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Words to the Wives

The Yiddish Press, Immigrant Women,
and Jewish-American Identity

Shelby Shapiro

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This book is dedicated to two getraye yidishe tekhter [true Jewish daughters]: my grandmother, the late Jean Axelrod, who lived through the events in these pages, and to my wife, Dr Marti Bornstein, whose encouragement, passion and patience, compassion and love sustained me. Mayne belibte, basherte Martele, your questions, concerns, and support and love are at the heart and soul of this work. Gor a sheynem dank!

SPELLING NOTE

A word about the use of the word “wives” in the title: throughout the magazines and newspapers, women are addressed as “*froyen*” [singular, “*froy*”], which in Yiddish means married women. The words for an unmarried woman are “*meydl*” [plural, “*meydlekh*”], with its connotation of youth (think of the English word “maiden”), or, less charitably, “*alte moyd*” [“old maid”].

All translations from Yiddish to English are mine, except where indicated otherwise. Utilizing dictionaries written by Alexander Harkavy in 1898 and 1928, every attempt was made to not employ today’s definitions for yesterday’s words.¹ In transliterating Yiddish words, I have employed the standardized Yiddish orthography developed by the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research.² To remain historically accurate, however, I have not modernized or updated how authors, editors, and publishers spelled Yiddish words. For example, the word for girls or unmarried women [“*meydlekh*”] sometimes appeared as “*meydlekh*” and other times as “*meydlakh*.” In such matters I have not “corrected” original writers. Although Yiddish has no capital letters, following general practices, I capitalized the first letter of articles, books, and other publications. The names of individuals also appear as per standardized Yiddish orthography

¹ Alexander Harkavy, *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*, rev. ed., 1988 reprint of orig. ed. Schocken Books, rep. YIVO, 1928).

² Mordkhe Schaechter, *The Standardized Yiddish Orthography with the History of the Standardized Yiddish Spelling* (New York: YIVO Institute of Jewish Research and the Yiddish Language Resource Center of the League for Yiddish, 1999).

except where better known under other spellings, for example “Sholem Aleichem” rather than “Sholem Aleykhem.”

Instead of the orthographically correct “Khanike” for the winter holiday variously rendered as “Channukah,” “Chanukah,” “Hannukah,” and so forth, I chose the compromise spelling of “Chanuka.” Similarly, I use “Shevuos” for the holiday variously called “Shevuat,” “Shevuoth,” “Shevuoth,” or “Shebuoth.” In referring to various holidays, I use the Ashkenazic “-s” instead of the Sephardic “-t” for the end consonant of Hebrew words: thus, “Sukkos” instead of “Sukkot,” “Shabos” instead of “Shabat,” “Simchas Torah” instead of “Simchat Torah.” Where necessary, I use “BCE” (Before Common Era) and “CE” (“Common Era”) rather than the Christian “BC” (“Before Christ”) and “AD” (“*Anno Domini*”).

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This book started as my PhD dissertation at the University of Maryland-College Park. I owe much to my advisor and dissertation chairman, R. Gordon Kelly. Though the subject matter was not his field of expertise, the ability to ask the right questions certainly was. Throughout I have had the enthusiastic support of another member of my dissertation committee, Alan Kraut.

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Introduction

During his first week in New York, a *griner* [greenhorn] saw a man with a cigar in his mouth, sitting on Saturday on a park bench and reading a Yiddish newspaper. Cried out the *griner*: ‘America is a *goldene medina* [a wonderful country]. *In amerike ken afile di goyim layenen Idish.*’ [In America even the Gentiles read Yiddish]!

Significantly, the newspaper reader in this joke was clean-shaven, without the beard or sidecurls (*peyes**) of observant, or *frum*,* Jewish males, performing a religiously forbidden act: smoking on Saturday, the *Shabbos* (the Sabbath). Just as significant is what the smoker-on-*Shabbos* is doing: reading a Yiddish newspaper. Hence the greenhorn’s confusion: who are these people? They look and act differently than those in his own cultural milieu. Further, what the clean-shaven smoker has in his hands is likewise something new: a newspaper, in Yiddish yet. This book looks at how the Yiddish press sought to create Jewish-American identities for one particular set of readers not mentioned in the above-quoted joke: women. Women, identity, and the printed word sit at the center of this book, which examines two women’s magazines and the women’s pages in three daily newspapers, from 1913, when the first Yiddish women’s magazine appeared, until 1925 when the Immigration Act of 1924 took effect, ending mass migration.

Newspaper publishers and editors saw themselves as *vegvayzers**—“guides,” literally, “showers of the way.” In this new environment,

immigrants and their children faced a broad horizon of possibilities for shaping or reshaping their identities in the face of new external and internal constraints. External constraints included the economic situation of the immigrants and varying degrees of antisemitism within American society, while internal constraints included the variable power of traditions and beliefs which they brought with them from the Old World.

In the society the immigrants had left, authority in communal and religious life in the public sphere reposed in men. Furthermore, the religious pluralism characterizing the American Jewish religious landscape did not exist in the Old Country, or at least nowhere close to the same degree. After the American Revolution, religious diversity became the norm, even among the small numbers of Jews residing in the United States. No longer did a community have but one Jewish house of worship. To quote historian Jonathan Sarna, Jewish religious life went "... from synagogue-community to community of synagogues."¹ As in the Old World, while women could go to a synagogue, their presence did not count toward the quorum necessary for holding services, the *minyan*.² Men had the duty of transmitting religious beliefs to their sons, not to their daughters. The two institutions of religious education, the *kheder*, providing religious instructions to boys under thirteen years old, and the *yeshiva*, for more advanced religious study, remained exclusively male domains.³ Fulfilling religious obligations required that men recite prayers in Hebrew. As a result of gender-based views on education, Jewish males from Eastern Europe consequently had an *official* literacy rate approximately double

¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Evolution of the American Synagogue," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, eds. (NY: New York University Press, 1995), 219.

² Samuel Kassow, "Introduction," in *The Shtetl: New Evaluations*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 13.

³ Paula Hyman, "'The Other Half': Women in the Jewish Tradition," in *The Jewish Woman: New Perspectives*, ed. Elizabeth Koltun (NY: Schocken Books, 1976), 10–7, 109, 112n3; Paula E. Hyman, "Seductive Secularization," in *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 50, 54.

that of females, although recent scholarship has cast doubt about the vaunted literacy of Jewish men.⁴

Traditionally, women instructed their daughters how to fulfill their religious duties in the domestic sphere, such as keeping a kosher home and following “ritual purity” laws.⁵ These laws maintained that a menstruating woman was “*tameh*” [“impure”] until immersion in a ritual bath, or *mikve*, following the end of her menstrual period. Only after immersion in the *mikve* could a married couple resume sexual relations.⁶ Historian Beth S. Wenger describes these laws as wound around “... primitive blood taboos and profound anxiety toward female reproductive capacity,” although rationalized in terms of alleged health benefits.⁷

The self-identity of men and women necessarily had different characteristics as result of the gender-specific aspects of both Jewish society and the host American society.⁸ For example, female citizenship represented something different from male citizenship, regardless of national origin. Legal disabilities covered sex-specific legislation about work and education, for example, to the most glaring difference, the inability to vote. Jewish religious norms barred women from becoming rabbis, among other things.

I will not be retelling the story of Eastern European Jewish migration to America; suffice it to say that the social mobility of Jewish migrants took place rapidly. Jewish immigrants and their descendants moved from the

⁴Simon Kuznets, “Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure,” *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975): 80–82; for doubts concerning Jewish male literacy, see Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women—Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004); Iris Parush, “Another Look at the Life of ‘Dead’ Hebrew,” *Book History* 7 (2004): 171–214; Shaul Stampfer, “Gender Differentiation and Education of the Jewish Woman in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” *Polin* 1 (1992): 63–87; cf. comments on Ab. Cahan’s Hebrew proficiency in Sanford E. Marovitz, *Abraham Cahan* (NY: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 18.

⁵Hyman, “‘The Other Half’: Women in the Jewish Tradition,” 106–107; Norma Fain Pratt, “Transitions in Judaism: The Jewish American Woman Through the 1930s,” *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (Winter 1978): 684–686.

⁶“Taharat (Toshorat) Ha-Mishpahah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 15, Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House. Ltd., 1971), 703.

⁷Beth S. Wenger, “Mitzvah and Medicine: Gender, Assimilation and the Scientific Discourse of ‘Family Purity,’” in *Women and American Judaism: Historical Perspectives*, Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna, eds. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 203.

⁸Paula E. Hyman, “Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities,” *Jewish Social Studies* 8, no. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 2002): 153–61.

working class into the ranks of the lower-middle class and beyond, as the worlds of possibility and opportunity enabled social advancement in a relatively short time span compared to other ethnic or national groups entering the country at the same time—not for everyone, of course. But moving from the ranks of the working class to the middle class occurred often enough for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to famously summarize this phenomenon in two words when asked how long it took to go from a job in the garment industry (where her father originally worked) to a seat on the United States Supreme Court: “one generation.”

THE PUBLICATIONS

This study examines how five Yiddish publications (two magazines and three mass newspapers) sought to develop Jewish-American identities for Eastern European Jewish immigrant women between 1913 and 1925. The publications chosen for this study represent a variety of viewpoints and identities, political, religious, and class-based. The study’s time period starts with the first Yiddish magazine for women, *Di froyen-velt/The Jewish Ladies Home Journal*, published from April 1913 until October 15, 1914. In May 1922 another Yiddish women’s magazine came out. *Der idisher froyen zburnal/Jewish Women’s Home Companion* lasted until October 1923. Between 1914 and 1916, the three mass circulation Yiddish daily newspapers examined in this book, *Dos yidishes tageblatt/Jewish Daily News*, *Forverts/Jewish Daily Forward*, and *Der tog/The Day*, began targeting Jewish women by printing women’s pages, a term I shall use to refer to all of the publications in this study. The book ends in 1924, the year the United States Congress ended the New Immigration by enacting severely restrictive anti-immigrant, nativist legislation.

The three daily newspapers in this study, *Dos yidishes tageblatt*, founded in 1885, *Forverts*, founded in 1897, and *Der tog*, founded in 1914, all mass circulation newspapers that sold nationwide, considered each other as the enemy: a question not only of fighting for readers and advertisers, but for ethnic leadership itself. Each paper represented a different leader or set of leaders, as well as different solutions to the perceived problems facing the immigrants. In their roles as publishers, editors, and writers, those involved in these publications served as “group interpreters across ethnic boundaries” and “cultural mediators,” in the words of American ethnic historian Victor R. Greene.⁹

⁹Cf. Victor R. Greene, *American Immigrant Leaders, 1900–1910: Marginality and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4–6, 7, 8, 15–16, 86–95, 100–104.

ACCULTURATION VS. ASSIMILATION

I use the term “acculturation” to describe the process of integration and identity-building, rather than “assimilation,” even though “assimilation” is the word favored by historian Paula R. Hyman, whose insights and research brought gender into the center of Jewish Studies. “Assimilation” carries a heavy load of pejorative associations; using the word in a non-pejorative sense would require constant qualification. Not surprisingly, when writers in the five publications studied here used the word “assimilation,” it *always* carried negative associations, more often than not targeting Reform Jews, particularly those from Central Europe, the so-called German Jews. Otherwise accusations of assimilationism could also mean abandonment of a Jewish identity, however defined. Writers in the Yiddish press did not use “Americanization” as a synonym for assimilation, or vice versa. Not only does “acculturation” lack the value-judgmental associations of “assimilation,” but “acculturation” implies a greater sense of agency, negotiation, or interplay in the process of identity formation.¹⁰ Negotiation plays an intrinsic role in developing ethnic identities, or, to use a more awkward term, the process of “ethnicization.” At least one scholar defined “ethnicization” as the assignment of an ethnic identity by forces outside the ethnic group.¹¹ His view, however, would render immigrants powerless, without agency, people acted upon, rather than people acting on behalf of their own interests, ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, making conscious choices enabled or constrained by a variety of factors including their own belief systems and the socioeconomic conditions of the host society. Other scholars have defined “ethnicization” as the negotiation, combination, or blending of Old and New World customs, lifestyles, and mores.¹² Figure 1.1 demonstrates the complexities of this process, as an Orthodox male speaks to twelve women seated in a jury box, something particularly American, at a time when women, who had

¹⁰Marion A. Kaplan, “Tradition and Transition - the Acculturation, Assimilation and Integration of Jews in Imperial Germany: A Gender Analysis,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 27 (1982): 4–7.

¹¹Jonathan D. Sarna, “From Immigrants to Ethnics: Toward a New Theory of ‘Ethnicization,’” *Ethnicity* 5, no. 4 (December 1978): 370–78.

¹²Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al., “Forum - the Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U. S. A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 3–41; Ewa Morawska, *Insecure Prosperity: Small-Town Jews in Industrial America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xviii.



Fig. 1.1 Advertisement for Matzoh Meal. Note the traditional male addressing an all-female jury: juries were American, not traditional. *Der tog*

just won the right to vote, fought to be placed on juries. He asks them to render a favorable verdict on his product. They are the ones in charge.

The ways in which publications viewed and celebrated Jewish holidays mixed maintenance of old beliefs with modifications and inventions of new beliefs, especially when dealing with the role of women. The complex process by which immigrants negotiated new identities, some radically different and others modifications of their old identities, found advocates among the writers, editors, and publishers in the various journals discussed

herein. Both writers and readers came from a common culture, and not surprisingly that culture set the terms of reference for both groups. The journey across the Atlantic to the New World did not erase all vestiges of the Old World. For large numbers of immigrants, adherence to forms of Jewish traditional beliefs represented one form of continuity with the past. Another continuity manifested itself in the language used to address the immigrants. Not only did they use Yiddish, but many writers consistently employed religious references and imagery in their writing.

Writers explained or “translated” America and American events for their readers in cultural terms familiar to those audiences. This form of translation represented another aspect of the sense of negotiation at the heart of the acculturation process.¹³ This writing strategy not only “translated” America into familiar Jewish religious terms, but by so doing it also perpetuated such traditional knowledge, if only to a limited degree.¹⁴ In the words of sociologist Anthony Giddens, “(e)very instance of the use of language is a potential modification of that language at the same time as it acts to reproduce it.”¹⁵

But this particular device went beyond holiday use and beyond the pious. Even those who had rejected religion, such as the writers grouped around *Forverts*, employed this practice. When Abraham Cahan wrote for the Socialist *Arbeyter-tsaytung* before he and others left the Socialist Labor Party to found *Forverts*, he produced a column based on the weekly Torah portion which he signed “*Der proletarishker magid*” [“The Proletarian Preacher”]. The persistence of religious references represents one of the continuities between Old and New Worlds.¹⁶

In a Thanksgiving editorial, *Der tog* referred to immigration restriction laws as a barrier between peoples, using the word for the partition in traditional synagogues separating men from women, the *mekhitse*.¹⁷ The

¹³For a study of this phenomenon, see Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1890–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 2004).

¹⁴Cf. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 24.

¹⁵Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 77–78, 220.

¹⁶Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 204; see, also, Gerald Sorin, *Tradition Transformed: The Jewish Experience in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 113–14.

¹⁷“Thanksgiving,” *Der tog*, 27/November 1924.

caption to the photograph of a turkey in the Socialist *Forverts* referred to it as an “American *kapores**,” alluding to a pre-Yom Kippur custom [*shlogn kapores**] whereby a man would symbolically transfer his sins to a chicken, which would then be whirled over his head. The caption went on to note that “Thanksgiving is *Yom Kippur* [the Day of Atonement] for turkeys.¹⁸ In a non-holiday reference in *Der tog*, Adella Kean suggested that her readers “*shlogn kapores**” with their old frying pans and substitute them for others.¹⁹ Celebrating the appointment of a woman to a high position, *Forverts* used a phrase commonly heard among the Orthodox when writing that there is “*Borukh hashem*” [“Thank God,” “Bless the Lord”] a female ship’s captain.²⁰

In talking about how clothing fashions seem to repeat themselves, a *Forverts* writer remarked that fashions return to *breysbes* [“In the Beginning,” a reference to the first word in the Book of Genesis].²¹ Another *Forverts* author, Dr I. Romberg, wrote about those who listened to the *drosbes* [“sermons”] of Margaret Sanger and followed her *toyre** [Torah] on birth control.²² During 1916’s “Baby Week” in New York City, pioneer pediatrician Dr Abraham Jacobi, *Der tog* reported, gave an entire *toyre* on child-raising.²³ An article in *Der tog* noted opposition to corset-wearing by doctors for health reasons and reformers for moral reasons, “and neither have had success with their *muser-drosbes* [moralizing sermons].”²⁴

Along with the Torah, writers referred to the *Shulkhan arukh**, a sixteenth-century codification of Jewish religious laws.²⁵ A 1915 article in *Dos yidishes tageblatt* concerning table etiquette referred to it as “a *Shulkhan arukh** on How to Conduct Oneself at the Table.”²⁶ *Froyen zhurnal*, in an opening column on etiquette, stated that “Today we have an entire code, an entire *Shulkhan arukh** of forms and manners and

¹⁸ “Interesante naves in bilder,” *Forverts*, 27/November 1924.

¹⁹ Adella Kean Zametkin, “Fun a froy tsu froyen,” *Der tog*, 20/July 1918.

²⁰ “Notitsen fun der froyen-velt,” *Forverts*, 16/June 1918.

²¹ “Di elter bobes’ kleyd iz arayn in der mode,” *Forverts*, 2/September 1917.

²² Dr I. Romberg, “Misis senger un ihr kamf far veniger kinder,” *Forverts*, 29/October 1922.

²³ “Di ‘beybi vokh’ in niu york,” *Der tog*, 9/March 1916.

²⁴ “Vilen nit tantsen mit meyd lakh vos trogen korseten,” *Der tog*, 8/February 1921.

²⁵ Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, “Shulhan Arukh,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1977), 1475.

²⁶ “A shulkhn orekh vi zikh oystsufihren baym tish,” *Dos yidishes tageblatt*, 11/October 1915.

refinements.”²⁷ *Forverts* reported on an American women’s conference held in South Carolina which called for an end to the racial “double standard” and the establishment of “the same *Shulkhan arukh** on morality.”²⁸

Describing the wonders of the Fireless Cooker in *Der tog*, Adella Kean told readers that the results of this innovation could best be described as “*tam gan-eydn*,” “a taste of Paradise” [literally, a “Taste of the Garden of Eden”].²⁹ As for the contamination of foods by the Trusts, she stated “Yes, a quarter of a million unnecessary preventable dead we send to the *malekh hamoves* [“Angel of Death”] for the sins of capitalist society.”³⁰ Elsewhere, Kean referred to the dangers of a “new *malekh hamoves*—the automobile.”³¹

As for a non-Jewish actress involved in a breach of promise suit, *Der tog* wrote that “Miss Benson comes from the very *kodshe-kodoshim* [“Holy of Holies,” a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem], she is the daughter of a Bishop in the West.” Describing her as “a bit of a *rebbe’sin*” [“Rabbi’s wife”], it noted that she “... first became acquainted two years ago with girls and wives of the upper ‘400’ and taught them the holy *toyre** of—tango and still other such kosher dances.”³² Whether used sarcastically, as in the “holy *toyre* of tango,” or seriously, this linguistic device connected readers to their past, and as long as writers employed such devices, would perpetuate Old World meanings in a New World setting. Jewish religious terms, as shown above, could describe the activities of Jews and non-Jews alike. That these writers employed specifically Jewish religious references points to the difference between acculturation and assimilation.

Historian Andrew R. Heinze, in his *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity*, examined two of the publications scrutinized in this study, *Dos yidishes tageblatt* and *Forverts*, demonstrating the role of consumption, consumerism, and advertising in identity-building and acculturation. While this study extends beyond the time period covered in *Adapting to Abundance*, the only changes occurring thereafter in the arena of consumerism and consumption concerned the number of advertisers and the types of

²⁷ “Etikete,” *Froyen zhurnal* (May 1922): 61.

²⁸ “Notitsen fun der froyen-velt,” *Forverts*, 21/January 1923.

²⁹ Adella Kean Zometkin, “*Fun a froy tsu froyen*,” *Der tog*, March 8, 1919.

³⁰ Adella Kean, “*Fun a froy tsu froyen*,” *Der tog*, February 5, 1921.

³¹ Adella Kean, “Froyen-klobs hoben gekent oysfihren shehnere gasen un besere hayzer,” *Der tog*, 9/January 1925; see, also, “Der nayer male-khamoves fun froyen shehneyt,” *Der tog*, 12/October 1915.

³² “Di sheyne rebbe’sin fun di heylige kosher-tents,” *Der tog*, 9/August 1915.

advertisements presented.³³ I will, however, use advertisements to illustrate particular points.³⁴

It should be noted that where I differ from Heinze has to do with his views of immigrant religiosity and the American environment. Despite all the advantages offered by the New World and the ease with which old identities could be abandoned, how many immigrants actually jettisoned everything and converted to the many varieties of Christianity available to them? One historian of Jewish conversion to Christianity wrote that converts “represented only a small fraction of the Jewish population at large,” even at the peak of Jewish migration.³⁵ This is not the situation presented in the story of the man with a name that could or could not be recognizably Jewish, who constantly insisted he was Catholic. He belonged to the Knights of Columbus, not B’nai B’rith; in college joined the Newman Society, not Hillel; gave charitable donations to the St Vincent de Paul Society, rather than the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, “and it is in a Catholic cemetery that I buried my father, *oleva ha’shalom* [may he rest in peace]!” Instead—as amply illustrated by Heinze—a wide variety of reactions occurred, as immigrants mixed and matched new and old, kept, added, dropped, or adapted some customs, and invented others.

Efforts to create institutional forms such as the New York *Kehillab*—a governing council for the New York Jewish community—failed for a number of reasons, ranging from the lack of a (to use a mid-twentieth-century term) “critical mass” of their compatriots to engage in particular practices or arrangements, to a desire not to replicate situations whose very cohesiveness many perceived as coercive. A Yiddish proverb illustrates just how far the New World had moved from Old World rigidities that had prevailed in Jewish society, a sense of deferentially “knowing your place”—“*Amerike, vu a shister iz a mister*” [“America, where a shoemaker (*shister*) is a Mister”]. America provided new ways and means of establishing senses of self-worth and status, as spaces opened for immigrants to excel that did not exist in the Old World. External constraints such as legal disabilities against Jewish citizens or internal restrictions based on cultural norms did

³³ Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1990).

³⁴ For a history of changes in advertising approaches, see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

³⁵ Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 39.

not operate with the same power. Under new conditions, the social customs, institutions, and belief systems which had prevailed in the Old World could be kept, thrown out, or refashioned.

The *Kehillah* was a customary social framework in the hometowns and cities from whence the immigrants came. Yet that was part of the European landscape, not the American one. An example of another religious/ethnic group rejecting a long-standing institutional framework from its homeland helps to underscore this point about a new environment enabling different social relationships. Indentured laborers from India went to the Caribbean to work on plantations. Yet Hinduism as fashioned and practiced in the Caribbean had a very important difference from its traditional form in India. As their terms of indenture ended, most opted to stay in the Caribbean, in Indian villages. In these Caribbean villages, “... *caste no longer plays any significant social, political, or economic role* in contexts where indentured immigration obtained” [emp. added].³⁶ These indentured workers found that they did not require the glue of caste to keep them bound together as a self-identified Hindu Indian community. Similarly, for Jewish immigrants, religious organizations and individuals had the freedom to develop their own standards, forms, and associations, no longer having to conform to the central communal structures prevalent in Europe, whether Western, Central, or Eastern.³⁷

Many of these structures had acted as factors which constrained, rather than enabled, Jewish self-activity. The freedom to marry without specific permission in Central and Western Europe, and the freedom to pursue most economic activities and acquire a secular education in Eastern Europe, represent examples of such external constraints.³⁸ Biblical prohibitions against producing graven images acted to constrain those interested in becoming artists, leading them to migrate.³⁹ The immigrants no longer had to act under the compulsion of an external authority (as in the German municipalities and the Tsarist regime), internal institutions such

³⁶ Peter van der Veer and Steven Vertovec, “Brahmanism Abroad: On Caribbean Hinduism as an Ethnic Religion,” *Ethnology* Vol. 30, 2 (April 1991): 154.

³⁷ Cf. Christian Wiese, “Europe in the Experience and Imagination of American Jewry: An Introduction,” in *American Jewry: Transcending the American Experience?* Christian Wiese and Cornelia Wilhelm, eds. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 18.

³⁸ For permission to marry, see Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering. 1820–1880: The Second Migration*, vol. 2 of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. Henry Feingold (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press in cooperation with the American Jewish Historical Society, 1992).

³⁹ Kenneth E. Silver, *The Circle of Montparnasse: Jewish Artists in Paris, 1905–1945* (NY: Universe Books and the Jewish Museum, 1985).

as governing bodies sponsored or supported by the State, or religious “laws,” as set forth in holy texts, and long taken for granted. They now had the freedom to adapt, adopt, reject, or remake as they saw fit.

One such institution concerned itself with making sure that those involved in the production of foodstuffs followed Jewish dietary laws. Yet the desire for kosher products led, not to a central authority, but rather to multiple organizations issuing such certifications, as can still be seen just by glancing into a food cabinet and reading labels: in addition to Hebrew markings, others include the letters “O” and “U” in circles, each representing a different kosher certifying authority.

Since this is not a reader-response study, I make no assumptions or speculation as to the *actual* influence of these publications upon their reading audiences. The press represents but one of many institutions involved in acculturating immigrants to American society. A list of other institutions involved in the acculturation project would certainly include schools; forums for popular culture such as theater, the movies, and later radio; political parties; mutual aid societies; philanthropic organizations, and so forth.⁴⁰ No matter what the actual effects a publication may have had upon its readers, the vision of that publication, through its advice columns, advertisements, features, and editorials, presented readers with alternative views of what it meant or could mean to be Jewish or Jewish-American. In short, the wide spectrum of the Jewish press offered a broad selection of possible identities, different conceptions of an ideal self. The concept of the “Jewish Street” is helpful: if we visualize all of the varieties of Jewish-American identity as separate blocks, buildings, rooms, basements, attics, or corners, these publications would represent the directories of those locations, or to employ a culinary comparison, the bills of fare served in those restaurants, diners, eateries, or food carts.

⁴⁰ See, for example, John Higham, “The Immigrant in American History,” in *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America*, ed. John Higham (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 24–26; Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986); for the Yiddish theater, see Sharon Power, “Yiddish Theatre Actresses and American Jewish Identity,” *Shofar* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2012): 84, 107, 89; Elizabeth Ewen, “City Lights: Immigrant Women and the Rise of the Movies,” *Signs* 5, no. 3 Suppl. (Spring 1980): S45–S65; Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); for an account of street life and acculturation, see David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).