

**A Statistical Portrait of American Jews into the 21st
Century**

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Chapter 1

Sampling American Jews

Jews are about 2% of the U.S. population, fewer than many people guess.¹ The number could be slightly higher or lower depending on one's solution to the ancient puzzle, who is a Jew? Moses wasn't, Jesus was. Karl Marx, raised a Christian, is usually counted as a Jew. So is Albert Einstein, who simultaneously professed atheism and Zionism. Anybody can convert to Judaism, but if the conversion is performed by a Reform or Conservative rabbi, neither Orthodox Jews nor the nation of Israel will recognize it.

A born Jew, according to Orthodoxy, is a person whose mother is Jewish. This simply pushes the ambiguity to earlier generations. I am a *kohan*, which traditionally means that my forefathers reach back to Aaron, brother of Moses. Who can say that none of them married a gentile, as Moses did, rendering all my subsequent grandfathers non-Jewish?

It is illegal for the U.S. Census to require people to identify their religions, so there is no full enumeration of American Jews. We have estimates from sample surveys. The General Social Surveys (GSS), source of the data for this booklet, asks respondents, *What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?* Of some 46,000 adults interviewed since 1972, there were 980 -- 2.1% of the total -- who said they were Jewish, while 61% said Protestant, and 25% said Catholic. Asked a slightly different question -- *In what religion were you raised?* -- 2.2% said Jewish. These estimates accord with other recent surveys.²

For this study I count as Jewish everyone who answered "Jewish" on either question, a total of 1,078 respondents. This includes 152 people who said they were raised Jewish but were not Jewish at the time of interview (16%), and 102 people raised non-Jewish but were Jewish at the time of interview.

A difficulty with my definition is that it is based on questions about *religion*. Many self-identified Jews are not religious, identifying themselves as Jewish on the basis of parentage or non-religious ethnicity. If they took the questions literally, as inquiries about their belief in religious doctrine, they might answer "no religion." Fortunately, when Mayer, Kosmin, and Keysar (2001) estimated the number of American Jews, they

differentiated those who were religious (about half) from those who were not, together coming to about 2% of the U.S. population, so we may presume that our sample reasonably well covers self-identified American Jews.

The General Social Surveys

A typical social survey, like a Gallup or Harris poll, has about 1,500 respondents. If 2% are Jewish, these 30 or so respondents are too few to analyze as a separate group. As a result, the attitudes and behaviors of Jews, like other small subgroups of the population, are poorly described in numerical terms. The GSS provides a unique opportunity to aggregate nearly 35 years of polls, providing enough Jewish respondents from which to draw a reasonable portrait.

The GSS were collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, under the direction of James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith. This is the highest quality survey data available. Actually, it is a collection of surveys of the American population, all done near springtime nearly every year, sometimes every other year, since 1972 with about 1,500 people interviewed each year. While the questions asked of respondents changed somewhat from one year to the next, about half the questions were repeated each year, and others every third or fourth year. By merging yearly data, we have answers from many thousand of respondents.

The interview contains "background" and "foreground" questions. Background includes education, occupation, characteristics of respondents' parents, and features of the place where they were raised. Then respondents were asked about their current situation -- their foreground -- including recent work and family activities, and what they think about such topics of general interest as politics, abortion, drugs, etc. With this information, we can explore a wide range of attitudes and behaviors, inquiring how Jews, as group, compare to other Americans.

It may seem mysterious to non-statisticians that a sample of only 1,000 people can accurately reflect the attitudes and behaviors of six million American Jews. The results of a good poll are never perfectly accurate, but they are usually pretty close. The key to drawing a sample that reflects a larger population is *random selection*. This simply means that every person in the population has the same chance of being interviewed as every other person.

Random samples have a remarkable property. Their accuracy depends solely on the size of the sample and not on the size of the population. A random sample of 1,000 residents of Syracuse, NY (my city, with a population of about 180 thousand) is no more nor less accurate than a random sample of 1,000 residents of the United States (population about 300 million). If we asked respondents whether they were for or against X, *in both cases* the percentage of our sample for (or against) X would usually be within 4% of the "population value" (i.e., the percentage we would have gotten if we had interviewed the entire population of Syracuse or of the United States).

When I say the result would *usually* be within 4%, I am waffling a bit for simplicity. To be technically correct, there is a .95 probability that the sample percentage will be within 4% of the population value. Mathematical sampling theory tells us that if a random sample's size is 1,000, then the poll result will "usually" (95 times out of 100) fall within about 4% of the population value. The smaller the sample, the larger the uncertainty.³ If the sample size were 100, the poll result would usually fall within about 10% of the population value.

The GSS, like most polls, deviates from simple random sampling of the population. First, the sample is drawn from adults (no children under 18) who speak English, do not live in institutions (no nursing homes, prisons, college dormitories, or army bases), and live in the Continental U.S. (not Hawaii, Puerto Rico or Alaska). The purpose of most of these restrictions is to keep the cost of the survey down, and probably we are not as interested in the attitudes of children as of adults. Second, since it would be too expensive to send interviewers all over the country to visit every randomly-drawn respondent, it is usually geographic areas that are selected randomly, and then the respondents themselves are selected less randomly from within those areas, so that they are accessible to interviewers. This detracts from the true randomness of the sample but not too badly.

Tom W. Smith (2005) published a prior portrait of American Jews based on the GSS for years 1972-2002. There is obvious redundancy between his report and mine. As one might expect when two competent researchers examine the same data set, there are no jarringly inconsistent findings, though certainly there are differences in emphasis and interpretation. Smith's major inquiry was the degree to which Jews are distinctive compared to 14 other American ethnic groups, and major religious groupings. He concluded that both demographically and attitudinally, American Jews are a distinctive ethnic/religious group.

My own analysis asks how -- or if -- American Jews differ from non-Jews of *similar background* as defined by education and urban residence in the “blue” states of the East and Pacific Coast. Thus, the interpretive frames of the two reports are considerably different.

Fair Comparisons

For Jews, like most American ethnic groups, the timing and circumstances of arrival, the opportunities and discrimination they found here, and the social capital they brought along, all affected their social trajectories. Eastern European Jews, the largest wave of Jewish immigration (see Chapter 2), found employment in the nation’s cities, usually along the East Coast. Today Jews are still concentrated in metropolitan areas (Table 1-1).

Table 1-1. Metropolitan Living

Place of residence:	Jews (n = 1,005)	U.S. Population (n = 41,724)
12 largest cities and their suburbs	52%	19%
13-100 th largest cities and their suburbs	32%	29%
Rural and small urban areas	16%	52%
	100%	100%

Jewish immigrants made full use of America’s schools. Ninety-one percent of Jews in the GSS finished high school (compared to 76% of other respondents). Sixty-five percent of Jews between ages 22 and 50 earned a college degree (compared to 24% of non-Jews).

After World War II many moved to the West Coast, and the east-west pattern of settlement persists. Table 1-2 shows for each of the nine major census divisions of the continental United States the percentage of population that is Jewish. Jews are most concentrated in the Middle Atlantic and New England states and along the Pacific Coast. They are relatively sparse in the middle of the nation, from the Dakotas to the Deep South.

Table 1-2. Geographical Distribution of American Jews

Census region:	Percent of Region that is Jewish:
Middle Atlantic (NY, PA, NJ)	6.4
New England (ME, VT, NH, MA, CT, RI)	4.1
Pacific (CA, OR, WA)	3.4
South Atlantic (FL, DE, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA)	2.1
Mountain (MT, ID, WY, NV, UT, CO, AZ, NM)	2.0
East North Central (MI, OH, IN, IL, WI)	1.3
West South Central (OK, AR, TX, LA)	0.9
West North Central (ND, SD, MN, IA, NE, KS, MO)	0.9
East South Central (KY, TN, MS, AL)	0.4

These patterns are familiar and too simple to hold our interest. A substantively worthwhile portrait must go further and “control for” the well known fact that Jews are now concentrated in well-educated urban communities of politically liberal “blue” states, mostly near the East and West coasts. The remainder of this analysis will compare America’s Jews to a specially defined control group of non-Jewish respondents who share these characteristics.

I define “Controls” as GSS respondents who are white, college educated, live in one of the nation’s 100 largest cities or their suburbs, and do not live in the “middle swath” of states.⁴ One might object that a college degree is too high an educational standard because 48% of Jewish respondents lack this qualification. My counter-argument recognizes the informal educational character of Jewish folk culture as reflected in its literary traditions, business acumen, intellectual argumentation, and

Talmudic scholarship. Many older Jewish respondents, though lacking a college degree, have a functionally equivalent education. We can proceed without settling the point, introducing college education as an additional control when it seems appropriate, as shown below.

The Control group, 6% of respondents (n = 2,358), is an American elite, interesting in its own right. The remaining 92% of GSS respondents (n = 38,241), the bulk of Americans, I denote as “Others.”

To illustrate the value of Control comparisons, consider the stereotype of the Jew as intelligent. For several years the GSS included a ten-word vocabulary test, one measure of intelligence. The mean score for Jewish respondents = 7.5. The mean score for the GSS as a whole = 6.0, consistent with the stereotype. But this isn’t a fair comparison. We should properly ask, Are Jews smarter than non-Jews *of comparable background*? Table 1-3 compares Jews with Controls (and Others). Furthermore, since vocabulary obviously benefits from schooling, and Controls are defined to have college degrees, it seems appropriate to account for this educational difference. Therefore I subdivide the table, placing everyone with a bachelors degree in one row, and everyone with only a high school degree in a separate row. This allows a fair comparison of test scores with background variables equalized.

Looking only at college graduates, Jews have virtually the same score as Controls. That is, Jews and non-Jews have similar vocabularies so long as they come from similar backgrounds, so the stereotype is not sustained. Among high school graduates, Jews do score considerably higher than Others, probably because Jewish folk culture is a relatively rich learning environment for people who cannot, or do not, go to college.

Table 1-3. Mean Vocabulary Test Score, by Education Level⁵

Education level:	Jews	Controls	Others
College degree	8.1 (n = 254)	8.0 (n = 1,359)	7.5 (n = 2,406)
High school only	7.0 (n = 200)	--	5.9 (n = 10,441)

Most of my data displays make these kinds of “fair” comparisons, though usually I will show percentages rather than means. For example, the GSS asks respondents, *If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle, class, or the upper class?* Less than 10% of Americans tell an interviewer they are in the lower or upper classes, so categories are dichotomized in Table 1-4. The class identification of Jews and Controls is nearly the same. Both groups perceive themselves as more fully in the middle class than do Others – the bulk of the population.

Table 1-4. Self Perceptions of Social Class

Perceived social class:	Jews (n = 1,017)	Controls (n = 2,618)	Others (n = 36,398)
Lower or Working	19%	17%	54%
Middle or Upper	81%	83%	46%
	100%	100%	100%

My statistical portrait of American Jews is based on these kinds of comparisons. Tables will rarely include all respondents because many items of information were not collected every year, and there are other reasons including human error why data may be missing. The applicable number of respondent (n) is shown in parentheses; the larger the n the more accurate the percentages.

In comparing two groups, say Jews and Controls, a rule of thumb is that differences of less than 10% are trivial and usually will be ignored.⁶ The percentages of Jews and Controls who regard themselves as middle or upper class, 81% and 83% respectively, are essentially the same. Both of these groups differ considerably in their social class perceptions from Others.

The GSS gives us quantitative data covering the last decades of the 20th century and the opening of the 21st. Before we go further into these numbers, we look in the next chapter at the European background of American Jews and relevant features of the nation to which they came.

In Brief

A portrait of American Jews can be drawn from the cumulative General Social Surveys (GSS), which since 1972 has annually or biennially interviewed random samples of about 1,500 adults, producing an aggregate Jewish sample of over 1,000 respondents. Most of the following analysis compares Jews with non-Jews of similar background. Called “Controls,” they are white, college educated, and living in one of the nation’s large urban areas of the “blue states” in the nation’s East and West. Requiring Controls to have a college degree is conservative because only half of Jews have that level of education. Therefore, where appropriate, comparisons are restricted to college educated Jews.

Jews comprise 2% of the population, Controls another 6%. A third comparison group, called “Others,” includes the remaining 92% of Americans.

Chapter 2

America

By the 12th century, Jews were split into two distinct cultural groups. The *Sephardim* lived in Islamic countries, particularly Moorish Spain, and spoke Ladino, which sounds like Spanish but is written with Hebrew letters. The *Ashkenazim* lived in Christian Europe, speaking German-sounding Yiddish, which also is written in Hebrew letters. They shared as core religious writings the *Torah* and *Talmud* but differed on peripheral rituals.

The first Jews to arrive in North America were a shipload of Sephardim, fleeing persecution in Portuguese Brazil. They landed in New Amsterdam in 1654. New York City has been a center of Jewish life every since. Perhaps half of the Jews who arrived over the next two centuries were Sephardim; at least all the congregations established before 1800 -- in New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, Charleston, and Richmond -- followed Sephardic ritual. Historians often refer to these Sephardim as the “first wave” of Jewish immigration to North America.⁷

The second wave comprised German Jews coming in the mid-1800s. The 1840s were a time of poor economic and political conditions in the German states, encouraging both Christians and Jews to seek more freedom and the better economic opportunities offered by America’s growing cities, its westward expansion, and the California gold rush. By 1880 there were 250,000 Jews in America -- most having come as part of this broader German immigration -- spread fairly evenly across the country’s towns and cities, often working as merchants. The prevalent Jewish denomination of America had changed from Sephardic orthodoxy to permissive Reform, which originated in eighteenth century Germany by assimilating to Christian forms. Most German Jews, like the Sephardim before them, found acceptance and prosperity in America, some attaining extreme wealth and social prominence. Thirteen percent of GSS respondents say their ancestors came from Germany or Austria.

My grandparents came in the third wave -- the two million Jews from Russia and other Eastern European nations who arrived between 1880 and 1924, mostly settling on the urbanized East Coast and in more distant cities like Chicago and Los Angeles. This third wave was by far the largest, first because there were more Jews in Russia than the

earlier regions of departure, and second because their passage was facilitated by the recent introduction of large-capacity steamships on trans-Atlantic routes. Between 1880 and 1924, the total Jewish population of the United States increased by 800 percent. Forty-two percent of GSS respondents say their ancestors came from Russia, 15% from Poland, and another 10% from elsewhere in eastern Europe – 67% altogether.

The newly arrived immigrants, looking for work, were unwelcome competition to laborers already here. Prosperous Americans also found the East Europeans an unappealing group, often living in crowded slums, without English language or Anglo-style manners. Like contemporary immigrants from Italy or Asia, they seemed ridden with vice and disease. Even the German Jews initially held the East European Jews at arm's length, sometimes alienated by the religious orthodoxy that enveloped the Russians' lives and discouraged assimilation, and sometimes threatened by Yiddish-accented radicals who rejected Judaism and espoused socialism or communism. But by the 1890s, at least the leaders of the German Jewish community had largely overcome their prejudices, establishing charities and schools to integrate and uplift these Jews into American life. Most Americans were not so charitable. In 1924, responding to the growing nativism of home-born whites against immigrants and blacks -- at a time when the Ku Klux Klan could march in Washington, DC -- the United States passed restrictive immigration laws, effectively stopping new arrivals from Eastern and Southern Europe.⁸

With immigration essentially ended, the broadest trends for American Jews during the rest of the century were speedy assimilation and remarkable success. Increasingly Jews became integrated into the educational system, the work force, and disproportionately into the professions. Blatant anti-Semitism was largely gone by mid-century though never fully disappearing. With economic improvement, Jews moved to better housing, usually toward the suburbs, still favoring Jewish neighborhoods. Religious practices adjusted to the permissive American environment with Reform Judaism becoming far more popular than the Orthodoxy of Eastern Europe, and Conservatism emerging as a compromise position. Judaism's adaptations to America included keeping a kosher home but eating in restaurants, observing the High Holidays but working on Saturday, driving to the synagogue for services but parking a respectable distance away, giving *bat mitzvahs* for girls as well as *bar mitzvahs* for boys, elevating

the importance of *Hanukkah* as an occasion for December gift giving, and increasing acceptance of intermarriage.

The mid-century's pivotal events were World War II and in its aftermath the creation of Israel, both having more symbolic than physical impact since relatively few American Jews suffered immediate family losses or immigrated to the new nation. Nonetheless, Nazism and the establishment of a Zionist "homeland" were deeply emotional events, more important than religion as components of American Jewish identity. During my dissertation research on Jewish social scientists, undertaken in 1967, I found few Jewish professors who were religious but many who felt a strong Jewish identification, often emoting over the Holocaust or their pride in Jewish intellectual achievements, or in the accomplishments of the new Jewish nation. Some of my subjects, at that late date, still refused to buy a Volkswagen. The Six Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbors broke out in June 1967, toward the end of my research. My subjects became extremely involved in that crisis; several were surprised at the depth of their feelings. This surprise was equally prevalent among those who had previously been apathetic or sympathetic toward Israel (Mazur 1971, 1972, 1973).

The 1960s and 70s were decades of resurgent ethnic pride among Americans of all shades, first among blacks during the Civil Rights Movement, then American Indians, Hispanics, even white "unmeltable ethnics" (Novick 1972). Jews were affected too, especially by the Six Day War, a stunning display of military machismo, banishing the shameful image of sheep led to slaughter. A 1967 poster brilliantly caught the spirit, showing a bespectacled Woody Allen-type figure in black Hasidic garb with beard and side curls, crammed in a phone booth, tearing open his shirt to reveal a Superman emblem beneath. In the moment's euphoria, there was no hint of the troubles that would follow that lightning victory and occupation of Palestinian territories.

Parenthetically, American Hasidism, which some regard as historically long lived, is in fact another resurgent movement of the 1960s. There were few if any Hasidim in the United States before that time. Today they are concentrated in the New York metropolitan area, visually salient but numerically few. Hasidim notwithstanding, the modal trend among American Jews is away from traditional Judaism. In the next chapter

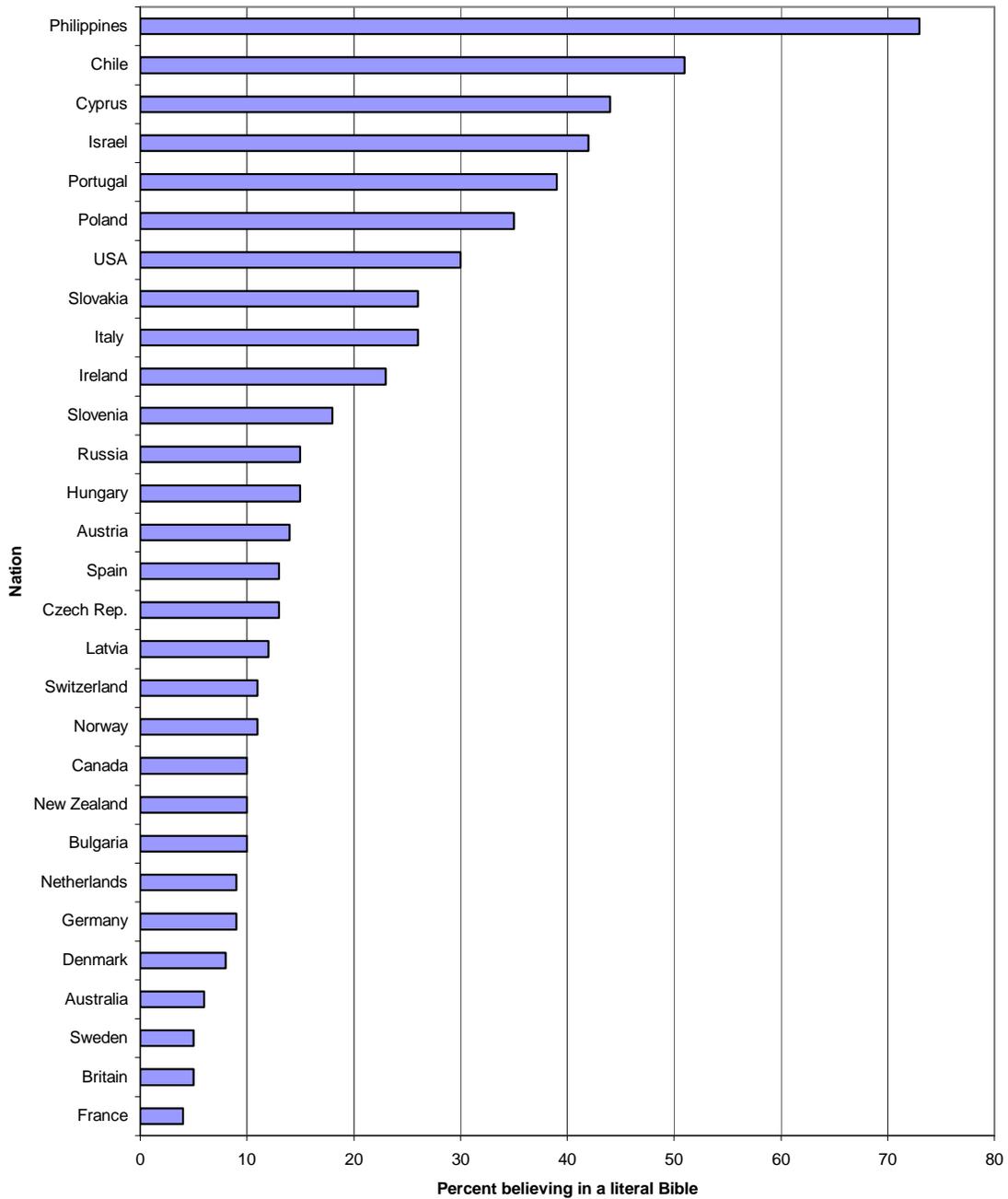
we will explore this in more detail, but first we must examine the country's broader religious context.

American Religion

In 1998, the United States was one of 29 nations participating in a survey of religious attitudes and behavior, coordinated by the International Social Survey Programme. The survey covered religious beliefs about God, miracles, heaven and hell; frequency of worship; and participation in church activities (http://www.gesis.org/en/data_service/issp/data/1998_Religion_II.htm). By every measure, the United States was more religious than most other nations. One statement, "The Bible is the actual word of God and it is to be taken literally, word for word," is a good indicator of core fundamentalist belief. Respondents in the Philippines and Chile lead all other nations in choosing this literalist response; the United States ranks seventh (Figure 2-1). Americans are three times more likely than Britons or most Europeans to believe the Bible is literally God's word.

There have been several suggestions why Americans are more devout than Europeans (Stark and Finke 1993; Noll 2001), and far more accepting of religious beliefs that are highly implausible on scientific and logical grounds (Mazur 2007). The answer is not wholly settled, but we can say that this is nothing new. The French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville, famous for his observations of American society during a visit in 1831, wrote in a letter to a friend, "It's obvious there still remains here [in the United States] a greater foundation of Christianity than in any other country of the world to my knowledge" (Pierson 1938).

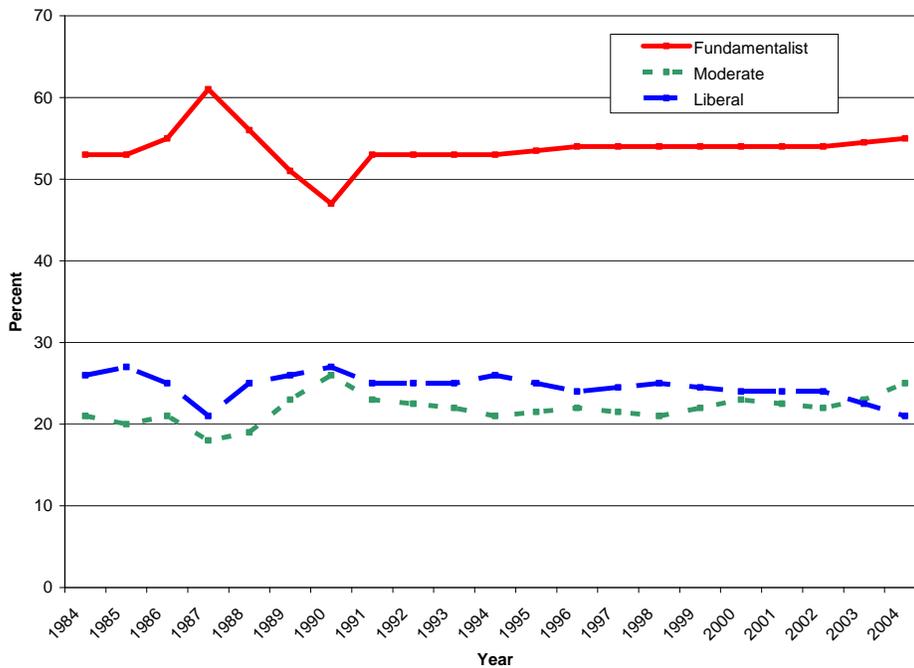
Figure 2-1. Percent Who Believe the Bible is the Actual Word of God and is to be taken Literally, by Nation



We must appreciate the inordinate religiosity, especially fundamentalist religiosity, of Christian America without overstating it. Today we have evangelical megachurches, “born again” televangelists, Christian radio, best-selling novels about the

coming rapture, and elected officials promoting fundamentalist Christian precepts. But the appearance may be deceiving. There was in the U.S. during the early to middle 20th century a disproportionate increase in fundamentalist congregants relative to moderate mainline denominations, probably due to higher birth rates among the fundamentalists (Stark and Finke 1993; Noll 2001). Since 1972, according to GSS data, there has been little change in weekly attendance at religious services. Since 1983, when a prayer question was first asked in the survey, there has been little change in the frequency of personal prayer. Since 1984, when the GSS refined its classification of Protestant denominations (Smith 1987), there has been little change in the distribution of respondents among fundamentalist, moderate, and liberal denominations, except for brief fluctuations in the late 1980s (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2. Percent of Fundamentalist, Moderate, and Liberal Protestants, by Year



The media's exaggerated picture of fundamentalist growth is partly explained by the political ascendancy of the South due to population and economic shifts away from the Northeast. This enabled the election of Jimmy Carter, the first southern president of modern times. Carter was a moderate Democrat but more importantly a born again Christian and a distinct break from the conventional Christianity of his predecessors. Bill

Clinton of Arkansas, a Southern Baptist, and especially George W. Bush of Texas made the White House a venue for the kind of religiosity that had earlier seemed a backward feature of the remnant Confederacy. Media impressions notwithstanding, American Protestants have not departed much from the religious traditions of their parents, but that still leaves us a very religious nation.

A benign aspect of American religiosity is that, unlike many other devout nations, the United States is usually tolerant of minority creeds. I am not forgetting episodes of bigotry against Catholics, Mormons, and of course Jews, but religion is one of our lesser bases for nastiness against compatriots, surely far less than race. Besides being constitutionally guaranteed, most Americans personally tolerate all forms of religious belief, possibly excepting atheism. The Jews who came to live here, once they learned English and adopted the cultural veneer of America, found an environment that was not palpably hostile. Indeed, by the final third of the 20th century many Jewish community leaders complained implicitly that America was *too* accepting, inviting assimilation and literally seducing Jews to their collective demise through intermarriage. Anti-Semitism had functioned for centuries to keep Jews intact through endogamy. Without intolerance, or with very little of it, what happens to the survival of Judaism?

In Brief

Most Jewish immigrants to America came from Eastern Europe between 1880 and 1924, when the Congress severely restricted entry. Compared to Europe, the United States was an accepting environment, conducive to social integration. Its public education system and growing economy provided ample avenues for upward mobility. Overall during the 20th century, Jews assimilated and became economically successful.

A paradox of the United States is its simultaneous modernism and inordinate religiosity. Despite its overwhelmingly Christian culture, America is tolerant of diverse religions, allowing its Jewish citizens to flow in any direction of their choosing. One of our first inquiries concerns how Judaism, the religion, fared in this setting.

Chapter 3

Religion

Since 1984 the General Social Surveys has included the same question about the nature of the Bible that we saw in Figure 2-1 of the last chapter. Asked how they regard the Bible, respondents select one of three choices:

- a. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word;
- b. The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally;
- c. The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by men.

The percentages in Table 3-1 show that Jews and Controls are both skeptical – compared to other Americans -- that the Bible is the literal word of God, but Jews are more incredulous even than Controls that there is any holy inspiration at all. Half of Jews regard The Bible as a book of fables. (In each row, numbers that are very close are boldfaced.)

Table 3-1. Nature of the Bible

The Bible is:	Jews (n = 417)	Controls (n = 1,327)	Others (n = 15,936)
Actual word of God	10%	10%	37%
Inspired word of God	40%	61%	49%
Fables	50%	29%	14%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 3-2 summarizes additional GSS questions about religious belief or practice. (Sample sizes in parentheses vary because different questions were asked in different years.) All show the same pattern: Jews are considerably less religious than Controls, while the Controls barely differ from Others. By these measures, Jews are far less religious than American Christians, as previously reported by Mayer et al. (2001).

Table 3-2. Indicators of Religiosity

Indicator:	Jews	Controls	Others
Attends religious services at least monthly	23% (1,072)	46% (2,682)	51% (37,663)
Believes in life after death	40% (599)	77% (1,700)	80% (23,983)
Prays at least weekly	46% (440)	69% (1,133)	79% (12,719)

We should not press this point too far. Roughly half of Jews still hold fairly conventional beliefs and practices: accepting that the Bible as inspired by God, occasionally attending religious services, believing in life after death, praying weekly. Specific Jewish religious practices were reported for 2000-01 by the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) from interviews of a representative sample of over 4,000 U.S. Jews (United Jewish Communities 2004):

Light Chanukah candles	72%
Hold/attend Passover seder	67%
Fast on Yom Kippur	59%
Belong to a synagogue	46%
Light Shabbat candles	28%
Attend Jewish services monthly+	27%
Keep kosher at home	21%

Lighting Chanukah candles tops the list. Since my childhood, rabbis have bemoaned the rising popularity of religiously insignificant Chanukah, seeing it cards and gifts (and occasional “Chanukah bush”) as accommodations to the Christmas season. The Passover seder, certainly important religiously, is coincident with Easter and may be reinforced for that reason. (I suppose since *The Da Vinci Code* everyone knows that The Last Supper was a Passover seder.) Only about a quarter of Jews observe the Sabbath – one of the Ten Commandments – even to the extent of lighting *Shabbat* candles.

Less than half of NJPS respondents belonged to a synagogue in 2001. Among these synagogue members, 38% reported their denomination as Reform, 33% as

Conservative, 22% as Orthodox, and 7% as other types. Mayer et al. (2001), using different assumptions, provide congruent estimates of synagogue membership and relative size of denominations.

In Brief

We saw in the last chapter that the American population is inordinately religious. American Jews are not. In the 19th and early 20th century Jewish worship converged toward American forms, but today Jews are distant from the deep religiosity of Middle America, even from the less intense devotion of urbanized, college-educated Christians of the East and West Coasts. It is no longer satisfactory to describe American Jews as “assimilated” with respect to religion. Their disagreement is not simply over Christianity versus Judaism but over the mythology of scripture and of a God who listens to prayers, of literal belief in Old Testament stories of creation and flood – beliefs held by a third of today’s Americans (Mazur 2006).

If modern Jews do not conform to the mainstream, or even to the religious views of educated blue-state Christians, from whom are they absorbing their irreligion? Possibly from the nation’s elite universities and kindred intellectuals. Most professors at our best doctorate-granting universities regard the Bible as a book of fables; half or more in the liberal arts and sciences are atheists or agnostics.⁹ The Jewish focus on elite academia is not incidental as Jews are highly overrepresented there (Ladd and Lipset 1975; Marsden 1994; Gross and Simmons 2007; Ecklund and Scheitle 2007).

Chapter 4

Intermarriage and Conversion

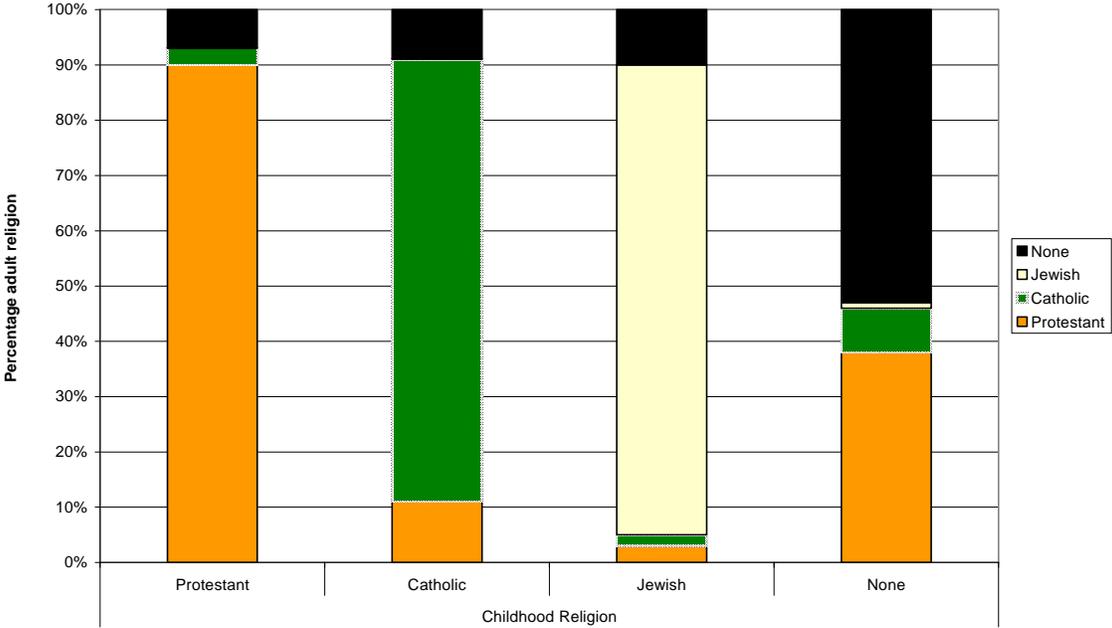
Christian readers might assume that by abandoning Judaism's traditional beliefs and practices, many Jews have ceased to be Jewish. But we saw in Chapter 1 that nearly all those raised Jewish (84%) still identified themselves as Jewish at the time of interview. For the generation sampled by the GSS, "being Jewish" has more meaning as an ethnic or ancestral identification than a religious one.

Items reported by the NJPS attest to the importance of nonreligious factors. Asked if half or more of their close friends are Jewish, 52% of respondents said yes. Since only 2% of Americans are Jews, this indicates a strong ethnic bias in friendship selection. Forty-one percent of NJPS respondents contributed to Jewish causes; 52% regarded being Jewish as very important. Asked if they ever visited Israel, 35% said yes; 20% visited two or more times. GSS data also show the importance of Israel to American Jews. The GSS asks its respondents their views, favorable or unfavorable, toward various nations, including Israel. Seventy-three percent of Jew gave Israel the most favorable ratings, compared to only 18% of Controls and 19% of Others. This enormous difference shows the intense affection that American Jews feel for the Jewish state, compared to other Americans.

Persistence of Religion

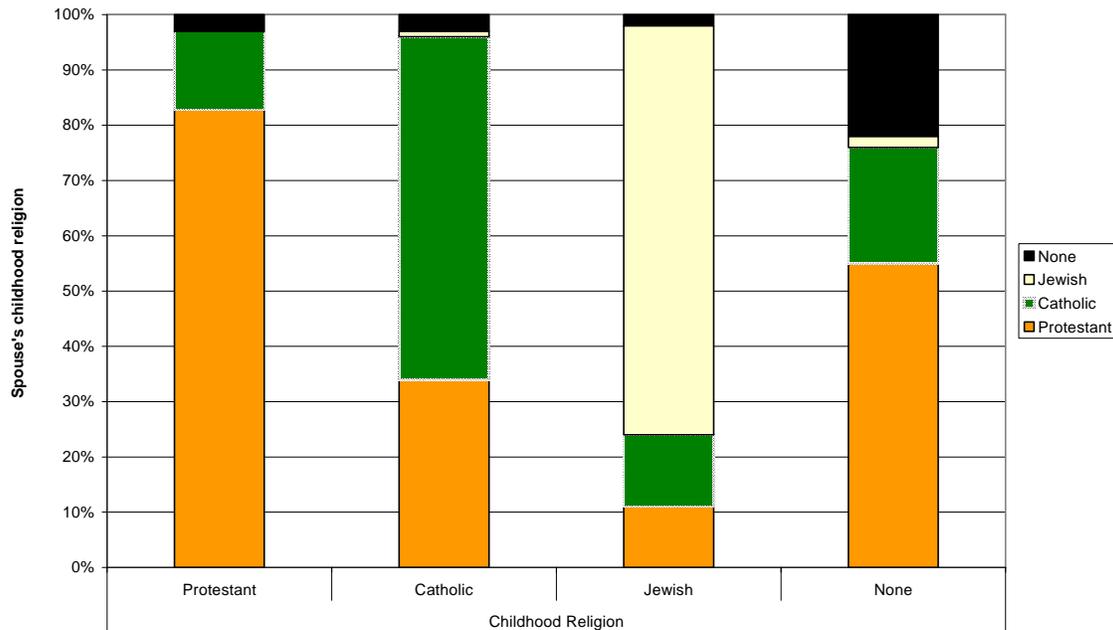
We accept the religions in which we are raised, more or less. Those who deviate do not deviate far. Even in a nation as religiously free as the United States, with its many competing denominations, people reliably maintain the religious traditions of their parents. Of the GSS respondents raised as Jewish, only 5% reported that they were Christian at the time of interview. If we include the various Protestant denominations under one umbrella, roughly 80% of GSS respondents continued to identify with the religion in which they were reared (Figure 4-1). Of those people raised without religion, half remained irreligious as adults while roughly a third joined the nation's Protestant majority.

Figure 4-1. Childhood Religion Determines Adult Religion



Childhood socialization influences people’s social affiliations as well as beliefs. We usually marry someone born into our own religion (Figure 4-2). Even people reared without any religion disproportionately find mates who were raised non-religiously, though about half end up with Protestant spouses simply because most Americans of the opposite sex are Protestant.

Figure 4-2. Childhood Religion Affects Marital Choice



Endogamy conserves the traditions of childhood. When people reared in a particular religion marry a spouse in the same or similar religion, the couple instills this orientation in their children. Usually they associate with friends and belong to organizations that reflect similar beliefs and insulate them from contradictory forces.

Conversion

The famous epiphany of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus was like a flash of lightning, individualistic and without portent (Acts 9:3). If true, Saul's experience was unusual. Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke (2000) compile abundant evidence that conversion nearly always involves the intercession of another person and occurs gradually. Often converts "reconstruct" their conversion after the fact, attributing it to a self-conscious search for the truth or to sudden enlightenment, but in cases that are well studied, there is generally an intermediary -- a friend or family member already in the new group -- who facilitates an extended transition.

The social process of conversion applies to politics as well as religion. In the first place, most Americans identify with the political party of their parents, holding similar political ideologies as liberals, moderates, or conservatives (Marcus et al. 1995;

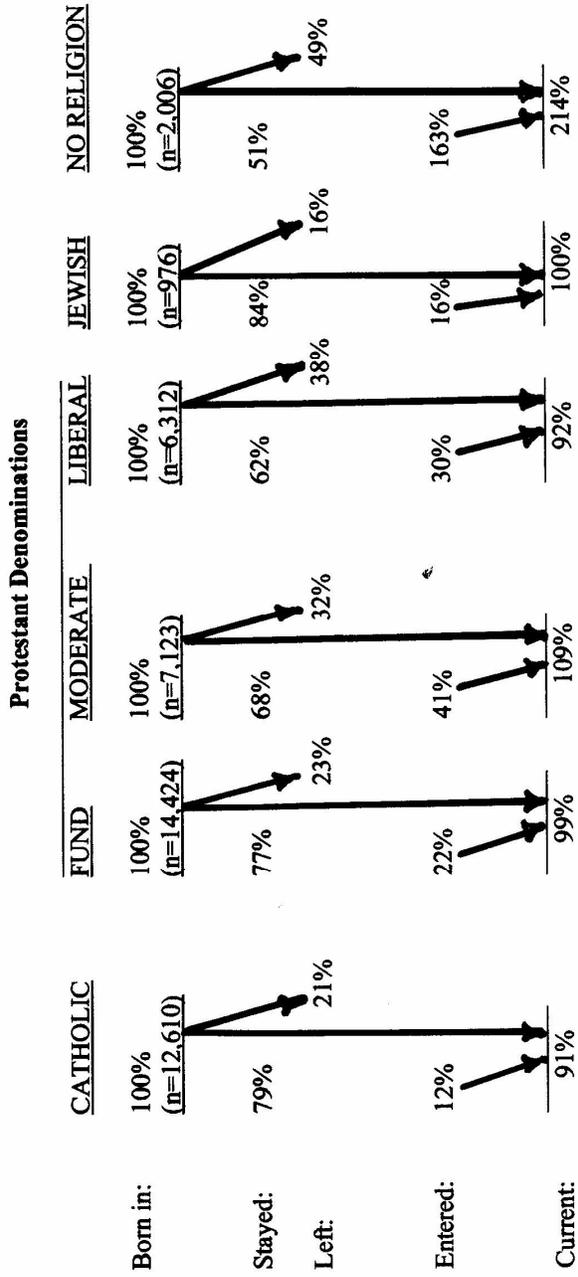
Zaller 1992; Kinder 2006). When young adults do change their politics, usually it is through immersion in friendship, college, or work groups of the new political persuasion, or through marriage to someone with those views.

With GSS data we can compare the importance of childhood socialization with that of adult conversion in sustaining a religious group. Figure 4-3 contains separate flow diagrams for Catholics, fundamentalist Protestants, moderate Protestants, liberal Protestants, Jews, and those with no religion. The number of GSS respondents *born in* to each of these groups is defined as its base = 100%. Most remain in the same group as adults, but some leave while others enter after childhood. In the Catholic diagram, for example, the 100% born into Catholicism are split into 79% who remain Catholic and 21% who leave the religion. Another 19% were not Catholic as children but declare themselves Catholic as adults.¹⁰ Adding those who enter to those who remain gives the percentage of current Catholics = 91%. Thus, over the last generation, American Catholics decreased by 9% (i.e., $100\% - 91\% = 9\%$).

The flow diagram for Protestant fundamentalists shows that most of today's fundamentalists were born into fundamentalist families. The 22% converting into fundamentalism (most raised as non-fundamentalist Protestants) nearly equals the 23% leaving fundamentalism, so the cross-generational percentage change is practically nil ($100\% - 99\% = 1\%$). The conversion rate into fundamentalism is considerably smaller than the conversion rates to moderate (41%) or liberal (30%) Protestant denominations. Jews are the most persistent of the groups shown in the figure. Nearly everyone who is Jewish was born Jewish. Few Christians become Jews, and few Jews become Christians.

Looking across Figure 4-3, birth is far more important than conversion as a means of recruitment, with one exception. Respondent who say they have no religion are increasing three times faster from "conversion" than from child rearing (163% versus 51%). "No religion" is the fastest growing of the categories, perhaps signaling a departure from traditional American religiosity.

Figure 4-3. Flow Diagrams for Different US Religious Groups



The few people who do convert are more likely to enter their new religion through conformity with a spouse or friends than by self-consciously searching out new beliefs. Among married converts to Catholicism, 84% wed someone born Catholic. Among married converts to Protestant fundamentalism, 56% wed someone born a fundamentalist. Among the married converts to Judaism, 63% married a born Jew. These rates of intermarriage among converts are far higher than would be expected by chance.¹¹ Almost certainly, in most of these cases, religious conversion was an accommodation to religious intermarriage.

Intermarriage

We lack good measurement of intermarriage at the beginning of the 20th century, but a reasonable estimate is that ten percent or less of American Jews wed Christians at that time.¹² Sometimes it was a cause for family mourning. World War II and the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 70s weakened the taboo, and all observers note a marked increase since then. Currently, the intermarriage rate among young Jews is between 40% and 50% (see Chapter 9).

A traditional argument against intermarriages is that they do not work, causing unhappiness and divorce. Married respondents to the GSS were asked how happy their marriage is. Table 4-2 shows a slight tendency for Jewish-Jewish marriages to be happier than Jewish-gentile marriages (or than gentile-gentile marriages), but this result should be taken cautiously because it is based on relatively few cases.

Table 4-2. Percent of GSS Respondents Whose Marriage Is Very Happy

Both spouses Jewish (n = 312)	One spouse Jewish, one not* (n = 172)	Both spouses not Jewish (n = 16,390)
69%	60%	64%

*Includes non-Jewish respondents married to a Jew

In Brief

Most Americans maintain at least nominal association with the religion in which they were raised. Few Jews become Christians, and few Christians become Jews. When

these conversions do occur, there are often associated with marriage to a spouse of the other religion.

Americans usually marry someone of the same or similar religion. The intermarriage rate among Jews, very low in the early 20th century, is now between 40% and 50%. GSS data do not allow us to test if intermarriages are unusually prone to divorce. Since nearly half of U.S. marriages end in divorce anyway, it is difficult to think that a religious difference could greatly worsen matters. GSS data suggest that intermarried spouses are slightly less happy with the marriage than endogamous couples.

Chapter 5

Politics and Values

Conventional political wisdom holds that Jews vote Democratic. Table 5-1, showing party affiliation as reported to the GSS,¹³ shows that 54% of Jews but only 29% of Controls are Democrats. This 25% difference is larger even than the difference between Jews and Others (54% - 39% = 15%). The skew toward the Democrats, and away from the Republicans, is not explained by education, income, or residence in the large cities of blue states. It has historical roots in the affection Jews felt during World War II for Franklin Delano Roosevelt as well as the Democrats' more liberal attitude toward minorities during much of the 20th century.¹⁴ (In each row, numbers that are very close are boldfaced.)

Table 5-1. Political Party Identification

Party identification:	Jews (n = 1,073)	Controls (n = 2,697)	Others (n = 37,837)
Democrat	54%	29%	39%
Independent	32%	36%	35%
Republican	14%	35%	26%
	100%	100%	100%

Asked to rate their political views as liberal, moderate, or conservative, Jews are more liberal, and less conservative, than Controls or Others (Table 5-2). This too has historical roots, extending back to the Liberalism (versus monarchy) of 19th century Europe, and perhaps is not as pronounced now as it was in the early or middle 20th century. The percent of Jews identifying themselves as liberal does not decrease as family income increases (not shown).

Table 5-2. Self-rated Political Views

Political views:	Jews (n=904)	Controls (n=2,476)	Others (n=32,845)
Liberal	48%	38%	26%
Moderate	31%	24%	40%
Conservative	21%	38%	34%
	100%	100%	100%

The GSS addressed the issue of free speech by asking respondents if they thought various types of advocates should be allowed to speak publicly in their community. Controls were slightly more permissive than Jews across the range of advocates, and both groups were more permissive than Others (Table 5-3). College educated Jews were as permissive as Controls (not shown).

Table 5-3. Percent Willing to Have Advocates of Various Types Speak Publicly

Type of advocate:	Jews (n = ca. 700)	Controls (n = ca. 1,700)	Others (n = ca. 25,000)
Anti-religion	85%	91%	68%
Racist	70%	79%	60%
Communist	86%	90%	60%
Militarist	73%	86%	58%
Homosexual	91%	94%	72%

Several questions assessed prejudice toward particular citizens: blacks, women, or homosexuals. Representative examples are summarized in Table 5-4. There is little difference between Jews and Controls. Both groups show less prejudice than Others.

Table 5-4. Prejudicial Attitudes toward Homosexuals, Blacks, and Women

Attitude:	Jews (n= ca. 600)	Controls (n = ca. 1,500)	Others (n= ca. 20,000)
Sex between homosexuals is always wrong	30%	30%	73%
It should be illegal for blacks to marry whites	9%	4%	24%
Would not vote for a black for president	9%	5%	15%
Would not vote for a woman for president	7%	5%	14%
Women should run their homes and let men run the country.	9%	7%	26%

Additional questions probed left-right issues that do not target particular citizens. Jews are more liberal than Controls on abortion, legalized marijuana, and disapproving of wiretapping (Table 5-5). Differences on gun permits, the death penalty, and reduction of income inequality are near the margin of polling error and too small to be meaningful. Others are less liberal than Jews and Controls on abortion, legalized marijuana, and

requiring gun permits. Not surprisingly, Others are more favorable than Jews or Controls toward government reducing income inequality.

Table 5-5. Liberal Attitudes Undirected at Particular Citizens

Attitude:	Jews (n= ca. 700)	Controls (n= ca. 1,700)	Others (n= ca. 25,000)
A woman should be able to get a legal abortion for any reason.	80%	60%	38%
Marijuana should be made legal.	47%	36%	23%
In general, disapprove of wiretapping	81%	73%	80%
A person should be required to obtain a police permit to buy a gun.	93%	88%	76%
Government should reduce the income difference between rich and poor.	39%	36%	48%
Oppose the death penalty for murder	29%	33%	26%

To assess priorities for government spending, GSS respondents were given a list of fifteen problem areas and asked if government spent too much, too little, or about the right amount on each area. There was fair agreement in priorities across groups. Table 5-6 shows the largest differences that do occur.¹⁵ Overall, Jews favor more spending than Controls (and Others), but their priorities are similar. Others give relatively high priority to Social Security and relatively low priority to mass transit.

Table 5-6. Percent Saying Government Spends Too Little on these Problems

Problem:	Jews (n = ca. 700)	Controls (n = ca. 1,500)	Others (n = ca. 23,000)
Health	79%	64%	65%
Education	76%	67%	61%
Environment	72%	68%	60%
Cities	69%	55%	51%
Drug addiction	60%	52%	64%
Mass transit	51%	51%	35%
Social Security	48%	39%	57%

Assessing confidence in American institutions, the GSS asked respondents if they had a great deal of confidence in the people running these institutions, only some, or hardly any. Again, there was considerable agreement across groups. Table 5-7 shows the largest differences that do occur.¹⁶ Jews have slightly less confidence in virtually all

institutions than Controls do. Jews and Controls differentiate among institutions more than Others do, reporting a high confidence in science, a middling amount in education, but little confidence in the military or clergy. Others show less differentiation in judging one institution against another.

Table 5-7. Percent Having a Great Deal of Confidence in People Running Institutions

Institution:	Jews (n = ca 800)	Controls (n = ca 2,000)	Others (n = 28,000)
Science	55%	60%	42%
Supreme Court	40%	45%	32%
Military	21%	27%	38%
Clergy	17%	23%	31%

In Brief

Today’s Jews strongly identify themselves as Democrats rather than Republicans, and they are more likely to call themselves politically “liberal” than other Americans. They support free speech for a wide variety of advocates, and express little prejudice toward blacks, women, or homosexuals, but Jews are no more liberal in these views than non-Jews of similar background. They are, however, unusually supportive of a woman’s right to abortion. On questions regarding government priorities for spending, and confidence in American institutions, Jews usually answer similarly to other Americans.

On balance, Jews are an unusually Democratic and politically liberal group. As in the case of religion, their views closely parallel the politics of elite universities (Ladd and Lipset 1975; Rothman et al. 2005).

Chapter 6
Income, Education, and Occupation

Few Jews came to the United States wealthy or prominent, but by the end of the 19th century several German families had accumulated fortunes (Birmingham 1996). At that time newer arrivals from Eastern European were filling the slums of East Coast cities, but by the 1920s some of these Russian Jews also found great success, for example, in Hollywood’s new movie industry. Upward social and economic mobility became a major theme of the 20th century.

Income

The GSS contains no measure of wealth so we must rely on yearly income to measure economic wellbeing. Since 1972, respondents were asked their personal income from all sources before taxes, and also their family’s total income. The highest category was \$25,000 or greater – a good income in 1972. To be consistent, the same questions and categories are used every year, although by now inflation has put most respondents in the highest level. Still, the comparison is worthwhile. Table 6-1 shows the personal and family incomes of Jews to be slightly less than those of Controls, although both groups’ earnings are well above the incomes of Others.

Table 6-1. Respondents with Family Income, and Own Income, Exceeding \$25,000

Type income:	Jews	Controls	Others
Family income	62% (n = 909)	73% (n = 2,550)	40% (n= 34,437)
Respondent’s own income	52% (n = 609)	56% (n = 2,062)	26% (n = 21,171)

Obviously education affects earning power, and Controls are defined as having college degrees. If we compare them to Jews with college degrees, then Jewish incomes slightly exceed those of Controls (not shown).

Beginning in 1998, the GSS asked respondents additional questions about their personal and family incomes using categories as high as \$110,000+. These few years do not contain many Jewish or Control respondents, but the results in Table 6-2, though

based on small numbers, fortify our picture of American Jews as economically successful.

Table 6-2. Years 1998 to 2004 Only: Respondents with Family Income, and Own Income, Exceeding \$110,000

Type income:	Jews	Controls	Others
Family income	27% (n = 253)	22% (n = 622)	5% (n = 7,129)
Respondent's own income	18% (n = 183)	9% (n = 509)	2% (n = 5,098)

Education

The children of Jewish immigrant families made exceptionally good use of free education offered by American public schools, probably more so than any other immigrant group of the time (Chapter 2). Has this extraordinary increase in educational attainment continued through the current generation? Does degree attainment among today's Jews still exceed the rate of the general population?

Table 6-3 divides GSS data collection into three roughly decade-long periods: 1972-1984, 1985-1994, and 1995-2004. For each decade, we compare the percentages of Jews holding bachelors and graduate degrees, with corresponding percentages for all U.S. adults. For all Americans, percentages of both bachelors and graduate degrees doubled over this period; the Jewish rate of increase was no higher. However, since more Jews than gentiles were degree holders in the 1970s, the subsequent doubling has resulted in 35% of today's Jews with graduate degrees, and nearly two-thirds with at least a bachelors degree, whereas only 27% of today's non-Jews have college degrees.

Table 6-3. Degrees Held by Jews (**Bold**) and U.S. Population (Plain text) Since 1972

Highest degree:	1972-1984	1985-1994	1995-2004
Bachelors degree	21% 9%	27% 14%	30% 17%
Graduate degree	17% 5%	28% 7%	35% 10%

The association of education with income is well known and hardly needs repeating, but it is worth examining this relationship separately for Jews and non-Jews

(Table 6-4). There we see that Jews suffer no disadvantage in earnings – possibly a slight advantage – at all degree levels.

Table 6-4. Percent with Own Income Over \$25,000, by Degree

Degree:	Jews (n= 609)	Non-Jews (n = 24,500)
High school or less	32%	22%
Bachelors degree	56%	51%
Graduate degree	70%	65%

Occupational Prestige

The intermediate link between education and income is employment. There are, first of all, differences in the working status of Jews, Controls, and Others at the time of interview (Table 6-5). Two-thirds of Controls work fulltime, while closer to half of Jews and Others are full time workers at the time of interview. Controls are younger than the other groups (mean age of Jews = 48, of Controls = 43, and of Others = 45), accounting for a little of the difference in fulltime employment. When the table is rerun, limiting age of respondents to the range 25-60, Controls are still 10% more likely than Jews to be working fulltime (not shown).

Table 6-5. Working Status at Time of Interview

Status:	Jews (n=1,077)	Controls (n=2,707)	Others (n=38,011)
Working fulltime	51%	66%	48%
Working part time	14%	11%	10%
Retired	12%	8%	13%
Keeping house	14%	8%	19%
Other	9%	7%	10%
	100%	100%	100%

Respondents were asked what work they normally do. There are lots of ways to classify jobs, for example, blue collar versus white collar. Sociologists tend to focus on the *prestige* of the job rather than the actual work that is done. People are in remarkable agreement about which jobs have high or low prestige. In Table 6-6 occupational prestige is categorized as low, middle, or high. Jobs with relatively high prestige include engineer, school teacher, and social worker. Jobs of middle prestige include bookkeeper,

insurance agent, and secretary. Some jobs in the low prestige category are salesperson, truck driver, gas station attendant, and laborer.

Table 6-6. Occupational Prestige

Prestige:	Jews (n=558)	Controls (n=1,348)	Others (n=20,750)
Low	12%	5%	35%
Medium	25%	14%	32%
High	63%	81%	33%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 6-6 shows Jews in less prestigious jobs than Controls, but in higher prestige jobs than Others. If we limit respondents to those with college degrees, the representation of Jews, Controls, and Others in high prestige jobs is roughly equal.

In Brief

American Jews are very well schooled with two-thirds having college degrees and half of these earning an advanced degree. The U.S. population is barely half as well educated. We unfortunately lack measures of wealth and high income, but data that are available show the earnings of Jews, especially those college educated, at the same level as Controls and well above the bulk of the population. As a group, Jews hold jobs that are lower in prestige than Controls but higher than the rest of the population. The occupational prestige of college educated Jews equals that of (college educated) Controls. Altogether, in socioeconomic terms, Jews have done well in America.

Chapter 7

Parental Launch Pads

Why have Jews done well in America? Did they start from disadvantage and work exceptionally hard to attain success? Or did they start from advantageous family backgrounds, then proceeding pretty much like other Americans? To answer this, we compare the parental backgrounds from which our respondents' careers were launched.

Parental Income, Education, and Occupational Prestige

Respondents were asked to judge their family income was when they were teenagers – was it below average, average, or above average? By this recollection, Jewish and Control families were similarly advantaged compared to Others (Table 7-1). Obviously this gives us only a hint of the parents' true financial situation.

Table 7-1. Recollection of Family Income when Respondent was a Teen

Relative income:	Jews (n=776)	Controls (n=1,910)	Others (n=28,013)
Below average	23%	21%	33%
Average	44%	45%	52%
Above average	33%	34%	15%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 7-2 compares father's education of Jews, Controls, and Others. The fathers of Jews and Controls have similar educational distributions. Both groups are high compared to fathers of Others.

Table 7-2. Father's Education

Father's education:	Jews (n=856)	Controls (n=2,313)	Others (n=28,731)
Less than high school	35%	25%	56%
High school	33%	38%	33%
College degree	32%	37%	11%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 7-3 compares mother's education across groups. Control mothers were more likely than Jewish mothers to finish high school, but percentages completing college are similar. Both groups are better educated than mothers of Others.

Table 7-3. Mother's Education

Mother's education:	Jews (n=951)	Controls (n= 2,491)	Others (n=32,806)
Less than high school	33%	20%	50%
High school	46%	58%	43%
College degree	21%	22%	7%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 7-4 compares the occupational prestige of fathers. Here again we see Jewish and Control fathers with nearly the same distribution of scores, and both considerably above fathers of Others. Jewish mothers and Control mothers are similar in occupational prestige, and both are well above mothers of Others (not shown).

Table 7-4. Father's Occupational Prestige

Father's prestige:	Jews (n=516)	Controls (n=1,254)	Others (n=19,032)
Low	16%	12%	30%
Medium	25%	32%	45%
High	59%	56%	25%
	100%	100%	100%

These data consistently show that Jewish respondents come from backgrounds similar to Control families and certainly privileged compared to Americans as a whole. Thus, an important reason why today's Jews are well placed economically is that they started with a leg up.

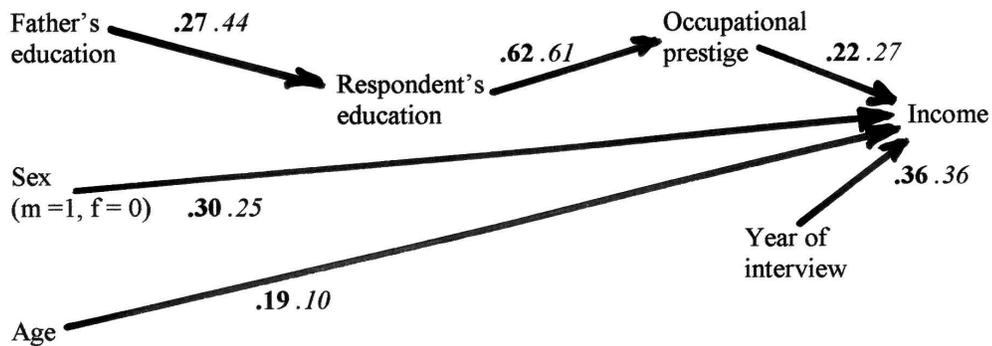
Modeling Economic Success

There are many poverty-to-success anecdotes about Jewish Americans, especially from the immigrant generation (e.g., Wells 1999), but immigration essentially ended in 1924. Nearly 90% of Jews in the GSS are American born – about the same percentage as Controls and Others. (One-third of Jewish respondents – mostly elderly – reported both parents foreign born, compared to only 13% of Controls and 11% of Others.) By now Jews are well integrated into the United States. It should not be surprising that their economic success is determined similarly to other Americans. Still,

considering the anecdotes, it is worth a further look for anything special about upward mobility among Jews.

Figure 7-1 shows a simplified model of intergenerational mobility, the kind commonly used in sociology. At the left are variables in the respondent's background: sex, age, and parental social status, the latter measured by father's education.¹⁷ Arrows represent influences of background on later variables in the respondent's life, first on educational attainment, which in turn affects occupational prestige, which affects income.¹⁸ Important factors are missing, notably personality, skills and luck, but the model approximates the societal process of mobility in America.

Figure 7-1. A Model of Intergenerational Mobility for Jews (**Bold**) and Gentiles (*Italic*)



With the diagram as a basis, GSS data are used to evaluate the importance, or strength, of each pathway (arrow) between variables. Regression analysis produces a “beta coefficient” for each path (independent of other paths). By definition, betas range in magnitude from zero to 1.0, indicating the importance or strength of each arrow. If a beta is very low, between 0.0 and 0.1, the path is unimportant and no arrow is shown. In practice, a beta = 0.6 is very high, indicating that the associated arrow shows an important influence.

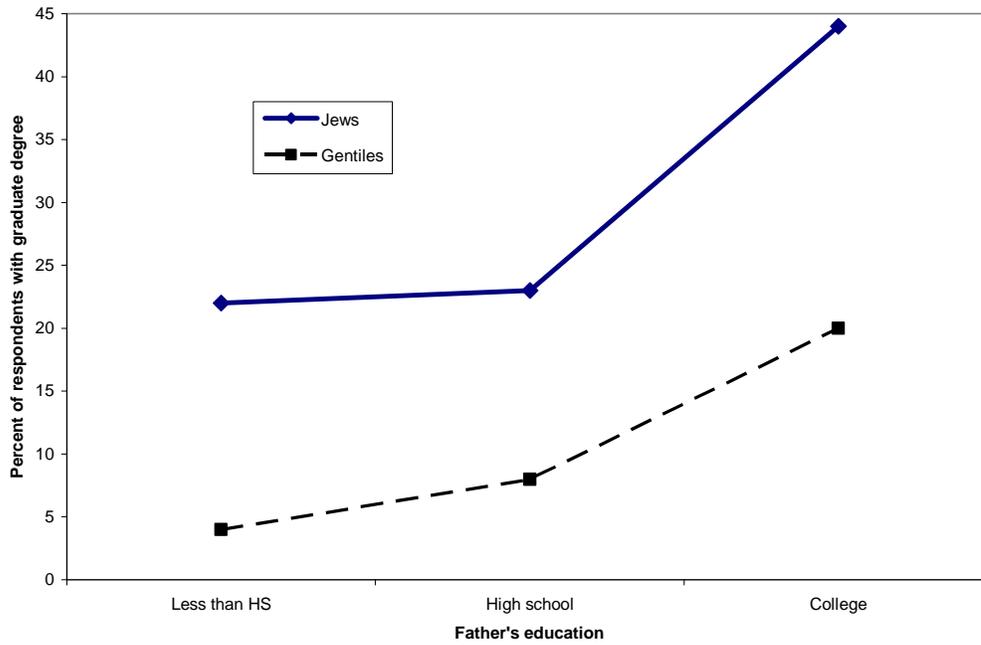
Betas for Jews are shown in **boldface**, for non-Jews in *italic*.¹⁹ Figure 7-1 shows that for nearly every arrow, betas are similar for Jews and gentiles. Education is an important determinant of occupational prestige (beta = 0.6) for everyone. Prestige

moderately determines income (beta = ca. 0.2). Women suffer lower incomes than men, an effect as large as that of prestige on income. Inflation, measured by the year of interview, continually moves more respondents into the highest category of income: \$25,000+. All this is true of Jews as well as non-Jews.

There is one arrow where betas differ more than the others – from father's education to respondent's education (beta = 0.27 for Jews, 0.44 for non-Jews). In words, educational attainment of gentile respondents is fairly predictable from the educational level of their fathers; it is not as easy to predict the education of Jews from the education of their fathers. This may reflect the high premium Jews place on education.

This difference is easier to digest if seen graphically. Figure 7-2 shows percentage of respondents (over age 25) with graduate degrees increasing as father's education increases. Jews and non-Jews are shown separately. Twenty-two percent of Jewish respondents earned a graduate degree even when their fathers did not complete high school; the corresponding percentage for gentiles is 4%. Raising the father's education to college doubled the percentage of Jews earning graduate degrees; it quintupled the percentage of gentiles earning graduate degrees. Jewish respondents, more than non-Jews, attended college *whether or not* their fathers did.

Figure 7-2. Percent of Respondents with a Graduate Degree by Father's Education, for Jews and Gentiles



In Brief

Today's Jews, like today's Controls, are educationally, occupationally, and economically more successful than most Americans because they were born into families that were more privileged than most Americans. Allowing for this advantageous start, the socioeconomic mobility of Jews is similar to non-Jews. One place where Jews are exceptional is their pursuit of higher education, which is less constrained by their parental education than is the case among non-Jews.

Chapter 8
Family

Jews are one of the American ethnic groups giving especially high value to family. Immigrants frequently came to the United States as extended families, if not all at once then strung out over months or years.

Table 8-1 summarizes demographic features of the GSS respondents' families. The Other families are discernibly different than Jewish and Control families. The Others are less likely to live alone or to have never married, they have larger families (more siblings, more children, more people in the household), they divorce more often, and they were younger when they married and had their first child. The Other families are less likely than Jews or Controls to have moved to a different state than the one where they grew up. Compared to Others, Jewish and Control families are very similar on most of these characteristics.

Table 8-1. Family Characteristics

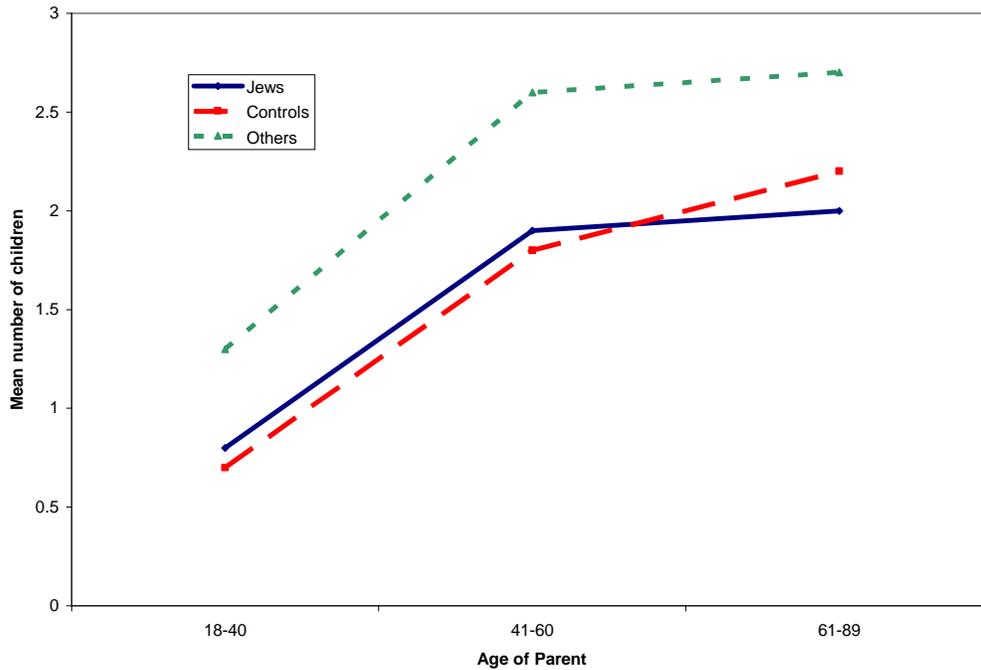
Characteristic:	Jews	Controls	Others
Living alone	28%	27%	22%
Mean number of people in the household	2.4	2.5	2.8
Currently married	57%	56%	55%
Never married	22%	27%	18%
If married, ever divorced	23%	24%	32%
Mean number of children	1.5	1.3	2.0
Ideal number of children	2.4	2.4	2.6
Mean age of respondents	48 years	43 years	45 years
Mean age at first marriage	24 years	25 years	22 years
Mean age at first child	27 years	28 years	23 years
Now lives in different state than in youth	45%	50%	32%
Mean number of siblings	2.5	2.7	4.2

Are Jews Replacing Themselves?

The mean number of children shown in Table 8-1 is deceptively low because many respondents have not completed their families. Figure 8-1 shows how number of children levels off as parents age. Jews and Controls are similar relative to Others, which likely reflects the tendency for higher educated families to have (and want) fewer

children. Jewish births top out at two children, slightly below the 2.1 children that demographers regard as necessary for replacement, allowing for early deaths.

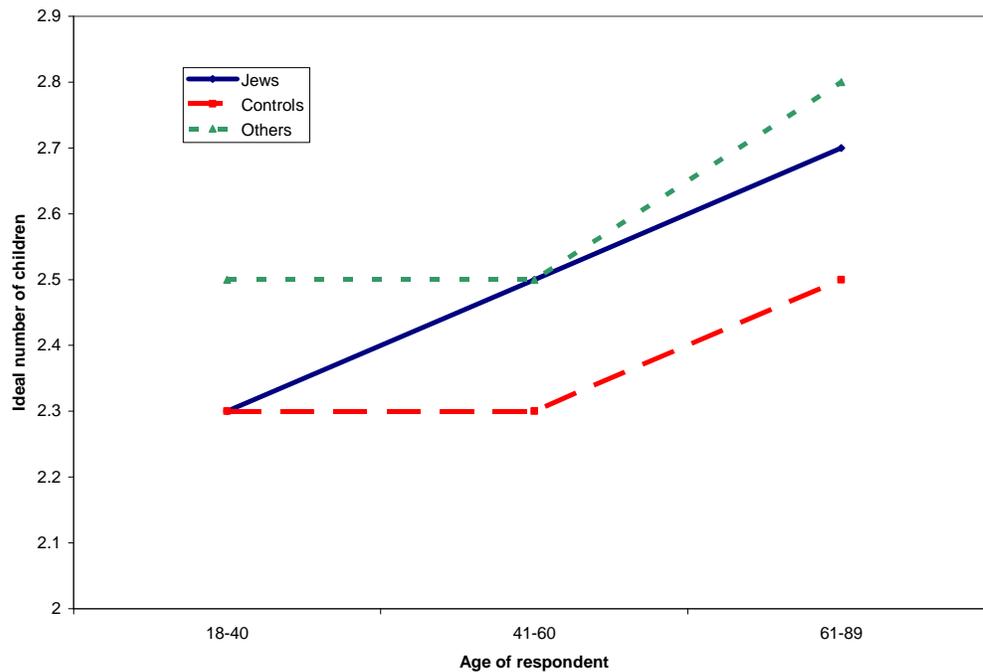
Figure 8-1. Mean Children by Age of Parent



The likelihood that Jews will maintain their numbers is even smaller if families now in their childbearing years do not want as many children as their elders did. Figure 8-2 shows the ideal number of children desired by respondents of different ages. The youngest people of all groups want fewer children than older respondents, suggesting that today's young Jews will complete their families with fewer than two children.²⁰ This is consistent with the NJPS estimate that the average number of children born to Jewish women is less than 1.9 (United Jewish Communities 2004).

Even if Jews held their numbers constant in the next generation, they would become a smaller portion of the American population, which is growing about 1% per year – half from natural increase and half from immigration.

Figure 8-2. Ideal Number of Children by Age of Respondent



Desirable Qualities in Children

During its first decade the GSS gave respondents a list of thirteen qualities sometimes found in children and asked, which is the most desirable? The listed traits were good manners, tries hard to succeed, honesty, cleanliness, sound judgment, self control, acts like a boy/girl, gets along well with other children, obeys parents, is responsible, is considerate of others, interested in why and how things happen, and studious. The hope of the surveyors was to find variation among American subgroups in the traits most desired. They found, instead, broad agreement across the population. The trait most favored was honesty (38%), followed by sound judgment (17%) and obeys parents (14%), with all the rest far behind. Comparing Jews, Controls, and Others, we get nearly the same result. Jews and Controls give a little more emphasis to sound judgment, and a little less to honesty.

No doubt disappointed by these bland results, the GSS introduced a new and shorter list of traits in 1986, asking which is the most important for children to learn? This version is more interesting because it reveals variability across the population, as we

see in Table 8-2. Numbers in each row that are very close are boldfaced. Large majorities of Jews and Controls pick thinking for oneself as the most important thing for a child to learn. Others also place this at the top of their list but with less agreement. On the other side, Others more three times more likely than Jews or Controls to pick obedience as the most important trait. Popularity ranks least important with everyone (except, probably, the children themselves).

Table 8-2. What is the Most Important Thing for a Child to Learn?

Most important:	Jews (n=377)	Controls (n=1,072)	Others (n=14,323)
Think for oneself	71%	72%	49%
Work hard	11%	14%	16%
Help others	11%	9%	13%
Obey	7%	6%	21%
Be popular	1%	0%	1%

In Brief

No doubt there are important but intangible features of family life that escape our measurements, but from what we can measure it is clear that Jewish and Control families are very similar, and they are discernibly different from Other families. Jews and Controls are more likely than Others to live alone or to have never married, to have smaller families and fewer divorces, to be older when they first married and had their first child, and to have moved to a state where they didn't grow up. All of these differences may be correlates of socioeconomic advancement.

Americans are in general agreement about the traits of the ideal child. As usual, Jews and Controls agree more with each other than they do with Others. While differences are not great, Jews (and Controls) think it most important that children learn to think for themselves, and accord relatively low importance to obedience. This preference -- thinking for oneself over obedience -- epitomizes the entrepreneurial, intellectual, and innovative spirit that is sometimes said to be the hallmark of American success. The GSS cannot tell us if the children of Jews and Controls actually embody these traits.

Chapter 9

How Are Things Changing?

The GSS has been running since 1972, allowing researchers to track changes in the American population with unusual precision. With only about 30 Jewish respondents per year, we are severely limited in tracking specifically Jewish trends. Nonetheless, we can take advantage of the overtime aspect of the GSS by using a variety of analyses and making some reasonable assumptions. Here we assess changes in the topics of preceding chapters, taking them in order.

Religion

Since 1988 the GSS has asked self-identified Jews their current denomination, and their denomination as a child. Table 9-1 shows these distributions to be fairly similar but with a slight lessening of traditional practice. Orthodoxy and Conservatism together lost 12% over the generation, their defectors splitting between Reform and no denomination.

Table 9-1. Jewish Denomination as a Child and as an Adult (GSS)

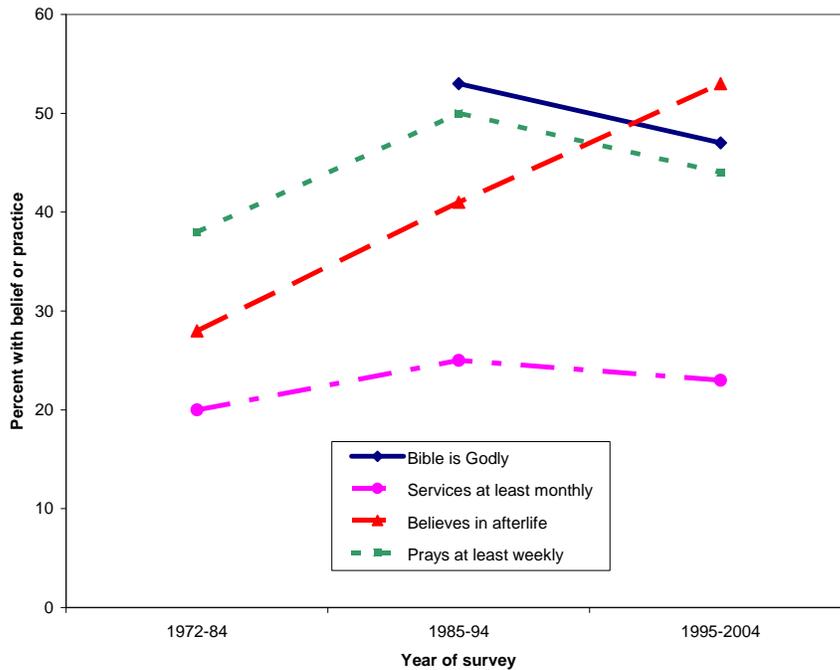
Denomination:	As a Child (n = 608)	As an adult (n = 572)
Orthodox	11%	5%
Conservative	29%	23%
Reform	30%	37%
None/DK/No answer	30%	35%
	100%	100%

The indicators of religiosity used in Chapter 3 (i.e., believes the Bible has godly origins, believes in an afterlife, attends services at least monthly, prays at least weekly) are graphed in Figure 9-1 against the year of interview. (Survey years are collapsed into three periods -- 1972-84, 1985-94, and 1995-2004 -- with approximately equal numbers of respondents.) The trends are a hodge-podge, showing no consistent decrease in religiosity. Most surprising (to me) is that Jewish belief in an afterlife increased over the years of the GSS.

Mayer et al (2001), comparing surveys of American Jews in 1990 and 2001,

concluded that the proportion who are religious dropped during that decade from 64% to 55%. Figure 9-1 does show declines across the 1990s in three of the four indicators of religiosity. However this does not appear as a general trend across the entire graph. Apparently Jewish religiosity had its greatest decline before the GSS began and, overall, has not decreased much further since the 1970s.

Figure 9-1. Indicators of Jewish Religiosity by GSS Year



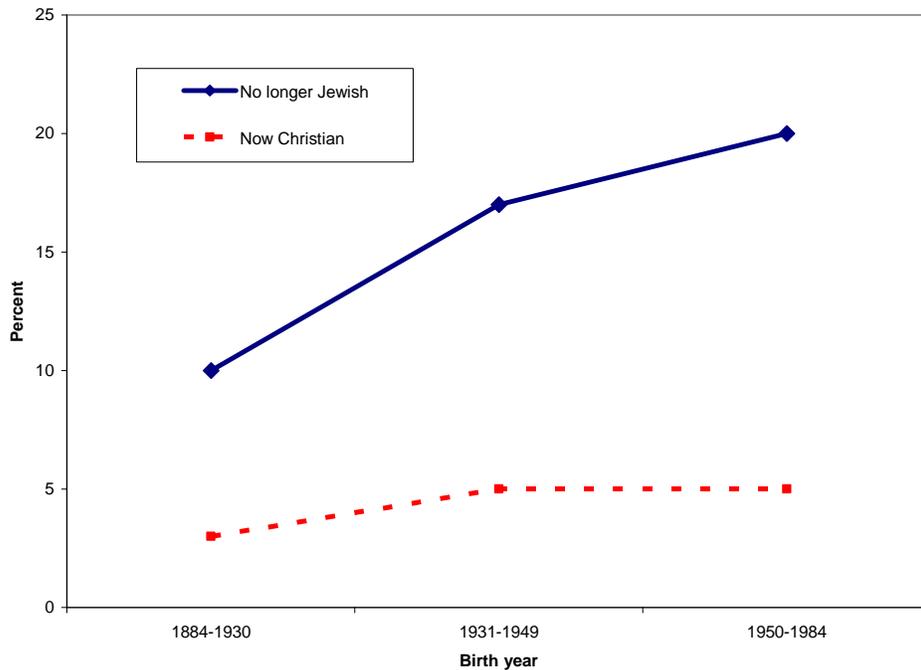
Intermarriage and Conversion

Are Jews by birth increasingly giving up their self identity as Jews? Figure 9-2 shows the overtime change in the percentage of apostates, i.e., respondents who were raised Jewish but, at the time of interview, no longer identified themselves as Jews. Also shown is the percentage of converts to Christianity, i.e., respondents raised as Jews who, at time of interview, declared themselves to be Protestant or Catholic.

Time is measured by birth year, rather than interview year, to give us a longer view into the past. Only 10% of respondents born Jewish before the Depression did not identify themselves as Jews when interviewed. But the rate of apostasy increased through the 20th century, doubling for respondents born after 1950. While apostasy increased,

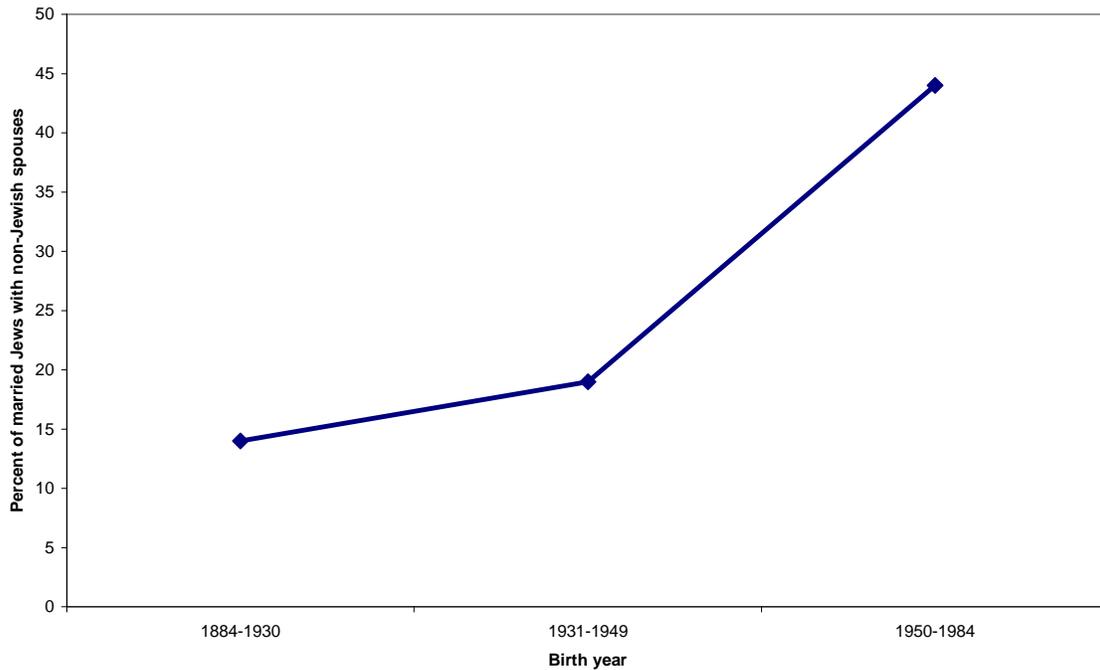
conversion did not. The portion of born Jews who converted to Christianity remained at 3-5% throughout the century. We saw in Chapter 4 that those few conversions that do occur often accompany religious intermarriage. But even intermarried Jews appear to be reluctant to accept a Christian identity.

Figure 9-2. Born Jews Who are No Longer Jewish, or Now Christian, by Birth Year



The intermarriage rate is the percentage of Jewish respondents with non-Jewish spouses. Graphing this against respondent's birth year shows intermarriage increasing over the 20th century (Figure 9-3).²¹ GSS data suggest that roughly 15% of Jews born before the Depression married a non-Jew. Those born in the 1930s and 1940s – their weddings would have been in the 1960s and 1970s – had a modestly higher rate. GSS data put the intermarriage rate for Jews born after 1950 at roughly 45%.

Figure 9-3. Jewish Intermarriage Rate by Birth Year



Accurate rates remain difficult to obtain because of sampling error and ambiguity about who to count as a Jew at the time of marriage. The NJPS attempted more precise estimates, defining intermarriage as the wedding of someone who is Jewish to someone who is non-Jewish *at the time of survey*, and counting only intact marriages. NJPS rates (Table 9-2) accord well with GSS rates.

Table 9-2. NJPS Estimates of Jewish Intermarriage Rate

Year marriage began	Percent intermarried
Before 1970	13
1970-1979	28
1980-1984	38
1985-1990	43
1991-1995	43
1996-2001	47

Source: United Jewish Communities (2004)

Politics and Values

The strongly Democratic as opposed to Republican identification of Jews, and their moderately strong association with liberal values, remain essentially constant from the 1970s to the present.

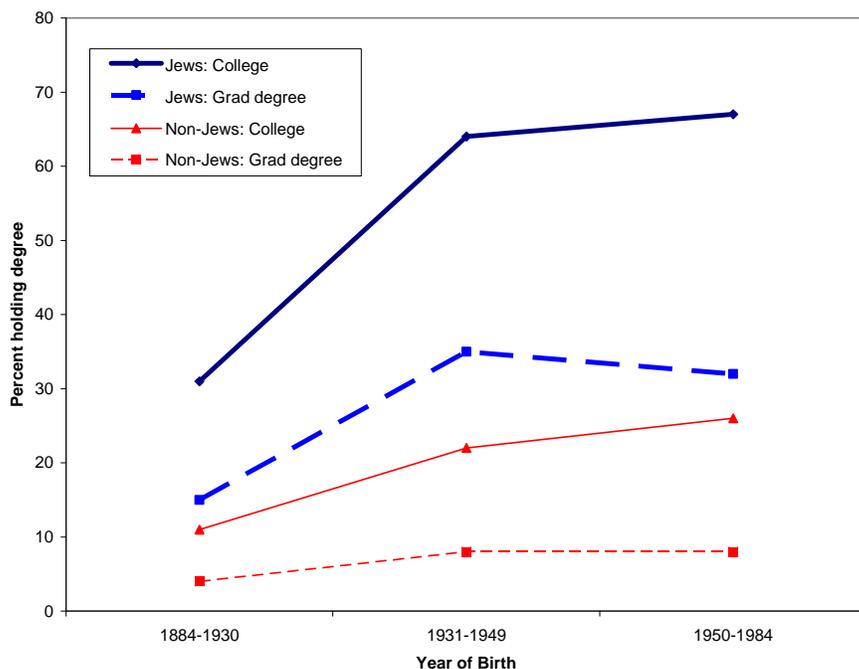
Income, Education, and Occupation

The GSS does not record salaries across all years that are realistically high for the past decade, so changes in Jewish income since the 1970s cannot be adequately assessed. Occupational prestige, with some change in coding, is available for all years and does seem adequate to evaluate change. The percentage of Jews in high prestige jobs (i.e., the highest third in prestige scores) increased from 27% in the survey years 1972-84, to 32% in the survey years 1995-2005.

The best data are on higher education. Percent of Jews with college degrees, and percent with graduate degrees, are graphed in Figure 9-4 against birth year.²² (Only respondents age 30 or older are included in order to allow time for completion of higher degrees.) Non-Jews are also graphed for comparison.

Especially noticeable is the large jump in college and graduate degrees among Jews born between 1931 and 1941, who attended university in the 1950s and 1960s (and contributed to the activist movements of the sixties [Lipset 1993]). Non-Jewish degrees also rose at that time, but not as steeply. College completion leveled off, and graduate degrees declined, in the generation of Jews born after 1950.

Figure 9-4. College and Graduate Degrees for Jews and Non-Jews



Parental Launch Pads

Jews (and Controls) in the GSS came from relatively advantaged homes, which at least partly accounts for their socioeconomic success compared to the bulk of Americans. The GSS generation of Jews (and Controls) remains relatively advantaged and therefore should continue to provide their children an advantage at the starting gate. There may, however, be some lessening of this launch effect. Though data are limited, Figure 9-4 suggests that the oomph is not as great in the post-1950 births as in the prior cohort, and some may be coasting on their parents' achievements.

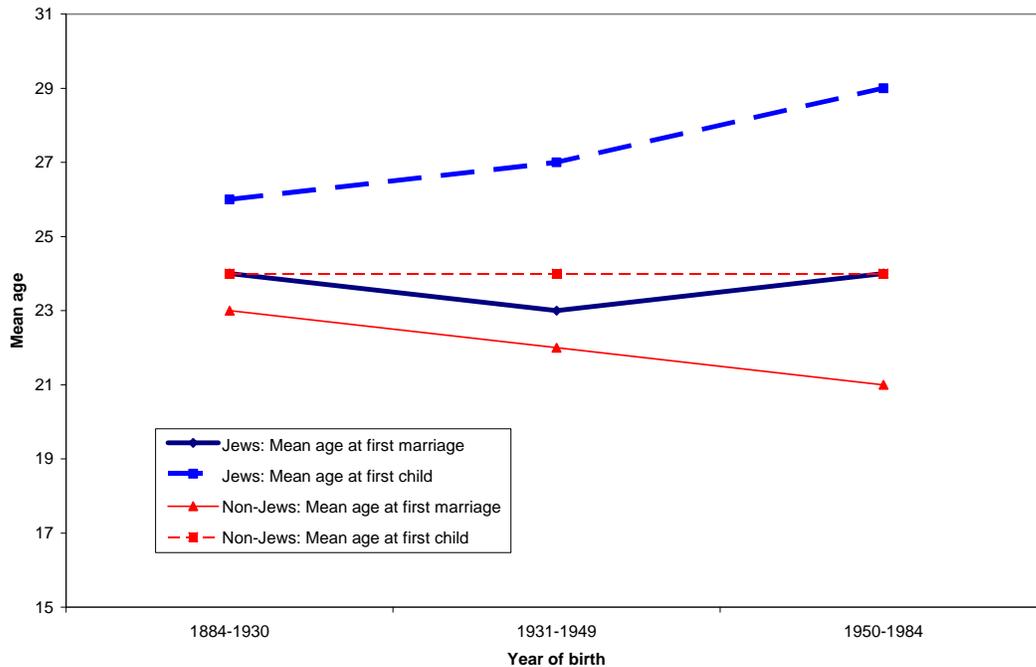
Family

We have already seen important changes in the Jewish family including an increased intermarriage rate now almost 50%, and average levels of secular education and affluence only dreamed of by the immigrant generation. Here I emphasize the changing size of the Jewish family. This is difficult to assess directly because younger GSS respondents have not completed their childbearing years. Figure 9-5 shows other

relevant and fairly-measured factors as a function of birth year, comparing Jewish and gentile marriages.

For Jews, the age of first marriage is staying around 24 years, while age for the first child is born is moving upward, now about 29 years. Non-Jews are lowering their age of marriage but continue to have their first child at age 24. A delay in child bearing usually means a reduction in the number of children.

Figure 9-5. Ages at First Marriage and First Child for Jews and Non-Jews



We saw in Chapter 8 that child bearing among Jewish (and Control) families is already relatively low and insufficient to maintain the size of the population in the next generation. Possibly this will be a greater source of loss to the Jewish community than the waning of religious observance or the dilution of Jewish identity. Certainly it will cause far more loss than formal conversion to another religion.

In Brief

Prior studies suggest that young Jews are less strongly religious, and less strongly identified as Jewish, than older American Jews (Ukeles, Miller and Beck 2006). Much of

that change occurred in the few decades after World War II. The GSS shows only a slight decrease in Jewish religiosity and identification since the 1970s, including a shift from Orthodoxy and Conservatism to Reform and no denomination. Increasingly, born Jews do not as adults identify themselves as belonging to the Jewish religion, but we cannot tell if they are apostates only from religious Judaism, or from a broader ethnic identity. Hardly any born Jews identify themselves as Christian, and those few who do apparently converted because of marriage to a Christian spouse.

Since the 1970s there has been a slight drop in some traditional beliefs but with countervailing tendencies, especially increasing belief in an afterlife. Orthodox youth are increasing in number because of a very high birth rate, especially compared to the low birth rate of most other Jews (Ukeles, Miller and Beck 2006), but the Orthodox compose only a small portion of America's Jews and do not much influence the long-term secularizing trend. The intermarriage rate, which grew sharply after the 1960s, has nearly level off.

The strongly Democratic as opposed to Republican identification of Jews, and their moderately strong association with liberal values, remain essentially constant from the 1970s to the present. Today's Jews are well educated and hold relatively prestigious jobs, at least partly the result of being raised in families with favorable socioeconomics. Jewish educational and occupational improvements have nearly leveled off in recent decades, and these achievements may have reached their high points.

Chapter 10

Overview

Based on his exhaustive analysis of GSS items, Tom W. Smith characterized Jews as the most distinctive of all ethnic and religious groups in the United States (2005: 52). My results also show Jews differing from the bulk of their countrymen on most comparisons. But the present analysis shows in addition that Jews are, on many dimensions, similar to the small portion of non-Jewish Americans of similar social and demographic background. Thus, among these American elites, the Jewish/non-Jewish divide is not so great after all.

Today's Jews are strikingly less religious than the American norm. Whether it is the Jews or the gentiles who are out of step depends on one's perspective. Religiosity in the United States is anomalous compared to other technologically advanced nations. It is remarkable that one third of Americans accepts the Bible as the literal word of God, despite its inconsistencies with science and logic (Mazur in press).

Today's Jews are privileged educationally, economically, and occupationally. Their advantageous position is due at least partly to the relatively favorable socioeconomic status attained by their parents by the mid-20th century. Further back, Jewish immigrants came to the United States without much money but with high rates of literacy and business experience, making them better equipped for life in a free, industrializing society than peasant farmers from Ireland and Italy (Antin 1912; Lieberman 1980). I am not discounting the importance of personal talent and hard work, but these virtues lift young people higher when they start from the middle of the ladder rather than the bottom rung.

Jewish identification with the Democratic Party is exceeded only by blacks. Jews are more likely than most Americans to call themselves politically liberal, and on specific issues they are more likely to take a liberal position, especially on abortion, acceptance of homosexuality, and freedom of speech. Jews have a far higher rate of intermarriage than other Americans. Jews are older when first married, have fewer divorces, have their first child later, and have less children than the average American. They are more mobile geographically.

Taken together, these indicators show that Jews are not modal Americans, defying the melting pot metaphor of assimilation. Certainly they have flowed into the mainstream, but they have not thoroughly mixed with it, persisting as a side channel. They have strong intellectual company, holding religious, political, and social views very much like the professorate of our elite universities.

Granted that today's Jews differ from *most* Americans, they do not differ much from non-Jews of *comparable background*. On most comparisons the GSS shows Jews to be similar to white college-educated gentiles living in urban areas of the "blue" states of the East and West Coast. Their occupational prestige and incomes are similar. On most social issues, they are comparably liberal. Factors influencing intergenerational social mobility, such as education and gender, have similar effects on both Jews and these non-Jews. Family characteristics including delayed marriage and fewer children are similar, as are their perceptions of ideal children.

Still, there are some uniquely Jewish characteristics even after controlling on background. Jews are far less religious. Few Controls are fundamentalist, but they are nearly twice as likely as Jews to profess religious beliefs and practices. Jews are far more Democratic and less Republican than Controls. Jews are more likely than Controls to call themselves politically liberal (though their views differ little on most specific issues). Formal education has been an inordinately high Jewish priority through the 20th century.

What will we see in the near future? Jewish intermarriage, which rose sharply after the 1960s, has leveled off but at a high rate. Today nearly 50% of young Jews marry non-Jews. This can only reinforce the ongoing diminution of traditional practice and belief. The proportion of born Jews who call themselves "Jewish," when asked their religion, decreased continually over the past century. However, they resisted identifying themselves as Christians, even after marrying Christians. Rather than moving to another religion, they move away from religion altogether. Unfortunately, the GSS does not ask if they remain *ethnically* Jewish.

It is often said that Western Europe has become the first post-Christian society. One might as well say that Judaism is becoming the first post-belief "religion."

In the near term there will remain a visible corpus of Jews in America who are modally different from the mainstream, being inordinately successful, Democratic, and irreligious. Inter-marriage and low birth rate will make Jews a continually smaller portion of the population. Perhaps the loosening of religious bonds will be countered by some other binding quality -- one of shared history or kinship. Heightened interest in genealogy, now including the tracing of gene lines, may reinforce group identity. (I am in an internet-connected group of genetic *kohanim*.) Or the disassembly may continue unabated.

By now Jews are well integrated into most American institutions, often at the highest levels. There are no signs of faltering socioeconomically, but the special thirst for school that marked Jewish mobility during the first half of the 20th century may be quenched. Jews will remain well educated as a group, but fewer children will earn higher degrees than their parents. This is partly because parents are now well educated, and partly, I think, because that ardor for education as a channel of mobility has passed to newer Asian immigrants.

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¹ Worldwide, Jews are less than one quarter of 1% of the population, whereas Christianity comprises a third of the earth's people, Islam a fifth, Hinduism 14%, and Buddhism 6%.

² United Jewish Communities (2004); Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar (2001).

³ Very small and very large percentages are estimated more precisely than middling percentages, but this is a subtlety that need not detain us.

⁴ Excluded census regions are East North Central, West North Central, West South Central, and East South Central.

⁵ The level of accuracy – the 95% confidence limits – for Jewish scores is ± 0.3 , for Controls and Others it is ± 0.1 .

⁶ A 10% difference, although “statistically significant” because of the large sample sizes, is too small to have much substantive meaning.

⁷ Convenient sources on Jewish history are Johnson (1987) and Gilbert (1993).

⁸ For a closer look at the experience of immigrating from a Russian Jewish *shtetl* to an American city, see the life of Mary Antin, author of *The Promised Land* (Antin 1912; Mazur 2004).

Restrictions on immigration were loosened in the 1960s.

⁹ Religion retains a stronger hold in non-elite universities, community colleges, and of course religion-based colleges.

¹⁰ I use the number born into each group as the denominator of the percentage entering as adults.

¹¹ According to the GSS, 26% of Americans are Catholic, 32% are fundamentalist Protestant, 2% are Jewish, 17% are moderate Protestants, 13% are liberal Protestants, and 10% have no religion.

¹² Drachsler (1921) examined marriage certificates issued in Manhattan and the Bronx during the period 1908-1912 and found less than 5% of Jews married Gentiles, but he identified Jews by their names and acknowledged that this method undercounted the true rate of Jewish intermarriage (1921: 27).

¹³ Affiliation is reported on a 7-point scale running from strongly Democratic to strongly Republican. Here, respondents claiming strong or moderate affiliation are considered adherents to that party. Respondents who claim only slight affiliation to either party are included with middle-of-the-roaders.

¹⁴ Blacks have an even stronger affinity for the Democrats with 67% identifying with that party.

¹⁵ Not shown are problems where groups differ by less than 10% in spending priorities: space, crime, race, arms, foreign aid, welfare, roads, and parks and recreation.

¹⁶ Not shown are institutions where groups differ by less than 10% in having great confidence: medicine, major businesses, financial institutions, education, the federal government, Congress, and organized labor.

¹⁷ Previous analyses showed education as highest degree earned. In this model, education is measured by the number or years of schooling completed. No slight is intended by ignoring mother's contribution, but in earlier decades the status of a family was determined primarily by the husband; also there are technical advantages to limiting parental status to a single variable.

¹⁸ Respondent's income is dichotomized into \$25,000+ or less.

¹⁹ For Jews, $R^2 = .31$, $n = 547$; for Gentiles, $R^2 = .29$, $n = 20,814$.

²⁰ If young Jews attained their ideal of 2.3 children, there would be an increase in numbers, but the tendency among Jews and Controls in the GSS is to idealize larger families than they actually have.

²¹ Unfortunately, when the GSS asks marital status, it does not determine if respondents are in their first or subsequent marriages. It does ask if respondents have ever been divorced, so by subtracting divorcees from the sample, we focus in Figure 9-3 on first marriages.

²² Readers may be perplexed why my overtime trends sometimes use birth year and at other times use year of interview. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Since respondents of all ages are included in each year's survey, differences across GSS years allow an unambiguous look at changes from era to era, but the time span is short, extending only back to the 1970s. (Here GSS years are clumped into three periods to increase sample size, so the time span is even shorter.) Using birth year allows us to scan change across most of the 20th century. But respondents of all ages are not properly represented in all birth years because the oldest respondents were born in the earliest years. Differences seen across birth years may be due to the changing ages of respondents. I use birth year only when we can be fairly sure that observed differences are truly changes from one era to another.