

The War That Made Americans: New Immigrant Integration in World War II

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This Thesis examines the role World War II had on the assimilation of Second Generation New Immigrants. I will accomplish this by examining the changes in internal and external perception that attended this population from their parent's arrival in America in the early 20th century through the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Numerous events factored into the shaping of New Immigrant assimilation, but none played so large a role as World War II. New Immigrants willingly and effectually joined the war, proving, by the understanding of racial theories at the time, their fitness to enter mainstream American culture. This project was significantly enhanced by government policies such as the GI Bill, which, by providing college education and housing loans, enabled many New Immigrants to enter the middle class in the suburbs and the creation of a Judeo-Christian tradition, which allowed Catholics and Jews to practice as religious equals to Protestants. The physical dispersal of New Immigrants across America for training and deployment helped veterans realize that they were citizens of a much larger United States than they had previously indwelt, increasing their citizenship of the country. The sum of these factors is that in the aftermath of the Second World War many New Immigrants began to enter into mainstream American, recasting their distinguishing cultural marks as an aspect of their identity rather than a totalizing category.

Preface:

This dissertation is the original, unpublished, independent by the author Nicholas Turner.

I would like to thank Dr. Steven Diner for overseeing my work on this project, the Rutgers University Library Archives for making available many of the resources used herein, and my wife Michelle for her love and support during its completion.

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Introduction

Abraham Shulman, a highly observant Jew from Bessarabia, a fertile region in southern Russia, was pressed into the Czar's service in the Russo-Japanese War. Upon his return from the war in 1908 or 1909, he left to join his brother in Newark, New Jersey, because "he was pretty much perturbed by the fact that a man could be called upon to defend his country and possibly give his life, but not be able to purchase land in that country."¹ In 1921 Abraham met his wife, the daughter of a man who grew frustrated with America and returned to what is now Poland alone when he could not convince his family to return with him. Jerry Shulman was born in Newark in 1923 into a mixed neighborhood, by his estimation about 35% Jewish, and otherwise a conglomeration of Irish, Italian, Polish, German, and a few black families. His family was positioned somewhere in the lower-middle class: Abraham owned a small wholesale grocery business that, while never making them rich, ensured food stayed on the table even during the Depression, which hit the neighborhood hard.

As storm clouds gathered over Europe, Jerry was more aware and more involved than the average American high schooler. He still had relatives in harm's way to whom his mother frequently wrote and sent money so that they could move to the United States or Palestine. Although his grades were good, Jerry did not attend college directly out of school, a result of his older brother's inability to find a job with a college degree during the Great Depression combined with his own inability to commit to anything long-term

¹ Jerry Shulman. Oral History Interview, October 31, 1997, by G. Kurt Piehler and Mark Weiner, 2, Rutgers Oral History Archives. <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/shulman_jerry.pdf>

with the peace-time draft plucking up neighbors and relatives. Finally, after listening to a radio announcement of the bombing of Pearl Harbor while working for his father, Jerry knew his number would be called up shortly and chose to enlist and dictate his own fate rather than wait for the draft and have it decided for him. As he served in the Army Air Corps he was distinctly aware of his status as a Jew: it was reinforced by casual anti-Semitism during his training and by the distinct possibility that he might have to ditch his dog tags if shot down over Germany to avoid extra brutality. Despite several close calls, Jerry survived to VE day and was enrolled at Rutgers on the GI Bill by November of 1945, working towards a college degree and a middle-class lifestyle in the suburbs surrounding Newark in the expanding economy of the 1950's.

The discipline of history demands a certain amount of humility from its practitioners. Frequently when we come to the past expecting a tidy storyline that conforms to our expectations, we discover that not only were our hypotheses incorrect, our questions were not even close. If there is such a thing as a representative story of a widely varied demographic, Jerry Shulman stands as a good archetype, and he overturned my initial line of inquiry. When I started this study I intended to answer what I thought would be an interesting and relevant question: why would the children of European immigrants fight for the United States, frequently against their homelands? As I read transcribed interviews of veterans like Jerry Shulman, however, I quickly discovered that my question was off the mark. Second Generation immigrants considered America to be their homeland and the countries from which their parents hailed as fundamentally "over there." The American Government's official policy accepted this stance and happily enlisted its

new Americans in the fight against the Axis Powers, but “native” Americans, those living in the country for a number of generations and entrenched in its white-dominated racial system, were not always so quick to accept the entrance of “new” immigrants into mainstream American culture. The Second World War forced these two streams of identity making—self perception and external perception—into closer conformity and introduced a new, widely accepted population able and allowed to participate in white America.

This thesis will follow the process of identity creation in second generation immigrant soldiers. It will first be necessary to contextualize their lives and their relationship to the broader American culture by analyzing the emergence of their pre-war communities. Subsequently, we must consider the value of studying war, particularly a war as totalizing as World War II, in regards to questions of identity formation. Thirdly we will examine the experiences of this demographic during the war in an attempt to identify ways in which their relationship with the American mainstream began to evolve. Finally we will follow the soldiers in their journey home as they return to civilian life, complete an education, and enter the changing landscape of 1950s America.

Resources

I was fortunate enough to uncover a largely untapped collection of oral histories that will enable me to answer the questions set forth above. The Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II is an online, digitized collection of transcribed interviews conducted by Rutgers researchers with Rutgers Alumni who were veterans of the Second World War. It is divided into two broad sections, the Pacific Theatre and the Atlantic Theatre; because of my research interests I opted to focus exclusively on the latter. The

Atlantic subsection contains 241 oral histories, which I read and tallied by location and recentness of immigration, along with other categories as they became relevant.² The generational results are as follows: 1st: 5 (2.07%); 2nd: 91 (37.75%); 3rd: 45 (18.67%); and 4th+: 100 (41.49%). Focusing in on countries of origin for the Second Generation, I discovered that 67% of the interviewees were from Central, Southern, or Eastern Europe, or classic New Immigrant extraction, while 33% were from Northern or Western Europe or Canada, or classic Old Immigrant extraction.

This proportion complicates some established narratives. A typical tidy categorization based on waves of immigration would not project so many relatively recent descendants from Northern and Western Europe, and would generally expect such individuals to have already entered the white American mainstream. The oral histories depicted a different reality, where a significant number of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe continued to come to America and continued to have their experiences shaped by their non-American origins. Research in modern immigrant groups suggests the main factor in retaining old country cultural influence is not national extraction but duration of

² I quickly discovered that the messy reality of American immigration history makes simple codification impossible. 31 of the interviewees were of mixed national extraction while 14 of them were from a mixed generation. Mr. George T. Volk, for example, is Second Generation Irish and Fourth Generation German. I was able to get around this complication, for the purposes of broad-strokes demographic setting at least, by focusing on the division of “Old” Immigrant extraction versus “New” Immigrant extraction; only 1 individual bridged this gap. When issues of mixed generation emerged I counted those individuals by the younger generation, for the experiences detailed in the oral histories suggest that these individuals experienced pressures akin to children who were “fully” Second Generation.

residence in the new country.³ I likewise found the experiences of the Second Generation from both traditionally “Old” and “New” immigrant countries to be similar, dictated more by time in country and less by nation of origin. I will thus be categorizing the interviewees by wave of immigration; when referring to my subjects as a demographic I will refer to them as “New Immigrants” and, to avoid confusion, note national extraction on the individual level. I should further note that throughout this paper I will be frequently referring to the demographic of Second Generation New Immigrants as simply “New Immigrants,” particularly when the ramifications would reach beyond simply their generation. This shorthand is not anachronistic: Joseph T. Salerno, a Second Generation Italian immigrant makes it clear that he, like mainstream society, considered someone whose parents were born in America to be a “native” American, while anyone else was considered an immigrant of sorts.⁴ Where it is relevant to note the differences between generations I will do so.

I proceeded to break down the data set by socio-economic background, as could best be estimated by the profession of the parent or parents and clues given in the oral histories. Of Second Generation Immigrants, 31% were brought up working class, 23% lower-middle class, 36% middle class, 2% upper-middle class, and 6% were brought up

³ Alejandro Portes, “Language and the Second Generation,” in *The New Second Generation*, ed. Alejandro Portes (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1996), 15.

⁴ Joseph Salerno, Oral History Interview, March 28, 2007, by Shaun Illingworth and Michael Perchiacca, 13, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/salerno_joseph.pdf>

“poor.”⁵ This archival collection thus provides us with a large pool of interviews to compare and contrast the experiences of the children of immigrants from different backgrounds.

It should be noted that the Rutgers Oral History Archive of World War II is inherently limited in scope. Perhaps the greatest limitation is that it only includes the voices of those individuals who attained a college degree in an era where the majority of immigrants and their children belonged to the working or lower-middle classes. One factor contributing this imbalance is a disproportionate representation of Jewish individuals in the archive: 16% of New Immigrants in this study self-identify as Jewish, while a mere 2% of the United States population at the time was Jewish. For reasons outside the scope of this thesis, American Jewish culture at the time lauded the ideal of the *yeshiva bochur*, or bookish youth. Leon Canick, who grew up as one of these *yeshiva*, recalls that from his school “amongst the Jewish people, about 40 percent [went to college]. Amongst the non-Jewish, somewhere about eight percent maybe.”⁶ As will be discussed at more length later, relatively few Jewish students were able to attend New York universities because of the quotas in place, so many came to Rutgers as an alternative. I do not believe this poses as significant a challenge as it at first appears, for, as will become clear, the

⁵ To further complicate my methodology, I discovered that the “false prosperity” many families experienced in my lifetime during the Great Recession was mirrored during the 1920s and 30s. I have listed socio-economic class by occupation, lifestyle, and self-perception, but in many instances an individual considered working or lower-middle class would have fewer anxieties about money and the future than someone listed as middle class.

⁶ Leon M. Canick, Oral History Interview, October 11, 1994, by G. Kurt Piehler and Patrick Goodwin, 7, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/canick_m_leon.pdf>

Second World War was instrumental in broadening the opportunities available to individuals of this background. Indeed, it is precisely these Second Generation college graduate veterans who would go on to vanguard the entry of their demographic into the white mainstream. For many Jews in particular and New Immigrants in general, their military service was the first time they were forced to spend an extended period of time without the sanctuary of the ethnic neighborhood immersed in a demographic more akin to the nation as a whole. The concentration of New Immigrants in this study thus provides us with a more highlighted example of the transformation New Immigrants underwent as they entered mainstream society.

New Immigrant Origins and Race

Historians of immigration divide the history of European immigration to America before 1924 into two broad categories: the “Old” and “New” immigrations. These waves of immigration denote both a time period and area of extraction: the “Old” immigration refers to migration patterns before roughly 1885, when the majority of those coming to the New World were of Northern and Western European origin, while the “New” immigration refers to the increasing influx of people from Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe that occurred between approximately 1885 and 1924. The mere fact that the “New” immigration is traditionally bounded on one end by 1924 speaks volumes about the reception this second wave of immigrants received. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, America was home to a strong nativist movement which lauded the qualities of the “American race” and, by varying degrees and with varying arguments, vilified all others, but particularly whichever target was “most foreign.” This nativist

block prevailed upon Congress to pass the Johnson-Reed Act, more commonly known as the Immigration Act of 1924, which established quotas on immigration based on the census of 1880, when there would be dramatically fewer immigrants from Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe.

To the modern reader the usage of a term like “American race” may seem unusual, given our polyglot origins. However, at the time “race” was the accepted way of articulating identity and categorizing people by any number of their features. There was thus considerable disagreement as to how race was best understood. In 1888, expert opinion placed the number of races between two and sixty-three.⁷ Per the historian Reynolds Scott-Childress, the root cause for this uncertainty lay in the conflation of “color races” and “nation races”—terminology which was not employed at the time.⁸ The concept of “color races” is fundamentally phenotypical: a person’s essential identity is tied to their appearance, while the concept of “nation races” is fundamentally performance-based: a person’s essential identity is tied to their behavior and cultural expressions.

The rough equivalent to “nation races” in today’s terminology is “ethnicity,” which explains how early 20th century Americans could speak of defending the “Protestant race” or “English-speaking race.” It may be tempting to apply a language of ethnicity retroactively when referencing groups such as Italian, Jewish, or Russian Americans,

⁷ David R. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 11.

⁸ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 11.

but I believe this anachronism would be more than a mild inaccuracy. Indeed, per historian David Roediger, “the striking absence of a term for ethnicity in the early twentieth century underlines the fact that the two meanings of race...were not sufficiently far apart to be regarded as distinct by experts or society in general.”⁹ By referring to today’s “white ethnics” as such in the 1930’s and 40’s is to accept as a foregone conclusion that the “white race” could be divorced of some of its cultural specificity and come to include New Immigrants. In reality the status of New Immigrants and their children was much less certain at the time. On the one hand, New Immigrants were not subject to the same type of hard racism as black or Asian Americans.¹⁰ On the other hand, however, there is an abiding scar handed down in the oral histories given by New Immigrants and their children that articulates just how outside of mainstream whiteness they were truly considered.

Perhaps the best articulation of New Immigrant status prior to the Second World War comes from Karen Brodtkin, who calls them “conditionally white.”¹¹ This phrase handily captures a number of contingent aspects of the whiteness bestowed upon New Immigrants and their children. First and most importantly for this study, discussions of the racial status of immigrants from Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe emerged most frequently when they were considered “racially unfit” to join unions, hold certain jobs, or

⁹ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 13.

¹⁰ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 30-31.

¹¹ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 12.

participate in aspects of American citizenship.¹² Second, the Progressives of the early 20th century and particularly New Deal adherents believed in a racial optimism that simultaneously held that immigrants from Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe were inferior to the “American race” but that through time and education they, and most importantly their descendants, could be “improved.”¹³

To better understand the nature of the socialization facing the children of new immigrants, it may be illuminating to note the technical distinction between settlement and migration. Settlement refers to the influx of people into an area that is sparsely inhabited, so that the population does not have to adapt its culture to any preexisting culture, whereas migration refers to the influx of a population into an area where an existing culture is already strongly enough rooted to require the adaptation of the new culture. Except for a brief time at the beginning of the 17th century, Europeans coming to what is now the United States did not have to contend with a native population of sufficient size to make them change their culture. What emerged, then, from people from Great Britain, Germany, France, and Scandinavia, was a country that, internally complex and fluctuating as it may have been, must have appeared to outsiders as a homogenous “American” culture. The historical shorthand for this emerging culture is “WASP”—White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. As the immigrants coming to America were increasingly neither Anglo-Saxon nor Protestant, and only conditionally white, they discovered that they could either isolate themselves from pressures to change, thereby limiting their participation in

¹² Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 79.

¹³ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 19-20.

the broader American culture, or participate more fully but risk losing hold of their old-country heritage.

The ethnic community most often expressed itself through simple neighborhood organization. Because the government was not interested in allowing in individuals who could not support themselves, immigrants coming to the United States typically had to have a sponsor, typically a relative, who would make sure they could find housing and a job. This, combined with a desire to find familiarity in such a strange world, created a reality where “in the Italian neighborhoods of New York’s lower east side in the 1920s it was possible to trace, block by block, not only the region in Italy but the very villages from which the inhabitants had come.”¹⁴ In “La Famiglia: Four Generations of Italian Americans” Richard Gambino, describes the extreme pressure such tightly-knit, interdependent communities could exert upon their children to abide by traditional Italian values in the face of pressures to become, disparagingly “gl’Americani!”¹⁵

While first-generation immigrants may have been able, to some degree, to insulate themselves from American influence and wished the same upon their children, the simple reality, was that their children could not escape from the reality of being born in America. Gambino articulates that

To the immigrant generation of Italians the task was clear: Hold to the psychological sovereignty of the old ways and thereby seal out the threats of...the American society that surrounded them...The immigrants chil-

¹⁴ Andrew Greely, “What Is an Ethnic?” 13.

¹⁵ Richard Gambino, “La Famiglia: Four Generations of Italian Americans,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working-Class America* ed. Joseph Ryan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), 45.

dren, the “second generation,” faced a challenge more difficult to overcome. They could not maintain the same degree of isolation. Indeed they had to cope with American institutions, first schools, then a variety of economic, military, and cultural environments.¹⁶

In these institutions, children were taught that culturally different foods, ways of dress, accents, histories, emotional systems, names, values, and in short all those things that form an identity were inferior.¹⁷ With the strident nationalism of the early twentieth century this was a zero-sum game: America was the best and anything reminiscent of foreignness must therefore be lesser. And Second Generation immigrants felt this strongly. Werner Carl Burger, who came to America from Germany when he was six months old, gives us a good articulation: “I remember being extremely embarrassed in class when the teacher said, “How many of you here are foreigners?” I have to raise my hand, you know, and, when we’d go to a department store, Mother would speak to me in German and, of course, I would literally cringe and try to crawl under a counter somewhere, because I didn’t want people to know we’re foreigners.”¹⁸ As Roediger puts it, “We were becoming Americans...by learning to be ashamed of our parents.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Richard Gambino, “La Famiglia,” 45.

¹⁷ Gambino, “La Famiglia,” 45. and Leonard Covello, “Accommodation and the Elementary School Experience,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working-Class America* ed. Joseph Ryan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), 105.

¹⁸ Werner Carl Burger, Oral History Interview, November 22, 2002, by Shaun Illingworth and Joseph Sivilie, 6, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/burger_werner_carl.pdf>

¹⁹ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 195.

What thus emerged as the twentieth century approached its midpoint was a large demographic of Second Generation immigrants who were in a highly transitional status, in some ways tied to their parents' culture and in others tied to American culture. We have seen that society did not know exactly how to view the racial status of New Immigrants and their children, but definitely held that they were not fully American and would have to prove that they belonged. Within the immigrant community there was a struggle between those interested in embracing America and its advantages and those who wanted to continue to embrace their heritage. This is the context in which we will explore the importance of war, specifically a war as universally-mobilizing as the Second World War, on Second Generation immigrants.

The War

It is valuable to focus on war as a social mover because it helps us more fully understand the worlds New Immigrants came from and entered. First, the war struck at New Immigrants more closely than it did "native" Americans. Second, the New Immigrant history with war and conscription makes their participation noteworthy. Finally, war on the scale of the World War II has a unifying and totalizing effect unmatched by other social movers.

The children of New Immigrants were uniquely positioned to experience the day-to-day concerns of "American" children while simultaneously seeing a bigger world because of their immigrant background. Interviewees remember almost universally that for the average "American" the events leading up to the Second World War were generally de-emphasized in the prevailing climate of isolationism led by people like Charles Lindbergh

and other highly respected America-Firsters.²⁰ For example, Werner Sturm, whose father fought for Germany in the First World War and, as a staunch Socialist Democrat, fled after the rise of Hitler, “didn't think there was any great feeling among some of the Americans I knew about Hitler. Nothing like it was in our home, nothing compared to that. [They] were just not as aware of the Nazis...Perhaps even politics in general.”²¹ Joseph Marino recalls animated discussions about the rise of Mussolini and invasion of Ethiopia that divided families and neighborhoods.²² This awareness was felt especially strongly by the children of immigrants from Eastern Europe, many of whom were Jewish and lost family in the Holocaust. Morton Sobin for instance, the child of a family of Russian Jews, recalls going door to door on Sunday mornings asking for donations to help the people in Europe and having a grandmother who would scratch the eyes out of pictures of Hitler or Goering.²³ All of this added up to a stronger connection to the events leading up

²⁰ Lewis Bloom, Oral History Interview, June 21, 1994, by G. Kurt Piehler, 14, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/bloom_lewis.pdf>

²¹ Werner Sturm, Oral History Interview, March 1, 1996, by G. Kurt Piehler and Ken Gilliland, 13, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/sturm_carl_werner.pdf>

²² Joseph Marino, Oral History Interview, September 13, 2007, by Shaun Illingworth, 14, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/marino_joseph_part1.pdf>

²³ Morton Sobin, Oral History Interview, December 11, 2001, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 7, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/sobin_morton.pdf>

to the Second World War than that which would arise from, for example, learning about the Sino-Japanese conflict through newspaper clippings for a school project.²⁴

American attitudes toward war changed with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Any presentiments the immigrant community may have had about the inevitability of war, brought on by participation in the Lend-Lease Program and the peacetime draft, were quickly confirmed. In the climate of hyper-patriotism and nationalism that followed, Werner Sturm's father, a proud German and leader of a German singing club, was investigated by the FBI, but he could truthfully say that "Look, I've been an anti-Hitlerite before you even knew who Hitler was."²⁵ Before the war a strong anti-fascist, pro-intervention stance was a fringe position commonly held only among those recent immigrants from Europe who were connected to the emerging situation, but the outbreak of war moved the majority of Americans into this camp. The outbreak of war thus aligned America more closely with a key immigrant interest more fully than any propaganda piece or government policy.

The Second World War not only marks a dramatic shift in public opinion, but also a significant shift within the immigrant community on participation in war. Many of the interviewees had parents who fought in the First World War or, in the instance of Alexander Nazemetz and Robert Mojo, fled their home country to avoid doing so. In *GI Jews*, Moore explains that military service was widely viewed as a misfortune, and "parents of

²⁴ Allan Prince, Oral History Interview, July 19, 2001, by Shaun Illingworth and Greg Kupsky and Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 9, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/prince_allan.pdf>

²⁵ Werner Sturm, 5.

recent conscripts would light mourning candles, as for a deceased relative.”²⁶ This sentiment stems from a widely held (and frequently accurate) assumption that the government was not representative of the people’s interest; recall Abraham Shulman’s father who left Austria-Hungary because as a Jew he could be called up to fight but could not own land. These concerns, coupled with long service times and fickle discharge and pay situations, made military service a burden to be avoided if possible, not an opportunity and responsibility as a citizen.

In the instance of the Second World War, however, circumstances uniquely aligned to remove the stigma from participation in war on behalf of the government. First, the oral histories make it clear that Franklin D. Roosevelt was almost universally revered among the homes of New Immigrants. The policies of the New Deal proved that the government was interested in their wellbeing, and as Roosevelt favored active intervention in Europe before Congress or America in general. Although his parents may have dreaded military service in World War I, when the child of a New Immigrant enlisted or was drafted in World War II, he was generally confident that he was participating in a conflict he personally supported. Aaron Polinsky, for instance, was drafted into the Army Air Corps but went with both he and his family feeling it was his duty. He relates that “I felt that way and they did too. They felt that this country had been doing a lot for

²⁶ Moore, *GI Jews*, 30.

them. And they felt that we should try to do better, we should try to help to put an end to this scourge that was occurring in Europe at the time.”²⁷

Secondly, the war was seen as an opportunity to advance one’s career. Joseph Salerno, in fact, recalls that there was an aura of concern among high school students, especially those who were from poor families, that they were going to “miss the war.”²⁸ Coming out of the Great Depression, government jobs with opportunity for advancement and training for the civilian workforce were sought after positions. This, combined with a sense that one would inevitably be called upon to fight after Pearl Harbor, led many such as Werner Sturm to enlist and chose their fate, maybe gain something by the war and avoid the mud in the trenches, rather than wait for the draft.²⁹ In the end Second Generation immigrants participated in the war as draftees and enlistees with about equal frequency, but both generally saw both a moral and practical motivation behind their participation.

Not all of the oral histories recorded such a positive account of the immigrant war effort. A few instances particularly stand out. Charles Mickett, the son of Austro-Hungarian immigrants, recalls that “until my mother died, we couldn’t mention the name

²⁷ Aaron Polinsky, Oral History Interview, January 12, 1996, by Melanie Cooper, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <<http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/military-history/30-interviews/interview-html-text/316-polinsky-aaron>>

²⁸ Joseph Salerno, 13.

²⁹ Werner Sturm, 16.

Roosevelt in our house 'cause he took her three sons and put them in the war.”³⁰ Joseph Salerno had a similar experience. Caught up in the pre-war fervor, he recalls coming downstairs after the declaration of war following Pearl Harbor “like a cheerleader” and seeing his mother weep, saying “this is nothing but trouble.”³¹ In a different vein, Melvin Silverman’s father served in the American Army during the First World War and left with an ambivalent view of military life. Thus when Silverman enlisted to avoid the draft, he did so with open eyes, saying “I did not expect positive things from the military experience. And sure enough, they met my expectations.”³² These voices should not be left out of an account of immigrant participation in World War II, but neither are they representative. The oral histories from the Rutgers Archive on WWII clearly relate that at the very least the individuals participating in the war did not see their service as a great personal tragedy exacted upon them by a tyrannical government in which they have no stake, but rather was a service to a cause they generally believed in and could profit by.

Finally, we must examine the Second World War because it had a totalizing and unifying effect unlike other social movers. Per Deborah Moore, the draft and the patriotic fervor of the country inspired Jewish youths to join the military in large numbers for

³⁰ Charles Mickett, Charles Oral History Interview, October 24, 1997, by G. Kurt Piehler and Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 6, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/mickett_charles.pdf>

³¹ Joseph Salerno, 14.

³² Melvin Silverman, Oral History Interview, November 9, 1994, by G. Kurt Piehler and Travis Richards, 18, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/silverman_melvin.pdf>

the first time, making the war and its outcome theirs as much as anyone else's.³³ They, like other Second Generation immigrants, would go through the same conscription, training, and deployment experiences as "native" Americans and bond through these trials. In this way war is unlike other potential events in a narrative of assimilation. Government aid policies and academic conversations could not reach every corner of society like mass mobilization.

The oral histories recall no such ambivalence in the war effort: back home, everyone either had a loved one in the war, was impacted by rationing, or felt the effect of conscription in the workplace. On the battlefield, Moore argues that war was a leveling agent, because "questions of life and death transcended any particular religious faith."³⁴ Regardless of one's attitude toward the religion of others and of religion in general, the interviews frequently bear out the famous aphorism that "there are no atheists in a foxhole." Charles Mickett, for instance, seldom attended his Catholic church growing up and by the time he was deployed to Italy considered himself functionally an atheist, but had a profound religious experience while being shelled by German artillery:

And then, all of a sudden, a voice said to me, this is how I know there is a God. It said, "Chuck, I want you to lead a sin-free life." Out of the blue...I say, "Lord, ... I can't promise you that." Then, I said to the Lord something about, "Lord, you know, I don't think my mom would like it if something would happen to me." I still didn't just have the guts to say, "Lord, I just don't want to die," and he said, again, "Chuck, I want you to lead a

³³ Moore, *GI Jews*, 47.

³⁴ Moore, *GI Jews*, 145.

sin-free life.” That terminology, I never heard. I said, “God, I can’t promise that.” I said, “I just don’t want to die.”³⁵

Inversely but linked, in the aftermath of the war and its atrocities, men of all religious backgrounds questioned their faith in God. Irving Pape, for instance, a Jew of Russian extraction, detailed his experiences thusly:

Ever since World War II, my opinion of organized religion has changed from what it used to be. I could take it or leave it in those days, but when I saw what I saw in Europe and I started to think about it, I was never able to understand how people who could call themselves Christians or people who could call themselves Jews could be at each other to the point where they could put human beings in ovens. I didn't understand that. So I said if there is a God, where was he? And I have asked that question to myself ever since.³⁶

For our purposes the important thing to take away from these experiences is that soldiers were free to have them and have them respected regardless of their religious background. The war gave experiences and demanded questions that bridged Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and secular divides.

War also provided the surety of purpose and a common enemy that other events could not. Most of those interviewed recall the active Klan and Bund movements in New Jersey in the pre-war years. Images of swastikas in Madison Square Garden are shocking today, but there was considerably less stigma in associating with fascist ideology before the war. Walter Nelson, a Second Generation Swedish American, recalls sneaking into Bund meetings for the free beer and because associating with Germans proved he had

³⁵ Mickett, 41.

³⁶ Irving Pape, Oral History Interview, January 3, 1995, by G. Kurt Piehler and Curtis Tao, 7, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/pape_irving.pdf>

grown beyond the anti-German sentiments of his immigrant parents; ironically, for Nelson participating in the Bund was a gesture of his Americanness.³⁷ Eugene Polinsky, like many Jews and Catholics of New Immigrant extraction, recalls facing considerable persecution from Klan and Bundist sympathizers. “I was more than disturbed. I was scared, because I would experience something almost everyday in Maywood and something on campus everyday. You’d experience something that was not a clean cut, really American, All-American feeling anywhere. There were a lot of Nazi or German sympathizers, more than you believe.”³⁸ Before America entered the war, pro-fascist activity was widespread and compatible with American identity.

The onset of war changed public outlook on these activities dramatically. Werner Sturm’s father was investigated by the FBI for his publicly pro-German stance. Per Sturm, “December 7th converted everybody I knew... When Pearl Harbor came, everyone was ready to enlist the next day, including me.”³⁹ Anti-Semitism immediately became identified with Nazi policies and, though by no means stamped out, was censured in its more formal aspects.⁴⁰ The war afforded immigrants an opportunity to benefit when official government policy recognized their enemies as public enemies. In a modern parallel,

³⁷ Walter Nelson, Oral History Interview, May 21, 2004, by Shaun Illingworth, 6, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/nelson_walter_peter.pdf>

³⁸ Eugene Polinsky, Oral History Interview, December 11, 2001, by Shaun Illingworth and Lauren O’Gara, 10-11, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/polinsky_eugene.pdf>

³⁹ Werner Sturm, 12-13.

⁴⁰ Moore, *GI Jews*, 155.

Patricia Kelly and Richard Schaufler measured the “success” rate of different ethnicities in 1980’s Miami and found that Cuban Americans come out ahead in many measures, such as school performance and crime rate. Among the reasons suggested for this, Kelly and Schaufler list “continued support on the part of the U.S. government” as a result of anti-Castro policies—support which many other Latin and Caribbean immigrants in Miami were unable to draw upon and suffered without.⁴¹ War, with clearly delineated enemies and allies, can have a salutary effect on those whose concerns would likely be marginalized in a time of peace. The precise mechanisms through which the New Immigrant outgroup was able to find belonging will be explored in the following section.

The Americanizing Effect of the War

In 1923 the Supreme Court case rejected Bhagat Singh Thind’s appeal for U.S. citizenship. Thind claimed that based on the dominant racial theories he, a high-caste North Indian, was legally Aryan and thus fit to be naturalized as a citizen. The Court, however, ruled that the practical knowledge of the “average man” held that there was a fundamental difference between Indian whites and American whites, thus he could not naturalize.⁴² The understanding of the “average man” would continue to be the measure to which peripheral groups’ Americanness was held. Historians looking back at the inclusion of New Immigrants thus have a slippery concept to isolate; the multifaceted task

⁴¹ Kelly and Schaufler, “Divided Fates,” 40.

⁴² *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, Certificate From The Circuit Court Of Appeals For The Ninth Circuit., No. 202. Argued January 11, 12, 1923.—Decided February 19, 1923, *United States Reports*, v. 261, The Supreme Court, October Term, 1922, 204–215. <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5076/>>

of “looking American” includes everything from socio-political participation to diet to religious custom to housing. Fortunately those second generation New Immigrants who transitioned from legally “American” to culturally “American” were attuned to the system and their oral histories are littered with clues regarding their acceptance. New Immigrants became accepted into the American mainstream as they proved their worth on the battlefield, adapted their cultural markers to the norm, participated in the American racial system, entered into a broader American society than they had previously inhabited, and began to shift their loyalties towards American organizations.

The first step in proving one’s fitness as a good American was disavowing any competing loyalties. In the years leading up to the Second World War, hyper-nationalism dominated global politics. The Axis Powers (and, arguably, the Allied Powers as well) created centralized states that reached much more deeply into individual citizen’s lives than before and sought to make the nation-state the sole focus of personal loyalty. In order to bolster their influence, many of these nations recognized the size and strength of ex-patriot communities in the United States and sought to win their loyalty.

Interviewees at the time remember these efforts distinctly. As mentioned earlier, Kurt Leuser was deeply embedded in the German immigrant community in New Jersey and recalls receiving a very official letter from stating “Germany did not recognize [the] citizenship of German nationals in other countries, and giving me the time frame during which I was to report” for military service.⁴³ Edward Piech recalls his family fundraising

⁴³ Leuser, 19.

to send packages over to Poland before the war.⁴⁴ Joseph T. Salerno's brother left New Jersey to fight for Italy against Ethiopia.⁴⁵ When the Second World War broke out in this climate, the American government was initially suspicious of the loyalty of New Immigrants from now enemy countries. Many interviewees mention a widespread fear that "fifth column" elements would arise from the ranks of Japanese and German immigrants.⁴⁶ There was a similar mistrust of Jews and Russians on the suspicion they were all communist agents. Irving Pape, of Russo-Jewish descent, for instance, recalls his father's business struggling because of the rumors going around that he was a socialist.⁴⁷

These fears would prove to be ungrounded. Kurt Leuser never joined the German Army. Salerno's brother joined the American Army almost as soon as he returned from his service in the Italian Army.⁴⁸ Salerno recalls his own interrogation on the subject distinctly:

I get called out one day and I have to go see an Army...major in intelligence...He's got me in there and he says, "Look, you're of Italian extraction. Your parents came from Italy." He said, "Who are your loyalties with?" I said, "With the United States." He said, "Well, would you have

⁴⁴ Piech, 13.

⁴⁵ Salerno, 11.

⁴⁶ Helge Jespersen, Oral History Interview, June 24, 2003, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 8, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/jespersen_helge.pdf>, and Edward Bautz, Oral History Interview, October 15, 1999, by Shaun Illingworth and Michael Ojeda, 12, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/bautz_edward.pdf>, for instance.

⁴⁷ Pape, 4.

⁴⁸ Salerno, 11.

any hesitation to fight against the Italian Army?" I said, "None at all." I said, "They mean nothing to me."⁴⁹

In many instances individual's immigrant roots made them hostile to their old country rather than split their loyalties. Werner Sturm's father, as an ex-patriot Social Democrat from Germany, had long opposed the Hitler regime.⁵⁰ Justin Weiss, whose father served in the American Army in WWI, speaks for many from the Pale of Jewish Settlement in Western Russian and Eastern Europe when discussing his background: "You wouldn't have identified it as Polish, Eastern European Jewish was what he was."⁵¹ Eastern European Jews frequently considered themselves and were considered permanent alien residents; it was not hard to transfer loyalty away from a country that never embraced them. Leon Canick elaborates a similar sentiment regarding the political situation in Russia: "that whole group...of Russian Jews, were tremendously patriotic...towards America. They were violently anti-Bolshevik you see. They were not so anti-Russian as they were anti-Bolshevik."⁵² Although the presence of extreme Leftists was never as large as propagandists would have the public believe, there remained some Jews of a Communist/Socialist persuasion through the 1920s and 30s. These, however, were disenchanted with the Soviet Union with the advent of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Act.⁵³

⁴⁹ Salerno, 25.

⁵⁰ Sturm, 5.

⁵¹ Justin Weiss, Oral History Interview, August 2, 1994, by G. Kurt Piehler, 2, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/weiss_justin.pdf>

⁵² Canick, 3.

⁵³ Moore, *GI Jews*, 8.

With the history of forced conscription amongst many immigrants and pogroms against Jews in particular, there was frequently no loyalty remaining to the country individuals had left, even if they retained certain of its cultural markings. New Immigrant participation in the Second World War confirmed for the wider American public what was already common knowledge among their own ranks: “we always felt, ‘The United States above all.’”⁵⁴

World War II gave New Immigrants an opportunity not only to prove their loyalty, but their competence. In the racial climate before the Second World War, the “average man” considered Americans of Anglo/Nordic stock the best citizens and soldiers and sought to point out the inherent flaws in the various New Immigrant races. In the early 20th century there were indeed significant cultural, linguistic and religious differences between immigrants from Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe and “native” Americans, and these differences were interpreted as racial attributes or, more accurately, racial shortcomings. Italians, particularly Southern Italians, were frequently portrayed as hyper-emotional and parochial at the expense of the disciplined rational faculties and broad-mindedness necessary for good citizens and soldiers. When social scientists Katz and Braly attempted to codify stereotypes in 1933, for instance, they found remarkable consensus that Italians were considered “passionate.”⁵⁵ Those from peasant backgrounds all across Europe, especially if they practiced Catholicism, were viewed as physically pow-

⁵⁴ Salerno, 15.

⁵⁵ Joachim Kruger, “Probabilistic National Stereotypes,” in *European Journal of Social Psychology* 26 (1996): 962.

erful but inherently submissive and lacking the kind of initiative and independence necessary for complicated work, and thus good Democratic citizenship and soldiering.⁵⁶

Although the interviews reflect that a considerable number of Jews served in the First World War either as Americans or in their home countries, there was no place in the American cultural psyche for Jews as soldiers.⁵⁷ Per Israel Cohen, an unfortunate history had produced changes in the “organism of the Jew. [History had] bent and stunted his body...sharpened his mind...given him a narrow chest, feeble muscles, and a pale complexion.”⁵⁸ Numerous Jewish interviewees remember being mistrusted initially, as anti-Semitic attitudes teaching that Jews were devious and malingering were common. Anthropologists administered IQ tests that did not adequately account for linguistic and cultural differences, thus “proving” that over 80 percent of Jewish, Russian, Italian, and Hungarian immigrants were “feeble-minded or even moronic.”⁵⁹

Because of the persistence of these negative stereotypes, Raymond Wolfinger posits that “‘Recognition’ is the prize in ethnic politics. When the first Irishman was nominated for alderman in the mid-nineteenth century, this implied a recognition of the statesmanlike qualities of all Irish. The same process works in the mid-twentieth century.”⁶⁰ If some of the conditionally white Second Generation New Immigrants could

⁵⁶ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 44.

⁵⁷ Moore, *GI Jews*, 27.

⁵⁸ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 32.

⁵⁹ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 141.

⁶⁰ Raymond Wolfinger, “Ethnic Political Behavior,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working-Class America* ed. Joseph Ryan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), 137.

prove their aptitude on the battlefield, the entirety of that population could be represented in the American mainstream.

World War II was the perfect proving ground to enter into the mid-twentieth century version of American masculinity, which was built on “a good left hook” and decisive action to end conflict.⁶¹ Culture at the time lauded “American military norms of virility, cooperation, and initiative. Learning how to handle weapons and defend themselves would become part of their understanding of manhood”⁶² New Immigrants understood that, like it or not, their ability to excel in martial virtues would reflect upon their entire community. Maurice Meyers, for instance, grew up in what he would quantify as a “very orthodox, extremely orthodox”⁶³ home in Plainfield, New Jersey, but, upon arrival for training in Kentucky, he “adjusted to [Army life] so well, I surprised myself, and I surprised myself to this day.”⁶⁴ He had never picked up a rifle before his induction, yet shot top marks on the rifle range and earned an Expert Marksman Badge. Because of his drill sergeant, however, Meyers felt the sting of prejudice:

The thing is that he was a real misfit and there was talk that they had to take him out to the firing range and teach him everything before we even got there, because he was completely worthless. The unfortunate part of this is that he was Jewish, which was very unusual, because the rest of them were all Southerners, and he, being Jewish, did not make it better for

⁶¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 27.

⁶² Moore, *GI Jews*, 9.

⁶³ Maurice Meyers, Oral History Interview, April 14, 2000, by Shaun Illingworth and Michael Ojeda, 4, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/meyers_maurice.pdf>

⁶⁴ Meyers, 13.

us, it made it worse, and we had a lot of anti-Semitism from people, our own cadre.⁶⁵

Ultimately soldiers like Meyers would not be able to overcome this prejudice until they proved their merit on the front lines. Harold Freeman recounts how, during one shelling, “One of the men in a nearby hole kept bitching about the rear echelon boys who were enjoying the war—and at the Jews who were never even in the army at all.”

Freeman jumped from foxhole to foxhole in order to tell this man that he was a Jew.⁶⁶

Ultimately New Immigrants proved their bravery, perhaps being driven to go above and beyond what was expected of them in order to disprove negative stereotypes. Freeman remembers a sergeant who received three or four wounds but always came back from the hospital to disprove the stereotype that Jews were eager to get off with a slight wound.⁶⁷

Many of the interviewees in the Rutgers archives received commendations for medals and rose rapidly through the ranks because of their merit. For example, Melvin Silverman enlisted as a private but by the end of the war he was promoted to Sergeant and placed in charge of an important quarry, supervising the reconstruction of many of Germany’s roads.⁶⁸ By the end of the war it was impossible to ignore the contributions New Immigrants and their children had made to the war effort, and this proof of their fitness for citizenship helped induct them into mainstream America.

⁶⁵ Meyers, 14.

⁶⁶ Moore, *GI Jews*, 167.

⁶⁷ Moore, *GI Jews*, 167.

⁶⁸ Silverman, 53.

It is easy to dwell on the many flaws in the American racial system, but it can be instructive to contrast it against other Allied powers to discover that America's way of handling race was sometimes positive and recognized the contribution of New Immigrants. Harold Saperstein made contacts amongst Jewish refugees as the war was winding down, eager to learn details of their experiences. One of the men he met was Romanian-born Jewish French Underground fighter, still limping from a bullet wound. Per his testimony, originally in his unit of 120 men 26 of them had been Jewish—he was one of only 5 left alive. Yet the official record on his unit showed not a single one of them to be Jewish. Jewish participation was being erased from the Resistance efforts that would come to play so large a role in the French psyche that developed after the war.⁶⁹ To literally add insult to injury, when this wounded resistance fighter reported to a state hospital he was received warmly until his Jewish identity was known, at which he was pointedly asked “when are you going to leave France?”⁷⁰ Similarly, in the immediate aftermath of the war, Victor Gellar recalls finally getting the opportunity to visit Paris on leave. What he saw, however, stunned and sickened him. Hundreds of Parisians were marching down the Place de l'Opéra with signs reading “down with Jews” and protesting the efforts of Jews to reclaim property taken from them during the Nazi occupation.⁷¹ Similarly, Allen Prince was deployed in the Indian Ocean and Middle East with the Ambulance Corps, and saw first hand the realities of apartheid when he was forbidden by white South

⁶⁹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 205.

⁷⁰ Moore, *GI Jews*, 205.

⁷¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 248-249.

African officers from speaking to the black crew.⁷² Black African recruits made up an important part of the Allied war effort in the region, yet far from rewarding these efforts, apartheid was codified for the entire South African country in 1947. This stands in marked contrast to the United States policy which, for all its flaws, desegregated the armed forces in 1948. New Immigrants demonstrated their ability to contribute as citizen soldiers and were more recognized for it in the United States than in some instances amongst the Allies.

As New Immigrants proved their capabilities in World War II, they frequently were compelled to dampen expressions of cultural difference in the name of practicality, regimentation, and military discipline. In some instances something as simple as the donning of a uniform could make a dramatic difference in a world where disuniformity was seen as a sign of inferiority. The novel *The Young Manhood of Studs Longonian* articulates this nicely when one antagonist says that “You know, you can tell an inferior race by the way they dress. The Polacks and the Dagoes, and niggers are the same, only the niggers are the lowest.”⁷³ The institution of uniform dress and diet could ease the acceptance into mainstream society. In some instances this meant that individuals chose not to observe dietary restrictions or habits. The first non-kosher meal Maurice Meyers ever ate was in the Army.⁷⁴ In other instances conformity may simply have meant that issues that would have assumed paramount importance in a person’s civilian life faded into the

⁷² Prince, 19.

⁷³ Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness*, 140.

⁷⁴ Meyers, 14.

background. There were deep divides within the Catholic and Jewish soldiers that served in WWII, but once in uniform they discovered that they were fortunate to have a chaplain of their religion, let alone one that represented their national parish or branch of Judaism. The greater shades of difference that were frequently tied to their immigrant background were washed out by military life, and this made participation in the mainstream easier.

Participation in America was not defined strictly in positive terms of what America was, it was just as strongly defined in negative terms of what it was not. For the conditionally white New Immigrants it was particularly important to understand, if not necessarily embrace, the importance of color and race prejudice in white America. Although New Immigrants were not cultural blank slates before the war, the war would impact where they stood vis a vis individuals of other color groups.

When historians analyze a group's receptivity to racial ideology, it can be easy to overlook the prejudices already within a population. Such an approach, however, limits the degree to which we can reflect the complexity of the identity issues being resolved. In some instances the past socialization of New Immigrants led them to reject color and race prejudice, and in some instances it made them more receptive.

Jewish Americans have historically been supportive of and sympathetic towards the struggles faced by black Americans, having faced a similar history of exclusion and persecution.⁷⁵ As Moore articulates, "many Jews recognized that anti-black racism often accompanied antisemitism" and many Jews, particularly those from a Zionist back-

⁷⁵ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 107.

ground, were inclined to support the civil rights movement.⁷⁶ After the war Martin Sherman, a Jewish American entomologist, recalls rejecting a job with a university in Florida after they explicitly told him that, as a perk to make his work easier, “[They would] give [him] a nigger and two mules.”⁷⁷ Similarly, when Morton Sobin, coming out of a strongly Zionist home, was upset at his experience in the Deep South:

While walking the streets of Montgomery, a few of us together, some black people stepped off into the street. That burned my ass. That really did. I wasn’t one of these torch wielders, or anything like that, but I knew it wasn’t right. The whole thing wasn’t right. Blacks and Spanish people became servants only, in the Armed Forces, you know, make beds, clean the toilets, serve food, stuff like that. It bothered me a great deal, always did.⁷⁸

It is important to note that in each of these instances, however, the individual is criticizing the system of color bias from a secure position within it. As conditionally white individuals, Jewish Americans and other New Immigrants were most readily accepted as in-group Americans when they were in a setting in which black-white segregation was the norm. Martin Dash, for instance, had his navy application rejected in his neighborhood recruiting station in Brooklyn where he was identified as a Jew, so he went down to relatives in Baltimore where the recruiters were happy to have him. Per Moore, “Dash’s status changed in the context of a city in which blacks were segregated from

⁷⁶ Moore, *GI Jews*, 171, 264.

⁷⁷ Sherman, Oral History Interview, October 14, 1998, by G. Kurt Piehler and Rich Colton, 45, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/sherman_martin.pdf>

⁷⁸ Sobin, 15.

whites. In Baltimore, despite its religious and ethnic divisions, he appeared more white than Jewish.”⁷⁹

Similarly, Hyman Samuelson was deployed to New Guinea as the white officer of the 96th Battalion, a segregated black company. Paradoxically, this enabled him to grow closer to his men and even mainstream America as he was impressed by their expression of Christianity.⁸⁰ Amongst those who were outside of the white racial system, Samuelson’s conditional status as a Jew evaporated and allowed him to become “simply a white American officer.”⁸¹ Finally, perhaps one of the strongest and strangest instances of the power of color distinction to erase race distinction came when Seymour Mitterhoff, a Russian Jew intimately familiar with antisemitism after a childhood troubled by the Bund, was shot down in a dogfight over China. He was rescued by Chinese civilians and recalls being treated like a hero while being smuggled from village to village: “They said that a Yank was coming, before the towns, each one. Most of them hadn’t seen an Anglo-Saxon person.”⁸² In a context where he was the only white person for miles, Mitterhoff felt comfortable claiming not only his status as a white American, but even went so far as to, perhaps inadvertently but still tellingly, call himself an Anglo-Saxon.

⁷⁹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 36.

⁸⁰ Moore, *GI Jews*, 95.

⁸¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 96.

⁸² Seymour Mitterhoff, Oral History Interview, April 26, 2010, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Thomas Duffy, 35, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/mitterhoff_seymour.pdf>

When the war was over, the structures of the GI Bill tended to strengthen the strides New Immigrant veterans had made towards Americanization. Roosevelt's New Deal promised that those who contributed to the government could expect the government to care for them in turn; American GIs returning from war were to become the beneficiaries of this system. The manner in which the GI Bill rewarded service strengthened veteran's connections to the white American community while weakening their connection to their immigrant roots.

The GI Bill, in line with the New Deal legislation from which it descended, promised those returning from the war assistance in getting a "good house...in a racially homogenous neighborhood."⁸³ In the immediate postwar years this usually meant placement in the booming, and atomizing, suburbs. David Roediger emphasizes the importance of the physical house—including the personal home, the language schoolhouse, and the house of worship—in socializing the Second Generation towards the ways of their old country past. New Immigrants tended to live in multi-generation housing at a greater rate than other groups while, in spite of relative poverty, their homemakers worked outside the home less often than native-born women.⁸⁴ This, combined with a world heavily circumscribed by parish and neighborhood boundaries, meant that social reproduction was most likely to occur in the cultural enclaves from which many Second Generation immigrants hailed. As veterans returned from the war and used GI Bill mortgages to purchase a home in the suburbs, this old world influence lessened. In a study on the destabilizing

⁸³ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 224.

⁸⁴ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 189.

of white ethnic neighborhoods, Stephen Adubato and Richard Krickus argue that “after WWII, the highway program, the FHA mortgage initiative, and VA mortgage guarantee programs facilitated suburbanization...while very little was done to encourage urban redevelopment.”⁸⁵ Incentivized housing and middle class jobs in the suburbs created a pull while deteriorating city conditions created a push that landed many New Immigrant veterans in the emergent, expanding middle class that defined Americanness.

In everyday parlance, the GI Bill has become almost synonymous with government-reimbursed college education, which is a testament to the monumental shift this piece of legislation had on the expectations of American youth. For Joseph DeMasi, from a working class Italian neighborhood before the war, “[college] was unheard of, because I would be the first Italian boy that would be going to college from my neck of the woods...That's a place for the rich kids, and it wasn't until World War II and the GI Bill that opened the door to a college education.”⁸⁶ DeMasi makes it clear that the Italian community he was brought up in, unless something dramatic broke the cycle, “whatever your father was, that’s what you are.”⁸⁷ The GI Bill enabled him to go to law school and escape a trajectory towards factory labor. However, DeMasi did not simply leave his former neighbors behind entirely. DeMasi used his education to open a firm as the only

⁸⁵ Stephen Adubato and Richard Krickus, “Stabilizing White Ethnic Neighborhoods,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working-Class America* ed. Joseph Ryan (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1973), 84.

⁸⁶ Joseph DeMasi, Oral History Interview, April 1, 1996, by G. Kurt Piehler and Tara Liston, 9, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/de_masi_joseph.pdf>

⁸⁷ DeMasi, 12.

Italian attorney in Warren County, occupying a middle ground between the established white Americans (in this instance the Irish community) who ran the town and the Italians and Slovaks who worked lower income professions.⁸⁸ In this way DeMasi personifies a shift in the post-war years brought about by the acceptance of educated and entitled New Immigrants in mainstream America.

Before the war, the America to which New Immigrants belonged was often no more than several dozen blocks wide. The vast majority of interviewees had never traveled any significant distance from home before their deployment; Joseph McCartney had never left New Jersey,⁸⁹ and Alexander Nazemetz had never spent the night away from home before he was drafted.⁹⁰ They grew up during the Depression where money was tight, mobility was limited, vacations were few and local, and where the rhythms of daily life very much circumscribed. Moore articulates their situation neatly: “They felt at home in America, but their America was urban and, in many ways, provincial. After the war they would feel at home in a much larger and more diverse America.”⁹¹

Once called up, recruits from the New York and New Jersey areas were funneled through the base at Ft. Dix, New Jersey, to training stations located mostly in the South. Werner Sturm had a strong desire to get out of his factory town, but when he reported to

⁸⁸ DeMasi, 48.

⁸⁹ McCartney, 10.

⁹⁰ Nazemetz, Oral History Interview, April 6, 1995, by G. Kurt Piehler and Kevin McGuire, 11, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/nazemetz_alexander.pdf>

⁹¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 20

Camp Shelby outside of Oxford, Mississippi, he “was absolutely astonished at that time,”⁹² particularly at the pervasive reality of segregation. Albert Messerlin is one of many interviewees who remember being taken aback by the poverty of the South: “Well, the shock [was] how some of these people lived so poor in these cotton fields, you know, sort of shocking,”⁹³ Artie Gorenstein recorded some of the sights he passed on a train to basic training in Mississippi: In Columbus, Ohio, he saw “an airplane factory that took a good ten minutes to pass it was so long,” and in the backwoods of Kentucky he saw a “primitive farmhouse...A dirt yard surrounds this with a pigpen near that. The pigs run around and it seems as though the litter of children run around much the same way.”⁹⁴ For perhaps the first time New Immigrants were exposed to a large demographic of “native” Americans who were far more destitute and “backwards” than themselves. In a time where so much stock was set by appearance and modernity, this experience of an America that they could feel superior to may have helped New Immigrants feel that they could approach the proverbial table as equals.

Aside from the Deep South, other recruits did advanced training in places as widespread and, in their eyes, as exotic as Texas, Wyoming, Kansas, and Indiana. After this experience, some felt stifled when they returned to the somewhat narrow parameters of their prewar existence. Per Moore, “all of [them] had seen other parts of the United

⁹² Sturm, 20.

⁹³ Albert Messerlin, Oral History Interview, March 23, 2001, by Cecilia Navas and Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 31, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/meserlin_albert.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Moore, *GI Jews*, 63.

Sates; several were restless and viewed their prewar life with distaste. As soon as they could they packed their bags and headed west, joining what would become a huge migration of Jews to cities such as LA.”⁹⁵ Rutgers researchers interviewed veterans from places as far flung as Hawaii, Florida, Texas, and California to collect their oral history archive. Per Raymond Shipley, war “takes you out of your home that you never left and there’s quite a difference. You’ve got to grow up quick.”⁹⁶ Leif Jensen and Yoshimi Chitose conclude in a study on Second Generation children from various waves of migration that, “On the whole, second generation children appear to be more geographically mobile than native children.”⁹⁷ This was certainly true of the Second Generation of New Immigrants, who had no choice but to be scattered for deployment around the country. The physical dispersal of New Immigrants away from their corner of the Atlantic coast into the broader fabric of America helped expand their horizons and open the possibility that, in the post-war years, they could be citizens of the entire country, not just a few blocks in a factory town.

Perhaps just as important as this dispersion was the mixing of New Immigrants amongst various old-stock Americans. Probably the greatest potential for cultural conflict came when urban New Immigrants mixed with rural Southerners—a fact that the military was not ignorant of and chose to address head on. Per Moore, “by 1943 war

⁹⁵ Moore, *GI Jews*, 262-263.

⁹⁶ Raymond Shipley, Oral History Interview, November 5, 2004, by Shaun Illingworth, Jason Kulak and Kenneth Karnas, 26, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/shipley_raymond.pdf>

⁹⁷ Leif Jensen and Yoshimi Chitose, “Today’s Second Generation,” in *The New Second Generation*, 88.

movies pictured the ideal infantry platoon as a melting pot, with at least one person each from Texas, the Midwest, and Brooklyn...Someone from Brooklyn was surely a white ethnic, which usually meant either a Catholic or Jew.”⁹⁸ Joseph McCartney’s experience bears this out: “We had a kid from Tennessee, a couple from Arkansas, we had two or three from New York state, two from Oklahoma, and one from Michigan. The others came from all over the country.”⁹⁹ Edward Piech had a similar experience in his bomber crew, which had members from Arizona, Delaware, and Rural Retreat, Virginia. This crew member “was still fighting the Civil War...He was a typical southerner that loved his whiskey and loved his fighting. Yes, he and I, we didn't get along too well at first—because he was down on Yankees.”¹⁰⁰ This sentiment, echoed by several other interviewees, marks a subtle but important shift in perception. Piech’s family was not even in America during the Civil War, yet when in the South he instinctively identified and was identified as an American from north of the Mason-Dixon. It was a regional identity, but one that wove him more deeply into the fabric of American history and society. Furthermore, it is telling that Piech calls himself a “Yankee.” In the North, “Yankee” was among the terms employed to distinguish native-born whites from immigrant whites.¹⁰¹ Once outside this region, however, it took on the broader meaning of anyone from the North; as soldiers from across the country mixed and mingled, regional identification

⁹⁸ Moore, *GI Jews*, 59-60.

⁹⁹ McCartney, 17.

¹⁰⁰ Piech, 33.

¹⁰¹ Michael Novak, “Confessions of a White Ethnic,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working Class America*, 27.

could supplant ethnic background, indirectly pushing New Immigrants to become a certain type of American instead of a certain type of outsider.

Sometimes regional differences pushed New Immigrants into a regional American identity, but sometimes the unexpected bonds that could be formed in spite of these boundaries pulled them into the greater American community. At times these relationships pulled different regions of the same cultural community together. Jewish recruits from the Northeast frequently found themselves making connections with the small Jewish communities in the South and West, who were different in speech and practice but nevertheless welcomed a break from their isolation.¹⁰² Artie Gorenstein was deployed to Biloxi, Mississippi, a town with no sizable Jewish community during Rosh Hashanah, but he was feeling a little homesick and felt the need to celebrate this important time. He was given 36 hours leave, so he took a train to New Orleans. The Jewish Community Center there arranged for him to spend the evening with a family which turned out to be precisely like his own back home, down to the subscription to the same Zionist-yet-traditional newspaper.¹⁰³ Mr. Gorenstein enjoyed the evening greatly and wrote home to tell his family, who in turn wrote to thank his hosts. The two families exchanged several gifts and letters. Encounters such as these simultaneously strengthened the bonds of the Jewish community and helped New Immigrants realize that they could potentially fit in in a much larger America than they had previously indwelt.

In other instances New Immigrants forged bonds outside of their cultural milieu. Maurice Meyers grew up in an very Orthodox household before the war and seldom

¹⁰² Moore, *GI Jews*, 75.

¹⁰³ Moore, *GI Jews*, 76-77.

formed relationships outside of that community. This changed, however, in the Army, where his best friend was a “Southern version of me...who wasn’t Jewish”¹⁰⁴. Melvin Silverman became good friends with Bernie Rooney, an Irish Catholic, and the two would attend each others’ services regularly, frequently as an underhanded way to get out of training.¹⁰⁵ George Volk, a Second Generation Irish Catholic who had experienced some anti-Catholic prejudice dating in high school, discovered when he was deployed to Ireland that he had not thought to ask if girls he was dating were Catholic or Protestant.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, for some Jewish men, the war afforded them their first dances and dates with *shiksas*, or gentile girls.¹⁰⁷ These extra-cultural bonds helped New Immigrants feel more comfortable in an America that, simultaneously was slowly becoming more comfortable with them. Lewis Bloom recalls one Southerner, from an old money Virginia planter family, who became a good friend after several months of working together. After the war this friend confided that “until I met you I thought all Jews had horns” and convinced Bloom not to waste his career by entering the diplomatic service “Because you’re going to be discriminated against. You’ll end up in a Banana Republic...Just stamping passports.”¹⁰⁸ If the standard for who was American was up to the common sense of the common man, then these interpersonal relationships could have a great deal of impact.

¹⁰⁴ Meyers, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Silverman, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Volk Oral History Interview, February 19, 1999, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 2, 8, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/volk_george.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ Moore, *GI Jews*, 71.

¹⁰⁸ Bloom, 30.

Finally, during and after the Second World War many New Immigrants began to place less of their energies in cultural organizations and more in American ones. For decades “national” or “racial” clubs were an important focal point of immigrant life, along with churches and synagogues that represented a particular community. Andrew Greely, in “What is an Ethnic?,” posits that in America ethnic groups have a strong appeal because the “urban man needed something to provide himself with some sort of identification between his family and the impersonal metropolis.”¹⁰⁹ Herbert Gans elaborates one particular instance of what this might look like:

The life of the West Ender [an Italian neighborhood in Boston] takes place within three interrelated sectors: the primary group, the secondary group, and the outgroup. The primary group refers to that combination of family and peer relationships which I shall call the *peer group society*. The secondary group refers to the small array of Italian institutions, voluntary organizations, and other social bodies which function to support the workings of the peer group society... The outgroup, which I shall describe as the *outside world*, covers a variety of non-Italian institutions in the West End, in Boston, and in America that impinge on his life—often unhappily to the West Ender’s way of thinking...

The primary group is a peer group society because most of the West Ender’s relationships are with peers, that is, among people of the same sex, age, and life-cycle status... The peer group society... dominates the life of the West Ender from birth to death.¹¹⁰

A brief examination of this sociological clarifies how deployment in the military could upset this social structure. Military training and deployment suddenly surrounded men from this sort of society with an entirely new group of men of the same sex, age, and

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Greely, “What is an Ethnic?” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working Class America*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Herbert Gans, “Ethnicity and the Peer Group Society,” in *White Ethnics: Life in Working Class America*, 77-78.

life-cycle status—an entirely new peer group. Indeed, as “combat veteran” was added to the descriptors in life-cycle status, the bonds forged with this new peer group assumed more relevance than the bonds with the old peer group. Just as there were a number of secondary institutions in place to support an Italian peer group, there were a number of secondary institutions in place to support a military peer group, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion. Upon a return from service, the outgroup, America at large, suddenly seemed a little less foreign and, when it provided GI Benefits, its demands seemed a little less one sided. At the most basic levels, service in World War II loosened New Immigrants from their prewar societies.

Oral histories frequently bear this theory out. Robert Mojo, for instance, belonged to the 66th Division, which, by his account, is one of the most active in terms of reunions.¹¹¹ The men in this division formed a bond that they felt most others would not understand because of the unique and tragic history of the division.¹¹² When Mojo returned from his deployment and began attending Rutgers, the fraternity he joined was comprised almost entirely of veterans.¹¹³ John Rosta had a similar experience. Although he was raised in a neighborhood with a heavy Hungarian presence and even a Hungarian cinema,¹¹⁴ when he returned from the war he became more active in the VFW: “Its membership requirement to have served overseas in a war zone made the exclusivity

¹¹¹ Mojo, 28-29.

¹¹² Mojo, 29.

¹¹³ Mojo, 43.

¹¹⁴ Rosta, 10

more appealing.”¹¹⁵ Raymond Shipley recalls joining the American Legion after the war: “you had to have someplace to go and do something, you know, and you were with a bunch of guys from the service. You just fit in, you know.”¹¹⁶ Joseph McCartney recalls during the Kennedy election that he was predisposed towards JFK because of his Irish Catholic roots, but what really won him over was Kennedy’s engaging personality and the fact that he had, like McCartney, served in World War II as a “navy man.”¹¹⁷ The military provided New Immigrants with a new, more advantageous, and often more relevant bridge between themselves and American society than their preexistent neighborhood and cultural groups.

At the same time as military organizations were supplanting the interpersonal support that immigrant fraternal organizations provided, government organizations were supplanting the mutual aid societies that were once hallmarks of the New Immigrant experience. Mutual aid societies once served as a community-organized welfare society and loan organization, but with the rise of New Deal policies brought to fruition in the GI Bill, organizations such as the Federal Housing Authority and the Veterans Association took over those roles, and did so with significantly greater capital.¹¹⁸ American institutions gave veterans their best bet at financial success in the post-war world, and, as evi-

¹¹⁵ John G. Rosta, Oral History Interview, October 18, 1997, by G. Kurt Piehler and Mark Rybak, 47, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/rosta_john.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Shipley, 27.

¹¹⁷ McCartney, 54.

¹¹⁸ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 231.

denced by the eagerness of interviewees to use the GI Bill, they had no qualms about using them.

During and after World War II, New Immigrants were increasingly able and willing to participate in American society. At the beginning of the war there were those who doubted the loyalty of New Immigrants, but they were quickly silenced as New Immigrant soldiers proved their fitness for citizenship on the battlefield. While they were trained around the country, New Immigrants became aware that they were citizens of an America much larger than the one they had inhabited earlier. As they engaged with and befriended Americans from all backgrounds, New Immigrants began to shift their primary self-identification away from the cultural enclaves of their prewar years and into Veterans organizations and relationships that brought them into the American mainstream.

New Immigrants Effect Upon America

We have seen the numerous ways in which New Immigrants entered more fully into the American mainstream during the World War II years, but no study of this process would be complete without likewise noting the ways American society changed to accommodate them. American religious institutions and linguistic expectations broadened to include New Immigrant servicemen.

Like several other government initiatives to bring New Immigrants into the greater fold of American whiteness, the Judeo-Christian movement began during the Great Depression. A coalition of anti-New Deal idealists, conservative Christians, and antisemites rallied their followers for right wing causes, appropriating “Christian” as their

banner.¹¹⁹ The coalition of liberal Christians and Jews on the other side adopted the catchphrase “Judeo-Christian” to articulate their stance. Official government policy was on the side of the Judeo-Christian ethic, but it would not be able to significantly enact this stance until the Second World War.

The Armed Forces recognized that by mobilizing a nation of a variety of religious backgrounds, there was the potential for considerable conflict and a decline in troop morale. The Army chose to address the issue head on. The Fascist enemy nations represented intolerance, thus the best way to distinguish American soldiers from the enemy was to consciously promote tolerance. In February of 1943, the Chaplain’s School at Harvard University, adopted the following plan, per the Army’s official history:

At that time four men were being quartered in most dormitory suites. So far as it could be arranged, a Catholic, a Jew, a Protestant of one of the liturgical churches, and one from an evangelical body were billeted together. This plan did much to promote cordiality and friendship.¹²⁰

The Standard Operating Procedure of the armed forces stated that all Americans believed in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the individual dignity of each human being, and positive ethical standards of right and wrong existing apart from the will of any man.¹²¹ These common ideals were more important than differences in guiding America’s wartime mission.

¹¹⁹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 122.

¹²⁰ Moore, *GI Jews*, 123.

¹²¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 121.

The military's efforts to instill the Judeo-Christian ethic did not succeed overnight. Chaplains had to navigate the tightrope between staying true to their convictions and providing religious counsel to those of other traditions. Many Catholic chaplains, for instance, were extremely uncomfortable with the American alliance with Communist Russia, but had to promote their allies when speaking of them.¹²² Of the 311 Jewish chaplains commissioned, a significant majority (147) came from Reform congregations while fewer came from Conservative (96) and Orthodox (68) synagogues because the committee in charge of selecting and certifying Jewish chaplains wanted chaplains who were culturally American as well as Jewish.¹²³ The Army made it explicit to all chaplains that "no room for theories or individual opinions or new slants...we're expected to take it as its given,"¹²⁴ an ideological hegemony that could understandably rankle many devout practitioners. Still, the heavy-handed, top-down effort at diversity was, by and large, implemented.

Victor Gellar, a more traditionally observant Jew, recalls an argument between himself and a more secular Jew over Gellar's use of *tefillin* in his prayers. Gellar thought he had been empowered to pray however he saw fit, while the other individual thought he was making a spectacle of himself "in front of the goyim" and waving a proverbial red flag at latent antisemites.¹²⁵ When Gellar appealed the issue to his devoutly Catholic

¹²² Moore, *GI Jews*, 124.

¹²³ Moore, *GI Jews*, 129.

¹²⁴ Moore, *GI Jews*, 123.

¹²⁵ Moore, *GI Jews*, 133.

Master Sergeant, the latter affirmed “my tefillin’s right to serve in the army with me.”¹²⁶

In another amusing and somewhat similar incident, two functionally secular Jews, Abe Farber and David Jacobs, were aboard a troop convoy during Passover. The Colonel told them that the Jewish Welfare Board in Seattle had given him crates to be used at this time and ordered them to carry out a Seder, as per the Standard Operating Procedure recognizing Jewish holidays. Neither of them being observant, they panicked and asked the ship’s chaplain, an Episcopalian, for help. He was happy to oblige without compromising his own beliefs, for, in his observation, “the Last Supper was also a Seder...He put on a JWB yarmulke, walked over to the ropes, untied them, invited one and all to join the party, and then conducted the ceremony in flawless Hebrew, translating as he went.”¹²⁷ It may not have occurred organically, but the military’s emphasis on establishing a Judeo-Christian tradition was progressing.

On February 3, 1943, the USAT *Dorchester* was torpedoed off the coast of Greenland, killing hundreds of servicemen. In the panicked moments before their boat sank, four chaplains, two Protestant, one Catholic, and one Jewish, helped organize survival efforts and, eventually, gave up their life preservers and spots on the life boats to save more men. Witnesses recall the four of them linking arms and simultaneously offering their prayers as the ship sank.¹²⁸ In the weeks and months that followed, the American propaganda machine broadly distributed accounts of the sinking of the *Dorchester* as a

¹²⁶ Moore, *GI Jews*, 134.

¹²⁷ Moore, *GI Jews*, 136.

¹²⁸ Moore, *GI Jews*, 121.

triumph of the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Edward Piech recalls, during his own Atlantic crossing in May of 1943, seeing the outline of the *Dorchester* and being acutely aware of the story.¹²⁹ Proponents of the Judeo-Christian tradition had the heroes they needed to help instill mutual respect and recognition between soldiers of religious backgrounds.

If the shared experiences of training and the trials of war were enough to inspire a greater degree of respect between members of different faiths, the tragedies awaiting them on the European continent would inspire sympathy to a greater degree. David Cohen was with the 4th armored division when they liberated Ordruf, the first concentration camp with inmates that Americans uncovered. Cohen became ill multiple times, but in the midst of everything else, it heartened him “as a Jew to see these officers and men had the same feeling...the Catholic chaplain was crying...He said the Kaddish in Hebrew... [there was] a camaraderie in our division that didn’t know from Jew or Christian.”¹³⁰ Similarly, Jewish infantryman Sam Fuller recalls the capture of Aachen when several hundred captured Germans were being debriefed, they showed mass defiance and their officer called upon them as German soldiers to “salute the Fuhrer in our minds.” In response, the American General announced that “every man of Jewish faith in our outfit... would have the chance to participate in a makeshift Yom Kippur inside Aachen Cathe-

¹²⁹ Piech, 41.

¹³⁰ Moore, *GI Jews*, 229.

dral.” Fuller’s sergeant, “who was about as Jewish as a pork chop” entered the cathedral, followed by many other gentiles: “on that occasion everyone was Jewish.”¹³¹

New Immigrants were able to expand the culturally accepted definition of Americanness in regards to language as well as religion. In the early 20th century, anthropologists frequently employed the term “the English-speaking race” to refer to a typical white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, and language adoption was held as the standard of assimilation into American culture.¹³² “Good English” campaigns were held across the United States and, in 1902 New Mexico’s statehood was delayed until “the migration of English-speaking people who have been citizens of other States does its modifying work with the Mexican element.”¹³³ Nebraska banned the teaching of any foreign language under the ninth grade, and language loyalty oaths were frequently extracted from children.¹³⁴ The dominant scientific theories of the early and mid 20th century held that bilingualism created mental confusion and limited the development of children.¹³⁵ In no uncertain terms, the white mainstream demanded its members speak English and only English.

The demands of American society reached deeply into the homes of New Immigrants, but did not entirely eradicate old country tongues. The Rutgers WWII Archive exemplifies just how diverse the linguistic experiences of New Immigrants were. For

¹³¹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 242.

¹³² Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 52-53.

¹³³ Alejandro Portes and Richard Schauffler, “Language and the Second Generation,” in *The New Second Generation*, 10.

¹³⁴ Portes and Schauffler, “Language,” 10.

¹³⁵ Portes and Schauffler, “Language,” 10-11.

some in the Second Generation, English was the only language they were taught, either as a conscious choice to assimilate or because it came automatically after some time spent in America.¹³⁶ In other instances they grew up speaking only the old country tongue and had to learn English at school, sometimes with the added responsibility of bringing home their learning to their families.¹³⁷ Some received formal education in the language of their parents.¹³⁸ Mark Ruffo grew up with a father who spoke only Italian and sent them to a parish school that taught Italian, but insisted they only speak to him in English.¹³⁹ Most frequently the children grew up hearing the old country language spoken (usually when their parents did not want them to understand what was being said) and picking it up conversationally but never receiving formal education in it.¹⁴⁰ National unity and allegiance to country demanded that foreign languages would not be taught in public schools, but many students who attended these institutions learned them at home. In short, when the Second Generation was called upon to go overseas and fight for America, they frequently did so with foreign language skills developed formally or informally in their immigrant homes and neighborhoods.

¹³⁶ Peter Logerfo, Robert Olson, Andrew White, and Charles Mickett, for instance.

¹³⁷ John Rosta, Ralph Buratti, and Joseph DeMasi, for instance.

¹³⁸ Mark Ruffo and Thomas Kinaszczuk, and many Jewish interviewees for instance.

¹³⁹ Mark Ruffo, Oral History Interview, October 7, 2005, by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Stephanie Ruffo, 3, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/ruffo_frank.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Nazemetz, Charles Sloca, and many others.

It did not take long for these language skills to become useful. Melvin Silverman learned Yiddish and German at home, which allowed him to translate when speaking to captured Germans. When translating, he used “Yiddish mostly, which was an advantage because I loved to watch the faces of the Germans turn white when I spoke Yiddish as opposed to German. A terrible feeling you know. To say look I'm putting terror in this guy's face just because of the language I'm using, but they understood me.”¹⁴¹ Ernest Hilburg discovered that many of the beaches in Normandy were defended by Russian POWs, and that he and other Jews who spoke Yiddish could communicate haltingly with them.¹⁴² Max Horlick thinks the language skills he developed at home saved his life. He was pulled from his unit at the front of the Battle of the Bulge to the rear because the Army needed men who were excellent in both their foreign languages and English to interrogate German POWs.¹⁴³ Joseph DeMasi found time on leave to track down his mother's family in the small Italian village of Airola. When he arrived he discovered that the population was in bad shape because they had been forced to billet German soldiers who had taken nearly every scrap of food in town. DeMasi managed to sequester a half-track of food for the village, and in return he was made honorary mayor and make a strong pro-

¹⁴¹ Silverman, 38.

¹⁴² Ernest Hilburg, Oral History Interview, August 18, 2007, by Matthew Lawrence, Jr. and Jessica Thomson Illingworth, 7, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/hilberg_ernest.pdf>

¹⁴³ Max Horlick, Oral History Interview, October 30, 2009, by Shaun Illingworth, 40, Rutgers Oral History Archives. Online: <<http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/images/PDFs/horlick-max.pdf>>

American impression upon the people.¹⁴⁴ In an evolving world order in which America no longer isolated itself but sought to lead a coalition of nations, individuals with language skills could make valuable contributions.

Conclusion: Internal Changes and Outcomes

At the close of the Second World War, New Immigrants stood as new entrants into the American mainstream. They had proved to others and to themselves the many ways in which they could benefit the nation as full participants in its civic and culture and institutions. New Immigrants had been placed in a position where they had to prove they belonged, and they had met many of those conditions. In some ways they had changed themselves to be more palatable to the “average man,” while in others they profited from a changing society whose institutions positioned them to advance more than other liminal groups.

We have seen how New Immigrants changed in relation to America and how America changed in relation to them. To conclude, it is worth briefly considering how these changes reached into the New Immigrant communities themselves. America decided it had room in its civic society for an expanded definition of citizens, but only if some of the sharper, more distinctive edges were rounded off of New Immigrant culture. This is clearly seen in the changes that occurred in Catholicism and Judaism in the post-war years.

¹⁴⁴ DeMasi, 31.

In America, particularly the America of the late 1940s and into the 1950s, religious participation was seen as a national criteria of social respectability.¹⁴⁵ This marks a break from Italian, particularly Southern Italian, Catholic practice. Historically the Southern Italian peasant has had an antagonistic relationship with the clergy, as the priests, drawn from the upper-classes, either directly exploited the peasants, supported large landowners who did so, or at best simply treated them with a degree of haughtiness and detachment.¹⁴⁶ This was not much different than the Catholic church the typical Italian immigrant experienced; the Irish American Catholic church was marked by a very different, much more fervent, ascetic, and politically charged expression of faith that bewildered newcomers.¹⁴⁷ Irish Catholics had fought their own struggle to gain control of their church some decades earlier and were not eager to relinquish those victories to newcomers.

Joseph Marino grew up in an Italian household where Italian Catholicism was important. His father was instrumental in getting the Italian community to build their own Catholic church, away from the potential domination of the American/Irish clergy.¹⁴⁸ His family home was outside the heart of the Italian neighborhood, but they maintained a strong connection and feasts, dances, and celebrations such as Columbus Day were huge

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Lopreato, "Religion and the Immigrant Experience," in *White Ethnics: Life in Working Class America*, 63.

¹⁴⁶ Lopreato, "Religion," 60.

¹⁴⁷ Lopreato, "Religion," 60-61.

¹⁴⁸ Marino, 12.

affairs.¹⁴⁹ Just before he left for his deployment, however, Marino began dating Margaret, the daughter of his Irish Catholic school teacher, and they were married during the war.¹⁵⁰ In his words: “she was Catholic, is Catholic, was Catholic.”¹⁵¹ In this way Marino is representative of a growing trend in American Catholicism: the embracing of a pan-Catholic whiteness. Soldiers’ dog tags did not have the option of signifying Italian, Polish, or Irish Catholic, but simply a universal “C;” soldiers could not usually opt for a chaplain down the street if theirs did not observe the same saints’ days and liturgy. Catholic soldiers were expected to focus on those values they shared with other Catholics (and even other Judeo-Christians), worship together, and then take these lessons into civilian life. As individuals such as Marino moved out of their homes into the suburbs, they discovered that the national parishes of their youth did not follow them. Instead, per Joseph Lopreato in “Religion and the Immigrant Experience,” “Italian Americans have found that membership in the ethnically mixed Roman Catholic church of the suburbs is an important expression of their newly adopted middle class status.”¹⁵² Per Lopreato,

In the church as in the family, ‘intergenerational’ conflict inevitably developed...the ultimate success of the Catholic church among the Italians in America owes much to its capacity to abandon those characteristically Italian practices that in these of the younger generation marked it as ‘for-

¹⁴⁹ Marino, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Marino, 5.

¹⁵¹ Marino, 5.

¹⁵² Lopreato, “Religion,” 63.

eign' while at the same time retaining enough of the old atmosphere to make the old people feel that the church belonged to them.¹⁵³ The changes in American Catholicism are thus in some ways analogous to the changes within the generations of the New Immigrant community. The Second Generation, those who had fought in World War II and identified more closely with America than with their old country roots, were willing and able to strike a balance between conflicting identities. America recognized Catholicism as a socially respectable religious choice, but at the cost of some individual expression.

American Judaism likewise underwent transformations in the post-war years, in some ways similar and in some ways different. Similar to Catholics during World War II, there was no option of Orthodox, Reformed, Secular, or Zionist Jewish on soldiers' dog-tags, merely a (somewhat anachronistic) "Hebrew." Due to the very nature of recruiting chaplains from religiously practicing congregations and the fact that the only activities in the military directed towards Jewish life were religious observances, the sizable virtually-secular Jewish community went unrepresented.¹⁵⁴ Per Moore, "Ironically, under army auspices Jews achieved a group cohesiveness they never had as civilians."¹⁵⁵ As with Catholics, some of the sharper edges were rounded off American Judaism in order to make it fit more neatly into the American conception of religious practice and identity.

The Second World War brought about two other large changes within Jewish identity that do not have parallels outside of it, however. It would be inappropriate to discuss

¹⁵³ Lopreato, "Religion," 63.

¹⁵⁴ Moore, *GI Jews*, 74.

¹⁵⁵ Moore, *GI Jews*, 75.

Jewish identity in the postwar years without some discussion of the *Shoah*, or Holocaust. Every Jewish GI interviewed by Rutgers was asked about their reaction to the discovery of the camps, and each of them had a hard time putting it exactly in words. Eugene Polinsky speaks for many when he says that “It affected me terribly yes, because I, while I was in Europe...I did find out a number of people who were involved in the Holocaust. They knew what my background is, and I was able to somehow bring comfort to them.”¹⁵⁶ The interviews reflect a general soul searching that the events of the Holocaust demanded of all individuals, but particularly Jews. At least seven of those interviewed lost family members in the Holocaust; like it or not, their Jewish identity was awakened in an important new way. Those returning from the experience of the camps would carry with them the memories and experiences that would serve to shape the identity of their communities and the nation at large.

Polinsky’s response indicates a second layer to the Jewish response to Nazi policies: in order to prevent things like this from transpiring again, Judaism needed to assume a more active, aggressive identity, and American GIs were the perfect vanguard for this change. Jeremiah Gutman recalls how, in the postwar years, Zionism moved from its status as a sectarian fringe belief to a tenet accepted by both liberal democrats and popular-front radicals.¹⁵⁷ Both of Maurice Meyer’s parents were active Zionists in the prewar years, but Meyers saw *Ha-shomer Ha-tzoyer* as basically a social club, a way to get his parents off his back. Meyers relates that “it wasn’t, I guess, until after the war that a lot

¹⁵⁶ Eugene Polinsky.

¹⁵⁷ Moore, *GI Jews*, 253.

of us really saw the seriousness of Zionism, how important it really was.”¹⁵⁸ The nation of Israel was established in 1947, an event with ramifications for Jewish identity far beyond what can be addressed here. What is relevant for our purposes and worth noting here, however, is Gutman’s response to Arab threats to “push [Israel] into the sea.” Gutman, flexing the new muscular Jewish identity developed during the war years, started gathering and illegally smuggling arms and optics to back up his assertion that “I’ll push back.”¹⁵⁹

It is tempting, when writing a paper such as this, to end on a high note such as this, a positive expression of an identity discovered at the intersection of cultural specificity and American assimilation. To do so would, however, be an injustice to the reality of the postwar years. The ongoing story of New Immigrants in the United States has been marked by highs and lows of acceptance and rejection. On one extreme, Michael Novak gives a scathing indictment of the American reception of white ethnics: “Unfortunately it seems the ethnics erred in attempting to Americanize themselves before clearing the project with the educated classes.”¹⁶⁰ Novak, like several of the authors in the volume he wrote for, feels that America never fully accepted white ethnics as they were, but required them to change too much in order to be palatable. Those in his camp cite the growing ethnic consciousness movement in the 1960s and 70s as evidence that the assimilation I detail in this paper was unsuccessful. They point to continued white ethnic

¹⁵⁸ Meyers, 12.

¹⁵⁹ Moore, *GI Jews*, 253.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Novak, “Confessions of a White Ethnic,” in *White Ethnics*, 29.

poverty and disaffection with the Vietnam War¹⁶¹ as evidence of the betrayal of this population by the government.

In many ways they are right. I explicitly want to avoid writing a narrative that is too triumphalist, one where the challenges New Immigrants overcame only serve to highlight the virtues of this population. The truth is that prejudice against white ethnics continued throughout the war, through the postwar years, and, in various guises, exists in the present day; the interviews from the Rutgers oral history archive bear this out as well. However, the fact remains that I am, in my conclusion, able to switch from a language of “New Immigrants” to the more familiar “white ethnics” because of the changes that occurred during this time. It is during the Second World War that the language of “ethnicity” gained purchase among academics and effectively divorced “nation-races” from a connection to biology.¹⁶² Mary Waters, when writing about her assessment of Polish ethnicity and its difference from race, described modern ethnicity as “lacking in social costs, providing enjoyment, and chosen voluntarily.”¹⁶³ This is not attempting to say that modern white ethnics do not experience prejudice—they do—but is said to contrast with the identity that would have been tied up a New Immigrant’s racial extraction.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ White ethnic participation in the Vietnam War, interestingly, can be seen as history coming full circle. I have detailed how the parents of many interviewed New Immigrants left their home countries to avoid conscription in a war they felt like they had no reason to fight; many white ethnics felt similarly during the Vietnam era and popularly endorsed fleeing to Canada to avoid the draft.

¹⁶² Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 25.

¹⁶³ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 32.

¹⁶⁴ Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 32.

At some point in history the understanding of what it meant to be a white ethnic underwent a subtle transformation from a fundamental categorization to an aspect of identity; I locate this change in the Second World War. Deborah Dash Moore articulates this neatly: “Most Jewish recruits did not reflect on these subtle changes. For the majority, military service was only incidentally about being Jewish. The move from civilian to soldier involved so many adjustments—mental, social, and physical—that the issue of Jewish identity usually took a back seat to the more obvious shifts in personal status.”¹⁶⁵ The Second World War transformed almost every aspect of those fighting in it as they learned to locate their identity on a whole new scale of belonging. New Immigrants had proved they were fit for citizenship on the battlefield and were in a position to demand that society recognize their contributions by expanding its definition of whiteness to include them. In the postwar world veterans had to decide whether they would take advantage of GI Bill opportunities and move to the suburbs, attend college, marry outside of their ethnic background, and, ultimately, identify more closely with a white American identity than an ethnic one. No two individual stories I read ultimately reached the same conclusion in regards to the dual identities as American and ethnic, but what matters is that during World War II New Immigrants made it possible to choose.

¹⁶⁵ Moore, *GI Jews*, 84.

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