

Chapter One

Whitens Whites, Keeps Colors Bright

Jewish Families Queering the Race Project

Part I

Identity and the Library of Congress

My daughter Paris is two-years-old. She stands in front of the hallway mirror gazing at herself, finding herself, questioning, exploring, discovering. My daughter Paris is two years old and she stands in front of the hallway mirror repeating a new phrase she has learned: “Jewish girl.” “Paris is a Jewish girl.” What does she see this time when she gazes and says “Jewish girl” that she may not have seen on a previous occasion? What image of herself is being created with these new words to accompany her constantly changing reflection? What could she possibly be thinking the phrase “Jewish girl” means? What does it mean for/to/about her?

I am her mother. I say, “Paris is Jewish.” She repeats: “Paris Jewish.” She asks about other members of our family, “Toni Jewish?” Toni is her younger sister, then about eight-months-old. I say “Yes, Toni is Jewish.” She asks further, “Imma Jewish?” I answer “Yes, Imma is Jewish.” She asks, “Ché Jewish?” I answer, “Ché is Jewish.”

Ché is our nine pound, short-haired dachshund. We hope that Ché Guevara is honored, not appalled. Paris knows that Ché is different from

the other members of her family. She knows that Ché is a dog. But what are boundaries and groups? When is some one or thing in or out, with or not with? When Paris asks, “Ché Jewish?”, I figure it can’t hurt to say yes. What have I done? Does all of this not yet have meaning for her anyway so it doesn’t really matter what I’m saying? Am I being inclusive? Can a dog be Jewish? Have I avoided a more difficult issue by not including the possibility of a different repetition of the new phrase she is learning with the word Jewish in it? What are the implications of an alternative answer on my part?: “No, Ché is not Jewish.” Would that be any more meaningful, any more true, any more descriptive than leaving Paris with her current pattern of repetition? “Paris Jewish.” “Toni Jewish.” “Momma Jewish.” “Ché Jewish.”

With regard to the humans, Paris hasn’t asked about anyone who isn’t Jewish, so I have not yet said to her, “No, . . . is not Jewish.” We take as a given, from the social constructionist point of view, that the creation of any identity is made possible by the processes of separating phenomena, people, body parts, land masses, etc. and with it the exclusion and marking as “other” of some to make the subject identity. If this is a given from social and political philosophy, how does it work in the raising of children? In my example, how does the suggestion of an identity that does not yet have a “not” work in the creation of identity?

I look forward to a time when my children will ask if “so and so” is Jewish, and we will explain that she is not. I am not afraid of claiming identity and acknowledging boundaries. In contrast to a common insight which people seem to suppose is a criticism, to have a group likely *does* suggest that there are limits. What the critique does not take into account is that identifying (an even somewhat bounded group) also suggests expansiveness, because it means that there are other groups. I’m *glad* “my group” isn’t the only group out there. (Oy, if it were . . .) To identify does not only mean you negate others, it also means you recognize others. It does not only mean you recognize them in order to place them as your nonexistent negations (where you are the single referent), it means that you can also be recognizing that others exist and that we are different.¹ This is also an affirmation. Perhaps it is common for majority or dominant groups to identify through the creation of an other which is marked as inferior. But it may also be common for minority and nondominant groups to identify as part of a process of recognizing difference where hegemonic modes often homogenize. Further, perhaps we can see—against the grain of the common critique which negates the power differential between dominant and nondominant groups and thus their potential philosophical and political differences—that to identify can entail (1) acknowledging differences, and (2) do so with multivariant systems of valu-

ation. In the case of many minority groups, this suggests that noting difference does not have to come to meaning in either a bi-polar subject/object ontological frame, nor an hierarchical one in which difference exists because some characteristics are esteemed and others are abject. It is common in the United States today to interpret a Jewish (or others' at times) insistence on identity as insular or xenophobic. For many of us, however, Jewish historical modes of identity provide helpful guideposts in a contemporary politics in which diversity, multiple and shifting identities, and difference offer new avenues in the creation of social relations based on dignity, respect, and fairness.²

Tell me about your image of my daughter Paris looking in the mirror, a Jewish girl.

Tell me about this nice Jewish girl who thinks of her family first.

Excuse me. Let me interrupt. (So Jewish of me.)

What is/who is a Jewish girl?

According to the Library of Congress, my daughter does not exist. Or, in a more recent political move, she was provisionally invented.

I say to my daughter, "African-American." She tries to sound it out. It proves more difficult for her to repeat than the word Jewish. Is "African-American" harder to say than "Jewish?" I am not-African American. As I've mentioned, I am Eastern European (though the "color" of Paris' skin is quite similar to that of various members of my family. For example, my bio-mother is often taken for Black, Arab, Greek, or any number of other racial/national/ethnic groupings. Ah . . . race). Is there something coming from me that makes "Jewish" easier to say? "African-American Jewish girl." She hasn't quite got the hang of it all yet. Am I looking into a crystal ball, telling us about the issues we will face in our future?³ Her word play and its limitations are already certainly reflective of a current incapacity to understand identity as not only multiple but mutually constitutive, Paris' two-year-old meaning-making notwithstanding. I have not only taught her to say the word Jewish in reference to her two-year-old self, I have taught her to say Jewish girl. I am doing my best to teach her to say African-American Jewish girl. Will I always feel that I can teach about being a Jewish girl, but still qualify my teachings for African-American Jewish girlhood with the phrase: "the best I can?" Again, to what degree or in what ways are our present politics and our future struggles already encoded in early childhood language acquisition? In what ways do our languages frame, make openings and make closings, individual empowerment and liberatory identity politics from our earliest

days in life? As a political philosopher and activist, I presume to talk knowledgeably about mutually constitutive identity signifiers; as a mother I'm winging it and hoping for the best at each moment. Paris learned the words for girl, Jewish, and African-American from her momma and her imma all at the same time and by the age of two. This does not mean she will not go on to learn and also to cultivate continuously new knowledges, practices, and relationships about all of this identity business. But still, how could anyone look at Paris and write a theory of separative and bounded identities? I suppose that has been the point . . . those who have been able to do so have not been the Paris' of the world. Theorizing a seamless cloak of unmarked identities is the privilege/constitutive of elites, not of African-American Jewish girls with two mothers.

The very possibility of Black Jews is erased in the U.S. racial creation/coding of Jews and other groups in numerous subtle and insidious ways.⁴ For example, a subject search in my university library's catalogue with the title "Black Jews" yields nothing despite the fact that the library carries two books by women who are both Black and Jewish (Azoulay and Walker) and they use the words "Black" and "Jewish" in their titles.⁵ This is because there is no Library of Congress subject heading for "Black Jews." Many Black Jews' origins in the early colonial West Indies fed the development of such groups later in the United States.⁶ When I search for Black Jews, the computer system "helpfully" tells me to use the category "Black Hebrews," which actually refers to a specific web of African and African-American communities, some also called Israelites (living mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, the United States, and in the modern state of Israel) who use this self-identifier and to which Azoulay and Walker, Toni, and Paris do not happen to be members.⁷ The search for Black Hebrews at the University of New Hampshire library yields one volume.⁸ We also carry one volume on Jewish communities in Africa, a significant aspect of history for all of us and particularly the African-Americans who call themselves Black Hebrews, and yet the book is not included under the subject heading Black Jews.⁹

A subject search for "African-American Jews" also yields nothing, (again despite the fact that we actually carry the Walker, Azoulay, and Chireau volumes.)¹⁰ In a post-1960s political challenge to library categorizations, activist librarians succeeded in shifting numerous cataloging methods. As heir to this legacy, the term "African-American Jews" did eventually become introduced as a Library of Congress subject heading though it is rarely and unevenly utilized. Because many databases will not have revised their categorizations, a random search of library databases around the country yields similar ellipses as in the University of New Hampshire system. Further, under the category search for African-

American Jews the University of New Hampshire system suggests for you the subject category “African-American Jewish Relations”¹¹ to which it directs the searcher to its more “proper” category: “African-Americans Relations with Jews.”

Racial thinking in the United States so essentializes and separates groups that it cannot imagine African-American Jews. The closest it can come is to think of the changing historical *relationships between* an essentialized community now referred to as African-Americans and an essentialized community now referred to as Jews. The contradiction here is made further apparent because the listing of books the library carries under this subject heading even includes Azoulay and Chireau, though (for some reason I cannot fathom,) neither the Walker, nor the Parfitt volume. The voluminous writings on “Black-Jewish Relations” in the United States is often the result of caring and/or leftist activist intellectuals supposedly contributing to a more complex understanding of racial politics in this country.¹² What we also must take note of is the way that this whole genre of literature reinscribes essentialized notions of who Jews and Blacks are that also forecloses the possibility of imaging Black Jews.¹³ The University of New Hampshire library also carries a number of books which tell the stories of African-American Jews within them, but erases this fact by identifying multiracial or transracial on a Black-white grid, where the Blacks are not assumed to be Jewish and often the “whites” referred to are Jews.¹⁴

Part II

On Lines and Lines that Aren't Lines

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,—
the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa,
in America and the islands of the sea.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

As I note in the preface to this volume, Paris has come to be my daughter through adoption. We are a multiracial Jewish family.¹⁵ “Yes, Imma is Jewish,” I say. Imma is also her mother. “Paris has two mommies,” as the saying goes,¹⁶ but more, she has a momma, and an Imma (Imma is the Hebrew word for mother). I was born into and raised by a Jewish family. There are about six million Jews in the United States today. I am among the approximately four to five million Ashkenazi (European) Jews living in the United States. When asked my *racial* identity, if given the chance,

I say Ashkenazi Euro-Jewish: a descriptive term I hope, yet specifically chosen to be responsible in identifying European/white privilege, simultaneously staking my claim in identifying my Jewish/nonwhite self. Dawn, my partner and Paris' Imma, has come to Jewish community through conversion. Dawn is one of approximately one hundred seventy thousand Jews by Choice living in the United States today. Dawn has cast her lot with the fate of Jews; when asked *her* racial identity she says "white." Growing up Baptist in rural northern California, she knows whiteness in her own way and knows what access to whiteness means in a way that I do not. Paris has an African-American Jewish sister, Toni, who has also become family with us through adoption. Paris and Toni are two among approximately four hundred thousand Jews of Color (or nonwhite and non-European Jews) in the United States today.¹⁷ Right now we name their identities. Over the various courses of their lives, they will undoubtedly come to be identified by many others and hopefully to find ways to identify themselves.

Over one hundred years ago W. E. B. Du Bois wrote: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." He was correct. And there was also more to it. Today we are called upon to "Theorize the Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in the 21st Century" (the name of a panel for which I was once invited to deliver a paper). We were called upon to do so in the twentieth century too. We have done much work, but a history of hard work does not offer us neat accomplishments. We have learned much in order to begin to understand what Du Bois could have meant. In many ways we have barely begun our project. Du Bois was right not because there are truths and finally some white folks heard one spoken by a Black man. Du Bois was right because he helped us make some sense of our world, fight injustice, create alternatives. At the same time, we know from the vantage point of the twenty-first century that the color line does not really work out as easily as a line.¹⁸ Some folks go here, others there; don't step over the line/out of place. Where would Jews in the United States fall in reference to the line? Perhaps "the problem" was the problem of the political challenges engendered in the ways that the line(s) kept shifting throughout the last century, and now in our new one. The one drop rule for those here of African descent was and remains unevenly applied.¹⁹ The U.S. Census Bureau kept changing the boxes you could fill out, meaning the racial options one could fit into (or not) actually changed. Sometimes Latina/os and Native Americans are white, sometimes black, sometimes in a mid range classified as people of color. Sometimes what mattered to certain people was the extent to which they were whiteable/white-able, able to become white.

What does the color line mean in these contexts? Where are Jews? Where am I, Euro-Ashkenazi Jew: white/not-white? Where is Dawn, convert, following Ashkenazi Jewish practices, white? Where are Paris and Toni: adopted African-American Jews being raised in the Ashkenazi tradition by Euro-Jews? Technically three out of the four of us are converts. What does that mean for the line? We are all four Jews, though contrary to contemporary popular expectation, only one of us identifies as straightforwardly white. We are all four Ashkenazi because the religiously related practices of this ethnic group will most likely guide much of our creation of a Jewish home: yet only one of us has an Eastern European Jewish biological family heritage. How does the fact that our daughters are girls (for now, by our identification) position them with respect to power, privilege, access, alternatives . . . position them with respect to a nonlinear line? How does the fact that they (currently and until further notice) are being raised in a family with two mommies, and specifically a momma and an imma, constrain and enable their life paths, most likely not to be very linear paths? While Dawn and I have both self-identified as “mothers,” already in the course of their short lives, Paris and Toni have had parents who have shifted widely around the gender continuum—a common term referring to the multiplicity of genders within a sociopolitical architecture that is anything but a continuum between two opposite reference points. How does this fact fit in: their mothers come from different class backgrounds, but are now both members of an intellectual elite, holding relatively prestigious jobs, but can barely scrape together enough funds to pay the landlord each month?²⁰ How does class position one with respect to the line that really isn’t?²¹ Both their mothers are serious students of Marx’s, but class issues remain ever befuddling. We must look to geography and history.

For those of you newer to throwing Jews into the mix of complex theorizing about identity, here is a quick history/geography lesson. A vast number of Jews in the world are non-European/not of European ancestry. They are Indian and from other parts of Asia, Arab or Persian from all over the Middle East and North Africa, African from other areas south of what is referred to as North Africa, Latin American from all around Mexico, and Central and South America.²² But these racial/geographic categories made up in Western modernity do not necessarily offer the most useful explanation for racialized Jewishness. One of the central ethnic differences significant to (not all, though still a large percentage of) Jews (perhaps as opposed to European Christians) for the past half millennium or so, for example, is between groups labeled Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Ashkenazi Jews have become associated with “European” peoples, including all the contradictions that being part of Europe’s excluded entails

in identifying as European.²³ Sephardi Jews are associated often with the darkness of the rest of the continents, and yet Sepharad is the Hebrew word for Spain.²⁴ Sephardi Jews are of European ancestry as well (in the ways that ancestries are complex only semicontiguous routes),²⁵ meaning they are ethnically or in terms of their communal norms or religious practices related to the Jews of Spain prior to the Catholic Inquisition.²⁶ But the racial/ethnic differences significant for even Western Jews have not necessarily worked the same ways as they have for modern Western Christians. Spain might be part of Europe, but Sephardi cultures are considered racially/ethnically/religiously different from other technically also European Jewish cultures that may or may not come under the rubric Ashkenazi. With the Inquisition, some Jews made it into more northern areas of Europe, many went back south into Africa and on to areas now called the Middle East. There are significant differences between Mizrahi (Eastern, Middle Eastern, and/or Asian) Jews which have developed over time. It would not only be a mistake to consider Mizrahi Jews a homogeneous group, but also reinforcing Western hegemony not to point out that Eastern Jews are only eastern at all through the creation of the West as west. With these points we must ask: to the degree that many North African, Middle Eastern, and other Eastern Jewish communities may have roots in/have been created en route from Spain, does it make sense to lump them into the category of European? Perhaps for certain purposes, but not necessarily in the current usage of the term as used in U.S. race discourse. For that matter, since the terms European and white largely presuppose Christian Europe and/or Christian white, identifying Ashkenazi Jews as European is also quite complicated.²⁷

Despite their demographically circumscribed status among world Jewry, the majority of the Jews now living in the United States are Ashkenazi.²⁸ This means that at the start, U.S. racial categories which cast those of European heritage as “white,” and therefore many who now associate Jews with whiteness, are already skewed by the ignorance which accompanies (makes possible/is made possible by) U.S. dominance. The rest of Jews in the world associated, in currently popular U.S. racial/geographical terms, as nonwhite are erased by the narrowness of the historically construed “problem of the color line” in the United States. This erasure is effected by both majority and minority groups.²⁹ It appears, at least in contemporary multicultural politics, that many minority groups have mostly inherited the knowledges produced by dominant discourses on race which derace/erase the majority of Jews.³⁰ The majority of Jews are forgotten, or perhaps never known, by most folks of goodwill working in antiracist politics in the United States. The majority of Jews become deraced when presumed to be the U.S.-created vision of Jews as Ashkenazi. In this move too, then, their re-racination serves to erase.

The first Jews to come to the Americas, and the territories which would eventually become the United States, came as crypto-Jews. The first Jews recognized as Jews publically came in a group of twenty-three Sephardi men, women, and children in 1654 fleeing persecution, traveling north from Brazilian territory under Portugese rule. Upon their arrival, the Dutch governor in New Amsterdam, Peter Stuyvesant, attempted to expel them. That the majority of this group were women, Karla Goldman (2004) writes: “we must pay careful attention to the stories about these beginnings and the three hundred fifty years that have followed. Unless we take full measure of the ways that Jewish women have shaped both Jewish community and American society at large,” we will be left, she cautions, “with impoverished notions of whom we have been and whom we might become.”³¹ She makes no comment on the shift from U.S. Jewish Sephardi origins to Ashkenazi dominance. Jews participate in many ways in our own racial erasures. There are records of Black Jews in the U.S. colonies dating back to 1668 (an African-heritage man by the name of Sollomon is recorded as perhaps the first Jew to live in New England), and to 1683 (Berger 1978, 10–11). By the mid-1700s more Jews lived openly in the New World’s West Indies: some Ashkenazi, mostly Sephardi, and including communities comprised of those of African descent. By the late-1700s, Berger (1978, 12–13) reports that census figures from Surinam note “834 Sephardim from Southern Europe and North Africa, 477 Ashkenazim from Northern and Eastern Europe and 100 Mulattos.” There were likely also ties between the Portugese-Jewish community in early New York of the mid-1850s and Jews of African heritage who might have occasionally come to the Sephardi Portugese synagogue (the first synagogue in New York) and those still living in the Carribean/West Indies (Berger 1978, 30).

Sephardi dominance of the U.S. Jewish community would not last into the twentieth century. So, what of the current majority of U.S. Jews who come from non-Sephardi Europe? Where are they on the color line? European stereotypes of Jews are not related to any actual history of the Jews of sub-Saharan African descent (a history basically unknown in Europe of the period).³² In Europe, “European” (or those who might be now coded as white) Jews were cast as other, as dark, as Black, as non-European/Semitic. When whiteness was invented, Jews were not included in the category. Jews were not considered ethnically of the European nations in which they resided. When the nation-state was created, Jews (not being of the nations) were not included as subjects/rights bearing citizens. The legacy of European Christian anti-Semitism intertwined with the legacy of struggles to end the exclusion and oppression of Jews in Europe are the legacies gifted to U.S. racial politics. Still, when European Ashkenazi Jews began to come to the United States in large numbers they were cast as nonwhite. Yet in much of today’s racial categorizations Jews are

presumed to fit into the box called white/European. They crossed the line? Did they? Did some? The line can be crossed? What could make that possible? Who might be able, under what historical conditions, at what costs? An historical perspective on Du Bois allows us to see that the problem of the twentieth (and thus far this) century was the challenge of the politics involved in the shifting definitions of both the color and the line. An historical perspective on Du Bois allows us to see that whatever “the color” and whatever “the line” mean, they also only exist as creations mutually constituted with other aspects of what has come to be politically salient in human experience such as sex/gender, sexuality, class, ability, and a host of other matters that matter.

Part III

Paying for Whiteness

The price the white American paid for his ticket was to become white—: and in the main, nothing more than that, or, as he was to insist, nothing less. This incredibly limited not to say dimwitted ambition has choked many a human being to death here . . .

—James Baldwin *The Price of the Ticket*

Race and Class: James Baldwin teaches us about race as a social construction in the United States with particular cultural and political consequences. He also shows us that there have been some differences for racial politics between those who have been identified as “immigrants” and the varied groups of people who came to these shores on slave ships, as indentured servants along with those whose ancestries have long been associated with the territories which the United States governs (such as: Puerto Ricans, Alaskans, Hawaiians, southwestern natives formerly living under Mexican rule, and an array of other indigenous peoples typically comprising the tribes referred to as Native American or those living on the Pacific Islands which are not official states but are within U.S. jurisdiction).

In order to both appreciate and trouble it, let us look at Baldwin’s insight a little more closely. For example: not all indentured servants were from Asia, as is commonly thought. Since before the founding of the American Republic, the United States imported “white”/European servants, debtors, and criminals for servitude and hard labor as they did African slaves and later Chinese, then Japanese, then Filipino (mostly men). Even many of those we might call “immigrants,” collected in Baldwin’s reference to those who paid the price of a ticket to come here,

often got their ticket by promises of indentured servitude to those who actually paid the money. Many men and women paid in work: whether in Europe to get the ticket, on board, or once on shore—many women's work price was/is sexual. Many stowed away. In Jewish communities already organized in the United States, self-help organizations and free loan associations made it possible to purchase tickets for relatives or other known persons from Europe without any one individual or family having enough funds to pay the monetary price themselves. Further, getting on the boat was one thing. Surviving the trip and passing U.S. economic, trade, health, and other quotas in order to get off Ellis Island and stay legally in the country also proved challenging. One reason this was such a challenge was the U.S. government's fear of the high numbers of Jewish radicals: politics makes immigration policy on many levels.

But let us listen to Baldwin for those who did get to stay here as immigrants, regardless of the myths that cover over the variety of circumstances of any individual's arrival. If you made it here, whatever costs you had incurred thus far were only the beginning. Coming to the United States held the promise of life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the possibility of moving beyond abject poverty and extreme forms of organized anti-Jewish state violence. But these promises, once you got off the boat, also came at significant cost in other terms of racialized politics and cultural practice and memory. When the masses of poverty-stricken Jews came to the United States in the twentieth century in an effort to outrun anti-Semitism, they arrived into a racialized world which pre-labeled them in the nondominant category "nonwhite." Yet at this point in U.S. politics, Jews are usually associated with the race/economic/power category white. How specifically did this shift occur and what specifically were the costs to which Baldwin refers?

We are looking at the erased/deraced Jew in the United States in the twenty-first century. "The Jew" is now (although most folks who perform this elision do not have the words for it) the Euro-"Ashkenazi Jew": a person presumed to be whiter than a stereotyped African-American, of immigrant stock from Europe.³³ In the race section of an average application these days in the United States, there is no box to check off for "Jew." It is now usually expected that a Jew will check off "White." Okay, there are hundreds of thousands of Jews in the United States who could also check off (the categories change, depending on who has drawn up the form): "Black, not Hispanic; Hispanic; Asian and Pacific Islander; Native American, Alaskan Native." Now the U.S. Census Bureau allows individuals to check off more than one "race" box in order to "count" mixed heritage people. This new addition to the Census was the result of years of long hard struggle and political compromise. The new option has

its possibilities and its problems.³⁴ But, still, I doubt anyone expects people to use that category to name their Jewishness: Paris and Toni are African-American Ashkenazi Jewish, I am “white/nonwhite” Ashkenazi Jewish, Dawn is white Ashkenazi Jewish. The “other” or “check all that apply” type options were not intended for us. Yes, there are those who, like Dawn, may easily check off white; but let’s face it—those of us who were raised rural poor Baptists are not really in the minds of the people who now claim Jews to be white folk. Of course, there are the stereotypical Euro-Ashkenazis like myself who find it necessary to confuse the statisticians and check off “other.” So who are those white Jews? And how did such a category come into being if Jews as a group in the United States started off as nonwhite, and many remain so?

At mid-century, the United States was in the midst of an intense ideological struggle. In a postwar environment, the world reeled from news of racial and cultural genocide in Europe, women were being asked again to redefine their identities as men returned home and needed the jobs they had recently been asked to perform, and economic opportunity became available to some in a partial financial boom. In the mid-1950s, news of Christine Jorgensen’s “sex re-assignment surgery” was splattered across the popular U.S. press as well as the medical literature. This was an historical moment when aspects of one’s identity presumed to be as immutable as one’s “sex” were suddenly open to change, shifts, switches. Across lines of race, class, “sex,” gender roles and sexuality, religion/ethnicity and culture, identities long held to be “facts” were morphing, and the facticity of such facts called into question. Simultaneously, there was a move to shore up such identities, to fix them in more permanent ways. Much of the new openings in identity crossings in this era were made possible only through complex processes of reessentializing identity categories, and the communities created in and moving across lines previously held to be impermeable.³⁵ The changing status of Jews in the United States, perceived as a community, at this historical moment was both product and producer of such intense ideological transformations and contradictions. What we need to see is in what ways the Jewish community both crossed a race line at this delicate moment, and in what ways it did not. What made this perceived collective crossing possible and what was required to effect it? Who were among the many individual and subgroups of Jews either unable or unwilling to meet those requirements and why? The basic politics of the U.S. Jewish community today continues to be constructed and constrained by these mid-century dynamics: those conceived as part of the collectivity, and those marginalized, what opportunities for Jews as political agents are opened up and which narrowed?

In *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says About Race in America*, Karen Brodtkin offers some excellent insight on these questions. Her book makes an important contribution to the study of (U.S.) American Jewish history and beyond. Brodtkin offers a highly developed analysis of how the category of Jews came to be equated with the category of “white” in the United States since World War II. To do so she also explains how racial categorization worked prior to that time so that previously Jews were not considered properly within the boundaries of whiteness and its privileges. As the subtitle suggests, Brodtkin engages in this examination not only by drawing on the U.S.-based literature of critical race theory more broadly but also so that she can say something about racial formation and racialization in the United States beyond the case study of Jews.

Brodtkin’s work is situated within a discourse and political movement which understands that not only do we all have multiple identities, but that these multiple identities are mutually constitutive of one another. As Brodtkin discusses, the ethnoracial construction of Jewishness is gendered, it is sexed, and it is classed.³⁶ For example, according to Brodtkin, Jews fell into/helped to create an economically stratified shifting racial system. Changing racial classifications for these new “Americans” depended in large part on the taxonomy of trades, and the political forces that went into classifying certain trades as skilled and others not, certain groups of people as “intelligent” and others not. As new immigrants, the Irish, Jews, and other eastern Europeans as well as southern Europeans were originally lumped together with peoples already living in the United States who were considered, for the most part, nonwhite.³⁷ Each ethnic immigrant group was generally steered toward certain geographical locations and trades. Although most of the trades pursued by these new immigrants required a variety of skills, they were often classified as “unskilled” laborers which was a major contributor to their off-white racial categorization. Labor unions and other institutions helped to create classifications of trades and jobs that were ethnically segregated and then stratified, creating the imbricating economies of class and race. Though Brodtkin notes that all of these classifications were gendered as well, she is best at showing the mutual constitution of class and race.³⁸

Brodtkin critically examines the interplay between what she terms ethno-racial assignment and ethno-racial identity as it transformed over time and in relation to larger political phenomena in the United States. The story she tells of this interplay provides valuable insight into the changing nature of U.S. Jewish identity in its ever mutating raced/gendered/classed formulations. Simultaneously, the story she tells provides valuable insight into the changing nature of the ethno-racial construction of off-whites (those not quite white and not African) in U.S.

history and how that re-created the very (and continually binary) categories of white and Black in this country over time.³⁹ For U.S. Jews, a major shift occurred at mid-century with postwar governmental programs geared toward already designated white men and men of certain immigrant backgrounds. These affirmative action programs included the GI Bill, opening up educational opportunities to some groups previously excluded, as well as new housing subsidies which made possible the phenomenon we commonly refer to today as suburbia.⁴⁰ Given certain peculiarities of Eastern European Jews (many of which were effects of those earlier processes of racialization, that is, literacy rates, urban culture, a system of self-help organizations translated from their home countries and political traditions, and skills associated with the trades they had been steered into), relatively large sections of the U.S. Jewish community were able to access these new governmental programs as ladders to economic advantage and more prestigious work options which were made possible by a certain honorary crossing of the color line.⁴¹ This was so not only in contrast to indigenous populations and African-Americans, who were either expressly or de facto excluded from many of these programs, but also in contrast to numerous other European immigrant groups (whether from Ireland, Eastern or southern European countries) whose racial placement in the labor market over time left them with fewer opportunities to access such programs.

However, in the move Brodtkin makes from the Jewish particular to the ethno-racial universal, she does at times conflate the two and reinscribe certain problematic aspects of U.S. racialization.⁴² Some of the limits of what Brodtkin is able to accomplish in this generally very carefully argued text are themselves interesting for analysis. In many ways the limitations exhibited by Brodtkin's analysis demonstrate the challenges many face right now in thinking about these issues. For example, Brodtkin has a tendency to generalize in such a way that has significant consequences for the study of Jews within the context of critical race theory. Some illustrative examples may be found in her own inability to complicate the common U.S. *postwar* equation of Jewish as white. Brodtkin does not challenge the characterization of the postwar U.S. as middle class, nor, concomitantly the postwar equation of U.S. Jews as middle class. She accepts a highly controversial historical account of a lack of anti-Semitism in the late nineteenth-century United States and replays a tendency to portray Yiddishkeit as a common, unitary culture. As one final example, Brodtkin herself employs an uncritical use of the category Black as the mark of race. The author simply did not need to make the overstatements and create such exclusionary or unitary categories.⁴³

Race, Class, and Gender: Indebted to Brodtkin, and therefore able to build on her work, Debra Schultz offers us *Going South: Jewish Women in*

the Civil Rights Movement. Schultz's work is able to more centrally place Jewish women in a race critical study of Jews in the United States. This book on the civil rights activism of women who are Jewish is an important contribution to the literature on Jews, feminism, race and the civil rights era, class struggle, and the legacy of Jewish political activism. Utilizing Schultz's work will thus enable us to further complicate the co-constructed aspects of U.S. Jewish racial identity shifts.

Schultz draws on oral histories of fifteen Jewish women to develop her analysis. There is some writing on Jews in antiracist movements, but those studies tend to focus on Jewish men. There are also some studies on women in the civil rights movement, though if Jewish women are mentioned their Jewishness is erased and they are thrown together with a cluster of white Christian women. The oral histories help Schultz to develop a very thoughtful understanding of the complexities of the era and complications Jewish women faced working to be a part of it. The book utilizes the oral histories in conjunction with extensive research in the literature and history of Jewish communities in the U.S. South, Jewish feminism, Jewish political activism and identity, the role of Jews in an emerging multicultural politics in the United States, the civil rights era up to the beginning of Black Power, and the origins of mass-based mid-century antiracist activism and coalition building. Despite the sub-title, this book is specifically about Northern Jewish women who went South in the early days of the civil rights movement. Through this lens we learn about struggles in the new movement and the emergence of a new kind of political imperative for African-Americans. Through her particular study, we also learn about the precarious status of Southern Jews.⁴⁴

Schultz's work is a terrific counterpart to Brodtkin's in that it also takes on the pivotal period in U.S. history when portions of the Jewish community entered into the middle class and the community's concomitant "whitening." Schultz's study of the northern Jewish women who went South expands the historical analysis by showing the alternate routes taken by many Jews at that time and since. Especially given the invisibility of non-Euro Jews in the United States, Jews as a community must struggle with the wager on whiteness and power that developed in the postwar period. Regardless of any erasures effected in the creation of the truth and non-truth of the Jew-White equation, and because of them, we must critically engage this fraught communal wager even as distinct portions of the community maintained their relationship to progressive and radical politics, their deep thinking about social justice and the costs of assimilation, and their high levels of involvement in concrete movement activism.

Although studying basically the same historical moment as did Brodtkin, Schultz's analysis clarifies that not all Jews went the route of middle class into whiteness. Many Jews did not then, nor have now,

entered the middle class (the move Brodtkin demonstrates which was key to the whitening of the community as a whole) with significant portions classified in U.S. terms as low income and below the poverty line.⁴⁵ Many Jews who did make use of new access to education and developing skills often associated with the white middle class (regarding areas such as the law, health, writing, organizational management, public speaking, or working the media which Brodtkin analyzes and relates to becoming middle class) rejected or chose an alternative path than the yellow brick road to accumulating wealth for personal gain. Many Jews, whether consciously or not at the time, forfeited “earning” the potential privileges of whiteness because their politics made them traitors to “the race”—in this case traitors to the so called white race. These gendered and classed historical analyses show that some Jews were coming to be granted honorary membership as whites if they also towed the political line of “mainstream” U.S. values. To remain committed to progressive and or radical politics generally, to remain committed to racial justice in racist (U.S.) America, to eschew the myths of capitalism and consumerism make one a traitor to whiteness—each and all serve as a barrier to those who might otherwise want to hitch a ride on the backs of others across the tracks to white (U.S.) America.⁴⁶ If Brodtkin shows us that *class* climbing made possible some Jewish crossings of the *color* line at mid-century, Shultz’s work on Jewish women civil rights workers further shows us that toeing a certain *political* line is also required in order to cross the *color* line.

Shultz discusses the women as daughters and as (later for most of them) mothers. She is able to explore multiple ways of being Jewish that do not underestimate the power of secular Judaism and the spirituality of political Jewishness. Schultz does not shy away from the difficult issues of the limits of whiteness, of privilege and class struggle, of Jewish identity forged in the wake of the Holocaust in Europe and the scourging of Communism and radicalism in the United States. Schultz gives us real insight into the class, racial, sexual, familial, educational, and other life factors of the women she studied which does not end with the women themselves. Her portrayal of these women’s lives is both steeped in good historical insight as it offers us new perceptions on the social construction of identities and communities, on the importance of carrying on a legacy steeped in *tikkun olam*/social justice, and on a fiery Jewish sensibility.

In a post-McCarthy world in which mass and directly class-based activism was no longer a political option, the civil rights movement became one of the most viable avenues for historic Jewish work in radical politics.⁴⁷ Jewish women were among the earliest northerners to go south at the beginning of the civil rights movement. Moreover, Jewish women were often the only women at many of the sites, and were usually the only

non-Black civil rights workers at the start of the movement. Schultz offers us a contrast to the common postwar view that equates Jews as a whole with wealth, and therefore with whiteness and power. In the tradition of contemporary activist Jewish feminists, who have contributed much to Jewish and general challenges to capitalism,⁴⁸ Schultz recovers an historical legacy of a different *Jewish* understanding of the relationship between wealth and power: if you've managed to get any of it, use it . . . for justice. In this Schultz is among those such as Kentowitz who turn the equation of how to use wealth, access, skills, and power on its head: from one that is automatically in the service of oppression to one that seeks to end oppression. From this Jewish feminist historical study of gender, Schultz shows us that those who have followed this Jewish practice were left out of the new classification of Jews as white folk described by Brodtkin.

Race, Class, Sex/Sexuality, and Jews with Queer Genders: There have also been many important works published addressing the intersection of Jewish identity and sex/gender and sexuality.⁴⁹ This frame of analysis is central to the work of theorizing the shifting processes of racing, deracing, and erasing in the United States. The sex/gender/sexuality triad is constitutive of race as are other politically salient aspects of identity. Becoming white has required conforming to certain sex/gender/sexuality norms which are troubled by the changing historical status and practices of Jews in the West. White gender norms are bourgeois Western and Christian constructions and these have been anything but static. They have also generally differed from Western Jewish constructions of gender, if even in response to transformations in normative expectations. Recall that in the early 1900s my maternal grandmother was being raised as a boy in Russia. She was not the only Jew to have a cross-gendered experience.⁵⁰ Examining the situation at another level of abstraction, we can see that due to their "different" gender assignments more broadly, Jews historically have been seen as queer in the Christian West.⁵¹

As class is also part of the racial construct, we must remember that the gender norms of whiteness are also often expectations of elite Christians in the West and cross with class-based constructions of gender among Western Jews.⁵² The general wisdom of Jewish history acknowledges the importance of any Jews who may have become wealthy in the political functioning of a local community. But class as a form of status, prestige, privilege, and enfranchisement in decision making in Jewish communities was also largely a matter of learnedness. The learned were also often quite poor. So even Jewish class categorizations have had a different history than common Marxist or other economically based versions in the West. Further, the elite aspiration was generally defined in terms of

the ability to study (Jewish texts). Surely many poor Jews dreamed of riches, but the hegemonic paradigm of status was being able to study in a religious house of learning (*yeshiva*). This was also out of reach for the majority of Jews not only because most were workers, but also because most could not reach the levels of learnedness required (or required to find fiscal and/or political sponsors). As Western Christian notions of manhood came to include physical prowess and chivalry, Jewish self-identity further reinforced its commitment to manhood through study, in part to differentiate itself from the surrounding nations.⁵³

Though most Christian women in the West were also poor and engaged in physical labor, the elite association of white womanhood with fairness and a quiet etiquette excluded Jewish women from not only the category of woman, but then also as being of the Gentile race. It is no coincidence that the word Gentile, meaning racially/nationally non-Jewish, came to be related etymologically to the word for Gentility—as in of the upper class. Though it is too easy to paint an homogenous portrait of “Jewish womanhood,” it can be said that an elite Jewish expectation which corresponded to men as scholars was that of their wives as the businesspeople who would financially support the household.⁵⁴ Again, most families needed numerous workers as most people were extremely poor. Further, within religious settings women were expected to be quiet and without a voice in the arena of men. However, Jewish businesswomen were a far more common occurrence than Gentile independent businesswomen and Jewish ones were generally respected within the community as one way of conforming to *Jewish* gender norms. Also, although excluded from formal settings of religious study, Jewish women still tended to have higher literacy rates than the women in their surrounding areas. Noting examples of physically weak, “effeminate,” studious men, and strong savvy women as independent agents in the economic sphere and interacting with Christian neighboring communities helped to cast Jews as a whole as queer (in sexed/gendered terms) and also served to preclude them from consideration for membership in the sexed/gendered constructs of the European nations (later equated with whiteness).

Part of what made Jews eligible for honorary status as whites in the mid-twentieth-century U.S. was select groups of Jews’ entry into the economic middle class. Part of the “cost” of that whiteness was the classed expectations of assimilation to certain sets of norms related to sex/gender/sexuality. New ideas of the Jewish man as businessman, or man of the professions, emerge as a stereotype. With the development of the State of Israel, Jewish men claim a stake in military capacities, physical strength, and physique as markers of manhood.⁵⁵ Nice Jewish girls are then expected to be quiet, not feisty. New Jewish women are then supposed to

be “kept,” not working outside the home with an independent income base and bearer of strong opinions. A race critical analysis of Jews in the United States from the perspective of queer theory allows us to see that crossing the color line required a “straightening up” like the pretense of the mythic line itself.⁵⁶

Without explicitly devoting analysis to this phenomenon, the work of both Brodtkin and Schultz helps us to get a clearer picture of mutually constitutive constructs of heterosexuality, gender/sex, class, and race as they have come to work for Jews in the postwar United States. Brodtkin shows clearly how one of the costs of whiteness that was required of these Euro-heritage Jews as some moved into the middle class was the quieting of women: unbending the Jewish style of queered gender-bending in the West that accompanies whiteness. Relying on Jewish daughters to marry up heterosexually was also important in the generations of social climbing that made it possible for some Jews to be granted honorary status as whites. Thus, complying with Western, Christian, middle-class norms of heterosexuality was necessary for the “whitening” of Euro-Jews as a group in the postwar era. But Schultz shows us that the large numbers of Jewish women activists threatened these new sexualized gender roles which some Jewish parents were coming to demand of their daughters. Some of the Jewish women activists married up, in the sense of marrying men in the professions only newly available to Jewish men; they also tended not to simply class climb with this newfound access but to use it in the service of radical and progressive political movements. Other Jewish women partnered with and/or married nonwhite men and founded a new generation of not-so-white Jews in ways that some of their class climbing parents hadn’t exactly expected either.⁵⁷ Also, many of these women coupled with other women and became activists as lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered Jews,⁵⁸ fundamentally challenging their potential status as part of the U.S. American mainstream. My sisters and I have long joked: my parents got the *naches* (joy, pride, delight) of having a “son-in-law” doctor and a rabbi; okay she’s the academic sort of doctor, a woman, and there’s nothing legal about it. . . . Along my path in adulthood I also ran into some old friends of theirs who didn’t turn out as expected either.⁵⁹

Finally, drawing on a queer understanding of Jewish gender roles, we can use Schultz to help us locate these trends for Jewish civil rights workers within Jewish tradition. In elite circles, Eastern European Jews were used to women acting in the secular public sphere with non-Jews. Outside of elite customs, Schultz also links the kinds of work the women in the early civil rights movement were doing with a basic ethic found among working-class Jewish women that *their* traditional gender role was to “just do the work that needed to be done.” Schultz brings us up

historically to Jewish experiences in the United States, demonstrating that the more open sexual mores in the 1960s, of which Jews made ample use, actually made possible—as they were made possible by—the very involvement of these Jewish women in the early civil rights movement. As Jewish women made use of these openings in traditional U.S. heterosexual mores, they were able to take more risks in the kind of political work they could do, which continued to classify them beyond mainstream Western, Christian, gendered, and heterosexual norms of whiteness contributing even today to the ways that Jews are still often considered “queerly gendered.”

Jewish men’s work in the civil rights movement also continued to cast them as not-quite-white even as many might have taken the opportunities to get advanced educational degrees and enter into more white-collar professions. To the degree that many Jewish men then and now might use their newfound privilege in the service of critical race and other justice politics, we find that they remain beyond traditionally (white) raced ideals of manhood.⁶⁰ Further, as we will see in the next chapter on adoption and new reproductive technologies, despite their elite academic credentials, most well-educated Jewish men and men in the professions—their individual places made possible by a *communal* shifting in U.S. racial designations—still don’t meet the narrow standards of U.S. white masculine citizenship.⁶¹

Part IV

Bringing It Home . . . and Out Again

As an interesting point for reflection, I would like to look at one contribution to current identity politics that is not specifically a “Jewish” work, but a multicultural work that includes Jews. This piece, honoring its roots in feminist praxis, is significant in that its method itself makes use of and demonstrates the knowledges with which many are working regarding intersectionality theory. It also, therefore, helps clarify the limitations in the contemporary mode.

In 1998, World Trust released a video called *The Way Home*. Women from distinct ethnic groups were formed into “councils” which met separately over a period of eight months to engage in dialogue within their own communities. The main subject of the encounters was race as it intersects with gender, class, and sex/sexual orientation. The ethnic communities represented in the process were (as named in the video): African-American, Arab, Asian, European-American, Indigenous, Jewish, Latina,