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HAVA TIROSH-SAMUELSON, DANIEL BERNARDI,
AND MURRAY POMERANCE

Introduction

The Hollywood Question

This book sets out to mark a new and challenging path to the understanding of the role of Jews and their experience in Hollywood filmmaking. Since the beginnings of the Hollywood film industry at the turn of the last century, Jews have contributed—as executives, producers, directors, writers, and performers—to the building and development of the studio system, the star system, and the arts and sciences of the Hollywood style. Thus, in a central and influential way, they have been concerned with the construction of the American Dream, or at least the Hollywood version of that dream. The promise, opportunity, and material success that shaped the cultural and collective identity of this nation of immigrants have been inspired, and to some degree structured, by a Jewish minority that embraced the majority culture more than at any other time in their long diasporic life.

Our multidisciplinary approach looks with new light at the Jewish experience on film. If our joint examination stands upon two fundamental questions—what is the historic presence of Jews in America? What involvement has the Jewish presence brought to Hollywood specifically and American popular culture broadly?—the studies herein do not pause to elaborate on them directly, so we raise them here. What follows in these pages is aimed at any interested reader, scholarly or not, who is a lover of Hollywood film and interested to know more about it; and any reader, Jewish or not, who cares about the nature and complexities of Jewish experience, especially as it relates to cinema. American movies may not exactly constitute a picture *of* our culture, but they surely make a picture *for* us, one that we gaze at with seriousness and also a certain loss and regaining of self. And Jewish experience is one of the repeating, pervad-

ing motifs in that picture, a motif, we believe, worth considerably more attention than it has received.

JEWES IN AMERICA

Present in America since 1654, Jews sided more heavily with the rebellious colonies during the revolution for independence, receiving full citizenship by the end of the eighteenth century and sharing in the economic expansion and industrialization of the nineteenth (Hertzberg; Diner; Diner and Grunberger). Unlike Europe, in America “Jews could reside anywhere, they could own land, engage in retail trade and become artisans and craftsmen” (Farber 35). Between 1820 and 1880, 250,000 Jews came to America from small cities in central Europe, seeking in the new land the promise of a better life. These Ashkenazi immigrants, most from German-speaking families, joined the largely Sephardic Jewish population in America that numbered a few thousand and was concentrated in major port cities (e.g., New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, Newport, and Savannah). Although the newcomers were skilled laborers in weaving, shoemaking, tailoring, and baking, in America they found their livelihood mainly as peddlers and small shopkeepers, usually trading in dry goods as agents for more established Jewish businesses in urban centers (Ashton 48–49). Peddling brought the Jewish immigrants to smaller towns and rural areas in the South, Midwest, and West, expanding Jewish populations in mid-size cities as part of the rush of western migration in the United States from 1830 to 1870. By 1877, Jews were nearly 8 percent of the California population and synagogues could be found throughout the continent in expanding cities as well as in smaller towns. By the end of the century, a new Jewish business elite comprising bankers (e.g., Schiff, Seligman, Lehman, Kuhn, and Loeb) and department-store magnates (e.g., Strauss, Bloomingdale, Gimbel, and Altman) had emerged, part of an upward mobility in the North spurred in part by the economic demand created around the Civil War.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the goal of many American Jews was integration into the gentile world, accomplished mainly through intermarriage. According to Jonathan Sarna, “some 28.7 percent of all marriages involving Jews . . . were intermarriages” (45). The particular makeup of American culture and politics allowed Jews to enjoy life unencumbered by religious persecution, although social discrimination and exclusion remained prevalent. Of course, there were also periods of acute anti-Semitism (Dinnerstein; Gurock). Nonetheless, the United States Constitution made it possible for Jews to defend their rights in American law courts, and many

Jews believed that American principles echoed Judaism's values (even if the application of these principles varied from one state to another).

Throughout the nineteenth century, Jews in America articulated a new vision of what Jewish life should be, reshaping religious practices to fit the distinctive American reality of the open society (Sarna). In the 1880s there were about 260,000 Jews among over 50 million inhabitants of the United States, constituting a small minority of only 0.5 percent of the population. The Jewish religion as practiced in the United States was largely Reform Judaism, a mode that rearticulated traditional Jewish practices in numerous ways with the intent of modernizing the faith. In addition to synagogues, American Jews established new fraternal organizations to address their changing needs, of which the largest was B'nai Brith, first established in New York in 1843 to provide social and welfare services to Jewish immigrants. Other such organizations included the Free Sons of Israel (founded 1849), the Order of Brith Abraham (1859), and the Free Sons of Judah (1901). Through these organizations American Jews experimented with the implications of living in a new environment and created distinctive forms of Jewish religious expression.

In the 1880s American Jewry was profoundly transformed by a wave of migration from Russia, Poland, and the Ukraine, about 2.5 million people (Goldstein). These were Yiddish-speaking Jews who settled mainly in the industrial centers of American cities, especially in the garment industry near New York's port of entry and the cigar-making factories in Philadelphia and Boston. The new immigrants' backgrounds were different from those of their German predecessors. They came from small cities and villages where they had lived in almost exclusively Jewish environments. Now living in close proximity to non-Jews, east European Jews found that their main challenge was how to Americanize without losing their Jewish identity, whether defined in religious or in secular terms.

By the turn of the twentieth century, huge Jewish enclaves emerged in major industrial cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore, where factory jobs were plentiful, but the immigrants had to struggle with poverty, diseases, and a poor living environment. Since most Jewish workers concentrated in the garment industry, during the early twentieth century they created influential "Jewish" unions, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA), although both had a minority of non-Jewish—mainly Italian—members (Goldstein 75).

Jewish immigrants from the same European towns founded congregations composed of fellow townsmen, providing not only places of worship but also support for the most essential Jewish life-cycle needs, especially

funeral and burial in a Jewish cemetery. Ethnic networks also enabled Jews to better their social and economic positions, but as these immigrants participated and benefited from America's vibrant commercial culture, they moved out of the "neighborhood of first settlement" and established new, Americanized synagogues in which rabbis preached in English rather than exclusively in Yiddish. Only a small minority of Jews rejected the beliefs of traditional Judaism outright, never attending synagogue or giving up kosher food entirely; the great majority of Jews remained loyal to Judaism but practiced it in a lax and non-systematic manner (see Sarna; Glazer; Gartner).

Affirming their faith in America as a land of promise, Jews became enthusiastic consumers of American novelties—ready-made clothing, packaged foodstuffs, and manufactured goods—and they were regular attendees at dance palaces, nickelodeons, and other commercial places of amusement. Jews were also the creators of the mass culture that made America distinct (for but one example, consider the composer of "God Bless America," "Easter Parade," and "White Christmas"—Irving Berlin [born Israel Baline]). As a group they pursued economic and social mobility with special vigor, although they had to address the tension between Jewish values and their new surroundings. The traditional Jewish commitment to family and community often failed in America, replaced by a commitment to individual self-fulfillment and the ambitious pursuit of material comfort and social mobility.

The process of Jewish acculturation in America was carried out through the institutions of the Yiddish language, through which immigrants retained ties to the old country and thereby facilitated a conversation with the new culture without glossing over cultural, ideological, and religious differences among themselves. Via serialized novels, sketches, short stories, and essays, the Yiddish newspaper served as a major vehicle of integration, as did Yiddish books and pamphlets and, most of all, the Yiddish theater. Still, most Jewish immigrants remained committed to moving toward the English language and saw little wisdom in preserving the autonomy of Yiddish at the expense of their efforts at Americanization. This striving for fit and the ensuing familial tensions that affected everyday experience found their way as narrative content into many silent films, such as Edward Sloman's *His People* (1925). The Yiddish press and theater survived, supplementing the more active participation of Jews in English-language culture. As the immigration period came to a close, the influence of Yiddish was in decline among Jews, but by then it had already become Americanized, an urban lingua franca. When, in Roy Del Ruth's film *Taxi!* (1932), the obviously Irish Jimmy Cagney enters a casual sidewalk conversation in fluent Yiddish, contemporary urban audiences would have found no incongruity.

After World War I and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 (which restricted immigration of any cultural group to 2 percent of those from that group who were already in America as of 1890), Jewish culture in America underwent a noticeable change. In the interwar years, a generation of young American Jews who were thoroughly conversant in American ways became significant consumers and producers of the American entertainment industry. In the film industry in particular, Jews sought new ways of bringing their Jewish and American outlooks together (Friedman *Hollywood's Image*). Within three decades after the mass migration of the 1880s, Jews were enjoying unprecedented material ease and, according to Eric Goldstein, the Jewish working class had largely vanished. Jews entered the motion picture industry in droves—an industry revitalized by the conversion to sound (by 1932) and closely allied with the garment industry (because of the link between motion pictures and costume design and a common system of labor practices [Toll]). During the 1910s and 1920s, as studios were springing up in Southern California, Los Angeles emerged as the nation's fourth largest city and became a major Jewish center. The original Hollywood moguls included men like Jack and Sam Warner, who had been in the entertainment business in Ohio, and Sam Goldwyn, who had partnered with Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky in New York. The movie business and the Jewish experience came to share the Hollywood sun.

JEW IN HOLLYWOOD

The movie industry was a revolutionary cultural tool that transformed popular consciousness (Buhle *Jews*). Jews were at the heart of it, as performers, producers, studio moguls, and distributors (Gabler). The Hollywood studio system was in full swing by 1930. As “a small set of corporations,” studios were organized in such a way that “each successful corporation had a powerful leader who formulated strategies to maximize profit and maintain the long-run power of the studio corporation” (Gomery 3). The studios were economic institutions devoted to marshaling, organizing, and, in Henry Ford fashion, systematizing artisanship while exploiting labor forces. The base of film production was thus ultimately economic, and Hollywood in practice was a complex industry in which ownership, production, distribution, exhibition, marketing, and sales were closely intertwined and dominated by a very small number of individuals (Jewell 50–89).

Film and media scholars have sought to both reveal and complicate the history of Jewish involvement in Hollywood by pointing to the foundational role played by immigrant Jews during the birth of the movie system (1885–1929) and in its classical period (1930–1960). In *An Empire*

of *Their Own*, for example, Neal Gabler shows how the moguls, a small group of Jewish immigrants from Europe, turned the Edison laboratory's late nineteenth-century production of kinetoscope reels into a production-line industry that capitalized on the leisure interests of American society in the twentieth century. Indeed, the names of these immigrants turned studio bosses are now common historical reference points in film history books: Harry Cohn (of Columbia), William Fox (born Vilmos Fried, of Fox Pictures, later merged into Twentieth Century–Fox), Samuel Goldwyn (born Schmucl Gelbfisz, of Goldwyn Pictures, later merged into Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), Carl Laemmle (of Universal), Louis B. Mayer (of Metro), Jack and Harry Warner (born Wonskolaser, two of the Warner brothers), and Adolph Zukor (of Paramount). Each contributed to building a Hollywood entertainment industry that remained at the center of cultural production throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In addition to Zukor, Marcus Loew, Goldwyn, Mayer, Fox, and the Warners, the history of Hollywood cannot be told without significant reference to the names of Jesse Lasky, Carl Laemmle, Barney Balaban, Irving Thalberg, Joseph Schenck, and David Selznick, to mention just the most famous in the heyday of the studio system (1925–1958). These magnates worked through the complex managerial structures to exercise their choice of what and how many films to produce, the price at which to market their products, and the order in which films should be released—decisions that would have enormous impact on popular culture in the United States and throughout the world (Schatz).

Hollywood was a company town, insular and unwelcoming to outsiders, with a culture that was cultivated by Jews who created an atmosphere of competition. Genuine friendship among them became difficult if not impossible. The moguls cultivated an exclusive community based on gambling—in football, cards, horses, movies, or elections—and shared a recreational life that revolved around what were considered very “un-Jewish” activities, such as racehorse breeding and competitive riding (Gabler 252–63). Jews sought to establish social settings in which they could “play tennis and golf, where they could transact business, and where, perhaps most of all, they could reestablish their own pecking order” (Gabler 274). For example, the Hillcrest Country Club on Pico Boulevard, across the road from the Fox studio, addressed these needs, becoming “a sanctuary of Jewishness” for members and guests alike. But the meaning of “Jewishness” had little to do with religion or nationality and more with ethnicity, kinship, and folkways. If many tried to efface their Jewish identity in order to be accepted into mainstream business culture, or to pass as gentiles (Rogin), they experienced continuing exclusion from various clubs and

neighborhoods regardless of how they cultivated a non-Jewish appearance and style, especially after east European Jews came to Hollywood.

Nor was ascertaining the Jewishness of studio moguls, directors, and stars an easy practice, since many not only gave up traditional Jewish life and intermarried with non-Jews but even changed their names in order to erase markers of Jewish identity. The very attraction of Jews to the film industry and the way they operated the studio system illustrated how they were marginal in American society because of their Jewishness. Acting in front of the camera (in the classical studio days and up until our present situation) have been such obvious and masked Jewish luminaries of the screen as Alla Nazimova, Ed Wynn, Erich von Stroheim, the Marx Brothers, Felix Aylmer, Douglas Fairbanks, Edward G. Robinson, Joseph Schildkraut, Paul Muni, George Burns, Gertrude Berg, Jack Benny, Fanny Brice, Anna Magnani, Peter Lorre, John Houseman, Melvyn Douglas, Louise Rainer, Paulette Goddard, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Martin Balsam, Jean-Pierre Aumont, Peter Sellers, Paul Newman, Judy Holliday, Jerry Lewis, Tony Curtis, Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall, Bea Arthur, Dustin Hoffman, Joan Collins, Barbra Streisand, Frank Oz, Bette Midler, Scott Glenn, Mary Hart, Jeff Goldblum, Ben Stiller, Sean Penn, Helena Bonham Carter, River Phoenix, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Jake and Maggie Gyllenhaal, among legion others (listed in roughly chronological order), all of whom—hiding or openly playing their Jewish identity—could draw on Jewish experience in forming their screen personae and creating the characters that endeared them to the box office. Yet moviegoers paying to watch these people were not always aware that Jewish experience was unfolding in front of their eyes.

If we consider the moguls, their “non-Jewish Jewishness” was itself a feature of being Jewish in America. Gabler puts it most powerfully when he states that Hollywood Jews “cut their lives to the contours of their environment and discarded the rest, because only here were they in complete command. The studios were repositories of dreams and hopes, security and power. If one could not control the world of real power and influence, the august world of big business, finance, and politics, through the studio one could create a whole fictive universe that one *could* control” (189). And in the invented world of Hollywood, the Jewish producers, directors, and actors could determine the image of the Jew that fit their own sensibilities (Friedman *Jewish Image*). Rampant anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s, when America was awash in a wave of nativism, played an important role in the decision of whether and how to present Jews on the screen, but no less relevant to this presentation was the ambivalent and conflicted identity that riddled the Jewish experience in Hollywood.

In this fraught context, what might it mean to say the “Jews invented Hollywood” (as phrased in Gabler’s pointed subtitle)? Gabler recognizes, for example, that the moguls did not use movies to spread Jewish thought and culture. “Hollywood,” he writes, “was itself a means of avoiding Judaism, not celebrating it” (300), and studio bosses like Fox, Warner, and Cohn did not use their power to make “Jewish films” or to mold American culture into Jewish likeness. Like a good number of Jewish directors and actors, these studio bosses did not even practice Judaism in their personal lives, by all accounts. Hence, the problem in advancing the simplistic argument that the Jews “invented” Hollywood is that it feeds the stereotype that they also “controlled” it, an argument that smacks of traditional anti-Semitism and that is also short-sighted in terms of the workings of the studio system. Hollywood is too complex to be controlled by a handful of people, and Jews are hardly now, and were hardly then, a unified group that shared a singular goal of domination.

But the charge that “the Jews control Hollywood” has persisted throughout the history of American film and media. Interestingly enough, it stems in part from the industry’s self-regulatory apparatus—the infamous Studio Relations Committee later renamed the Production Code Administration (PCA). Governing film content—the stories, themes, images, and words that found their way to the screen—from 1930 to 1968 through a document known as the Production Code, the PCA was headed in its most influential period, from 1934 to 1954, by Joseph Ignatius Breen, a figure well known to film historians. All the “majors” (MGM, Paramount, RKO, Twentieth Century–Fox, and Warner Bros.) and “minors” (Columbia, United Artists, and Universal) followed the Production Code’s general and specific rules throughout this period. Imbued with puritan Christian principles and supported by the Catholic Legion of Decency, a powerful reform organization, the Code strictly marshaled film production and content during the studio era. As Tom Doherty points out in *Hollywood’s Censor*, Breen himself was an anti-Semite. That suggests that his prevailing attitudes were never far from his obsession about, his interactions with, and his attempts to curb Jewish creative forces. In some ways similar to newly immigrated or newly assimilating Jews in the population at large, Jewish forces in Hollywood had to come to terms on a regular basis with this judgmental external gaze that singled them out, inquired into their motivations, and magnified their ostensible strangeness.

HOLLYWOOD AND THE HOLOCAUST

The golden age of the studios came under threat at the time of yet another major transformation in American Jewish life. The destruction of

European Jewry in the Holocaust brought a new wave of immigrants to America. Between 1944 and 1952, 137,450 European Jews immigrated, most of whom were survivors of Nazi slave labor and death camps. The postwar Jewish population in America was about five million, with Holocaust survivors representing about 2.5 percent. As Americans became more aware of the Holocaust in the years following the war, public expression of anti-Semitism waned. Between 1945 and 1967 American Jews began to feel increasingly at home, even as they found collective identity as ardent supporters of the nascent state of Israel while enjoying robust democracy as American citizens. The Holocaust, however, continued to play an important and contested role in shaping the consciousness of American Jewry. For some, the lessons of the Holocaust meant a determination to reject Jewish powerlessness; for others, the Holocaust required respect for and support of Israel; while for most, the Holocaust functioned as a touchstone of Jewish identity which in the fight against prejudice many channeled by actively participating in the civil rights movement (Svonkin). In subsequent years, how to represent the Holocaust on the screen has remained a topic contested no less than the significance of the Holocaust for American Jews (Avisar; Novick).

Discussion of the Holocaust in this volume suggests a vital theme, though it need not constitute a central turning point of all these analyses. Not only is the Holocaust a deeply important subject for, and source of, cinema (see Frodon), but its reverberations with Hollywood filmmakers during and following the Second World War manifest themselves independently of the identity of particular filmmakers. As with Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), for example, Steven Spielberg could not escape the shadows of the Holocaust—or of Jewish tradition—in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), nor could Bryan Singer, much later, with *Valkyrie* (2008), but we find the Holocaust invoked with equal piety and chill in *Hellboy* (2004), filmed by the Catholic director Guillermo del Toro. Classical treatments include such films as Frank Borzage's *The Mortal Storm* (1940), Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire* (1947), and Leo McCarey's *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (1942)—and none of these filmmakers were Jewish.

Hundreds of Jewish directors and artists came to Hollywood fleeing the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe, particularly Germany, creating a rich historical record of artistry and drama. The names of many of these Jews also distinguish film historiography, such as Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder (born Samuel Wilder), Michael Curtiz (born Manó Kertész Kaminer), Otto Preminger, and Fred Zinnemann. Lang, for example, though raised Catholic by his Jewish mother in Vienna, began his directorial career in 1918 at UFA, the principal German film studio during the Weimar Republic and

the Nazi regime. Joseph Goebbels, the head of the Ministry of Propaganda, banned his *Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) a few months after Hitler took power, reportedly “because it proves that a group of men who are determined to the last . . . could succeed in overturning a government by force” (qtd. in Eisner 130). Despite the ban, Goebbels invited Lang to a meeting, likely on the strength of *Metropolis* (1927), to offer him a role in the new German cinema. Lang elected instead to flee Germany for Paris, eventually arriving in Hollywood in 1936 where he made twenty-three films for various studios during his twenty-year career there.

JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS

Openly affirmed or closeted Jewish filmmakers produced a library of important films that sought to make a social point while also entertaining audiences. One could cite as exemplary Ernst Lubitsch’s *Ninotchka* (1939), George Cukor’s *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), Michael Curtiz’s *Casablanca* (1942), Mervyn LeRoy’s *The Bad Seed* (1956), or Arthur Penn’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). And their impact extends past the studio era into contemporary times. Stanley Kramer’s films of 1960s immediately come to mind during the transition to the New Hollywood; *Inherit the Wind* (1960), a film that loosely depicts the famed 1925 Scopes “monkey trial” on Darwinism; *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), about the Nazi war crimes tribunal; *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), the neo-slapstick comedy that satirized material culture and greed; or even the classic, if now dated, interracial marriage film *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967). As the industry entered the New Hollywood era, the period from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s in which Hollywood abandoned the Production Code in favor of a rating system, young Jewish filmmakers like Mike Nichols (*The Graduate* [1967], *Catch-22* [1970]), William Friedkin (*The French Connection* [1970], *The Exorcist* [1974]), and Woody Allen (*Bananas* [1971], *Sleeper* [1973]), as well as older stalwarts like Sidney Lumet (*Serpico* [1973], *Dog Day Afternoon* [1975]) and Mel Brooks (*The Producers* [1968], *Blazing Saddles* [1974]), made politically progressive films that balanced social commentary with cinema’s commercial demands. Subsequently, in the post-*Star Wars* blockbuster era, Steven Spielberg remains the most recognized contemporary Jewish filmmaker, adept at producing wondrous commercial spectacles like *Raiders* and *Jurassic Park* (1993) as well as poignant liberal dramas like *The Color Purple* (1985) or *Munich* (2005), to name just a few. If *Raiders* opted for a blithe and entertaining treatment of serious Jewish themes (the reverence of the Ark of the Covenant; the persecution of the Jews), and if *Munich* took a much darker look at an organized Israeli re-

sponse to vicious anti-Semitic aggression, the film that remains Spielberg's hallmark tribute to his own Jewish identity and its imbrication with Jewish history inside and outside Hollywood is certainly *Schindler's List* (1993), the story of one man's effort to save the Jewish workers in his own plant from Nazi extermination. *Schindler's List* remains the most controversial film of Spielberg's career thus far, viewed by some as an excoriation of Nazi ideology and a heroic depiction of the abyss of concentration camp life, and by others as a platitudinous exploitation of the victims.

As characters in Hollywood narratives, Jews have long been represented as stereotypes in troubling and disturbing ways. A particularly persistent stereotype is the character of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. A greedy, unfeeling, villainous moneylender, Shylock is recounted by Antonio the merchant as a "misbeliever, cut-throat, hound." There are many examples of this stereotype in film history, but perhaps the most obvious from the contemporary period comes from Spike Lee, who was heavily criticized for his gratuitously stereotyped Shylock characters, Josh and Moe Flatbush, nightclub owners who exploit the black musicians in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990). Gary Giddins in the *Village Voice* labeled the roles "undoubtedly anti-Semitic," while Caryn James in the *New York Times* described the brothers as "money-grubbing, envious, ugly stereotypes with sharks' smiles." Responding on ABC's *Prime Time Live*, Spike Lee defended himself by saying that "I couldn't make an anti-Semitic film." When asked why not, he replied that Jews run Hollywood, and "that's a fact" (James). Yet these representations persist, perhaps most notably in Tom Cruise's Les Grossman in *Tropic Thunder* (2008).

It is also true that Jews have been behind the production of some of the most troubling stereotypes of people of color in Hollywood film history, owing to the power of the American color line to position all minority groups on one side or another depending on their ability to pass or not pass as white. Louis B. Mayer, often credited with solidifying the star system when he ran MGM, became a major player in the development of Hollywood's representational codes after securing the rights to distribute D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), one of the most important films in film history, well remembered for both its innovations in narrative structure and its embrace of the Ku Klux Klan as heroes of a white nation (Bernardi "Birth"). Indeed, the first film credited with introducing synchronized dialogue to film audiences, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), found Jewish actor Al Jolson (born Asa Yoelson) in blackface, an overtly racist tradition that Michael Rogin links to Jewish assimilation in his book *Black Face, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, as Jewish filmmakers such as

Woody Allen, Steven Spielberg, Ethan and Joel Coen, Ivan Reitman, and many others expressed their Jewishness on the screen, it was an ambivalent, ambiguous, and conflicted Jewishness they showed, no less so than in the pre-World War II years (Hoberman and Shandler). With best sellers and box office blockbusters and hit television shows, Jews have been pivotal in the mass culture that formed in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, but interpreting the Jewish content of this creative work is not easy (see Dessler “Jews in Space”). In *American Jewish Filmmakers* (1993), David Dessler and Lester D. Friedman shed important light on the subject by exploring the work of Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, Sidney Lumet, and Paul Mazursky. They reject a “totally assimilationist perspective” and instead present these filmmakers as “part of a Jewish cultural tradition as well as an American cinema tradition” (5). By situating their films in the context of an American Jewish *Bildungsroman*, the metropolitan, urban life in which Jews are “outsiders among other outsiders” (6), and by analyzing Jewish humor, commitment to social justice, and involvement in alternative lifestyle trends, Dessler and Friedman convincingly argue that the work of these Jewish filmmakers reveals “the tensions that being Jewish in America creates as well as how the fusion of Jews and America fashioned a uniquely American Jewish sensibility” (19).

JEWISH EXPERIENCE AND FILM STUDIES

This volume originated in a conference that, as director of Jewish Studies at Arizona State University, Hava Tirosh-Samuelson put together with Daniel Bernardi, then director of Film and Media Studies, in October 2009. They received invaluable help from Murray Pomerance, who graciously took upon himself the thankless task of editing the volume, to which he also contributed an essay. Both the conference and the present volume were created to signal the significance of film studies for Jewish studies and vice versa: to highlight ways in which the Jewish experience is essential both to the history of Jews in America and to the history of film and media in America. Only when Jewish studies and film studies interact can the complex place of Jews in the construction of American popular culture and the impact of America on Jewish individual and collective identity be properly understood.

Remarkably, there are relatively few books that explore the Jewish experience in American cinema, and none that offer the multifaceted and in-depth studies one finds in these pages. In standard treatments of the film industry (Schatz; Gomery; Jewell), the Jewish identity of the studio moguls is noted but hardly discussed. Similarly, in standard histories of Jews

in America (e.g., Hertzberg), the involvement of Jews in the film industry is duly recognized but barely dwelled upon, precisely because Hollywood Jews sought to assimilate. And in scholarship that analyzes the artistic content of films, the Jewishness of certain motifs is unnoticed and misunderstood, or receives limited treatment because the scholars themselves may not have sufficient knowledge of American Jewish culture. A small number of significant volumes have been published in response to the work of Jews in Hollywood—not least Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own*, Friedman's *Hollywood's Image of the Jew*, and Desser and Friedman's *American Jewish Filmmakers*, as well as auteur studies such as Eric Lax's *Woody Allen* (and that do not, typically, give serious attention to the filmmaking of their subjects as a function of their Jewishness). The present collection, in contrast, means to address new issues in a very contemporary way; to use new points of view, both historical and auteurist, both dramaturgical and phenomenological, both critical and aesthetic; to collect the work of authors with powerful insight into the Jewish experience but who do not typically write about the subject; and in general to step beyond the already classical treatments of such filmmakers as Allen, Lumet, Brooks, and Sydney Pollack that frame them and their films as the most important to consider in this light.

We begin with Lester Friedman's penetrating analysis of Edward Sloman's *His People*, a powerful and largely unknown film about the pressures toward both traditionalism and assimilation that was produced just before the sound era. Here we have the story of a family with two tightly bonded brothers, one of whom wishes to lose his Jewish identity in the urban metropolis and the other of whom is loyal to an aging, scholarly father. Friedman's astute vision of the implications of this familial division, both for the increasingly fragile Jewish family and for American culture in the 1920s, deeply engages with Judaism as a center of feeling, a font of ritual, and an object of fidelity. And Sloman is shown clearly to have been a master at dramatization, who with this film played to intense and particular audience expectations for Jewish subject matter. Given the intense participation of Jewish artists in various waves of American immigration, especially in the context of Hitler's rise to power in Germany, it seemed proper to move next to Catherine Portuges's study of Jewish immigrant filmmaking personnel, whose impact on Hollywood film history has been so telling and so deeply engraved. Immigration comes with a keen social, psychological, and cultural displacement, Portuges shows. From Paul Henreid and Hedy Lamarr to Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Thomas Mann, to name only a few of Portuges's subjects, immigrants underwent various transformations when they came into the film business in America. Accents were sanitized, friendships

were dissolved and reconstituted, assets were often frozen. And as these actors, authors, composers, producers, and directors found, in Hollywood anti-Semitism was far from far away.

A central and specific structural force behind Hollywood anti-Semitism is then explored in Wheeler Winston Dixon's illuminating essay, "A Rotten Bunch of Vile People with No Respect for Anything Beyond the Making of Money': Joseph Breen, the Hollywood Production Code, and Institutionalized Anti-Semitism in Hollywood." With the case of Breen, Dixon shows, anti-Semitism was not merely an issue of one powerful man's predispositions, although we can see here how Breen was indeed one of the most powerful controlling forces in Hollywood; the power went further, embedded in the structure of the Production Code Administration and the studio bosses' adherence to the strictures on scriptwriting and *mise-en-scène* that Breen enforced through the Code. Complicating Hollywood's reaction to Jewish filmmaking and Jewish subject matter on film was the need of big studios to exhibit their pictures in Germany, and the fear of many bosses that severe anti-Nazi plots or characterizations could be economically compromising for them.

Compromises of a different kind—smaller in scale yet magnified through the lens of a vast publicity apparatus—characterized identity formation, public presentation of self, and emotional turmoil in two celebrated Hollywood marriages of the 1950s, that of America's "girl next door," Debbie Reynolds, to crooner Eddie Fisher, and then Fisher's love affair and wedding with the preeminent screen star Elizabeth Taylor (the recent widow of his close friend Mike Todd). The Debbie-Eddie-Liz triangle is studied by Sumiko Higashi, with meticulous attention to American consumerism at the time: both women were acquiring a Jewish husband, Fisher was acquiring a particular cachet by marrying each of them, and, crucially, the details of the matings and marriages were lucrative fodder for numerous fan magazines of the time, most notably *Photoplay*. Through these weddings, intermarriage itself came to be an open and nationally celebrated subject of speculation, gossip, and innuendo.

In his essay on the directorial genius of George Cukor, William Rothman inquires into the nature of accomplishment that is possible at a limiting distance from the kind of scandal we find with Eddie, Debbie, and Liz. Perennially recognized as a cultured and suave gentleman in the Hollywood community, Cukor was able to realize such masterpieces as *A Bill of Divorcement*, *Dinner at Eight*, *The Philadelphia Story*, and *Born Yesterday* while remaining almost entirely closeted as a Jew (although not closeted as a homosexual). "He cultivated impeccable manners," writes Rothman. "He knew, and mastered, the rules of proper behavior so as to assure that

his manners never betrayed him when he was in the company of gentiles." Cukor, for Rothman, was part of Hollywood's Emersonian outlook "that made the 1930s a golden age of the American cinema, inducing a cultural amnesia from which America, to this day, has not fully awakened."

For Cukor there remained always an underpinning moral line, a deeply committed sense of truth and propriety that universalized his Jewish experience in Hollywood. A similar moral commitment, what Susan Sontag termed "Jewish moral seriousness," can be seen as a characteristic of Hollywood cinema. Sarah Kozloff examines Sontag's "Notes on Camp," among other works, with a specific query about the attribution of "moral seriousness" to Jews and with a specific interest in "liberal, moral seriousness in American film." With *Street Scene*, *Dead End*, *No Way Out*, and numerous other works from filmmakers including Martin Ritt, Sidney Lumet, Mike Nichols, and the Maysles brothers, moral seriousness attained a status it could not but lose, she finds. "Films that disavow any connection to reality or serious issues are more likely to win critical approbation from the left" by the time of *Jaws* (1975), and more recently "Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, and Todd Solondz have won fans with their refusal ever to be serious, ever to put themselves on the line about moral issues." A central tenet for Kozloff, "whether or not the artwork exudes moral seriousness," is that "the viewer has a responsibility to take the work *seriously*, that is, to weight it with all one's moral faculties."

Looking at *Schindler's List* in terms of the "morally serious" point of view, Kozloff notes that critics have not stopped pummeling Spielberg for its "shortcomings." This film, however, had an extraordinarily long and troubled production history, the careful unfolding of which can reveal vested interests, political alignments and misalignments, authorial intentions validated and lost, and an array of claimants to aspects of the original material involving Oskar Schindler and his work to save Jews from the gas chambers during the Second World War. Peter Krämer's deeply engaging and meticulously researched history of the Schindler story and of Spielberg's involvement with it, "The Good German?: Oskar Schindler and the Movies, 1951–1993," involves examination of original historical sources and consideration of numerous attempts by others to make a Schindler film. Krämer concludes that "building on the long tradition of Jewish interpretations of Schindler's story, the way Spielberg presented his lesson about the Holocaust deeply implicated the film's viewers as guilty bystanders"; and further that "the original intention of Oskar Schindler and his initial promoters to 'rouse the conscience' specifically of Germans was to some extent realized with the release of *Schindler's List*."

The Holocaust as a subject of film has been the focus of considerable

(and irresolvable) study, to enumerate and evaluate what it is to look at images of unutterable horror, to query what it is to own such images, and to understand the experience of regarding them. Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard*, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, and hundreds of other films aimed at education and entertainment have probed the moral atrocities of the camps—just as *Schindler's List* did. In an essay of profound philosophical and moral gravity, cast over with the dark shadows of human mortality and social responsibility, David Sterritt examines images of Nazi horror and images of the catastrophic 9/11 attacks in relation to one another. Illuminating the work of W. J. T. Mitchell, who suggested that just as “through centuries of anti-Semitic bigotry, oppression, and violence, Europe and later America produced the Jewish people as ‘symbols of decadence and evil,’” Sterritt concludes that the destruction of the Twin Towers agitated and disturbed Americans “to a degree out of proportion to the amount of death and destruction that actually took place.” Sterritt shows us that “in the modern cultural unconscious, teeming as it is with living symbols and offending images, the realities embedded in such terms as ‘world Jewry’ and ‘global capitalism’ are now inextricably tied to icons of hellish trauma—the Holocaust death camps, the World Trade Center’s fiery towers.”

Of course, it would be a mistake to assume that Jewish experience onscreen is always and inevitably only serious or traumatic. From Eddie Cantor and the Marx Brothers to the present day, the Jewish experience has been substantially connected to screen comedy. Vincent Brook gives an articulate analysis of “Boy-Man Schlemiels and Super-Nebishes: Adam Sandler and Ben Stiller,” discussing among many subjects the conventional veiling of the ethnic roots of our superheroes (until Sandler’s *You Don’t Mess with the Zohan*), the telling nature of anger and “knocking them dead” in Jewish humor, and the fascinating phenomenon of flirting with Jewish identity (so evident in the work of Stiller). Approaching these performers with a keen sociological interest in multiculturalism and ethnic performance, Brook notes the intra-ethnicity and compromises inherent in American Jewish experience.

The compromise that is often part of Jewish identity construction in Hollywood is not only an enigma to be resolved but a source of mystery and obscurity. The great American playwright and screenwriter David Mamet claims he wrote *Homicide* in order to explore his Jewish roots, and Lucy Fischer is thus approaching a fundamental issue in Jewish experience and self-knowledge as she examines this work in depth. She notes how in this police procedural, Mamet not only fashioned a world of the Jewish tough guy but also revealed the stratifications of an elaborate caste system involv-

ing ghetto poverty and controlling wealth. The central protagonist is torn between loyalty to the Star of David and his police badge, but for Fischer, the prevailing point of interest is the way the brilliant Mamet, an “unaffiliated Jew,” manages his characters, situations, and outcomes. In this essay, we have a telling exploration of a struggling Jewish identity *behind* the construction of “Jewish identity” onscreen.

The issue of screen performance, especially as related to Jewish identity, inspires Murray Pomerance to an extended analysis of what might be termed the Jewish “face,” that is, the mask of Jewish identity that persuasively works inside the Hollywood film to convince viewers of a fundamental realism. The irony that Jewish characters can be, and have been, performed successfully by actors who are not Jewish, and that Jewish actors have successfully portrayed characters who are not Jews, riddles the assumption we may too unconsciously make between cultural “appearance” and underlying structural “motive.” Pomerance’s analysis includes a discussion of Helen Hunt’s *Then She Found Me*, Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, and other films, and culminates in an analysis of the work of the recognizably Jewish Jerry Lewis as he incarnates the recognizably goyish Buddy Love in *The Nutty Professor*. How do we grasp, and then lose, our sense of screen Jewishness; and with what tools is it assembled by performers who do not have a Jewish experience to build on?

And finally, by raising and carefully dissecting the troubling question “Why do so many people in our culture (Jews and non-Jews alike) *hate* Barbra Streisand?” Vivian Sobchack moves through a “social and emotional terrain” in order to show Streisand’s own moving through, moving up, moving out, as it were, to find her own space for action in Hollywood filmmaking. For Sobchack, Streisand is a pure subject, permitting her to “‘escape’ the constraints I felt from within and without by being marked both female and Jewish” while at the same time to focus on a decidedly Jewish performer and filmmaker who has been decried as “‘voracious,’ ‘ambitious,’ ‘Caligulan,’ ‘megalomaniacal,’ ‘totally controlling,’ ‘excessive,’ ‘self-glorifying,’ ‘hard as nails,’ ‘hyper-picky,’ ‘perfectionist,’ ‘meddling,’ ‘aging,’ ‘infantile,’ ‘self-absorbed,’ ‘narcissistic,’ ‘self-centered,’ ‘egotistical,’ ‘extravagant,’ and, of course, ‘a bitch’”—all these terms being “blatant, if secularly encrypted, references to Streisand’s Jewishness.” Sobchack finally shows how, with Streisand and perhaps anyone else, terror “accompanies the burden of being (or acting like) a ‘chosen person.’”

The experience of Jews in American cinema compels us to think anew about the meaning of American popular culture produced for mass consumption. Has America become exceptionally open to distinctive Jewish ideas and cultural sensibilities? To what degree has American mass

culture become Jewish? How do non-Jews resonate with the ambiguous Jewish content of films they may not fully understand? Film historians and critics—who generate rigorous studies of the language of cinema—must join together with scholars of American Jewish experience, who shed light on the political, religious, social, ideological, and cultural aspects of American Jewish life, if we are to better understand the Jewish experience in American cinema. We offer this interdisciplinary examination as an attempt to address these important questions.