

Excerpt from

**Offers We Couldn't Refuse:**

**The Decline of Actively Secular Jewish Identity  
in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States**

*The introduction to this 2006 paper, removed here for brevity, opens by describing a trend I was observing: atheist Jews in their 20s choosing to affiliate with religious communities. In conversations with them, I found that some were unaware of the history of secular Jewish culture, and others perceived this older culture to have “naturally” died out. This paper poses the question, “Did secular Jewish culture fall, or was it pushed?” It responds that Jews adapted their identities to fit American norms not only because this offered opportunities for social advancement but in response to trauma that they experienced and witnessed.*

*I specify a focus on Ashkenazi Jews in the United States, while noting that secular Jewish culture also developed in other communities, such as among Mizrahi Jews in Shanghai circa World War II. After clarifying the terms “Judaism,” “Jewishness,” and “secular,” I offer a distinction between “passive” and “active” secular Jewish identity. I use the former to refer to the absence of religious practice or involvement, and the latter to name the “practicing” secular identity of Jews who demonstrate public pride in Jewish ethnicity, culture, history and peoplehood but reject religion. After this excerpt, the original paper goes on to explore how this historical shift shaped the Jewish revival movements that emerged in the 1970s.*

– April Rosenblum

**1880s-1940s: When Secular Jewish Culture Was Normal**

In his landmark essay *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, Will Herberg relates an anecdote that illustrates how views of American Jewish belonging have changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Herberg, writing in 1955, remembers speaking to a group of older Jews some years before, and bringing up Maimonides, the medieval Spanish rabbi and shining star of traditional Jewish religious thought. When Herberg explained that Maimonides, like others in Muslim Spain, spoke Arabic as his everyday language, an elderly audience member “listened intently, and then broke out sarcastically in Yiddish: ‘Eikh mir a Yid!’ (‘You call that a Jew!’). In the eyes of this man, even someone as esteemed as Maimonides could not rate as a ‘real’ Jew because he did not know any Yiddish.”<sup>1</sup>

Evocative as it is of power dynamics that persist in Jewish communities today, this story will strike various readers as maddening, endearing or both. What is instructive for my purposes, however, is this older man’s matter-of-fact confidence that, no matter how monumental one’s religious credibility might be, ethnicity – represented here by the secular language used in daily life by his ethnic group – outweighs religion when it comes to defining Jews.

For Jews coming of age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the idea of full participation in Jewish life without religion may appear to be a contradiction. But between the 1880s and 1940s, being a secular Jew, or “freethinker,” as many atheists called themselves, meant you could participate in hundreds of cultural, social and political activities where it was assumed that you had no tie to religion *and* that you had a strong Jewish identity. If religious Jewish society had social

institutions such as religious schools for children, *yeshivas* for higher religious learning, burial societies, kosher slaughterers and synagogues, so too could secular Jews access a world of institutions in which they were the norm.

Secular Jewish schools provided children with education in regular academic subjects as well as in Jewish history, Yiddish language and literature, and social justice ideals. One could read a multitude of Yiddish newspapers, sing in choruses, join activist organizations and live in apartment buildings, all created by and for secular Jews. As patrons of Yiddish theater and members of Jewish sports teams, unions, occupational organizations and *landsmanshaftn* (immigrant fraternal organizations for Jews who originated from the same towns, which provided camaraderie, medical insurance, funds for weddings and more), actively secular Jews could mingle with religious Jews while performing secular activities based on an ethnic bond.

To recognize the diversity within Jewish civic life is not to imply that religious and secular Jews agreed on what constituted a valid Jewish identity. However, secular Jewish culture was sufficiently widespread and visible that if religious Jews refused to recognize secular Jews as “real,” it had little impact on secular Jews’ daily lives, or on their confidence in their culture and credibility. Jewishness was understood, at least by secular Jews, as an inherited bond, beyond which the individual Jew commanded his or her own ideological allegiances.

An illustration of this worldview can be found in the song “*Ale Briday*” [“All Brothers”]. Based on an 1890 poem by the Yiddish socialist writer Morris Winchevsky, “*Ale Briday*” was described in the 1920s as “the most popular folk song that was sung in the old country” and remains to date one of the most frequently-sung Yiddish songs in the United States.<sup>2</sup> The lyrics extol unity between Jews: “And we are all brothers / ...And we stick together / ...like no one else / ...*Frum and link* (religiously observant and leftist), all united, like the groom with his bride (my translation).”<sup>3</sup> Given the broad representation of Jews in Left ideological movements of the time, including anarchism, communism, many varieties of socialism and diverse brands of Jewish nationalism such as Zionism, Bundism and territorialism, and the dearth of them in right-wing politics, one can likely assume that “leftist” stands here for “political”.

Whether or not *frume* or *linke* Jews actually yearned for such unity, the popularity of “*Ale Briday*” suggests the circulation in the 1920s of two concepts: First, that Jewish society was composed of both religious and politically engaged, non-religious Jews. Second, that both religion and politics were surface qualities: chosen behaviors, which might separate their adherents from one another in daily life, but which were trumped by the deeper, familial connection that united all Jews.

That religion was becoming more marginal to Jewish identity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was apparent to professional religious leaders as well. In 1909, the Conservative branch of religious Judaism founded a highly-regarded Teacher’s Institute. It tended to graduate the type of Jewish education teacher who was “more typically a Zionist than a religious Jew, though of course many were both,” writes Nathan Glazer. “This institute attracted many students to the Seminary who did not feel strongly about religion but did feel strongly about the Jewish people and Jewish culture – about Jewishness. ...The Seminary did not try to justify in any elaborate way the fact that it served as an institution in which many people who had no strong feeling for the Jewish religion were educated.”<sup>4</sup>

In local and national surveys throughout the 1920s and 1930s, “again and again it was discovered that [young Jews] had moved much farther from any religious position than the Catholic and Protestant students. More were atheist, more agnostic, fewer accepted any traditional religious formulations.”<sup>5</sup> A 1935 poll of 15-25 year olds of all backgrounds in New

York showed that the vast majority of young Jews – 72% of males and 78% of females – had attended no religious services in the previous year. In 1938, less than a third of Jews in America were connected to a synagogue – even indirectly through a participating family member.<sup>6</sup> In the years leading up to World War II, if anything appeared to be “naturally” dying out among American Jews, it was religious identity.

### 1920s-1950s: Traumas, Successes and Disappearing Acts

If ethnic ties and a sense of peoplehood were the foundation of actively secular Jewish culture, forces exerting pressure against that culture could be found in the United States even during its heyday. Eastern European Jews received messages that their ethnic culture was inferior from both detractors and presumed allies. Antisemitic policies and informal practices prevented Jews from being admitted to specific colleges, social clubs, resorts and professions. On the other hand, advocates attempting to help lift immigrants out of poverty taught Jews that social advancement would require exchanging their ethnic mannerisms for white, middle-class norms.

These messages of corrective critique came from well-to-do Central European Jews, who used English, German and Russian in settlement houses to teach courses in flag-waving and hygiene, but forbade the use of Yiddish.<sup>7</sup> They came from social workers, who worked with Jews, and other poverty-stricken European immigrants who were not yet fully considered white, and could decline public assistance to immigrants with uncouth ethnic habits such as eating traditional foods or taking in boarders.<sup>8</sup> They framed the education of children of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, as at the City College of New York, where as late as the 1960s, students were required to take speech classes to unlearn English pronunciations shaped by living with Yiddish- and Italian-speaking families.<sup>9</sup> Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, a student there, remembers the visceral shame that the classes instilled. “Words like *shmate* trapped me...marked, stripped and revealed me. I came from people who talked *like that*. I came from them and would be stuck with their lives. In case I needed proof of the connection between their lives and that accent, I had only to attend [City College] and discover that in order to graduate, I had to learn NOT to talk *like that*.”<sup>10</sup>

The persuasive arguments being made to Jews about their culture’s inferiority were balanced by attractive suggestions of what could be gained by assimilation. If Jews could blend in sufficiently well to evade anti-Jewish prejudice and satisfy white cultural norms, they could access professional jobs, financial security and middle-class comforts which had been out of reach for most of their ancestors in Eastern Europe.

The political atmosphere of the 1920s heralded a new era of urgency for Jews anxious to blend in. A wave of xenophobia rocked the country, targeting Jews, Asian Americans and other “aliens” as a corrupting and threatening element in American society. Jews in general were associated in the public mind with the recent Bolshevik revolution and its potential threats to Western democracies, and Jewish anarchists and other political activists were deported in large numbers. Henry Ford used his Dearborn Independent newspaper to warn readers around the country about “The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem,” declaring that a tiny percentage of Jews had taken control of the United States, and reprinted the antisemitic forgery, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” as evidence of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, opponents of immigration were lobbying to ban the influx of races

considered genetically inferior. Jewish immigrants were described in a Congressional report as “filthy, un-American and often dangerous in their habits.” In 1921 and again in 1924, anti-immigration activists won strict quotas. Immigration came to a virtual halt.<sup>12</sup>

As the 1930s went on, there was growing justification for American Jews’ fears. The country experienced a marked rise in popular antisemitism as the Nazis rose to power. The Philadelphia neighborhood where Jewish linguist and activist Noam Chomsky lived as a child “was inhabited mainly by Germans and Irish Catholics, who were, for the most part, anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi.”<sup>13</sup> A common attack on the Roosevelt Administration described the President’s policies as the “Jew Deal” or warned voters, “It’s *your* country. Do you want Sidney Hillman [a Jew in Roosevelt’s circles] to run it?”<sup>14</sup> Politicians like Gerald L.K. Smith capitalized on popular sentiment by making antisemitism a central plank of their platforms.<sup>15</sup> Street movements, such as the Christian Front and the Nazi-funded German American Bund, provided the muscle to back up the antisemitic rhetoric heard on the extremely popular, nationally-syndicated radio shows of Father Charles Coughlin. Novelist Chaim Potok remembers,

You had Father Coughlin from Detroit yelling anti-Semitic diatribes at you from the radio on Sunday afternoons. Did I listen to him? Absolutely! You wanted to know what the enemy was saying so you could respond. And if you didn’t listen, the anti-Semitic neighbors would turn up their radios so you would hear him when you walked down the street.

And then, of course, there was the ranting and raving of Hitler, which I would get on the radio – with a lot of static – from time to time. ...I wanted to milk everything for what it was worth, because you never knew if there would be another minute.<sup>16</sup>

The looming war in Europe reinforced a sense of powerlessness among many Jews, even as American antisemites accused them of being overly powerful. In July 1938, representatives of 32 nations in Evian-les-Bains almost universally expressed unwillingness to accept Jewish refugees. In August 1941, Senator Gerald Nye, a populist Republican, opened hearings to investigate “warmongering” by a “Jewish-controlled monopoly” in Hollywood.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, news trickled out of Europe about Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. The stories were so severe that government public relations offices sometimes refused to publicize the real numbers of Jewish victims, for fear Americans would not believe them.<sup>18</sup> When the war finally ended in 1945, revelations about the total number of dead confirmed to American Jews that the murder of Jews in Europe had gone beyond even their worst fears. Looking back on that time, Potok describes the desolation felt in his family when they learned the extent of the killing. “I still remember the day my father received a letter from Europe telling me that not one relative had survived. He sat down and told my mother, and she just fell to pieces. She kept saying, ‘Nobody? *Nobody?* I can’t believe *nobody.*’ Once I talked about the Holocaust with my father. He told me that we had lost 103 aunts, uncles, second cousins, whole families. Then he turned away.”<sup>19</sup>

The vulnerability of their brethren in Europe had a concrete impact on how Jews in the United States carried themselves in their daily lives, even when their physical surroundings appeared to be safe. In her autobiography, poet Marge Piercy writes that her family followed the events of the war closely. “Mother told me about what was happening to the Jews in Europe – it is foolish to imagine people did not know. It was all over the Yiddish papers.”<sup>20</sup> But, beyond the safety of Piercy’s home, “I was a Jew, and thus an outsider. My mother was always saying,

*Don't tell anyone.*" If it were known that the family was Jewish, "she was terrified that the Nazis would appear and carry us away to a concentration camp."<sup>21</sup>

Some survivors of the Holocaust attempted in the most literal fashion to erase their Jewish identities, in order to protect themselves or their children from the trauma that seemed to be always around the next corner for Jews. Helen Fremont and her sister grew up in a Midwestern suburban community in the 1950s. Raised as Roman Catholics, they uncovered their parents' Jewish identities only as adults, in the early 1990s. Fremont remembers how

When I was small, maybe five or six, my mother came to my bed every night to tuck me in. She would teach me the sign of the cross in six languages: Polish, Russian, German, Italian, French, and English. Each night I selected a language, and we said the sign of the cross in that language: *In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.* Then she taught me the prayer Our Father in these languages, and I rehearsed them until I knew them by heart. I loved the way gumdrop syllables rolled off the tongue in Italian and the way consonants crashed in German... What I didn't understand was that my mother was equipping me with the means of survival: proof of my Catholicism to anyone in a dozen countries.<sup>22</sup>

As indirect witnesses to the mass murder in Europe, and – in the case of the survivors who now entered the United States in small waves – direct witnesses, many American Jews hoped that becoming less visible would offer them safety. As the Cold War and a renewed tide of domestic anti-communism ramped up, however, Jews instead became even more visible as presumed threats and targets. Jews featured prominently both in the rhetoric of right-wing anti-communists such as Congressman John Rankin and among the actual ranks of schoolteachers, Hollywood directors and others who were barred from employment for suspected communist ties.

The new decade opened with a historic low point for American Jews. In the summer of 1950, a seemingly average, lower-middle-class Jewish mother and father, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, were arrested in New York City on charges of passing nuclear secrets to the Soviet Union. In many Jewish households and organizations, it was felt that the Rosenbergs were singled out not only as Communists but as Jews. Despite their protestations of innocence, the Rosenbergs were executed on June 19, 1953. Anthropologist Karen Brodtkin remembers that her family was deeply affected by the Rosenbergs' trial and execution. "It was a terrifying thing and discussed in the same hushed tones that the Nazi genocide was talked about in our house. ...My parents talked about these things with their friends, but I do not think they discussed them with our non-Jewish neighbors. I believe this was out of a fear that to do so might evoke an anti-Semitism they suspected our white neighbors harbored but which they didn't want to know about."<sup>23</sup>

In the post-Holocaust, anti-communist era, Jews had compelling reasons to want to blend in to the crowd. Both the "carrot" of upward mobility and the "sticks" of antisemitic violence and red-baiting motivated American Jews to avoid seeming too foreign, too visible, too "ethnic."

There was, however, one acceptable difference that had been enshrined as an American ideal from the nation's inception: difference in religion. Jewish GIs, thrown into the overwhelmingly Christian turf of the military, had already experienced the way that this permissible difference could mediate their experience as outsiders. Deborah Dash Moore observes that many secularly-identified Jewish GIs saw Jewish religious services as a refuge. GIs like Albert Eisen and Harold Paris wrote home – at times apologizing to their secular families –

that they were experiencing an excitement for Friday night services that they would never have conceived of before. Eisen wrote to his parents that, “as a minority, it becomes necessary for us to declare ourselves to those who, unfortunately, are imbued with anti-Semitic sentiments.”<sup>24</sup> In a world where religious difference was the most permissible one, religious gestures had become a source of ethnic self-defense.

Announcing this difference was not risk-free. When Claire Gorfinkel, born after the war, asked her mother for the kind of Jewish star necklace she saw other Jewish girls wearing, she was chided, “‘We don’t wear our religion around our necks.’ For our family and that segment of the Jewish community of which we were a part, it was sufficient to know that we were Jewish. To go beyond that was to flaunt it, perhaps even to invite trouble.”<sup>25</sup> Still, for many Jews, religion offered a difference that could allow them to be like their neighbors: not an untamed, still-foreign and perhaps-disloyal ethnic group, but white people, who worshipped on Saturday.

To Eastern European Jews, America had long represented an escape from the dangers and limitations of European life. Memories of these dangers revealed themselves in the kinds of cautionary tales passed down in the families of Jews like Paul Jacobs, an American student radical in the 1930s. “A Jew does not ‘make rishis.’ To ‘make rishis’ was to stir up a fuss of some kind, and it was a cardinal sin, for it supposedly made Jews vulnerable to the potential wrath of the Christian world. This world was conceived of as something like a potentially evil sleeping giant who, if awakened by a loud noise, might, and probably would, turn on the disturber of his peace and do him harm.”<sup>26</sup>

Now these lessons seemed relevant again. The war had offered convincing evidence that America was one of the few places in the world where Jews were safe. Anti-communism and the Rosenberg execution warned Jews not to step out of line if they cherished that safety. Jews had absorbed messages subtle and un-subtle: If they were really glad they were in America, they would do well to keep a low profile and conform as much as possible.

If the lure of a happy, middle-class American life was the offer they longed to accept, the examples that had been made of European Jews and of domestic Jewish outsiders served as chilling reminders of the alternative. America was making Jews an offer they couldn’t refuse. It was from this vulnerable position that American Jews reshaped themselves in a new landscape.

### **1950s-1960s: A New Jewish Identity for New Circumstances**

In the 1950s, a number of changes in public policy altered the geography of Jewish life. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, made funds for housing and education available to returning veterans. Although its practical implementation excluded many African Americans from reaping these rewards, the Act enabled Jews and other veterans of European descent to attend college and purchase homes in record numbers. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled against the use of restrictive covenants, a widespread realty practice which had prevented home sales in white neighborhoods to minorities. Soon afterward, federal urban renewal campaigns led to many working-class, ethnic neighborhoods being demolished, despite the protests of their residents, in order to build highways, stadiums and upscale business districts. For Jews who could afford to move out of their old, ethnic neighborhoods, the 1950s created both pressures and opportunities to do so.

After living in dense, older construction, the appeal of the newly-developed suburbs with affordable, spacious, modern homes was clear. But moving required leaving areas where “everyone...or almost” everyone was Jewish. In poet Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz’s neighborhood

of Flatbush, Brooklyn, “Jewish was the air I breathed, nothing I articulated, everything I took for granted.” Born in 1945, Kaye/Kantrowitz grew up surrounded by resettled Holocaust survivors, in a neighborhood where her parents’ Jewish, secular values seemed perfectly normal.<sup>27</sup>

My father had been raised observant, my mother, not. But to us breaking religious observance was progressive, the opposite of superstitious; when we ate on Yom Kippur [a holiday when religious Jews fast], it never occurred to me that this was un-Jewish. I knew I was a Jew. I knew Hitler had been evil. I knew Negroes – we said then – had been slaves and that was evil too. I knew prejudice was wrong, stupid. I knew Jews believed in freedom and justice.

... Soon we would get our first TV, so my mother (and I) could watch the McCarthy hearings. I knew the whole fate of humanity hinged on these hearings, as surely as I knew the Rosenbergs had been good people, like my parents, with children the same age as my sister and me. I knew government people, like McCarthy, had killed the Rosenbergs, and I was terrified, but it literally did not occur to me that real people, people I might meet, people who had children and went to work, hated the Rosenbergs, thought they should die. Nor did it occur to me that there were people who thought unions were bad, people who did not know you never cross a picket line, did not know prejudice was wrong and stupid.<sup>28</sup>

Some Jews were able to move to suburbs that were densely Jewish, as their older neighborhoods had been. Others, despite moving to areas with fewer Jews, were able to maintain something of the Jewish community that had nourished them in their old neighborhoods. Karen Brodtkin’s family arrived in Long Island in 1949, but kept the same, all-Jewish networks of friends, colleagues and shopping destinations. Brodtkin’s parents did succeed in imparting to their suburban daughter the political values that had guided them in Brooklyn; values that mirrored Kaye/Kantrowitz’ lessons during the same years in Flatbush.

I tended to think of the political outlook I learned in this milieu as Jewish. I knew from listening to teachers’ shoptalk at my parents’ parties that school principals were bosses not so different from garment bosses, as well as jackasses; that the Board of Education was an endless source of trouble and idiocy, and that teachers were what made schools run despite them. I listened to their stories of teacher unions’ organizing and learned from childhood that you didn’t cross picket lines. I knew that everyone in this dispersed Jewish community was a Democrat and voted for Adlai Stevenson, while my [gentile] spatial community of Valley Stream went solidly for Eisenhower. ...Joseph McCarthy was evil incarnate, and we rejoiced at his downfall. ...In one sense, then, being a Jew meant being part of a multigenerational community, not really political but Democrat, pro-union, antimanagement, and secular in the way one saw the world.<sup>29</sup>

Still, for Jews who had felt at home in working-class urban enclaves where various ethnicities had carved out niches, the transition to a more homogeneous, white, middle-class suburban atmosphere presented a culture shock. Not all Jews made the transition easily. “My grandmother tried to live in our suburban house the way a good Jewish mother in the immigrant working-class community was supposed to live,” remembers Karen Brodtkin.<sup>30</sup> But the isolation of the suburbs, with its model of nuclear families, its lack of a place for beloved older relatives, its erasure of active working roles for women, didn’t allow Brodtkin’s grandmother the meaningful life she had had in the old neighborhood. “Fulfilling the immigrant dream of

suburban prosperity brought no pleasure.” Instead, Brodtkin’s grandmother “lost the hard, work-based domesticity she knew and from which she derived her identity and authority,” and she eventually took her own life.<sup>31</sup>

The poet Adrienne Rich remembers how her father – a well-heeled Southern Jew who had striven to fit into the white world – expected his family to behave in public during his consideration for an academic position. “[My sister, mother, and I] were constantly urged to speak quietly in public, to dress without ostentation...to assimilate with a world which might see us as too flamboyant.” Rich’s grandmother, a Sephardic Jew who had mastered Southern standards of white womanhood, dressed subtly and wore the most unassuming jewelry possible. “A few times, within the family, I saw her anger flare, felt the passion she was repressing. But when [my father] took us out to a restaurant, or on a trip, the Rich women were always tuned down to some WASP level my father believed, surely, would protect us all.”<sup>32</sup>

Journalist Charles Silberman recalls how his own neighborhood’s block association paid a visit to his neighbors after the family’s grandfather had moved in, “not to welcome the elderly gentleman but to protest his habit of sitting on the front lawn quietly reading his Yiddish newspaper while he caught the afternoon sun. ‘It’s not nice,’ they complained, by which they meant that they were embarrassed by his public display of Jewishness. Had the eighty-two-year-old man read a French newspaper, the block association members would have been delighted with the touch of class he added to the neighborhood.”<sup>33</sup>

As suburban Jews were trained in the rules of “nice” public behavior, they began to adapt their activities to a religious context. Social clubs and communal functions that had previously been hosted by ethnic organizations now found home in “synagogue centers,” structures which combined leisure activities and social services into one building with a Jewish house of worship. One well-known proponent of the synagogue center model was Mordechai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement. Kaplan, who had directed the aforementioned Conservative movement’s Teacher’s Institute in the early 1900s and was acutely aware of Jews’ decreasing religious engagement, advised synagogue leaders “to make the synagogue more attractive by adding to the house of worship and the [religious] school a variety of non-religious activities that might serve the entire surrounding Jewish community.” Proponents of the model suggested that it “might be the nucleus for a new type of Jewish community. Its focus would not be religion but something we may call ‘Jewishness,’ which would be the common element in a variety of activities – religious, political, cultural, intellectual, philanthropic, all of them legitimately Jewish.”<sup>34</sup>

Synagogue centers had flourished in cities, and were supremely well-suited to the needs of Jewish suburbanites, who could tap into many of the social resources of a Jewish neighborhood in one building. But the proposed vision of equal legitimacy for non-religious Jewish expressions was challenged, in practice, by an American culture that found Jews easiest to understand as a religious group. In the classic 1970 young adult novel, *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, Judy Blume’s main character moves to the suburbs of New Jersey from New York City, with her parents – one Christian, one Jewish. Margaret’s new friends are astounded to discover that she has no religion.

“But if you aren’t any religion, how are you going to know if you should join the Y or the Jewish Community Center?” Janie asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I never thought about it. Maybe we won’t join either one.”

“But *everybody* belongs to one or the other,” Nancy said.<sup>35</sup>

For the uniformly white residents of Margaret’s suburb, both the JCC and the Y are centers of extracurricular activities, yet Margaret is expected to play in one of them according to her *religion*. Confused, she vows to study up on religions and make a choice. In the new world of the suburbs, before she can decide where to play volleyball, she has to decide on a theology.

I argue that as viable alternatives for overtly secular Jewish self-expression disappeared, and non-believing Jews were subsumed into religious Jewish environments, a sort of unstated consensus developed in American Jewish communities. Religious institutions would allow large numbers of non-religious Jews to come for what they really wanted: social activities among their ethnic peers. In return, those Jews would come to a few, specified religious observances as a gesture of loyalty to one’s “roots” and out of a sense that this was what one did as a member of the community – as well as for the enjoyment of seeing everyone one hadn’t seen throughout the year. This not only limited the ways that non-religious Jews expressed their identities, but diluted the religious environment itself.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 202.

<sup>2</sup> A. Litvin, quoted in Eleanor Gordon Mlotek, *Mir Trogn a Gezang*, 160.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Winchevsky, “*Akhdes*,” quoted in Mlotek, 160.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism*, 93-4.

<sup>5</sup> Glazer, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Glazer, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Gerald Sorin, *A Time For Building*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Issue Is Power*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Kaye/Kantrowitz, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Ford, “The International Jew,” excerpts and comments, in Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, 407-409.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Congress, *Temporary Suspension of Immigration*, excerpted in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, 405-407.

<sup>13</sup> Robert F. Barsky, “Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent,” no page number in electronic version.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 33.

<sup>15</sup> Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews in Modern Times*, 329-30.

<sup>16</sup> Chaim Potok, quoted in David Walden, “A Conversation with Chaim Potok,” in Chaim Potok, *Old Men At Midnight*, no page number.

<sup>17</sup> Roy Schwartzman, “Hollywood’s Early Cinematic Responses to Nazism.”

<sup>18</sup> Novick, *Holocaust*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Walden, “Conversation with Chaim Potok,” no page number.

<sup>20</sup> Marge Piercy, *Sleeping With Cats*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Piercy, 56.

<sup>22</sup> Helen Fremont, *After Long Silence*, 11-12.

<sup>23</sup> Brodtkin, *White Folks*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, “When Jews Were GIs,” <http://www.fathom.com/course/21701756/session3.html>. Link inactive.

<sup>25</sup> Claire Gorfinkel, *I Have Always Wanted to Be Jewish*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Jacobs, *Is Curly Jewish?*, quoted in Novick, *Holocaust*, 40-41.

<sup>27</sup> Kaye/Kantrowitz, *Issue is Power*, 94.

<sup>28</sup> Kaye/Kantrowitz, 93.

<sup>29</sup> Brodtkin, *White Folks*, 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Brodtkin, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Brodtkin, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Adrienne Rich, “Split at the Root,” in Wesley Brown and Amy Ling, *Visions of America*, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Silberman, *A Certain People*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Glazer, *American Judaism*, 90-91.

<sup>35</sup> Judy Blume, *Are You There, God?*, 35.

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