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Not Quite White: Gender and Jewish Identity

CHAPTER 4

For my father, as for many Jews, my insistence on seeing a relationship between Jewishness and race is a puzzling and not entirely welcome endeavor. What my father finds "most troubling is the inability to understand your basic premise, especially your use of the term 'race' and the Jewish question. Are Jews a race?—a black race if not accepted and white if they are?"

With respect to ethnoracial assignment (the institutionalized practices and discourses of the dominant society), the answer is yes. As the institutional framework of race and ethnicity, assignment is not something an individual has much choice about. However, my father has a point with respect to ethnoracial identities. Groups fashion their identities for themselves, even though they do so in response to ethnoracial assignments. Individuals also construct their ethnoracial identities in the same context, often with a great deal of self-consciousness and emotional investment.[1]

This chapter explores the meaning of Jewish ethnic identity in a period when Jews were assigned to the not-fully-white side of the racial spectrum. The first part argues that one of several coexisting forms of Jewish identity, namely Jewish socialism, was

hegemonic in New York City's turn-of-the-century immigrant Jewish communities. The second part homes in on those communities' constructions of Jewish women of my grandmothers' generation, especially about the ways they differed from dominant white ideals. How were my fairly apolitical grandmothers connected as women and as Jews to a progressive, Jewish working-class culture? What was my political inheritance from this culture?

Jewish Socialism as Hegemonic Jewishness

The Lower East Side of New York City, like eastern European Jewish neighborhoods in other industrial American cities, was a community of workers and bosses, shopkeepers and socialists, radicals and rabbis who were tied together in a mixture of forced and voluntary interdependence. There was no shortage of conflict over economics and politics. Interminable contests over meaning in general, and the meaning of Jewishness in particular, all took place within a context of intense interdependence where Jews were exploited and ghettoized by the larger society.

In this context, ethnic identity meant identification with a community that was coping with anti-Semitism and inventing dreams of something better. People in these communities used their Jewish heritage on a daily basis to institutionalize and negotiate the meanings, values, and acceptable variants of American ethnic Jewishness. Through Jewishness and *Yiddishkeit,* they found ways of dealing with cross-class relationships. They developed moralities and values that linked religious and secular, progressive and conservative, boss and worker, men and women, within the Jewish community and within a single system of meaning. In short, they found ways to support conflicting interpretations and interests and to contain the inevitable clashes.

They had to invent ways of valorizing the different versions of Jewish identity and practice so that they could coexist in one community and within one shared moral universe at a time when

they had nowhere else to go. The edifice of racial assignment forced differences and conflicts to be contained—spatially, discursively, and politically—by a kind of "us-ness," a negotiated, overlapping, and familiar range of practices, meanings, and values that were locally hegemonic.

What Arthur Liebman has called Jewish socialism in his classic *Jews and the Left* became the dominant form of Jewish identity for this community for much of the period between the 1880s and World War II. This does not mean that all Jews were socialists, or even that Jewish socialism was the only recognized way of identifying oneself as a Jew within these communities. It does mean that part of being Jewish was being familiar with a working-class and anticapitalist outlook on the world and understanding this outlook as being particularly Jewish. It also meant that other versions of Jewish identity maintained a respectful dialogue with Jewish socialism. It served as a cultural platform for progressive political activity in part because many of its values were shared even by those who did not share its specific politics.[2]

Paula Hyman's wonderful book *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* speaks to the genesis of various forms of Jewish identities. She argues that nineteenth-century western and eastern European Jews built very different forms of Jewishnesses in response to their different circumstances, and that it was the eastern European Jews who gave rise to this particular form of hegemonic American Jewishness. In Western Europe, modernism and the spread of capitalism brought a liberalization of politics and a greater acceptance of Jews as citizens. German Jews, in particular, saw their opportunity to gain civil rights and entry into German society. Whether or how to allow this was "the Jewish question" debated among Christian Germans in the 1840s, in Karl Marx's youth. Nevertheless, assimilation became, for the first time, a possibility, and the relatively middle-class, middleman Jewish minority in Germany, as in France and England, adopted the lifestyle of modern bourgeois society. Marx's equating of Jews with capitalists in his essay

"On the Jewish Question" reflects, though in a distorted and anti-Semitic way, the class position that a certain portion of German Jewry had achieved in the context of relative political freedom. However, Marx's characterization of Jews resonated with older European stereotypes of Jews as usurers, getting rich in an un-Christian, immoral way. Such stereotypes prevailed across Europe, where, especially in the east, Jews were not allowed to own land, the historical source of much non-Jewish wealth.[3]

With social assimilation, the gendered public and private spheres that were part of bourgeois western European society became also part of Jewish culture. Jewish men came to be public, immersed in the secular world of business success. And Jewish women became domestic. As part of the assimilationist process, the good Jewish woman in France, Britain, and Germany, like her Christian counterpart, became the guardian of the home and of a woman-centered, domesticated religion. She thereby became also the guardian of the future of Judaism. In Western Europe then, Hyman suggests, Jewish identity came to be based on religion rather than on any ethnic distinctiveness of daily life. These Jews, especially those from Germany, made up the first wave of Jewish immigrants to the United States.

In sharp contrast, the arrival of capitalist modernity in Eastern Europe left no place for Jewish assimilation. Particularly in Russia, capitalism was accompanied by heightened anti-Semitism. Here, Russians were incited to violence, pogroms were organized, and segregation was justified by stereotypes of blood-sucking Jewish merchants. Eastern European Jews under Czarist rule had long been restricted to the so-called Pale of Settlement, a geographic area comprised of parts of Poland and western Russia, outside of which they were not allowed to take up residence. It was here, in the 1880s and 1890s, that they began to develop a secular Yiddish culture, *Yiddishkeit*, that provided a common link between Jews from different villages, regions, and nations and infused Jewish life with the intellectual, political, and artistic excitement of urban modernism. Yiddishkeit and capitalism's dislocations combined to break down the class divisions between the wealthy and learned on the one hand, and the ordinary manual workers on the other. These distinctions had governed *shtetl* (village) life before Jews became concentrated in cities.[4]

Because Russia's version of capitalism was anti-Semitic in the extreme, modern Yiddish culture, or Yiddishkeit, had a strong anticapitalist streak. Frozen out of class mobility and social assimilation, these Jews emphasized living a moral life developed in a communal, working-class, and decidedly leftist political direction. As a popular culture of the late nineteenth century, Yiddishkeit contained a synergistic mixture of religious and secular emphases on social justice that spoke to the Jews' new class- and racelike stigmatization in eastern Europe and the United States.

This popular culture also developed its own notions of Jewish womanhood. They were still patriarchal, but they also granted a measure of social mobility, political authority, and economic power to women, thus distinguishing Yiddishkeit from western European ideals of Jewish womanhood. The Jewish *Haskalah* (Enlightenment movement), in Russia, encouraged secular education, including women's. However, its intellectuals opposed wage work for women, claiming that it supported the religious ideal of the Talmudic scholar and made husbands lazy. They also believed that it undermined women's domesticity and corrupted their morals. Of the political groups in the Jewish community, the Bund (the General Jewish Labor Union of Russia and Poland) attracted most women. Women were among its top leaders and even more numerous among the middle leadership and active rank and file. The Bund attracted many women seeking a new life and a break with the demands of their families, although they were still expected to do the cooking and caretaking. The Bund promised gender equality, even if women were expected to wait for its delivery by the revolution. Zionist ideologies of "muscular Judaism" and the exclusion of women from any public role attracted far fewer women, but they too talked about the ultimate equality of the sexes. All strains of Yiddishkeit "legitimated the presence of women in the world of commerce

and artisanry as well as their cultivation of character traits that would ensure the survival of the family."[5]

From its birth then, modern eastern European Jewish culture encompassed the religious and secular and connected them through a common Yiddish language. That language sustained a rich secular literature, music, and theater that reflected the culture of their urban, working-class communities. Decidedly communal and ethnic in response to anti-Semitism, and secular in contrast to the family-centered religious assimilationism of the western European model, this is what eastern European Jews brought to America after 1880, where it developed and flowered in its own ways in the residential and occupational ghettos of the immigrant Jews who became part of America's working class.[6]

Working-class Jewishness in New York

The Lower East Side of New York City, which was "with the possible exception of Beijing, the most densely populated square mile on earth," was where most immigrant Jews first settled.[7] In the United States, in general, persistent racial segregation and labor force segmentation made working-class neighborhoods also racial and ethnic neighborhoods. The eastern European Jews who lived on the Lower East Side nevertheless had regular contact with the German Jews who had arrived earlier and whose neighborhoods were uptown; they were also separated by occupation, social status, and constructions of Judaism. Assimilated western European Jews, on the other hand, tended to look down on the new immigrants, harboring a mixture of embarrassment and charitable benevolence toward them.

Not surprisingly, the idioms by which Americans have expressed working-class consciousness have been racial and ethnic idioms. Historian Herbert Gutman was an eloquent pioneer in showing how working-class European immigrants fashioned their ethnic understandings and practices into an alternative culture that served as a world from which they developed their own critiques of capitalism.[8]

Jews were no exception. Even if they had been students, professionals, or intellectuals, Jewish immigrants all necessarily became part of a working-class Jewish community. As Gerald Sorin has shown, this reshaped their politics. Their kin, friendship, and work ties all bound them solidly to a community whose Jewishness was overwhelmingly proletarian.[9]

As Liebman argues so well, to live as a Jew in this community, especially before World War I, meant that one actively participated in a politicized working-class culture. It shaped one's options and one's ways of being a man or woman. It had local power, or hegemony, to shape daily relationships even across class lines. This was because, as Annelise Orleck put it, "[m]ost Jewish immigrant New Yorkers . . . were nourished on the same daily diet of socialist fundamentals."[10]

Jewish socialism shared a broad set of principles with the rest of the community: that everyday Jews were members of the working class and were exploited as workers; that Jews were stigmatized and discriminated against as a race; that Jewish workers had to organize and fight the bosses and the state for their due; that the goal of the international working-class struggle was to build a society based on reciprocal principles that fed the mind and spirit. And they shared a messianic faith that this would happen. The mass appeal of socialism gave it a hegemony in the Jewish community that it lacked in almost all of nonethnic America. Yiddish cultural practices and political views were working class. They provided a glimmer of alternative ways of constructing cross-class relationships and political practice by making them Jewish values. So perhaps the majority of Jews who had no allegiance to socialism, the Bund, or the Workmen's Circle were still likely to be quite antibourgeois and to have a working-class orientation simply by absorbing it through living in the Jewish community.[11]

But the Torah's biblical commandments and Jewish religious traditions were also woven into the fabric of socialism. Just as a ghetto existence shaped the politics of identity in the Jewish community, so too did it shape its religion. Annelise Orleck

describes Jewish women's activism as animated by "a heady mix of ideology gleaned from Isaiah, Marx and their mothers."[12] Jewish socialism and unionism together were at the center of the dense web of the community's institutional life, of mutual aid societies, like the Workmen's Circle, secular schools, choruses, literary and theater societies, and summer camps. The largest Yiddish daily newspaper in the world, the *Forward*, was socialist.

Political radicals were central actors in building community institutions right from the beginnings of Jewish immigration.

> Already by the 1890s, in the first years of Yiddish-language agitation, some of the most beloved speakers, editors and poets in the community were Socialists or anarchists who saw the struggles for unionization as the journey out of Egypt toward the Promised Land.[13]

The garment workers' unions were perhaps the institutions most important in making Jewish socialism a bedrock of political culture on the Lower East Side.[14] The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACWU) were built through huge waves of strikes that began with female shirtwaist makers in New York City in 1909 and continued in New York and Chicago especially, until 1914. The strikes unionized the clothing industry and institutionalized Jewish socialist politics among the unions' largely female membership. They organized their own social worlds around worker education, recreation, and Yiddish culture. They built residential cooperative apartments in the Bronx, the Rand School, the Workers' University, a Breadwinners' college, and the People's Institute at Cooper Union as well as a variety of self-help, literary, and music societies.

Unions were not the only Jewish groups to build social institutions to support a political community. Indeed, the idea of alternative communities was part of the life of Jewish political organizations. In New York City, whose population was over a quarter Jewish and the largest concentration of Jews in the United States, the concept took its most concrete form (no pun

intended) in building. The 1920s saw a large wave of second-generation residential expansion as Jewish builders developed new Jewish neighborhoods. Although most of the building was for profit, some was not. Some of the most impressive undertakings were carried out by labor unions and political groups, especially in new areas of the Bronx. The ACWU built a large cooperative colony as well as financing other apartment houses designed for workers in the Bronx. The Sholem Aleichem Houses were built to preserve secular Jewish culture; the Labor Zionist Farband built co-ops; and left-wing socialists built the Workers Cooperative Colony. The Typographical Union and the Jewish Butchers Union also built cooperative housing projects. As Deborah Dash Moore has shown, "The cooperatives represented an ideological variation within the ethnic Jewish building industry, an example of Jewish builders uniting with Jewish workers to construct housing tailored to their socialist specifications. . . . In several cases the cooperatives created Jewish neighborhoods virtually overnight."[15]

Although Jewish culture was working-class conscious and heavily socialist, successful working-class politicians had also to identify themselves politically as Jewish.[16] The most widely known image of that fusion comes from the 1909 strike of shirtwaist makers in New York City. When Clara Lemlich, a leading organizer and striker, moved for a general strike at a mass meeting filled with young women garment workers, its chairman, Benjamin Feigenbaum, a socialist, asked the crowd in Yiddish to take the Hebrew oath to strike. But working classness and Jewishness did not fuse easily or naturally.[17]

It was not enough for a leader to be Jewish and socialist, as Arthur Gorenstein has argued in explaining why the Lower East Side in 1908 supported a Tammany candidate for Congress over the well-known unionist and Socialist Party leader Morris Hillquit. The Tammany candidate ran as pro-Jewish. Hillquit claimed:

> The interests of the workingmen of the Ninth Congressional District are therefore entirely identical with those of the workingmen

> of the rest of the country, and if elected to Congress, I will not consider myself the special representative of the alleged special interests of this district, but the representative of the Socialist Party.[18]

Gorenstein argues that Hillquit and the Socialist Party seriously underestimated the importance of Jewishness to the identity of working-class voters. This construction of Jewishness as a response to racialization and anti-Semitism was particularly clear in that election year. The Jewish community was then under attack at home and faced intense pogroms in Russia. American Jews mobilized against renewed efforts in 1907–1908 to restrict immigration from Europe and Asia. And they felt the weight of renewed racist stereotypes of Jews as a dirty and criminal people. Some of this, particularly an article by the NYC police commissioner, had a racist intent, but some also came from "friends" like Eugene V. Debs and Lincoln Steffens, who wanted to attack the dirty and dangerous conditions of the Lower East Side rather than its people. The two were not easy for many Jews to distinguish.

The Socialist Party's record on immigration was also less than stellar. With one of its strongholds being white workers on the West Coast, the party (including Hillquit) supported restricting immigration from among "backward races" and those "who are incapable of assimilation with the workingmen of the country of their adoption." Hillquit claimed this was directed against Asians, and that Jews should have no concern. However, Jews had a great deal of concern and were strongly opposed to any restrictions on immigration. Much of their opposition was based on the assumption that any restriction would be extended to Jews.

When, in 1910, the Socialist Party assumed a more explicitly Jewish and antiracist stance, it succeeded in reelecting its candidate, Meyer London, a leader in the 1910 cloakmakers' strike, to Congress. The Socialist Party's new position opposed any restrictions on immigration. But London also ran as a representative of the Jewish working class. Jewish workers did not accept the notion that a Jewish identity was peripheral to their working-class interests. In electing Meyer London, Gorenstein argues, they showed that they wanted a Jew who would represent specifically Jewish workers, and that Jewish workers did not believe that the interests of all workers were identical.[19]

The Dailiness of Jewish Working-class Culture

Jewish socialism on the Lower East Side was also a daily system of meaning and membership that gave a working-class character to the neighborhood. Historian Stephanie Coontz has argued that Euro-immigrant cultures employed categories of public and private but infused them with very different meanings than did their native-born middle-class counterparts. The cultural consciousness of a difference between "our" (private) world and "theirs" (public) in the working-class Jewish ghetto emerges most clearly in married women's daily responsibilities for family and household labor. Food in Jewish and Italian immigrant neighborhoods, wrote Elizabeth Ewen, "became an arena of contention between immigrant women and American society. . . . Social workers would write of their clients, 'Not yet Americanized, still eating Italian food.'"[20]

Stephanie Coontz argues that statements like this actually marked a real boundary between mainstream bourgeois culture and late-nineteenth-century working-class cultures that was recognized on both sides of the class and cultural divide. Working-class culture was a "clear-cut alternative to bourgeois individualism and work patterns."[21] Bourgeois culture insisted on a dichotomy between a public sphere of work, power, rationality, and maleness and a private sphere of domesticity, subordination, emotion, and femaleness. In contrast, within the working-class world, connections were paramount—among individuals, families and households, as well as between economy and affect. The language, Coontz notes, was confusing because both classes used the word "private" but meant different things by it. The

working class used "private" to set off its ethnic cultural values from those of the bourgeoisie. The immigrant working class distinguished between its own community-based moral universe and that of the mainstream, between "our world" and "theirs."

Coontz suggests that "private life" applied to nonwork time, or "leisure time," and to values and practices governing that time. These practices contrasted with bourgeois practices based on hierarchy, alienated labor, competition, and individualism. Her point fits nicely with the observations of other feminist scholars that working-class women's perspectives bring family and community, work and politics together in a single sphere, which Coontz would characterize as the "private" world of working-class culture.[22] In contrast to bourgeois usage then, this working-class meaning of "private" did not mark a family or gendered sphere so much as it did community membership and separation from the social relations and values of mainstream American culture and the state.[23]

Following Gutman, I have argued elsewhere that if we focus on working-class women in trying to analyze class, it becomes clear that the American working class forms its culture and institutions in ethnic neighborhoods just as much as or more than it does in factories.[24] Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* is a classic portrait of the male part of this community. But working classness is also a complementary relationship between wage earners of both sexes and the mainly women who did the unwaged labor of transforming wages into necessary goods and services.

One's assigned contributions depended upon one's gender and stage of life. Daughters joined their fathers and brothers in shouldering responsibility for earning the family's wages. Often daughters were the main breadwinners, in part because they could more easily find work in the garment industry than could their more highly paid male kin.

Just how important were daughters' wages became clear when community and citywide relief committees visited the families of the young women who had been killed in the Triangle

Shirtwaist Company fire in 1911. They found that Jewish and Italian women "were supporting old fathers and mothers, both in this country and abroad; mothering and supporting younger brothers and sisters, sending brothers to high school, to art school, to dental college, to engineering courses."[25]

Single Jewish women were not seen as sexual beings in need of social and/or ritual regulation. Unmarried daughters, who were innocent of the pleasures of sex, "were seen as more socially neutral," and there were apparently few prohibitions on their mixing with men at work or in public, in Russia and in the United States.

Jewish anxieties about women's sexuality focused on married women. Because a woman became sexually wise once she married, she could not then go about so freely in public. If she were to attract the attentions of other men, she would threaten her husband's honor. The sexuality of men, married or single, carried few restrictions, nor was it ritually regulated. Their harassment of women workers seems to have been taken as part of male nature. In Jewish culture, married women were potential seducers whose behavior needed to be regulated socially and ritually. Since women's hair was believed to arouse erotic feelings, Orthodox women shaved their heads or covered their hair with a *shaitl* (wig). And they had to take a *mikveh* (ritual bath) each month after their period before they could resume sexual relations with their husbands.[26]

Consequently, married women frequently turned home-based activities into income-generating opportunities. Almost every Jewish household took in boarders at some time. This involved a great deal of work for the mother of the house, for she did all their cooking, washing, and ironing, perhaps helped by a daughter. Through boarding, single men and women were integrated into the community either as paying boarders or as "temporary" members of an integrated household economy under the direction of a mother. Household composition was a fluid mix of newly arrived immigrants, boarders, and kin, but households always needed a mix of waged and unwaged workers.

For widows with young children, like the mothers of future ILGWU leaders Pauline Newman and Rose Schneiderman, wage-earning, rent-paying boarders made the difference between poverty and homelessness. All four of Deborah Schneiderman's children served time in an orphanage when she could not feed them. Pauline and her sisters worked in factories from the time they were children, and their mother took in washing.

Such informal entrepreneurial activities were also important for the neighborhood economy. Domestic needs and resources varied over the course of a year and a life cycle, so some households were likely to be labor poor while others were labor rich at any given time. A household with small children was likely to need more domestic labor than a mother could supply, while one with older sons and daughters might have a labor "surplus" and be in a position to provide this kind of help. Direct reciprocity certainly existed, particularly between kin, but assistance could also be given in the form of a paid service. Although they appear to be "profit-seeking" ventures, informal economic activities like boarding or doing laundry operate on self-exploitation and are better understood as cash-mediated forms of reciprocity within working-class communities. That is how they were treated in women's neighborhood economies.

Within the neighborhood, married women and men engaged in a variety of more or less institutionalized but gender-specific reciprocal relationships that linked individuals and households to one another in complex networks of interdependence. Each Jewish neighborhood had its own little stores and pushcarts run by fellow immigrants, women and men, so that it was a somewhat self-contained world. Food shopping was a married woman's activity and a social activity, part of a vibrant street culture according to which one looked out for one's neighbors and the neighborhood, enforced norms of reciprocity, compared prices, bargained ferociously, watched the kids, and just socialized. The social relations of women's unwaged work were also central to the infrastructure of daily life.

> Families were close. You just got up and visited. You knocked on the door. They opened it and you were one of the family. If someone got sick, the neighbor took care of them. My mother went for an operation and the neighbor took the younger children. They would shop and cook. Neighbors gathered in the halls, brought out their chairs and chatted. If someone was bad off, they made a collection.[27]

As Annelise Orleck shows so well, when we listen to women, it is obvious that Jewish working-class struggles were not confined to factories. Mothers had their own mighty struggles that centered on transforming wages into the wherewithal of life for their families. Women's mutual aid relationships and the mobilizations they sustained were key forms of the conscious working-class struggle.[28]

Nothing dramatized the cooperation of women on the Lower East Side in carrying out their household responsibilities as clearly as the meat boycotts, food protests, and rent strikes that rocked the city on and off from 1902 until the 1950s.[29] These were the strikes of the *balebostes*, the Jewish mothers who created their own version of Jewish socialist theory when they boycotted, marched, and threw the meat from the stores of offending butchers into the street. Their construction of themselves as strikers and their appeals to Marx, as Paula Hyman points out, dovetailed nicely with the Book of Isaiah's "warnings to the rich and haughty and its prophecies of judgment and cleansing"[30] and brought the secular and the religious together in the pursuit of social justice and the condemnation of greed.

When the price of kosher meat skyrocketed in 1902, women on the Lower East Side took to the streets. They called for a boycott and labeled themselves strikers. The police made arrests, the *New York Times* called it a riot, and 20,000 people turned out for a strike-support rally. The boycott spread to Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Harlem where women enforced it through patrols. But the strikers also appealed to male-run

unions, benevolent and fraternal groups, to set up cooperative stores. Victory came in the form of price rollbacks almost to the original level.[31]

"Watching their mothers battle to improve their families' standard of living, it was clear to working daughters like Schneiderman [and] Newman . . . [that t]heir mothers saw their homes as directly linked to the larger economy and fought to keep them safe from deprivation."[32] So it is not surprising to learn that one of sixteen-year-old Pauline Newman's first big political actions was to organize a rent strike (with mixed results) on the Lower East Side.

> Taking her cue from a successful 1904 rent strike, Newman hatched an ambitious plan: to build a rent strike using both women's neighborhood and shop-floor networks. The result was the best organized of the early twentieth-century housewives' actions, and the largest rent strike New York had ever seen. Newman and her friends began by organizing their peers. By late fall they had assembled a band of four hundred self-described "self supporting women" like themselves, committed to rolling back rents. These young women soon found a sea of willing converts: the mothers of the Lower East Side.[33]

Between 1917 and 1920, women again took matters into their own hands against what many of them saw as food profiteering. An altercation on Orchard Street over the price of onions exploded when a peddler called upon his wife to beat up a woman customer. A crowd of women overturned his cart and scattered his vegetables in the street. Maria Ganz, a participant, left a vivid account of what happened: "It seemed only a moment before a mob of hundreds of women had gathered. Cart after cart was overturned, and the pavement was covered with trampled goods. . . . Policemen came rushing upon the scene, and they too were pelted with whatever was at hand." The women held a meeting of thousands, organized the Mothers' Anti-High Price League, and marched on City Hall, police attempts to disperse them notwithstanding. Here too, women had their own

leaders, were able to enforce boycotts in their neighborhood, and spread them to other Jewish working-class neighborhoods in the city.[34] Food riots highlight the fact that women depended upon one another to execute successfully their responsibility for all those forms of unwaged labor by which they turned hard-earned dollars into onions, potatoes, and pot roast.

Food riots also made manifest the value of interdependence across class lines in the community. They showed everyone that merchants were accountable to community values of reciprocity. As Judith Smith said, "When ethnic retailers raised their prices, immigrants viewed such acts as an abandonment of the principles of community justice and particularly as a breach of reciprocity." It was "an injury to a customer loyally patronizing a *paesano* or *landsman*."[35]

Women held merchants and peddlers accountable to a Jewish working-class morality even though merchants and peddlers were not workers. The women insisted that the relationship between sellers and their customers was at least as much an ongoing personal relationship as it was a business one. Because of this personal relationships with peddlers, food rioters were doubly outraged at their prices and felt justified in expressing their moral indignation. They condemned those who behaved like bourgeois businessmen.

For men no less than women, their identities as Jewish and working class were formed in their neighborhoods as well as in factories. Men had their own forms of community-based networks that linked their work and domestic lives. These too were organized around the reciprocity of mutual aid. They centered on *landsmanshaftn*, unions, political parties, and the dense network of mutual aid institutions generated by these important community institutions. Secular and religious associations flourished in Eastern Europe in the latter nineteenth century. Jewish men combined artisan guilds, mutual aid, and Torah-reading in their associations. In the United States, Jews organized mutual benefit associations along lines of craft and town or region (landsmanshaftn) and, by the early 1900s, affiliated local

chapters with more broadly based regional and national organizations. Landsmanshaftn most commonly provided medical and burial insurance and funds for wedding celebrations. A man's brothers in his landsmanshaft were expected to turn out for his wedding and other important events in his family life cycle. Although they were men's organizations and centers of male social life, a few had women's auxiliaries. Other forms of benefit organizations also existed. The secular and progressive Workmen's Circle grew rapidly after 1900 and ultimately developed chapters in many cities. Such organizations were crucial for integrating new immigrants into the worlds of waged labor, politics, cultural life, and the neighborhood. They helped them to find places to live, connecting them to jobs and to opportunities for social and cultural activities. Their role in providing medical and life insurance policies was important to maintaining families in the insecure context of working-class life. Moreover, the reciprocity upon which they were based provided a more general kind of social insurance. Although women and men may have had a certain amount of sex segregation in their community institutions, they both operated on the same principles of reciprocity, and both linked work and family life.[36]

Daily Hegemony of Working-class Culture

The hegemony of this working-class Jewish political identity in daily life emerges most clearly when we examine cross-class relationships within the Jewish community. Even though the large majority of Jews were workers, the immigrant community was not made up only of workers. Eastern European Jews soon became owners of garment factories, sooner still became contractors in the industry, and, most quickly of all, became "inside" contractors—that is, usually male workers who hired women "apprentices" and, under the guise of teaching them, paid them almost no wages for their work. Workers, contractors, and bosses were often tied by kinship, by membership in the same landsmanshaft, and by schul (temple). The community also had its

merchants, local officials, and rabbis who stood both within and outside it. Under some conditions they functioned in accord with dominant working-class values; under others, they clashed with them.

Cross-class ties certainly complicated class struggle. Louis Painkin, a militant garment worker, noted:

> I had a relative who was in the raincoat business; he gave me a chance to learn the trade and subsequent to that I struck against him. . . . [W]e put him out of business. . . . He died of aggravation. And I was practically the leader of it. I was dedicated . . . [but] also too young to appreciate anything . . . done for [me]. You are involved in a cause, and the cause is paramount.[37]

Another point of view came from a letter writer to the *Jewish Daily Forward:* "I am a Socialist and my boss is a fine man. I know he's a capitalist but I like him. Am I doing something wrong?"[38]

By no means did ethnic loyalty and participation in the same community institutions stop Jewish bosses and Jewish workers from fighting each other. Garment manufacturers organized among themselves, and during strikes they frequently hired Jewish goons to attack the workers. Arnold Rothstein, a Jewish underworld boss, was the son of a manufacturer and behind some of the Jewish gangs that terrorized unionists. And Jewish leftists in the furriers' union led by Ben Gold helped get the gangsters jailed. Workers went on strike against their kin.

Moreover, most workers dreamed of becoming something other than a worker. One of the avenues closest to hand was that of garment contractor or manufacturer, so that yesterday's worker could be tomorrow's boss.[39] But contrary to received wisdom, neither aspirations such as these nor close ties to the "enemy" class proved a barrier to Jewish working-class radicalism. Indeed, Jews probably had a higher per capita count of petty and not-so-petty businessmen in their communities than did most other European immigrant groups. Yet they were also among the most radical.

Although mothers occasionally declared "war" on exploitative merchants, on a daily basis they were in the trenches insuring that peddlers and local merchants functioned as part of the moral world of the working-class community. Here is historian Elizabeth Ewen on the daily life of a peddler:

> Every week Mr. Lefkowitz called for his twenty-five cent installment [on a sewing machine]. Sometimes he got it, more often he didn't. . . . Years passed: he was still coming for his installments and had become an old friend. There were tears in his eyes when he received his last twenty-five cents (after eighteen years). . . . [He] was a neighborhood fixture, performing a variety of services as he put together his income. . . . [H]e supplied wine and whiskey by the gallon for family celebrations, he bought black cloth for those who must go into mourning; he sold lottery tickets; and yet with all these irons in the fire, he was almost as poor as any of us.[40]

Merchants, men and women, were first of all neighbors who provided goods and services to other neighbors at prices that were affordable within the neighborhood. For some men, peddling was an alternative to factory work. For many Orthodox Jewish men, the flexible schedule gave them time for Torah study. Although some hoped to become rich, few did. Their poverty in turn reinforced merchants' and customers' interdependence and strengthened a community infrastructure that had a leveling effect on income.[41]

The fact that local merchants were also members of the ethnic community was a powerful lever for demanding their accountability to a morality of reciprocity. Merchants who were not members of that ethnic community might be freer to behave like profit-seeking businessmen, and it might be much more difficult for communities to call them to account.

Ethnicity has been an important idiom by which working-class women have enforced their values, but it has not been the only one. Although storekeepers, rabbis, and teachers have not always sided with workers, it has happened often enough (and sometimes across ethnic lines) to demand an explanation. Mr. Lefkowitz has plenty of company in the behavior of his occupational counterparts in other working-class communities. They have a good historical record of actively supporting many major industrial and social-justice struggles in the United States. From Appalachian textile towns and Rocky Mountain mining camps to East Coast neighborhoods of immigrant Europeans, shopkeepers, teachers, and clergy joined strikes, extending support and credit because their own survival lay with those who brought wages into the community. Their actions highlight the power of community morality on all who live in working-class communities.[42] Together with women's mutual aid networks this cultural value system is a class and ethnic political identity that has helped nineteenth- and twentieth-century working-class communities avoid the physical and moral isolation of households, incorporating them instead into community-based social universes in opposition to bourgeois organization and culture.

The working-class Jewish community as an economic and moral community has been larger than single neighborhoods. American patterns of racism and nativism have insured that ethnicity and culture transcend particular neighborhoods. Workers have depended upon far-flung social networks and voluntary associations made up of those of the same ethnicity for their jobs, housing, health, recreation, and marriage partners. Jews as well as other racially stigmatized people were constantly moving around within neighborhoods as well as into and out of them, so that ethnic communities have been simultaneously dispersed and local, with effective kinship networks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often spanning states and sometimes continents. Instead of a cash nexus dissolving reciprocity, working-class cultures used cash to expand its range. The widely understood moralities at the heart of political identification placed stringent constraints upon exploitative behavior. But they also helped ethnoracial working-class communities develop in new places and assisted people in their moves within and between them.

Jewish Womanhood

Jewish working-class culture had its own ideas about womanhood. They differed from those of the mainstream, not least by accepting women as strong economic and political actors. However, feminist scholars have pointed out that Jewish women were not the social equals of Jewish men, and that aspects of the community's notions of gender resonated with those of the mainstream. For example, patriarchal Jewish ideals of Talmudic scholarship for men and their right to economic support from women resonated with bourgeois values of patriarchal entitlement. Anzia Yezierska's novel *Bread Givers* is a moving portrait of a daughter's desperate struggle for independence from one such economically dependent father, an utter tyrant in his sense of entitlement to rule his family absolutely.[43]

Although the immigrant community buffered its members from daily contact with anti-Semitic stereotypes—of Jewish women as aggressive and coarse, and Jewish men as effeminate but lecherous knaves—charities, settlements, and other forms of uplift were an important point of contact with mainstream values. Charity was brought into the community largely by middle-class German Jews whose programs sought to make Jewish women more respectable and refined, and to make Jewish men more manly, more athletic, and brave.[44] When immigrants encountered their coreligionists' institutions of assimilation and uplift, this was the kind of Americanization they learned. There was also a strong assimilationist current in the Jewish socialism represented in the *Forward*, which was the most widely read paper in the community, and by a large part of the Socialist Party, which was quite influential in both garment unions. Nevertheless, real differences between Jewish and bourgeois ideals of domesticity persisted.

Even though Jewish women and bourgeois women were both expected to marry, and neither was expected to work for wages after marriage, *balebostes* (Jewish housewives) were not the same as their mainstream counterparts. A Jewish mother's sense of her work was similar to the preindustrial notion of mistress

of a household, whom Alice Kessler-Harris has described as someone who has socially recognized skills and knowledge of the domestic arts, who organizes her own work and that of junior members of the household, and who also invents and carries out a mixture of unwaged and entrepreneurial activities.[45] For Jewish mothers like my grandmother, the home was a crowded workshop, hardly a haven in a heartless world.

Jewish mothers' conceptions of their work also challenged bourgeois notions of a woman's place. "In most working-class families it was common practice for the husband to turn over his wages to his wife."[46] Part of a Jewish mother's labor was to manage a complex household economy that depended upon several wage earners and her own nonwaged labor. By controlling all household income, married women asserted the importance of their work as well as its continuity with waged work. The centrality of a household economy in practice and as a working-class woman's cultural ideal departed from the prevailing individualist idea that a wage is paid simply for work done for employers and that only wage labor is real work. Women's household management also challenged bourgeois notions of men as decision-making heads of households.

That claim was undermined by wage-earning husbands especially, and by sons and daughters who struggled to withhold all or part of their wage packets for personal use.[47] Nevertheless, mothers' constructions of their labor as skilled work performed by adult women as part of their social place in a household and community economy was broadly upheld by the practices of women and men of the community.

As the history of rent strikes and food riots showed so dramatically, Jewish motherhood also contained the notion of political activism as part of women's responsibility to their families and community. This community also voted strongly for suffrage and supported Jewish feminist agitation.[48] Mothers' political activism stemmed from their domestic authority and responsibility to do whatever it took to provide that home for family and kin, as well as from the construction of "private" as encompassing the household as part of the working-class community.[49]

Silent films were a new medium at the turn of the century, and no one was more addicted to them than the immigrant working class. In New York City, notes Sharon Pucker Rivo, about a quarter of Manhattan's populace "frequented the city's 123 film houses, close to a third of which were located on the Lower East Side." The earliest non-Jewish moviemakers like D. W. Griffith and Mack Sennett, aiming at these audiences, tended to portray Jewish immigrants as innocent, "harmless and unthreatening," victims of a cruel and unjust society. The first Jewish, and mainly male, film portraits of Jewish women emerged from Hollywood studios and New York Yiddish film producers after World War I. Here, Jewish immigrant women become strong mothers and daughters, holding together their families, maintaining their cultures and communities in the face of adversity. Even though the Hollywood versions had more of an airbrushed quality, in both "the images flickering on the screen reflect the self-assurance and strong character of the women involved with making the films, both behind the scenes and on the silver screen—Fannie Hurst, Frances Marion, Vera Gordon, Anzia Yezierska, Rosa Rosanova, Molly Picon, and Lila Lee."[50]

Although Jewish women were believed to be intensely sexual, at least after marriage, the recent record has been fairly silent on that aspect of women's Jewishness. However, June Sochen has pointed us at places to look for exploring Jewish women's bawdy side. Early-twentieth-century "red hot mamas" like Sophie Tucker were a kind of Jewish and comic counterpart of African American mothers of the blues. Indeed, Tucker frequented Harlem and Chicago blues clubs and knew Bessie Smith. Tucker, who described herself as the last of the red hot mamas, was one of many remaining Jewish mamas who still performed in the 1950s.

> "I Just Couldn't Make Ma Feelings Behave," one of her popular songs, declares an unspoken view in the 1910s and 1920s: that women have sexual feelings, that they have a right to them, and even further, could state them in public. Tucker was a large woman, probably weighing in at 180 pounds by 1916 when she opened at Riesenweber's, a new nightclub in New York; she did not fit society's image of a beautiful, desirable woman. Yet, like her black blues sisters, Tucker sang proudly of her needs and asserted her right to their fulfillment. All women, she implied, of whatever shape, had sexual natures. Besides Tucker, Millie DeLeon, Belle Barth, Belle Barker, Totie Fields, and many others operated within the bawdy comic genre. Contrary to the dominant representations of Jewish women, the bawdy Jewish woman entertainer has had a long history.

Sochen suggests that this tradition of "talking back" continues in Joan Rivers and Bette Midler.[51]

In Yiddish popular culture and daily expectations (if not in Hollywood), Jewish mothers were not expected to be ladylike. Mike Gold wrote of his mother, "How can I ever forget this dark little woman with bright eyes, who hobbled about all day in bare feet, cursing in Elizabethan Yiddish, using the forbidden words 'ladies' do not use, smacking us, beating us, fighting with her neighbors, helping her neighbors, busy from morn to midnight in the tenement struggle for life."[52] "Yiddishe Mamas" were often sentimentalized in story and song—from Scholem Asch to Sophie Tucker, and especially in Hollywood during the 1930s. Mother-blame was definitely not part of this culture.

Many years ago, Kamene Okonjo, in criticizing the sexism of Western treatments of Ibo political organization, pointed out the European incapacity to regard motherhood as a political status. Challenging Euro-American translations of Nigerian female leaders as queens, Okonjo noted, "In fact, she did not derive her status in any way from an attachment or relationship to a king. The word *omu* itself means 'mother,' being derived from . . . 'she who bears children.'" Unlike the bourgeois Western construct, Nigerian cultures recognize motherhood (in the sense of mother-of-one's-people) as a political status. So too did immigrant Jewish communities (and some recognized motherhood as a sexual status as well). In this they were similar to their immigrant Euro-American, African American, and Chicano/a counterparts.[53]

Expectations of Jewish daughters differed from those of their mothers, but also and even more sharply from those of bourgeois womanhood. If the womanhood of mothers centered around neighborhood, family relations, and unwaged labor, that of daughters centered around waged labor and the street, around a factory-based community and public leisure, both of which contravened confinement to a private sphere upon which bourgeois respectability depended.

Christine Stansell traced the roots of a widespread Euro-immigrant daughterhood to Irish immigrant youth culture of the streets. As Kathy Peiss has shown, Jewish women were among other young, immigrant women early in the twentieth century who used dress, style, and behavior to make a statement about who they were that rejected bourgeois notions of feminine refinement and domestic confinement. They created images of a working-class-conscious, heterosexual youth culture that grew up on the streets of New York. Jewish working girls participated fully in the commercial nightlife of dances, theaters, and eating places and especially in lectures and night school. Young working-class immigrant women claimed the streets and public spaces as theirs; they dressed to attract the attention of men. They frankly acknowledged their sexuality as expressive of power and subjectivity and as a means to get men to take them to the new public amusements they could not afford on women's low wages. The young Kate Simon gives us a rare look at young women's sense of themselves as sexual. Describing herself in the first fitted dress her mother made for her, after she had had her first menstrual period, she says:

> I might let Tony [a molesting barber] play his finger games under the sheet or punch his round belly. I might say "Son of a bitch" or even "You fucking bastard" to the humpbacked watchman if he tried to pinch my ass as I passed the factory, or dance around him, my skirt swirling flirtatiously, as he lumbered toward me. The next time I went to Helen Roth's house, her high-school brother would kneel and lay at my feet a sheaf of long-stemmed red roses. Federico De Santis and his brother Berto would stick daggers into each other for rivalrous love of me.
>
> I was ready for all of them and for Rudolph Valentino; to play, to tease, to amorously accept, to confidently reject.[54]

Sexuality and economics were interwoven in a direct challenge to parental notions of a household economy and authority over daughters. Jewish daughters struggled with themselves and their parents about how much, if any, of their wages to withhold for themselves.[55] Wages were the economic base of daughters' independence from both factory and family subordination. Jewish daughters did not have to assert their right to be working women or to be single for a period, but it was probably a struggle to be as independent of family demands as they might like to be.

Jewish daughterhood had its own characteristic forms of political activism, especially around unionization and fighting the garment bosses. In their struggles as wage earners, Jewish daughters were supported by their mothers and by more general community values. Wage earning was an honorable and expected contribution of sons and daughters equally. Their mothers' neighborhood networks provided the infrastructure for sustaining strikes and factory-based class militancy.

The immigrant Jewish daughters who animate recent historical work—and some of Barbra Streisand's most popular films, like *Yentl* and *The Way We Were*—are passionate beings. Their passions center around learning, independence, and personhood, but curiously, not around sexual expressiveness (which is not to be confused with romance).[56] Here even the feminist literature is relatively silent on specifically Jewish women's quests. We only know that daughters had an intense desire for learning and personhood. Community values rooted in eastern European secularism encouraged their passion for reading and for school, and mothers especially supported their daughters to the extent they could. Deborah Schneiderman was a single mother on the verge of starvation, but she worked nights in a factory and kept

her daughter Rose in school until she could no longer find night work. Only then did Rose leave school for the garment factory. Although young women dreamed of independence and escape from the shops, maybe to becoming a teacher (and saw schooling as useful to upward mobility), the passion for learning was at least as much to nourish the soul. As Orleck observed, "Reveling in beautiful language and debating difficult ideas made them feel that they had defeated those who would reduce them to machines."[57]

If mothers supported their daughters' aspirations and unionization, daughters also learned from their mothers about political struggle and the importance of their struggle for food, clothing, and shelter. In the memoirs of their sons and daughters, immigrant Jewish mothers never appear housebound but rather as "mediators between the home and the larger society of school, work, and recreation" as well as supporting their daughters' "aspirations and desires for independence and education."[58] Maybe, like my grandmother and my mother, these immigrant mothers also supported their daughters' dreams even when they believed the odds were against them.

But how did mothers respond to their daughters running the streets in a heterosocial youth culture replete with music, strong drink, and unsupervised, late-night entertainments? Here the record is strangely silent for both Jewish mothers and daughters. Indeed, I found scarcely anything about sex and the Jewish girl! Did mothers worry about their daughters' respectability? Surely they were aware that the police and the social work establishment frowned on such behavior. Did they share in that standard? Or did mothers see that they shared their daughters' economic dependence on men and wish them well in their quest for pleasure and sweetness? We do not yet have answers to these questions.

Despite the relative freedom that Jewish women had in comparison to bourgeois women, Alice Kessler-Harris's pioneering study showed long ago that the Jewish men in positions of union and community leadership subscribed to keeping women's activism to a confined and appropriately gendered space. Labor leaders like Pauline Newman, Rose Schneiderman, Fannia Cohn, and Rose Pesotta spent their political lives in struggle with a sexist, recalcitrant, and fundamentally conservative, male, union leadership. Clara Lemlich is known in history books as the "wisp of a girl" who ignited the crowd and the 1909 uprising of 20,000 women's garment workers in New York City. She later married and "disappeared," in much the same way that the political activism of mothers disappeared in Jewish men's histories of working-class politics—until feminist scholars unearthed it.

Historians Annelise Orleck and Joyce Antler have recently shown us that the married Clara Lemlich Shavelson was anything but inactive. Indeed, she pushed the limits of the acceptable in the eyes of her family—although, significantly, apparently not in the eyes of the community.[59] Like a good Jewish mother, Shavelson raised her children, but she did not give up her activism. As a Communist Party member, "she turned her attentions to a group that had been utterly ignored by trade unionists, socialists, and communists alike: working-class wives and mothers. For the next thirty-eight years, they would be her constituency."[60] She built a political constituency on the platform of community-sanctioned Jewish motherhood. In the World War I period, as a soapbox speaker in Brownsville, Shavelson organized food riots, kosher meat boycotts, and rent strikes in response to wartime inflation. She built ongoing tenant and consumer organizations that spread throughout Jewish New York. She was one of the founders of the United Council of Working Class Housewives (UCWCH) and, with other Communist Party women, struggled unsuccessfully to get the party to recognize the importance of women's consumer struggles.

Indeed, Shavelson made much of her motherhood in organizing. She often pointed out her children when they passed her speaker's platform on the way home from school. Her daughter hated it.

> I would kind of slink by and my friends would say: "Oh look, there's your mother." And I would say, "Come on, hurry up!" . . . Here she

was pointing at you: "And we have before you my child! My little girl! My Ritala. Ritala, stand up! Raise your hand. This is my little girl Ritala. And over there. . . . " By that time I had disappeared.[61]

Shavelson's organizing came into its own during the Depression. As a member of the Unemployed Council, the UCWCH, and the Emma Lazarus Council, a tenant association in Brighton Beach, Shavelson was involved in huge mobilizations to demonstrate, to block evictions effectively, and to demand local unemployment compensation. Through the Communist Party women's networks, the UCWCH was able in 1935 to spark an extraordinarily powerful, nationwide meat boycott that began in New York City, in the black neighborhood of Harlem and in Jewish neighborhoods, to protest the high cost of living.[62]

Resistance to Shavelson came not from the community but from a Communist Party that in the late 1930s struggled mightily against its women and against politicization of the Jewish version of motherhood that its women had begun to take into the streets across the nation. Avram Landy inveighed against Mary Inman's argument that "motherhood was a socially constructed institution subject to change through political organizing. 'Motherhood,' he wrote, 'is a phenomenon of nature and not of society.'" Women could only become equal to men by wage work and union membership.[63]

But the mass of Jewish daughters who worked in the garment shops and who joined the ILGWU en masse were treated as anything but equals by the men who ran their union. Despite the fact that garment union memberships were up to three-quarters women, the leadership remained almost completely male. There were women organizers and activists like Clara Lemlich and Theresa Malkiel, and there was the occasional officer like Pauline Newman, Fannia Cohn, Rose Schneiderman, and Rose Pesotta. Although these women and the rank-and-file young women they tried to represent had their own ideas about what they wanted from a union, their ideas differed sharply from those of their male leadership.

Just as Jewish mothers' sense of themselves as household managers animated their struggles for bread, Jewish daughters yearned for independence from subordination to families and factories. This vision sustained their struggles to build a union and to shape it to serve their needs for an institution that supported the kind of social and intellectual life that would validate them as people.

Young women's dreams may be hard to reconstruct, but as Alice Kessler-Harris suggested over twenty years ago, the lives and struggles of the Jewish working-class women leaders who came out of the garment union provide a record of their sisters' aspirations and the ways they were circumscribed and thwarted by the male ILGWU leadership. Rose Schneiderman and Pauline Newman had stormy relations with an ILGWU that refused to recognize them as equals or to acknowledge their efforts on behalf of women. They had difficulties too from a white and middle-class Women's Trade Union League that supported them as women but often participated in the racism and elitism of the larger society.[64] "'Remember Rose,' wrote Pauline, 'that no matter how much you are with the Jewish people, you are still more with the people of the League.'" But she also acknowledged that "[t]hey don't understand the difference between the Jewish girl and the gentile girl."[65]

From their struggles we can learn something of Jewish daughters' aspirations for independence and their visions of what it meant to them, of an alternative to factory and marital subordination. Their vision, as Kessler-Harris points out, was of a community of working women that could provide institutional alternatives to family-based subordination. They wanted their union to do this, to build a community for single women, to support their peer groups and interdependence without domesticity, for most, for a short period, and for some like Newman, Cohn, and Schneiderman, for life.

Young women garment workers wanted more from their union than wages, and they struggled with their male leadership to make the union a center for the kind of social life they

envisioned: low-cost vacation places for working women, insurance, worker education, the kinds of things that would support the independence and adulthood of single women.[66] A central need was for a program of worker education. All the female leaders of the ILGWU built such programs—and did so over the objections of their male leadership. Fannia Cohn devoted her life to worker education within and beyond the ILGWU. Moreover, it was the women members of dressmakers' Local 25 of the ILGWU whose efforts led to the creation of an educational department and to building Unity House, a union vacation house. The men disparaged them, saying:

> "What do the girls know—instead of a union they want to dance." But the women persisted, insisting that the union would be better if the members danced with each other. The women proved to be right. By 1919 Unity House . . . had moved to quarters capable of sleeping 900 people and two years later Local 25 turned it over to a grateful International.[67]

It was Fannia Cohn who made the ILGWU's extraordinarily vibrant Workers' Education Department a center of daily working-class life.[68] Women clearly built the ILGWU through their militant actions and their strategic leadership, but except for an occasional mention of their collective bravery or the young Clara Lemlich's charisma, they are virtually invisible in prefeminist Jewish labor history. Feminist scholars have started to show how the impetus for making unions a center of working-class daily life came from the ILGWU's women members, who craved for themselves something of the intellectual, recreational, and associational life that the community's institutions already gave to men, and they saw the union as their vehicle.[69]

That passion was also a quest for personhood and a resistance to domination that Orleck refers to as "industrial feminism." Suffrage was attractive to many immigrant daughters, who recognized that the race-based benefits of feminine refinement and male protection were white-only and never intended for them. Jewish women strikers were beaten by police and thugs

on picket lines. They were treated by judges and employers as bad girls "whose aggressive behavior made them akin to prostitutes." When the "mink brigades" of wealthy feminists put an end to police brutality by just showing up on the picket line, their presence made clear that there was one sexual morality for white middle-class women and another for them, and that while the former might benefit from being dependent good girls, this was not even an option for working-class Jewish women.[70] Immigrant daughters' desire for suffrage stemmed in part from their recognition that they were the only ones who would or could end the abuses they faced, and in part from their desire for financial independence.

They also resisted domestic subordination to men. Although Jewish women struggled with their fathers and husbands, there seems to have been less resistance to rights for women among ordinary men than there was among the male union leadership. Men on the Lower East Side voted strongly in favor of suffrage, but the leadership of the ILGWU consistently opposed it as a legitimate issue for the working class. To understand this, we need to explore the limitations Jewish male culture placed on Jewish women's independence.

Orleck argues that the ILGWU's resistance to women was rooted in the fact that they subscribed to a unionism that was "a muscular fraternity of skilled male workers," in their case located unfortunately in an industry with a female workforce. For them, a largely female rank and file was a necessary evil whose vision was hardly worthy of consideration. These leaders were also leaders of the Socialist Party, and their practices necessarily represented those of Jewish socialism. When it came to women's places, they were also not that different from the Communist Party. The communists tried to limit the activism of mothers after 1930; the socialists did the same to daughters.

Together, they reflected the limits to women's assertiveness in working-class Jewish culture. Jewish women may have had more latitude than did bourgeois ladies, but they had less than Jewish men. Jewish daughters were expected to marry; their

assertiveness and independence were temporary. Rose Schneiderman's mother warned "Rose that if she pursued a public life she would never find a husband. No man wants a woman with a big mouth."[71] To choose a lifelong career of activism and forgo marriage as Newman, Schneiderman, Cohn, and Pesotta all did was a hard path for a Jewish woman to take. Schneiderman and Newman kept quitting and returning. All four women were excluded from the informal male life of the union and continually struggled against loneliness.[72] There was no social place for grown women in the union because women were expected to find their place by marriage. In their struggles to make the union a social center for women, daughters were seeking at least a complement to marriage and family centeredness with its ultimate subordination of women.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the experience of Jewish working-class identity, the ways that it constructed Jewish men and women, and the ways that those constructions shaped their political activism. These immigrants distinguished the Jewish way of life from the dominant white middle-class culture by the nature of the relationships they created with each other. This does not mean that Jewishness was in full or even consistent opposition to bourgeois life, just that it more or less consistently marked itself as different and separate from it. This is especially true in the emphasis in Jewishness on reciprocity in structuring intracommunity institutions and relationships, and in working-class constructions of womanhood. These were key aspects of the social structure and values by which the Jewish community identified itself.

First and most generally, a culture of reciprocity underlay the creation of relationships and institutions. This was manifest in the centrality of mutual benefit and labor union organization to community structure, in the proliferation of housing cooperatives, in the structuring of same-sex social relations, in inter-

household relationships, and in efforts to enforce reciprocal ideals upon local merchants. These ideals gave strength to class struggles against employers from their own ethnic community. When they did not behave as "landsmen," they were greedy bosses, beyond the pale of kinship. Leftist political organizing built upon this culture of reciprocity.

Second, women and most men rejected the ideals of bourgeois domesticity in favor of alternative measures of womanhood that supported women as wage earners, family managers, and political citizens within and beyond their communities. However, male-dominated socialist and union politics did not build upon this dimension of class consciousness. Indeed, the political cultures of the Jewish Left seem to have been blind to the alternative constructions of themselves that women developed. Political organizing certainly benefited from women's aspirations even without understanding them. However, the Jewish men's leadership undercut this emerging working-class feminist consciousness even as it built upon, or more accurately, appropriated it.