

This Land is Your Land: This Land is My Land
A Study of the Jewish Struggle to Maintain Identity
And Find Acceptance in the United States of
America

A Curriculum Guide in American Jewish History for High School Students

By: Jill Suzanne Jacobs
Presented to: Dr. Michael Zeldin
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RATIONALE

History is the use of a particular set of methodologies to reconstruct the past based on multiple sources and documents. The study of history involves the learner in many crucial questions and teaches many important skills and truths. In order to understand our present world we must search our past. What happened, and why? What forces were at play, and how did they interact to create what we know as history? Based on our findings, what conclusions can we draw? How can the lessons of history guide us as we chart our future? The kinds of understandings that the study of history engenders create students who are cognizant and reflective about the past they have studied and who are thus empowered to engage in serious deliberation and decision making about the future.

These skills and understandings are especially important for the Jewish student who encounters his or her heritage. As liberal Jews seeking to find our way in the modern world we must first understand and connect with our past. We teach Jewish history to shape and guide the development of Jewish identity, to see the role that Jewish civilization played in its larger context, to find a guide for present decisionmaking, and to encounter patterns that may connect us to future generations. We teach history not as a *product*, but a process. As such, emphasis is placed on how history comes into being, critically examining the forces, factors and players that shaped our present and perhaps continue to shape our future. The student will not be a consumer of history, but a creator of it. While a certain mastery of the data of American Jewish history is expected, it will be acquired not through the memorizing of facts

represented in a textbook, but rather through the focus on history as a process of reconstruction. Part of the process of teaching Jewish history is awakening in the student an awareness of his or her Jewish roots which will then clarify and deepen his or her awareness of him or herself in the context of the Jewish people. In so doing we place our students in the continuum of Jewish heritage and empower them to join their fellow Jews in the Jewish tradition of struggling with our past.

The history of the Jews in America can be characterized as the dual struggle of a people both to be accepted by the mainstream culture and to maintain their identity amid that culture which has been at times hostile and at other times ambivalent toward their religious and cultural differences. It is the story of religious innovation and compromise as Jews have sought both new and traditional ways of expressing their Jewishness in the "land of opportunity". The Jews who left Europe to start anew in America were not among the most educated, rich, or religiously committed of their fellow Jews. They came seeking a better economic life for themselves and their children some knowing, others discovering, that along the way their religious obligations would be compromised. Those who were indifferent assimilated and were lost in a generation or two; but those who cared to connect to and preserve their Judaism created a Jewish way of life that is at once both American and Jewish.

The Jewish student of this history is both an inheritor of this legacy and a perpetuator of it. Through the study of American Jewish history, the student will examine and clarify the forces that

have shaped our people's tenure in this land. After a brief overview of the early stages of American Jewish history, students will focus on several turning points in the post-World War II era. The course will begin with the arrival of 23 Dutch Jews in New Amsterdam in 1654. It will continue chronologically through American Jewish history until the present day. We will study the challenges the Jewish community faced with the rise of the suburbs in the 1950s, the counter cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the rise of intermarriage in the late 1970s and 1980s. Finally, students will begin to analyze the present decade, and begin to evaluate the direction the Jewish community is moving. Students will seek to answer: Is the American Jewish community dissolving into apathy and ignorance, or are we witnessing a religious and cultural revival? What forces and ideas of the past have brought us to the present day? Students will also be asked to chart their own family's Jewish history in America, and contrast it with what they know to be typical of the American Jewish experience. At each juncture of history, students will examine the tensions of remaining Jewish in an un-Jewish land. They will ask, how did Jews accommodate themselves religiously? culturally? What were the implications of the choices made? Through the study of American Jewish history, the student is able to reenact the dilemmas of American Jews from generations past. This process leads to a questioning and reevaluation of one's own Jewish practice and one's own Jewish community. Emphasis will be placed on understanding the choices and evaluating the choices open to the community today.

History will be taught in a pluralistic manner, calling on the student's judgment to decide what actually happened, and why is it significant. Education about history in this interactive, pluralistic mode is dependent on the use of primary sources. While a textbook may be used for general background and information, more often we will analyze primary and secondary sources. A history curriculum that does not utilize primary sources is at best the telling of a story, precluding the students from making decisions and engaging in the process of evaluation.

Students will study the interfacing of American and Jewish culture and focus on the implications of the choices American Jews have made. This will provide a foundation for the students to ask, "How can we, as educated Reform Jews, make critical, informed, and creative decisions about our future?" As the student studies the various stages of American Jewish history and engages in the process of questioning, he or she will gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the American Jewish experience and the role that he or she plays of the perpetuation of American Judaism into the next generation.

GOALS:

1. To view American Jewish history through the lens of the dual struggle of American Jewry: to maintain identity and find acceptance.
2. To involve the student in the process of reconstructing American Jewish history.
3. To gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the American Jewish experience and the role the student plays in the perpetuation of Judaism.
4. To encourage a questioning and reevaluation of one's own Jewish practice and commitment as well a critical examination of one's own Jewish community in light of material learned.

During the course students will have the opportunity to:

1. Conduct an oral history project of their own choosing.
2. Participate in an American-Jewish immigration simulation experience.
3. With classmates, design and serve as a docent in a museum exhibit depicting the American Jewish experience.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Describe examples of the Jewish struggle for acceptance and the maintenance of identity as they appear in the history of Jews in the United States of America.
2. Discuss different trends in American Jewish history and describe his or her own Jewish choices in the context of those trends.
3. Critically evaluate his or her Jewish choices, articulating the "Jewish choices" he or she makes.
4. Use primary sources documents, literature, and other historical sources to reconstruct history.

Unit I: Introduction, What is History, What is Jewish History?

By the time a student reaches high school in a liberal supplementary or day school, he or she has some familiarity with history as a discipline from their secular studies. However, more often than not, their view of history is a rather unsophisticated one, which sees the study of history as the mastery of data. In order to teach history as a process of reconstruction, the instructor must essentially "deprogram" the student from this view of history and imbue in the student an understanding of how history comes into being. The study of Jewish history has particular importance in this particular time in our history as we as modern Jews are becoming increasingly estranged from our past:

The modern effort to reconstruct the Jewish past begins at a time that witnesses a sharp break in the continuity of Jewish living and hence the ever-growing decay of Jewish group memory. In this sense, if for no other, history becomes what it has never been before — the faith of fallen Jews.

-Yoseph Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, page 86

For this reason, the study of American Jewish history is more than the simple mastery of data. Through the processes of studying the past, one also study's one's Jewish self. For this reason, the study of American Jewish history is a sacred task.

GOALS:

1. Give students a theoretical framework for the understanding of history.
2. Enable students to differentiate between being a "history consumer" and a history "creator".
3. Enable students to articulate the differences between "Jewish History" and "other" histories.
4. Initiate students into the sacred task of reconstructing American Jewish life.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. discuss the concept of history critically, recognizing that Jewish history is a recent (19th century) field, state his or her own

opinions on the significance of history, recognize that there is not one history, but a multiplicity of histories.

2. define in speech or in writing:

history consumer - one who critically reads a secondary historical source (either an article or a book) in order to better understand the past

history creator - one who examines secondary historical sources, and primary historical sources such as literature and documents in order to learn about the past through inquiry and then record one's findings

3. articulate some of the questions that a Jewish historian might ask.

4. describe the ways in which literature, documents, oral and written histories can be used in sources for the creation of history.

During the unit, students will have the opportunity to:

1. wrestle with different definitions of history, and develop a definition of their own

2. create their own "historian's notebook" which they will use throughout the duration of the course

KEY CONCEPTS:

° history consumer/history creator

A history consumer is someone who reads (or views if it is a video) a history that someone has reconstructed (such as an article or a book). Part of the aim of this course is to create critical history consumers who are aware that the creation of history is predicated on subjective perspectives. This does not delegitmate a history, but it means that all history must be read with a critical eye. But in this course we want to empower students not only to be critical consumers of history, but creators of history themselves. History creators are people who gather data from various sources such primary source documents, literature and interviews, and then use them to reconstruct the past.

° primary source document/secondary source

A primary source document is a document created in the time period being studied which can be used to shed light on that era. For example, a primary source document could be: a letter, a diary, a business contract, a prenuptial agreement, or a newspaper article. Secondary history sources are histories written (i.e. articles or books) based on primary sources which convey a particular view of history. As historians, students should learn to critically examine both.

◦ **history/histories/Jewish history/historian**

This course emphasizes history as a process rather than as a product. History comes into being when a historian reconstructs the past. As there are many ways of examining the past, so too are there many histories. Jewish history in particular seeks to understand the experience of Jews in the different countries in which they lived, and the ways they interacted and were affected by the host culture. An understanding of history is enhanced through the understanding of the role of the historian who uses various sources to reconstruct the past.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

(Note to the teacher: Although I have listed several suggested learning activities here, I do not recommend using all of them in the introductory unit. Just pick one or two, add on or two of your own, and use the rest spread out throughout the course. You might want to use some of the techniques suggested to study some aspects of American Jewish History.)

• **Wrestling with definitions**

1. Ask students to write down their own definitions of history
2. Then ask for some examples and write definitions on the board
3. Then, pass out sheet with the following quotes, read definitions out-loud as a class.

"Definitions of history"

Websters New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition: [M.E. <L. historia <Gr. a learning by inquiry, narrative, histor, knowing learned] 1. an account of what has or might have happened, esp. in the form of the narrative, play, story, or tale 2. a) what has happened in the life or development of a people, country, institution, etc. b) a systematic account of this usually in chronological order with an analysis and explanation. 3. all recorded events of the past. 4. the branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past; a recording, analyzing, correlating, and explaining of past events 5. a known or recorded past 6. something that belongs to the past 6. something important enough to be recorded.

"The historian's job is to complicate, not to clarify . He (or she) strives to celebrate the diversity of manners, the variety of species, the opacity of things."

-Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory*, p. 289

"History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past."

-J. Hutziga

-one other quote (from *What is History*)

4. Questioning Sequence:

- questions for knowledge:
 - According to Webster's dictionary, what is the etymology of the word, 'history'?
 - According to Webster's dictionary, history is the branch of knowledge that ...
 - According to Jonathan Z. Smith, what is the task of the historian?
- What purpose does history serve, according to J. Hutziga
- questions for comprehension
 - Who can summarize each of the three different definitions of history?
 - How are these definitions similar? How are they different?
- questions for analysis/synthesis/evaluation
 - Which definition is closest to the definition that you wrote down? Which one is the farthest away? (Have students support their answers with examples.)
 - Did any of these definitions give you a different perspective on history? Which one(s)? Why? (Have students support their answers with examples.)
 - Based on your perception of history, what do you think is the job of the historian?

5. Closing Activity: Have students re-write their definitions of history, based on what they have learned. Have students share their answers. Collect definitions, type up, and pass out to all students in the next week. Instruct students to place definitions in their "historian's notebook".

• **Flowers Are Red? (It's all about perspective)**

1. Play Harry Chapin's song "Flowers Are Red". Instruct students to listen to the song and think about their own learning experiences, especially with history. After playing song, pass out lyrics.
2. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, ask questions on different levels of taxonomy (for an example of such a questioning sequence, see above).

3. Have students compare the attitude of the first teacher ("flowers are red, young man") to the second teacher ("there are so many colors in a flower, so let's use every one"). Make a chart and record answers on the board (for those visual learners!)

4. Have students apply the two teacher's attitudes, to different attitudes towards history. (This class is the polar opposite of the teacher who said, "There is not need to see flowers any other way, than the way they always have been seen". Diversity of perspective in an integral part of the creation of history.)

5. Closing Activity: Have students write a song or cheer, or create a banner about creating history

(This lesson is adapted from a lesson created by Marc Dollinger, Ph.D.)

• **Journalism as the first draft of history**

1. Pick a controversial event and bring in different articles from different publications (Different daily newspapers such as the L.A. Times, the New York Times, the small local paper, student press, Jewish press, Women's Press, African American Press, etc...) Try to represent as many different perspectives as possible.

2. Break students into small and have each group read one or two article and then dramatize the event for the class based on the articles they have read.

3. Discuss with students the differences in presentations. Which "facts" were emphasized? What was the tone of the different presentations? What were the differences between the presentations? How do you account for the differences? How can something like age, gender, ethnicity or religion effect someone's perspective? Is it possible to be completely objective? In what ways can a person's ethnic or religious perspective help or hinder the report? How can we apply this to history? To Jewish history? How can we use our perspective as we write our own history?

• **Different histories**

1. Bring in different history books of Jewish history, American history, Women's History, etc.

2. Break class into small groups and give each group a book. Have each group examine their book and discover what kind of questions the historian is seeking to answer.

3. Reconvene as a class and discuss. What makes Jewish history "Jewish", Women's History "Women's History"? (Perspective, events analyze, sources used, questioned asked).

4. Make a chart on the board : Perspective, events, sources, questions. Ask students, if you are an historian of American Jewish history, what is your perspective? What different perspectives could different historians of American Jewish history have? What events might you analyze? What sources might you use? What questions might you ask?
5. Record answers on board. Then type up and pass out to students the next week. Instruct students to place in their historian's notebooks.

• **Using Primary Sources**

1. Collect as many primary source documents that reveal anything about the nature of the religious life of the synagogue which the students attend. (Temple bulletin, school bulletin, school calendar, lesson plan from Sunday school, prayer book, etc.) Have students try to reconstruct a picture of the religious life of the synagogue. For the next week have students bring things from their home, and repeat the same exercise.

• **Making Historian's Notebooks**

1. Have students create their own historian's notebooks which they will use throughout the duration of the course. Students should consider: What is the role of the historian? What is the task of the historian of American Jewish history? What kinds of tools does the historian need? What kinds of questions does he/she ask? What kinds of sections should your notebook have? How can you use your notebook to be a better historian?

TEACHER RESOURCES

- *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi
- *What is the Use of Jewish History?* by Lucy S. Dawidowitz
- *How to Write the History of an American Jewish Community* by Jacob Rader Marcus, American Jewish Archives (you might want to purchase copies of this 32-page booklet for each one of your students. It could serve as a guide for their "historian's notebooks".)
- Chapter 5 from *Classroom Teaching Skills, 2nd Ed.* by James M. Cooper
- Chapter 4, "The Inquiry Training Model," from *Models of Teaching* by Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weill
- Chapter 18, "Social Inquiry: A Social Studies Inquiry Model," from *Models of Teaching* by Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weill

Source Materials

Flowers Are Red

From Harry Chapin's album. "Legends of the Lost and Found". Also from "Harry Chapin: The Gold Medal Collection".

The little boy went first day of school,
He got crayon and started to draw.
He put colors all over the paper,
For color is what he saw.
And the teacher said, "What'cha doin', young man?"
"I'm paintin' flowers," he said.
She said, "It's not the time for art young man.
And anyway flowers are green and red.
There's a time for everything young man,
A way it should be done
You've got to show concern for everyone else,
For you're not the only one".
And she said,

"Flowers are red, young man,
Green leaves are green.
There's no need to see flowers
any other way
than the way they always have been seen."

But the little boy said,

"There are so many colors in the rainbow,
So many colors in the morning sun,
So many colors in a flower,
And I see everyone."

Well, the teacher said, "You're sassy!
There's ways that things should be!
And you'll paint flowers the way the are,
So repeat after me."
And she said:

"Flowers are red, young man,
Green leaves are green.
There's no need to see flowers
any other way
than the way they always have been seen."

than the way they always have been seen."

But there still must be a way
To have our children say:

"There are so many colors in the rainbow,
So many colors in the morning sun,
So many colors in a flower,
And I see everyone."

But the little boy said again:

"There are so many colors in the rainbow,
So many colors in the morning sun,
So many colors in a flower,
And I see everyone."

Well the teacher put in him in a corner.
She said, "It's for your own good.
And you won't come out 'till you've got it right
And are responding like you should."

Well finally he go lonely
And thoughts filled his head
And he went up to that teacher
And this is what he said:

"Flowers are red,
Green leaves are green.
There's no need to see flowers
any other way
than the way they always have been seen."

Of course time went by, like it always does.
They moved to another town.
And the little boy went to another school
And this is what he found:

The teacher there was smiling,
She said, "painting should be fun!
And there are so many colors in a flower
So let's use everyone."

But the little boy painted flowers
In neat rows of green and red.
And when the teacher asked him why
This is what he said:

(And he said)
"Flowers are red,
Green leaves are green.
There's no need to see flowers
any other way

"Definitions of History"

Websters New World Dictionary of the American language, Second college Edition:

[M.E. ,L. *historia* <Gr. a learning by inquiry, narrative, *histor*, knowing learned} 1. an account of what has or might have happened, esp. in the form of the narrative, play, story, or tale. 2. a) what has happened in the life or development of a people, country, institution, etc. b) a systematic account of this usually in chronological order with an analysis and explanation. 3. all recorded events of the past. 4. the branch of knowledge that deals systematically with the past; a recording, analyzing, correlating, and explaining of past events 5. a know or recorded past 6. something that belongs to the past 6. something important enough to be recorded.

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The historian's job is to complicate, not to clarify. He (or she) strives to celebrate the diversity of manners, the variety of species, the opacity of things.

J. Hutzinger:

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Unit 2: Introduction to American Jewish History

"The Question is now open: How will American Jews affirm Their Jewishness? To answer this question, we must first search the past."

- Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of An Uneasy Encounter*

American Jewish History can be characterized by the dual struggle of the Jews to at once be accepted by mainstream American society and maintain their Jewish identity amid that society. The choices Jews made, and their consequences, resulted in a brand of Judaism that is at once both Jewish and uniquely American. This course will view American Jewish history through the lens of that struggle.

GOALS:

1. To give students an overview of American Jewish history
2. To introduce students to the dual struggle of America's Jews: maintaining identity and finding acceptance

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. identify the following eras in American Jewish history:
 - The Colonial and Early National Periods
 - The German Migration, 1830-1880
 - Migration from Eastern Europe, 1881- 1945
 - The 1950's: the move out to the suburbs and the rise of the American synagogue
 - The 1960's and 1970's: Counter-culture, turbulence and change
 - The 1980's and beyond: Assimilation or Religious Revival? Where are we going now?
2. give examples of ways in which American Jews struggle to achieve acceptance as Americans and maintain their identity as Jews. Students should be able to give examples from history as well as from their own lives.
3. begin to understand how the struggle to find acceptance as an American and maintain identity as a Jew may sometimes come into conflict. Students should begin to reflect on examples in their own lives.

KEY CONCEPTS:

- Assimilation/Adaptation/Enculturation/Isolation

These are four different approaches Jews had toward their host culture in America. Assimilation meant shedding one's cultural distinctiveness and becoming part of the mainstream culture. Adaptation meant adapting or changing one's own cultural or religious beliefs, practices or commitments to be more compatible with the mainstream culture. Enculturation is a process by which ideas, beliefs or practices or the host culture are integrated into one's own culture (an example of this would be Jewish feminism or the Jewish ecological movement). Isolation is a rejection of the host culture by separating oneself from it as completely as possible (an example of this would be the Hassidic Jews who live in Crown Heights).

° **Acceptance**

Most Jews and Jewish groups who have lived in the United States of America throughout history have sought to find some degree of acceptance by the host or mainstream culture. The acceptance often meant both an acceptance of their Jewish cultural and religious distinctiveness, as well being accepted by the a mainstream culture as a whole. For some this acceptance was a matter a equal access to universities, jobs, and country clubs. For others, this acceptance ran deeper, as it was a quest to be accepted as an American while remaining a Jew.

° **Jewish Identity/Identity Maintenance**

Throughout American history, Jews have sought different ways maintain their identity as Jews. Some examples of identity maintenance have been: giving one's children a Jewish education, celebrating Jewish holidays, associating with other Jews, and eating specifically Jewish foods.

° **Dual Struggle: Acceptance/Identity Maintenance**

The history of Jews in the United States of America can be characterized by the dual struggle to find acceptance by the mainstream American culture while simultaneously maintaining their identity as Jews. This course will focus on the interaction between these two struggles, when they complemented each other, and when they undermined each other.

° **Immigration**

American Jews today are descendants of an immigrant population. This course will focus on the immigrant experience of different Jewish populations: the conditions they left in the "Old Country", and the conditions they found upon arriving in the United States of America.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• **Timeline Banner**

1. Divide the class into the six different eras of study: The Colonial and Early National Periods; The German Migration; Migration from Eastern Europe; The Post World War II Era: The Move to the Suburbs and the Rise of the American Synagogue; The 1960's & 1970's: Turbulence and Change ; The 1980's and beyond.
2. Give each group a small packet with information about their era. The packet should include: A one to two page summary (text-books are good sources for these); some photos; a "Did You Know ... " sheet with interesting facts about the era. (Helene Schwartz Kenvin's book, "This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews" is a good source for this)
3. Give each group some butcher paper, magazines (from which to cut out pictures) and some *cool* art supplies.
4. Instruct each group to make a banner representing their era. Banners should then be shared with the rest of the class, and then displayed in the room in chronological order as a time-line.

• **Mr./Ms. Jewish America – This is YOUR Life !!!!**

This activity has two parts: a puzzle game that divides the students into different era groups, and then a television-talk-show-style presentation by each one of the groups. The premise is that there is one person (Mr./Ms. Jewish America) who has lived through the entire history of America's Jews. This show is a review of his/her life, era by era.

1. Get a big piece of cardboard for each era. On each cardboard piece glue: the "title" of the era, the dates, a summary of the era, and other information, such as photos, pictures and fact sheets. Do this for each one of the eras. Then cut up the cardboard into puzzle pieces, making enough puzzle pieces for each student. If at all possible, try to have one or two "things" on each puzzle piece (like a photo or the dates or summary, etc..)
2. At the beginning of class randomly hand out one puzzle piece to each student. Inform students that they have been given a piece of an era, they must now find other students who have puzzle pieces from the same era. Students should locate their partners and put together their puzzle. (You might want to offer prizes for the first three groups to finish just to make this more exciting.)
3. When all the groups have finished their puzzle, instruct them to arrange themselves in chronological order.

4. Explain to the class that we will be having a special guest visit our classroom: Mr./Ms. Jewish America. The oldest living American Jew in the world. Today is Mr./Ms. Jewish America's 340th birthday. So as a special present, we are going to present him/her with a review of his/her life. (This is modeled after the old television show, "This is Your Life).
5. Give each era group a bag of appropriate props to be used in their skits. Instruct them to use the information on their puzzle, their textbook, and the stuff in their bag to create a skit.
6. Have students perform their skits in chronological order. (You might want to invite the rabbi or educator to watch -- just for fun!!)
P.S. - you can also use the puzzle game for the "Timeline banner" activity!

• **American Jewish History "Squirms"**

1. Begin by asking students if they ever had to choose between their American or Jewish identities or commitments. Have students give examples and discuss briefly. Some examples might be: going to Yom Kippur services on the day of a big chemistry test; having to choose between class services on a Friday night or playing in a school baseball game; having to choose between attending weekly ballet lessons on Saturday, or missing once a month to attend the rabbi's Shabbat morning "Teen-Torah" study sessions; singing Christian songs in the school winter pageant; etc.....
2. Then tell students that they are not the first American Jews in history to have faced these dilemmas. In fact, some of these struggles are as old as American Jewish history itself.
3. Bring out a covered coffee can with the word "SQUIRMS" written on it. Inside are different dilemmas Jews have faced throughout their history in America. Have students draw out different "squirms" and explain how that would act in that situation. Or, divide the class into small groups and have them do skits of the different squirms.
4. De-brief with a discussion and summary.

Examples of "squirms":

Colonial Era: You have been living in the American colonies for about ten years now. There are rumors of an impending war with England. You would like to volunteer for the army, but you are afraid that your religious practices might be compromised by your army service. What do you do?

German Immigration and Experience: You have just arrived in America, and have learned of a group of people who are heading out west to participate in the Gold Rush in California. You would like to

join them, and bring your family along, but you and your family would be the only Jews on the caravan, and you are concerned about continuing your Jewish practice, especially celebrating Jewish holidays. You feel this would be particularly difficult for your children. What do you do?

Eastern European Immigration and Experience: You are a mother of four and a worker in a sweat shop on the lower east side. Every Friday you get up at four in the morning to complete your Shabbat preparations before you go to work. Shabbat observance is very important to your family because it is the only time in the entire week when the family is able to be together. At the sweatshop, conditions are particularly oppressive and you would like to join a union. You feel it is your moral duty to fight for the rights of workers like yourselves. However, union meetings often take place on Shabbat. What do you do?

Eastern European Immigration and Experience: You are an immigrant parent who is about to enroll his/her child in school. You think it is very important for your child to become 100% American and therefore want to enroll him/her in the public schools. However, you are aware that Christian prayers are recited each morning at the beginning of school and you child will be required to participate in the school's annual Christmas pageant. You are worried about these pressures and wonder if you should enroll your child in the local chedar instead. What do you do?

The 1960's and 1970's: Turbulence and Change: You are a young woman who has grown up in a staunchly Orthodox household: *Kashrut* and Shabbat restrictions were strictly observed. You grew up with a strict separation of the sexes: men recited the *kidush* over the Shabbat wine, while women recited the *bracha* over the Shabbat candles. The *shul* you attended all of your childhood separated men and women, and did not count women in the *minyan* —the prayer quorum required for the recitation of certain prayers. Since attending college, you have made the acquaintance of some young Jewish men and women who believe Judaism's traditional separation of the sexes is wrong. They are forming an egalitarian *minyan* in which men and women pray together. They ask you to join them. You were raised to believe that such behavior is contrary to the fundamental tenets of Judaism, yet you are curious. What do you do?

The 1980's and 1990's and beyond: You are a college student who has grown up in a typical "Reform" household. You were sent to religious school, had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and were confirmed at the Temple in the 10th grade. Your family attended high holiday services at the Temple and celebrated Hanukah and Passover at home. Now

that you are no longer at home, it is up to you to maintain your Jewish identity. There are many interesting activities on your college campus; community service, pledging a sorority or fraternity, writing for the campus newspaper, and the Hillel. How do you express your Jewish identity at college? or do you?

• **Culture Clash**

1. Tell students that before we begin studying history, we are going to spend some time talking about ourselves and our values. Hand out to each student three different value cards. Cards should reflect: American, Jewish, and universal values. However, do not tell students you have classified the values this way. Part of the exercise is for students to classify these values on their own.
2. Tell students they have 10 minutes to try to find three cards that express their own value system. They may trade with fellow students, or they may use the grab-bag twice. (The grab-bag is all extra values that you did not had out. I suggest you make three values for each student and then about 15 extra in the grab-bag. IT IS OKAY TO MAKE DUPLICATES (i.e. more than one card with the same value). Keep the grab bag with you, or else you will find that all the students will just rummage through the grab-bag, looking for the value they want.)
3. After ten minutes (or so, if the students are having a really great time, let them go a little longer) instruct students to sit down, and have students share their value cards. When students read off their values, help them classify them: Jewish, American, Liberal/Universal, etc.... Ask them what cards they gave away. why? What cards did they gain and keep, why? Ask: who has all "Jewish" cards? why? Who has all American cards? why? Who was satisfied with the cards they received in the first place? Who still is not satisfied? Allow for a small discussion to ensue.
4. Then say, the exercise that we have just done is a simulation of a process that not only happens today, but also has occurred throughout American Jewish history. Throughout American Jewish history, Jews have encountered American Jewish culture. Sometimes American culture was in direct conflict with Jewish culture:

Shabbat services vs. soccer games
keeping kosher vs. eating at Mc Donald's

Sometimes American culture was not conflict and served to add to an American Jew's identity and value system:

democracy
free-market economy
freedom of speech

Sometimes values from American culture became part of Jewish culture:

feminism/Jewish feminism
liberalism/Tikkun Olam
vegetarianism/tzar ba'alei chaim.

In different eras, different Jews (or different groups of Jews) made different choices and decisions about their Jewishness in this un-Jewish land. In this course, we will begin to examine some of those choices.

Examples of values:

(Note: such values are not necessarily American, Universal, Jewish, etc., but can be a combination of several different elements.

Students should be encouraged to explore the different sources of their value systems)

American: freedom of speech, democracy, capitalism, diversity, equality, pluralism, celebrating the 4th of July, celebrating Easter, celebrating Christmas, celebrating Halloween, eating a Big Mac, going to high-school football games on Friday nights, being popular, having lots of nice clothes, having a cool boy/girl friend, driving a nice car ...

Universal/Other: peace, justice, freedom, feminism, environmentalism, socialism, anarchy, communism, vegetarianism personal happiness, independence, seeing the world, visiting old age homes ...

Jewish: Tikkun Olam, Ba'al Taschit, lighting candles on Shabbat, having a mezuzah on my door, keeping kosher, celebrating Jewish holidays, having Jewish friends, marrying a Jewish person, going to synagogue on the high holidays, going to synagogue on Shabbat, not driving on Shabbat, not working on Shabbat, eating Jewish food, learning/speaking Hebrew, praying, visiting Israel, becoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah, learning about Judaism, Tzdekah ...

TEACHER RESOURCES:

As this unit requires a broad knowledge of American Jewish history, I recommend becoming familiar with as many of these works as

possible. In the upcoming units, I will specify chapters germane to particular areas.

- *This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews* (textbook with teacher's guide) by Helene Schwartz Kenvin
- *Background for the History of American Jewry* (pamphlet from American Jewish Archives) by Jacob Rader Marcus
- *American Jews/A Reader* by Marshall Sklare
- *Jewish Life in Twentieth Century America* by Milton Plesur
- *The American Jews* by Arthur Goren
- *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* by Jack Wertheimer
- *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* by Arthur Hertzberg
- *A History of the Jews in America* by Howard M. Sachar
- *Unity Within Diversity: Jewish Religious Pluralism in America* (HUC student curriculum) by Jane Dora West
- *Being Jewish in America: The Tensions and Struggles of the East European Immigrants* (HUC student curriculum) by Dina Burt
- *The American Jewish Woman* (HUC student curriculum guide) by Amy Grossblatt

Unit 3: Colonial and Early America/Using Primary Source Documents

As far back as the medieval Crusades, and as late as 1648, European Jews were driven out of their homes. The direction of most of these refugees was East into the Slavic and Arabic realms. But with the rise of industrialism, mercantilism, and the development of a new European civilization on the other side of the Atlantic, European Jews began to move West. At first it was just a trickle of individual Jews who came to make their fortune, and were soon lost to the non-Jewish majority. Yet the story of any people is not of those who were lost, but of those who persist. Hence our story of the tenure of Jews in North American land begins with the first Jewish settlement in New Amsterdam in 1654. The struggles of the Jews then, as well as those who joined them in colonial America reverberate throughout American Jewish history as each generation has began anew to negotiate their way between the often conflicting demands of being an American (or citizen of the New World) and being a Jew. This unit is a survey unit, spanning from the arrival of the first group of Jews in the New World in 1654 to the American Revolution in 1776.

The history of these Jews has only begun to have been written. Our sources of knowledge of the lifestyle of these Jews are the documents they left behind: their letters, their business documents, and other personal and professional papers. Students will study these documents in effort to gain insight into the lives of these early American Jews.

GOALS:

1. To teach students to use primary sources in the reconstruction of history.
2. To introduce students to the earliest period of American Jewish history.
3. To acquaint students with some of the issues of this era, for example struggles for: religious freedom, citizenship and the rights accorded to citizens, the right to serve in the military, and to adapt Judaism to a new land.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. Examine letters, petitions, contracts, and other personal and business primary source documents, and use such documents as

sources of historical information (ex: nature of religious life, cultural life, business life, status of relations between Jews and non-Jews, etc...)

2. Describe the conditions under which Jews lived in Colonial and Early America. .
3. Give examples of ways that Jews in the Colonial period sought to gain acceptance as citizens, and sought to maintain their identity as Jews.

During the unit, students will have the opportunity to:

1. Reconstruct Colonial Jewish life based on primary source documents.

KEY CONCEPTS:

◦ **Sephardim**

The first Jews who settled in New Amsterdam were descendants of families that had lived for centuries in Spain and Portugal. These Jews were *sephardim*. Many sephardic customs (such as melodies used in prayer and food permissible on Passover) differ from that of Ashkenasic (European) Jews.

◦ **New Amsterdam**

The first group of Jews who came to the "New World" in 1654 settled in New Amsterdam — a colony that had been founded by agents of the Dutch West India Company of Amsterdam. The group had been en route to the Caribbean, but when they ran out of money to pay the ship's captain, New Amsterdam, though not their port of choice, became their port of hope.

◦ **burgher**

A form of citizenship which was originally denied to Jews in New Amsterdam. When Jewish petitions to be admitted as burghers were denied by the leader of New Amsterdam, Jews appealed to the New Amsterdam council, arguing that Jews should be given the right to become burgher since Jews were allowed to become burghers in Amsterdam. The council granted then granted the Jews the right to become burghers.

◦ **Peter Stuyvesant**

The leader of New Amsterdam when Jews arrived in 1654. He opposed admittance of Jews to New Amsterdam on the grounds that they would be a financial burden. He also denied Jewish application for status as burghers until his decision was overturned by government in New Amsterdam, and opposed religious freedom for the Jews on the grounds that this might pave the way for freedom of religion for other religious groups such as Lutherans and Catholics.

Jews were denied the right to practice their religion publicly, and hence a synagogue was never built.

◦ **ways in which Jews fought for and gained acceptance**

Jews fought to be accepted as burghers or citizens, to engage in the economic life of the colonies, and to participate in the military.

◦ **ways in which Jews fought to maintain their identity as Jews**

Jews fought for religious freedoms, such as the right to build synagogues and to worship publicly.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• **Background reading in a textbook**

As this is a period of Jewish history with which most are unfamiliar, a common background of knowledge will be necessary before deeper issues are examined. Helene Schwartz Kenvin's *This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews* Part I, provides excellent background reading for this era. I suggest the reading be accompanied with a set of questions on all levels of Bloom's taxonomy. You might want to make certain students responsible for different questions, and then have them present their answer to the class. This can be done in the context of a discussion about the text.

• **Guided study of a primary source document**

As studying from primary source documents is a skill like any other, students need to be guided through the process before they can learn independently. Jacob Rader Marcus has compiled a book of documents on American Jewry in the Eighteenth Century (*American Jewry ◦ Documents ◦ Eighteenth Century*). I suggest you consult this work for primary source documents. I have included some that I think I particularly rich and that the students will find interesting. I recommend that you study one text together as a class. Then divide the students up into chevruta (dyads) and give each chevruta a different text with which to work. I recommend that alongside each text should be a list of questions/key concepts. Students should study the text together with aid from the teacher who will rotate around the room helping groups. Session should end as each chevruta reports back to the group about their findings.

• **Make a Town Newspaper!**

Using primary source documents, have students create a Jewish newspaper which would reflect Jewish life in Colonial America. Sections to include: "Ask the rabbi" advice column, a cooking section

(note that Jews kept kosher), articles about the synagogue, articles about births, deaths, and weddings, profiles of important people, human-interest feature articles. In order to ensure content, give students choices from lists of assigned articles. You might even want to hand out primary source material with the assignments. Encourage students to create artwork as well. When newspaper is finished, distribute to the entire school!

• **Make a Museum Exhibit**

Have students create "artifacts" that could be placed in a museum exhibit on Jewish life in Colonial America. Such artifacts could include diaries, letters, newspaper articles and pictures of different aspects of religious, cultural, familial and business life. Have students serve as docents and invite the rest of the school to view the museum.

TEACHER RESOURCES:

This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews (Textbook with Teacher's Guide) by Helene Schwartz Kenvin, Part I

American Jewry ° Documents ° Eighteenth Century compiled by Jacob Rader Marcus

The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter by Arthur Hertzberg, Chapter 1-4

The American Jews by Arthur A. Goren, Chapter 2

A History of the Jews in America , by Howard M. Sachar, Chapter 1

-The following primary source documents are included in this curriculum guide. I have taken them from Jacob Rader Marcus' collection, *The Jews in America* .

-No. 40: Abraham I. Abrahams, Circumciser and School teacher, 1767- 1769, pp. 90-93

-No. 41: A Slaughterer Certifies Kosher Meat, 1768, p. 93

-No. 52: The Jews observe their Holydays, 1784, pp. 136-137

-No.54: The Burial of Benjamin Moses Clava, 1785, pp. 138-141

-No. 55: The Gentiles of Philadelphia Help the Synagogue, 1788, pp. 142-143

-No. 63: Code of Laws of Congregation Mickvah Israel, Savannah, 1791-1792, pp. 176-181

-No. 66: A Problem of Intermarriage, 1793, 187-188

Source Materials

American Jewry · Documents
Eighteenth Century

PRIMARILY HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

Jacob Rader Marcus

DIRECTOR, AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES
ADOLPH S. OCHS PROFESSOR OF JEWISH HISTORY
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
CINCINNATI

THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE PRESS
CINCINNATI
1959

Lopez, his wife, and his children were Marranos, secret Jews who pretended to be Christians in order to escape the wrath of the Inquisition, and they had just arrived from intolerant Portugal.

Abrahams could not get away until October, but on the twenty-seventh of that month he performed the operations at Tiverton. Abrahams stayed on, enjoying the hospitality of the Lopezzes for almost a month, and returned to New York in the middle of November. Then, in a letter to Aaron Lopez (Document A), he announced his safe arrival at home and informed his host that Isaac Adolphus, a New York merchant, was sending some prayer shawl fringes (*tzitzit*) for the newly circumcised Lopezzes. Abrahams himself sent a gift of some fringes for the children of Mrs. (Moses?) Lopez, Aaron's sister-in-law. In Document B, Aaron acknowledged the receipt of the gifts and sent his thanks on behalf of the family.

As a rule, Jews who lived in a community where a synagogue existed were very faithful in their adherence to Jewish law and ceremonial. Before his employment as a tutor, Abrahams was a merchant and manufacturer of liquor and snuff, and in all probability he continued in business even after becoming the community teacher and circumciser. But with all his trade he could not support his thirteen or more children and appealed, about 1769, to the elders of the synagogue (Document C) to permit him to occupy one of the congregational "parsonages."

SOURCE: Documents A and B: Newport Historical Society Library, Lopez Letters; Document C: American Jewish Historical Society Library, Lyons Collection, No. 48.

No. 40 Abraham I. Abrahams, Circumciser
and Schooiteacher—1767-1769

A [no. 40]

New York, November 28th, 1767.

Mr. Aaron Lopez.

Sir:

I arrived safe here last Fryday week, after a very fatiguing, tedious passage, having lain at Fisher's Island several days. And at last came home by land from Huntington [Long Island], which was attended with no small expence. However, hope all is for the better. I long to hear of your brother and family. Beg it by the earliest opportunity.

Herewith send four double setts *tsitziths* for them, being a present from Mr. Isaac Adolphus. He has no tephilim ["phylacteries"] to spare or would send some. Also four setts for Mrs. Lopez, her sons, with my compliments to her.

Although the New York Jews were never very successful in carrying on their own religious and secular schools, they were interested in providing an education for their children. In 1762 they hired Abraham I. Abrahams (1720-96) to serve as a teacher. His contract specified that he was "to keep a publick school in the *Hebra* [the community building], to teach the Hebrew language and translate the same into English, also to teach English, reading, writing, and cyphering." On frequent occasions he officiated also as a volunteer rabbi and circumciser.

In September, 1767, Aaron Lopez, the Newport merchant, asked Abrahams to come to Rhode Island and to circumcise Abraham Lopez, Aaron's older brother, and his three adult sons. Abraham

I found my family all in health, who join their best wishes to you and yours, with, sir,

Your most humble servant,
Abraham I. Abrahams

B [no. 40]
Newport, December 4th, 1767.

Mr. Abraham I. Abrahams:

Your esteemed favour of the 28th ulto. released us from the anxiety we felt on the event of your fatiguing passage, and are exceeding glad you was at last restored in safety to your dear friends, whom [I] have the pleasure to learn, you found in health.

I delivered your kind message with the *tscissiths* to my brother Abraham, who, with his wife and children, thanks you for your friendly enquire [enquiry] after them, and likewise to Mr. Adolphus for his religious present; I also delivered [to] my sister in law the *tscissiths* for the boys, with your kind compliments.

Please to receive in return an ample and round salutation from the whole family, who, thanks to the Almighty, is well. My brother and his family did not return from Tevertown till last Monday. They are all bravely [brave] and full of devotion. God may increase it in them and in all our brethren, that we may cordially join to praise His mercifull regard for us.

I am, with particular esteem, sir,

Your most humble servant,
[Aaron Lopez]

C [no. 40]

To the Gentlemen Parnasin and Elders of K. K. Sheerith Israel. Gentlemen:

Having served this congregation in the capacity of a Ribbi upwards seven years, and having a numerous family to support, have been obliged to try several ways to do the same honestly, as the pay I get for the same is far too short.

Therefore, as the house next the synagogue that I lived in, was not fit to carry on any business, and Mr. [Isaac Cohen Da] Silva, the former razan's health would not permit his living far from the synagogue, I propos[ed] to the gentlemen parnasin and elders to give me the [sum?] allowed him for rent and I would remove, on which I was allowed fifteen pounds towards the same, which allowance was taken from me last year, yet was in hopes to been able to do without it. But as times are so bad and little to be done, if you gentlemen will be so kind as to take

it into consideration to put the house in proper repair [and] fit for my family, and will let me have it again [to] dwell in, you will very much oblige, gentlemen,
Yours and the congregation's most humble servant,

Abraham I. Abrahams

No. 41 A Slaughterer Certifies Kosher Meat—1768

The Jews of North America exported relatively large quantities of meat to the West Indies and to Surinam in South America. In order to guarantee that a shipment was ritually acceptable, the firkins or barrels were accompanied by a statement certifying that the contents were kosher. Congregation Shearith Israel of New York supervised the export of such meat from the first half of the eighteenth century and levied an export tax to raise revenue for the congregation. To prevent frauds on the part of meat dealers and shippers, the barrels enclosing the meat were branded and sealed, and, as an added precaution, the meat itself sometimes carried a lead seal.

The following form was used in the eighteenth century by a Philadelphia shohet. This slaughterer was evidently engaged in certifying kosher meat to be exported to the Dutch island of Curaçao. In spite of its faulty spelling, the meaning of the certificate is clear.

Edwin Wolf 2d and Maxwell Whiteman, in their *History of the Jews of Philadelphia*, say that this certificate was prepared by a shohet working for Michael Gratz, of Philadelphia. The latter, as we know, was engaged in the exportation of meats to the West Indies about 1767.

SOURCE: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Form for to make the certificat

Mr. send by this vessel caled [called]
whereof [is] Capt. bound to Coracoa
..... fuhins [firkins] market [marked] From No.
till Insides market [marked] with a strengh [string] seal
and wax [with special markings] I testefy by this that I have
kill de [the] meat and examine[d] the same, as being *Shohet* ["slaugh-
terer"] of this place, and that in consideration of that, all our brothers,
the House of Israel, may eat of the same.
In witness thereof, I sign my hand, Philadelphia, the 17...

No. 52 The Jews Observe Their Holydays—1784

The following letter by "A Protestant" appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper. The writer lamented the fact that Christians were more concerned with their worldly pursuits than with the observance of Good Friday, and pointed out that Jews, in contrast, were meticulous in celebrating the Passover, which usually occurs about the same time. It is possible that the writer (probably the Reverend Charles Crawford) had no particular group of Jews in mind, but it is more likely that he was thinking of the Jewish community of Philadelphia which clustered around its synagogue Mikveh Israel. SOURCE: *The Pennsylvania Packet, and Daily Advertiser*, December 23, 1784.

Though I do not pretend to such an outward shew of religion as our modern enthusiasts, yet I flatter myself I am never the worse Christian. However, I cannot help being extremely shocked, when I observe the way of our blessed Saviour's death [Good Friday], appointed by the church (as no doubt it ought to be) so strict and solemn a fast, treated, by all ranks of people, with that unchristianlike levity and concern, which casts a reproach upon our country.

That day, in my opinion, ought to be observed, if possible, more holy than the Sabbath, that we poor sinful mortals, instead of following our worldly concerns on this most sacred day, might have the opportunity attending before and sending up our praises to God, for giving his only Son to die an ignominious death upon the cross, as an expiatory sacrifice for our sins. Certainly one day's abstinence from the concerns of this world cannot be any injury whatsoever.

The Jews set us the example; who, at the time of their Passover, re-

frain from the tempting lure of gain during the course of almost a week. Let not us Protestants be behind all other nations [religious groups] in shewing respect to the dying day of Jesus Christ. Wherefore, I think, to promote such a due observance of that day as is requisite, I humbly propose that the clergy exhort their respective congregations to attend the service of the church, and keep holy that day, which certainly would not fail to be acceptable both to God and thousands of Christians [indentured servants?], who at this present are debarred, against their inclinations, in conformity to a custom contrary to all the rules of religion and right reasoning. I have nothing more to add but my prayers that this plan may be carried into execution, and I remain in hopes,

Yours,
A Protestant

No. 53 Michael Judah Leaves His Estate to Jewish Charities—1784

Michael Judah was a small-town merchant who left New York to settle in Norwalk, Connecticut, in all probability because the competition in that town was less keen. There is a record of a petty loan made available to him by Congregation Shearith Israel. It may be that the £5 the trustees of the congregation lent him in 1745 set him up in business.

Judah married out of the faith. His son David, who became the ancestor of General Henry Moses Judah and of Theodore Dehone Judah, the Pacific Coast railroad promoter, was a Christian. Michael Judah, however, was a loyal and observant Jew. He seems to have attempted to keep a kosher household, brought the mohel from New York to circumcise his son, and, as we shall see from the following will, bequeathed the bulk of his very modest estate to Jewish charities.

The Solomon Simson mentioned in the will was a well-known New York merchant and one of the founders of the Democratic Society. Captain Eliakim Raymond, the executor, was related to Michael's late wife, Martha Raymond Judah.

The testament reflects the attempt of a Jew to maintain his religious loyalty in an overwhelmingly non-Jewish environment.

SOURCE: Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut Archives, Norwalk District, No. 3498.

Know all men by these presents that I, Michael Judah, of Norwalk, in the County of Fairfield and State of Connecticut, being weak in body

and sick, and caling to mind the frailty of human nature and that it is appointed for all men to die, and being sound in mind and memory, and having a desire to dispose of the little interest which it has pleased God in his providence to endow me with, do hereby make this my last will and testament, revoking all other wills heretofore by me made.

And my will is, first, that after paying my just debts and funeral charges, I give and bequeath to my son, David Judah, five pounds lawfull money as his part of portion in my estate,

And the remainder of my estate to be given, equally divided and given, the one half to the Synagoge in Newyork, and the other half to the poor widows and orphans of my own naton, living in Newyork, to be distributed at the discretion of Mr. Solomon Simson of Newyork.

And I do hereby make, ordan, constitute, and appoint Capt. Eliakim Raymond to be my executor of this, my last will and testament.

In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 31th day of December, A. D. 1784, in prisents [the presence] of

Aron Abbott
Matthias Abbott
Stephen Abbott
Michel Judah

Fairfield County, in Norwalk. Personally appeared Michael Judah, signer and sealer to the above written instrument, and signed, sealed, published, and pronounced the same to be his last will and testament, before me, the day and date above written.

Elephalet Lockwood, Justice of Peace

No. 54 The Burial of Benjamin Moses Clava—1785

According to the records, Benjamin Moses Clava, a Jewish merchant, was a business partner of Barnard Gratz in the 1750's. His death on March 15, 1785, and the burial which it necessitated, ordinarily matters of routine, created a problem for the members of Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel.

Like many other peddlers and merchants who lived in obscure villages and hamlets, Clava had fallen in love with a Gentile woman, and their marriage had been solemnized by a civil official. Here was a poser for Philadelphia Jewry. Was he entitled to proper Jewish burial? Three years before his death the members had needed his help in building their synagogue. His name was not found on the list of donors, and it appears that he did not belong to the congregation.

As we shall see below (Document A), the members decided that

Clava might be buried in consecrated ground, but without shrouds or benefit of ritual cleansing. Other sources indicate that he was buried in a corner of the cemetery, and when the actual burial took place, some members disregarded the congregational decision and interred Clava with the proper rites and ceremonies. Document A is copied as it is found in the records. For the sake of clarity it is followed by a version in modern English.

Even after the members of the congregation had decided the issue some uncertainty remained. Had they done the right thing? Where could they obtain guidance for action in future cases? There was not a single qualified rabbi in all of North America at the time; all the officiating "rabbis" were readers of the service. Faced with a baffling question and with no one in the vicinity to answer it, the congregation decided to refer the matter, in a Yiddish letter, to the rabbis of Amsterdam and The Hague (Document B).

source. Document A: Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia, Minute Book, Vol. I, 1781-95; Document B: Congregation Mikveh Israel, Correspondence.

A [No. 54]

At a meeting held of the congregation on the 5th [of] Nison, 5545, or 16th March, 1785.

Present:

Messrs. Asher Myers	Moses D. Nathons
Manuel Josephson	Benjamin Nones
Henry Marks	Manuel Noah
Jonas Philips	Moses Nathan Levy
Moses Jacobs	Samuel Hays
Mordicai Levy	Myer Derkom
Jacob Cohon, hazzan	M. Gratz

When the parmass acquainted the gentlemen that in consequence of a letter received from Mr. Jonas Philips, Henry Marks, and Moses D. Nathons requasting to have the congregation calld imadeatly as is of great portencee in a present case, for the genaril good of the sasiaty. When the letter was read setting forth that there is to be a burell of one B. M. Clava who was marrid to a *goy* [Gentile] by *goyim*, and as many to our sorry are in the same predilement, that some mode of buriall aught to be adapted from the comon way of good *yehudim* ["Jews"]. Wher on it was debated and agreed on, with out a desanding voice, that a *din taurah* [*din torah*, an authoritative decision] should be asked and oboydid by. When Messrs. Manuel Josephson, Moses D. Nathons, and

Joseph W. Carpeles was chosen to give the *din* ["law"] or wordedek in writing but as the corpse or *mes* was laying to be buried, there ansure is at present that B. M. Clava and all such persons in fewture is to be entiard with out washing and clothing, but put in the corphin as he now lays, and carried to the grave. Agreed unanimously.

[Paraphrase of Document A—No. 54]

The parnass acquainted the gentlemen that, in consequence of a letter received from Messrs. Jonas Phillips, Henry Marks, and Moses D. Nathans, the congregation had been called immediately to discuss the present case, a matter of great importance for the general good of the society. Whereupon the letter was read, setting forth that there was to be a burial of B. M. Clava, who had been married to a Gentile woman by Gentiles. Since many, to our sorrow, are in the same predicament, some mode of burial ought to be adopted different from the usual way of burying good Jews.

Whereupon the question was debated, and it was agreed upon, without a dissenting voice, that a legal ruling should be asked and abided by. Messrs. Manuel Josephson, Moses D. Nathans, and Joseph W. Carpeles were chosen to give the verdict in writing, but, since the corpse was waiting to be buried, their answer at the present was that B. M. Clava, and all such persons in the future, were to be interred without ritual washing and clothing, but to be placed in the coffin as they were, and to be carried to the grave.

Agreed unanimously.

B [no. 54]

Philadelphia, Sunday, 9 Nisan, 5545 [March 20, 1785].

To the honored . . . Rabbi Saul [Loewenstamm] of the Ashkanazic Community of Amsterdam. . . .

Last Tuesday, the fifth of this month [Tuesday was the fourth: March 15, 1785], there died here a man named Benjamin Moses Clava, who left a Gentile woman whom he had married in a civil ceremony. He had with her two daughters who are also still living. He was said to be a man of great Jewish learning. After he had married the Gentile woman, he became blind and had to stay in. His Gentile wife provided for him and the Jews sometimes sent him kosher food. On Tuesday it became suddenly known that he had died and that no Jews had been with him at the time of his death. (About a year before his death he called several Jews and recited the confession of faith before them, but continued to live with the Gentile woman till his death.)

There was a lot of speculation in our congregation about his burial.

The president and the leaders and a majority of the members of our congregation met to agree on the matter, and it was finally left to a religious court for a decision. The congregation appointed as a court Moses Nathan and the two undersigned with instructions to send you a copy of our decision in English. Here, for the record, is a brief resume:

The dead man shall be buried in a corner of the cemetery, without ritual washing, without shrouds, and without a ceremony, but four boys shall carry him to the grave and bury him, and the shrouds that have been prepared shall be put into the casket, but he shall not wear them. Whoever shall disregard this decision, and render any service to the dead man, shall be excluded from all religious functions until he submit to the congregation and accept whatever punishment be imposed upon him. This decision shall be permanently enforced and applied to all transgressors who shall marry out of the faith. This is the outline of the decision.

Now the president went to the place where the body was kept to see whether there were any irresponsible people who would attend the body in disregard of our decision, and he found there several irreverent and irresponsible men, among them [Moses] Mordecai. The president warned the men, in the presence of Mordecai, not to attend the body, but Mordecai paid no attention to his words, and, on the contrary, quoted rabbinic laws against him. And they washed the body and clothed it in shrouds, that is to say, the president anticipated that and cut the shrouds almost completely into pieces, but they [the malcontents] did what they wanted. The congregation will shortly decide what to do to these men.

All this goes to show the conduct of Mordecai, who is ready to destroy good ordinances that were made to meet the needs of the moment because of the great lack of discipline that prevails in our generation. Now, those unrespectful men who attended the body unlawfully claim that the decision was improper. We, therefore, request of you to answer . . . about this decision, whether it was properly made to meet the need of the hour.

May the mouths of those who speak falsehoods be closed, may they be put to shame and receive their just deserts from the Lord; and may we soon see the coming of the Redeemer, so that Israel's authority will be as of old to punish those who rebel against God and his law. Then the Lord will be One and his name will be one; and there will be reward for those who labor for the Lord and his law.

We are looking forward to your reply and are ready to observe your instructions as slaves obey their masters, and disciples their teachers. With best wishes, etc.,

Manuel Josephson
J. W. Carpeles

No. 55 The Gentiles of Philadelphia Help the
Synagogue—1788

After the Revolution Congregation Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia found itself in debt to the extent of £800. Its new building had cost a considerable amount of money, and many of the Jews on whose help the congregation had counted had returned to their New York or Charleston homes.

In an effort to save the synagogue the congregation experimented with a variety of expedients, including an appeal to the non-Jews of the city. This appeal, which was circulated among local Gentiles, is given below. Among the subscribers who responded to it were Benjamin Franklin, David Rittenhouse, William Bradford, Thomas McKean, William Rush, Charles Biddle, and one of the Muhlenbergs. Although the synagogue failed to raise the necessary amount on that occasion, its problem was solved in 1790 when the state authorities permitted Mikveh Israel to run a lottery.

Knowing the men whose help they sought, and having done business with them frequently, the Jews did not hesitate to solicit their subscriptions. Equally, if not more important, however, was their conviction that in an "enlightened" age Gentiles could not object to aiding men of a different faith in worshipping according to the dictates of their consciences.

SOURCE. The appeal was published in abbreviated form in J. T. Schaf and T. Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, II, 1439-40. It is reprinted here in its entirety, except for the signatures, from the original in the Archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia.

To the humane, charitable, and well disposed people, the representation and solicitation of the good people of the Hebrew society [community] in the City of Philadelphia, commonly called Israelites.

Whereas, the religious order of men in this city denominated Israelites were without any synagogue or house of worship until the year 1780 [1782], when, desirous of accommodating themselves and encouraged thereto by a number of respectable and worthy bretheren of the Hebrew society then in this place (who generously contributed to the design), they purchased a lot of ground and erected thereon the buildings necessary and proper for their religious worship;

And whereas, many of their number at the close of the late war returned to New York, Charleston, and elsewhere their homes (which they had been exiled from and obliged to leave on account of their attachment

to American measures), leaving the remaining few of their religion here burthened with a considerable charge consequent from so great an undertaking;

And whereas, the present congregation, after expending all the subscriptions, loans, gifts, etc., made the society by themselves and the generous patrons of their religious intentions, to the amount of at least £2,200, were obliged to borrow money to finish the building, and contract other debts that is now not only pressingly claimed, but a judgment will actually be obtained against their house of worship, which must be sold unless they are speedily enabled to pay the sum of about £800; and which, from a variety of delicate and distressing causes, they are wholly unable to raise among themselves;

They are therefore under the necessity of earnestly soliciting from their worthy fellow-citizens of every religious denomination their benevolent aid and help, flattering themselves that their worshipping Almighty God in a way and manner different from other religious societies will never deter the enlightened citizens of Philadelphia from generously subscribing towards the preservation of a religious house of worship. The subscription paper will be enrolled in the archives of their congregation, that their posterity may know and gratefully remember the liberal supporters of their religious society.

Philadelphia, April 30th, 1788.

No. 63 Code of Laws of Congregation Mickva
Israel, Savannah—1791-1792

Within six weeks after its incorporation, Congregation Mickva Israel appointed a committee of five members to prepare a new code of regulations, replacing the congregational rules which had evidently been in effect before the incorporation in 1790.

The following body of laws (Document A) was adopted on July 31, 1791. The administrative structure was simple: a board, a president, a treasurer, and a secretary. Democracy expressed itself in the provision that any three members could appeal from an action taken by the board and could submit the issues directly to the congregation. Apparently no separate "benevolent society" was established, for charities were handled by the president and the trustees.

The influence of the environment may be seen in the code. Offerings by strangers were to be collected at once. Most of these were businessmen who came by boat and most likely left on the next one. There were no facilities to bill them, and it therefore behooved the congregation to collect synagogue offerings as soon as possible. Also indicative of local conditions is rule fifteen. A number of the members spent much time on their plantations or in the countryside, inevitably collecting mud on their boots. Such persons were not to mount the pulpit in their customary footwear.

Whatever influence the environment had, loyalty to the ancient Law was not neglected. Intermarriage under congregational auspices was forbidden, and, under rule twelve, Sabbath violators were to be denied synagogue honors. The seriousness with which the congregation viewed such ritual offenses is evidenced by Document B, which describes the trial of Isaac Polack, who was accused of keeping his store open on the Sabbath.

SOURCE: Congregation Mickva Israel, Savannah, Minute Book, Vol. I, 1790-1851.

At a meeting of the congregation of the synagogue, agreeable to order of the 25th July, inst. [1791]

Present:

Levi Sheftall, parnos	Abraham Depass
Sheftall Sheftall, <i>gaboy</i>	Coshman Polack
Mordecai Sheftall	Levy Abrahams
Joseph Abrahams	Emmanuel De La Motta
Ralph Depass	Abraham Abrahams
David Cardozo	Moses Sheftall
Benjamin Sheftall, Senior	Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary
Samuel Mordecai	

The parnos opened the business when Mr. Levy Abrahams was put in the chair and the laws read paragraph by paragraph and approved of as follows:

Rule 1st.

That this congregation be continued by the former name of Mickva Israel, and that the mode of worship be according to the Portuguese minhange ["rite"], and that all [money] offerings shall be made in Hebrew, and that the money so offered shall be nominated in the name of the coin, as named in the state.

Rule 2d.

That their shall be chosen on every third Monday in August annually, from the *yehadin* [members] of this congregation (whose ages shall exceed twenty-one years), one parnos and six ajunto [board members], and their [shall] be chosen by the *yehadin* one person out of the said ajunto to act as *gaboy* ["treasurer"]; and that they have power to regulate this congregation and inflict penalties on all transgressors of the following rules.

Rule 3d.

That the said parnos, *gaboy*, and ajuntomen and a secretary, being elected by ballot and having a majority of votes, shall be considered as such. And if the parnos elected refuse to serve, he shall pay a fine not exceeding forty shillings; the *gaboy*, thirty shillings, and each ajuntoman, ten shillings. And if in case a parnos, *gaboy*, or any of the adjunto be re-elected, and do not chuse to serve, neither of them shall be liable to pay the fine specified. On refusal of the new elected parnos, *gaboy*, or ajunto, the old officers to serve until a new election take place, which shall be within three days after said general election, and that the officers elected shall take their seats on the first day of Rossanah ["New Year"].

Rule 4th.

That the *hatinim* [honorary officers] be drawn from the *yehadim* (exceeding the age of twenty-one years) within twenty four hours after the general election, by the presiding parnos and ajunto, when the parnos shall notify the same to the persons so drawn, who shall be obliged to declare his or their acceptance or refusal to the parnos within forty eight hours after; and should any decline serving, shall pay a fine not exceeding forty shillings each; and [if] in proceeding through the whole of the above disscribed *yehadim*, none will accept, then each pay the above mentioned fine, and in such case, the acting parnos and *gaboy* be obliged to serve.

Rule 5th.

Should the parnos be absent at any time, then the *gaboy* shall preceide; and in case of the absence of both, then the members of the ajunto shall act by seniority.

Rule 6th.

Should the conduct of the officers or any of the ajunto be at any time reprehensible, in such case, on complaint in writing from a *yehid* or congregator, he or they shall be called to account by the remainder of the ajunto. But should the determination of said ajunto be not satisfactory to the complainant, on application of said person, signed by at least three *yehadim* (not allied by consanguinity of blood) to the parnos and ajunto, to have a general meeting of the *yehadim* called, they shall in such case be obliged to convene them within one week; and should the *yehadim*, so met, think their was no just cause of complaint, they, the *yehadim*, shall have it in their power to inflict a [fine] [on] the complainant or complainants.

Rule 7th.

That a decent behaviour be observed by every person during service, no person to raise his voice above, or disturb the reader, or hold any conversation either in the synagogue or places adjacent. And in case any person so offending, on being called to order and still persisting, shall, for every such offence, pay a fine not exceeding forty shillings.

Rule 8th.

That any person refusing a mitzwa [religious honor] shall not be entitled to another untill he can give a sufficient excuse to the parnos. Also, any person who is called to [participate in reading the] *seiphet* shall be obliged to offer for the parnos [money for the congregation], and that no offering be less than six pence.

Rule 9th.

That the parnos shall call the ajunto once a month and oftner if requisite.

Rule 10th.

That any person fined for a violation of these rules shall not be intitled

to receive any mitzwa, or have any offerings made for him untill he has complied by paying such fines.

Rule 11th.

That the *gaboy* keep a proper set of books, collect all offerings and fines, shall ballance said books yearly, and render accounts to the *yehadim* and congregators quarterly, and to strangers weekly and sooner if requisite. That the secretary keep proper books, in which shall be inserted the rules and proceedings of the ajunto and congregation. Also, that the *gaboy* and secretary be obliged to bring up their books [to date] at delivering the same to their successors in office. Any neglecting so to do, shall be liable to a fine not exceeding five pounds, and that the books of both *gaboy* and secretary be kept in English.

Rule 12th.

That every person professing the Jewish religion (either *yehid* or congregator) who shall violate the Sabbath or holydays, on information being given to the parnos of his or their so acting, he or they shall be called before the ajunto within four days, if the accuser and the accused be in town. If not, then the business to remain untill both parties be present. And should such person or persons be found guilty, he or they shall be deprived of every honour in the synagogue untill he or they make such concessions as may appear satisfactory to the parnos and ajunto.

Rule 13th.

That the parnos shall have power to bestow charity of the monies in [the] fund to the amount of twenty shillings; and in case a larger sum be wanted, he shall consult the ajunto.

Rule 14th.

All persons hereafter desirous to become a *yehid* of this congregation shall notify the same by letter to the parnos, who shall, within one month after receipt of such letter, call a general ajunto before whom such letter shall be layed, and who shall ballot for such applicant. And if a majority of votes are in favour of the applicant, he shall be considered as a *yehid* on his paying one guinea towards the charity fund of this congregation, and having been a resident six months previous to his making application.

Rule 15th.

That every person shall appear in synagogue in as decent apparel as his abilities will admit, and that no person shall be called to [the] *seiphet* in boots.

Rule 16th.

All persons intending to have a wedding in their family shall notify the same to the parnos, requesting the attendance of the hazon

[reader], who shall be desired to attend provided the wedding be with a female of our religion. Also, in case of births, such persons shall be obliged in like manner to inform the parnos, in order that they may have those honours paid them that is customary. Any person neglecting to inform the parnos shall not be intitled to receive those honours that is accustomed; also that the hozon shall not attend in such cases.

And lastly, Rule 17th.

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, do solemnly promise upon our sacred honours, each for ourselves, and not one for the other, to abide by and consider ourselves as bound by the foregoing rules untill they shall be altered or amen[d]ed by three-fourths of the *yehadim* present.

Mordecai Sheftall, Levi Sheftall, Joseph Abrahams, etc.

The business being closed, the chairman resigned the chair when the parnos closed the meeting.

Savannah, 31st July, 1791.

B [no. 63]

At a meeting of the parnas ["president"] and adjunto ["board"] at the house of the parnas.

Present:

Mordecai Sheftall, Jr.

David Cardozo

Levi Sheftall

Benjamin Sheftall

Emanuel De La Motta

Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

The parnas informed the adjunto that his reason for calling them together was in consequence of information being given him of Mr. Isaac Polack keeping his store open on the Sabbath.

Orderd, that the said Isaac Polack be summoned to attend the parnas and adjunto on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, in the synagogue, to shew cause, if any he has, why the 12th rule of this congregation should not be put in force against him. Order that this adjunto do meet on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, in the synagogue. There being no other business proposed, the adjunto closed.

Savannah, 11th March, 1792.

At an extra meeting of the parnas and adjunto at the synagogue, agreeable to order of the 11th instant,

Present:

Mordecai Sheftall, parnas

Emanuel De La Motta

Levi Sheftall

Benjamin Sheftall, Sr.

David Cardozo

Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

The parnas informed the adjunto that agreeable to order he had livered the secretary a citation for Mr. Polack which was in the following:

City of Savannah
K.K. Mickva Isra

Mr. Isaac Polack:

Information being given to the parnas and adjunto that you did, contrary to laws of God and the rules of this congregation, keep your s open on the Sabbath, you are, therefore, hereby summoned to be appear before the parnas and adjunto of this congregation on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, at the synagogue, to show cause, if any have, why the 12th rule of this congregation should not be put in force against you.

Given under my hand at Savannah this 12th day of March, 1792.

Signed: Mordecai Sheftall, parnas of K.K.M.

By order

Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

Mr. Polack attended, agreeable to summons, and confessed his store was open on the Sabbath, and alleged for [the] reason that it was avoidable, as he had sundry goods consigned to him from Charles and the captain of the vessel sent them to his house without his knowledge, and he ordered his clerk to store them. The opinion of the adjunto being taken, [they] wher [were] of opinion that Mr. Polack had violated [violated] the 12th rule.

Nothing further being proposed, the adjunto closed.

Savannah, 13th March, 1792

[reader], who shall be desired to attend provided we weuung we with a female of our religion. Also, in case of births, such persons shall be obliged in like manner to inform the parnos, in order that they may have those honours paid them that is customary. Any person neglecting to inform the parnos shall not be intitled to receive those honours that is accustomed; also that the hozon shall not attend in such cases.

And lastly, Rule 17th.

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, do solemnly promise upon our sacred honours, each for ourselves, and not one for the other, to abide by and consider ourselves as bound by the foregoing rules untill they shall be altered or amen[d]ed by three-fourths of the *yehadim* present.

Mordecai Sheftall, Levi Sheftall, Joseph Abrahams, etc.

The business being closed, the chairman resigned the chair when the parnos closed the meeting.

Savannah, 31st July, 1791.

B [no. 63]

At a meeting of the parnas ["president"] and adjunto ["board"] at the house of the parnas.

Present:

Mordecai Sheftall, Jr.	David Cardozo
Levi Sheftall	Benjamin Sheftall
Emanuel De La Motta	Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

The parnas informed the adjunto that his reason for calling them together was in consequence of information being given him of Mr. Isaac Polack keeping his store open on the Sabbath.

Order, that the said Isaac Polack be summoned to attend the parnas and adjunto on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, in the synagogue, to shew cause, if any he has, why the 12th rule of this congregation should not be put in force against him. Order that this adjunto do meet on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, in the synagogue. There being no other business proposed, the adjunto closed.

Savannah, 11th March, 1792.

At an extra meeting of the parnas and adjunto at the synagogue, agreeable to order of the 11th instant,

Present:

Mordecai Sheftall, parnas	Emanuel De La Motta
Levi Sheftall	Benjamin Sheftall, Sr.
David Cardozo	Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

The parnas informed the adjunto that agreeable to order he had delivered the secretary a citation for Mr. Polack which was in the words following:

Mr. Isaac Polack:

City of Savannah,
K.K. Mickva Israel

Information being given to the parnas and adjunto that you did, contrary to laws of God and the rules of this congregation, keep your store open on the Sabbath, you are, therefore, hereby summoned to be and appear before the parnas and adjunto of this congregation on Tuesday evening next, at 6 o'clock, at the synagogue, to show cause, if any you have, why the 12th rule of this congregation should not be put in force against you.

Given under my hand at Savannah this 12th day of March, 1792.

Signed: Mordecai Sheftall, parnas of K.K.M.I.

By order
Benjamin Sheftall, Jr., secretary

Mr. Polack attended, agreeable to summons, and confessed his store was open on the Sabbath, and alleged for [the] reason that it was unavoidable, as he had sundry goods consigned to him from Charleston, and the captain of the vessel sent them to his house without his knowledge, and he ordered his clerk to store them. The opinion of the adjunto being taken, [they] wher [were] of opinion that Mr. Polack had not violated [violated] the 12th rule.

Nothing further being proposed, the adjunto closed.

Savannah, 13th March, 1792.

No. 66 A Problem of Inter-marriage—1793

Inter-marriage was a problem in the colonies from almost the first day. Communities were small, individuals lived in the countryside, social relations were easy and natural, and inter-marriage was inevitable. The typical Jewish settler wanted a home and children, and when there were no Jewish women, he married a Gentile.

The fact that a Jew married out of the faith did not necessarily mean that he himself deserted the religion of his fathers. There can be no doubt that on numerous occasions the Jewish village merchant held to his ancestral faith to his dying day and would gladly have brought his Gentile wife into town for conversion had he been given any encouragement by the Jewish community, but conversion was frowned upon by the congregations.

As early as 1763 Shearith Israel in New York passed a law forbidding the acceptance of proselytes or marriage with a proselyte. It is not too difficult to understand the motivations of these early Jews.

They may have maintained—in defense of their attitude—that they did not have the proper religious authorization to admit converts; they may have argued, with some cogency, that English Jewry had promised the civil authorities that they would not engage in proselytizing and that they were merely following current English synagogal practice, but all this was certainly a rationalization. Underlying the taboos was the desire on the part of the struggling young community to maintain itself in the face of powerful assimilatory influences. Once they let down the bars, they knew or believed that they would be lost as a Jewish group. Back of it all was their grim and almost fanatical determination to survive as a distinct religious entity.

In 1793 a member of the Philadelphia community, Moses Nathans, brought his problem of intermarriage before the congregation. He and the Gentile mother of his children had never been married according to Jewish law. However, she was willing to become a Jewess and sought the privilege of conversion and of a Jewish marriage. The husband's friends were sympathetic to the request. Nevertheless, they felt that they could do nothing on their own account and referred the matter to the ecclesiastical court of the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in London. Accordingly, the president, Benjamin Nones, sent the following letter. Very likely a similar note was dispatched to The Great Synagogue (Ashkenazic) in the same city. In the meantime, the man concerned—a member of the board!—was, from the point of view of synagogal ritual, looked upon as unmarried.

The hazzan's records show that he married the woman in 1794 in accordance with Jewish ritual.

SOURCE: Archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel, Philadelphia.

Philadelphia, August 7th, 1793 (5553).

To the *beth din* of K. K. Shagnar a Shamaim ["court of the Holy Congregation Gate of Heaven"], of London, whom God augment.
Gentlemen:

We, the parnass and adjuntas ["board members"] of K. K. Mickvey Israel, of this city, have the honor to address your respectable board on business of importance to Jewdaisme at large, and to our young and rising congregation in particular, and we flatter ourself you will, as soon as it may be convenient, favor this congregation with your answer and advice.

The case is this: A *yahid* [member] of this congregation has lived in

a public way with a goyah ["Gentile"] woman who has kept house for him about eight years and has had by her three childrens, two of which are boys, which he had *nimmolim* ["circumcised"] at the 8th day. The same person *now* applies to us, with the consent of the woman, to make her a *gilyoret* ["convert"], as also to grant him permission to marry said woman with *huppah u-kedushin* [Jewish ritual marriage].

We must say in favor of the above *yahid* that he has and does keep up, as far as we know, to our rules and contributes toward the support of our congregation as others do.

We have represented, to the best of our knowledge, the case and conduct of the person, and therefore request your opinion on the subject and what we have to do. Your answer will much oblige this congregation, in whose behalf we are, gentlemen,

Your most obedient, humble servants,

Benjamin Nones, parnass

Unit 4: The German Migration (1830-1880) and the German-Jewish Experience/ Secondary Sources

RATIONALE:

They came with scant religious and secular education, and they came to make their fortune. Leaving behind often comfortable lives in Europe, they arrived on the eastern seaboard and spread out across the nation. Among them were pedlars and cowboys, clubwomen and Jewish educators, Orthodox Jews and the founders of American Reform Judaism. They were the German Jews who immigrated between 1830 and 1880, and their legacy is the Jewish infrastructure they created, much of which still forms the basis for our Jewish organizations today.

This unit will focus on four aspects of the German-Jewish experience in North America: their immigration, the women's club movement, the beginnings of Reform Judaism, and the westward movement. These four foci touch on different ways in which German Jews struggled to find acceptance and maintain their identity in a new land. The women's club movement exemplifies many common phenomena of American Jewish history as a whole: when Jewish women were not accepted into Gentile women's clubs they formed their own Jewish clubs which were a mirror image of the clubs in which they could not participate. This encapsulates many aspects of the American Jewish experience, for the creation of Jewish women's clubs was both a way for the women to gain acceptance as Americans (by doing what other American women did) while simultaneously maintaining their identity as Jews. Through studying the beginnings of the Reform movements, students will examine the religious issues Jews faced in North America, and the attempts of one group of Jews to reconcile Judaism with western modernity. This is also an opportunity for students to learn more about their own religious movement and place Reform Judaism in historical context. The study of Jews who took part in the Westward movement provides a novel opportunity for students to study how Jews maintained their identity under unusual circumstances. The study of the subject offers students the opportunity to become acquainted with using secondary sources (in this case articles) for the study of history.

GOALS:

1. To view four aspects of the German-Jewish experience through the lens of the dual struggle to find acceptance and maintain identity.
2. To use secondary sources to learn about the past.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. identify four aspects of the German-Jewish experience in America: the immigration, the women's club movement, the beginnings of American Reform Judaism, and the westward movement.
2. describe the different issues involved in the aspects studied (see above) of the German-Jewish experience.
3. critically read an article on American Jewish history and use information learned to form his/her own opinions about the past.
4. demonstrate in speech or in writing information learned from reading an article on American Jewish history.

KEY CONCEPTS:

◦ **Reform Judaism**

"Reform Judaism arose in Germany in the early 1880s both as a reaction against what some Jews regarded as Orthodox rigidity and backwardness, and as a response to Germany's new, more liberal climate—a climate that seemed to open to Jews who were willing to drop traditions that isolated them from their German neighbors."¹ The German Jews who immigrated to the United States brought with them this modern, enlightened religion. In America, Reform Judaism developed and flourished, and eventually grew into the largest denomination of American Judaism. Reform Judaism emphasized ethics over rituals, and created synagogues that mirrored the decorum and style of the neighboring Protestant churches.

◦ **Women's club movement/ women's volunteerism**

The German-Jewish women's club movement and volunteerism of the late 1800's and early 1900's mirrored the Gentile women's club movement and volunteerism that took place in the larger American society. -- look at article in library in American Jewish History 1980

◦ **Push and Pull factors of immigration**

Between 1815 and the beginning of the Civil War, two million German-speaking Europeans migrated to America. By 1875, another

¹Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History* page 230

million arrived. Among these immigrants were Jews who fled the postwar destruction and difficulties of a pre-industrial society and came to America in hopes of finding the "golden" land. Like all immigrants who came to the United States, German Jews were motivated by both "push" factors (unsatisfactory conditions in the country in which they lived) and "pull" factors (hopes of better conditions in a new country). The primary motivation behind the move was economic as Jews sought to make a better economic life for themselves in America.

◦ **Occupations: mercantilers and cowboys**

Once in the United States most Jews continued their trades of mercantilism and clothing in the new country. Jews who remained on the east were involved in peddling or the garment industry, while Jews who settled across the west engaged in mercantilism. However, a small but significant minority of Jews abandoned their traditional trades and worked the land. These Jews who took part in the westward movement made their mark as cowboys, farmers and even cattle ranchers. (Fun fact: The first mayor of Butte, Montana—Henry Jacobs—was Jewish!)

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• **A Walk Through the German Immigration Experience**

Set up the room like a museum with different exhibits depicting the immigration experience of German Jews. Topics of exhibits should include: life in Germany, the journey over, arrival, life in the new land. Authentic or designed artifacts should be placed at each station. The artifacts could include: letters, photographs, diaries, pictures, newspaper articles, etc... Each museum exhibit should serve as a learning station. Students should be allowed to wander around the room freely, performing the directed tasks at each station. Tasks can include filling out questionnaires, creative writing or artwork

• **Joe Cohen on the Range - Jews who went West!**

1. Begin activity by playing, "Irving Jewish Cowboy". Ask students their impressions of song. What were the stereotypes? Do they really think there were any Jewish cowboys? Hand out lyrics, instruct students to place in their historian's notebooks.
2. Kidding aside, there were a number of Jews who defied conventional wisdom and practice and set out for the "Wild West". On the frontier, Jews lived under a wide range of conditions and held

a wide range of occupations. They were farmers and cattle ranchers, small town merchants and even mayors! Many of the Jews who joined the westward movement took to the soil, taking up a trade their ancestors had been forced to abandon long ago. Some Jews brought their trades of mercantilism with them when they went west. In both the prairie and the town, the degree of religious observance of these Jews ranged from the liberal Reform to the strictly Orthodox, to the assimilated, and everything in between.

3. Hand out articles on western Jews to small groups of students. Have students: a) give a presentation based on their article b) write a song about a fictional western Jew based on their article c) all of the above.

• **The treifah banquet! Reform Judaism's Adventures in North America.**²

1. Hand out a copy of "The Big Banquet Blunder" from "Keeping Posted" -September 1978. Read document out loud as a class.
2. Using Bloom's taxonomy of objectives, develop a questioning sequence ranging from knowledge, to evaluation, to synthesis.

• **The German Jews: A Video Documentary**

Divide class into four study groups: immigration experience; Jewish club women; Jewish cowboys; beginnings of Reform Judaism. Inform students that as a class we will be making a documentary on the German-Jewish experience. You might want to view a documentary film and point out different aspects: narration, interviews, vignettes, etc ... Have students perform their "documentary segment" for the rest of the class and videotape it.

TEACHER RESOURCES:

- *Unity Within Diversity: Jewish Religious Pluralism in America* student curriculum by Jane Dora West, Unit Two: Exploring Pluralism in the American Jewish Community
- *American Jewish Women* student curriculum guide by Amy Grossblatt
- *The American Jews* by Arthur A. Goren, Chapter 3, page 21-36
- *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* by Jack Wertheimer, Part III: The Fragmenting World of Organized Judaism

²This activity is based on an activity developed by Jane Dora West in her student curriculum, *Unity Within Diversity: Jewish Religious Pluralism in America*. I highly recommend consulting her curriculum for this unit.

- *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* by Arthur Hertzberg, Chapters 7 -9
- *A History of the Jews in America* by Howard M. Sachar, Chapters 2-3
- *The Many Faces of Judaism* (textbook) by Gilbert Rosenthal pages 56-69
- *Jews and Judaism in the United States: A Documentary History* by Marc Lee Raphael
- "Keeping Posted" , September 1978 issue on Reform Judaism
- "Memories of the Jewish Farmers and Ranchers of Colorado" by Max P. Cowan in *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* Vol. X No. 3, April 1971
- "North Dakota Memories" by Henry and Lea Fine in *Western States Historical Quarterly*, vol. IV, No. 4, July 1977 pp. 331-340
- "The Jews of Omaha: The First Sixty Years" *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. V, No. 3, April 1973 pp. 205-224
- "A History of North Dakota Jewry and Their Pioneer Rabbi" by Isadore Papermaster in *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* Vol. X, No. 2 January 1978 pp. 170-190
- *Dakota Diaspora: Memoirs of a Jewish Homesteader* by Sophie Trupin

Source Materials

The Ballad of Irving the Jewish Cowboy

He was short and and fat and rode out of the West

With a Mogen David on his silver vest

They called him Irving

Big Irving

Big fat Irving

The 142'nd fastest gun in the West.

141 men could shoot faster than he

But Irving was looking for 143

Walked into the corner saloon like a man insane

And ordered three fingers of two cents plain.

Irving . . .

Big fat Irving

Big fat sissy Irving

He always followed his mother's wishes

Even on the range he carried two sets of dishes

Well finally Irving got three slugs in the belly

It happened outside the frontier deli

He was sitting there twirling his gun around

And butterfingers Irving gunned himself down.

Irving . . .

Big fat Irving

Big fat dumb Irving

Big dum-dum dead Irving

The 142'nd fastest gun in the West.

The Big Banquet Blunder

Everyone was ecstatic. The newly formed Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, the only American institution to train rabbis, had just ordained its first graduating class that July afternoon in 1883 and was preparing to celebrate with a sumptuous nine-course meal. The caterer, having received no instructions to the contrary, decided to serve the assembly of rabbis and layleaders the finest European delicacies. But when the first course of clams was placed before the guests, two rabbis rose in horror muttering "treif" and left the banquet hall in disgust. Three other guests quietly refused to partake in a meal that included such forbidden food as shrimp, crabs, and frogs' legs.

As word of the "treif banquet" spread among the more conservative members of the ten-year-old Reform movement, the long suppressed ideological differences between them and the radical reformers burst into the open. No longer would they remain silent as fellow Jews violated their traditions, the conservatives declared. Either the radicals would have to reconsider their attitudes regarding dietary laws, Sabbath observance, and halachah, or lose those congregations committed to upholding these traditions.

Isaac Mayer Wise, the leader of the Reform movement, refused to compromise. In his opinion, the dietary laws were not part of the covenant, and therefore not binding. Furthermore, he said, adherence to kashrut often produced a blind fanaticism that destroyed genuine religious feeling.

Two years later, the growing rift was widened by the ratification of the Pittsburgh Platform. In language that contradicted the views of many conservative-minded rabbis and congregants still within the Reform movement, the platform declared: "We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. . . ." adding: "Their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation." In the opinion of the conservatives, the platform's eight articles of faith stressing the individual's freedom to accept only that part of Jewish tradition deemed appropriate to modern times destroyed the historical continuity of Judaism and the link binding American Jews to world Jewry.

By 1887, enough congregations had left the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to support a rabbinical college of their own, the Jewish Theological Seminary. Several years later, both the United Synagogue of America and the Rabbinical Assembly were established. Based upon the Reform model these three institutions constitute the Conservative movement in America today.

Unit 5: The Eastern European Immigration and Experience/ Oral History/ Using Literature as an Historical Source

In 1880, the Jewish population in the United States numbered about two hundred and eighty thousand. These Jews were primarily the descendants of Jews who immigrated to the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, although some could trace their ancestry to the Sephardic Jews who arrived in Colonial America. Between 1880 and 1925, these Jews were joined by more than two million Jews who immigrated from Eastern Europe. Fleeing from poverty and anti-Semitic pogroms, they arrived in the United States penniless and largely uneducated even in Judaism; and yet in two generations they rose to prominence in American life. Along the way they struggled: to become American, to remain Jewish, and to understand the meanings of their dual identities.

During this period of history, as in others, fiction was a powerful tool with which to chronicle the ambiguities of the American Jewish experience. In this unit, we pay special attention to this literature which has highlighted such struggles, and revealed its subtleties. Through literature, students will explore the themes of the pull between assimilation and tradition, the loss of identity, the exploration of unfamiliar cultures and feelings of marginality. ¹In so doing, students will acquire yet another tool for reconstructing the American Jewish experience. Students will also have the opportunity to engage in oral history projects, acquiring yet another historian's tool.

GOALS:

1. To familiarize students with the factors which caused the mass migration to North America, and the challenges Jews faced upon their arrival.
2. To acquaint students with some of the challenges Jews faced upon their arrival in a new land -in particular the challenges that relate to the dual struggle to become American and remain Jewish - through the study of literature.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

¹ Joyce Antler, Introduction to *America and I: Short Stories By American Jewish Women Writers* page 2

1. Describe the conditions Jews lived under in Eastern Europe, in terms of both economic and religious freedom, and compare them to the living conditions they found upon arrival in the United States of America.
2. Discuss themes found in American Jewish literature (particularly poems and short stories).

During the unit, students will have the opportunity to:

1. visit an old age home and engage in an oral history project.

KEY CONCEPTS:

- **assimilation/acculturation/adaptation**

These are three of the different approaches Jews had toward mainstream American culture. For further explanation please see Unit II.

- **American identity/Jewish identity**

During this period of history, Eastern European Jewish immigrants struggled to develop an American identity and to redefine their Jewish identity. In this period of history, as in others, American Jews struggled to define for themselves what it meant to be an American, and developed different answers. For some, being an American was being a loyal citizen, for others, it may taking part in labor strikes. For parents, being an American often meant sending their children to public school; and to their children, being an American sometimes meant playing baseball. Along with their struggle to become Americans, Jews struggled to maintain their Jewish identities in a un-Jewish land. Again, Jewish identities took the form of many different expressions: religious, cultural and political.

- **push/pull factors of immigration**

In an age of mass migration, several million Jews left their Eastern European homes in hope of finding a better life in the United States of America. They came to escape anti-Semitic pogroms, military draft laws, and create a better material and spiritual life for themselves and their children.

- **literature as an historical source**

Fiction is often a powerful document which reflects the values, ideals, struggles and truths of the time in which it was written. When read with a critical eye, it can be a useful historical source.

- **oral history**

Oral history is a technique of gathering information about the past. Through interviewing people who have lived during the era which we are studying, we can gain valuable perspectives and information.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• **The Wigwams Are Silent by Israel Ephros**

-Read *The Wigwams Are Silent* by Israel Ephros, a Hebrew poet, together with your class. Do not reveal the cultural background of the author. Ask students what they think the author is trying to communicate? What does the author think about Indian culture? American culture? What does the author feel is happening to Indian culture? *Then*, reveal that the author was an Eastern European Jewish immigrant, and the "Indians" he was writing about were really the Jews. Ephros felt that the Jews were being spiritually destroyed by America. Instruct students to look at the poem with new eyes. What is Ephros saying about the American Jewish experience?

- For a synthesis activity, you might want to have students write their own poem about their own experiences as an American Jew. OR, you can have students do handmade midrash on this topic. (Please see Jo Milgrom's book, *Handmade Midrash*.)

• **The Loudest Voice by Grace Paley**

Assign this story as homework or read together as a class. Before the students read the story, make sure they have some background on the Eastern European immigration and experience. This story is a good one to use to teach students how to use literature as an historical source. The following are some suggested discussion questions:

p. 466- Mr. Hilton mentions to Shirley that he heard her read "The Lord is My Shepherd" at the school assembly. What kind of information can we glean from this? (Assembly could have been religious in nature, prayers may have been said. At this prayer in American history, prayer was allowed in school.) If prayers were allowed in public school, what kind of pressures do you think this would put on a student who was not part of the Christian majority?

p. 466 - After the Thanksgiving decorations came down, the Christmas decorations were put up. What kinds of messages do you think this sends to students, especially students who are learning how to become an American? (That Thanksgiving and Christmas are both American holidays.) If Christmas is an American holiday, but if it celebrates an event sacred to Christianity (i.e. it is a Christian holiday), should it be considered an American holiday, a Christian

holiday, or both? Do you think it is appropriate for a Christian holiday to be considered an American holiday? What kind of implications does this have for Americans who are not Christians?

p. 467 - When Shirley's mother learned that her daughter was participating in a Christmas play and singing Christmas carols, she expressed concern. She said, "If we came to a new country a long time ago to run away from the tyrants, and instead we fall into a creeping pogrom, that our children learn a lot of lies ... " What did Shirley's mother mean by a "creeping pogrom" ? (That learning Christmas carols and participating in Christmas plays was a subtly dangerous threat to Jewish survival.)

p. 467 - Why do you think Mrs. Klieg would not allow her son to participate in school Christmas play?

p. 468 - When Shirley's mother expresses her displeasure over her daughter's participation in the Christmas play, her father responds, "Christmas. What's the harm? After all, history teaches everyone. We learn from reading that this is a holiday from pagan times also, candles, lights, even Chanukah. So we learn it's not altogether Christian. What belongs to history, belongs to all men." What does he mean by this? (He is universalizing or Americanizing Christmas. He believes that everyone can share in its message, and has no objection to his daughter's participation.) Shirley's father then continues, "You want to go back to the Middle Ages? Is it better to shave your head with a secondhand razor?" What is he doing here? (Shirley's father is equating Christmas with America and progress; Jewish tradition with backwardness.)

-Shirley's parents have two different perspectives on Christmas, what are they? What are their implications vis-a-vis Jewish identity?

p. 469 - During the school Christmas play (in which many of the actors have identifiably Jewish names) one of the actors plays the part of Jesus wearing his father's prayer shawl. What is the symbolic significance of this?

p. 470 - At the end of the story, Shirley climbs out of her bed and kneels on the floor to recite her prayers. She makes a "little church" out of her hands and recites the *Sh'ma*. What message is this symbolic act communicating?

Some suggested synthesis activities:

- have students write their own short stories
- have students write their own plays and perform them
- have students write songs

◦ have students write diaries of the different characters in the story which would illuminate their perspectives on the various issues raised.

You can use these activities as a synthesis activity for an individual story, or as a culminating activity for the unit.

• **Other Suggested Stories:**

◦ "The Fat of the Land" by Anzia Yezerksa. Gives classic expression to the subject of enculturation, won the Edward O'Brien Prize in 1919 for the best short story of the year.

◦ "America and I" by Anzia Yezerksa. Explores the development of a young immigrant woman's identity. Published in *America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women* edited by Joyce Antler.

◦ "A Cycle of Manhattan" by Thyra Samter Winslow. A story about the rapid assimilation of a Jewish family in America. Published in Winslow's 1923 collection, *Picture Frames*.

◦ "The Girl Who Went Right" by Edna Ferber. Depicts the struggle of a young Jewish woman to find her place in America and accept her Jewish identity. Published in *America and I*, edited by Joyce Antler

• **Eastern European Immigration Simulation Experience**

Set up the room in stations and have students go through several steps before they can immigrate to the United States of America. Stations should include: leaving the Old Country, the journey over (by ship!), as well as several stations on Ellis Island including a health inspector, a literacy test, and a political screening test (to screen out criminals, "political radicals", etc.) Students should encounter different obstacles at each of the stations (such as obstinate bureaucrat) and should often be "sent back" for one reason or another. Session should conclude with a de-briefing in which students can discuss the difficulties in coming to America.

(Chapter 2 in Irving Howe's book, *World of Our Father* is a particularly useful source of information for this exercise.)

• **Old Age Home Oral History Project**

Students will have the opportunity to interview Jewish elderly living in an Old Age home. I suggest this be part of an on-going Tzdekah project. The class could visit the home at least three times. If at all possible, the class should prepare songs or some other presentation for the elderly. Students should be encouraged to develop a relationship with a particular elderly person, and interview this person over the course of the three (or more) visits to the Old Age Home. Students should be guided to ask questions

regarding Jewish observance, knowledge, education and identity. Students should then write up the results of their interview in essay form and then share with the class. These essays should then serve as the basis for a class discussion.

Teacher Resources:

- *This Land of Liberty* (textbook) by Helene Schwartz Kenvin , part IV
- *A History of the Jews in America* by Howard M. Sachar, Chapters 4-6
- *The Jews in America* by Arthur Hertzberg, Chapter 10-12
- *The American Jews* by Arthur A. Goren, Chapter 4
- *America and I: Short Stories By American Jewish Writers* edited by Joyce Antler (See selected stories and Introduction)
- *The World of Our Fathers* by Irving Howe, Parts I and II (Chapters 1-12)
- *The World of Our Mothers* by Sydney Stahl Weinberg
- *A Bintel Brief* edited by Isaac Metzker

A compilation of 60 years worth of letters to the *Jewish Daily Forward*. An excellent source of primary source documents.

- *Resource Guide: Eastern European Immigration to the United States* by Shoshanah Silberman

This teacher's guide offers a variety of learning activities. Of particular interest is its transgenerational approach which allows for involvement of the elderly and families.

- *Being Jewish in America : The Tensions And Struggles Of The Eastern European Immigrants* an HUC curriculum by Dina Burt
- This curriculum has excellent suggestions for learning activities centering on the conditions under which Eastern European Jews lived and their political activities. I highly recommend incorporating her ideas into this course.

Source Materials

America and I

Anzia Yezierska

AS ONE OF THE DUMB, voiceless ones I speak. One of the millions of immigrants beating, beating out their hearts at your gates for a breath of understanding.

Acht America! From the other end of the earth from where I came, America was a land of living hope, woven of dreams, aflame with longing and desire.

Choked for ages in the airless oppression of Russia, the Promised Land rose up—wings for my stifled spirit—sunlight burning through my darkness—freedom singing to me in my prison—deathless songs tuning prison-bars into strings of a beautiful violin.

I arrived in America. My young, strong body, my heart and soul pregnant with the unlived lives of generations clamoring for expression.

What my mother and father and their mother and father never had a chance to give out in Russia, I would give out in America. The hidden sap of centuries would find release; colors that never saw light—songs that died unvoiced—romance that never had a chance to blossom in the black life of the Old World.

In the golden land of flowing opportunity I was to find my work that was denied me in the sterile village of my forefathers. Here I was to be free from the dead drudgery for bread that held me down in Russia. For the first time in America, I'd cease to be a slave of the belly. I'd be a creator, a giver, a human being! My work would be the living joy of fullest self-expression.

But from my high visions, my golden hopes, I had to put my feet down on earth. I had to have food and shelter. I had to have the money to pay for it.

I was in America, among the Americans, but not of them. No speech, no common language, no way to win a smile of understanding from them, only my young, strong body and my untried faith. Only my eager, empty hands, and my full heart shining from my eyes!

God from the world! Here I was with so much richness in me, but my mind was not wanted without the language. And my body, unskilled, untrained, was not even wanted in the factory. Only one of two chances was left open to me: the kitchen, or minding babies.

My first job was as a servant in an Americanized family. Once, long ago, they came from the same village from where I came. But they were so well-dressed, so well-fed, so successful in America, that they were ashamed to remember their mother tongue.

"What were to be my wages?" I ventured timidly, as I looked up to the well-fed, well-dressed "American" man and woman.

They looked at me with a sudden coldness. What have I said to draw away from me their warmth? Was it so low from me to talk of wages? I shrank back into myself like a low-down bargainer. Maybe they're so high up in well-being they can't any more understand my low thoughts for money.

From his rich height the man preached down to me that I must not be so grabbing for wages. Only just landed from the ship and already thinking about money when I should be thankful to associate with "Americans."

The woman, out of her smooth, smiling fatness assured me that this was my chance for a summer vacation in the country with her two lovely children. My great chance to learn to be a civilized being, to become an American by living with them.

So, made to feel that I was in the hands of American friends, invited to share with them their home, their plenty, their happiness, I pushed out from my head the worry for wages. Here was my first chance to begin my life in the sunshine, after my long darkness. My laugh was all over my face as I said to them: "I'll trust myself to you. What I'm worth you'll give me." And I entered their house like a child by the hand.

The best of me I gave them. Their house cares were my house cares. I got up early. I worked till late. All that my soul hungered to give I put into the passion with which I scrubbed floors, scoured pots, and washed clothes. I was so grateful to mingle with the American people, to hear the music of the American language, that I never knew tiredness.

There was such a freshness in my brains and such a willingness in my heart that I could go on and on—not only with the work of the house, but work with my head—learning new words from the children, the grocer, the butcher, the iceman. I was not even afraid to ask for words from the policeman on the street. And every new word made me see new American things with American eyes. I felt like a Columbus, finding new worlds through every new word.

But words alone were only for the inside of me. The outside of me still branded me for a steerage immigrant. I had to have clothes to forget myself that I'm a stranger yet. And so I had to have money to buy these clothes.

The month was up. I was so happy! Now I'd have money. *My own, earned money.* Money to buy a new shirt on my back—shoes on my feet. Maybe yet an American dress and hat!

Ach! How high rose my dreams! How plainly I saw all that I would do with my visionary wages shining like a light over my head!

In my imagination I already walked in my new American clothes. How beautiful I looked as I saw myself like a picture before my eyes! I saw how I would throw away my immigrant rags tied up in my immigrant shawl. With money to buy—free money in my hands—I'd show them that I could look like an American in a day.

Like a prisoner in his last night in prison, counting the seconds that will free him from his chains, I trembled breathlessly for the minute I'd get the wages in my hand.

Before dawn I rose.

I shined up the house like a jewel-box.

I prepared breakfast and waited with my heart in my mouth for my lady and gentleman to rise. At last I heard them stirring. My eyes were jumping out of my head to them when I saw them coming in and seating themselves by the table.

Like a hungry cat rubbing up to its boss for meat, so I edged and

simpred around them as I passed them the food. Without my will, like a beggar, my hand reached out to them.

The breakfast was over. And no word yet from my wages.

"*Gottiniu!*" I thought to myself. "Maybe they're so busy with their own things they forgot it's the day for my wages. Could they who have everything know what I was to do with my first American dollars? How could they, soaking in plenty, how could they feel the longing and the fierce hunger in me, pressing up through each visionary dollar? How could they know the gnawing ache of my avid fingers for the feel of my own, earned dollars? My dollars that I could spend like a free person. My dollars that would make me feel with everybody alike."

Lunch came. Lunch past.

O-i weh! Not a word yet about my money.

It was near dinner. And not a word yet about my wages.

I began to set the table. But my head—it swam away from me. I broke a glass. The silver dropped from my nervous fingers. I couldn't stand it any longer. I dropped everything and rushed over to my American lady and gentleman.

"*Oi weh!* The money—my money—my wages!" I cried breathlessly. Four cold eyes turned on me.

"Wages? Money?" The four eyes turned into hard stone as they looked me up and down. "Haven't you a comfortable bed to sleep, and three good meals a day? You're only a month here. Just came to America. And you already think about money. Wait till you're worth any money. What use are you without knowing English? You should be glad we keep you here. It's like a vacation for you. Other girls pay money yet to be in the country."

It went black for my eyes. I was so choked no words came to my lips. Even the tears went dry in my throat.

I left. Not a dollar for all my work.

For a long, long time my heart ached and ached like a sore wound. If murderers would have robbed me and killed me it wouldn't have hurt me so much. I couldn't think through my pain. The minute I'd see before me how they looked at me, the words they said to me—then everything began to bleed in me. And I was helpless.

For a long, long time the thought of ever working in an "American" family made me tremble with fear, like the fear of wild wolves. No—

never again would I trust myself to an "American" family, no matter how fine their language and how sweet their smile.

It was blotted out in me all trust in friendship from "Americans." But the life in me still burned to live. The hope in me still craved to hope. In darkness, in dirt, in hunger and want, but only to live on!

There had been no end to my day—working for the "American" family.

Now rejecting false friendships from higher-ups in America, I turned back to the Chetto. I worked on a hard bench with my own kind on either side of me. I knew before I began what my wages were to be. I knew what my hours were to be. And I knew the feeling of the end of the day.

From the outside my second job seemed worse than the first. It was in a sweat-shop of a Delancey Street basement, kept up by an old, wrinkled woman that looked like a black witch of greed. My work was sewing on buttons. While the morning was still dark I walked into a dark basement. And darkness met me when I turned out of the basement.

Day after day, week after week, all the contact I got with America was handling dead buttons. The money I earned was hardly enough to pay for bread and rent. I didn't have a room to myself. I didn't even have a bed. I slept on a mattress on the floor in a rat-hole of a room occupied by a dozen other immigrants. I was always hungry—oh, so hungry! The scant meals I could afford only sharpened my appetite for real food. But I felt myself better off than working in the "American" family, where I had three good meals a day and a bed to myself. With all the hunger and darkness of the sweat-shop, I had at least the evening to myself. And all night was mine. When all were asleep, I used to creep up on the roof of the tenement and talk out my heart in silence to the stars in the sky.

"Who am I? What am I? What do I want with my life? Where is America? Is there an America? What is this wilderness in which I'm lost?"

I'd hurl my questions and then think and think. And I could not tear it out of me, the feeling that America must be somewhere, somehow—only I couldn't find it—my America, where I would work for love and not for a living. I was like a thing following blindly after something far off in the dark!

"*Oj weli!*" I'd stretch out my hand up in the air. "My head is so lost in America! What's the use of all my working if I'm not in it? Dead buttons is not me."

Then the busy season started in the shop. The mounds of buttons grew and grew. The long day stretched out longer. I had to begin with the buttons earlier and stay with them till later in the night. The old witch turned into a huge greedy maw for wanting more and more buttons.

For a glass of tea, for a slice of herring over black bread, she would buy us up to stay another and another hour, till there seemed no end to her demands.

One day, the light of self-assertion broke into my cellar darkness.

"I don't want the tea. I don't want your herring," I said with terrible boldness. "I only want to go home. I only want the evening to myself!"

"You fresh mouth, you!" cried the old witch. "You learned already too much in America. I want no clockwatchers in my shop. Out you go!"

I was driven out to cold and hunger. I could no longer pay for my mattress on the floor. I no longer could buy the bite in my mouth. I walked the streets. I knew what it is to be alone in a strange city, among strangers.

But I laughed through my tears. So I learned too much already in America because I wanted the whole evening to myself? Well America has yet to teach me still more: how to get not only the whole evening to myself, but a whole day a week like the American workers.

That sweat-shop was a bitter memory but a good school. It fitted me for a regular factory. I could walk in boldly and say I could work at something, even if it was only sewing on buttons.

Gradually, I became a trained worker. I worked in a light, airy factory, only eight hours a day. My boss was no longer a sweater and a blood-squeezer. The first freshness of the morning was mine. And the whole evening was mine. All day Sunday was mine.

Now I had better food to eat. I slept on a better bed. Now, I even looked dressed up like the American-born. But inside of me I knew that I was not yet an American. I choked with longing when I met an American-born, and I could say nothing.

Something cried dumb in me. I couldn't help it. I didn't know what

it was I wanted. I only knew I wanted. I wanted. Like the hunger in the heart that never gets food.

An English class for foreigners started in our factory. The teacher had such a good, friendly face, her eyes looked so understanding, as if she could see right into my heart. So I went to her one day for an advice:

"I don't know what is with me the matter," I began. "I have no rest in me. I never yet done what I want."

"What is it you want to do, child?" she asked me.

"I want to do something with my head, my feelings. All day long, only with my hands I work."

"First you must learn English." She patted me as if I was not yet grown up. "Put your mind on that, and then we'll see."

So for a time I learned the language. I could almost begin to think with English words in my head. But in my heart the emptiness still hurt. I burned to give, to give something, to do something, to be something. The dead work with my hands was killing me. My work left only hard stones on my heart.

Again I went to our factory teacher and cried out to her: "I know already to read and write the English language, but I can't put it into words what I want. What is it in me so different that can't come out?"

She smiled at me down from her calmness as if I were a little bit out of my head. "What do you want to do?"

"I feel. I see. I hear. And I want to think it out. But I'm like dumb in me. I only feel I'm different—different from everybody."

She looked at me close and said nothing for a minute. "You ought to join one of the social clubs of the Women's Association," she advised.

"What's the Women's Association?" I implored greedily.

"A group of American women who are trying to help the working-girl find herself. They have a special department for immigrant girls like you."

I joined the Women's Association. On my first evening there they announced a lecture: "The Happy Worker and His Work," by the Welfare director of the United Mills Corporation.

"Is there such a thing as a happy worker at his work?" I wondered. "Happiness is only by working at what you love. And what poor girl can ever find it to work at what she loves? My old dreams about my

America rushed through my mind. Once I thought that in America everybody works for love. Nobody has to worry for a living. Maybe this welfare man came to show me the *real* America that till now I sought in vain."

With a lot of polite words the head lady of the Women's Association introduced a higher-up that looked like the king of kings of business. Never before in my life did I ever see a man with such a sureness in his step, such power in his face, such friendly positiveness in his eye as when he smiled upon us.

"Efficiency is the new religion of business," he began. "In big business houses, even in up-to-date factories, they no longer take the first corner and give him any job that happens to stand empty. Efficiency begins at the employment office. Experts are hired for the one purpose, to find out how best to fit the worker to his work. It's economy for the boss to make the worker happy." And then he talked a lot more on efficiency in educated language that was over my head.

I didn't know exactly what it meant—efficiency—but if it was to make the worker happy at his work, then that's what I had been looking for since I came to America. I only felt from watching him that he was happy by his job. And as I looked on this clean, well-dressed, successful one, who wasn't ashamed to say he rose from an office-boy, it made me feel that I, too, could lift myself up for a person.

He finished his lecture, telling us about the Vocational-Guidance Center that the Women's Association started.

The very next evening I was at the Vocational-Guidance Center. There I found a young, college-looking woman. Smartness and health shining from her eyes! She, too, looked as if she knew her way in America. I could tell at the first glance: here is a person that is happy by what she does.

"I feel you'll understand me," I said right away.

She leaned over with pleasure in her face: "I hope I can."

"I want to work by what's in me. Only, I don't know what's in me. I only feel I'm different."

She gave me a quick, puzzled look from the corner of her eyes. "What are you doing now?"

"I'm the quickest shirtwaist hand on the floor. But my heart wastes away by such work. I think and think, and my thoughts can't come out."

"Why don't you think out your thoughts in shirtwaists? You could learn to be a designer. Earn more money."

"I don't want to look on waists. If my hands are sick from waists, how could my head learn to put beauty into them?"

"But you must earn your living at what you know, and rise slowly from job to job."

I looked at her office sign: "Vocational Guidance." "What's your vocational guidance?" I asked. "How to rise from job to job—how to earn more money?"

The smile went out from her eyes. But she tried to be kind yet. "What do you want?" she asked, with a sigh of last patience.

"I want America to want me."

She fell back in her chair, thunderstruck with my boldness. But yet, in a low voice of educated self-control, she tried to reason with me:

"You have to *show* that you have something special for America before America has need of you."

"But I never had a chance to find out what's in me, because I always had to work for a living. Only, I feel it's efficiency for America to find out what's in me so different, so I could give it out by my work."

Her eyes half closed as they bored through me. Her mouth opened to speak, but no words came from her lips. So I flamed up with all that was choking in me like a house on fire:

"America gives free bread and rent to criminals in prison. They got grand houses with sunshine, fresh air, doctors and teachers, even for the crazy ones. Why don't they have free boarding-schools for immigrants—strong people—willing people? Here you see us bunning up with something different, and America turns her head away from us."

Her brows lifted and dropped down. She shrugged her shoulders away from me with the look of pity we give to cripples and hopeless lunatics.

"America is no Utopia. First you must become efficient in earning a living before you can indulge in your poetic dreams."

I went away from the vocational-guidance office with all the air out of my lungs. All the light out of my eyes. My feet dragged after me like dead wood.

Till now there had always lingered a rosy veil of hope over my emptiness, a hope that a miracle would happen. I would open up my

eyes some day and suddenly find the America of my dreams. As a young girl hungry for love sees always before her eyes the picture of lover's arms around her, so I saw always in my heart the vision of Utopian America.

But now I felt that the America of my dreams never was and never could be. Reality had hit me on the head as with a club. I felt that the America that I sought was nothing but a shadow—an echo—a chimera of lunatics and crazy immigrants.

Stripped of all illusion, I looked about me. The long desert of wasting days of drudgery stared me in the face. The drudgery that I had lived through, and the endless drudgery still ahead of me rose over me like a withering wilderness of sand. In vain were all my cryings, in vain were all frantic efforts of my spirit to find the living waters of understanding for my perishing lips. Sand, sand was everywhere. With every seeking, every reaching out I only lost myself deeper and deeper in a vast sea of sand.

I knew now the American language. And I knew now, if I talked to the Americans from morning till night, they could not understand what the Russian soul of me wanted. They could not understand *me* any more than if I talked to them in Chinese. Between my soul and the American soul were worlds of difference that no words could bridge over. What was that difference? What made the Americans so far apart from me?

I began to read the American history. I found from the first pages that America started with a band of Courageous Pilgrims. They had left their native country as I had left mine. They had crossed an unknown ocean and landed in an unknown country, as I.

But the great difference between the first Pilgrims and me was that they expected to make America, build America, create their own world of liberty. I wanted to find it ready made.

I read on. I delved deeper down into the American history. I saw how the Pilgrim Fathers came to a rocky desert country, surrounded by Indian savages on all sides. But undaunted, they pressed on—through danger—through famine, pestilence, and want—they pressed on. They did not ask the Indians for sympathy, for understanding. They made no demands on anybody, but on their own indomitable spirit of persistence.

And I—I was forever begging a crumb of sympathy, a gleam of understanding from strangers who could not understand.

I, when I encountered a few savage Indian scalpers, like the old witch of the sweat-shop, like my “Americanized” countryman, who cheated me of my wages—I, when I found myself on the lonely, untrodden path through which all seekers of the new world must pass, I lost heart and said: “There is no America!”

Then came a light—a great revelation! I saw America—a big idea—a deathless hope—a world still in the making. I saw that it was the glory of America that it was not yet finished. And I, the last comer, had her share to give, small or great, to the making of America, like those Pilgrims who came in the *Mayflower*.

Fired up by this revealing light, I began to build a bridge of understanding between the American-born and myself. Since their life was shut out from such as me, I began to open up my life and the lives of my people to them. And life draws life. In only writing about the Chetto I found America.

Great chances have come to me. But in my heart is always a deep sadness. I feel like a man who is sitting down to a secret table of plenty, while his near ones and dear ones are perishing before his eyes. My very joy in doing the work I love hurts me like secret guilt, because all about me I see so many with my longings, my burning eagerness, to do and to be, wasting their days in drudgery they hate, merely to buy bread and pay rent. And America is losing all that richness of the soul.

The Americans of tomorrow, the America that is every day nearer coming to be, will be too wise, too open-hearted, too friendly-handed, to let the least last-comer at their gates knock in vain with his gifts unwanted.

He said, "My! My! Shirley Abramowitz! They told me you had a particularly loud, clear voice and read with lots of expression. Could that be true?"

"Oh, yes," I whispered.

"In that case, don't be silly; I might very well be your teacher someday. Speak up, speak up."

"Yes," I shouted.

"More like it," he said. "Now, Shirley, can you put a ribbon in your hair or a bobby pin? It's too messy."

"Yes!" I bawled.

"Now, now, calm down." He turned to the class. "Children, not a sound. Open at page 39. Read till 52. When you finish, start again." He looked me over once more. "Now, Shirley, you know, I suppose, that Christmas is coming. We are preparing a beautiful play. Most of the parts have been given out. But I still need a child with a strong voice, lots of stamina. Do you know what stamina is? You do? Smart kid. You know, I heard you read 'The Lord is my shepherd' in Assembly yesterday. I was very impressed. Wonderful delivery. Mrs. Jordan, your teacher, speaks highly of you. Now listen to me, Shirley Abramowitz, if you want to take the part and be in the play, repeat after me, 'I swear to work harder than I ever did before.'"

I looked to heaven and said at once, "Oh, I swear." I kissed my pinky and looked at God.

"That is an actor's life, my dear," he explained. "Like a soldier's, never tardy or disobedient to his general, the director. Everything," he said, "absolutely everything will depend on you."

That afternoon, all over the building, children scraped and scrubbed the turkeys and the sheaves of corn off the schoolroom windows. Goodbye Thanksgiving. The next morning a monitor brought red paper and green paper from the office. We made new shapes and hung them on the walls and glued them to the doors.

The teachers became happier and happier. Their heads were ringing like the bells of childhood. My best friend Evie was prone to evil, but she did not get a single demerit for whispering. We learned "Holy Night" without an error. "How wonderful!" said Miss Gnacé, the student teacher. "To think that some of you don't even speak the language!" We learned "Deck the Halls" and "Hark! The Herald Angels" . . . They weren't ashamed and we weren't embarrassed.

Oh, but when my mother heard about it all, she said to my father: "Misha, you don't know what's going on there. Cramer is the head of the Tickets Committee."

"Who?" asked my father. "Cramer? Oh yes, an active woman."

"Active? Active has to have a reason. Listen," she said sadly, "I'm surprised to see my neighbors making trala-ala for Christmas."

My father couldn't think of what to say to that. Then he decided: "You're in America! Clara, you wanted to come here. In Palestine the Arabs would be eating you alive. Europe you had pogroms. Argentina is full of Indians. Here you got Christmas. . . . Some joke, ha?"

"Very funny, Misha. What is becoming of you? If we came to a new country a long time ago to run away from tyrants, and instead we fall into a creeping pogrom, that our children learn a lot of lies, so what's the joke? Ach, Misha, your idealism is going away."

"So is your sense of humor."

"That I never had, but idealism you had a lot of."

"I'm the same Misha Abramovitch, I didn't change an iota. Ask anyone."

"Only ask me," says my mama, may she rest in peace. "I got the answer."

Meanwhile the neighbors had to think of what to say too. Marty's father said: "You know, he has a very important part, my boy."

"None also," said Mr. Sauerfeld.

"Not my boy!" said Mrs. Klieg. "I said to him no. The answer is no. When I say no I mean no!"

The rabbit's wife said, "Is disgusting!" But no one listened to her. Under the narrow sky of God's great wisdom she wore a strawberry-blond wig.

Every day was noisy and full of experience. I was Right-hand Man. Mr. Hilton said: "How could I get along without you, Shirley?"

He said: "Your mother and father ought to get down on their knees every night and thank God for giving them a child like you."

He also said: "You're absolutely a pleasure to work with, my dear, dear child."

Sometimes he said: "For God's sakes, what did I do with the script? Shirley! Shirley! Find it!"

Then I answered quietly: "Here it is, Mr. Hilton."

Once in a while, when he was very tired, he would cry out: "Shirley, I'm just tired of screaming at those kids. Will you tell Ira Pushkov not to come in till Lester points to that star the second time?"

Then I roared: "Ira Pushkov, what's the matter with you? Doppel Mr. Hilton told you five times already, don't come in till Lester points to that star the second time."

"Ach, Clara," my father asked, "what does she do there till six o'clock she can't even put the plates on the table?"

"Christmas," said my mother coldly.

"Hol Hol!" my father said, "Christmas. What's the harm? After all, history teaches everyone. We learn from reading this is a holiday from pagan times also, candles, lights, even Chanukah. So we learn it's not altogether Christian. So if they think it's a private holiday, they're only ignorant, not patriotic. What belongs to history, belongs to all men. You want to go back to the Middle Ages? Is it better to shave your head with a secondhand razor? Does it hurt Shirley to learn to speak up? It does not. So maybe someday she won't live between the kitchen and the shop. She's not a fool."

I thank you, Papa, for your kindness. It is true about me to this day. I am foolish but I am not a fool.

That night my father kissed me and said with great interest in my career, "Shirley, tomorrow's your big day. Congrats."

"Save it," my mother said. Then she shut all the windows in order to prevent tonsillitis.

In the morning it snowed. On the street corner a tree had been decorated for us by a kind city administration. In order to miss its chilly shadow our neighbors walked three blocks east to buy a loaf of bread. The butcher pulled down black window shades to keep the colored lights from shining on his chickens. Oh, not me. On the way to school, with both my hands I tossed it a kiss of tolerance. Poor thing, it was a stranger in Egypt.

I walked straight into the auditorium past the staring children. "Go ahead, Shirley!" said the monitors. Four boys, big for their age, had already started work as propmen and stagehands.

Mr. Hilton was very nervous. He was not even happy. Whatever he started to say ended in a sideward look of sadness. He sat slumped in the middle of the first row and

asked me for help. Miss Glacé, I did this, although she thought my voice too reserved; and said, "Show-off!"

Parents began to arrive long before we were ready. They wanted to make a good impression. From among the yards of drapes I peeked out at the audience. I saw my embarrassed mother.

Ira, Lester, and Meyer were pasted to their beards by Miss Glacé. She almost forgot to thread the star on its wire, but I reminded her. I coughed a few times to clear my throat. Miss Glacé looked around and saw that everyone was in costume and on line waiting to play his part. She whispered, "All right..." Then:

Jackie Saurefeld, the prettiest boy in first grade, parted the curtains with his skinny elbow and in a high voice sang out:

"Parents dear

We are here

To make a Christmas play in time.

If we give

In narrative
And illustrate with pantomime."

He disappeared.

My voice burst immediately from the wings to the great shock of Ira, Lester, and Meyer, who were waiting for it but were surprised all the same.

"I remember, I remember, the house where I was born..." Miss Glacé yanked the curtain open and there it was, the house—an old hayloft, where Celia Korblub lay in the straw with Cindy Lou, her favorite doll. Ira, Lester, and Meyer moved slowly from the wings toward her, sometimes pointing to a moving star and sometimes ahead to Cindy Lou.

It was a long story and it was a sad story. I carefully pronounced all the words about my lonesome childhood, while little Eddie Braunstein wandered upstage and down with his shepherd's stick, looking for sheep. I brought up lonesomeness again, and not being understood at all except by some women everybody hated. Eddie was too small for that and Marty Groll took his place, wearing his father's prayer shawl. I announced twelve friends, and half the boys in the fourth grade gathered round Marty, who stood on an orange crate while my voice harangued. Sorrowful and loud, I declaimed

about love and God and Man, but because of the terrible deceit of Abie Stock we came suddenly to a famous moment. Marty, whose remembering tongue I was, waited at the foot of the cross. He stared desperately at the audience. I groaned, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The soldiers who were sheiks grabbed poor Marty to pin him up to die, but he wrenched free, turned again to the audience, and spread his arms aloft to show despair and the end. I murmured at the top of my voice, "The rest is silence, but as everyone in this room, in this city—in this world—now knows, I shall have life eternal!"

That night Mrs. Kornbluh visited our kitchen for a glass of tea.

"How's the virgin?" asked my father with a look of concern.

"For a man with a daughter, you got a fresh mouth, Abramovitch."

"Here," said my father kindly, "have some lemon, it'll sweeten your disposition."

They debated a little in Yiddish, then fell in a puddle of Russian and Polish. What I understood next was my father, who said, "Still and all, it was certainly a beautiful affair, you have to admit, introducing us to the beliefs of a different culture."

"Well, yes," said Mrs. Kornbluh. "The only thing . . . you know Charlie Turner—that cute boy in Celia's class—a couple others? They got very small parts or no part at all. In very bad taste, it seemed to me. After all, it's their religion."

"Ach," explained my mother, "what could Mr. Hilton do? They got very small voices; after all, why should they holler? The English language they know from the beginning by heart. They're blood like angels. You think it's so important they should get in the play? Christmas . . . the whole piece of goods . . . they own it."

I listened and listened until I couldn't listen any more. Too sleepy, I climbed out of bed and knelt. I made a little church of my hands and said, "Hear, O Israel . . ." Then I called out in Yiddish, "Please, good night, good night. Ssh." My father said, "Ssh yourself," and slammed the kitchen door.

I was happy. I fell asleep at once. I had prayed for everybody: my talking family, cousins far away, passersby, and all the lonesome Christians. I expected to be heard. My voice was certainly the loudest.

Unit 6: The Post World War II Era: The Move to the Suburbs and the Rise of the American Synagogue

At the end of World War II, young American Jewish families, along with their non-Jewish compatriots, moved out of the city and into suburban homes. This move marked the merging of American Jewry into mainstream American life. No longer surrounded by Jewish schools, Jewish businesses, and other Jewish families, Jews became increasingly influenced by non-Jewish surroundings. In the face of such changes and new situations, American Jews had two basic options (with many variations) with regard to their Jewish practice and identity: to integrate or assimilate into the growing general society, or to work towards group survival. The rise of the American synagogue in the suburbs was an outgrowth of the "group survival" option and also a reflection of a new way of being Jewish. In Jewish neighborhoods of the pre-World War II era, being Jewish tended to be a general expression of oneself. But with the end of World War II and the move out to the suburbs, Jewish expression increasingly became confined to specific acts or ceremonies. Through the use of primary or secondary sources, literature, and oral history, students will reconstruct and examine these changes.

GOALS:

1. To examine the changes that took place in American Jewry with the move out to the suburbs, in particular, the rise of the American synagogue.
2. To use tools learned thus far to reconstruct the American Jewish experience of the post-World War II era.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. describe the post-World War II era as a time when Jews moved out of the city and into the suburbs.
2. describe the rise of the American synagogue in the suburbs, the purposes it served, the kind of Judaism it reflected.
3. describe the interaction between Jewish and American culture that took place in this era.
4. articulate their own opinions about the era based on examination of literature, primary and secondary sources, and an oral history project.

If possible, students should have the opportunity to:

1. meet with one of founding members of the synagogue and learn about the synagogue's beginnings.
2. work with other students to reconstruct the history of one's own synagogue or community synagogues based on oral history (interviews) and examination of primary documents (Temple bulletins, rabbinic sermons, etc.)

KEY CONCEPTS:

- **integration/interaction**

Integration and interaction are two different models of approaches that have characterized the Jewish situation in the United States of America. The integrationist model purported that a comfortable synthesis or harmony could be found between the values and practices of Judaism and that of the larger American culture. This model is a companion to the "melting pot" approach that Americans had toward immigration and immigrant groups. This approach was prevalent in the 1950's. An approach that is becoming more prominent in the 1990's is the interactive model which is based on notions of cultural pluralism.

- **values of Judaism complementing, informing or conflicting with American values**

In the 1950's, as in other eras, Jewish values complemented, informed, or conflicted with American value (or vice-versa). Using the tools learned thus far, students should look for instances of values complementing, informing, or conflicting.

- **suburbs**

Between 1945 and 1965, about a third of American Jewry left the big cities and moved to the suburbs. There, without the structure of the Jewish neighborhoods they had left behind, a new form of Judaism began to develop.

- **suburban synagogue**

The small congregations that existed before the mass move to the suburbs were transformed into large, bustling congregations that fulfilled Jewish religious, cultural, social, and educational needs. In this period of American Jewish history, the synagogue was transformed as its leadership was professionalized and as an institution it took on many of the roles that had previously been the domain of the Jewish family and the Jewish neighborhood.

- **rise of American Judaism**

With the rise of the suburbs and the suburban synagogue, a new, uniquely American kind of Judaism began to develop. Reform and Conservative Judaism—movements which took into account the demands of modernity—flourished. The rabbinate became

professionalized as the rabbi increasingly took on pastoral roles. In addition the focus of Judaism, which had previously been the home and the neighborhood, increasingly became the synagogue. There, Jews carried out most of their Jewish actions, but outside of the synagogue were part of mainstream American Jewish life. The American Judaism that grew out of this period, attempted to address these new realities.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• Second Blood — One Man's Expression of a Jewish-American Identity

1. Introduce the concept of Jewish values complementing, informing or conflicting with American values. You might want to make a diagram of this.

2. Read "Second Blood: A Rosh HaShonoh Story" (found in *America and I*) together with the class. This story is written at the end of World War II and reflects the changes that were to take place in greater numbers after the war. Have students look for examples of how Dave's Jewish values complement, inform or contradict his American values.

3. Discussion questions:

Before examining the story, as well as the students' reactions to it, it is important to ascertain that student learned basic facts and drew basic conclusions. Here are some questions to help you accomplish this:

• Questions for knowledge/understanding

- When was the last time Dave was in synagogue?
- Describe Martin Lieberman, the "other Jew" at the National Chemical Company. What is the nature of Dave and Martin's relationship?
- How does Dave demonstrate that he is an "American"? (page 135, 3rd paragraph)
- On which Jewish holiday did Dave decide to give blood?
- What happened when Dave went to a movie with his wife Cathy on Sunday? How was his reaction different from Cathy's? why?
- Is Dave's wife Jewish? What leads you to this conclusion? (Have students cite examples from the text to support their answers.)
- What was Dave's mother's favorite saying? What did she mean by this? How does Dave come to understand this saying?

- How did Dave experience Rosh HaShanah celebrations when he was a child?
- What does Dave decide not to tell his wife, Cathy? why?
- Where does Dave go after he has given blood?

Once students have grasped the fundamentals of the story, they are ready to move into higher level, more abstract thinking. Here the emphasis is on process, rather than on a particular product.

- **Questions for analysis/evaluation/synthesis**

- What does Dave's relationship with Martin Lieberman reflect about his Jewish identity?
- Dave asks himself, "It was enough to be an American, wasn't it? ... Without a fellow having to stress the fact that he was a Jew?" What do you think? Do you think being an American is enough?
- Why doesn't Dave tell Cathy that he is planning on giving blood on Rosh HaShanah? What part does he not want to tell, that he is giving blood, or that he is giving it on Rosh HaShanah?
- How does Dave consider giving blood on Rosh HaShanah to be a Jewish act? What do you think? Do you think giving blood is an appropriate way of observing Rosh HaShanah?
- How do Dave's actions demonstrate the relationship between his Jewish values and his American values?
- Upon reflecting upon his reaction to the "short" at the movies, Dave concludes, "So after all these years, a guy turns out to be not only an American, but a Jewish American. Very interesting!" What does he mean by this? What has Dave learned about himself?
- Why does Dave phone the library to find out when the next Jewish holiday is?
- What is interesting about the place Dave chooses to call to find out about the next Jewish holiday? Couldn't he have called a synagogue, another Jewish institution, or an observant Jew that he knew?
- Why does Dave decide to go to his childhood *shul* after giving blood?
- Do you identify with Dave and his feelings about Judaism? How?
- How would you describe the interaction between Dave's Jewish values and his American values?
- How would you describe the interaction between your Jewish and American values? At what times do they inform, complement or conflict?

4. Don't put closure on this one! Leave students in struggle!

• **The Origins of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs**

1. Have students read the introduction to Herbert J. Gan's article, "The Origin of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs". Ask questions for knowledge and understanding.
2. Divide the rest of the article up into manageable parts and have students read and then present their section of the articles in groups of two or three.
3. The next week bring in a panel of people who were founders of different synagogues in the area, have them speak on their synagogue's beginnings.
4. Have students interview other founding members and write up the interview.

• **The Wonder Years — Suburban Sitcoms, Jewish Style!**

1. View the Bar Mitzvah episode of "The Wonder Years" with the class. Have students look for instances when Jewish and American values complement, inform or conflict.
2. Then inform students that we are going to create our own Jewish sitcom set in the 1950's. Divide students into small groups and have them write their own sitcoms. Be sure to give examples, or even a list of ideas, so that the sitcoms revolve around Jewish issues.
3. Have students videotape their sitcoms in their own homes, then watch as a class (invite the rabbi or educator to come too)!

TEACHER RESOURCES:

Gans, Herbert J. "The Origin of a Jewish Community in the Suburbs" in *American Jews/ A Reader* Sklare (Ed.) Behrman House ©1983

Goren, Arthur A. *The American Jews*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press © 1982

Hertzberg, Arthur *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* Simon and Schuster © 1989, Chapter 18

Kenin, Helene Shwartz *This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews* (textbook) Behrman House Publishers ©1986, Part IV, Chapter 1

Sinclair, Jo "Second Blood: A Rosh HaShonoh Story" in *America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women* Antler (Ed.) Beacon Press © 1990

Wertheimer, Jack *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* Basic Books ©1993, Chapters 1-4

Source Materials

*Second Blood:**A Rosh Hashonoh Story*

Jo Sinclair

THE SECOND TRIP Dave made to the Red Cross blood donor headquarters was different from the first. It was a little over six months after his first contribution, and he made the appointment by telephone for Saturday.

When the woman on the phone said she could not take him because of a full schedule, he gently insisted.

"It's the only time I can come," he lied. "Squeeze me in, will you? I'm anxious to give my second pint, but I'm afraid I couldn't do it for another six months if I don't get down this Saturday. I'm working overtime a lot. War work, you know."

It was a lie about the overtime, but it worked. She'd finally said yes, Saturday at three o'clock, and when he hung up he felt such a full little throb of satisfaction that it made him smile, just thinking of it. Saturday was the first day of *Rosh Hashonoh*, and for some stubborn, fierce reason he wanted to contribute his blood on that day.

It was an odd notion. He had not been in a synagogue for years, not since his mother had died. There was one other Jew at the National Chemical Company, where he did research chemistry in anesthetics. He was as friendly with the other Jew, Martin Lieberman, as he was with the other fellows, but certainly not friendlier. Lieberman was a lot like himself, thirtyish, fond of bridge and musical comedies, and married, with two kids, too. Certainly he and Lieberman had sat over enough ham sandwiches in the company lunchroom not to be bothered about orthodox Judaism. Neither of them looked Jewish either, being

sandy blond, with regular—what Dave always called American—features.

He just wasn't a *kosher yid*, Dave thought with a little smile. Now what the heck was this *Rosh Hashonoh* anyway? He had not fully understood it when the impulse cropped up in him, and he did not really understand it even now, after the appointment had been made. He had not thought of being a Jew for such a long time that this business now was a little scary. He felt so determined about it, that was the scary angle.

At five o'clock he rang out, got into his car and drove home at thirty miles an hour. He had been keeping the car at thirty ever since the rubber business had begun to stew all over the nation.

It was enough to be an American, wasn't it? he asked himself soberly. Without a fellow having to stress the fact that he was a Jew? He thought for a moment of his mother. She had wanted him to go to Temple, and sometimes he had gone. Ten years now since she had died. And Dad dead four years before that. Eight years married. His mother had never even seen Cathy.

He had always thought it was enough to be an American. He was working on that principle now; conserving tires, gas, warden duty and advanced first aid, careful about things like sugar rationing and charge accounts and picking up groceries himself instead of asking for delivery. He and Cathy had rigged up a blackout room in the basement when the first excitement came, and the kids were primed for it; for more than a year, they had even practiced once a week going down and playing there for an hour while he and Cathy read in the room. Chuck and Edie; they were good, sensible kids who had taken the war in their stride from the very first.

He drove thoughtfully. Halfway home he knew he was not going to tell Cathy about *Rosh Hashonoh*. After all, a fellow's wife didn't have to know everything he did. It was enough that a man and his wife loved one another and shared in the most important things. A little thing like this; Cathy didn't have to know about it.

Saturday, at two o'clock, he phoned home. "Dearest? I'm working until five. Special rush job. Sorry, darling. I'll pick up the groceries on my way home. See you later."

He was at the Red Cross by ten of three. Everything was familiar,

the same as last time. The same smiling, joking assistants in their nurse uniforms. He handed one of them his blood donor card and went to hang his coat in the men's room.

In the outer room again, he sat in one of the chairs and the assistant stuck a thermometer in his mouth. "Let's see what a raging fever you have," she joked, and he exchanged a smile with several of the others who sat there with thermometers in their mouths.

People came in and were immediately made ready. He liked the looks of the people in the room; most of them were smiling, their eyes eager. There were about three women to each man.

He signed the big white record card for the clerk at the desk, then went into the hallway to the small desk, where a jolly nurse pricked his finger for the hemoglobin test and asked him the rapid questions about serious operations, recent colds, and all the rest of the no's. Then came the blood pressure examination.

It was all the same as last time, even to the little jokes and smiles from the nurses and volunteer workers. But somehow it was different, too. He sat in the narrow hallway, his record card in his hand, his shirt sleeves rolled up, and waited for an empty cot. He could see into the outer room, the constant flow and ebb of donors through the door, hear the nurses saying, "How do you do," and "Goodbye. Come again!" There he sat, feeling like—by God, like he was in *shule*, praying!

Then a nurse beckoned to him; a cot was empty. He walked into the inner room and got up on the high cot, and she took his card. He glanced swiftly about him. Yes, it was the same. People were lying on the other cots, stretched out flat, their eyes closed, the thin rubber pipes extending from their arms into glass flasks. Women and men; but I'll bet I'm the only Jew here, he thought, all the others are in *shule*.

His lips tightened. This was his way of praying, wasn't it?

The nurse swabbed his arm with antiseptic. "Doctor," she called, "will you find a vein, please?"

Dave watched intently. Last time there had been a woman doctor; this time the doctor was a dark, oldish man with deft hands. He found a vein quickly, then there was the almost painless plunge of the needle, and, looking down out of the corner of his eye, Dave could see the

thin rubber leading from his arm down into the flask.

"Keep clenching and opening your hand," the nurse said, smiling down at him. "You'll be pumping your own blood that way."

It took almost ten minutes. As he lay there, the blood flowing slowly out of him into the bright glass flask with his name on the tag, Dave thought hard of why he had felt compelled to come here today.

Looking at the tag with "David Gordon" written on it, Dave remembered that Sunday night. He and Cathy had gone to a neighborhood movie. They had had Mrs. Lowell's daughter stay in the house with the kids, and they had just made the eight-ten show.

After the feature one of those news shorts flashed on. It was made up of captured film which had been put together into some kind of sequence. The shots concerned Jews in occupied countries and their treatment at the hands of the Nazis.

He sat there watching the rather blurred pictures of bearded men, narrow twisting ghetto streets filled with crouched people and uniforms, old women being forced to clean streets, huddled crowds of men and women with starving eyes. And there were kids everywhere, kids with little, pinched, dark faces and terrible eyes. When he saw their eyes he felt himself squeezing together inside, and his chest hurt.

Then, in one of the large ghettos, he suddenly thought he saw his mother. In a group of Jews outside a synagogue, she stood out in almost an isolated way because of the expression on her face. Next to the haunted faces of the group, hers seemed strong and determined. A tall, grave woman, dark hair pulled straight back from her face and tied in a knob behind her head, her eyes looked out at him the way his mother's often had looked when she was sad or troubled.

He trembled, sitting there, the shiver going through him so strongly that Cathy whispered, "David, what's the matter? Are you feeling ill?" He squeezed her arm. "It's nothing," he whispered.

It was impossible, but that woman was exactly like his mother. A soldier was pushing her around, but she wasn't being pushed; her rigid body and held-high head were insisting on her right to walk by herself.

The voice of the commentator in the picture said, "Jews in this barricaded ghetto are being kept from worship on the eve of one of their holidays."

The woman who looked like his mother stared at Dave from in front

of that huddled group. Her eyes were stern, troubled, accusing—and unafraid. And, watching her, he remembered his mother so vividly it was almost a pain.

She had had a favorite saying, "Davey, what one Jew does anywhere in the world is the business of all Jews. If a Jew in Europe is whipped, I'll feel the whip, too." That had been at the very beginning of all the awful mess in Europe. How she would suffer now if she were alive to feel the many new whips.

The short was over. The woman who looked like his mother flashed off the screen, and the feature came on. When Cathy got up to go, he stumbled after her.

Outside, walking toward the car, she said casually, "Weren't those European pictures awful, David? But it's unbelievable. That just couldn't happen, could it?"

She was a good woman and sensitive, and he loved her very much. He respected her mind, too. She read a lot and she was cynical about a lot of things most women look for granted. But she didn't understand. That woman—why, that woman was practically his mother! It was almost as if she'd opened her mouth and talked to him. "Those accusing eyes! 'Any Jew, anywhere in the world, Davey.' Well, but of course he didn't expect Cathy to feel it as strongly as he did.

He kept himself from shouting, "Don't be absurd, Cathy?" he said quietly. "Those pictures were the real thing."

He hadn't slept well. In the night he had asked himself, Well, what can I do? I'm doing something in the lab that's as essential as marching and shooting. Any Jew, anywhere in the world. By God, she was right; that's exactly the way I felt.

Then he thought wryly, So, after all these years, a guy turns out to be not only an American but a Jewish American. Very interesting!

The next day, during his lunch hour, he had phoned the library reference division. "I want to know when the next Jewish holiday occurs," he said firmly.

The information had been told him in the usual monotone; full details, as if he were a gentle asking for mysterious information, he thought with a shaky grin.

"The next holiday is the one called *Rosh Hashonoh* (the voice spelled it out for him), which is the Jewish New Year (the voice had then told

him the exact Jewish year). It occurs this coming Saturday, starting, as is customary in Jewish law, sundown the preceding evening."

And as the voice talked, he remembered *Rosh Hashonoh* all through his boyhood. New clothes, and the house so clean, and cake baked so that the house was fragrant with it, holiday food cooked, and all of them had gone to *shule*, and on the way there and on the way home again, one met relatives and friends in the street, and one cried gaily: "Happy New Year!" and the glad cries came back from other people, and everybody smiled, everybody was all dressed up and clean and happy for the new year.

The telephone voice stopped talking. "Thank you very much," he had said mechanically, and hung up.

On the cot now, in the Red Cross room, Dave thought grimly: All right. This is from one Jew to all Jews, wherever they are. I give my pint of blood on a Jewish holiday, on the first day of *Rosh Hashonoh*, to make up for all of them getting kicked out of that ghetto *shule* on a holiday (if you'll excuse my melodramat!).

But he did not feel dramatic. Looking at the almost full flask, he felt grimmer than ever.

All right, Ma, he thought, and the tears bit back of his eyes.

"That's that," the nurse said, smiling down at him. "You hold this pad against your arm now."

She sniped the rubber tube and put the last touches on the flask as he lay watching, holding the small bandage against his arm.

Then she fixed the bandage, pressing the adhesive down gently, and he was through.

"Sit up," she said cheerfully. "But don't jump right down. Sit quiet for a while."

He sat there feeling fine, not a thing the matter with him. The other cots were still occupied, but with new donors, he thought with satisfaction. And he felt a momentary surge of gladness as he thought of the front door opening so steadily and the donors coming so steadily, a never-stopping march of them into this building and into this roomful of cots. A never-ending march of shining glass flasks full of blood across the world.

After a few moments he jumped down and went into the canteen.

It looked the same, the easy chairs covered with bright cretonne, the sandwich bar, the smiling assistants carrying the trays.

He drank down the glass of water one of them gave him, then ate a peanut butter sandwich and drank two cups of coffee.

"Is this your first time?" the woman asked.

"No, second."

"Well, you don't get a button this time," she explained. "You wear the button you received the first time." She stamped the date on his card. "You get a silver button at the third contribution, you know."

I don't need a button, he thought. "That's fine," he said automatically. He looked down at the lump of bandage on his arm. Over there they wore a button with the word *Jude* on it!

He got his jacket from the dressing room, and left. "Goodbye," the nurse in the outer room called. "Thank you, and do come again!"

"I will," he said as he went out. As he walked down the steps three others came up, two women and a man. Again he felt that throb of gladness.

He started to drive home. No, he would not tell Cathy. Maybe she would understand, but it was quite all right not to tell her; this was something she did not have to understand.

He drove slowly, a soft and tender feeling like a bruise in his chest. Yes, his mother would have understood why he had gone today, yes and why he was not going to tell Cathy. She would have nodded—he could see her eyes now—and smiled.

The tender, bruised feeling deepened. And this thing he had just done, yes, his mother would have understood it very well. How, in this second giving of his blood, he had given not only as an American but as a Jew.

As the light began to change, the feeling inside of him suddenly became clarified. With a jerk, he turned the car toward the right, and drove up Kinsman Road. His lips were tight, but the tears had broken through at last, and he let them slide down his cheeks as he stepped on the gas pedal.

All right, ma, he thought tenderly.

He was driving through the Jewish district now, the streets he had not seen for ten years. When he passed the Imperial Theatre, where he had gone to the movies in his childhood, he relaxed, his lips shaky in a smile. He wiped his eyes, slowing down.

In another five minutes he would be at the *shule* his parents attended all their years in America. They had moved with it up from the narrow, cluttered street which was now slums, the street where he'd been born; when the Jews had started to move they had moved too, and the first thing all the Jews had done on Kinsman was to build a new place for their beloved *shule*. How many times his mother had told him the story.

He could see the big, sprawling building now, and a feeling of quiet elation began to hum in his chest. He had come home, at last.

Unit 7: The 1960's and 1970's: Counter-culture, Turbulence and Change/ Journalism as the First Draft of History

The 1960's and 1970's were turbulent times as old norms and values were questioned and dismantled, and new ones rose to take their place. As feminism and other social change movements began to take root in America, Jews took those values and applied them to Judaism. They created a Jewish feminist movement, and many participated in the civil rights movement out of a sense of their obligations as Jews. Israel too, figures into this picture, as the American Jewish community became "Zionized" after Israel's victory in the 6-Day War in 1967. Out of such turmoil came a reevaluation of Judaism and Jewish identity, as Jews sought new ways to express their Judaism: through feminist Judaism, through civil rights and anti-war work, through ethnic identification, and through pro-Israel activities.

GOALS:

1. To examine the ways in which the changes in American culture affected Jewish culture, and the ways in which people's Jewish values influenced their actions in the larger American society.
2. To learn about the different kinds of Jewish identities in this period —ethnic and religious.
3. To use newspapers as a historical source,

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. articulate the ways in which changes in American culture were reflected in Jewish culture.
2. explain how someone's Jewish values might influence/inspire them to participate in the civil rights movement.
3. discuss different kinds of Jewish identity in this era
4. paint a picture of Jewish life (in words or through art) based on examination of Anglo-Jewish newspapers of the time.

During the course of the unit, students should have the opportunity to:

1. meet with people who were active in the civil rights and anti-war movement in the 1960's and 1970's.
2. meet with someone who can discuss a feminist approach to Judaism.

KEY CONCEPTS:

- **rights/responsibility/obligations**

In the American legal tradition, rights are enshrined in constitution. As Americans we have the right to bear arms, the right to free speech, the right not to self-incriminate, the right to vote, etc.... The Jewish legal tradition differs from the American legal system in that rights are balanced with responsibilities. As human being we have rights, but we also have responsibilities to G-d and to other people. For example: if someone finds property that is not their's, that person is under obligation to return it, according to the Jewish legal tradition (B. Baba Maetzia); and a person is obligated to give Tzedakah, even he or she is poor. During this unit, students should examine how these two ideas are manifested in Jewish and American cultures.

- **Counterculture**

Jews were highly involved in the civil war and antiwar activities, and were thus affected by the feminist and counterculture movements. By the late 1960's, some Jews had began to take the ideas from the broader society and apply them to their own communities. Out of such criticism came the Jewish counterculture movement which spawned the Jewish Feminist movement and the Chavurah movement. Jews in the Chavurah movement rejected the Judaism of the suburban synagogues as stale and hierarchical, and worked to create an egalitarian, participatory Jewish community which developed new and innovative ways of Jewish expression.

- **Feminism/ Jewish Feminism/Feminist Judaism**

An outgrowth of the larger feminist movement in larger American society, this movement focused on the inequality between men and women in Jewish religious and communal life. Jewish feminists sought to equal opportunities for women at all levels of Jewish leadership — as rabbis, cantors, educators, and synagogue board members. In the early 1970's their criticism turned to Judaism itself as they sought to transform the tradition into a Judaism that would be inclusive of both women and men. These transformations brought about a Feminist Judaism which includes a changed liturgy, and new rituals for women (such as Rosh Hodesh).

- **African American/Jewish relations**

The history of African American/Jewish relations in the United States is a controversial one — one in which the two groups today do not share a common view of history. While some American Jews speak of a time when African Americans and Jews were partners in the civil rights movement, other African Americans argue that the alliance was one between elites and never a true partnership. While it is true that Jews were heavily involved in the civil rights

movement the 1960's (they made up approximately two-thirds of the Freedom Riders that went South in 1961; in 1964, Jews represented from one-half to two-thirds of the Mississippi Summer Volunteers), issues in the 1970's such as busing and affirmative action rent the African American/Jewish political alliance.

• **Israel/ American Zionism**

Israel's stunning military victory in the 1967 Six-Day War became the focus of many American Jew's attention in the aftermath of the June war. For many Jews, Israel became a new focus of pride and identity, as American Jews began to identify with the state of Israel in greater numbers and greater intensity than in the past. While this identification resulted in a wave of Jews who made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel), it also resulted in a change for Jews who remained in the United States of America. Pro-Israel activities, such as political lobbying for Israel or engaging in Israeli cultural activities, became more common in the American Jewish community as Jews sought for different ways to express their Jewish identity.

• **ethnic identity/ religious identity**

As Jews became increasingly involved with other ethnic minorities in the United States, a new kind of Jewish consciousness began to develop, one which placed emphasis on the ethnic aspect of Jewish identification. Jews who identified themselves ethnically emphasized the cultural aspects of their heritage such as food, language, and the state of Israel. But even as Jews began to identify themselves ethnically, the religious Jewish identity of American Jewry was being transformed (see *Counterculture and Jewish Feminism*).

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

• **American Values, Jewish Values, and the Civil Rights Movement**

1. Discuss with students the concepts of rights versus responsibility. How do these two ideas interact? When do they complement each other? When do they stand in dynamic tension?
2. With the above ideas in mind, study two legal documents one American, the Bill of Rights, one Jewish, Mishnah Baba Batra 1:5 and its gemara (Baba Batra 7b). How are the concepts similar in these two documents? different? How might a person act given the world view of the Bill of Rights? the mishnah and gemara of Baba Batra? What kind of society is created when rights are enshrined? What

kind of society is created when rights are balanced with responsibilities and/or obligations?

3. Study Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream" for evidence of these two ideas (rights and responsibility). What kind of value-system does King's speech reflect.

4. Have students write their own "I Have a Dream" speeches based on their value system of rights and obligations.

• **L'Olam and White Shell Woman: The Emergence of an Ethnic Jewish Identity**

1. Have students give examples of the ways they express their Jewish identity. Then go back and have students label those expressions ethnic or religious. Do they consider the Jews to be an ethnic group, a religious group, or both? Explain that as a result of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, and the Jewish interaction with African Americans and other ethnic groups, some Jews began to reconceive their Jewish identity in terms of ethnicity. This is a story of one woman's emerging Jewish identity.

2. Have students read Joanne Greenberg's "L'Olam and White Shell Woman" silently to themselves, OR read it out-loud as a class, OR assign the story as homework.

3. Questioning sequence:

In this questioning sequence I have listed the questions in the order of the story. They begin with lower level (knowledge and understanding) questions and move to higher level (evaluation, synthesis, analysis) questions. You might want to read this story out loud as a class, stopping at certain points for discussion. Or, you could assign each student a questioning sequence for which he/she would be responsible. Each person should give special thought to his/her question and then present their answer in class.

◦ Where does the main character take a job? What does she hope to learn?

◦ How did Navaho culture and lifestyle change after World War II. Why? What happened? What kinds of changes took place in American Jewish culture after World War II? Why? How do these differences reflect the different experiences Navaho's and Jews have had in American?

◦ What kind of similarities does the main character draw between her Jewish culture and the Navaho culture? Do you agree or disagree with them? In what ways are American Jews similar to and different from other American ethnic groups?

◦ How does the main character "prove" that she is not like all the other Anglos? Why? What does the main character's choice

reveal about her knowledge of Hebrew? In what context does the author use Hebrew? How is this context different from the way she is representing Hebrew to the Navahos? (Her knowledge of Hebrew seems limited to liturgical Hebrew, yet it seems she presented it as if it was a spoken language to her.) What does this reveal?

◦ The Navaho girls refer to the Jews as a "tribe". In what ways are the Jewish people like a tribe? What would constitute a tribal Jewish identity?

◦ What did the author mean when she said, "My Abraham and Isaac were American Navaho, who had never seen a Jew before." How has her experience with the Navaho influenced her Jewish identity?"

◦ How does the mixture of Navaho and English remind the author of the Yiddish-English she spoke with her grandfather? What does this reveal about the similarities between the Navaho American and the Jewish American experience? about minority ethnic groups in the United States in general?

◦ At the end of the story, the author says, "My tribe wasn't like the Navaho in some ways." In what ways are her tribe different? What does this reveal about the core values of Judaism or Jewish culture?

◦ The author says that she is a stranger not only in Navaho culture, but in the American city of her birth as well. How is she a stranger?

◦ How would you describe the author's Jewish identity? In what ways is it similar or different from your own?

• **Being a Jewish Feminist: How an American value informed/complemented Judaism**

1. Read sections of interviews from Sylvia Barak Fishman's "A Breath Of Life" about ways in which feminism has transformed Judaism.

2. After a class discussion, have students interview different women leaders in the Jewish community about their opinions on the ways in which feminism has transformed Judaism.

-OR-

1. Invite someone to class to speak about Jewish feminism and the history of the Jewish feminist movement.

• **Troubled Alliance: African American-Jewish Relations**

1. Invite an African American and a Jewish American who were involved in the civil rights movement to speak about their involvement and reflect upon African-American/Jewish Relations

• **The Six Day War and the Rise of American Zionism**

Students should look at 1976-68 Anglo-Jewish newspapers and magazines to assess the mood of American Jewry in May/June 1967 and beyond. Students should present their findings in an oral or written report . -OR- Students can create collages using photocopies of the newspapers and magazines.

TEACHER RESOURCES:

Greenberg, Joanne "L'Olam and White Shell Woman" in *American and I* Antler (Ed.) Beacon Press © 1990

Fishman, Sylvia Barak *A Breath Of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* The Free Press © 1993, Chapters 1, 6-10

Heschel, Susannah (Ed.) *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* Schocken Books © 1983

Kenvin, Helene Schwartz *This Land of Liberty: A History of America's Jews* (textbook), Unit V, Chapter 3

Kaufman, Jonathan *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* New American Library ©1983 (The entire book is useful. The introduction provides an excellent overview.)

Sachar, Howard M. *A History of Jews in America* Vintagae Books © 1992, Chapters 20-24

Hertzberg, Arthur *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* Simon & Schuster © 1989, Chapter 20

Umansky, Ellen M. and Dianne Ashton (Eds.) *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook* Beacon Press © 1992, Part IV

Wertheimer, Jack *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* Basic Books © 1993, Chapter 2

Source Materials

L'Olam and White Shell Woman

Joanne Greenberg

I WAS BROKE and there was a Tribal Fair looming ahead, so the Window Rock Reservation Restaurant and Coffee Shop took me on as its first "Anglo" waitress. We started work at seven in the morning and finished with the last coffee customer, around eight or nine at night. We got fifty cents an hour and hypothetical tips. It wasn't bad the first week. I got up early and walked to work in iridescent morning light; we would serve a few customers and then sit idly and watch fat flies fighting and making love through the siesta noons; a few more customers and we would close up right after Mr. Coombs came in for his eight o'clock coffee. There was time to walk in the evening cool, enjoying the vibrating clarity of the air, feeling tired and pleasantly philosophical in all that immense desert darkness, because of having a job there, in a sense, belonging.

The other waitresses were Navaho girls who had learned their English sketchily, as a second language. I jumped at the chance to learn some Navaho. (In the catalogue of accomplishments, the exceptional ones are valued out of all proportion to their usefulness.) It would be a wonderful tongue to "lapse into" at school. It was disappointing to learn that Navaho is as tonal as Chinese, as inflected as Greek, as glottal as Hottentot; a language without tenses, nouns, or verbs as English knew them; without objective meaning as English practiced it. In the end I had to be content just waiting table. Alas for the hope of the scent of sagebrush blowing over the groves of academe.

By the end of the week, Navaho were beginning to drift in from the back country, and there were tourists stopping for sandwiches and coffee. The Indians would come in pairs, tall, potbellied men dressed in a Woolworth Western style, which they made theirs by wearing velveteen shirts—rust, peacock, and orchid—weighed with rows of dimes and quarters that were sewn in decorative patterns across their chests, huge turquoise belts, and long hair tied in the "butterfly" bun. They would come to us and speak their English word gravely, "Petsi." They never stopped to talk to the girls or to look around. They gave their money, drank their Pepsi's, and left, to disappear, even as I tried to follow them with my eyes, into the endless, empty landscape. Generations had lived this way in the desert, the descendants of those who had fled from the Spanish, their rich, rapacious conquerors, into the places where no one could follow them and survive. They got the horse and the sheep and the art of silver from that Spaniard and took his gifts into the desert to wed to their way. Bessie Tsoosie, who had the tables by the window, told me that the People had always had these things, and this land. She couldn't imagine the People without sheep, horses, turquoise, or silver—things "ancestral."

In the early mornings, and at night after closing, I sometimes walked down the road toward Fort Defiance. It amazed me that people could live in a land where so little grew. Sheep are as rapacious as conquistadores. I soon learned that the Navaho wander by single families over hundreds of miles, moving often, to keep those sheeps' bellies full. Alice Yazzi told me that children spend the years of their childhoods alone, watching the family flocks which they drive to graze the mesas and the dry washes. "All time alone," she said. The earth and sky I saw were so overpowering that I pitied the little child who had to pass between them all alone; and I did see them occasionally, walking by in the distance, straight little figures between the great everlasting, with a stick against coyotes and their father's twenty sheep.

I'd forgotten that the idea of childhood as a separate time was not a universal idea. When a kid came in one day with his fly gaping wide and no underwear, I laughed to Alice about it, and then said half-jokingly, "Somebody should tell him to zip up before he falls out." She looked at me in wonder. "Are his." (His pants, his pants—if he

had wanted them another way he would have put them another way.) They called themselves 'The People, after all.

Other Indians barely existed for them, and the Anglo was a pale fanatic who walked around killing sheep to save the herd. But the Anglo and his Second World War had been powerful enough to deal a death blow to the Old Way. Husbands and sons had come back from training camps and battlefields transformed by the white enemy-brother, and had begun to agitate for electricity, English, and the germ theory. I had forgotten about the Christian church.

We were clearing off the big table one afternoon when the radio that had been blaring its standard rockabilly whine suddenly went into syncopated, tremulous machine-gun sounds—Navaho. After some talk there was a song, a haunting, warping, Oriental-sounding song in half-pitches. I was sure I'd heard it somewhere before, but this was impossible. When it came to me, I burst out laughing. It was "The Old Rugged Cross!" It sounded Oriental because in Navaho, tone dictates meaning, whether a melody will or no. I tried to stop laughing at the impossible sound of that hymn, to tell them that the laughter meant no disrespect, but with every try I would get the giggles. When I finally coughed out an apology, Alice only shrugged. "Anyway, I am not Christian," she said.

"Not me too," Bessie echoed. Lita and the two cooks who had come out to watch me laugh, shook their heads. I had to laugh again.

"Well," I said, "neither am I."

"You ain' no Navaho." And the girl looked at me as though I had stained something borrowed. The People and the Enemy, brother or stranger.

I couldn't let things stay that simple for them. "No," I said, "and not Tewa or Zuni. I'm something else, something called a Brooklyn Jew."

"I never heard of that tribe," Alice answered skeptically.

I looked out the window over the dry reaches of the land. "Our two people would have understood one another. My people once came from a land like this, and they herded sheep too. You name everything on your land for some event in the past, a miracle or wonder that happened there. My fathers did that too. Navaho don't disappear into

the people of the pueblos or the white man. My fathers kept their ways too." They were quiet, still skeptical.

Then one of the cooks said, "You Anglo; you talk Anglo."

So I rared back and hit them with the "Shema," and then "Kol Nidre," which was what came to mind.

They listened in complete silence and, afterward, Bessie Tosie said, "That sound like Tewa."

The fat cook snorted. "I speak Tewa, and that ain't Tewa."

"What did you say them people was?"

"In the beginning, Israelites, then Hebrews, then Jews."

I saw a sharp glance go between Alice and Bessie, and the two cooks were looking at one another. Having more than one name meant something to them. I was about to ask about it, but a bunch of tourists on their way to Fort Defiance came in, and we were busy all the rest of the afternoon.

When the last dinner customer left, I saw the girls whispering together, and when I walked up to them, they stopped. "What's up?" I asked. My voice sounded tired.

Alice said, "We was goin' to ask, could you an' Lita close up, cause we want to go to the Squaw Dance."

I'd wanted them to ask me to a Squaw Dance so much I had almost hinted at it. To the big Navaho socials came people from way back in the hills, the little scattered families and bands who were summering their sheep west of us. Many of them would travel for days to meet friends, eat, make love, trade horses, and dance and sing all night. The hosts laid in tremendous stores of mutton and fried bread and Anglo coffee. I knew that few Anglos had ever been invited to a Squaw Dance, and it would be ruinous to try to crash one, even though it spread out to seven acres of ground, with trucks and horses parked beyond and the courting strung out beyond that. But it was their dance, after all, so I agreed to close. As soon as I said yes, they turned and left.

Lita and I stood in the middle of the floor and looked at the nothing that was swept off, mopped up, put away. It took us until after ten to get things straight.

We left together, exhausted. Outside the air was cool, thin, and trembling, like glass. The night was black, the sky busy with all its stars; there were clouds of them—clustered, spilled, spread. There

were more stars than I had ever seen before. Eastward from where we stood, and miles away, we saw the faint glow of reflected light from Gallup, and in the night wind, now faint, now clear, a series of rippled sobs: the sound of the chanting of the Squaw Dance. I tried to ask Lita why I couldn't see it; there was no light, no sign of movement over the great plain that barely rose and dipped away from us. Her English wasn't up to my question, so I finally just asked, "Where is the dance?"

"Ah," and she pointed with her lower lip, the Navaho way, out where it was, where I saw nothing but stars and the huge night overhead, brush, rock, and sand below. There wasn't even a sign of their smoke, although I knew that they would be building high fires by now. Lita could bear her separation no longer. With a quiet sound to free herself of me politely, she began to walk out into the emptiness to which she had pointed, and in a moment she had disappeared. I was alone, looking up at the crowded sky, wondering if my ancient fathers, Jacob or David, pursued in deserts and wise in the nomad way, didn't also camp so as to be invisible, lighting fires for their feast of mutton without even a wisp of betraying smoke coming between their pursuers and the friendly stars.

The next day we were up and running, the Fair gaining on us. Tourists and concessionaires and Indians from many tribes were setting up just outside the administration area. All of them wanted coffee and hot cakes and sausages and eggs cooked four minutes precisely. More coffee. More eggs.

"Hey, miss, these cakes is cold!"

"Hey, waitress, where's that order of beans and steak!"

"Hey, waitress!"

"Hey, wait-RESS!" The usual 1:30 slackening disappeared in a sea of soda, coffee, and "peksi." None of us were really good waitresses, but the girls who had spent all night at the Squaw Dance were particularly lead-footed under the pressure: endless nontipping Navaho: hot dogs: two with, three without; side of French fries; the troupe of a carnival comedy act asked for eight double orders of tomato juice with raw egg and Worcestershire. Campbell's soup calmly boiling over (cause-and-effect) to run all the way down the back counter. Five maltds. How do you make a maltd? Grandma at her first Anglo

restaurant and fifteen minutes of grunting and lip thrusts before I found out she wanted Alice to serve her, avoiding ritual pollution at my hand. I went and got Alice. ("I'm really Navaho or else they're really Jews, a stubborn, stiff-necked, lost tribe of Jews! Over the Bering Strait and the Mezzuzah fell in the water!")

What is graceful and natural at 7:30 in the morning and in no particular hurry, is misery at 2:00 in the afternoon with Bessie backing out, and three tables waiting, and the cook cursing the world in Navaho.

By 4:00 it's catastrophe. Alice was breaking dishes and I had gotten so far behind that customers were leaving, and the owner, working cash register during the rush, was glowering at me. The work kept building as the supper people began to come. The dinners got fancier, the table settings more elaborate, and I began to feel like the innocent bystander in an old Laurel and Hardy movie, someone suddenly caught up in a pandemonium he hadn't made and didn't understand. All this, and in the din you couldn't hear yourself think. Our customers were not city people used to living in low voices; and, of course, there was the radio. (Blood and Whiskey—eight choruses.) We closed at 10:30. Nobody said good night, and I didn't remember making it to my bed.

The next day was worse, a dish-clattering, spoon-dropping madhouse, a nightmare treadmill of noise and anger. When we got in one another's way, we growled, and the courtesy we had erected to save ourselves from one another fell away. Somebody got the idea that Bessie was taking tips off the other tables. God knows, there were few enough tipplers in the crowd, and nobody had actually seen her; but the suspicion was planted; it grew and twisted in our tired minds until we found ourselves "covering" our tables against a thief, suddenly wary and unreasoning in exhaustion. The Fair was a week long and I'd wanted to see it, but we were closing late each night and I was too tired to go after work. As it was, I wondered if I could make it through the week.

And then it rained. It was a bitter thing to learn that the desert's rain was as brutal as its drought. A baked ground has no power to absorb its gift of moisture. The water rose in each little low place until it was in flood. It beat against the adobe earth; it fell sheeting solidly; exploding drops stung like shot; and I learned with my own arms and

shoulders how the hard rock ridges could have been tunneled down into arroyos, the arroyos into incredible canyons. There was water flowing away to loss everywhere. The rain-eaten gullies poured water in torrents, but it was spilling away uselessly, all that needed water in the dry land, a tragic waste. We barely made it to work that morning without falling in the ruts that hadn't been there the night before. We opened late and served a couple of cowmen and a family whose car was bogged in a low spot. Later there were some Indian agents, but no one else, so after lunch hour we all went into the kitchen to see what the cooks had for us.

"Surprise for you girls," the fat cook said. "Right here."

It was "their" treat: fried bread and chili. The bread was a crisp-edged, edible platter of deep-fried dough, and the girls spread it thickly with green chili.

Alice turned to me. "You was tellin' about them people I'ven some-where like us . . ."

"You mean the Hebrews?"

"Yeah, what they eat?"

"Well, they had mutton and prickly pear like yours, but more varieties of fruit . . ." And I bit with scholar's confidence into my bread covered with chili, chewed, swallowed. I had eaten fire. Fire erupted inside me. I felt my face go red, tears sprang from my eyes, searing heat traced paths into my head and down the whole track of my throat. Through tears running freely, I saw Alice and Bessie and Lita and the cooks rocking with laughter.

Then someone put a cup of hot coffee in my hand and said, "Drink." "No," I gasped, "water."

The voice said, "Coffee, now. Hot. Water don' work."

I drank, and for a moment the heat of it only brightened the scalding pain of the chili, but then the burning leveled, then it lowered. I was still flowing tears: nose, eyes, mouth. "That was very good," I said, feeling foolish. It set us off again until we were all in tears.

"Your tribe," Alice said, "I don't know what they eat. I know what they don't eat."

I laughed wetly and held my coffee cup and looked out the window into the grim rain. There we were, enjoying my Anglo anguish while the urgent, vital, earth-feeding gift, all of it, was draining away.

I looked back at their faces, calmed and healed by the laughter, and I was wondering how I could have missed the single quality in my fathers which must have been the ground-tone of their lives: patience—with hunger and drought and such wasted plenty as this rain. We stood around quietly, eating and listening to it sound over our heads, more at peace with one another now that there was a chance to rest.

What a strange beauty the desert had. I liked it best at night. The Psalmist says God's greatness is from Everlasting to Everlasting. It was only a beautifully meaningless thought at home, because the world at home was man's creation and even time stood for a certain rate of depreciation. Here, there was everlasting in any direction, as far as the eye could see; and through it, cutting it into east and west, north and south, a man-sized man might come, leading his sheep to where the grass was young and there was water. Abraham and Isaac knew the desert's beauty and tyranny, capriciousness and cruelty. I was learning an admiration for the strength a people must have who would wrest their lives from it. My Abraham and Isaac were American Navaho, who had never seen a Jew before.

In the late afternoon the rain stopped, and two hours later it was impossible to tell that it had fallen. Only a fresh scent hung in the air. The ground was dry; the brush was dry; the torrents that had flooded and poured downland to some distant river were gone. People were all around, putting out their heads and folding up their raincoats to go on where the rain had stopped them. There must have been a hundred people in the supper rush, and we didn't close till ten.

At quitting time I asked Alice if the Squaw Dance was still going on. "No, they be one before end of grass here; soon people start south, away from high place, cold."

I was still hoping for that invitation, but I was afraid to press it, so I asked her what the steps looked like. She searched me for ridicule. None was there. "Here," she said, "I make it for you. . . ." And she showed me, but it wasn't much: a shuffle back and a shuffle forward, widening to the left so as to move very slowly in a circle. As she did the step she looked as embarrassed as Navaho permit themselves to look. "Step. This step. Step isn' dance . . ." Wrestling with the impossible Anglo words to try to tell me what I could never know from

my world of dances with *steps*. She had been forced for the first time to consider the poverty of her "step."

I said, "I can see that. I know a dance that looks like that. The joy in it is that the people are all together, stepping together and coming down with both feet on the same place as the person before them, and the dance grows in layers. The dancers make the layers together, as if they were saying: All together we make one."
 "A dance of your tribe?" she asked.

"One of them."

"And you are not Indian?"

"No."

"Soun' like Indian to me."

The question of identity was put on the day before the end of the Tribal Fair. Because of overtime I would be able to get back to school in time for registration. I could leave when the Fair ended, hitch to Gallup, Gallup to Denver to New York—and no money spent staying over. As the Fair edged off, the crowds in the restaurant slackened, and on the last two nights we closed at nine.

There was a full moon. The Navaho God in charge of such things had lit my night, and I was grateful. We stood around outside and talked, waiting for the cooks to come out. There was supposed to be another Squaw Dance over near Fort Defiance but the girls were too tired to walk. The plan was to wait near the highway for a ride, and I guess I was hanging around hoping to be invited along when the car showed up. Their talk was the mixture of Navaho and English that they used when they were together. I was only half-listening.

"Who was shearing in the Fair for—" (the last lost to Navaho and to me).

"Johnny Begay an' his uncle, who—"

"Who was singin'?"

"They got—"

It reminded me of the Yiddish-English stew I spoke with my grandfather.

Lita put out her lip toward me after a while. "Her tribe—sheep—if they got song like . . ."

Navaho are a reticent people, and while the ancient Hebrews may have been reticent also, it's not noticeably present in modern Jews. I

was amused while I listened to them, and curious enough to speak first.

"Did you say sheep? Funny. I know a song about a lamb . . ."

They smiled, yes, in the moonlight; and I smiled, yes, took a breath and broke free. I sang "Chad Gadyo," and then translated it verse by verse, from the dog and the little lamb to God's battle with the Angel of Death. Singing got me drunk at this altitude, maybe; maybe freedom and the full moon; but I was loose-limbed and happy, and, before I knew it, we were all dancing a hora in the American desert to the very uneven strains of "El Yivneh Hagahil." They countered with two shepherd's songs.

I tried to feel them as a Navaho, but I couldn't. The trembling lifts and lowerings of their melody reminded me of a good cantor, hovering proudly, gently over his best notes. The songs were quiet, trembling, but clear; melody rising from the small voices between illimitable earth and illimitable sky might be the cry of my own people, reminding God, however gently and reverently, that One-and-Omniscient must still be instructed by man in the agonies that only man knows: mortality, imperfection, being so ceaselessly changed, and so quickly ended. I sang them a Psalm. Egypt had not yet taught us whips and slavery; Babylon had not yet made us dwellers in cities; ghettos had not yet walled us in. Afterward, we traded song for song.

Alice said, "In them songs, it's still singin' for God. You don' tell which God you singin' about."

"We were nomads," I said. "We couldn't take much with us, roaming the world. After a while we even had to leave our languages behind, and our dreams. We took our God. One God. Only One."

"Oh," she said, pitying me my poverty. "We got different song, different Spirit."

"I've heard a little about Changing Woman," I said, "and White Shell Woman, and Born of Water . . ."

"Well, White Shell Woman is Changing Woman, only change . . ."

"No," Bessie said, "White Shell Woman different. Song say," and they took the discussion away from me again.

Theology. I hoped I wasn't giving them revenge for the green chili. If I want disputations, I thought, I'll go home. Then, for no reason,

I remembered the kid with the open fly and no underwear. Blessed are the poor; they have the most stupendous pride. If you are poor and have a long history too, the pride gets perfected under the eyes of countless conquering armies.

Lita said, "Your tribe—make sand picture, like us?"

It's cold in the desert at night; I hadn't felt it before. Now I was getting dizzy looking at the stars—And I will multiply your seed as the stars in heaven . . . Well, that had been a different night and another land. I said, "My tribe wasn't like Navaho in some ways. We have one God, a spirit we believe is too great to name or picture. Names and pictures define things, limit them. He has no limit for us, no edge, no boundary. The only visible thing—is a book."

Two lights broke over the small hill to the south. It was a car on the way to Fort Defiance. It came up the road and stopped before the subtle signal of Lita's arm lifting only a degree from her side as they walked to the highway and I followed. I knew that I had been included without having to be told. I was learning. Now I could tell a silent affirmative when I heard or, rather, didn't hear one. We all got in the car and moved down the road.

I asked, "Who is giving the dance; I want to leave something."

"I take you," Bessie said.

So we went a distance, and then stopped and got out of the car in the middle of Everlasting, and we walked off the roadbed and into the desert. I stumbled over everything: white hummocks, ruts, stones. They walked easily. I was an Anglo, all right, a stranger.

In the American city of my birth I was a stranger too. I learned the city's ways until I passed, "assimilated" but for the strange intonations of my prayers, out of the ghetto. I never regretted the passage. Beyond that ghetto there are a thousand worlds to see. I was often lonely for the security of the "separated," but loneliness is a small price to pay, and the pain of it would have as much easing as I could give it. This night was such an easing. I didn't know the Navaho, not their language or beliefs. They didn't know Abraham or Isaac, but I wasn't lonely, stumbling over what they knew and expected. Why should I be; it was the biggest ghetto I had ever seen.

We went over a little rise in the land I thought was level and saw the big fires and the trucks—all of it in the downwind silence.

"Can Anglo understand Squaw Dance?" Bessie asked.

I smiled. "The tenements of the old ghetto teem with people, shriek, noise, and stench," I answered. "Washlines scar the sky between the houses. The streets shine with rotting fish skins. A man lives his swarming, impacted life without seeing one green thing growing from the ground. With such similarities, how could I miss?"

Unit 8: The 1980's, 1990's and beyond, Where do we go from here?/ The Uses of History

The history of America's Jews in the 1980's and 1990's is a chapter that is yet to be written. The turmoil of the 1960's and 70's left in its wake an American Jewry that was free, bold, powerful, and clearly at home in America. American Jews have won the battle to become American, and with success has come new challenges. Once again American Jewry has endeavored to define itself, give meaning to its practices hallowed through time and create meaningful new ones. Now more than ever — in the absence of traditional Jewish "givens" such as faith, community and a common enemy — being Jewish is a matter of choice. The jury is still deliberating whether the past decade and a half has been one of assimilation or one of revival—or both. There are indications of both trends in the last decade and half. Ultimately it will take an informed and passionate Jewry to ensure that the trend of religious and cultural revival is the one that continues into the 21st century.

GOALS:

1. To critically examine Jewish life today — one's own Jewish community, one's own Jewish belief and practice — and begin to see both in the context of American Jewish history.
2. To examine the trends of assimilation and revival in the last decade and a half.

OBJECTIVES:

At the end of the unit, students should be able to:

1. identify trends in Jewish life and engage in deliberation about the future based on what he/she has learned about the past
2. identify signs/indications of assimilation and revival in the last decade and a half.
3. articulate how history can be used as a basis for decision-making about the present and the future.

KEY CONCEPTS:

• assimilation/revival

In the past decade and half, there have been signs of two contrasting trends; assimilation and revival. On the one hand there are Jews who are living more intensive Jewish lives than their parents or even grandparents, applications for rabbinical school is at an all time high, Jewish studies courses are taken by college students across the country, and large numbers of young Jewish parents are

choosing to send their children to Jewish pre-schools. On the other hand a large percentage of Jews are assimilating and over 52% are marrying into the non-Jewish majority.

- **being Jewish as a matter of choice**

"For Jews, the world of choice opened up as anti-Jewish barriers came down. With increasing political and social freedom, with access to most of the opportunities offered in America for employment, education and status, Jews found that for the first time being Jewish was indeed a matter of choice, not fated birth, one could actually choose to be 'in' or 'out'."¹ While one may be born Jewish, in today's multicultural world of almost unlimited choice, one only lives as a Jew if one actively affirms one's Jewishness.

- **using history as a guide for decision-making about the future.**

The study of Jewish history should equip a student with insight in the problems of Jewish identity, Jewish continuity, and the nature of Jewish culture and religious practice, thereby creating students who are cognizant and reflective about the past and are able to engage in serious deliberating about the future.

SUGGESTED LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

- **Assimilation or Revival?**

1. Have students study selections of personal vignettes from *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America* by Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard. Try to give each *chevruta* (dyad) selections from the three main sections; "The Unaffiliated", "The Community", and "The Revival". Direct students to examine the nature of the different Jewish identities of the different people. After you have chosen the vignettes, you might want to write appropriate discussion questions.
2. Bring the group back together. Have each group present their different vignettes and give a summary of their discussion.
3. Close with a discussion on nature of different Jewish identities and their implications for the future.
4. Have students interview people about their Jewish identities. Then compile those vignette into a book. Have students work in small groups to write the introductory and conclusion chapters

- **In the Context of History**

1. Have students read the afterward on pages 933-936 in Howard Sachar's book, *A History of Jews in America*.

¹Barry W. Holtz, *Why Be Jewish?* American Jewish Committee, page 5

2. Discuss the nature of the Meyer family's Jewish identity and practice in a historical context.
3. Have students interview family members of different generations about their Jewish identity. Then have students create a family tree of Jewish identity. Each person's "branch" should illustrate their Jewish identity in its historical context. -OR- Have students write a family history like the one they read in Sachar's book.

• **America and I**

Have students write reflective statements about their own Jewish identity and practice in light of the material learned. Have students share with the class and have a discussion -OR- Have students make a collage or make a hand-made midrash instead. —OR— Have students write historical fiction (short story) about a Jewish teenager in the 1990's.

• **The Uses of History — A Case Study**

1. Explain to students that even if people can agree on what happened in history, there may still be disagreement on how history is used. A good example of this is the Holocaust. While Jews agree that: 1) the holocaust happened and Six Million Jews were killed and 2) American Jewry needs to be educated about the holocaust, there is serious disagreement in the Jewish community over *how* the holocaust should be used in Jewish education.
2. Give students a cope of the article, "When Will Jews Let It Rest?" by Eli Hecht (Los Angeles Times, January 2, 1994). Have them read the article to themselves, noting the author's argument on the uses and misuses of the holocaust in American Jewish education.
3. Discussion Questions:
 - How does the author portray Oskar Schindler? How is this different from the way Steven Speilberg portrays Schindler in his movie? How are these two men using history to make a point? How do their views (Speilberg and Hecht's) differ from one and other?
 - How does the author feel Jews are being educated about their history? What problems does he feel this view of history causes?
 - How does the author think Jewish history should be taught? Why?
 - How is the author using history to make decisions about the future?

- **American Jewish Hall of Fame**

Have students choose a person from American Jewish history who they think should be nominated for the American Jewish Hall of fame (you may want to generate a list). Then have students write a 1-2 page biography on the person explaining who this person was, what he/she did, and why he/she is deserving of a spot in the American Jewish Hall of fame. The student should also artistically represent the person and his/her life's work.

TEACHER RESOURCES:

Bershtel, Sara and Allen Graubard *Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America* The Free Press © 1992 (recommended selections included)

Hertzberg, Arthur *The Jews: Four Centuries on an Uneasy Encounter* Simon and Schuster © 1989, Chapter 20 and Conclusion

Holtz, Barry W. and Steven Bayme *Why Be Jewish* American Jewish Congress ©1994

Sachar, Howard M. *A History of Jews in America* Vinatage Books © 1992, Afterward

Wertheimer, Jack *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* Basic Books © 1993, Chapter 9 and Conclusion

Source Materials

When Will Jews Let It Rest?



'Schindler's List' sanctifies an amoral war profiteer; this is the last straw in the obsession with victimization.

By ELI HECHT

For the life of me I can't understand what possessed Steven Spielberg to make "Schindler's List," to glorify a latter-day Robin Hood who profited at the expense of Polish Jewry.

In brief, this is Oskar Schindler, as depicted in the film, which, being shot almost completely in black and white, conveys the impression of a documentary: Schindler, a failed German businessman, goes to Krakow in 1939 to make his fortune as a supplier of the German army. He takes over a factory that the Nazis have appropriated from the Jewish owners. He persuades Krakow Jews, whose bank accounts are being frozen, to provide him with the capital he needs to start the manufacture of cookware; since they can't own money, he pays them back in pots and pans. He hires Jews because they are cheaper than Poles. He ingratiates himself with the most vile of the Nazi Establishment to keep his contracts—and his obscene profits—growing.

In his personal life, too, Oskar Schindler is less than heroic, to put it mildly. He indulges in every excess of vanity and sensuality. With a wife back home, he keeps a mistress in Krakow while maintaining a years-long affair with his secretary. He lives like a prince (in a home expropriated from Jews), wears the finest silk suits and jewelry, drives—or is chauffeured—in the most luxurious cars.

All that he has is afforded by the round-the-clock labor of Jews, his virtual slaves. I would call it "Swindler's List."

As the movie evolves, Schindler decides to help "his" Jews for one of two reasons: because man also has a soul and he will have to give an accounting to G-d after death; or that he play G-d by saving his worker-victims from the Nazi ovens and make even more profit. We really never know.

In the end—and this I find incredible, almost blasphemous—Jews anoint him a *tzadik*, a righteous person of great rarity, sending the message: No matter how evil man is, he can change. I don't think so. Let me explain.

I was a fifth-generation American growing up in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn in the 1950s. With survivors of the Holocaust all around, it was like living in the Twilight Zone. The butcher had a tattoo number from the Nazi camps, as did the baker and the teacher.

Almost everyone had a number. I thought that when you came from Europe you received a number on your hand together with your passport.

I can remember visiting a family and being told by the woman, "How lucky you are, *yingela*, sonny-boy, that you have a father, a mother, a brother, a sister, uncles, aunts

and even grandparents. The only thing I have left from Germany is this!" She shoved her hand with the blue tattoo in front of me.

My teacher, a survivor of the camps, often would start to cry, thinking of the suffering he and his family had experienced. Many of my classmates were from second marriages, with half-brothers and -sisters 10 or 15 years older. Either their father's or mother's first spouse had been killed and the survivor had remarried.

In almost every household I visited, the fear of death and persecution persisted. There was hardly a holiday or happy occasion that didn't end in a funeral speech for the family members

'If for a moment you think there is a moral lesson to be learned from "Schindler's List," tell it to E.T.'

who weren't there. At parties for newborn babies or Bar Mitzvahs, there was always talk about a dead or martyred relative for whom the child was named.

At times I felt like a victim myself for having been born free, healthy and safe in rich America. Survivors of the Holocaust would point to me and say, "Look at this American! How old are you?" I would state my age. "Yes, that's how old my son would be, but he was killed in the camp." Others would ask, "How many brothers or sisters do you have?" After I answered, they would say, "Lucky you! Mine were killed before their Bar Mitzvah age." I became very sensitive to their cries of misery and untold misfortune.

With this in mind, I am wondering why Jews in Hollywood are singing the praises of "Schindler's List" and its sanctifying of Oskar Schindler. He should be shown for what he was, a war profiteer, an opportunist, a carpetbagger of the worst kind, and not a "righteous Gentile." Why did he make an effort to save Jews near the end of the war? Was it because he knew that Germany was losing and wanted to have some Jews on his side? Was it because he wanted to outsmart the Germans, or establish him-

self as a more superior Aryan than the other Germans? What moral awakening occurred in this man driven to play G-d? I really don't care to know. He went to his grave with the answer.

I understand that for many Jews this film is a sacred cow and nothing bad should be said about it, just as the museums of the Holocaust are considered beyond criticism. However, truly speaking, for young Jewish Americans, these films and museums add nothing but fear. The message is that the world is never a safe place for Jews.

Throughout Jewish history there have been untold catastrophes. Beginning with the enslavement in Egypt, millions of Jewish brothers and sisters were sacrificed; millions more were dispersed; all that they put into building new lives in the diaspora was lost, again and again. Yet there never was a need for museums.

I am sick and tired of this generation identifying Judaism with suffering. Why is it imperative for our children and young people to visit Holocaust museums? Why do they need to hear lectures about skinheads and neo-Nazis and growing anti-Semitism? Why should they see every film about the Holocaust, always portraying Jews as victims running for their lives?

I know what I am talking about. I may not make movies, but I run a school for children. What we should be doing is teaching the richness and everlasting greatness of our noble religion and not the negative experiences.

It is preposterous to think that an American filmmaker can help preserve Judaism by showing a most horrific and pitiful scene of naked Jewish women huddled in the gas chamber. This doesn't make better Jews, just better-selling movies. If for a moment you think that there is a moral lesson to be learned from "Schindler's List," tell it to E.T.

These movies, museums and displays only cause more pain. There is no enlightenment to be gained from seeing Jews as victims over and over again. If anything, it gives Jewish young adults further reason to think they should assimilate. "Why be Jewish?" they ask after viewing such material.

"Schindler's List" is expected to make millions for its producers. If only this money were channeled into building Jewish schools and rehabilitating the children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims, then it would make some sense.

What is sincerely needed is a commitment to end all negative portrayals of Jews. What is needed is for Jews, first of all, to say to Steven Spielberg and anyone else tempted to present Jews as victims: and call it entertainment. *Day-eno! Enough!*

Rabbi Eli Hecht is past president of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Saving Remnants

And the remnant that is escaped of the House of Judah shall again take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards: for out of Jerusalem shall a remnant go out, and they that escape out of Mount Zion: the zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this.

—Isaiah, 37:31,32

Two American Jews, immigrants long ago and now thoroughly assimilated, meet on the street in New York.

“So,” says one, “what remains to you of being Jewish?”

“I still drink tea from a glass,” replies the other. “What about you?”

“I’m still afraid of dogs.”

—Jewish joke

Saving Remnants

Feeling Jewish in America

Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard



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Assimilation, the American Way

Being unaffiliated certainly does not preclude strong and prideful assertions of Jewish identification by contemporary Americans. The expressions of such identification are as varied as the individuals themselves. Michael Stone,* a New York-based motion picture production manager in his early forties, is married and the father of a young son. Jewish concerns affect his political views, social relations, image of family, intimate commitments, even his sense of physical security. If not actually obsessed with Jewishness, he is emotionally involved with the issue to a striking degree.

“Fear and Pride”

The Six-Day War was a catalyst for what is now my paranoid and proud split feeling about Jewishness. The '67 War is the first Israeli war that I remember. I was aware that this time Israel could have gone out of existence. I had never been a Zionist. I'd never been actively interested in Israel. This changed after 1967. I didn't go around shaking my friends who were less concerned, who just didn't care. But I was profoundly affected by it. I read books on the founding of Israel, which means something since I'm not a great reader. I also read books on the Holocaust, and I sent

*Pseudonym.

money to Israel. I knew people who went down to the embassy and went to Israel, and I was tempted.

I identified a lot with Israel at that particular time. And I am very suspicious of that feeling. I see it almost exclusively in psychoanalytic terms, as a neurotic reaction, paranoia mostly. This was the biggest threat toward the most Jews anywhere in the world, and, as I saw it, it happened largely *because* they were Jewish. There were lots of other reasons for the war, I know, but to me, it was because they were Jewish. I felt threatened by the war.

It's true that the idea of threat, of vulnerability, was the major content of being Jewish when I was growing up. I don't remember specifically being sat down and told, "The Holocaust happened and you're Jewish, so you'll always be threatened in some way." But I grew up with a very strong sense of that. My grandmother told me stories of being a child in Russia and seeing the cossacks come through her town and literally cut off people's heads with swords. She came to America after a pogrom in 1903, I think. And she told me that story a thousand times. I felt the threat as a kid even though I lived in Scarsdale. Once, at an ice-skating rink in Rye, I got beat up, and the theme was that I was a "kike." I was seven or eight. It was a little scary, but it wasn't really a big deal.

I have a rifle now—and people are appalled that anyone who is intelligent and liberal would have a rifle—and I'm going to Vermont next week essentially to master it and become very good at using it, and I'm going to buy some pistols, and bury the pistols and ammunition. I am comfortable enough with how weird that seems, although I can imagine what my analyst would say. And I would absolutely consciously use those guns to defend myself and my family. I wouldn't hesitate to shoot people who were coming after Jews, if that happened again. Which is, I think, a highly neurotic fear, and yet I'm comfortable with it. It's not that likely. It is even highly unlikely. But the fact that the possibility exists at all means somebody—me—should do something about it.

The other half of feeling threatened as a Jew is feeling some justifiable, rich pride in being Jewish. My parents always made it clear that there was a disproportionate contribution in the sciences and arts and letters from Jews. I knew at a young age that Einstein was Jewish. It was good to be Jewish, to belong to that group, to be hardworking and productive.

I find myself very surprised now that I want to know right away, Is this person Jewish? And I think, How fucked up. I'm like my

grandmother. She'd see somebody on TV: "Gabe Pressman, he's a Jew," she would call out. I like working with Jews. I do feel an instant connection to people who are Jewish. I think ultimately there is a bond among Jews.

For five years I lived with a non-Jewish woman. Her father, a German Jew, came from a family so well established and wealthy that the fact that they were Jewish hardly crossed their minds. He married a Lutheran German woman whose brother-in-law died in Hitler's army. She fled with him, and they escaped through France and came here and changed their name, and became Unitarians. The father, as a result of fleeing Hitler, completely turned his back on anything Jewish and did his best to be American, to be German, to be anything but Jewish.

When I fell in love with this woman, I would get very confused by the German thing. She wasn't just Christian, she was German. There was nothing Jewish about her whatsoever. I listened to more German during those five years—the German language is definitely creepy to me, and I hate listening to it. I am amazed at the intensity of my reaction; I can't stand listening to German. Anyway, the relationship came to a point where either we were going to get married or it would end. I knew it wasn't right. Part of it was that there was this fundamental lack of trust, this missing shared identity. It wasn't really a matter of attitude. She wasn't totally sympathetic to the plight of Israel, but more so than most of my radical friends, who *were* Jewish. And it wasn't a matter of observance. I certainly don't observe anything.

In fact, except for funerals, I haven't set foot in a temple for fifteen years. And before that there wasn't much either. I went to Hebrew school for three years to have a Reform bar mitzvah. I had no choice about that. But after that, there was a choice, and I stopped right away. I hated Hebrew school; it wasn't special, like sports or wrestling practice, and it wasn't fun, and my family in no way reinforced it as a value. My parents felt the obligation to send me, for the grandparents. Both my grandmothers kept kosher homes, the Sabbath, candles, everything. But we rarely went to their houses for holidays or anything like that. My mother rejected all observance. Both my parents understood Yiddish, yet neither ever spoke it to the other. My mother had a very strong Jewish identity, but no religious identity whatsoever. I know if I took a quiz I would probably get in the bottom tenth percentile of right answers about basic Jewish observance.

So what divided me from my girlfriend wasn't observance, certainly. Or even the absence of paranoia, though she certainly felt none of that. All of her lovers had been Jewish. That was no problem for her. She didn't believe any Christian things. Her whole shtick was the California feeling thing. Modern American. She was really assimilated. I can't be terribly articulate about what was missing between the two of us. I felt strongly that I was a Jew. She clearly wasn't. She resented tremendously my even raising these feelings. If we went to see a film about Jews—I remember we went to see *Night and Fog*, a great date—I could count on our getting into an argument, a displaced argument about how she was dressed or why I was late. I would be very affected by the movie; she would be very defensive and not so affected by the movie. Then, at one point, I asked her whether she would convert if we were going to get married. I actually asked her! I was surprised to hear the words come out of my mouth. Very surprised. What a provocative, almost hostile thing to say to her. And that really was the end of the relationship. Because she said, "Absolutely not!" And she was insulted that she wasn't good enough the way she was. The problem was basic: I was saying, "I'm a Jew, it's important to me, and on some level, she could never share it. Though the "it," she shared "it," the content of the "it" that's so important—that's what I can't define. In a sense, even if she had said yes, it wouldn't have made her Jewish. It wouldn't have solved anything. Because, in fact, there wasn't anything she could convert to that was Jewish in my sense. She would have converted, we would have gotten married, and we would have been divorced in a year. It would have been an exercise in futility.

When I met Jeanie, my wife, I thought it was great that she came from a more Jewish home than I did. We had an Orthodox marriage ceremony. She said if we were going to get married, then it should be civil or Orthodox, either was fine with her, but there was nothing else, because if it's not Orthodox, then basically it's not Jewish. I was in the position of having to assemble ten men who knew their Jewish names, which was no small problem. And I had to memorize a passage in Hebrew, which was like classical Greek to me. It was very awkward. Still, I ended up feeling very good about the whole thing. I liked it because it was authentic and serious and real.

I wish we did more. I had thought that maybe we would run some modified Jewish home, which for me would be a heightening

of observance. Well, Jeanie's not interested in that at all. She came out of a rigorous Jewish home, and it was a matter of either embracing it or rejecting it—and she rejected it. My own background was so much more watered down, there wasn't much to reject, so I'm sort of stuck in the middle. Jeanie refuses to romanticize Jews—Israelis, grandparents, Orthodox rabbis, any Jews. I automatically give extra points to people if they're Jewish; she takes points away. In fact, I'm lucky to be her husband. I feel I'd have a much less confused relationship to Judaism if I had been born into that world, if Orthodoxy had been closer and I had rejected it cleanly. I would have listened to all of the Yiddish; I would have been involved in the life, the culture; I would have been oppressed by the religion. I would have rejected all of it. Without the generation of my parents between me and that world, I'd have a much clearer idea of where I stand.

I am romantic about it, I'm sure. A high point of my life, and not just professionally, was our re-creation of the Lower East Side for a film I worked on. All the stills that you see about Jewish life on the Lower East Side, we made them move. This is what it must have been like when my grandparents went to community banquets at Beethoven Hall on Second Avenue. Of course, I wasn't able to read the street signs and the Yiddish lettering, but I knew they were authentic. And I loved it. I yearned for it. I had no trouble getting up at four in the morning to work on the set. Not that I would exchange my life now for that. I know the problems were overwhelming—it was dirty, it was crowded, it was poor, it was oppressive. But it was perfect for me: like stepping into a still photograph every morning, then going home every night.

I've heard of groups of people meeting to learn more about Judaism. I have friends who have been in groups like that. But I can't see myself there. I guess I don't want it enough. The truth is, I'd probably study Italian—we're planning to go to Italy—before I'd study Judaism. Partly, I suppose it's that I don't really have religious feelings. I don't believe in God, so that's a problem. It is the underlying problem. To learn the blessings and light the candles and all that if one doesn't believe in God seems just like putting on a costume, nothing more. The inner thing has to be belief. I know there are people who think rituals do some good, independent of any faith. I don't think so. I guess all this means I'm assimilated, but I don't really like to admit it.

So I'll probably end up wanting to push some lame thing on our

children in terms of their Jewish education, something not far from what my parents did to me. I'll take the kids aside to talk. They'll grow up with a sense of Jewishness, a sense of some justifiable fear and pride. I'll tell them about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust and the vulnerability of the Jews. It is part of the survival indoctrination of children to know that they are particularly vulnerable because they are Jews. And Jeanie will cook Jewish food sometimes and tell stories about our grandparents. But, in truth, our children will have even fewer opportunities for observance than I did. My mother, after all, will be their grandmother. They will never ever hear her speak Yiddish. And maybe they'll totally reject my vision of pride and fear. I feel strongly that I am Jewish, and my kids will have a less strong feeling of that, and I think in the generation beyond there will be none. They'll say, "Yeah, my grandparents were Jewish." It will be a fact of birth, nothing more than that. I anticipate being sad about it.

And then again, maybe all that's lost are some feelings that are so tied up with my own personal psychology that they just may have nothing to do with the next generation. They might feel a lot less paranoid; that would be a gain. It is a burden for me. Having guns is not such a terrific thing.

Leslie Epstein offers a more cheerful version of Jewish identification. A well-known and respected novelist in his early fifties who teaches writing at Boston University, Epstein is married, with three children. After growing up in Hollywood (his father and uncle wrote the screenplays for *Casablanca*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, and other classic films), Epstein achieved literary fame with his novel *King of the Jews*, a modernist, black-humor tale about the bizarre leader of the Jewish Council in one of the ghettos set up by the Nazis. For Epstein, the thinking that went into the book was connected to his own reflections about being Jewish and what it meant to him.

"*Mozart Was Jewish*"

Being a Jew in Los Angeles was very different from being a Jew in New York. In L.A., the sun was shining and nothing had anything to do with Judaism. I was a Hollywood brat, and I grew up with Christmas trees. We did occasionally go to my grandparents'

house for Seder. It was the typical scene with all the eight- and nine-year-old cousins running around, and people dipping their fingers in the wine and that was it. I also went to Sunday school for a while, but got thrown out. I can still sing a snatch of a song or two. But basically I preferred playing tennis. My parents didn't mind when I stopped going—they were happy not to have to drive me there. My parents had been given the typical strict upbringing, and they broke free and said, The hell with it, we're not putting our kids through that. They were the second generation. And I'm the typical third-generation Jew, groping his way back to what he never had—no roots, no knowledge, nothing to be proud of, nothing to offer up as my own. I was a Christmas-tree and Easter-egg boy who felt something was missing, and so I felt compelled to discover it. World War II broke out a year after I was born. The distance in time and space, in atmosphere and spirit, between the events in Europe and my life in America pushed me to write about the war, the Holocaust specifically. I was Jewish; I had to deal with it. I sprang toward this material at a very young age. Even as a fourteen-year-old, I was writing a story about Hitler. And the impulse that lay behind *King of the Jews* is that attempt to fill in the empty spaces of my knowledge and experience. Because I didn't know it directly in my life, I felt the need to counter it, to confront it.

The barriers raised against my Jewishness gave way very gradually. I used to spend a lot of time driving around on Hollywood Boulevard with friends. After a while, it wasn't O'Reilly and Hockenberry in the car with me; it was Fox and Rosenkrantz and Mosk. Once, at Yale, a bunch of us were sitting around a table and there was a guy there who tried to pretend he was black, he was so afraid of being Jewish. At some point, one guy said, "Well, there's no one at the table but us Jews," and this other guy turned deep red. He thought he'd been fooling people all this time. I can still remember that moment now, thirty years later. I kind of liked him saying that. I liked being included at that table.

The real change happened while I was at Oxford, of all places. It was in part the influence of other Americans there. So many were East Coast Jews. They were so secure about it. I wanted to be like them. But more, I think, it was simply that the time had come. I'm not a Jungian, but maybe there is a collective Jewish unconscious, some genetic program, that surfaced then. I knew this one guy who used to sit around the pub where we ate lunch¹ and one day

he said only half-jokingly that if he ever had a sabbatical, he would devote it to proving that Mozart was Jewish. That stuck in my mind for eight years, and I eventually wrote a story about this little old man who had spent his whole life, from the time of his youth in Romania to his old age on New York's Lower East Side, proving just that. The evidence is impressive! I'm entirely in sympathy with the character.

When the dam broke, I became insufferable. I got this book with lists, like "Jews in music." It's pathetic. The big three: Mozart, Meyerbeer, and Mendelssohn. Jewish pitcher? Sandy Koufax. Sid Luckman? He was a Jew. I loved this poem about Hank Greenberg. He was playing for the Detroit Tigers, hitting fifty-seven, fifty-eight home runs, and Detroit was in the pennant race. Came the big day, Yom Kippur, and Greenberg refused to play, jeopardizing both the pennant and his chance for the home-run record. Edgar Guest, I think, wrote the poem, and the refrain is: "We shall miss him in the outfield/We shall miss him at the bat/But he's true to his religion/And we honor him for that."

Plus I went to Israel. In fact, on the boat there I met a German girl, and we were together for four years. She even came to America to live with me. She was going to Israel for all kinds of complicated reasons. Her father was a Communist and an anti-Nazi, but he was drafted. There were pictures of him in uniform. She would weep over that, she would weep over the Holocaust, and somehow that history brought us together. It was crucial to both of our identities. I don't think you can be Jewish and not feel that the center of things is the Holocaust. I think it will prove to be to Judaism just what the Exodus was. And I'm convinced that in another couple of thousand years it will be remembered in the same way. But as much as I admire the Jews for groping for a way of incorporating the Holocaust into Judaism, ultimately I feel the Holocaust belongs to the whole world. That if it makes any claims on us, it does so on all of us. The Jews are the paradigm of what could happen to everybody. And their experience exposes what everyone is capable of. I really dislike people saying things like "We should do more, go to temple more, because of the Holocaust." The Holocaust does make some claim on us, but it's not on the level of synagogue attendance.

In some crazy way, not formally, I've come to feel intensely Jewish.

My wife is Jewish, but that wasn't a factor in our marrying. I

wouldn't have cared if I had married a Catholic. I don't know if she ever went to Sunday school. We never talk about it. We were married in city hall. I don't go to synagogue. I've been to a fair number of them, to give talks about my book, and I was dismayed by the rabbis. They were so mediocre. But beyond that, I'm just not drawn to religion. I was walking near the Boston Common while ago, and this guy came right up to me and said, "You Jewish?" I drew the line; I'm not hiding anymore! So I said, "Yes." He tells me to take this lemon and hold this twig* and follow him into his mobile van. He says: "Say this after me. . . . You speak Hebrew? No? So say this after me. . . ." And I did it. I guess I was charmed. I think religious people are crazy, but charmingly crazy.

I've seen Orthodox children. Through the windows of the apartment we lived in on the Upper West Side, I'd see these poor pale kids pathetically trying to play handball and missing by about three feet, and they'd look up with their little pale faces. I was moved by them. That could have been me, I would think. I know everyone claims to be from a long list of rabbis in the old country; I do, too. I have this photo of the rabbis in my family, and I think, had the world gone differently, I would have been one of these kids with the *peyes* [earlocks] and the pale faces and unable to catch a ball. But I have to admit that I prefer Hank Greenberg. My wife feels this much more than I do—she feels "Yech," and I get angry at her for saying "Yech," but I also feel contempt for their awkwardness and paleness. They're very sad. They don't have a childhood. They're missing so much—a childhood, sports, America. I would have been very upset if my kids had chosen that. No, I suppose I am assimilated, rebelliously. For me, what it comes down to is some tribal thing. I feel comfortable around other Jews. It's for this tribal reason too that I suppose I would feel a twinge if my daughter married—as she probably will—a non-Jewish person. Judaism has been around for thousands of years. The thread has gone on for so long, has been woven into such a marvelous tapestry, been almost lost so often. What a shame for it to end.

Our children were raised a little more Jewish than I was. We always had a Christmas tree. Christmas is a fabulous thing for kids; I remember presents piled up under the tree. I'm not going to take

*The citron and palm branch used in the ritual celebration of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles.

something so beautiful away from them. But we also started having a little Hanukkah celebration. I'd read from a book about the holiday to the children, and they'd listen patiently. We also had Thanksgiving. And we used to have Easter—though that was downplayed a bit. We had a chocolate-Easter-egg hunt, but the resurrection of Christ we stayed away from. Mainly, I tried to make a point of bringing up the fact that they're Jewish. We'd get out of the car and I'd say something like "All right, Jews, pile out." The kids had friends who were more actively Jewish, who went to Sunday school, but they always said it wasn't for them. They saw that these kids were miserable, forced to go by their families. I wasn't going to do that. But who knows what the fourth or fifth generation will be like? I believe in this strange historical-genetic process. Something will work out.

I think *King of the Jews* was a contribution to awareness and continuity. After I finished it, I thought I was done with being a professional Jew, a "Jewish" writer. The result was that my next book, *Pinto and Sons*, took eleven years, and began to take off only when I discovered that the main character was a Jew. In fact it began to write itself only when I let him tell it in his own voice—which turns out to be a lot like mine. And not just the voice, but the themes—mainly about the fate of Indians in California—are the same: destruction and betrayal. I'm a Diaspora Jew, and I'm interested in endings.

Author Paul Berman offers an exceptionally creative example of Jewish identification. In his early forties, he lives in New York and writes regularly on history, literature, and politics for the *Village Voice*, *Dissent*, *Tikkun*, and other journals. But for a time he was also a contemporary version of a figure straight out of the Lower East Side "world of our fathers" so central to Jewish-American nostalgia.

"A Yiddish Journalist"

Like a lot of kids who are intellectual, or maybe like all kids, I grew up feeling like an oddball. I was crazy for reading and ideas. I had political passions. Other kids were interested in these things, too, but maybe not so much as me. And I used to wonder what made me different. I went through all the answers—being a

unattractive Jewish features, like dark curly hair or big noses." Klein noted that after undergoing ethnotherapy, a significant number of her clients were able to feel "more comfortable" with their Jewishness. The evidence of their progress was that they were dating Jews for the first time, joining Jewish organizations, or becoming active in political causes that involved specifically Jewish concerns. "Anytime that people move from a passive to an active stance," Klein concluded, "it breeds higher self-esteem. That's what the groups are all about."

Jeremy Block* was born in Baltimore in 1940, and moved to California when he was a boy. A veterinarian, he lives with his wife in San Francisco. He recalls having felt deeply ambivalent about being Jewish throughout his life.

"My Parents Are, But . . ."

There was a period when I would not have said I was Jewish, but by the time I was in my late twenties, if it came up, I just said "Yes," and didn't explain. I went from "No, I'm not" to "My parents are, but . . ." to just saying "Yes." Over time, I started to feel Jewish. I felt Jewish, but confused. Before I started in the ethnotherapy group, there was the feeling of not being comfortable about being Jewish, somehow not feeling right. I became aware of wanting more contact with things Jewish. I've always felt like an outsider.

My family was ethnic Jewish, agnostic. My grandmother used Yiddish words, I remember. My mother's family also used Yiddish expressions, told jokes. There were occasional Seder's, but at other people's houses. I've always felt antireligious and antiritual, and I still do. After my mother and I finally settled in Hollywood, she got me to go to the Reform temple for a year to get confirmed. I was already fourteen and hadn't been bar mitzvahed.

My wife is an artist. I met her at UCLA twenty-three years ago—we're still married. She came from a farm in Iowa, Midwestern, very American. "You ain't got no ethnic," I tell her. She was transferring to Berkeley, so I got a job as a vet there, and we've lived in the Bay area ever since.

Sometime in the early 1980s, I heard about ethnotherapy and

*Pseudonym.

went to a lecture by Judith Klein, where she talked about her thesis work and showed a video about the groups she ran. She talked about Chicanos and Asians and how every ethnic group has similar problems about their ethnicity, not just Jews. I gave her my name, and months later I got a notice about a group being organized. I went to the first meeting where there were about ten or twelve people. I remember being amazed at how WASP-looking half of them were, with names to match, like “Ross.” We talked about that.

At the first meeting, people would say why they were there. Mostly there was stuff about confusion, a sense of lacking and loss, with some saying they wanted to be more a part of a Jewish community. The leaders asked “What is a Jew?” and we went around and answered, and there was a whole list of things like “hard to get along with,” “being good fathers,” “being emotional,” things like that. After going around, Judith pointed out that no one had said “a fighter.” Then people talked about what being Jewish meant to them. It was validating to hear how other people were feeling confused. I remember, at an all-day session near the end of the group, Judy was looking at all the food. She said she remembered that when she had done some event with a gentile woman and she had been looking at all the food, the other woman said, “Don’t worry, it will all get eaten.” She then said, “That’s the gentile way of looking at it; the Jewish way is to worry whether there will be enough.”

In the day-long session, one of the exercises we did was to stand up in front of the group, say “I am a Jew,” and then say whatever came to mind, and then repeat “I am a Jew,” and whatever else, over and over. When I did it, to my utter shock, from God knows where, I ended up crouched behind a chair, with my hand making like a gun, saying, “I am a Jew, and if you try to hurt me because of that, I’ll kill you.” I listened to myself saying that, and I thought, This is really strange. Maybe it was part of my sense of being an outsider—which is partly Jeremy and partly being a Jew.

I remember that when the group was singing “Hava Nagila,” I went into the kitchen, and the guy who was the group’s co-leader came in and pulled me over to the group, which was all right. It was just that I don’t like that kind of ritual, like I don’t like sitting around the campfire singing campfire songs. I don’t like ceremonies. I don’t celebrate my birthday, or Christmas. I don’t like religion, but I think I have less antipathy toward Judaism than

other religions, because I understand more about the historical things now.

The summing up was about what you got out of the group and what you were going to do with what you got, about feeling better and more comfortable about being Jewish. I said I wasn’t sure what to do or where to go, and I went over all the things I didn’t want, like the rituals and the religion, and I even asked “Does anyone have any suggestions?” and one of the guys said, “You want a Jewish volleyball team.”

A couple of years ago, I learned about something called the Society for Humanistic Judaism and I thought, This is for me, and I went to a lecture and to a couple of their events, like a picnic. But even this was still too much about religion and rituals. I think my desire for the Jewish thing is part of my desire for a group bigger than myself. I don’t belong to any groups or movements.

What I came to after the group was that I was going to acknowledge more consciously that I was Jewish, with my Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Like I would use a Jewish word, or tell a Jewish joke and explain it to my non-Jewish staff, or say to a non-Jewish friend, “Pretty good for a gentile”—things like that. I did join the local Jewish community center, but I only went to a play there, and to a lecture, which was a report about politics in Central America. And I did become a member of an organization called American Veterinarians for Israel, which really exists, and I actually went to Israel a few years ago. My wife was in Italy and we arranged to meet in Israel. I expected a kind of Jewish *gemütlichkeit*, or Jewishkeit. I said I would let myself be open to the rush of Jewish experience. But I didn’t feel that at all. I thought I was in a Levantine country, Middle Eastern, and the tension was palpable—I would never want to live there.

I talked the group up a lot, to all my Jewish friends, and they all said it sounded interesting, but none of them took me up on it. I think that it helped me feel more that there is something like a shared common experience of being Jewish, though I can’t really explain what this is. But for an illustration, this insurance guy came to see me, and he was a Jew, and I knew he was a Jew, though he didn’t say it and he didn’t trade on that, and I thought, If I’m going to do business with an insurance agent who I don’t know, I’ll do it with him. Part of me said, I trust this guy, he wouldn’t cheat me. Now intellectually, I knew this was silly. Still, if someone came to my door and said, “Help me, I’m Jewish, and I

saw you had a Jewish name," I think I would help him. . . . Don't tell anyone I said this. The more a person is like me, the more I'm likely to help him.

When Jeremy Block was infected with what he has learned to call self-hatred, he had no involvement in the Jewish community; now that he has been cured, he still has no involvement—though he does occasionally tell Jewish jokes. Apparently, for him there is no serious tension between his previous life and a new Jewish identification.

And why should there be? The fact that an American Jew today has many non-Jewish friends, dates and marries a non-Jew, and is uninvolved and uninterested in Jewish community affairs should not be taken to imply a pathological condition for which the recommended therapy is becoming "more" Jewish. While self-hatred could plausibly explain certain behaviors of a self-hating individual ("tending to date non-Jews," "avoiding Jewish organizations and traditional holiday observances"), such behavior in a given individual does not—particularly in the present-day American context—provide a basis for ascribing self-hatred. Although a self-hating Jew would definitely display behavior of this sort, a contented and even proudly identified Jew can, as Block does, show the very same characteristics—not joining Jewish groups, marrying a gentle woman—but not for the same reasons, and not with the same meanings.

Ethnotherapy makes a strong claim: That a proud and open commitment to Jewish identification is the path to psychic health for unaffiliated American Jews. That Jews who are deeply engaged in Jewish culture and religion, who gain joyful and satisfying experiences from their Jewish identification, who are knowledgeable and well integrated in a Jewish community, will be much healthier psychologically than assimilated Jews, for whom Jewish identity is by definition problematic. As Irving Levine of the American Jewish Committee said while a guest with Judith Klein and two other ethnotherapists (of non-Jewish ethnicities) on the Phil Donahue show, "It isn't a question of chauvinism or whatever: it is a question of good mental health."

Levine, we suggest, was being somewhat disingenuous. It may not be "chauvinism" that is in question, but the worry of all Jewish organizations about the growing trend toward disaffiliation

must be part of the reason for the American Jewish Committee's support for Klein's kind of therapy. Given the low levels of knowledge of and interest in Judaism as a religion or a cultural heritage among the unaffiliated, it is understandable that Jewish-community professionals should grasp at that most modernist of the therapeutic approach, psychic discomfort may be traced back to problems in self-image, which, whatever else goes into its construction, certainly includes one's ethnic, racial, religious, regional, and class backgrounds. Being Jewish could not fail to have some meaning for an American Jew. But to make ethnic assertion—the stronger, the better—a crucial sign of mental health is a highly ideological claim with little empirical or theoretical support.

The traditional self-hatred perspective simultaneously overrates the peril of being Jewish in contemporary America and underrates the scope of positive self-images available to Jews today. Even unaffiliated American Jews who know very little about Judaism, Jewish culture, or the Jewish community are aware of the favorable stereotypes about Jewish character—Jews are smart, sensual, responsible, clever, and so on—commonly found in the broader cultural milieu, which is to say, in the books, movies, and TV shows that are shared by all Americans. In ethnotherapy's own terms, such positive notions of Jewishness should provide psychic supports for personal self-esteem powerful enough to complicate the theoretical dynamics of classic Jewish self-hatred.

Janet Freed* is a magazine editor in her late twenties. Though apparently in need of some powerful ethnotherapy, she in fact offers a striking illustration of just how complicated those dynamics have now become.

"Half-Jewish"

In the last three weeks, I've all of a sudden become Jewish. I got an invitation to a lecture at the Anti-Defamation League. And for some reason I thought, I'm going to do this.

I grew up without much Jewish identity. My parents both came from Brooklyn, what they would refer to as a "Jewish ghetto." And they definitely wanted out of that. Wherever they lived—in

*Pseudonym.

The Community

The passage of the Jew into American life is a saga of the deepest human experience. It afforded dignity and safety and psychological space to a homeless, embattled people who had been strangers in many lands for much of their history. . . . The Jew spans the whole of American experience, sharing the marvelous incongruity of each citizen: his pride in his origins, his success as an American, and his simultaneous worship of Jehovah, Lincoln, and Babe Ruth.

—Stanley Feldstein, *The Land That I Show You: Three Centuries of Jewish Life in America* (1978)

actual content of Jewish texts and doctrine, the feeling of a basic superiority to an ineradicably anti-Semitic "other" can be powerfully active in binding individuals to the community.

Arlene Segal* is a good example of almost undiluted Jewish ethnicity of this sort. A nurse, with a husband and teenage daughter, she is in her mid-forties and has lived in New York all her life.

"Jewish Culture Is Unique"

Last year, my daughter, Ann, went out with a boy who was a Syrian Jew who had moved to the United States and had gone to a yeshiva. They went to a ball game, and at the game they got into a conversation, and he said he didn't think he would feel funny about marrying out of the Jewish religion. And that made Ann make up her mind never to see him again. I was glad she did this because it says to me that Ann likes who she is, and is proud of who she is. I like the fact that she is comfortable with her Jewishness, that she asserts it and doesn't hide it. She said that she didn't respect him. She just didn't know how anybody who knows what it is to be Jewish could consider doing that. Because then you assimilate, the Jews dilute, die out. And that's bad.

I was born after the war, but I always identified with the Jews in the concentration camps. What I identified with particularly was their resilience and their . . . survivability, if there's such a word, their transcendence, their staying power. And that's been a sustaining theme in my own life in small ways, and in large ways. What's strong about me, what's secure about me, has roots in my Jewishness.

I like who I am. I feel comfortable in my own skin, and I like that I'm assertive and have confidence in myself. In a society which doesn't particularly like Jews, either you can get very defensive and shrink because you don't want to make waves, or you can be the opposite. And I've become the opposite. I have contempt for apologetic, defensive Jews, for those who consider it a great accomplishment to have gentile friends, to feel that they "belong." I feel self-conscious saying this, but I really think that Jews are superior. That has certainly been my experience—in the people I've met, and also in the disproportionate contributions

*Pseudonym.

Jews have made to civilization. Names like Jesus, Marx, Freud, Einstein, Brandeis, Salk, Levi-Strauss—the whole ethic of Judaism is to contribute. I think it's a function of their Jewishness that these people have made these contributions, because that's the way Jews are raised—to value the intellect, to value contribution.

I do think it's hard to be Jewish. I have the deepest feeling that people don't like Jews. It's not just paranoia. At the hospital I worked at, I was constantly confronted with what I knew to be sometimes subtle, sometimes not-so-subtle, forms of anti-Semitism. For instance, if a woman was in labor and she was complaining, she was referred to as "Oh, you know that type from the Island," which was code for "Jewish." And when the holiday season came around, and every single crack in the wall was filled with a Christmas bell, or a Christmas tree, or a Christmas something, I wanted to put up some of the symbols of Hanukkah. Well, those were relegated to a small corner. I mean if you're just the slightest bit sensitive, you'll notice anti-Semitism—like in a comment about your name, or a so-called friendly comment about how smart Jews are. And you meet with people and they're telling ethnic jokes and you know the minute you leave the house they're going to tell their Jewish jokes. . . . Of course, I have to admit that I tell ethnic jokes too.

I feel strongly that I'm Jewish. I vote totally according to Jewish issues, and what's best for Israel. I give money to Israel, and for years I've made phone calls for the Federation and UJA to solicit funds for Israel. I admire all the people active in these organizations because they are part of a network that ensures the continuation of the Jewish people. I feel an instant bond with people who are Jewish. If someone came to my door, and said, "Look, I'm Jewish, I need help, take me in"—I would. And if I ever needed help, like in a foreign country, I'd immediately go to a Jew.

But I don't feel the need or the desire to participate in a lot of the rituals of Judaism. I just don't see how they would give me any kind of peace or inner strength. I've gone to synagogue, and I've tried, I've really tried. But I don't get it. We joined the synagogue so Ann could go to Hebrew school. But we don't do much else. Being Jewish in our house is not a very arduous, unpleasant experience. It's more a kind of feeling, a positive identity kind of thing. We have a Passover Seder, but it doesn't have much to do with God or religion. The point is that Jews all over the "world" are sitting down on this night, as they've done throughout history, to

remind themselves of the meaning of Passover—what happened then and what still happens: anti-Semitism, and the desire of the larger society, the world, to deprive the Jews of their rightful freedom.

For me being Jewish is not observance, it's not God, and it's not synagogue; it's being a part of a particular history, a people, a culture. Living a Jewish life might be defined as living by the letter of the Law, like going to synagogue and saying certain prayers and having a kosher home and all those ritualistic things. But I feel living a Jewish life is living by the precepts and values and morals that the Jewish religion propounds: being honest, working hard, contributing. These to me are Jewish things. If I read a newspaper and see that some guy got indicted, I'm always glad if that person's not Jewish, and always pained if he is.

I think the Jewish culture is unique. There would be a terrible void in the universe if the Jews died out. And a large part of this uniqueness is the quality of survival. I guess really its uniqueness is survival. Look at all the other cultures that have died out. The fact that the Jews haven't been destroyed is very important to me, and to my sense of pride. I'm proud that I belong to this group of people who have survived in spite of oppression, persecution, and terrible threat.

Arlene Segal insists that her sense of herself as Jewish is confident and unproblematic. Her Jewish identity is exclusively ethnic; she is not concerned with God or synagogue or observance. Her link is with the people. She feels an instant bond with other Jews and has a Seder to affirm her connection to Jews all over the world and throughout history; she is hypervigilant about signs of anti-Semitism. Above all, she is proud of her group and committed to its survival. But this sense of group, however intensely felt, is not the equivalent of a distinctive ethnic culture. What is usually thought of as the content of a culture—history, language, art, ritual, tradition, philosophical assumptions—these do not draw her attention and commitment. The list of achievers she cites to prove the unique superiority of the Jewish essence is exclusively made up of people who were only marginally Jewish and whose contributions were to world, not Jewish, culture. (To be fair, the list offered by Dimont—who is thought to know a great deal about Jewish culture—is no different. Of the Jewish heroes

he nominates for glory, from Abraham to Einstein, the most recent participant in Jewish community life is Jesus.) Indeed, on closer examination, it turns out that the uniqueness of the Jewish culture, whose disappearance, Arlene Segal says, would cause "a void in the universe," basically consists in its survival.

Arlene Segal's combination of intense loyalty and sparse knowledge captures the general state of popular ethnic feeling among Jews today. The group undeniably exists, but its cultural meaning has been reduced to hardly more than pride in survival and achievement (usually achievement that has little to do with being Jewish), and a conviction, spoken or not, about the superiority of "us" to "them."

Of course, such tribal sentiments are not officially emphasized. In polite and guarded Jewish public discourse, the powerful sense of "us" and "them" is expressed more obliquely in a constant litany of Jewish accomplishment. It is just this self-congratulatory glorification of the group that can disturb thoughtful individuals actively engaged in Jewish life.

Leon Wieseltier, a Jewish scholar and respected literary critic and political writer, strongly supports Jewish group consciousness, and even a politics of Jewish interest. But he finds the *abrightnik* smugness of mainstream Jewish group pride deplorable and ignorant. It is not the thinning out of the culture that draws his criticism—historical forces are not apt subjects for blame—but the refusal of the community to acknowledge the crisis, its preference for inflated pride and defensive boasting over serious engagement: "The most important question to many American Jews is whose is it, ours or theirs? Jewish or non-Jewish? American Jews are very proud that Maimonides was a 'Jewish thinker,' but they don't have a clue about what he thought. Maimonides himself was not proud that he was a 'Jewish thinker,' because he was too much a thinker and too much a Jew to bother with that kind of idiotic pride. American Jews think life can be satisfied by just being Jewish, whatever that means. They admire everything Jewish. Nothing Jewish is foreign to them. Of course, if they knew anything about the Jewish tradition, many things would have to be foreign to them. If *Kabbalah*, and *halachah*, and philosophy, and Spinoza, and Sabbatai Zvi are not foreign to you, then the only thing you see in all of them is that they are Jewish. The traditional Jews who take these things seriously and see that they have some content are the first to admit that a lot that is Jewish is foreign to

Israel has only sharpened. As the prominent Jewish-American political scientist Daniel Elazar put it in 1976:

Israel, both as a state and as the only Jewish country in the world, has become the touchstone of Jewish self-esteem and the measure of Jewish achievement for the world at large. As a result it has acquired an authoritative role in Jewish life that, for the moment at least, is unchallenged. Moreover, as the only place in the world where an authentic Jewish culture can flourish (at least potentially), it exercises an unequalled attraction upon American Jews searching for a meaning in their Jewishness. Even the more peripheral of American Jews are touched by the Jewish authenticity of Israel, while the more committed find the power of Israel in this respect almost irresistible.

The expectation that Israel could stimulate identification, pride, and participation has certainly been borne out. "If a single factor in the self-respect American Jewry does possess can be isolated, it is its pride in the State of Israel and its achievements," writes Rabbi Jacob Neusner. "Zionism lies at the foundation of American Jewry's capacity to affirm its Jewishness." The rebirth of the Hebrew language naturally had a great effect on Jewish cultural life and on Jewish education. Hebrew songs and dances were a rich source of energy and spirit for Jewish youth organizations, not just those that were officially Zionist. High-quality Hebrew teachers' colleges and Hebrew-speaking camps created a network of lively institutions that nourished the current generational elite of American Jewish scholars who now staff the numerous Jewish studies programs in American universities.

But even more than the maintenance of cultural commitment and engagement, the image of a "Golden Age" held out the hope of a Jewish culture and community appealing enough to bring back the Jewish youth who were increasingly drifting away into the larger integrated society.

Beth Greenbaum* is an exemplary model of how Israel has worked its power for the mainstream Jewish community. For them, she is an ideal, a paradigm of what should happen to young Jews in an American Jewish world invigorated and sustained by its

*Pseudonym.

ties to Israel. In her life she expresses just that reversal of the assimilation process for which Jewish-community activists hope and pray. She is an attorney, working as counsel for a major Jewish institution. She grew up in Council Bluffs, Iowa, where the Jewish community numbered only in the hundreds. Although her parents had a fairly strong Jewish consciousness and were involved in community activities, Greenbaum herself did not attend Hebrew school and recalls that she preferred to be with her non-Jewish friends.

"Zionist, Israel-Oriented, Like Me"

When I was a young person back in Council Bluffs, I didn't want to be Jewish. I didn't want to be set apart, to be different. I wanted to go to church and sing in the choir and be like my Christian friends. The Jewish things that we did have at home were not present in a living way. We always had a Passover Seder, and I hated it. We rushed through it as quickly as possible to get to the meal. And the worst was when we went to my uncle, a rabbi with a small Conservative congregation in a town in Illinois. The Ros Hashanah service was long, three and a half hours, all in Hebrew, and I didn't understand a word, and there was no children's service, where it was explained.

When I was sixteen, I really wanted to get away from home, and the Reform synagogue's youth organization had this program in countries abroad, so I signed up. The England part was filled, and all that was open was Israel, and first I thought, Ugh, all those Jews. But I had a friend who said I really should go, so I took a chance. And I fell in love with the country. It's hard for me to articulate what happened, but I think I began to feel myself part of a five-thousand-year history, and a part of the Jewish people. I think there are chords within each of us that may remain unresponsive all our lives unless triggered by the right stimulus. I believe that my core was Jewish and that I had been absorbing Jewish feelings all my life through my parents, relatives, whatever that I had suppressed them, and that being in Israel was just the right stimulus. Maybe it was being in a place where Jews were people like everyone else. I didn't have to hide my Judaism. I didn't have to be embarrassed about being a Jew. Not only were the people around me not embarrassed about it, they were proud of it. After I returned, I felt a difference in my being Jewish. I talked about Israel all the time. I did not have that sense of being

apart anymore. Since then I've been back to Israel seven times, including right after the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War.

Now all of my friends are Jewish, mainly from my work with the United Jewish Appeal. All of them are also very Zionist, Israel-oriented, like me. Look around my home. Over there are four books on Jerusalem, a book, *The Israel I Love*, another book, *Israel: The Reality*. A Turkish coffee pot bought in Jerusalem. A vase made of hand-painted Israeli glassware. Next to it is something I got as a gift, a piece of gray slate, with an olive tree with the Hebrew word *Shalom* engraved on it as the branches. Over there are four pictures, prints of tapestries by an Israeli artist, taken from biblical themes. Behind that is the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and a platter from the Old City of Jerusalem. And the *Second Jewish Catalog*, books on Jewish Law, Jewish literature, and numerous books on the Holocaust.

I've gotten to know more about the religious tradition, which I appreciate, like the atmosphere of Shabbat. But I'm really not at all religious in the believing-in-God sense, though I think it is important to belong to a synagogue, and I do. When I go to services and pray, I pray because I'm in touch with the tradition. The prayers mean something to me on that basis: that I am saying the same words that Jews have said for thousands of years. That link with my heritage is very important to me.

I started keeping a kosher home when I moved into my present apartment. I had taken a course called "Basic Judaism," which teaches you all the different things: Shabbat, Passover, keeping kosher. The rabbi who taught the course talked about keeping kosher in ways I'd never thought of, as a sanctification. And so I began to see keeping kosher as a link to thousands of years of Jewish history. Written Jewish history goes back three thousand years, and those people kept kosher. The whole concept is that every time you pick up a dish, every time you eat food, you have to think about who you are, that you are a Jew, that you're setting yourself apart from the rest of the world, that you are sanctifying your belief and your faith by keeping your home kosher. And I wanted a home where every Jew could eat; I didn't want someone to feel uncomfortable thinking there was a possibility of *treif*, food that wasn't kosher.

But I don't feel I have to move to Israel. I believe that when the state of Israel was created in 1948, the Jews of the world—the Diaspora—and the Jews of Israel entered into a partnership, and

that partnership guarantees that the Jews of the Diaspora will provide the financial support necessary to maintain Israel. But not necessarily to live there. I meet Israelis who say that a Jew who doesn't go to live in Israel is not a good Jew. I have no patience with that idea. It's like saying that you can be a good Jew only if you pray three times a day. At one time in my life, I did feel defensive about not going to live in Israel, but not anymore. No Jew should ever be forced to live anywhere. We were forced to live in ghettos for thousands of years.

Beth Greenbaum may be younger than most leaders of national Jewish organizations, she may be part of the new generation, but she is carrying on the traditions that have characterized American Zionism from the time of Louis D. Brandeis's leadership in the 1920s onward: philanthropy, political support, visits, artifacts, admiration, and praise—"partnership" combined with a firm denial of Zionism's fundamental demand for *aliyah* (settlement in Israel).

This "Zionistic" perspective differs profoundly from the central doctrines of classical Zionism. No one in the mainstream community disagrees about the importance of "the land of Israel" in Jewish doctrine and history. After all, traditional Jewish religion is clearly the religion of a particular people, a people "chosen" by God. To this people God gave not only his revelation, the Torah, but also a particular piece of land. Almost all of the holy writings and a good deal of religious ceremony—the Temple service, the sacrifices, the holiday festivals, the harvest festivals—are bound up with the idea of the Jewish people living and worshipping in this land. There is perhaps no single line of Jewish ritual that is recited more universally by Jews, even by those who are almost entirely nonobservant, than the ending of the Passover Seder, which is the most widely observed of all Jewish customs: "This year we celebrate here, but next year in Jerusalem."

The aspiration to return to the land is echoed in Israel's founding document, the Proclamation of Independence: "Exiled from the land of Israel, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom." But contrary to this sweeping claim, many of the "Jewish people" had long ceased to "pray and hope" for any such goal.

The Revival

All right, Judaism can't be all things to all people, but I insist that every Jew has the right to construct his own ark, set sail, trim his vessel as he sees the mountain rising in the distance.

—Mark Jay Mirsky, *My Search for the Messiah: Studies and Wanderings in Israel and America* (1977)

How about a liberated frum ballerina/writer/auto mechanic into Dylan, Shabbos, yoga, camping, Baal Shem Tov, polarity massage, existentialism, Degas and Torah.

—“Personals” ad, *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* (1982)

Living Tree Kabbalah seminar. We do soul work with Jewish meditation and bioenergetics, toward becoming richer, more loving human beings.

—“Ongoing Groups” ad, *East Bay Express* (1991)

Michael Strassfeld, co-author of *The Jewish Catalogs*, the popular how-to books of practical Judaism, was a member of the first Havurah, and he has remained a Jewish-revival activist. He is currently the executive director of Anshe Chesed, a synagogue on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, described in *Seven Days* magazine as "one of the hippest synagogues around." The article notes that the synagogue's "current incarnation came out of a young, Jewish revival movement, and is known for its participatory self-driven spirit. At 10:00 A.M. each Saturday morning the four-ring synagogue . . . simultaneously offers a service for every sensibility—intellectual, spiritual, formal, informal." Strassfeld remembers the central concern of the early revivalists with the creation of an intimate and supportive community, an alternative to the established institutional forms.

"The Boston Havurah"

The *Catalog* to a certain extent came out of the Boston Havurah, the Havurat Shalom, which began in 1968 in Cambridge and then moved to Somerville. It was started to be two things: first, a small religious fellowship, where people could be Jewish together, celebrate holidays, and study texts, as well as being a fellowship in the interpersonal area; and second, it was supposed to be an alternative rabbinical seminary. Its full name was "Havurat Shalom Community Seminary." That part of it never really took off. Some of the core founding members were graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary. They were dissatisfied with the education at the seminary, which they found very academic, cold and dry. One of our members said that when he was there, he never heard anyone talk about God. The important figure for these people when they were at the seminary was Abraham Joshua Heschel. He was a theologian and a philosopher interested in mysticism, as well as a political activist, involved in civil rights and anti-Vietnam War activities.

The Havurah was a strange mix—the social action of Reform Judaism, the critical scholarship of Conservative Judaism, and some of the fervor and style of Hasidism. At first it was just men who were admitted, and their wives came along. By the third year there was more consciousness; my wife and I had to be admitted individually, and single women were joining. It was during the third year that a woman led the service for the first time. There

wasn't even a discussion about it. After a while, it became unremarkable. We were egalitarian. As someone said at a conference, this was a place where the men held the babies and the women held the Torahs. Usually we had about twenty or thirty members. And there was a real ideal of community, of being friendly with everyone. We had potluck dinners every Friday night. For about six months we did co-counseling. There were also agenda-less meetings for people to express their feelings. We had several encounter groups to discuss personal relations.

Politically we were all part of left-wing culture. One "refugee" from a very conservative yeshiva in New York came, and it was culture shock for him in lots of ways. He liked Nixon because everyone at his yeshiva liked Nixon. For us he was very strange. Partly the Havurah was a Jewish version of sixties left-wing culture, but it was also an attempt to be more authentically Jewish. We were against conventional forms, and against professionalism, but not against traditional Judaism. What we were doing was just as authentic as Orthodoxy.

The center of the week for the Havurah was Shabbat. The morning service began at 10:30. The prayer room had no furniture, just cushions. People would sit silently; there was a no-talking rule. Then the service would be led by the person picked for that week; the style depended on the particular person. Sometimes people developed a theme, possibly tied to the Torah portion of the week or to a holiday. They would bring readings and talk about these as a focus. Or they might choose psalms or prayers connected to that theme. And there was a great deal of music—Hasidic melodies, wordless tunes, or songs that were tied to the theme. You were supposed to give the person who ran the service feedback later. I think this worked as well as it did because some of the founding people were very good at this. There were experts on liturgy, like Zalman Schachter. In the first year, there were a lot of creative services. I was there once when, instead of reading the regular Torah portion, the person doing the service read a D. H. Lawrence poem. Some people brought in breathing exercises or meditation. Over time, though, the services became more traditional, in the sense of using the traditional prayer book and Hebrew. The point is, people were willing to grapple with the tradition, to deal with the tension between observing the traditional rituals and being creative and different. In the early years, if we wanted to do something that the tradition prohibited—

saying Kaddish for a non-Jew like John Lennon, for example—we just said, “Oh, yes, that feels all right, let’s do it.” Later, we wanted to know if there was something in the Jewish tradition that gave us grounds for doing something like that. If the tradition said no, we might still do it, but we would always take the tradition into account. For us, tradition had a voice but not a veto. *Halachah* had a voice, but no veto.

The *Catalog* happened when some of us were talking about how we actually couldn’t remember how to build a *sukkah*,* and we fantasized about a book that would tell people how to do things. Then Richard Siegal, who coauthored the *Catalog* with my wife and me, did a master’s thesis at Brandeis University about what a Jewish *Whole Earth Catalog* would be like. So we said, “Let’s do it, just for our small circle.” We put notes in Jewish student newspapers. Someone knew Chaim Potok, who was at the Jewish Publication Society, and he was important in supporting us and seeing our vision. The first one came out in late 1973, and no one expected what happened. There was a little story in the *New York Times*, which helped sell out the first edition of 20,000. By 1982 over 250,000 of the first catalog were sold, and over 100,000 of the second one, which came in 1976. The third one came out in 1982. Obviously it was the right time. There was a search for something beyond what people have now. There was a desire for more meaning in life, a look back to religion, to tradition. And there had been the Six-Day War, the rise of Jewish pride, a feeling of comfort with being openly Jewish, the idea of ethnicity, black pride, and the search for roots. A significant thing is that now havurot exist in a lot of synagogues. Our ideas have spread.

During the sixties, when the havurot began their “experimental spirituality,” the counterculture at large emphasized originality, new modes of ritual. Like contemporary aesthetics with its shock tactics, the ritual sensibility of the new religious innovations strove for powerful effects to avoid the danger of routine and conformity and to convey the immediacy of experience.

Thus the creation of new ceremonies was favored over repetition

*A hut of wood and branches built as part of the celebration of the holiday of Sukkot to symbolize the temporary dwellings of the Israelites in the desert following the Exodus from Egypt.

of traditional ceremonies. The usual answer to the question “Why do we do this ritual this way?” is “It has always been done this way.” But proponents of creative spirituality found this response inadequate. Within Christianity, the spirit of sixties innovation reached heights that are difficult—and to some of those who were involved, embarrassing—to recall in these cooler times. There were, for example, enthusiastic young Catholics who strove to incorporate the entire range of secular culture into their religious services, as illustrated by the following account of a ritual happening at a Catholic college in 1968:

About forty persons have gathered for mass on a Sunday afternoon in the dining room of a large house that serves as one of the dormitories for a Catholic college. Homemade posters and banners hang on the walls; the dining room table has been converted into an altar; the priest wears a sports shirt, and some of the nuns present wear Bermuda shorts; the Epistle is a passage from the *New York Times* (Sunday edition, of course); the Gospel is taken from the writing of Daniel Berrigan, with bongo drums beating in the background; a Beatles song serves as an Introit, and a partially clad woman student, who is an accomplished jazz dancer, cavorts about at the Offertory. The homily is a collective effort; at its beginning, several marijuana cigarettes are lighted and passed around, and almost all of those present will offer a few thoughts before or after taking a hit.

A Protestant expression of the same spirit of inclusive experimental spirituality, sixties-style, was described by Harvey Cox of the Harvard Divinity School, author of *The Secular City*, a best-selling theological manifesto calling for the incorporation of secular modernity into religion. “The symbolic treasures of the full sweep of human history are available to us, everything from the oldest cave drawing to the newest image of Utopian hope,” Cox wrote. Putting his ideas into practice, Cox organized an “experimental liturgy” for Easter at a Boston discotheque. As a basis for the ceremony, Cox made an unusual choice: “We wanted to surround the colorful Byzantine Mass with participatory liturgical dance . . . with light-and-music collages, with physical encounter movements—and also somehow to bring those powerful Old Christian symbols of New Life and shared bread more directly into the service of human liberation.”

Nearly two thousand people participated, painting peace signs,

crosses, fishes, and assorted graffiti on each other's bodies. They drew scenes of war and death and taped these to the walls. Free-wheeling liturgical dancers dressed in black-and-white leotards enticed people into "sacred gesture and ritual motion." Cox observed: "People who had never danced in their lives stretched out arms and flexed legs and torsos. The lithe solemnity of the movements made me think we should get rid of pews forever. . . . In one group, a teen began humming 'Jesus Loves Me' and soon her whole arm-and-leg-ennmeshed group began to hum with her." There were choruses from Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*, a gospel reading, and Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus." After more jumping, hugging, and moaning, communion was celebrated by a Roman Catholic priest, an Episcopal priest, two ministers of the United Church of Christ, and Cox, an ordained Baptist minister. Then the Hindu mantra "OM" was chanted and people fed each other the communion elements. Finally, the ceremony ended as the participants gathered outside the building to greet the dawn, chanting to the accompaniment of the Beatles singing "Here Comes the Sun."

Havurah-style innovation, deplored by Jewish conservatives as the "greening of Judaism," seems quite restrained when compared to this Christian exuberance. Substituting a D. H. Lawrence reading for the Torah portion of the service is relatively stodgy. It is notable, however, that even among those who were leaders in the search for originality, innovation, and "play" in ritual and ceremony, there has been a retreat to a more traditional stance. Harvey Cox, for example, published a work in the mid-eighties much more sympathetic to traditional religious thought and ritual, and more in keeping with the post-sixties zeitgeist, which found that the old rituals worked better in creating the desired mood and tone. Michael Strassfeld noted this trend among the veterans of havurot as well. The "innovation" that seemed to be most satisfying in the long run has been the deliberate and self-conscious choosing of traditional liturgy and religious forms. Ceremonial "traditionality" seems most effective in creating a sense of the spiritual, possibly because, as with the new Orthodox, it satisfies the desire for authenticity.

The innovative spirit of the counterculture has not, however, been entirely superseded by a new appreciation of tradition. On the contrary, it has survived and gone far beyond the original

havurah practices. Rabbi Zalman Schachter, the acknowledged inspiration of the liturgical creativity of the first Havurah and of the *Jewish Catalog* more than twenty years ago, is now the spiritual leader of a network of "New Age" Jewish groups. A scholar of Judaism, a rabbi, and a professor of religious studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, Schachter has often served as the Jewish representative at ecumenical New Age guru gatherings, appearing with Baba Ram Dass, the Tibetan lama Rimpoché, the poets and mystical searchers Allen Ginsberg and Robert Bly, and others. Schachter upholds an inclusive spiritual perspective, treating mystical Judaism as the Jewish version of a universal spiritual truth, which may be found as well in other spiritual traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, Gurdjieffism, and so on.

“Different Worlds”

Where I was raised, out in the country in Northern California, we were the only Jews for miles. My father was an engineer building the Shasta Dam. We had no real religious upbringing in our home. On Passover we'd invite the Jewish boys from the nearby military base—and do the Seder in English. But my grandparents lived in Petaluma, in a community where everyone spoke Yiddish, and it was there that I got the sense of a mysterious world that I knew I belonged to. When I was thirteen, we moved into the San Joaquin Valley, near Stockton, and I was prepared for bar mitzvah. We joined a Reform temple, but my bar mitzvah was actually in a little Orthodox Yiddish shul in Petaluma. Even at thirteen, I felt that there was something going on there that wasn't going on in the Reform temple. It seemed real; the other seemed bullshit. All that feeling vanished the next year, when I went to a summer camp for Reform youth. I had an adolescent conversion experience. I made up my mind at fourteen to be a Reform rabbi, and from then to the first year of college I was sure that was what I was going to do with my life.

When I got to Berkeley in the early sixties and was studying philosophy, I began to really find out what the Orthodox thing was about. There was a group of about four of us getting together then to learn about it. (Now, when I go back to Berkeley, it is astonishing. I see forty or fifty people coming to the Lubavitcher shul on a Saturday, and fifty or so coming to this other Orthodox shul, and forty or fifty coming to Hillel for services.) To support myself, I worked as the cantor of the Hillel congregation, and even conducted services on Friday night. I was always a bit of an actor, and I could pull it off. Then my wife and I decided to go to Israel. It was there I encountered this incredibly complex yeshiva culture that I hadn't known about. I fell in love with it. I started wearing a yarmulka and *tzitzis*, keeping kosher. The only reason I didn't walk into a yeshiva and go the whole way was that I was married. You see, what my wife liked in Israel was that you could really be Jewish *without* being religious. There was something else too. We had both thought we could go to Israel and get rid of our alienness, be with our own. But when I got to Israel, I discovered I was “Anglo-Saxon,” as the Israelis call American Jews—an Amer-

ican. I identified as an American, with Americans. And at some point, I chose being a Jew in America, rather than an American in Israel. I found I was alienated from where I had gone so as not to be alienated. I decided to go back to Berkeley and become a scholar of Judaic studies.

I didn't become a Judaic scholar, finally. I became a philosopher. But I always wanted to live a religious life, a life of sanctification. This is an absolutely critical and central feature of my life. I want to have a life with a sanctification of the seasons, of sex, family, the stages of life. I want the whole thing, and the Jewish mode is the one that presents itself to me. But I've realized that I can't survive in the *frum* world—it doesn't have a large enough circle of interesting, intelligent, imaginative members. So I've become almost shamelessly exploitative of the religious world. I stand outside of it and dip into it; I taste from it what I want. I don't live a responsible life in the middle of it or work for change within it. When I lived in Los Angeles, I moved near the Lubavitcher center. I kept Shabbos there. But I was living completely outside the community. I just couldn't live the Orthodox life. For one thing—the first thing that comes to mind—I couldn't stand their attitude toward sexuality. I love buying into the heavy male bonding when I'm in it, but, really, I find the situation with regard to men and women unbearable. I think of myself as a committed feminist. I feel deeply upset by the kinds of bad faith involved in Orthodox attempts to cover up the antifemale stuff rooted deep in Judaism. If I stand up in front of a minyan, as a prayer leader, I have a lot of trouble praying those prayers that thank God—“*sh'lo asami isha, sh'lo asami goy*”—that He has not made me a woman, that He has not made me a gentile. I won't read those words. I won't say, “Thank God for not making me a woman.”

When I live near where there is a daily minyan, I'll go and put on *tefillin* every morning. Up until ten years ago, I used to drive to one in town. But when I'm not near, I can't bring myself to do it. So it works only when I can walk into a context where I can play it out, where I can impersonate a religious Jew, when I can be the person I might have been. I'd always hoped that when the belief became strong enough, I could do it honestly, without irony. But this hasn't happened. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think at some level that I should go out, buy the *tzitzis*, and just do it, be Orthodox. You know, I carry my *tefillin* with me whenever I

travel—even though I haven't put them on for years—because at any moment, I might realize that that is what I am. Now *that* is an insanity! I know better than that. A person *decides*—and I won't. I became a vegetarian because I could not ultimately make the commitment to keeping kosher, but I couldn't bring myself to eat *treyf*, either.

I don't think I can sort out what is the religious part and what is the enormous desire to be rooted in some ethnic world. I've actually been learning Yiddish over the past several years. I've started reading things. I'm still not good at it, but I love it. I love the way my mouth feels when I speak it. I throw in Yiddish phrases all the time at the university. Nobody I know speaks it. I don't have anyone to talk to. But it feels like home when I start speaking Yiddish.

My children went to Hebrew day schools; they know Hebrew. But neither of them is going to be an observant Jew. They held on to it a while after they left home, and they dig it, sort of. Sometimes I have a pang of guilt that I haven't done better by them. But then I think, What does it mean to “do better”?—what, turn them into yeshiva boys? Are you crazy? I'm blessed that my two sons are super human beings. I couldn't ask for better people than they've turned out to be. They had a really good mother, and I fathered them well, and then there was luck.

It's true, they respond to my ambivalence. Like, my sixteen-year-old, who was living with me, had some friends over on Shabbos afternoon, and they were up in his room smoking dope, and I said, “You know you can't do that.” And he knows it. He can smoke during the week in the house, and I know he smokes outside on Shabbos, but he isn't allowed to smoke in my house on Shabbos, and he knows he can't eat *treyf* in my house. Once my kids leave home, it's their life. I couldn't object if they have non-Jewish girlfriends. There is a multiplicity of ways in which human beings have culture, and religious lives, and this is the one I'm in. This is my people, and family, and history. If my children leave it and embark on another one, I'll want to know, “Are you sure this is right? Are you sure this is authentic for you?” But I wouldn't dream of saying, “How could you?” One of my brothers is in a Buddhist monastery in Burma. That appealed to me—enormously. And still does. But I'm working out my karma of having been born a Jew.

I live in a lot of different worlds. A certain kind of American literary world—I write a lot of poetry that has nothing Jewish in it; I'm influenced by Ammons, Creeley, William Carlos Williams. The academic world of philosophy—I teach Kant and Hegel, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. And there's music—I get together with musicians and play a lot of bluegrass, and Jimmy Rodgers. I play mandolin and autoharp. Don't forget, in California I grew up among Okies. I experience my life as complex pieces that I am constantly weaving into a single life. I feel uncomfortable when I can't bring it all together. I love to introduce my friends to one another and bring my worlds together. And that's how it is for all of us. I don't feel there are any more worlds for me than for other people in my situation. That's what it is to live in contemporary Western culture. And I love it. I love the way I live my life. I feel it is right for me.

The texture of modern identity is well described in *The Homeless Mind*:

Modern identity is peculiarly open. While undoubtedly there are certain features of the individual that are more or less permanently stabilized at the conclusion of primary socialization, the modern individual is nevertheless peculiarly "unfinished" as he enters adult life. Not only does there seem to be a great objective capacity for transformations of identity in later life, but there is also a subjective awareness and even readiness for such transformations. The modern individual is not only peculiarly "conversion-prone"; he knows this and often glories in it. Biography is thus apprehended both as a migration through different social worlds and as the successive realization of a number of possible identities.

Altman is a delighted exemplar of biography as a "migration through different social worlds and as the successive realization of a number of possible identities." His commitment to Judaism and Jewish identity is certainly central, and his involvement in Jewish thought is extraordinary and intense. Yet modern values not derived from Jewish religion and thought permeate his being and crucially constrict the scope and power of his Jewish commitment. Nothing outside his own chosen values is allowed practical moral weight: not the actual tenets of Judaism as a religion, not the

demand on every Jew to be ultimately loyal to the Jewish people. In mundane terms, he can find no moral or psychological force in the commandment to marry someone Jewish or to make Jewish commitment an unquestionable requirement for his children. The path of Buddhism, chosen authentically, is as valid for a Jew—his brother, in fact, or himself—as carrying on Judaism. The consequences of such modernist undermining of religious and ethnic bonds of conscience are evident to Altman, but such a realization does not impose personal responsibility. He muses: "Judaism isn't going to last forever. It's not like you have some obligation to the past to keep it going. You should do it because you want to do it. But you don't have some obligation to the ancestors to keep it going, to keep it alive. It should be kept alive only if it should be kept alive, if it is powerful for you."

. Final Learning Activity .

Have students create a museum of the American Jewish experience. Divide students into different time periods and have them act as museum curators and docents for their particular time period. Each group should collect artifacts for their time period. The museum artifacts should primarily be the different projects the students completed during the course of the year. Students should make a sign for their time period with symbols representative of issues studied and characteristics of the era. Students should also write explanations to accompany all the artifacts. Finally, the students should open up the museum exhibit to the synagogue community or even to the wider public! Students should then act as docents for the museum.

The Jews in America: Four Centuries Of An Uneasy Encounter
by Arthur Hertzberg

Arthur Hertzberg has written a disturbing portrait of the Jewish story in America. From the beginning, he posits, the Jewish tenure in America has been a struggle with a dominant culture which has undermined Judaism. Even worse, those Jews who left the insulated Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe for the shores of America were among the least equipped to embrace their heritage in a culture antithetical to their own. They were the least educated and the least committed of the Jews. They were not pious people steeped in Jewish learning, but pedlars eager to succeed financially and provide for themselves and their children. The Jewish encounter with America has been fraught with ambiguities and compromises on both sides; and from the beginning, the American Jews have lacked the depth of learning and commitment to combat this open, but nonetheless hostile land.

The Jews who first landed on American soil had shallow religious and intellectual roots. The Jewishness they sought to create stemmed from the memories of Jewish and folk traditions. Since colonial times there was a trickle of Jews who came, assimilated, and were lost to the American majority. The history of any group in America, however, is based not on those who disappear, but on those who persist. Hence, the beginning of American Jewish history is in 1654 with the arrival of 23 Dutch Jews in New Amsterdam. After some debate, authorities allowed the group to stay because it was economically desirable. As a steady flow of Puritans came to the New World, along with a trickle of Jews,

America became increasingly inhospitable to Jews who were viewed as adherents of a false religion. Acceptance into society was contingent upon their conversion. Of the Jews who came to America in the colonial era, an estimated 75 percent left the Jewish community. (page 48)

The Jews who continued to live a Jewish life established institutions nearly identical to those left behind in Europe. (page 48) Yet those institutions did not survive for the next generation. By the end of the colonial era, the small group of Jews on the Eastern Seaboard of North America could be categorized into three types: those who assimilated because success and social acceptance were their highest priorities; those who sought to preserve Orthodox Judaism in America; and finally those Jews who assimilated into Gentile America but nonetheless felt Jewish and identified as Jews, if only nominally. (page 55) For the Jews who made religious changes or compromises, they did so out of necessity rather than ideology. "In America, there was no contemporary echo of the writings of Moses Mendelssohn. Partial or very nearly total nonobservance of the commandments of the religious tradition became the norm very early without any attempt at an intellectual defense." (page 56) To be Jewish meant simply to feel Jewish and did not entail any special learning, religious actions, or beliefs.

In the post Revolutionary era, separation of church and state made religion into a private, personal matter. While this allowed for the freedom of Jewish religious expression, it was simultaneously antithetical to Judaism. For Judaism is a religion predicated on public and communal acts. By 1837, "when the

descendants of Colonial Jewry were into their third generation, the rate of intermarriage was one in three. " (page 91) Against a minority of religiously committed Orthodox, the large majority was passive and indifferent.

At the turn of the 19th century American Jewry received an influx of a new and different population: the Russian Jews. Coming on the heels of the Czarist pogroms of 1881-1882 two million Russian Jews emigrated to America. Like the Western European Jews who came before them, it was the poorest and least educated segment of Russian Jewry who left Europe to begin again in America. This lower class of Jews came to America angry at the Eastern European Jewish elite and eager to free themselves from their economic and religious control. The Judaism that they formed was a compromise between the demands of Judaism and the demands of America. "They knew that they had to learn American manners, and that the observance of the Jewish religion, and especially of the Sabbath were obstacles to success ... And yet Jews continued to believe, into the second generation and beyond, that 'Jewish values', the specific heritage that the immigrants had brought with them from Eastern Europe, had to be preserved." (page 177) These immigrants wanted their children to remain identified Jews, but the Jewish education they gave them was scant. Folk religion, family memory, and rudimentary ritual skills were passed on from this generation to the next.

In the 1920's and 1930's Jews moved out of the ghetto but continued to live in overwhelmingly Jewish neighborhoods. Their penetration into American society was not complete: Many business,

social, and educational opportunities were still closed to them. The synagogue had ceased to be the center of Jewish life, which, instead centered around the *defacto* association of Jews with each other. The perfunctory Jewish education that was given was deemed irrelevant because it was not a useful tool in the endeavor to become American.

During the war years a new war-time American nationalism developed. A tacit bargain between America and its minorities was made. Jews and other minorities could enter the American mainstream if they would demonstrate their loyalty to America by shedding the vestiges of the "Old Country". The American Jews attempted to create a paradoxical relationship with mainstream American culture whereby they would "become part of the majority society while keeping some kind of Jewish communal life alive."
(page 315)

The children of these Jews carried these ideals of commitment and compromise with them as they moved into the suburbs and began to create a new American Judaism. Without the Jewish ghetto or neighborhood to serve as a means of association with other Jews and Jewish culture, Jews created synagogues and communal institutions to fulfill these purposes. "Between 1945 and 1965, about a third of all American Jews left the big cities and established themselves in suburbs. The small-town synagogues which already existed in these areas were transformed into large, bustling congregations, and hundreds of new communities were created. ... It was the largest building boom in the history of American Jews." (p 321) Yet these synagogues were not bastions of Jewish learning, religious revival,

and spirituality. They were a means of associating with other Jews and "inoculating" one's children against intermarriage. Being Jewish in America meant, as it had meant for generations, feeling Jewish.

With the decline of American organized religion in the 1960's and the rise of intermarriage in the 1970's and 1980's, American Jewish leaders have groped with a suitable paradigm in which to ground Jewish identification. In the 1990's, as intermarriage rates continue to climb, it seems that Jewish leaders are working against the tide of American Jewish history and its ethos which decrees that Jewish practice is permissible only when it does not interfere with being an American. The categories of Jews at the end of the Colonial era, with some adjustment, still hold true today. There is still a segment of American Jewry which regards their Judaism as an impediment to success. A core group of Jews seeks to preserve not only Orthodox but other forms of Jewish religious expression -- Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative. Finally there are those Jews who claim to "feel Jewish" but whose Jewish identification is not substantial. Hertzberg ends his book with this warning:

"American Jews may be the descendants of not very learned, poor immigrants, but they are Jews, and thus they know that being Jewish is indissolubly connected to moral responsibility and to the inner life of the spirit ... The embers of the classic Jewish faith still smolder, but they may be dying among the mainstream of American Jews ... the need for and the possibility of a spiritual revival are clear. If it does not happen, American Jewish history will soon end, and become part of American memory as a whole." (page 388)

A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America
by Jack Wertheimer

In *A People Divided : Judaism in Contemporary America*, Jack Wertheimer reveals an interesting perspective on American Jewry. He chronicles their experience in America not as an ethnic group, but as a religious group. Wertheimer describes the history of American Jewish religious expression against the backdrop of the history of religion in America in general. In so doing Wertheimer illuminates religious trends and places them in the context of broader trends in American life. What emerges is a portrait of an American Judaism (or Judaisms), that along with the rest of religious America, is in deep crisis.

In contrast to Hertzberg's work, *The Jews in America*, which examines Jewish identity, marriage and affiliation patterns, Wertheimer examines American Jewish religious expression. What is revealed is a population that practices almost as many Judaisms as there are Jews. Judaism in contemporary America includes a Secular Humanistic congregation in Michigan which bans all reference to the Deity and isolationist Ultra-Orthodox Jews whose dress and social patterns are more a reflection of 18th century Poland than today's America. In between these two extremes are the fragmented movements of Modern (or Centrist) Orthodoxy, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Judaism. Yet these movements, as Wertheimer accurately points out, are more coalitions than movements due to the diversity of belief and practice under each stream's ideological umbrella. While such a wide spectrum of belief and practice may point to the endurance and

vitality of American Judaism, it may lead to its demise. Can the center hold a Centrist Orthodox who abides by traditional gender roles, a feminist Reconstructionist who uses female G-d-language, and an iconoclastic pork-eating Secular Humanist all under the common identity of 'Jew'?

Wertheimer's book begins in the post-war years, in the heyday of organized religious life in America. For the Jews who left the Jewish neighborhoods for the predominantly Gentile suburbs, it was the beginning of a uniquely American form of Judaism fostered primarily by Conservative and Reform institutions. Affiliation rates soared as American Jews without the Jewish neighborhood joined synagogues and enrolled their children in religious school. Hence, the synagogue replaced the Jewish neighborhood as a means of socializing with other Jews and educating the children into the Jewish way of life. The Conservative Movement was the main beneficiary of the rise in affiliation rates, followed by Reform, and then Orthodox.

Yet this explosive growth in synagogue affiliation did not mark a commensurate boom in religious zeal and observance. Jewish attendance at weekly religious services lagged far behind Protestants' and Catholics'. Jewish practice in this era was largely "*fer de kinder*" and a "highly public, though superficial display" (page 17). With the exception of the most committed Orthodox, American Jews in the midcentury were committed to neither in-depth religious study nor practice, and Judaism became increasingly the realm of the synagogue or Temple rather than the home. Rabbis and

preoccupation with accommodation to a preoccupation with survivalism (p.28). Although the "buzzwords" have changed from "Jewish identity" to "Jewish continuity" much of organized Judaism is still focusing on mere perpetuation into the next generation.

Intrinsic in the fragmented nature of American Jewish life is the internecine conflict among America's Jews. In addition to the widening rift between the religiously committed, the religious denominations are at war with each other. While Jews at the "right" end of the religious spectrum label their liberal counterparts illegitimate, Jews on the left scorn traditional Jews as a fossilized and dying breed. Yet as these religious leaders fight each other over the hearts, souls, and minds of America's Jews, a generation is being lost to apathy and ignorance. Yet, the picture of the future is not entirely bleak. Alongside the rising intermarriage rates is an increasing interest among a segment American Jewry in identifying with their heritage and perhaps even grappling with the tenets of their faith. Both Hertzberg and Wertheimer agree that it will take nothing short of a religious revival to harness these energies and move American Jews and Judaism successfully into the 21st century.