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Michal Flombaum	14 April 2010

From The Jazz Singer to an American Girl:
The Turn of the Century Jewish Immigrant in American Popular Culture

by

Michal Sarah Flombaum

Adviser

Dr. Catherine Nickerson

Department of American Studies

Dr. Catherine Nickerson
Adviser

Dr. Regine Jackson
Committee Member

Dr. Eddy Von Mueller
Committee Member

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the use of turn of the century Jewish immigrant characters in American popular culture. By looking at a classical Hollywood example of the first milestone in sound film and elements from value driven children's media later in the 20th century, I demonstrate how Jewish elements of the immigrant characters' identities are minimized when the character in the product is meant to relate to a mass American audience. The fact that both the musical film and children's media are supposed to be universal genres forms the basis for this comparison. In analyzing Alan Crosland's 1927 film The Jazz Singer, I use the film's adaptation from a play, its production context and producers, and its style and form to reach the conclusion that the religious elements in the film are only a foil to the main character's Americanization. Likewise, the animated children's film An American Tail reveals once again how a Jewish producer complies with American conventions in making a film about immigration in which the main character must deviate from his Jewish roots to become American. Barbara Cohen's illustrated storybook Molly's Pilgrims demonstrates how immigration narratives can turn into assimilation narratives absent from religion through censorship, and American Girl Doll's character brand Rebecca Rubin reinforces that religion in immigration stories can only exist when the product is for a Jewish segmented audience. This Jewish American segment then seems separate in modern American society rather than included. Based on this trend, I conclude that the use of Jewish characters in immigration narratives tends to form a dangerous model immigrant that easily leaves her culture, religion, and ethnicity behind in her Americanization. Thus, the turn of the century Jewish immigration narrative forms a plot device, a tool for popular culture with which to further ideals of the American Dream for immigrants.

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Everybody ought to have a lower East Side in their life.

- Irving Berlin, Jewish songwriter of *White Christmas*

Introduction

In December 1997, I was a 4th grader at Salanter Akiba of Riverdale, a Jewish, Modern Orthodox school in Riverdale, New York. My family was not completely observant at home, as my Israeli mother and Argentine father grew up fairly secularly, but at school, I prayed every morning, learned Torah, and observed the kosher dietary laws. Until December 1997, keeping kosher meant no Oreos at school. And then, Nabisco changed the Oreo recipe, and the Orthodox Union, one of the associations that oversee kosher dietary laws, ruled Oreos to be Kosher. I was ecstatic. I felt as if I was in on a secret, having eaten Oreos at home and knowing how superior they were to their kosher counterparts of Famous Amos or the more unfortunate Jewish brands like Kedem. This knowledge and experience let me feel more secure with incomplete observance at home because now the Orthodox Union, my classmates, even my 4th grade *Tanach* teacher, would all approve of Oreos. I also felt more secure as an American. As the daughter of two immigrants living in a mostly Jewish neighborhood, the fact that Nabisco made Oreos kosher signified to 4th grade Michal that Nabisco cared about Jews just like her. With the kosherization of the Oreo, Jews had arrived. Jews suddenly mattered enough in America to completely reconfigure, and even risk, the formula for Oreos, or at least that's how it seemed to a 4th grader. Even now, when the fictional Rachel Menkin, the Jewish department store owner, walks into the Sterling Cooper office on the television show *Mad Men*, it makes me feel as though Jews are included; it makes me feel included.

This should not be revolutionary: Jewish subjects, historical and modern, are featured in popular culture ranging from Spielberg's Holocaust film *Schindler's List to* Larry David's *Curb Your Enthusiasm.* And yet, what struck me in the case of the Oreo is that America was paying attention to Jews, not just for Woody Allen movies or Holocaust books, but also for their religion. Nabisco was tailoring itself to fit a Jewish dietary law, to reach a specific, small market that would not eat Oreos otherwise. Rarely when Jews are depicted is thought given to the inclusion of their religion. Rather, more often than not, Jewishness either only reconfirms American themes like religious tolerance or the importance of assimilation, or it is emphasized in order to show something other, something different and specific only to Jews. This paper uses four case studies, one classical and grounded in early Hollywood and three from more contemporary children's media, to further discuss how the first wave of Jewish immigration, the turn of the century immigration, is used in fiction as a way either to teach general themes that arise from immigration stories or to further segment Jewish Americans as another entity or market. Though all created by Jews, these pieces of popular culture endorse and comply the consumption of a certain type of identity, one that privileges the "American" piece of American Jewish identity.

Method

The first section uses the 1927 Alan Crosland film, The Jazz Singer, to introduce the theory that films use Jewish immigrant stories to advance the ideals that support the American Dream. I use the history of adaptation from the short story "The Day of Atonement" to the play *The Jazz Singer* to the film to show how the essence of piece changes from a story that supports assimilation as well as religious tradition to one that

privileges Americanization. A close reading of the story's symbols, the reception of the play, and the history of the Warner Brothers and the invention of sound film all work to establish an understanding of what the story was at first and what it would become. The analysis of the film uses elements of film style and form in the same way. Looking at the use of space, the concept of God, the label of Jazz Singer, and sound sequences all reveal the ways in which the film presents a specific set of messages for the viewer. Combined with the trajectory of how to the film came to be as such, we can see these uses as ways in which the film intentionally sets up the opposition of old world religion against Americanization. The reception of the film cements this idea. Many were only concerned with the landmark use of sound, while those involved in the creation and development of the story felt that the film had strayed from the Jewish roots and instead pointed only to general immigrant and assimilatory rhetoric. Thus, The Jazz Singer works as an example of how a Jewish story loses its identity when a mass audience becomes involved; the trajectory, analysis, and reception work together to demonstrate how the film needed to be changed when it needed to appeal to mass America. Moreover, The Jazz Singer is the quintessential example of Jewish producers subscribing to the ideas above, and of how a text can target Jewish and immigrant audiences to teach them how to be a model immigrant or model minority defined by American conformity.

My analysis in the example of The Jazz Singer rests on the precedent of support from more general commentary on immigrants and Jewish immigrants in film. Texts like Joel Rosenberg's article *The Jewish Experience on Film: An American Overview*, Carlos E. Cortés's *The Immigrant in Film: Evolution of an Illuminating Icon*, and Andrew R. Heinze's book Adapting to Abundance provide more specifics than the previous, broader

studies of Lester Friedman's Hollywood Image of the Jew and Patricia Eren's The Jew in American Cinema. While Friedman and Eren depend on generalizations and overviews, Rosenberg, Cortes, and Heinze use targeted approaches to speak about the phases film has went through in how these present immigrant Jews and immigrants. Their findings support my hypothesis about using immigrant Jews in fiction as model immigrant who can Americanize if religion is minimized in the work at hand. Each scholar illustrates how and why Hollywood has done so as part of American movies' larger role of acting as a comforting reflection of American life.

My next section seeks to apply the same theory to children's media. If we are to believe that texts for children have the goal of teaching messages or history, then it is necessary to evaluate why and how the turn of the century Jewish immigration is used. Media plays a role in the socialization of children as what they watch, read, or play with teaches them about U.S. society, culture, and ideals. Children's media is a pervasive tool of consumption and socialization, just as musicals and classical Hollywood films like The Jazz Singer were monolithic for an American audience just beginning to coalesce. Thus The Jazz Singer introduces and establishes the trend and its repercussions, forming a strong basis with which to look at another mass market. Children's media that uses the turn of the century Jewish immigration as a topic then must be explored to see how this topic informs children about American norms.

The creators of An American Tale minimize Jewish topicality and specificity to instead include universal themes for a mass audience. The illustrated story book, Molly's Pilgrims, differs in that the Jewish creator in this case wanted to use Jewish specificity while teaching American themes, but textbook editors and lesson plan writers have

changed the story to de-emphasize the Jewishness for a larger audience of children. The third case, the American Girl doll and book series based on the fictional character Rebecca Rubin, is more complex. The creators claim that despite her religion, Rebecca Rubin is meant for all American girls as she represents American themes that are not dependent on any type of religion or time period, but also teaches girls about Jewish immigrant life in the early 20th century. An investigation of American Girl's research and marketing tools, as well as reception of the doll, reveals that American Girl did indeed set out to create a specifically Jewish doll with the intention of targeting the Jewish market. These case studies thus demonstrate that the inclusion of the Jewish immigrant narrative is not meant to include Jews in the American whole. Rather, when Jewish immigrant stories are told, Jewishness is minimized or emphasized depending on whether the audience is a mass American market or a segmented, separate Jewish one. This tailoring of the religious, specific content can happen either because of the producers themselves or by an outside force, further illustrating that even if someone sets out to include Jewishness without making it a polarizing force, as Barbara Cohen attempts to do with Molly's Pilgrim, gatekeepers of culture augment the content to create American themes that fit larger American audiences.

I sacrifice an extended close reading on each of these texts, using my own analysis of the primary sources to support the points I extrapolate from an investigation of the production and reception of these works. The section on The Jazz Singer includes a more in depth analysis of the text itself, but still follows the structure of summary, creation, analysis, and reception to form my argument. I parallel the structure in my section on Children's Media, with the slight change of analysis coming before the

analysis of production, so that the reader may have an understanding of the text before reading about the creation. With The Jazz Singer, because I first explain the story and the play, the reader understands the basic plot of the piece before reading about the adaptation. This parallelism between the two sections is meant to highlight that my case studies are lenses through which to see how Jewish immigration is used in media, rather than stand alone analyses of film or literature. This holistic approach to the production, meaning, and reception of a work places the texts in a context that allows us to see the differences and similarities among the works while still recognizing the argument at hand.

Results

Using The Jazz Singer as a fully developed case study with which to establish the major theory eases the reader into the section of children's media as both are examples of media meant to have a universal appeal. The Jazz Singer is the classical example, on which many scholars have dissected the significance of the text as the first sound film, a Jewish themed first sound film, an immigrant film, and many others. Thus its status as a debatable text allows us to use the theory as it applies to children's media. Through children's media, we then see how nearly a century after both the turn of the century Jewish immigration wave and the release of The Jazz Singer, Jewish immigration is still merely a device that supports the American Dream, luck and pluck successes, and assimilation. Therefore, though Jewish immigration is a topic used in many mass market stories, Jewishness can only be highlighted when the story is meant to appeal to only a Jewish market, and must be minimized when it is meant for a larger American audience. This usage illustrates that Jews in America, despite progress, social mobility, and

acceptance, are still a separate entity, a minority. American Jews can be held up in fiction as a symbol of assimilation and the American Dream, but their immigration story must be secularized if it is to be meaningful and symbolic for anyone other than Jews. Jewish American life then, during immigration and today, is a mythical paradigm of assimilation, for even when Jewish producers seek to be specific and religious, America can only see the civil, patriotic American themes rather than ideals meaningful for a religious minority. With this augmentation, the Jewish characters in these pieces of popular culture become model immigrants for audiences. Jack, Fievel, Molly, and Rebecca all teach the audience how to be American, teaching minorities and immigrants in this country how to change, how to move away from their religion and pursue the American Dream. This message may be merely coincidental; the works convey this message as a byproduct of creating a product for a mass audience through the minimizing Jewish specificity, yet, it is a problematic message as it reaches audiences what an American identity should be.

Section One: The Jazz Singer's Evolution as a Jewish Immigrant

In 1927, a fledgling studio took a gamble on the first full-length feature sound film when Warner Brothers entrusted all they had to *The Jazz Singer* and Vitaphone sound technology. Despite the risk of losing their investment, damaging their reputation, and straining their familial relationship, WB chose a film with content that, on the surface, appears anything but safe. Featuring musical star Al Jolson as Jakie Rabinowitz, Alan Crosland's *The Jazz Singer* follows a young, Jewish son of immigrants from the ghetto to the stage as he leaves the old world of tradition behind for jazz, blackface, and Broadway. The milestone of sound in movies seemed to be enough to distract viewers from attaching meaning to the fact that this historical event for film in America, the first sound film, was made not only by Jews, but also about this immigrant group just beginning to advance in society. Though this oversight could be attributed to the spectacle of sound, analyzing the film's adaptation from a short story and a play illustrates that the film was never meant to highlight anything Jewish. Rather, a close look at the production plans reveals how the sound element became the core of the film. As sound took center stage, the WB necessitated a return on the investment in sound, and thus they too needed more universal, more American themes that could appeal to a larger audience. With this change, The Jazz Singer moved from a short story centered on Jewish struggles to a large-scale star and sound vehicle, cutting loose its Jewish roots and transforming them into more universal ones about immigration, even pandering those themes about assimilation towards Jewish audiences directly. This preference for immigrant imagery and themes over a portrayal of immigration specific to Jews

immigration echoes the assimilation of the Jewish creators of the film, along with that of most Jews in Hollywood. Most importantly, this multifaceted analysis of the roots, journey, and arrival of the first true sound film speaks to the tendency of popular culture to privilege American Dream rhetoric over an ethnic or religious one as immigration fiction's purpose is to reinforce American ideals.

Roots

The Jazz Singer was born when Samson Raphaelson saw vaudeville entertainer Al Jolson perform at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1911 **(**Carringer 11). Raphaelson describes his reaction as such: "When he finished, I turned to the girl beside me, dazed with memories of my childhood on the east side. My god, this isn't a jazz singer. This is a cantor…the words didn't matter, the melody didn't matter. It was the emotion—the emotion of a cantor," (Carringer 11). The jazz singing moved Raphaelson because he heard Jolson's singing as an emotional prayer; it was inherently connected to Judaism for him. Raphaelson then combined this connection between the jazz music and Judaic expression with pieces of Jolson's biography to write the short story *The Day of Atonement*, and published the piece in *Everybody's Magazine* in January of 1922 (Carringer 12). The story that took root that night would eventually become the first true sound film, but for the undergraduate and bourgeoning writer, Raphaelson, what developed that night was his viewpoint of Jewish American life as an understanding of the way tradition can inform modern, Americanized concepts like Jazz.

In *The Day of Atonement,* Raphaelson paints an honest image of the Lower East Side and a Jewish family, the Rabinowitzes. When young Jakie Rabinowitz, the son of a cantor, wants to sing Jazz and assimilate, his religious father attempts to force Jakie to

stay true to tradition instead. Jakie runs away, and gets his big break in San Francisco, eventually returning to New York when the man who discovered him, David Lee arranges an important audition for Jakie, now Jack Robin. Robin falls in love with Jazz and with a performance partner, Amy Prentiss. Their engagement sends his father into a "nervous collapse," as he does not want Jack marrying a *Shiksa* (a non-Jewish woman). Due to his illness, the Rabbi cannot perform the Day of Atonement services, forcing Jack to choose between Broadway and his community, his religion. Ultimately, he performs the services, and Jews from all over Manhattan come to see the now famous singer perform in the Hester Street synagogue. The story ends with David Lee arranging on the phone for an even bigger producer to come see the religious performance.

The story emphasizes the problems that arise from acculturation, but takes care to establish both sides of the debate between the cantor and Jakie/Jack, the religious and the American sides respectively. In the beginning, when chastising Jakie for his unwillingness to become a cantor, Cantor Rabinowitz explains, "It's too good here in America—too much money—to much telephones and trains and ragtimes. A little bit more God ain't a bad thing, Jakie," (Carringer 150). The Cantor's tone here is gentle and explanatory, as seen in phrases like "it's too good" and "a little bit." While he criticizes the American lifestyle of commerce and progress, he simply asks for some "more God" for his son. By allowing the Cantor to make a calm request, Raphaelson wants the reader to understand this position as well as Jakie's attitude of assimilation, giving it credence. Arguing on behalf of the side of assimilation, Raphaelson, through the narrator, writes:

> "how could the old cantor, or, for that matter, Jakie himself, understand that instead of being sinful and self-indulgent, loose and lazy, this grave-eyed boy with the ways of the street was sincerely carrying on the tradition of plaintive, religious melody of his forefathers—carrying on the tragic tradition disguised

> ironically with the gay trappings of Broadway and the rich vulgarity of the East Side?" (Carringer 151)

Here Raphaelson reinforces that Jazz, Broadway, and "rich vulgarity" are all derivatives of the religious singing the Cantor wants Jakie to learn. Just as he stated in his response to Jolson's performance in Champaign, Raphaelson does not believe these two routes, Jewish prayer and jazz, to be oppositional for he believes that the two can coexist as they inform each other. Assimilation can happen even while one maintains their Judaism and belief in God. Thus, Raphaelson points out, the debate in the story between father and son, the dilemma Jakie/Jack must face between choosing Judaism or Broadway, can be resolved if we understand assimilation as a compromise that involves tradition as well. The ending, in which David Lee calls the producer to see Jack sing at the synagogue likewise tells the reader that Jakie/Jack does not need to choose a path devoid of religion to become successful. Rather, Jakie Rabinowitz, praying Kol Nidre in the Hester Street Synagogue, can also be Jack Robin on Broadway.

Moreover, Raphaelson's story uses certain religious references and ideas to force the reader to understand the story as a Jewish one and not only as a more general immigration story. He mentions specific elements and characters of the Jewish bible, and uses Hebrew and Yiddish words like *Rebi* (Rabbi), *Chaidar* (Jewish school), and *Chazon* (Cantor). A meaningful mention of Russian synagogues more specifically recalls the old world and the migration the characters underwent. These mentions bring Jewish traditions to the forefront of the story where the reader must confront them, even without a clear understanding of Jewish practices. Raphaelson's use of these concepts demands that the reader notice these words, these images, as a part of the characters' daily lives. Similarly, although the dilemma about jazz singing is a source of tension, the major

destructive force in the relationship between Jack and his father, and Jack and his religion, is Jack's engagement to Amy. When the cantor hears that Jack is engaged to a non-Jew, a shiksa, he has the nervous breakdown, making the fear of intermarriage as the major problem with assimilation for the father. Thus while, the story is certainly about the universalities "about initiation into realities of adult life, and psychological ordeals," it is also about the specific Jewish immigration realities of "anti-Semitic classmates, and falling in love with a *Shiksa*" as Robert Carringer describes in his introduction to the The Jazz Singer and *Day of Atonement* (Carringer 21). These themes make the story specific to Jewish immigration, while still teaching the reader about immigration in general.

The adaptation process began soon after the release of the story, and Raphaelson's eventual control in this process illustrates his protectiveness over the meaning in his work. Rumor has it that Jolson himself was moved by these autobiographical and religious connections, and immediately began shopping the story to studios for film production through the intermediary of Anthony Paul Kelly (Carringer 12.) One such rumored producer was D.W. Griffith, who declined on the grounds that the story was "too racial," and others agreed; nobody in Hollywood was interested in a Jewish story (Carringer 12). Jolson's next choice was to develop the story as a stage performance, but Raphaelson did not want the story to turn into a gaudy musical review. Instead, selling the story to producer Al Lewis, Raphaelson successfully ensured that as *The Day of Atonement* became the play *The Jazz Singer* with the main idea intact: the Jew "lost between two worlds" (Carringer 13, 23). Raphaelson could have let Jolson take the lead with adapting the short story, but the author chose instead to protect his work and the "racial" and Jewish themes that made Hollywood wary.

This protection made the play revolutionary as it differed from other plays at the time that included Jewish themes or characters. Two plays contemporaneous to *The Jazz Singer*, *Welcome Stranger* and *Abie's Irisih Rose*, portrayed Jews stereotypically and used melodrama and overly emotional scenes to appeal to audiences instead of projecting any type of normalcy (Carringer 24-25). *The Jazz Singer* the play, however, tried "to give a sincere portrait of life as it may actually be lived in a time of crisis for a Jewish family—a mixture of high tragedy, low comedy, and everyday routine. It also tries to present Jewish customs and lore in a fashion that avoids both the pageantry-spectacle…" (Carringer 24-25). With this normalcy, the play *The Jazz Singer* reflected the essence of *The Day of Atonement*, even maintaining nearly the same plot. In this adaptation, Raphaelson was able to protect the strong Jewish imagery that the story illustrated in a non-stereotypical manner, as well as his main tenant that Americanization did not necessitate a rejection of one's traditions.

Although its producers feared an unfavorable response because of some of this same Jewish imagery, *The Jazz Singer* won audiences, successful reviews, and star power, proving the ability of success for a Jewish production. George Jessel, the star of the play, garnered the support of the Jewish community by speaking out about the play and its affect on his identity. Jessel stated, "I had found faith and I turned about face and became a new George Jessel…I became the man I am portraying on the stage," (Carringer 14). For both himself and audiences, Jessel connected the play with Jewishness, solidifying the inherent Jewish quality of the piece. This quality did not offend the secular reviewers, however, as the New York Post called the play "literate and interesting" and assuaged audiences that they should not just stay away because of the

Jewish topics (Carringer 13). A New York Times review that stated that the play took no chances with its audiences, making it clear that, for most, the Jewish subject matter was not problematic or risky (Carringer 13). Only one review believed the play to be too Jewish, but this sentiment did not stop Warner Brothers from buying the film rights for 50,000 dollars, nor did the Jewishness keep Warner Brothers from investing the future of their studio and the future of sound on film technology in the film.

Three months before play's debut, in June 1925, The Warner Brothers, Harry, Jack, Sam, and Albert, signed a contract with the merged Bell and Western Electric companies to produce sound films. The first of these films were Don Juan, also directed by Alan Crosland, and a series of Vitaphone shorts, showcasing what the sound technology of Vitaphone could do for film. Despite their success, however, these milestones led to more worries for The WB. Following a history of bankruptcy, overspending, and dealing with loan sharks and a possibly anti-Semitic Wall Street, The WB faced renegotiations with Western Electric/Bell as well as a year long waiting period with sound in which all the studios strove to make the next big advancement (*WB Presents 14*, Gabler 132, 136-137.) These setbacks were especially disappointing after the painstaking process the Brothers went through to acquire Vitagraph studios and the ultimate sound product of Vitaphone. Their history had been a rocky one, constantly feeling like the outsiders, even among other Jews in Hollywood, and always confronting financial constraints (Gabler 131). In 1925, Sam Warner went to the east coast to explore sound further, and returned enthusiastic and ready to push his other brothers towards this venture. Working with Waddil Catchings of the Jewish investment bank Goldman, Sachs, the brothers eventually agreed to take their loan and buy the defunct Vitagraph studio for

800,000 dollars along with an LA radio station. Bell and Western Electric merged, and despite some suspicions of anti-Semitism, WB signed a contract that stipulated the WB as the artistic side and Bell/Western Electric as the technology experts (Gabler 136-137.) Because of this arduous process, the WB were particularly disappointed when they needed to wait to try again after Don Juan, when their reign over sound film was not solidified. More painful than the disappointment was the Warner Brother's knowledge that they would need a hit to revive their studio and return the investment they made.

It was surprising, then, that the WB would choose The Jazz Singer as their next sound film; however, tracing the production plan reveals that they did not acquire the film for this reason. First, the WB signed a contract with George Jessel, the star of the play, and then bought the film rights, though according to Jack, Harry wanted the rights "desperately" (Gabler 150). Harry believed "it would be a good film to make for the sake of racial tolerance, if nothing else" (Gabler?). Harry was unconcerned with the role Vitaphone could play in the film, while Sam and Jack were excited about the prospect of sound (Gabler 125). This difference in how the brothers approached The Jazz Singer illustrates how each approached their own Jewish and American identities. While Harry, the oldest brother, followed in the footsteps of his Polish immigrant father Benjamin, leaning towards religion and moral philosophies, Jack was the exact opposite (Gabler 122.) Infamously loud and bubbly where his brother Harry was stern, Jack gave way to assimilation, even marrying a non-Jew. The split between the two brothers affected their work and their family, as Abe (Americanized later to Albert) sided with Harry and Sam with Jack. Thus Harry "paraded his Jewishness," looking toward movies in general and The Jazz Singer in particular as a way to follow his father's rule of "fight with the

weapon you have at your command so that the children and their children may have a right to live and have Faith, no matter what their Faith may be, in our great country, America" (Gabler 140, 123). Harry took his father Benjamin's words to heart throughout his career, always hoping to influence America with ideals from his Jewish European routes. This attitude only drove a wedge between the four brothers as Harry and Abe, even as he changed his name, represented the old world and Jack and Sam the new.

As such, Sam saw The Jazz Singer as the perfect vehicle to try again with sound, to assert their dominance once again, while Harry was more interested in the cultural and racial ramifications. Initially, Ernst Lubitsch was set to direct, and George Jessel was to reprise the role on film. The first stalling event was Lubitsch's departure from Warner Brothers (*Jewish experience 17)*. They then postponed making The Jazz Singer because of Jessel's schedule; however, they ultimately replaced him with Al Jolson. The reason for the replacement varies among stories, but at the core of each version is Vitaphone. One theory holds that assimilated brother Jack Warner wanted to cast non-Jews in the roles of the Cantor and the mother, casting that would make the film less Jewish and more accessible for non-Jewish audiences, and that George Jessel did not agree with the choice (Gabler 141). Nor did Jessel agree with the new ending that included a performance on Broadway in addition to the performance in the synagogue, (Gabler 141). This change likewise shows the difference between Jessel's Jewish approach to the material and Jack Warner's idea that the film needs to less Jewish because of the Vitaphone risk. The next theory blames Jessel's demands for more money because of the involvement of Vitaphone. Still, some surmise that Jessel was thrown out because he seemed too Jewish, having taken mainly Jewish roles in the past, and even in this act, we

see evidence of some of the Warners' fear that the film would not succeed with such Jewish overtones or such a Jewish story (Gabler 141). In any version of the story, we can see the tension that existed between the investment in making The Jazz Singer a sound film and the risk of making a Jewish film**.** We can also see how The Warners', despite different intentions among the brothers, were implicit in changing the source material to make audiences comfortable. Even Harry, the brother who followed his father the most, must have been aware and accepting of the changes that occurred due to the risk of making a Jewish film, and thus he too contributed to packaging an American identity for consumption.

Production on The Jazz Singer in involved the creation of a new studio complex that could handle the size of the production, making it much more involved that the previous Vitaphone films, and therefore a production that needed to succeed (Carringer 15-16). This was not another "short term gamble," but rather, The Jazz Singer, the first full-length feature with its own sound performance, required a new studio, up to date theaters, and the biggest talent (Carringer 17.) Those outside Warner Brothers agreed that the film was important, revolutionary, and a gamble, as *Moving Picture Word* called The Jazz Singer an "extended run production," meaning that it was expensive and involved, and pronounced that it "marked an epoch" (qtd. in Carringer 18). New star Al Jolson even invested his own money, proving that The Jazz Singer was important, expensive, and risky, so risky that it could no longer support a Jewish agenda, but needed one that was more universal, more assimilatory, more American (Carringer 18). The Warners, mainly Jack and Sam, chose to replace Jessel, change the endings, and recast the parents all for the reason of making a film into " an assimilationist fable," which required the star

power of Al Jolson, a "a Jew as assimilated as they were," (Gabler 141). Vitaphone commanded that Jack and Sam win out over traditional, old world Harry because the WB needed to renew the momentum and their profits after their tumultuous beginnings in Hollywood. Thus even while Harry "desperately" wanted to make a film that realized his father's ideas about teaching Faith to America, Sam and Jack, with the demanding help of Vitaphone, took the film out of the religious context of "The Day of Atonement" or the play version of *The Jazz Singer*, and made the first sound film relate to all of America; They made The Jazz Singer.

Journey

The Jazz Singer follows the short story in that a young Jakie Rabinowitz (Robert Gordon) leaves home to become a performer. His parents find out about his leaning toward American show business when Moisha Yudelson (Otto Lederer), the leader of the Jewish community, discovers Jakie performing in a saloon only a few hours before the beginning of the Day of Atonement, the holiest of Jewish holidays. Moisha runs to tell Cantor Rabinowitz(Warner Oland) about Jakie's singing, and when Jakie returns home, he and his father fight until Jakie runs away. We next see Jakie years later, now Jack Robin (Al Jolson), as he auditions for a role in a nightclub. The performer Mary Dale (May McAvoy) discovers Jakie here, and she arranges for him to join her on her tour. Jack writes a letter to his parents detailing his new life, and when Mary is called away to another show, he too is invited to perform on Broadway. He then returns home to tell his parents about his newfound success, and while his mother (Eugenie Besserer) understands, even impressed by his talent and his future plans, his father kicks him out. His father then falls ill, leading Moisha to beg Jack to come see his father and to commit

himself to performing the Day of Atonement Kol Nidre services on the same night as the opening of Jack's Broadway review. After debating with himself, Mary, and his mother, Jack does both- leads the Kol Nidre services and opens the show on Broadway.

It is necessary to look beyond simple changes in the names of characters or plot sequences to understand how the film truly differs from the story and the play. The film purposefully downplays the Jewishness, highlights the American dream, and includes messages that would resonate with Jews specifically. While the plot reflects many of the changes that occurred throughout the adaptation process and how those changes transmit messages about immigration in general, it is worthwhile to look at elements of film form and style to help elucidate those messages. The film adaptation creates two distinct spaces, the Rabinowitz' apartment and the outside world, and use the contrast between the two to note the opposition between the old world and modern America. The first inter-title notes the "throbbing of the ghetto," before we see various images of immigrant city life like peddlers or children playing (The Jazz Singer). The tone of these images seems appreciative and honest, and it stands in stark contrast to the description of Cantor Rabinowitz who is "stubbornly held to the ancient traditions of his race," (The Jazz Singer). The hustle and bustle of the modern city life only emphasizes the "ancient" and "stubborn" ways of the cantor, establishing the central conflict of the film, the difference between the old, as it is synonymous with religion, and new, the American, which translates to industry, progress, and growth, even just in these exposition shots.

We see the Rabinowitzes frantically preparing for the holiday, unaware of the outside world, in their apartment, the only place we ever see them aside from the synagogue. Jakie, however, spends the few hours before the start of the holiest day of the

year singing in a saloon, a secularized space. Moisha is there too, drinking and enjoying himself. Despite his religious affiliations, he can exist in the secular, Americanized space, but even with this ability, Moisha's allegiances lay with the Rabinowitzes and Judaism, and runs to tell them about Jakie right away. Before entering the apartment, Moisha performs the Jewish custom of kissing the *mezuzah*, the doorpost marker that holds the Jewish prayer of the *Shemah*. With this act, he enters the religious realm as represented by their apartment, and the film once again marks the religious sphere as separate from the secular one, just as the *mezuzah* is meant to mark a Jewish home as separate from others. Moreover, after Cantor Rabinowitz chastises Jakie for his singing, Jakie exclaims, "I'll run away and never come back," and leaves home. This statement and his running away both solidify the idea that Jakie is not only leaving the physical space of the Rabinowitz's apartment, but that Jakie is also leaving what the space represents- the old world and religion. Thus even if the next scene is a magnificent portrayal of the services for Day of Atonement, complete impressive mise-en-scene and enlarged shot scale, the spectacle is just meant to reinforce the antiquity of the Rabinowitz' religion as it is necessary for the understanding the merit of Jakie's Americanization.

Likewise, Jakie's return to the apartment when he lands his Broadway debut reestablishes the apartment space as a religious, old, "stubborn" one that represents the Rabinowitz's way of life. First, the narrating inter-title states, "For those whose faces are turned toward the past, the years roll by unheeded—their lives unchanged," (The Jazz Singer). These words connote a stagnant quality to their lives, insinuating that because of their religion and its effect on their attitudes toward assimilation, they are stuck. Jakie restates it in his own words, in the inter-title that reads, "Mother you haven't changed a

bit." With this repetition, the film illustrates how his relationship to his parents and to this space symbolizes his relationship to religion as the parents and their apartment represent an un-adapting religious life. As he sentimentally becomes excited to return to this place, the inter-titles read in succession and in ascending order, "New York!" "Broadway!" "Home!" and "Mother!" (The Jazz Singer). Even in these sweet associations, there exists the implicit idea that returning to this place, home, means returning to the unchanged, religious mother. The idea of leaving and coming back home to the apartment mirrors his leaving and coming back to his religious roots. As the film refers to the traditional characters and the juxtaposition between the outside world and the Rabinowitz's apartment, the film sets up the opposition between old and new in this idea of "leaving" and "returning" to the physical space of the apartment.

The mentions, or absence, of God in the film accomplishes the same denouncement or departure from religion. The first time the film mentions God is in the Cantor's exclamation, "I teach him better than to deface the voice God gave him.," (The Jazz Singer). With these words, the Cantor sets up the contrast between the religious and the secular; singing prayer is holy, while singing jazz is debasement. Reflecting back to the very opening inter-title, a sort of epigraph, that read, "Jazz after all, the misunderstood utterance of a prayer," we can now have a different understanding of it (The Jazz Singer). The misunderstanding is the Cantor's denial of Jazz as a prayer, as a type of expression, and it represents his inability to understand secularism and assimilation. Another mention reinforces assimilation, when Jakie later argues with his father and says, "You taught me that music is the voice of God! It is as honorable to sing in the theatre as in the synagogue!" (The Jazz Singer). Jakie's claim is a direct response

to his father's earlier statement about debasing the voice God gave him, and Jakie means to emphasize the assimilatory idea that respecting God through music can occur in the secular arena. The film's use word God above allows us to see more clearly how the Cantor is a cautionary character against the "stubborn" old ways of religion, and how Jakie, as he grows to depend more on luck and pluck and to sing prayers instead of praying them, becomes Americanized. This use of the epigraph differs from its origins, as those words invoke the purpose of the story *The Day of Atonement* as Raphaelson realized it the night he saw Jolson perform. The final naming of God in the film furthers this notion. Upon seeing and hearing Jakie sing Kol Nidre on the Day of Atonement toward the end of the film, Mary comments, "A jazz singer- singing to his God.," (The Jazz Singer) With this statement, Mary gives him a dual labeling as a jazz singer, a secular, Americanized performer, and a Jew, as she notes that he is connecting to God. She recognizes and labels the prayer as singing, however, and Jakie's stylized performance, complete with arm motions and a "costume," cements the idea that even this, one of the holiest of Jewish prayers, should not be read as solely religious. It is singing, and it is a performance, reiterating to the audience that religion and tradition is acceptable in America as long as one is still open to assimilation, like Jakie. Whereas Raphaelson meant that Jazz is related to religion to elevate both forms of expression in America, the film equates them only to point out the stubbornness in the Cantor's attitude and practices.

The use or absence of invoking God when discussing Jakie's career functions similarly to minimize divine intervention and emphasize American ideals. When Jakie sing an audition piece, he asks that another patron at the restaurant wish him luck.

Though seemingly innocent, Jakie's words are suspect for they do not include a mention of God before a big audition performance. Devout Jews often make note of God's responsibility in everything, even answering, "How are you?" with "Thank God." The absence of God in this simple statement signals that older Jakie, now Jack Robin, has left the old world and God behind, depending instead on the American self-made notions of luck and pluck. Any Jew in the audience would notice that Jack intentionally calls on luck rather than God, and he or she would take this absence as a clear message against religious dependence in favor of the American Dream. Similarly, The inter-title that introduces Jack's performance life in the Mid-West reads, "Mary's promise realized," again leaving out any mention of God's role in Jack's success (The Jazz Singer). It is Mary's connection, pluck that leads Jack to his Promised Land, which is not God's promised land, but rather the American touring circuit. These absences illustrate that Jack views his career through a secular, American trajectory and not controlled by God's intervention. The film suggests then that this luck and pluck, and not divine intervention, are the true nature of success. When Mary tries to help Jack decide if he should open the show or perform on Broadway, she comforts him and says, "Your career is the place God as put you. Don't forget that, Jack," (The Jazz Singer). Though this sentiment could be read as Mary's acknowledgement of God's role in Jack's career, her words only function as a reminder that Jack should only believe and trust in his career. Likewise, when his mother sees Jack perform she says, "Here he belongs. If God wanted him in his house he would have kept him there." Even though both these women seem to call on God's role in Jack's career, he does not, emphasizing that he moves toward the American Dream and away from God. The film also only allows for these references to God when it comes to

reinforcing Jack's place as a Jazz Singer as these references still allow for the career to have the most importance.

The use of the title "Jazz Singer" accomplishes the same goal of placing the American Dream in the forefront of the film. He first earns the name when Mary tells him, "there are lots of jazz singers, but you have a tear in your voice," signifying that he is a jazz singer, but he is also different (The Jazz Singer). The tear is a sadness or pain that comes with him from the old world; it is the prayer that is referenced in the opening epigraph. The next time someone calls him a jazz singer is once he is established in Chicago. A woman, jealous because he takes her place on a bill, casually refers to him as such, but this time there is no reference to the "tear," to his background. Thus as he becomes more established, he becomes a jazz singer and less of a cantor's son with a prayer in his singing. Even during the fight with his father, after he returns to New York, the father rejects him as a son and instead calls him a jazz singer, sealing Jakie's newfound identity as Jack as a secular one.

The title "jazz singer" acts a secularizing force in the conversation between Jakie and Mary when he tries to decide what to do on the Day of Atonement and the day of his opening show. Though the actual words "jazz singer," are only mentioned once, they are discussing his career as one and how that defines him. While putting on black face, literally disguising himself, Jakie says that he wants to "make good tonight…I'm going to put everything I've got into my songs" (The Jazz Singer). Here the disguise implies that his statement refers to the show, but they are ambiguous words and could also be about his mother's request to have him lead the holiday services. Many scholars have written on the racial significance of this black face sequence, but few discuss it in relation to his

Jewish identity. Black face, a costume that purposefully looks like a costume with the wearer's skin peaking out, is meant to represent a dualism here. Beneath his costume, he is still Jack Robin/Jakie Rabinowitz, only he must decide which persona to be that night. Thus the black face sequence reiterates that he must choose one or the other for there is no reconciliation, but he is still unsure about which to choose. His next words, "I'd love to sing for my people but I belong here. But there's something after all, in my heart-maybe it's the call of the ages—the cry of my race," imply more ambiguity (The Jazz Singer). He clearly feels torn between the two options, performing in the show and pursuing his career and returning to his people; however, the symbolic application of a costume as well as the words "ages" and "race" tell the audience that the right choice is to choose the theater. Mary confirms this choice as the films agenda as she defines his life as the theater and that his career is the place God put him. He agrees, "my career means more to me than anything else in the world," and yet he sees the Cantor as he looks at himself in the mirror. This scene, as it revolves around his identity as a Jazz Singer and as a Jew, clearly shows that even with pieces of his Judaism, his "race" and the "call of the ages", the "songs of Israel," he will find someway to keep the title of Jazz Singer. The earning and success of that title is what matters first and foremost, as it is his career, and if he can retain some Jewishness in the process, then he will, but he would never sacrifice the title of Jazz Singer.

Just as we can see the message of the film reflected in the uses of certain spaces and words, so too does the message become clear through the contrast between the parts of the film that are in sound and the parts that are silent. Most of the notable sound parts are the musical numbers, of which three are the Jewish prayer Kol Nidre. The musical

numbers lend themselves to the spectacle of sound technology and Jolson's talent, and they are the pieces of the film that impressed and intrigued audiences, but the dichotomy between the pieces are revealing. Kol Nidre, arguably the most important and holiest Jewish prayer, receives the same royal Vitaphone treatment. This may seem to suggest that the film does in fact emphasize a Jewish factor, or it could point to the fact that this prayer is equal to *Toot Toot Tootsie* or *Mammy*. It is exoticized for audiences through the use of the sound technology as well as through the elaborate set, but the film also belittles the prayer by equating it. All the musical numbers are performances, religious or not, emphasizing that the holiness is moot. This comes across the clearest when Cantor Rosenblatt performs the Kol Nidre for an audience in Chicago. Here the film forces the audience to see that even a prayer can be assimilated, it can fit into the overall American theatre practice, contrary to Cantor Rabinowitz's antiquated and stubborn opinion.

The turning point of the film, Jack's return home as a Broadway star, is half in sound and half silent, the portions of which point to the conclusion that the film furthers assimilation. He sings for his mother, saying he is going to try out a new song on her. Here we see his dedication and devotion to his mother, the more assimilatory, understanding parent. He sings to her and gives her a speech: "I'd rather please you than anybody I know of…if I'm a success we're going to move up in the Bronx," (The Jazz Singer). He continues to list who they will see, what they will do, and what he will buy her, promising her success and social mobility. The definitive conversation between Jack and his mother can take place in sound, placing importance on the content, which itself is typical of immigrant and American Dream mentality. Though he cares for his mother's opinion, her acceptance, the audience only hears his aspirations of assimilation. The

Cantor interrupts, however, with the word “Stop!” Only this word of their fight is said aloud. The rest is silent, and while the audience can read the Cantor’s reasoning, they cannot hear it in the same way as they heard Jack’s ideas for the future. It cannot resonate the same way for the audience because in the film, it is not as important. Thus while the Cantor makes arguments on the religious grounds about how he taught Jack “the songs of Israel,” the audience must give these arguments the same weight that they give to Jack’s silent insistence that he is of the new world and his father is of the old, and less weight in comparison to Jack’s future, the part that spoken about in sound. Here the sound separates the old from the new, just as the old and new were separated in song, the references to characters physical setting, and uses of “God” and “Jazz singer.”

Arrival

These elements from the film represent but a few changes that occurred in the adaptation process; however, they all point to a much larger thematic change. While Raphaelson’s story meant to compare Jazz and prayer as a way to legitimize both, reflect the normalcy of Jewish life in American, and to propose a new view of assimilation that allows for the maintenance of religion, the film, in these ways, proposes assimilation by rejecting old world values. The largest change is, of course, the final scene, in how the film solves the predicament between Jakie praying for his community and singing on Broadway on the same night. In the story and the play, Jakie chooses to sing the Kol Nidre prayer in his father’s place, and he does not perform on Broadway. While this change could be a way to add another musical number for Jolson and for Vitaphone, the new ending reinforces the preferential treatment of new, assimilatory ideals over religious ones (Carringer 26). As scholar Joel Rosenberg describes, “The film seems to say that

one can have it all, that America is willing to cut some slack for the assimilating Jew as long as he or she gets the overall priorities straight — namely, an appropriately proportionate wedge of the American Dream," asserting that film's position as one that furthers the American Dream as the main point of the immigration experience (Rosenberg 14). Robert Carringer is even more specific when he describes the differences in the play and the film endings, writing, that the film" "transformed from a fable of adjustment (how the new generation finds its place in cultural tradition) to a more characteristically American fable of success—open revolt against tradition, westward movement, the expenditure of energy, triumph, and the replacement of the values of the old by values of the new" (Carringer 27). Rosenberg and Carringer take issue with the fact that the ending, as well as other changes, transformed the film into an "American fable of success" instead of the multi-faceted portrait of Jewish immigrant life that the play presented, and while the ending is the most apparent change, the film's use of setting and characters, sound, of the word God and the title Jazz Singer, all support the same conclusion about the film's messages.

Responses to the film, both from a critical perspective and from those involved in the film, reinforce that the changes made while adapting the story and play into a film only strengthened Vitaphone's role and necessitated assimilatory messages. Most reviews only acknowledged Vitaphone, hardly noting other aspects of the film (Sennet 19). The trade publication *Variety* went even further, claiming that if it was not for Jolson's well known hits, it would be "doubtful if the general public will take to the Jewish boy's problem of becoming a cantor or a stage luminary," and the film would only resonate with Jewish audiences (qtd. in Williams 143). These reviews support the idea that the

film's main goal was to showcase sound through the musical scenes, and that in order not to offend audiences and ensure a success, they needed to minimize and universalize the Jewish content. Raphaelson noticed these changes as well, "I had a simply, corny, well-felt little melodrama, and they made an ill-felt, silly maudlin, badly timed thing of it. There was absolutely no talent in the production at all, except the basic talent of the floating camera," (Carringer 20.) He continued, "It was embarrassing. A dreadful picture. I've seen very few worse…." (Carringer 20). More specifically, about the biggest change, the ending, Raphaelson lamented, "Now that situation was basically from my play, but in my play the song I had him sing was—lord almighty, the one thing I wouldn't have him sing was a song about mother. There's a limit…(Carringer 21). Raphaelson's responses to the film are particularly interesting in that he is not offended by the addition of having Jack perform on Broadway in addition to in the synagogue. Rather, Raphaelson is offended by the choice of song and the general lack of art in the film. If we read the song choice as a reference to having both- Broadway and his mother- then it seems that Raphaelson is offended by this ideas as it contradicts with the original message in the play. His comments, along with the reviews above, cement that the gamble inherent to the Vitaphone technology drove the story into becoming a musical devoid of any of thoughtful, and especially Jewish messages that translated to audiences.

Thus, while the Warner Brothers did indeed take a risk when choosing to make The Jazz Singer a sound film, it was not risky in the least if it was just to be an immigrant film and not a *Jewish* immigrant film in terms of its treatment of the religion. As they modified the story, moving it away from the original meaning Raphaelson intended, the more Americanized Warners changed it from a Jewish, racial story that Harry sought out

to a non-risky, safe bet. The bet became safe through their changes as it became an American film, projecting ideals of successful assimilation in everything from the film's star to its symbols and style. The trajectory, and the analysis, of the film likewise demonstrate how the film was not Jewish in regard to religion at all, but American. The Jewish pieces of the story then are meant to only reinforce a bland Americanness devoid of certain types of religion or culture, rather than stand alone in any informative or meaningful way. The Jazz Singer, through its safe American material, presents the audience with a guide for assimilation and immigration. The film juxtaposes Jack with his father, Jazz with Judaism, and Broadway with the Synagogue to make the film secular in its message, but the secularism is suspect as it teaches audience that this version of immigration is the model version. The film's universality as a big budget, musical, as the first sound film, makes this especially dangerous. Similarly, children's media's role as a mass-market didactic popular culture necessitates secularism, and is just as hazardous for identity formation in presenting that secularism.

Section Two: Learning from Feivel, Molly, and Rebecca

An American Tail

An American Tail, the1985 animated children's film, tells the story of a young mouse, Fievel Moskowitz, as he immigrates with his family from Shotska, Russia to New York City in 1885. During the journey, Fievel accidentally separates from his parents, and he must try to find them in New York City while dodging cats, fighting for mouse rights, and learning to be an American. The film, produced by Steven Spielberg and directed by Don Bluth, presents classic themes related to immigration through the illustration of the hardships and rewards of leaving a dangerous place for freedom. As a Jewish mouse family, the Mousekowitz's must leave Russia because of their enemies, cats, while Jewish humans emigrate because of anti-Semitic policies and acts, like Pogroms (raids). To Fievel's dismay, cats exist in America as well, and the mice must rally against them. While the film can be heralded as a text that introduces a mass audience of children to the hardships the Jews faced, specifically the fact that struggles do not end on the shore of a new country, the film ultimately weakens these lessons. Though the film accomplishes a teaching of immigration, it sacrifices symbolism to lessen the Jewish topicality. Analyzing Spielberg and Bluth's intentions in making the film reveals a contrast between these intentions and the actual rendering of the symbols and their reception. This contrast then allows An American Tail to exemplify how a Hollywood feature necessitates the sacrifice of detailed insight into the treatment of Jewish immigrants as a particular when trying to appeal to a mass market, and reflects

how children's media uses the turn of the century Jewish immigration to teach universal themes rather than to further a familiarity with Jewish topics.

Though most of Spielberg's previous work signaled that he did not care to make Jewish films, looking to his attitudes toward his own Judaism reveals that one of his goals in making An American Tail was to create a film with meaning that would do justice to Spielberg's own Jewish family history. Spielberg himself grew up as a typical baby boomer, yearning to fit in with white American suburban culture. Later, while starting a family, he found that he did feel a connection to his Jewish ancestry despite his attempts to distance himself (McBride 20). In a biography of Spielberg, Joseph McBride writes:

> "He was a child of second generation American Jews who broke away from their roots and for whom assimilation was part of the price of social acceptance and professional advancement. As a result, Spielberg, like many others in his generation, grew up questioning the relevance of his old-world heritage and the faith of his parents and grandparents," (McBride 19).

Here McBride describes Spielberg's attitude towards his religion as one that is mainly assimilatory. Spielberg and his family had set the goal of fitting in; however, McBride also categorizes Spielberg's attitude as one that is sensitive to a status as different and "other" in relation to the American WASP majority (McBride 19). Spielberg indeed questioned his roots, and part of this questioning was a dichotomy between trying to fit in and still feeling separate. This confusion that emerged from his desire to assimilate drove Spielberg to professionally focus on pleasing the mainstream culture through his films. As McBride describes Spielberg, an "alien seeking acceptance with American majority," Spielberg wanted to make films that would do well and that would be entertaining for the widest audience (McBride 20). Thus with few exceptions, like the Nazi enemy in Raiders of the Lost Ark, Spielberg bypassed Jewish imagery, instead opting for subjects with mass-market appeal until making An American Tail.

An American Tail took shape when Spielberg started his family and would think back to his own childhood, to hearing stories from his grandfather, Fievel, illustrating the Jewish history embedded in the film from its inception (McBride 21.) The film was Spielberg's first animated feature, and at that time, it was a rare non-Disney cartoon, meaning that Spielberg needed to make an impact in regard to profit so that he could distinguish himself and his brand as well in regard to treating the personal subject with the respect it deserved. Despite the importance of making his first film a hit, Spielberg chose to use his grandfather's story, a Jewish immigration story, for the film, and ignored his previous inclination to secure popularity with mass-market friendly topics. Still, An American Tail held hope for Spielberg, as director Don Bluth stated in 1986, "Animation is really an enigma. To most people, the characters you see on screen are actually symbols…That is why animation is like poetry. It is symbolic communication," (Darnton). His words here imply that Bluth and Spielberg truly believed in the symbols of the film, that they could tell an important story of immigration and teach lessons of good vs. evil, of coming to a new country, for both children and adults. Ultimately, their goal of communicating a symbolic lesson with a Jewish focus was weakened by the other goal of finding a mass audience and by Spielberg's tendency to hold the popular opinion above Jewish themes.

The main sign that the film veers away from teaching lessons through the specificity of a Jewish example is the failure of the symbolism of the mice, who seem to represent only immigrants in general and not solely Jews. Though the film is based in Spielberg's own Jewish roots, aside from the opening scene depicting Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday, there is no other mention of Fievel's religion. The opening scene

depicting a Pogrom against both Jewish mice and humans leads the audience to believe the mice in the film represent Jews as a type of allegory as that scene aligns with history. This is fact further supported by Art Spiegelman's copyright lawsuit against the film for allegedly stealing his representation of Jews as mice from his book Maus (Bammer 90). The lawsuit, like the opening scene, allows us to believe that all mice in the film represent Jews in the fable; however, the rest of the film seems to say conversely that mice are just mice, who have lives and homes in a world in which humans exist as well. While Cossacks (Russian military communities) hunt human Russian Jews in the film, cats hunt all mice despite origin or religion (Italian Catholic and Irish mice are also depicted throughout the film). The role of mice as just mice, and not necessarily representing a minority at all, forces the questioning of the film as a Jewish immigrant text.

Consequentially, the rallies for mice's rights, the plot against the cats in America, and the songs about America, land of no cats and breadcrumbs on every floor, become confusing. The message behind these events and images does not seem to be clear or strong if this is not a Jewish narrative, as the cats no longer hold a clear parallel in history. By making the cats out to be the cause of immigration and the largest hardship in America that the mice must overcome, Spielberg and Bluth disregard any of the causes and effects of turn of the century immigration for Jews specifically. The cats are no longer anti-Semitic Cossacks, and thus Fievel's religion is irrelevant because he could be an immigrant of any background pursuing any type of freedom in America. Instead, the producers make cats a universal problem. In doing so, they remove the film from the

confines of a “Jewish” film and try to make it a universal one about any type of immigrant.

Despite this odd discontinuity of fragments of Jewishness in the film, An American Tail tries its best to be an immigrant narrative through the common enemy for immigrants: the cats. The reason for emigration from Russia is to escape the cats, as Fievel’s father tells the children, “In American there are no cats” and “In America, you can say anything you want.” Other immigrants on the boat from Hamburg, Germany to the U.S. echo these sentiments as they sing stories about cat terrorism in their own countries: “but there are no cats in America, and the streets are paved with cheese/No cats in America to put your mind at ease,” (An American Tail). Here all the immigrants, despite country of origin, recognize a common reason to leave, but encounter the same enemy in the US as well. Facing the cats in America after leaving various countries could be commentary on the fact that all immigrants search for freedom, but must work to achieve it even in America. Moreover, the presence of cats in the US could speak to immigrant solidarity, as the mice must team up to fight the cats, despite their countries of origin. America unites all of the immigrant mice in the fight for mouse rights, equalizing the mice in the melting pot of America. With either explanation, it is clear that the film has gone beyond the specificity of Russian Jewish immigration. Instead, the film showcases the plights of many different kinds of immigrants through the secondary characters (mice) from other backgrounds and their common position in leaving their countries because of cats only to find the enemy in America.

The rest of the film similarly depicts universal immigrant experiences and themes. Tanya, the sister, asks why they changed her name at Ellis Island, while Henri the French

pigeon teaches Fievel about the Statue of Liberty and what it represents as it is constructed. Furthermore, an evil rat puts Fievel to work in a textile sweatshop, and we see human women working in the same exploitative environment, providing a glimpse into the working conditions of immigrants at the turn of the century. We also see mice and human children reciting the pledge of allegiance in a classroom, and a rich mouse signing up dead mice to vote. These last two images are excerpts from American life, good or bad, that exist even today. Likewise, in strict capitalistic fashion, the manipulative, enemy rat says, "You don't need a family, kid. You've got a job here," (An American Tail). These pieces of the film could very well teach children about immigrant life in America, but none are explained or expanded upon, and only some adults would understand these as asides about immigrant experiences and American values. The central conflict seems to be Fievel's search for his family and the mice's simultaneous attempt to rid America of cats by sending them to Asia. This latter plot point, however, does not have an equal in history that would make this film a work of Jewish immigrant fiction, thus leaving the film to be just about immigration, a point further exemplified in the mice's rally against the cats: "Why did we come to America? For freedom! Why are they building that statue (the statue of liberty)? What does it stand for? For freedom!"(An American Tail). the head of the mice chants. This type of scene would certainly resonate with a child or an adult, as it consists of chanting mantras about American life and identity, but many of the other pieces about being a newcomer to the US can escape the audience when the film veers away from the Jewish story. These examples teach the audience about immigrant life as it reflects American ideals such as fair working

conditions, patriotism, and freedom, but the examples are general, lacking the specificity of the Jewish immigrant with which the film begins.

Likewise, the film can be understood as an immigrant text as we can also find the theme of displacement supplementary to the idea that the immigrants did not always have an easy adjustment to America or to the examples described above. As Angelika Bammer writes, "'An American Tail, in short, is a fantasy, a fantasy of identity (re)constitution within the always again recuperable hold of the dual communities of nation and family. For not only are Feivel and his family Americans now, it is America that makes this family possible," (Bammer 90). Bammer believes that An American Tail does in fact convey a message, albeit mythic, one of families finding each other in America as new people and a new family that must rebuild as Americans, "to remember, reconnect it again after the violence of disruption" (Bammer 92). While the film is problematic in many ways, it still conveys the main theme of freedom in America and portrays émigré families trying to readjust. Given Bluth's words and Spielberg's connection to the subject matter, it was meant to transmit both these messages, even if they do not perfectly render a Jewish immigration tale. Perhaps the most telling piece that supports that An American Tail's use the turn of the century immigration and flight from Russia as a message and not just as a plot device is the sequel to the film, Fievel Goes West. Fievel and his family struggle in New York, and they move west for opportunity once again, cementing their status as immigrants because their American dream is never satisfied; they must keep working and moving to succeed. In these ways, by showing fragments of American life and values, the immigrant experience, and the displacement of a family that must struggle

even after they arrive in America, An American Tail succeeds in some ways, but not as a Jewish text as may have been intended.

Reception of the film questions the thematic success of the film. The generality of the immigration messages in the film resulted in a lack of understanding and appreciation for Spielberg's and Bluth's efforts to make the film meaningful. Janet Maslin, in her 1987 *New York Times* piece about the decline in good animation, epitomizes this point when she writes, "the style of the film is much too conventionally childish to interest parents in the audience, and yet the content probably alludes many children," (Maslin). Maslin's comments suggest that Spielberg could not achieve both his goals for the film. While successful, earning 47 million in the US, which made it the highest non-Disney, animated film at the time, critics like Maslin were not impressed by the symbolism, history, and "poetry" for which Bluth and Spielberg aimed. Maslin is right to note that the mix of childish animation and adult topics did not work to affect the audience, as using inconsistent symbolism to communicate general themes could not reach a child to teach him or her. Another *Times* reviewer called An American Tail a film with a "split personality," echoing Maslin's statements that the film cannot be a mass animation hit that entertains while teaching complex lessons (Canby). Certainly, such inconsistent symbolism of the cats and mice, as the film moves from a Jewish story to one about all immigrants, means that Spielberg could not make his first animated feature into the film that would connect his roots with his filmmaking.

Though analyzing the theme displacement and general immigrant experiences of the film prove that the film does present worthwhile, interesting lessons, the film abandons Jewish specificity in order to accomplish commercial success. Despite

Spielberg's radical move to make a movie about his own heritage and religion, he and Bluth opted instead to alter the focus from a Jewish perspective to a broader one by failing with the allegory of cat and mouse. The film avoids an opportunity to showcase an important piece of the immigrant puzzle and of the Jewish American landscape by denying itself to present the same lessons through a more specific, more Jewish allegory. Instead, the failure to be specific, to have a minority tell a universal story and elicit a broad appeal in the process, demonstrates the lack of producers and the public to believe that Jews are included in America as the film could only appeal to everyone if the symbolism highlights immigrants rather than Jewish immigrants.

II. Molly's Pilgrim

Molly's Pilgrim, a 1985 illustrated storybook by Barbara Cohen, represents a different problem than the production and reception of An American Tail. In this case, Cohen thought that the title character's Jewishness was the main factor in the story, and that it would be this factor that would convey to the readers the more universal messages in addition to the specific one about Jewish familiarity. Rather, though *Molly's Pilgrim* has achieved popularity, many editions of the stories as well as lesson plans edit this Jewish factor to a minor one. The main character is a Jewish immigrant named Molly who faces ridicule from her classmates in the suburbs for the way she looks, speaks, and dresses. When the class learns about Thanksgiving, Molly completes the assignment of making a pilgrim doll by dressing it like a Russian immigrant, her mother. She brings it to school only to deal with more hurtful comments until the teacher lets her explain the doll, and helps the rest of the class to better understand Molly's religion and history by learning more about Thanksgiving. Molly and the teacher explain together that

Thanksgiving is linked to the Jewish harvest holiday of Sukkos as well as to Jewish immigration to the US as Jewish Russian immigrants can also be seen as pilgrims who came to this country for religious freedom. Cohen's sensitive tale teaches children about the meaning behind Thanksgiving and immigration, while familiarizing them with Jewish life and history. Unlike An American Tail, Molly's Pilgrim could teach these broader lessons and achieve success without sacrificing the meaning of the Jewish content, but later editing of the story and its themes as it appears in lesson plans for school curriculums reveals that this text too must be altered to omit Jewish specificity when presented to a wider audience. With Molly's Pilgrim, however, this omission is not the work of the producer, but rather those who interpret and repackage the story.

The most telling piece of evidence, the one that provides the most insight into Cohen's intention in regard to the Jewish content, is Cohen's 1985 diary of censorship entitled "Censoring the Sources." In this piece, written for the School Library Journal, Cohen chronicles the events that led to the censorship involved in the publication of Molly's Pilgrim in a textbook for third-graders, thereby elucidating the pieces of the story that were most important to her and to her understanding of the book's message. The first edit Cohen received from the publisher, Harcourt Brace Jonavanoritch, had the entire first part of the book, the part which included the other school children taunting Molly for her Jewish and immigrant differences, cut out and replaced with a summary. While the summary mentions Molly's religion as a Jew, Cohen laments, it does not go into the careful detail Cohen had included originally.

Moreover, all of the Jewish references- Sukkos, God, the Bible- were omitted. Cohen explained to her agent, "Listen, for $1500, I won't sell my soul…" ("Censoring"

97). Cohen's wording of "I won't sell my soul," and her decision to not allow for an edition of Molly's Pilgrims that lacks a religious context signals that these are the important facets of the story. It is not just that Molly and her mother are pilgrims too- it is not just a story about immigration, but specifically about Jewish immigration and its themes and ramifications, historical and social, a fact made even clearer in Cohen's comments to an NYU professor acting as a consultant on the textbook. When the professor claims that Molly's Pilgrims is good literature because of its universal quality, Cohen responds:

> Only because it's specific…I have an agenda too. They like the story because it universalizes Thanksgiving. I like it because it's specific. The fact that Molly is Jewish is important to me. The fact that Sukkos is mentioned is important to me. It gripes me that the only Jewish holiday most non-Jews have heard of is a minor one, Chanukah. That holiday as been blown up out of all proportion to its traditional significance because it happens to fall at Christmas time. I want non-Jewish kids to know about other Jewish holidays too. That's why Sukkos is in there. I won't have it removed ("Censoring" 98.)

Here, Cohen lays out her agenda. She wants to educate, or raise awareness among, non-Jews about real Jewish American life, Jewish history, and Jewish observance. She believes that it is this awareness that then promotes the universal themes of acceptance and tolerance because she uses the specific example of a Jewish immigrant. Inherent to the goal of teaching the larger themes is the specific one of having a Jewish character who non-Jewish children can read about. The non-Jewish characters in the story struggle with identifying and learning about a Jewish immigrant who does not fit the American norm in their minds. Meanwhile, Molly yearns for her old life of Jewish separatism on the Lower East Side and the ease that came with it, and simultaneously resents not fitting in. Cohen is the opposite of Molly; she wants the real life non-Jews, the supposed audience for the textbook as well as the publisher, to know about Jewish life. While Cohen used this goal in creating the book, Molly can only realize and accomplish it

towards the end of the story when she explains her pilgrim and heritage to the school children. It is Cohen's main point that, in Cohen's own words, "this little girl is Jewish" (*Censoring* 98).

In the end, after a few more drafts and conversations, Cohen agrees to the publication, as long as there are revisions that emphasize Cohen's intention for a story with the specific lesson about Jewish awareness. She agrees to the elimination of the words "God" and "the bible" because the word "worship" implies enough about religion. Moreover, the word Sukkos remains in a variation of the original line that explains that American pilgrims celebrated Thanksgiving because they knew about the Jewish harvest holiday ("Censorsing" 99.) With these changes, the Jewish aspect of the book is preserved at least in part, enhancing both the universal and specific agenda as Cohen intended. Cohen writes about the compromise, "Sukkos. Half a million third graders hearing the word Sukkos. Their teachers read the notes in the teacher's edition and explain the holiday. Jews aren't just Chanukah. They're Sukkos too, and Sukkos is one source of a holiday we all celebrate, Thanksgiving. I feel myself weakening," ("Censoring" 98). Here we see once more Cohen's thoughts on the purpose of the story as she weakens because of the educational factor of teaching a Jewish specific, the less well-known holiday of Sukkos, as it relates to something universal. And yet, Cohen is ambivalent about the editing, writing "Did I do the right thing? I don't know," and she ends by noting that censorship is alive because "we inflict it on ourselves," ("Censoring" 99). We can interpret this resigned note to mean that Cohen, like any other writer, purposefully chose every word and sentence in the story, and meant for those words to convey meaning about Jewishness and not just about Thanksgiving. She did not initially

write, “the pilgrims celebrated thanksgiving because they knew about the Jewish harvest holiday,” but rather constructed the sentence “they read about it in the bible” to show the roots of Judaism as they relate to universal themes of giving thanks and seeking freedom. Cohen censors herself for this edition of the story, with prompting from this editor, because it is important to her to retain the uniquely Jewish elements of the story and reach audiences with at lest some of those elements. Her actions are thus unlike Spielberg’s, though both alter their stories, because he censors himself by toning down the Jewishness of An AmericanTail as to avoid alienating non-Jewish audiences, whereas she censors herself so that she is able to reach audiences with at least some Jewish specificity.

Most of Cohen’s dreams for the book are realized today in textbooks and lesson plans, but few of these secondary permutations emphasize the Jewish factor. Instead, many focus on the topic of immigration as it relates to acceptance, and only discuss the Jewish pieces of the story as it relates to those universal pieces. One lesson plan from the University of North Carolina School of Education asks Fourth grade students to draw a Venn diagram comparing the Thanksgiving Pilgrims to Molly’s family (Milholland, Vaden, and Wilson). This is intended to raise similarities about religious freedom or a harvest holiday, but it is vague about focusing on teaching something about Judaism or Jewish immigration. Likewise, another activity asks the teacher to design questions about “cultural, social, and historical significance of the book,” but does not mention religious significance explicitly (Millholland, Vaden, and Wilson). Rather, one of the stated goals is to have students understand immigration to North Carolina and to “trace the history of colonization in North Carolina and evaluate its significance for diverse people's ideas”

(Millholland, Vaden, and Wilson). Here the principles found in Molly's Pilgrims are applied to a state history lesson, but there is no mention of Jewish awareness. Another lesson plan for North Carolina school children, this time for those in Guilford County, is framed around the question, "How are pilgrims today from the past alike and different from the pilgrims of today?" placing immigration in a modern perspective for children (Brady). It also includes "synagogue" as one of the vocabulary words, an addition that inches closer to Cohen's intent of relaying facts about Judaism (Brady).

Conversely, The Holocaust Outreach Center at Florida Atlantic University uses Molly's Pilgrim as a part of "A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust". Despite its placement in the Holocaust lesson plan, Molly's Pilgrim is read alongside texts about immigration and Ellis Island, but this lesson plan also has elements that emphasize the Jewish piece of the story and of Molly's character (Heckler). One activity includes comparing Molly's life on the Lower East Side with her life in Winter Hill, an exercise that would have to showcase not only the differences in living conditions but also the differences in Jewish life and familiarity. Molly does this same exercise for herself throughout the story, signaling to the reader that Jewish life in America varies in regard to place. This lesson plan also points out many Yiddish words in the story and highlights, however briefly, the anti-Semitism in Russia that led to Molly's family's immigration (Heckler). It even suggests that the teacher ask students if they know about Sukkos and invite a Rabbi to speak about the holiday and its significance (Heckler). In these ways, despite the odd placement in a Holocaust guide, this lesson plan more closely fits Cohen's ideals for the book- to educate about acceptance and religious freedom for immigrations while familiarizing non-Jews with Jewish practices and history. This slant may have to do with

the inclusion of the story in a Holocaust unit, perhaps as a way to talk about anti-Semitism and freedom of religion. The differences between these three lesson plans elucidate the difference between Cohen and the textbook editors. The first two, like the textbook edition, are vague about the Jewish content, using it mostly as a vehicle to discuss the other issues instead of one used to discuss Jewish issues. The last one, however, focuses on the Jewish pieces, but only because teaching Jewish history is its main intention as it includes the story as a unit on the Holocaust. Thus the Jewish piece is mostly irrelevant unless it is the implicit goal of the lesson; teaching Jewish content can never be an included and enhancing goal, as was Cohen's intention, only specialized and separate.

These different interpretations may show the possible deviations from Cohen's intended goal, but the Phoenix Learning Group film adaptation and accompanying lesson plan show how Cohen's goal can be simultaneously accomplished and also modified in the hands of others. The film won the 1985 Academy Award for Best Live-Action Short, popularizing the story, and for Cohen, teaching a much wider audience about acceptance, Jewish immigration, and Sukkos (Pheonix Leaning Group). Despite this accomplishment, the Pheonix Learning Group's lesson plan only mentions the Jewish aspects of the film when related to the immigration with the task, "Research the plight of the Russian Jewish immigrants. Write about your findings. Share your findings with friends and family" and with the goal "To link the plight of Russian Jews to the plight of the pilgrims…" (Pheonix Learning Group). Other goals including exploring different backgrounds and friendship, but it makes no other mention of Judaism or Jewish themes. Thus, though the film catapulted Cohen's story into further fame, teaching more people about Sukkos, the

plight of Russian Jews both in Russia and in the US, and Jewish biblical history, these religious aspects can be easily ignored when used to teach other, and yet still worthy, agendas about immigration. These possible omissions illustrate that even if the author means to showcase Jewish content along with broader themes, many others believe that the religion must be lessened if it is to appeal to more Americans than just Jews.

III. Rebecca Rubin, An American Girl

The newest American Girl doll, Rebecca Rubin, differs from the two texts above. Instead of fearing Jewish content as a marginalizing force, the parent company strove to create a Jewish character that was sensitive to religion and immigration and simultaneously accessible for all consumers. The American Girl branding entails the creation of a doll that represents a historical period, connecting a time in U.S. history with American themes that empower young girls, giving them, in the company's words, "chocolate cake with vitamins," a doll that will be fun, but also wholesome and educational. Rebecca Rubin is the newest creation, adding a Jew to the exiting line that includes a colonial girl, a Native American, a Mexican American, and a freed Black slave, among others. The company also produces dolls that girls can customize to look like themselves, The Girls of Today, but the historical dolls come with a series of six historical novellas aimed at young girls and clothing and accessories for girls and the dolls based on these books. All of these pieces are meant to add to the connection between fun, history, and values.

With each episode in the Rebecca Rubin series, the books introduce Jewish values such as *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, (Changes for Rebecca) and holidays like *Hannukah* (Candlelight for Rebecca). These references allow for opportunities to teach

the reader about Jewish immigrant life, and the books makes sure that it presents both assimilatory and traditional material. Rebecca learns how to adjust while maintaining her religion, family ties, and understanding of other immigrants like Ana, her cousin. The reader learns along with Rebecca that one does not need to change completely to become an American or an American Girl. The rest of the Rebecca Rubin brand functions in the same way. Her accessories range from a movie set to a *Hanukah* and Sabbath set, from the secular to the traditional. In this way, even a non-Jewish girl interested in the character, the stories, and the doll can consume the brand as there is something to play with or to connect to for the most religious of Jewish girls and the most Christian or Atheist of girls. Thus the actual merchandise and themes of the stories to do not limit the brand to Jews alone, nor are these products too Americanized or Christianized to turn away Jews. Despite the apparent accessibility for all consumers, a close look at the research, marketing, and reception of Rebecca Rubin and other cultural or racial American Girl dolls demonstrate that American Girl indeed meant to target a Jewish market. This analysis reveals that American Girl emphasizes the Jewishness in a way that is not meant to teach a widespread understanding or familiarity with Judaism, but to reach a specific demographic. This specificity once again reinforces that the religious and the traditional in immigration narratives are polarizing forces that are restrained when the product is for a mass market, but not when the product is meant to reach a Jewish market.

Over the course of six book series, Rebecca introduces readers to Jewish immigrant life on Manhattan's Lower East Side. We learn about how her cousin Max, an actor, inspires Rebecca to become an actress despite her parents' wishes, even secretly getting her a role in one of his films. We follow along as Rebecca helps her cousin, Ana, and her

family to immigrate to the US from Russia, teaching the reader about the reasons for migration. We read about how the girls help fight against unfair factory working conditions or how Rebecca simultaneously helps Ana adjust to American school while also fearing that Ana will embarrass her. In Candlelight for Rebecca, Rebecca's class makes Christmas ornaments and Rebecca worries that her family will be mad at her for doing so. While the teacher calls Christmas a "national holiday," Rebecca's Grandfather, maintains that it is "a Christian holiday. We are Jewish so we don't celebrate, no matter how American we are," (Candlelight for Rebecca 26). Similarly, the story behind *Hannukah,* in which the Jews needed to defend themselves and Judaism from the Greeks, is referred to a story that teaches that "we can't forget who are, even if it means being a little different," (Candlelight for Rebecca 32). In Meet Rebecca, however, Rebecca must learn to understand that despite Jewish law, her father must keep their store open on Saturday (Meet Rebecca 22). Though her father insists that this is necessary, and not a denial of their religion, he does not support their cousin Moyshe Shereshevsky's changing his name to Max Shepard in hopes of becoming a successful actor (Meet Rebecca 8). Despite this disapproval of assimilation, upon realizing that Rebecca has been raising money to help Ana and her family move to the US, Rebecca's father states, "When your daughter is a successful American business woman, what can a father do except sit back and watch?" (Meet Rebecca 68). These examples oscillate between teaching the reader about Jewish tradition, like not celebrating Christmas, and also about the importance of assimilation, of becoming a "successful American business woman," ensuring that the stories are not one sided on the issue of Americanization.

On one hand, Rebecca Rubin illustrates a missing character in the American Girl Doll collection. American Girl tries to present her not as Jewish character, but as an immigrant who came to the country at the turn of the century, maybe even replacing a prior doll. Samantha, the line's first doll representing the Victorian period, was retired, or in AG terms "archived" in 2009, and American Girl needed a new representative for the early 20th century who also had brown hair and eyes. Additionally, perhaps, an immigrant story needed to be told. In 2000, American girl set out to design Rebecca with this goal in mind. Focusing on seeking to represent an immigrant experience, two in house historical researchers landed on a representative of the Russian-Jewish immigration (Salkin.) Explaining the reason behind this choice, Shawn Dennis, Senior Vice President for Marketing, said to the New York Times that "Russian- Jewish immigration, that group has an effect on the labor movement, that group has an effect on the burgeoning Hollywood entertainment business…We thought it would have the makings of what would be a relatable story to tell" (Salkin.) Another American Girl executive, Susan Jevens was quoted on Boston.Com, and said "We don't really classify our historical characters via a particular religion…we classify them by the pivotal period in history they represent…Rebecca is our American Immigration character," (Articles of Faith). Jevens goes on to defend to defend the choice of including aspects about Rebecca's religion in her character by noting that that inclusion is just evidence of the focus on the "bigger theme." She states, "..in Rebecca's case, (is) the immigrant experience and the significant impact Jewish immigrants made to mainstream American culture," echoing Dennis' remarks (Articles of Faith). According to these executives, Rebecca's Jewish identity is just a facet of her life that allows her to represent an immigrant movement and that

movement's place in history. Thus, her Judaism is not her defining characteristic, and the doll is not only for Jews.

While American Girl may have intended indeed for Rebecca to be an immigrant character first and a Jewish character second, American Girl's marketing and research indicate that there was a deliberate appeal to the Jewish American audience. American Girl has had experience with this type of identity creation for a doll that represents a race or ethnicity; Addy, American Girl's black doll, a freed slave, and Marisol, a Hispanic "girl of the year," as well as other ethnic dolls have already been criticized. This may explain the years of planning that went into creating Rebecca, and we can then understand the research as not just being about historical accuracy but about cultural sensitivity as well as market appeal. American Girl even deliberated about Rebecca's looks, illustrating the care they took in designing her as a Jewish doll. Jewish characteristics are a touchy, hard-to-define set of features. One such characteristic was her hair color. Settling on dark auburn, they rejected dark brown because it seemed, "perhaps too typical, too predictable, failing to show girls there is not one color that represents all Jewish immigrants," (Salkin). Additionally, in regard to her background, American Girl consulted with Jewish history experts and authorities, signaling that they were searching for a specific type of Jewish history to portray. They spoke with the American Jewish Historical Society as well as the Yeshiva Univeristy Museum (Salkin.)

Most importantly, their marketing was equally derived to attract Jewish attention. American girl hired Joseph Jacob advertising to build ad campaigns with Jewish publications and direct mailings to Jews, and even changed the doll's release date to coincide with the Israel Day Parade in New York City. Further evidence that Rebecca

was intended to be a Jewish doll as much as an immigrant doll is American Girl's hiring of Elie Rosenfeld to check for sensitivity in the books, although she did not find anything to cut in regard to physical characteristics, religious practices or stereotypical professions (Salkin). In these ways, while American Girl doll applied the same rigor to historical research and rigorous planning of the marketing and branding of the character as they do to any doll they produce, American Girl doll also wanted to have a Jewish doll that would not offend and would even excite Jewish audiences who could afford he 95 dollar doll. This intentional Jewish and not only immigrant characterization forces us to re-examine American Girl's purpose in creating the doll, the themes they wanted to teach, and the audiences they wanted to reach with these themes.

More generally, American Girl claims that any historical doll they produce could appeal to any real life American girl, boy, or parent, but critical perspectives on other American Girl products demonstrate that ultimately consuming the doll has to do with the consumer's own identity. American Girl believes that it is the history and "Americanness" of the other historical dolls or the "just like you" (customizable dolls with contemporary accessories) line of American Girls that attracts consumers. Most girls, however, identify and ultimately buy the doll that represents them the most, either because of an attachment to history or physical features. American Girl relies on universal themes and morals to reach any consumer, " to bring history alive and provide girls with role models," thus providing "chocolate cake with vitamins," (Diamond 123). Just as these themes can transcend diversity, as they are all American themes, so too can they transcend generation gaps, often inspiring mothers and grandmothers to play along with the girls and to add to the historical lessons with personal experience or knowledge

(Diamond126). As such, family legacy becomes a part of play, but this legacy is rooted in identity politics, including race and ethnicity. As Diamond et. Al. describes," the complex brand narratives girls, mothers, and grandmothers use to author their own stories facilitate the creation of family mythologies that represent a synthesis of the commercial and the personal," (Diamond). Here, Diamond et. Al. explains how the doll and her stories, though fabricated, fit into a frame work of not only a larger history, but a family history as well. It would make sense then, that the historical doll a girl chooses should fit in with her own family.

American Girl's goal of "mending tears in the cultural fabric," by producing a doll that allows for educational, interactive, intergenerational play is flawed in part due to the racial and ethnic segmenting that must occur in selecting a doll. From a business perspective, Diamond et. Al. explains "marketers must recall that they are often managing political, not merely commercial properties and cast their decisions in a broader theater of influence. The brand is always a narrative, even if it is also a cycle, cluster, or canon—that is, plysemous and antiphonal in character, requiring careful to all its stakeholders," (Diamond 132). Here, we see how the brand is not just making a doll, but rather a multi-faceted and politicized narrative, doll and accessories included. The intergenerational play and marketing perspective reached here means that Rebecca Rubin is a Jewish doll, and will be selected for that purpose.

Another scholarly perspective, this time from a cultural studies standpoint rather than a business model, likewise demonstrates that the selection of a doll is rooted in the consumer's identity. Building off of Benedict Anderson's idea that nation is a "blurred, project in the making," or an "imagined political community," scholars Kreshel and

Acosta-Alzuru maintain that the American in American Girl is re-imagined with the creation of each doll (Acosta-Alzaru and Kreshel 144). In their study, they interview girls about the dolls they have chosen along with dolls with which they do not identify, finding that girls imagine their Americaness based on who they are racially, ethnically, or historically. They believe Josephina represents Mexican Americans because of her "earrings" and "that Hispanic flavor," and thus do not select her, instead picking Molly or Kristin because of their family's histories and race. (Acosta-Alzaru and Kreshel). One Mother comments about the different dolls, "Just the different nationalities, it's very important…because, you know, Black little girls deserve to have…you know, the dolls they enjoy playing with...you know, not just the white dolls" (Acosta-Alzaru and Kreshel 151). The mother here recognizes American Girl's goal of representing multiculturalism with the words "different nationalities," but still believe those nationalities should be consumed by members who identify with the nationalities. The girls' comments about their own dolls reinforce that they only identify with the dolls that represent the America they identify with, that they create or imagine based on their own experience. As such, Rebecca Rubin would certainly be the nationally Jewish doll, or the American-ly Jewish doll, only attractive to Jewish girls who have a Jewish "family mythology."

Further supporting this point, whether or not American Girl intended it, the American Jewish public is the one reacting, for better and for worse. On AG's side is Abraham Foxman, president of the Anti-Defamation League, a Jewish watch group. Foxman said to the New York Times, "It's not offensive. It's sensitive…Most of the times these things fall into stereotypes which border on the offensive," (Salkin) Here Foxman does not comment on the merit of the doll as an educational, historical, or identity tool for young

girls, only noting that it is not stereotypical or offensive. Other Jewish commentators have accepted the doll with open arms, heralding the doll as a long-awaited representative. Meredith Jacobs, host of The Modern Jewish Mom, on the Jewish Channel, stated, “This is our history, right here in this doll” literally calling Rebecca Rubin a representative (Fishkoff). She plans to buy the doll for her daughter and hopes her daughter will explore her family’s history as a result, and adds, “I don’t think people who aren’t Jewish think about how big a deal it is for a mainstream doll company to make something Jewish” (Fishkoff.) This last comment suggests that the production of Rebecca Rubin signifies inclusion of Jewish pieces into larger American life, but if the doll was researched, marketed, and received by children as a solely Jewish representative, then the production only signifies segmentation.

Blue Greenberg, author of “On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition,” who reviewed the books for American Girl, expands on how the character can be sensitive and symbolic of inclusion, but also a segmenting force at the same time. She believes the story is authentic and thus worthy of not only being a Jewish milestone but a milestone for immigrant literature. Greenberg maintains that the story’s central point, as American Girl intended, is to write about the tension of Americanization, something minorities can relate to, but in supporting this she says, “We still wrestle with these questions today of how do we fit into the larger American culture? The Christmas-Chanukah tension is not behind us,” making it seem that Greenberg, like Foxman, does in fact view it as a Jewish character and text primarily (Yelling). He even states “this will be really nice for Jewish girls,” and in perfectly American Girl etiquette, also states “equally important, I think it’s a nice introduction to Jews for non-Jews” (Yelling). Greenberg’s comments display the

straddling work American Girl attempts with Rebecca. They want it to be sensitive and accurate, as to not offend Jews and teach an immigrant history, but they also want it to be for Jewish girls, a special market, without alienating the non-Jewish market. It is a smart branding decision, but it is also a risky one. While Foxman views Rebecca as "sensitive," Jacobs takes her evaluation a step further to celebrate the doll. She sees the creation of a Jewish doll as inclusion, which is contradicted by American Girl's marketing, history with other ethnic dolls, and Greenberg's point that the doll represents how the question of how Jews fit in with American culture. The facts that American Girl researched and market it as different, that girls pick dolls that only represent them, and that the question of Jewish inclusion is a question all support that though AG would like us to think that their goal was just "sensitivity," they actually created a solely Jewish doll.

Like the critical perspectives above, some view this specialization as unnecessary. Rabbi Brad Hirschfield felt so strongly, he wrote an article in the Jewish Week asking, "what is it about us, about how we think of our place in American popular culture that makes this doll so significant?" (Hirschfield). He believes Jewish girls should instead celebrate Jewish normalcy instead of exclusion. This normalcy is indeed celebrated in the Rebecca books, as her father and grandparents remind her during her bouts of confusion with American and Christian culture, they came to America for religious freedom. And yet, Jewish girls need their own, separate doll and book series, both according to various Jewish authorities above and according to American Girl. The fact that American Girl even views this as a niche market and opportunity signifies, along with Jacobs comments that "I don't think people who aren't Jewish think about how big of a deal it is for a mainstream doll company to make something Jewish" (Hirschfield), that Jewish

immigration can still be used as a means of specialization. Instead of building a sense of normalcy, Hirschfield maintains that the doll only furthers difference. He states, “Is ours a story of cultural oppression and consistent lagging behind in our ability to achieve the American dream? In fact, it’s just the opposite. We are, arguably, the most successfully integrated religious/ethnic minority in America. Ironically, we can’t seem to decide if that should make us proud or terrified” (Hirschfield). Rabbi Hirschfield bluntly supposes that acculturation and immigration are not themes for the Jewish American girl today, and thus we should not focus on it. The creation of the doll, however, along with the themes in the books, can be accessible for non-Jews while still supporting that AG believed that Jewish girls needed their own dolls. While the books reflect a duality of Americanization and Jewish familiarity for Jewish and non-Jewish readers, the way in which AG marketed and researched this doll and others, the way consumers respond, and the way Jewish pundits have responded all demonstrate that in making Rebecca Rubin, AG made a Jewish doll for Jewish public.

Conclusion

Despite the diversity of mediums among the works discussed, these three children's texts exemplify how Jewish immigration promotes American themes in fiction rather than any type of understanding of Jewish specificity. An American Tail, despite its origins in Speilberg's own Jewish roots, became a mass-market film and thus necessitated mass-market, American themes, causing the breakdown in the historical lessons and symbolism. In contrast, Barbara Cohen meant to teach universal themes with the Jewish specificity in her book Molly's Pilgrim. En route to successful reprinting in textbooks, use in lesson plans, and adaptation into a short Oscar winning film, others augmented the text to fit a different agenda, believing that universal themes could only be taught if the Jewish pieces were assuaged. American Girl's Rebecca Rubin then represents a more confusing scenario: AG seeks for middle ground with the books, using Yiddish words while also urging Rebecca to become an "American businesswoman," but customizes the doll, the pricier product, for a Jewish market, defining the Jewish market as separate. These media thus aim, either because of the producers or other editors, to teach children American themes using Jewish immigration as nothing but an example of assimilation. Only when the goal is to entice a Jewish audience, as in the case of the Rebecca Rubin doll, does the producer emphasize the Jewish pieces of the fiction at hand. Thus, Jewish immigration is a tool, a plot device, which promotes the American Dream narrative.

The Jazz Singer, in its attitude of assimilation, was created as a sound film because the Jewish factor could exemplify the popular, commercially viable theme of Americanization. We look to its adaptation, how it changed the essence of the story, to its

creators, and to its symbols to see that the sound in the film necessitated accessible, American themes. We can understand the landmark use of sound in film as one that exemplifies Jewish immigrant characters in early Hollywood film and general American popular culture. Thus, the analysis of the trajectory of the creation of The Jazz Singer, the creators, and an analysis of the film itself all serve to demonstrate typical representation of turn of the century Jewish immigrants as models of assimilation. Case studies from children's media prove that this use is long lasting and permeating. In this genre of media that is meant to teach, to inform and to entertain, Jewish immigrants are used to further American themes of success, Americanization, and acceptance. This usage then not only socializes children, Jewish and non-Jewish, to understand how American identity is constructed in immigration, but also speaks to a bigger point about Jews in society.

We can see from these four examples that Jewish specificity can only exist in popular culture when the text is meant to appeal only to Jews, like pieces of the Rebecca Rubin brand. When the text is intended for a larger audience, either from the beginning or in a revision stage, the text must be as accessible as possible, meaning less religious, and more American. In this case, the turn of the century Jewish immigrant becomes a dual foil and model for assimilation, as he or she learns about America and chooses, maybe despite the wishes of those around them, to Americanize. In this way, nearly a century after Raphaelson saw Al Jolson perform in Illinois, prompting him to recognize that Jewish prayer and Jazz are not at odds but rather can coexist and inform each other, Jewish characters must still be Americans first. This definition of the Jewish immigrant in popular culture forces us to reconsider the place of American Jews in society today, as Jewish topics are polarizing and marginalizing in popular texts.

These texts are the complete opposite of the Oreo example. While Nabisco's kosherizing the Oreo led me to believe that an American mass-market company was considering my religion, that the company was including me, and me these texts form an exclusion through their secularization. Their intent is to reach a large audience and to make a profit, or in the case of American Girl, to reach just the small Jewish audience and make a profit. This mission, however, has an important result. In including assimilatory, secular material instead of Jewish specificity, the texts present a guide for immigrants and minority, a guide for Americanization. These characters cannot have both their old world religion and American success, and thus any audience member who identifies with the characters' struggles learns that the resolution for herself is to give herself over to an American identity that denies a religion or any other type of specificity.

If the audience member is to be successful, like Jack Robin, Fievel, Molly, or Rebecca, she will need to either be American only or Jewish only, just as the texts must be either wholly assimilatory or else specialized for a Jewish audience. Therefore, the texts present a model immigrant unintentionally, and any immigrant, minority member, or even just religious or ethnic American consumes that paradigm and questions her own position and identity as an American. Even the Jewish producers of these works, in creating these models, consume the paradigm they create, and send it out to teach more audiences in their effort to make a profit. The musical and the children's works in this piece are all meant to be fun, light, and heartfelt. Indeed, the audience laughs and cries with all of these characters as they learn about themselves and America; however, in captivating the audiences, the characters' pose a problematic model of assimilation as each character, through adaptation, editing, or marketing, becomes one or the other,

Jewish or American, and never incorporates a reconciliation in their assimilated identity. Nabisco was able to be sweet and Kosher in modifying the American snack, just as Woody Allen could make audiences laugh while acknowledging his religion, but the works in the project represent the version of Americanization that popular culture can transmit when producers, even Jewish ones, find Jewish religion or ethnicity, or any other culture or religion, to be at odds with a mythic American identity.

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