

# Modern Jewish Identity and Origins

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**Abstract:** *In the late nineteenth century and early decades of twentieth the scholars, politicians, and the popular press were accentuating the threat approaching the Nordic or Anglo - Saxons - the real face of Americans, coming from the impoverished Irish, and later the Eastern and Southern European impoverished immigrants, among them Jews, and their whiteness was under suspicion, and anti - Semitism was widely adopted. Anti - Semitism attitudes thoroughly changed after World War II and they became middle - class. 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act, the most significant program in the American history, was compiled to provide prosperous economic large, multinational corporations with skilled clerical, technical, and managerial hands. For this purpose, the government provided financial support during the job search, small loans, and educational benefits, including tuition and living expenses. This - the most transformational postwar regulation made Jewish upward mobility to the middle class happen together with the Jewish outstanding endeavor and strive towards educational accomplishments.*

**Keywords:** assimilation, anti - Semitism, inequitable, middle - class, segregate

## 1. Introduction

“External pressures and internal attachments combine to make the Jew in the modern world often more aware of this identification than of any other. Conscious of the influence which Jewishness has upon his character and mode of life, he tries to define its sphere and harmonize it with the other components of self. Such Jewish self - consciousness has been especially characteristic of the last two centuries”. (Michael. A. Meyer, 1967. p.8)

In the ghetto insulation, the all - inclusive and undoubted character was attributed to Jewry, which lost it to a certain level not earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century. Exactly with the Age of Enlightenment Jewish identity becomes sectional and consequently unsettled. Modern Jewish history from an intellectual standpoint begins in 1748 - 1824, and problems also emerge when Moses Mendelssohn, for example, achieves the standing of a high - profile philosopher of the Enlightenment and is restrained at one stage in his life to hold firmly to his Jewish loyalty: By 1824 certain attempts have been made: philosophical absolving, strong attempts to metamorphose both Jews and Judaism, struggles for political and social integration and absolute non - acceptance of Jewish identity. The members of this unique society, in the period of Romanticism, promoted new justifications, that demonstrate Jew's tenacious wish to clarify persevered Jewish recognition to himself and the universe with regard to dominant cultural values represented in his ancestry. (Ibid, 1967).

According to Kenneth Roberts the American nation was established and evolved by the Nordic race, but after a great influx of millions of the Alpine Mediterranean and Semitic immigrants joined the WASP, he predestined an inexorable outcome of engendering a hybrid race of “worthless and futile as the good - for - nothing mongrels of Central America and Southeastern Europe”. (Brodkin. K.2010)

In the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth predictions of scholars, politicians, and the popular press were accentuating that “mongrelization” of the Nordic or Anglo - Saxon race the real face of Americans by the second - class European and non - European races was

damaging the composition of the nation. The 1920s and 1930s it was the climax of anti - Semitism In America. It's true that the United States has a record of anti - Semitism and of an assumption that Jews are representatives of a secondary race. However, Jews were not alone. American anti - Semitism was a segment of a more inclusive model of late nineteenth - century racism against all southern and Eastern immigrants, together with Asian immigrants, to say nothing of African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans. These views gave grounds for all kinds of inequitable behavior, including closing the doors, between 1882 - 1927, to immigrants from Europe and Asia.

To categorize and define human beings frequently is based on genuine or presupposed physical, biological, or genetic distinctions, as a method to differentiate who is incorporated and who is eliminated from a group, to attribute specific traits, to determine social roles, and to allocate status, power, and privilege.

People are to know their standing. So, social categories, like gender, race, class, and ethnicity are used to set up and preserve a certain type of social order. The stratifications and their distinguishing characteristics, connotations, and implications are socially built - through history, politics, and culture. Special connotation and relevance were frequently accredited to give an explanation for the invasion, expansion, subjugation, and oppression of the whole groups of people, and despite the fact that peculiarities may have altered gradually, this system of systematization and classification still remains in a way.

For example, Native American people were described as barbaric, unrefined, and unmanageable savages in the writings of early colonists on this land. This condoned the near - massacre of Native Americans by white habitants and the repealing of treaties between the U. S. government and Native American tribes (Zinn, 1995)

Today, Native Americans are no longer called savages, Frederica Y. Daly speaks about the oppression the Native People have gone through, as well as their achievement in maintaining traditional values and the cultural restoration they have initiated. (Daly, F.1994)

Anti - Semitism attitude radically changed in the U. S. after World War II. All of a sudden, the same people who had encouraged racial intolerance and anti - immigration sentiments, and deported the Euro - origin people, as representatives of subservient races, and hampered their immigration only a couple of decades ago, now come to consider them middle class - white urban citizens. (Rodriguez, Sylvia.1997)

According to Karen Brodtkin, it was not an academic inspiration of the ruling class to change their attitude towards Jews. In reverse, it was the strongest and best anti - discrimination program in American history, and it was for Euro males. It was not how it was authorized, significant is, how it was practically realized. State policies altered the category of whiteness to involve European immigrants. There are commonalities and distinctions in degrees each of the European immigrant groups become "whitened".

### What Jews shared with other Euro - immigrants

The U. S configuration of Europe into inferior and superior races started with the marginalizing of the Irish in the middle of the nineteenth century, that was followed by a great number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century. Prior to that European immigrant - involving Jews had been successfully integrated into the white population. Although, the 23 million European immigrants, the inflow in the U. S. to work after 1880 was exorbitant to engross. Immigrants and their children constituted more than 70 percent of the population in large cities and in a decade urban American cities had acquired an outlined southern and eastern European immigrant ambience. Working - class immigrants shared public areas with the upwardly mobile elites and the middle class.

The Red Scare of 1919 connected anti - immigrant with anti - working - class sentiment. The Red Scare attitude was propelled by an economic depression, extensive postwar strikes, the Russian Revolution, and another incursion of postwar immigrants.

The assumption in European races was promoted most strongly aimed at the well - to - do, U. S. - born Protestant elite, who was alarmed by appearing unassimilable working class. By the end of the nineteenth century, Senator Henry Gabot Lodge propelled Congress to stop immigration to the United States. Theodore Roosevelt cautioned about "race suicide" (Brodtkin, K, 2010).

This scare gained force in the beginning of the twenties century owing to aristocrats and scholars who initiated doctrines of eugenics - reproducing "better" humanity.

Major to this attempt was Madison Grant's "The Passing of the Grant Race. (M. Grant, 1916) Grant exposed the attitude that there existed three or four major European races, from superior Nordics of northwestern Europe to the second - rate southern and eastern races of the Alpinas, Mediterranean, and retrogressive, Jews, who second to be scattered everywhere in his native New York City.

For Grant, race and class were intertwined: the upper class was racially genuine Nordic; the lower classes were from the

lower races. Such views were typical for the mainstream of the early twenties - century society. Scientific racism of the 1920s spread the conception that real Americans were white and they were from northwest Europe. Racism by white workers in the West pressed laws expelling the Chinese in 1882. Racism shut the immigration doors practically to all Asians and most Europeans between 1924 - 1927.

Racism in general and especially anti - Semitism prospered in higher education. Initially, Jews were the first of the Euro - immigrant groups to be enrolled in colleges in large numbers, thus they faced bigotry there. The protestant elite whined, that Jews were not sophisticated, and were noisy and aggressive. Harvard University President A. Lawrence Howell, being a vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, as well, overtly was against Jews at Harvard (Brodtkin, K.2010).

Some Jews from the older generation assume that Jewish success is consequential to hard work and a high regard for education. Actually, these traits made advancement possible for Jews, for example in New York, where they were clustered. In 1920, Jews made up 80 percent of the students at New York City College, 90 percent of Hunter College, and prior to World War I, 40 percent of private Columbia University.

By 1934, Jews constituted about 24 percent of all law students across the country and 56 percent of them in New York City. However, more Jews, become public school teachers; than doctors or lawyers. (Markovitz; Ruth Jakinov; 1993)

According to the second generation of Jews, explaining second mobility if Jews is based on whom they are compared with. In comparison with other immigrants, Jews were successfully socially climbing. But likened to nonimmigrant whites, that mobility was restricted. Anti - immigrant, racist, and anti - Semitic impediments made the Jewish middle class remained limited to a small number of occupations. They were barred from mainstream corporate management and corporately employed in professions, counting out garment and movie industries, in which they were leaders. Eastern European Jews were established in small businesses.

The first Generation maintained the idea that Jews overcome anti - Semitic blockades because Jews are special. The second generation response is that the Jews who were socially mobile were unique among Jews, and were put such a question to them: what they might have been without the racism and with some anti - discrimination program? That is exactly what the post - world War II boom, twinning down anti - Euro racism and anti - Semitism, and governmental anti - discrimination program reached out to white males.

By that time Jews were just as all other whites. Until that period Jews were in a world of Jews. Italians were a kind of Jews but distanced from Jews. Portuguese were more remote.

Jews left that world In 1949. Many of them moved to Volley stream, Long Island, which was protestant and Republican,

but Irish, Italian, and Jewish townees attached it a more out - of - town and Democratic impression.

Neither religion nor ethnicity is segregated at school or in the neighborhood. Jews Catholics, and Protestants, Italians, Irish, Poles, English were incorporated on the block and at school. They considered themselves middle - class and knowledgeable. (Ibid, 43)

Scientists try to respond the question: Which came first: Did Jews and other Euro - ethnics become white by status and inclusion because they became middle - class? Or did being encompassed into an enlarged chronicle of whiteness hastened the process of opening the economic doors to middle - class standing? According to Brodtkin, obviously, both trends could be acceptable.

Some of the shifts activated during the war against fascism galvanized a more comprehensive model of whiteness. Anti - Semitism and anti - European racism lost reputability.

The 1940 statistics did not differentiate native whites of native parents from those of immigrant ancestry, so European immigrants and their children became more protected white. \*

[\*Grant. M 1916; Ripley 1923; also Patterson 1997; Grant, quoted in Higham 1955, p156.

Couled 1981; Higham 1955; Patterson 1997, p108 - 115 ]

Principals of culture substituted principals of biology. Instead of the precarious trend that would demolish American democracy, immigrants became ethnic groups whose progeny had flourishingly integrated into the mainstream and entered the middle class. Ethnic environs converted into the test of American democracy's advantage over racism. Jewish mobility became the story of people who begin life in poverty and achieve success and wealth through honesty, and hard work.

Through hard work every ethnic group would get its share and the United States would be a Nation with commensurate opportunity for all its individuals to become fractions of a successful middle - class majority. And Jewish immigrants and their offspring were happy to join Middle America. It cannot be said, that anti - Semitism vanished often during World War II, but it ceased to be popular and become covert.

Despite the attitude towards who was white facilitated for Euro - ethnics to emerge as middle class, economic well - being had an enormous role in the whitening process. The economic flexibility of Jews stemmed finally from America's postwar economic affluence and its substantially increased need for professional, technical, and leadership labor, and governmental help in obtaining it.

The United States came out from the war with the most powerful economy in the world. Wages rose in 1946 - 1960, enhancing buying power, and giving the most population some unrestricted earnings. American manufacturing, banking and business services were substantially dominated by big corporations that transferred into multinational

corporations. Corporations needed increasing numbers of clerical, technical, and managerial professionals.

## 2. Conclusion

In the end of the nineteen century, the U. S. division of Europe into inferior and superior races was the continuation of the discrimination of the Irish in the middle of the nineteenth century. Jews were involved in the discrimination group of southern and eastern European impoverished migrants. Some older generation Jews attach the Jewish success to hard work and their great attention to education. Although the younger Jewish generation considers, the Jews became white entering the middle class, was of course due to their endeavor to work very hard, but their mobility was also provided by the anti - discrimination program in after World War II.

The 1944 Serviceman's Readjustment Act is the most significant anti - discriminatory program in American History. It was produced to procure the demanded labor force skills, for this purpose great support was extended in the form of diverse loans.

\*This census also explicitly changed the American race to white (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1940, 2: 4)

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