Adaptation, Immigration, and Identity: The Tensions of American Jewish Food Culture

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Adaptation, Immigration, and Identity: A Recipe for American Jewish Food Culture

In 2014, historian Herbert J. Gans wrote an article titled, “The coming darkness of late-generation European American ethnicity,” in which he outlines how “late-generation Europeans” maintain ethnic ties. He argues that for the majority of fourth- and fifth-generation Americans, expressions of European cultural identity have ceased to exist: “Whatever is left of their ethnicity, whether as practice or identity, it is likely to be dominated by some material or non-material symbols,” he asserts. These symbols remain relevant because of their ancestral ties and can be expressed through three institutions: ethnic structure, private ethnic practice, and ethnic identity. In his study, he excludes groups that are said to have a religious component to their identity, arguing that “religious membership helps keep late generation ethnicity alive,” as opposed to other ethnic groups, such as Italians, Germans, or Irish who do not have a religious bond.¹ Within this group of exclusion is the Jews.

However, according to a 2013 study by the Pew Research Center, the majority of both religious and non-religious American Jews today do not believe that Judaism is defined by religion. “62% say being Jewish is mainly a matter of ancestry and culture, while just 15% say it is mainly a matter of religion,” the study states.² And, as American Jewish culture has become less defined by religion, there has been an influx of “material and non-material symbols” that are expressed through the institutions described by Gans. One of the most prominent areas through which this is expressed is food.

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American Jews express ethnic ties through food in the categories cited by Gans. Jewish ethnic structure institutions, such as synagogues, often hold community events based around Jewish food. While the institution itself is religious, the events focus on food as a key aspect of Jewish culture. For example, Beth Ha’Tephila, a Reform synagogue in Asheville, North Carolina, recently celebrated its 13th annual Jewish Food and Heritage Festival. Many of the volunteers and attendees were not connected to the synagogue, and did not maintain religious ties, but attended the festival every year because, as one volunteer explained, it is one of the only times that the local Jews identity as being Jewish. In terms of Jewish private practice, the food-based Passover seder ritual has been cited as having over 70% participation among American Jews, both religious and non-religious.

The expression of American Jewish ethnic identity through food exists, but the means through which this is expressed is not so simply explained. While the actions of both ethnic structures and private ethnic practice appear to contribute to Jewish identity, there is little evidence as to how or why food has become a way for American Jews to express their Jewishness. This thesis explains how that connection developed, arguing that American Jewish food culture became linked to Jewish identity as religious observance became less prevalent in the lives of subsequent immigrant generations.

This thesis builds on research by Hasia Diner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett that deals with the history and development of American Jewish food culture, particularly Diner’s *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article “Kitchen Judaism.” The goal of

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3 Festival volunteer, interview with Mari Moss, October 18, 2015.
Diner’s work is to explore how the food cultures of each of these groups changed before migration, how they responded to the new food culture of America, and how these new foods and food environment transformed their identity. She argues that for each of these groups, memories of hunger coupled with the “realities of American plenty” contributed to the development of an immigrant ethnic identity that was shaped by food.\(^5\) In terms of Jewish identity, she specifically argues that East European Jews in the United States took advantage of the plentiful American foodscape by embracing foods for everyday consumption that were once restricted to the wealthy class in Eastern Europe. America caused many to abandon aspects of religious practice, most notably adherence to the rules of *kashrut*, which are Jewish dietary laws, but despite this loss, most continued to identify as Jews.\(^6\) Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article “Kitchen Judaism” explores how Jewish cookbooks published in the United States “illuminate the changing notions of Jewish womanhood and the Jewish home in the United States.”\(^7\) She makes an argument for each cookbook she explores, detailing why each would have appealed to certain Jewish women (immigrants, American-born, Reform, etc.), creating a journey through American Jewish food culture from 1871 to 1941.

Both of these sources heavily influenced the direction of this thesis, specifically Chapter 1, by offering both content and avenues of research. I use Diner’s work in order to help construct how first-generation East European Jewish immigrants responded to the American foodscape. However, as a whole my thesis advances her argument by

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exploring *how* American Jewish identity was constructed in relation to food, starting with this first generation of immigrants. In the case of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I borrowed her approach of drawing on primary source cookbooks, using them as she did in order to construct a view of the developing American Jewish foodscape. I also put these cookbooks into a larger historical context of Jewish immigrant history. Finally, my analysis of how American Jews constructed an identity based on food does not stop in the 1940’s; chapters 2 and 3 explore a new migrant generation, Holocaust survivors, and explain how American Jews changed aspects of their food rituals in response to secular, modern events, specifically the Holocaust.

This thesis studies how and why Jewish food culture has become linked to American Jewish identity through the evaluation of how different generations of immigrants to the United States changed their food culture upon arrival. It not only looks at conventionally studied immigration periods in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also treats a new group, Holocaust survivors, as first-generation migrants. It ends with an analysis of how American Jews have altered holiday food rituals to include Holocaust memorials, evaluating through what means and thought such a destructive event has made its way into American Jewish holiday celebration.

Initially, the goal of this thesis was to explain how Holocaust survivor food culture changed as a result of the event itself. It was hypothesized that survivors developed a stronger connection to food than they experienced in post-war life because of the strict wartime food rations and the starvation conditions of most Nazi ghettos and concentration camps. However, after conducting interviews with three survivors from Poland and Lithuania, it became clear that the Holocaust was not the event that heavily
impacted their food culture; rather, it was migration to the United States because of exposure to not only new foods, but also an entirely new eating environment.

The experience of Holocaust survivors reveals the crosslink among migration, secularization, and integration. Survivors largely abandoned East European Jewish foods after arriving to the United States as they became acculturated into American society, returning to traditional Jewish foods only during the holidays. They also ceased to strictly adhere to the laws of kashrut, which most had followed strictly as children in Eastern Europe. The most interesting aspect of acculturation, however, was the development of their self-proclaimed American Jewish identity coupled with their observations about American-born Jews. “They become Jewish only when they eat their foods,” noted correspondent Kaja Finkler, when talking about American Jews who were born in the United States. Hypothesizing that there was a link between American-born Jews, food, and identity, my research question then expanded to why Holocaust survivors who identity themselves as “American Jews” do not have the same connection with food as American Jews who were born in the United States.

The basis for this change was traced back to first-generation Eastern European immigrants, who migrated to the United States from 1880-1920. Migration to the United States greatly impacted the food culture of first-generation Jewish immigrants by altering both the physical foods they ate and the environment in which they were consumed. While first-generation immigrants adapted to their food environment through the incorporation of new foods into their diet, it was later generations that came to link their Jewish identity to food, specifically that associated with Jewish holidays, because of its connection to both the old world and ancient Jewish tradition. Thus, while survivors who

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8 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
migrated to the United States after the Holocaust developed an American Jewish identity extremely quickly compared to earlier waves of first-generation immigrants, they did not link their Jewish identity to food because of their inherent, direct connection to old-world Judaism. They continued to make personal connections with food on a religious basis, but were unable to identity with it in a secular context.

While Holocaust survivor food culture did not change as a result of the Holocaust, American Jewish food culture did. As Jewish holidays and their accompanying food rituals became less linked to religion and more to culture, American Jews incorporated modern, secular events into their holiday food rituals. The narrative of the Holocaust met American Jewish food culture through the insertion of Holocaust memorials into Passover haggadot, the instruction manual for the Passover seder. By linking the memorials to religious precepts, the Holocaust became a legitimate Jewish event.

Chapter 1 explains how American Jewish food culture developed, by following the food journeys of incoming immigrant waves and their American-born children from 1820-1939, just before the outbreak of the Second World War. Using both Jewish cookbooks published in the United States and Jewish immigrant narratives, it argues that with subsequent American-born generations and their food acculturation, American Jewish identity became linked to Jewish food, most specifically Jewish holiday food, because of its connection to both the old world and an ancestral past.

Chapter 2 follows the lives of three Holocaust survivors who migrated to the United States in the late 1940’s, after World War II. Using oral histories to evaluate how their food culture changed in light of migration, and how their first-generation status influenced their perception of “American food” and American-born Jews, it argues that
Holocaust refugees who migrated to the United States after the Holocaust did embrace elements of American Jewish food culture, but could not attribute their Jewish identity to food because they experienced an old world, religious-based Judaism first hand. They did not need to link their Jewish identity to food because their Judaism was inherently connected to the “authentic” old world.

Chapter 3 turns back to American Jewish food culture, analyzing how American Jews altered Jewish food ritual in light of the Holocaust. Using Passover haggadot written by Reform, Reconstructionist, and non-denominational congregations, it argues that American Jews inserted Holocaust memorials into the Passover seder by making it a redemptive event, linking it back to religion by citing it as part of God’s original promise to Abraham. Linking the memorials to religious precepts gave them legitimacy and served as yet another link to the ancient past. Thus, the incorporation of these memorials into Jewish holiday food ritual exemplifies the link between American Jewish food culture and identity by linking the secular to the religious in order to ensure the longevity of Holocaust memory.

Throughout this thesis, the term “identity” is used to explain how Jews, both Eastern European and American, thought and, in the case of my correspondents, continue to think, of themselves. Borrowing the definition of Gans’ term “ethnic identity,” identity refers to “whether, when, where, and how people perceive themselves as ethnics and how they feel and express this identity.”

The term “Jewish food culture” refers to two aspects of culinary culture. The first is everyday foods, which will generally be put in context as either East European or American. The second is Jewish holiday foods. Specific distinctions will be made between these two categories throughout the thesis.

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particularly in Chapter 2. The term “American Jewish food culture” refers to the specific ways that American Jews eat and interact with everyday foods (both American and East European) and Jewish holiday foods.
Chapter 1

Preparation: The Development of American Jewish Food Culture

In 1871 Esther Levy published the *Jewish Cookery Book*, the earliest Jewish cookbook published in the United States.¹ It consists of Anglo-Saxon recipes, aimed at preserving the kosher tradition while also expanding the traditional Central European Jewish palette. “Having undertaken the present work with the view of proving that, without violating the precepts of our religion, a table can be spread, which will satisfy the appetites of the most fastidious,” the introduction states, [t]he contents of our Book show how various and how grateful to the tastes are the viands of which we may lawfully partake.”²

Levy’s *kashrut* adherence was an exception. Before WWI, most Jewish cookbooks published in the United States were not kosher, an interesting observation since the majority of Jewish immigration from Europe took place between the years 1881 and 1924.³ How was the growing population of American Jews affected by cookbooks like Levy’s? What other Jewish cookbooks were published during this period, and why did they eliminate the rules of *kashrut*, one of the key aspects of the Jewish eating tradition?

This chapter explores the role of food in the lives of European Jewish immigrants who came during three periods of migration: the Initial Migration (1820-1880), Great Migration (1881-1924), and Restricted Migration (1925-1939). Analyzing cookbooks

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from each of the different periods, it takes a historiographical look at the development of American Jewish food culture through the three immigrants waves, putting them in context of larger social and political changes implemented by each group. As scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains in her article “Kitchen Judaism,” cookbooks do not necessarily indicate what Jewish immigrants and subsequent generations of American-born Jews actually consumed. They do, however, offer a glimpse into the development of American Jewish food trends, as styles of cookbooks changed in each immigration period in response to growing numbers of American Jews. American Jewish food culture became linked to Jewish identity through acculturation into American society through increased secularization and religious laxity.

American Jewish food culture evolved with subsequent periods of immigration. American-born Reform Jews, the children of the initial migrators, largely abandoned kosher practice in favor of more inclusive, Americanized recipes. During the Great Migration, first-generation immigrants were encouraged to Americanize their food culture by these same American Jews. Kosher cookbooks containing both Jewish and American recipes were published and distributed to incoming immigrants by American Jewish organizations in order to facilitate this change. As subsequent American-born generations descended from these Eastern European Jewish immigrants, cookbooks indicate that a style of Jewish cooking developed that fell away from religious observance; the foods served did not adhere strictly to Jewish dietary laws. By the era of Restricted Migration, this “Jewish style-cooking,” was in full swing.

However, while the majority of American Jews abandoned everyday kosher adherence, holidays and their accompanying foods increased in importance. Cookbooks
highlighted Jewish holiday foods as the pinnacle of American Jewish culture and tradition, while American-born Jews began associating Jewishness with the recipes of their old world family members. Thus, leading up to World War II, Jewish holidays became linked to American Jewish identity by being a time to celebrate Jewish heritage and culture with traditional Eastern European Jewish foods that were once consumed daily by early, first-generation immigrant ancestors in Eastern Europe.

**Initial Migration**

The nineteenth century was not the first time Jews came to the United States. They have been a presence since the seventeenth century and numerous works have been written about their influence in the colonial era.\(^4\) However, it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that large numbers of Jewish immigrants came to the United States.

From 1820-1880, 250,000 Central European Jewish immigrants came to the United States and settled in cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York.\(^5\) When they arrived, they established Jewish institutions that focused less on religion, and more on moral conduct and social justice. Among these were social organizations, such as B’nai B’rith, which was established in 1843, and adopted the philosophy of “uniting Israelites in the work of promoting their highest interests and those of humanity.”\(^6\)

In general, the goal of Central European Jews was to become acculturated to American practices, and food became an integral part of this process. Early generations

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\(^6\) Ibid., 137-138.
of immigrants established Jewish food organizations, such as kosher butchers (shochtim) and Jewish food stores and shops in order to meet their dietary needs. However, cookbooks such as Levy’s demonstrated how kosher food could be made more American. Following Levy’s recipes, these same kosher ingredients could be used to create more elegant dishes that were more appropriate for the American middle class, of which Jewish immigrants aspired to become apart of.

However, this was both the beginning and end of an era. In 1889, as Eastern European Jews were flooding into the United States during the Great Migration, the first edition of what was to become the most popular Jewish cookbook for decades was published, indicating a new trend in a growing American Jewish tradition; the incorporation of forbidden foods into Jewish consumption.

“Aunt Babette’s” Cook Book, Foreign and Domestic Receipts for the Household, A Valuable Collection of Receipts and Hints for the Housewife, Many of Which are not to be Found Elsewhere, was published in 1889 by the Bloch Publishing Company, a Jewish printer out of Cincinnati. While this cookbook was actually published during the Great Migration period, it was written by a group of Central European Jews who arrived during the years of Initial Migration. It catered to a growing group of Central European Jews, German Reform Jews, who “rejected certain ritual requirements that set Jews apart,” such as kashrut adherence. The cookbook introduced a “new style” of cooking into the Jewish home known as “trefa,” which is simply a form of Jewish cooking that does not

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9 Ibid., 80.
observe Jewish dietary laws. This style of cooking includes forbidden foods, such as shellfish and pork products.\textsuperscript{10}

Because of its inclusion of forbidden foods, at first glance “Aunt Babette’s” does not appear Jewish. For example, she contains an entire section dedicated to oysters and fish, including recipes for forbidden foods like oysters, crab, and lobster. There is also a section labeled “Easter dishes,” which is not a holiday that Jews typically celebrate.\textsuperscript{11} However, when putting these examples in context of its German Reform author and intended audience, its implicit Jewishness makes sense. “Aunt Babette’s” Cook Book spoke persuasively to the social aspirations of American Reform Jewish readers,” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes. In their quest for acculturation, these Jews abandoned the dietary laws that they saw as “unaesthetic ceremonial practices.”\textsuperscript{12} “Aunt Babette’s” was Jewish not for its dishes, but because of its intended audience.

The popularity of “Aunt Babette” represents the increasing popularity of 
_terefa_ cooking in American Jewish tradition. The authors viewed the incorporation of forbidden foods into a large sector of the American Jewish population as a step toward modernity, a concept which would ultimately influence the food culture of incoming Eastern European Jewish immigrants.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett offers insight into how there was a hierarchy as to which forbidden foods were included in _treyf_ cookbooks. “Such volumes were selectively _treyf_; they might include shrimp, oysters, ham, and bacon but less often lard and uncured pork, particularly in the earlier publications. \textsuperscript{11} Aunt Babette, “Aunt Babette’s” Cook Book, Foreign and Domestic Receipts for the Household, A Valuable Collection of Receipts and Hints for the Housewife, Many of Which are not to be Found Elsewhere (Cincinnati, OH: Bloch Publishing Company, 1889). Easter is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom Jews reject as the Messiah. \textsuperscript{12} Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Kitchen Judaism,” 80.
Great Migration: Before WWI

Between 1881 and 1924, 2.5 million Eastern European Jewish immigrants entered the United States. The majority of these Jews were from Eastern Europe, hailing from present-day Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, and Romania. Various factors contributed to this influx. First, violent pogroms throughout the Pale of Settlement left many Jews homeless and shaken. Three distinct series of riots, 1881-1884, 1903-1906, and 1917-1921, resulted in the displacement of half a million Jews. Second, economic opportunities for Jews in Europe were declining. As Jewish population increased, so did competition for jobs in traditional Jewish trades. Similarly, industrialization made imported goods cheaper and more accessible, pushing many local Jewish shop owners out of business. Also, the “Temporary” May laws passed in Russia in 1882 revoked Jews rights to the liquor trade working on Sundays, and tightened restrictions on living outside the Russian Pale. These restrictions contributed to Jewish impoverishment and led them to seek out opportunities abroad, with the hope that America held more opportunities than were available to them in the Russian Pale of Settlement.

When waves of Eastern European Jews began immigrating to the United States in 1881, American Reform Jews created organizations to help facilitate the acculturation process. One way that these organizations promoted acculturation was through the

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13 The Pale of Settlement refers to an area outside the Russian interior where the Russian government permitted Jews to permanently settle beginning in 1804. It included provinces in Lithuania, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Moldova. It is best characterized as being made up of shtetls: small towns with a significant Jewish population.
15 Diner, “A Century of Migration”, 84.
16 Ibid., 85. Sundays were the Christian day of rest. Jews, resting instead on the Sabbath, commonly opened up shop on Sundays in order to make up for closing on Saturday.
creation and distribution of cookbooks. *The Settlement Cookbook*, published in 1901 by Lizzie Black Kander, was one of the most successful volumes. It was created as a project of The Settlement, a Jewish communal institution, that was founded in 1900 in Milwaukee with the goal of helping immigrant families better adjust to American life.

Kander was the president of this organization from 1900-1918. In her first year, she both organized and taught cooking classes for young immigrant women. She decided to publish a cookbook because she thought it would make it easier for the young women to practice making the recipes taught in class at home. In her words, the structure of the actual cooking class became difficult because:

> The children spent much valuable time copying the simple recipes devised for them, and when they brought home what they had learned, there was often opposition from their parents to the new ways.17

Here, it is important to note the difference between how immigrant children and young immigrants, as opposed to older immigrants, adapted to the new food culture of the United States. The older immigrant generation was not as quick to alter their cooking and eating style as the younger generation. This is because they were accustomed to their own recipes, familiar with certain ingredients, were limited in the amount of time they had to learn how to cook new foods, and still adhered strictly to Jewish dietary laws. The children of first-generation immigrants, however, grew up with classes like those offered at the Settlement so they both learned how to cook new foods and became more accustomed to the American foodscape.

*The Settlement Cookbook* contained a variety of recipes for dishes of all shapes and sizes, ranging from simple breakfast dishes like toast to more complex dinners like

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fish glace and lobster a la bordelaise. It was similar to “Aunt Babette’s” in that it outlined important household rules, like how to set the table and how to properly measure. However, it also contained basic definitions of works like “cooking” and “food,” presumably as a way to help educate immigrants who were learning English for the first time. The book was also similar to Aunt Babette’s in that it was treyf, or contained recipes for forbidden foods. This was rare for early twentieth century cookbooks. Generally, cookbooks distributed by organizations were kosher, because they were more likely to be embraced by Eastern European Jewish immigrants who were reluctant to abandon everyday kosher practice. However, this cookbook was created not only to encourage immigrants to adapt to Americanized food choices, but also as a way to raise money for The Settlement organization. Thus, non-kosher recipes appealed to a wider range of American Jews, particularly Reform Jews, of whom the majority had long abandoned everyday kashrut adherence.

Some cookbook authors appealed to the Yiddish culture of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, publishing volumes in their native language so they could better understand the material. In 1901, Heidi Amkhanitski published Ler-bukh vi azoy tsu kokhn un bakhn (Manual for How to Cook and Bake), one of the earliest Yiddish cookbooks published in the United States. This cookbook focused heavily on traditional Jewish dishes, such as teyglek (cooked dough rolled in nuts and honey) and khremzlekh (Passover pancakes made from matzah) while also including recipes for American dishes, such as apple pie and potato salad. Her recipes were guaranteed kosher, presented

19 Kander, The “Settlement Cookbook,” 4-5.
simply, and were both quick and affordable, guaranteed to save the working immigrant woman time and money while also providing her family with a delicious meal. For each of these reasons, older generation immigrants would have been more likely to use her cookbook as opposed to *The Settlement Cookbook*. Not only did it appeal to stringent dietary habits, but it also included foods with which they were more familiar in a language that they could easily understand.

American Jewish attempts at acculturation through food were not the only driving factor for changes in Eastern European Jewish immigrant food culture. Incoming young immigrants changed their dietary habits based on a variety of factors, including exposure to an entirely new, more accessible eating environment.

One of the most obvious differences for young immigrants between the old world and the United States was the increased availability of food. While many incoming immigrants started off living in slums and were vastly underpaid at their newfound jobs, many were able to afford more, better quality food than they were able to in the Pale. “The formerly poor started to eat blintzes, kreplach, kasha-varnitches, strudel, noodles, knishes, and most importantly, meat everyday,” explains Diner. Because America offered a variety of once unattainable foods to Eastern European immigrants, most young immigrants adjusted to the new food environment quickly. They were thrilled to have everyday access to foods that in Europe were originally restricted to the weekly holiday of the Sabbath. As immigrant Marcus Ravage, who emigrated from Romania to New

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York in 1900, recalls writing to his parents, “In New York every night as Friday night and every day was Saturday, as far as food went…”\(^{22}\)

Eastern European Jewish immigrants also set up their own food storefronts, which catered specifically to the growing numbers of newly immigrated Eastern European Jews. Similar to the early Central European Jewish immigrants, they became Jewish shop owners, stocking items that catered to both religious and dietary needs. For example, in 1899 a survey of the Eighth Assembly District in New York City, which included a large number of Jewish immigrants, cited 631 food-related stores alone, many of which “catered to the needs of the inhabitants of this area.”\(^{23}\)

These Jewish-owned storefronts, cafes, and restaurants became hubs for social interaction, becoming the communal backbone for a growing American Jewish culture. The food stores established by Eastern European Jews were in the same areas as those established by the earlier wave of Central European Jews, encouraging Jews from all different backgrounds to come together for a good meal. “East European newcomers began to enjoy the cold cuts sold in the German Jewish delicatessens,” explains Diner. “Although east European Jews had not eaten these foods before migration, as American Jews they learned to think of them as traditional.”\(^{24}\)

One of the consequences of increased food accessibility was the growth of Jewish holiday cooking. As everyday meals became increasingly marked by foods originally reserved for holidays in Eastern Europe, holidays like the Sabbath became marked less by

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\(^{23}\) Diner, “A Century of Migration”, 87-88. Breakdown of specific Jewish food-stores: 140 groceries, 131 kosher butcher shops, 36 bakeries, 10 delicatessens, 7 herring stands, 2 matzo stores, 13 wine shops, 15 grape wine shops.

\(^{24}\) Diner, *Hungering for America*, 201.
food type and more by food amount. For example, Alfred Kazin describes the numerous options his family provided on the Sabbath in his autobiography *Walker in the City*, in a chapter titled “the kitchen”:

…the “company” dishes, filled for some with gefilte fish on lettuce leaved, ringed by red horseradish, sour and half-sour pickles, tomato salad with a light vinegar dressing; for others, with chopped liver in a bed of lettuce leaves and white radished; the long white *khalleh*, the Sabbath loaf; chicken soup with noodles and dumplings; chicken, meat loaf, prune and sweet potatoes that has been baked all day into open pie; compote of prunes and quince, apricots and orange rind; applesauce; a great brown nut cake filled with almonds, the traditional lekakh…

For Kazin, an American-born Jew, the Sabbath holiday became the pinnacle of all things Jewish. This is because his mother, a first-generation immigrant, still belonged to the old world; she spent most of her time in the kitchen preparing the Sabbath meal, so the dishes she prepared were associated with old world Eastern European Jewish tradition.

However, for first-generation immigrants like Ravage, who did not have families in the United States, holidays lost some of their charm and flare. “In a land where everyday was some kind of denatured holiday- where you could eat Sabbath twists on Wednesday, and matzohs on New Year’s- the holidays themselves became meaningless and dull,” he wrote. This mindset in part has to do with absence of family. Ravage’s mother was still in Romania, where she was working in the kitchen to bake all of the delicious foods for the holiday meal. Because he experienced the old world himself and remembered his own mother in Europe making all of the preparations for the Sabbath meal, it was harder for him to see the holiday as a special occasion; while he might consume the same foods, he maintained a deeper connection to the old world through his own personal experiences.

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26 Ibid., 58-59.
This early change in the minds of some American-born Jews as opposed to some first-generation immigrants represents a trend that would continue to grow as subsequent generations of American Jews were born. A tension between the consumption of Jewish foods every day and only during holidays developed and varied from individual to individual. However, for those who became more acculturated and consumed more American foods than Jewish foods, the everyday Jewish meal fell away, but holidays remained. Thus, holidays became increasingly linked with Jewish identity because the foods that were served were a connection to an old world past, through associations with Eastern European born family members.

In 1918, just after the First World War, Florence Kreisler Greenbaum published a Jewish cookbook titled, The International Jewish Cookbook. Unlike most of the previous Jewish cookbooks published in English, all of the recipes listed were guaranteed kosher. In fact, this was one of the first publications in the United States that celebrated the uniqueness of Jewish cuisine. As the introduction states,

The aim throughout [this book] has been to lay special emphasis on those dishes which are characteristically Jewish- those time-honored recipes which have been handed down the generations by Jewish housewives (for the Sabbath, Passover, etc).

This quote also reflects the trend that was seen in Kazin’s narrative. Jewish holiday foods, those cooked for the Sabbath and Passover, had taken precedence as characteristically Jewish because they were cooked and passed down from old world Jewish immigrants.

Another unique aspect of Greenbaum’s cookbook is its specific section for Passover dishes. Thus far, this is the only cookbook that has a specific section for holiday foods; publications like Aunt Babette’s and The Settlement Cookbook simply
inserted those recipes into the everyday palette. This indicates a change in the kinds of instructions that Jewish cookbooks were giving at the time. Presumably, cooking Passover foods used to be implicit knowledge; Greenbaum’s inclusion of them demonstrates that by 1914, they had to be explicitly marked in order to help some Jews know what to make.

Thus, by the end of the Great Migration, American Jewish food was becoming increasingly estranged from everyday foods, but resurged in Jewish holiday foods because of their connection with the old world. However, the transformation of American Jewish food culture was not yet complete, as the changing social and political climate of American Jewry influenced how those living during the period of Restricted Migration tackled the Jewish food question.

**Restricted Migration**

Taking place from 1924-1939, the period of restricted migration marked the end of the era of mass Jewish migration. In the years after WWI, the United States passed strict immigration quotas, limiting the number of individuals from each nationality that could enter the country. Initial changes were made in 1921, becoming tighter in 1924.

Meanwhile, the Eastern European Jewish population that arrived in the 1880’s was changing. As first-generation, American-born Jews grew older and obtained higher education, they were able to abandon old immigrant enclaves as a result of increased wealth and social status. Many left the traditional sweatshop work done by their parents
for white-collar jobs, such as teaching and law. These offered higher wages and therefore a more comfortable lifestyle.

This more comfortable lifestyle was marked by a distinct, widespread change in Jewish food culture. By the 1920’s, most first- and second-generation descendants of Eastern European Jews had abandoned a strict, kosher tradition in favor of a more Americanized palette sprinkled with the consumption of “kosher-style” food. This type of food was traditionally Eastern European, but did not follow Jewish dietary laws.

One result of this widespread change was that adherence to the strict dietary laws of kashrut was no longer necessary in order to claim Jewish identity. While cookbooks used by German Reform Jews such as “Aunt Babette’s” demonstrated this idea decades ago, this is the first time that large numbers of Jews with Eastern European roots disregarded kosher practice while still embracing aspects of a traditional Eastern European diet.

This move away from religious observance might appear to contrast with the earlier notion that for American-born Jews, Jewish holiday food was becoming an important aspect of American Jewish identity because of its connection to religion. However, this is not the case. This generation saw holidays, and their foods, as a link to an ancient Jewish religious identity that was lost with kashrut abandonment. Instead of simply being linked to immigrant parents or grandparents, holidays became a time for them to connect with centuries of Jewish history. This can be referred to as “culinary Judaism.”

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Even for this generation, food continued to be the backbone of communal life. Those who were propelled into upper- and middle-class society continued to socialize around the table, even if the foods had changed. For example, New York Jews created a culture of summer leisure in the Catskill Mountains. Staying in *kochaleins* or opting for fancy resorts, they spent the days “mixing with other Jews, eating Jewish-style food, and enjoying the entertainment that made the ‘Borsht Belt’ famous.”

Despite the growth of the American Jewish middle class who had largely moved away from strict adherence to Jewish dietary laws, starting in the 1920’s, food companies, such as Gold Medal Flower, Quaker Oats, and Coca-Cola published cookbooks to encourage the widespread use and promote the legitimacy of their products. In order to reach a wider Jewish audience, appealing to both the remaining old generation and the American-born generations, they were written in a mixture of both English and Yiddish. Gold Medal flour was one of the first companies to release a Jewish cookbook in 1921, and was later followed by Manischewitz and eventually Crisco, in 1935.

Manischewitz was a company that produced kosher food. Its cookbook, *Tempting Kosher Dishes Prepared from World Famous Manischewitz’s Matzo Products*, consisted of 250 recipes, some of which were sent in from Jewish housewives across the United States. “Send Us Your Favorite Recipe,” the introductory page touted. “We shall carefully test recipes submitted, and pay liberally for such recipes that are accepted for publication in future additions of this book.” The recipes themselves covered a wide range of foods, “from half-dozen ways to prepare the ever useful Matzo Knoedel to a

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29 Diner, *Jewish Americans*, 153. *Kochaleins*, the word for “cooking by yourself”, was the name given to simple bungalow colonies in the mountains.

delightful method of making Strawberry Shortcake." While the intention was to encourage consumerism, this cookbook also encouraged conservatism, by encouraging the use of traditional Jewish holiday foods in everyday dishes. This cookbook served as another example of how holiday food, like matzo, resonated in the minds of the American Jewish population. By appealing to a food that was used in ancient tradition, the cookbook touted that by using this product, which was consumed by the Ancient Israelites in their escape from Egypt, even the most American dishes could become Jewish.  

Despite the hold that “kosher-style” food had on the majority of America’s Jewish population, as new Jewish denominations took root in the United States the kashrut question became a heated subject for debate. Orthodox Jews were the most traditional and maintained strict observance to religious law. A split between this sect occurred during this period, stemming in part from what rules constituted a kosher dish, creating Traditional Orthodox and Modern Orthodox. The latter catered to Jews who wanted to be observant but also wanted to keep with the convenience of times. For example, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregation’s OU, out of the Modern Orthodox sect, modernized kashrut supervision, which made processed foods such as canned goods acceptable for consumption. They also created a symbol to put on packaging in order to certify that these foods were kosher. Traditional Orthodox followers rejected these modifications.

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31 Ibid., 3.
32 Passover is a holiday that commemorates the escape of the Ancient Israelites from Egypt. Matzo is one of the main foods consumed during the week-long celebration because it is a reminder of the haste with which the Ancient Israelites left Egypt- they left so quickly, that their bread did not have time to rise. A more detailed description of Passover will be presented in Chapter 3.
34 Diner, Jewish Americans, 102.
Reform Judaism had been a presence the United States with the arrival of Central European immigrants during the Initial Migration. This denomination’s answer to the food question became obvious early, at the celebration meal after the first American Reform rabbis were ordained in 1883. “…apparently, the Jewish caterer thought that ‘kosher’ food meant only the exclusion of pork products; sea foods were so good they had to be kosher,” quotes Kirshenblatt-Gimblet from “The First Ordination and the Terefa Banquet,” explaining how the reception consisted of terefa dishes, such as shrimp. Reconstructionist founder Mordecai Kaplan mimicked this position, issuing a statement in the 1922 that warned Jews that strict kashrut adherence would make it harder for the Jewish people to advance in the United States. “Sooner or later Judaism will have to get along without dietary laws,” he confessed.35

Jewish political activism grew exponentially during the 1930’s. This was prompted in part by the Great Depression.36 Many Jews blamed capitalist policies for the problems of the Depression, including the lack of jobs and the distribution of resources. These individuals often turned to left-wing politics, with some embracing the ideas of communism and socialism. Additionally, when Franklin D. Roosevelt presented his New Deal, growing numbers of Jews flocked to him in support.

Political activism was also influenced by the rise of American anti-Semitism, which hit its highest point during this decade. In order to combat criticism, most Jews shied away from drawing attention to only their concerns, taking a broader approach by supporting problems experienced by all oppressed groups. They highlighted ways that

35 Diner, “Hungering for America,” 184.
36 Diner, Jewish Americans, 161-163. The majority of Jews fared better than most during the Great Depression because the majority of them were self employed or were on municipal payrolls. Americans noticed this and blamed them for causing the depression. Also, noting Jewish acceptance of Roosevelt, Americans accused them of trying to take over the government.
discriminating practices hurt all Americans, instead of focusing only on themselves.\textsuperscript{37} In a sense, these political and activist moves mimicked the food culture of the period. Just as American Jews had developed a food culture based around non-kosher Eastern European food, they were also developing institutions that focused on broader aspects of social justice. These institutions remained inherently Jewish, just as Jewish holiday foods became linked to Jewish identity.

**Conclusion**

American Jewish food culture developed as first-generation immigrants and their children became acculturated into the American foodscape. First-generation immigrants incorporated new foods into their diet as a result of increased food accessibility, while also adhering to the Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut*. However, their American-born children grew up in an environment that was removed from strict religious observance, and old world adherence to the strict dietary laws of *kashrut* were abandoned in favor of more inclusive, American tastes and “kosher-style” food. By the end of the restricted migration period, a distinct, American Jewish food culture was established that linked East European Jewish food to American Jewish identity. While everyday American Jewish food culture was based on adaptation from the more inclusive, surrounding environment, it remained Jewish in the eyes of those who consumed to it because of its link to the earliest Jewish migrant generation. Holidays became the pinnacle of Jewish cooking and identity, as these foods were not only a link to an old world past, but an ancient one as well.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 164.
When Hitler came to power in 1933, Jewish conditions in Germany quickly worsened. Despite protests by Jewish organizations, the United States refused to loosen immigration quotas. A small wave of exceptions from 1933-1938 allowed for the entrance of 150,000 German Jews, many of whom were intellectuals. However, most of these individuals, expelled from their European homes and lives, were never able to reach the professional status they had in Europe. As a whole they stuck to themselves and were too small a group to make an impact on American Jewish social patterns. However, after the horrors of the Holocaust, a new wave of first-generation migrants would flock to the United States: Holocaust survivors. Their response to not only the new American, but also American Jewish environment, would influence how their food culture changed and what impacts it had on personal identity as an Eastern European, Jew, and perhaps an American.

\[^{38}\text{Ibid.}, 148.\]
Chapter 2
Consumption: The Impact of Migration on Holocaust Survivor Food Culture

In 2004, the Society of Nutrition Education published a research brief in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior titled “Holocaust Survivors Report Long-Term Effects on Attitudes Toward Food,” in which researchers used 25 individual interviews to study how the Holocaust impacted survivor food habits. Five themes emerged from the data: difficulty throwing away food, storing excess amounts of food, craving or intense desire for certain foods, difficulty standing in line for food, and experiencing anxiety when food is not readily available. Drawing from these themes the study concluded, “[f]ood-related issues from the Holocaust remain for survivors” and suggested that food and nutrition programs be aware of these issues in order to ensure comfortable eating and nutrition counseling for individuals who have experienced food deprivation.¹

While both the conclusion and suggested implication for this study has merit, the study itself was flawed. The focused interview questions that were asked to each survivor addressed areas that were affected by more than just the Holocaust. For example question five asks, “Does the abundance of food here in the United States influence your attitudes toward food?”² This question plays not only on Holocaust experience, but also on the migration experience of these survivors. Each of the participants interviewed in this study were living in South Beach, Florida at the time it

² Ibid., 191.
was distributed and came to the United States between 1946 and 1994. The time of their migration and the age in which they migrated inevitably affected the way they answered the food questions provided. In this case, the Holocaust was perhaps not the only experience that influenced the food culture of these survivors; so did migration.

This chapter follows the lives of three Holocaust survivors, Jay Ipson, Kaja Finkler, and Esther Lederman, and analyzes the changes in food culture that occurred from their childhoods in Eastern Europe to their migration to the United States after the Holocaust. It asks what changes occurred, how they manifested themselves, why they took place, and to what extent they contributed to the creation of their self-proclaimed American Jewish identity.

While my survivors vividly recall their food situations during the Holocaust, the Holocaust itself did not contribute to changes in their food culture. Rather, survivor food culture was altered by migration to the United States after the Holocaust, which exposed them to new, American foods and culinary practices, which they adopted into their everyday diet. They also abandoned strict adherence to Jewish dietary laws, with only one correspondent, Jay, continuing at all. Similar to early generations of American-born Jews, Jewish holidays, continued to be marked by the consumption of “authentic” Jewish foods remembered in childhood. The combination of both adaption and maintenance contributed to the creation of my correspondents’ self-proclaimed, dual American-Jewish identity. However, the Jewish aspect of their identity differs from that of American-born Jews because their Jewishness is not linked to food in a secular context, as was developed in Chapter 1.

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3 Ibid., 190.
The first-generation migrant status of my correspondents affected the extent to which survivors were able to acculturate into American Jewish society. The acculturation experience of survivors was more rapid than that of the first-generation immigrants from chapter 1; survivors abandoned kashrut adherence and an Eastern European food style, which was not seen until subsequent American-born generations in the early immigrant period. However, despite rapid acculturation, the self-proclaimed American Jewish identity defined by my correspondents differs from the American Jewish identity of American-born Jews in terms of the extent to which food plays a role. Food did not come to define the Jewish experience of my correspondents like it did for American Jews because for American Jews born in the United States, Jewish identity is based on food, while my correspondents’ Jewish identity is linked to old world.

Childhood

From a young age, each correspondent developed a distinct, Eastern European Jewish food culture largely based on adaptation from the surrounding Eastern European environment before WWII. “Jews adopt the food and culture of those that are around them,” explains Esther. “We ate potatoes, we ate cabbage, we ate chicken, fish, beef, lamb, dusk goose, like everybody else.” Her favorite foods as a child were ice cream and chocolate. “Yeah, I like sweets,” she laughs.⁴ Jay, a survivor from Lithuania, describes how his family incorporated the Lithuanian diet into their lives. “Because Lithuania was a modest country, we ate a lot of herring that we used to pickle ourselves,” he explains. Other common foods were potatoes, root vegetables such as turnips, beets, and radishes,

⁴ Esther Gutman Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
Kaja recalls eating a lot of vegetables during her childhood in Poland. “My mother was always on a diet, and she kept me on a diet,” she recalls. “We ate very healthy, non-fatty foods.” While she viewed Otwock, the Jewish community she grew up in, as being more isolated from the Polish community than either Esther or Jay viewed their own environment, she mentions that the two groups relied on each other for food trading. Thus, the majority of foods consumed by Jay, Kaja, and Esther were adapted from the surrounding Eastern European environment.

However, while Jews adapted these foods from the surrounding population, the preparation of food was different because it had to follow the religious dietary laws of kashrut. Here, Jay explains these laws:

A kosher animal is one that has a split hoof and two stomachs; because it chews its cud, it’s pure. And then it has to be ritualistically slaughtered, where there’s no pain to the animal; it dies instantaneously before it can be used. And then it has to be cleansed and prepared under Jewish supervision, which is more stringent than the health department. And that’s what kosher is, in a roundabout way. So, meat and milk cannot be mixed; you don’t eat the child [that was nurtured by] the mother’s milk. And why it all came about is because in olden days when you did not have refrigeration, pork spoiled just like that. Now, a pig has a split hoof, but it’s not a clean animal. If you take a piece of bacon or ham, lay it out in the sun, it’ll rot and spoil immediately. You take a piece of beef and put it out in the sun and it might dry out, without ever getting spoiled.

Both Jay and Kaja were raised in Orthodox homes, so they abided strictly to these laws. Esther’s family was not as strict because they were not religious, only attending the synagogue on high holidays. “We kept a kosher home,” she writes in her memoir, and claims that the only time her mother went into the kitchen was when she prepared the

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5 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
6 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
7 Kaja Finkler, Lives Lived and Lost East European History Before, During, and After World War II as Experienced by an Anthropologist and her Mother (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 222.
8 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
meat, because she did not trust the maid.\textsuperscript{9} However, she also reveals that they would sometimes bring ham into the house, for sandwiches.\textsuperscript{10}

While the majority of foods consumed by all three correspondents were also common to the surrounding Polish and Lithuanian populations, Jewish holiday foods maintained their cultural authenticity. Cholent, for example, is a dish that was created in order to bypass the Jewish law that outlaws cooking on the Sabbath. “You would take a big pot, put in some meat if you had it, potatoes and beans, and oil, fat, salt and pepper and garlic, whatever, and cover it up with beans and take it to the baker and put it in the oven. Because the oven was out for all night from Friday to Saturday,” Esther explains.\textsuperscript{11} On Saturday, before the Sabbath meal, it was taken out of the oven and eaten.

Survivors were taught from a young age how some Jewish holiday foods are tied specifically to the meaning of the holiday itself. For example, on Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), a popular dish is tzimmes, a mixture of carrots, prunes, and honey. “You would eat a sweet food so your new year is sweet. So honey was one. And carrots in Yiddish is mern, which also means to multiply, so you can multiply whatever it is you want to multiply, whether it’s children, money, or whatever,” explains Kaja.\textsuperscript{12} On Hanukkah, foods cooked in oil are consumed in order to remember the miracle of the oil after the destruction of the Second Temple. One of the most popular is latkas, or potato pancakes. “It’s not the kind of pancake you buy in the store that’s made more like french fries put together into pancake,” Jay explains.\textsuperscript{13} During Passover, foods that contain

\textsuperscript{10} Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
\textsuperscript{13} Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
yeast are not consumed, in order to remember the hurry with which the Ancient Israelites left their enslavement in Egypt. Esther describes some of the main foods eaten during this holiday:

You are not supposed to eat anything that has risen, right, so if you are really crazy you turn the house upside down and then you take everything out [that has touched risen food] and you take everything in [that has not touched risen food] and you change your dishes, and everything. You eat matzo, which is straw, but you can dress it up. And then at the seder you have fish, whichever way you want, you have soup, chicken soup with matzo balls.14

Gefilte fish is also considered to be authentically Jewish, even though it does not have a specific holiday on which it is consumed. Kaja remembers eating gefilte fish on the Sabbath, while Jay remembers eating it other times during the week. Here, he describes how it is made:

A gefilte fish is like taking a carp; you catch a carp, you bring it home while it’s fresh, you scale it, you gut it, you take all the guts out of it, then you make your gefilte fish (the stuffing), which it made out of the stomach of the fish with pepper and salt and all the ingredients that go into making the fish ball, then you put it back into the fish. And then you got your gefilte fish. And then you slice it into slices and then you serve it. And that’s gefilte fish, where you eat all of it, the only thing you have left is the backbone, the tail and a piece of the head, because inside the head there is a little piece that’s the most delicious piece of the whole fish just behind the brain. That’s gefilte fish.15

The childhood foods of Kaja, Esther, and Jay were thus a product of both adaptation from the surrounding Polish and Lithuanian populations and Jewish holiday tradition. Unfortunately, this food culture was completely disrupted by the outbreak of war in Europe and the mass genocide of their own Jewish people. Type and taste no longer mattered: food simply became the key to survival.

14 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
15 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
The Holocaust

Jay, Kaja, and Esther vividly remember their food situations during the Holocaust. “We had ration cards. So, we were allowed 934 calories per person per week,” describes Jay.16 This was the food situation in the Kovno ghetto, where he and his family remained from 1941-1943, when they escaped. “In the middle of a November night my father cut the barbed wire and when we could no longer hear the guard walking on the cobblestones I was told to run across and hide behind a fence across the street,” he remembers. His mother and father joined him behind the fence, and together they walked five blocks to meet a farmer who was waiting for them with a wagon full of straw. He took them Trakai, a Polish town, where a Polish-Catholic farmer let them hide on his property. Here, Jay’s father dug a hole in a potato field, which became a hiding place for the family. “We lived on potatoes, sauerkraut, white bread, and water from the lake,” he recalls. His father would leave the hole to beg for food and, by luck of passing by a farmer’s house with a radio, learned that the Soviets were approaching their location. In 1944, his family was liberated.17

“Starvation in the Warsaw ghetto was rampant,” writes Kaja in her book Lives Lived and Lost.18 In 1941, Kaja and her mother were pushed into the ghetto. Later that year, she was smuggled out of the Warsaw ghetto and into the Piotrków ghetto, where her father was contained. By 1943, Kaja’s mother had been taken to the Skarzysko-Kamienna munitions factory to work and her father had died of sickness. “He would not

16 Ibid. Jay recalls more specifically what he was given: “4 ounces of flour, 4 ounces of beans, 3 ounces of salt, 22 slices of bread, and 3 ounces of beef that could have come from a pet (they took all our pets and killed them) or it could have come from a horse. That’s what you were given for a week, regardless of your age or need.”
17 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
18 Kaja Finkler, Lives Lived and Lost, 227.
eat the soup provided by the Germans in the ghetto because it was not kosher,” she writes. That year she was sent to Bujag, a woodworks factory, where she was “provided a minimum ration of bread and sugar.” She also recalls eating soup. In 1944, she was transferred to Ravensbrück, where each day she received rutabaga soup and, every three days, was given a ration of bread. One of her most vivid memories of the camp is dreaming of hot chicken soup with rice. “I thought of this food all the time,” she writes. In 1945 she was transferred again, this time to Bergen-Belsen, where she was kept in a room for days without food. In her words, “[h]aving no food for days on end, I could no longer walk and could barely breathe. People were dying all around me.” She managed to hold out until April 15, 1945, when the camp was liberated by the British.

Esther’s food situation was not as dire as Jay or Kaja’s, but was different than the middle-class lifestyle she was used to. The Chmielnik ghetto, where the family was located from 1940-1942, was not physically fenced off from the outsider world, so her mother was able to trade needlework to Polish women in exchange for food. “We had plenty of eggs, butter, flour, sugar, and everything edible except for meat”, she writes in her book *Hiding for Survival*. In 1942, Esther escaped the ghetto and tried to secure a safe place for her family to hide. Unfortunately, it was too late; the day after she escaped, the ghetto was liquidated, and her mother and sister were taken away to a concentration camp, where they later perished. Esther made her way to the house that her boyfriend, 

19 Ibid., 237.
20 Ibid., 238-239.
21 Ibid., 243. Her ration of bread was about 200 grams, or 7.05 ounces.
22 Ibid., 243.
23 Ibid., 246.
Ezjel, and his family, were hiding-he had disclosed this location to her before they left the ghetto. Here, she hid with six other people in the attic of an abandoned cottage until 1944, when they were liberated by the Russians. “Our hosts were wealthy farmers, so basic food was no problem,” she remembers.25 Breakfast consisted of milk and bread, and dinner was milk, potatoes, and sometimes eggs. “There were orchards groaning with the weight of apples, pears, and other produce, but nobody thought to bring us some,” she writes in her memoir. “But, even in the bad times, we never went hungry.”26

Despite these vivid memories of their food situations and, in the case of Jay and Kaja, the drastic starvation conditions, the Holocaust did not ultimately influence changes in my correspondents’ food culture. They do not discuss changed eating habits as a result of the Holocaust, nor are they reluctant to talk about food culture in their pre-war or post-war lives. Rather, evidence shows that the food culture they developed after the Holocaust is a product of their migration of the United States, after survival.

Migration

In the years following the Holocaust, all three of my correspondents migrated to the United States, leaving the culture of Europe behind. Kaja moved to Brooklyn, New York with her mother in 1946, Jay moved to Richmond, Virginia with his mother and father in 1947, and Esther also moved to Brooklyn, New York with her husband, son, and mother-in-law in 1949.27 While they did not all come from or end up in the same place, each survivor adapted their food culture to fit the new, American environment, incorporating new foods into their diet and adjusting to new culinary practices.

25 Ibid., 67.
26 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
27 Interview(s) with Mari Moss, June-July 2015.
For Jay and Kaja, this adaptation did not take place right away. Because both were young children who still depended on their accompanying family members for food and because their families continued to strictly adhere to the dietary laws of kashrut, some aspects of Eastern European Jewish childhood food culture continued. For Kaja, her diet continued to consist of vegetables and traditional Sabbath foods, such as cholent and gefilte fish. “After the war it was very much continued,” she explains. “I come from a very traditional, Hassidic family, so it continued to be like that.”

Similarly, Jay’s mother always kept a kosher kitchen. Once they grew older, however, both correspondents abandoned this lifestyle, adapting more Americanized practices into their diet. Esther, on the other hand, adopted American style food and culinary practices upon her arrival because she was old enough to provide for herself.

The incorporation of new foods affected the everyday meals of survivors. New fruits and vegetables, such as grapefruit and green peppers, changed the taste and form of mealtime dishes. “I remember when we came to this country, there were things that we never really saw. There were certain foods that people ate here when they came, because they were available,” explains Kaja. New genres of food also made their way into the lives of survivors. Jay, for example, was exposed to Chinese food, which continues to be one of his favorites. Similarly, some foods were abandoned because they were not available in the United States. Esther, for example, recalls how the ham in America was not as good as the ham in Poland.

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28 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
29 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
30 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
31 Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
You see Polish ham was always best, I can’t do the ham here. There’s no taste. You took a crusty roll with butter, put some ham in it, heaven. No matter how you stand on your head here you cannot get a good piece of ham.\textsuperscript{32}

The same holds true for institutions. Jay explains how there used to be two kosher butchers in Richmond, but once they left, he abandoned his previous level of kashrut strictness.\textsuperscript{33}

Other changes in food culture were linked to the new culinary practices and new environment that they were exposed to when they arrived to the United States. Restaurants, for example, were more common and offered a larger variety of food than those found in Eastern Europe, further exposing my correspondents to new types of food and new methods of preparation. Interestingly, Kaja’s abandonment of kosher practice stemmed more from the open, diverse American environment than from exposure to new foods. “I aspired to travel, to see the world to study, to engage in life in ways I could not living in the Orthodox community and following all the commandments,” she writes. In doing so, the abandoned her “prescribed rhythm of life,” that included observance of kashrut.\textsuperscript{34}

While exposure to new foods, absence of old foods, and a more diverse environment changed the everyday food culture of Kaja, Jay, and Esther, they did maintain some aspects of Jewish childhood food tradition by continuing to cook and consume Jewish holiday foods. Every year for Hanukkah, Jay continues to make potato pancakes, using the same method and ingredients as his mother.

\begin{itemize}
  \item I really grind it down, I squeeze out the moisture, then I put in all my ingredients, then I strain it through a [cheesecloth], so there’s not really much water, then I put it in the oil and make the pancake. And you can also make a potato cake the same
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{32} Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
\textsuperscript{33} Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
\textsuperscript{34} Kaja Finkler, \textit{Lives Lived and Lost}, 267.
way, instead of making it into small size cakes you just have a cake pan and you make it as a cake.\textsuperscript{35}

Kaja cooks gefilte fish for the holidays.\textsuperscript{36} Even Esther makes matzo dishes for Passover, such as matzo brie and matzo ball soup.\textsuperscript{37} These foods continued to be prevalent in my correspondent’s lives because of their connection to Ancient Jewish tradition. Recall how Jewish holiday foods are considered to be authentic by each of my correspondents. Because of the cultural connection that they made with these foods, it was harder to abandon them than some of the Eastern European staples. Additionally, holiday foods were integral to the celebration itself. “Well, traditionally you have certain foods, everyone looks forward to on that specific holiday of course,” says Jay. “All holidays are tied with food.”\textsuperscript{38}

While my correspondents continued to consume and prepare authentic Jewish foods for holidays and special occasions, they did adopt the American Jewish practice of extending their holiday celebrations and meals to more than just family. In the United States, American Jews celebrate holidays with friends, both Jews and non-Jews. This is especially prevalent at the seder dinner during Passover. “The seder was always a family tradition. In the United States it has become a social tradition,” Kaja explains.\textsuperscript{39} Now, my correspondents also use Jewish food as a way to interact with and share their culture with others. Esther, for example, recalls how when her children were in college, she would tell them to bring anyone home they wanted to Passover dinner. “They always

\textsuperscript{35} Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2016.
\textsuperscript{36} Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
\textsuperscript{37} Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
\textsuperscript{38} Jay Ipson, interview with Mari Moss, June 26, 2015.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
brought friends, there was always room for everybody,” she recalls. Similarly, Jay and his wife, Ella, threw Hanukkah parties every year and invited all their friends. Thus, my correspondents did only adopt American foods and food traditions; they also adopted American Jewish traditions.

The ability of Kaja, Esther, and Jay to adopt new, American foods, maintain some aspects of Jewish food tradition, and also incorporate American Jewish elements adds to the creation of a dual American-Jewish identity. Today, my correspondents do not identify as Polish or Lithuanian: they identify as American Jews. “I’m an American. I’m a naturalized citizen. My religion is Jewish, I’m very proud of my religion, but I’m extremely proud of my country,” asserts Jay. Esther feels just as strongly: “Oh I am Jewish, I’m very much Jewish. I’m an American. I’m very American. And I’m very Jewish. Born in Poland, speak a few languages, but I adapted.”

However, despite this self-proclaimed American Jewish identity, my correspondents continue to acknowledge differences between their own food culture and the food culture of American Jews who were born in the United States. For example, Kaja is not familiar with the “Jewish” origins of classic deli foods, like pastrami, smoked white fish, and brisket. These foods were “simply not available” to older generations of Jews in Europe, she asserts. Yet, both the American Jewish and non-Jewish population classify them as Jewish.

Survivors also do not understand some American Jewish food traditions. For example, both Esther and Kaja are perplexed by why some American Jews keep a kosher

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40 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
41 Ibid.
42 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
43 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
home but break kosher when they go out to restaurants. To them, it doesn’t make sense to follow the rules half way; “either you do or you don’t,” Esther states. Similarly, Kaja also laughs at American Jews who celebrate the end of Yom Kippur by attending the break fast, even though they didn’t fast in the first place. A break fast is a food celebration that takes place at the end of a fasting holiday. Here, she explains:

A community like Chapel Hill [for example], I think people are generally quite secular, even when they maintain Jewish tradition in terms of going for the holidays to the synagogue. They may or may not fast on Yom Kippur. But, they will always tell you that they’re going to a break fast. Which I always find funny, you didn’t even fast but you’re going to a break fast? Well this is a very American kind of thing.

In both of these examples, my correspondents are amused by how American Jews link themselves to food traditions. In the case of kosher duality, they don’t understand why Jews would bother following the traditions at home only to break them somewhere else. The same goes for the break fast. Overall, they recognize that American Jews consciously link their own Jewish identity with food tradition. “Particularly in the United States it [Jewish identity] becomes framed by food,” explains Kaja.

My correspondents, however, do not link their Jewish identity to food because of their inherent connection to the old world. For them, Jewish foods are not a link to Jewish identity because their Jewish identity was formed from first-hand old world culture and religion. When asked about personal connections between food and Judaism, none of my correspondents provided answers that linked Jewish food to the creation of their Jewish identity. Kaja maintains some personal religious connections with food while both Jay and Esther mentioned specific foods from their childhood. While they

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44 Ibid.
45 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
46 Ibid.
continued authentic Jewish food traditions after migrating to the United States, they never intended to maintain their Jewishness through food. They simply continued to prepare Jewish food for holidays and special occasions because it is what they were used to. They remember the foods they ate, and they enjoy eating those foods now, but they do not necessarily think deeply about the associations between Jewish food culture and personal identity.

**The Limits of Migration**

While migration did affect the food culture of each of my correspondents, there are limits in regard to its impact. For example, migration did not affect Esther’s decision to abandon kashrut; it was a personal choice. “My husband and I, we never saw the point in it or the reason of it,” she asserts. Additionally, some changes that have occurred in survivor food culture are a product of time rather than migration. For example, Jay explained multiple times that food used to be prepared without any waste; every part was used or eaten. However, because of increased use of processed foods and the rise of large chain grocery stores over the past 50 years, it has become easier to buy foods that are pre-made rather than prepare fresh meals.

Increased globalization has also impacted food availability. Some foods that survivors did not have access too previously have suddenly become available. Recall how Esther claimed that she could not get a food piece of ham in the United States; later in her interview, she revealed that now, she is able to by Polish ham in the store.47 Similarly, Jay is able to get pickled lox and salmon at Costco and Kaja can get challah at Weaver Street Market and Southern Season. She even requested that Southern Season, a

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47 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
“non-Jewish kind of store,” start carrying Passover foods, to which they obliged. Thus, food preparation and culture in America itself has evolved over time. While these changes are outside the scope of my paper, it is important to acknowledge that changes to my correspondents’ food culture does not stop with migration; it is a continual process.

Finally, just because the Holocaust did not affect the changing food culture of these survivors does not mean that the Holocaust did not deeply affect their lives. The suffering, destruction, and horror that these individuals experienced are not memories that are easily forgotten. Esther, for example, contributes the loss of her religious faith directly to the Holocaust.

I have problems going to the synagogue, I have problems with prayers. I don’t, because I have my own personal argument with the guy upstairs, if it is a guy. My mother was 42, my sister was 14, did they have to die? And the way to die? By being gassed? They did not have to.

Jay, on the other hand, has dedicated his life to preserving the memory of the Holocaust. In 2003 he founded the Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Virginia, and even now is invited to give lectures in schools across the United States. Therefore, the Holocaust continues to make an impact on the lives of my correspondents, even if it did not contribute to direct changes in the ways they interact with food.

Conclusion

While the Holocaust acted as a catalyst for mass survivor migration to the United States, it did not contribute directly to the changing food culture of any of my correspondents. Jay, Kaja, and Esther vividly remember their food situations during the Holocaust, but did not change their dietary habits because of these conditions. Rather,

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48 Kaja Finkler, interview with Mari Moss, July 22, 2015.
49 Esther Lederman, interview with Mari Moss, June 9, 2015.
migration to the United States after the Holocaust led to the adoption of new foods and
culinary practices from the surrounding community, similar to how their childhood food
cultures were shaped by the surrounding Eastern European population. While these
adoptions changed their everyday diet and, in the case of Jay and Kaja, their strict
abidance to the dietary laws of kashrut, they did not lose all aspects of their Eastern
European childhood food culture. They continued to prepare and consume authentic
Jewish holidays foods, maintaining century-old aspects of the Jewish eating tradition.

The ability of my correspondents to adapt to new American and American Jewish
food culture while also maintaining more traditional Jewish food practices mimics their
self-proclaimed American Jewish identity. However, they still make distinctions between
themselves and American Jews who were born in the United States, notably rejecting the
consumption of Jewish food as a conscious link to Jewish identity because of their direct
connection to the old world. While the effects of migration on the food culture of my
correspondents are limited, because of increased globalization, they still played a vital
role in the transition from Eastern Europe to the United States.

Just because survivors did not change their food culture in response to the
Holocaust does not mean that the Holocaust did not affect the food culture of any Jewish
group. American Jews responded to the event by adapting their own food culture to
memorialize the event.
Chapter 3

Interpretation: The Impact of the Holocaust on American Jewish Food Culture

Immediately after World War II, American Jews were uncertain how to approach the Holocaust. Six million Jews had been violently murdered by the Nazi regime, making it one of the most tragic events in Jewish history. For decades, historians argued that American Jews stayed silent about the Holocaust until the 1960’s, after the Eichmann trial took place in Israel. More recently, however, many historians have changed their view, arguing that in the aftermath of the Holocaust, American Jews first responded to the event by acknowledging it in their own, Jewish spheres.¹

One of the first ways American Jews memorialized the Holocaust was through the adoption of Holocaust memorials into Jewish holidays. This is because, for centuries, the Jewish calendar has served as a marker of both ancient tradition and practice. The first incidence occurred in 1947, when the Synagogue Council of America, made up of Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis, chose the Tenth of Tevet as a day of Holocaust remembrance.²

The council chose this date for two reasons: first, they wanted to revive an old Jewish holiday that had long slipped from American Jewish consciousness. The Tenth of Tevet marks the first day of the Babylonian siege on Jerusalem, which took place in 586 BCE. While it had been on the Jewish calendar for centuries, American Jews did not celebrate it in until 1947, the year it was designated by the council as Holocaust

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² Ibid., 53.
Remembrance Day. The second reason why the council chose this day was because it is a day of fasting. Recall from chapter two that hunger is one of the most universal themes of Holocaust testimony. Thus, fasting was a way to remember not only Holocaust victims, but also their suffering.

By 1949, the Synagogue Council referred to the Tenth of Tevet as the International Day of Memorial for Victims of Nazi Persecution, and American Jews commemorated it accordingly. However, despite American Jewish dedication to the holiday, the memorial day was short lived. In 1951, the Israeli Parliament designated the 27th of Nisan, most commonly referred to as Yom Hashoah, as Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day. Because it was issued by the Israeli delegation, which had claimed authority in the eyes of the Jewish world as head of all Jewish affairs after the founding of Israel in 1948, the Synagogue Council’s Tenth of Tevet was overshadowed by the late 1950’s. Interestingly, Yom Hashoah was not designated as a fast day, which was a key factor in choosing the Tenth of Tevet. The failure to fast on Holocaust Remembrance Day, however, is not as intriguing as the incorporation of Holocaust remembrance into the Passover seder.

Passover is a Jewish holiday during which incorporation of Holocaust remembrance is most widespread. The weeklong celebration, which begins on the 15th day of the Jewish month Nisan, commemorates the freedom of the Ancient Israelites’ from Egyptian bondage. During Passover, Jews are not supposed to eat leavened foods or fermented grains, such as barley, wheat, rye, oats, and spelt. These foods are known

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3 Ibid.
as *chametz* in Hebrew. *Chametz* are eliminated from the diet as a way to remember the haste with which the Ancient Israelites left Egypt.  

The incorporation of Holocaust remembrance into the seder ritual is ironic because of its close relation to food consumption. Why would American Jews choose to memorialize an event marked by starvation through a food-based ritual? Where does the suffering of the Holocaust fit in? This chapter provides answers to these questions. Thus far, this thesis has focused on the development of American Jewish food culture in relation to American Jewish identity and how Holocaust survivors both accepted and rejected that mold. Here, the Holocaust meets American Jewish food culture by acting as a secular addition to a religious-based event. While most American Jews lived secular lives by the end of WWII, Holocaust memorials that were inserted into the Passover seder were linked to religious precepts because it gave them legitimacy. Those who were not religious continued to honor the Passover seder tradition and memorials because Jewish holiday food was connected to their Jewish identity, as argued in Chapter 1. The Passover seder ritual became a way to not only link American Jewish identity to Ancient Judaism, but also a way link a century-old Jewish history to a modern Jewish event.

In my analysis, I compare haggadah booklets from three different branches of Judaism, exploring whether or not a Holocaust memorial is present and at what point it appears during the seder in order to determine how American Jews have incorporated Holocaust remembrance into seder ritual. The haggadah is the instruction manual for the seder. It outlines when the ritual foods and wine are consumed, specific texts and

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6 According to the Passover story, the Jews had to leave Egypt so quickly that they did not have time to let their bread rise. Additionally, in Ashkenaz tradition, foods that fall under the category *kitniyot* are also eliminated. This includes legumes, seeds, beans, millet, rice, and peas. See “Food Restrictions on Passover Explained: Chametz and Kitnoyot.”
prayers, as well as the order in which they are said. Because it serves as a guide through
the seder, the haggadah is the place where Holocaust memorials are incorporated. In
typical Jewish fashion, haggadah booklets have evolved over time because of
denomination and cultural relevance. For this reason, I also provide the historical context
of the time period that each haggadah was published. In terms of analysis, I analyze
haggadot that were published from 1999-2002, demonstrating the continued prevalence
of the Holocaust even 50 years after the event.

American Jews adapted the Passover seder to be a time of Holocaust
remembrance by making it a redemptive event. The covenant between God and Abraham
is the framework around which the Holocaust theme of redemption is centered. Recalling
this promise, the Ancient Israelites were going to suffer through three trials: isolation,
suffering, and affliction. Only then would they gain redemption. Memorials inserted into
the haggadah achieve this by acknowledging the suffering that survivors experienced in
the camps, then citing that suffering as means to redemption through examples of
survivor camp testimony, the continued and strengthened survival of Jewish culture and
tradition, and the creation of the State of Israel.

While Reconstructionist, Reform, and non-denominational haggadot have
different texts, they insert memorial passages at similar, strategic places within the seder
service which further acknowledge Holocaust suffering as a means to ultimate
redemption: the return of the Messiah. The placement of Holocaust memorials before the
tradition of filling Elijah’s cup, which is linked to the opening/closing of Elijah’s door,
symbolize the suffering of the Holocaust as a means to ultimate redemption by citing the
event as necessary for the coming of the Messiah. Memorials placed after Elijah’s door is
closed symbolize how despite the Holocaust, the Jewish people continue to have faith in the coming of the Messiah; they acknowledge that Jewish culture is still alive, well, and thriving. Each of these placements occurs after the consumption of the afikomon, as a way to remember how survivors were restricted in their meal consumption.

Notably, haggadot do not insert memorials in places where food is consumed, nor do they explicitly link the suffering experienced by Holocaust survivors to the ritual seder foods, as is done with the Ancient Israelites. However, they do use the seder foods as a way to remember hunger, by using them as a point of comparison between the food situation of the Jews in Egypt and the Jews in concentration camps. In this case, we ultimately see that while the Holocaust is viewed through the seder with a redemptive lens, it does not mean that the genocide was deserved.

The seder

Before the role of the Holocaust in the Passover seder can be described, it is necessary to explain what the seder is and the food elements that contribute to the ritual. On the first and second nights of Passover there is an event called the seder, which is a ritual meal that retells the story of the Israelites’ bondage in Egypt. Five foods are used during this meal to explain the plight of the Ancient Israelites. Matzah commonly referred to as, “the bread of affliction,” represents the unleavened bread that the Ancient Israelites prepared as they began their flight from Egypt. This food plays a special role at the end of the seder. The afikomon is a final piece of dessert matzah that is eaten in order to end the seder dinner, shulchan oreich. Once the afikomon has been consumed,

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no more food can be eaten for the rest of the night. Maror, a bitter herb, represents the suffering that the Israelites experienced as slaves in Egypt. Charoset is a mixture of wine, cinnamon, nuts, and fruit that represents the mortar that the Jews used to build Egyptian pyramids while enslaved. Karpas, a green vegetable (usually parsley), represents the lowly origins of the Jewish people. Near the beginning of the seder it is dipped in salt water, which represents the tears shed by the Ancient Israelites while in bondage. Finally, pesach is a roasted bone that symbolizes the lamb that was sacrificed in order to save the Israelites’ first born sons from death. It is more commonly referred to as z’roa, which means forearm in Hebrew, and represents the arm that God extended to save them.

Wine is also an essential element of the seder. Over the course of the service, four cups are consumed as a symbol of the four parts of the covenant God offered to Abraham, centuries before the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. The first three parts, gerut (alienation), avdut (servitude), and innuy (affliction), have to be experienced by the Jewish people before they experience redemption, through their return to Israel. The first two cups are consumed before shulchan oreich, the seder dinner, and the second two are consumed after the afikomon is eaten.

After barech, giving grace after the seder meal, there is a tradition of pouring a fifth cup of wine for the ancient prophet Elijah and then opening the front door so that he might come in. This practice symbolizes continued faith in the coming of the Messiah.

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9 According to the Passover story, God commanded that a lamb be sacrificed and its blood be smeared on every Israelite doorpost, in order to save the lives of the first-born son. The next morning, the Egyptian sons were dead while the Israeli ones were still alive. The actual name of the holiday, Passover, is a reference to this phenomenon because death “passed over” the blood-smeared houses.
10 Elwell, The Open Door, xvi.
because in Jewish tradition, the Prophet Elijah is the messenger for God’s ultimate return. The return of the Messiah is linked to God’s covenant with Abraham by acting as an extension of the covenant that promises a return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

**The Haggadot: Text**

The haggadah itself was not the first place that Holocaust seder memorials were inserted. *The Seder of Ritual Remembrance*, published in 1952 by the American Jewish Committee, was not a full haggadah, but an insert that could be added as a supplement to the haggadah. This was one of the earliest American Jewish attempts to memorialize the Holocaust, and it was extremely successful. It was printed in newspapers, broadcasted on radio and television, and many publishers copied it into *haggadot* illegally, ignoring the laws of copyright. *The Seder of Ritual Remembrance* thus set the precedent for inserting American Jewish Holocaust memorials into the Passover seder ritual.

In 1960, the Eichmann trial made the Holocaust a global phenomenon by bringing Nazi atrocities to the forefront of American news. At the conclusion of the trial two years later, Adolf Eichmann was sentenced to death for his heavy involvement in the Jewish genocide. At this point, American Jews expanded their efforts at memorializing the Holocaust outside the Jewish sphere. However, while more public, large-scale memorial efforts began to take shape, there was also an increase in Passover *haggadot* that incorporated Holocaust memorials. “Of the close to one hundred nontraditional *haggadot* published between 1970 and 2002, approximately 25 percent incorporate

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Holocaust texts…,” writes scholar Liora Gubkin in her book *You Shall Tell Your Children: Holocaust Memory in American Passover Ritual*.\(^\text{14}\) Thus, as the Holocaust became a household name, American Jewish efforts increased even within their own sphere, to ensure that it never left.

The Reconstructionist *new American Haggadah* was originally published in 1941, but has since been adapted to include Holocaust memorials. It exemplifies redemption by acknowledging the suffering that survivors experienced in the camps and by citing the continued, strengthened survival of Jewish culture.

The 1999 version first inserts a small Holocaust passage after the *magid*, the telling of the Passover story. The text is redemptive, calling on readers to remember how the Pharaoh was not the only tyrant from whom God freed the Jews. “And that is why the story of Passover is more than just the story of the emancipation the Israelites won from Pharaoh,” the passage begins. “It is the story of the emancipation of peoples of the world who have won from tyrants and oppressors throughout the ages and across the globe.”\(^\text{15}\) Here, the text emphasizes how despite Holocaust genocide there were survivors. The stories of these survivors are ones of redemption; their existence exemplifies the fulfillment of God’s promise of redemption because they gained freedom from Nazi bondage.

The *new American Haggadah* also inserts two passages at the end of *barech*, the blessings said at the end of the seder meal. In a section titled “Pour out Your Wrath,” the haggadah introduces a new ritual. Guests are supposed to dip their finger into a wine cup and remove a drop, symbolizing “that anger- even justified, necessary, and righteous

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anger- diminishes energy that could be devoted to saving the world.”\textsuperscript{16} This first passage offers a token of forgiveness, explaining that dwelling on the wrongs inflicted on the Jewish people does no good. It acknowledges not just the suffering experienced by the Jewish people, but how that suffering can be turned into a tool for activism. Wallowing on affliction, despite redemption, achieved nothing. Rather, the past experiences of Holocaust tragedy can be used as a way to help others, and ensure that they do not have to endure the same fate.

The second passage in this section is dedicated to the acts of resistance that Jews undertook in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which took place on April 19, 1943, on the first night of Passover. The passage begins with a brief explanation of the uprising, then leads into the poem “Pesah Has Come to the Ghetto Again,” which was written on the night of the uprising by Binem Heller. Both of these elements acknowledge the suffering experienced by those who were imprisoned. However, the final words that follow them are redemptive, acknowledging that while the uprising was ultimately suppressed, the deaths of those who participated were not in vain: “If the uprising failed to liberate the Jews of Warsaw from their oppressors, it failed with heroic glory.”\textsuperscript{17} These resistance efforts strengthened the Jewish people, the Jewish nation. They silenced those who viewed the Jews as weak, who criticized them for not fighting back against their oppression. Their redemption comes in the form of respect, not only by survivors, but by future generations of Jews who realize their strength and continue to acknowledge that strength by preserving the Passover ritual.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 72.
The Reform haggadah *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah*, was published in 2002. It acknowledges redemption by citing survivor camp testimony, the continuity and strength of Jewish culture, and the creation of the State of Israel.

It first contains a redemptive Holocaust memorial during the *magid*, using a survivor story in order to exemplify how God fulfilled the ultimate promise of redemption. The story begins with a young boy, commanded to sing by a German guard. He sang *V’HiShe-amada*, God’s promises, after which the German guard asked him the meaning of the song. “This is God’s promise to our ancestors and to us. It was not one alone who rose against us to annihilate us, but in every generation there were those who rise against us to destroy us. But the Holy One, who is blessed, ever saves us from their hand,” the boy explained. The German laughed, and tormented the boy: “Let’s see how your God will save you from my hands.” The boy was next in line to be executed, when the German received order to return the Jews back to camp; Gardelegen, the German city where they were, had just surrendered to the American army.\(^{18}\) The miraculous sparing of the young boy’s life and ultimate freedom after torment is an example of how redemption showed itself even in the camps.

This Reform haggadah also contains a redemptive passage during the section *kos eliyahu*, the cup of hope. This section has a unique name in this haggadah, but is the same ritual as filling Elijah’s cup and opening Elijah’s door. The passage contains two tributes to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, one a poem titled “On the Eve of the Warsaw Uprising,” written by Alan Shapiro and the other a brief overview of the event itself. Here, the poem addresses the suffering experienced by those who fought in the uprising.

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\(^{18}\) Elwell, *The Open Door*, 45.
by acknowledging their hopeless situation before the uprising. This is exemplified in the following lines:

For soon my uncle closed the door when we grew cold, and the flames straightened. “Where is Elijah?” Nobody in the room had ever asked.19

The accompanying passage, however, acknowledges the redemptive aspect of the event by ending the text, not with the destruction of the rebels, but with their accomplishment of “[sustaining] the uprising for two months.”20 Overall, the two passages follow the trend of acknowledging the affliction caused by the Holocaust, but ultimately address the redemptive aspects of the event. In this case, redemption came in the form of the strength of the Jewish people, the rebels. While they ultimately perished in their efforts, they became a source of pride for survivors and for generations of Jews who continue to honor their efforts during this Passover ritual.

*The Open Door* offers a final memorial passage during *halleil*, a section devoted to singing songs of praise. Here, a personal narrative by Nurit Levi Shein, whose grandparents were killed during the Holocaust, explains suffering and redemption. Despite their gruesome deaths and final resting as “smoke up a concentration camp chimney,” Jewish people like Shein continue to practice the seder ritual.21 The ongoing strength of Jewish culture in light of the Holocaust is in itself redemption. Despite the horror of genocide the Jewish tradition continues to survive, and is passed on by survivors to be practiced by their successors. Thus, the affliction of the Holocaust was redeemed through cultural strength and perseverance.

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19 Elwell, *The Open Door*, 90.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 97.
Furthermore, the affliction experienced by his grandparents, and millions of others, led to redemption through the creation of the State of Israel. In 1948, The State of Israel was founded after negotiations between the winning powers involved in WWII. The horrors of the Holocaust were a driving factor for the creation of the Jewish State. Thus, as the passage implies, the suffering of the Holocaust did lead to the return of the Jews to the promise land of Israel. In many ways this is the most powerful example of redemption, because God’s covenant to Abraham ultimately promised that the Jewish people would return to their homeland.

The B’nai B’rith Hillel Foundation published On Wings of Freedom: The Hillel Haggadah for the Nights of Passover, a non-denominational haggadah, in 1989. It also acknowledges redemption by citing survivor camp testimony, the continued strength of Jewish culture, and the creation of the State of Israel.

It contains the text of a Passover seder that took place in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen, where the rabbi linked the current position of himself and his Jewish inmates to the promise God made to Abraham. “We are witnessing the darkest night in history, the lowest moment of civilization, will also witness the great light of redemption, or before the great light there will be a long night, as promised by our Prophets,” he proclaimed.22 Including this passage in the haggadah now that the Holocaust has passed exemplifies that redemption did occur for these victims. The story not only survived, but also has been incorporated into Jewish tradition, as a way to further demonstrate the truth of God’s promise of freedom.

On Wings of Freedom contains a second passage that cites the creation of the State of Israel as a redemptive aspect of the Holocaust.

We have suffered greatly, but we have also become a people of some numbers around the world, and we have a stronger claim to the Land of Israel than we have had in 2000 years. Though our suffering continues, God has not yet failed to ‘keep saving us from their hand.’

Once again, this is the strongest example of God’s fulfillment, because it is the fulfillment of God’s promise that the Israelites would one day return to the land of Israel. In the case after the Holocaust, the Jews did even more than return to the land; they claimed it.

A third set of memorial passages in On Wings of Freedom is inserted during the pouring into Elijah’s cup and the opening of Elijah’s door. The text of these passages reflects on the dual purpose of doors, opening and closing.

The first passage explains that an open door could represent a Temple, or synagogue door that welcomed Jews and onlookers; or, it could represent the door “opened by our oppressors themselves…by the SS troops of Hitler, dragging our people from their hiding places or their dining tables.” The dual representations of the open door express both Holocaust affliction and redemption. When the Jews were imprisoned by the Nazi regime, the door of affliction was opened, which did cause widespread suffering and death. However, opening the door of redemption allowed for the release of Jewish prisoners and the survival of the Jewish people and culture.

The second passage in this section explains how during the Holocaust, the key feature of any Jewish hiding place was being able to mask the entry; essentially, the door needed to be closed in order to ensure full protection. In this case, Holocaust affliction is

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23 Ibid., 37.
24 Levy, On Wings of Freedom, 95.
contributed to the closed door. Being physically trapped inside and having to hide their identity from Nazi soldiers was a form of suffering. Redemption comes with the ability to open the door and experience physical freedom, which took place after the defeat of the Nazi regime.

The final passage uses a similar analogy to explain the actions of two inhabitants of Le Chambon, a small French village that was under Nazi control for most of WWII. Pastor André Trocmé and his wife, Magda, acted as redeemers by opening their doors to Jewish refugees trying to escape persecution. Despite the suffering the Holocaust caused, some doors were opened for Jews in need, allowing for the continuation of Eastern European Jewry and ultimately the strengthening of the Jewish nation.

Thus, the passages found within The Open Door, On Wings of Freedom, and the new American Haggadah demonstrate the affliction of the Holocaust while also linking the event back to redemption. These texts are not the only way that these haggadot represent both of these ideas; they also do so through placement.

**The Haggadot: Placement**

The placement of passages within these haggadot also emphasizes the suffering experienced by Holocaust survivors as a means to ultimate redemption. All three place passages after the *afikoman* is eaten, which serves as a reminder of how survivors were restricted in their food consumption; recall that after the *afikoman* is consumed, no more food is supposed to be eaten for the rest of the night. The placement of these passages before the practice of filling of Elijah’s cup takes this one step further by emphasizing
that the suffering was not in vain, but the means to the ultimate redemption: the return of the Messiah.

The *new American Haggadah* inserts three Holocaust memorials before the cup of Elijah is filled, during a section titled “Pour out Your Wrath,” as discussed in the previous section. The placement of these passages before the cup of Elijah is filled is significant because it acknowledges the Holocaust as the means to ultimate redemption. The order acknowledges that the Holocaust was one more form of suffering that had to be endured by the Jewish people before they could be taken to the land of Israel, to the Land of the Messiah. Once again, the Holocaust acts as the affliction that, according to God’s promise, has to take place before redemption.

The placement of passages after the door of Elijah is closed does not highlight the Holocaust as a means to the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people through the return of the Messiah. However, it does acknowledge the redemptive nature of the Holocaust by linking it to the continuation of Jewish culture and continued faith in the coming of the Messiah.

*The Open Door* passages about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising appear in the haggadah after the door of Elijah is closed. Here, the placement reflects how the Jewish people continue to maintain in the coming of the Messiah despite the setbacks they experience before His arrival. Using the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as a subject of these passages cements this point, because ultimately the rebellion was unsuccessful. However, the Jewish people continue to reflect on, even praise this event. Despite the mass death of the fighters, they do not see the effort as being in vain. Similarly, the
affliction experienced by the Jews thus far is only leading to something better. More affliction cannot shake them; only make them stronger and more faithful.

**The Haggadot: Comparison**

So far, the passages analyzed in the Reform, Reconstructionist, and non-denominational *haggadot* have memorialized the Holocaust as a redemptive event both through text and passage placement. They have achieved this by linking the Holocaust to God’s covenant with Abraham, thus citing the Holocaust as the affliction that was ultimately followed by redemption. Redemption came in the form of survivor testimony, continuation and strengthening of the Jewish tradition, the creation of the State of Israel, and faith in the return of the Messiah.

Notably, none of these passages are linked directly to food consumption. Unlike how the ritual seder foods are linked to the plight of the Ancient Israelites in Egypt, the Holocaust is not explained through food. However, the ritual seder foods are used as a point of comparison between the situation of the Ancient Israelites in Egypt and the Jewish inmates in concentration camps during WWII.

*On Wings of Freedom* inserts a passage during the *magid*, at the point when the broken *matzah* is uncovered and the seder plate, containing the ritual foods, is raised so everyone at the table can see it. Throughout the seder service, *matzah* is referred to as the “bread of affliction.” It represents not only the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt, but also their poverty. Here, the text uses a prayer said by the council of Rabbis in imprisoned in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen to explain how the Jews trapped in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen did not even have *matzah* to eat for Passover.
Our God in Heaven, behold it is evident and known to You that it is our desire to do your will and to celebrate the Festival of Passover by eating Matzah and by observing the prohibition of chametz. But our heart is pained that enslavement prevents us, and we are in danger of our lives…

In including this text, the haggadah makes a comparison between the situation of the Ancient Israelites and those who experienced the Holocaust. The suffering of the Holocaust outweighs that of the Ancient Israelites because unlike the Ancient peoples, the Jewish inmates do not even have matzah, the food of poverty, to eat. This passage focuses solely on affliction, indicating that the Holocaust was one of the worst tragedies in Jewish history. The suffering of the Holocaust, therefore, is explicit in some haggadah text, indicating that while the event itself might be redemptive, it was not deserved.

Conclusion

American Jews adapted the Passover seder to include the Holocaust through memorials that reflect on the redemptive nature of the event. These memorials come in various forms and are inserted in various places within haggadot of all different American Jewish denominations. Both the texts and placement link the suffering experienced by the Holocaust to the affliction prophesized by God in his covenant to Abraham. Redemption after the Holocaust is presented in four forms: survivor testimony, strengthened Judaism, the creation of the State of Israel, and ultimately the coming of the Messiah. Additionally, none of the memorials analyzed are connected directly to food, as a way of respecting the suffering of Holocaust victims and acknowledging that while redemptive, the Holocaust was not obligatory.

While today the majority of American Jews live secular lives, they continue to honor the Passover seder ritual by reading the haggadah and consuming the ritual meal. Reading and reflecting on the religious texts and the inserted Holocaust memorials year after year ties not only American Jews to an Ancient past, but also gives it legitimacy as a Jewish event. Thus, by being inserted into the Passover ritual, the Holocaust has become an integral, long-lasting part of Jewish history.
Conclusion: The Implications of Immigration and Migration

The link between American Jewish identity and Jewish food was a product of adaptation and immigration. As first-generation East European Jews flocked to the United States, they acculturated into American society by incorporating more Americanized foods into their food repertoire. While early immigrant generations continued to adhere to the dietary laws of kashrut, subsequent immigrant generations abandoned these laws in favor of more inclusive American tastes, and by the 1920’s “kosher-style” food dominated the American Jewish foodscape. Holidays became increasingly influential in the lives of American Jews, as they became one of the only times when traditional, Eastern European Jewish foods were consumed. By the eve of the Second World War, American Jewish identity became defined by Jewish holiday foods because of their link to both the East European old world, and a connection to an Ancient Jewish past. Overall, food became a secular link to an old world defined by ancient religious tradition.

Holocaust survivors who migrated to the United States after the Holocaust experienced a rapid change in food culture compared to earlier waves of Jewish immigration. Jay Ipson, Kaja Finkler, and Esther Lederman each incorporated new foods into their diet and altered their culinary practices, such as eating out at restaurants, and abandoned strict adherence to Jewish dietary laws in response to the new, American food environment. These incorporations aided in the creation of their self-proclaimed American Jewish identities. However, despite these rapid changes, my correspondents continue to make distinctions between their own food cultures and the food cultures of American Jews who were born in the United States. My correspondents recognize that
American Jews connect Jewish food with identity, but reveal that they themselves do not link their Jewish identity to food. This is because my correspondents have a direct connection to the old world; they were raised in that old world, religious environment, rather than having to experience it through material symbols.

While my correspondents did not change their food culture in response to the Holocaust, American-born Jews did, by incorporating Holocaust memorials into the Passover seder ritual. They achieved this by citing the Holocaust as a redemptive event, linking it to the escape of the Ancient Israelites from Egyptian bondage by placing it in the context of God’s ultimate promise to Abraham. While American Jewry was becoming increasingly secular after WWII, linking these memorials to religion gave the event legitimacy and created a further connection to an ancient Jewish past.

This argument reveals that American Jewish food culture developed out of American Jewish tensions between the religious v. the secular and memory v. forgetting. As explained in Chapter 1 as American-born Jews became more secular, they lost their everyday kashrut adherence and eventually, everyday consumption of “Jewish-style” food. Holidays, because they were marked by authentic Jewish food tradition, became a time for remembrance, not only of the Ancient Israelites, but also Old World, Eastern European Judaism. American Jews continued to acculturate into American society with subsequent generations, and by the end of WWII most were living increasingly secular lives. Despite this loss of religion, the Passover seder, a food ritual, continued to be practiced as a way to connect to an Ancient past. Taking this further, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, memorials were inserted into the Passover seder as a way to give legitimacy to the event, thus linking the secular to the religious and preserving the
memory of a modern historic Jewish tragedy. Thus, American Jewish food culture continues to be a product of these tensions as they themselves are an aspect of American Jewish identity.

The findings of this thesis were a product of looking at a group that was defined by one event, and changing how they have historically been viewed. Holocaust survivors are viewed today as the product of Nazi atrocity and Jewish resilience. Their existence tells not only a story of horror, but also one of triumph; recall that this is one of the ways in which haggadot have framed Holocaust memorials. However, my correspondents experienced more than just genocide. While they are part of a dark history and recall amazing stories of survival, their struggle did not end with the Holocaust. Migration to the United States, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, handed them an entirely new set of struggles, similar to those Jewish immigrants who first arrived in this country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In citing their struggles of immigration, this thesis was able to reflect on how personal identity is created in response to tragedy, through adaptation, and immigration.
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