

## INTRODUCTION

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### *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side*

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Harlem and the Lower East Side: two world-famous neighborhoods in New York City that evoke not only a rich history but also a particular ethnic or racial narrative. Most Americans can likely conjure up which ethnic or racial group has “belonged” to which space.<sup>1</sup> In fact, these spaces—one downtown and one uptown on Manhattan Island—have become almost synonymous with the history of African Americans and Jewish Americans in the Progressive Era and Jazz Age. This is at least a little odd since blacks and Jews did, of course, live in many other places—in other cities, in small towns, and in rural settings. Nevertheless, these two urban neighborhoods have, over the past one hundred years, accrued symbolic significance.

Indeed, Harlem and the Lower East Side are unique in the way they have been imagined and represented in U.S. popular culture in general and in the imagination of African Americans and Jewish Americans more particularly. It is impossible to recount the history of U.S. Jewry or discuss the emergence of Jewish American literature without emphasizing the importance of the Lower East Side in such narratives. The same is true of Harlem with respect to black history, especially if one is interested in the African American literary and artistic traditions. It is extremely difficult, moreover, to think of any other U.S. “ethnic” group that has so closely identified and been identified with any one specific neighborhood, or, as Hasia Diner has so aptly argued, with one “particular chunk of space.”<sup>2</sup> There are many Chinatowns, Little Italys, and Greek towns, but there is only one Harlem and only one Lower East Side. The various and striking parallels between the emergence and appropriation of “Black Manhattan” and the “Jewish East Side” quite simply call out for a comparison between the representations of these two spaces, which, over the course of the

twentieth century have become iconic. Yet, despite the many similarities between their “imaginings,” this is the first volume to take on the task of placing the two urban neighborhoods in conversation with one another.

HARLEM AND THE LOWER EAST SIDE:  
THE CREATION OF URBAN ENCLAVES

The area in lower Manhattan that would eventually be called the Lower East Side had had a Jewish presence long before the first wave of Eastern European Jews arrived on its streets. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, Jews from Bavaria, the Rhineland, and other (what would later become) German provinces immigrated to the United States, and some settled in the vicinity of lower Manhattan. During the 1830s the area went by the name of Little Germany due to the numerous Christian and Jewish German speakers who lived there. It was only following the tidal wave of Jewish immigration from parts of Eastern Europe that a certain swath of lower Manhattan—south of Fourteenth Street and north of Fulton, nestled between Broadway and the East River—began to be perceived of as a specifically “Jewish” place. Approximately two and a half million Eastern European Jews arrived in the United States between 1880 and 1920, and the majority of these immigrants settled in the few square miles of city space on the east side of Manhattan’s southern tip.<sup>3</sup>

The first decades of the twentieth century consequently witnessed the emergence of a rich cultural landscape on the Lower East Side. Although the neighborhood was never entirely Jewish, the overwhelmingly presence of Jews within such a circumscribed and densely populated area helped to create the popular perception—both inside as well as outside the Jewish community—that it was indeed a “Jewish” place. Amidst the poverty of the crowded tenements and the seemingly omnipresent sweatshops, the hundreds of thousands of Jews who lived in this urban enclave espoused and developed diverse ideological and religious commitments: from anarchism and Zionism to Yiddishism and Orthodox Judaism. Moreover, these immigrants managed to build, within a relatively short time, an impressive array of visible and highly developed institutional networks, including trade unions, synagogues, and settlement houses, such as the still-operational Educational Alliance. Another towering Lower East Side institution was the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the most influential Yiddish newspaper of the era, which operated out of the tallest building in the area and dominated the immediate skyline. This period also spawned the “golden age” of the Yiddish theater. Sanford Sternlicht documents that, at the height of the Yiddish theater’s popularity in 1920, there were at least eighteen individual Yiddish theaters dotting the streets

of the neighborhood.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the flourishing of journalism, theater, and other creative arts during the early part of the twentieth century, the Lower East Side also laid claim to the first major Jewish American fiction writers, Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yeziarska. These authors, both of whom spent much of their own lives in the neighborhood, not only portrayed life on the “Jewish East Side” but also drew their creative inspiration from its chaotic and eclectic cultural makeup.

The mass black movement to Harlem began a few decades after the Jewish settlement of the Lower East Side and was part of the Great Migration of a half-million African Americans who left the South for northern cities between 1910 and 1920. When blacks started to settle in the northern reaches of Manhattan at the turn of the century, Harlem was an upper-middle-class white residential suburb that had recently begun to see the arrival of upwardly mobile “ethnic” immigrants. Railroad and subway development eventually led to land speculation in the area, and a subsequent housing bust pushed previously reluctant white real estate owners to sell or rent property to African Americans. As blacks moved into the area, the white residents, especially the more established and wealthier Harlemites, quickly moved out. Historian Gilbert Osofsky notes that already prior to World War I the neighborhood had become “the largest colony of colored people in similar limits in the world.”<sup>5</sup>

More famous than its Jewish counterpart for its artistic outpouring during the 1920s, Harlem rapidly gained a reputation as the African American cultural capital. The Jazz Age saw the emergence of what would later be coined The Harlem Renaissance—a period of unprecedented African American creativity in literature and the arts. And, as an increasing number of migrating African Americans chose New York City as their preferred final destination, Harlem also became the headquarters for some of the most influential national African American social and political organizations, including the NAACP and its magazine *The Crisis*, which served as one of the major venues for African American writers and intellectuals. These were also the years in which many of the most prominent artists, writers, and political leaders lived and worked in Harlem—people such as W. E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, and Marcus Garvey, the controversial leader of the “Back to Africa” movement.

It is important to remember, however, that though Harlem remained at the heart of African American cultural life for many years to come, already by the mid-1920s what had once been an affluent white suburb had become an overcrowded, poverty-ridden, and racialized urban enclave.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, for many scholars, the 1935 Harlem riots mark the end of the “renaissance” period and the beginning of a significant transformation in

the way this urban space was perceived in the U.S. popular imagination: from the symbol of African American achievement to the emblem of black inner-city problems.<sup>7</sup>

Recent scholarship has made two central and convincing claims about the African American and Jewish American relationships to these metropolitan neighborhoods. One is that both communities have developed a powerful affective relationship toward Harlem and the Lower East Side respectively. The second is that these two neighborhoods have gained exemplar status, one that allows these spaces to “stand in” for *the* black or *the* Jewish U.S. experience in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> And yet, despite a series of interdisciplinary studies that investigate why Harlem or the Lower East Side has come to figure so prominently in the psyche of African Americans or Jewish Americans, hardly any work comparing the two iconic enclaves has been carried out. Moreover, given the current spatial turn in literary studies, an emphasis on the spatial dimension of African American and Jewish American identity formation—rather than these groups’ affective links to a particular place—is long overdue. *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side* aims to begin filling in these lacunae by placing canonical—and less canonical—African and Jewish American novelists who wrote about these urban spaces in dialogue with one another.

Since the publication of Hasia Diner’s seminal *In the Almost Promised Land: Jews and Blacks: 1915–1935* and later Emily Miller Budick’s *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation*, an increasing number of works—literary, sociological, and historical—have been carried out on what Adam Zachary Newton has memorably termed “blackjewishrelations.”<sup>9</sup> Among the numerous cultural histories examining the fraught relationship between African American and Jewish Americans, Cheryl Greenberg’s *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* stands out. In the last five years, a number of excellent cross-ethnic literary studies, such as Dean Franco’s *Ethnic American Literature: Comparing Chicano, Jewish, and African American Writing*, and Martin Japtok’s *Growing Up Ethnic: Nationalism and the Bildungsroman in African American and Jewish American Fiction* have also been published. Still other work, such as Eric Sundquist’s encyclopedic study *Strangers in the Land: Black, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* has sought to compare post–World War II African American and Jewish American literature by looking at the specific political, cultural and sociohistoric contexts of each tradition’s emergence. This impressive and constantly growing body of scholarly work suggests that, today, comparative Black-Jewish Studies has become a field in its own right within U.S. Multiethnic Studies.

Perhaps not surprisingly, much of the comparative work in Black-Jewish Studies has concentrated on the way in which these two communities have represented each other in literature (e.g., Budick), how they have

formed and/or torn asunder alliances at particular historical junctures (e.g., Greenberg), or how each community's identity and self-representation have been linked one to the other (e.g., Japtok). Another interesting and more recent comparative angle—exemplified in Franco's book—has centered on what might be called a dialogic multicultural approach that attempts to unsettle the nationalist-based or other “essentialist” assumptions of the field. While *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side* builds on these path-breaking studies and perhaps comes closest to Martin Japtok's emphasis on how these two groups have represented *themselves* in and through literature, this book aims to use notable literary texts in order to introduce the *spatial dimension* into the ongoing discussion about the relationship between and the self-representation of African Americans and Jewish Americans in the United States.

This volume accordingly continues and expands upon existing Black-Jewish scholarly studies. Its unique approach and contribution consist of its comparative envisioning of Harlem and the Lower East Side, each of which has been absolutely central in the cultural memory of these two communities as well as in helping shape modern and contemporary notions of African Americanness and Jewish Americanness. Tapping into the growing interest in comparative ethnic studies, the book also shifts away from essentialist models of ethnic studies and underscores the spatial aspect of black and Jewish self-fashioning, while contending that the process of each group's ethnic or racial identity formation has been linked in complex ways both to the relationship between the two groups and to the urban spaces each group has called its own. Through a comparative study that accentuates the spatial dimension by juxtaposing depictions of the Lower East Side with Harlem, we begin to see just how important particular spaces have been in negotiating U.S. identity. And, though this volume focuses exclusively on blacks and Jews, its claims, I believe, have concrete implications for Multiethnic Studies more generally.

While each article in the volume discusses one period or specific authors, all of the articles in this collection offer a spatially informed reading of African American and/or Jewish American literature. Some of the chapters, such as Meredith Goldsmith's and my own, engage directly with comparative readings of Harlem and the Lower East Side. However, other chapters, such as Cherene Sherrard-Johnson's and Adam Meyer's, read only one author or literary tradition through the lens of space. Each chapter critically engages with the impact of space on the identity formation of the two communities, but it is the volume as a whole that carries out the broader comparative work. This approach, where essays alternate between a comparative and single neighborhood/author perspective, allows for a breadth of scholarship without forfeiting in-depth investigations of

each space. The comparative chapters map out how the representations of Harlem and the Lower East Side dovetailed as well as diverged one from the other, while the chapters that focus on one tradition or author reveal the contradictions and complexities that characterized the depiction of each of these neighborhoods. Taken together, the volume offers the first truly comprehensive overview of how “Black Harlem” and the “Jewish East Side” have been represented over the course of the twentieth century in African American and Jewish American literature.

There is another—and perhaps less obvious—spatially informed framework that organizes this volume and links the various chapters together. All of the essays address, in their own way, two central questions: one relates to the social production of space and the other to how space, in turn, helps produce social subjects. More specifically, the first question queries *why* these urban spaces have come to stand in for *the* twentieth-century Jewish American and African American experience. What is it about Harlem and the Lower East Side’s “social production” that has facilitated the transformation of these spaces into icons? This first question assumes, of course, that the literary depictions of these neighborhoods, these imaginative fashionings and negotiations of space, are not simply passive or reflective of already existing places, but rather—as Edward Soja has taught us in a different context—have themselves helped to engender the way in which these communities have thought about, explained, experienced, and indeed created and recreated Harlem and the Lower East Side over time.<sup>10</sup>

The second question, no less important and inextricable from the first, is informed by the notion that space is constitutive of identity and relates to what the literary representations can tell us about how these city spaces have affected the positioning of Jewish Americans and African Americans in relation to dominant U.S. society. In other words, socially produced space, in its turn, helps to shape how groups know, narrate, and experience themselves, and the way they are identified and experienced by others. Therefore, examining the way the representations of Harlem and the Lower East Side have changed over time can help us understand the shifting position and self-understanding of U.S. Jews and blacks over the past century.

#### HARLEM AND THE LOWER EAST SIDE AS SITES OF CULTURAL MEMORY

There is widespread agreement among social and cultural historians of American Jewry that the Lower East Side has become a site of intense emotional investment for Jewish Americans and that, in the post-World War II era, there has been a certain sacralization of this neighborhood.

Historian Beth Wenger, for example, claims that as increasing numbers of Jews left the Lower East Side in the 1920s and 1930s they developed a sentimental relationship to it. The neighborhood helped to frame their collective experiences as American Jews, helped them to make sense of change, as well as to create a narrative history and a physical context for locating Jewish American communal origins. American Jews have, in other words, claimed the Lower East Side as their originary site of cultural memory, “embracing it as the Plymouth Rock of American Jewish history.”<sup>11</sup>

U.S. Jewry has come to perceive the Lower East Side as the site of lost and retrieved origins and, as such, this place has become sacrosanct. It has, over the years, become suffused with both mystique and nostalgia. By evoking its name, by identifying with it, Jewish Americans can both stake a claim in a common Jewish American history and in a dominant Jewish American narrative, one that tells the story of poor immigrants who rose out of the quintessentially Jewish American ghetto and managed to enter mainstream middle-class U.S. society. Just as importantly, the neighborhood has come to represent authenticity, a place where Jews could be truly themselves. In the minds of many contemporary U.S. Jews the Lower East Side lays claim to a purer and more authentic Judaism, one that has to a great extent been lost or at least diluted.<sup>12</sup> These Jewish Americans, then, attempt to tap into if not reclaim this authenticity by appropriating the neighborhood as their own.<sup>13</sup>

Turning to Harlem, one immediately notices a difference. Scholars do not and cannot talk about cultural memory in the same way for the simple reason that Harlem as a site of crowded black urban life did not disappear over the course of the twentieth century. The process of iconization of this neighborhood, then, cannot be limned in the same terms as the Lower East Side, since the sacralization of the Lower East Side for Jewish Americans has meant the making sacred by having left it as well as through a certain memorialization and reconstruction of a neighborhood that no longer exists in present reality. Hasia Diner reminds us that the memory of the Lower East Side assumed its power not only from the Jewish sojourn there but more importantly from the drama of exodus from it.<sup>14</sup> And, yet, as scholars such as Dorothea Lobbermann have convincingly pointed out, Harlem still signifies as a crucial “memory place” for African Americans.<sup>15</sup> Harlem, then, represents something else in the popular imagination, and its status as the symbol of black American experience has evolved through a different path.

Although its transformation into an iconic space cannot be limned in the same terms, Harlem—like its Jewish counterpart—has over time become a place associated with cultural exemplarity and a site of intense emotional investment. Beginning with the Harlem Renaissance and continuing all the way into the present, Harlem has continuously been invoked and served as a

catchphrase or even catchall for African American life, both in scholarship and in literature. In the 1970s, the prominent African American historian Nathan Irvin Huggins claimed: "Throughout the world, and throughout this century, Harlem has *been* Afro-American life and culture."<sup>16</sup> Several decades before this declaration, Harlem had already been famously described as "the Mecca of the New Negro" and as a "prophetic space,"<sup>17</sup> and these epithets were reiterated in fiction and nonfiction alike, thus indicating that the neighborhood has also been suffused—at least during particular periods—with a certain sacrosanctity. Thinking about the title of John Henrik Clarke's edited volume of short stories: *Harlem: Voices from the Soul of Black America*, one immediately notices the conflation of Harlem with "Black America," while the use of the term *soul* can be seen to gesture toward the endurance of an identification of Black Manhattan with some aspect of sanctity.<sup>18</sup> These are just a few examples that demonstrate that Harlem has indeed been invested with sacredness—not because of black sojourn and exodus, but rather because of the promise this space once generated and, as many of these essays propose, continued to engender throughout the past century.

This urban enclave began to signify incredible optimism during the late Progressive Age and into the Jazz Age, representing the possibility of producing a rich African American culture against the odds created by a bleak history of slavery, oppression, Jim Crow, and poverty. This space also came to represent—again, during particular periods—the possibility of living out certain aspects of the American Dream. Harlem, like the Lower East Side for Jews, has been the place that African Americans embraced as the Plymouth Rock of African American history—at least in terms of the escape from the persecution of Jim Crow and the place where blacks could practice hitherto unknown cultural freedoms.

However, as many of the articles in this collection forcibly remind us, Harlem as metaphor has been Janus-faced, since alongside its promise, it has simultaneously been inscribed as a site of intense anguish that has not been transmuted over time into mere nostalgia or mystique. Harlem can thus be understood to stand in for a dual modality in the minds of African Americans: one modality is full of promise and hope, while the other is full of despair. There is, in other words, a deep ambivalence in the very iconicity of Harlem, an ambivalence that hardly exists in the contemporary representations of the Lower East Side. Unlike its Jewish counterpart, whose sacralization has produced a narrative of linearity—from ghetto to middle class, with some nostalgic loss and sadness on the way—Harlem's sacralization has not been the result of a "progressive," one-way, and linear story, since the possibility this space symbolized always dovetailed with desperation. The story Harlem points to is zigzagged and jagged-edged.

In order to begin giving an account of why these parallel processes of iconization have differed so markedly, this volume traces the ways in

which Jews and Blacks in the United States have imagined, fashioned, and understood Harlem and the Lower East Side over the course of the twentieth century. Incorporating the insights of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the supposition throughout this volume is that a group's positionality in social space is constitutive not only of the group's habitus but also of the kinds of narratives communities construct about themselves and their "place."

Scholars such as Karen Brodtkin and Matthew Jacobson have convincingly argued that even though "Jewishness" was still framed within a discourse of race during the Jazz Age, it was to undergo a radical sea change as the century progressed: namely, Jewishness was slowly morphed from a racial category into something that would later be articulated as "ethnicity." "Blackness" by contrast, continued to be linked to a series of *racial* characteristics, and the definitional power of the black-white divide only increased over time. Indeed, it was this reinforcement of the black-white divide that helped Jews—who had been interpellated as off-white subjects—jockey successfully for a position as normative and white Americans. Jewish American white ethnic identity formation has been, then, fundamentally dependent on the prior racialization of African Americans and on the specific operations of the black-white divide, which—interestingly enough—is itself a spatial metaphor. It could also be argued that in the United States, ethnicity and the creation of an "ethnic" rather than a "racial" identity have been intimately linked to minority groups' ability to move across different spaces. In other words, spatial movement—both horizontally, in terms of being able to enter and exit certain places relatively freely, and vertically, in terms of climbing up the class ladder—has been key to the de-racialization of particular minority groups, such as the Jews. By sharp contrast, the black-white divide prevented this kind of spatial mobility for African Americans during much of the twentieth century.

Harlem and the Lower East Side—as real and imagined spaces—have been two crucial sites through which Jewish Americans and African Americans have negotiated and renegotiated their diverging social positions as well as their gendered, racial, and class identities. Examining the (re)production and (re)presentation of these two neighborhoods thus becomes crucial for understanding the coalescing of modern and contemporary, individual as well as collective, Jewish African and African American identity. Through its shifting focus, *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side* shows how these identities have been forged in the crucible of space.

#### VOLUME'S TRAJECTORY

Henry Louis Gates Jr. opens the volume with a panoramic overview of the emergence of Harlem as cultural icon. Gates argues that while the Harlem Renaissance was the second African American literary renaissance,

it was the New Negro writers who were, in fact, responsible for imagining and promoting this New York City neighborhood as *the* site of the black cultural sublime. Tracing the other renaissances that emerged in the wake of the New Negro one, Gates underscores how the invention of Harlem as the cultural metaphor for black America presents a certain paradox that many of the articles in this volume touch upon: it was precisely as Harlem was turning into the great American slum that influential intellectuals and “race leaders” such as Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson were touting this black urban space as “the Mecca” of the New Negro and “the greatest Negro city in the world.” What this, in turn, suggests is that Harlem, as a metaphor for black life in the United States, has functioned to suture a certain tension—the tension between the myth and hope on the one hand and Harlem’s social reality on the other. Teasing apart the ambivalence at the heart of the iconicity of Harlem is therefore key to unraveling the kind of cultural work—the elisions and disavowals—that this process of sacralization of Harlem has accomplished.

Following Gates’s cue and beginning the comparative work of the book, in the second chapter I trace the representations of Harlem and the Lower East Side back to the early-twentieth-century canonical novels of Abraham Cahan, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Anzia Yezierska. I outline how in both the African American and Jewish American narratives the protagonists’ relationship to Harlem and the Lower East Side is portrayed as being informed by a complex dynamic of attraction and repulsion. Yet in each case the source of the ambivalence as well as its manifestations are different. In the African American novels, the ambivalence toward Harlem manifests itself in racialized terms where the positive and the negative pull of the neighborhood are inextricably linked to Harlem being perceived of as “black” space. For the African Americans protagonists, in other words, the problem with their ghetto and their position in society is construed primarily through the prism of race. In the Jewish American narratives, by contrast, the ambivalence toward the Lower East Side, especially in its negative manifestation, is much more class-inflected and is not directed at the perceived “Jewishness” of the neighborhood. I argue that these differences—which emerge from an investigation of the common trope of ambivalence—are significant and can help us to account for the diverging significations of Harlem and the Lower East Side as the twentieth century progressed.

As the 1920s waned, Harlem solidified into the largest black urban ghetto in the United States, and Jews moved out of the Lower East Side in increasing numbers, authors Jessie Fauset and Tess Slesinger began exploring “alternative spaces” in which their female characters could forge less scripted gender, ethnic, and class identities. Juxtaposing Jessie Fauset’s *Plum Bun*

with Tess Slesinger's vastly understudied *The Unpossessed*, in chapter 3 Meredith Goldsmith shows how racially identifiable urban enclaves—such as Harlem—are limned as too conservative for the novels' upwardly mobile minority female characters, especially in terms of dominant gender norms. More specifically, femininity in these “racialized” enclaves is portrayed as reinforcing either “genteel” heteronormative coupling or maternity. The protagonists in *Plum Bun* and *The Unpossessed* therefore explore the emancipatory potential of Greenwich Village, hoping that a different—or “third”—space will allow them to escape the oppressive gender norms of the more clearly ethnically marked areas. Ultimately, and tragically perhaps, both novels underscore how the Village fails to serve as a constructive setting for the development of an emancipated ethnic female subjectivity.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Jewish presence in the quintessentially Jewish American ghetto steeply declined. Consequently, the Lower East Side tended to fade into the background of the fictional landscape, only—as Hasia Diner argues in chapter 8—to reappear in full force in the 1950s. By contrast, African Americans continued to pour into Harlem during the mid-century, which, in turn, ensured that Harlem never really dimmed in the popular or fictive imagination. In chapter 4, Cherene Sherrard-Johnson takes us back to Harlem via the writings of Ann Petry. Through a multilayered investigation of Petry's fiction and nonfiction, Sherrard-Johnson argues that these various texts simultaneously reinforce and pose a challenge to the popular conception of Harlem as either ghetto or the originary site of African American revival, renaissance, and possibility. On the one hand, in her nonfiction, Petry seems to incorporate and emphasize the dual “nature” of the neighborhood space by contrasting vignettes of urban blight with those of society ladies and famous Harlem residents. On the other hand, in her fiction, she reminds us how the urban space of Black Manhattan has always been profoundly influenced by norms traveling from the South and the white suburbs. The New Negro and other Afrocentric conceptions of the black community, then, have always been informed by other spaces and places. More specifically, by contrasting Petry's famous *The Street* with her less famous *Country Place*, Sherrard-Johnson traces how middle-class black female gentility—associated with the New Negro Woman of the Harlem Renaissance—traveled and transmogrified from country to city and vice versa.

Providing yet another crucial comparative perspective to the question of iconicity, Cheryl Greenberg reads *Call It Sleep*—the last of the early classic Jewish fiction in which the Lower East Side features prominently—alongside James Baldwin's first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Greenberg claims that the symbolic setting of each novel has not only helped guarantee its canonical status, but that the striking similarities between the two texts' trajectories

can help scholars to understand more fully the many parallels between the way that Jews and blacks have imagined and fashioned themselves through space in the United States. The essay outlines how both communities have understood their identity as shaped by their marginalization—spatial and otherwise—and how they have constructed a comparable historical narrative of persecution, struggle, and perseverance. Greenberg persuasively argues that *Call It Sleep* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain* are profoundly informed by these “founding” group narratives, which, in turn, makes these novels particularly useful sites for exploring the specific way in which the black and Jewish experiences have intersected, reflected as well as differed from one another.

In chapter 6, Adam Meyer challenges the neat bifurcation of Harlem as black and the Lower East Side as Jewish. His essay not only gestures toward the continued Jewish presence in Harlem, but also focuses on a genre that has yet to receive critical attention in comparative Jewish American and African American literary studies: namely, the novel about liberal Jewish educators in Harlem schools. Following the narrative trajectories of various novels that sketch the careers of these young and ideological teachers, Meyer reveals their striking similarity: The teachers begin with missionary zeal, are soon forced to confront the harsh realities of their pupils and eventually to deal with the death of one of their pet students; this traumatic event, in turn, leads to a tempering of their idealism but, perhaps paradoxically, a redoubling of their determination to remain and teach in Harlem. In the novels, it is important to note, the neighborhood is not presented as mixed or multiethnic space; rather, the Jewish protagonists are consistently described as entering all-black space. In the end, however, Meyer argues that it is the Jewish protagonists’ inability to confront their own privilege as liberal educators—as representatives of the white mainstream who can come and go as they please—that helps to undermine their own effectiveness as reformers.

In chapter 6, then, Adam Meyer consequently underscores one fraught aspect of the “jewishblackrelations” that Cheryl Greenberg touches upon in her chapter. As Greenberg demonstrates, the potential for cooperation and the bridging of differences between these two relatively visible minority groups have not only existed throughout the twentieth century, but that potential has been realized during certain junctures in modern and contemporary U.S. history. However, the very different positions of Jews and African Americans in the post–World War II era made any alliance between the two minority groups laden with potentially explosive fault lines. As Meyer suggests, one of the fault lines has been the extraordinary success of Jews in the United States.

Magdalena Zaborowska's essay continues the focus on Harlem and examines James Baldwin's oeuvre, arguing that, throughout Baldwin's career, he portrayed Black Manhattan as both a source of artistic inspiration and a prison for the black body. Opening with his early nonfictional essay "The Harlem Ghetto," Zaborowska traces the centrality of this neighborhood in the creation of Baldwin's aesthetics and ethos. If Harlem is depicted as a place of destructive social forces, it is also a place that offers African Americans uncanny chances for spiritual and artistic liberation. This paradoxical juxtaposition of harsh social realities with possibilities of a better, racially and ethnically mixed future becomes a pattern in Baldwin's work, and this pattern is particularly marked in his later fiction. Zaborowska argues that *If Beale Street Could Talk* is pivotal for understanding Baldwin's developing aesthetic and political vision. Not only is the novel told from the perspective of a young black woman, who, against all odds, carves out a temporary space of love and hope for herself, but it also presents an alternative future for those who are willing to transgress gender, race, and class lines. This novel, then, underscores with particular force how modern African American identity has been shaped—circumscribed but also transformed—by the double-edged legacy of Harlem.

Providing a final frame for the volume, and complementing Gates's opening chapter by concluding with the same kind of panoramic overview, this time of Harlem's Jewish counterpart, Hasia Diner argues that the post-World War II era has spawned "a Lower East Side memory culture." This memory culture has not only reimagined but re-created the Lower East Side, transforming it into the most potent signifier of Jewish American authenticity and traditionalism. Beginning with the publication of Sydney Taylor's wildly popular children's book *All-of-a Kind Family* in 1951 and continuing in the 1960s with the republication of "lost" immigrant novels set on the Lower East Side, the neighborhood took on increasing significance in the American literary imagination. On the one hand, the increasingly powerful memory culture ensured the enthusiastic reception of these novels, while on the other the novels themselves served to (re)enforce the neighborhood's iconic status, demonstrating yet again how the social produces space. Diner concludes by analyzing a fascinating new fictional genre, the Lower East Side romance novel, which emerged in the 1980s. If the popularity of these contemporary novels are any indication, the production of the Lower East Side as *the* site of Jewish American origins and *the* Jewish American sacred space has been extravagantly successful.

Bringing together prominent and young emerging scholars, *Black Harlem and the Jewish Lower East Side* engages in spatially informed readings of twentieth-century Jewish American and African American literature.

This book thus offers new approaches to Jewish American and African American literary criticism, and, I hope, will urge us to think about how individual and collective modern and contemporary U.S. Jewish and black identity formation has occurred in relation to specific iconic spaces.

## NOTES

1. Throughout the introduction, “race” will be used to describe African Americans and “ethnicity” will be used to describe Jewish Americans. Although Jewish Americans were still considered a “race” in the early twentieth century, today they are clearly “white ethnics.” For more on the distinction between race and ethnicity, and its genealogy, see Catherine Rottenberg “Race and Ethnicity in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *The Rise of David Levinsky: The Performative Difference*.” MELUS 29, no. 3–4: 307–23.

2. Hasia Diner, *Lower East Side Memories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 50.

3. For a very short history of the Lower East Side prior to the 1880s, see Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, 46–47.

4. Sanford Sternlicht, *The Tenement Saga: The Lower East Side and Early Jewish American Writers* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 44–48.

5. Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890–1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 122–23.

6. Ibid.

7. See Dorothea Lobbermann “Harlem as a Memory Place: Reconstructing the Harlem Renaissance in Space,” in *Temples for Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 211.

8. See, for example, Hasia Diner, Jeffrey Shandler, and Beth Wenger, eds., *Remembering the Lower East Side* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Lobbermann, “Harlem as a Memory Place.”

9. Adam Zachary Newton, *Facing Black and Jew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

10. See Edward Soja, “Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination,” in *Human Geography Today*, ed. Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre (Oxford: Polity Press, 1999), 260–79.

11. “Introduction” in *Remembering the Lower East Side*, 2, 6.

12. See Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, 8, 27.

13. The edited volume *Remembering the Lower East Side* as well as Hasia Diner’s *Lower East Side Memories* document the “reconstruction” of this urban space. Through the creation of the Tenement Museum, the opening of restaurants meant to produce a certain turn-of-the-century aura, and of a variety of tours, there has been a concerted effort to make the Lower East Side “real” again.

14. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories*, 20.

15. See Lobbermann, “Harlem as Memory Place,” 210–13.

16. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Revelations: American History, American Myths* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), 21; emphasis added.

17. See, for example, Alain Locke's "The New Negro," in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 7.

18. John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Harlem: Voices from the Soul of Black America* (New York: Signet, 1970).