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EDITOR'S NOTE



FOR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW, I have been editing the papers of 24 women working in different fields and in different places throughout the world. These women also come from very different parts of the Jewish community and work in a variety of settings: some are academics; some are writers; some are social workers. All originally presented papers in 1997 and 1998 at the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women located at Brandeis University. Reading their work, thinking about their ideas, and sometimes struggling to translate them into English has been an unexpectedly absorbing experience for me and I've wondered what it is, exactly, that I find so rewarding. I've concluded that spending time in the company of an international, interdisciplinary group of Jewish women begins to fill a most basic and persistent need in me: the need of human beings to see themselves sympathetically represented and reflected in their culture.

As a Jewish woman growing up in post-war America, I rarely saw any semblance of my reflection in the mainstream culture. Although I grew up in the middle of New York City where almost everybody in my immediate world was Jewish, representations of Jews were absent from the museums I visited, the movies I saw, or the books I read in school. Except for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which I consider problematic reading for a young Jewish girl, there was no Jewish heroine in the books of my childhood. I identified with active, adventurous girls like Jo March, Nancy Drew or Cherry Ames and liked reading about the dramatic lives of European and English queens. I didn't then notice that none of the women I was reading about were Jewish, or that Archie and Veronica seemed to have no Jewish friends; that there were no Jewish Mouseketeers; or that there were no Jewish girls in *American Girl* or *Seventeen*.

I was in my forties and listening to West Indian writer Jamaica Kincaid speaking at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston, when I suddenly perceived their absence (like Pnina Motzafi-Haller in her essay about *mizrahi* women in Israel, I applied the insight of an African-American woman to my own life). Jamaica Kincaid had done a brilliant and audacious thing: invited to choose her favorite painting at the museum and speak to a large audience about the reasons for her choice, she had beamed an old snapshot of her mother on the museum's large screen and talked about it.




All of us in the audience, of course, had been accustomed to viewing the parade of art history on such a screen – from the Greeks to the Renaissance masters to the Impressionists and Abstract Expressionists. We were accustomed to oil portraits and elaborately framed photographs. The effect of Kinkaid's snapshot was shocking and made the author's point more forcefully than her words: Had we ever seen the image of an ordinary West Indian woman on the walls of a museum? Had we ever contemplated her face? Her body? Her surroundings? Her life? How did we ascribe value to this snapshot when it was viewed in a private photo album, in a newspaper, or here, in the context of other portraits in the museum? We had all read or at least heard of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but what about the invisible woman? In this case, what about an entire sub-culture usually hidden by the majority African-American minority culture?

I viewed many of these working papers as such snapshots that raised some of these and many other questions.

In addition to experiencing a kind of invisibility as a Jewish girl in America, I also felt an invisibility in the Jewish community as the daughter of Czech Jews (of *ashkenazi* descent on my mother's side; *sephardi* on my father's). We lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where there were many Jewish refugees from Central Europe but where the definition of Jewish culture was determined by people who, like the majority of American Jews, were of Russian and Polish descent.

This particular group, I later learned, had jettisoned their working-class, Yiddish-speaking parents (as well as their working-class culture) in the Bronx, or Brooklyn, or Queens, or the Lower East Side. They were West Siders now, middle-class, highly educated, new Jews, who frequented the American – not Yiddish-language – theater and Lincoln Center, collected art, read the cultural sections of the *Times* and the *New Yorker*. The men worked as professionals; the women were delighted to be full-time homemakers in the image of Betty Crocker. Most were political liberals who had flirted with Communism or Socialism in college; they had friends or acquaintances who were blacklisted and were deeply affected by McCarthyism. They had also been deeply affected by the events of the second world war and were in every way invested in a prototypically 1950s American mainstream lifestyle.

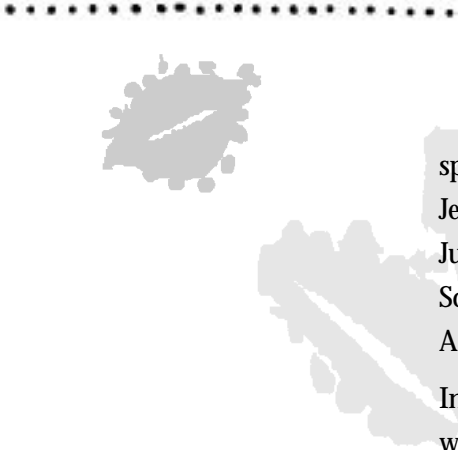
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My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, had never seen a bagel, and were not especially interested in Israel. Although they had no sympathy for McCarthyism, they were staunch anti-Communists who regarded Stalin as another version of Hitler. During the 1950s, they struggled to earn money and to adjust to America. Like many Jewish (and other) refugee women, my mother supported the family. My father – a former Olympic water polo player and sometimes officer of the Organization of Czech Sportsmen in-Exile-in-the Western World – was mostly unemployed until I was ten years old.

All this is to say that, as I was growing up, I felt as invisible in the Jewish community as I did in the American one. And when I had finished growing up, although I was counted as an American Jew, I still did not feel like American Jewish culture included me. G.B. could have been describing the Epsteins when she writes “Iranian Jews do not easily mesh with the majority Jewish culture. Those who live in North America feel marginalized: their experience has been that American Jews know nothing about them... The Iranian Jewish diaspora is triggering a re-examination of hegemonic notions of American Jewish identity. Iranian Jews with their own ethnic and cultural tradition are challenging the American Jewish culture that was brought from Eastern Europe and that is presumed to apply to all arriving Jews regardless of their background. This ashkenazi standard for Jews is similar to the WASP standard for assimilation to North American society.”

The issue of cultural hegemony is addressed in an even more dramatic way by South African Sally Frankental. “It is a truism to note that all Jewish communities, in all times and places, reflect the context in which they are located,” she writes. “In the South African case, the segregationist policies of the colonial authorities, the Boer republics, and the Union, followed by the apartheid system of the past fifty years, form the inescapable frame for all who live in South Africa... the disproportionate numbers who arrived from one region, Lithuania, gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish



spoken, and in a variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the east Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established in South Africa only in 1933, far later than in most diaspora communities." All this, of course, shaped the lives of South African Jewish women.

In reading these papers, I was struck by how many kinds of Jewish women there are, how profoundly we are influenced by our country of origin and the continuity or discontinuity of Jewish life within its borders, and by our experience of such factors as entitlement, dislocation, prejudice and outsider status. History, particularly this century's history, has not treated all Jewish women equally. In writing their papers, some authors – like Katalin Talyigas of Hungary – was reconnecting to and reconstructing the history of Jews in their country for the first time. Others, like Micaela Procaccia, who lives in Rome, is steeped in her history and writes with the surety of long immersion in the past: "In the year 1537, a Roman Jewish working class girl named Lariccia cried for days because of an unwanted match," begins her paper. "The day before the *qiddushin*, or betrothal, a washerwoman named Clemenza heard Lariccia saying to her father: "I do not like this man, nor do I desire him. I refuse him and reject him, nor do I want him." She declared herself to be "the unhappiest of all women," and on the next Shabbat, she told her father that she would not agree to let "the *qiddushin* become *nissu'in*.' Her father then hit her with the butt of a knife."

The biographical section of this volume itself makes for fascinating reading – as much for the wide geographical spectrum represented as for the facts each woman deemed important to include. As different as each woman is, I find much in common with her. It was easy for me to enter into her world.

Although this first HRIJW collection of writing by Jewish women around the world is inevitably uneven and incomplete, it is a respectable beginning. The authors represented here are, in some countries, part of a larger scholarly and cultural project of researching and writing about women's lives; in others, they are pioneers – the first of their kind. In some countries, they have been able to draw on a large body of data and literature; in others, they are themselves creating that data and literature. Ana Lebl from Split (now in Croatia) lives in an aging and relatively poor community of only 100 Jews



with scarce resources; Americans Riv-Ellen Prell and Pamela Nadell enjoy the support of Jewish Studies as well as Women's Studies departments at major American universities. Our Israeli and Latin American contributors bring both these realities into yet another perspective.

Some of the authors chose to spend time reworking their original presentations; others were content to have published what they originally presented. Many have struggled to express themselves in English – their second or third or fourth language. As a writer who has often had to communicate in foreign languages, I admire their pluck; as editor, I hope they forgive my journalistic bias, my many questions, and my inadvertent mistakes. Parts of all their work – even where it represents a starting point – moved and inspired me. I hope it will move and inspire you.

Helen Epstein

October, 1999



BASIA NIKIFOROVA was born in 1945, the first Jewish child born after the war in Volkovysk (Belarus). Her parents, who had lived out the war as Jewish partisans in the forests, moved the family to Grodno, where she finished secondary school. She is a graduate of the Philosophy Department in Moscow State University and taught ethics at Grodno Medical Institute before realizing her dream of moving to Vilnius. Only in 1990 did her father tell her about Lithuanian collaboration with the Nazis and that Latvian collaborationists murdered her mother's family. This information changed her scientific interests. Moving from the abstract idea of religious and ethnic tolerance, she began to focus on Christian-Jewish relations, and sources of anti-Semitism in the Eastern Europe, receiving grants from Harvard University and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. During 1997-1998 she was Fellow of the Center for Study of World Religions at Harvard University and Maria Salit-Gitelson Tell Fellow of YIVO. Her subject of research was "*Religious and National Tolerance / Intolerance in Lithuania: The Case of Lithuanian's Jews in the Twentieth Century.*"

LAURENCE PODSELYER is a researcher at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris at the Jewish Research Center. After many years dedicated to South American anthropology concerning Amerindians in Amazonia, she turned to Jewish culture and to the socio-anthropology of the Lubavitch community as well as a study of a Parisian suburb with an important Jewish population. Both fields focus on returning to religion as a new tendency of French Jews in the context of immigration and cultural change in France. She is a member of the editorial board of *Pardes* and the author of numerous publications.

RIV-ELLEN PRELL, an anthropologist, is Associate Professor of American Studies and an adjunct member of the faculties of Jewish Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of the forthcoming *Fighting to Become Americans: Jewish Women and Men in Conflict in the 20th Century*; *Prayer and Community: the Havurah in American Life*; and co-editor of *Interpreting Women's Lives: Personal Narratives and Feminist Theory*. Prell has published a number of articles on American Judaism in the late twentieth century, how gender shapes our understanding of American Jewish culture and Jewish/Black relations in the United States. She has served on the editorial boards of the Encyclopedia of Jewish Women in America and the feminist journal SIGNS. She teaches about American Jewish women, Jews and popular culture and religion and culture.

EETA PRINCE-GIBSON, an Israel-based academic and writer, is working on her doctorate through the Hebrew University on women settlers in the West Bank and Gaza.

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JEWISH WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

by Riv-Ellen Prell

The first conference of the International Research Institute on Jewish Women in 1997 coincided with a remarkable publishing event: the publication of *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Women in America*. This two-volume work edited by distinguished scholars and activists Professors Paula Hyman and Deborah Dash Moore is testimony to a transformation in both American and American Jewish life. It would have been unthinkable merely thirty years ago, unlikely two decades ago, and probably unmanageable ten years ago.



It was not a paucity of Jewish women and activism that proved a challenge to this undertaking; the Encyclopedia brims over with exciting historical figures. What has changed in recent decades is the recognition of the importance of documenting American Jewish women's lives and organizations, the expansion of Jewish women's participation in the secular and Jewish spheres of the nation, and the birth and growth of a scholarship that allow us to reflect on those processes.

Because the United States is an exceptionally important site of the second wave of feminism that developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is not surprising that a Jewish feminism would shortly follow. The development of Jewish community life in the United States has positioned Jewish women to play leadership roles in the secular movement and to develop their own.

The massive East European Jewish immigration to the United States between 1890 and 1910 brought two and a half million *ashkenazi* Jews to the United States. They were preceded by a German Jewish immigration of about 50,000 Jews who left Central Europe between 1820 and 1870 and a far smaller *sephardi* immigration. While German Jews and their descendants prospered quickly in multiple regions of the United States, the far more numerous East European Jews stayed primarily in the East and in urban centers. They entered an economy hungry for skilled labor to work in the booming factories where Jews produced clothing, jewelry, and other items of an expanding consumer economy.¹

Through unionization that increased workers' wages and entrepreneurial opportunities to create small businesses, Jews were able to enter the middle class fairly rapidly compared to other European white ethnics who came to the United States at a comparable period. Indeed, by the mid-1970s, Jews were moving from a solid position in the middle class to the upper middle class. Jewish woman followed the pattern of American middle-class family life that prescribed taking them out of the labor force at marriage in some cases, or with the birth of their children in others. Because of their political liberalism and relative affluence, which afforded opportunities for education and membership in a variety of women's volunteer organizations, Jewish women were able to participate actively in movements for women's equality and to take advantage of career opportunities that feminist activism had created.

¹ For a general reference work on American Jewish mobility and demographics, see Calvin G. Goldscheider and Alan S. Zuckerman, *The Transformation of the Jews*, University of Chicago Press 1984

Second wave feminism grew in tandem with, and out of, the leftist student protests of the 1960s and early 1970s. These Jewish students grew up in homes in which achievement through higher education was one of the highest priorities. Sons born in the 1940s and 1950s entered professions to a far greater extent than their fathers who tended to be in business and white collar management. The daughters had many more years of education on average than their mothers.²

As the American college campus of the 1960s became the incubator of political transformation, it was not surprising that Jews, often only a generation or two away from socialism and anarchism, and still in the midst of liberalism, would be active participants in political movements. A feminism that spoke to equal opportunity for women and men would be especially appealing to a relatively privileged group of women who were given identical opportunities to their brothers, but whose career options were far more limited.

The middle class Jewish trajectory, combined with the extraordinary opportunities opened by the women's movement, made it possible for American Jewish women to achieve remarkable success in the paid labor force. Since World War II, but particularly since the 1970s, Jewish women and men have begun to resemble one another in educational attainment and employment as they never have previously, according to the research of Israeli sociologists Harriet and Moshe Hartman.³ For example, in 1990 Jewish women born between 1954 and 1965 were slightly more likely to have received Bachelor of Arts degree as their highest degree than Jewish men (46.2 percent to 43.1 percent). In contrast, Jewish women born between 1946 and 1955 were slightly less likely to receive terminal Bachelor of Arts degrees than men (32 percent to 35 percent). Jewish women born between 1946 and 1965 had an average 16 years of education compared to 13 years of education for American white males and females of those ages. Only Jewish males had more education than Jewish women, slightly more than 16 years on average.

The only group of Americans consistently more educated and professionalized than Jewish women is Jewish men – though that gap, too, may be closing. The working lives of Jewish women who do not marry differ almost not at all from Jewish men in that they remain in the workforce employed full time. Jewish married women differ from Jewish men only after they have two children. Then, Jewish women often leave the work-force, returning after their children reach school age. They also continue to work longer than other white workers. Therefore, they comprise a highly educated and productive sector of the work-force.⁴

With American Jewish women currently employed to a far greater extent than in the 1950s, their ability and/or willingness to participate in Jewish communal life has been affected. A recent study commissioned by the Jewish women's organization, Hadassah, found that today's Jewish women were less likely to participate in Jewish activities than previously. Drawing on Sylvia Fishman's work, Amy Sales reported that 45% of young Jewish women who work full-time volunteer for non-Jewish causes, while 18% give their time to Jewish causes. Jewish women are somewhat more likely to volunteer their time than Jewish men, a fact that

² For a discussion of Jewish men's professionalization, see "The Economics of American Judaism" Carmel Ullman Chiswick, *Shofar*, Vol. 13, No 4. (Summer 1995)

³ All references are cited in the accompanying bibliography

⁴ See Amy L. Sales, "Surveying the Landscape: Current Research on American Jewish Women" in *Voices for Change: Future Directions for American Jewish Women*, The National Commission on American Jewish Women, 1995 p. 31.

has been true since the end of the second world war. Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum, in their survey of the sociology of American Jewish women, come to a slightly different conclusion. Their analysis of a variety of studies reveals that Jewish women's paid labor does not affect their voluntarism: indeed, those who have part-time employment volunteer to a greater extent than those women not in the workforce.⁵

Another major change in the status of Jewish women has taken place in the religious sphere. Some Jewish denominations have allowed women to be ordained as rabbis and cantors, to count as adult Jews in order to read Torah, make the minyan, and serve as synagogue presidents and leaders. They have thus transformed a shrinking base of Jewish religious participants into a far stronger one. The improved education of both orthodox and non-orthodox young women will likely have a parallel effect. The Jewish community cannot exist without women's leadership and religious participation. That simple fact indicates the dramatic effect of feminism on American Judaism.

Judaism, as it is practiced in the United States, has been changed by feminism in another way. The turn toward spirituality, healing, innovative ritual, new music and the democratization of Jewish higher learning have been in large measure brought about by the efforts not simply of Jewish women, but of Jewish women committed to feminism. As American Jews approach the end of the twentieth century they are participants in a different religion than they were at mid century. Judaism continues to uniquely reformulate the trends of the dominant culture which have consistently had a major impact on how Jews practice their religion.⁶

Over the last three decades, the traditionalism of orthodox Jews has intensified and liberal Jews' synagogue affiliation is down (though not over the last decade according to recent surveys).⁷ At the same time, Jewish practice in the non-haredi Jewish religious institutions has, in a variety of forms, become more inclusive of women, and has allowed greater educational and leadership opportunities.

Parallel to these transformations in religious practice has been a change in educational expectations for young Jewish women and girls. The recent *North American Study of Conservative Synagogues and Their Members, 1995-1996* reported that there is now very little difference in the expectations of the *bar* or *bat mitzva*. Since *bat mitzva* in the Conservative movement is a relatively recent phenomenon, the equality in preparation and expectation is all the more remarkable.

The growth of Jewish day school education in the United States is also a critical feature in the increased Jewish education of women. Israel, too, continues to provide opportunities for young Jewish women to study intensively and to increase their competence in the study of traditional Jewish texts.

Overall, the profile of young Jewish adults who continue to identify with Judaism into the 21st century will be feature far greater learning than the majority of identified Jews at mid-century. As recently as the late 1950s, rabbis were decrying the domination of synagogues by women who lacked Jewish educations and could not be competent leaders. Not only was the level of men's Jewish education exaggerated then, but Jewish women's leadership persisted and women's educational opportunities have followed suit.

⁵ Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum in "Feminist Sociology and American Jews" in their book cited in the bibliography pp150-151

⁶ See Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*, Basic Books, 1993

⁷ Steven M. Cohen, "Religious Stability and Ethnic Decline: Emerging Patterns of Jewish Identity in the United States" The Florence G. Heller Jewish Community Centers Association Research Center.

Most research about American Jews since World War II has been fairly insensitive to gender differences. Scholars are just beginning to learn something about the ways that Jewish women participate in their Judaism. The available data suggest a deep commitment on the part of Jewish women to belief in God and Jewish practice. Understanding the meaning of Judaism to those Jewish women who identify religiously as well as those who understand themselves to be secular Jews will be an important avenue for research.

Jewish feminism has been powerfully tied to issues of sexuality within the American Jewish community. Jewish women have been in the forefront of developing a gay Jewish movement in the United States. Evelyn Torton Beck's collection, *Nice Jewish Girls*, as well as the publication of the journal *Bridges* have brought Jewish lesbians into the light of American Jewish organizational life. Debates about the halachic status of gay Jews and gay marriage suggest that American Jewish life and Judaism will continue to respond to and reassess Judaism in light of issues of sexuality well into the next century.

What is paradoxical about the relationship between feminism and Judaism is that the acute feminist critique of normative Jewish tradition has inspired so many women to participate more fully in Jewish life. While I'm not aware of a study of this phenomenon, I have found dozens of examples of women and gays who, though risking marginalization, have sought out Judaism as they have come to understand their difference from the dominant culture. The feminist and "queer" analysis of the patriarchal foundations of Judaism seems to have allowed some Jews to formulate a new identity and brought them to fuller participation and visibility within the Jewish community. A similar phenomenon may be observed within the large community of children of Holocaust survivors whose parents were marginalized and, at times, isolated from the mainstream Jewish community in the 1950s and 1960s. Daughters of survivors such as psychologist Eva Fogelman, authors Helen Epstein and Eva Hoffman, comedian Deb Filler and film historian Annette Insdorf have become prominent figures in their respective fields and in the international second-generation community.⁸

American Jewish women have a long history of participating in local and national organizations to confront problems facing the Jewish community. The National Council of Jewish women began with German Progressive women's concerns for the safety of East European young immigrant women. Hadassah, founded in 1912, was established to support a national homeland, as was Pioneer Women, established in 1925. Sisterhood auxiliaries have proved critical to fund raising for synagogues. All of these organizations also acted to educate women, depending on the period, on a variety of subjects, both Jewish and non Jewish. They provided a critical foundation for women's leadership in the Jewish community through organizations that created women's spheres parallel to those of men.

The "Federation movement" centralized philanthropic activities and often competed for members with women's organizations while maintaining their own gender parallel organizations. With the rise of second wave feminism, women began moving out of entirely female organizations but the American Jewish community has been very slow to move women into major leadership positions nationally.

Jewish women's organization have "grayed" nation wide. As older male Jewish organizations such as *B'nai B'rith* have lost members, so have traditional post-war Jewish women's organizations. Hadassah and the

⁸ See Helen Epstein, *Children of the Holocaust*, New York 1979 and *Where She Came From: A Daughter's Search for her Mother's History*, New York 1997.

National Council of Jewish Women have devoted considerable energy to recruiting younger women and to reorganizing their structures and goals. They have aggressively supported feminist causes. The National Council of Jewish Women was responsible for supporting the Jewish Women's Resource Center and Hadassah's funding of the International Institute for Research on Jewish Women are two examples of ways in which these groups have responded to changes in women's lives.

Because of the confluence between academic life, the baby boom, and Jewish women's activism, there has been a significant increase in Jewish feminist scholarship. Historians, religious studies scholars, literary critics, sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural critics have participated in the revision of their own fields through research on Jewish women, as well as establishing a feminist foundation for Jewish studies as a secular scholarly effort.⁹ Jewish feminist scholarship often took its inspiration from Jewish feminist activism. The *Jewish Woman in America*, written by two historians and one literary critic, began as an effort to respond to a lack of information, role models or knowledge about the history of American Jewish women.

Rachel Adler's critical work in feminist Jewish theology began in 1971 with her article "The Jew Who Wasn't There," one of the first efforts to find a language to talk about the place of women in Jewish law.¹⁰ In the 1990s, a younger generation of Jewish feminist scholars write with a scholarly perspective that allow them to rethink what has already become something of a canonized matriarchy of Jewish feminism. Laura Levitt and Myriad Peskowitz's most recent collection, *Judaism Since Gender*, did just that by not only rethinking the study of Jews and Judaism through gender concepts, but revising some earlier feminist work as well. The multi-generational nature of that volume is one of its most interesting contributions.

This scholarly output, as well as the academic turn toward multiculturalism, has worked to develop a burgeoning field of Jewish women's studies with courses offered throughout the United States.

What is perhaps most exciting about the study of American Jews, American Jewish culture and the impact of Jews on the shape of American culture is that it is wide open to scholarly pursuit. As feminist scholarship has turned from women to the study of gender, such issues as the impact of the construction of an American manhood and womanhood on the religious lives of American Jews, and the development of a secular, modern, and post-modern Jewish culture have become important areas to explore. With the exciting links that can be made between Jewish studies and cultural studies, feminist history and American Jewish history, the study of the construction of racial identity and understanding the impact of gender on Jews' ascent into the dominant culture, a rich scholarship will only grow.

⁹ For reviews of the impact of feminism on various fields on Jewish scholarship, see Lynn Davidman and Shelley Tenenbaum eds. *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*; Judith Baskin ed. *Women of the World*; and *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*

¹⁰ Rachel Adler "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halakha and the Jewish Woman" *Davka* (Summer 1971) reprinted in *On Being A Jewish Feminist*, ed. Susannah Heschel Schocken, 1983 pp12-18.

The growing importance of Yiddish and Eastern European immigrant culture in America to younger scholars and artists will lead to wonderful work on women and gender in that culture. Even in such seemingly well-mined areas as labor organization, political activism, and popular culture, we stand to learn a great deal about how “the project of assimilation,” as Paula Hyman described the phenomenon shaped American Jewish life.¹¹

Another area of Jewish women’s lives that is an increasingly important site of scholarship is their representation in the American mass media. In the burgeoning field of media studies, particularly in area of construction of identity, far too little has been written about Jews and Jewish women. Joyce Antler’s *Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture* is a welcome attempt at this conversation. The last decades have seen the publication of the first major studies of the role of Jews in Hollywood such as Neal Gabler’s *How the Jews Invented Hollywood* and Lary May’s *Screening Out the Past*. As film historians note, Jewish subjects in film peaked in popularity in the 1920s. Not until the 1970s did Jews re-appear in any numbers and the role of Jewish women has been, with few exceptions, largely negative. Of equal, if not greater concern, than the treatment of women is the fact that the media shows virtually no examples of loving relationships between Jewish women and men. In the 1970s, such films as *Goodbye Columbus* and *The Heartbreak Kid* portrayed young Jewish women as unattractive and/or demanding partners.

Television has followed film in this regard. Even as a small number of Jewish characters appeared on network series in the 1980s and 1990s (in *Seinfeld*, *Thirtysomething*, and *Northern Exposure*), the male protagonists are always paired with non-Jewish girlfriends and wives. The media seem unable to present loving heterosexual or homosexual relations between Jews. Media Jews live in an eternal time warp of the 1920s when the melting-pot was the culture’s dominant trope, and marriage between Jews and others was its most popular theme.

Representation and image are powerful forms of communication in any culture, but particularly in a mass media-dominated one. The uncomfortable absence of Jews able to be Jewish with one another in media where so many Jews write, direct and produce is a worrisome matter for anyone concerned about the lives of Jewish women.

In virtually every arena, American Jewish women have succeeded in creating opportunities to pursue the Judaism they want, and the kind of family and work lives meaningful to them. But the ability to tell their own story – the story of American life as they have experience it – remains an important challenge.

On the other hand, Jewish women have been part of an incredible cultural renaissance of fiction, poetry, journalism, dance, art and music. It would be difficult if not foolhardy to list all of the Jewish women working as Jewish artists in the United States. The handful of identifiably Jewish artists prior to feminism and the explosion of talent in a context of expressing cultural identity speaks eloquently to the ability of Jewish women to represent themselves even while they are being mis-represented in the mass media.

¹¹ Paula Hyman refers to the “project of assimilation” in her seminal work *Gender and Assimilation: Roles and Representations of Women in Modern Jewish History*. She suggests that assimilation as a sociological phenomenon differs from the project, which entails official policy. The host nation’s agreement to allow Jews to assimilate differed from Jewish leaders who wanted Jews to acculturate but not to abandon their unique identities as Jews through religion, philanthropy, and education. These processes were played out within the context of the Jews of western societies also joining the middle class. That class membership sharply differentiated the experiences of men and women. Thus, the project of assimilation is one in which gender and class are critical constituents to understand.

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This bibliography serves as an invitation to a sample of works in each field. It is biased toward books for the sake of economy of space, and toward works of scholarship, rather than memoir, and journalism. As scholarly works, each has a fine bibliography. By excluding articles I have left out important work in each field, but scholarship that is readily available in the works cited.

An annotated bibliography and guide to archival resources on the history of Jewish women in America is available in the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Women in America* (volume II), and may be accessed through the world wide web at [www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/women's studies/jewwom/jwmain.htm](http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/women's_studies/jewwom/jwmain.htm)

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