

## YICCHUS - (STATUS)

So great is the Jewish "commercial spirit," so omnipresent, and so much part of Jewish religious teachings themselves, that, beginning in the 19th century, many Jews socializing into "civil" Christian society found themselves embarrassed by the crass behavior that resounded from the Orthodox synagogues. "There were many modern, acculturated Jews," observes Howard Sachar, "who were increasingly repelled by the synagogue's cacophony: the nasal singing, the selling of prayers, the gossiping of women in the gallery, the absence of decorum." [SACHAR, p. 159]

"In Judaism," says Martin Sklare, "there is no sharp division between the sacred and secular, and consequently little development of separate norms in each area. This system conflicts with the Christian -- and American -- one which distinguishes between the sacred and profane, defines which situations belong to each category, and provides for special behavior." [SKLARE]

In other words, in Orthodox Judaism everything anywhere may be "profaned;" there is no physical sanctuary -- including a synagogue -- from the ubiquitous prowl of economic exploits (the Sabbath -- the day of rest -- is, for the religious, the exceptions). Jay Gonen notes an old joke about Jewish obsession with money even in religious contexts, circulated not by Gentile anti-Semites, but by Jews in Israel:

"Two Jews, by a miracle, find time to pause and reflect in front of a holy site, the Wailing Wall, or the western wall of the Second Temple. One of them notices that the other is weeping profusely over the destruction of the Second Temple. 'Why are you crying so much?' he says, 'True, the Temple has been destroyed, but the lot is still worth something.'"  
[GONEN, p. 27]

Jewish comedian Joan Rivers explains materialist and ostentatious Jewish identity this way: "I'm Jewish. If God wanted me to exercise he would've put diamonds on the floor." [SAPOSNIK, 1998] One of Jewish comedian Milton Berle's jokes went: "A Jewish youngster asked the boy next door to play with him. The boy answered, 'My father says I can't play with you because you're Jewish.' The Jewish lad answered, 'Oh, that's all right. We won't play for money.'" [BERLE, M., 1996, p. 311] Or, "The Israelis have just developed a brand-new car. It not only stops on a dime, it picks it up." [BERLE, M., 1996, p. 305] And: "Why did the Israelis win the Six-Day War?" "Because the equipment was rented." [BERLE, M., 1996, p. 305]

Another joke of the same genre circulated in the American Jewish community runs like this:

"And then there was the Jewish Santa Claus. He came down the chimney and said: 'Hi, kids. Want to buy some presents?'" [BLOOMFIELD, p.

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Another joke even addresses manipulation of anti-materialist notions of respect in the Gentile world towards Jewish economic advancement:

"A wealthy Boston Brahmin was on his deathbed. The end was near, and he asked his three business partners, a Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew, to come to the hospital to discuss some matters pertaining to his estate.

'You boys know I have no family,' he began, 'so I'm dividing my wealth among the three of you, in three equal shares. As a sign of your good friendship, however, I would like each of you to make a token gesture after I'm gone, by putting a thousand dollars into my coffin before it is lowered into the ground.'

Several days later, the funeral was conducted according to the wishes of the deceased. At the appropriate time, the Catholic friend walked up to the coffin and placed in it an envelope containing one thousand dollars. The Protestant friend came forward and did likewise. Finally, the Jew walked up to the coffin, took out the two envelopes, and replaced them with a check for three thousand dollars." [NOVAK/WALDOKS, 1981, p. 95]

As always in Jewish folklore, Gentiles are -- to the wily, down-to-earth Jew -- stupid.

William Novak and Moshe Waldoks call the following joke "a favorite, found in most collections of Jewish humor":

"A minister, a rabbi, and a priest were discussing how they made use of the funds in the collection plate. The minister said, 'I draw a line on the floor, and I throw the money into the air. Everything that lands to the right of the line is for God; everything on the left is for me.'

'That's pretty much what I do,' said the priest. 'But instead of a line, I draw a circle. Everything in the circle is for God; everything outside the circle I keep for myself.'

'I, too, have a system,' said the rabbi, 'I take the money and throw it up in the air, and whatever God catches He can keep.'" [NOVAK/WALDOKS, 1981, p. 95]

Such observations about Jewish values are acceptable, and *common*, within the Jewish community itself but, as Jewish scholar Nancy Jo Silberman-Federman notes, such a joke told from a Gentile would flag him or her as an anti-Semite. She notes the self-deprecating (and/or exploitive) tone of many Hanukkah cards sent by Jews to each other:

"[In one case] the front of the card pictures a Jewish woman hugging Santa. The copy reads, 'Merry Christmas! Thank goodness for Gentiles.' The inside reads, 'Somebody has to buy retail!' If certain jokes are told by non-Jews, both the teller and the joke would be considered anti-Semitic ... This [celebrating of such jokes in Jewish circles] may be seen socially as a mechanism for in-group solidarity."  
[SILBERMAN-FEDERMAN, p. 220]

Whereas in most -- if not all -- other religious faiths, adherents seek physical refuge from the anchors of materialist concern while they pray, in Orthodox Judaism, overt pecuniary transactions -- involving personal egos and status assertion -- are an integral part of the traditional Jewish religious service itself. Jewish sociologist Martin Sklare calls it "commercialism in the synagogue." This includes "shenodering, the pledging of money for the opportunity of participating in the Torah service ... , the holding of auctions during holidays and festival services for the purpose of 'selling' certain particularly honorific privileges; by stimulating competitive instincts, large amounts may be pledged; and the Yom Kippur appeal: fund raising which takes place during *Kol Nidre*, a particularly holy service." [SKLARE, p. 363]

To traditional Christian -- and other religious temperaments -- such vulgarization in a "House of God" inevitably calls to mind the old Christian story of Jesus becoming outraged at the Israelite money changers on Temple grounds. [Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11: 15-17; Luke 19: 45-46] What kind of religion, non-Jews have found themselves asking through history, is this?

In modern times, of course, to ask such a question is to attract assault as an "anti-Semite." And, however bizarre, Jewish scholar Sara Horowitz's comments, post Holocaust, in linking Jesus' outrage at Jewish money-dealing in the sacred Temple to the Nazi persecution of Jewry is typical:

"The New Testament [has] multiple descriptions of Jews defiling the Temple and Jesus' consequent need to purify the holy space by throwing out the Jewish money changers ... Historically, the image of the Jewish money changer whose presence defiles sacred space conflates with Jews as money lender, with the typing of the Jew as materialist and avaricious. Jewish attachment to money over attachment to God, to nation, or to other people is repeatedly portrayed in Nazi propaganda newsreels and feature films." [HOROWITZ, p. 125]

But even when the Zionist "father" of modern Israel, Theodore Herzl, visited (in the late 19th century) the famed Jerusalem Wailing Wall, the supposed last remaining edifice of the ancient Temple itself, so revered in Jewish religious tradition and a magnet to Jewish pilgrims, he could only write with disdain that "we have been to the Wailing Wall. A deeper emotion refused to come, because that place is pervaded by a hideous, wretched, speculative beggary." [HERZL, in PATAI, p. 746-747]

Isaac Baer Levinsohn describes the Eastern European synagogue of the nineteenth century:

"Each ... synagogue abides by ... only general disorder ... This [person] jumps while another shouts; this one moans his loss while another one complacently smokes ... One has just begun his prayer as another has finished it ... this one jokes and pulls another by the ear. Quarrels and fisticuffs often ensue about private as well as public matters ... One aspires to be the sixth to come up to the Torah, another seeks the honor of taking the Torah out of the Ark and often they quarrel on that account." [SACHAR, p. 217]

As many Jews, leaving their ghettos and Orthodox Judaism in the 19th century attuned themselves to surrounding Christian "civil" society, many became concerned about "embarrassing solicitations" in the synagogue. One American Conservative Judaism publication even chastised its community, saying:

"There is no charitable expression in the English language that can connote the desecration of a Torah honor and the degradation of a House of Worship into a market place of vulgar vanities and rude commercialism." [SKLARE, p. 363]

Sklare describes Orthodox religious gatherings:

"The Orthodox shul with the accompanying multitudinous prayers, jams of people and children, all joined together in a cacophonous symphony of loud and sometimes raucous appeals to the Almighty." [SKLARE, p. 372]

"The Orthodox synagogue," says James Yaffe, "seemed [to Reform-minded Jews] dirty, shabby, unruly, un-American." [YAFFE, J., 1968, p. 98] Conversely, even today in America, notes Solomon Poll,

"the Hasidim [ultra-Orthodox Jews] noticed the great tendency to imitate the non-Jews. Jewish weddings had bridal processions. The groom was led in by his own parents; the rabbi also participated in the bridal procession; ushers attended the ceremony; the rabbi made a speech during the ceremony; pictures were taken -- many times, movies. All these appeared to the Hasidim as mockeries and imitation

of the goyim to which they vehemently objected." [POLL, 1969, p. 41]

Martin Sklare notes that one of the major affectations in the creation of the modern Conservative Judaism movement was a change toward "decorum." In Orthodox Judaism, he notes, "should a worshipper consistently adopt what would generally be considered a reverent demeanor ... his deportment might well be the subject of intense criticism ... The form of Orthodox worship does seem to be almost unique in its lack of solemnity." [SKLARE, p. 361] Although, "when I was a boy," says Earl Shorris, "I was told that the reason why there was no musical instruments in the synagogue was that we were mourning the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem." [SHORRIS, E., 1982, p. 89]

The novelist Herman Wouk wrote with fondness about his memories of Orthodox synagogue culture brought to America with Jews from Eastern Europe:

"Calls to the Torah, opening of the Ark, and so forth, all went for a price. The auctions were colorful and exciting enough, but the mood of prayer naturally vanished while they went on. They were often pretty long. During the reading of the Torah, moreover, it became the practice of each man, as he was called to his aliya, or reading turn, to announce his contribution to the synagogue's many charities. For each announcement he or his family received a public blessing by the shamas. Again this was a process of high economic value, but not attuned to the thoughts of the higher world ...

They enabled many tiny congregations to survive and grow into majestic congregations and fashionable temples. With the prospering of the Jewish community, these devices of desperation have gradually given way to conventional fund raising.

'Five dollars for the third reading!' Nor do I want to forget the historic auction one Yom Kippur afternoon nearly forty years ago, in a synagogue in a Bronx cellar, when my father outbid men with far more money (though they were all poor struggling immigrants) for the reading of the Book of Jonah ... These auctions are a thing of the past and it is better so, but they served a purpose. Children in such synagogues learned unmistakably what a precious thing a call to the Torah was."

[WOUK, p. 123-125]

The value of the Torah would seem to suggest a price tag. Auctioning off the rights to recite prayers and announcing in public, each in turn, individuals' charitable contributions reveals a lot more about Jewish

merchant culture -- and its pressures, struggles for community status, and symbiotic religious dogma -- than it does anything remotely spiritual. Wouk's fond memories for all the big bills flying around the Torah in his synagogue (albeit for religious intention) reflect a nakedly material concern. Such activity reaffirms what the Torah was largely intended as: recipes, rules, and regulations for Jewish self-advancement in a hostile political world, or -- as apologists like to frame it -- communal survival through the centuries. Wouk's childhood memories of high auction recitation prices confirming the Torah's value are obviously rooted in pride for his father and his status as an economic victor, as well as a general fascination with the wheeling and dealing of a street bazaar. Even the synagogue could function as a forum to celebrate human vanity in one's ability to pay for something, in this case the right to recite sacred texts. (Synagogue members have even been sued in recent years for not paying membership dues. In Rockaway, New York, for example, in 2001 David Slossberg and three others were sued for back payment by the White Meadow Temple.) [GOLDWERT, M., 1-5-01] "Conspicuous charity," wrote Judith Kramer and Seymour Levantman about the Jewish American community in 1961, "is less a matter of religious or ideological commitment than a conventional social obligation serving as a source of status." [KRAMER, p. 101]

Anthony Polonsky notes the Jewish tradition of "ostentatious generosity" in seventeenth century Poland:

"Was this piety on the part of a few rich individuals shared by all Jews? To answer this question clearly, one must study the religious attitudes of the time. It seems that participation in services was motivated more by a desire to shine in public than by profound faith. If previously a synagogue seat was a sign of respectability in the community, now unfortunately they were being sold. Indeed, the practice of buying seats, backed by a deed of sale became common." [POLONSKY, p. 59]

For an Eastern European Jewish community ever fixated upon worldly accomplishment and the hierarchical status of respective members, even in their most holy religious center "the *prosteh yidh* [common Jews] sat at the back of the synagogue." [ZBOROWSKI, p. 74]

In the late 1950s the American Jewish poet, d. a. levy, wrote:

My father and i  
 went to a temple to hear  
 the services  
     sat down in time  
     to hear the haunting  
     language for just a moment  
 when someone told us we had to stand in the  
 back - we had chosen 'reserved seats'

seats that had been paid for  
 we left and it was there i completed  
 my external jewish education [PORTER, p. 126]

As James Yaffe observed in 1968:

"The synagogue charges no admissions fee to services, except on High Holy Day, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hoshanah, when everybody comes to worship. Then most synagogues require worshipers to buy tickets, and many sell reserved seats; the closer to the altar, the higher the price ... 'Passing the plate' is not a custom in the synagogue. Sometimes a plain white envelope is left on the worshiper's seat. Inside he finds a slip of paper with his name on it, and a list of suggested contributions, from twenty dollars up; he will put a check next to the amount he prefers, and slip the piece of paper back into the envelope. In old-fashioned Orthodox synagogues the method is often less decorous; the rabbi reads out the member's names, and each man is expected to call out how much he intends to give." [YAFFE, J., 1968, p. 154]

Jewish student Silja Talvi complains about this Jewish tradition of charging steep admission to the most sacred of Jewish holy days (she blames "capitalism" for this custom, however, and rationalizes that the high prices are somehow useful in keeping "psychopathic anti-Semites" out of synagogues):

"It is not a stretch to surmise that many more established synagogues have taken their cues from the capitalist economy that surrounds them, having arrived at the point of valuing finances about kehilla [community]. For all this kvetching about all the lost, unaffiliated Jews, how many among the country's mainstream Jewish religious leadership have stopped to think about dropping cost-prohibitive barriers to getting in through the front door? ... In this regard, Jewish religious institutions would do well to take inspiration from the Lubavitchers and Christian churches alike: Free admission, fundraising drives and donation baskets have a certain logical and friendly appeal, especially for those unaffiliated, lower-income Jews who have reason to feel uneasy about spending close to \$100 to be allowed a seat at a temple to spend the day or evening in prayer. Non-Jews who have overheard me in conversation about the fees involved in obtaining tickets for Jewish holiday services have expressed confusion at the very existence of fee schedules and entrance tickets. The tickets, I explain, are a necessary and common-sense precaution for Jewish institutions that hope to make it more difficult for psychopathic anti-Semites to walk through their doors. But why the high cost, they ask? For once,

I don't have a good answer." [TALVI, S., 2001]

Convert to Judaism Lydia Kukoffmn explains the Jewish idea of "paying to pray" like this:

"I remember how put off I was at the thought of tickets for religious services. It was so foreign to my way of thinking. Over the years, however, I have come to realize that, although I may still resist the idea of paying to pray, it is the one time of the year when the temple is able to assure its continuity, and thereby its potential for service to its members." [KUKOFF, L., 1981, p. 84-65]

There are even Jewish jokes about such materialism in the synagogue:

"It is Yom Kippur. A man comes to the synagogue in a state of obvious excitement. The usher is at the door looking at admission tickets. As the man tries to walk in, the usher stops him: 'Let's see your ticket.'

'I don't have a ticket. I just want to see my brother, Abe Teitelbaum. I have an important message for him.'

'A likely story. There's always someone like you, trying to sneak in in for the High Holy Day services. Forget it, friend. Try somewhere else.'

'Honest. I swear to you. I have to tell my brother something. You'll see. I'll only be a minute.'

The usher gave him a long look. 'All right,' he says, 'I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. You can go in. But don't let me catch you praying!'" [SILBIGER, S., 2000, p. 44]

Paul Cowan recalls the synagogue memories of his father (former CBS-TV president Lew Cowan):

"Once, when I was a boy, my father told me that he recalled the Yom Kippurs he went to synagogue and watched Jake Cohen [Lew's father] weep and beat his breast to atone for his sins. Then, after services, Lou would walk home with his parents and the rest of the huge Cohen clan and listen, appalled, as they fought over status and money; as they gossiped cruelly about siblings who weren't there. That wasn't religion, my father would tell me angrily. That was hypocrisy." [COWAN, P., 1982, p. 6]

In 1982, Earl Shorris recalled his childhood memories of the kinds of men who headed his synagogue:



"We arrived at the synagogue as a family, three generations led by my grandfather ... My grandfather spoke to his friend Eddie -- Big Eddie, he called him. They spoke as members of the board of directors of the synagogue, important men, big donors. My grandfather earned his money from the labor of Italian and Polish women who sewed clothing in his factories. Big Eddie sold cheap wine and whiskey to the poor of the town. We did not approve of Big Eddie. His diamond ring and his fat cigar offended us ... [H]is business offended us. There were fights in front of his store, stabbings, more than one killing. There were rumors about him. Some people said he dealt with criminals. It is said that he gave so much to the synagogue to atone for the way he made his money ... He traded donations for a position as a director of the synagogue. My grandfather said Eddie wanted to be president, that he was willing to donate a community center if the directors would elect him president .... [SHORRIS, E., 1982, p. 3-4] [When Big Eddie finally strode up at the synagogue to be so honored, "the man our community commended to God" (p.7)] the color of his flesh was as rich and vulgar as his suit. [Grandfather,] you were so small, so pale beside him. Jerusalem was conquered, the Temple was destroyed, and there was no prophet in all of Israel. After the service I asked my father why it had happened. Money, was all he said. Sometimes you have to do these things, my grandfather added. A building doesn't come cheap." [SHORRIS, E., 1982, p.7]

Jewish pride and concern for status and material affluence has a long history. There is a Yiddish word for it: *yicchus*, which connotes the traditional Jewish importance of personal and familial prestige, status, and a respected reputation in the community. This *yicchus* could be obtained for parents by their children's marriage to a spouse of higher standing. But *yicchus* could be lost too, for instance, by stooping to manual labor. [ZBOROWSKI, p. 78]

"In his ghetto community [the Jew] strove for *yicchus*," wrote Harry Golden, "a word which has remained to this day the most important word in Jewish culture ... [It] is more than a thousand years old ... Yiddish and Hebrew are filled with words denoting the nuances of community standing." [CUDDIHY, p. xi]

Originally supposedly rooted in family genealogies and scholarship, it also grew to reflect upper class occupations, material affluence, and -- for many -- ostentatious display of ownership. As Zborowski and Herzog put it:

"Historically, traditionally, ideally, learning has been and is regarded as the primary value and wealth as subsidiary or complementary. Economic pressures and outside influence have made of wealth a constant contender for first place in the value hierarchy." [ZBOROWSKI, p. 74]

David Koskoff even suggests that the idea of the marriage bond expressed as expensive jewelry has roots in ancient Jewish history, where the wedding ring had to be

"large, heavy, and gold. It was expected to be of a specified value and fully paid for! Indeed, in the Hebrew stipulation that the ring must have a stipulated value, we see, perhaps, the origins of later customs which laid down that a wedding ring must be durable and of some worth -- not a mere trifle ... The basic principle survives today. It is not the thought that counts, it is the money." [KOSKOFF, p. 273]

In non-religious Jewish circles, the principles of economic status (and embarrassment) are the same. "Community pressure can be exerted in many other ways," says Yaffe,

"Some [Jewish] federations publish a book at the end of each [fund-raising] campaign, in which the names of all contributors and the amounts of their contributions are listed. In Cleveland this book is mailed free of charge to every affiliated member of the Jewish community ... [YAFFE, J., 1968, p. 172] ... [At fund-raising dinners] the same thing goes on ... After the food and the speeches, the name of each guest is read out from a stack of cards, and he is required to stand up and announce how much he intends to give -- and to hand in his signed pledge then and there." [YAFFE, J., 1968, p. 173]

Zalman Schachter was asked why many young Jews in the post-1960s era left Judaism for other faiths like Buddhism. "First," he replied,

"it doesn't feel real if it comes from their own thing. If you come to shul on Yom Kippur -- this is the gross level, yah? -- and you know you're going to be hit for the United Jewish Appeal and the building fund, you can't take your own tradition seriously." [KAMENETZ, R., 1994, p. 150]

The above kinds of expression of Jewish competitive pride, material self-worth, ostentation, and economic centeredness even at the heart of their religion -- often aggravating anti-Jewish sentiment in surrounding Gentile populations -- have been widely criticized.

The wealthy Jewish gravitation to ostentation in Amsterdam (in the 1500s and 1600s) is noted by Jewish scholar Herbert Bloom:

"If we compare [in Amsterdam] the Sephardic Jews' luxurious and extravagant lifestyle with the simpler and more restrained ways of

the average wealthy Dutchman, the contrast is striking and served to accentuate the traditional association between the Jew and money."  
[BLOOM, H., p. xvi]

"In Germany," notes Joachim Prinz,

"forty Marrano ['secret' Jewish] families participated in founding the Bank of Hamburg in 1619, and by the middle of that century they were accused of having too luxurious a life style, as evidenced by their palatial homes and their ostentatious funerals and weddings ... Some of the finest homes in Amsterdam belonged to newly arrived Marranos." [PRINZ, J., 1973, p. 127]

Oscar Rank (formerly Rosenfeld), an earlier Jewish psychoanalyst and follower of Sigmund Freud in the early 1900's, complained that Jews in Vienna go "out of boredom to the synagogue and reduce it to a place of business, as if it were a branch of the stock exchange. The women show off their dresses, or what is beneath them; the men discuss petty affairs, but not what is beneath them." [KLEIN] Walter Rathenau, the first Jewish foreign minister of Germany, noted (in 1897) Jewish ostentatious display in Germany, where he spotted "the curious vision of a completely alien tribe of people, conspicuously overdressed, of mobile and hot-blooded gesture. An Asiatic horde here on the sands of Brandenburg!" [GRUNFELD, F., 1996, p.. 203]

Another Jew, Mordechai Breuer, took a harsher look at the European synagogue tradition as Jewry looked at itself during the Enlightenment: "What will the *goyim* say? was the question many an Ashkenazi Jew asked himself in view of the uncouth behavior, noisy commotion, and lack of formal structure that had established themselves in numerous synagogues." [BREUER, p. 244]

Walter Lippman, a prominent American journalist of German-Jewish descent, complained about excessive expressions of ostentation in the Jewish community of New York City in the early decades of the twentieth century:

"The rich and vulgar and pretentious Jews of our big cities are perhaps the greatest misfortune that has ever befallen the Jewish people. They are the real fountain of anti-Semitism. They are everywhere in sight, and though their vices may be no greater than those of other jazzy elements in the population, they are a thousand times more conspicuous... When they rush about in super-automobiles, bejeweled and be-furred and painted and overbarbered, when they build themselves French chateaus and Italian palazzi, they stir up the latent hatred against crude wealth in the hands of shallow people: and that hatred diffuses itself. They undermine the natural liberalism of the American people... The Jew is conspicuous, and unless in his own conduct of life he manages

to demonstrate the art of moderate, clean and generous living, every failure will magnify itself in woe upon the heads of the helpless and unfortunate. " [LIPPMAN, Quoted in Cuddihy, p. 143]

Harold Hochschild, Jewish chairman of a mining conglomerate, noted in a private memo in 1940 that

"Anyone who visits restaurants, theatre or other places of entertainment in New York especially on Saturday or holiday nights, who has traveled on large pleasure-cruise ships, or who has seen certain types of Jewish summer hotels or camps near similar Gentile resorts must admit that differences in behavior play a strong part in anti-Semitism ... It may not be morally wrong for Jewish women to overdress and overload themselves with jewelry and makeup, but these habits are certainly repugnant to many Gentiles." [HOCHSCHILD, A., 1986, p. 184]

Even Chaim Weitzmann, a pioneer Zionist and first President of modern Israel, had deep concern about many American Jews and their self-created magnetism for anti-Jewish hostility. "He believed," says Peter Grose, "that the [American] anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s was partly the Jews own fault." Weitzmann worried that

"Along with a new generation of modest and honest workers, there is a certain part of Jewish bourgeoisie -- rich, quasi-powerful, loud, vulgar, pulling a weight far in excess of their numbers, ostentatious, in the eyes of the Gentiles they and they alone represent Jewry, and this is a grave danger." [GROSE, p. 167]

A compilation of non-Jewish observers were featured in an article about anti-Semitism in the American Hebrew of 1890, says Marie-Jane Rochelson:

"Possible reasons cited for the dislike of Jews included their commercial 'sharpness,' their 'clannishness,' and their 'vulgar' ostentation in dress and manners. It is hardly surprising that [prominent Jewish author Israel] Zangwill's portrait of wealthy, materialistic, and family-oriented Jews in 'Grandchildren' [a chapter in one of his books] evoked discomfort [among Jewish readers]." [ZANGWILL, 1998, p. 26]

The respected Danish-American social crusader, Jacob Riis, and Lewis Hine, were the foremost photographic chroniclers of immigrant life in New York City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, bringing to public attention the harsh urban conditions of the new poor and dispossessed from all over the world. Observing the Jewish community, Riis wrote:

"Money is their God. Life is of so little value compared with even

the leanest bank account. In no other spot does life wear so intensely BALD and materialist an aspect in Ludlow Street ... Proprieties do not count on the East Side; nothing counts that cannot be converted into hard cash." [RIIS, quoted in CUDDIHY, p. 140]

"The great mass of American Jews," wrote Jewish author Ralph Boas in 1917, "have sunk into a comfortable materialism ... The sad result is that in prosperity the Jewish self-consciousness ceases to be religious and becomes merely racial." [BOAS, p. 150] "The Jew party [was] appalling," [future First Lady] Eleanor [Roosevelt] had written her mother-in-law in 1918 after an evening with [influential Jewish mogul/politician] Bernard Baruch, "I never wish to hear money, jewels or sables mentioned again." [GOODWIN, D.K., 1995, p. 102]

Jews in early 20th century America, notes sociologist John Higham, were popularly seen as

"the quintessential parvenu -- glittering with conspicuous and vulgar jewelry ... attracting attention by clamorous behavior, and always forcing his way into society that was above him. To treat this stereotype entirely as a scapegoat for somebody else's psychological frustrations is to overemphasize the irrational sources of 'prejudice' and to clothe the Jews in defensive innocence." [MACDONALD, p. 49]

In mid-twentieth century, Judith Kramer and Seymour Levantman noted that

"Lacking occupational variety and economic *yichus* (the prestige of old and respected family businesses), [second generation Jewish Americans] substituted money as the measure of success. Money, and what it can buy, has remained the major source of status stratifying the [Jewish American] gilded ghetto and justifying its popular appellation." [KRAMER, p. 13]

In 1998, apologist Jewish professor Judith Elkin sought to explain parallel kinds of Jewish ostentation away in Latin America, explaining that "for tourists unfamiliar with the prevailing ostentatious lifestyle of the wealthy, the expectation of Jewish wealth may appear to be borne out on first contact with mercantile and industrial entrepreneurs, especially in the Caribbean basin ... Actually, a princely lifestyle can be sustained in Peru, Colombia, Mexico, or Brazil quite cheaply, and a household with five or six servants may be only middle class in terms of the net financial worth of the head of household." [ELKIN, p. 156]

Jewish historian Howard Sachar also notes Jewish communal ostentation in the *public* sphere throughout Latin America:

"In Sao Paolo [Brazil], as in Mexico City or Buenos Aires [Argentina],

a major focus of Jewish identity is a luxurious sports facility-country club-community center ... Like its model in Buenos Aires, it is called Hebraica ... Not to be outdone, the Jews of Rio have constructed their own modern Hebraica building on the prestigious Rua des Laranjeiras. A seven-story building, it is equipped with comparable facilities." [SACHAR, H., 1985, p. 262]

The sister of Jewish comedian Roseanne Barr remembers growing up in Salt Lake City and her feelings when she her family went to the local synagogue: "In a synagogue parking lot filled with Mercedeses, Lincolns, and Cadillacs, our old Chevy stood out like a sore thumb." [BARR, p. 3] Barr eventually made it big in Hollywood where many famous moguls go home at the end of the work day to nearby Beverly Hills, a famed and wealthy enclave that is largely Jewish. (According to the local Jewish Federation Council, the 1990s population of Beverly Hills was 62% Jewish). [HASSE, 1998] Beverly Hills, notes Jewish journalist Connie Bruck, is "one of the most ostentatious displays of wealth that exists in this country, a town that spawns every excess that money can buy." [BRUCK, p. 80] This city, adds Janet Steinberg, "is the quintessential symbol of opulent California life." [STEINBERG, J., 7-15-99, p. 37] As Jewish professor Barry Shain notes about this lifestyle: "I understand [President Bill Clinton's sex playmate] Monica Lewinsky [who was raised in Beverly Hills, and is Jewish] very well. I never knew her personally, but I went to Beverly Hills High School. I understand her moral life from my experiences growing up with those wealthy Jewish women. They look upon the world as an opportunity to amuse themselves." [LUCIER, J., 3-2, 98, p. 12]

There are those who think that Palm Beach, Florida, is more "decadent" than Beverly Hills. One Washington DC newspaper declared, for instance, that Palm Beach is "the wealthiest and most decadent, glamorous and self-indulgent place on earth." Not surprisingly, the population of metropolitan Palm Beach, too, is over 50 percent Jewish. [CHAFFEE, K., 12-3-1999, p. C12] "In 1962," noted the Palm Beach Post in 1999, "only about 3,000 Jewish people lived in the greater West Palm Beach area. Today, estimates put that number at 100,000." [HAYES, R., 1-26-99, p. 2B] The results of this invasion into a once predominantly WASP enclave is noted by Jewish author Ronald Kessler who has written an entire book about Palm Beach, highlighting what he describes as "anti-Semitism": "I tried to lean over backwards not to probe too deeply into anti-Semitism on the island. But I soon learned that I would be missing a big chunk of the story [of Palm Beach] if I skirted a subject that made me uncomfortable professionally and that was personally painful." [KESSLER, R., 1999, p. 68] Symbolic perhaps of the changing elite guard, is the fact that *The Social Index Directory*, an elitist listing of Palm Beach society people, "is now owned by the family of Robert Gordon, who is Jewish." [KESSLER, R., 1999, p. 9] Although Jews have their own exclusive country club in Palm Beach (the Palm Beach Country Club), with 350 members, Kessler assails the non-Jewish community, complaining that "the [WASP] aristocrats are still in charge [of Palm Beach], the upper crust intact, the future of WASPdom secure." [KESSLER, R., 1999, p. 52]

Melvin Urofsky notes the 1940s visit of eventual Israeli prime minister Golda Meir to Palm Beach:

"At Palm Beach, Florida, she was stunned at the elegance of the dinner crowd, their jewels and furs, and she mentally contrasted the scene of wealthy men and women vacationing in their posh resorts and that of Haganah [the early Israeli army] soldiers freezing in the Judean hills. 'These people don't want to hear about fighting and death in Palestine,' she thought, but she was wrong, and before the evening had ended, they had pledged her \$1.5 million, enough to buy a winter coat for every soldier in the Haganah." [UROFSKY, M., 1978, p. 162]

How about the posh Hamptons enclave for the super-rich on Long Island, New York? "The placement of the Jewish Community Center so prominently at the entrance to the town," notes Steven Gaines,

"gave [Jewish real estate baron Evan] Frankel great satisfaction over the years and had its desired effect, particularly during the Jewish High Holidays, when Woods Lane was line end to end with the luxury cars of those attending services. One year, a local man was provoked to count the number of German-made cars parked in front of the synagogue and remark in an indignant letter to the East Hampton Star that the Jews must have forgotten Germans' war crimes." [GAINES, S., 1998, p. 216]

In 1998 Jewish mogul Ira Rennert made national news and came under widespread public attack for his plans to build the largest -- and most ostentatious -- home in America on New York's Long Island. His 63-acre compound would include three separate buildings, 29 bedrooms, 39 bathrooms, two bowling alleys, a 164-seat cinema, 17 acres of manicured garden, and parking for 200 cars. The Washington Post likened it all to the "architecture of egoism." [HARDEN, p. A1] Rennert, also noted the [London] Daily Telegraph, "is an enthusiastic Zionist and financial backer of Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which has led to [neighbor] fears [that Rennert's new home is really] a school or a conference center." [SAPSTED, p. B2]

Another Jewish home builder on Long Island, Barry Trupin also engendered local wrath for his reconstruction of the Chestertown House. "What irked everyone," notes Steven Gaines, "was the arrogance of it all -- not just to tamper with a famous old house, but to tamper with it so badly ... The house was indeed a grotesque creation, part faux-Normandy castle, part Disneyland on LSD. It was the largest private renovation project ever undertaken in New York State." [GAINES, S., 1998, p. 220-221] Plans for the home included a personal zoo, a helicopter landing pad, and "an indoor barrier reef ... a vast sunken aquarium ... with a twenty-foot waterfall cascading down chunks of rock imported from Vermont, into a pool in which guests could not only swim but skin-dive, with hidden underwater air nozzles. The reef was stocked with 500 species, including lobster, parrot fish, sea anemones, grouper, and octopus." [GAINES, S., 1998, p. 232]

Another such Jewish mogul is David Saperstein, the largest stockholder in America's largest radio

network, Westwood One. "He's building a much-touted mansion in an exclusive neighborhood near Beverly Hills," noted *Mother Jones* magazine in 2001, "the 45,000-square-foot extravagance, dubbed the 'Fleur de Lys,' will include a ballroom to host dinner parties of 250, according to the Los Angeles Times." [MOTHER JONES, 5-3-01] [Note also, elsewhere in this work, immigrant Jewish Iranian tendencies to mansionize existing homes, Norman Lear's unique mansion, and Hollywood producer Aaron Spelling's comparably spectacular, and newsworthy, home ostentation in Los Angeles].

Chaim Bermant notes the style of Hollywood's old guard Jewish movie moguls:

"If there was little intrinsically Jewish in the output of the Hollywood tycoons, there was something particularly Jewish in their style. The elder Selznick once told his son David (producer of *Gone With the Wind*): 'Live expensively! Throw it around! Give it away! Always remember to live beyond your means. It gives a man confidence.' This was not, in fact, far from the principles on which Hollywood operated, where the very cost of a film -- 'this multi-million dollar epic' -- was often used by the publicity department as a commendation." [BERMANT, C., 1977, p. 98]

In 1959, apologetic Rabbi Albert Goldman observed that

"often unable to distinguish between the real and the apparent, the substance of worth and the tawdry yet glittering imitation, their ersatz values attest to their basic superficialities. Lacking the understanding and support of their Hebraic traditions and group life, some suburban Jews fall prey to the current cultural 'success system' and, in their own insecurity, scramble madly after prestige and power. They believe that the indiscriminating expenditure of money alone will assure the attainment of their life goals." [GOLDMAN, A., p. 203]

In modern times, suggested Roger Kahn in 1968, "it is only slightly hyperbolic to suggest that when a Jewish businessman feels threatened he reaches not for a gun or a club, but for a checkbook." [KAHN, R., p. 181] And Jonathan and Judith Pearl note the common nature of the modern Jewish *bar mitzvah* ceremony: "While scholars debate whether this centrality is part of a historical continuum or aberration, the fact is that for many American Jews, the focus of *bar mitzvah* has shifted from scholarly achievement to lavish partying ... This focus on extravagance is all too well known." [PEARL/PEARL p. 16]

"Many people feel that the supreme Jewish crime is materialism," noted Jewish author James Yaffe in 1968,

"Jews, under the impact of the American experience, are said to have become money grubbers and turned away from the Almighty in order to worship the Almighty Dollar. It certainly isn't hard to find



instances which seem to bear this out ... Spending money to make a splash to achieve status with friends and relations, has become a common game among American Jews. Everyone makes jokes about the women at Miami Beach with their mink coats and their jewelry, the women on Park Avenue with their wall-to-wall carpeting and their expensive furnishings in the style sometimes known as Brooklyn Renaissance, the men in their long black Cadillacs. ('Can your little boy walk yet, Mrs. Cohen?' 'God forbid he should ever have to!') The popularity of these jokes itself is proof that they correspond to a reality -- though the people who make them always insist they refer to 'those other Jews.' If you want to see that reality with your own eyes, spend a day or two at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills ... Even more horrible examples of lavishness and vulgarity are provided by many wedding and bar mitzvah parties. Extraordinary things occur." [YAFFE, J., 1968, p. 270-271]

Here's an observation by Jonathan Rieder in his study about Italians and Jews in a section of Brooklyn:

"Two Italian women with many Jewish friends decried the way the ostentatious show of status debased the meaning of genuine tradition: 'These fancy weddings and bar mitzvahs are disgusting,' they complained. 'None of that has anything to do with tradition. It's better to spend the money and go to Israel. It's showing off, keeping up with the Joneses. There's a "Can you top this?" attitude. It's all show.'" [REISER, J., 1985, p. 30]

In 1984 Dov Fisch complained about bar mitzvahs "with scantily clad go-go girls" and the president of the Monticello Raceway who defrauded it of nearly \$5,000 for his son's bar mitzvah. "Tragically," he wrote, "the bar mitzvah syndrome has become a symbol of so much of what is wrong with American Jewish life today. The one-upmanship knows no bounds." Hence, a Long Island boy was zoomed to his bar mitzvah by a motorcycle racer, another arrived home to parade beneath, literally, a "fiddler on the roof," and a Jewish couple spent \$2,000 for a "Car Mitzva" which commemorated "the thirteenth year of their Rolls Royce." Harvey Cohen's bar mitzvah was at the rented Orange Bowl football stadium in Miami, where

"the parents shamelessly invited two hundred guests to the spectacle, featuring a sixty-four piece band, bartenders dressed as referees, waitresses dressed as cheerleaders, and pom-pom girls wearing sweaters with the letter 'H' for Harvey ... [The] electric scoreboard lit up with the words: 'Happy Birthday Harvey.'" [FISCH, D., 1984, p. 224-225]

Famous Jewish prostitute Xaviera Hollander notes one of her most memorable Jewish lovers:

"Take the case of the obscenely rich young investment banker with whom I had formed what is politely termed a relationship. I had arranged romantic music, shimmering candlelight, an exquisite meal and I was wearing the most seductive perfume. Casanova Cohen, the ardent lover, rushed into bed. He gave me a perfunctory kiss and then got down to business. Literally. He treated me to a resume of his day's dealings and then demonstrated his refinement by cataloguing his cherished possessions from Rolex to Rolls Royce. I think that he expected me to be overawed and could not comprehend that I found him boring, intellectually, not physically." [HOLLANDER, X., 2000, p. 39]

Stephen Bloom notes what happened when a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews bought a slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, in 1987, and soon began to make their influence felt in the town:

"Generally, newcomers are eager to assimilate to a new culture. That's why they came in the first place. But instead of arriving at the lowest rung of the economic ladder, these Jews had arrived already on top. The Jews who settled in Postville came from cities, and many brought with them large sums of money ... Sholom Rubashkin built an enormous house on Wilson Street in an area of Postville thta the locals quickly labeled 'Kosher Hill.' Iowans were loathe to show such material wealth. 'That Rubashkin home is a palace,' Alicia [one of the non-Jewish local people] said, and no one denied it." [BLOOM, S., 2001, p. 50]

"In recent years," wrote Gerald Krefetz in 1982, "some Jews have succumbed to that all-American tendency to compound braggadocio and vulgarity in touting their ability to make it. Leaving discretion and taste aside, they boast of their abilities, vanities, and riches. One observer noted that after generations of oppression, 'it is not simply that living well is the best revenge but rather that living well is an obligation.' And telling about it is a compulsion. Jewish leaders, particularly those of the old school, feel called upon to ask 'followers to avoid ostentatious display, fearing it might create antagonism.'" [KREFETZ, p. 5]

Such requests generally fall on deaf ears: materialist "this world" consumption is championed by the Jewish religious faith itself, after all. Take the 1996 case of Jewish scholar, Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky, who laments the fact that his ex-wife expects him to economically support her enrollment in a religious school to become a rabbi, *and* continue payments on her BMW. (The woman eventually became Orthodox, where she was forbidden to become a rabbi by sexist Orthodox standards). [RUBIN-DORSKY, p. 456]

Samuel Heilman notes the concern an Israeli ultra-Orthodox rabbi had for the materialism of another ultra-Orthodox rabbi in America:

"I visited someone in the United States a few years ago, a ben Torah," [said the rabbi]. Stern nodded as he spoke, as if to imply that I had caught the drift of his message. 'We got into his car, a beautiful car.' He said 'beautiful' as if it were two words: 'beauty full.' 'The car had everything. Beautiful thick velvet seats, beautiful radio, lots of room, even a telephone -- this was before so many people had telephones in their cars. So I said to him -- we'll call him 'Reb [Rabbi] Shmuel -- 'Reb Shmuel, this is a beautiful car.'

'And you know what he said to me? He said to me: 'Reb Moshe, *bist a na'ar* [you're naive]. This is last year's model; I've already ordered next year's model.'

'Why?' I asked him. 'This is a wonderful car; you could keep it still for years.' You know, it was one of those big Lincolns, a really gorgeous car.

'And he said to me: 'Reb Moshe, my neighbor already has a new model and it's eating me up.'" [HEILMAN, S., 1992, p. 250]

Still, some embarrassed Jews seek to blame non-Jewish origins for the ancient Jewish propensity towards materialism and ostentation. "We [Jews]," says Hillel Levine, "woke up from the American dream and tried to discover who we really were. For many of us this now means turning our concerns inward into the Jewish community, because we are disenchanted with the crass materialism of the larger society. Yet where can we find inspiration in the multimillion dollar presences of suburbia?" [LEVINE, p. 185]

Norman Podhoretz recalls taking a fellow secular Jewish author, Norman Mailer, to an Orthodox synagogue in New York City:

"He asked me to take him to a synagogue on Yom Kippur because he wanted to see the Hassid in the flesh ... There were wooden benches, and as common in this kind of setup, these were young men, students smoking and dropping cigarettes on the floor. Orthodox Jews, especially Hassidic Jews, don't treat synagogues like a church ... After a short while Norman announced he'd had enough." [MANSO, p. 367]

Stephen Bloom notes the ultra-Orthodox community of Postville, Iowa, and its raucous religious effect on the tranquil town:

"An hour must have passed, and then, as though on cue, a great roar of voices

erupted from within the shul. The worship had ended and the men broke into raucous song. These liturgical melodies were booming and boisterous, each lasting twenty to thirty minutes. Soon, the singing was accompanied by banging. The men were pounding the metal tables with fists. They were stamping the shul's wooden floor with the heels of their shoes and boots. The collective sound signaled to me that they must have been drunk .. I was eavesdropping on some sort of loud, inebriated religious reverie ... The sounds shooting out from the shul's windows and front door were deafening on this otherwise serene Iowa night." [BLOOM, S., 2001, p. 36]

He also notes, once he is actually among these worshipers, that they "seemed drowned in showmanship -- who could wail loudest, bow farthest without falling over, read the longest Hebrew passage fastest and without taking a breath." [BLOOM, S., 2001, p. 203] They also get drunk as part of their religious activity: This was an old fashioned chugging contest. Toast after toast followed ... [BLOOM, S., 2001, p. 206] "Rapturous song, powerful drink, and overwhelming body heat was the Holy Communion of these believers. Everything about the day was intense and bodily: the dirty mikveh [communal bath], drinking, singing, the body odor, the pounding of fists and feet." [BLOOM, S., 2001, p. 207]

Secular Jew Howard Jacobson wrote in 1993 about his experiences while waiting to see the famous Orthodox Lubavitcher rabbi, Menachem Schneerson, in New York City. For a decade, the rabbi gave out a dollar (symbolic charity) to each of those who came to wait in lines to see him. As Jacobson notes:

"I am taken down -- and I stress the preposition: down, down, down -- and into the *shul* of the Lubavitcher headquarters, where the dollar-queue will form, and here I behold a sight which beats even Areyonga in the Central Australian Desert for uncouthness, for outlandishness, for other-worldliness beyond any imaginings of other worlds. The *shul* teems and shudders with men and boys in every attitude of Hebraic, and to my eyes pre-Hebraic, worship ... And here's the most startling thing of all -- men and boys begging, begging in the synagogue, banging for your money, pulling at your sleeves for charity -- *tsodekeh, tsodekeh* -- offering to pray for you for money, to pray for your parents for money, selling you raffle tickets, shoving them into your pockets, into your breast pockets -- a *mitzva*, a *mitzva* -- except that that's not the most startling thing of all, because the most startling thing of all is that they're selling gold watches down here.

I try to hold on to my nerve. Jesus lost his sense of humor and proportion in the temple, and I am determined not to lose mine." [JACOBSON, H., 1995, p. 144-145]

"We [Jews]," Jacobson consoles himself, "believe there's no distinction between the world's business and the business of the spirit." [JACOBSON, H., 1995,p. 145]

Leaving his momentary personal audience with the rabbi, "no sooner do you beat back the first wave of beggars [in the synagogue]," recounts Jacobson,

"than you find yourself waylaid by tradesmen wanting to sell you polythene sleeves to store your dollar in. For two dollars you can protect the one dollar. Or you can have it sealed and plasticated, turned into a place-mat with a date and a picture of the Rebbe [rabbi]."  
[JACOBSON, H., 1995, p. 150]