughed. He wanted to go to West Point, but no one took this seriously, and he was unable to get the congressional appointment needed to attend. After graduation he worked at menial jobs, read military history, decided Hitler was a brilliant strategist and began making pro-German anti-Semitic remarks to his mainly Jewish friends, chiefly to get a rise out of them. It worked: there were arguments, fights and ruptures. Soon his ideas had become even more extreme, but it had ceased to be a game.

Mark Jacobson, who grew up in Queens not far from Burros's home in Ozone Park, told me this story a decade later, proposing that we make it into a movie. We were living in Berkeley at the time, in that queasy interval between the end of school and the beginning of adult life, and we expended a good deal of energy imagining the films we would make without imagining very hard that we would actually make them. For this purpose, with its craziness, self-destructive fury and endless ironies, *The Danny Burros Story* was perfect. It seemed inconceivable that anyone would ever finance such a venture, but

that not only didn't discourage us; we took it as evidence that we were on to something.

From the start we thought of the film as a comedy. A "Jewish Nazi" was seemingly absurd, and the Rosenthal/Gelb book, though large and predictable, contained one memorable detail: as a member of the American Nazi Party, and desperately concealing his origins, Burros would, nevertheless, bring knishes back to the Nazi barracks and date women who, according to his friends, were "obviously Jewish." The notion of Danny hiding his terrible secret and, at the same time, compulsively revealing it was fascinating and darkly hilarious.

Of course, to us, everything Jewish was funny. Jackie Mason used to get laughs simply by saying the word *Jew*. At times his entire act seemed to consist of little more than opening his mouth and pronouncing that one syllable, over and over, until the gentiles in the audience were looking at each other in confusion, while the Jew rolled around on the floor, gagging hysterically.

The hysteria came from the fact that Mason was proclaiming aloud and with pride, a matter commonly viewed as an embarrassment. And even if he was overcompensating, that was part of the joke, for this mixture of vanity and shame was central to the business of being a Jew in America at the time.

After seeing an early cut of *The Believer*, the novelist Paul Honda said that it wasn't so much about a Jewish Nazi as simply about being Jewish. Which was, really, how Mark and I always thought of it. Danny Burros was our own Jewish ambivalence and hybrid Americanness exaggerated into comic proportions.

Even if we did not deny our origins and join anti-Semitic movements, even if we officially, perhaps even truthfully, liked something about being Jewish (though who could have said what) in the '50s and early '60s it separated us from an America that seemed otherwise uniformly calm, Christian and normal. We got into fights with kids from parochial schools, weren't invited to WASP cotillions, and had to have "our own" dancing classes and holiday parties. When we went to pick up a gentle girl for a date, we were sure that her parents were giving us an especially beady and mistrustful eye—even when, perhaps, they weren't. In junior high school, a friend told me that his mother had known immediately upon meeting me that I was Jewish, despite my innocuous name. He said this as if calling my attention to a mark on my face I might not have noticed, thereby wising me to the fact that I could never pass for a regular person. A thought that hadn't occurred

to me because I could see that mark even better than his mother could. And had I missed it, my father would have been there to point out that Adolf Hitler, the ultimate authority in these matters, would have put me in a gas chamber regardless of what I might claim about myself. Clearly, being a Jew was not a matter of faith or testimony, as in a normal religion; it was inscribed into your flesh like numbers on your wrist. What a pointless redundancy those fucking yellow stars had been.

I want to stress that this youthful angst—though full of brooding, romantic longings, class-consciousness and the like—was hardly serious. It was nothing like being a Jew in a Russian shtetl, the Warsaw ghetto or an English public school. This was America in the age of television. Jewishness was just another identity crisis, a plot device, tougher than acne, simpler than homosexuality; Chuck Berry could have written a song about it. We just wished it would go away; or at least become invisible, shut up and leave us alone.

It didn't. It got bigger. I found it easier to imagine myself a woman than a gentile, I couldn't stop talking about "who was Jewish" and what was Jewish (butter, goyishe; mayonnaise, all Jewish), yet I could hardly have said what my Jewishness was, other than this sense of separateness, a "history of persecution" though, in fact, I had never been persecuted. It was an identity without palpable content.

In this it seemed a kind of hyperexistentialism; existence didn't precede essence, it *was* essence. To be Jewish, as far as I could tell, was to think of oneself as Jewish. Beyond that, I had no idea what it entailed. There was a religion out there somewhere, but, despite the usual bar mitzvah, I knew next to nothing about it. And though I enjoyed the paradox of this form without substance—like a mirror reflecting another mirror—it was frustrating. Above all, it accused me.

Of what? Of not knowing. Not knowing the religion, the history, the language, even, in much detail, the secular culture. I didn't want to know it, I wanted not to know it, not to be sucked down into that strifling ghetto of the mind. I looked at those people in their ugly black suits and white shirts, their covered heads and long skirts, their greasy hair, forgotten bodies, bad breath and worse politics. They were hideous, sexless, narrow-minded. But they knew. They knew and they knew, and in that knowing they didn't wonder what it meant to be a Jew. Therefore they belonged, not just to each other (which we, in our resolute individualism, never quite did) but to history, and, perhaps beyond it, to G-d.

Why would someone who seems to feel nothing for G-d, who believes nor doesn't, but for whom the whole subject is sin not an issue, why would such a person feel troubled by religion? Possible answers: First, that he is lying to himself about his indifference, that all of life is that foxhole with no atheists (or even agnostics, as Simone Weil says, "We all have a hunger, even when we fast by fasting.") Second, that regardless of questions of belief, this particular religion links him to the traditions of his ancestors, which give it an indispensable, even religious value. Maybe it was simply that ignorant and disconnected as I was, I still felt the weight of history conveyed through the great chain of Seders. If, as we said even Pesach, "it is as if I myself came out of Egypt," then presumably myself had lived all of Jewish history; for thousands of years I had been saying the prayers, following the hallakah (the religious law), keeping this thing alive. And, if nothing else, I didn't feel qualified to break the chain. Yet the tradition held me without holding me. I stayed without knowing. And I broke the chain every day.

For years Mark and I did nothing about our movie. Back in that first flush of excitement, I had written a six- or seven-page treatment, laying out what has become, in fact, the opening scene, and following through to Danny's suicide. It was a Samuel Fuller-esque tale, gritty, noirish and rather somber for what was supposed to be comedy. Mark knew someone who worked for Dustin Hoffman's company; we submitted it to them and never heard back. So we dropped it and went off about our lives, Mark to New York and I to Los Angeles.

In L.A., I met and then married Leora Barish, whose father was a Conservative rabbi and a career Army chaplain. Growing up on military bases and attending yeshivas, Leora had a Jewish experience shared by almost no one in the United States except her brother. She knew Hebrew, understood how the religion worked and couldn't help responding to the beauty of the biblical language. At the same time she had had Judaism shoved down her throat, far more than she could swallow, and by then it nauseated her.

That combination of disgust and knowledge (plus a fetching indifference) made her the perfect teacher for me. She was, really, more resource than a teacher; she had no interest in imparting what she

knew and even less in convincing me of its truth or efficacy, since she had no use for it herself. You can imagine the seductiveness.

Yet when our son, Max, was born, Leora, who had previously eaten Chinese food on Yom Kippur, began almost without comment to attend a synagogue in Venice, California, where we were living. Sometimes I went along. Later I took a class on "Jewish meditation" and began reading a little on my own: Aryeh Kaplan, Rav Kook, the Tanya.... At night, in bed, I would read a *chumash* (the five books of Moses with commentary), going back and forth between the Hebrew and the English trying to puzzle out the original. Leora, lying beside me studying homeopathic repertoires, would answer my questions about vocabulary and grammar and explain the *shoreshes*, the linguistic roots from which groups of words are derived, without looking up from her book.¹ Gradually, I began to appreciate the primitive power of ancient Hebrew, which I'd first felt when her father made the priestly blessing over us at our wedding.

Reading the Torah that slowly, a few verses a night, with digressions into the commentaries (little essays, often a thousand words or more on a single verse or idea), was like looking at an ordinary object through a microscope or on LSD. The complexity of the structures, associations and nuances overwhelmed me.

I realized that though I'd never read Talmud, nor had the first scrap of a real Jewish education, the thinking was familiar. I had been raised by a lawyer to be a lawyer, had spent years of dinner table conversations learning to climb around the jungle gym of legal reasoning. I had the typical American mistrust of "legalisms," yet those detailed, endlessly expansive, interconnecting discussions contained not only truth and beauty, but an emotional force that kept catching me by surprise.

Still, reading and thinking came much more easily than prayer and observance. I would emerge from temple each Yom Kippur glowing, serenely devastated, and promise myself a deeper practice in the coming year. And, a week later, watching Orthodox families walk to synagogue for Sukkoth, would feel only revulsion. I was nothing like these people. I didn't believe anything. How I could possibly practice their religion?

It was much later, after we'd moved to New York, that I decided it didn't matter if I "believed," whatever that meant. One could go to shul, light Sabbath candles and so on, not out of a conviction that G-d existed, much less that "He" actually commanded such actions,

but for the actions themselves, the way they organized the day, week, the year, for the pleasures of ritual, and to connect to and k alive the traditions of one's forebears.

Later still, I read essays by the Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz, which made me doubt the very idea of a religion based "human benefits." Leibowitz writes about actions done *Lishmah* (for their own sake) and not-*Lishmah* (for their effects). Though both have their place in religious practice, the former is clearly superior to expects nothing in return. Leibowitz can barely conceal his disdain a religion of efficacy focused on human needs, like my "pleasures ritual" or the organizing of one's week. The purpose of religion, argues, at least of Judaism, is man's service to G-d, not the reverse.

In Leibowitz I found for the first time a working explanation of Judaism that made sense. "The central aspect of 'Judaism'..." he writes "has been the struggle over the Torah and its Mitzvoth..." That is the struggle to keep the commandments laid out by G-d in the Torah. These include not simply the original ten, but a vast system of laws and customs that, by rabbinic count, number 613. They cover not only typically religious matters, but also criminal and commercial law, tort family relations, sexual conduct, treatment of disease and so on...

Leibowitz is bracingly contemptuous the impulse to adapt the system to humanistic ends. Speaking of a secular writer who warms Judaism to be about "the satisfaction of a profound psychic need" the urge "...to be happier, more perfect, or moral," Leibowitz observes that all religions try to provide these things. What is specific to Judaism is the acceptance of "the yoke of Torah," and the observance of the *mitzvoth*. If doing this fulfills "psychic needs," or makes one happier or "more moral," that is largely incidental.

Throughout his life [the religious Jew] rises early every morning to observe the *Mitzvoth of prayer with the congregation* even when he feels no need to "pour out his heart before G-d," and perhaps has never felt such a need in his life. He may do so even though he knows that there is no need to inform the Omniscient of his needs and despite his understanding that as a frail human he cannot effectively praise and glorify the Almighty; he prays, it may be, contrary to his perception that there is no relation between his prayer and the events which befall him or occur in the history of Israel. If one day he or one of his children falls ill, he con-

sults the physician and resorts to the science of medicine as would any atheist, without diminishing the sincerity with which he recites the benediction "who cures the sick of his People of Israel."²

What Leibowitz is describing, and implicitly advocating—and from which I have borrowed heavily to inform Burros's thinking in *The Believer*—is obedience to the *halakab* (the law), not because it "makes sense" or improves life, but because the Torah commands it. And he is careful to distinguish obedience from belief. One might believe in G-d, one might have seen miracles that attest incontestably to His existence and power, yet refuse to worship Him. (The Israelites who left Egypt saw the Red Sea parted, yet still made the Golden Calf.) Conversely, one might choose to worship Him without any evidence whatsoever of His existence. Leibowitz does not take the next step, but to me it seems inescapable: that one is fully capable of worshipping G-d (i.e. observing the *mitzvot*) even when convinced that He does *not* exist.³

Here, at last, was a Judaism I could believe in, because it didn't require belief. It was beyond theology, beyond psychology, beyond reason. It offered nothing except itself, and therefore could never disappoint. Its very lack of argument was what persuaded me: that precisely by dispensing with all calculations of cost, benefit and truth, it offered something truly beyond this world, a *praxis*, things to be done entirely for their own sake. One might ask, then, why these particular things instead of others? And, unless you accept the divine origin of the Torah, there is no answer except that this system links you to a tradition and, thus, to your ancestors.

But in finding a Judaism I could believe, I realized something else: that I could never practice it. I could not accept the yoke of Torah, I could not rise early every morning to observe the *mitzvab* of prayer with the congregation. Maybe once a week, at best, and I doubted I could ever lay tefillin (put on phylacteries for morning prayer) or thank G-d for not making me a gentile or a woman—though, perhaps, I was grateful for both. I could not keep kosher or observe the Sabbath. I was too addicted to "the sweet joys of this life..." too busy, too self-absorbed, too greedy, too secular, too impatient, too fallen. I couldn't do it. I didn't want to do it, not enough—and this even though (abandoning Leibowitz's antiefficacy position for a moment) I

was convinced it would be "good for me," for my family, perhaps even for the world.

It is interesting to discover that one cannot do what is in one's interest. *The Underground Man* says, "Sometimes a man does not want to do what it is in his interest. Sometimes he wants to do precisely what is not in his interest." But that was a protest against the crushing rationalism of modern life. I was refusing the very spirituality Dos toevsky offered in its place. And, still, I couldn't do it.

One spring evening in the early '90s, Mark and I were driving around the New Jersey Pine Barrens doing research on a thriller we had been hired to write for Universal. Fifteen years had passed. Mark was now a well-known magazine writer and cult novelist; I had become a "working" screenwriter. And neither of us had written another word on the movie we still thought of as *The Jewish Nazi*. Yet when he blithely announced that he was certain we would one day make the thing, I concurred, though in my heart I didn't believe it.

I had spent the previous decade in Los Angeles, writing and failing to get made a handful of scripts that I loved and earning a living on others that I loved less. By now I dreaded every great idea that came my way; I had had so many and had completed so few, that each new one seemed simply a fresh torment sent to mock me with my inability to bring it off.

Yet here, driving through the April twilight, I couldn't resist a new scene for a film I hadn't even written: Danny Burros, the Jewish Nazi, takes a bunch of skinheads into a synagogue, intending to paint swastikas and plant a bomb. But, to his horror and disgust, he finds himself unaccountably moved, first by the sanctuary itself, the memories it evokes, and then, even more, by the ark, the Torahs, the mysterious calligraphy of the letters. The long-repressed Jew wells up in him. Suddenly appalled that he has brought Nazism into this sacred place, he tries to get them out of there, but before he can, one knocks a Torah to the floor. The holiest object in Judaism has been desecrated. Danny's heart is pierced.

Mark appreciated the lurid craziness of this scene, but he was uncomfortable with what seemed to him an excess of Jewish content. Yet that was why I liked it; I saw that in our earlier conceptions, we had made Danny Jewish without making him a Jew. But now imag-

ining him as one gave the film new life. For weeks I couldn't stop thinking about it.

But then I went on to other things.

Mark and I have a mutual friend, Jonathan Buchsbaum, who teaches film at Queens College in New York. A couple of years after the conversation in the Pine Barrens, Jonny asked if either of us had an old, unproduced script from which his students could shoot a few scenes. Mark suggested we write some scenes from *The Jewish Nazi* and let them shoot that.

I began to write the interview between Danny and the *New York Times* reporter. Mark was tied up with work and family, so, in the end, I wrote all six scenes alone. The students had fewer skills and less drive than advertised, and we hired a professional cameraman, a novice production designer, picked up some amateur actors and I directed. The result (a year and a half later) was a thirteen-minute short called *Thousand*, after a *Moby* track we used over the opening scene.

In the course of this, almost without a conscious decision, it had become my film and not Mark's. This was due partly to his busy schedule, partly to my own greater involvement in film and Judaism, and, no doubt, to the infinite vagaries of personality. Jonny asking us for a script, offering equipment, crew and, above all, his own participation, seemed to me the opening of a door which, if we didn't walk through it, would close forever, and we would never make the film. I don't like to think that I stole Mark's idea, the idea he had first offered to share with me, but in some sense this is what happened, though less deliberately than that sounds. As Mark and I say in another screenplay—one we did write together—great deeds are often founded on a crime. And after nearly twenty years, doing anything at all with *The Jewish Nazi* seemed like a great deed.

Thousand was awkward and crude, but it had a power, and the central character was compelling. Encouraged by this and by the performance of a nonactor, Judah Lazarus, in the lead role, I quickly wrote a feature-length script.

When I began writing, I knew the story through the desecration scene, where Danny, against his will, begins to respond to the Torah. From there, it had to change, but it was not immediately clear how.

As a youth, Danny had hated being a Jew, so he'd become the opposite, a Nazi; the Nazis turned out to be boring and stupid, yet being one had brought him to a synagogue where his old self woke up and now urged him back toward the sweetness and piety he'd spent his life trying to escape, and which he still loathed, even as he loved it. I saw that Danny had to become a Jew again, but at the same time he had too much invested ever to give up being a Nazi.

Laying it out like that, the solution became obvious: he would lead a double life, resume Torah studies while, inexplicably, continuing his efforts to plant bombs and kill Jews. He would be a rabbi and a Nazi, a thing and its opposite, a living contradiction. He would not reconcile or synthesize the two; he didn't want them reconciled; he liked being pulled in opposite directions. This was irrational, yet felt exactly right. And it excited me like nothing I had ever written. It was the way I felt, not only about Judaism, but about so much else: America, my parents and myself. It seemed I had been looking for this story all my life.

"I hate and I love," Catullus writes in poem 85, "and who can tell me why?" I hate because I love, because I need the beloved and am therefore vulnerable to it. It can refuse me or betray me, and I hate it for this power it has over me. I hate it for the sweetness I feel toward it, the wish to merge with it, and the panic that it triggers (I will lose myself) makes me push it away. I hate it because hate is the perfect complement to love, like peanuts and dairy, or boys and girls; they are incomplete without each other, and tastier and more beneficial together. Love without hate, with the hate repressed, was a dimmed and diminished thing.

To be honest, Danny's long bursts of anti-Semitic invective were the core of the script and the easiest parts to write. Most movies about ethnic or racial hatred are so embarrassed by their subject that do not invest the time and detail necessary to convey why the characters would feel such things. Similarly, depicting anti-Semites as rage-driven monsters or pathetic fools fails to explain or even wonder how it is that intellectually sophisticated and often brilliant minds have hated Jews and Judaism. But if we ask ourselves why, and if it is really a question and not a lament, perhaps we can come up with some tentative answers.

Here is one 4: Nazism was, among other things, a reaction against the dislocations of modern life. A number of major twentieth-century literary figures (Pound, Eliot and Wyndham Lewis among them) not

only felt a similar anguish at these conditions, but were also attracted, at different times and to different degrees, to various forms of fascist anti-Semitism. (There are left-wing versions, as well.) Sifting through their distress at the breakup of traditional, homogenous societies, the ensuing "rootlessness" of modern life, the "degeneration of values,"⁵ the coming of pop culture, and especially the rapacious spread of that greatest of all equalizers, money, or, better still, "finance"—it is not impossible to see how they could frame "the Jews"⁶ for the job. For Jews seemed to embody modernity in their very being. If, as Jean Baudrillard has said, America was a post-modernist nation from its founding, the Jews have, in a sense, been post-modernists since Babylonian captivity. Long before Jacques Derrida, there was the Talmud, a de-centered, indeterminate text if there ever was one. After you have puzzled through those complex, infinitely allusive, hair-splitting arguments that somehow never definitively resolve anything, after you have followed the reasoning of why an injury inflicted by a man climbing a ladder requires a different remedy from the same injury inflicted by a man descending a ladder, after you have studied even a single page of Talmud with texts crowding in on and disputing with each other in radical nonlinearity, quantum physics, indeterminacy theory and floating currencies become, perhaps, less mysterious.

In this vein, I wanted Danny's anti-Semitism to be as sophisticated as possible, yet with an ironic edge so that each diatribe against the Jews would invert from a simplistic hatred to a mockery or dread of that hatred, even at times to an inadvertent celebration of the thing he hates. When he tells the gathering in Mrs. Moebius's living room that the public "will be glad" once they realize that Jews are being killed, is he saying that this is wonderful news for all of them as Nazis, or that it is the nightmare of his life as a Jew? He's saying both, and the horror and delight can never be disentangled. He tells the reporter that Jews believe in "nothingness without end," and sometime later a rabbi on television translates (actually mistranslates) *ein sof*, the most ineffable incarnation of G-d in Jewish mysticism, as "nothingness without end," as if no matter how hard Danny runs away, Judaism keeps catching up and pulling him back.

The very exuberance of Danny's invective tells us that something complicated is going on. As Carla says to him late in the film, "Oh, is that why you became a Nazi? So you could talk about Jews incessantly?" She's right; the speeches are his very life. He cannot stop talking about Jews. Hating them or loving them is finally beside the point.

But beyond this, I have to admit that I believed in those rants, not in their literal truth (if there could be such a thing), but in the sheer visceral pleasure of hatred. I got off on anti-Semitism, on the adolescent, Lenny Brucean pleasure of saying forbidden things. A Jewish Nazi who didn't enjoy his anti-Semitism, who was merely tormented by it, would make no sense; worse, he would be boring, and there would be no point in making a film about him.

More important, without an exuberant hatred I could never express my delight in being Jewish. The film is, finally, my love poem to my religion, my people. Jewish culture honors not only paradox and contradiction,⁷ but the spirit of self-criticism. This is commonly called self-hatred, but it is more than that. The comedy of a rabbi-manque who can praise G-d only by reviling him, love his people by despising and even trying to kill them, sounds like something out of a Hasidic tale or one of Kafka's paradoxes.

Yet I was afraid. I was afraid of offending gentiles and Jews, of being misunderstood, of being taken for an anti-Semite, or, should I say, only an anti-Semite. Above all, I was afraid of getting it wrong. My knowledge of Judaism is sketchy and self-taught. I read, studied, asked questions, had the script vetted by those who did know. But still I lived in dread of some dead-eyed yeshiva *bocher* with his twisted, sardonic mouth, someone who knew it backward and forward, casually pointing out the crucial thing I had missed, upon which the whole thing would fall to pieces at my feet.

It is odd to think of a movie being wrong. Maybe I was simply afraid that this love poem I was sending would be misread (A problem I'd had before). That like an Ionesco character, or someone with an eccentric version of Tourette's, I was trying to say "I love you" but what kept coming out of my mouth was "Fuck you."

In the initial showings in the United States, that had not happened; people seemed to get the movie and to like it. But as I set off for film festivals in Europe, where anti-Semitism wasn't just a conceit but a dark and terrible history, I worried that my "celebration" of hatred would look puerile and trivial.

I was going to festivals in three cities with special relationships to the film's subject matter: Moscow, the capital of a nation with a long tradition of anti-Semitism; Munich, where Hitler first came to power; and Jerusalem, which exists in its present form in considerable part because of what happened in the other two.

At the press conference in Moscow, the first question, asked in a dry

Russian-inflected drawl, was: "So, are you saying that Hitler and Goering actually loved the Jews?"

I laughed. I had never thought of it that way, but, following the argument, I could see how someone might come to that conclusion. It was, really, the kind of thing I would have wanted to say—blame everybody, forgive everybody—if I'd had the guts⁸

Yet just before I'd started shooting *The Believer*, a friend had showed me a Nazi propaganda film, *The Eternal Jew*. Made in the '30s, it is a loathsome work, intercutting images of Jews with those of swarming rats, and reeking with hatred, yet at times the film seems about to turn into something else. The word "Jew" occurs so often and the fascination, indeed, obsession with Jews is so unrelenting that one is tempted to say—as Carla does of Danny in *The Believer*—the only people I've ever met who were this interested in Jews were Jews themselves. At one point, a narrator tells us: "Only 2% of the population of Germany is Jewish, yet Jews comprise 38% of the lawyers, 46% of the physicians, 51% of the college professors." And one wonders, is this good or bad? Is the film complaining that Jews are taking more than their fair share of the top professions, or that they are, well, a master race? It is so difficult not to hear the second meaning like an echo behind the first that one wonders how well the filmmakers knew their own minds.

So if I didn't quite have the nerve to say that Hitler and Goering loved the Jews, surely there was a passion there, an obsession, that, if not love, was closer to it than would make us comfortable. Maybe we could imagine it as love unrequited.

Everywhere in Russia people made shrewd and intelligent observations about *The Believer*, and seemed to understand it perfectly. Yet there was an odd detachment, as if the subject had very little to do with them. The history of Russian anti-Semitism was acknowledged but never discussed. And, unlike everywhere else I've shown the film, very few people came up and identified themselves as Jews.

Part of that may be due to the odd nature of Jews and Jewishness in contemporary Russia. Someone told me that during the Soviet era being Jewish, even when not openly stigmatized (since Communists were supposed to believe in universal brotherhood), was invariably a professional disadvantage; therefore, many Jews married gentiles to dilute their problem, and perhaps to indicate a desire to be "real Russians."

As a result, though at first glance I saw very few Jews in Russia, on

closer inspection, it seemed that almost everyone was Jewish. Or partly, or related to Jews or thought they were. It was as if one curious consequence of the deep-seated anti-Semitism was that the whole country had become hopelessly entangled with Jewishness (another Hebraic plot?), the ancient Cossack enmity now swirling around these aberrant Semitic corpuscles like the ingredients in an icebox cake.

As if, in short, it were an entire nation of Danny Balints. Which, since it was that old anti-Semite Dostoyevsky to whom I looked when writing, should hardly have been surprising. Danny's "inexplicable contradictoriness" wasn't shocking to the Russians, it was their national heritage.

The Believer showed twice at the Munich Film Festival, and after each screening, a vocal minority (Germans and Americans) argued that the film should not be exhibited to German audiences. It would encourage the neo-Nazis, perhaps give them new ideas and, worst of all, might allow them to claim that even the Jews know these things about themselves and are finally admitting it.

A larger but quieter group disagreed; they thought most Germans would find the film interesting, perhaps moving: a new way of looking at "all that." As for "the lunatics," they would never come to see it; in any case, they were beyond redemption, so it hardly mattered what they saw.

Behind this tactical disagreement seemed to lie a deeper issue: to the majority, the lunatics were a fringe element, repulsive but irrelevant; to the minority, they were the lurking, dreaded thing, always ready to return. Naturally, none of us worried about ourselves, our complicity in silence, our own fascist longings. We only worried about the others.

In truth, fascists were an audience I dreamed of and longed for. In making the film, I had had, among other grandiose notions, the idea that I was designing a cure for bigotry. Here, unlike in all the pious, liberal warnings against prejudice, was a celebration of hatred. Want to hear the words "fucking kike" declaimed joyously? Want to hear *why* they are fucking kikes? And yet as you watch (I told myself), it slowly changes. First, you realize that the one who hates Jews most and best is a Jew himself. Then you see that he is able to hate them only because he has studied them long and hard. The film argues that

and, presumably, not ambivalent, found this offering loathsome or irrelevant.

But they didn't. They were, I suspect, the best audiences the film will ever have. Even the ones who didn't like it liked talking about it. The question-and-answer sessions that at other festivals barely lasted thirty minutes went on here for an hour and a half and could have gone all night. They got every joke and reference; young men in kippot came up afterward explaining textual connections and allusions I not only hadn't intended, but that I couldn't really follow.

Best of all, they took Jewish anti-Semitism for granted. Everywhere else I'd gone, the inevitable question was "How did Danny come to be a Jewish Nazi?" In Jerusalem no one had to ask. Instead, they wanted to know had I made the movie about Israel? About the conflict between secular Jews and the ultra-Orthodox, which to many of them seemed more intractable and infuriating than relations with the Arabs. More than one person said that if the Palestinian problem were ever resolved, the Jews would then be at each other's throats the next day, and it would tear the country apart.

I had not been thinking of that when I made the film—I'd barely known about it—but, for a filmmaker, that it made them think of it seemed somehow to complete the whole project. They had taken my private obsession and made it their own, given it meanings, given it a life beyond what I knew or had experienced or, even, could understand.

The Believer was shot during June and July of 2000. Two weeks after we wrapped, the Democrats nominated Joseph I. Lieberman as Al Gore's vice-presidential candidate.⁹ It was the first time a Jew had run for national office on a major party ticket, and it seemed the perfect conclusion to an administration that had by its end a Secretary of State (sort of), Secretary of Defense (halfway) and Secretary of the Treasury (unequivocally) who were all Jews—or at least could be claimed as such.

This was partly a tribute to the Clintons, partly the result of broader developments. People who had gone to Ivy League schools in the 1960s had encountered large numbers of Jews who were not only bright and ambitious, but at ease in American society. And the '60s themselves broke down many of the remaining social barriers, so that by the time that generation reached positions of power, they had sat

up all night bullshitting with Jews, gotten stoned and had sex with them, gone into business with them and by now were not infrequently married to them. In short, being Jewish wasn't a big deal anymore. Was that good or bad?

While making *The Believer*, in which it sometimes seemed that the word "Jew" appeared more times than in any film in history—except, perhaps, the Nazi's *The Eternal Jew*—I often winced at subjecting a cast and crew of gentiles to my obsession, or perhaps at exposing the obsession to so many strangers. (Even now I wasn't up to being Jackie Mason.) Yet I never heard or even sniffed the faintest hint of complaint, discomfort or boredom at this monomania. As far as I could tell, no one cared.

When I say "the gentiles," I was not, in fact, always sure who was what. Years ago I'd met a couple who claimed that they had been together for months before either one realized that the other was Jewish. ("Are you really? So am I!") They weren't hiding it; it just hadn't come up. This had seemed inconceivable to me. How could you spend an hour in someone's company—much less have ongoing sex with them—without ascertaining that particular fact? Yet now I found myself wondering vaguely whether the gaffer or the camera assistant were Jewish, yet, strangely, not asking. Them or anyone else. I'd gossip about who might be gay or sleeping with whom, but not "that." Which can mean only that, strange to say, I didn't really care.

Somewhere in those weeks of finally making this Jew-obsessed work, of unraveling the idea that had defined me and which I was now trying to define, the subject itself seemed to be vanishing before my eyes.

We were free.

But what did it mean to be a Jew if it wasn't a problem? Without suffering (even the vicarious kind), what became of one's "Jewish identity"? If the Jews were free, if the oppression and the vast culture that grew up around it disappeared, if all the world ate bagels and no one at all ate kugel, then it seemed we had two choices: we could let it go at last and lose ourselves in the great sea of the nations, or we could perform the *mitsvot*.

And then September 11th.

Then the Chinese jeweler told my friend Shirley (whom she didn't know was Jewish) that 4,000 Jews had failed to come to work at the World Trade Center that day (because they knew!) and that the FBI was treating the attacks as a Mossad plot. Then Peruvian cabdrivers

and commentators on network television and guests at sophisticated dinner parties and patients with Jewish analysts were saying that it was because of Israel, because of AIPAC-funded distortions of American foreign policy, that at bottom it was again, as ever, the Jews' fault.

So maybe we weren't free after all. Was that bad or good? Because if the new, darker world scared and infuriated me, I could not deny that in some private room of the mind, it was also a relief. This was a world I knew how to live in.

Notes

1. Hebrew vocabulary is built up from three-letter roots called *shoreshes*. Recently I encountered the word *galut*, which is Hebrew but commonly used in English for the Diaspora. I asked Leora what it meant. Literally, she said, it means "exile," but it comes from the *shoresesh gal*, "wave," and is associated with *galgal*, "wheel," as well as with *gilgul*, "rolling," and, also, "reincarnation," derived from the wheel of life.
2. "Lishmah and not-Lishmah" in *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish Stat.*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992; p. 64. (emphasis in the original).
3. The philosopher Emanuel Levinas attempts to resolve this problem by arguing that in Judaism the law *is* G-d.
4. For others, see Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion*, London: Pluto Press, 1994.
5. The phrase comes from an essay by that title interspersed in sections through the third volume ("The Realist") of Hermann Broch's trilogy, *The Sleepwalkers*.
6. "the Jews." The problem is the word "the"; it turns disparate individuals into a monolith, like the Borg on *Star Trek*. To say "Jews run Hollywood" is to make a factual claim (right or wrong) about a group of individuals. But "*The Jews run Hollywood*" implies that the studio chiefs, network heads and their ilk are acting in concert *as Jews*, presumably in the interests of the Jewish people. No one who has actually worked in Hollywood could imagine for a minute that these individuals act in behalf of anyone except themselves and, perhaps, their shareholders.
7. As they say: two Jews, three opinions.
8. One has to be careful talking about "the holocaust." The historical events remain unspeakable and incomprehensible and to make light of them in any way risks blasphemy. And yet if we are candid, and not just pious, then we must admit that we laugh about the terrible, we

It would not be difficult to imagine a version of *The Believer* that failed to provoke. Had Danny been a simple self-hating Jew, extreme but unnuanced, the story might have offered mere exploitation—some violence and sex, but little of enduring interest. Had Danny acted out of a blind desire to eradicate self and people, his character would have been repugnant and the film a forgettable curiosity. What makes *The Believer* so impressively compelling as narrative and important as commentary is the Danny who both hates and loves his Jewishness, and provides equally good reasons for both. The underlying reasonableness of both sides of Danny's ambivalence is what allows his character to transcend the mundane. If Danny's affection for the tradition of his ancestors alone made sense, then this film would have been a grand act of pandering. It is because Danny's anger also commands consideration that the thoughtful viewer cannot repress *The Believer* from consciousness.

What is the source of Danny's venom toward Judaism and Jews? There are perhaps personal motivations, reasons in his individual history that turn him against the faith of his father(s). Surely we can feel frustrated, even infuriated, with the passive, pathetic figure who is Danny's father. But this would be a weak—because unelaborated—foundation. If there is one complaint I have heard repeatedly from others who have seen the film, it is the absence of any dynamic explorations of Danny's psychology or character. The youthful Danny we see early in the film is already a magnificent critic of the tradition, one whose criticism borders on rage. How did he get to be this way? We have little way of knowing. Certainly the declining father of later years cannot offer a sufficient explanation. So it is not a complex, richly detailed biography that explains Danny's anger. In fact, it seems to me that Danny's anger is not personal at all. The absence of the personal suggests that what he expresses is not his own. It is, as a conceptualization of both history and theology, an expression of anger on behalf of the Jewish people as a whole. What Danny gives voice to is what any Jew might say—if he could allow himself.

Consider Danny's debate with his teacher in the yeshiva classroom. The discussion focuses on the well-known story of the binding of Isaac by his father Abraham (called the "Akedah" in Jewish tradition; see Genesis, chapter 22). Danny challenges the Torah's narrative, or at least his teacher's representation of it, in virtually every detail. To the Torah's command that Abraham take his "only son," Danny responds that Abraham had another son, Ishmael. When his

classmate, Avi, explains that Isaac was the only son whom Abraham loved, Danny responds sarcastically, "Oh, they only kill them when they love them....?" He then characterizes the God of the story as a bully. When his teacher rebukes him for judging God, Danny responds that God gave us free will and intelligence, and our exercise of judgment must therefore be the will of God. He then heightens his protest by declaring that Abraham actually killed Isaac. And even if he didn't, Danny observes, Isaac was so traumatized by the event that he was as good as dead for the rest of his life.

Danny, in this scene, is hardly the conventional pious "yeshiva bocher." His angry challenge will not be turned aside. But, in this respect, he surely goes no further than might any modern person who has read the biblical story. Who has not wondered about the nature of the God who stands behind the cruel command that Abraham sacrifice his son? What modern Jew has not tried to rationalize or suppress the simple meaning of the Torah's starkly troubling narrative? The moment one allows for critical questioning, as anyone participating in modern culture must, one cannot help but observe what Danny observes. If Danny is extreme in this scene, it is only for his unwillingness to avert his critical gaze.

Or consider the characterizations offered by the adult Danny to Guy, the *New York Times* reporter, in the café. Explaining the perversity—sexual and otherwise—of the Jews, Danny argues that "a people—a real people—derives its genius from the land: the sun, the sea, the soil. This is how they know themselves. But the Jew doesn't have soil." Asked about the Israelis, Danny responds that "those aren't real Jews.... They no longer need Judaism because they have soil. The real Jew is a wanderer, a nomad. He has no roots, no attachments. So he universalizes everything." In this exchange, Danny begins as a modern romantic, espousing the very ideas that would energize early Zionism in the nineteenth century. Is it not true that there is something abnormal about the condition of a people without a land? We will each have our own response to this question. But Jewish heroes of the last century certainly thought this to be so. And the flip side of Danny's argument, claiming that Israelis are not "real Jews" because "real Jews" are landless and universalist, is merely a slightly edgy articulation of Franz Rosenzweig's praise of "the people in exile." The Jewish journey across the continents has not been an entirely negative legacy. Jews and Judaism have been enriched by the need to learn to live in multiple civilizations. So, is it a good thing

that Jews have once again built a particularist society on their own soil? Not a few liberal Jews have wondered about this. And is the secular "macho" Israeli really a Jew? A recent photographic exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York, picturing a macho Israeli in military dress and tefillin (prayer straps), asks this question without offering a clear answer. Danny is, in other words, in good modern Jewish company.

In other scenes, Danny expresses what other Jews might express if only they could permit themselves. In his confrontation with the elderly survivors of the Holocaust as part of his sensitivity training, Danny's lack of sympathy (until the last moment) is appalling. But who can dismiss his question to the man who watched the murder of his son—"What did you do while the sergeant was killing your son?" Is it not true that centuries of persecution left Jews in Europe with a legacy of passivity that was self-destructive? Has Israel not learned the lesson implicit in Danny's question and refused to let itself stand by while its children are murdered? Danny is not wrong and his anger is understandable. If he is pitiless in the way he expresses his critique, he is also too candid for the contemporary Jew to hear the truth in what he speaks.

Of a similar quality is Danny's rant before the invited audience, arguing that to destroy the Jew one must love the Jew. "The Jew wants to be hated," he suggests provocatively. "He longs for our scorn. He clings to it as if it were the very core and mystery of his being. If Hitler had not existed, the Jews would have invented him. For without such hatred, the so-called Chosen People would vanish from the earth." However perverse Danny's formulation of his argument here, there is something very right in what he claims. How else might one explain the continued fund-raising success of the Anti-Defamation League when, by all objective accounts, anti-Semitism is at an all-time low in this country? Or how, in the same context, can we understand the relatively high rate of affirmative answers by Jews to survey questions asking whether "anti-Semitism is a serious/very serious problem in this country?" I have a rabbi friend who has claimed—in private conversation—that "our real problem is that they want to sleep with us, not that they want to kill us." And believe me, my friend the rabbi is no anti-Semite. Even Danny's claim that Jews would have invented Hitler, while perhaps wrong in the specifics, is not entirely off base. The Jews who answer "yes" to the "serious problem" question are inventing anti-Semites in their imag-

inations every day. Besides, according to universal scholarly opinion, Haman, in the biblical book of Esther, is a fictional character. So if Jews did not invent Hitler, we did invent Haman. The problem with Danny's argument, in this instance, is only in the details.

So if Danny does not always speak *the* truth, he generally speaks a truth, and his is almost always a truth with ample modern Jewish support. Furthermore, his argument often has a pedigree that extends well back into Jewish tradition. For example, his exchange with his teacher over God's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac replicates, in many of its details, precisely the questions that Rashi, the paramount medieval Jewish commentator, articulates at the very same points. "Take your son," says God; "I have two sons," says Rashi, putting words in Abraham's mouth. "Your only son," says God; "each is unique to his mother," says Rashi. "The one whom you love," says God; "I love both of them," says Rashi, again for Abraham. Danny is a genuine yeshiva-bocher, one who argues often, if not always, from within the tradition. It might outrage the modern secular Jew to learn that Abraham might in fact have killed Isaac. But the educated Danny knows that one midrashic tradition represents exactly that version of the story. And, far better than his teacher, Danny knows that there is no reason not to follow that midrash. It is recorded in the canonical tradition and is therefore a legitimate view.

So what is the problem with this Danny, the Talmudic critic of Jewish wisdoms, ancient and recent? The answer begins, of course, with the way Danny often says what he says. However acute his perception of the blemishes of Judaism, his resentment at what he sees often makes his critique altogether too caustic. His distortions, too, make it difficult for the listener to separate out the true kernel contained in his observation from the useless husk. But, as I said earlier, these problems do not adequately explain the strength of the responses animated by Danny's critiques. Along with these problems, there are, I would argue, two other qualities that make his criticism so difficult to hear. First, Danny allows himself to say things that many a Jew knows to be true but is afraid to admit. It is painful to face parts of reality one has worked hard to suppress, and Danny forces the viewer to do so. Second, Danny, on the big, bright screen of the modern movie-house, does what he does in public. It is Danny the *public* questioner and critic who causes such a stir in the Jewish gut. And it is here, ironically, that Danny may stray farthest from Jewish tradition, ancient and modern. But this claim requires many words of clarification.

Jewish tradition is well known for its questioning and even critical character. One of its foundational stories represents Abraham challenging God to be just with the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah. "Will the judge of all the world not do justice?" he exclaims (Gen. 18:25). If there are but ten righteous residents in the cities, Abraham argues, God must save the cities on their account. God does not have the right to act arbitrarily, Abraham seems to assume, and he lets God know it.

The same tradition of critique carries forward into classical rabbinic culture. Perhaps the most striking expression of this critical voice is found in the Talmud's famous representations of the death of Rabbi Aqiba by the hands of the Romans in the early second century. In one of the Talmud's versions (tractate Menahot, p. 29b), the deceased Moses ascends to heaven to find God tying decorative crowns on the tops of letters in the Torah scroll. Moses inquires into the purpose of these crowns and is told that, many generations in the future, Rabbi Aqiba will use them as the basis for deriving laws. Moses asks to be transported into Aqiba's school in order to witness his interpretive skills and, finding himself impressed and even amazed, Moses questions God concerning Aqiba's future reward. God then transports Moses to the setting in which Aqiba's life ends. Moses is made to witness the flesh of Aqiba, who has been tortured and murdered by the Romans, being weighed out in the marketplace. How does Moses respond to this grisly scene? "This is Torah and this its reward?" he protests. God, in the story, is permitted to offer only a feeble response: "This is what it occurred to me to do."

Rooted in the historical reality of persecutions of Jews by the Romans during the revolt led by Bar Kochba (133-5 C.E.), this Talmudic story bears witness to the brutality of that experience. But the story's most remarkable element is the way it responds to that brutality: Moses, the giver of Torah, the great hero of rabbinic tradition, is made to articulate the ultimate question—how can God allow one who observes God's Torah to suffer so grievously and unjustly? In fact, it is difficult to imagine a more challenging theological question, whether in antiquity or today. Yet it is Moses, in this version of the story, or the Ministering Angels, in the Talmud's other version (tractate Berakhot, p. 61b), who expresses it. It is not the evil rebel who gives voice to this challenge, not the unbeliever who wonders how God can be passive in the face of such cruelty. It is the wisest, the most respected figure in the tradition—indeed, the true "Believer"—

who, as the Talmud understands it, will speak the truth and protest false pieties.

I think it is fair to say that both of these stories—the biblical challenge by Abraham and the Talmudic protest by Moses—are examples of the rebuke of God. In each case, the hero seems to enact the biblical command, "you shall surely rebuke your neighbor (Lev. 19:17)," in connection with God. The fact that the object of each rebuke is the divine covenantal partner does not remove this model from the human realm, though. It merely demonstrates how deeply the obligation to offer correction is embedded in the covenantal ideal. If it is appropriate to rebuke even God for perceived wrongs or injustices, how much more necessary is it to offer correction to human partners in the covenant of Israel.

But here is the rub. The command of Leviticus directs a person to offer private, personal rebuke to his neighbor. Indeed, the Talmud, emphasizing the difficulty of properly fulfilling this directive, cautions that one not attempt to rebuke another if he or she is unlikely to be able to "hear" it. Undoubtedly, correction offered in public is more difficult, if not impossible, to hear. Contrary to what we might assume, the Talmud's critical challenge of God's justice, spoken by Moses, is a "private" rebuke. How can this be so, given that it is expressed in what is, *prima facie*, a public document? In reality, the Talmud is an insider's work, accessible, until modernity, only to scholars who had undertaken long years of specialized study. "Private" here means inside, and there is no doubt that insiders might share questions and critiques that would be inappropriate if spoken in a more public domain. And even the Torah's rebuke, offered in the voice of Abraham, is less than public in the sense just defined. It is unimaginable that the Torah was meant, in its origins, to be recited beyond the circle of Israel. Besides, Abraham's complaint for justice in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is more than offset by the silent, accepting Abraham of the "Akedah." It is the latter Abraham whose model echoed most powerfully in the traditional worlds of both Jews and Christians in later centuries.

So, when we return to Danny, whose critique is arguably the critique of a believer in the ancient model, we must ask whether his is a rebuke offered in a manner in which it might be heard. He is obviously not speaking in the company of insiders, as one Jew to his neighbor. He yells his critique mostly as an outsider, no matter how powerfully his emotions draw him back to the Jewish center. And his

fictional voice is expressed by means of that most public of contemporary media—film. Can such a rebuke fulfill the ideal of Leviticus? Or is Danny's—and Bean's—the way of the Talmudic informer, who is hated for telling even the truth in a way that can be hurtful to his people?

Let me define the category of "informer" by relating an example from the midrash. In the midrash's version of the drama of Esther and Mordechai, the wicked Haman seeks to destroy the Jews by enticing them to participate in sin (if they sin, God will have to punish them). Haman persuades Mordechai to invite his Jewish subjects to an orgy and, despite Mordechai's attempt to dissuade them, many willingly attend. At the moment they begin to dissuade them, sinful activity, Satan arises and speaks against them before God. Informing God of their sin, Satan succeeds in persuading God to destroy them (of course, this is not the end of the story).

The informer, in this story, is Satan. In other rabbinic stories, the informer might be the snake (from the Garden of Eden). Without exception, the informer is a hated or condemned figure, and what makes him hateful is his willingness to speak against Israel, often to foreign authorities (such as the Romans), in a way that brings them harm. This is so whether or not what he says against Israel is true.

The hatred of the informer in Jewish tradition and history was extreme. The rabbis instituted a prayer, to be recited three times daily, to curse the informer. The Talmud insists that informers will be punished in Hell for all generations, with no hope of a reprieve. In Europe in the Middle Ages—and particularly in Spain—the plague of informers was so profound that local Jewish courts sometimes condemned them to death, buying the cooperation of the authorities to carry out the court's verdict.

Why was the attitude toward informers so excessive? Obviously, because their actions potentially brought harm, whether economic or physical, to the Jewish community. During centuries when the well-being of Jews was repeatedly placed in jeopardy, the possible harm done by the imprudent speech of insiders could not be tolerated. When the consequences might be so grievous, the community understood itself to have the right—a right with which we will sympathize—to suppress the potentially damaging utterance.

So our question is, is Danny a rebuker, seeking to correct the wrongs he perceives as a sympathetic compatriot, or an informer, bringing potential harm to his former community by exposing their

blemishes to the gaze of unsympathetic outsiders? Before responding too quickly—isn't the latter the *obvious* answer?—let us examine a contemporary analogy that may force us to reconsider.

Jewish organizations in the United States have repeatedly condemned the mainstream press for what they allege to be biased reporting concerning Israel. They commonly insist that Israel and her policies are represented critically and unfairly in the American media. The Jewish press, by contrast, will be described as fairer or more objective in its reporting. This is despite the fact that the American news media broadcast or publish a wide variety of views concerning events in the Middle East, whereas the American Jewish press prints a narrow range of acceptable opinions. Indeed, the Jewish press is characterized by a kind of "Israel-orthodoxy" that will almost always support "Israel's side" of any incident or dispute.

Notably, the habits of the American Jewish press are not replicated in Israel. Israeli newspapers are generally a wide-open affair, printing opinions from a broad range of perspectives. And, whether leaning to the right or to the left, they do not hesitate to express criticism—often biting criticism—of their government, its leaders, and their policies. I offer a few select recent examples:

During the recent Passover holiday (2001), Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon offered lengthy interviews to the three leading Israeli papers. Sharon spoke of the recent conflict with the Palestinians, of the current state of Zionism, and of his own past. Subsequently, columnists in each of the papers criticized Sharon for being naive or out of touch—for viewing the world of today through the lens of yesterday. The language they used to offer their critique was sometimes less than respectful. But this is typical of Israeli political rhetoric, in the newspapers as much as in the street.

On the occasion of Israel's Independence Day, one columnist wrote at length of Israel's failure to respect the needs and rights of her Arab citizens in connection with the public commemoration. For the Arabs, Israel's Independence Day is a day of bitter memories—memories that find no legitimate public expression. Where, the writer asked, are the monuments to the hundreds of Arab towns and villages inside the Green Line that were destroyed during the War of Independence? Why is the memory of these villages suppressed or erased in official Israeli policy, for Jewish and Arab citizens of the state alike? This was a biting, bitter op-ed piece, one that surely upset many readers. But, in the Israeli press, it had its place.

A more recent column questioned the justice of Israeli policies in the West Bank during the protracted intifada, policies that protect the right of relatively few Jewish settlers to move about freely while restricting or confining the mobility of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Why, the author wondered, must Israel expend its resources, and oppress and alienate the local population, to protect settlers whose right many Israelis oppose in the first place? Whatever wrongs might be committed by Palestinian militants cannot erase the wrong promulgated by this Israeli military policy, or so the columnist argued.

I cannot remember the last time I saw opinions like these expressed in the American Jewish press. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that they would be unprintable. One frequent contributor to the Jewish press recently told me that he is unable to express his true opinions concerning the "situation" in Israel and the West Bank for fear that he would jeopardize his career.

But how can we explain this dichotomy between the Israeli and American-Jewish press? Why will one community permit the outspoken expression of critique and dissent when the other will not? A sympathetic explanation would reference the "inside-outside" distinction adumbrated above. The Israeli press is an "inside" press. In the Israeli papers (as well as other media), Israelis speak to Israelis. In those papers, therefore, commentators may feel free to express their opinions—whatever those opinions might be—as openly as they like, for there is no fear of doing harm when the audience is one's brothers and sisters. But the American Jewish press is, in some sense, an "outside" organ, for it represents Israel (as well as the Jewish community) before the American populace at large. Expressed in American Jewish papers, certain views might do harm, for critical comments could be (mis)interpreted as evidence of absence of support for Israel. So, the argument would go, it is better to exclude critical opinions from the Anglo-Jewish press, even at the expense of community self-censorship.

Whatever the logic of this distinction, it is impossible to sustain in a world where the critical Israeli op-ed, in English, is only as far away as the click of a mouse. With information technologies being what they are, there is no longer a real difference between "inside" and "outside." All expression for the record is "outside"; it is all "public" in the widest sense of the word. What is written one day for the Israeli paper can be picked up the next day by the *New York Times*

or the *Washington Post*. And it often is. Furthermore, opinion writers in Israel are well aware of this fact. Their judgment is that there is no need to suppress critical opinions, even when the "audience" is the world.

Moreover, even in the absence of current electronic technologies, it is impossible to imagine an "inside" and "outside" when speaking of Israel-related opinion. Israel operates on the world stage. Her actions and policies are debated in the public forum. She has no secrets because, in this world, there would be no way to keep a "secret" secret for very long.

In a world such as this, the very distinction between "inside" and "outside" is pernicious, and the belief that what one says among insiders will not be heard among outsiders simply naive. In reality, we have no choice but to speak with the recognition that, whatever we say, anyone may listen. For this reason, it is essential that any expression be defensible before the scrutiny of the broadest possible audience. Israeli opinion-makers understand this, and they therefore allow themselves to speak their mind, whoever might hear. Do I speak the truth as I understand it?—this is the question each must ask. In contrast, the American Jewish press, which is afraid of the scrutiny of the outsider, limits expression and disallows dissent. And, for this reason, it is scorned by knowledgeable insiders.

The Jewish community, like Israel—like *all* communities—lives today in the public square. Its actions and opinions are viewed and scrutinized by all who care to look. The traditional Jewish distinction between the rebuker and the informer may, therefore, no longer be sustained. If it is impossible to speak amongst insiders alone, it is necessary to speak honestly in the presence of all. Rebuke, like all sacred obligations, is performed in the open. Arguably, the nature of rebuke must therefore change. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the public nature of the act requires that it be softened, the sharpness of the criticism blunted. Remember: Any compromise with conscience will be a *public* compromise. A partial rebuke will be seen for what it is, that is, only a half-truth. If the obligation to rebuke changes in the contemporary setting, it can be only in the direction of "full disclosure." The rebuke must be spoken as honestly as possible. This is so because, living together in a vast glass house, there will be no "sin" that will not be seen.

But, though a rebuke must be expressed honestly, it must still be offered in a manner in which it might be heard. And here, there is

admittedly doubt whether Danny's—or shall we say Bean's—critique succeeds. Danny's violence, both physical and verbal, makes him a problematic messenger for rebuke. Moreover, the distortions that are often the vehicle for his messages make it difficult to hear what is right in what he says; some viewers will simply be too consumed in trying to correct his distortions. These problematic qualities, it may be argued, are in the service of dramatic characterization. Danny does successfully demand that we sit up and take notice, and, we must admit, the rebuker to whom we pay no attention is no rebuker at all. But is this justification enough to mitigate the extremism and brutality that will make some viewers so uncomfortable? Only the individual viewer can answer for him or herself.

My answer to this question? An unhesitating yes. It seems to me that the voice of *The Believer* is the voice of one who loves Jewish tradition but hates its flaws. And both are spoken with total honesty, at least as the rebuker understands it. In his view, the Torah is mysterious and sacred, its discipline one that provides direction and comfort. But the same Torah is also a repository of sometimes arbitrary and even cruel laws, and its discipline more than once seems an exercise of divine power for its own sake. Can there be any denying the wisdom of this insight?

Does the bile of the messenger diminish the profundity of his message? For me, the answer is no. First, because his resentment and outrage are real, if exaggerated. Who cannot feel resentment at the injustices of this, as of any, tradition? Who will deny the outrage of historical victimhood transformed into cultural value? Second, because for most people—and I include myself in this category—it is difficult to articulate critiques of a tradition one loves, and where I might vacillate, Danny does not hesitate. In the end, I believe, critiques are better expressed than not expressed. Finally, because I am a Jew who is committed to the tradition of my people, I too must stand among the rebuked. And I think that I am better able to hear the rebuke because it is, by virtue of its dramatic context, oblique and not direct.

The Believer offers a model for what might be described as a post-modern rebuke. As we have noted, in the age of (potentially) universal public access to information, no rebuke, however culturally specific, can be truly private. Being public, perhaps it is wisest that rebuke be expressed indirectly, in the heightened reality of film rather than in the pious banality of a sermon. Because it is refracted

through the artistic medium, the one who cannot hear it will not. He or she will turn aside or dismiss it as absurd. Still, in the distorted voice of dramatic exaggeration, a truer critique might well reside, and that critique will be heard by the one who is willing to listen. *The Believer* is an experiment in such postmodern rebuke and, whether successful as rebuke or not, its intuition is brilliant.



I

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self-criticism" had, for German Jews, a strongly positive connotation well into the 1880s. Moritz Lazarus could speak proudly of the Jews as the classical people of "self-criticism" in his pamphlet *What Is National?* And Emanuel Schreiber, the rabbi of the Bonn Jewish community, in 1881 published an entire book on the "self-criticism of the Jews," in which this quality is glorified and exemplified by his own attack on the neo-Orthodox Breslau Rabbinical Seminary. His attack, he argues, should not be taken as "self-hatred" because 1) it is valid and 2) he is not condemning all Jews, just a subset. It is only with the increase in virulent public anti-Semitism, with its concomitant identification among German Jews with the Eastern Jew as an idealized image of the "good Jew," that the concept of "self-criticism" is replaced by the pathology of "self-hatred," an illness attributed to Jews. Jews had been long the subject of medical discourse, first as healer and then as part of that group most at risk from disease, reaching back into the Middle Ages. The merging of the image of the self-critical Jew with that of the mad Jew produced, in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the image of the self-hating Jew as art of the rhetoric of race. A half-century after the French Revolution, within the confines of the Parisian Anthropological Society, the question of specifically Jewish tendencies toward illness, their form and frequency, was raised again. It was at the time of the most visible demands of French Jewry for a share in the power of the bourgeoisie, who had attempted to exclude them in the Third

Republic. In the *Bulletin of the Anthropological Society*, M. Boudin commented in a letter from Vichy concerning "idiocy and mental illness among German Jews" based on German census statistics. The focus of this short paper was on the much higher frequency of psychopathologies among Jews in Germany than among Catholics or Protestants in the same population. For example, in Bavaria one mentally ill individual was found for a population of 908 Catholics and 967 Protestants but for only 514 Jews. This led Boudin to observe that psychopathologies are "twice as frequent among the Jewish population as among the German population." Boudin attributed this to "the frequency of marriage between blood relatives." Statistics as a means of quantifying insanity as a sign of Otherness had been used following the 1840 American census. In the interpretation of that data, the antiabolitionist forces, headed by John C. Calhoun, had argued that blacks suffered more frequently from mental illness when free than when enslaved; thus, freedom promoted psychopathology. For Boudin, inbreeding, the exclusivity of the Jews, was the pseudoscientific origin of the Jews' tendency to psychopathology. The contemporary demand for legal equality was translated into its antithesis, the desire for psychopathology. Boudin also focused on the problem in Germany, rather than in France, distancing it even more. For the French, the German Jew became the Other. Boudin concluded his paper with a critique of the view that the etiology of psychopathology among the Jews could be traced to their "cosmopolitanism." The idea that the Jew is associated with modern civilization and the decadence of city life was introduced here, if only to be rebutted. What for LaFontaine had been a general predisposition to illness had become by the mid-nineteenth century a predisposition for mental illness. The Jews were seen as covertly ill in a manner that provided observers with proof of their own emotional and intellectual superiority.

The statistics brought by nineteenth- (and indeed twentieth-) century writers on the topic of the mental instability of the Jews do not, of course, reflect any specific predisposition of the European Jewish community for mental illness. Indeed, this view has recently been labeled one of the "misconceptions" about the genetic disorders that befall the Jews. The statistics, cited over and over by mental health practitioners during this period, most probably reflect the higher incidence of hospitalization of Jews for mental illness owing to their concentration in urban areas, which, unlike rural areas, were not as

conducive to the presence of the mentally ill within society. Also, urban Jews had developed a better network for the identification and treatment of illness, including mental illness. The sense of community, coupled with the impression that the mentally ill were unable to function within urban society, may have led to more frequent hospitalization and thus to the higher statistical incidence of psychopathology among the Jews.

By the 1880s the linkage of the Jew with psychopathology was a given in anthropological circles. In the *Parisian Anthropological Society* the Prussian census of 1880 was the point of departure for an even more detailed debate on the psychopathologies of the Jews. Again statistics were used to stress the greater occurrence of mental illness among the Jews. The comments on the etiology of mental illness are more diffuse. M. Zabrowski laid it at the feet of the ecstatic preoccupation with mysticism and the supernatural, a clear reference to the Eastern Jews, whose presence was being felt even more in Paris following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 and the resulting forced immigration. He and M. Sanson also stressed the curative role of agricultural employment and the absence of Jews in this field. The "cosmopolitanism" of the Jews, the pressure of the fields in which they were occupied, formed part of the reason for him. But M. Blanchard simply stated that "hysteria and neurasthenia are more frequent among the Jewish race than all other races." Thus it was no longer simply mental illness, itself a delimitation of LaFontaine's more general view of the Jewish predisposition for illness, but rather "hysteria and neurasthenia" that were typical of the Jew. The source, according to M. Sanson, was endogamous marriage.

The view that all Jews were especially prone to hysteria and neurasthenia through inbred weakening of the nervous system appeared in canonical form in Jean Martin Charcot's *Tuesday Lesson* for October 23, 1888. Charcot, Freud's teacher, described "a case of hysterical dyspnea. I already mentioned that his twenty-year-old patient is a Jewess. I will use this occasion to stress that nervous illnesses of all types are innumerable more frequent among Jews than among other groups." Charcot attributed this fact to inbreeding.

By 1890 Charcot's view had become a commonplace in European psychiatry. Standard German textbooks of psychiatry such as those by Schule, Kraepelin, Kirchhoff and Krafft-Ebing cited Charcot. For Krafft-Ebing the "anthropological" cause of the greater incidence of insanity among the Jews is their endogamous marriages which he, as

a liberal, compares to the degeneracy found in the inbred upper class. But it is mysticism, as in the image of the Eastern Jew, that he contrasts with the rationality of the Western religion. The result of this stress of inbreeding and mysticism is to focus on the exclusivity of the Jews. The form of this insanity has sexual implications:

Very often, excessive religious inclination is itself a symptom of an originally abnormal character of actual disease, and, not infrequently, concealed under a veil of religious enthusiasm there is abnormally intensified sensuality and sexual excitement that lead to sexual errors that are of etiological significance.

It is in the description of neurasthenia in Krafft-Ebing's study of the illness that the image of the Jewish man is to be found. He is "an over-achiever in the arena of commerce or politics" who "reads reports, business correspondence, stock market notations during meals, for whom 'time is money.'" The association of the Jew with the "American illness," through the use of the English phrase "time is money," presents the cosmopolitan Jew as the quintessential American. This conflation of two personifications of Otherness underlines the political implications of seeing in the "cosmopolitanism" of the Jews, in their function in the modern city, the source, on one level, of their neurasthenia. Yet this integration of the Jews into the negative image of modern civilization is contradicted by the view of the exclusivity of the Jews in their sexual isolation from Western society.

The image of the neurasthenic as Jew is not found as widely within Krafft-Ebing's text, however (even though he elsewhere in the same text stresses the special proclivity of the Jew for neurasthenia). Rather, this analogy of the Jews is written from the Jewish point of view. The quote was used in Martin Engländer's essay *The Evident Most Frequent Appearances of Illness in the Jewish Race* (1902). Engländer was one of the early Viennese supporters of Herzl and the Zionist movement. He discussed the cultural predisposition of the Jews to neurasthenia as a result of the "over-exertion and exhaustion of the brain...among Jews as opposed to the non-Jewish population." The struggle, haste and drive, the hunt for happiness have caused "reaction in their central nervous system." Neurasthenia is the result of the Jewish brain's inability to compete after "a two-thousand-year Diaspora" and "a struggle for mere existence up to eman-

ipation." Engländer thus attempted to dismiss the etiology of neurasthenia as a result of inbreeding, citing the Americans as an example of a "race" in which neurasthenia predominates and in which exogamous marriages are common. The cause of the Jews' illnesses is their confinement in the city, the source of all degeneracy; the cure is "land, air, light."

Engländer's views are not idiosyncratic. For him the madness of the Jews is a direct result of the Jews' political and social position in the West. Cesare Lombroso, whose name is linked with the concept of "degeneration" which he helped forge, was also a Jew. After authoring a number of studies on the degeneracy of the prostitute and the criminal, Lombroso was confronted with the charge that Jews, too, were a degenerate subclass of human being, a class determined by their biology. Lombroso's answer to this charge, *Anti-Semitism and the Jews in the Light of Modern Science* (1893), attempted to counter the use of medical or pseudoscientific discourse to characterize the nature of the Jew. But Lombroso also accepted the basic view that the Jew was more highly prone to specific forms of mental illness. He quotes Charcot to this effect, but, like Engländer, he sees the reason for this tendency not in the physical nature of the Jew but in the "residual effect of persecution." Both Engländer and Lombroso accepted the view that some type of degenerative process, leading to the predominance of specific forms of mental illness, exists among all Jews. The only difference from non-Jewish savants that they saw was the cause of this process. In rejecting the charge of inbreeding, Jews such as Engländer and Lombroso also rejected the implications that they indulge in primitive sexual practices that violate a basic human taboo against incest. The confusion of endogamous marriage with incestuous inbreeding was a result both of the level of late-nineteenth-century science and of the desire of this scientific discourse to have categories with which to label the explicit nature of the Other. The Jews are thus mentally ill, they manifest this illness in the forms of hysteria and neurasthenia, and the cause is their sexual practice or their mystical religion or their role as carriers of Western cosmopolitanism.

It is in this context that Max Nordau's often cited call for the Jews to become "muscle Jews," published in 1900, must be read. German nationalism through the code of *mens sana in corpore sano* is evident. But, of course, this earlier call by the father of German nationalism, *Turnvater* Jahn, had been heavily overlaid with anti-Semitic rhet-

oric. Nordau's call is yet another attempt from within the Jewish community to co-opt the underlying premises of anti-Semitic rhetoric and use its strong political message for their own ends. Nordau's call for a "new muscle Jew" is based on the degeneration of the Jew "in the narrow confines of the ghetto." But not only the Jews' muscles but also their minds have atrophied in the ghetto. Implicit in Nordau's call is the equation of the "old Jews" and their attitude toward life. Zionism demands that the new muscle Jew have a healthy body and a healthy mind. Thus he condemns his critics as having not only weak bodies but weak minds! This charge must be read within the inner circles of the Zionist movement in which (as has been seen) the opponents of Zionism are viewed as merely Jews possessing all of the qualities ascribed to them (including madness) by the anti-Semites.

Neurasthenia, the American disease, the disease of modern life, is also the disease of the Jews, modern people incarnate. Degeneration was the result of sexuality and was symptomized by deviant sexuality. If the best authorities were to be believed, and at least in Germany the best authorities argued that inbreeding was the cause of the neurasthenia of the Jews, there is more than a slight implication of incest. Indeed, Engländer expressly defends the Jews against the charge of "racial inbreeding" while condemning the provisions of Mosaic law that permit marriage between uncle and niece. He thus gives evidence to the implicit charge that runs through all the literature on the insanity of the Jews; that they are themselves the cause of their own downfall through their perverse sexuality and that their degeneracy is the outward sign of their fall from grace. The sexuality of the Other is always threatening. With the implicit charge of incest, one of the ultimate cultural taboos of nineteenth-century thought is evoked. Inbreeding is incestuous and is a sign of the "primitive" nature of the Jews, of their existence outside the bounds of acceptable, Western sexual practice.

The discourse of decadent civilization, of the city, is inexorably linked with the sexual exclusivity of the Jew. Nowhere is this linkage made more evident than in Thomas Mann's novella *The Blood of the Walsungen* (1905). This tale of brother-sister incest ends, at least in the first version, with an emphasis on the sexual exclusivity of the Jew. The brother has just consummated his relationship with his sister, and she ponders the fate of her German fiancé. Mann concludes the unpublished first edition with two Yiddishisms, a sign of the damaged, sexualized discourse of the siblings. Mann's father-in-law,

Alfred Pringsheim, so objected to the inclusion of Yiddishisms ("We robbed [beganeft] the non-Jew [goy]") as a sign of the siblings' ethnic identity that Mann suppressed the planned publication of the story. The novella, which Mann re-edited in 1921 to eliminate the Yiddishisms, echoed the sense of the corruption of both "modern life" as typified by the Wagner cult and the Jews. The Jews, through their lack of redemption, are morally weak, and this manifests itself in the most primitive manner, through incest. Indeed, Adolf Hitler, never the most original of thinkers, simply summarized "Jewish religious doctrine" as "prescriptions for keeping the blood of Jewry pure." The view that within the Jews' sexuality is hidden the wellspring of their own degeneration haunts the overtly sexual imagery of anti-Semitic writings from the end of the nineteenth century. The Jew, the most visible Other in late-nineteenth-century Europe, is also the bearer of the most devastating sexual stigma, incest.

Even those Jews who accepted the idea that the Jew was predisposed to some form of mental illness, a concept articulated in the rhetoric of racial science, could not accept it as applied to themselves. Rather, they projected the idea of an innate tendency to psychopathology onto other groups of Jews, the "bad" Jews, with whom they refused to identify. Parallel to the invention of the Eastern Jew as the image of the ideal Jew, separate from the corruption of all Western traditions, there arises the image of the self-hating Jew as the necessary product of this Western tradition. In 1904 Fritz Wittels continued the argument of writers such as Conrad Alberti that those Jews who accept the value systems of German society are condemned to self-hatred. In his pamphlet *The Baptized Jew* he adopts the entire *topos* of the hidden language of the Jews as presented in the rhetoric of science. Baptized Jews are, for Wittels, simply Jews who have "perjured themselves for base reasons"; they are lying Jews. These Jews have the capacity to become "anti-Semitic" Jews. We have already seen that Karl Kraus used the concept of "Jewish anti-Semitism" in speaking of the Zionists. He postulated his perception of a "correct" Jewish identity as the basis for any definition of the "good" Jew and saw in Herzl and the Zionists the antithesis: they were Jews who hated other Jews and, by definition, themselves. For Fritz Wittels, the ultimate form of the baptized Jew is the Jew who hates his or her own race. Wittels, a follower and biographer of Freud, began to outline in his pamphlet the psychosis of self-hatred. Some saw self-hatred as a necessary attribute of the "good" Jew.

Weininger uses a primitive understanding of the concept of projection in describing the process of self-hatred:

Thus the fact this explained that the bitterest anti-Semites are to be found amongst the Jews themselves. For only the quite Jewish Jews, like the completely Aryan Aryans, are not at all anti-Semitically disposed; among the remainder only the commoner natures are actively anti-Semitic and pass sentence on others without having once sat in judgment on themselves in these matters; and very few exercise their anti-Semitism first on themselves. This one thing, however, remains nonetheless certain; whoever detests the Jewish disposition detests it first of all in himself; that he should persecute it in others is merely his endeavor to separate himself from Jewishness; he strives to shake it off and to localize it in his fellow-creatures, and so for a moment to dream himself free of it. Hatred, like love, is a projected phenomenon; that person alone is hated who reminds one unpleasantly of oneself.

Weininger's awareness of projection as a psychological mechanism is but another adaptation of the rhetoric of science, here the science of psychology, to the psychopathology of the Jew. Both Wittels the psychoanalyst and Weininger the philosopher employ the model of the self-hater as one who embodies all of the essential negative qualities ascribed to the Jew. Weininger and Wittels have created a subclass for the psychology of the Jew that points toward self-hatred as the marker of the Jew most closely identifying with the double bind inherent in Western culture. This "double bind" is at the crux of the problem of self-hatred. As an assimilated or secular Jew, in order to be a "full" member of a society that believes in the inherent inferiority of the Jews, one needs to believe in one's own inferiority. This is virtually impossible (except in the model of self-destructive masochism) and has one projects this sense of difference on to "other" Jews.

Both Wittels and Weininger see the self-hating Jew as the apogee or nadir of this identification. But both present this as a problem in the psychology of race. This shift in the rhetoric of science, or at least the continuation of the biology of race into a biological psychology of race, represents the very beginnings of an explanatory model of self-hatred rooted in a dynamic psychology.

With the gradual replacement during the opening decades of the twentieth century of the biologically determined model for psychopathology with that of a psychodynamically oriented one, one would have expected the image of the madness of the Jew to have vanished. With Freud's reorientation of psychopathology, any particularistic attribution of specific patterns of mental disease to any group, especially on the basis of a presumed group-specific sexual aberration, should have been impossible. But Freud's views of the universal patterns of human sexuality, especially in regard to fantasies of incest, could not destroy the image of the Jew as predisposed to mental illness. This view continued, not only in the theoretical writings of Wittels and Weininger, but in the clinic where the most radical rethinking of the etiology of mental illness was being undertaken.

In Eugen Bleuler's Burghölzli, the clinic in which Freud's dynamic psychopathology was being applied in a hospital setting, Rafael Becker, a young Jewish doctor, was given the assignment of comparing Jewish and non-Jewish patients to determine whether the work done by earlier investigators could be validated with the psychoanalytic approach. Becker first presented his findings before a Zionist organization in Zurich during March 1919. He began with the statistics upon which everyone had based their assumptions and thus predetermined his own findings. The Jews do indeed suffer from a more frequent rate of mental illness than the non-Jewish population, but not because of inbreeding. Indeed, inbreeding has led to the Jews' becoming less frequently infected by certain illnesses, such as smallpox and cholera, since they "acquire immunizing force through inbreeding and the purity of the race." Becker also denies that there is any specific "psychosis judaica," any specific form of mental illness that affects only the Jews, any more than there are any specific anthropological signs that determine the inferiority of the Jews. Mental illness for Becker (as for Bleuler) was not brain illness but psychic illness. Becker dismisses the increase in luetic infections and their results, as well as senile dementia, among the Jews as merely social artifacts; these are the result of alteration in society in general—the spread of syphilis in the former case and the increased life expectancy provided by better social conditions in the latter.

Becker denies any specific increase in mental illness because of a special proclivity of the Jews but sees in the increase in the rate of other forms of psychopathology the direct result of the acculturation of Western Jews. Becker notes that even though Jews in earlier times

suffered more greatly from oppression, their strong faith preserved their sanity. Only with the decline in Jewish identity in the nineteenth century has there been an increase in mental illness. Becker picks up a thread in late-nineteenth-century anti-assimilationist Jewish thought that places the roots for the moral decline of the Jew at the doorstep of Jewish emancipation and acculturation. He introduces Alfred Adler's newly coined concept of "inferiority" to give a dynamic dimension to his assumption that Jews are more frequently driven into madness than their non-Jewish persecutors. It is the "assimilated Jew" who is diseased, self-hating and thus self-destructive.

Becker outlines the steps in the etiology of Jewish psychopathology. He denies any role to degeneration caused by inbreeding. He observes that because Jews are forbidden *de facto* the practice of certain occupations, many Jews marry very late. As a result, they have fewer and fewer children. (This is a substantial change from the charge made in the eighteenth century that the Jews' illnesses came from their early marriages and their large number of children!) As a result, the normal sexual development of the Jew is stunted because of the lack of an appropriate sexual outlet. Becker provided his audience with a solution that they would immediately have accepted as correct. He sees an alteration of the social structure that caused such illnesses as the appropriate "therapy." Provide appropriate occupations, resolve the sense of inferiority that results from being unable to enter the profession that one desires, and earlier marriages will occur, which will remove the direct cause of the psychopathologies. In the meantime, Jews can avoid the causes of overstimulation of sexuality by avoiding alcohol and sharp spices ("so beloved in the Jewish cuisine") and by exercising, following Nordau's prescription. This was Becker's prescription before a Jewish lay audience in 1918; the next year he published the results of his scholarly researches in the Burghölzli, which repeat many of his earlier views. He provides a case study of the inferiority complex of one of his patients, a thirty-eight-year-old merchant. The case study provides Becker with an illness that he now sees as the result of the position of the Jew in Western society. Not a "psychosis judaica" but rather, using the new rhetoric of psychoanalysis, "the Jewish complex." The Jewish complex in this patient, illustrated by long passages from the patient's own biographical account, is marked by the sense of inferiority brought about by his treatment in society from the age of four, when "at the market

day in Albstätten I alone of all the children was mocked...I felt the humiliation that the Jew as a human being must feel in society". Becker's patient continues to describe his life in terms of the social inferiority that he perceived as a Jewish child in a Christian world. Even though Becker records a fairly detailed description of the patient's sexual life, he sees in all of the anomalies of his sexuality only the product of the social inequality that led to his sense of inferiority. Thus Becker is able to avoid any relationship between the inborn sexual perversities ascribed to the Jew and his psychosis.

The theme of Jewish self-hatred reappears in the language of psychoanalysis in 1923 when Josef Prager writes an essay for Martin Buber's *The New Jew* entitled "Repression and Breakthrough in the Jewish Soul." Seeing Freud as an essentially Jewish thinker, Prager attempts to use the concept of repression as a tool for understanding the shaping of the "Jewish soul." He sees the conflict as existing between the norms of society and the ability of the Jew to adapt to them. When the society attaches negative evaluation to being Jewish, Jews who desire to be assimilated must repress these attributes, and in repressing them, they come to have a centrality for them. Now Prager sees this repression as being a quality of the drive for assimilation, and he sees in the articulation of one's Jewishness the first step to a "healing of the sick Jewish soul." Prager picks up the thread of a specific Jewish illness, an illness of the Jewish soul in Western society, which is "self-hatred." It is not the Eastern Jew but rather Westernized Jew who is sick, and the illness is one of the psyche. Here the process of projection is complete. Articulated through the new "Jewish" language of psychoanalysis (the Viennese answer to Hebrew as a cultural language), Prager's argument implicitly presents the Eastern Jew as one free of such ills.

In 1924, E. J. Lesser provides another case study: Karl Marx as self-hater. But Lesser hits on a new tack, seeing in Marx's self-hatred his Jewishness. Marx's language is that of the Jew in that he uses the *pitiful* in his argument. His Jewish identity even appears when he is damning the Jews. No matter what he undertakes, he remains the "full-blooded Jew." What is interesting is that other discussions of Marx's self-hatred in this period came to the same conclusion. They return to Buber's model of a conflict between Jewish identity and Western civilization to explain the aberration of self-hatred. Self-hatred is thus the denial of the essential Jew within; it is the dialectical process undertaken within the psyche. The essential Jew in

conflict with the values of the West produces the self-hater, that individual who typifies the Jew in the West.

With the rise of the Nazis, the image of the "self-hating" Jew, the self-critical Jew, became a touchstone for the political anti-Semites. Robert Weltsch, in an editorial in the *Jewish Panorama* of May 5, 1933, till called for the need for "self-criticism, in spite of everything." While rejecting the type of biologically defined self-hatred exemplified by Weininger, as well as German Jewish critical overcompensation, he called for an introspective evaluation of Jewish identity. He sees the striving for assimilation as an illness that led to these forms of self-hatred. The Jew must have a "Jewish national sense," which must arise through "self-criticism." Weltsch's observations rely on a dichotomy between healthy self-criticism and diseased self-hatred. Healthy are those who reject their acculturated identities and see themselves primarily as Jews; diseased are those who remain mired within the corruption of a primarily German identity. Again it is the belief of the Other, here the acculturated German, as self-hating and diseased that creates categories of the acceptable and the unacceptable Jews. Weltsch's Zionist orientation sees the "new Jew" as unconsciously rejecting the model of identity that predominated among German Jews during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His glorification of a separatist Jewish identity is parallel to the stress on national identities present throughout Europe. Just as the Nazis claimed that being consciously German was "healthy" and being Jewish was "diseased" (a metaphor that dominates Hitler's *Mein Kampf*), so, too, it was necessary for Jewish political ideologists to distinguish between "healthy" and "corrupt" Jewish identities. What is evident is that their own sense of self provided the model for the "healthy" Jew; that which they rejected, the model for the "ill" Jew. The German model for the formation of a "healthy" Jewish identity had some influence on the other side of the Atlantic. Given the great prestige of German medical science in the United States, it is little wonder that the American medical establishment, or at least American Jewish psychiatrists, took interest in the psychopathology of self-hatred. In 1920 A. Myerson, at the Boston State Hospital, attributed the psychopathology of the Jew to "social" rather than "biological" heredity. Like Becker, he sees in the Jews' isolation from appropriate forms of work one of the major sources for their psychopathology. Myerson also sees in the rejection by the Jews of "sports and play" one of the sources of the illness of the Jew. Again

following Norday's image of the "muscle Jew," here redefined as the "all-American athlete," Myerson provides yet another theoretical restatement of this myth:

Sports and play...form an incomparable avenue of discharge for nervous tension. They breed confidence in oneself. Being [extensor] in their character, they allow for the rise of pride and courage. Circumstances excluded the Jew from their wholesome influence, and the children of the race grew up to be very serious, very earnest, too early devoted to mature efforts, excessively cerebral in their activities, and not sufficiently strenuous physically. In other words, the Jew, through his restrictions, was cheated out of childhood.

Myerson, like Becker, needs to localize the baneful influence on the Jews outside of the Jews themselves. He locates it in another society, Eastern Europe, not America, with its reevaluation of older, foreign values. Indeed, the very fact that a large number of Eastern European Jews were manual laborers, under the most primitive conditions, relegates his condemnation of the image of the inactive Jewish child into the world of myth. For Myerson, the "bad" Jew as sick Jew resides in the East, is the Eastern Jew, the most evident representative of the stereotype of the Jew in post-First World War America.

The polemic attached to the idea of self-hatred as the pathological underpinning of the "bad" Jew continued in the United States throughout the mid-twentieth century. In Kurt Lewin's 1941 essay on Jewish self-hatred, Theodor Lessing's thesis of the innate psychosis of assimilated Jews trying to become "real" Germans (in his book of case studies of Jewish self-hatred of 1930) was examined within a social psychological model. Lewin, until 1932 professor of psychology at the University of Berlin and then the leading exponent of the study of group dynamics in the United States, was the major link between German concepts of self-hatred and American analysis of Jewish anti-Semitism. Lewin recognized, at least superficially, the false antithesis between the "bad" Eastern Jew and the "good" Western Jew in the German Jews' paradigm for the projection of their self-hatred. However, Lewin wishes to shift the discourse from one that sees self-hatred as an individual problem of adaptation, as in Lessing, to one of group dynamics. It is not the individual's need to compensate but rather the response of the group that is the source of self-hatred. Lewin believes that he is abandoning the labeling of the Jew as ill; instead, he is extending the idea, as in the older model, from a limited (though representative)

number of Jews to the entire category. "In fact, neurotic trends in Jews are frequently the result of their lack of adjustment to just such group problems." Neurosis is the result, not of inbreeding, but of group dynamics. It is, however, not only the privileged group's pressure on the minority that induces this sense of inferiority for Lewin; if this were the case, would self-hatred not manifest itself among such groups such as American Catholics? Assuming that this statement is empirically valid, Lewin seeks the etiology of self-hatred and finds it in those "Jewish" institutions associated with the Eastern Jew:

To build up such a feeling of group belongingness on the basis of active responsibility for the fellow Jew should be one of the outstanding policies of Jewish education. That does not mean that we can create in our children a feeling of belongingness by *forcing* them to go to Sunday school or *Heider*. Such a procedure means the establishment in early childhood of the same pattern of enforced group belongingness which is characteristic of the psychological situation for the negative chauvinists and it is sure to create in the long run exactly this attitude. Too many young Jews are driven away by too much *Heider*.

Lewin contrasts the German ideal of *Bildung*, education, with the institutional structures in traditional Judaism that have been viewed since the Enlightenment as antithetical to true education. Indeed, when G. E. Lessing's quintessential Jew Nathan the Wise educates his adopted daughter Recha, he turns her out so that she may learn from nature instead of educating her within "Jewish" structures such as the *Heider*, or Hebrew school. Lewin's insights about the nature of group dynamics still revolve about the hidden agenda of the nature of subgroups of Jews. Under the mask of the "self-hating" Western Jew still lurk presuppositions about the mythic Eastern Jew, presuppositions present within American Jewry just as they are within German Jewry. The sick Jew is the Eastern Jew.

In 1939 the Austrian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim was released from Buchenwald and emigrated to the United States. Based in Chicago, Bettelheim began to write a series of essays on his experiences in the concentration camps. One of these essays, incorporated in 1960 in his wide-reaching study of the Jewish response to the Holocaust, *The Informed Heart*, was a study entitled "The Dynamism of

Anti-Semitism in Gentile and Jew." Bettelheim sharpened the category of Jewish self-hatred in this essay and provided an elaborate model of self-hatred as the rationale for the inability of Jews to survive the camps. In contrast to Lewin, he locates the source of self-hatred in the assimilated Jew. He sees the loss of autonomy in the camps as parallel to the overall loss of autonomy in modern society, indeed as the reason for the fragmenting of personality within the camps. The Jews depend on the values of the society—on rank, position, status—to define themselves. When these are removed, when they are reduced to the level of the beast in their own eyes, their identities are destroyed. This is the red thread that is present in Buber and in Weininger: that the Jews in the West have no center, that they have replaced it (if indeed it ever existed) with the outward trappings of Western society, articulated in the political or economic discourse of the West. Bettelheim analyzes the reactions of the Jews, the "adaptive mechanisms" that they used to cope in the camps, as "neurotic or psychotic mechanisms," had they been manifested outside of the camps.

The Western Jews' actions are "insane" because they are in response to an "insane" world. The Jews have no center; they are insane. These responses internalize the anti-Semitic image of the Jew and they project it onto another subset of Jews, the Jews in the camps. Indeed, Bettelheim's initial "speculation[s] on the extermination camp" provide a five-point list of factors that "explain" the "docile acceptance of the situation in the camp." First, the prisoners are aware of the "tenuous" nature of their psychological "emergency measures"; second, they lose "libidinal energy" in maintaining their "fictions"; third, they identify with the enemy, which provides them with "gratification in being overpowered by the enemy"; fourth, they perceive the world as a psychotic delusion that can be maintained only by being passive and avoiding any direct confrontation with reality; fifth, in identifying with the "enemy" "they were able to 'destroy' delusionally their enemy by their own death." This pattern is, of course, the pattern of self-hatred developed within the rhetoric of the psychology of race during the early twentieth century. Self-haters know that their own self-hatred is but a coping device, they focus all of their energy in maintaining this device, they identify with the rhetoric of anti-Semitism, they use this rhetoric as a means of avoiding any confrontation with the reality of anti-Semitism in the streets, and finally, they so identify with the anti-Semite that they must end in suicide or madness.

The power of Lewin's and Bettelheim's contradictory models dominated the understanding of self-hatred following the war. The self-hating Jew is the "mad" Jew, and this Jew is the antithesis of the self-definition of the observer. In a 1951 dissertation entitled "Identification with the Aggressor," Irving Sarnoff attempted to document this type of identification through the use of standardized tests. Drawing on the work of Bettelheim, Erikson, Anna Freud and Lewin (all German Jews), Sarnoff sees adult maladaptation (which he labels Jewish anti-Semitism) as a direct result of childhood insecurity. This was yet another attempt to create categories of "healthy" and "diseased" Jews based, as with Lewin and Bettelheim, on social rather than biological causes. The problem with Sarnoff and all of the other psychologists and sociologists who followed this model for "self-hatred" is that they made specific assumptions about what is "healthy" and what is "sick." To label entire categories of identity as "diseased" is to indulge in the type of polemic that lies behind the very concept of self-hatred, for, as has been shown, the double bind of identity formations may have a productive as well as a destructive outcome.

What is more, the strict polar definition of identity implied by the label "self-hatred" rests on a specific set of historical presuppositions about the structure of identity. This German model, if one may so label it, sees a simple and direct relationship between the internalization of a negative image of the Jew and the resultant shaping of the Jew's identity. This was valid within a culture that postulated an absolute polarity between "German" and "Jew." The "Germans," since they did not exist as an entity, needed some means of defining their national homogeneity. They did so by defining it negatively. We are Germans, which means that we are not Jews. This definition existed within Germany as a powerful and unbridgeable abyss between the nation of the homogeneity of the "German" people and the assigned role of the Jew as the litmus test of difference. Once it became evident to the German Jews of the late nineteenth century that they had fallen into the double bind of this self-definition, they attempted to postulate other models for their own identity. These models were then simply negations or adaptations of the anti-Semitic image of the Jew. Either the Eastern Jew became the idealized image of the Jew, or an image shaped out of the fictions of Western Jewry, or the Western Jew remained as the antithesis of the healthy Jew. In defining and sharpening the idea of self-hatred as a category of illness,

German Jews were able to relegate those Jews viewed as unsuccessful in their adaptation to a separate class, the diseased. They incorporated into this category all of the negative qualities with which they were labeled and from which they wished to distance themselves. The protean category of the self-hating Jew was thus developed. It placed the "bad" Jews within an accepted and recognized category of the anti-Semitic science of race, the psychopathology of the Jew, and separated them from the Jewish identity of the observer.

The "insane" Jew, the Jewish self-hater, was defined within a world in which there were specific limits on the concept of difference. When this concept emigrated to the United States, before and during the Holocaust, clothed in the status of German science, it was adopted without any question—this in a society in which the complexity of the definition of difference eliminated any simple polar definition of the Jew. Even though the myth of the "hidden language" of the Jews existed in American anti-Semitism, there was already a central racial marker for difference in the United States: the black. Class distinctions in the United States had more to do with defining difference for the Jew than did racial distinctions. Because of this, the very concept of the "Jew" as a label for difference was fragmented, especially after the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel.

But most important was the power of myth. In defining difference, the Germans defined themselves as monolithically German until 1945. This was the central myth about the definition of German identity. It had nothing to do with reality; if anything, it attempted to transcend the realities of a pluralistic group, itself politically and culturally fragmented. The central myth of twentieth-century America, especially after the Second World War, was the myth of American heterogeneity—not the melting pot but the ability to possess multiple identities. The power of this myth, itself fraught with the potential of the double bind, undermined the definition of the "self-hating Jew" within the model provided by German psychology. This model, based on valid psychological principles such as identification and projection, nevertheless reflected its historical origins. When applied to the American Jewish experience, it provided a working label for the signification of specific modes of divergence, modes that eventually turned upon the ideological implications of "Jewish self-hatred." For "self-hatred" among Jews is not the special prerogative of any specific group of Jews: It is the result of the internalized con-

trast between any society in which the possibility of acceptance is extended to any marginal group and the projection of the negative image of this group onto a fiction of itself that leads to "self-hatred" of self-abnegation. The German experience of the early twentieth century localized this general psychological truth in the experience of the assimilated Jew in Germany and thus endowed the overall experience of projection and identification with a specific ideological bias. Within all worlds of privilege this pattern repeats itself, but always with specific historical variations. The development of the concept of self-hatred within the experience of German Jewry led to a narrowing of the focus of the concept and to its interpretation within the specific contours of German Jewish experience. It was the tension between this more rigid, limited understanding of self-hatred (with its concomitant glorification of the difference of the Jew) and the post-Holocaust experience in the United States that provided yet another double bind through the American perception of Jewish identity formation after the Holocaust.

II

This double bind is worked out in great detail in Henry Bean's film *The Believer*. It is a powerful evocation of the legacy of the Shoah as filtered through a post-Holocaust, American sensibility. This story (or perhaps better this fantasy) about the impact of the memory of the Shoah on a young man in his twenties in contemporary America presents a perfect example of "identification with the aggressor." Anna Freud had already coined this term in 1936 in Vienna. When she came to work in London with children rescued from Nazi Europe after 1939, she described how these Jewish children when they played war games identified the warring factions as "Nazis and Jews." And all of the children wanted to be Nazis. She tied this behavior to a means of defending the integrity of the "ego," of that part of our psyche that defines our identity. She sees the children as identifying with the successful Nazis and rejecting their identity as the inevitable Jewish victims. This she links to the ultimate form of aggression against the self, suicide. A recent example of this "identification with the aggressor" is to be found in an autobiographical essay by the

Moscow writer Alexander Gelman, a Jew who survived the Nazi ghetto at Bershadt:

I went mad at the age of eight.

They were real German units, albeit under my personal command. For my games I used the real military forces moving on that road. I would turn them this way and that to suit my plans....

Did I understand that I was a Jew, that everyone there was Jewish and that was why we were being punished? Yes, I did. But in my games I stopped being Jewish. There were no Jews in them—no Jews served in my troops, there was not a single Jew on my staff. I only became Jewish in intervals between battles, like an actor stepping out of character for a while. I realize now that my games saved me. If today I am more or less sane it is thanks to the fact that—like a madman—I never stopped playing. I played ceaselessly through those three years, and continued playing for a long time following my return, after the war.

Being Jewish here means being the victim and, therefore, being marked for destruction, something that no "ego" can easily accept. For our bottom line is that we must preserve ourselves psychologically at all costs, even through becoming that force that wishes to destroy us.

When we first meet Danny Balint (played by Canadian actor Ryan Gosling) in *The Believer* we see him only as a neo-Nazi thug in the ultimate "Jewish" city, New York, who seems truly to enjoy beating up Jews as well as railing against the "international Jewish conspiracy." Only slowly in the course of the film do we learn his secret. Through the agency of a reporter (played by Garret Dillahunt) we begin to unravel Danny's background, to discover that he had been raised an Orthodox Jew. Indeed the moment of true revelation comes in the confrontation with the reporter in a diner, where Danny eventually pulls out a gun. We initially believe that it is to threaten the reporter into keeping quiet. Yet, following Anna Freud's model, he puts the gun to his own head, quite out of keeping with his neo-Nazi identity, and threatens to commit suicide if the reporter prints the fact that he is a Jew. For "identification with the aggressor" is simply an attenuated form of suicide.

Already as a child Danny Balint had begun to question his Jewish identity because of his internalizing Jewish victimhood in the Shoah. Being "Jewish" for him means, in the first order, being a victim, and that is something he truly "never again" wants Jews to experience. His answer to his overwhelming, American identification with the Holocaust as the defining moment that shaped his Jewish identity is to become one of the perpetrators, to join, and indeed to inspire a neo-Nazi cult. Smarter than all of the others in the group, he quickly becomes their leader and spokesman. Only in the course of the violence and murders that they undertake and his confrontation with the reporter who knows his secret does his Jewish identity reappear. By the end of the film he becomes a martyr to his own identification with the Jews as the victims of his own plots, dying in a bombing that he has instigated.

In earlier films on the Shoah, from Alain Renais's *Night and Fog* (1956) to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) to Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), the line between victim and perpetrator, between Jew and Nazi, is absolute.¹ These films provide a trajectory in the means of imaging the Holocaust in the cinema. They move from the image of the Shoah in which the victims are literally missing or present as photographs from the liberation of the camps to accounts in which living survivors provide narratives of the past (and in the case of Spielberg's film accounts of their meaningful survival). *The Believer* provides a further account of the third generation of Jews in America after the Holocaust. They were not only spared the direct confrontation with the Shoah because of its isolation in the United States, but now, two generations later, a generation that has the experience of the Shoah as a narrative that shapes the American Jewish collective identity in the twenty-first century.²

How can such a film succeed in capturing an aspect of the Shoah as imagined in American society in which Jews are an "over-represented minority" because they have become economically successful and thus part of the mainstream? The focus of the film is on the radical racist fringe in contemporary America in which anti-Semitism still exists as a potent force. This too is a reality on the American political landscape, if a peripheral one, but the impact of this fringe presence is extraordinary in shaping the protagonist's sense that he can move to the "other side" and be safe. He can become a perpetrator because the neo-Nazi movement is so marginal, so pathetic in those it recruits that a "smart Jew" could quickly become a leader.

This notion of "Jewish superior intelligence" must be understood as an aspect of the question of Jewish visibility in post-Shoah American cinema. How are Jews imagined to look in the cinema after the Shoah? Given the stereotype of the weak, pasty-faced Jewish intellectual that haunts films such as *The Young Lions* (1958), where Montgomery Clift seems to be the neurotic Jew incarnate, Danny Balint's incarnation as a tattooed skinhead presents the antithesis of his image as a Jewish school child. The tough neo-Nazi is the answer to the weak but smart Jew. Yet Jews after the Shoah come to assume a new type of body. Perhaps the classic case is the casting of Paul Newman (blue eyes, Jewish father, raised as a Christian Scientist) as the Jewish hero of the film based on Leon Uris's novel *Exodus* (1960) was one of the anomalies of this anxiety about the implied difference of American Jews. How could Jews be "racially" different as the Nazis (and neo-Nazis) claimed if they looked like Paul Newman! Indeed, in Robert Mandel's *School Ties* (1992) the theme of "passing" works only because of the sports activities of Brandon Frasier. He is not quite able to "pass" in the snooty (and anti-Semitic) private school that he attends. Yet in *School Ties* the character is not only athletic but also smart and compassionate. His athlete's body is not sufficient, within the narrative of the film, to enable him to be accepted, to pass successfully. Likewise the powerful, muscular body of Danny Balint attempts to mask the "Jew within," the pathetic, weak Jew as the victim.³

Neo-Nazis may be strong but they are also stupid or ineffectual, as *The Believer* shows. After the Shoah, Germans of all symbolic stripe come to embody a demonic quality, but certainly not intelligence. For their genius is that of the demented, evil intelligence—Morianity to the smart Jew's Sherlock Holmes. Orson Welles in *The Stranger* (1946), Sam Jaffe as "the professor" in *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), Peter Sellers as Dr. Merkwuerdigliebe in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), Hardy Krüger in *Flight of the Phoenix* (1965), or, indeed, Walter Slezak or George Sanders in any of their fiendish Nazi incarnations in the "B" movies made before 1945 are "evil." Indeed, before *Exodus*, smart Jews, if they are not victims, could be the equivalent of the "evil" German. Such an image of the smart yet destructive Jew can be found in Frederick Wiseman's character as a nihilist-anarchist in *Viva Zapata!* (1952), leading the Mexican children of nature to their doom, apparently for the sheer pleasure of it.

Danny Balint identifies with the neo-Nazi spiritually as well as physically. He becomes a neo-Nazi in act and deed. Henry Bean

noted upon accepting the Sundance Festival's Grand Jury Prize that "this is truly a story of love and hate. I love the provocative aspects...the notion of being a Jew and a Nazi at the same time." And yet this very aspect turns the film into a comment on the need for this type of identification among contemporary American Jews. The horror of this film lies as much in the presence of neo-Nazis in American society as in Danny Balint's "conversion" into a Nazi. But the slow unfolding of Danny's identity is the key to our understanding of what impact the Shoah can have on young American Jews raised in a world in which their identity is shaped by the narrative of the Holocaust. Self-hatred, with all of its history, takes on a new and forbidding face.

Notes

1. See especially Tony Barta, "Film Nazis: The Great Escape" in Tony Barta, ed., *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 127-48; Yosefa Loshitzky, ed., *Spielberg's Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Stephen Lewis, *Art Out of Agony: The Holocaust Theme in Literature, Sculpture and Film* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1984). See also Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ilan Avisar, "Holocaust Movies and the Politics of Collective Memory," in Alvin H. Rosenfeld, ed., *Thinking about the Holocaust: After Half a Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 38-58; Janet Lungstrum, "Foreskin Fetishism: Jewish Male Difference in Europe, Europa," *Screen 39* (1998): 53-66; Morris Zyril and Saul S. Friedman, "The Holocaust as Seen in the Movies. A Handbook of Criticism, History, and Literary Writings," in Saul S. Friedman and Dennis Klein, eds., *Holocaust Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), pp. 604-22.
2. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).
3. See Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Idea of Jewish Superior Intelligence at the Other End of the Bell Curve* (The Inaugural Abraham Lincoln Lectures) (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).



The *Believer* is a film with the power to evoke strong emotions. There is something in this story that touches a tender nerve, particularly if the viewer is a Jew. How else might we explain the condemnation of *The Believer* by one rabbi, who described it as "a primer for anti-Semitic actions," given that nothing it portrays is unavailable to the curious thug on a myriad of extremist Web sites. Or the reaction of a viewer in Israel who exploded in anger, criticizing various small details in the film with an emotion totally out of proportion with the nature of the criticism. The film's main character, Danny, is unavoidably provocative. But it is not immediately obvious what about him has this power. What makes him, and the film that is his vehicle, so successfully troubling?

Undoubtedly, part of the answer is Danny's hateful brutality. From the very first scene in the film, we know Danny as a violent bully. And his verbal bullying is often more brutal than his physical. For some viewers, this is disturbing enough. But movies today are filled with violence, often far more extreme than that depicted here. And the representation of bigoted thugs often makes us feel not troubled but smug and superior; "I could never be like that," we say to ourselves in a self-congratulatory tone. But Danny doesn't allow us to respond with such easy superiority, for it is not obvious—to some of us, at least—that "we could never be like that." Or, to be more accurate, even if we could never imagine *doing* what Danny does, we could imagine *feeling* as he feels. It is this, I would argue, that ultimately makes his provocation so powerful.

For more than three decades, William Potter Gale warned the world that a satanic Jewish conspiracy disguised as communism was corrupting public officials and the courts, undermining the United States and wrecking its divinely inspired Constitution. Jews, the self-described "reverend" taught, were offspring of the devil, while non-whites were "mud people" and whites were the real Hebrews of the Bible. By the time of his death in 1988, Bill Gale had spent half a lifetime energetically promoting his particularly bloodthirsty brand of anti-Semitism across America.

"Arise and fight!" Gale preached in one infamous sermon broadcast to Kansas farmers in 1982. "If a Jew comes near you, run a sword through him."

But William Potter Gale had a secret. It turns out that Gale, founder of the Jew-hating Posse Comitatus that raged through the Midwest in the 1970s and 1980s, was descended on his father's side from a long line of devout Jews.

In interviews with this author for a book being published this fall, Gale's daughters revealed with some bemusement the Jewish roots of their grandfather and his forebears.

Ironically, like so many other 19th-century Jews from Eastern Europe, Bill Gale's father Charles was fleeing Russian anti-Semitism and seeking economic opportunity when he arrived in the United States in 1894, changing his name from Grabifker in the process.

Four years later, Charles, then 18, lied about his age and place of birth in order to join the U.S. Army — but he was truthful enough to declare on his military enlistment papers that his parents' nationality was "Hebrew."

While Charles Gale eventually abandoned Judaism, married a non-Jew and raised his children as Christians, all of his siblings proudly embraced their religious heritage. Charles' younger sister, a practicing Jew, was often a guest in the Gale family household in Los Angeles when Bill Gale was a teenager.

Despite this and many other reminders of his father's heritage, Bill Gale had adopted Christian Identity theology and become an unrepentant anti-Semite by the mid-1950s.

Although it is in some ways unique, the remarkable case of Bill Gale is not unprecedented. Some of the most zealous anti-Semites on the American white supremacist scene have turned out to have direct family links to the religion and the people they have devoted their lives to hating.

Similarly, a self-described "Aryan" named Leo Felton, convicted this year in a conspiracy to blow up Jewish and black landmarks, turned out to have a black father (see [From the Belly of the Beast](#)). And uncounted white supremacists have sneaked across the color line to engage in sex with black women.

Jewish anti-Semitism, however, is a case unto itself.

Power and Powerlessness

Around the world, there is a sad and troubling history of Jewish self-hatred that has played itself out in a variety of ways. To even start to understand this history, it is necessary to understand the basic mythology of anti-Semitism.

As described by Norman Cohn — a leading scholar of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a classic anti-Semitic text — the political myth about Jewish world domination can be summarized as follows:

[T]here exists a secret Jewish government which, through a worldwide network of camouflaged agencies and organizations, controls political parties and governments, the press and public opinion, banks and economic developments ... in pursuance of an age-old plan and with the single aim of achieving Jewish dominion over the entire world.

On a more individual level, Jews are often stereotyped as unethical, dishonest, socially aggressive, conceited, clannish, stingy and obsessed with money.

Historically, these myths have been pervasive — so pervasive that they seep into the consciousness of many Jews as well as non-Jews.

"It is important to remember that western society has a heavy anti-Semitic underpinning, and negative stereotypes about Jews are part of the culture in which everybody grows up, Jews and non-Jews alike," says Sander Gilman, a University of Illinois at Chicago liberal arts professor and the author of *Jewish Self-Hatred*, a key text on the subject.

This view is echoed by Raphael Ezekiel, a psychologist and the author of *The Racist Mind: Portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen*.

"If you live next door to a cement factory, then inevitably cement dust gets into your body," says Ezekiel, who in recent years has worked as a senior research scientist and visiting scholar at the Harvard School of Public Health. "And the same goes for anti-Semitism and other prejudices. Everyone who grows up in a culture gets impacted by those beliefs that are deeply held, including the members of endangered groups."

These observations apply to Bill Gale. But there were other factors, too.

Like many other retired military officers in the early 1950s, Gale was drawn to the extremely conservative, anti-Communist politics of the time, which were often tainted by anti-Semitism and diehard opposition to racial integration. And because his idolized father had abandoned Judaism and lied about his immigrant status, Gale's adoption of anti-Jewish beliefs also may have been driven by a desire to preserve what he felt was his father's shameful secret.

Charles Gale also apparently endured subtle slights from his more financially secure Jewish relatives in Portland, Ore., and young Bill seems to have picked up on these resentments.

The Weak Jew

Co-existing with the myth of Jewish power and aggression is a parallel and yet contradictory stereotype: the Jew as vulnerable and weak. And it is this image of the Jew that most often gives rise to Jewish self-hatred.

"Jews who become genuine anti-Semites do so because of a need to recapture some sense of lost power, and that idea is very much connected to the image of the weak Jew," Gilman says.

When faced with a barrage of anti-Semitic stereotypes the majority of Jews readily choose to discard the images, says Gilman. But some Jews get caught up in false notions of "good Jews vs. bad Jews," while others may internalize the stereotypes or even choose to identify with the aggressor.

It is this latter tendency that best explains the behavior of those Jews who became leading advocates of forcible conversion in medieval times, along with those who join neo-Nazi groups in the modern era. In fact, Gilman cites studies by the famous child psychologist Anna Freud (the daughter of Sigmund Freud), who observed Jewish children in England who had recently escaped from Nazi Germany. She found that during some forms of spontaneous play, many of these children chose to identify as Nazis.

"Identification with the aggressor signals an attempt to recapture a sense of power and indicates a tremendous sense of powerlessness in the psychic life of the Jewish anti-Semite," says Gilman.

He also points to a similar phenomenon that was identified among African Americans by black psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Phipps Clark during the 1940s.

Among other things, the couple's pioneering "doll studies" revealed that black children as young as 5 years old already had developed negative self-images based upon the racially prejudiced values of the larger society. When given a choice between playing with a white doll or a black one, these studies found, the majority of African-American children chose the white doll. "You cannot assume that there is a single explanation for the all of the individual nuances of self-hatred," says Gilman, "but you can develop a model which explains the movement toward certain end goals. And the principle goal is the achievement of power."

Certainly, this seems to have been the case with Daniel Burros, a tragic figure from Queens, N.Y.

One More Victim

Growing up, Burros' pious devotion to Judaism greatly impressed the elders of Talmud Torah synagogue. But by 1960, Burros had pledged his loyalty to George Lincoln Rockwell, "commander" of the American Nazi Party. A year and a half after moving to Rockwell's headquarters in Arlington, Va., Burros left the party — but not Nazism — and returned to his native New York. Back in the Empire State, Burros hooked up with a variety of hate groups, earned a conviction for conspiracy to riot, and eventually migrated to the Ku Klux Klan, where he became the New York State organizer for Robert Shelton's United Klans of America (UKA), the most notorious Klan group of the period.

But on Halloween, 1965, Burros got quite a shock: A front-page article in *The New York Times* exposed his Jewish roots. Burros killed himself that same day.

At the time he died, Burros had been living for about a week in the Reading, Penn., home of Roy Frankhouser, then the 25-year-old grand dragon, or state leader, for the UKA. Frankhouser, who would go on to serve two federal prison sentences, bizarrely eulogized Burros at a Maryland gathering a short time later.

"To the good Jews, we offer our love and respect and understanding," said Frankhouser, praising his fallen compatriot for having separated himself from the "bad" ones.

Burros, of course, had made no such distinction. Throughout his short career as a militant white supremacist, he had favored total extermination of the Jews.

After hundreds of thousands of people read the *Times* story about Burros' roots, along with the front-page account the next day of his suicide, two editors at the paper teamed up to investigate.

Abe Rosenthal and Arthur Gelb's *One More Victim: The Life and Death of a Jewish Nazi* traced Burros' self-hatred to the same sources identified by Gilman: a quest for power by one who has come to associate all of his inadequacies and feelings of powerlessness with being Jewish. They wrote:

The record of his short life shows that never since his childhood did he believe himself strong enough, worthy enough, to survive as himself.

Dan Burros searched for the explanation ... and discovered it. ... Everything that was 'Jewish' in him was weakness to him. ... Most men hate something ... within them, but most men do not find the world telling them over and over, 'You are right to hate yourself.'

Dan Burros did ... and the one overwhelming irony of [his] life was that he became an example of the quintessential Jewish victim — the Jew who confesses that the diseased fantasy in the mind of the anti-Semite is truth.

Having confessed, Dan Burros sought to escape punishment. The only way he could do this was to identify himself with the aggressor, the man of strength, and become himself a judge of the Jews. To survive as he wished to survive, he had to destroy his enemy and his enemy was the Jew. ...

The Nazis were the accusers, judges, torturers, and executioners of the Jews. Thirsting for the torment and execution of the Jew in himself, Dan Burros fled to them. They would help him kill the Jews and they would give him the greatest gift, the death of a particular Jew.

Burros' story might have faded from memory, were it not for the efforts of Hollywood writer-director Henry Bean, who this year released "The Believer," an award-winning film based loosely on an updated version of the Burros story.

Swimming Upstream

Besides Dan Burros, there are very few known instances of those of Jewish heritage rising to prominence in the Klan. But one man who has persisted steadily in his efforts to promote the hooded order despite being born Jewish is Jordan Gollub, currently leader of the tiny Royal Confederate Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

In the 1980s, Gollub managed to rise to the post of Mississippi state leader of the Christian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, then led by Virgil Griffin of North Carolina. But in 1989, Griffin uncovered Gollub's background — Gollub had been born to Jewish parents in Philadelphia — and booted him out of the Knights as a result.

To the amusement of many, Gollub angrily qualified Griffin's account, saying that he had *actually* been ejected because of his religious "background and the fact that I'm against Catholics joining the Klan." Catholics, he argued, have a primary loyalty to the pope, rather than the United States. "We can't have an organization with 100% Americans with Catholics," Gollub told the *Jackson (Miss.) Daily News*.

Things haven't gone too well for Gollub since then.

Gollub has spent the last years trying to get a new Klan group going, with most of his efforts ending in disappointment. This summer, he announced plans to march in three Mississippi cities with a phalanx of his Royal Confederate Knights. In the event, he actually showed up in only two of those cities, accompanied by just three followers.

Afterward, said he would lead the Klan in three Alabama marches this December. When he learned that one of those marches would conflict with a Christmas parade, he said he was willing to reschedule.

Is That Wolfgang or Andy?

Andrew Britt Greenbaum was a bright, high-achieving high school student living in the predominantly Jewish suburb of Westwood, outside Boston, when he ran for class president on an explicitly racist platform and launched a tiny anti-Semitic hate group on the Internet that he called the Knights of Freedom.

Within days of graduating high school in 1996, the one-time chess whiz of his parents' neighborhood legally changed his name to hide his partly Jewish heritage. If the appellation Davis Wolfgang Hawke left any doubts as to his politics, the SS suits he liked to dress up in did not. His Wofford College dormitory room in South Carolina was draped with National Socialist flags, and he sold swastika armbands.

The architect of the "Ministry of Racial Unity" was not shy.

"We must all carry with us in our hearts this knowledge, that the dreams of Adolf Hitler have not faded away, but are just as alive today as they were years ago! The German army was defeated on the battlefield, but the ideals of Adolf Hitler live on in the hearts and souls of those who now carry the torch of the Aryan peoples," Hawke told supporters who called him "the chosen one."

Hawke's Net-based group, renamed the American Nationalist Party in its last moments of life, eventually claimed more than 100 adherents. But it collapsed in along with his make-believe ethnicity after the *Intelligence Report* described his Jewish heritage.

His one last bid for attention disintegrated into ignominy when, after promising a march of thousands of neo-Nazis in Washington, D.C., just four people showed up — not including the wannabe führer of Wofford College.

"He's a chicken," his mother, Peggy Greenbaum, told a reporter.

Greenbaum, who was labeled a "race traitor" by her son, told the *Intelligence Report* at the time that she had had no idea of her son's neo-Nazism. Weeping, she recalled how her nerdy boy had been taunted as a "kike" at school and was even beaten by classmates jealous of his good grades.

"I just don't know where it came from," she said of the 20-year-old who earlier bragged to the *Report* that he intended to become the "absolute, supreme dictator" of the United States.

"He seems to be so full of hate and so power-hungry. ... I just don't want him to hurt anyone."

Like other young people drawn to hate groups, Hawke was impressed by the power of Nazi martial regalia and its message of violence. The rest of what drove him to reject his parents and recommend their extermination may never be known.

Today, Gale and Burros are dead, Gollub is trying against all odds to rehabilitate himself in the world of the Klan, and Hawke has vanished without a trace from the public arena. But the story of hypocritical hate did not begin with Bill Gale, and it surely will not end with Gollub or Hawke.

For an entire millennium — from the 8th to the 18th century — Jewish converts to Christianity were among the leading advocates of forcibly converting their former brethren and of burning the Talmud, the text of rabbinical commentaries on Jewish law. In the early 20th century, there were numerous converted Jews who also made careers out of attacking their former co-religionists.

As long as there is religious and ethnic hatred in this world, there will be members of oppressed groups who turn on themselves.

Jew Talkin' to Me?

LIBERTY HEIGHTS FAILS TO SOLVE BARRY LEVINSON'S JEWISH PROBLEM. ALMODÓVAR TELLS IT STRAIGHT IN ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER.

By David Edelstein

Posted Thursday, Nov. 25, 1999, at 3:30 AM ET

Liberty Heights

Directed by

Barry Levinson

Warner Bros.

All About My Mother

Directed by

Pedro Almodóvar

Sony Pictures Classics

The World Is Not Enough

Directed by

Michael Apted

MGM



Barry Levinson has said that his new movie, *Liberty Heights*, was born when a magazine critic made a breezily derisive reference to the Jewishness of Dustin Hoffman's character in Levinson's dud sci-fi picture *Sphere* (1998). Why, he asked, make an issue out of a character's ethnicity? The barbs of that (Jewish) critic don't seem like such a big deal to this (Jewish) critic, but in Levinson they clearly touched a nerve. Trowned a nerve, even. He has responded the way his teen-age alter ego Ben Kurtzman (Ben Foster) and friends respond in *Liberty Heights* when they defy a sign on a local pool that reads, "No Jews, Dogs, or Coloreds Allowed." He's saying, "You got a problem with Jewish? I'll show you Jewish!"

Does Levinson fully understand what teed him off? The charismatic young men in *Diner* (1982), his first autobiographical work (and his masterpiece), weren't labeled as Jewish, and its most memorable turns were by actors named Kevin and Mickey. In his third on-screen visit to his native Baltimore, *Avalon* (1990), the milieu finally was Jewish, but the director was more interested in making sweeping points about the cultural fragmentation of the central immigrant family--and, by extension, the American family--than in exploring his tribal or religious roots. (That family was impersonated by those Hebrews Aidan Quinn, Elizabeth Perkins, Armin Mueller-Stahl, and Joan Plowright.)

The point is: Levinson airbrushed the Jewishness out of his movie memoirs, and that review must on some level have shamed him--made him feel as if he'd been dodging the issue.

The problem, I think, is that he's still dodging the issue. Levinson might be so assimilated by now that he barely remembers what would impel someone to filter the Jewishness out of his or her autobiographical alter egos. On the basis of the family depicted in *Liberty Heights*, he hardly seems to remember what a Jew is--only what a Jew is not. It's not a WASP. It's not an African-American. As a boy in the exclusively Jewish Liberty Heights section of Baltimore, being Jewish was just *being*; it was when he perceived his "otherness," the movie suggests, that a more complicated relationship to the world began.

That's what *Liberty Heights* attempts to recapture. The movie opens in 1954, when 16-year-old Ben first pokes his head out of his neighborhood and when desegregation is starting to bring together disparate ethnic and racial groups. Jews are not only interacting with WASPs and blacks; in the case of Ben and his older brother, Van (Adrien Brody), they're falling for them--much to the horror of the older generation, both white and black. Ben takes a shine to a "colored" girl (Rebekah Johnson), who sneaks him into her (upper-middle-class) house and introduces him to rock 'n' roll and to comedians who make fun of white people. Meanwhile, Van and his buddies crash a Halloween party on the WASP side of town, where Van goes gaga for a chill blonde goddess (Carolyn Murphy) in a fairy-godmother ensemble--the supreme shiksa. Even their dad, Nate (Joe Mantegna), is forced to ally himself with non-Jews. The owner of a dying burlesque house whose side business, the illegal numbers racket, has become his lone source of income, Nate loses a fortune to a small-time black drug dealer called Little Melvin (Orlando Jones)--a loose cannon who ultimately threatens his livelihood and his family.

Levinson's remarks about the review of *Sphere*--which was released only last year--suggest something else about *Liberty Heights*: that it was written fast. That might not be a problem if its canvas weren't so broad, but Levinson doesn't work simply anymore. He wants to make an epic. So he spreads the narrative thin, and the script plays like a first draft. It's full of wonderful bits that don't mesh (some of them could be spun off into their own movies) and with characters conceived either too coarsely or too vaguely. Little Melvin is a flaming racist outrage, and I can't make any sense out of Trey (Justin Chambers), a glamorous, rich WASP who's fond of crashing cars and who takes such a liking to Van that he appears to be foisting his girlfriend--the blonde goddess--on the Jew. Is this Aryan guilt, or does he really want to jump Van's bones? No clue from the actors, who look uniformly marooned.

The crosscutting among the movie's various strands is even weirder. While Van and his buddies comb wealthy neighborhoods for a glimpse of his shiksa, Nate auditions a stripper whose costume doesn't arrive and who ends up doffing her conservative street clothes on stage to wild acclaim. Is Levinson drawing a parallel here--saying that Jews are turned on by WASPs because they're so buttoned-up? (I think, alas, he is.) And when he crosscuts between a James Brown concert and a WASP party is he saying that Jews are turned on by blacks because blacks are so unbuttoned--because they shake, rattle, and roll? (Ditto.) Is he saying that coming of age as a Jew means learning to embrace both chocolate and vanilla?

In the end, the narrator, Ben, retreats into generic memory-play mode: "If I'd known things would no longer be, I'd have tried harder to remember them." Loss of the past--that's a universal theme, a "gentile" theme. The director has backed away from what appears to be his real, more local, theme, which is the tug of war within American Jews of his

generation between a compulsion to embrace other cultures and a feeling of superiority toward them. That idea is hilariously embodied by his best character, Van's friend Yussel (David Krumholtz), who starts a brawl when he gets his nose rubbed in his Jewishness at one WASP party and shows up for the next with his hair dyed blond and with a tale of Nordic ancestry. I wish there were more of Yussel in Ben and Van, who are both unforgivably wide-eyed and marshmallowy. Their blandness neuters what should be the movie's reason for being.

Liberty Heights is less gaseous than *Avalon*. The Jewish boys' exploration of life among the "other kind" is often wryly funny, and when they show up at the familiar Baltimore diner to compare notes, time stops and we bask in their banter. If I sound sour compared with other critics, it's because I think Levinson missed a chance to get something unique and audacious on screen: the story of a thin-skinned Jewish kid who'd grow up to make autobiographical movies that somehow leave out the Jewishness and then get so enraged by a critic's offhand projection of Jewishness into a big WASPy sci-fi picture that he vows to go back and remake his other films with Jews instead of gentiles. That would be something to see.

For Producer of Hit Show "The O.C.," Jewish Background Is Fertile Ground
By Richard Asinof

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PROVIDENCE, R.I., June 16, 2005 (JTA)--If Jewish elders are serious about reaching out to Jews between the ages of 13-17, they might consider hiring Josh Schwartz to write a script for them.

Schwartz, 28, executive producer of "The O.C."--that stands for Orange County, California--is the youngest producer ever to have a series on network television.

He also is one of the 50 most eligible bachelors in the United States, according to *People* magazine--but maybe not for long. Schwartz's girlfriend, who is Jewish, just moved in with him.

"She's Jewish, her mom's Jewish and her dad converted; one for our team," Schwartz said with a laugh.

Schwartz spent Passover at his girlfriend's parents' house, where he met the extended family at the seder.

"I sang 'dayenu,'" he told JTA in an interview at his alma mater, Providence's private Wheeler School, the day before giving the commencement speech for the class of 2005.

But don't expect to hear Klezmer music anytime soon on "The O.C."

"We already have Peter Gallagher," the actor who portrays Sandy Cohen, "playing the singing Jew on the show," Schwartz said.

And don't expect many Jewish community leaders to come running to Schwartz, whose interfaith family on the show, the Cohens, invent "Chrismukkah" so they can celebrate both holidays and reap the most presents, without making anyone feel guilty.

Like Seth Cohen, a quick-witted, funny, sarcastic, self-proclaimed "wise ass" on "The O.C.," Schwartz is filled with Jewish angst about life and failure and love that he doesn't mind expressing in public. In New England vernacular, Schwartz is "wicked" funny, but also charming and gracious.

The character of Seth Cohen originally represented "my point of view of the world and my experiences," Schwartz said. "Now the character has become so much of Adam Brody," the actor who plays Seth Cohen. "I've passed the baton to him."

Is Seth Cohen ever too neurotic?

"Maybe for America, but not for me," Schwartz said.

In his Ralph Lauren shirt, blue jeans, Converse All-Stars and sunglasses hanging from his shirt, Schwartz projects a boyish earnestness. He seems like a 21st-century Woody Allen, with much hipper taste in music and hopefully with better morals.

Millions of young, mostly teenage girls crowd around the TV screens on Thursday nights, welcoming each episode of "The O.C." as an intoxicating story of romance, heartbreak and mixed-up families. Father-son, brother-brother and mother-daughter dynamics abound, as do witty, quick, sarcastic remarks from Seth Cohen.

Alexandra, a 15-year-old fan from Cranston, R.I., has a pizza party with eight friends every time there's a big episode. When her cell phone rings, it plays the show's theme music.

For a computer literacy class in high school, Alexandra created a Powerpoint presentation about "The O.C.," showing the characters' complicated family tree.

For Alexandra, whose parents are divorced--her father is Jewish, her mother is not--part of the show's attraction is the emotional intensity of the characters.

"It's interesting to watch them," she said. "The personalities--what happens between the characters, between the girls and the guys--are very realistic."

For Schwartz, the emotional intensity of his high school experience still reverberates for him. His breakthrough script was about his senior year in high school.

In his recent commencement address at Wheeler School, he divided the world into those who compromise on their dreams and those who are true to themselves, often punctuating serious statements with one-liners.

"If you're going to put yourself out there, put the real you out there," Schwartz told the graduating class.

"It's your life; if you don't want to go to med school, don't go to med school. If you want to take a year off before you go to college, take a year off. You don't want to have kids, then don't have kids-- just don't be related to my parents."

Schwartz said he draws a lot upon his Jewish background in his work.

"If you're Jewish, that becomes a part of who you are as a human being. You're disappointed that you didn't have better TV shows during the holidays, and not being able to decorate your tree or have a tree," he said.

At the University of Southern California, Schwartz said he was a member of a fraternity where he was "one of the only Jewish kids, if not the only Jewish kid, for a couple of years. You become acutely aware of your identity."

Schwartz is realistic about the expected lifetime of "The O.C."

"We have a couple of years in us. We're so connected to primarily a young audience; it's an audience that's obviously fickle, and we're never going to want to overstay our welcome," he said. "But we've still got a couple of good years left in us."

Schwartz ended his commencement speech by urging the graduates to believe in their dreams.

"If it happened to me, it can happen to anyone," he said.

Perhaps the school board president, Alan Tate, best summed up the positive force surrounding Schwartz. During Schwartz's visit to the school the day before, Tate said, he kept hearing students passing in the corridors, saying, "May the Schwartz be with you."

Wait, Larry David is Jewish?

Zach Luck

In the most recent season of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, Larry David pretends to be an Orthodox Jew in an attempt to convince the director of the Kidney Consortium to give his friend a transplant, just so he can avoid donating the kidney himself. Each time the (genuinely) Orthodox Jewish director says something in Hebrew or Yiddish ("baruch ha'shem" or the like) Larry responds with a nonsensical "acchhhh... acchhh."

My extended family watched this episode together over Thanksgiving. I laughed until tears rolled down my cheeks at Larry's ridiculous interactions with Orthodox Judaism as I sat next to my uncle's girlfriend's 12-year-old daughter, one of the few non-Jews in the room. She laughed along, but commented, "He's not Jewish at all; he's just lying." Barely able to speak through my own laughter, I replied, "No, you don't understand. That's the point—it's funny because he's Jewish."

Before his debut on *Curb*, Larry David was the co-creator and writer of *Seinfeld*. *Seinfeld* drew heavily on American Jewish themes, stereotypes, and humor while only rarely acknowledging explicitly that any of the characters were Jewish. There is nothing new about this type of ethnic sugarcoating. From the earliest days of film, Jews have been re-tooling Jewish stories, stereotypes, and situations in order to obtain wider popularity. Even more than in cowboy movies based on the *shtetl*, tales of Hollywood's golden age (Cossacks became Indians and the pogroms became Wild West raids), the Jewishness of *Seinfeld*'s Upper West Side humor was abundantly clear.

Nonetheless, for the first few seasons even Jerry Seinfeld's own Judaism was ignored, and it ultimately came into play only in the now famous episode where his dentist converts to Judaism. ("He converted to Judaism purely for the jokes' ... 'And this offends you, as a Jew?' ... 'No. It offends me as a comedian.") Jerry's posse—Kramer, Elaine, and George—are ostensibly non-Jews even though George's relationship with his mother could not possibly be more stereotypically Jewish. Yet, by refraining from explicit references to Judaism and Jewish culture, *Seinfeld* was able to gain popularity with a mainstream American audience.

Seinfeld's popularity was based on how successful the show was at making the characters truly seem like everyone else – it is incredibly easy to identify with Elaine, George, or Jerry, or to say one of your friends "is just like _____." The show was extraordinarily successful at getting the audience to relate with the protagonists despite their nearly meaningless lives and narcissistic attitudes. Really, we all know it is because of their meaningless lives, shallowness, and inability to fit in that we identify with them. Audiences love to root for the underdog and find it easy to identify with the outsider. Fans of *Seinfeld* identify with this outsider quality—not with the implicit Jewishness of the characters. Judaism is simply a small part of the broader outsider identity of the characters, and since it reinforces rather than contradicts that identity, it remains in the background.

George Costanza's character was based on Larry David, and Larry David, the character on *Curb*, is George taken to an even greater extreme. While George would passively fail to fit in, Larry seems to actively make decisions so that he ends up on the outs. A source of social discomfort for everyone around him, Larry always says the wrong thing at the wrong time. Beyond the George/Larry comparison, everything in *Curb* is more explicit, blunt, and painfully awkward than in the gentler world of *Seinfeld*. But perhaps one of the biggest thematic breaks between *Curb* and *Seinfeld* is that in *Curb* Judaism is directly addressed. Larry's relationship with Judaism is one of the overarching themes of the most recent season and has been brought up repeatedly during the show's history. What changed? Why is Judaism suddenly central to the life of Larry David, the writer and the character, when he could

have easily chosen to gloss it over as in *Seinfeld*?

Lenny Bruce once said that he changed his name because "Leonard Alfred Schneider was 'too Hollywood.'" My hunch is that post-*Seinfeld* Larry David knows, and moreover knows that we know, that he's a rich Hollywood Jew—a deeply "insider" identity. In a sense, Larry David, in the post-*Seinfeld* world, has become "too Hollywood." References in the show to individuals who want to meet Larry or befriend him because of his connection to *Seinfeld*, constantly remind us that he is in fact rich and famous. But, if he is going to remain funny, he must find a way to convince his audience that he is still an outsider, an identity viewers can feel comfortable laughing with and at.

Rather than shy away from the reality that has become a part of one of the most successful, connected insider groups in America, he decides to show us what it is like for Larry David, the outsider and social failure, to go to High Holy Days services and to hold a Passover Seder. In doing so, he has found a surprising way to convince his audience all over again that he is truly an outsider despite fame and success. He does this by showing us that even within the supposedly "insider" world where he should belong, Hollywood Judaism, he finds himself all the more out of place.

In one episode Larry decides to go to synagogue for high holidays but doesn't have a ticket. He scalps a ticket in front of the *shul* and gets great seats for himself and his wife. Ultimately, as he is thrown out of the synagogue by security for using scalped tickets, he shouts accusingly "This is some example you are setting for my gentile wife! It's her first time in temple!" He proves to his audience not only that he fails to fit in with Jews (he doesn't belong to the synagogue in the first place), but that he specifically fails to fit in with a Jewish community that is rich and elite enough to have others covet synagogue membership enough to warrant scalpers selling tickets for High Holiday services.

Of course, Larry doesn't actually belong among Hollywood Jews. Like the *Seinfeld* characters he created, he is the stereotypical Upper West Side Jew. *Curb* draws humor from the deeply different attitudes towards Jewish identity that exists on the respective coasts of this country. Specifically, Larry plays up the stereotypes of the Upper West Side's loud, brash, Yankee-loving, *New Yorker*-reading, neurotic Jews and their shallow, status-obsessed, pop culture-versed, Los Angeles counterparts. The trappings of Southern California—from SUVs to McMansions to movie stars—are all aspects that help to define *Curb* as a departure from *Seinfeld*. Larry, the embodiment of the East Coast Jew, is an awkward fit in this environment, and this awkwardness guarantees laughs.

An example of this comes in the episode where a rabbi calls Larry and asks for permission to bring "a survivor" over to dinner. Larry assumes he means a survivor of the Holocaust and tells the rabbi to bring him along. After much deliberation ("Do they like to talk to each other? Do they talk about the camps?") Larry decides to invite his father's friend who survived the Holocaust to the same dinner so the two can meet. Bragging about his hardships on the show *Survivor*, the fit young man explains that he didn't even get snacks some days. The Holocaust survivor can take no more and begins a debate, which escalates into each of them screaming at the other "no, I'm a survivor!" The two Jewish worlds have collided: one connected to the vanilla fun of American pop culture and the other rooted in the sordid past of European atrocity. Larry fails to fit in comfortably with either image of Jewishness, and as he looks out over his kitchen table, the audience feels his incapability to fit in with any particular image of Judaism—Larry always will find a way to end up uncomfortable and hilarious.

If Larry doesn't fit in with the brand of elite Reform Judaism of the West Coast, or with any more traditional Jewish identity, does he at least find a way to patch together what little Jewish practice takes place in his own home? When Larry's gentile wife decides to hold a Passover Seder "for his father," it is her clear attempt to bring the David family more in line with the Jewish community around them. The neighbors are invited, as are family and friends. After receiving a series of "life-changing" golf lessons from a neighbor, who Larry knows is a convicted sex offender, Larry invites him to the seder. The second

to last scene ends with a young female guest choking on her food and a call for anyone who "knows mouth-to-mouth." Of course, only the sex offender can help her. Why wasn't there a gentle Jewish doctor at this Seder? In fact there had been, until Larry accused him of repeatedly stealing his newspaper. This is the only way for Larry to "do Jewish."

As the season draws to a close Larry gets important news from the private detective he has hired to investigate whether he was actually adopted. Much to his own surprise, Larry finds out that his "true" birth parents are non-Jews. Suddenly, Larry is no longer an outsider. He is no longer neurotic, conniving, bitter, or jealous. He goes fly-fishing. He fixes the roof. He runs into the baptismal waters and ultimately decides to give his kidney to a friend that he had avoided all season. The roof-fixing *goyish* Larry is funny precisely because the audience has grown so accustomed to knowing him as a socially awkward Jew. We see his relationship, this conversion narrative, as totally unbelievable because we, the audience, believe we know the real Larry. And of course, as he is being taken to the emergency room to give his kidney, Larry gets the news that he wasn't adopted. His conversion instantaneously reverses and his easy-going, fly-fishing spirit of charity is gone.

This part of the season's ending is a relief because we find out that we have not been duped. Larry is a Jew and an outsider. His days of fitting in were a farce. For all his discomfort among Jews throughout the season, the lesson is not that deep down he is a *goy*. The lesson is simply that Jews have become mainstream enough that it is funny (and also important) to distance ourselves from whatever images of homogeneous normality that any segment of the Jewish community is projecting. If Jews achieved total homogeneous normality, we would risk the most terrible fate of all—not being funny anymore.

ZACH LUCK will graduate in May with a major in Economics and a concentration in History. He still needs a job for the fall.