The Privileged "In-Between" Status of Latino Jews in the Northeastern United States

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The Privileged “In-Between” Status of Latino Jews in the Northeastern United States

by

Laura Limonic

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

The City University of New York

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Approval

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract of the Dissertation

The Privileged “In-Between” Status of Latino Jews in the Northeastern United States

by
Laura Limonic

Adviser: Professor Nancy Foner

This study is an in-depth look at how religion, class, and ethno-racial status interact and intersect to affect assimilation and integration prospects for new immigrants. The research focuses on Latin American Jewish immigrants in the Northeastern United States, a particularly interesting group to study because they are not easily classified within the American racial and ethnic system and existing ethno-racial categories. As a result, they are presented with a number of ethnic options that they can call upon. The choices they make as well as the constraints they face in making these choices, can broaden our understanding of contemporary immigrant life in America today. Using qualitative data from forty-one in-depth interviews as well as ethnographic research, the study shows how immigrants develop and adopt different ethnic labels as part of their larger sense of ethnic identity. The study finds that Latino Jews have a number of identities to choose from – national identities, Latino, Jewish or panethno-religious (Latino Jewish) and the label or ethnic identity they choose (or are assigned) is often situational and instrumental, yet legitimate. The study also focuses on the construction of panethnicity and a panethnic group identity. Latino Jews develop a panethnic identity through interaction with other in-group members, in an institutional setting such as a community centre or religious organization. Within an institutional or organized site, the exchange of religious customs reinforces a sense of shared history and is a strong factor
in the development of a new pan-ethnic identity. Overall, the experience of Latino Jews shows that class and race are important determinants in the construction and instrumentality of ethnicity and ethnic identity for this group of immigrants.
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Chapter One

Introduction

I'm not really sure where I fit in. At home in Mexico I was Jewish, but here it is so much more complicated. I am Jewish and Mexican and also Latino; it depends on who I am with and what people see me as.

Benjamin, Mexican-Jew in New York

Assimilation or incorporation into a new country is accomplished not only through socio-economic advances, language acquisition or acculturation but also inevitably involves changes in ethnic identity. Indeed, immigrant incorporation in the United States is shaped by the ethnic and racial stratification system in this country – and, how immigrants fit into the ethnic and racial landscape affects their life chances. A number of questions surround these issues. For example, how do immigrants navigate the different ethnic and racial categories in the United States; how is “insider” status within existing racial and ethnic groups achieved; how does membership in ethnic and racial groups influence life chances; and to what extent are immigrants able to define their own ethnic and racial identities to situate themselves within American society. I address these questions through a larger theoretical lens of panethnic identity and group construction, instrumental and strategic ethnic identity, and immigrant assimilation using a case study of Latin American Jewish immigrants in the Northeastern United States, primarily from Argentina, Mexico, and Argentina. In 2011, there were an estimated 150,000 Latin American Jews living in the United States (Sheskin and Dashefsky 2011).
Jewish immigrants from Latin America are a particularly interesting group for such a study because they are not easily classified within the American racial and ethnic system and existing ethno-racial categories. They inhabit two worlds, that of Latinos, who are generally seen as non-white in the U.S. and that of Jews, who are viewed as white. A central question is whether these Latin American immigrants are classified primarily as Jewish and therefore white; or whether, and in what situations, their national identities as Argentine, Mexican or Venezuelan trump their Jewish ethnic identity. Another critical question is whether Jewish immigrants from Latin America are readily accepted into the Latino communities in the Northeast or if they consider themselves Latinos. A further complication is that Jews from Latin America are often considered ethno-religious minorities in their home countries. Like other Latinos in the United States, Jewish Latinos invoke different identities (e.g. national, religious or panethnic) in response to different actors and situations (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000). While the ethnic label a person identifies with is shaped by structural factors that limit his or her choices, the agency a person has over these choices varies across racial and ethnic groups (Nagel 1994). Since ethnic identification is situational, how members of a group identify depends on whom they are interacting with and how their ethnic identification influences the outcome of a particular situation.

Jewish immigrants from Latin America arrive in the Northeastern United States with a dual identity already in place. They come from countries with deep ties to Catholicism, which permeates public and private lives in Latin America. As a result, Jews in Latin America have a strong sense of Jewishness and are often immersed in vibrant and strong communities. At the same time, Jews in Latin America hold
prominent positions in the media, academy, business and government. They also take part in the cultural traditions of their countries and have incorporated national food, music, symbols and cultural traits into their individual and communal lives. In essence, their national identity is as much a part of their individual sense of self as their Jewish identity.

It is when members of this group arrive in the United States that their identity, both as Jews and Latinos, is questioned. We might assume that Latino Jews would inevitably identify with and join the existing Jewish community, since to do so would elevate them to racial majority status vis-à-vis most other new immigrants. Also, Jews from Latin America are likely to belong to the middle or upper-middle classes in their home country, similar to many long-established Jews in the United States. This is especially true in the New York and Boston areas, where Jews are not only a numerically large group but also have had substantial economic, political and social success. But such assumptions about automatic -- or primary -- Jewish identity and interaction with Jewish Americans need to be critically examined: Latin American Jews’ national background and culture do not simply fade away in New York. It has often been said that immigrants discover their ethnicity upon landing in the United States. In the United States, Latin American Jews are no longer only Jewish minorities as they were in their home country, but are also sometimes identified in terms of their national origin -- and they, themselves, often claim national identities that were taken for granted in their home countries. At the same time, Jewish immigrants from Latin America discover that there is yet another ethnic category in the United States, the panethnic category Latino, and that non-Jewish Latinos may or may not accept them as in-group members.
The ambiguities encountered by Latino Jews shows that they confront constraints in their identity choices. Their choices are limited, not only by the available ethnic labels, but also by the acceptance of their choices by ethnic groups with whom they choose to identify. My research shows that, due to these constraints, a new panethnic group is emerging. Put another way, in the context of constraints on their ethnic identity choices, some Latin American Jews in New York are creating new identities and organizations that reflect what one might call their “in-between” status --- not fully Jewish, not fully Latino. In recent years a small number of organizations have sprung up which espouse the panethnic label “Latino Jews”.

Even though they face some constraints, my research also suggests that their high socio-economic status and their phenotypic resemblance to the white majority allow members of this group considerable fluidity and choice, and as a result they are able (in certain contexts) to call upon different ethnic identities and establish useful connections, obtain preferential treatment, access established networks, and benefit from policies that promote diversity. Latino Jews are buffered from much of the racial discrimination that affects the life chances of darker-skinned Latinos with less human capital. As a result of their high socio-economic status and phenotypic similarities to the mainstream, Latino Jews are able to benefit from their different ethnic identities – Latino, Jewish or Jewish-Latino and, in fact, their access to different ethnic and ethno-racial groups may influence their prospects for upward mobility.

**Methodology**

As far as I know, this is the first in-depth study on Latin American Jews in the United States. To conduct my research I employed two main methods: forty-one in-depth
interviews as well as participant observation. Quantitative data are not available since the most widely used demographic databank, the U.S. Census, does not ask questions on religion making it impossible to separate Latino Jews from non-Jewish Latinos. The United Jewish Communities and the Jewish Federation system conducted the National Jewish Population Survey in 2000-2001, but the data set has very few cases of Latino Jewish immigrants. Moreover, due to economic and political crises in the past ten years in Latin America, some of which affected the Jewish community directly, the number of Latino Jewish immigrants who have arrived in the United States in the last decade has risen significantly.

Data collection

My primary method of research was in-depth interviews with Jewish immigrants from Latin America, in the New York and Boston area as well as participant observation at Jewish-Latino organizations and social events. I chose these two areas because I wanted to gather a broad sample from different geographic locations. New York is the major area of settlement for Latino Jews in the United States, but there were also practical reasons for selecting New York and Boston; I live in New York and have close ties to Latino Jews in Boston, where I grew up and my parents live. At the same time, by choosing New York and Boston, I was able to hold certain socio-economic factors constant; my preliminary research suggested that these areas have attracted high-skilled immigrants looking to enter the American economy through jobs in higher-education, finance, medicine, and marketing or seeking to take advantage of educational opportunities afforded by the areas’ elite universities. Latino Jews do not, at least in these areas, follow the trends of chain migration so often reported in the immigration literature,
that is, “movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants” (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964:82). They have come primarily for the professional and educational opportunities in Boston and New York.

Insider perspective

My status as a Jewish-Argentine immigrant (1.5 generation) granted me automatic entry into this population. In many ways, aspects of my own personal life have led me to ask the questions relevant in this body research. Also, as an insider I was able to gain easy access to the population as well as establish comfortable connections. I sensed that respondents felt at ease with me and were able to talk openly about sensitive topics, especially with regard to race and ethnicity, without a fear of judgment, since they considered me “one of them.”

I also was able to pick up on the nuances of their speech and idioms, especially in Spanish, which might have been lost to an outsider. As an insider, I was given entrée to social and professional events and at these events I was well versed in the rules and norms governing social relations. This was particularly important at religious gatherings, where I knew to sit apart from the men and wear appropriate clothing, for example. At the same time, I made sure that the respondents and event participants knew of my role as a researcher and the objectives of my study. I worked to maintain an open, and, as far as possible, “objective” view, and use my “sociological imagination” in analyzing the interview and participant observation material. There are of course risks to being an insider, one being the bias of my own personal history and experiences which inevitably

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influenced the way I designed the study. While I base my conclusions strictly on the analysis of data I collected, I do not discount the importance and validity of using my own experiences as part of the research endeavor, particularly in formulating the questions that guided the study (for a discussion of using the self in sociological research see Katz-Rothman 2007).

**Recruitment of participants**

I began recruiting respondents both through my own personal networks as well as postings on local parent list-servs (internet) in the Brooklyn, New York area. From these original respondents I used snowball sampling to enlarge the sample. When asking respondents for additional contacts, I emphasized the need to find respondents who were different from them in socioeconomic status, ethnic identity and family status, in order to obtain as diverse and representative sample as possible. I conducted forty-one interviews, the majority in person, between 2011 and 2012. During the interviews I took extensive notes and also used a digital recorder to tape the interviews, with the consent of the respondents. All of the respondents received and signed a copy of the informed consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board at the City University of New York. I use pseudonyms throughout the dissertation to maintain the privacy and anonymity of the respondents. The interviews lasted between one to three hours and sometimes longer, and took place at cafes, offices, and people’s homes. One took place in a medical research laboratory and I conducted three over the telephone. I gave the respondents the choice to answer in Spanish or English, and the majority (thirty-eight) chose to conduct the interview in Spanish. The three people who preferred English had been living in the United States for over forty years. I translated the interviews myself, using “free
translation,” where I focused on the meaning of the words and not a literal translation, in order to best convey the meaning of the speaker.

A drawback of this sort of research is selection bias. Even though I attempted to widen my sample and include people of different backgrounds, education, family structure and socio-economic status, it is possible that my sample was limited in its scope. I did not encounter anyone who did not want to be interviewed; in fact, most looked forward to having a conversation about the process of immigration, the challenges of identity and their new ethnic identity in the United States. One of the obstacles I faced was being unable to interview as many male respondents in the finance industry in New York as I would have liked. In general, it was more difficult to arrange interviews with men. I approached many, and most appeared eager to participate, but scheduling was difficult and at times impossible, and as a result there is an overrepresentation of women in my sample.

Participant observation

Through my preliminary research I discovered a religious organization, the Jewish Latin Center, based in Manhattan. I began attending monthly Friday night services in 2010 and continued to do so through the end of 2012. The religious services were followed by dinners where I was able to observe the interactions among those in attendance, and note the language used and the culture of the participants. I also made a number of close connections with some of the members and built relationships with them throughout my participation in the center’s events. I attended parties hosted by the Jewish Latin Center at outside venues, such as barbeques and cocktail parties. In 2013, I was approached by the Rabbi (and founder) of the Center to assist in a venture to work with
underprivileged Latinos in New York City. I have been working closely with the Rabbi and five other members of the Jewish Latin Center to come up with a program where the group members can volunteer their time and mentor Latino youths. The project is still in its early stages and should take shape in the coming year. I also attended weddings, religious events and social events where I was able to observe the interactions of Jewish Latinos with other co-nationals or co-religionists.

Research visit to Argentina

I travelled to Argentina during the summer of 2011 and spent four weeks meeting with and interviewing leaders of Jewish communal, political, philanthropic and religious organizations. I met with the presidents of local foundations, a Rabbi at a prominent conservative synagogue, the director of the governing body of Jewish athletic associates in Latin America, professionals at AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina) – the organizing body of the Argentine Jewish community -- as well as Argentine-Jews whom I interviewed about their identities and experiences as ethno-religious minorities in Argentina. I conducted a total of twelve interviews during this time. I also attended a number of religious and Jewish cultural events at local synagogues and athletics clubs. I was present for and attended the annual rally for the victims of the AMIA bombing (I describe the bombing in detail in later chapters). My visit to Argentina allowed me to get a sense of the similarities and differences between a Jewish community in Latin America and the communities or experiences of the Jewish populations in New York and Boston. I was better able to understand how Argentine Jews identify with their national and Jewish background, the ways Judaism is practiced in these countries and how the members of
these communities interact with and relate to members of the Catholic majority in Argentina.

Description of sample

Of the forty-one respondents with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews, fourteen were male and twenty-seven were females (see Appendix A for sample of questions). Twelve of the respondents were from Mexico, sixteen from Argentina, eight from Venezuela, two from Puerto Rico, two from Colombia and one from Uruguay. About two-thirds of the sample resided in the New York area (primarily New York City but also Westchester, Long Island and New Jersey) and the remaining one-third in the Boston area. Their length of stay in the United States ranged from two to fifty-one years, with an average of nineteen years in the United States. At the time the interviews took place, the respondents ages ranged from twenty-eight to seventy; the average age was forty-five. Of the forty-one respondents, twenty-seven were married and of these all but two had children, whose ages ranged from less than twelve months to the upper thirties.

In general, the interviewees had high levels of education. All but one person had a college degree or equivalent and more than two-thirds had obtained a Masters or Ph.D. degree. Also the majority was employed in finance, law, education, marketing, or the arts. Only one person was out of work and seeking a job; the remaining respondents who were not working were taking care of small children, studying or pursuing independent projects (i.e. not technically unemployed).

All of the respondents had legal authority to either live or work in the United States. Some were naturalized citizens or permanent residents while those who did not have permanent residency or citizenship had professional or investor visas or student
status. None of the respondents mentioned their legal status as an obstacle to settling in the United States.

The majority of the respondents were not religiously observant; of the forty-one interviewees only five said they were religiously observant. Most were in the middle, choosing to identify as Conservative Jews, even if in practice they seldom attended synagogue. Others (two) identified with the less observant Reform movement. Of the respondents who were married, three were married to non-Jews, and as expected Judaism played a smaller role in their everyday lives. Whereas most respondents (thirty-five) reported attending a Jewish day school in their home country, only five of those with school-aged children sent them to Jewish day schools in the United States. Of the forty-one respondents, ten belonged to a Jewish Community Center (though others said they had belonged when their children were younger); in comparison all but four respondents had been members of a communal athletic club in their home countries.

All of my respondents spoke English, some with a native mastery and others with pronounced accents. As I mentioned earlier, the majority chose to conduct the interview in Spanish, even if they had been in the United States for a considerable length of time.

**Outline of Dissertation**

The dissertation seeks to answers questions about the effects of ethnic identity on assimilation and integration by studying how immigrants, in this case Latin American Jewish immigrants, identify ethnically and the possibilities and constraints they face in choosing or being assigned an ethnic identity. I focused the research on the following questions:
• How do these immigrants identify—given the number of identities they can choose from?
• What constraints do they face?
• What are the functions of their ethnic identity?
• How is a new panethnic identity constructed?
• How does race and class influence their ethnic identity and the associated costs and benefits?

The conclusions from this study can shed light on how ethnicity is negotiated and renegotiated as part of the process of assimilation. Using this unique group as a case study allows a greater understanding of how class and race affect ethnic and panethnic group construction and identity formation as well as how the intersection of these factors (class and race) with ethnicity affect life chances of immigrants in the United States.

**Chapter outlines**

Chapter two provides a theoretical framework and overview of the relevant literature for the dissertation. In this chapter, I discuss the competing theories of assimilation, ranging from classical assimilation (Gordon 1961; Park and Hughes 1950; Warner and Srole 1945), to newer assimilation theories such as segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993a) and new assimilation theory (Alba and Nee 1997, 2003).

Relevant to the discussion in this study is a review of the literature on ethnic identity. Throughout the study I find that primordialist theorists (Geertz 1973; Shils 1957) as well as instrumentalist (Bates 1983; Hechter, Friedman, and Appelbaum 1982; Hechter 1986; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972) and constructivist views (Nagel 1994, 1996; Spickard and Burroughs 2000) on ethnicity are all important lenses with which to view the ethnic
identity of Latin American Jewish immigrants. As Jews, many of the respondents saw the Jewish aspect of their ethnicity as stemming from primordial or ascriptive ties, whereas the strategic and situational use of their ethnicity at times was more instrumental. At the same time, their constant renegotiating of ethnicity and in particular the creation of a new panethnic (Latino Jewish) identity gives credence to a constructivist view of ethnicity. This chapter also presents an overview of the literature surrounding panethnicity, in particular Latino panethnicity (De la Garza et al. 1992; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Itzigsohn 2004, 2009) as well as the role of religion and religious institutions in assimilation to American life (Foner and Alba 2008a; Herberg 1983).

Chapter three provides a historical overview of Jewish immigration and Jewish populations in Latin America in general, and Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico in particular, as well the New York and Boston areas, where the research took place. As religious minorities in their home country, Jews from Latin America experience a reversal of status upon migrating to the United States, where their ethno-religious identity is a marker of belonging to the religious and ethnic mainstream, especially in New York and Boston. The Jews in New York and also (though perhaps not as steadily) in Boston have experienced remarkable success in political, economic and social mobility. For Latin American Jews then, arrival in these cities is accompanied by a shift in their status from minority to majority. The historical analysis in this chapter provides a brief comparative perspective, which allows a deeper understanding of the national context and structures shaping the identity as well as the integration and assimilation of ethnic groups.

In chapters four, five and six, I discuss the findings of my research. I have broken down the chapters into three “ethnic identities” that Latino Jews can access – Jewish,
Latino and Jewish-Latino. In both the chapters on “being Latino” and “being Jewish”, I discuss the ethnic options members of this immigrant group can access, and how the intersection of race and class limits or expands these options. I use an instrumentalist view of ethnicity to show how Latino Jews highlight one ethnicity over another in certain contexts. However, their experience suggests that as ethnicity is re-imagined in the United States, it is also constructed along cultural lines and “Latino Jew” comes to be seen as a legitimate and valid identity. The chapter “On Becoming a Latino-Jew” explores themes of panethnic group construction as well as immigrant integration along religious lines, and adds to the literature on panethnicity by showing how ethno-religious identity and religious affiliation should be considered when evaluating the construction of panethnic groups and identity. In chapter seven, I conclude by exploring further questions that have resulted from this research and possibilities for additional study.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The questions raised in this study focus on issues of assimilation, integration and ethnic identity for Jewish Latin American immigrants. This group is unique in a number of ways and its members face many of the issues addressed in the literature on immigration and assimilation. While they certainly belong to the cohort of “new” immigrants (defined as those immigrants who arrived to the United States post-1965) and encounter a society that today is comprised of a diverse number of ethnic and racial as well as religious groups, their membership as Jews clearly resides with the “old” and now “American” cohort. Their life chances as immigrants and their insertion into the American ethnic and racial hierarchy then relies on factors that are pertinent to both waves of immigrants. Following is a review of the literature on assimilation, ethnic identity and religious affiliation which, while not all encompassing, gives an overview of the salient issues that are central to the study of Jewish Latino immigrants in the United States.

Assimilation

Classical assimilation model

In the 1920s, Robert Park was one of the first sociologists to concentrate his research on the incorporation of immigrants in the United States. By studying immigrant (of European descent) ethnic groups during the early twentieth century and their path towards assimilation, he developed the “cycle of race and ethnic relations” or the contact theory of assimilation. Park’s model shows that, as a result of immigration, ethnic groups
interact and engage in competitive relations, eventually followed by a period of accommodation, which, over time leads ethnic groups to completely assimilate into the host society. Park’s theory centers on the idea of a core mainstream society that, while influenced by new immigrants, remains more or less stable. In the United States the core mainstream was defined as white Protestants and new ethnic groups assimilated by approximating the culture, values and norms of white Protestants. Other scholars who studied earlier waves of immigration and assimilation also posited that as immigrants became more integrated into the American society they would begin to lose their ethnic identity and shed some of the characteristics that differentiated them from mainstream Anglo-Americans (Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964; for a discussion of assimilation theory see Alba and Nee 1997).

In 1964, Milton Gordon expanded on Park’s theory, and outlined several stages as different dimensions of assimilation that ethnic groups go through. These stages, according to Gordon, are “ideal types” and immigrant groups might remain in one stage indefinitely. Gordon’s stages of assimilation include cultural or behavioral assimilation whereby members of an immigrant group take on the cultural patterns of a society and structural assimilation in which group members enter the institutions of the host society. The final stage, according to Gordon, is complete assimilation, which involves a decline of ethnic and racial prejudice and ethnic identity, and results in an increase in intermarriage.

Classical assimilation theory gained traction as a way to understand the process by which immigrants and their children inserted themselves within American society.
Yet this classical model was flawed in a number of ways. Foremost, classical assimilation theory is based on an Anglo-conformity model, which Gordon defined as:

“Anglo-conformity” is a broad term used to cover a variety of viewpoints about assimilation; they all assume the desirability of maintaining English institutions (as modified by the American Revolution) the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as dominant and standard in American life (1961:265).

The Anglo-conformity model dismisses the experiences of African-Americans and other racial minority groups, which results in maintaining and privileging white Protestant groups. At the same time Gordon failed to see the complexities and tensions between established groups and new immigrants, and assumed a universal welcome to new immigrant groups (Croucher 1997).

Empirical evidence has shown that overall, the descendants of early European immigrants were able to assimilate into the host society, however not as seamlessly as the classical assimilation model assumes (and racialized immigrants even less seamlessly). At the time of immigration, these immigrants were viewed as unassimilable, racially inferior and all around too different from what was considered American at the time (Foner 2005). Over time, they approximated the Anglo-white majority, and their presence and influence on American culture also changed what it means to be American. The children and grandchildren of these immigrants eventually achieved economic parity with the mainstream, gained political power and spatially integrated with the white majority, at the same time “remaking the American mainstream”, points that are emphasized in the new assimilation theory developed by Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003). Their acceptance into the American society depended in large part on the sheer number of immigrants, approximately 14 million or around 14.5 percent of the population
between the decades of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Gibson and Jung 2006), as well as the political and economic structures that facilitated their process of assimilation. The Italians and the Jews (the largest immigrant groups to come to the United States at the turn of the last century) had a divergent level of skills (many Jews, for example had skills in tailoring or carpentry which could be applied to the manufacturing sector in the United States), did not speak English and faced ethnic and racial discrimination. They did well, over generations, as the American economy grew and demanded their labor, the educational system eventually provided their children and grandchildren with an avenue for upward mobility and the political structure gave immigrants and their children an opportunity for social change through activism in unions as well as through voting and electing ethnic government officials. Over time, other government policies, which benefitted primarily veterans and their families after World War II, also contributed to mechanisms of assimilation through the purchase of homes and funding for higher education (Katznelson 2005). Not only were the homes major assets to be transferred on to future generations, they were also in new suburban areas, where the children of immigrants socialized and lived among different ethnic groups, and in the process lost some of their sense of ethnic affiliation and identity that was so closely tied to their urban ethnic neighborhoods (Alba and Nee 2003; Alba 2009; Foner 2005; Gans 1979; Waters 1990).

**Post-1965 immigrants**

Post-1965 immigrants and their children face a different American landscape. By eliminating national origin quotas, the Hart–Celler Act of 1965 paved the way for increasing numbers of non-European immigrants to enter the United States. These new
immigrants transformed the American racial and ethnic landscape from a largely binary black-white one into a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society. Not only were the sending countries dramatically different from those in the previous large immigration wave to the United States but so were the political and social movements taking place at the time which greatly altered the integration process for the newer immigrants (Kasinitz et al. 2008). The Civil Rights Movement and subsequent civil rights legislation not only provided opportunities for African Americans to seek recognition and redress for past wrongs but also influenced other ethnic and racial minorities in providing new models for them in terms of making social and political claims (Lopez and Espiritu 1990). The political and social climate of the 1960s influenced such scholars as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, whose work championed the possibilities of ethnic pluralism. As Glazer wrote, the social landscape in the United States has become more ethnically and racially diverse, with ethnic and racial groups occupying distinct and important positions within the social hierarchy:

The new development has emerged directly out of the demands of minority groups for recognition. There was the explosive impact of the “blackpower” slogan and all it carried in its train - the demands of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, of Asian Americans, of American Indians, and then the “new pluralism” of the white ethnic groups with their demands for equal time and equal recognition.... There is an emphasis on individual and group wholeness, health, identity; a “heightened sense of being,” “respect,” “cohesiveness,” and survival. Ethnic identity, the ethnic group, is good; it should not be merely tolerated (1983:107-108).

There is continuing debate on how the children and grandchildren of post-1965 immigrants will incorporate and/or alter the American racial and ethnic landscape. While some scholars have argued that the descendants of new immigrants will eventually assimilate or approximate the mainstream, there has been some evidence that not all will
join the ranks of the majority (Feliciano 2006; Portes and Zhou 1993). In fact, how immigrants and their children incorporate depends on a number of factors such as class backgrounds, human capital, social capital as well as their race and ethnicity vis-à-vis the racial and ethnic hierarchy of the receiving society (Greenman and Xie 2008; Zhou and Gatewood 2000; Zhou 2005). The children of immigrants with high human capital find a relatively easy entry into the middle class, often through the professional labor market (Light and Bonacich 1991; Light 1983; Portes and Rumbaut 2006) and are likely to follow in the footsteps of the earlier European immigrants and assimilate wholly into the mainstream. For the millions of other members of the second generation, the lack of human capital hinders the process of incorporation and assimilation and race and ethnicity are likely to have a greater effect on the process of assimilation (Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters 2011; Zhou et al. 2008).

**Segmented assimilation theory**

In light of the divergent patterns of immigrant incorporation, a theory of “segmented assimilation” has emerged. Portes and Zhou argue that contemporary immigrants face a decidedly different experience than their earlier counterparts:

First, descendants of European immigrants who confronted the dilemmas of conflicting cultures were uniformly white. Even if a somewhat darker hue than the natives, their skin color reduced a major barrier to entry into the American mainstream. For this reason, the process of assimilation depended largely on individual decisions to leave the immigrant culture behind and embrace American ways. Such an advantage obviously does not exist for the black, Asian and mestizo children of today’s immigrants (1993:76).

Racialized immigrants minorities not only face the hurdle of the racial caste system in the United States, but the economic structure has also changed dramatically since the arrival
of earlier waves of immigration. Whereas some turn-of-the-twentieth century immigrants were able to parlay their low skill jobs into better paying manufacturing jobs which afforded the second generation possibilities of upward mobility, these opportunities, argue Portes and Zhou, are simply no longer available for low-skilled workers. To be sure, there is evidence, as Waldinger (2007) argues, that the representation of early immigrants in manufacturing jobs (or “good” jobs) has been overstated, and immigrants and their descendants succeeded through a variety of paths. However, contemporary immigrants do enter a labor market where the gap between the low skilled and high skilled is ever growing. The effect of racialized status and changing economic structures is that assimilation will occur but will result in different socioeconomic attainments for the new second generation. According to Portes and Zhou, assimilation for some in the second generation may occur in the classical “straight-line” model, so that they experience upward mobility and achieve parity with the natives, but many others will experience downward assimilation (a decline of socioeconomic status) or, alternatively, “selective acculturation”. Upward mobility, they predict, will be experienced by the second generation whose parents have high levels of human capital, or who have access to ethnic networks that can buffer them or their children from downward mobility and also provide employment within an ethnic enclave, where according to Wilson and Portes, immigrants can do better than working for similar white-owned business (Wilson and Portes 1980; see also: Jensen and Portes 1992; Waldinger 1993). In contrast, racialized immigrants (and their children) with low human capital are more likely to live in poorly served areas (i.e. urban areas with high crime, low-performing schools and fewer job opportunities) and interact with disadvantaged groups while taking on an
“oppositional culture” resulting in a higher probability of committing crimes, dropping -
out of school or joining street gangs and overall negative or downward assimilation.
Certain immigrant groups may embrace some aspects of their traditional home culture as
an avenue for upward mobility thereby selecting which aspects of the American culture
are more useful in the process of assimilation.

Evidence of upward mobility

The segmented assimilation model has been intensely debated. On the one hand,
as Portes and Zhou argue, the economic structure is quite different today than it was 100
years ago and there is some evidence that this has resulted in fewer opportunities for
intergenerational mobility for children of low-skilled immigrants (Bradbury and Katz
2009; Orfield and McArdle 2006). The effect of racial stratification is likewise
significant; the racial status of new immigrants sets them apart from the white majority
and is likely to present obstacles for mobility, though as I discuss in the following
section, earlier European immigrants were also regarded as ethnically and racially
inferior to the mainstream at the time of arrival. In Blurring the Color Line, Richard Alba
(2009) convincingly argues that new immigrants will likely change the meaning of white
much the same way earlier immigrants did. The first wave of immigrants benefitted from
a non-zero-sum type of mobility, whereby the economic opportunities were such that
their children could be upwardly mobile without affecting the life chances or
socioeconomic positions of the white Protestant majority. The descendants of the latest
immigration wave, Alba contends, are likely to experience similar non-zero-sum
mobility, as opportunities for work become available in higher-skilled jobs (as baby
boomers retire) and the demand for this type of labor will outpace the supply of the
available white majority labor force. Also as Alba and Nee (2003) outline in their new assimilation theory, there is considerable evidence that over-time the children of new immigrants will assimilate even if differently than the children of the older cohorts:

Clearly assimilation will not apply to all immigrant minorities to the same extent, and is one way in which the incorporation stories of the past are likely to differ. The contemporary immigration is more diverse than that of the past, in terms of the forms of capital immigrants bring, the nature of the communities they enter, and their race and legal status (2003:274).

The trend of the descendants of new immigrants (which Alba and Nee show through data on the high rates of English language proficiency, educational attainment and socioeconomic mobility) is that many will move into the mainstream and in the process give new meaning to being “American”:

Assimilation has reshaped the American mainstream in the past, and it will do so again, culturally, institutionally, and demographically. The cultural reshaping of the mainstream that we see as resulting from immigration is not accurately conveyed by the metaphor of the melting pot, which implies that change is largely a process of fusing elements from different cultures into a new, unitary culture, but much cultural change appears to occur as the mainstream expands to accommodate cultural alternatives, usually after they have been “Americanized” to some extent, by shedding their more exotic aspects (2003:282).

The work of Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters and Holdaway in Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age (2008) also gives a more optimistic view of the life trajectories of second-generation immigrants. Their conclusions are based on a study of over 3,400 second-generation immigrants living in New York City. When compared to their native-born counterparts (non-Hispanic whites, African –Americans and Puerto Ricans) there is no evidence of second-generation decline and most children are doing better than their parents:
On the whole, second and 1.5 generation New Yorkers are already doing better than their immigrant parents. The Chinese and the Russian Jews have demonstrated particularly rapid upward mobility. This upward trajectory is partly explained by their parents’ premigration class background and “hidden” human capital—but, particularly among the Chinese even those from working class backgrounds or with poorly educated parents have sometimes achieved stunning upward mobility. Not surprisingly, those second generation respondents who belong to groups that the context of reception has racialized as blacks or Hispanic have a more mixed record. For these individuals, racial discrimination remains a significant factor in shaping American lives. Yet even here, most of the children of immigrants are exceeding their parents’ level of education, if only because their parents’ levels were quite low. West Indians, the group in the greatest danger of being negatively racially stereotyped, show real gain over their partner and their native born peers on a number of fronts (2008:342-343).

Overall, Alba and Nee and Kasinitz et al. debunk the downward assimilation theory proposed by Portes and Zhou and show that even though the economic structures are different for today’s immigrants and this group and their children are racially different from the white mainstream, the likelihood of assimilation through upward mobility and boundary shifting for the children and grandchildren of new immigrants is strong.

**Ethnicity in America**

Ethnicity is central to any discussion of assimilation. Whereas classical assimilation models relied on the black/white models of ethnic relations and ethnic interactions, the multitude of new ethnic groups forces us to change the model. The binary black/white model of race relations in the United States has evolved into a multiethnic one where socioeconomic class interacts with different racial and ethnic groups to produce a new social hierarchy. Hispanic and Asian immigration has had enormous demographic implications and transformed the black-white division into what
David Hollinger (2006) terms “the ethno-racial pentagon” which divides the United States population into the following five categories – African-American, Asian American, Euro American, Indigenous and Latino. As the rigidity of the “one-drop” rule has lessened, new questions arise as to how ethnicity and ethno-racial identities are constructed. Since the 1970s (and in the incorporation of new ethnic and racial groups as well as American social and political movements) three competing theories have emerged surrounding ethnic identity - instrumentalism, primordialism and constructivism.

Defining ethnic identity

For the purposes of the theoretical discussion on ethnicity, I use the following definition of ethnicity which Yetman (1999:2) describes as:

…the sense of identification with and membership in a particular ethnic group implies the existence of a distinct culture or subculture in which people perceive themselves and are perceived by others to be bound together by a common origin, history, values attitudes and behaviors – in its broadest sense, a sense of peoplehood- and are so regarded by other members of society.

In addition, the ethnic identity framework for this study draws heavily on Henri Tajfel's and Tajfel and Turner's work (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel 1970; Tajfel et al. 1971) on social identity. Social identity is based on in-group membership, which gives individuals a social identity and a sense of belonging in the social world. An individuals self image is enhanced by elevating the status of their group as well as discriminating or holding negative views against the out-group. In this way groups are divided into “them” and “us” or in-groups and out-groups. Ethnic identity is then a social identity, which informs individuals’ self-concept and is linked to belonging to a particular ethnic group.

Primordialist Perspective
Theories or models that rely on a primordial sense of ethnicity, focus on the static nature of ethnic identity - people are viewed as being born into an ethnic group and through socialization, they begin to understand their place as members of a particular ethnic group. Primordialists emphasize the ascriptive nature of ethnicity, which is transmitted by kinship and family ties (Geertz 1973; Shils 1957). Primordialist theory has been criticized for its inability to explain the changing nature of ethnic boundaries, situational identity, and contextual ethnicity as well as the influence of social and political structures on ethnic identity (for a discussion of the issues see Jones 2002). Nowhere is this critique more accurate than in the case of immigrants, whose ethnicity and ethnic identity change as a result of having moved from one society to another (as well as throughout the process of assimilation).

Instrumentalist Perspective

The instrumentalist perspective attempts to understand why it is that individuals participate in ethnic organizations or movements or claim ethnic identities. In studying the motivations of individuals, theorists point to the role of social, economic and political goals. As Stack (1986) argues, ethnic identity stems from a desire to keep or further any privilege associated with the particular identity. Other scholars, following a rational-choice framework, also see ethnicity as an instrumental tool whereby ethnic ties can be manipulated for social and political gains (Bates 1983; Hechter, Friedman, and Appelbaum 1982; Hechter 1986; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972).

Instrumentalism is a central concept in Glazer and Moynihan’ book Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews and Italians of New York City (1963), who see ethnic groups as primarily interest groups:
Human groups do not exist in nature... They are chosen and whether one chooses to see oneself as Third World, Black, Negro, is not determined by either biology or sociology. It is a free act, even if constrained by social influences...the ethnic and racial groups of the city are also interest groups based on jobs and occupations and possessions.... owing to the concrete nature of their jobs (or lack of jobs), their businesses, and their professions, they are also defined by interest. And since they are interest groups, and since all policies affect interests differently, they also affect group relations. (1970: xiv, Ixxxiii-iv)

Ethnic groups, in this context, work much like lobbying groups whose members, by using their ethnic ties and affiliations, seek to gain certain concessions from the state. There is evidence that members of ethnic groups do use their ethnicity to gain power, or privileges - the Irish political machine of the previous century is an example of this as are the concessions made today to the Hasidic Jews in New York who vote in blocks and reap the benefits of ethnic political solidarity.

Constructivist Perspective

The constructivist school emerged as an alternative to the primordial and instrumental view of ethnicity. Constructivists question how ethnicities emerge, what processes and material are involved in “constructing” an ethnic identity. In contrast to primordialism and instrumentalism, constructivism understands ethnicity to be in a constant state of flux as groups and members define and redefine themselves. This approach is especially useful in thinking about the changing ethnicity of immigrants, whose ethnicity is re-constructed as an effect of the immigration process. Constructivists view the process of defining ethnicity as an interaction of structure and agency, as Joane Nagel describes:

Just as ethnic identity is both volitional and ascribed, ethnicity is constructed by individuals and ethnic groups themselves as well as by social, economic and political outsiders. Ethnic boundaries are
constructed from within and from without, propped up by both internal and external pressures (1996:32).

In essence, ethnic identity “reflects the creative choices of individuals and groups as they define themselves” (Nagel 1994:152), yet is constrained by the allocation of ethnicities by the larger society. Nagel goes on to argue that ethnicity can be more fluid for some groups, primarily those that resemble the majority, such as whites in the United States and much more constrained for others, whose ethnic and racial status is imposed by the racial structure of the larger society. Ethnic and racial groups such as African Americans and Latinos are less likely to have as much agency over their own ethnic identity, since their ethno-racial status is largely determined by outsiders/others. However, according to Nagel, their choice in their identity schema is largely dependent on context and situation – “an individual’s ethnic affiliation at any point in time depends on the ethnic identities available to him or her in a particular situation. Sometimes there is a choice and sometimes not” (1986:96).

Barth (1969) argues that what is important in defining ethnic groups is the boundaries that people draw - both group members and non-group members. Essentially, if people are both defined by others and define themselves as an ethnic group, then they are an ethnic group, regardless of the cultural patterns they do or do not display. Using Barth’s definition then, the “symbolic ethnicity” of Herbert Gans’ (1979) model or the “ethnic options” that Mary Waters (1990) writes about -- whereby the descendants of European immigrants can choose how and when or even if to identify with the ethnicity of their immigrant grandparents or great-grandparents, and with no cost -- are in fact more than symbolic, and are legitimate ethnic identities. Ethnicity is then based on some commonality, perhaps ascriptive, religious, and a feeling of unique cultural heritage. It is
likely that, as assimilation theorists point out, ethnicity wanes over time but it does not mean it ceases to exist or matter.

Whereas instrumentalists emphasize how identity is linked to state or societal incentives or pressures, constructivists point out that even if the identity stems from outside pressure or political, economic, or other motivations, it is imbued with shared value:

When people take on, create or assign an ethnic identity...they take on, assign or create a story, a narrative of some sort that captures the central understandings about what it means to be a member of that group (Spickard and Burroughs 2000:42).

And unlike the primordialist theorists, who view the shared ties, values and sense of shared groupness as ascribed, constructivist theory offers a less static model, one where the identity is constructed, and for immigrants, is part of the process of immigration and integration. In this study, Jewish Latinos have constructed or redefined their ethnic identity, as part of their assimilation process, while their sense of shared cultural material is both imagined and constructed.

**Panethnicity**

In the wake of the “new” immigration, there has been considerable interest in the emergence of Latino and Asian panethnicity and panethnic groups, that is “the expansion of ethnic group boundaries to include different national or ethnic groups that share a common language, a common culture, or a common regional origin into an encompassing identity” (Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000:226). However, the rise in scholarly work on panethnicity and Latino panethnicity in particular, has not necessarily been associated with a widespread adoption of a panethnic identity among Latinos. A Latino panethnic identity is just one of number of ethnic categories individuals choose to identify with.
Latinos may be more likely to identify by their country of origin, but there is some evidence that those in the second generation and beyond prefer the wider Latino category (De la Garza et al. 1992; Itzigsohn and Dore-Cabral 2000; Itzigsohn 2004, 2009). Also, as Joane Nagel argues, ethnicity is not solely determined by the individual but is also constrained by societal forces, in this case, an individual might identify primarily as Mexican, but outsiders may assign a Latino identity to her.

Contemporary studies of panethnicity, while not dismissing cultural ties, focus primarily on structural factors that underlie the creation of panethnic groups (Bean and Tienda 1987; Calderon 1992; Itzigsohn 2004; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004; Oboler 1995; Okamoto 2003; Oropesa, Landale, and Greif 2008; Padilla 2011). Felix Padilla (1985, 2011) was among the first scholars to study the structural forces underlying Latino panethnicity. In his book, *Latino Ethnic Consciousness*, Padilla examines the experiences of Mexican and Puerto Rican activists in Chicago during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Padilla sees panethnicity as essentially emerging in the face of political and social struggle. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans banded together to counter discrimination, their disadvantaged economic, social and political status and police injustice. Their “consciousness” emerged in a specific context and time frame. Padilla’s instrumentalist view of Latino panethnicity is limited in its scope by his particular study. By focusing on the instrumentalist viewpoint of the organizing community leaders (who are the subjects of the research), Padilla fails to study the identity affiliations of others in the community, many of whom might have constructed panethnic Latino identities that went beyond social and political mobilization. Padilla
also argues that the situational nature of the panethnic grouping does not necessarily continue once the situation is resolved or amendments are made.

Following Padilla’s study, a number of other scholarly works on Latino panethnicity emerged. Some scholars, such as Martha Gimenez (1992) criticized the term Latino, arguing that it homogenizes an extremely diverse population and in doing so includes members from countries that did not have a history of oppression in the United States (Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are two groups that have been historically marginalized). Gimenez is concerned not only with the effect of homogenization on marginalized minorities but also on the racializing effect of a homogenizing label on all Latin Americans in general:

These labels (1) reduce people to a set of stereotyped, generally negative traits which presumably define their culture and identity and predict a give set of negative behaviors (e.g., high rates of crime, drug addiction, out-of-wedlock child-bearing, welfare dependency, etc.), (2) they reduce people to interchangeable generic entities, negating the qualitative differences between, for example, persons of Puerto Rican descent who have lived for generations in New York City and newly arrived immigrants from Chile or some other South or Central American country and (3) they reinforce racism in the society as a whole by encouraging the perception of people in racial/ethnic terms rather than in such terms as social class or national origin (1992:8-9).

Gimenez makes an assumption that ethnicity is static and therefore negative traits associated with Latinoness will not change. Empirical evidence has shown otherwise - the influence of new arrivals has in fact changed what it means to be Latino, albeit slowly. Interestingly in New York City, the absolute and relative number of Puerto Ricans to other Latino groups has fallen considerably and suggests that newer immigrant groups from Latin America and the Caribbean will likely define what it means to be Latino in contemporary New York (Bergad 2011).
Gimenez’ critical view on Latinoness notwithstanding, a number of other studies on panethnic origins and identity have continued to emerge. Suzanne Oboler’s 1995 book, _Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives_ also separates the struggles faced by more established Mexicans and Puerto Ricans from the experiences of newer arrivals:

The inclusion of Latin American immigrants as instant ‘Hispanic ethnics’ is at best reinforcing Latin American cultural traditions and language and at worst once again rewriting the respective histories of Chicano and Puerto Rican populations (1995:86).

However, according to Oboler, shared culture and language could have a very real effect on the construction of a Latino panethnic identity, yet “these very real shared linguistic and cultural commonalities should not be confused with automatic adherence to political and ideological panethnicism” (1995:136). Oboler further argues that gender, class and race are important determinants of a Latino identity. This last point is particular pertinent to the group in this study, whose status as members of the white majority both in racial and socio-economic terms differentiates them from the racialized Latinos in the United States and questions their legitimacy as Latino in-group members.

A cultural definition of Latino panethnic identity emphasizes a shared culture that crosses national origin, racial and socio-economic lines, though the literature on the creation of a cultural panethnic identity is scarce in the sociological realm. Whereas the trend in sociology has been to dismiss the existence of shared culture among immigrants from Latin America, empirical evidence, especially in the emergence of Latino arts culture shows otherwise. So does the importance of shared language, which has the capacity for "generating imagined communities, building in effect particular solidarities" (Anderson 1983:122). Spanish language newspapers, radio stations and television networks in the United States all act to unify disparate Latino groups into one audience
(at least those who speak Spanish), where they are consumers of a shared Latino or Hispanic culture. Today we can speak of Latino music, which is comprised of national based or regional music such as salsa, merengue and tango all of which form part of the larger Latino music repertoire. As Latino panethnicity has grown, Latino cultural institutions have emerged, such as the Museo del Barrio and the Association of Hispanic Arts (AHA) in New York, which were founded to showcase the art of Puerto Rican artists in New York but changed to include artists from all over the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America. There is also some evidence that the Latino media (newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations) have helped to construct and reinforce a cultural Latino panethnic identity (Martínez 2004). Smaller creative ventures, such as Latino cultural performances underscore the growing trend towards the construction of panethnic solidarity through shared cultural symbolic and experiences.

**Becoming white**

In many ways the process of assimilation for older European immigrants involved changes in their ethno-racial identity. Whereas today these immigrants are part of the white majority, they were seen as racially inferior to north and western Europeans on arrival and, according to some historical accounts, as “problematically white”. Early European immigrants worked hard to achieve racial majority status by distancing themselves from African Americans and benefited from citizenship rights (owing to their legal status as whites), access to union membership, and educational and housing opportunities granted by the federal government under the GI Bill – all of which changed the meaning of white in America (Barrett and Roediger 2008; Brodkin 1998; Jacobson 1998; Portes and Zhou 1993). The historical record documents how the Irish, the Slavs,
Jews, Italians and other European immigrants were portrayed as racially inferior in the media and were classified as such by academics and the government (Barrett and Roediger 2008; Gilman 1994; Roediger 2005). In Blurring the Color Line, Alba (2009) using a non-zero-sum mobility model adds to the evidence that the American economy coupled with the political and social structures allowed these formerly racial minorities to become members of the racial majority. And, he adds, it is likely the children of new immigrants will experience a similar shifting of the color line.

The impact of these contemporary immigrants on the sociology of immigration and ethnicity is significant. Scholars look to these new groups to understand how they are both forming new and altering existing racial and ethnic boundaries. As a result of the continued influence of new immigrants, doubt has been cast on the classical assimilation model. Among the third and fourth generation immigrants of European descent, for example, there has been some evidence of ethnic retention and ethnic resurgence, especially among descendants of the European immigrants from earlier migration waves, what are called “white ethnics”. These groups were considered to have been fully assimilated into the mainstream, but their renewed interest in their ethnicity raises questions about this assumption. The response of scholars to this ethnic resurgence was to posit that these ethnic identities were not instrumental or indeed really significant, but were “ethnic options” that were occasionally emphasized or “symbolic ethnicity” (Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1990). By holding onto cultural symbols, members of these groups claim an ethnic identity, without necessarily having to practice the customs or belong to ethnic cultures or organizations of the earlier generations. Unlike racialized
minorities, whites can be ethnic when they choose to be and without the costs associated with ethnic group identification.

**Religion and Immigration**

The link between immigration and religious identity (and its effect on assimilation and incorporation) has been a subject of interest for scholars who study both the “old” (turn-of-the-twentieth century wave) and “new” (recent, post-1965 wave) of immigrants to the United States (though as Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind (2009) point out, the interest in studying the religious lives of new immigrants is fairly recent). The role of religion in the lives of immigrants is significant. Religious identity and participation in religious life are, in many ways, an avenue to becoming American.

**Religion as an avenue for assimilation among “old” immigrants**

When the nineteenth and twentieth century immigrants arrived in the United States, Protestantism was the mainstream dominant religion. The Catholic and Jewish immigrants then, differed from the white majority not only in language and culture but also in religious affiliation. However, as Herberg describes in *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, immigrants were expected to shed all traces of their immigrant past, with the exception of religion:

Of the immigrants who came this country, it was expected that sooner or later, either in his own person or through his children, he would give up virtually everything he had brought with him from the “old country” – his language, his nationality, his manner of life – and would adopt the ways of his new home. Without broad limits, however, his becoming an American did not involve his abandoning the old religion in favor of some native American substitute. Quite the contrary, not only was he expected to retain his old religion, as he was not expected to retain his old language or nationality, but such was the shape of America that it was largely in and through his religion that he, or rather his children
and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life (Herberg 1960:27-28).

In many ways Herberg, along with Oscar Handlin, argued for a triple melting pot theory of assimilation, along religious lines. In this model, first generation national origin identities eventually blend into religious identities in later generations. The children and grandchildren of immigrants might marry outside their national origin group but within their religious group, thereby strengthening religious identity. Overtime, the Jewish and Catholic religions, formerly minority religions, became part of the American Judeo-Christian civil religion.

Religion has been central to the role of adaptation for immigrants for a number of reasons. Whereas the meaning associated with religion has long been a subject of interest for sociologists {as in Durkheim’s classic work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1917) (2012)}, Herberg (1960) argued that religious meaning is especially important for immigrants, who experience a trauma after immigration and settling in a new and unfamiliar country. Religious practices, such as sacred rituals or praying with native co-religionists, provided an emotional connection to their pre-immigrant life (Handlin 2002). It also gave (and gives) immigrants a sense of self, an anchor to hold onto as everything around them changes (Herberg 1960). Religion is also an instrument by which parents can transfer traditional (pre-migration) beliefs and customs to their American-born children. Additionally, religious organizations provide a space for new immigrants to gain respect and recognition within the organizations and even the larger ethnic community, often times in the context of the experience of post-immigration downward occupational mobility (Foner and Alba 2008a). And perhaps most pertinent to the immigration process, ethnic churches have always been central in providing immigrants
with much needed information about schools, social services, medical assistance, jobs and housing or as Hirschman puts it the three R’s: refuge, respectability and resources while religion provides an acceptable form of ethnicity (Hirschman 2004:1228).

Religion and the “new” immigrants

In studying the experience of the more recent “new” immigrants, religion and religious organizations again provide meaning for new immigrants, ease entry into their new lives and provide a space for connections with co-nationals (Alba, Raboteau, and De Wind 2009; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Warner and Wittner 1998). Whereas sociologists once assumed that religion and religious affiliation would wane in the modern, rational, industrial era, there is evidence that rather than declining religion is thriving in America (Finke and Stark 1992; Shibley 1996; Stark 1999; Warner 1993). Yang and Ebaugh (2001) argue that the religiosity of new immigrants and their commitment to religious congregations contribute to the continued importance of religion and religious life in the face of modernity and effectively challenge the secularization model. The new immigrants, the majority of whom are Christians from Latin America (Lugo et al. 2008) adapt their religious style and practice as part of their integration process. They practice, for example, what Warner calls “de facto congregationalism” (1994:54) modeled after the Protestant tradition of a congregation that gathers on a voluntary rather than obligatory basis. This is similar to the experience of the old immigrants, especially the Reform Jewish movement, whose Protestant style of convening and practicing religion was more palatable and adaptable to being Jewish in America (Diner 1995; Silverstein 1994). Yang and Ebaugh also find that new congregations and religious organizations provide more than just a place to worship – they offer social services for those in need, make available
venues for socialization and community building and also serve as social spaces for civic functions by offering classes on citizenship and voting. Again, this is not unlike the past, where local parishes and synagogues had an important role in aiding immigrants in acclimating to their new society by providing both a link to their home country and co-nationals as well as an avenue to becoming part of their new society. Religious congregations also serve to construct and re-construct immigrant ethnic identity. Again as Herberg (1960) argued, “Religion has been analyzed as a socially acceptable form through which U.S. immigrants can articulate, reformulate, and transmit their ethnic culture and identities” (quoted in Foner and Alba 2008:4).

Ethnic churches can also be a factor in upward mobility, through skill building classes for immigrants and the second generation. Additionally, ethnic congregations can act to buffer immigrant children from negative associations linked to downward mobility by offering church sponsored spaces for activities and socialization (see Min Zhou and Carl Bankston 1998).

While today’s new immigrants bring with them diverse religious traditions (Hinduism, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.), the Jewish and Catholic faiths of older immigrants were, during earlier periods, seen as new and decidedly un-American faiths. They became a part of the American tripartite religion over time, in part because of the sheer number of immigrants who identified with one of these faiths, as well as an “Americanization” of the religion in the form of Congregationalism which I discussed above, and also in part because of the separation of Church and State, both de facto and de jure (Foner and Alba 2008). Since no denomination benefitted from the support of the state, all were (and are) free to legitimately exist alongside one another as well as take on
additional roles such as education and social services without intervention or competition from the state or a state-sponsored religion.

Though a recent study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) has shown a gradual decline in the unaffiliated (persons not affiliated with any established religious faith), especially among people under 30, Americans are still more religious than western Europeans. Moreover, the political and legal structure of the United States allows and even nurtures religious pluralism, which is especially important for new immigrants who, like those in past immigrant generations, rely on ethnic churches as an avenue for integration and assimilation, as well as ethnic identification.

**Conclusion**

In the preceding pages I have provided a brief overview of the sociological literature that is most relevant to the questions surrounding the immigration and assimilation of Latin American Jewish immigrants in the United States. Their success as immigrants and their upwardly mobile assimilation process rests in part on the legacy of their Jewish predecessors and the continued presence and influence of long-established American Jews. Yet, as this study shows, their ethnicity is constructed and re-constructed across ethno-racial, religious and socio-economic lines and very much depends on the intersection of these factors. Their status as Latinos is reinforced by their shared sense of culture with other Latinos and the existing Latino cultural movement in the United States, yet their socio-economic as well as their racial status demarcates boundaries between themselves and less privileged Latinos. Their experiences as “new” immigrants addresses --- and, I believe can shed light on --- questions concerning panethnic group construction among immigrants as well as immigrant religious participation, the racialization of
ethnicity and the renewed interest in instrumental ethnicity. I draw on the theories discussed here as a lens to understand the experience of Latino Jews throughout the following chapters.
Chapter 3

The History of Jews in the Americas

Introduction

This chapter examines the historical experiences of Jews in Latin America and in the Northeastern cities of Boston and New York in the United States. Jews in Latin America share common experiences, especially as minorities in Catholic dominant societies, and at the same time are influenced by the dominant social and political structures unique to their country of origin (in this case Argentina, Venezuela and Mexico). As immigrants in the United States, Jewish Latin Americans find a society in which Judaism is part of the Judeo-Christian American civil religion – and their ethno-religious status as Jews no longer makes them outsiders. The acceptance of Jews and the Jewish religion in the United States was itself a process which could not have occurred without a number of factors such as economic opportunity, participatory politics, separation of church and state and perhaps most importantly the sheer number of Jewish (and other immigrants) who made the United States their home at the turn of the twentieth century. This chapter looks, in particular, at the history of Jews in New York and Boston – the sites of the field research for this study.

An Overview of Jewish Immigration to Latin America

Jewish immigration to Latin America can be traced back to the late fifteenth century, when Jews, persecuted by the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, left Spain and later Portugal for the new Iberian colonies in Latin America. During the Spanish Inquisition, Jews who settled in countries under Iberian rule were forced to convert to Catholicism. Among the converted (conversos in Spanish) were those who adhered to
Christianity but continued to practice Judaism in secret (crypto-Jews). Crypto-Jews were known by the more derogatory name *marranos*, meaning pig or swine in Spanish. Even though many converted and observed their new Catholic faith, *conversos* were still met with suspicion and were often persecuted for “Judaizing” or covertly practicing Judaism and thus faced many hardships in colonial Latin America. In Lima, for example, the Church affiliated government, under a charge of Jewish treachery, persecuted an entire community of converted Jews; some of those convicted were burned at the stake while others died in prison. Nonetheless, there were time periods in which Jews managed to establish communities and practice freely, especially in countries ruled by the Portuguese or the Dutch. By the mid-seventeenth century Jews had established strong communities in Brazil, Suriname, Curaçao, Haiti, Jamaica, Barbados, and St. Croix. The Jews who originally settled in these colonies later expanded into Central America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico) (Elkin 1998). They did well in these new settlements, with partial entry into the upper classes and as legally separate from blacks yet they were not allotted the same social acceptance and political power as white Christians (Cohen 1983).

Again, during the late nineteenth-century the Jews of eastern Europe experienced persecution in the form of organized pogroms as well as economic distress (Foner 2000). Many of the Jews from eastern Europe (Ashkenazi Jews) fled to Latin America, with the hope of finding both religious freedom and economic and political stability. Countries in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay) and Brazil opened their doors to all European immigrants in an effort to populate sparse areas, which resulted in a large migration of Jews to the region. Jews also settled in smaller numbers in Mexico and
Venezuela. The majority of Sephardic (Jews originally from Spain, Italy, Portugal and later the Arab world) and Mizrahi Jewish (Jews originally from Northern Africa) immigrants in Latin America came from Turkey, Greece, Syria, and Morocco during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

The last wave of Jewish immigrants to Latin America arrived from Europe in the 1930s and 1940s fleeing the reign of Hitler and settled in already established Jewish communities across the continent. Since by this time many countries, including the United States, Brazil, and Mexico, had either restricted immigration or completely closed their doors to new immigrants, Jews settled in countries with more tolerant or open immigration policies, such as Cuba, Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina.

Argentina

Argentina has long been defined by the sheer number of European immigrants who settled in the country during the peak immigration years. From 1870 to 1930, 6.5 million immigrants arrived in Argentina (Germani 1966), the majority Italians and Spaniards. There were few Jews among the early immigrants to Argentina – in 1895, the Argentine Census counted only 6,085 Jews. By 1920 this number had grown to an estimated 126,700 (see table 3.1).
<table>
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<td>1895</td>
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<td>1900</td>
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<td>1920</td>
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<td>1925</td>
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<td>120,000</td>
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<td>1930</td>
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<td>160,400</td>
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<td>200,200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1945</td>
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<td>254,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>249,326</td>
<td>265,000-275,000</td>
<td>285,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td></td>
<td>294,000</td>
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<td>1955</td>
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<td>305,900</td>
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<td>1960</td>
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<td>1965</td>
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While Jews have never comprised a sizeable share of Argentina's total immigrant population, the numbers from a global perspective are significant. Argentina has the largest population of Jews in Latin America and the seventh largest Jewish community in the world. Buenos Aires, with the largest Jewish population in the country, is now and has historically been, the center of Jewish life in Argentina.
Post-colonial immigration

Prior to Independence in 1816, Argentina was under Spanish colonial domination and subject to the rules of the Inquisition, which prohibited the practice of and allegiance to Judaism in any way. Jews, as a result, were unwelcome and few Jews (and likely no overt Jews) resided in Argentina during this period. The decades following independence from Spain continued to be characterized by ties to the Spanish colonialists and the Catholic Church, and Argentina therefore remained an unwelcome destination for Jews. In 1852, however, Argentina adopted a pro-immigration stance that would eventually come to define the country’s ethnic and racial population and identity. The push for immigration came from Argentina's elite who believed that the eventual modernization of the country would be possible only with the influx of new immigrants, and perhaps more important the landed elite had a need for manpower to work the fields and tend the cattle. The pro-immigration policies were extremely racist – the influx of new immigrants was touted as a way to “whiten” the mestizo race (Solberg 1970). And, while it is unlikely that Jews were among those specifically targeted in these pro-immigration policies, the doors were open to Jewish immigrants nonetheless.

Jews did not begin to settle Argentina in significant number until the 1890s. Their acceptance was in small part due to the victory of secularist parties, which lessened the strength and reach of the Catholic Church and made Argentina a more attractive destination for Jews. The "push factors" - persecution, violence, and economic pressures that the Jews of Russia were facing - however, were likely the major impetus for large-scale immigration to Argentina (and other countries) (Elkin 1998). At the time that Russian Jews were leaving in large numbers (primarily to the United States but in smaller
numbers to Latin America), Belgian philanthropist Maurice de Hirsch (commonly known as the Baron Hirsch) founded the Jewish Colonization Association. The JCA relocated eastern European Jews to rural colonies (Mosiesville, Colonia Mauricio, Villa Clara) in the interior provinces of Argentina, where Jews established agricultural communities and Jewish life flourished for a short period of about 50 years (Freidenberg 2005).

Figure 3.1

Photograph of early Jewish settlers in the agricultural colonies circa 1880


In the decades that followed the first migration of Jews to Argentina, Jewish immigrants eschewed the rural provinces, choosing to settle in urban areas. The children of the rural settlers eventually moved to the large cities, primarily Buenos Aires, which today houses the majority of the Jewish population, but also Córdoba and Rosario.

Both early Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews arrived in Argentina with little money and relatively untrained for the agricultural labor needs of the country.¹ Many were,

¹ The majority of Jews in Argentina are of Ashkenazi descent with roots in central and eastern Europe. While the population of Sephardic and north African Jews (from Syria, Turkey and Morocco) is numerically much smaller, Sephardic Jewish institutions are a vital part of the larger Argentine Jewish Community, and their customs, foods, and language are an important component of the Argentine Jewish identity.
however, skilled in carpentry, tailoring, and furniture making. Those who did not have applicable skills worked as small-scale peddlers. Most immigrants remained in blue-collar jobs or small industries, which relied heavily on the labor of women and children. While the majority eventually did well and climbed out of the working class, it took Argentine Jews four generations to experience the same kind of upward mobility that their counterparts in the United States achieved in two or three (Sofer 1982).

Throughout the period of industrialization, Jews began to fare better in the trades and many of the small-business entrepreneurs enjoyed a modicum of success. It was not until the 1970s that a significant percentage of Jews gained employment in the professional class (21.3 percent in 1974) (Schmelz and DellaPergola 1985). On average, Jews in Buenos Aires have much higher levels of educational attainment than the larger population (Schmelz and DellaPergola 1985). As a result, the majority of Jewish Argentines are middle-class professionals or small-business owners. There is a growing sector of Argentine Jews who live below the poverty line, but Jewish social service agencies with support from the international community have stepped up their efforts to assist this sector of the population.

**Contemporary Jewish life in Argentina**

Jews in Argentina are found across all socio-economic classes, have diverse political views, and range from wholly secular to ultra-Orthodox in their religious orientation. Organizations exist to serve the gamut of the Jewish population in Argentina. About sixty percent of Jewish school-aged children attend Jewish schools. Jewish day schools were founded when Jews first settled in Argentina and found that government
schools were either non-existent (in rural areas) or of low educational level, and Catholic schools were not a welcome option. The Argentine Jewish education system has been consistently well funded and of high standard, though enrollment tends to fluctuate with the economic and political cycles of the country. In recent decades, Jewish secondary schools have reliably prepared students to excel at national public (and well-regarded) universities and have been a dominant factor in pushing third and fourth generation children into the professional classes. Jewish schools in Argentina (and other Latin American countries) comprise part of the web that, along with other communal organizations discussed in the following section, keeps members of the community interconnected.

Even though the overall population size of Jews in Argentina is small, their contribution to national civic life is significant. Starting with Alberto Gerchunoff (who wrote Los Gauchos Judíos in 1910), Samuel Glusberg (editor of renowned Argentine journals América and Babel), Jacobo Timmerman (editor of the newspaper La Opinión), and Marcos Aguinis (author of various widely read and acclaimed books and former minister of culture), Jewish writers and editors have left their mark on Argentine social and intellectual culture. Jewish Argentines have had prominent roles in other areas such as the arts and cinema, sciences (Nobel Laureate César Milstein) and sports (Juan Pablo Sorin, captain of the Argentine World Cup Team).

Yet, Jews in Argentina are still excluded from the most powerful institutions in Latin America. As Elkin writes:

In no country do Jews have access to the traditional dominant triumvirate of the church, the armed forces, and the landowning oligarchy. Their exclusions from the first and the last is a foregone conclusion.
The exclusion from the armed forces in Argentina, which has at historical moments been the locus of national power, is a formidable barrier in keeping Jews out of the national political hierarchy. The Argentine armed forces have in the last century been a powerful player both when the military has exercised power as well as when it has been allied to an elected president.

*Jewish communal and religious organizations*

The Jewish community in Argentina (as well as the rest of Latin America) is governed by the *Kehillah* model whereby members are elected to a central governing organization that oversees Jewish social services, education, and marriage and burial services, as well as other aspects of communal life. The major political organization of the Argentine Jewish community is the *Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas* (DAIA) (the Delegation of Argentine-Israelite Associations). Founded in 1936, DAIA represents all of the sub-communities (Ashkenazi, Sephardic, religious and non-religious) before Argentine government authorities and is mandated with protecting and safeguarding its members. The other major Argentine Jewish institution is the *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (AMIA) (the Mutual Argentine-Israelite Association), which was founded to serve the Ashkenazi community but has become the largest and most far-reaching Jewish provider of services and record keeping. Both of these organizations work in tandem to unite the Jewish population into an organized community. These organizations are the voices of the population vis-à-vis government officials, the media, and international Jewish organizations. The headquarters of the Latin American Jewish Congress is also in Buenos Aires.
Jewish communal athletic institutions are the core of Jewish life in Latin America and Argentina is no exception. Early on, barred from joining existing associations, Jews formed their own athletic clubs in the early part of the twentieth century. Like other sports club organized around national origin lines (the Italian Club or the Syrian Club are two examples), Jewish sports clubs provide a secular way for Jews to congregate and socialize as well as conduct business – all within an ethnic confine. Over the years these athletic organizations have expanded and now include libraries, auditoriums, nursery schools, cultural classes, and events as well as countless sports facilities. Teams compete nationally and internationally and are recognized as serious and worthy contenders.

Argentina has a number of important sport clubs such as Hebraica, Maccabi and Hacoaj, among others. All have sites in the downtown Buenos Aires area as well as larger campuses outside of the city where people can go for the day or rent or buy vacation homes in gated facilities. Sports clubs have played an important role in the construction and maintenance of Jewish ethnic groupness in Latin America. Also, as Judith Elkin (1998) points out, sports clubs were the first place where Jews of different national origin groups began to comingle, speak Spanish (not Yiddish, Ladino, or Arabic) and begin to form a pan-ethnic Argentine-Jewish secular identity.

Unlike the United States, synagogue affiliation in Latin America is relatively low compared to affiliation with other Jewish organizations. People attend synagogue but do not necessarily join or pay a membership fee. Yet, in Buenos Aires, where most Jews reside, there are more than 70 synagogues ranging from Orthodox to Reform (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Argentina.html). Support for synagogues comes in the form of donations and school fees, rather than memberships.
Anti-Semitism

Argentina has suffered a number of large-scale organized anti-Semitic incidents, all of which mark the identity of Argentine Jews and their sense of “otherness”. The first large-scale anti-Jewish demonstration was the *Semana Trágica* or Tragic Week, which took place in January 1919 during a strike at an ironworks. During the strike, violence erupted and the general public blamed Jews, along with Bolsheviks and Catalans. Following these incidents, the Jewish neighborhoods of Buenos Aires came under attack and an estimated 1,500 people were killed, with another 4,000 wounded, the majority of them Jews (Mirelman 1975). While it has often been seen as an isolated incident, Elkin (1998) points out that it had a defining role in how Argentine Jews came to view themselves vis-à-vis the larger society:

...while Argentine Jews customarily downplay the events of 1919, one cannot escape the feeling that a psychological process was set in train as Jews internalized the lesson of Tragic Week. Evidence is suggestive if not dispositive. Jews learned that political activity was more dangerous for them than for others and the entire Jewish community could be attacked for the actions of anyone who had been born Jewish. This sense of collective destiny, the understanding that the entire community is hostage for individual Jews remains strong among Argentine Jews (Elkin 1998:99).

While Argentina’s ties to fascism during the regime of populist leader Juan Perón from 1945-1955 have been widely documented, Perón’s treatment of Jews remains ambiguous. Even though Perón included Jews in his government, shuttered anti-Semitic newspapers, and issued statements protecting the Jews during heightened periods of anti-Semitism, he also professed strong affinities with Fascist regimens and ideologies and allowed thousands of German exiles, among them many Nazi fugitives, to settle in Argentina.

Perón also introduced Catholic education into public schools (Avni 1991; Klich 1997;
Senkman and Sosnowski 2009). Nonetheless, regardless of the mixed messages of Perón’s government, the presence of German and Nazi colonies in Argentina certainly contributed to an undercurrent of anti-Semitism.

Jews were again targeted in the 1970s during the reign of the military junta. Not only does the army in Argentina have a long history of anti-Semitism, but also since their arrival in the late nineteenth century Jews have had an extensive history of political activity on the left, a political position that rendered them vulnerable to the junta’s persecution. During the 1970s, a number of Jews participated in or sympathized with the leftist revolutionary movement and many joined the Montoneros (the leftist revolutionaries), which subsequently made them targets of the military. A disproportionate number of Jews were tortured and killed at the hands of the military, and while the Jews were not persecuted for being Jews per se, they were far more likely to experience the repression of the regime than other groups. In discussing the disappearance of Jews during the dictatorship, Feitlowitz writes

...Jews – less than 2 percent of the Argentine population, account for about 10 percent of the missing. The explanation does not point to an out-and-out Jew hunt. Rather, Argentine Jews are largely urban and well educated. They are well represented in journalism, the arts, psychology and psychiatry--- “categories of guilt,” in the parlance of the regime. Having your name in the wrong address was also a category of guilt, and so was getting caught by random chance. In common with the Nazis, the Argentine commanders directed their violent policies against those they considered aliens. But where Hitler’s definition of Otherness was clear and specific, those of the Argentine tyrants were comparatively fluid and ambiguous (1998:106).

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2 In the late 1800s and early 1900s, politically active Jews participated in the creation of unions and later formed what came to be known as the Bund (The Union of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, founded in 1897) (Laubstein 1997).
Another blow to the Jews of Argentina was the reaction of DAIA (the political arm) of the Jewish community, which openly received the military regime in 1976 and was, as a result, heavily criticized by members of the community. Their reaction is indicative of the rift between more powerful segments of the Argentine Jewish population and those members of the Jewish middle class with leftist leanings. This division among the Jews of Argentina continues to exist today. During my fieldwork in Argentina in 2011, I met with many leaders of prominent Jewish institutions (AMIA, DAIA, Hebraica, Fundacion Tzedakah). When I asked about the presence of anti-Semitism, most were quick to say that they did not perceive it to be a major problem in Argentina and chose to steer the conversation in other directions.³

In 1988, the Argentine parliament passed a law against anti-Semitism and racism. As I show in later chapters, however, both institutional and cultural anti-Semitism still exists on a large scale. Post-1988, Argentina experienced two large organized terrorist attacks against Jewish organizations. The Israeli Embassy was bombed in 1992, killing 20 people and injuring thousands. In 1994 a car bomb destroyed the building housing AMIA’s headquarters and killed over 80 people. The tragic loss of lives was accompanied by the destruction of thousands of books, documents, and Jewish cultural artifacts. The government has been criticized for failing to investigate the attacks and

³ Feitlowitz (1998) gives a convincing account of relations between DAIA’s presidency and the military junta and cites those relations as a reason for inaction on the part of the political arm of the Jewish community. In later years, there have been charges that the AMIA’s presidency and the Menem government conspired in covering up both a large financial scandal and the bombing. Incidents such as these illustrate how divided the Jewish population is in Argentina and how many of the Jewish economic elite have worked to stifle politically active members of the population in an effort to maintain a “relative calm”.
find and try the perpetrators, and almost 20 years later the authorities are no closer to finding and trying the responsible parties.

**Figure 3.2**

![Figure 3.2 Image of the aftermaths of the terrorist attack on the AMIA building](https://www.amia.org.ar/index.php/content/default/show/content/14)

Although there are many differences in the experiences of Jews in the United States and Argentina, as compared to other Latin American countries, the Argentine Jewish experience most closely resembles that of the United States. Jews in Argentina straddle all of the socio-economic classes, have found their way into politics, the media and the arts, and have assimilated more than Jews in other Latin American countries. At the same time and unlike the United States, a strong anti-Semitic undercurrent and the structure and reach of vibrant communal organizations, keep Jews from becoming fully part of the Argentine mainstream.
Mexico

As a result of fervent Catholic sentiment among the Mexican population and the government, Jews leaving Europe viewed Mexico as inhospitable during the nineteenth century. When Jews started leaving Europe in large numbers, a tiny fraction chose Mexico; in 1867 there were about twenty Jewish families in Mexico City. In 1879, a change in government policy opened the country to foreigners in the interest of economic diversity and investment, and the first large wave of Jewish immigrants arrived from Alsace (France). They did not, however, establish a viable Jewish community; in fact, not only did they not build a synagogue, many married Catholic women and raised their children in the Catholic tradition. Mexican political and social affairs revolved around Catholicism and the Catholic Church, and as a result Jewish immigrants did not find a welcoming place to establish their roots and religion. In fact, Mexico was not a favorite destination for any immigrant group. In 1900 foreigners comprised just .42 percent of the country’s population (Zárate 1986), a tiny fraction, especially when compared to the United States whose immigrant population was around fifteen percent in 1910 (Gibson and Lennon 1999).

Jewish institutions

Jews began immigrating in comparatively larger numbers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they did not organize any semblance of religious life in Mexico until the Revolution of 1910. Up until the Revolution, political power in Mexico was concentrated in the hands of the Catholic Church; non-Catholics did not have the freedom to openly practice their religion. Post-1910, the anti-clerical movement officially separated Church and state and allowed other religions the right to greater observance.
Over the following decades synagogues were established, each representing a distinct Jewish national-origin group. There was a synagogue for the *Sephardim* from Damascus, another for the *Ashkenazi* of eastern Europe and later a third for the Jews who emigrated from Greece, Turkey, the Balkans, and Italy. As new groups came they also established their own synagogues. Over time synagogues joined together and Jewish immigrants began to identify on a pan-regional level (Sephardim and Ashkenazi) rather than in terms of national-origin (Greek, Russian, Syrian, etc.). As the ethnic and national-origin boundaries of Mexican Jews continued to wane they began to form a larger unified pan-ethnic community and in the 1930s established a *kehilla* governing body called the *Comité Central de la Comunidad Judía de México* (Central Committee of the Mexican Jewish Community). By 1952 over sixty-three organizations had joined the *Comité*, among them religious, communal, athletic, and charitable groups. Other smaller *kehilloth* sprang up, but the *Comité* has remained the largest and most powerful (Shatzky 1952).

The majority of Mexico’s 39,000 Jews live in Mexico City, where most Jewish organizations are found. There are twenty-three synagogues in Mexico City and at least twelve Jewish schools. All across Latin America, Jewish institutions provided the services that the state was unable to deliver in a satisfactory matter. Nowhere was this more apparent than the education system, which had long faltered in Latin America and Mexico in particular. While the Catholic Church was a principal provider of education, for obvious reasons Jews could not and did not attend parochial schools. Over time, some Mexican Jewish children attended secular private schools, but over eighty percent of Jewish Mexican school-aged children continue to attend Jewish schools. As in other Latin America countries, Jewish cultural life in Mexico revolves around the athletic club
or community center, Centro Deportivo Israelita. Members attend “El Deportivo” for sports, cultural events, social events, camp, etc.

Jewish life in Mexico is characterized in many ways by the closeness of the community in social, political, geographic, and economic areas. The Jewish population of Mexico City is concentrated in a few neighborhoods such as Polanco and Bosque de Las Lomas (affluent western suburbs). The economic position of Jews in Mexico parallels that of Jews in other Latin American countries with polarized economic classes. They have achieved considerable success in business, professional areas, and entrepreneurial pursuits (Elkin 1998).

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism in Mexico is closely linked to the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Since the Inquisition, which wiped out any new Jews or conversos (some of whom may have practiced Judaism in secret) in public autos-da-fé, the doctrine of the Catholic Church permeates social and political ideologies. While there is little documentation of anti-Semitism or discrimination against Jews in Mexico, a law was recently passed prohibiting such discrimination. The necessity for such a law points to the likelihood of existing anti-Semitism and associated discrimination. Unlike Argentina or even Venezuela, there have not been any large-scale or organized attacks on Jewish organizations, but there is an undercurrent of “othering” of Mexican Jews. Mexican Jews are also ambivalent about the presence of anti-Semitism: they are accustomed to swastika graffiti or anti-Jewish jokes, but they do not protest the religious ceremonies where a puppet symbolizing “the Jew” is ritually burned during Easter (discussed in chapter four), and acknowledge an outsider status based on their ethnicity and religion.
**Venezuela**

Jews first arrived in Venezuela via Curaçao in the seventeenth century, but it was not until the nineteenth century that Jews began to settle in larger numbers and establish a community. In the 1920s Jews immigrated to Venezuela from eastern Europe and north Africa, but Venezuela’s immigration surge occurred later than in most other Latin American countries. Venezuela experienced its first real peak in immigration during the post-War period of the 1940s and 1950s. The earliest and numerically largest proportion of Jews came from eastern Europe and established the burgeoning Jewish community. In the 1960s an increasing number of Moroccan Jews settled in Caracas, joining north African and Middle Eastern Jews. Over time, due to a number of factors such as fertility rates and migration patterns, Sephardic Jews began to have a larger presence in Venezuela and took over the governing of the Jewish central institution (DellaPergola 2000). Today there are anywhere from 9,500 to 14,000 Jews in Venezuela, down from a high of 22,000 when Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999 (Candia 2011). The recent out-migration of Jews from Venezuela to the United States and Israel is felt across all organizations of the community. Synagogue and school attendance are down, as is membership in Jewish community centers.

Similar to the Jewish populations in the rest of Latin America, the majority of Venezuela’s Jews reside in the capital city, Caracas. Venezuela’s society is strongly divided across socio-economic classes, with racialized indigenous groups largely occupying the lower rungs of the social hierarchy. While the first immigrants of what is today’s contemporary Jewish community held lower skilled and lower paying jobs such as peddlers of food and household goods, in the following generations they increasingly
occupied and maintained positions in the country’s upper classes. In the latter half of the twentieth century, many Venezuelan Jews amassed great quantities of wealth. As a result of their financial success, as well as their small numbers, Venezuelan Jews are more likely to be tolerated if not socially accepted. They have contributed to both the country’s economic gains as well as the growth of Jewish communal organizations.

Jewish institutions

In Venezuela the largest, centralized Jewish organization is the Confederación de Asociaciones Israelitas de Venezuela (CAIV). The CAIV receives most of its funding from wealthy members of the Jewish community in Venezuela. Additionally, most CAIV leaders are themselves wealthy or have important connections to other sectors of the Venezuelan Jewish population that have the means to fund community projects and institutions. Like AMIA and DAIA in Argentina, CAIV functions as the official political representation of Venezuelan Jews. It also provides the infrastructure for and funds religious, cultural activities as well as social services. Like the other Latin American countries, sports and community centers and schools are at the heart of the community. In Venezuela there are two schools and one large sports/community center, Hebraica, which functions as the central meeting place for Jews in Venezuela; members not only socialize and participate in athletic and cultural activities, they often develop professional networks and business contacts. And seventy to eighty percent of Jewish Venezuelan school-aged children attend the Jewish day school at Hebraica.

Anti-Semitism

Until the Chavez regime (1999-2013) there were almost no reported incidents of anti-Semitism in Venezuela. Jews, while seen as European outsiders, were tolerated.
changed when Chavez came to power and in the ensuing years, Jews in Venezuela have been the subject of verbal anti-Semitic attacks from the government and the media as well as organized raids. In 2004, government officials raided the Jewish school housed in the athletic/community center of *Hebraica* in search of weapons. While no weapons were found, “it marked a turning point for the Venezuelan Jewish community” (Candia 2011). Following this raid, Jewish organizations were the victims of other attacks, including anti-Semitic graffiti on Jewish organization buildings, desecrated *Torahs* (Hebrew bible scrolls), and small-scale bombings. The anti-Israel rhetoric of the Chavez regime was often used as a cover for anti-Semitism.

The Chavez regime pushed many Jews of Venezuela to seek more hospitable climates. The rise of anti-Semitism, as well as the socialist economic policies, which affected many Jews in the private sector, will likely continue to be forces that contribute to the out-migration of Venezuelan Jews. Chavez of course died in 2013, and is succeeded by former vice-president Nicolas Maduro. While it remains to be seen what the policies of the new government will be and how Jews will be affected, it is likely that the pro-Chavez government will follow in the same footsteps.

**Jews in the Americas: the United States vis-à-vis Latin America**

Jews coming from Latin America enter a very different context when they move to the United States, and a significant aspect of this context relates to the history and present-day position and role of American Jews. It is not just that Jews are so much more numerous in U.S. cities where most Latin American Jews settle --- New York, being the most prominent --- but the historical trajectory of Jewish immigrants and their
descendants, and their patterns of adaptation and assimilation in the United States, are different from the situation in Latin America.

The United States has always been defined by its immigrants, with many of the first settlers fleeing religious persecution. Even more important, the United States constitution enshrines the principle of religious freedom and separation of church and state, which as Foner and Alba (2008) argue have been instrumental in structuring a society that not only tolerates but has eventually included certain religions associated with immigrant groups in the American mainstream. In contrast, Latin American colonies were a setting for the extension of the Catholic Church’s ideology, and the Catholic Church has long been a, and in some periods the, dominant institution supported by the state. (To be sure, the United States also upheld racist practices through the legal support of slavery and de jure discrimination of African Americans and African Americans continue to be bear the legacy of American racist policies.4) This fundamental difference, as Elkin points out, resulted in very different landscapes for Jewish immigrants in the United States and Latin America:

The Jewish community of the United States came into existence within a society that had been spun off Europe in the Age of Enlightenment. The Jewish communities of Latin America came into existence in societies that had been founded and still were grounded in pre-Enlightenment past. Jew were emancipated by their arrivals in the United States; Jews of Latin American republics have not been fully emancipated yet from the hateful religious and political stigmata that followed them into the New World (Elkin 1998: 215).

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4 Scholars have argued that the dominant position of European immigrants is due in large part to the continual repression and legacy of slavery of African American in the United States (see Brodkin 1998; Steinberg 2001).
The United States Constitution signed in 1776 guaranteed the separation of church and state, which resulted in automatic emancipation for the Jews. Jews could hold public office in the United States, be buried in any cemetery, and faced considerably less de jure segregation or discrimination. In contrast, in Latin America at that time, certificates of “purity of blood” were required to hold public office, marry, or even bury the dead. The Spanish Inquisition and its hold on the New World did not end until the first decades of the 1800s.

Jews first arrived to the United States during the colonial period, in fact, some of the first Jews to arrive came through what was then New Amsterdam from Recife, Brazil in 1664, a Dutch colony that had been taken by the Portuguese (and therefore no longer safe for Jews) (Pessin 1957). It was not until the 1800s that significant numbers of Jews began to settle in the United States. Until the 1880s the majority of Jews to settle in the United States were from the German speaking countries of Europe, a group which was successful in attaining favorable economic position and social status. In the 1880s, German speaking Jews were joined by Jews from eastern Europe, whose numbers quickly outpaced the earlier Jewish migration (in 1877 Jews comprised only .52 percent of the United States population: by 1917 they were 3.28 percent) and as a result had a much more dramatic effect on Jewish life in America (Sklare 1971). Because this last wave was so numerous and significant, the following sections concentrate on the Jews that arrived during this time period.

Large wave of Jewish immigrants

The largest wave of Jewish immigration occurred between 1880 and the early 1920s, and was made up overwhelmingly of Jews from Europe, most of them coming the
Pale of Settlement in Russia. As a result of the pogroms of eastern Europe and the general anti-Jewish climate in the region as well as economic and financial perils, Jews began out-migrating in droves, primarily to the United States but also, as I have already mentioned, to Latin America (in smaller numbers). A number of factors affected the out-migration of Jews many of which are rooted in the emergent industrialization of the time as well as the rampant anti-Semitism. Jews in eastern Europe were traditionally middle-men or skilled tradesmen – the demand for which had fallen due to increasing poverty of the peasants they served as well as the rise in supply of this type of labor from other Jews and Christian middle-men. The demand for the goods of the tailors, furriers, hat makers and cobblers also fell as industrialized goods made their way into eastern Europe. At the same time, anti-Semitism was pervasive, evident in the violent attacks on Jews as well as the introduction of the May Laws of the 1880s, which:

...prohibited Jews from owning or renting land outside cities or towns and discouraged them from living in the villages. Quotas limited the entrance of Jews the entrance of Jews into gymnasium and the universities. In 1891 thousands of privileged Jews were expelled from Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev. Thousands more were deprived their livelihoods as innkeepers and restaurateurs in 1897 when liquor traffic became a government monopoly. Finally coercion culminated in violence. The “spontaneous” outbreaks of 1881, the massacre of Kishinev in 1903, the pogroms that followed, and the revolution of 1905 obliterated hope. The accompanying economic crisis reduced Russia’s Jews to penury (Rischin 1962:24).

As Jews began out-migrating, a chain reaction was set forth and their families and friends followed (Foner 2000). During this time period 2.5 million Jews made their way to the United States. They joined immigrants from Italy and other European countries in the largest wave of in-migration the United States had experienced to date.
The period of 1880-1920 saw the largest wave of Jewish immigrants to arrive in the United States – most of whom came through New York and tended to stay either in New York or migrate to other large cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and, to a lesser extent, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, and Boston. By the 1920s, Jews, like the majority of Americans, lived in cities, many of them working in low-skilled jobs in the garment industry or selling goods in small shops, on pushcarts, or by peddling. About sixty-seven percent of Jewish immigrants came with a trade or skill, most in tailoring but also in carpentry, shoemaking or butchering (Foner 2000). The garment industry experienced a surge in growth during the turn of the twentieth century, precisely at the time of peak immigration of eastern European Jewish immigrants. The pre-immigration experience of Jews in the garment industry (even if it had not been in industrialized manufacturing) provided an entry into this growing sector of the American economy, especially in New York.

As immigration peaked so did national anti-immigrant and racist sentiment, aimed at Jews and other new European ethnic groups. Native-born elites advocated for strict immigration reform that would greatly limit the entry of eastern European Jews and southern Italians who, it was felt, were ruining America and polluting the nation's racial stock -- and such efforts were in fact successful in the early 1920s as evidenced by the passing of restrictive immigration laws. The discrimination the Jews experienced was not only common but in some cases legally sanctioned:

Not only was it acceptable to speak about the inferiority of Jews and Italians in newspapers, magazines and public forums, but discrimination against them was open and, by and large, legal. Elite summer resorts made no bones about shutting out Jews. In the 1880s, many in upstate New York set up placards: “No Jews or Dogs Admitted Here” (Foner 2000:148).
Well into the 1930s and 1940s and, in some cases even later, Jews experienced discrimination in many ways. They faced barriers in moving to desirable neighborhoods that were "restricted" as well as entrance to elite colleges and universities and were unable to obtain employment in many mainstream firms and corporations (Dinnerstein 1994). Being identified as a Jew during this period was a hindrance to social mobility:

In the 1930s a Jewish name was not only a hardship for those people trying to move into mainstream America but was also a vestige of Old World and immigrant origins from which they wanted to distance themselves (Dinnerstein 1994:124).

Despite facing discrimination, the United States offered opportunities for Jews to participate in American life. Through a combination of factors (which I discuss more in-depth in chapter four) including the size of the Jewish population (and other immigrant groups), political participation, advocacy by Jewish agencies, economic opportunity and government programs as well as the changes in cultural attitudes in the aftermath of the World War II, Jews made inroads into American society and, over time, became part of the white majority (Alba 2009; Alba and Nee 2003; Foner 2000). By the middle and certainly by the end of the twentieth century, many Jews occupied professional positions, had high levels of educational achievement, had gained important positions in local and eventually national politics, and thought of themselves, and were thought of by others, as American even while retaining a Jewish identity.

Suburbanization

As Jews moved to the suburbs in the decades after World War II, they became an important presence in many of them, often clustering together, for example, in neighborhoods of Westchester and Nassau counties (outside of New York City) as well
as affluent areas like Newton, Massachusetts (outside of Boston), Shaker Heights, Ohio (outside of Cleveland), or Silver Spring, Maryland (outside of Washington, DC).

However despite the clustering, the move to the suburbs was a path towards assimilation for Jews: “For the most part, the suburban exodus promoted migration to areas without the kind of overt ethnic character that was stamped onto a large number of urban neighborhoods” (Alba and Nee 2003:113).

In the suburbs, new synagogues were built and Jews joined them in record numbers; in fact, many had never belonged to a synagogue before making the move to the suburbs (Gurock and Moore 2012). For many Jews in the suburbs, the synagogue provided a place to retain some vestige of Jewish identity. The suburban synagogue offered much more than religious services—it was a place for socialization, through men’s clubs, sisterhoods, and youth movements, as well as the provider of Jewish education for children. Reformed and Conservative Jews, however, were decidedly more and more secular even if their commitment to synagogue membership might make it appear otherwise (Diner 2006). Indeed, synagogue membership in the suburbs often just meant attending services on major holidays, rather than consistent and active participation:

The suburban synagogue became a perfect reflection of the ambivalence of American Jews. It was built and joined as a sign of Jewish tribal consciousness and religious and ethnic identity, but participation in its activities (and especially those that were particularly religious) was part-time at best, which served to signal that its members were busy doing other things and did not want to be completely identified with what went on inside or even acknowledge that the synagogue played a large part in their lives. Unlike Jews of an earlier generation whose community life was focused on the house of worship where they could still celebrate their differences, these suburban Jews no longer wanted a synagogue that was an insular environment, a ghetto. Instead they
were following the American version of the famous dictum “They are Jews in the synagogue and people everywhere else” (Heilman 1995: 30).

Assimilation

Jews worked hard to achieve parity with the mainstream and have, overall, experienced high levels of upward mobility. Their assimilation into the mainstream is most apparent in the rate the rate of intermarriage (marrying outside the Jewish faith), which rose, dramatically in the later decade of the twentieth century. As Alba and Nee (2003) point out, unlike other European ethnic groups, Jewish efforts to promote endogamy were initially successful; in the 1960s only eleven percent of Jews married non-Jews but by 1985 the intermarriage rate of Jews had risen to fifty percent. The effect was to cause Jewish leaders to bemoan the total assimilation of the Jewish community and voice fears about its possible disappearance. For many, probably most, third- and fourth-generation descendants of eastern European immigrants, who are no longer subject to much, if any, discrimination as Jews and who feel fully part of mainstream America, Jewish ethnicity and ethnic identity have become what Herbert Gans (1973) has called "symbolic ethnicity". Latin American countries provide a definite contrast, since the outsider status of Jews not only forces Jews to continue to operate within a Jewish enclave but also Jewish life is not centered on synagogues. Jewish social and professional circles --- and identities --- there are continually reinforced by Jewish schools and athletic centers/communal clubs leading to closer-knit communities in which the majority of members marry and live within the confines of a Jewish enclave.

New York as a Jewish town

If you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn’t matter even if you are Catholic; if you live in New York,
you are Jewish. If you live in Butte, Montana, you are going to be
goyish even if you are Jewish …. Jewish means pumpernickel
bread, black cherry soda and macaroons. Goyish means Kool-Aid,
Drake’s cakes and lime jello (Bruce 1992:5).

New York City has been and continues to be a special place to be Jewish. Since the
beginning of the twentieth century, Jews have shaped the city and in turn been
transformed by the great metropolis. In large part, the influence of New York on its
ethnic immigrants and vice-versa is due to the sheer number of immigrants who have
made their home in New York. The Jewish population, in particular, soared during the
early twentieth century- growing from approximately 60,000 residents in 1880 to more
than 1.5 million in 1914 (Sussman n.d.). By World War II Jews comprised over a quarter
of New York City’s residents and its largest ethnic group (Gurock and Moore 2012).
Jewish life flourished in New York until the 1970s, when in the face of urban blight Jews
left the city in large numbers. Even with the exodus of Jews from New York in this
period, many neighborhoods continued to have a Jewish flavor and in the 1980s and
1990s and into the twenty-first century were reinvigorated by new Jewish immigrants
from the former Soviet Union as well as the children of former New Yorkers who
returned to the city.

Jewish New York – the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

As Deborah Dash Moore (Gurock and Moore 2012) writes in the foreword to Jews in
Gotham:

By the middle of the twentieth century, no city offered Jews more
than New York. It nourished both celebration and critique. New
York gave Jews visibility as individuals and as a group. It provided
employment and education, inspiration and freedom, fellowship
and community. Jews reciprocated by falling in love with the city,
itst buildings’ hard angles and perspectives, its grimy streets and
harried pace.
Dash Moore paints a romantic vision of Jews and New York. It is true that New York afforded and continues to give opportunities for Jews as a group and as individuals, and in turn Jews often have had a great attachment to the city. But this love affair Dash Moore writes of has its foundation in a set of economic, political, and social forces that shaped the Jewish experience in New York. The sheer number of immigrants in New York, the skill set of eastern European Jews, the industrialization taking place at the time of the great migration which created particular employment niches especially in the expanding garment industry, as well as the institutions and policies of the city that helped immigrants adjust to life in New York and gain positions and influence there all contributed to what might be called a special relationship between New York and Jews -- and to making New York a city where it is comfortable to be Jewish.

The great Jewish migration to America: eastern European Jews

While Jews from the German-speaking regions of Europe had begun to make their home in New York decades earlier, it was not until the arrival of massive numbers of eastern European Jews to New York, that Jews began to truly shape the culture of the city. By the time eastern European Jews began arriving in New York in the 1880s, many German-speaking Jews had adjusted to life in America and had assimilated and become middle class. They shared little in common with their co-religionist newcomers (Polland, Moore, and Soyer 2012). The older Jewish immigrants had entered the garment industry during a time of high demand (due in part to the need for uniforms for the American Civil War) and had established themselves in it –by 1870 the majority of the retail and manufacturing sides of the garment industry was in the hands of German Jews (Gold and Phillips 1996). They hired the new eastern European Jewish immigrants as workers in
their garment factories, often for low wages and under poor working conditions, furthering an existing class rift between older and newer Jewish immigrants. The established (German–speaking) Jewish immigrants, however, played an important role in assisting the new immigrants in New York. Not only did they employ newcomers (albeit at low wages), they established charitable foundations and donated to synagogues and organizations that assisted the new immigrants in adjusting to life in America. The charitable work of the German-speaking Jews created a precedent for future generations of Jewish immigrants who needed assistance, such as refugees from the Holocaust in the 1940s and immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1980s and 1990s (Gurock and Moore 2012).

*The Lower East Side*

While German-speaking, middle-class Jews had mostly moved beyond the confines of lower Manhattan, the majority of eastern European Jews (240,000 who arrived in the 1880s; 391,000 in the 1890s; and 1,387,455 between 1901 and 1914) settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (Polland et al. 2012). On the Lower East Side they lived, worked and congregated in the area’s tenements, in remarkably overcrowded conditions. Though a geographically small area, the Lower East Side was the center of Jewish life in New York, and arguably in America. While, the tenement apartments were small and living conditions difficult, a vibrant street life flourished where Jewish immigrants peddled goods and storefronts, synagogues and restaurants served as meeting places for the new immigrants. Seemingly one large Jewish ghetto, the Lower East Side was actually broken down geographically by country of origin, with Hungarian Jews in close proximity to one another and Latvian Jews on another block for
example. In this way, Jews during their early years as immigrants frequently kept strong ties to their fellow countrymen or those from the same community, often did business with one another, and socialized with people from back home. Whether or not they brought a broader sense of Jewishness from the Old World --- and a good many did, in part owing to discrimination they experienced in eastern Europe as Jews --- they felt a strong sense of being Jewish in New York, again partly because of how they were identified and indeed stigmatized by others but also because they moved in Jewish social worlds in their neighborhood and at work and most other activities.

As the Jewish population grew in the early twentieth century so did demand for Jewish (eastern European) and kosher foods, religious sanctuaries, and Yiddish culture. Jewish immigrants responded to these demands and filled Jewish neighborhoods with kosher bakeries, butchers, delicatessens, and appetizing eateries. They built small synagogues and established Yiddish theaters and newspapers. They paved the way for a strong Jewish identity tied to New York. This was a place where Jews from all over eastern Europe (as well as Spain and the Middle East to a lesser extent) came together and even with their differences forged a Jewish cultural identity that was linked in some ways to an identity as New Yorkers (Foner 2000; Gurock and Moore 2012; Rischin 1962).
Beyond the Lower East Side

Jewish immigrants who arrived at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries were forced to live in overcrowded and unsanitary tenements given housing availability and their economic status (Rischin 1962). By the 1920s, given the large number of eastern European Jews and the pressures on housing on the Lower East Side as well as the search for better apartments, many had moved beyond the Lower East Side. The decline of the Jewish inhabitants on the Lower East Side began at the turn of the century – in 1892, seventy-five percent of New York Jews lived on the Lower East Side, by 1903 this number had fallen to fifty percent and 1923 it was estimated that only twenty-three percent of New York Jews lived in the area (Rischin 1962:93). Eastern
European Jews went first to east Harlem or Brooklyn neighborhoods such as Williamsburg and Brownsville and later in the decade of the 1920s, with the advent of the subway, even further afield to “suburban” neighborhoods such as Flatbush in Brooklyn or the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. As Dash Moore writes in her book, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (1981) – the move into new neighborhoods was also often a move into the middle class. In addition to Brooklyn, the Bronx\(^5\) was attractive to Jews (as well as Italians) since they could flee overcrowded neighborhoods and still commute easily to their jobs on the new subway system. By 1940s the geography of New York Jews had changed dramatically and 48 percent of the city’s Jewish residents could be found in Brooklyn and 30 percent in the Bronx, while in comparison Manhattan housed only 15 percent of the Jewish population (Dash Moore 1981).

**Education**

From the beginning of the mass immigration period, most Jewish children attended their neighborhood schools and were educated among other Jews. As Foner (2000) notes the public schools at the time generally were not an avenue for significant upward mobility not only because of the low standard but also because immigrant children often left school at a young age to enter the workforce. However, the neighborhood schools did serve as a site for socialization into American society (often through the denigration of Yiddish and the inculcation of Anglo-Saxon norms and culture):

\(^5\) The union-financed Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union houses were built in the Bronx, which offered inexpensive housing for union employees and their families, the majority of whom were Jewish. The buildings were modern and, relatively spacious, constructed with tax breaks from the city, and they gave Jewish immigrants and their children an opportunity to own real estate at an affordable price.
Among local American institutions centered in the neighborhood, the public school influenced second generation Jews with singular authority. School was for immigrant Jews, and especially for their children, the preeminent American institution – the local representative of American society, the repository of its ideal values and the symbol of its aspirations…American schools offered Jews access to American society and contact with non Jewish Americans (Dash Moore 1981:89).

The rise in educational attainment both in primary and high school and later in college occurred much later. In fact New York had few public high schools in the early years of the twentieth century and many jobs did not require a high school diploma (even some professional ones), even less so a college degree (Foner 2000). Whereas attendance inched up over the decades it was not until the end of World War II when Jews, like other Americans, began attending college in large and significant numbers – which offered entry into the middle, professional class (Sacks 1994; Steinberg 2001).

*Jewish education*

While in the cities of Latin America, private Jewish education is one of the factors that keep the Jewish community vibrant and connected; Jews in New York had relatively little interest in formal Jewish education. In fact, by World War I only 24 percent of Jewish children received any form of Jewish education (Dushkin 1918). The lack of commitment to Jewish education mainly stemmed from the fact that the public schools were secular and therefore open to Jews. This was not the case in Latin America, where not only were public schools either of poor quality or overtly Catholic, but, even if they had wanted to attend them, Jews were not granted entry into secular or Catholic private schools. At the turn of the twentieth century public schools were not always welcoming or tolerant of Jews and immigrants in general. The second generation of New York Jews in the 1920s and beyond, however, benefitted from an improvement in both
the educational level as well as the tolerance for religious diversity. This was due in no small part to parental pressure in middle class neighborhoods as well as the rise in Jewish teachers and associated teacher’s unions {whose numbers eventually led the Board of Education to grant Jewish holidays as school holidays in 1960 (Lederhendler 1999)}. Gaining elevated political and professional status

In 2013, Mayor Bloomberg (a former Boston and now New York Jew) will end his third term as mayor of New York. Bloomberg is the product of a political system that welcomes and encourages ethnic political participation “organized for mobilization around ethnic group lines, and a political culture that sanctions, indeed encourages, newcomers to engage in ethnic politics” (Waldinger 1996:1084). Nowhere was this more apparent than the Tammany Hall era of the Irish, who made their mark on New York City politics, but also paved the way for the eventual entry of other ethnic groups (Mollenkopf and Sonenshein 2009; Nancy Foner and Waldinger 2013). Between 1914 and 1920, New York Jewish immigrants participated in local politics and succeeded in electing ten state assemblymen, seven city councilmen, one municipal judge, and one congressman on the Socialist Party ticket (Michels 2005). Later generations were even more successful in electing Jews into public office as well as bringing Jewish issues to the forefront of discussion:

For second generation Jews, Jewish political progress in America came to mean not only recognition of Jewish leaders but also espoused of Jewish issues. Through the Democratic Party, second generation Jews in New York pursued the goal of political assimilation by striving for acceptance as an ethnic group (Dash Moore 1981:230).

Over the decades the success of the Jews in Democratic Party became evident in the election of Jews to public office – including Mayor Abe Beame in 1974 and Mayor Ed
Koch in 1978 through 1989 as well as national and state congressmen. Jews have also been successful supporting and advocating for political and social causes important to the Jewish population such as the well-being of Jews world-wide, Jewish refugees (both of the Holocaust and the Former Soviet Union) and of course the state of Israel (Diner 2006)

As for the civil service, it was Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia who dramatically altered the hiring practices of the municipality, thereby opening up positions for large numbers of Jews. Jobs (firefighters, police and teachers) that Tammany Hall had previously given to the Irish under the patronage system now required a competitive exam and high school diploma. Many Jews were well prepared to succeed at the exams. As among African Americans in later decades, civil service jobs gave Jews an entry into the middle class.

Jews benefitted as well from the Ives-Quinn Anti-Discrimination Bill, which was passed in New York State in 1945 and prohibited discrimination in employment based on color, race or creed (New York State was the first state to pass an anti-discrimination law). In 1948, New York also passed the Fair Education Practices Act, which prohibited discrimination in university admissions. Jews, by the end of the twentieth century, had made significant inroads into the insider circles of New York’s elite classes due to their eventual admission into high-level professional occupational positions. It is important to note, that Jews like other immigrants, were helped immensely by the GI Bill after World War II which eased the way into the middle class – by providing money for school and homes. Also as Alba and Nee (2003), show the demand for high-skill labor at firms that had traditionally favored WASP employees had also grown and Jews were well
positioned to profit from this spike in demand as well as the cultural shift that allowed for the opening up of the upper-level professional opportunities.

**New York as the center for Jewish organizations**

Even though the center of political life in the United States is Washington, DC, the locus of Jewish organizational life is midtown Manhattan. In the 1940s a myriad of Jewish religious, political, social, and philanthropic organizations existed in New York. Some of the most prominent (many which continue to exist today) were the America Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, and the American Zionist Emergency Council. Religious training grounds included Yeshiva University in Washington Heights and the Jewish Theological Institute in Morningside Heights. Today, New York continues to house the nation’s most important Jewish organizations and foundations and has added new ones in recent decades, such as the Center of Jewish History.

New York is also home to a number of Jewish aid societies that had been around since the surge of Jewish immigration. Organizations such as United Service for New Americans (USNA) or the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) assisted Jews in their transition to the United States by providing legal assistance, housing, job referrals as well as assistance in adjusting to American norms and culture. These organizations were especially active during the post-war period when refugees from the holocaust made their way to New York (Helmreich 1996).

**Post World War II - New York expands – suburbs and the city**

Home from the Second World War, many Jewish families took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the GI Bill to attend college or Federal Housing Authority
loans to purchase homes and move to the suburbs. They moved to bedroom communities in Westchester and Long Island, to places where their presence was welcomed or at least tolerated. But the move to suburbia and eventual assimilation into suburban life, at least in those early post-war years, brought with it the loss of quotidian Jewish life:

Acceptance, however, posed new social threats to Jewish suburbanites. Although many New York Jews established strong informal relationships with each other within these suburban developments, they did not congregate, as they once had in tightly knit Jewish neighborhoods. Their worlds were no longer totally Jewish, particularly since they now perceived their non-Jewish neighbors as friends and not enemies. They wondered how they could still express to their children, in an agreeable way, a sense of Jewish difference from those with whom they lived. One 1950s parent, writing from his home in a village in mid-Westchester, articulated his family dilemmas: “Somehow,” he wrote, “we do not worry so much in the city about the problem of children’s identifying themselves with the Jewish community.” Thinking back on his own youth in the city, he continued, “On the street, in the school, among their friends – and even in the home- they found out who they are and what it means.” But “when your street, counting both sides, has twenty houses, twenty families and only one other than your own child is Jewish, you wonder and worry” (Gurock and Moore 2012:103).

However, not all Jews made the move from urban to suburban; for some it was out of reach and other preferred urban life where there was a strong sense of Jewish identity and close networks (Gurock and Moore 2012). While suburbanization was significant and did indicate the beginning of what would become a decline in the number of Jews in New York, the rate of suburbanization of New York Jews in the 1950s and 1960s was slower than it was for other white ethnic groups (Lederhendler 1999) (see table 3.2).
Table 3.2: Non-Hispanic White and Jewish Population of New York City, 1950-1991 (millions)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Non-Hispanic white</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By the 1970s, the Jewish population in New York City had declined significantly as many Jews had joined other middle-class whites in what became known as “white flight.” A combination of high crime rates and low public spending propelled many families to leave New York in search of safer (and less racially diverse) neighborhoods with better schools and public services, and by this time many suburban areas had large numbers of Jews and many synagogues.

At the same time as members of the second, and later the third generation were heading for the suburbs (and in some cases, affluent areas of Manhattan like the Upper West Side), a new wave of Jewish immigration was taking off --- from the former Soviet Union (FSU). Estimates on the initial number of FSU Jews vary widely - United States government census figures (the census does not ask about religious background) estimated 35,000 Soviet-born in the New York metropolitan area in 1980 whereas the
Jewish Union of Russian immigrants estimated between 90,000 and 100,000 Soviet Jews in 1981 (Orleck 2001). Today between 200,000 and 300,000 (and up to 500,000 counting American born children) Jews from the FSU live in the wider New York metropolitan area – sixty percent in Brooklyn and twenty-five percent live in Queens. The majority of the immigrants were aided by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and the now defunct NYANA (New York Association for New Americans)-organizations that had once helped earlier European immigrants settle in New York (Orleck 2013).

Recent population trends

As of 2002, the New York Jewish population is again on the rise (see table 3.3), and Jews are a significant part of New York City’s population --- around one out of eight. This growth is in large part attributed to the high fertility of the ultra-Orthodox communities in Williamsburg and Borough Park, Brooklyn. But unlike earlier generations of New York Jews who, even if they lived in ethnic enclaves, contributed to the social, economic and political fabric of New York, Orthodox Jews inhabit religious enclaves, where assimilation is not only a threat to their sense of ethnicity but also a threat to their piety and spiritual lives. Russian-speaking Jews have also contributed to the growth of the Jewish population in areas such as Forest Hills, Kew Gardens, and Rego Park – all neighborhoods in Queens.
Table 3.3: Change in Number of Jews by County, Eight-County New York Area, 1991, 2002, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Number of Jews</th>
<th>Percent of Jews in Eight-County Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronx</td>
<td>82,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>371,000</td>
<td>456,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>308,000</td>
<td>243,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens</td>
<td>233,000</td>
<td>186,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staten Island</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal, New York City</td>
<td>1,027,000</td>
<td>972,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nassau</td>
<td>203,000</td>
<td>221,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffolk</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westchester</td>
<td>92,000</td>
<td>129,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal, Suburban Counties</td>
<td>393,000</td>
<td>440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Eight-County Area</td>
<td>1,420,000</td>
<td>1,412,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Jewish Community Survey: 2011, UJA Federation

While the population of Jews in Manhattan has fallen in recent decades, the overall population of Jews in New York City and surrounding counties has grown by nine percent since 1991. Even if much of the growth is attributed to Jews from the former Soviet Union and high birth rates among Orthodox Jews, many of the children and grandchildren of earlier Jewish immigrants who had fled to the suburbs in earlier decades have returned to the city, especially in upper middle class areas such as the Upper West Side and East Side of Manhattan and Park Slope and other neighborhoods in brownstone Brooklyn.

Today’s New York Jew
As Hasia Diner eloquently writes, since the 1960s, Jews in the United States have gained immense status, freedom and unparalleled success:

Never had Jews in America, or possibly in any place, been so secure, successful and integrated as they found themselves since 1967. Their soaring rates of intermarriage demonstrated their normalization, as did their diffusion into American economy and their rise to prominence in many fields that had been previously off-limits to Jews. They found no position closed to them, no options restricted, no neighborhood or school beyond their reach. In short their Jewishness did not disable them. Colleges and universities that less than half a century earlier had imposed quotas on Jews now had Jewish presidents…At the beginning of this era defense organizations had felt compelled to track discrimination in the boardrooms of major corporations and in most Wall Street law firms. By the end of the era, Jews served as CEOs of many of the nation’s largest and wealthiest corporations. The more prestigious the law firms, the more Jewish attorneys it had on its staff (2006:320)

New York City is a unique place for immigrant groups from a diverse number of sending countries. The sheer number of immigrants shapes the culture of the city while at the same time they, and even more their children, are assimilated into a city where diversity is tolerated and often celebrated. The history of the Jews and the Italians shows that a number of factors such as the structure of local governments, economic opportunities as well as the impact of large numbers of immigrants all worked in tandem to make New York a truly immigrant city (Foner 2000, Foner 2005, Kasinitz et al. 2008) While this was true for the Jews and Italians who arrived at the turn of the century, new immigrants have also reshaped the city by participating in the political, economic and cultural life of the city. In this way, Latino Jewish immigrants not only feel at home in a city that prides itself on its Jewish flavor, but is also exceptionally welcoming to immigrants in general.

**Jews in Boston**
Unlike New York, which is famous as the quintessential immigrant city in the United States and for the large and longtime role of Jewish immigrants, Boston and New England in general are better known for the white elites that have longed resided there and the heavy influence of Irish immigrants. Boston was not among the port cities where the Sephardic Jews first settled in the 1600s, and the Jews that arrived in Boston were mostly transient. While other small cities began to form communities and establish synagogues (Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville and St, Louis), Boston did not get its first synagogue until 1843 (Sarna, Smith, and Kosofsky 2005).

In the mid-1800s, Jews were often reluctant to settle in Boston, many preferring cities with a less established social hierarchy and better economic opportunities as well as greater ethnic diversity. Whereas in the 1800s New York and other port cities saw an important influx and settlement of Jews from German-speaking countries, Boston did not. The few Jews who did settle in Boston in the early and mid-nineteenth century were from Poland and were more religiously conservative than their German counterparts who went to New York City.

Just as New York began to experience a surge in Jewish migration from eastern Europe in the 1880s and 1890s, so did Boston. Boston’s Jewish population grew from 5,000 to 40,000 in two decades (Sarna et al. 2005). The immigrants often lacked funds, jobs, and established networks and settled in poor neighborhoods. In response to the large in-migration, the small Boston Jewish community established the first Jewish federation to assist immigrants. At the same time, Jewish immigrants relied on one another due to their inability, as in New York, to permeate Boston’s white Protestant elite. This was true not only for Jews but for Irish and Italian immigrants in the city. The “proper Bostonian”
wanted little to do with the new immigrants and saw them as racially inferior to his own
group. At the same time, Boston Jews faced discrimination from Irish and Italians,
fortifying a strong sense of “otherness” for Boston Jews. While their experience as
minorities was similar to their New York counterparts, the small numbers of Boston Jews
kept their group more insular.

Jews in Boston made a living much the same way New York Jews did, through
peddling and employment in manufacturing. Whereas New York had a huge garment
industry, which employed many Jewish immigrants, Jews in Boston found work in shoe
manufacturing as well as in the textile mills outside of the city. In the decades following
immigration, Boston Jews moved out of the low-paying jobs, with many earning a living
as small business owners or in later generations as professionals. In Boston, the Irish
have long dominated the political scene, while the Protestant elite held sway over cultural
and mainstream businesses arenas. Jews only began to penetrate these sectors after the
Second World War. They also moved into the surrounding areas and dispersed across
Massachusetts faster than New York Jews left the city, in part simply because the city of
Boston is relatively small compared to its large suburban areas in contrast to much larger
New York City and its many suburban-like outer borough areas (Sarna et al. 2005). Not
only did economic opportunities exist beyond the confines of the city, but also
immigrants and their children found a better quality of life in suburban areas.

Contemporary Jewish Boston

Jews in Boston are a relatively small community (the most recent figures for
2005 show that there were an estimated 210,000 Jewish adult and children in the Greater
Boston area, which includes Boston and all of the surrounding suburbs, and Jewish
households comprised 9.1 percent of the area population (Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University 2006). Compared to the number of Jews in New York, the number of Boston area Jews is certainly less significant presence (in 2011, an estimated 1.54 million Jews lived in New York City and the surrounding suburbs and Jewish households comprised sixteen percent of the region (Cohen, Ukeles, and Miller 2012). Beginning in the 1920s and accelerating in the post-War period, Jewish life in Boston moved to smaller suburban communities, the largest in Brookline and Newton (part of the greater Boston area) but also to the South Shore and farther west. Boston proper never took on a particularly “Jewish flavor” like New York, but the suburbs in turn, especially Newton and Brookline, attracted many Jews and were and are the loci of Jewish communal activity. Synagogues and community centers were founded as well as day schools.

The anti-Semitism that existed in the country up to the Second World War was certainly present in Boston, where students were denied entry into the elite universities as well as access to social elites. Partly in response to the difficulty that Jews throughout the country had in gaining admission to, and feeling comfortable in, Ivy League universities, Brandeis University was founded in 1956 in a western suburb of Boston as a non-sectarian Jewish university with the mission of providing an education for young Jews. In the following decade, discrimination against Jews began to wane, and more opportunities in high-status and mainstream institutions became available so that more Jews, for example, were able to gain entry to the elite law schools and, with degree in hand, get positions in white-shoe law firms. By the 1960s Jews in the Boston area were faring considerably well in socio-economic terms. In 1965, the median income for Jews in the
greater Boston area was $9200, considerably higher than the general population’s median income of $7100 (Axelrod 1967:49). Jews in Boston were experiencing high rates of social mobility and assimilating quickly. This trend has continued as the 2005 Community Survey shows: forty-two percent of Jewish households in the Boston area earned $100,000 or more.

Jewish life in Boston

The 2005 *Boston Jewish Community Study* found that Boston area Jews increased in numbers by approximately 34,000 people\(^6\) (Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University 2006). The Jewish population in Boston is clustered into regional areas (see table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brighton, Brookline, Newton, and Contiguous Areas</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>62,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Boston, Cambridge, and Contiguous Towns</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>44,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Framingham</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwestern Suburbs</td>
<td>19,000</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Sharon</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>21,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other towns</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>42,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 2005 Boston Community Survey: Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University for CJP Boston

While the kosher butchers, delicatessens, and bakeries associated with a Jewish past are no doubt fewer in number in the Boston area than in New York, they have been recreated in the suburbs. Boston may not have a distinctive Jewish flavor, but the suburban Jewish populations have created Jewish cultures, religious, and educational

\(^6\) The rise in population may be due not only to higher birthrates, intermarriage, and to a lesser extent immigration but also to better survey methodology.
institutions. Each geographic area in Boston (in table 4) has a network of synagogues (Reformed, Conservative and Orthodox) as well as vibrant Jewish community centers and Jewish day schools. Services for children are especially prevalent in the form of Jewish pre-schools and summer camps, fulfilling a demand for these services but at the same time functioning as an organized arena for social networking.

The post-war period opened up Boston as an attractive place for Jews from other parts of the United States to settle. In the 1980s, Jews from the former Soviet Union (with the help of the Jewish Federation and aid societies) joined these transplants and made Boston their home. The professional opportunities in higher education, law, business and medicine have attracted many immigrants (both Jewish and non-Jewish), and so have the large number of colleges and universities. There are communal and religious organizations in the majority of the areas where Jews reside, which encourage a strong sense of Jewish communal affiliation, while at the same time allowing for an American identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided background, albeit brief, on Jews in Latin America and the United States, with a focus on New York and Boston, the two metropolitan areas where I conducted research, to give a sense of how Jewish identity and community have been shaped by a broad range of social, cultural, and political factors as they developed over time. The legacy of Spanish colonialism and the dominance of Catholicism as well as the economic and political structures in Latin America all contributed to an othering of Jews not present today in the Northeastern United States. In sharp contrast, New York is a city where not only is diversity
celebrated, but being Jewish is also comfortable and normal, including at the very highest ends of the social ladder. Boston has also become a welcome haven for many Jewish transplants and Jewish immigrants from abroad. In short Jews have gained insider status in America through their large numbers, immigration policy which granted them entry as well as voting rights, economic advances, institutional advocacy, suburbanization, and a greater acceptance of immigrants than is found in Latin America.
Chapter Four

On Being Jewish AND Latino: The Construction of a Panethno-religious Identity

I don’t understand. How can you be Jewish? Aren’t you Latina? How is it that you speak Spanish? I thought your family was Jewish.

Introduction

Growing up in suburban Boston, an area with a large Jewish population, I was often peppered with these sorts of questions. It seemed odd to me at the time that Americans might not know that Jewish communities exist in Latin America, especially since many of my classmates and I had common origins in Eastern European shtetls (the Yiddish term for a small Jewish town in Eastern Europe), where our great-grandparents were born. We shared many traditions and Jewish rites, though the Seders (the traditional Jewish Passover meal) at our house were often a cultural mélange of Spanish, Hebrew, and English prayers, and the songs sung at the end were as likely to be Argentine tangos as Yiddish folk songs. How, I wondered, was it possible that my friends and classmates did not understand that you could be both Jewish and Latina? Was it possible to create a new identity that encompassed both aspects of my culture and ethno-religious group?

In this chapter, I am concerned with Jewish immigrants from Latin America who construct and identify as Jewish Latinos or Latino Jews. While the majority of the respondents in my study are conflicted about what group or community they belong to as well as what ethnic identity is assigned to them in the United States, only about a third of

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7 I use these terms interchangeably, since many of the respondents themselves do not make a distinction. There is, however, some debate on which term is more suitable.
the respondents have been able to reconcile this conflict by adopting a more encompassing panethno-religious identity, i.e., that of Latino Jew.

**Panethnicity**

As I discussed in greater detail in the chapter two, contemporary studies of panethnicity, while not dismissing cultural ties, focus primarily on structural factors that underlie the creation of panethnic groups (Bean, Tienda, and Census 1987; Calderon 1992; Hattam 2007; Itzigsohn 2004; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004; Okamoto 2003; Oropesa et al 2008). In uncovering the roots of panethnic construction and institutionalization, some scholars (Calderon 1992; Hattam 2007; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004) emphasize the role of government policies such as classification by the Census Bureau and government funding for social programs that target panethnic groups (Hispanics, for example). Other studies focus on the role of the underlying economic structure in the development of panethnic identities (Bean, Tienda, and Census 1987; Okamoto 2003; Oropesa et al. 2008; Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani 1976). Political factors are also involved; following the Civil Rights Movement, and political and social gains achieved by African Americans, panethnicity has been used as a way for new panethnic groups, namely Latinos and Asians, to mobilize support for policies addressing economic, social and political inequalities.

Regardless of which factors explain the construction of panethnic groups, there is evidence that many recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America and their children incorporate a panethnic label as part of their individual ethnic identification (Itzigsohn 2004; Jones-Correa and Leal 1996; Nagel 1994; Rodriguez 2000).
In general, there are numerous factors that affect how immigrants define or identify themselves as well as in which racial and/or ethno-religious categories others place them. These choices and constraints are related to factors such as age, time in the United States, religious identity in their home country, professional affiliations, socio-economic status and, political participation, as well as phenotypical characteristics and language ability. For Jewish Latin American immigrants in particular, two additional factors are directly linked to the evolution of a panethno-religious identity. The first is the lack of a perfect proximal host (as defined by Mittelberg and Waters (1992) in the form of an existing ethnic group they can connect to; the second is the opportunity to identify as a Latino Jew or Jewish Latino through an organized group or institution. The second factor is especially salient in this chapter. My research suggests that institutional support is a central element in shaping self-identification as a Latino Jew, regardless of the shared cultural values members of this group acknowledge having.

When I started my research, I expected to find that the majority of respondents (immigrants of Latin American Jewish origins) struggle with their identity in much the same way that I do. And in fact, I find that this is true – most of the people I interviewed often feel conflicted about their ethnic or ethno-religious identity. The resolution of this conflict, however, varies due to factors such as geography, marital status, education, profession, and religiosity. All of the respondents expressed a link to Judaism, ranging from a religious to a primarily ethnic or cultural connection. At the same time, all of the respondents have some sort of national identity, for example as Mexican or Argentine, and many also have a broader panethnic Latino identity, that is, a sense of identification

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8 I discuss in later chapters the complicated relationship Jewish Latin American immigrants have with North American Jews and non-Jewish Latinos in the U.S.
with the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America and those who come from them (Jones-Correa and Leal 1996). Ethno-religious identity is fluid for Jewish immigrants from Latin America and, as a result, can be highly situational; members of this group can choose when and where to highlight certain parts of their multi-layered ethnicity. While the plasticity of their ethnic identity is due in part to the choices they have, they are also constrained by the actual – or perceived lack – of acceptance on the part of American Jews and/or U.S. Latinos.

For example, Claudia, an Argentine native who immigrated to Puerto Rico as a child, is a long-time Boston resident. She is active in both in her local Jewish synagogue and in Boston’s Latino community through her professional work and social milieu. Nonetheless, she feels that she does not completely belong to either group. When I asked if she felt accepted by other American Jews, she answered, “I mostly identify as Latina or Hispanic, and that’s when I get ‘What, I thought you were Jewish?’ It’s amazing to me how provincial American Jews can be.” Yet when I asked her to discuss her identity as a Latina, she spoke about not being accepted as a legitimate Latina:

Because of my last name [Jewish] nobody takes me for Latina, but I am Hispanic. Some people with darker skin color or life experiences would look at me as European. I was very active in the Latino community but I question my own legitimacy and I think the average Latino does not perceive me as legitimate.

Claudia’s sentiments were echoed in other interviews. Many respondents feel that they are both Jewish and Latino though never completely one or the other, like Julia, a young Mexican Jewish woman in New York:

In Mexico, it was easy, I was Jewish- always Jewish. But here it changes. I send my kids to a Jewish day school on the Upper West Side, and I feel accepted- except that to them I am always the
Mexican. Yet among Mexicans of the middle and upper classes in New York, I am still the Jew.

Jose, a physician from Boston, recalls his experience at a boarding school in New Jersey in the 1960s, where he was ostracized for being both Jewish and Latino, though he never felt completely one or the other:

My father sent me to boarding school in New Jersey when I was young, we were not very involved in the Jewish community in Venezuela. My parents were Holocaust survivors- which can make you go either way, you can become more religious or have as little to do with the religion as possible. My parents went the latter route. So of course I was shocked when I got comments like kike or spike [derogatory slurs for Jews and Hispanic Jews] from my classmates are boarding school. I didn’t think of myself as a Jew and not really as Hispanic either. But I could not escape it…In fact it wasn’t until I went to college that I started looking for Jewish meaning and what it meant to be Jewish…. And Latino never, until I met my second wife, and I actively sought a Venezuelan woman, I wanted to learn my roots. I wanted to speak Spanish and be Jewish.

Jose expresses some of the conflicting roles of belonging or being identified as two distinct ethnic minorities, both of which, at the time that he was in boarding school were met with discrimination and scorn. An identity can occur from within but also, from how others place you. A key question this chapter considers is how respondents reconcile and deal with this identity conflict and how the emergence of a panethnic identity can develop from it.

**Imperfect Proximal Hosts**

The framework laid out by Mittelberg and Waters (1992) in their work on proximal hosts serves as a useful tool for analyzing the identity conflicts of and ensuing resolutions for the immigrants I studied. Mittelberg and Waters define proximal hosts as “the category to which the immigrant would be assigned following immigration.” The
identity of the immigrant is influenced by how the immigrant herself sees her own identity, how the host society assigns an ethnic identity to the immigrant, and by acceptance (or lack thereof) from the proximal host or the immigrant’s co-ethnics. If, as Mittelberg and Waters point out, there is little variation across the three then an immigrant ethnic identity is strong with a low probability of ethnogenesis, or the creation of a new ethnic group identity. But if there is greater variation, then there is a higher likelihood of ethnic ambivalence and ethnogenesis. Jewish immigrants from Latin America have two possible proximal hosts, Latinos and American Jews. Acceptance into either of these groups would make ethnogenesis unlikely, but for many members of this immigrant group, American Jews and Latinos have proved to be imperfect proximal hosts and a third identity has emerged, that of Latino Jews. The majority of the Latin American Jewish immigrants in the study arrived in the United States with a strong Jewish identity from their home countries, where they are a distinctive ethnic minority, moving into a sector of society (within the Northeastern United States) where Jews, though religious minorities, are seen as part of the white majority. How accepting these proximal hosts are of the immigrants and how much the immigrants feel a sense of belonging to each group (i.e. Latinos and Jews) is critical in the process of defining their ethnic identity. Like Claudia, most of the respondents feel that they do not fully belong to one group or community, that there are aspects of their cultural identity that are simply lost in the process of assimilating into a particular segment of American society.

**Latinos as imperfect proximal hosts**

The majority of the people I interviewed spoke about a Latino connection, primarily as a cultural or emotional link (I discuss the Latino part of the Latino-Jewish
identity in chapter six). A Latino identity, in this case, is tied to language, food, music, family structure and what some describe as “calidez humana” or human warmth. At the same time, many drew a distinction between themselves and the larger Latino group in the United States. For example, Sonia, a Mexican Jew living in Brooklyn, has a strong Latino identity; in her job, she targets the Latino population in the marketing and advertising industry and most of her colleagues are Latinos. She feels, however, that she is somehow different from her Latino colleagues and her target audience because of her upbringing and socio-economic background. Like Sonia, many Jewish Latinos draw from the class and racial paradigms of their home country to establish a separation between themselves and what they perceive as the larger group of “typical” Latinos in the United States. Another example is Ana, a Mexican Jew, who self-identifies as Latina:

I used to work at X Consulting Group and there was a Latino group – Argentines, Spanish, Mexicans, Peruvians – we were all a group and I did not feel that we were different from Mexicans. We share a language, a culture, we are not as strict as the gringos, we are more politically incorrect and more fiestero [party-loving] I felt more identified with them.

At the same time, Ana is quick to separate herself from Latinos of lower socio-economic classes:

Unfortunately, Latinos here [in the United States] are disproportionately Latinos who are illegal immigrants, or low-education, or the 2nd generation – they are of lower socio-economic classes. They do not mix very much. I don’t have anything in common with them. For example the other day I was at a concert and a Mexican guy came to talk to us; he told us he has been here

While we cannot discount the classism that exists in the United States, the rigid social class system in Latin America erects social barriers which are much more difficult to cross. Moreover, while racism and a racial hierarchy which place whites at the top exist in Latin America, the color line is somewhat blurred since racial categories are heavily influenced by class. For an in-depth discussion on race and class see Race and Ethnicity in Latin America (Wade 1997).
for 8 years and was a general manager of a restaurant. He told me where in Mexico City he was from – an area of lower socio-economic status – and then I started to think, “even though this guy is from Mexico City, I have nothing in common with him, I do not identify with him at all”. He started off as a waiter and is now a manager of a restaurant, but I came here to do an MBA at Harvard.

Like Ana and Sonia, most of the Jewish Latinos I met make a clear distinction between themselves and those whom they perceive as “other Latinos.” ¹⁰ The line between the two groups is drawn around socio-economic class, race, immigration status, and religion. The separation made by Jewish Latinos between themselves and those they perceive as “other Latinos” is shaped in large part by their outsider status in their home countries – and sense of social distance from the majority of the population there. While the experience is not universal across all Latin American nationalities, most said that being Jewish in Latin America is synonymous with a being an ethnic minority. Class plays a role, too. Most Jewish Latino immigrants are from well-off and highly educated families in their home countries, where they (like most other Jews there) had minimal interaction with the lower classes, which contributed to the “otherness” of the Jewish community, especially in countries with a stark separation of social classes such as Mexico and Venezuela.¹¹ Most of the respondents were quick to establish a boundary between themselves and the group they perceive as “typical Latino” in the United States. They draw not only on their experience as members of an elite economic minority in their home county but also on their understanding of the relatively low position of Latinos in the U.S. ethnic and racial hierarchy:

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¹⁰ A more detailed discussion of the perceived race and class differences between Jewish Latinos and non-Jewish Latinos is discussed in Chapter 6.
¹¹ A more in-depth discussion of Jewish Life in Latin America and the individual experiences of the respondents can be found in Chapter 3.
Most of my interactions with other Latinos are people in the service industry, or my cleaning lady. We have something in common, we speak the same language – but we are different. I don’t feel connected to them (Andres, Mexican-Jew in New York).

Another respondent differentiates between what she sees as Hispanic and Latino and in this way also sets herself apart from those that have lower social positions:

I am Latina, sure, but I am not Hispanic, I think Hispanic refers to Puerto Ricans and Mexicans and it is considered part of the lower class.

Like other immigrants, their place in this hierarchical social system is an important predictor of their successful integration into American society, and they are quick to separate themselves from those they perceive as having a place on the lower rungs of the American racialized social class system (Barrett and Roediger 2008).

In general, the majority of Jewish Latin American immigrants in the Northeast have a privileged status: they are well educated, middle to upper class, and white. The respondents themselves make firm distinctions between themselves and other Latinos and are able to do so in many circumstances due to their skin color, religious affiliation, and social class (Nagel 1994). However, most felt that, even if they wanted to be considered part of a greater Latino panethnic group, their identity as in-group Latinos is questioned.

This lack or perceived lack of acceptance by other Latinos is related to many of the same distinctions that the Latino Jews themselves use to mark the boundaries between themselves and the larger Latino panethnic group. Latino Jews see themselves and are

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12 This does not mean that all Jews are white, wealthy and educated in Latin America. Even though Mizrahi Jews might be darker in skin color than many of the Jews from Eastern Europe, in Latin America “money whitens.” Jews with lower socio-economic status are more likely to immigrate to Israel where the government provides ample financial and resettlement assistance.
seen by others as phenotypically different from Latinos in the United States. Maya, an Argentine woman, talks about her husband’s experience as a doctor and the interactions he has with his patients:

Many people ask my husband where he is from; they don’t believe he is actually from Latin America nor understand why he speaks Spanish, and the patients often don’t understand how a white man can be Latino.

Jose relates similar experiences:

To some extent, I am defined by my name. My name is Jose and that makes my identity. That forces it. My patients ask me, “Are you Hispanic? You don’t sound like it, you don’t act like it”.

Jose is assuming that because his name is Spanish, he is in a sense, showing the world he is Latino or Hispanic. And in fact, he has consciously chosen to be called Jose and has not Anglicized his name. However, his whiteness, lack of accent, and position of power as a doctor all establish a social and ethnic distance between himself and his patients. Like Maya’s husband and Jose, those who interact regularly with non-Jewish Latinos in the United States had similar experiences. In fact, the identity of Jewish immigrants from Latin America is shaped – and constrained – by a combination of the experiences they had in their home countries as well as the reception received in the United States by existing Jewish and Latino groups.

American Jews as imperfect proximal hosts

How people identified in their home country is one of the most important determinants of identification in the United States. For those whose religious identity is salient, a strong connection to a more traditional American synagogue is especially likely. Those who did not have a strong religious or even communal attachment to Judaism or the Jewish community in their home country seem more likely to seek out co-nationals or
other Latinos who do not necessarily have a strong Jewish identity. I discuss in other chapters those who strongly identify as Latinos or Jews (or both depending on context); in this chapter I am concerned with the people who have not found perfect proximal hosts.

There is a common assumption that Judaism and Jewish practices are universal, crossing countries and cultures. There are certainly recognized differences in Jewish practices and beliefs between Ashkenazi (Jews of eastern European descent), Sephardic (Jews with roots in Spain and the Middle East) and Mizrahi Jews (North African Jews), which date back hundreds of years and bear the mark of regional influences. Within Judaism, there are also different levels of religiosity, interpretation, and observance, reflected in the myriad Jewish institutions in the United States, including schools, synagogues, and cultural and community centers. There is a belief, however, at least among American Jews that in modern times different groups within Judaism cross regional boundaries. An Ashkenazi reformed synagogue, for example, is expected to be the same in New York, Paris, and Mexico City. American Jews tend to assume the universality of Jewish religion’s core beliefs and principles as well as cultural practices. And to a large extent this is true. Jewish rituals such as lighting candles on Friday night, blessing and drinking wine, and observing the Sabbath by not working and attending synagogue are central to Judaism and Jewish religious practices, and shared by different Jewish sects and groups. However, there are clear cultural differences specific to regions of the world. Across Latin America, the influence of local cultures is apparent in the attributes of Jewish communities. In Mexico for example, Jewish cooking has evolved to
include *chiles* and cilantro. In Argentina, participation and support of a “Jewish” soccer team is one of the most prominent ways of displaying a Jewish identity (Rein 2010).

Across Latin American countries, the food, music, and language that comprise the enactment of Judaism are strongly influenced by national cultures. The American Jewish paradigm, both religious and cultural, is largely based on the German Ashkenazi or eastern European experience. Many of the Latino Jews I met who were either themselves of Ashkenazi European background or the descendants of Ashkenazi Jews found that there was something “American” and not “Latin” in the Jewish paradigm found in the United States. In Latin America, Sephardic and Mizrahi traditions are important facets of the collective community, through food, language, and cultural values. Moreover, Latin American Judaism is practiced beyond the walls of a synagogue:

> Most Argentines don’t go to synagogue to pray, or I don’t even remember going very often. We have other ways to interact and be Jewish. Our whole world can be Jewish if we want it to. I went to Jewish schools and then Hebraica (the athletic club). But here we don’t have that. There is the JCC (Jewish Community Center) and it fulfills some of the same functions. In fact this summer we are just going there—so we can interact with other members of the community at the pool. But it’s not really the same. I tried to join a synagogue here, but I don’t feel connected to it (Marina, Argentine-Jew in Boston).

In Latin America many Jews belong to and actively participate in the Jewish community through Jewish organizations that are outside the religious sphere. This is less common in the United States. American Jewish life has, since the 1950s progressively moved beyond communal organizations and into the synagogues (Sarna 2004). Even though many people continue to “feel Jewish” or identify as Jews, fewer people have a broad institutional connection to Jewish life in the United States. As a result of these factors, American Jews have proved to be an imperfect proximal host for some Latino Jews.
Upon arrival in the United States many Latino Jews sought out a place in a Jewish community either by choosing a neighborhood with a significant Jewish population such as the Upper West Side of Manhattan or the Boston suburbs of Newton or Brookline and by attending a synagogue, or sending their children to Jewish day school. In Latin America, Jewish institutions are a focal point around which Jews congregate, socialize and even do business. The cultural institutions such as Jewish athletic or social clubs as well as religious ones are spaces where people go to be with family and friends and connect with people perceived as “like them”. Many immigrants remember feeling “at home” or “with family” in these institutions. Upon immigrating, they seek out organizations that feel like home, even if friends and family from their home country are absent. Familiar songs, foods, activities, or Spanish-accented Hebrew, as well as the reception they receive make the communal institutions more familiar or home-like.

Many respondents mentioned that they felt uncomfortable with the less traditional religious services in the United States, even though they did not consider themselves particularly religious or observant. The presence of women rabbis was mentioned frequently, especially among newer arrivals. “I cannot get used to women rabbis, that would never happen in Argentina”, an Argentine woman told me. A young Mexican woman echoed the sentiment: “In Mexico we do not have women rabbis, and this is something that only happens in America”.

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13 This seems to be in contrast with the low importance Latin American Jews place on synagogue attendance. As far as I can glean, it seems that if they are to go to a synagogue in the United States, they would like the experience to be similar to the one in their home country, even if they do not consider themselves highly religious or observant.

14 Interestingly, Argentina is one of the few Latin American countries where women are allowed to practice as Rabbis.
I heard many times that the American Jewish community is “cold and formal” when Judaism means warm and welcoming to Latin American Jews. As a result, many immigrants do not relate to or identify with American Jews, seeking out people with similar backgrounds instead: “we would like to meet people like ourselves”. Some also felt that American Jews did not really understand them. A Venezuelan man I met at the Jewish Latin Center in New York (discussed in-depth in the following section) told me how difficult it has been for him in the United States, as a Jew and a Latino:

I am so excited you are studying this (Latino Jews). I have thought so much about being Jewish and Latino, because it has been so difficult for me here. I went to a synagogue in Atlanta, and people would say to me, “oh you are Venezuelan, are you in the process of converting [to Judaism]? Don’t people know there are Jews all over the world? That is why I am so happy to find this place (the Jewish Latin Center).

Given the ambivalent reception by American Jewish as well as Latino proximal hosts, one would expect the formation of a new panethnic group combining Jewish, national, and Latino aspects of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The majority of respondents, however, do not self-define themselves as Latino Jews and in fact their ethnic identity is much more bifurcated and situational. In general, the respondents who self-identify as Latino Jews have had some interaction with an organized religious or cultural institution that fosters a panethnic Latino Jewish community. Though other factors, such as age, profession, and social contacts, seem to have some influence on the creation of a panethnic Jewish Latino identity, my research suggests that participation in an established organization that caters to and actively recruits Jewish members of Latin American descent is the strongest factor leading to and reinforcing a Latino Jewish identity in the United States.
One such organization and the site of my ethnographic research is the Jewish Latin Center, a Chabad organization in New York City formed in 2009, which actively seeks to build a community of Latin Jews. The Jewish Latin Center functions as an organized space where members construct an ethno-religious identity that is outside the sphere of existing ethnic and religious categories. Though one might suspect that it is self-selection that draws people to these organizations, I found that in reality, people did not seek out a Latino Jewish organization like the Jewish Latin Center. Most ended up there by happenstance, hearing about it through friends, and surprised to find how “at home” they felt.

The Jewish Latin Center: an ethnographic sketch

I visited the Jewish Latin Center for the first time in the fall of 2010. The Jewish Latin Center functions as a provisional synagogue as well as religious community outreach center, located on the 6th floor of a high-rise building in Manhattan’s Midtown district. I knew from my previous encounters with ultra-religious Jewish communities that women must adhere to a strict dress code which prohibits pants, short skirts, revealing tops and usually requires head-covering, either in the form of a head-scarf or a wig. As I rode up the elevator, I looked down at my clothes and was worried that my attire was not conservative enough for an orthodox Jewish service. I would later see that my concern was unfounded at this particular congregation and at Chabad synagogues in general.

I stepped off the elevator and picked up a prayer book from a folding table before entering the main room. I saw that I was among the first to arrive and made my way to the back of the room. The room was set up with folding chairs in rows and a screen
dividing the front and back of the room to separate the men from the women, as is customary in Jewish Orthodox synagogues. Jewish Orthodox rules prohibit men and women praying together; often times the women’s sections are found on the second level of synagogues where women can look down on their family members and the rabbi during the service. Since this was not a traditional synagogue but rather a large auditorium-like room, the screen in the middle served as a barrier between the men and women. The service had been called for 7:00 PM, and it was now 7:20. I have grown used to American punctuality and was surprised by the more common Latin American custom (“Latin” time) of arriving twenty to thirty minutes after the starting time. I looked around and saw about 10 men entering and making their way to the front. The men were dressed in suits or trousers and sweaters, and all wore kippot, the traditional beanie that Jewish men wear as a head covering. None of the men were dressed in typical orthodox garb, such as black suits, tall hats, and prayer shawls. As the women trickled in, alone or in small groups of two or three, they made their way to the back of the makeshift synagogue. Their style of dress was much more varied than the men’s, but all leaned towards modern and fashionable. While some women dressed in skirts and long-sleeved tops, as is customary among Orthodox Jewish women, the majority wore less traditional attire such as pants or shorter dresses or tops with exposed arms. None of the women covered their heads with a scarf or a wig. I was particularly interested in the attire because traditional dress is one of the most visible markers setting Orthodox Jews apart from non-Jews as well as less religious Jews. In fact, many came dressed as if this was the first stop before a night on the town. I later learned that this is common among Chabad congregations; they are open to all and in fact have a mission to proselytize
among and often attract younger, less-religious Jews. The success of *Chabad* can be largely attributed to the philosophy of inclusion and serving as a safe space for all to discover and practice Judaism, not just the extremely pious (Fishkoff 2009; Heilman and Friedman 2010).

People milled in slowly. The men took their seats upfront and the women made their way to the back of the room, kissing friends on the cheeks, stopping to chat with one another before settling down for the remainder of the service. The service that night was *Kol Nidre*, named for the *Kol Nidre* prayer that starts *Yom Kippur*, the Jewish Day of Atonement and the holiest day of the year. In my previous experiences, *Kol Nidre* services had been somber events where people arrived early, and appeared to make concerted efforts to concentrate on the service and prayers. Since these experiences had taken place at less religious Jewish synagogues such as Conservative or Reform houses of worship, I had expected the *Chabad* services I was attending that night to be much more solemn and somber. The chatter of the women sitting near me in the back of the room was the second signal that the Jewish Latin Center served more of a socializing function for the people who attended than a space to practice religious rites and traditions.

The Rabbi leading the service, Rabbi Mendy as the congregation called him, was a young Orthodox man in his early to mid-twenties. I had read earlier on the center’s website that Rabbi Mendy was originally from Brazil, which helped explain the snippets of Portuguese I heard throughout the women’s section. Rabbi Mendy welcomed everyone to the service in English, with interjections of Spanish and Portuguese. The service was short, as *Kol Nidre* tends to be, and primarily in Hebrew or Aramaic (the
ancient language of Israel and the language of many Jewish prayers). The women sitting around me participated in the prayers and chanted alongside the rest of the congregation. Their participation, however, did not hinder their socializing, which they did during small pauses or breaks in the service. At the end of the service the Rabbi wished everyone an easy fast\textsuperscript{15} and invited everyone back the next day for a day of prayer and an evening meal to break the fast. I did not return the next day for the \textit{Yom Kippur} services, but over the next year and a half, I began to attend regular Friday night services and monthly dinners. I engaged with many of the members, got to know the Rabbi and his wife, and began to understand what drew people to the Jewish Latin Center.

I returned a few weeks later for my first Shabbat (Friday night service) and monthly dinner. The email invite I had received stated that the service would begin at 7:00; this time I arrived at 7:15 and that was still too early for a Latin event. Over the next 15 minutes, people began to trickle in and make their way to their appropriate gender-specific section. The service was again short, primarily in English and people seemed eager to get on with the second half of the night – the Shabbat dinner. When the service ended, people found their way to the other side of the room where tables had been set up to accommodate seventy-five to one hundred people, many more than had been present at the service, and I wondered if the space would fill up. I realized that evening, and over the next year, that the dinners were the main draw as the events gained popularity. I looked around, unsure where to sit; many of the people seemed to know each other and made their way to a table together. I found a place at a table with about

\textsuperscript{15} On \textit{Yom Kippur}, Jews are required by religious law to fast and are prohibited, according to Jewish law, from engaging in any activity that might distract them from the serious work of atonement.
eight other people, men and women ranging in age from their mid-twenties to mid-fifties. I sat down, not quite knowing what the protocol was. Did people sit with strangers and try and meet new people or were the guests sitting at tables with people they were already acquainted with? It seemed from looking around that most were sitting with old friends or friends of friends. I listened to the accents at the tables and realized that they were more or less divided by nationality. From what I could glean, there was a Venezuelan table, an Argentine table, and a Mexican table.

My dining companions seemed to be on the older side and less “chummy” than some of the other groups. The most out-going person and my “in” to the group at my table was a man in his mid-fifties whom I will call Robert. Robert is an American man who is married to a Brazilian woman, Nilda. Neither of them is very religious, they both explained, but they enjoy the Shabbat dinners around the city and this one in particular because Rabbi Mendy is from Brazil, so Nilda feels more at home here. They introduced me to some of the other dinner guests, the majority Brazilian, though an American man and a Colombian woman were part of the entourage. The talk revolved around careers, education, travels home, and real estate (after all, this is New York and real estate tends to dominate dinner party conversations). At no time did the conversation turn towards religious topics.

The food was served buffet style, on aluminum trays with disposable plates and cutlery. Dishes ranged from traditional eastern European Jewish cuisine, such as gefilte fish (balls of chopped white fish served boiled), to Middle Eastern specialties like hummus (a chickpea and sesame paste spread popular in the Middle East) and eggplant salad. The bar was stocked with wine, spirits and soft drinks. As we served ourselves
and took our seats again, Rabbi Mendy called for our attention. He officially began by reciting the traditional Hebrew blessings over the wine and bread. After the prayers were uttered and as people began to partake in the evening’s dinner, the Rabbi welcomed the guests and began to call on individual people to stand up and say a few words. When he spoke now, he spoke in both Spanish and English, peppered with Portuguese, a marked difference from the religious service where he spoke in English and prayed in Hebrew and English. The use of language set a different tone for the dinner. People were being addressed in the language of their home country and throughout the night spoke Spanish or Portuguese to Rabbi Mendy, which gave their conversations an air of intimacy.

The first guest invited to speak was Robert from our table. Rabbi Mendy introduced him by saying a few words about Robert’s dedication to the Jewish Latin Center. Robert, in turn, expressed his gratitude to the Jewish Latin Center for hosting these dinners and especially thanked Rabbi Mendy for founding the congregation. That night and over the next year, Rabbi Mendy asked many people to stand up and tell a bit of their story. Some were new arrivals to the city and were happy to find a place that “felt like home.” Others were just passing through and had heard about the Jewish Latin Center from an acquaintance and wanted a place to spend a Shabbat. Still others, like Robert, were not from Latin America, spoke little Spanish or Portuguese, yet found a welcoming and vibrant community within the Jewish Latin Center. Through listening to the introductions and the few words spoken by the people attending the Friday night dinners, I was able to get a sense of how this congregation was constructed. Rabbi Mendy was likely not only to mention a person’s home country but also their spouse and their profession. For example a typical introduction might be, “I would like Ariel, from
Uruguay, to say a few words. Ariel works at Goldman Sachs and has been an important supporter of the Jewish Latin Center.” As a sociologist, these snippets of information gave me insight into the socio-economic and demographic nature of the population, but they also served as points useful for networking, which I would come to see was a major function of the Jewish Latin Center. In fact, I found that many people who attended did so precisely for business opportunities and job prospects. I was handed business cards on many occasions and was also asked numerous times if I was aware of any job opportunities or possible business collaborations.

Joining or creating a congregation composed of fellow immigrants is not a new or unique phenomenon. The literature on immigration has many examples of co-ethnics congregating in a religious setting to develop the social networks that allow them to adapt to their new country (Foner and Alba 2008; Warner 1998; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). Ethnic religious institutions have important social functions that differ from non-ethnic religious organizations. In his work on Korean churches in the United States, Pyong Gap Min (1992) describes the four major social functions of immigrant and minority churches as fellowship, maintenance of ethnic identity and ethnic subculture, provision of social services, and ability to gain social status and social positions. This model is useful in analyzing the functions of the Jewish Latin Center, with two major exceptions: rather than maintain ethnic identity and ethnic subculture, the Jewish Latin Center actively promotes a new religious-ethnic identity. Also, the Jewish Latin Center does not actively provide social services, nor is it a place where there are large differences in social status. Since the Center is at the early stages of development and growth, it does not have the financial capital to provide social services and concentrates on recruitment and building
its own membership base. It is possible that as members take on more leadership roles, social status within the congregation will begin to matter more. In what follows, I concentrate on the fellowship and promotion of a new religious-ethnic identity.

Fellowship

As Min (1992) points out, churches have always been a central meeting point for people to congregate and feel part of a group. This is a particularly important function in immigrant’s churches, which cater to people who are far from home and lack a sense of community and a dense network of familial ties that they had there. In this sense, the Jewish Latin Center actively fulfills this fellowship function. It is not merely a place to practice religious rites; in fact, religious observances do not appear to drive the attendance of many of its members. People I spoke with talked about their extensive involvement in Jewish communal institutions, such as the athletic clubs or the Jewish day schools in their home countries, and while the majority also belonged to a synagogue there, most did not attend services with any regularity. The regular attendance at the Jewish Latin Center deviated from their religious practice at home.

As I described above, the Friday night services were more social than religious events, with many people arriving closer to the end of the service and staying for the dinner. The social events sponsored by the Jewish Latin Center were even more popular than the religious services. Community building is in fact, one of the guiding missions of the Jewish Latin Center. When I met with Rabbi Mendy, he spoke extensively about the need to fill a void, to construct a community similar to those in Latin America:

Latin American Jews have a strong Jewish community because we are from small communities. Most families belong to something that is Jewish and gives a stronger sense of community. Here in New York there is less of a sense of community because the
Jewish community is larger. This disturbed a lot of Latin Americans that came here and creates a distance to Judaism. They do not feel comfortable here. Communities in South America are very warm and welcoming. The community and family life is very important.

Fellowship is a key function of the Jewish Latin Center. This is evident not only in the interactions I observed among attendees but also in the social groups and relationships that have grown out of meetings and events at the Jewish Latin Center. Many people feel that even though they can connect with other non-Latino Jews, co-nationals and non-Jewish Latinos, they have a stronger connection with Jews from Latin America. This is what might be called an identity based on an “imagined history” (similar to Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined community) with people from different national origins focusing on the shared aspects of their background and ignoring important differences. In this case, that imagined history includes being Jews from small communities in Catholic dominant societies, speaking a common language, and having shared cultural values, all the while downplaying nationality differences among them. For example, the Jewish community in Argentina is very different from the Jewish community in Mexico. Argentine Jews are much more likely to be assimilated, less likely only to attend Jewish schools, and are found across all socio-economic classes, whereas the Mexican Jewish community is much smaller, more insular and, generally, of high socio-economic status. Thus, when people attend the Jewish Latin Center in New York City, they meet others from the same national background as well as those from other Latin American countries with whom they share imagined histories and form strong bonds.

Rabbi Mendy actively works to have the Center fulfill a fellowship function. On any given evening, he makes it a point to introduce people as potential friends, and he
sometimes acts as a matchmaker. He has married a few couples that have met at the Jewish Latin Center and actively seeks to make other matches. Since Rabbi Mendy is concerned with Jewish people marrying outside the Jewish faith, he seeks to match people romantically as a way to curtail intermarriage:

One of our primary goals is that young professionals get together. A few couples have met at the center. In a world where we are living today, assimilation is threatening our nation. We are actively setting people up.

The Jewish Latin Center, therefore, functions as a meeting place for many new immigrants who have not found a congregation or social venue to meet others with similar or imagined similar backgrounds. Since the majority of the attendees are recent immigrants, the center functions not only as an entry into an established or, perhaps more accurately, establishing community and religious institution but also as an organized space to forge new social ties.

**Establishing a New Ethno-religious Identity: The Construction of Latino Jews**

It is important to note that the people who attend the Jewish Latin Center or other Latino Jewish events are a small minority of the Latino Jewish population in the United States. Partly this is simply because there are very few Jewish Latino institutions or organizations. It is possible that if more specifically Jewish Latino institutions existed, more Jewish Latinos would join and identify as Latino Jews.

For Latino immigrants in New York, of course, there is also the fact that the metropolitan area is home to the largest Jewish community outside of Israel; in fact, being a New Yorker is sometime synonymous with being Jewish. Therefore we would expect that young, well-off Jewish immigrants from Latin America would find a suitable congregation already in existence among the hundreds of Jewish synagogues in New
York and the surrounding areas. Joining an established community via a synagogue would grant new immigrants entry into an established network and allow them to access the social capital associated with the New York Jewish community. In fact, many of the Jewish immigrants from Latin America who join or attend synagogue are able to find a place among established congregations. But for those Jewish Latino immigrants whose religious traditions or rites do not align with American Jewish congregations or who simply feel out of place in these spaces, the Jewish Latino Center fills a void. Indeed, the Jewish Latino Center challenges the universality of Judaic rites and practices as well as Jewish culture.

When I first started attending services and dinners at the Jewish Latin Center, most of the small groups that formed seemed to be made up of co-nationals. There was, as I noted, a Venezuelan table, a Mexican table, an Argentine one and a Brazilian one, among others. As the Jewish Latin Center began to grow in numbers, these tables became more integrated. While many people may know each other from their home countries, they also often join tables and groups with people from other countries. This cross-national intermingling is even more apparent during the cocktail hour (added to the Friday night dinners 2011) or parties sponsored by the Jewish Latin Center held off the premises. The congregation then becomes panethnic Jewish Latino rather than Jewish and Latin American.

To return to the reasons for the development of a panethno-religious group among Latin American Jewish immigrants, both cultural and structural factors are involved the development of a panethno-religious group among Latin American Jewish immigrants. One I have emphasized is the lack of a perfect proximal host: Latin American Jews do
not feel completely integrated or accepted into either U.S. Latino communities or the American Jewish community. Additionally, shared cultural essentials, such as language, strongly influence the construction of the Jewish Latino identity. Furthermore, as minorities from overwhelmingly Catholic societies, Jews from Latin America bring with them a shared experience that extends beyond national boundaries. Not only are Catholics the majority, Catholicism in Latin America is present and important in government and schools, and the national psyche at large. This is especially true, for example, in Mexico where the Catholic faith has such a strong influence on the culture of the society and religious icons such as *La Virgen de Guadalupe* are national symbols. As a result of the omnipresence of Catholics and Catholicism, Jews (as well as other religious groups) are minorities that often face discrimination in both subtle and more obvious ways. Indeed, there is structural and institutional anti-Semitism across Latin America. In Venezuela for example, Jews are not allowed to be members of some elite country clubs. Government posts, especially high-level elected posts, are difficult to obtain for Jews. Many immigrants in New York also spoke of small, minor incidents of anti-Semitism that they dealt with on a regular basis in their home countries, such as being teased or the subject of jokes. Baruch, a Mexican Jew told me:

> In Mexico, I was often identified as Jewish. Non-Jewish Mexicans saw me as Jewish. I did not suffer a lot of anti-Semitism in general, but they [the jokes] were meant to be aggressive. But, you need to have a sense of humor about it.

While the sending countries each have unique cultural traits, the Catholic Church is a strong political player in the region and, to a somewhat varying degree, within each country, where Jews are considered religious and even ethnic minorities. As a result, strong Jewish communities emerged and continue to thrive in Latin America while
remaining much less assimilated into the mainstream culture than in the United States. The majority of Jews share a sense of belonging to Jewish communities across Latin America, and this serves as a basis for connection for Latin American Jewish immigrants in the United States. For those immigrants who have learned about and joined the Jewish Latin Center, their participation fills a void and re-creates, in a small way, the feeling of community that existed in their home countries. Latin American Jews are accustomed to having their social, professional and religious lives intertwined and take place within large Jewish institutions. Given the Jewish structural institutions in place in Latin America and the tight-knit Jewish communities there, Latin American Jews are more likely to have culturally-based panethnic identification than non-Jewish Latinos. They not only share a language and some regionally specific norms, they also have a shared experience of belonging to a religious minority group, and many were entrenched in the communal institutions of their Jewish community.

Given this background, it is not surprising that a majority of respondents have a sense of some sort of Latino-Jewish cultural commonality. They have a sense of a shared past with other Jewish Latinos, that they see as primordial, though it is their experiences as immigrants in the United States that shape and construct their ethnic identities. As Benjamin, a Jewish-Mexican said to me:

I definitely feel more at home with other Jews from Latin America. We share so much, our culture, our background, the way we are. Also, our parents and grandparents came from the same place. We have similar roots.

The word roots signals the primordial sense of ethnicity. Yet, Benjamin’s roots are from Eastern Europe, similar to the majority of American Jews. Benjamin’s sense of connection with other Latino Jews, while seemingly primordial is actually a construction
of their shared histories as Jews in Latin America and Latin American or Latino Jews in the United States.

Most mentioned that they feel more at home with other Jews from Latin America, share a sense of history, and generally treat other Latino Jews as members of their community or group. At the same time, few described themselves as Latino Jews. For those who defined themselves as Latino Jews, the most important factor in self-identification in panethnic or panethno-religious terms is the existence of an institutional space where the panethno-religious identity is introduced and reinforced. This is the case for people who have had the opportunity to interact with other Jewish Latinos not only in a religious setting like the Jewish Latin Center, but also in organized social groups or other institutionalized settings.

A majority of those strongly identifying as Jewish Latinos feel that their particular cultural practices and ethnic backgrounds are salient and relevant in both their personal identity schema as well as in developing a sense of group belonging. Which part of their identity, however, and background is most relevant depends on personal circumstances as well as situations. When I started research for this dissertation, I expected, true to Mittelberg and Water’s predictions concerning proximal hosts that I would meet many people who identified as Latino Jews or Jewish Latinos. I knew, from personal experiences, anecdotes, and preliminary research that Jews from Latin America tend to feel, at times, alienated from the North American Jewish community yet, at the same time, unable to claim a Latino identity in the United States. As suspected, many respondents went through a process of ethnogenesis, or change of identity. Most do not
nominally self-identify in name as Latino Jews, however, unless they have had opportunities to do so in institutional settings such as the Jewish Latin Center.

**Other Latino Jewish organizations**

As the numbers of Latino Jews in the United States have grown, organizations and institutions have begun to take notice and provide cultural, social, and religious and outreach programs and services. A number of Jewish institutions, especially in places like New York, Miami, and Southern California have begun to organize and offer programs around the Jewish Latino panethno-religious identity. It is likely that immigrants and their children will identify more as Latino Jews, if they have the opportunity to participate in an institutional setting in Latino Jewish events, whether social, cultural, artistic, or religious. Through my research, I have discovered a number of Jewish Latino political organizations, organized religious groups, Jewish Latino blogs, and even Jewish Latino merchandise. Latino Jewish groups have been cited in Jewish newspapers such as *The New York Jewish Week* (Padilla 2011; Goldman 2002), and Jewish websites such as ynet.com. The institutions that support the emergence of a Jewish Latino panethnicity can be categorized as follows – political alliances and institutions, religious organizations, organized social groups, art and cultural associations, academic associations, and commercial endeavors.

**Art and cultural associations**

We can see the promotion of Jewish Latino panethnicity art in film, music, the visual arts, and literature. The 92nd Street Y, a prominent and longstanding Jewish cultural organization in New York City, sponsors Jewish Latino Arts Festivals or *Feria Latinas*, which features a visual art exhibit, film screenings, lectures, and social events.
The weeklong series promotes Jewish Latino culture and partners with the social group Judios Latinos. The flyer for the event held in 2007 (see figure 4.1) was in Spanish and English. Subsequent fairs have been held in 2009 and 2010.

Figure 4.1

Image from the 92nd. St. Y

Cultural institutions have also promoted the art of Jewish Latinos within larger programs such as the Latino Film Festival in San Diego, which featured a Jewish Latino segment at the festival in 2011 and 2012. The festival’s website promoted the Latino Jewish feature of the program this way:

In recent years, Jewish Latino films are getting their due as both feature films and documentaries explore the fusion of these two cultures. From lighthearted comedies to serious documentaries in
search of cultural identity, these films bring to light the lives of Jewish Latinos in the Americas and themes of multiculturalism in today’s society.

In general, the organizations that promote Jewish Latino cultural and religious events seek to attract Jews from Latin America and are less interested in appealing to American Jews. These events are a way for Jewish organizations to draw in new members as well as a conduit to established Jewish institutions for Jewish Latino immigrants.

**Community and social organizations**

There are a number of urban, communal groups, aimed primarily at promoting socializing among younger, typically professional, Jewish Latino immigrants. In New York City, the largest and most prominent social group is the *Judios Latinos* (Latin Jews). The group was started in 2002 by an Argentine woman in her twenties and originally was based in Makor, a now defunct Jewish organization that supported local social and cultural programming in New York City. The mission of *Judios Latinos* is to promote unity among Latin American Jewish immigrants and foster a strong sense of belonging. The website’s mission’s statement reads:

*Judios Latinos* provides young Latin Jews a sense of community as they transition from their countries of origin and build their lives in New York while it reinforces the rich cultural and social heritage of this distinct group and introduces this rich heritage to the greater New York City community. *Judios Latinos* generates awareness about the Latin Jews living in the United States within the American Jewish and general Latino communities and promotes collaboration, respect, and friendship between the Latin Jewish community in New York City and the American Jewish and general Latino communities in the City. *Judios Latinos* also hopes to establish connections between the American Jewish community and the various Jewish communities in Latin America. (www.jlnyc.org).
Most of the website is in Spanish and shows pictures of men and women in their twenties and thirties at a variety of social events, including Latin dance parties, social fundraising events for Latin America, and gallery exhibitions. While the events and group membership are open to anyone, the heavy use of Spanish and Latin-themed events are likely to attract Spanish-speaking Latinos. Other similar groups have formed around the country at colleges and universities and tend to have the support of the Jewish community, much as Makor did. The Hillel organization at the University of Pennsylvania, for instance, started Jewish Latinos at Penn (JLP), which “brings together Central American, South American and Mexican Jews and their friends for cultural events. Latin Judaism differs in many respects from contemporary ‘American’ Judaism, from language and community to an embrace of ‘tradition’ irrespective of observance.”

Other community organizations have also tried to recreate the Jewish organizations that are such central institutions in Latin America. These clubs, such as Hebraica or Maccabi in Argentina, Hebraica in Venezuela, and El Deportivo in Mexico, are some of the strongest institutions within the Jewish communities in Latin America, where they serve as athletic clubs, cultural institutions, as well social meeting places. In Miami, Hebraica functions as a Latino Jewish Community Center and is a space where Latino Jews living in South Florida meet, socialize, network, and develop a panethno-religious community.

While institutions like Hebraica are able to create a sense of shared identity and in many ways re-create the tight-knit community found in Latin America, structural

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16 (See [http://pennhillel.org/social-cultural-sector#1](http://pennhillel.org/social-cultural-sector#1)).
17 Many of the respondents mentioned that the lack of these clubs in the United States is what makes it difficult to become “part of a community”.
forces in place in the United States preclude them from becoming the strong institutional heavyweights they are in Latin America. In the United States, many of the services provided by these associations can be found elsewhere. For example, participation in athletic instruction and competition happens at the community level in Latin America. While many private schools in Latin America are beginning to have stronger athletic programs, Jewish and non-Jewish clubs are still the leading athletic institutions. Jewish community centers are the places where many young people learn to swim, play soccer or tennis and then go on to compete with other clubs (Jewish and non-Jewish) and in other countries. The *Maccabia* games (a series of athletic competitions among Jewish clubs) are important meeting places for Jews across the world and, especially in Latin America, are followed closely by Latino Jewish immigrants. In the United States, in contrast, local schools are likely to provide athletic programs that Latin American Jews use. In Latin America, Jewish clubs teach dance, put on plays, and have art exhibits and book readings. While Jewish community centers in the United States often offer similar programs, their quality and prestige are often unequal to the programs found in local schools or specialized arts institutions.

Either existing North American Jewish communal institutions or Latin American Jewish immigrants themselves promote Latino Jewish organizations, cultural events, and social groups in the United States with established U.S. Jewish institutions spearheading or supporting many of the initiatives. Since a major concern in North American Jewish communities is preservation or continuity of the Jewish people, fostering the involvement of Latin American Jewish immigrants is part of Jewish community self-preservation. Issues such as assimilation, non-attendance at synagogues, and intermarriage are pressing
for American Jewish community leaders. By creating institutions or cultural events that bring these Jewish immigrants into the fold, these leaders are expanding the North American Jewish community.  

Conclusion

The evidence from the interviews I conducted as well as the ethnographic research I undertook at the Jewish Latin Center shows that few Jewish immigrants from Latin America actually call themselves Jewish Latinos. Most Latin American Jewish immigrants identify themselves as Jews. They also identify with their national origin and as Latin American. Self-identification as Jewish Latinos is less common, and generally only salient for those – admittedly a relatively small number – who are involved in various ethnic or ethno-religious groups that bring Latin American Jews together. The extent of involvement in Latino Jewish ethno-religious groups and strength of a Jewish Latino identity vary by degree of religiosity, education, and social class, as well as experience in the home country. For example, those who are less religious are more likely to be involved in Latino Jewish groups than are those with a strong religious background, who are more likely to identify with long-established Jewish ethno-religious groups in the United States. Jewish Latinos have a sense of a shared past with one another, that they see as primordial, though it is their experiences as immigrants in the United States that shapes and constructs their ethnic identities. What is clear is that only a few Latino Jews adopt a Jewish-Latino identity, even though virtually all Jewish Latinos have a sense that

18 Jewish institutions have also supported immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Iran, not only politically but also by sponsoring and maintaining ethno-religious institutions, with differing results. (Feher 1998; Gold 1994)
they are both Latino and Jews based on a common language, feelings of distance from North American Jews or Latinos, and ethnic minority status in their home countries, which entails a similar upbringing in Latin American Jewish communal and institutional life. It is likely that as the number of Latino Jews continues to increase (and this is probable given the on-going political and personal safety issues in Latin American countries with sizable Jewish populations such as Mexico and Venezuela), a growing number of American Jewish institutions will sponsor Jewish Latino programs, events and organizations, which will expand the number and strength of those who call themselves - and thus are - Jewish Latinos.
Chapter 5

On Being Jewish: Exercising Strategic Ethnic Options

Introduction

Integration and assimilation into a new society often require immigrants to reimagine themselves and their identity. Upon settling in a new country, many immigrants experience a change in the status associated with their ethnicity or ethno-racial status; they cease to be part of the majority. For most immigrants their ethnic, racial or religious status is such that in the United States they are considered members of a minority group. This is especially true for a large number of Latinos in the United States who immigrated from places such as Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Post immigration many Latino immigrants occupy a lower place within the racial and ethnic hierarchy in the United States than they did in their home countries. For many Latino Jews, however, they experience a rise in ethnic status post-immigration. This group of immigrants, while certainly a privileged minority in Latin America, is in many ways excluded from the mainstream – in large part due to the Catholic dominant societies in Latin America. Their ethno-religious status is both a source of stigma as well as a basis for exclusion in their home counties where the Catholic faith prevails among the majority of the population and also guides government institutions. Jews in Latin America find themselves in economic privileged positions, yet their access to important sectors of society such as government and elite ruling class is limited by their ethno-religious status. While their Jewishness sets members of this group apart in Latin America, it (Jewishness) is what grants them insider status in the United States, especially in cities like New York, Boston and even Miami where they have settled in large number. In the following pages,
I discuss how Jews in the United States have become part of the mainstream (especially in large urban areas) and how Latino Jews position themselves in such a way that they benefit from the mainstream and arguably privileged status of the Jews in these cities.

In this chapter, I explain how the Catholic dominated societies in Latin America operate in such a way that does not allow Jews to be truly considered insiders. While Jews have certainly become more integrated in recent times, historically they have been excluded and marginalized from the ruling sectors of society. The marginalization they faced forced them to operate within closed ethnic enclaves where business and personal relations were conducted primarily within Jewish groups. Jews in Latin America have also built their own (Jewish) educational, religious and financial institutions, the majority of which continue to exist today. Jewish communities in Latin America have thrived and its members gained prestige, wealth and some status, yet their wealth and prestige have never been enough to grant them insider status into the dominant Latin American societies.

Many of the respondents in this study are accustomed to operating and benefitting from the Jewish ethnic enclave in their home countries. As Julia, a 34-year-old Mexican–Jewish woman living in New York describes, “in Mexico, there are advantages to doing things within the (Jewish) community, Jews always give each other a hand”. Or Marina a young woman from Argentina told me:

I loved being part of the Jewish community in Argentina, my life revolved around it- maybe it was like living in a bubble, but I did not mind. I always felt that within the community, like in school, or Hebraica or even in the neighborhood or where we went for vacation, I never had to worry. Everyone knew me, I knew everyone and felt safe and at home. Also whenever we needed something –for example advice on how to come to the United States there was always people to turn to.
Emilia, a Mexican-Jewish woman living in New York explained to me:

I prefer belonging to the Jewish community in Mexico, it is more of a community, and I feel more entrenched with the people there, than the American Jews here. In Mexico- since there are so many class differences and physical differences, you can be 100 percent of the time with Jews. There are a lot of things for Jews—like schools, clubs things that don’t really exist here in the same way. And that was or is enough in Mexico. Here [in the United States], it is more important to give tools to your children to go to the best university and spend money on them. You lose the sense of community.

While these enclaves serve as places where Jews can prosper and the community can thrive, they also reinforce the larger societal view of Jews as “other”. In fact, among the Jewish Latinos that I interviewed, those who chose to actively situate themselves beyond the physical as well as commercial and social borders of the Jewish community or enclave, in their home societies still found that their ethno-religious status was used to define and categorize them by the larger society, even if they distanced themselves from the Jewish enclave:

In Venezuela, most people knew that I was Jewish, even if I did not tell them, or my last name is not Jewish. They might ask where I live or where I went to high school, even if we had little to do with the other Jews, people just placed you. (Jose, Boston area Venezuelan Jew).

The second part of the chapter looks at the experiences of Latin American Jews after they immigrate to the United States. As Jews they are no longer “othered” by society, and they find themselves in an unusual position where their ethno-religious identity can grants them insider status. In fact what separates them from the mainstream is their Latino background. They learn to navigate the ethno-racial hierarchy of the United States and find that they no longer need or can operate within an ethnic enclave.
This is in part because there are numerically too few Latino Jewish immigrants to create one in New York or Boston, and also because non-observant Jews in the United States no longer operate within closed ethnic enclaves. As a result, Latino Jewish immigrants quickly learn to access the privileges associated with their ethno-religious identity through a “strategic ethnic option”. By choosing when and to whom to reveal their Jewishness, they are able to form ties or access Jewish networks, gain a foothold in a Jewish community through participation in communal or religious institutions and also signal to others that as Jews they are white and therefore establish a distance between themselves and other non-Jewish Latinos. I found that an open Jewish identity was more prevalent in professional sectors with a high representation of Jews such as banking, law, or medicine. At the same time, those who work in the arts, marketing and media are less likely to be as open about their Jewish background or use their Jewishness as a point of connection.

**Being Jewish in Latin America**

Regional commonalities abound across Latin America – almost all Latin American nations were originally Spanish colonies and as a result much of their cultural, political and religious (i.e. Catholic) identity can be traced back to Spanish colonialism. Of particular relevance is the history of the Inquisition and its influence on Jewish life in the Americas. The Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition marked the first time that Jews (and Moors) were classified as racially different than Catholics (Netanyahu 1995). Additionally as Fredrickson (2002) argues, the racist ideologies of the Inquisition such as *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) laid the groundwork for modern racist regimes such as the Jewish Holocaust and Jim Crow laws. The Inquisition and its racist ideologies
were in full force during the period of Spanish colonization and as a result Jews were forbidden entry to the colonies. The Jews who did immigrate to the colonies were *Conversos* or New Christians, some of whom maintained their Jewish faith in secret. The Inquisition in the colonies was as powerful and far-reaching as it was in Spain and also relentless in its persecution of New Christians accused of Judaizing or practicing Judaism in secret\textsuperscript{19}. An important point, however, is that the majority of Jews who had converted were by the time of settlement in the new colonies largely assimilated; the Inquisition had started over 100 years earlier and over time fewer and fewer Jews practiced their faith in secret.

While there were a small number of Jewish settlements that date back to the time of early colonization, primarily in the Caribbean, the majority of the Jews in Central and South America today are the descendants of immigrants who settled in the region after the colonies gained their independence from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Jews who settled in Latin America during this period did not have any direct interactions with the Inquisition as it had been largely dismantled, and they were no longer subject to institutionalized decrees mandating purity of blood. However, they were subject to the stigma of Judaism, which was as Elkin (1998) points out is embedded in the vernacular language.\textsuperscript{20}

**Anti-Semitism in Modern Latin America**

\textsuperscript{19} Historians debate over the motives for persecution, some argue that the accused were persecuted primarily for political reasons while others give more weight to a religious argument (Elkin 1998). It is more likely a combination of factors that made some New Christians targets of the Inquisition.

\textsuperscript{20} Some of these remain today such as the word *Judio* (Jew) to mean miser.
The legacy of the Inquisition left an indelible mark on Latin America and its effect continue to be felt long after the undoing of the religious regime:

Jews could not have settled in the Latin American republics had not radical changes overtaken the colonies on their road from dependence to autonomy. These changes legitimized the presence of Jews, yet never led to the rejection of the belief system that had formerly mandated their exclusion. Consequently the life of Jews in Latin American republics moves in a different context from the life of Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese dependencies; but is a context shaped by ideas rooted in the earlier era (Elkin 1998:25).

As Elkin (1998) argues, long after the dismantling of the Inquisition, the Catholic anti-Jewish beliefs continued to play a role in the determination of the Jews’ social status in Latin America. Many of the indigenous communities of the region were indoctrinated into the Catholic religion, and the inculcation of the Catholic faith was often carried out with overt anti-Semitic teachings. In Mexico, for example, there are still instances of town ritual burning of the “Jew”, which dates back to medieval times and was likely introduced to the indigenous population by the Spanish colonialists. The newspaper El Heraldo de Chiapas reported on a town ceremony which occurs every year during Easter where the residents of a town in Chiapas, Mexico build life-size puppets of “Jews” which are paraded around town and later burned on Easter Sunday. The puppets are a symbol of Judas, who was said to betray Jesus in the Bible, and the burning is meant as a type of reinforcement and religious ritual where both anti-Semitism and Catholicism are reinforced. The article concludes by saying that this ritual serves both as a celebration, purification as well as a symbol of solidarity among the townsfolk:

Without a doubt this tradition foments union and respect among their inhabitants, which ends with a delicious cacao stew and burning of the Jews throughout Sunday night, and act which ‘purifies the soul and gives harmony’ to the human being (Marroquin 2012). (Author’s translation)
In many ways this story is emblematic of how closely anti-Semitism is tied to the teachings of the Catholic church – it is essentially religiously motivated, especially among the indigenous or mestizo populations of Mexico, Central America and the Andean countries (Elkin 1998). There is some evidence that in the Southern Cone, much of the present anti-Semitism might have originated in the teaching of the Catholic Church, but in modern times is likely to stem from the roots of fascist regimes in the area. Argentina, for example, has seen a number of organized attacks against the Jews, beginning in the early twentieth century with the “Semana Tragica” (tragic week) which I discussed earlier, to the most recent bombing of Asociación de Mutuales Israelitas Argentinas (Israeli Argentinean Mutual Aid Association) (AMIA) in July 1994, where the building was destroyed and eighty-five people were killed. In other Latin American countries, anti-Semitism has been less institutionalized, even if its existence is indisputable. Nonetheless, the existence of anti-Semitism in its different forms affects and shapes the Jewish communities across all Latin America.

**One Continent: Different Countries**

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Jews began to settle and form the foundations of what would later become thriving Jewish communities in Latin America. Jewish immigrants joined the millions of people who left the Old World beginning in the nineteenth century and travelled to settle anywhere that would have them. The result of wars, pogroms, industrialization and religious persecution fueled the intense wave of Jewish migration to America, both north and south. Nineteenth century Jewish immigrants to Latin America came from Europe and the Arab world (Germany, French, Morocco and later Poland, Russia). There are certainly a multitude of commonalities and
shared histories among the Jewish communities of Latin America, including their religious and ethnic orientation, one or more common languages and the experience of being a religious and ethnic minority in Catholic dominant societies. At the same time, important distinctions can be made across the region and in particular between Mexico and Central America, the Andean countries (Peru, Venezuela, Colombia) and countries of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay and Chile). Most notably the influx of immigrants and their effect on the modern cultural and political state varies widely across the region and results in a different national landscape for the Jewish experience in Latin America. The individual and collective identities of Jews in Latin America depend heavily on the political, religious and migratory histories of each country. While I have described the histories of Jewish settlement in more detail in chapter three, following is a brief outline of some of the different patterns of immigration to and related policies in Argentina, Mexico and Venezuela and how, as a result, Jewish settlement in these countries was affected.

Argentina and the Southern Cone

In general, the historical patterns of Jewish immigration to countries in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay and Chile) are similar to those in the United States. When millions of eastern European Jews were moving to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, a considerable number headed for Argentina and surrounding countries. Jews began settling in Argentina during the 1880’s primarily from Eastern Europe but also from the declining Ottoman Empire, especially from Aleppo and Damascus.
Jews continued to arrive to Argentina until about 1930, when the political situation in Europe made out-migration virtually impossible. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Argentina actively recruited European immigrants to populate their countryside, work the land and contribute to the industrialization of the country. Unlike other Latin American countries where Jews settled in large numbers, the dominance of old Inquisitional laws and ideologies began to wane as national policies pushed forward both immigration and some religious freedom. The inflow of thousands of immigrants created and defined the Argentine racial and ethnic landscape into a much more multi-ethnic one than other Latin American countries. For a considerable period of time foreigners made up more than seventy percent of the Argentine population (Solberg 1970). No other country in Latin America experienced such a huge influx of immigrants. This certainly led to development of an Argentine society that more closely resembles the United States in its push towards industrialization, as well the multi-ethnic characteristics of the population. Moreover, increasingly diverse social classes emerged as a result of modernization and industrialization. This shaped the experience of the Jews in Argentina; Argentine Jews were and are members of a multi-ethnic society where the Catholic Church is dominant, but its dominance, it has been argued, stems in large part from institutionalized relationships with the military and government. In fact, some argue that Argentine Jews are in fact part of the majority and their experience is no different than that of the Jews in the United States. There are however, strong indicators that the reality is otherwise. The evidence lies in the lack of access that Jews have to elite social circles and government posts, the presence of persistent and accepted anti-Semitism in vernacular language as well as the history of significant terrorist acts against
Jews and Jewish organizations. Even if Argentine Jews are not othered in the same way that Jews from other Latin American countries are, the rampant, institutionalized anti-Semitism tells a different story. So does the experience of the immigrants I interviewed for this study:

I did not realize the amount of anti-Semitism that existed in Argentina, until I came here. In Argentina, it is accepted, it is everywhere. Swastikas all over the place, “die piece of shit Jew” graffiti, and people constantly make anti-Semitic remarks. Yet because we (Jews) are in a way allowed to be part of the society, nobody says anything. My ex-boyfriend’s mother is a very important lawyer, and she got so far because she hid her Jewish identity. If people had known then she probably would not have been so successful. When I came to New York and I realized that the situation in Argentina is not normal or acceptable. (Florencia, Argentine-Jewish woman living in New York.

Venezuela

Unlike, Mexico and Argentina, Venezuela is not home to a particularly large Jewish population. It is, however, the home country of many Jews who immigrate to the United States. While Sephardic Jews originally settled in Venezuela via Curacao and held important positions within the local government, modern Jewish Venezuela has its origins in the Moroccan, Iranian, Palestine, Libya and Iran who settled in the early 1900s. In later years refugees from eastern Europe and other Arab countries contributed to the growth of the Venezuelan Jewish community, which while never numerically large was nonetheless prominent.

In recent years, Venezuelan Jews have experienced a spike in anti-Semitic incidents since President Chavez took 1998. A report by the Anti-Defamation League (2006) details the rise of anti-Semitism in the government sponsored media as well as organized attacks on Jewish organizations since Chavez took office. The anti-Semitic
rhetoric is closely tied to anti-Israel and anti-Imperialism sentiments on behalf of the government as well as support for overtly anti-Semitic regimes such as Iran and Lebanon. Since the recent passing of Chavez in 2013, it is unclear whether the climate for Jews in Venezuela will continue to deteriorate, but his successor, Nicolas Maduro who was handpicked by Chavez, is has thus far remained closely aligned to Chavez’ policies and ideologies. While the overt anti-Semitism and attack on Jewish organizations are fairly new occurrences in Venezuela, there is evidence of exclusion from the mainstream during earlier or more tolerant regimes, as recalled by some of the respondents I interviewed from Venezuela which I describe in the following section.

Mexico

In Mexico, national and ethnic identity is closely tied to the colonial and religious history of the nation-state, and Mexican national identity is essentially ethno-religious, i.e. Catholic – mestizo (Lesser and Rein 2006). This is largely due to the enormous influence of the Catholic Church during the Inquisitional and post-Independence. While a small number immigrants from Damascus and Aleppo (Syria) and Turkey immigrated to Mexico in the twentieth century (Elkin 1998), the majority of Jewish immigrants arrived later, first after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and subsequently to escape the war and persecution in Eastern Europe. Most of the Jews in Mexico settled in Mexico City, but there are a number of other settlements across Mexico, including Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, Cancun and San Miguel. The Jews in Mexico are financially well off and maintain a living standard well above the national average; they have built robust communities, though the Sephardic and Ashkenazi factions remain somewhat divided. In
2012 the Jewish population of Mexico was estimated at 39,200 down from 43,000 in 2000, likely due to immigration to the United States and Israel (DellaPergola 2013).

**Contemporary Jewish Experience in Latin America**

The brief history I outline above and in greater detail in chapter three, gives a sense of how Jews in Latin America have been able to construct strong, vibrant communities. The first generation of immigrants to arrive in Latin America escaped persecution as well as economic and political crisis. They were, by any comparative measure, much better off in Latin America than they had been in Europe or the Middle East. However, regardless of the achievements of the individuals and the communities as a whole, Jews in Latin America were never, nor are they now, truly part of the mainstream. As a result, the insular networks among Jews in Latin America countries are dense and occupy central roles in the lives of Jews.

For Jews living in Latin America being Jewish was not (and is not), in Mary Waters’ (1990) phrase, an ethnic option, but an inescapable part of their identity. Amanda, a Venezuelan Jew with German origins and now residing in Boston, describes herself as very secular. When talking about her upbringing in Venezuela she spoke about how her family upbringing involved few Jewish traditions and rites and her family did not belong to or participate in any of the Jewish organizations in Venezuela when she was growing up. Nonetheless, when I asked how she identified in Venezuela, she answered,

Venezuelan, no. [I identified] as Jewish, it was almost a forced identity. I went to a non-Jewish private school and I was called, ‘the Jewess;’ my family belonged to a non-Jewish country club and we were the ‘Jews’.
For Amanda, it did not matter how much she did not want to be identified by her ethno-religious background – it was not her choice, it was imposed by the Venezuelan society. A Mexican Jewish woman living in New York tells of similar experiences – “in Mexico being Jewish was a total identity, it was everything. Therefore in Mexico you are always seen as an outsider or a foreigner”. Diana, a Venezuelan Jew told me, “In the United States, being Jewish is an option, that is not the case in Venezuela”.

The same holds true for many of the respondents from Argentina, who feel that they were never truly part of the mainstream, even if they chose to disconnect themselves from the larger Jewish community by attending secular schools and belonging to secular (non-Jewish) social and athletic clubs. An Argentine Jew living in New York describes his experiences at an elite secular private school where his Jewishness determined his outsider status:

At school in Argentina, I often felt different, even though I did not have a strong Jewish identity. It was fashionable when I was young to wear a cross. This obvious sign of religious symbolism differentiated me from the majority of the Christian students at my school. I was placed in the “other” group; there were a number of other Jewish families at the school. I could not choose not to be Jewish. As I got older, I began to realize that being Jewish in Argentina was or is to have minority status.

This fixed identity is in large part a product of both the institutional and cultural Catholicism present in Latin America whereby all non-Catholics have a minority or outsider status. The status of outsider has fueled the insular nature of Jewish communities, which has then reinforced their place as communities of outsiders. Or put another way, communities have remained in many ways closed and tight-knit because the national societies have not granted them access to or afforded them a majority status. Moreover, early on Latin American Jewish communities adopted a kehillah style of
community. *Kehillot* (which I discussed in greater detail earlier in the dissertation) can be likened to a centralized government, which due to the close geographic nature of the Jewish population in Latin America (primarily in urban areas) is a successful model. In contrast, the American model of Jewish community relies on the synagogue as the primary organization around which the community congregates and organizes. As such, Jews in the United States are much more decentralized and often find other organizations to fulfill educational, cultural and social functions.

Latin America has also been subject to various political and economic shocks, the effects of which have worked to maintain the Jews as minorities, regardless of their financial, intellectual, artistic and in some cases even political successes.\(^\text{21}\) In countries with especially wide social class divisions, such as Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia, Jews are likely to be found in the upper ranks of the social class system. Most are well educated, and have access to professional and social networks that grant them certain economic privileges. In the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, many of the Jews belong to the professional middle classes, which have suffered hard economic blows during the recessions of the past decades. While there is some evidence that the success of Jews (as well as other ethnic groups such as Asians and Middle Easterners) in Latin America may grant them a some modicum of privileged “white” status (Rein 2010; Rein 1973), we cannot discount the role of discrimination and exclusion which place Jews in a minority category.

\(^\text{21}\) For a summary of these events and their effect on the Jewish communities of Latin America see Luis Roniger’s (2010) article “Latin American Jews and Processes of Transnational Legitimization and De-Legitimization”.
Ethnic groups and ethnic identity are constructed and maintained through both external and internal forces. Joane Nagel (1994:154) defines ethnicity as “the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations”. The external “opinions and processes” that Nagel points to are important determinants of Latin American Jewish identity. While many of the people I interviewed had strong ties to a Jewish community and a strong religious as well as ethnic identity with Jewishness and Judaism when they lived in Latin America, another sizeable number (about thirty percent) did not acknowledge feeling very “Jewish”. As expected, those respondents who reported having deep ties to Jewish communal institutions of any kind in Latin America- religious, cultural, or political -- expressed strong Jewish identities. However, what is more striking is that those who did not have any communal ties to Judaism or Jewish institutions in Latin America, still felt that an identity as a Jew was forced upon them there. Diana, a Venezuelan Jewish immigrants living in Boston, describes her experience as young Jewish woman in Venezuela:

In Venezuela, I identified as a non-Venezuelan, an immigrant. Native Venezuelans called the white European immigrants “monsieur” or mister in French. The distinction was more about Venezuelan or foreigner rather than Jew or non-Jew. Even though the distinction was more of a European immigrant versus non-immigrant one in Venezuela, people [i.e. non Jewish Venezuelans] often made you very aware of your place in the Jewish community. I went to a Jewish school. [Moral y Luces] and in University if you had good grades, people would say “oh that Jew from Moral y Luces ” you were made to feel separate, like an outsider.

22 Many of the respondents identified as Jewish because that is the group assigned to them by the Latin American societies, even if they did not feel that a salient Jewish identity.
Diana’s sense of exclusion is not unique to Venezuela. Even though the integration of the Jews varies greatly across Latin America, across Latin America societal pressures define Jews as an “other” and/or forcing an outsider status on them. Elena, a Mexican-Jew living in New York had the following to say when I asked about her experience regarding being Jewish in Mexico:

In Mexico the Jewish identity is forced on you. Both by the larger non-Jewish world and the Jewish community you are immersed in. Mexico is a very Catholic country, which is why the community is so closed or tight-knit

This outsider status comes from both the non-Jewish white (European origin) sector of the population, which sees them as religiously and ethnically different, and in Argentina perhaps even racially different, as well as compared to the indigenous or mestizo population who as Diana indicates above draw a distinction between themselves and Jews across a racial/color line. In essence Jews occupy an undefined status. In countries with a large mestizo population (such as Mexico or Venezuela) Jews are othered by the mestizo or indigenous population because they are white and non-Catholic; at the same time they are not accepted by the ruling classes because in the eyes of the Catholic dominant elite classes, Jews are perhaps “off-white” or merely just not Catholic. In Argentina, a country with many more European immigrants, the divide and lack of acceptance more likely comes from a racialized anti-Semitism that has its roots in Europe and later the national military institutions.

The failure to become part of the mainstream in Latin America has, in large part, contributed to the growth and maintenance of strong Jewish communities across the continent. Even in countries where the Jews have a stronger foothold in the mainstream - such as Argentina - they have strong, tight-knit communities, which abound with Jewish
institutions such as schools, country clubs, synagogues, and athletic clubs. In Mexico and Venezuela, the absolute number of Jews is smaller, but the communities are more tight-knit and insular. For example, Jews in Mexico tend to be less likely to attend non-Jewish schools than Jews in Argentina (and in fact have the highest rates of Jewish day school attendance (DellaPergola 2013), where the racial and ethnic boundary between Jew and non-Jew is more porous. The tight-knit communities have reinforced the strength of a Jewish identity and the institutions the Jewish communities have built. In Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia, these communities are similar to the *gemeinschaft* Jewish communities of eastern Europe and the Middle East, where Jews lived in small self-contained communities.

The majority of respondents spoke about their experiences in their home countries as closely tied to involvement in the Jewish community. They were expected to follow certain norms and mores, which though influenced by the social values of the country, felt very much like “Jewish” values and norms. These might include attendance at exclusively Jewish institutions, living in geographic proximity to other Jews, entering careers in certain professions, and marriage to other Jews. These expectations are not all that different from those in other Jewish (or other ethnic) communities around the globe, but in the Latin American context, the social pressure to conform to these norms is higher given the dense social networks in the Jewish community and sense of exclusion from the mainstream society. In fact, many respondents felt enormous pressure to conform, and for some the failure to do so led to emigration. Benjamin, a Jewish-Mexican research scientist living in New York, explained that the Jewish community in Mexico was too
conformist. He left Mexico to attend college and later graduate school in the United States and now lives and works in New York.

I left in part because the community and the society were in general too closed-minded. It was difficult to have contact with people outside of the Jewish community. Many people who wanted something more or different left Mexico to study abroad. I was fortunate in that my family had money and could afford to pay for my studies abroad. In Mexico, as a Jew I felt that there were no options- that the life trajectory was in a sense already set. You are born, you go to school, and then you go to Israel for a year [after high-school]. Mexico was very repressive at that time and I needed to get away from there.

Elena immigrated from Mexico in part because she had reached an age where all of her Jewish friends in Mexico were married and the pressure to get married and start a family was too strong for her to stay in the tight-knit community:

I was in my twenties and everyone had started to pair off and then have babies. It was expected that you would meet a nice, respectable Jewish mate and get married and stay in the community, and I was not meeting anyone. I did not know what to do. I had no friends to go out with anymore, so I decided to come to graduate school here and start fresh. I miss the closeness of the community, but it was also suffocating.

Many of the immigrants I interviewed from Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico and Colombia described growing up as members of the Jewish communities as “belonging to a group” or “being part of something”. The majority of respondents from Mexico and Venezuela reported that an average of ninety percent of their close friends there were of Jewish origin. The closeness of the Jewish community was cited as both positive and negative. Many respondents miss the feeling of belonging and shared communal values, yet they also reported having felt stifled by the tight-knit nature of the community. Ana, a young professional from Mexico, describes how she misses the closeness of the community:
I miss the Jewish community in Mexico. I like that people go to the Jewish school, and the athletic club [Jewish]. It was a long time before I met non-Jewish friends. In Mexico it is very easy, it is more closed, so there is more of a sense of community. We all marry amongst ourselves.

Benjamin also misses aspects of the communal life in Jewish Mexico, but was quick to add that the community can also prove stifling:

I had strong sense of belonging to the Jewish social group [in Mexico]. I did not feel very Mexican. Mexico is like South Africa where whites are the minority and the Jews are even more of a minority, where they [the Jews] are white, but still discriminated against. Jews were discriminated against by whites for being Jewish. There is a duality; Jews are part of the oppressors yet they are at the same time oppressed. I wanted to leave Mexico in large part because of the closed nature of the Jewish community, but I miss the communal aspect of the social group. Everyone helps each other; you can always count on help from other people. This helps you feel less isolated. Here in New York, life is more isolated.

In Argentina, the Jewish community is more integrated into the larger society than in other Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Mexico. The Argentine Jewish community, as I noted is around 180,000 and while it constitutes less than one percent of the population it is larger than those in other Latin American countries. Argentina’s multi-ethnic population has shaped societal values and norms and has made Argentina a more liberal and permissive society than some of the other countries in Latin America. The Jews of Argentina are less likely to feel that their lives are wholly tied to the Jewish community than Jews in, say, Mexico and Venezuela. The Argentine Jews interviewed in the United States indicated a range of embeddedness within the Jewish community in their home country, ranging from complete integration to total detachment. Socio-economic status, family traditions, geographic proximity to other Jewish community members, and religiosity, among other factors, shaped the degree to which they were
connected to the Jewish community in Argentina. Like the Mexican and Venezuelan Jews, some of the Argentine Jews I interviewed lived in close-knit sectors of the Jewish community before they emigrated. Maya, an Argentine Jew who moved to New York, recalls how her life in Argentina centered on Jewish communal organizations and a thoroughly Jewish social life.

I always attended Jewish schools in Argentina, the Natan Gazan in elementary school and the Martin Buber School [both of which serve a generally upper and upper middle class population]. In Argentina, the majority (almost 100%) of our friends were Jewish; we had deep ties within a certain upper-middle class group of the Jewish community through our schools and our athletic/country club memberships.

Luciana, an Argentine Jewish woman from in Boston recalls a similar upbringing:

In Argentina, almost all of my friends were Jewish, I went to Jewish school, Jewish country club, lived in a Jewish neighborhood. It was not until I got to university that I started to meet and become friends with non-Jews, and that was strange. For them and for me—they also had not had much interaction with Jewish people. And then I came to graduate school in Boston – what a change. I have met all sorts of people and can connect on different levels. But I also miss the community in Argentina – I cannot find that here.

Not surprisingly, degree of religiosity has an important effect on how embedded Latin American Jews were in the Jewish community in the country of origin. The more religious Latin American Jews are, the more likely they were to participate in Jewish religious institutions in Latin America and have had more sustained contact with other religious members of the community. Even though Jewish life in Argentina and other Southern Cone countries has been characterized as revolving around secular Jewish institutions as well as having a strong guiding Zionist ideology, orthodox communities have always been a part of the Jewish landscape and their importance has become more
significant in recent years. A number of prominent Argentine Jews have become active in the Chabad movement. Bernardo Kliksberg, an Argentine Jewish economist who has held important policy position at the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations, regularly speaks on behalf of the Chabad-Lubavitch social service agencies in Argentina. More recently in March 2013, Kliksberg made a speech at the Chabad Jewish Latin Center in New York, urging people to donate time and resources to the Chabad organization.

Structural segregation and institutional exclusion, as I have already indicated, have contributed to the “othering” of Latin American Jews. While this is less true today in Latin America than it was thirty years ago, many immigrants I met remembered instances of institutional segregation when they were younger and living in Latin America. They also spoke about being the target of or knowing someone who experienced anti-Semitism. One Argentine – Jewish woman recalled being teased and singled out in school, “I remember swastikas on the wall. Also I remember being teased in school because we were ‘Jesus killers’ ”.

The experiences of these women indicate an underlying and I would add acute, anti-Semitism that exists across Latin America, even if many of the respondents did not indicate they had felt discriminated against. Swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti are common sights across Latin America, as are jokes belittling Jews. Institutional discrimination is also present across all of Latin America. Jews, for example, are

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23 Jews who subscribe and belong to Chabad communities have a strong Jewish connection to their (religious) communities and its members. In recent years the religious Chabad movement has gained a stronghold in Latin America, due to a number of factors such as the weakening of local Jewish institutions, the economic crises of the last decade and a perceived lack of spirituality (Bokser-Liwerant 2008).
unofficially barred from entry into certain country clubs, white-shoe law firms or financial firms:

There are certainly clubs where (country clubs) where Jews are not allowed to belong. It’s ok because we have our own, but this is where the real business of the country takes place. Important businessmen and politicians gather there – and Jews are left out. I think before some of the very wealthy Jews were allowed to join, but I’m almost certain that is not the case anymore. In a way it’s not overt anti-Semitism, I mean the Jews in Venezuela do well. It’s more that people consider you different. And Jews operate in their world in a way (Diana, Venezuelan Jewish woman in Boston).

While anti-Semitism has not wholly disappeared from the United States, open anti-Semitism is rare - and taboo in public discourse - especially in areas with large concentrations of Jews.

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, anti-Semitism in Latin America dates back to the early colonization of the continent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a time when Jews and converted Jews were persecuted in Spain and Portugal under the Courts of the Inquisition. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Jews began to settle in Latin America in greater numbers, they were cautiously welcomed. As their communities grew in strength and numbers, so did anti-Semitic sentiment. Daily incidents of anti-Semitism, including in jokes or off-hand remarks, are casually accepted in mainstream social circles in Latin America. Baruch, a Mexican Jewish immigrant living in New York explained:

I suffered very little anti-Semitism, but I did suffer a few incidents, among them anti-Semitic jokes that I thought were meant to be aggressive. This happened mostly at the university. You need to have a sense of humor about it. They [non-Jews] do not accept you as Mexican; you are always the Jew first.
And even if there was no overt sense of anti-Semitism, many describe a feeling of being an outsider, such as Ana does when she told me about her experiences working in Mexico, before immigrating to the United States:

I identified primarily as Jewish in Mexico. I worked in a company with seven employees and only two of them were Jewish, I did not hide the fact that I was Jewish, but at time I felt that they saw me as an other, or someone strange.

Marina, an Argentina-Jewish woman living in New York, talked about the level of ignorance the greater Argentine population has regarding Jews:

Here [in New York] you don’t have to explain what it means to be Jewish – everyone knows. Argentina is a country dominated by Catholicism. Everyone assumes you are Catholic. You have to explain to people what being Jewish means. In Argentina they [non-Jews] make you feel different. You are made to feel like a minority.

Unlike the United States where anti-Semitic incidents are rarely tolerated and the perpetrators of anti-Semitic incidents can be prosecuted for hate crimes, the public in Latin America -both Jewish and non-Jewish - has a much higher tolerance for anti-Semitism. Additionally in Latin America, institutional support to rid the nations of anti-Semitism is minimal. Jewish political institutions are less powerful in Latin America than they are in the United States. In the United States, for example, the Anti-Defamation League is a political organization with a considerable amount of clout, which it uses to push for the prosecution of anti-Semitic incidents as hate crimes and temper anti-Semitism in the media.

This is not to say that the Jewish institutions in Latin America do not routinely condemn anti-Semitic incidents. Recently, the leading Argentine Jewish political organization spoke out against a cartoon (below) depicting a parody of the suffering and
death at concentration camps during the Holocaust, which was printed in Pagina 12, a leading Argentine newspaper.  

Figure 5.1

As a result of the backlash, the newspapers issued an apology but did not retract the cartoon. Instances such as these are not uncommon across Latin America. Nor are anti-Semitic slurs, graffiti with phrases such as “Judios de Mierda” (Shit Jews) “Perros Judio” (Jewish dogs) or swastikas. Recent political or economic crises have seen an upsurge in these types of incidents, and while Jewish institutions have certainly condemned them, they have not been able to exert pressure on the government to support the prosecution of these crimes. These sort of virulent displays of anti-Semitism abound in Latin America and continue to give weight to the argument that the Jew is a religious,

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24 The translation of the cartoon is as follows:

**Title: An adventure of David Gueto (Spanish for "Ghetto"): Concentration Camp DJ**

DJ Gueto: "Come on, dance!! Party, party"

Prisoners: "We have nothing to celebrate about. They kill and extinguish us en masse"

DJ Gueto: "Come on! don't be so lame. Dance!!!!!!"

Prisoners: "They kill us in gas chambers and make soap bars from our bodies... did you know that?"

Hitler: "David is right: a bit of fun wouldn't hurt you guys"

Prisoners: "Yes, Mr. Hitler"

Hitler: "Come on, have fun. Life is short"

Prisoners dance...

Hitler: "Thanks, David. If they're relaxed, the soaps turn out much better"

DJ Gueto: I can imagine... hahaha"
ethnic, and cultural minority in the eyes of the larger society. But perhaps most telling is the continuing and widespread acceptance of these episodes by Jews as a normal feature of life that they must deal with, indicating that Jews themselves have internalized the minority status forced on them by the larger society.

**Latin American Jews Migrate: Being Jewish in the United States**

While Jews in Latin America cannot escape their Jewishness, their arrival in the United States and in particular the Northeast brings a new, and wider range, of ethnic options for this group. With an estimated 5,425,000 Jews or 39.5 percent of the worldwide Jewish population, the United States has the largest population of Jews outside of Israel (DellaPergola 2013). Within the United States the largest concentration of Jews is found in the Northeast (see table 5.1 for a breakdown of the Jewish population in the largest metropolitan statistical areas in the United States).

**Table 5.1: Jewish Population in the United States for the Top 20 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Metropolitan Statistical Area Name</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2011 Total</td>
<td>2012 Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA</td>
<td>19,015,900</td>
<td>2,064,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA</td>
<td>12,944,801</td>
<td>617,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL-IN-WI</td>
<td>9,504,753</td>
<td>294,280</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX</td>
<td>6,526,548</td>
<td>55,005</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX</td>
<td>6,086,538</td>
<td>45,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD</td>
<td>5,992,414</td>
<td>275,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV</td>
<td>5,703,948</td>
<td>217,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Jewish Population</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL</td>
<td>5,670,125</td>
<td>555,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA</td>
<td>5,359,205</td>
<td>119,800</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH</td>
<td>4,591,112</td>
<td>251,360</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA</td>
<td>4,391,037</td>
<td>304,700</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA</td>
<td>4,304,997</td>
<td>22,625</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Detroit-Warren-Livonia, MI</td>
<td>4,285,832</td>
<td>67,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, AZ</td>
<td>4,262,236</td>
<td>82,900</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA</td>
<td>3,500,026</td>
<td>39,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI</td>
<td>3,318,486</td>
<td>44,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA</td>
<td>3,140,069</td>
<td>89,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL</td>
<td>2,824,724</td>
<td>58,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO-IL</td>
<td>2,817,355</td>
<td>54,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Baltimore-Towson, MD</td>
<td>2,729,110</td>
<td>115,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116,969,216</td>
<td>5,298,730</td>
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Source: American Jewish Year Book 2012 digital files
(http://www.jewishdatabank.org/PopulationStatistics.asp)

**Jews as a minority majority in the United States**

In the United States, Jewish Latinos’ identity as Jews (especially in the cities where this research took place) grants them majority status. While Catholicism is the dominant religion in Latin America and has a huge influence on Latin American culture and politics, in the United States, Judaism, along with Protestantism and Catholicism, is one of the three main denominations in American religious life (Herberg [1960]1983). By the mid-twentieth century, Jews, along with Catholics, had been incorporated into the system of American pluralism, and America had become transformed into a “Judeo-
Christian” nation (Foner and Alba 2008). Will Herberg, in his now classic account, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* argued that it was “largely in and through . . . religion that he [the immigrant], or rather his children and grandchildren, found an identifiable place in American life” (1960:27–28). Being Jewish, in other words, was and is a way to be American. This was not, however, always the case. Jews began arriving in large numbers to the United States primarily from Europe (Germany and later eastern Europe) during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. As ethnic immigrants they faced religious, ethnic and racial discrimination much like the other immigrants of the time did. While Jews (as well as other European immigrants such as the Slavs, Irish and Italians) were considered legally “white” and therefore were able to become naturalized citizens and vote (in contrast to Asian immigrants who were denied these rights), their status as white within a larger social context and the privileges associated with being white in America was questioned (for a more in-depth discussion of the racialization of early Jewish immigrants in the United States see Foner 2005). In fact, Jews were not considered “white on arrival”; they became or achieved whiteness over time. There are a number of factors that allowed Jews and other immigrants to assimilate into the American mainstream over time, which I have considered more in depth in chapters two and three. Richard Alba (2009) explains their eventual assimilation through structural and economic factors that allowed all immigrants to prosper in the booming post–war era. In essence, Alba argues, the majority of the population had nothing to lose if the immigrants (or their children) gained, i.e. the postwar economic expansion allowed for “non-zero-sum mobility”. At the same time, federal policies resulting in the suburbanization boom placed the children and
grandchildren of these earlier European immigrants in communities where these second – and third-generation immigrants had interactions with the white Protestants who had traditionally dominated the mainstream. Federal programs like the GI Bill and the FHA (Federal Housing Authority) and VA (Veteran’s Assistance) provided support for Jews and other second-generation immigrants to enter the middle class. These benefits were not racially universal, and as such were privileges argues Karen Brodkin (1998) in her book *How Jews Became White Folk and What That Says About Race in America*, precisely because they were given to white GIs and not black GIs. Using a historical materialist approach Steinberg (2001) also shows that economic factors present at the time of Jewish immigration to the United States provided Jews the opportunities to excel, assimilate and become part of the white middle-class, while at the same time preventing African Americans from achieving middle-class status. Another factor pertinent in the eventual assimilation of Jews was the 1924 immigration act that essentially closed the doors for newcomers to the United States until the end of World War II; because older European Americans no longer feared a flood of immigrants they considered to be racially inferior they were more amenable to accepting the Jewish and Italian immigrants that had already settled in the United States. At the same time, these immigrants were more likely to acculturate and assimilate since newcomers were not joining them and reinforcing the culture of the “old country”. Over time, Jews have certainly assimilated into the American mainstream and today are largely part of the middle and upper middle class.
New York: A Jewish Homeland

The cities of Boston, New York and the surrounding areas have large and prominent Jewish populations. New York City, with its roughly 1.5 million Jews (Dashefsky and Sheskin 2013), is the source of cultural and for some (such as the ultra-orthodox Satmar sect) religious center Jewish life in the United States. New York holds a prominent place in the development of American Judaism and the identity of American Jews. New York was the main port of arrival for Jews immigrating to the United States, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was where most settled (even today New York has the largest population of Jews in the United States). Because the majority of the Jews settled in New York, when we refer to the history of Jewish immigration to the United States, we are in essence referring to experience of Jewish immigrants in New York. As Foner (2005) points out, being Jewish in New York was not always synonymous with socio-economic or racial privilege. In fact, Jews were considered “in-between people” (Barrett and Roediger 1997) or “probationary white” (Jacobson 1998). Their status in New York, changed not only as a result of the economic factors discussed in the earlier section, but also due to characteristics unique to New York City which I discussed more in length in chapter three. One of the most important factors is the sheer number of immigrants and of among those immigrants the number of Jews who settled in New York. The time of arrival was particularly important for the development and later advancement of eastern European Jews in New York. At the turn of the century, New York was undergoing a second industrial revolution of sorts, and the Jews along with other immigrants benefitted from the demand for labor and manufactured goods.
In the United States and especially in the New York metropolitan area and other cities with substantial Jewish populations, as one respondent said to me “being Jewish here is not such a big deal”. Being Jewish means being part of the mainstream and many Latin American Jews actively seek out a heavily Jewish neighborhood or Jewish school because it is a way of becoming an American, and especially a New Yorker. New York culture and Jewish culture define and influence each other. In New York, traditional Yiddish words are New York colloquialisms, and bagels and knishes (traditionally Eastern European foods) are common New York street foods. In general, the respondents felt that residing in New York changed their status as Jewish minorities in Latin America to members of the mainstream (as Jews in New York):

"Being Jewish in New York is part of the larger New York culture. This is what I like about New York. I actively sought this [living in New York] out, being a Jew in New York is in a sense being a New Yorker.

Marina, a Jewish-Argentine in New York had similar experiences:

Here you don’t have to tell people what it means to be Jewish- you don’t need to explain. Everyone knows [what it means to be Jewish]. In Argentina you feel different. You always have to explain yourself, in Argentina you feel like you are a minority. Here I might feel like a minority because I am a foreigner, not because I am Jewish. Actually it’s the opposite, that [being Jewish] makes me more a part of the majority here.

In fact, for many, coming to New York was a bit like making aliyah (the Hebrew word for homecoming that Jews use when immigrating to Israel). While the majority of people I interviewed described their primary identity in their home countries as the identity that set them apart and made them different; this is very different in the Unites States. Florencia, a 38-year-old Argentine woman living on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, described her identity in Argentina as predominantly Jewish.
My identity in Argentina was Jewish, this was very clear to me from an early age, even though I was not involved in formal Jewish environments. I did not hide my Jewishness or conceal from an early age, this was one of the reasons for my immigration – I don’t have to explain to anyone about being Jewish. It is a big part of my identity, being a Jewish woman. In Argentina, my first job was at a trading desk, all were [except me] from traditional Catholic families. On day one guy says, “Ese Ruso no quiere pagar” “That Russian [the word used for Ashkenazi Jews in Argentina] does not want to pay” So I said something. But this was common practice, people made anti-Semitic remarks all the time. It is one of the big problems in Argentina. In Argentina anti-Semitism is institutionalized. This is evident in the emphasis on Catholicism through government institutions, for example the use of the cross in the judicial system. Though this guy [who made the comment] was a typical cultural anti-Semite.

My secondary identity was Argentinean – though I never had a sense of national pride, I had many friends from my elementary school, which was private, but not Jewish, I never felt that I fit in too much in Jewish institutional settings, I was agnostic and they were too religious. Even though I was always felt Jewish.

However, when I asked about her identity in the United States, she indicated that being Jewish had a minor place, in part because it is so comfortable to be Jewish in New York:

Not wanting to conceal my Judaism is one of the reasons of my immigration, I think. Because although I am not religious I feel that I don’t have to explain to anybody or be fearful or sorry—because of who I am.

Here I identify with more of an individual identity – as a New Yorker, because New York embraces all types. On the census I check of Latin and white and usually Caucasian on other forms. I have a Latino identity here, it comes from the way I understand certain things when compared to Americans, but I do not feel that I am fully part of a larger Latin group. Sometimes I can relate more to taxi drivers, they are immigrants, Sometimes my identity is just that of an immigrant, others Argentine-Jewish woman. The Argentine society is very different from other Latin American countries; other countries are much more polarized. They are also more religious. Perhaps my first identity here is not Jewish, because being Jewish here is not such a big deal.
Interestingly, Florencia told me that she made a conscious choice to live on the Upper West Side when she arrived in New York more than ten years ago, because of its Jewish cultural influences. Her family belongs to the Jewish Community Center in the West 70s and her children attended pre-school there. In her case, she actually became more closely affiliated with Jewish institutions in New York than in Argentina, where her family did not actively belong to or take part in the activities of Jewish communal institutions. Identity questions, however, are another matter. In Argentina, as well as across all of Latin America, Jewishness is a forced identity that defines Jews because it is what sets them apart. Florencia’s family would be Jewish regardless of their institutional or religious affiliations.

Today, Jews in the United States are categorized and recognized as white, as members of the racial majority. Most of the immigrants I interviewed were quick to point out their whiteness, particularly when I asked about the census classification:

“I always put white and if they have a white and other category than that also” (Lisa, Argentine-Jew in the Boston area).

“I don’t remember what I put on the census, I think Hispanic and Caucasian on the census and Caucasian on other forms” (Ruth, Venezuelan-Jew in New York).

“I always put white on any form, never Latino” (Emilia, Mexican-Jew in New York).

All of the respondents see themselves as white, even if they have strong affinities with their home country’s culture or a sense of belonging to their national-origin group. As immigrants in urban areas with large Jewish populations, Latin American Jews grasp that their status is elevated because they are Jews and benefit from a privileged position
within the American racial and ethnic hierarchy, “I am different from other Latinos because I am Jewish and because I am white”, Sarah told me.

The strength of Jewish identity: religiosity

A number of factors affect how much and when Jewish Latin Americans identify as Jewish over other identities. In large part the degree to which a Jewish identity is salient depends on the extent of embeddedness in Jewish life and the level of religiosity of the immigrants before arriving in the United States. Those who were more religious in their home countries are much more likely to seek out other religious Jews in the United States and primarily identify as religious Jews. Religious orthodoxy is their first identity – both in their home countries and here. As Jessica, an Argentine orthodox Jewish woman living in Westchester, puts it, “I feel in my heart Jewish is my first identity”. Her identity stems largely from a strong religious upbringing and her continuous ties to the orthodox Jewish community. She came to the United States as a young woman of seventeen to live with an aunt and finish high school here. She later pursued a university degree in computer science and married an American man, also a modern orthodox Jew. She describes life as an Orthodox Jew in the United States as much easier than in Argentina:

Even though the Jewish community is vibrant [in Argentina], it is much harder to be religious there than here. In New York there is an abundance of religious choices- activities, kosher food. Buenos Aires has much more [religious activities and accommodations] now than when I was a child. Today it is night and day. Socially it also much easier, we were raised orthodox but the community was socially Jewish not religious. Also modern orthodox did not exist in Buenos Aires. All of my modern orthodox friends moved to Israel. Basically in Argentina it was black hat or nothing
Jessica is one of the few people I interviewed who chose to answer in English. Her affinity for American culture and specifically Jewish American culture came through in her interview. She did, however, mention that she does have a Latina identity and identifies with certain cultural elements from Latin America as well as Latino culture.

She spoke about the warmth in human interactions, attributing this to a Latino cultural element:

> I consider myself Latina; I love to shock people when I speak Spanish. I also like Latino music, dancing, and rhythm- Zumba class for example. I don’t relate as much to Central American culture, I don’t think it is the same culture. But from South America- Venezuela, Brazil we have a similar culture.

She also spoke about her connection with other Latin American Jewish cultures, in particular those of other South American Jews.

> We have a common experience. I have been to Brazil and Uruguay and we have similar Jewish communities. Same type of schools, teachers, kosher-foods. All of these countries have the Jewish country-club culture, which doesn’t exist here in the U.S. They [Jews in South America] have similar lifestyles and vacation in the same places.

Jessica has about a dozen friends in Westchester who are Latino Jews. “It’s easier to be friends with them”. She does not, however, have much interaction with non-Jewish Latinos. Jessica and her family are strongly embedded in the Jewish community and it is this tie that most defines who she is, regardless of any pull she feels to Latin America or other Latin American Jews. Her Jewish identity stems not only from her ties to the orthodox Jewish community here but also a strong religious upbringing in Argentina.

Like Jessica, others who came with a strong religious upbringing are likely to join existing American religious Jewish communities and form strong alliances within them. Also, their identity is likely to be along religious lines. This is especially true for
orthodox Jews who closely follow the rules and rites that bind them to Jewish institutions and other religious Jews.

There are also immigrants who became more religious after immigrating and as a result also have strong ties American Jews and dominant identities as Jews. Susana, a Mexican woman I met, exemplifies this experience. I was introduced to Susana by a group of thirty- and forty-year old Jewish Mexican women living in New York. The social group consists mainly of upper-middle class women, married with children, living in Manhattan. The majority of the women in this group have a strong sense of Jewish identity, stemming from their cultural and religious upbringing in Mexico as well as the ties they have formed to American Jewish communities after immigrating. All of their children attend Jewish day schools and most of the women belong to a synagogue. However, Susana is the only one who identifies strongly as a religious or “modern orthodox” Jew. Like Jessica and other religious Jews, Jewish is her primary identity, “I identify first as a Jew, always a Jew and then as an immigrant”. But unlike Jessica, she became more religious after immigrating, “at university (in the United States), we (she and her husband) began to study (with a Rabbi) and we got closer to Judaism”. At the same time, she maintains social networks with her friends from Mexico and has developed an important cultural Jewish-Mexican identity. In fact, when I met her she was working on a Jewish-Mexican cookbook and spoke at length about the different influences of Mexican cuisine on traditional Sephardic and Ashkenazi foods. Susana also runs a small enterprise as a healthy kosher-food caterer geared towards a modern orthodox Jewish American clientele.
Other factors also influence the degree to which people identify as Jews. For many, opportunities to meet other Latino Jews or Latinos from similar socio-economic background simply do not exist. This is especially so for immigrants living in suburban areas, which tend to have either a smaller concentration of immigrants or an immigrant population that is more geographically dispersed. My research leads me to suspect that those who have few interactions with Latino Jews or middle or upper-middle class Latinos are more likely to interact with co-religionists and form connections, friendships and networks with other Jews.

In general, those whose religious beliefs are more in-line with the orthodox sectors of Judaism identified much more strongly as Jews above all else. Additionally, they are much more likely to be seen as Jews by others, since many dress in ways common to members of the Jewish orthodox sect, such as wearing long skirts and shirts among the women and kippot (traditional beanies) among the men. However, even the most religious respondents had some sort of Latino identity or Latino-Jewish identity, primarily in a cultural form, such as an affinity for and attachment to Spanish or Latin American music as Jessica mentioned, or the exploration of Jewish-Mexico through food for Susana.

**Situational identity and strategic ethnic options**

The orthodox leaning respondents in my study were the most likely to have a consistent identity --- to always identify as Jews and maintain strong connections to other Jews (American and Latino) and Jewish institutions. For the majority of Latino Jews, however, in my sample and indeed in the United States --- who often define themselves as “cultural Jews“ - their identity is likely to vary across different social and professional
settings. And this raises the crucial issue of situational and instrumental identity — and what I would call strategic ethnic options.

Social scientists have long agreed that ethnic identity can be highly fluid, especially for members of populations who phenotypically resemble those in the mainstream. This is largely the case for Latin American Jews, since many come from an eastern European background, and are phenotypically white. This may be less true for those with darker skin, whose ancestry is Sephardic, but I encountered few people who did not resemble those in the white mainstream of the United States, at least in physical characteristics. The majority of Latino Jews I interviewed, however, are neither religiously observant nor do they wear traditional religious garb. One way that they can be identified as Jews is through their last names; Jewish last names such as Levy, Goldstein, or Stein are as common among Jews in the United States as in Latin America, and are easily recognizable as “Jewish” last names. Still, many of the respondents, often have a choice as to whether or not to reveal their Jewish identity or ancestry. Most do in some way, either by seeking out Jewish friends (Latino or not), joining Jewish institutions or synagogues or revealing to co-workers that they are Jewish. While being Jewish in Latin America, they felt, was not a choice, most feel that it is in the United States and it is a choice they make in certain circumstances. Rebekah, a Colombian Jewish woman who has been living in Boston for over thirty years, identifies as both Latina and Jewish in the United States but in Colombia, even though she attended a

25 I have put Jewish in quotes because not all people with these last names are Jewish and while the many may have Jewish ancestors, it is important to point out that many people with a Jewish ancestry choose not to identify as such.
secular school, her primary identity was as a Jew, not only because of her closeness to the community but also because that is how she was identified by others:

In Colombia, I was different because I was Jewish. Everyone knew I was Jewish and it made me different. In elementary school, they would say things to me like, “You people killed Jesus Christ” I felt different.

In the United States, she told me, she has more of a choice. She does identify strongly with her Jewish roots, “The Jewish part of me is very important and wherever I go I seek out other Jews”. But she also has a number of non-Jewish Latino friends and is able to choose whether or not to highlight her Jewishness, depending on the situation. As a psychiatrist in a Latino mental health clinic, her relationships with patients often stem in part from a shared cultural background as Latino. “At work, my patients see me as Latina, but different, first because I am the doctor (position of power) that already make me different”. She can choose whether or not to reveal her Jewish identity to her patients, whereas in Colombia that choice did not exist for her.

These identity choices are not arbitrary, nor are they only situational. I would argue that they are in effect “strategic ethnic options”. The majority of the respondents have multiple ethnic or panethnic identities that they can choose from—Latino, Jewish and Jewish-Latino. While many times their choices are constrained by factors such as accents, immigration status, and last names, they can often choose which identity to reveal. Even though strategic ethnic options or instrumental ethnicity are highly fluid, they are still meaningful. All of the respondents had some level of affinity with the different ethnic and ethno-religious groups, and felt cultural, ideological, political or religious connections to different group identities. However, the majority found that revealing their Jewish identity could be more or less useful across different situations.
For example, Federico is aware that there are advantages to having multiple identities to choose from.

I am not one of those people that takes advantage but I do use these identities or “leverage”. The Latino is used when I talk to the people in the cafeteria for example. Being Jewish can bring you closer to people, and allows you to have a better relationship. Being Jewish, especially in New York opens more doors for you. Having a Jewish last name (as he does) is important.

Being Jewish in the United States, especially in urban areas like New York, is associated with a certain modicum of privilege. By adhering, or professing to have, a Jewish background, Latino Jewish immigrants are able to gain insider status.

In Argentina I felt that being Jewish made me a minority. Here I feel that I am a minority because I am a foreigner, not because I am Jewish. In fact quite the opposite, being Jewish makes me part of the majority here.

In recent decades, the racial landscape of the United States has changed dramatically, primarily due to the influx of new immigrants since the late 1960s. While Jews continue to be considered part of the white majority, Latinos are likely to be considered non-white. This presents a conflict for Latin American Jews for two reasons – as Jews in their home countries, their status was a privileged minority one, with their privilege stemming in large part from their economic success, but their status as “others” precluded gaining access to certain sectors of society and obtaining higher social class standing. At the same time, Latino Jews are eager to belong to the white majority in the United States, and make clear that there is a social distance between themselves and “other Latinos”, even if their accents, names and cultural heritage or values tell a different story:

I am both I would say, Latino and Jewish. I have a strong feeling of being culturally Latino, and this comes out when I meet other people who are Latino. I speak Spanish, we can talk about politics or sports, Latinos are more open. But I still feel that I am different,
sometime people ask me where I am from and I say Mexico and they say, “but you are so white”. So I am Latino, but I am white. And this as well as my Judaism makes me different from other Latinos. (Andres, Mexican-Jew in New York)

Like other immigrants before them, Latino Jews are quick to point out the differences between themselves and minorities that occupy lower rungs on the American ethnic and racial order. And one of these differences is their Jewish background. Being Jewish grants them insider status. This is especially true within institutions and professional areas where Jews are represented in large numbers.

In the professional realm, many spoke about “outing” their Jewishness, i.e. signaling to others that they are Jewish and therefore not like “other” Latinos. Moreover, having a Jewish identity establishes a connection between themselves and other American Jews. This practice of establishing a Jewish connection seemed more prevalent in professional areas where there is a substantial Jewish presence, such as finance, law, medicine and consulting services. Interestingly, Latino Jews who worked in the arts were more likely to highlight their Latino background. In the cultural arts, ethnicity and diversity are sought and celebrated. Funding sources also target minority ethnic groups and therefore play a role in the promotion of ethnic diversity in these areas.

Respondents spoke about a connection to other Jews and especially their Jewish superiors (bosses, supervisors) during holiday times. Jewish custom calls for inviting people who have nowhere to attend holiday meals to their homes during major Jewish holidays. In this way many respondents cultivated special relationships with their bosses or colleagues, attending a Passover meal or a break-fast (meal served to break the traditional twenty-four hour fast after the holiday of Yom Kippur) at the home of a boss or colleague. Benjamin, a Mexican Jewish research scientist, explained, “There are some
advantages to being Jewish here. For example, my boss is Jewish, we have things in common. He invites me to his house for holidays”. Marina, an Argentine economist, also recalls that when she was an intern she was invited to her employer’s house for Passover Seders and other Jewish holidays. In fact Jewish holidays came up numerous times during interviews. Not only do they provide a way to reconnect with their Jewish heritage by going to synagogue and meet new people (American and Latino Jews) but observance or celebration of Jewish holidays is a way of signaling their Jewishness to others. They may drop a mention of Jewish holidays in conversation, or refer to them when colleagues ask why they were absent from work:

Nobody knew I was Jewish until I took days off for some Jewish holidays, and then they asked me why I had been away. This is how they found out I am Jewish, not because I came out and told them. And back then perhaps being Jewish was not such a great thing, but over the years I realized it served a purpose, especially in the world of journalism where I worked.

Many who are accustomed to hiding their Jewish status in Latin America now find that it is an advantage to be Jewish in their new homes. It is a way to differentiate themselves from other Latinos and also establish connections and relationships to American Jews, especially those in high positions in the workforce. Sharing holidays is a safe and costless way to indicate they are Jewish, and also signal they are observing traditions and are not overly religious. Others, with Jewish last names, can’t hide their Jewish background and often come to realize later that being identified as Jewish helped them in some way or another. Leah told me the story of how she got her first job in a Latino mental health clinic in Boston in the 1980s in part because of her Jewish last name:

When we first came here, I did not plan to work, I never worried about finding a job. I had a degree in psychology from the University of Buenos Aires, and had some work experience but not
too much. Financial circumstances made it so I had to find work to support my family and my husband who was in graduate school. I knew very little English so I looked for work counseling Latino patients, though I had never had any experience with this population – my experience was mostly in psychoanalysis and serving middle-class Argentine. But I got called for a job in a poor part of Boston and when I went I met a Jewish guy who gave me the job. I never told him I was Jewish. I stayed there for many years eventually becoming the head of the Latino tram and stayed in touch with this man who hired me and became a mentor in many ways. Years later he said to me, I hired you because I knew that you were Jewish and you had had a different sort of training. I think he knew I was Jewish because of my last name or because I said I spoke Hebrew—though I don’t remember if I put that on my CV.

Leah’s story exemplifies a number of themes: first; that being Jewish within certain professions and groups can act as a positive signal, regardless of whether the assumptions are true or not and second; that having a Jewish identity is a way for the white Jewish and non-Jewish majority to differentiate Latino Jews from other Latinos and place them in a different (and likely higher) ethno-racial status.

The process of choosing when and where to reveal your ethnic identity relates to the theories of optional ethnicities or symbolic ethnicities elaborated in the works of Herbert Gans (1979) and Mary Waters (1990). Both Gans and Waters argue that even though whites in the United States may define themselves according to their ancestral background, such as Irish, Italian or Jewish, this identity is of low significance in terms of their life chances and, as Waters points out, is cost-less for individuals. As she writes “The analysis suggests that both that symbolic ethnicity exists because it meets a need Americans have for community without individual cost…” (1990:164). Waters and Gans studied third and fourth generation white ethnics, people who had largely assimilated into the American mainstream. The group in the present study differs in that
they are first generation immigrants and are often assigned an ethnic category based on their accent and status as new immigrants. At the same time, like those who Water and Gans have written about, Latin American Jews are generally considered white and identify as white. In this sense, their ethnicity at times can be optional, at least in terms of which part of their ethnicity they choose to highlight. Latino Jews quickly learn the landscape of the racial and ethnic hierarchy in the United States. As I pointed out earlier, they understand that being Jewish in the Northeast can be a valuable asset. Unlike in their home countries where their ethno-religious identity carries costs, it is a cost-less identity in the Boston and New York regions, and in fact can often be advantageous, evidenced by the experiences of many respondents: “When I was out of work, it was the Jewish community that helped me”. “In New York,” a young Venezuelan woman told me, “it is almost cool to be a Jew. It is something good. They (people) see you as a good student, hardworking and good in finance”. “Among Jews, they will say—oh you are from my team. It gives you a sense of belonging.” Sentiments such as these were echoed by nearly all of the respondents in my study, though the extent of the ethno-religious (in this case Jewish) advantage fluctuated according to individual circumstances such as professional vocation or degree of embeddedness within religious communities. The advantages come not only from the networks they can access, but also from the value placed on particular ethnicities in American society. As Lily pointed out, in the United States, Jews are generally seen as hardworking and smart by others; they are also considered white and at the same time given membership in what Jews call “the tribe”. By “coming out” as Jewish, Latino Jewish immigrants are signaling to other Jews that they are “members of
the tribe”. At the same time, to non-Jews they are differentiating themselves from Latinos who often have more negative value judgments attached to them.

**Conclusion**

While the status of Latino Jews changes from outsider to insider when they arrive in the United States, their reliance on their ethno-religious identity to form connections and gain insider status continues. But it continues in a very different way. In their home countries their identity was imposed on them and as a result Jews learned quickly to depend on one another and foster strong networks. In fact we might argue that modern Jewish communities in Latin America operate like an ethnic enclave, much the same way ethnic enclave communities work in the United States (see Portes and Bach 1980; Wilson and Portes 1980; Jensen and Portes 1992; Zhou 1995). These enclaves and strong networks exist because Latin American Jews have historically been excluded from mainstream society and even today must rely on their networks for many business, educational and social functions.

In the United States, they no longer need to operate within ethnic enclaves, since their Jewishness does not bar them from entry into the mainstream and indeed may help to facilitate it. Moreover, their association as Jews and with Jews allows them to accumulate much needed social capital. At the same time, they continue to develop and rely on ethnic networks and ethno-religious solidarity - but on their own terms. They can and do choose when to identify themselves as Jews. Many respondents spoke about their access to American Jews as providing ways in which they were able to get jobs or advance professionally. By joining Jewish institutions such as synagogues, schools or community centers, the immigrants were able to gain access to American Jewish
networks in the United States, and benefit from these ties (both strong and weak). In sum, I found that for those whose religious identity was not their most salient status, a Jewish option grants Latino Jewish immigrants an accelerated route to becoming part of the American mainstream – when and how they choose to do so.
Chapter Six

Discovering a Latino Identity

I always knew I was Jewish, and of course Argentine, but Latino was something I discovered when I came to the United States. When I think about it, of course I am Latino, I am from a Latin American country, I speak Spanish, I am an immigrant, but I am so different from so many of the Latinos here.

Victor, 65-year-old Argentine-Jew

Introduction

Among Latin American Jews, their pre-migration ethnic identity was largely Jewish. The tight-knit communities in Latin America create and reinforce strong identities as Jews through social and institutional networks, as well as mandated Jewish identities imposed by the larger society. In the countries where the population of Jews is smaller and they are on the borders of mainstream society (such as Mexico and Venezuela), their reliance on Jewish educational, religious as well as economic and communal institutions is even more notable. However, even in Argentina, where Jews are more integrated in the mainstream society, many are enmeshed within the Jewish community through schools, social circles, professional networks, athletic and social clubs, neighborhoods and synagogues. So it is no surprise, then, that of the forty-one respondents in this sample, when asked about their identity in their home countries thirty-five mentioned Jewish or Jewish-National (Argentine, Mexican, etc.) as their primary identity.

A Latino identity is something Latino Jews discover once they immigrate to the United States. Their accents, their use of Spanish, and their culture all mark them as Latino. Yet Latinos in the United States are identified not only by their national-origin,
language and culture, but also by their phenotypic difference from the mainstream white majority as well as perceived notions about their legal status, socio-economic class and educational level. In this chapter, I show how differences in these factors (legal status, phenotype, education and social class) set Latino Jews apart and buffer them from most of the discrimination faced by the majority of racialized (i.e. phenotypically different from the white mainstream) Latino immigrants in the United States. Latino Jews are able to speak about a cultural Latino identity, perhaps because their identities as white Latinos and as Jews allows them to enjoy a cultural status as Latinos and not a racialized one. While they also face some instances of discrimination as Latinos, these instances are few and likely have little impact on their life chances. Latino Jews have, as Mary Waters (1990) puts it, some modicum of “ethnic options”: they can be Latino and white or Latino and Jewish, options that are not available to the majority of the Latinos living in the United States.

**Latino panethnic identity**

A 2012 survey by the Pew Hispanic Center (Taylor et al. 2012) found that:

> When it comes to describing their identity, most Hispanics prefer their family’s country of origin over pan-ethnic terms. Half (51%) say they use their family’s country of origin to describe their identity. That includes such terms as “Mexican” or “Cuban” or “Dominican,” for example. Just one-quarter (24%) say they use the terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” to most often to describe their identity. And 21% say they use the term “American” most often (2-3).

My research suggests that Latino Jews follow similar trends, although often with a twist in that they are likely to say their national identity is primary, in many cases followed by their Jewish identity. Their panethnic identity as Latinos is typically a second or even third ethnic identity. For example, Ana a young professional Mexican-Jewish woman in
New York, has a strong Mexican identity and a strong Jewish identity – which trumps a Latino identity:

I identify first as Mexican and then as Jewish here. I don’t know an American Jew with which I identify with. I actually feel a closer identity with Latinos (non-Jewish) than with an American Jew.

At the same time, she explains that her identity as a Latina is “given” to her by others:

People are more likely see me as Latina or Mexican, it’s more obvious. I do not have a Star of David on my forehead but I open my mouth and say “hi” and people know I am Latina. I feel more Mexican than Latina though.

For Ana, her national identity trumps her panethnic identity (as a Latina) and even her ethno-religious identity (as a Jew), though earlier in the interview she mentioned her strong feelings and attachments to other Jews (primarily Latino Jews). Her experience shows how identity is fluid yet at the same time is influenced by how others categorize them (Nagel 1994).

For some, a Latino identity stems largely from the existing categories they find are available to them. In the United States the Latino label originated in large part from government classification schemes, which define a Latino as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (US Census 2010). As Alejandra, an Argentine-Jew explained to me, she is Latina because that is the category that exists for her in the United States:

I am not sure if I am Latina. None of my ancestors are Latinos. But part of my personality is because I was born in a Latin American country – and I believe your environment influences your personality. The typical Argentine has Spanish [from Spain] parents. In the United States I need to consider myself Latina because it is the only category that I think I fit into in a way. Though the typical Latino - at least the stereotype - is that of a Mexican who works in a restaurant. If we have anything in common it’s the language – language unites you.
When I was at university here [in New York] I was part of the Latino students association.

Others actively seek out a Latino identity or membership in Latino groups, which they see as an intrinsic part of their sense of self, even if they feel their legitimacy as Latinos is questioned by other Latinos or even, at times, by themselves:

I am Latina, but my last name is Jewish so no one takes me for Hispanic; they look at me and see me as a European. I mean the people with different skin color and different life experiences. I was part of a group called Las Comadres/Las Comadres is “a nationally known Latina organization empowering women to be actively engaged in the growing Latino/Hispanic communities through online and face to face networks” (statement from group’s website) though I always question my own legitimacy in the group. (Claudia an Argentine-Puerto Rican Jewish woman in Boston).

In general, a Latino identity is acquired as part of the process of moving to the United States. In their home countries they were Jews or Argentine or Mexicans, or Jewish-Mexicans. In the United States a new label is imposed on them, one that they negotiate along class and racial lines. They learn of this label and the implications of what it means to be Latino through the media, government classification schemes, daily interactions and social networks.

Socio-economic class

One of the most striking features among Latino Jews is their high level of educational attainment and professional success. While a few of my respondents came to the United States to attend college (Brandeis, Yale, Columbia, Brown and City College are among some of the colleges they attended), many had already completed a bachelor's degree in their home countries and pursued graduate degrees in the United States (Harvard,

26http://www.lascomadres.org/lco/lco-eng/aboutus/information.html)
Columbia, NYU, Pace, Fordham, Yeshiva and CUNY). Their success in the academic and professional realms stems, in large part, from their high levels of human capital as well as pre-migration social capital. The majority of the people in the sample are from families with relatively high socio-economic status in their home countries. Jews in Latin America, especially in Venezuela and Mexico, have achieved considerable financial success, which contributes to their upward mobility in the United States; whereas Argentina has a more economically diverse Jewish population and Jews occupy all socio-economic classes. Nonetheless, the majority of the Argentine Jews I interviewed have attained high socio-economic standing in the United States; some have maintained the socio-economic class they had in Argentina and others have experienced upward mobility relative to their positions there:

In Argentina, we left in part because of the military and political situation; it had gotten scary there, but also to make a better life for ourselves. Though both of us had university degrees, and we had a good standard of living – a maid, private school for the kids, a car, and an apartment -- we still worried and struggled. Argentina is so uncertain, we never knew if we were going to be able to pay our bills at the end of the month. When we came here we definitely did worse in the beginning, we had nothing – this was mostly due to the economic crisis in Argentina, which devalued the currency so much that by the time we got the rent from our place there [in Argentina] as well any other income we had coming in, it was not worth anything in dollars. Eventually though, here we did ok. We have a house, we sent the kids to college, and we go on nice vacations. It took a long time, but it is so much more certain here.

27 The majority of the Jews who emigrate from Latin America and do not have the financial means to come to the United States are able to go to Israel, where they receive considerable monetary assistance (as well as other services aimed at integrating new immigrants such as housing, education and job placement). As a result, most of the immigrants to the Northeastern United States are likely to come from a higher socio-economic background.

28 Unlike the United States, in Latin America, these sorts of services (private school, household help) are more accessible to the middle class, as the relative cost for these services is much lower than their equivalents in the United States.
Also I would not have been able to achieve the professional success in Argentina that I have here. There are more possibilities there (Leah, Argentine-Jewish woman in Boston).

The professional occupations and geographic locations (neighborhoods) of the Jewish Latinos I interviewed suggest positions in the higher income brackets. Unfortunately, I did not ask the income of my respondents because I thought this would be a sensitive topic and I wanted to establish a comfort level with my respondents where they would speak freely about other delicate topics such as race, ethnicity, social class and discrimination. Their educational attainment, profession and place of residence provide some clues about it. Of the twenty-nine respondents living in the New York area nine lived on the Upper West Side, where the median household income in 2011 was over $100,000 and an estimated twenty-eight percent of Upper West Side Manhattan households earned over $200,000; another six lived on the Upper East Side (where the median household income in 2011 was over $90,000 and an estimated twenty-one percent reported earnings of $200,000 or more) and the remaining lived in Battery Park, the West Village, brownstone Brooklyn or Williamsburg, Westchester and Long Island in areas where residents occupy relatively high income brackets (data from the US census at factfinder2.census.gov). In the Boston area, the people I interviewed mostly resided in high-income areas such as Brookline and Newton where over twenty-three percent of residents reported household earnings of $200,000 or more and the median household income in 2011 was estimated over $100,000.

Economic factors alone are enough to widely separate Latino Jews from the majority of Latinos in the United States, particularly in New York and Boston. In New York City, for example, in 2010 the median household income for Latinos was around $45,000.
(Bergad 2001). The professional status and other class markers indicate that Latino Jewish households in the New York City area earned considerably higher incomes than those in the larger Latino population. The economic success and the boundaries it creates for Latino Jews is similar to their experience in their home countries; their economic success in both instances has separated them from the larger population – in the U.S. case the larger Latino population. As Amanda, an academic Venezuelan-Jew from Boston said to me, “There is a class difference with other Latinos in the United States—they see you as having power, as rich.” Diana, another Venezuelan-Jew, expressed similar thoughts:

> Based on what you hear in the news, the connotation of being Latino in the United States is related to lower standards, low educational levels, crime and pregnancy in young people: it is not a positive connotation. I don’t think the media or the general society has positive connotations related to Latinos. For example a middle-class Puerto Rican does not want to be connected or considered Latino because of the negatives are attached to that.

Both Diana and Amanda’s comments show how important social class is in defining the Latino ethnic label. Latinos in the United States, as perceived by most of the respondents in this study, are from lower social class backgrounds, an image they seek to avoid. Dana, a Jewish Latina woman from Long Island, described the typical Latino in the United States as “Schwatzre Keppele (black head - a derogatory racial term for brown-skinned Latinos in Latin America); they receive a different education, they have different values than we do”. Again Dana is equating Latinos with lower socio-economic backgrounds but she also adds that they are racially inferior. While most respondents did not frame the differences between themselves and the larger Latino population in the United States
in racial terms, education and socio-economic class were, for most respondents, the key
variables in demarcating the boundaries between themselves and the “typical Latino”:

The typical Latino in the United States is different – it depends if
he is legal or illegal. I think they have fewer opportunities; they are
not very well prepared (a euphemism for uneducated in Latin
America). They come to work but have many more hardships here
(Emilia, Mexican-Jewish woman in New York).

I worked with all Latino men at my last job [in finance] and I hated
it, but I do feel that educated Latinos see me as one of them. There
are negative connotations about being Latino, that they are lazy or
corrupt. I interact with Latinos everyday and Jewish-Latinos or
American Jews a few times per week (Florencia, Argentine-Jew
New York).

When I asked Maya, a respondent from Argentina, if she ever felt discriminated against
for being Latina or Jewish, she told me, “I don’t ever feel discriminated against for being
either - my husband is doctor, so we are in a different social category”. These responses
are in line with general public perceptions of Latinos in the United States; In a study of
the portrayal of Hispanics in the American media, Lichter and Amundson (1994) found
that “compared to both Anglos and African Americans, television's Hispanics were low
in numbers, low in social status, and low down in personal character, frequently
portrayed as violent criminals” (71). Although this study is dated and it is possible, even
likely, that the portrayal of Latinos in the media has improved since the mid-1990s, their
statement probably still captures elements of how Hispanics continue to be represented in
television. One recent example of how Hispanics are still negatively portrayed in
television is the television sitcom “Devious Maids” which debuted in June 2013 and
centers around the lives of four Latina maids in California. The series has been
criticized for continuing to perpetrate stereotypes of Latinas as domestic workers.
For some the distinction between Latino Jews and the broader U.S. Latino community depends on the context and situation. When I asked Ruth, a Venezuelan born immigration lawyer from Long Island, if she felt that she has anything in common with the typical Latino in the United States she said to me: “I have nothing in common with other Latinos; in Long Island my clients [Latino immigrants] are poor, lower class. It’s a different world from mine”. Yet when I asked her whether there were situations where she felt more identified as a Latina, she told me, “We are all Latinos in my office. The legal secretaries are all from the middle class in their countries- they are from Colombia or Ecuador. We don’t have much in common, but we are all Latinos”. Ruth distinguishes herself much more strongly from her Latino clients (of lower socio-economic status and likely undefined legal status) than she does from the Latino administrative personnel at her office.

As I discussed above, in general, socio-economic status was used by the majority of the respondents as a boundary between themselves and the "typical" Latino in the United States, a stereotype that is reinforced by the media. This strong distinction may be due in part to the strong class divisions in Latin America, whereby social class boundaries are difficult to traverse and are important parts of self-identity, but it is also strengthened by the realities of life in the United States and the desire to distinguish themselves from a group that is often stigmatized in this country.

Race

As Tanya Golash-Boza has written, “despite the fact that ‘Hispanic’ is officially an ethnic label, it functions in some ways as a racial label” (Golash-Boza 2006:34). This racial label or racialization of Latinos or Hispanics is a strong force in determining life
chances, possibilities for assimilation or integration, as well as upward mobility for non-white Latinos (Golash-Boza 2006). Latinos are of course a racially diverse group, in phenotypic terms, as this study shows. The respondents in this study overwhelmingly resemble the white majority in skin color and they draw distinct racial boundaries between themselves and the racialized, darker-skinned Latino population in the United States. I asked all of the respondents how they answered the census question regarding race and ethnicity. Most were not sure how to respond:

LL: What do you check off on the census?

Alexandra, a Mexican-Jewish woman:

I’m never sure what to put. I think I put white and Latina, but I’m not sure. And just today at the doctor's office I was having this discussion with the receptionist, she said to me, “put Hispanic” and I said to her, no I am Caucasian.

Rebekah, a Colombian-Jewish woman experienced similar doubts:

Those forms are so confusing, I never know what to put. I’m pretty sure I put white and Hispanic. On other forms it depends, if there is a space for white I put that and Hispanic or Latino. If not I’m not sure.

Federico (Argentine-Jew in New York) explained that his European descent is an important determinant of his (and other Latino Jews’) ethno-racial identity, “We are not Hispanic, we are white Caucasians and we are Jewish, we are European Latinos”.

When I asked respondents if other (non-Jewish) Latinos saw them as in-group members or as sharing similar ethno-racial backgrounds, most answered that either their religion or their phenotypic features were factors that differentiated them in the eyes of other Latinos:

My cleaning lady is Latina and she sees me as white or “blanquita” [little white one]. She will say things like “oh that is
the food that *blanquitos* eat” or “you are *blanquita*”. I don’t think Hispanics see me as Hispanic because of my profile. (Sarah, Colombian-Jew in New York).

Gabriel (a Jewish-Argentine musician based in Boston) made a similar comment when referring to his cleaning lady, though he explained the differences as religious ones:

> With Latinos, once they know that you are Jewish it changes the dynamic- for example my cleaning lady is Latina and when she found out I am Jewish she said, “oh so we are not similar after all”.

Both non-Jewish racialized Latinos and Jewish Latinos evoke race as a boundary that both separates members of these groups from each other as well as defines the term Latino in the United States. As Gustavo, a Venezuelan Jew from Boston explained to me:

> People never think I am Latino, I am too white. I think that in this country it’s all about skin color. If you are white you are accepted and you are fine. But blacks face strong discrimination.

Latino Jews are aware their racial status elevates their position within the racial hierarchy of the United States. Their ethnicity as Latinos may lead to some discrimination in certain contexts, but they say that if they do experience discrimination it is likely a non-racial type of discrimination, based on their accent or their name. (Some also spoke of how being identified as Latino can, at times, privilege them in some ways, a point I develop later in this chapter):

> I am obviously Latina, I have an accent, and I am Mexican. But I don’t identify with other Latinos; I am a mix of Israeli, Latin American and Mexican. Also I am obviously not part of or like the typical Mexican immigrant. But I still face discrimination for being Latina. A friend said to me recently, “I am going to give you some advice, don’t talk too much in Spanish because people will not regard you well”. But there is an advantage to speaking Spanish, especially when dealing with people from the service industry and it’s the second language of the United States (Dalia, Mexican-Jewish woman in New York).
If the experience of earlier immigrants such as the Italians and Jews are an indication, this type of discrimination is likely to cease in future generations for lighter-skinned and white Hispanics like my respondents (Alba and Nee 2003; Foner 2000; Foner 2005). As Tanya Golash-Boza (2006:35) writes:

Because Hispanics belong to different racial groups, it is reasonable to expect that not all Hispanics will be treated equally. Hispanics who are viewed as white in the United States are less likely to face racial discrimination and more likely to follow a similar path of assimilation to that of Irish, Italian or Polish Americans.

In other words, they will become “Americans”, perhaps with a symbolic attachment to their national origins. Already, many of my respondents were optimistic about the implications of their ethno-racial status for their second-generation children: “Well my children are American, they were born here, so they are definitely not Hispanic or Latino. Though I should say it hurts a little, for them to be American and unlike me” (Marina, Argentine-Jew). Or Rebekah (a Colombian-Jew) said:

I don’t remember what I put on the census. It is always a problem, this question of race. When I have the option of distinguishing between race and Hispanic I put white Hispanic, but if I cannot put white Hispanic I put other. My daughter said to me, “you are Latin-American, but I am only half-Colombian, so really I am American.”

Like Marina and Rebekah, others echoed this sentiment. Their children, they assume, will likely grow up as white Americans or white Jewish Americans and not face ethnic-based discrimination. It is unclear if the same will be true for darker skinned Latinos. It is of course possible that Latinos in the United States will “remake the mainstream” (Alba and Nee 2003) and attain racial parity with the white mainstream, but we can be on surer ground in predicting the future for Latino Jews whose children, born and bred in the
United States and without accents or other distinguishing features, will be largely inserted into the white majority.

**A costless identity?**

If Latino Jews are buffered from discrimination in many ways because of their high socio-economic status and their whiteness, this does not mean that they do not face some measure of discrimination or prejudice. In particular their Spanish-sounding names or accents might signal to others that they are ethnically, if not racially, different.

In certain professional areas, facing discrimination as Latinos or Hispanics can prove to be costly. Victor, an Argentine-Jew with a professional background in Jewish philanthropy, recounted the discrimination he experienced during a job search in Boston:

I had been working doing fund-raising for the Jewish community for a number of years already when I went on some job interviews in the field. I had advanced through a number of rounds of interviews and finally I met the board. I thought the job was mine, I had experience, I have a degree in the field. During this interview, one of the board members asked me about my accent. He said something like, “well how do you think people are going to react to your accent when you call them asking for money?” I was not quite sure what to say. I realized what he meant of course, that my Spanish accent would be an impediment to successfully raising funds—since Hispanics or Latinos are not viewed so well. But I didn’t know what to say. I didn’t get the job. I know now that I probably could have sued or something on grounds of discrimination, but back then I think I was just in shock.

Ana, a Mexican-Jewish entrepreneur with an MBA from an Ivy League university, shared her insights on the discrimination of Latinos in the workplace:

The problem is not that you have an accent, it is that the clients think you are dumb because you have an accent- the opposite of what the English accent is. The British can say something stupid and because they have a British accent it sounds smart. The people in the United States associate a Latino accent with someone not so cultured or educated. The image of Latinos in the United States affects us all. In my old work, [an elite consulting firm] it
happened that there was a guy who was working there for a long time and was up for a promotion and they basically told him that that could not promote him because he had an accent.

She went on to say that in her line of work, she needs an American (or accent-less) image to succeed in her new, planned business venture:

….. but now that I want to run my own business I need an American partner, and being Latina will be a disadvantage to me in getting funded.

Yet in many ways, their whiteness trumps their accents. Their accents may provoke questions such as “where are you from?” or “where is your family from?” and answering Mexico or Venezuelan is usually met with an element of surprise as Diana (Venezuelan-Jew) explained:

It’s funny because we have this other identity as Jewish and I grew up in a Latin American country. But I don’t need to say anything because just by saying I’m from Venezuela sets me apart, it is different than being Puerto Rican. When people ask me where I am from, I often say Venezuelan. If my response is met with incredulity, such as “oh really?” I will explain that I am Jewish, unless I feel uncomfortable doing so, then I will merely say that my parents are from Europe.

Dalia, a Mexican-Jew, recalled how people cannot always place her and identify her as a European. Interestingly, while today Dalia sees Italian as “cool,” a hundred years ago the Italian immigrants in the United States faced a similar kind of racial or ethno-racial discrimination that is encountered by most Mexicans today. In contemporary New York, being seen as "Italian" is seen as a compliment!

Sometimes people hear my accent and they cannot place me so they ask, “Are you from Italy or France?” and when I say Mexican their faces change; it is not as cool to be Mexican as it is to be French or Italian.

The respondents also spoke about how much “cooler” or “more acceptable” it is to be
Jewish in the United States than in Latin America which I have already considered in earlier chapters.

The low levels of discrimination experienced by Latino Jews suggest that for white and Jewish Latinos, the benefits of being Latino -- which I consider below --- are higher than the costs. I do not want to minimize ethnic discrimination experienced by Latino Jewish immigrants, but my argument is that they are able to overcome, or minimize the effects of, this sort of discrimination owing to their skin color, their socio-economic class and their Jewishness.

The benefits of being Latino

It is not just that having a Latino identity, as I argue, is relatively "costless" for Latino Jews, but they can also benefit from the Latino part of their ethnic identity (as well as their Jewish identity which I have already discussed). One way is that they receive better service in a range of establishments where Hispanics work, from restaurants and nail salons to car washes. I saw first hand the interactions of one of the respondents with a Spanish-speaking employee at a café on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I met Dalia, a Mexican-Jewish woman, for an interview at an Israeli self-service café. We ordered our lunch and sat to eat, when she realized she needed flatware and water. Since the café was self-service, it would have been appropriate to go to the counter. As we were talking about this project and were broaching the subject of being Latino, she said to me, “It helps to speak Spanish, the people in restaurants who speak Spanish treat you better.” Shortly thereafter she asked an employee of the café to bring her water and flatware, in Spanish. She then turned to me and said, “See, he never would have done that if I was just a gringa.” While it is unclear if the café employee helped her merely because of
their perceived shared background or language, the fact that Dalia strongly believed it was so, influences her daily interactions with other Latinos in the service-sector. Like Dalia, many respondents mentioned these types daily interactions. Their use of identity is contextual as Diana points out:

My identity is a hybrid- I am a Latin Jew. At times I bring out one part of background and identity more than others. For example, when I am with Jews I will be more likely to talk about or refer to Jewish common themes. It is when I am receiving services, such as having my car washed that I make it a point to speak Spanish. If the guys are speaking Spanish, I will make it a point to speak Spanish and befriend them in that way.

I asked all of the respondents if they saw some advantage to being Latino or having a Latino identity and many respondents shared anecdotes of interactions with service sector employees and described receiving friendlier, and better service, at the hands of a Latina manicurist, waiter, or store clerk. Some mentioned preferential treatment such as receiving discounts or faster service. All of these interactions rest on both an assumed sense of shared background, primarily due to language,. In general the people in this study resemble the white mainstream and are consumers of services where they are in a position of power, yet they find common ground through language and perhaps conversational topics such as Latin American soccer or Latino food.

Another way in which Latino Jews instrumentally use, and benefit from, their Latino heritage is in the workplace. While there seem to be advantages to having or proclaiming a Jewish ethnicity in the legal and financial professions (which I discussed in earlier chapters), in the fields of education, arts and marketing there are often benefits to having a Latino identity and being seen as Latino. The respondents who work as educators, for examples, felt that their "Latinoness" legitimized them in the eyes of their
students, primarily Latino high school or community college students. Betty, a Puerto-Rican Jew in New York, spoke extensively about how she has little in common with the Puerto Ricans in New York:

I don’t identify with them, I went to an Ivy League school. I have a Ph.D., and my husband is French, though we speak Spanish at home. The typical Latino or Hispanic American is different from me; we might eat the same foods but have little in common, for example the Puerto Rican day parade has nothing to do with me or my identity.

Yet she went on to say that:

Here (in New York) when I used to teach in the public school, I would tell them I was from Puerto Rico; it was a way to have an “in” with the students. And they accepted me and were very proud.

Andres, a Mexican-Jew who teaches at a New York Community College, also uses his ethnic identify as a way to identify, and improve his relations, with his students:

At first, they [the students] can’t believe I’m Mexican. It's because I am white. But then they think it’s so cool. I can relate to my students in a way that perhaps other professors cannot. We have something in common.

Andres and Betty attribute their status as insiders with the students to a shared background, a shared identity. Yet in other contexts, they find little in common with non-Jewish or darker-skinned Latinos. Their use of their ethnic identity is strategic and situational as well as instrumental, but not only in the ways defined by instrumentalist theorists who argue that ethnic ties are manipulated for social and political gains (Bates 1983; Hechter et al. 1982; Hechter 1986; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972). They are using their ethnicity as a bridge between themselves and their students, as an avenue perhaps for increased status among the students or a greater sense of comfort with them.
Working in areas that target Latino audiences such as the media or marketing was also associated with a greater likelihood of identifying as Latino in the workplace. Sonia, a Mexican-Jewish woman in the marketing industry, explained that she does not have a racial and ethnic identity as Latina:

I guess I identify as Jewish Mexican, though my race and ethnic background is European. For me the Mexican part of my identity comes from the cultural aspect of my background, such as language.

Yet when we started talking about how she identifies at work, she told me:

I have a strong Latino identity, I work with the Latino market and most of my colleagues are Latino. …But I do feel different because I am Jewish or maybe not because I am Jewish but because of my social class. Though we [her Latino colleagues] share so many things… It is not that they are of a lower social class, but they have a different upbringing, many of them are second generation Latinos. I have more opportunities due to my upbringing.

Sonia can be culturally Latina while also distinguishing herself from other U.S. Latinos in terms of race, ethnicity, and social class. For others such as Federico, an Argentine-Jew with ties to the music business, his Latinoness provides an entry into the world of Latino music:

In my line of work, it definitely helps that I am Latino, or at least speak Spanish. People in the industry, the musicians mainly, can relate to me. And they also feel that I really know the music. But my last name is Jewish – so you know that is good when I am talking to producers or executives. It opens doors, I think.

Federico is able to draw on both his Jewish and Latino cultural and ethnic identities as a way to signal to other “in-group” members that he is, in fact, one of them. The openness of U.S. Latinos to working with him may be due, in part, to this shared ethnic background. Others who work in the arts, such as in theater and film or photography, saw their Latino heritage as a positive trait. They spoke
about the celebration of diversity in the art world and how their ethnic (Latino) background gave them status and legitimacy as artists.

These examples point to an instrumentalist function of ethnicity, whereby individuals use ethnicity for their own advancement, but they also provide evidence that a developing sense of cultural ethnicity can be used to bridge boundaries and establish familiar connections.

A third way that Latino Jews benefit from their Latino identity has to with affirmative action policies in the United States and those more generally promoting diversity in educational institutions and the workplace. As Philip Kasinitz and his colleagues note, Hispanic, Asian, and black immigrants have benefited from the gains of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s and subsequent legislation. Diversity is now more tolerated and often celebrated in some cities and, relevant here, affirmative action programs and policies have helped facilitate upward mobility among the children of immigrants (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Latino Jews are particularly well positioned to benefit from the changes that have occurred both politically and socially as a result of the struggles for equality by African Americans (and later Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans) in the United States. They are labeled white, and they are highly educated and have (or their parents' have) high socio-economic standing.

The original intent of affirmative action programs was to redress past wrongs (primarily the long standing injustice suffered by the descendants of African slaves as well as other marginalized groups including Native Americans, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans) in hopes of eventually leveling the playing field.
Over the years affirmative action policies have indeed helped some historically
discriminated minorities achieve middle class status, yet others new minorities
have benefitted greatly (and perhaps more so) from these programs:

Affirmative action, perhaps the most controversial program to be
developed after the civil rights movement, is sometimes billed as
making up for past injustices against African Americans. It is also
conceived as a program to guarantee “diversity” and minority
representation in educational institutions and the workplace…. As
immigration increased from the 1970s onward, however, it was
often not noticed how, in an increasingly diverse America, more
and more of the beneficiaries of affirmative action policies were
recent immigrants and their children (Kasinitz et al. 2008:332).

Among these “recent immigrants and their children” are Jewish Latinos, who in
this sample, overwhelmingly choose to categorize themselves as Latinos for the
purpose of affirmative action programs. When I asked the respondents what
ethnic or racial category they checked off on forms such as the census or
employment or school applications, most responded that in general white and
perhaps Latino or their national-origin, However for the purposes of college
admission or certain employment opportunities most identified as Latino:

I differ in what I checks off on forms and the census. I check of
Mexican on the census. Sometime Latino- since there is an
advantage to being Latino under affirmative action policies
(Benjamin, Mexican-Jew in New York).

I check off Hispanic, because I think I will have more probabilities
of getting a job. I would check of white and Hispanic if the option
to do so existed. (Fernando, Argentine Jew in New York)

I always made fun of affirmative action yet I feel that it gives me
an advantage. Being Latino gives me an edge; it makes me stand
out (Baruch, Jewish-Mexican in New York).

It is not just affirmative action policies that benefit Latino Jews, but a more general
and widely accepted view in New York and Boston that higher educational institutions

and places of employment should be diversified in terms of race and ethnicity.

As Celina, an Argentine/Puerto-Rican Jewish woman, told me, “The advantages of being Latina is that schools need diversity so for them your diversity is good”.

In fact, in many ways, Latino Jewish immigrants are providing diversity to college campuses. Still, there is also no denying that affirmative action and diversity initiatives were not designed to assist white Jews from Latin America, who do not suffer from racial discrimination and already have many social class advantages. While most respondents saw their status as Latinos as a way to facilitate admission into educational institutions, not all were comfortable with using their Latino heritage or ethnicity in this way. Carolina, an academic researcher based at a small university in the Boston area, explained that she is uncomfortable with being the “token” Latina for research and grants purposes:

> At the university where I work there is always pressure on me to put down Latina or Hispanic when we are applying for grants. They think it will help us if there is a Latina on the research team. But I don’t want to, I don’t feel comfortable.

And for some, especially those from the Southern Cone of Latin America, this option is not available, as an Argentine Jewish academic relayed:

> When I was an undergrad at State U. I could not apply for the Latino or Hispanic scholarships because of some rule that Argentines were excluded from applying. So it (affirmative action) never worked for me.

Under the same rule, a Mexican Jew of similar ethnic and socio-economic status would be eligible for ethnic or ethno-racial based scholarships.
Latino cultural identity

There is also an important cultural element to Latino Jews' sense of "being Latino" in the United States. Much of the literature on Latino identity, as I discussed in chapter 2, revolves around the structural factors (political mobilization, economic position, discrimination, government classification schemes) that underpin this panethnic identity (Bean and Tienda 1987; Calderon 1992; Itzigsohn 2004; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; McConnell and Delgado-Romero 2004; Oboler 1995; Okamoto 2003; Oropesa et al. 2008; Padilla 2011). There has been less interest in analyzing cultural elements involved in the development of Latino identity such as a shared language and other aspects of non-material culture (including norms and attitudes as well as such elements as music and food). While the scholarly work on Latino panethnic construction offers a greater understanding of the structural forces that promote Latino panethnicity, I believe it is also necessary to consider elements in the cultural construction of Latinoness, which are highlighted in my research on Jewish Latinos.

I have shown how a Latino identity can be largely situational for this group, and as a result, and in the main, instrumental. Yet the majority of the respondents possessed a cultural affinity to other Latinos or Latino culture in general, which they defined in terms of food, language, literature and norms, values and attitudes. As Emilia (a Mexican-Jewish woman in New York) told me, “I have a Latina identity- I speak Spanish, the food, being an immigrant. I hope to transmit that to my children”. Amanda a Venezuelan-Jewish academic in Boston,
while acknowledging the class and racial differences within the larger Latino population, expanded on her Latina identity:

I have a strong Latina identity: The language, the way of dancing, the music, and values. But also the way I see life is intrinsically Latin. How I see the mystery of life—everything, even how I laugh… I also love being with my Latino friends because I don’t feel as I am going to be judged. They don’t say things like, “you talk too loud”, or they don’t comment about the jokes I might make, or how affectionate I am or the way I use my voice.

Celina, an Argentine/Puerto-Rican Jew, echoed Amanda’s thoughts:

I identify as Latina, for sure, but most Latinos here are from Central America and Mexico—it’s funny how we all get lumped into this one group together. But there are things that bind us together, such as the language and the food. When I came here to do my undergrad at X liberal arts college in Boston, I was part of the “Latino mafia”; it felt like a home away from home. I also love things about the Latino heritage, I eat Cuban food and Puerto Rican food, and I dance salsa.

Language is perhaps the most important way that Latino Jews make a connection with Latino culture:

Well, speaking Spanish helps me connect to people, not only to people in my social circle, we understand each other better, but also to Latinos I encounter in an everyday setting—like waiters, or the nannies at my daughter’s pre-school. They cannot believe I speak Spanish, but when I do it gives us an instant connection, they act differently and probably I do as well (Florencia, Argentine-Jew New York).

And as Adriana, an Argentine-Jewish woman in New Jersey points out, speaking Spanish is not an instrumental choice, it is a means to construct what she terms a “special distinct connection,” which though it may be fleeting influences daily interactions:

Speaking Spanish creates a special distinct connection. In general speaking a language creates a connection when I am in stores or
restaurants it [speaking Spanish] and establishes a kind of intimacy with servers that I enjoy. It’s a pleasant quick moment of intimacy.

In general, among the respondents, the set of cultural norms and values they share with Latino family and friends, are what they regard as “Latino values” and are held in higher regard than “American values”:

Latinos have a different culture - for example the concept of friendship is much stronger among Latinos, it is more important for us. We have different values…in this country so much value is placed on work. And we have other things that are equally important—family, love. I also see the personality of Latinos as different. Generally they are happy people, optimistic – they are the kind of people that see the glass half full. This might be for a variety of reasons, because in general there is a lot of suffering in Latin America, but people tend to be happy with what they have. I find the society here to be more unhappy or unsatisfied because you have access to so much here and you are unhappier…Also, there is a certain Latin American culture that I share with other Latinos- especially the literature. We have read all of the same books that have shaped us. (Alejandra, Argentine-Jew in New York).

Federico, an Argentine-Jew, also felt that values and norms transmitted within families are different between Latinos and Americans:

I have a strong Latino connection, I feel very much connected to Latin American and the Latino culture in general. There is something cultural that is different also. Here [in the United States] the relationship between parents and children is different. The way “they” [Americans] raise children is very different here. Even though I feel very comfortable and in general I have more American friends than Latino friends, I am better able to relate to people from my culture, which has less rules and is less structured, whether they are from Argentina or Latinos.

In general their experiences speak to constructing a shared sense of a cultural Latino identity, which crosses racial, and social class lines. Moreover, this identity is not bound to a national-origin, i.e. the respondents did not describe their cultural values as “Argentine” or “Mexican”: the shared culture and associated values and norms are
viewed as Latino. The research and interviews with Latino Jews thus highlights the role of cultural norms in the Latino or Hispanic panethnic label and, I believe, can thus provide a deeper understanding of how panethnic identities are constructed among Latino immigrants and how group relations evolve.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the complexities involved in analyzing Latino identity among Latino Jews. It is, for one thing, a new and secondary or even tertiary identity for them in the United States. Moreover, for white, educated Latinos an identity as Latino is less likely to determine life chances than for other racialized, darker-skinned Latinos. Their Latino ethnicity is, to a large extent, optional and even if others label them Latino, their skin-color and socio-economic class trumps their ethnicity in the eyes of those in the larger society. In addition, a Latino ethnic identity can be instrumental -- and provide distinct benefits --- giving Latino Jews an edge in receiving services or gaining admission to college through affirmative action programs or access to jobs where there is an emphasis on diversity. To further complicate matters there is yet another aspect to their Latino identity. As I have also shown, their experiences point to the existence of a cultural Latino identity, which gives meaning to their interactions with Latinos in general as well as promotes a greater sense of shared culture and in some contexts an “in-group” attachment to the greater American Latino population. In this sense, the study of Latino Jews can contribute to the general literature on Latino panethnicity and raises questions that clearly require further study.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

The analysis in the previous chapters points to a number of conclusions about the experiences of Latin American Jewish immigrants in the Northeastern United States (New York and Boston areas). As immigrants, their insertion into American society relies, in part, on the different forms of capital (social, human, and financial) they bring with them and later develop in the United States as well as their perceived ethnic and class status vis-à-vis the American mainstream. Their use of strategic or instrumental ethnicity highlights the continuing significance of ethnicity in immigrant adaptation and adjustment to life in the United States. This study suggests, however, that the use of strategic ethnicity is more available to those whose class and racial status approximates that of the white majority. The evidence I have outlined in earlier chapters also points to the importance of religion and religious institutions as an avenue for assimilation for new immigrants and the importance of including religion and ethno-religious identity in the study of immigration. The construction and negotiating of panethnicity and panethnic groups is another topic that I have explored in this dissertation, indicating, as other literature on the subject has shown, that the development of panethnic identities is an important element in understanding the contemporary immigrant experience.

Assimilation

Whereas classical assimilation models posit that assimilation occurs through socio-economic mobility, residential integration, intermarriage, and the eventual loss of ethnic identity (Gordon 1964; Park 1950), new assimilation theory (Alba and Nee 2003) provides a better theoretical lens with which to view the experiences of Latino Jews.
because it emphasizes how assimilation can be achieved without the loss of ethnicity. As first-generation immigrants, they are comfortably situated in the middle or upper-middle classes, yet their ethnic identity as Jews, Latinos, and Latino Jews is defined and re-defined as they settle into American life. In fact, their experiences indicate that ethnicity is central to the process of becoming Americans, and their ethnicities add to the ethnic plurality in the United States and in the process contribute to the ever-changing definition of an “American”.

Latino Jews, my study indicates, are well on the way to assimilation into American society. The Latino Jews I interviewed have achieved high levels of educational attainment and professional success in the United States. They may face some discrimination in the job market or business ventures, though overall, it seems to have little effect on their possibilities for assimilation and/or upward mobility. Their socio-economic status and phenotypic resemblance to the white majority provide an avenue for assimilation. In fact, in many ways Latino Jews have been able to leapfrog over the traditional barriers to integration and upward mobility due to their high levels of human capital coupled with their resemblance to those in the white mainstream. Looking ahead, the signs are that the descendants of Latin American Jewish immigrants are likely to continue to do well and to fully assimilate into American society.

What does it mean to be a Latino?

Latinos in the United States are a highly diverse group - they originate from many different countries with distinct national cultures, are found across all socio-economic classes, and have ethnic and racial differences and diverse religious backgrounds. However, the stereotype of the “typical” Latino and the Latino experience in the United
States fails to encompass the diversity of the broad Latino group. In large part, we can attribute this stereotype to the large numbers of Latinos who hail from Mexico and Central America; Latinos, moreover, are overwhelmingly found in the working class. This study highlights a sub-set of Latinos in the United States and provides an alternative perspective on what it means to be Latino in the United States.

Latino Jews, as I have shown, are different from the majority of Latino immigrants (and descendants of Latino immigrants) in the United States today. Not only do they resemble those in the white mainstream in phenotype and have a socio-economic status that affords them a much higher position than the majority of U.S. Latino immigrants, but also their religious or ethno-religious identity serves as another boundary between themselves and the larger Latino population. Yet despite these many differences, a panethnic identity has developed among Latino Jews, constructed along non-material cultural lines, that gives Latino Jews a sense of commonality and shared values with other Latinos in the United States. This study also brings to the fore the need to include highly educated and successful Latinos in studying this population. Most of the research on Latinos in the United States has focused on lower-skilled immigrants. Yet, many of those who shape Latino culture (politicians, artists and entertainers, academics, businesspeople) are elites who do not physically or socially resemble the Latinos subjects in most academic research. Including elite Latinos in the mix can provide a more accurate and deeper understanding of Latino culture and the Latino experience in the United States.

Salience of ethnicity
The evidence in this study highlights the salience of ethnic identity in the United States today. As I have shown, the incorporation of the children and grandchildren of the first wave of immigrants, the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, and the influx of new immigrants post-1965 have all contributed to making America a place where diversity is not only tolerated but often celebrated. Ethnic identity and ethnic group affiliation not only provide immigrants with a social identity and a sense of self, but can be accessed to enable “in-group” entrée into certain social or professional circles, preferred treatment under affirmative action or simply a meaningful interaction based on shared commonalities such as language or perceived history.

Ethnicity matters, as the use of strategic ethnicity by Latino Jews shows. Latino Jews redefine their ethnicity in the United States and are able to access it for instrumental purposes. Latino Jews call upon different aspects of their ethnicity to better position themselves in social and service settings and in the professional and educational world. They are able to gain privileges from their ethnic affiliation because their socio-economic status and resemblance to the white majority allow them to do so, yet their experiences in using their ethnicity for instrumental purposes indicates that, beyond strategic uses, ethnicity and ethnic identity are meaningful aspects of their lives as they adapt to and become integrated into American life.

Construction of panethnicity

Latin American Jews come from diverse sending countries, with different social structures having influenced and shaped their ethno-religious identity before they emigrated. As immigrants in the United States, Latino Jews struggle to find an
appropriate or fitting identity. Members of this group have a number of identities they can choose from and they do so in different ways depending on the particular context. For example, they may speak Spanish or bring out their Latinoness in a service setting such as a restaurant, or proclaim their Jewish identity in a professional or social setting with other Jews. A Latino Jewish identity is likely to come out in an organized context around other Latino Jews (the Jewish Latin Center for example).

Jews from Latin America in the United States have not one, but two, proximal hosts --- Jewish and Latino groups --- and imperfect ones at that. The result is that some end up constructing a new identity in this country -- that of Latino Jews. A Latino Jewish panethno-religious identity relies on a sense of shared cultural commonalities with other Latino Jews (as ethno-religious minorities in their home countries, Spanish speakers, consumers of Latino material cultural) as well as a primordial sense of ascriptive identity as Jews. What also became clear in the study is that the support of an institution or organized network (in this case the Jewish Latin Center) was an important factor in the development of a panethnic group and ensuing panethno-religious identity. Many of the respondents had a shared sense of identity with other Jews from Latin America, but had few opportunities to meet, interact and form social groups with other Latino Jews. Organizations such as the Jewish Latin Center provide this opportunity as well as a legitimization of a Latino Jewish identity.

**The changing American Jewish experience**

In creating a new identity in New York, Latin American Jews’ background in their home countries is significant. They are, in truth, bringing a new “Latino” flavor to
the larger American Jewish community. They dance salsa at Bar Mitzvahs, spice the brisket with jalapeños and end Passover seders with a tango.

The social structure of their countries of origin influences how Jewish communities were created and maintained in Latin America. Many of the communities in Latin America continue to be tight-knit, have strong social and professional networks and solid communal, religious and educational organizations. As a result, Latin American Jews in the United States often feel at odds with the way Jewishness is practiced in this country and try to re-create some of the national Jewish practices and culture of their home societies by building Latino Jewish social, professional or religious organizations and introducing new foods, music or language to Jewish cultural and religious events. While much has been written about the impact of Jews from the former Soviet Union, who have come in large numbers, particularly to the New York area (see Markowitz 1993; Markowitz 1988; Orleck 2013; Orleck 2001) there has been scant research on Latino Jews. Jews from Latin America, like other Jewish immigrants in the United States, are contributing to an evolving Judaism in America through their participation in synagogues, schools, Jewish community centers and cultural events. The attendance of Latino Jews at the B’nai Jeshurun synagogue in Manhattan, for example, has helped create a unique spiritual and multi-cultural experience, with dancing and singing incorporated into the services as well as a large social component, which is typical of Jewish organizations in Latin America. Jewish Latino musicians, such as Osvaldo Golijov, are redefining elements of traditional Jewish klezmer music through the influence of Latino music. Latino Jewish film festivals have sprung up in New York and San Diego, also adding another cultural dimension to Jewish America. While a
numerically small group, the contributions of Latino Jews to Jewish culture and Jewishness in America has the potential to be significant; their Jewishness was a central part of their identity in their home country and is likely to continue to be so in the United States.

Limitations of study

As with any study of this kind, there are limitations to the scope of the research as well as available data. I limited my study to the Northeastern United States, and while I attempted to survey a wide and representative sample, it is possible that I have missed people who have no connections to other Latino Jews and have little, if any, interaction with other Jewish immigrants from Latin America. This said, I feel confident that I have captured the experiences of people who represent a large portion (and likely the majority) of the Latin America Jewish immigrants in the New York and Boston area.

I conducted most of my ethnographic research at the Jewish Latin Center, which gave me insight into how a Latino Jewish panethnic group and identity are being constructed. Yet, this center is a religious organization, and while most of the members or attendees were not ultra-religious, their presence at a Chabad (religious) organization indicates some level of religiosity, even if it is slight. It would be useful, in the future, to target other non-religious organizations which act to stimulate or strengthen a Latino Jewish panethnic identity.

Questions for Future Research

Throughout the data collection process and later during the analysis, a number of additional questions arose concerning assimilation and the use of ethnicity among the children of Latino Jewish immigrants; about whether the experiences of Latino Jews in
other geographic locations in the United States differ from those in New York and Boston; and whether the experiences of non-Jewish Latinos of similar social and economic status are similar in any way to those of the Latino Jews in this study.

Second-generation

My study focused on the first immigrant generation, but a crucial issue is the way ethnic identities will develop among their U.S-born children. When I asked the respondents how they chose to categorize their children on government forms and school forms the responses were mixed. Some said “white, definitely not Latino”, whereas others said, “maybe white and Latino and Latino for school”. A few of the respondents have adult children, and of those children who are married, some are married to Jewish-Americans, others to non-Jewish Americans, and one to a non-Jewish Latino. What this suggests is the likelihood of intermarriage to non-Latino Jews for most children of Latino Jews, and thus considerable assimilation across national-origin and religious lines (much like Herberg (1963) predicted over fifty years ago). Yet the numbers are too few to draw reliable conclusions. Moreover, as the American mainstream is remade (Alba and Nee 2003), it is possible that many of children of Latino Jews will claim a stronger Latino identity or a Latino Jewish identity.

Latino Jews in the Greater United States

As Nancy Foner (2001, 2005) shows in her work on comparative immigration, time and place matter. New York, especially, is a unique place to be an immigrant (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Preliminary research suggests that Miami and San Diego are also
distinctive places to be Latino Jews. Miami, for example, was mentioned in a number of the interviews as favorite destination for Latino Jews from all nationalities:

My brother and my uncles live in Miami; it seems everyone is moving there. It’s where I want to go. I want to be among my own people- Venezuelan Jews, people that speak Spanish, my family. It is where I want to settle (Ruth, Venezuela-Jew).

Baruch, another respondent, had moved to Miami a few months after I interviewed him. I ran into him at the Jewish Latin Center and he had the following to say about his move:

I looked for a job in New York and when I could not find one, I had a connection in Miami at a law firm. I am working as a lawyer there and could not be happier. We are in Aventura and it is full of Jews from all over Latin America. We already knew the area well because my family has an apartment there. It is such a different culture, more like the one in Mexico, you know? And it is so easy to fly between Mexico and Miami. Also, everyone speaks Spanish and there is kosher-Mexican food.

In fact, there is a burgeoning Latino Jewish population in Miami, evidenced by the presence of Latin American kosher restaurants, *Hebraica* (a re-creation of the athletic associations in Latin America), Latino rabbis and Spanish religious services. Miami’s economy attracts people with divergent levels of human capital. While there are certainly some opportunities in the legal and financial firms of the area (though likely fewer than New York or Boston) employment as entrepreneurs in small import and manufacturing industries, restaurants and the service sector is more accessible (and likely). Moreover, Miami’s affordability (relative to New York and Boston) as well as the prevalence of Spanish make it a more hospitable destination for immigrants with lower human and financial capital. Anecdotally I know of a number of Latino Jews in the Miami area who are visa over-stayers or received considerable assistance from the area synagogue to settle there. The socio-economic status of Latino Jews in the Miami area is more diverse and
some members of the established Jewish community have expressed trepidation regarding the large numbers of them settling in the area. In fact there is some evidence that American Jews are reluctant to socialize or congregate with Latino Jews, as indicated by the comments of Miriam Moussatche-Wechsler, the program coordinator for the Latin American Migration Program:

At the Jewish Community Center in North Miami [where there is a large presence of Latino Jews], we have seen many American families pulling their children out of camp or programs. They say it is because their children don’t speak Spanish, so they are having a hard time socializing with the Spanish-speaking Jews who attend. It has been difficult to integrate Latin Jews into Miami’s established Jewish community (Moussatche-Wechsler, 2012).

Further study of Latino Jews in the Miami area would illuminate some of the contextual forces that shape the immigrant experience, especially in comparison to New York and Boston. Miami is a top destination for many Latin Americans (not just Jewish ones) where the proximity to Latin America as well as the commercial activity that takes place with Latin America provide increased possibilities for transnationalism in identity formation, political participation and cultural influence.

Like Miami, San Diego’s Latino population is significant and the Latino and in particular Mexican population heavily influence the culture of both the city and the state of California. A number of my respondents from Mexico indicated that they have relatives living in San Diego, where they have formed a strong Latino Jewish community, replete with a Jewish athletic center similar to those that exist in Latin America. There are an estimated 600 – 700 Mexican Jewish families (Liwerant 2013) living in San Diego and preliminary research suggests that they have re-created in many ways the close tight-knit communities that exist in Latin America. Again further research would reveal the
underlying factors that promote the sort of community building that has taken place in San Diego, in contrast to what this study has shown has occurred in New York and Boston.

**Latino Elites**

Class and race (and ethno-religion) buffer Latino Jews from much of the discrimination faced by the larger Latino population in the United States. A question arises as to whether this has any implications for elite non-Jewish Latinos, especially those who are very light-skinned or phenotypically white. Are they buffered from discrimination in the same way as Latino Jews? Or does being Jewish make a difference --- and in what ways? Further study of the experiences of non-Jewish elite Latinos can shed light on how the intersection of social class with phenotypic resemblance to the mainstream may influence the position of Latino elites in the American ethnic and racial hierarchy. As I have emphasized, Latinos are a diverse group and to fully understand the Latino experience, we need to consider Latinos from divergent socio-economic classes and religious backgrounds. The Latino Jews in this study are able to traverse the stereotypes of Latinos in the United States yet access their Latino identity to garner certain privileges. While there has been some recent scholarly work on the Latino middle-class, this work mainly focuses on the trajectories of Mexican-Americans and their experiences as middle-class Americans (see Vallejo 2012). Additional research on how Latino elites develop and form strong networks and how their identities as Latinos intersect with their socio-economic status would help to illuminate the intricacies of Latinoness and Latino identity in the United States.
Conclusion

The research presented here offers, through a case study of a small and unique group, a different lens with which to view the American immigrant experience. It explores how religion, class, and ethno-racial status interact and intersect to affect the life chances and assimilation and integration prospects for new Latino Jewish immigrants as they construct and re-construct ethnic identities in their new home, and, I believe, it broadens our understanding of contemporary Jewish and immigrant life in America today.
Appendix A:
Jewish –Latino Research Survey Instrument

Date

Background

• What is your first name?

• In what year were you born? ___ ___ ___ ___

• Where were you born? _____________
  o State, Country _________________ ___ ___

• When did you immigrate here?

• Why?

• With whom?

• Do you plan on staying here?

Religion

• What is your (spouse's/partner’s/former spouse) religion, if any
  o None
  o Jewish/Judaism
  o Jewish and another religion (Specify ______)
  o Messianic Jew (Jews for Jesus)
  o Catholic
  o Protestant

• Your children?

• What is/was your mother’s religion, if any?

• What is/was your father’s religion, if any?
• Were you raised as Jewish?

• Do you consider yourself to be Jewish?

• What proportion of your closest friends would you say are Jewish? In the United States? In your home country?

• Did you have a Bar/BatMitzvah when you were a boy?

• When it comes to your outlook, do you regard yourself as:
  o Religious
  o Somewhat religious
  o Somewhat secular, or
  o Secular

• What branch of Judaism do you identify with, if any?

• Do you regard being Jewish for yourself primarily as being part of
  o A religious heritage
  o A cultural heritage
  o An ethnic group.
  o A racial group
  o A people

• Is anyone in your household currently a member of the following?
  o A synagogue or temple
  o JCC or a Jewish organization (IF NECESSARY: like Hadassah (ha DA sah) or B’naibrit (B nay brit))

• Do you have children?
  
  If yes the following:
• Are your children being or going to be raised as Jews?

• Are they being or going to be raised
  • Jewish and something else
  • Christian
  • Some other religion
  • With no religious identification
  • Secular, or
  • To choose a religious identification for themselves when they grow up

• If yes, do they go to public/private school? (if private)
  o Do they go to a Jewish Day School?

• Do they go to religious school?

• Do they participate in JCC activities?

• Is there something from the American Jewish community that you think is better/more enjoyable than how it was in your country of origin?

Identity in home country

• How did you identify in your home country?

• Secondary?

• What was your religious identity?

• Did you have a sense of national pride?

• Did you have a sense of group belonging? To which group?
• Is there something from your native country and its Jewish community that you miss?

Identity in United States

• What is your primary identity here?
• Do you have other identities?
• What do you check off on the census?
• How about other forms?
• How about your children?
• How would you say you are different than the average American Jew?
• Do you have a Latino identity?
• How would you say you are different than the average Latino in the US?
• A Latino Jewish?
• What is your relationship to Latino Jews?
• In what situations do you feel Latino/Jewish/Jewish Latinos?
• When do you call upon each identity?
• Do you feel like you are a part of one group or more than one group?
• Which group and when?
• What group do you feel that people place you in? in what situations?
• What values do you place on different ethnic identities? What about the greater society?
• Do you think these (Latino, Jewish, National, Jewish Latino) groups accept you?
  If so in what situations?
• How often do you interact with (L, LJ, J, National)
• Do you see any benefits in belonging to one or more of these groups? What are they?
• Where do you live?
• With whom?
• Are you involved in projects relating to your native land? Are you in touch with embassy/consulate
• How do you describe your attachment to Israel? Has it changed since your immigration to the US? Have you felt any changes in your attitude involvement in advocacy efforts since you moved to the US?

Education and Occupation

• What did you do?
• What is your degree?
• Where did you go to school?
• How do you identify at work?
• How did you get your job?

Language

• What is your primary language?
• How often do you speak Spanish/English and with whom?
• Do you prefer on or the other?
• Are there a lot of Hispanic Jews in your area/community?
• Would you be able to estimate around how many there are?

MEIM

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The MEIM was originally published in the following article:

It has subsequently been used in dozens of studies and has consistently shown good reliability, typically with alphas above .80 across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. On the basis of recent work, including a factor analysis of a large sample of adolescents*, it appears that the measure can best be thought of as comprising two factors, ethnic identity search (a developmental and cognitive component) and affirmation, belonging, and commitment (an affective component). Two items have been dropped and a few minor modifications have been made. Attached is the current revision of the measure, without the measure of Other-group orientation. The two factors, with this version, are as follows: ethnic identity search, items 1, 2, 4, 8, and 10; affirmation, belonging, and commitment, items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12. (None of the items are reversed.) The preferred scoring is to use the mean of the item scores; that is, the mean of the 12 items for an over-all score, and, if desired, the mean of the 5 items for search and the 7 items for affirmation. Thus the range of scores is from 1 to 4.

The suggested ethnic group names in the first paragraph can be adapted to particular populations. Items 13, 14, and 15 are used only for purposes of identification and categorization by ethnicity.

The Other-group orientation scale, which was developed with the original MEIM, is not included, as it is considered to be a separate construct. It can, of course, be used in conjunction with the MEIM.

Translations of the measure into Spanish and French now exist and are available, but we currently have no information on their reliability.

No written permission is required for use of the measure. However, if you decide to use the measure, please send me a summary of the results and a copy of any papers or publications that result from the study.

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In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican
American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be ____________________

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree     (3) Agree     (2) Disagree     (1) Strongly disagree

1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

13- My ethnicity is
   (1) Asian or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others
   (2) Black or African American
   (3) Hispanic or Latino, including Mexican American, Central American, and others
   (4) White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American; not Hispanic
   (5) American Indian/Native American
   (6) Mixed; Parents are from two different groups
   (7) Other (write in): _______________________________________

14- My father's ethnicity is (use numbers above)
15- My mother's ethnicity is (use numbers above)
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