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The Sephardi Century

A Relational History of a Los Angeles Community, 1893-1992

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Max Daniel

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Sephardi Century

A Relational History of a Los Angeles Community, 1893-199

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Sarah Abrevaya Stein, Chair

This dissertation analyzes the fluid, contingent, and unstable social and cultural roles of Sephardi Jews in the twentieth century United States. Specifically, this study examines the individuals and communities of Los Angeles, California and the breadth and depth of their local, national, and global relationships. As purveyors of “Oriental” goods and entertainment, merchants in and residents of a racially fragmented metropolis, or cultural and political activists and leaders, these Jews - individually and collectively - drew on diverse strands from their palimpsestic identities to shape and manage their position in Los Angeles, the United States, and the world. Based on communal and organizational archives, personal correspondence, press, census records, oral histories, and more, a complex portrait emerges of the contested and fungible experiences of American Sephardi Jews.

The dissertation of Max Daniel is approved.

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a home filled with books, discussions about languages, and diverse Jewish customs helped shape the interests that guided this dissertation. It is to them that this work is dedicated.

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Introduction

In late 1961, Maurice Amado established a philanthropic foundation to help fund the erection of a new synagogue on Los Angeles's Westside. The Izmir-born Sephardi immigrant and retired tobacco magnate spoke of his desire to build the "most attractive and important Sephardic community in the world, outside of Israel." The congregation would be "fully integrated into the American way of life" and capture "the attention of all Jews in this city and everywhere else." Finally, it would "be recognized that the Sephardim in Los Angeles are well organized, highly honored and respected."[1] Amado's sentiments were echoed and supplemented by other communal leaders who admitted that although "Sephardim now live in the glory of their past… the opportunity is now at hand to live gloriously for the present" and that a new center would be "a proud addition to the general community in our Spanish-American Southern California."[2]

Amado and others' vision for a Sephardi future understood the unique intersections of identities and belonging that characterized their community. They located themselves on the maps of Los Angeles, California, America, and the world. As a social project, the temple represented the Sephardi desire for membership, respect, and recognition within the landscapes of local and world Jewry, admission into a White middle-class "American way of life," and kinship with an ethnically-tinged "Spanish-American Southern California." Reflecting on collective memory and the burden of

[1] *Sephardic Messenger*, Vol. 3, no. 6, (January 1962), 1, Box 18, Folder 1, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel records (Collection 2340). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library. University of California, Los Angeles. [STTI Records]

[2] Sam Dana, "The Sephardic Challenge," *Sephardic Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 6, (January 1962), 9. Box 18, Folder 1, STTI Records.

history, their vision sought to reshape the "glory of their past" for the present, drawing on the popular narrative of medieval Spanish Jewry's Golden Age. While these exhortations were partly reflective of mid-century American middle-class optimism, throughout the twentieth century Sephardim continually navigated their relationships to Los Angeles, the American ethnic and racial landscape, and other Jews through the evolving, fungible, and relational nature of Sephardi identity.

***

Over the course of four chronologically sequential chapters spanning the long twentieth century, this dissertation charts the transformations of Sephardi Jewry in and through Los Angeles. The recent availability of significant archival holdings makes investigating this history newly possible and sheds light on what makes Los Angeles both distinct from and representative of the larger American and Jewish contexts in which the city has become increasingly important. From the world's fairs of the late nineteenth century through the events commemorating five hundred years since the expulsion of Jews from Spain, Los Angeles was home to a diverse, active, and evolving population of Jews from North African, Ottoman, Balkan, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern lands and their American-born descendants. In the American context, they were typically referred to as "Sephardi[c]," a vague label that upon first glance occludes the many intersecting identities and positionalities that it can encompass.[3] In telling a compelling history of these individuals and communities, I examine how they - and others - drew upon a broad lexicon of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, geographic,

[3] Throughout the dissertation, I restrict my application of "Sephardi" to individuals of Iberian Jewish ancestry *and* as it was used by contemporary English-language sources, which after the 1960s sometimes included Middle Eastern and North African Jews as well.

historical, and linguistic components to challenge, shape, and reaffirm the social, religious, cultural, political, ethnic, and racial classifications and structures around them.

"The Sephardi Century" is, on one level, a social and cultural history of a Jewish community in twentieth-century Los Angeles. Beyond this, however, it aims to demonstrate the utility and necessity of thinking about Jews and Jewishness as being shaped and formed in relation, reaction, and response to others. Exploring the dynamic social worlds of Sephardi Jews helps counter popular misconceptions of them as preserved relics from medieval Spain or as an isolated or exotic group and instead integrates them into the complex metropolis of modern LA. Looking at Sephardim alongside Greeks, Arabs, Japanese, African Americans, Mexicans, Whites, and Ashkenazim can also provide a unique perspective on how we think about shared histories, the tools and methods used to navigate those relationships, and their material and social impact.

A Relational Approach

Recently, scholars in the fields of Ethnic Studies, particularly of Latinx, Asian, and Arab Americans, have provided useful insights and frameworks for a relational approach to ethnic and racial formation in the United States. Adapting and expanding upon theories of racial formation formulated by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina describe relational frameworks of ethnic and racial identities as "constituted through relationships [and] dependent on a shared field of social meaning," focused on "the space and connections between people that structure

and regulate their association."[4] In contrast to a bidirectional understanding of race and ethnicity that looks at Whiteness and/or Blackness as the main referent, relational approaches take into consideration the full spectrum of connections and relationships within changing social environments.[5] These have been especially informative for scholars like Sarah Gualtieri, who uses this approach in her study of Arab Americans to define ethnicity as a "collective identity emerging from engagement with distinct and overlapping worlds."[6] Such a perspective emphasizes not only the constructed and heterogenous nature of identity and ethnicity, but its reactive and adaptable behavior across local, national, and global contexts. For the purposes of this dissertation, it helps to frame my understanding of Sephardi identity as not only, or even primarily, Jewish. Relational theory also provides an additional model for appreciating the idiosyncratic histories of Jews' place in the modern world. In other words, a relational history of Sephardi Jews helps de-essentialize and deconstruct what it means to be Jewish (and other categories of belonging) in the twentieth century.

Frequently marginalized, ambiguously racialized, and socially unintelligible as a discrete group, Sephardi Jews in the US were indeed defined in relation to their

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[4] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*. (New York: Routledge, 2015). On specific responses to Omi and Winant by Ethnic Studies scholars, see Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido, eds. *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.; Daniel Martinez HoSang and Natalia Molina, "Introduction," in *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice,* Natalia Molina, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 6.

[5] I have adopted the recent editorial preference in capitalizing "Black" when referring to racial and ethnic identity. While doing so for "White" is less universally accepted, I understand that the constructed nature of race – including Whiteness – justifies this choice. See "Black and White: A Matter of Capitalization," University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff, *CMOS Shop Talk: From the Chicago Manual of Style*, June 22, 2020. https://cmosshoptalk.com/2020/06/22/Black-and-White-a-matter-of-capitalization/. Accessed July 18, 2022.

[6] Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 14. Also see Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

"overlapping worlds," particularly those that were more widely recognized. Thus, Sephardim were positioned and positioned themselves within or against parts of an American social and cultural matrix that included "Oriental," Middle Eastern, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Greek, Turkish, Spanish/Hispanic, European, White, Asian, Black, and other elements.[7] That is not to say that any of those groups were discrete, unchanging monoliths of identity. But perhaps more so for Sephardim, their identity was formed by relationships and networks like those composed of occupational and cultural patterns connecting them to Greek Americans, a religious identity and sense of peoplehood that bound them to Ashkenazi Jews, and a linguistic and historical consciousness that linked them to Spain and the Spanish-speaking world, among others.

Like certain genes activated by environmental stresses, parts of Sephardi American identity lay dormant until activated by external conditions, whether it be for economic advantage or cultural capital. If they are working alongside Arabs, Greeks, and Armenians at the Streets of Cairo concession at the world's fair, for example, a common Mediterranean/Middle Eastern background becomes relevant. If they flee their South LA neighborhood once communities of color move in, their Whiteness seems more operative. And when establishing a panethnic political voice within American Jewry, their Jewishness comes to the fore. Sephardim's diverse historical and cultural DNA, combined with a multiethnic, multiracial, and global twentieth-century Los Angeles, enabled what sociologist Neda Maghbouleh labels "racial hinges" whereby

[7] For one of the few observations of this phenomenon, see Ruth Gruber Fredman, "Cosmopolitans at Home: An Anthropological View of the Sephardic Jews of Washington, D.C." (PhD, Temple University, 1982).

access to Whiteness (and other racialized categories) fluctuates for those who do not fit neatly into American racial schemas.[8]

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on three main categories of Sephardi relational analysis: regional/geographical, racial/ethnic, and religious/national. Respectively, they correspond to Sephardim within a Mediterranean/Middle Eastern diaspora, a racially fragmented Los Angeles among Whites, Blacks, Mexicans, and Japanese, and an internally diverse yet unequally representative Jewish world.

The Sephardi as "Oriental"

The immediate Ottoman, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern origins of immigrant Sephardim were reflected in their commercial and cultural ties to Greeks, Armenians, Arabs, Christians, Muslims, and other Jews.[9] While these groups' narratives share much in common with the more frequently discussed experiences of "White ethnics" like Italian, Irish, and Ashkenazi Americans, questions of legal status, "coethnic recognition," colorism, Orientalism, Islamophobia, demographic profiles, occupational niches, and more set Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Americans (including Jews) apart.[10] As

[8] Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

[9] See Jessica Marglin and Matthias Lehmann, eds., *Jews and the Mediterranean* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).; Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthias B. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land: The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews : The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

[10] Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*

Chapter One illustrates, a relational approach reveals the short-lived but deeply interconnected and diverse Mediterranean American diaspora in which Jews played a crucial role. Particularly through their shared roles at turn-of-the-century world's fairs, these connections catalyzed their arrival to the United States and Los Angeles and helped introduce American consumers to "Oriental" entertainment and goods like belly-dancing and Turkish-style tobacco and cigarettes. The relationship with Greeks became especially important once Sephardim settled in the US, whether in New York, Seattle, or Los Angeles, as explored when discussing fruit and produce peddling in Chapter Two. After American immigration restrictions in the 1920s all but precluded new Mediterranean arrivals, the glue holding together this diverse diaspora began to dissolve and no longer impacted American and LA's Sephardim in the same way.

The Sephardi as White

Sephardim in Los Angeles were no exception to W. E. B. DuBois's trenchant observation that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."[11] As noted by many scholars of Ethnic Studies and historians who have adopted relational approaches, Southern California and LA have long been places whose residents were deeply impacted by its distinct racial and ethnic hierarchies. Distinct from much of the country's primarily Black-White dichotomy, LA has been described as a White settler colonial society, a multiethnic, multicultural, transnational center, and a

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[11] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: New American Library, Inc, 1903), 10.

fragmented city whose fate is inscribed by geography.[12] As I show in this dissertation, especially in Chapters Two and Three, these characterizations of LA were profoundly influential for Sephardim, and vice versa.

What did Whiteness mean in twentieth century Los Angeles? Even if we assume European-origin Americans or those legally categorized as such are White, basing a definition of Whiteness on who can claim it risks relying on the tautology that "White people are White." In most historical discussions of LA, Whiteness is used in reference to hierarchies of power, privilege, and representation among the many groups in the city, although little is mentioned concerning intellectual, cultural, and anthropological approaches to race.[13] Like other racial formations, Whiteness and its multiple meanings are evolving and relational and helps put Los Angeles Whiteness in perspective and highlights its unique attributes.[14] For example, in pre-World War II LA European-origin Dust Bowl migrants of the 1930s were often derided as "Okies" (based on the origin of

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[12] Dean J. Franco, *The Border and the Line: Race, Literature, and Los Angeles* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*. (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2006); Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).; Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. (London: Verso, 1990); Scott Kurashige. *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008); George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), George J. Sanchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021); William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds. *A Companion to Los Angeles*. (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[13] I use Anglo to refer not only to American English-speakers, but more broadly to those of Northern and Western European origin and typically Protestant. This is to distinguish them from "ethnic" Whites of Italian, Russian, or Jewish backgrounds.

[14] Thomas A. Guglielmo*, White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

some in Oklahoma) and lumped in with other racially derided agricultural laborers like Asians and Blacks.[15] At other times, Mexicans could be assigned to a White or bespoke "Mexican" racial category. For Jews, antisemitism in the form of housing restrictions, employment discrimination, and the activities of Nazi sympathizers, particularly in the first half of the century, contributed to their own conditional Whiteness.[16] Whiteness in LA, then, was not always about color or place of origin, but a metonym for residential, legal, political, social, and economic privilege, access, and capital. For Sephardim, who rarely identified explicitly as White, this positioning in LA nevertheless put them among the city's White population.

Chapter Two explores a case study that explains how and what it meant that Sephardim were part of the White, Euro-American side of segregated flower and produce industries. While there was some cooperation and familiarity with the Japanese American side of the business, by the time the community was forced into internment camps in 1942, Sephardim behaved little differently than their White peers. Likewise, Sephardim came to adopt and act according to White fears relating to the entry of Black and Mexican residents into their neighborhoods, as covered in Chapter 3. As Natalia Molina demonstrated when connecting LA's public health policies targeting Asians to those targeting Mexicans, structures of racialization and race-making are an important part of relational approaches even between groups with limited direct contact.[17] So

[15] See Chapter 8, Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[16] Steven J. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017); Laura B. Rosenzweig, *Hollywood's Spies: The Undercover Surveillance of Nazis in Los Angeles* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

[17] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

while records do not reflect close social relationships between Sephardim and Japanese or Black Angelenos as they do with Greeks or Ashkenazi Jews, Asian and Black histories and experiences nevertheless shaped Sephardi lives in ways reflective of Los Angeles's broader racial shifts.

The spatial dimensions of race have also come to define twentieth-century Los Angeles in many ways, particularly in the realm of housing and real estate. Entrenched patterns of race-based segregation, discrimination, internment, and deportation effecting where certain groups could live, work, or attend school led Sephardim (and others) to, by and large, join the ranks of American-born Whites in LA.[18] Despite the erstwhile presence of housing covenants prohibiting Jewish residence and/or homeownership, by the 1960s the Sephardi place in White Los Angeles was literally cemented when the community successfully appealed to the City Council to approve construction of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel in the Westwood neighborhood, a saga covered in Chapter 3. This insight draws on Cheryl Harris' influential work, alongside many studies of Los Angeles, which demonstrates how Whiteness has been defined through place and property accumulation.[19] Ironically, one of the strategies

[18] As a central element of how race is an organizer of social, cultural, political, and economic power, I consider Whiteness as a constructed category that assumes an individual or group's innate fitness for privileged civic roles like citizenship, leadership, representation, protected labor, and more. On Whiteness, see: Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Ignatiev, *How The Irish Became White*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007); Lopez, *White by Law.*

[19] Specifically, through restrictive racial covenants, which tended to limit or exclude non-White buyers (sometimes including Jews) from more desirable and investment-worthy neighborhoods and properties, and redlining, the practice of grading racially-mixed and majority non-White neighborhoods as high-risk areas for real estate investment. In addition to wealth accumulation via property, areas racially coded as White often meant privileged

employed by a few Sephardim to retain some of the spatial and occupational privileges of Whiteness was by claiming "Hispanic-ness." When teachers in Los Angeles County's massive public school system were subject to mandatory racial integration in the 1970s, some attempted to prevent relocation from majority-White, suburban schools by arguing that their Sephardi-cum-Hispanic heritage counted toward racial diversity.

Sephardim, similar to historian Stephanie Lewthwaite's description of LA's Mexican community, used their "ethnic past and present for negotiating the city's contradictions, fears, desires… and the complex, overlapping patterns of racialization that distanced Los Angeles from the Black/White paradigm which dominated Eastern, Midwestern, and Southern cities."[20] As those studying Los Angeles and California in general have urged, the region's present shape did not emerge *ex nihilo* nor did it merely import external models, but followed a complex and evolving narrative of its own. The incorporation of Sephardim into LA's twentieth-century narrative helps undo a "history of forgetting" not only for a marginalized and often-invisible group, but of the many ways race and ethnicity affected life in LA.[21]

The Sephardi as Jewish

The final major axis of this project's relational approach is that between Sephardim and other Jews. Making up only a small fraction of American Jewry, non-

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access to education, jobs, public health and safety, crime and policing, environmental pollution, municipal management, and allocation of public and private investments. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91.

[20] Stephanie Lewthwaite, "Race, Place, and Ethnicity in the Progressive Era" in Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., *A Companion to Los Angeles.*

[21] Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (New York: Verso, 1997).

Ashkenazi Jews have often been excluded, marginalized, or misunderstood in Jewish communal spaces. Often attributed to institutional and societal racism in the US, some commentators have placed these practices within a specifically American Jewish "Ashkenormative" dynamic.[22] As both a cause and effect of these broader omissions, Sephardi Jews in the US have largely been bypassed as subjects of scholarly, and especially historical, interest. The intra-Jewish relational approach I take looks at how modern and contemporary Sephardi identity and community were shaped in dialogue with local, national and world Jewries. The influence flows in the other direction, too, whereby mainstream Jewry responded to the Sephardi "renaissance" of cultural and political activism of the 1970s. As I discuss in Chapter Four, organizations like the American Sephardi Federation were created in reaction to what its founders saw and experienced as neglect from the broader Jewish community, leading to the reification of an inclusive, pan-ethnic, non-Ashkenazi definition of "Sephardi."

While Sephardi Jews have yet to be fully integrated in American Jewish studies, scholars have recently begun to call for and explore new relational approaches that entail "rethink[ing] our geographic and geopolitical frames" that invite Sephardi perspectives.[23] Examples include Ellen Eisenberg's edited volume *Jewish Identities in the American West: Relational Perspectives* as well as her monograph on the American

[22] Tobin Belzer, et. al., "Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color" (Jews of Color Initiative, 2021); Naar, "Our White Supremacy Problem"; Jonathan Katz, "Learning to Undo 'Ashkenormativity'" *The Forward*, November 5, 2014, https://forward.com/opinion/208473/learning-to-undo-ashkenormativity/. Accessed May 10, 2022.

[23] Libby Garland, "State of the Field: New Directions for American Jewish Migration Histories." *American Jewish History* 102, no. 3 (2018): 429.; Ellen Eisenberg, "State of the Field: Jews & Others," *American Jewish History* 102, no. 2 (2018): 283–301; See the series of articles and responses in *American Jewish History,* 101, no. 4 (October 2017), 519-567; Ari Y. Kelman and Jessica Marglin, eds., "Jewish Studies/Ethnic Studies: Reflections on the California Ethnic Studies Curriculum Fights" (Concentration in Education and Jewish Studies at Stanford and the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life at USC, May 2021).

Jewish encounter with Japanese Americans on the West Coast, Hasia Diner's identification of parallel narratives among Jewish and Syrian-Lebanese migrations, and Eli Lederhendler's discussion of Spain in American Jewish history.[24] Furthermore, the literature on American Jews and race is both highly dynamic and in need of expansion, greater clarity, and engagement with other fields, with much of the historiography dealing with Black-Jewish relations and/or Jews and Whiteness in East Coast and Midwest settings.[25] Similarly, studies of Jewish Los Angeles have prominently featured the impact of Ashkenazi Jews, particularly their role in Hollywood and in local, multiethnic progressive politics.[26] Despite their relational perspective on Black, Mexican,

[24] Ellen Eisenberg, ed., *Jewish Identities in the American West: Relational Perspectives* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2022); Ellen Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice? Western Jews and Japanese Removal during WWII* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008); Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (Yale University Press, 2015), 10; Eli Lederhendler, *American Jewry: A New History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 195-209.

[25] Some key texts include Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says about Race in America*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)., Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity, (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Victoria Hattam, *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s*, (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2018).

[26] For examples of Jews' place in LA, see: Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight;* Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*; Max Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake: The Scope of Jewish Politics in Los Angeles from Watts to Rodney King, 1965-1992" PhD Diss., History, UCLA, 2017; Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Raphael J. Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles. (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Caroline Luce, "Visions of a Jewish Future: The Jewish Bakers Union and Yiddish Culture in East Los Angeles, 1908-1942," PhD Diss, History, UCLA, 2013.

and Asian Angelenos, however, Sephardim are virtually absent from historical approaches to Los Angeles, Jewish or otherwise.[27]

Sephardi/Mizrahi studies introduce new frameworks of relational perspectives that look at more holistic and integrated geographies and cultures from the North African, Ottoman, and Middle Eastern settings.[28] Sephardi LA offers one way to reorient (and re-Orient) our understanding of American Jews' relationship with the interconnected world of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, few have realized the potential in this line of inquiry. The historiography on Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jews in the United States is meager, progressing haltingly only in the past fifteen years. Remarkably, only a single book on the subject has ever been authored by a trained historian - Aviva Ben-Ur's *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History*, published in 2009. Despite its value, Ben-Ur's work is limited to early twentieth-century New York City while its main rhetorical thrust centers around Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations and, to a lesser extent, Sephardi-Hispanic ones- albeit without employing a relational framework. Other books about Sephardim in twentieth-century Latin America, like recent works by Adriana Brodsky and Devi Mays, complement articles about the US context by Julia Philips Cohen and Devin Naar - but these important contributions, like

[27] This has shifted slightly in recent years, particularly since Moroccan-born David Suissa took over as editor-in-chief of LA's largest Jewish publication, the *Jewish Journal,* in 2017. In 2020, "The Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish Roots of Los Angeles," was the city's theme for Jewish American Heritage Month.

[28] See Marglin and Lehmann, eds., *Jews and the Mediterranean*; Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity, 1880-1960* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans;* Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews;* Mair Jose Benardete, H*ispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews*, ed. Marc D. Angel, (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, Inc., 1982). On the diversity and instability of Sephardi identity, see: Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Sephardi Identities: A Response," *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 189–92.

Ben-Ur's, are typically limited to the pre-World War II period.[29] Relevant and enlightening scholarship has also come from other academic fields such as sociology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology, which have taken up a more sustained examination of American Sephardi communities, particularly vis-a-vis language and music.[30] Relevant too are the works by community and amateur historians, like Rabbi Marc Angel, Joseph A. D. Sutton, and Joseph Papo, who have authored full length books on the subject, as are the dozens of graduate theses written over the past century.[31] Yet there have been no professionally-trained historians whose primary and

[29] Devin Naar, "From the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans' to the Goldene Medina: Jewish Immigration from Salonika to the United States," *American Jewish History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 435–73, Devin Naar, "Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (2015): 174–205; Julia Philips Cohen, "The East as a Career: Far Away Moses & Company in the Marketplace of Empires," *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 2 (2016): 35–77; Julia Philips Cohen, "Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style, and the Performance of Heritage," *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): 364–98.

[30] Walter P. Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), Rina Benmayor, *Romances Judeo-Españoles de Oriente: Nueva Recolección* (Madrid: Catedra-Seminario Menendez Pidal, 1979). Saba Soomekh, *From the Shahs to Los Angeles: Three Generations of Iranian Jewish Women between Religion and Culture*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

[31] Marc Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1982), Joseph A. D. Sutton, *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush: The Story of a Unique Ethnic Jewish Community* (New York: Thayer-Jacoby, 1979), Joseph M Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America: In Search of Unity* (San Jose, CA: Pele Yoetz Books, 1987). Theses include: Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Sephardic Community" (MA, Seattle, University of Washington, 1939).; Giselle Hendel-Sebestyen, "The Sephardic Home: Ethnic Homogeneity and Cultural Traditions in a Total Institution" (PhD, Political Science, New York, Columbia University, 1969); Lorraine Arouty Gorlick, "The Los Angeles Sephardim: An Exploratory Study" (MSW, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1972; Roberta Noel Britt, "Los Angeles Sephardim: Community Relations Problems and Needs" (MA, California State University, Fullerton, 1973); Eliezer Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment: The Case of Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles" (Ph.D., Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 1976); Rose Eichenbaum, "A Comparative Study of the Liturgical Practices and Accompanying Dance and Ritualized Movement Behavior of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews Living in Los Angeles" (1980); Roberta Noel Britt, "The Role of Turkish and Rhodes Sephardic Women in the Seattle Sephardic Community" (Union Graduate School, 1981); Ruth Gruber Fredman, "Cosmopolitans at Home: An Anthropological View of the Sephardic Jews of Washington, D.C." (PhD, Temple University, 1982); David Bibas, "The Ethnicization of Immigrants: Moroccan Jews in the United States" (PhD, Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984); Judith Mizrahi, "Sources of Diversity in Sephardim" (PhD, Education, New York, New York University, 1987).

continued focus has been Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Jews in the US.[32] Furthermore, few common themes, questions, and arguments tie the aforementioned scholars and works together.

Ijo de kyen sos tu? (Whose child are you?): Defining "Sephardi"

One goal of this dissertation is to make the case that pinning down a single, prescriptive definition of "Sephardi" obscures the history of the individuals and communities who have fallen somewhere within its variegated meanings. I am interested in casting a wide net - even if it means focusing on marginal and otherwise unrepresentative events - that can more fully capture the experiences that shed light on how individuals and communities understood "Sephardi." I connect relational approaches to what Edgar Morin, a French scholar and writer of Sephardi background, termed *poly-enracinement*. Morin's concept of "polyrootedness" emerged from his writings on converso identity and its utility in creating a critical genealogy of Jews that incorporated an entangled past including Christian, Muslim, "Eastern," and "Western" elements.[33] I focus on "Oriental"/Middle Eastern, White/European, Spanish/Hispanic, and Jewish polyrootedness in unearthing a history of Sephardi LA across the four chapters and conclusion of this dissertation. In addition, the marginality of Sephardim in the US enabled them to evade persistent generalizations, images, and stereotypes that might have locked Sephardi identity more securely one way or another, linking

[32] The closest would be Ben-Ur, who's work shifted toward early modern Caribbean Jewry, and Devin Naar, whose current project concerns American Sephardim but was trained as an Ottomanist and published his first book on Jewish Salonica.

[33] My incorporation of Morin draws on Dalia Kandiyoti's *The Converso's Return: Conversion and Sephardi History in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), especially chapter 4.

polyrootedness to marginality. For both outsiders and insiders, “Sephardi” was an ad hoc label, shaped by the relations and contexts around them. By writing a relational history of Sephardim, we can see how identities and belonging are ambiguous, flexible, contextual, and in dialogue with others.

Among the several paradigms for differentiating Jews (e.g., religious, national, political, legal) one of the most resilient and least-understood is that between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrahi (Heb. “oriental” or “eastern”). This typology is complex and confusing as it can encompass different, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory components of cultural, historical, religious, geographical, and ethnoracial identities. Its relevance and importance gained ground in the modern period, particularly with the emergence of the professional study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) in nineteenth-century Central Europe alongside Jewish nationalism exemplified by Zionism, the Westernization and secularization of Jews around the world, and major migratory and demographic upheavals that brought world Jewry in greater contact. As Jews began to confront their pasts, their futures, non-Jews, and other Jews in new ways, so too did new ways of differentiating and defining Jews emerge, often borrowing from and adapting frameworks from their surrounding environment.

The word “Sepharad” first appears in the biblical book of Obadiah, and has commonly been understood to refer to the Iberian Peninsula. Throughout much of medieval and early modern Jewish history “Sephardi” rarely became the source of a pronounced identity in the way that specific places of origin had, as was the case for Salonica’s many synagogues based on Iberian hometowns or the divisions between the *toshavim* (Heb. residents) and *megorashim* (Heb. expelled ones) in North Africa. Indeed, labeling the first period of American Jewish history as “Sephardic” (typically

1654 to 1820) betrays Caribbean, English, and Dutch Jews' more ready use of "Spanish and Portuguese" as a label.[34] It was only when their early twentieth-century assimilated, Westernized, and middle- and upper-class descendants encountered working class Mediterranean and Ottoman Jewish immigrants in the US that they more cautiously guarded the "Sephardic" label.[35]

Another enduring meaning and application of Sephardi, preceding modern scholarship and still relevant in the twenty-first century, signifies certain approaches to *halakha*, *minhag*, Hebrew language, and an overall philosophy of Judaism that tends toward a more accommodating and flexible orthodoxy. This definition, based on religious practice and custom, traces a progression of ancient Babylonian Jewish tradition into North Africa, Spain, and back again to the Middle East. While many acknowledge the specific Spanish connotation of the term, it is also understood as describing a mode of Judaism as it developed within a predominantly Muslim culture and society, even absent an Iberian background.

With increasingly secular approaches to understanding Jews and Jewish history gaining popularity in the modern era, the meaning of "Sephardi" found new rhetorical roles in its dialectical relationship with European Ashkenazi Jewry. From the late eighteenth century, discussions about non-Ashkenazi Jewry by Ashkenazim tended to focus on the former's intellectual and cultural history, religious traditions, or racial characteristics. When the topic was history, flattering depictions of medieval Iberian

[34] Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration 1654-1820* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[35] Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Devin Naar, "Sephardim since Birth': Reconfiguring Jewish Identity in America" in Saba Soomekh ed. *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America*. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016).

Jewry preceded narratives of post-expulsion decline.[36] In terms of religious thought, appreciation for the rationalist contributions of Spanish Jewry or sixteenth century mystical traditions characterized Ashkenazi religious adaptation and appropriation of Sephardi philosophers and rabbinical minds.[37] In other fields, many Jewish (and non-Jewish) anthropologists noted the phenotypic resemblance of Mediterranean and "Oriental" Jews to their non-Jewish neighbors, which in an era of racial pseudoscience implied intra-Jewish racial differences.[38] Indeed, as part of the US government's Dillingham Commission investigating immigration, the 1911 multi-volume publication identified Ashkenazi and Sephardi as the two major subgroups of Jews.[39]

Among the most influential historical trends on this matter was the development of modern Zionism and the changing profile of Jewish life in Palestine and later in Israel, which encouraged an approach to intra-Jewish differences that went beyond national, linguistic, or religious frameworks. One result was the construction of Mizrahi Jewry, which drew on orientalist typologies and justified the creation of a racialized Jewish underclass in Israeli society. Balkan and Turkish Jews largely avoided the Mizrahi/Oriental label, speaking to the importance of Europe in defining Sephardi identity and a redrawing of Jewish groupings that borrowed heavily from Western

[36] A pattern discussed by Devin Naar, "Our White Supremacy Problem," *Jewish Currents*, Spring 2019, https://jewishcurrents.org/our-White-supremacy-problem/. Accessed May 10, 2022.

[37] Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy," *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Vol. 34, no. 1, (January 1989): 47–66 ; John Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[38] See Eric Goldstein's discussion of Maurice Fishberg in chapter four of *The Price of Whiteness.*

[39] Reports of the Immigration Commission, *Dictionary of Races or Peoples.* 61st Congress, 3rd Session. Senate, Doc. 662. (Washington, DC: US Govt., 1911), 73-74.

Orientalist and racial categories.[40] Present understandings of what exactly "Sephardi" means or refers to is still far from unanimous. Many of those who are labeled as such or fall under a panethnic umbrella do not or would not see themselves as Sephardi, but the large differences among Mediterranean, North African, and Middle Eastern Jews do not necessarily preclude a shared identity or grouping.

"The Glory of the Past:" Historical Background

In many ways this dissertation begins in 1492, its echoes of expulsion, diaspora, and empire reverberating for centuries across the globe – especially for Jews. For virtually the first time in over a millennium, the dawn of the sixteenth century witnessed the absence of openly professing Jews on the Iberian Peninsula. Spain's Edict of Expulsion in 1492, followed soon after by the neighboring Portuguese in 1497, set off waves of refugees who settled across the world - if they were fortunate enough to survive the journey. The largest numbers were drawn to extant Jewish communities dotting the Mediterranean littoral, mainly in Muslim North Africa and the Ottoman Empire, but they also settled in parts of Christian Europe that fell beyond the reach of the Catholic Church, like Livorno and Amsterdam. Many remained in Iberia and converted to Catholicism, with a portion known as crypto-Jews secretly maintaining and perpetuating Jewish ritual.[41]

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[40] Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Ella Shohat, *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings of Ella Shohat*. (London: Pluto Press, 2017). Tellingly, the major religious and political institutions that seek to represent Mizrahim in Israel are the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate and Shas (*Shomrei Sefarad*, lit. Sephardi Guardians [of Torah]).

[41] On Iberian Jewry and the Expulsion, see Paloma Diaz-Mas, *Sephardim: The Jews from Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992); Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Jonathan Ray, *After Expulsion* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). On Sephardi Jews in North Africa and Europe, see: Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the*

Unlike parts of medieval Western Europe, many Muslim powers tolerated Jews (and Christians) as a separate class of *dhimmi*, which limited their rights and opportunities but provided a measure of social and economic protection and stability. In the Ottoman realm, the *millet* system granted religious groups like Jews significant degree of communal autonomy, like other premodern Jewish communities. Coming to be known as Sephardim, these Jews carried with them the legacy of a rich religious, philosophical, and literary heritage that had once made Spain the leading cultural center of world Jewry. Building on the legacy of Iberian Judaism, these exiles and their descendants developed a new diasporic Sephardi culture that drew on their Balkan, Ottoman, and Muslim milieus. In particular, it thrived in port cities like Salonika, Constantinople, and Smyrna where Jews formed a central part of diverse urban landscapes that by the early modern period included Ashkenazi and Romaniote Jews, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, Muslim Turks, Greeks, Armenians, and Roma, among many others.[42]

While never totally static, Ottoman Jewish life began to undergo more significant changes beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Ottoman territorial losses and the

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Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Francesca Bregoli, *Mediterranean Enlightenment: Livornese Jews, Tuscan Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), Frances Malino, *The Sephardic Jews of Bordeaux: Assimilation and Emancipation in Revolutionary and Napoleonic France* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1978); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

[42] Devin Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

tanzimat reforms further opened up Sephardi communities to European-style modernity, widening the inroads made by *franco* and other elite Jewish families who benefited from European protection granted through Ottoman capitulations.[43] Additionally, Westernized Jews - particularly those affiliated with the French Alliance Israélite Universelle - responded to what they felt was the backwards and "Oriental" character of Jews in Muslim lands by establishing modern schools that taught French language alongside Jewish subjects, to the consternation of many traditional religious authorities.[44]

Economic concerns and accumulating political and military crises in the first two decades of the twentieth century had now made emigration particularly desirable for many Ottoman Jews. It is during this turn of the century expansion of the Sephardi diaspora where my dissertation begins in earnest. Latin American destinations like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba were especially attractive for Ladino-speaking Jews who could easily adapt to modern Spanish.[45] But for many of those who left the Ottoman and Mediterranean region, the United States was their initial goal. Few other cities in the country compared to New York as the center of Mediterranean immigrant life in the early twentieth century, whether for the Syrian Christian *mahjar* or the Greek

[43] Aron Rodrigue, "From Millet to Minority: Turkish Jewry," in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, eds. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[44] Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews : The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

[45] Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine;* Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). On the Syrian-Lebanese Christian diaspora in Latin America, see: Stacy D. Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

omogenia diasporas. Lively Greek and Armenian communities existed in Chicago, Massachusetts, and California as well, but like their European and Ashkenazi coreligionists, Mediterranean Jews tended to concentrate in New York City. These communities were made up of three major linguistic/regional groups of Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews, Ladino-speaking Ottoman and Balkan Jews, and Arabic-speaking Syrian Jews.[46] While all have come to use and become known as "Sephardi," social, religious, and associational life was still defined largely by town of origin until the 1930s, with the exception of Rhodesli, Romaniote, and Syrian Jews (themselves often divided between Damascene and Aleppan subgroups) who maintained distinct institutions into the twenty-first century. When immigration restrictions in the 1920s cut off virtually all incoming Mediterranean Jews (alongside Eastern and Southern Europeans, as well as all Asians), between 25,000 and 50,000 lived in the US, mostly in New York. Most of the Ladino-speaking Jews arrived after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, although some of the earlier arrivals and future lay leaders came with other Mediterranean migrants, many as part of the world's fair circuit between Chicago's in 1893 and St. Louis's in 1904. It was this first "wave" that provided some of the seeds for Sephardi communities across the US, including Rochester, New Brunswick, Atlanta, Montgomery, Indianapolis, Chicago, Seattle, and Los Angeles.

In general, Sephardi Jews came to the US later and in much smaller numbers than Ashkenazi Jews, Greeks, Armenians, or Syrian Christians, but developed important relationships with each of these groups. Linguistic and religious barriers among the first generation of migrants prevented more intimate and lasting connections

[46] Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America.* Some limited evidence suggests the presence of a small Moroccan Jewish population in the city, as well.

across groups, but Sephardi leaders quickly joined with other Jews in matters of philanthropy and religious ritual and with Greeks, Armenians, and Arabs in business and commerce. These groups were essential to the broader migrant network of Sephardim in the US and Americas at the beginning of the twentieth century, as Chapters One and Two touch upon. However, with the emergence of a native-born, English-speaking generation, Sephardi networks gradually became more enmeshed in Jewish spheres and their diversifying economic profiles and shifting global networks rendered their participation in a unique Mediterranean-American world a thing of the past.

In many respects, the profile of post-World War Two American Sephardi Jewry increasingly paralleled that of their Ashkenazi coreligionists. Public education, suburbanization, military service, sophisticated national philanthropy networks, and intra-marriage all facilitated the creation of a mainstream, English-speaking American postwar Jewry that, for the most part, was racialized as White.[47] As addressed in Chapters Two and Three, this was most evident in Sephardim's occupational and residential profiles in mid-century Los Angeles.

The context of the Civil Rights struggles of the 60s and its subsequent transformation of American society impacted Jews in a few unique ways. For one, their self-perception as reliable, liberal allies to Blacks gave way to fractured relationships

[47] Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950-1970* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001). Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994). Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jews since World War II*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Jews, Gender, and the Anxiety of Assimilation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness.*

and divergent political aims.[49] Reinvigorated by Israel's victory in the 1967 war and motivated by both fear of Jewish obsolescence and confidence in explicit expressions of Jewishness, American Jewry entered a new inward-turning phase. Stemming from the symbolic influence of the Black Power movement, Asian, Latinx, and indigenous Americans all developed new political and cultural responses to their historical and contemporary marginalization in the late 60s.[50] Soon after, European Americans - including Jews - similarly went through an "ethnic revival" that sought to capitalize on Americans' increased receptivity to diversity and multiculturalism while implicitly trying to dissociate from Anglo-Protestant Whiteness.[51]

Nowhere were these patterns more evident than in America's urban centers like Los Angeles, where the Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the Chicano Moratorium of 1970 put the city's ethnoracial divisions in full view. However, several factors make Los Angeles distinct from the sites that tend to inform our understanding of race, community, and identity in post-Civil Rights America. Patterns of horizontal suburban growth, the culture of home and car ownership, the region's image as an Edenic garden for White American families, the shape and evolution of agricultural and industrial development, a weak labor movement, active Black and Chicano movements, and demographic profiles have all characterized the unique history of twentieth century LA. These serve as a

[49] Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Marc Dollinger, *Black Power, Jewish Politics: Reinventing the Alliance in the 1960s* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2018).

[50] On this phenomenon, particularly as it appeared in Los Angeles, see Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[51] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

reminder that our understanding of Jews in urban America must consider the racial, ethnic, national, religious, political, and class dynamics unique to their city.

New York City and Seattle, like LA, have been home to Ladino-speaking Sephardi Jews for over a century – many of whom lived or had close relatives in all three cities. While these communities share much in common, significant differences between them shaped Sephardi life in specific ways. For example, Sephardim in LA were impacted by Japanese American internment much more than in Seattle, while New York had no comparable removal orders. Unlike New York, LA's lack of a strong labor movement and relative absence of large European immigrant communities made Sephardim (and other Jews) align more readily with middle-class native-born Whites.[52] And while Spanish-speaking Americans grew in political prominence across the country during the late 60s and into the 70s, the Chicano movement's impact on Los Angeles effected how Sephardi Jews identified (or not) as "Hispanic." Furthermore, the geographically extensive reach of both the city and county of Los Angeles changes what suburbanization meant for the city's Jews in political terms, dissimilar from other metropolitan areas where suburbs are removed from urban cores in many different ways.

In Los Angeles, Jews have been an integral part of the city since its annexation by the United States in 1848. While the Hollywood-based film industry was notably founded by Jewish entrepreneurs in the 1920s and the diverse east-side neighborhood of Boyle Heights included a lively Jewish presence until the 1940s, it was not until the post-World War Two era that the city's Jewish population and public profile boomed as

[52] Joshua M. Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

East Coast and Midwest Jews moved to the city and became increasingly influential in local politics. Los Angeles was rapidly becoming not only a center of American Jewry, but world Jewry as well.

By the 1960s, White flight, socioeconomic mobility, and urban renewal programs shifted the center of the city's Jewish life - Sephardim included - westward to Fairfax, the Westside, and the San Fernando Valley. Buoyed by new waves of North African and Iranian Jewish immigrants in the following decades, a new panethnic understanding of "Sephardi" began to emerge in Los Angeles that influenced the "revival" of Sephardi ethnic identity and culture across America, as addressed in Chapter Four. The apex of this movement and perhaps its largest and broadest effort was its involvement, through different individuals, organizations, and government agencies in the international commemorations surrounding 1992's quincentennial commemorations of the Jews' expulsion from Spain. Never before or since had Sephardi Jewry (if not always actual Sephardi Jews themselves) been at the center of American Jewish life in this way, and it is a brief discussion of this moment that introduces the dissertation's conclusion.

Structure and Chapter Summaries

Bookended by commemorations of the interrelated anniversaries of 1492, this dissertation explores a global and mercurial "Sephardi Century" that begins in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois and concludes with the internationally marked quincentennial of 1992.[53] The relatively long period of time under

[53] On the concept of the "American" Century see: Henry Luce, "The American Century", *Life*, February 17, 1941. On the "Jewish" Century, see: Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century, (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

discussion is helpful for understanding the constant negotiations of multiple Sephardi pasts and presents. Across three generations, the Sephardi population in Los Angeles likely never numbered more than several thousand and fewer were actively involved in communal life. However, this small sample size allows us to see the ways in which the lives of contemporary individuals and communities continue to be shaped by hundreds of years of history and ancestral origins in distant lands.

This aspect is clearest when rooted in the rich archival source base that is the foundation of this dissertation, the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel (STTI) records held at UCLA Library Special Collections.[55] More than a repository of institutional history, this collection functions more like a *genizah,* the traditional location where worn out or discarded Jewish religious texts are deposited, often containing an abundance of quotidian, non-ritual records.[56] Like the items that arrived in Los Angeles, the diversity of its contents is reflective of the immense breadth of the worlds of which the community was part. The seed of every topic or subject in this dissertation has its origins somewhere in the STTI archives.

Over four chronologically sequential chapters, my dissertation tracks the relational ethnic and communal identities constructed throughout the twentieth century history of Los Angeles's Sephardi Jews. Each chapter roughly corresponds to one of the axes upon which relational Sephardi-ness has been built, contextualizing and historicizing the moments that provided the necessary dynamics. Whether "Oriental,"

[55] Max Modiano Daniel, "The UCLA Sephardic Archive Initiative: Finding the Keys to an Untold History" *Judaica Librarianship* 21 (July 2, 2020): 38–48.

[56] Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

White, Hispanic, Jewish, Turkish, Spanish, American, or Angeleno, this complex, interwoven, and fungible array of relationships defined “the Sephardi century.”

Los Angeles itself rarely appears in the narrative of Chapter One but contextualizing the roots of its Sephardi community takes us to the world’s fair circuit and the origins of “oriental” entertainment in America. Not only does this provide historical background about LA’s first Mediterranean Jews, but it introduces key themes of self-Orientalizing, interethnic occupational patterns, and pan-Sephardi networks that will come to characterize the community’s twentieth century history. Tracing the routes of the first Mediterranean Jews to settle in Los Angeles demonstrates how these trends were present since the community’s inception. Chapter One looks at the unique occupational networks of these Jews through the Algerian Akoun family and the broader milieu of Mediterranean Jews active in the world’s fairs who made up some of the first leaders of LA’s Sephardi community in the 1900s and 1910s. The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago first drew them to the US alongside and in partnership with many Armenians, Arabs, and Greek co-Mediterraneans, usually from the Ottoman sphere. All these groups carved out their own economic niches in America and often did so across ethno-religious lines. Specifically, opportunities afforded by American consumer tastes for “Oriental” entertainment and goods went beyond the confines of fairgrounds and provided migrants with the means and motivation to stay in the US.

Like the previous chapter, Chapter Two uses a relational framework to explore how occupational and economic opportunities in Los Angeles depended on integration into a multiethnic urban and agricultural economy. Specifically, I contextualize the early years of Sephardi Los Angeles by exploring their connections to New York City Greeks in the imported tobacco trade and Japanese Americans in the flower and produce

industries, among others. Through community philanthropists like tobacco importers Raphael and Maurice Amado who partnered with Greek Americans or the many small businessmen like musician/*hazan*/florist Jack Mayesh who sold products grown in Japanese American nurseries, Sephardi life in Los Angeles was inextricably linked and shaped by others. Nevertheless, the Sephardi community also took shape within the discriminatory policies, laws, and attitudes - in addition to strong intra-communal economies - that divided the city, its residents, and its workers by race. Soon after World War II and the internment of Japanese Americans, these divisions were such that Southern and Eastern European immigrants, including Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, had secured their once-precarious foothold on the White side of LA's racial landscape.

Chapter Three continues to explore how Sephardi Jews adapted to and navigated the changing relationships of race and place in postwar Los Angeles. Economic growth, residential and institutional mobility, higher education, citizenship, and access to civic leaders (some of whom were Jews) enabled Sephardim, individually and collectively, to take part in the general postwar prosperity of White Angelenos. To tell this story, this chapter maps the residential and institutional shifts of the Sephardi community in the 1950s and 60s, culminating in their successful 1967-68 battle to build a new synagogue on the city's Westside which pit LA's civic and communal leaders against the conservative Westwood Homeowners' Association. The move of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel to the largely White, middle-class neighborhood of Westwood signaled Sephardim's acceptance into White LA through one of its most central pillars - real estate. Yet it also showcased the decreasing power of homeowners' associations, abandonment of restrictive covenants, and the rise of a racially liberal Los Angeles city government. In Westwood, it was arguably the inter-ethnic political ties of

Jewish (mostly Ashkenazi) Angelenos that helped Sephardim persuade the Los Angeles City Council to take their side.

Amidst the nationwide focus on civil rights legislation, policies, and desegregation efforts, public schools served as a key battleground. Alongside student busing, efforts to integrate faculty across the Los Angeles Unified School District encountered significant opposition from teachers. Many attempted to change their official racial classification and potentially avoid transfer, including a number claiming “Hispanic” status via Sephardi ancestry. The matter caused enough controversy and confusion such that school officials had to clarify that they considered Sephardi Jews to be “White.” The second half of Chapter Three shows how Sephardi identity encountered American racial liberalism and the inclusion of Hispanic/Latinx Americans.

Chapter Four expands on Sephardi relations with local, national, and world Jewry by uncovering how Los Angeles’s Sephardim were central to an ethnic “revival” in the 1970s and the concomitant construction of a Middle Eastern/North African panethnic “Sephardi” identity. Since their arrival, Sephardi Jews in America have lived within overlapping Jewish and Gentile societies that cast their own ethnic and cultural identity in the shadows. While these concerns had been articulated internally in the community for decades, the influence of movements like Black Power and an awareness of struggles facing “Oriental” Jews in Israel helped catalyze an explosion of Sephardi cultural and institutional expansion, growth, and activity beginning in the late 1960s. Recent arrivals of North African and Iranian Jews, alongside cultural and political shifts in Israel, helped facilitate the creation of a more inclusive definition of “Sephardi,” referring to Jews from the wider Muslim world rather than strictly those of Iberian descent. As a minority, Sephardim used the language and techniques of the broader

American “ethnic revival” moment to stake a place within a Jewish mainstream. Relationships to a nationwide institutional network afforded LA’s Sephardim greater financial, cultural, and political influence within this emergent Sephardi movement. Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching of these networks was the American Sephardi Federation. Established in 1973, the ASF was significantly indebted to religious and lay leaders from Los Angeles for programs like its youth division and its efforts to save Syrian Jewry.

In the years leading up to and including 1992, countless commemorations were held to acknowledge the 500-year anniversaries of the expulsion of Jews from Spain as well as their arrival in the Ottoman Empire. The dissertation’s conclusion proposes new directions for scholarship on modern Sephardi Jewry that take into consideration the interconnected projects of contemporary Spain and Turkey, both of which engage with Sephardi pasts. Doing so reminds us of the transnational and transhistorical components of Sephardi LA’s relational history as well as the agency and power Sephardim have to shape the identities of modern nation-states.

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The historical narrative I construct here offers several interrelated claims about the shapes of Jewishness, community, identity, and culture. For one, relational and intersectional frameworks are essential for a rich understanding of group formation and identity. In particular, the Sephardi Jews of Los Angeles are an ideal model for this kind of analysis in that their small size, hypermobility, and diverse backgrounds allowed them to weave through the racially and ethnically segmented American twentieth century. In this analysis, we are forced to reckon with an evolving, adaptive, and living American Sephardi history. Secondly, a relational framework helps tease out and explain the

variable positionalities of these individuals and communities and the flexible meanings of “Sephardi.” In addition to providing the contexts and narratives of possible identities and options, this project shows how and why Los Angeles and American contexts were integral in the creation of the Sephardi twentieth century.

Chapter One: “Streets of All Nations:” The World’s Fair and the Beginnings of Sephardi Los Angeles

By the time Gaston Akoun arrived in Southern California in 1905, he and his large family were already well known in the live entertainment industry throughout the United States and Europe.[57] For years, members of Akoun’s Algerian Jewish entourage managed and performed in various “oriental” concessions at expositions and world’s fairs in Paris, Chicago, St. Louis, and beyond. Knowing of his expertise, real estate developer and entrepreneur Abbot Kinney hired Akoun to direct the entertainment for his forthcoming “Venice of America,” a planned community and amusement park abutting the Pacific coast modeled after the Italian city, including navigable canals. Gaston’s previous concessions featured belly dancers - sometimes including his sister, Mathilde - performing under Franco-Muslim pseudonyms like “La Belle Baya” or “Belle Fatma.” From their breakout debut at the Algerian and Tunisian villages at Paris’s 1889 Exposition Universelle, the suggestive “hootchy-kootchy” performances - likely a blend of traditional Egyptian dance and modern Parisian trends - attracted thousands of curious fairgoers across the world, as well as the ire and censure of many others.

Among their many admirers was Sol Bloom, the American-born Jewish impresario visiting France to scout talent for the 1893’s World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Accepting Bloom’s invitation, the Akoun family and their entourage of performers arrived in the US a few years later to manage and perform at the “Persian

[57] Caroline Luce, “‘Oriental’ Jews on the Frontier of Leisure.” In *100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles*, edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce. Los Angeles: UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020. https://sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/frontier-of-leisure/. Accessed April 28, 2022.

Palace," a popular theater located on the fair's Midway Plaisance. They would continue to perform at different expositions as part of similar concessions with names like "Mysterious Asia," "Beautiful Orient," and "Streets of Cairo." Their use of minarets and Moorish architecture, employment of native merchants and performers, countless bazaars and markets selling "authentic" antiques from the Holy Land, and offerings of camel rides transformed how Americans imagined the Middle East. Yet the Jews, Arabs, Greeks, and Armenians behind these efforts have rarely been named or given credit.

While exceptional in some regards, the Akoun family was also typical of the many Mediterranean Jews and Christians active at the turn-of-the-century world's fairs.[58] While most of the family and their broader entourage of traveling entertainers did not remain long in California after Venice's amusement park closed, Gaston's stepfather Mordecai Zitoun and stepsister Rose elected to stay. In doing so they became the first known Mediterranean Jews to settle in Los Angeles who, along with other former world's fair employees, began organizing a local Sephardi community that has persisted into the twenty first century.

The fairs not only brought Mediterranean Jewish individuals and families to the US. Global inter- and intraethnic networks alongside the cultural self-fashioning those relations afforded were essential to their roles at the fair. These Jews served as a prism through which their material and cultural Mediterranean environments transformed into a performative, orientalist spectacle for American fairgoers. Although it would differ in intention, means, and context, the Akouns helped establish a paradigm that would

[58] Since "Sephardi" was rarely used in contemporary descriptions of these Jews until a few decades later, I use the geographic descriptor "Mediterranean Jew" to describe a shared socio-cultural Jewish identity and as a synonym for the more commonly used "Oriental Jew."

characterize the relational and multidirectional identity formation of Sephardi Jews over the next century.

Chapter Overview

This chapter foregrounds the foundation of Sephardi Los Angeles by examining the routes taken by its earliest arrivals through the world's fairs. The narrative of the Akoun family and the other North African, Ottoman, and Mediterranean Jews active at the fairs does not merely unveil the migratory pathways that gave birth to Sephardi communities in the United States. Crucially, their relationships and performances (both on and off the stage) set the patterns for the century-plus history of relational identity formation for American Sephardi Jews. The fungible, adaptable, and ambiguous meanings, particularly racial and ethnic, of being a Mediterranean-cum-Sephardi Jew in the United States developed in constant conversation with the world around them.

In the first part of this chapter, I will show how Jews like the Akoun family were part of a diverse, but short-lived Mediterranean American diaspora that occupied particular roles in the world's fairs. The few works on twentieth century American Sephardi Jewry have noted, albeit briefly and incompletely, the foundational importance of the world's fairs for the community.[59] Yet the much richer and established historiography of American Jewry as well those of Greek, Armenian, and Arab

[59] Marc Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1982); Albert J. Amateau, "The Social, Political and Economic Causes for the Emigration of Levantine Sephardic Jews", 1985, Box 1, Folder 5. MS-604. Albert J. Amateau Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio; Joseph M Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America: In Search of Unity* (San Jose, CA: Pele Yoetz Books, 1987); Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Rifat N. Bali, *From Anatolia to the New World: Life Stories of the First Turkish Immigrants to America* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2013). The historiography on Arab and Armenian Americans also point to the world's fairs as important events in their communities' narratives.

Americans have tended to relegate Mediterranean/Sephardi Jews to footnotes or brief allusions. Regrettably, our understanding of Mediterranean Jews in America shares the struggle of scholarship on Middle Eastern and North African Americans to find an integrated place in the study of US immigration and ethnic history, let alone American Jewish studies.[60] This absence is particularly notable given that proportionally, despite their relatively small numbers, Jews were the Ottoman ethnoreligious minority most likely to emigrate to America at the turn of the century.[61]

Histories of Sephardi Jews in the US have typically relied on a migration narrative that centers a cohort of young, single men escaping military conscription and chasing economic opportunity following the regional instability of the Young Turk revolution, the Balkan Wars, and World War I - with no direct connection to the fairs.[62] Despite their comparatively small numbers and participation in seemingly niche economic endeavors, the world's fairs were representative of an expanding and changing global Sephardi diaspora. This advance guard of Mediterranean Jewish migrants to the US may at first glance seem anomalous or eccentric, particularly given

[60] The *Mashriq & Mahjar* journal has been an important and recent outlet for this work. Also see the historiographic discussions in: Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) and *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

[61] Between 1860 and 1920, Jews made up about 6% of Ottoman emigrants to the US, but were only 1.2% of the 1906 Ottoman population, an overrepresentation by a factor of 5. By comparison, 65% of Ottoman emigrants were Christian Greeks, Arabs, Slavs, and Bulgarians who made up about 17.5% of the Ottoman population (a factor of 3.7), and 18% were Armenians, who made up 5 to 5.5% of the Ottoman population (a factor of 3.4). Additionally, between 1899 and 1910, "Hebrews" made up the single largest immigrant group from the whole of Africa, nearly a quarter of the small total of 7,400.

[62] Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Sephardic Community" (MA, Seattle, University of Washington, 1939); Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); Angel, *La America;* Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America*; Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America;* Bali, *From Anatolia to the New World*; Devin Naar, "From the 'Jerusalem of the Balkans' to the Goldene Medina: Jewish Immigration from Salonika to the United States," *American Jewish History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 435–73 and "Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (2015): 174–205.

their roles in “oriental” concessions. Yet their immersion in interethnic and transnational networks and its impact on their relational identity formation in America would be a common experience of future generations, particularly in Los Angeles.

To a certain extent, I argue that the first Mediterranean Jews in the US are better understood within that social context than primarily in relation to Ashkenazi/European Jews. My analysis of Jews at the world’s fairs visualizes a modern Mediterranean American diaspora made up of Greeks, Arabs, Armenians, and others and uses it as a primary category of historical analysis to offer a different narrative of American immigration and American Jewish history. One that offers an alternative to the isolation of ethnic, national, or religious groups as categories of historical analysis. This relational and regional frame tells a story of immigrants from places like Istanbul, Alexandria, or Paris who already possessed experiences of metropolitan, diverse, and urban environments incorporated into a global economy and culture. In contrast, for those who settled in the Los Angeles of the early twentieth century, the largely White city of over 300,000 residents was smaller and less diverse than many of the places they had once called home.

The second half of this chapter continues narrating the history of a Mediterranean American diaspora at the world’s fairs and explains how this diverse milieu helped construct an image of the “Oriental,” and later “Sephardi,” Jew in the United States as part of the fairs’ broader and arguably more consequential impact on American perceptions of the Islamic world. The fluid, contextual, and accreted identities, images, and labels adopted by or ascribed to Mediterranean Jews drew upon a vast array of cultural assets that included Mediterranean, African, Egyptian, Jewish, Eastern Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Asian, Bedouin, Arab, Italian, French, Turkish, Greek, and

Spanish characteristics. Whether through religion, ancestry, neighbors, history, education, language, profession, nationality, music, habits, or dress, these Jews fashioned and Orientalized themselves according to the needs of the moment, whether as performers, merchants, or promoters. In doing so they also helped shape and popularize orientalist aesthetic tastes and consumption patterns in America for things like dance, interior decor, and cigarettes.

Catalysts for making the US, and especially Los Angeles, a key site of the Sephardi diaspora in the twentieth century, the world's fairs employed hundreds of Mediterranean Jews, many of whom stayed in the US after the fairgrounds closed. These included several founders of the Sephardi community in Los Angeles, as well as a small cadre of very successful businessmen some of whom, like tobacco entrepreneurs Maurice and Raphael Amado, later became philanthropic pillars of Sephardi life and scholarship in LA and beyond. And as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the relational and adaptive processes of Sephardi identity formation continued throughout the century following changing social and racial landscapes. Like Mexico in Devi Mays's work on Sephardim or California in Sarah Gualtieri's on Arab Americans, Los Angeles is a staging ground for the encounter between the modern Mediterranean Jewish diaspora and North America.[63] Most of this chapter's narrative occurs outside of Los Angeles, but it is precisely in that city where the legacy and impact of the fairs echo most strongly.

[63] Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Gualtieri, *Arab Routes.*

Jews and the World's Fairs

For the average American fairgoer at the turn of the twentieth century, the experience was exhilarating.[65] The stately Greco-Roman pavilions and man-made waterways lit up by ribbons of electric lights were intended to conjure images of the onward march of human progress, industry, and technology. The numerous buildings representing different facets of industry and engineering, individual US states and territories, as well as foreign countries and empires gave the impression of a world in miniature. The whole of human history - past, present, and future - seemed to be within view. However, several yards away and within earshot was what many considered the real draw of the fairs - the entertainment and amusement section. To the chagrin of many of the fair's idealistic organizers, including anthropologists and industrialists, its circus-like environment and accompanying sights, sounds, smells, and tastes often took the spotlight away from the more refined themes of the expositions. It was here - called the Midway Plaisance in Chicago or the Pike in St. Louis - that one could ride the Ferris Wheel or a camel, see the cowboy Buffalo Bill or the belly-dancer La Belle Baya, or simply observe street performers dressed in folk costumes of their respective concessions. All for a small fee, of course - profit was top priority.

Mediterranean Jewish merchants established a foothold in the US as early as 1876 during the Centennial International Exposition held in Philadelphia. North African and Ottoman Jews had been involved in foreign relations with the United States since

[65] On the fairs, see the classic work Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Also of interest are Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Astrid Böger, *Envisioning the Nation: The Early American World's Fairs and the Formation of Culture* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2010); Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *Chicago's Grand Midway: A Walk Around the World at the Columbian Exposition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

the nation's independence, but by the end of the nineteenth century their presence was most strongly felt in their roles as merchants of specialty items from the Middle East. The Ottoman section of the Philadelphia fair featured hundreds of items on display sold by Turkish, Arab, Greek, and Armenian merchants, alongside Jews. These included the Jewish-Muslim firm of Souhami & Sadullah, which sold oriental goods as Ottoman representatives (returning again for the 1893 Chicago fair), and Haim Vidal, who showcased items from his carpet factory in Smyrna.[66] At the much smaller Tunisian section, M. Valensi represented the small North African nation's Bey Muhammad es-Sadiq, for whom he was also an interpreter - a commonly held role by Jews for North Africa's foreign affairs.[67] Valensi's Tunisian Bazaar and Cafe also served as an entertainment venue, featuring costumed musicians and dancers to amuse fairgoers while they perused the collection of silks, tobacco, and smoking pipes for sale - a foretaste of the orientalism that would emerge in full bloom in Chicago seventeen years later.[68] "Oriental" furnishings, tobacco, music, and dance may have been first introduced to a mass audience in Philadelphia, but it was in Chicago where Jews and others launched these trends into the mainstream of American consumer culture.[69]

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[66] Julia Philips Cohen, "The East as a Career: Far Away Moses & Company in the Marketplace of Empires," *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 2 (2016), 46; *Rich Turkish and Persian goods, imported by Haim Vidal, Constantinople*, (Philadelphia, T. Birch & Sons, 1878); "Furniture Exhibition, Antwerp," *The American Architect and Building News* 22, no. 612, September 17, 1887, 136; Susan Nance, *How The Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 44-45.

[67] Alexander Meyrick Broadley, *The Last Punic War: Tunis, Past and Present; with a Narrative of the French Conquest of the Regency*. (London: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1882), 183.

[68] J. S. Ingram, *The Centennial Exposition : described and illustrated : being a concise and graphic description of this grand enterprise commemorative of the first centenary of American independence* (Philadelphia: Hubbard Bros., 1876), 558. Jamila Salimpour, "1876: The First Ripples of Belly Dance on America's Shores," *Habibi* 2, no. 7 (Fall 1993).

[69] Karina Helen Hiltje Corrigan, "Turcoman Portieres and Arabia's Sweetest Perfumes: He Turkish Style in American Middle- Class Interiors, 1890-1930" (MA, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream,* 44; *Chicago Daily Tribune,* July 3, 1876, 7; David Scobey,

A Family Affair

In a 1960 essay in *Commentary*, "A Sephardic Family," writer and critic Edouard Roditi wrote of his Mediterranean Jewish origins. He related how, when his Ottoman-born uncle Victor Roditi planned to marry Mathilde Akoun, the Roditi family matriarch Rebecca (née Belinfante) became deeply concerned about the moral propriety of Mathilde's family of "oddly barbaric" side-show operators. Through her connections as the patroness of an Istanbul guest house for Jewish pilgrims en route to Palestine, Rebecca found solace upon learning that the Akouns descended from the famed Rabbi Ephraim Ainkaoua of Tlemcen and Jacob Cohen Bakri (known for his role in the Bacri-Busnach Affair, an inciting event leading to the French occupation of Algeria.) Such ancestry was apparently unknown to the Akoun family themselves, who had "become more disoriented than Westernized" in their "schemes of cheap show business."[70]

The families had more in common than this anecdote or their disparate Ottoman and Algerian origins may imply. Both were led by strong, independent matriarchal figures. At the head of the Akoun clan was Orida (née Bent-Eny), mother to Gaston, Fernand, and Mathilde. She managed many dancers and performers, including her own daughter, at "oriental" themed world's fair concessions in Paris and across the United States. A widow by the time the family came to Chicago from Paris in 1893, Orida guided her children through the entertainment business and provided "advice in most of

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"What shall we do with our walls? The Philadelphia centennial and the meaning of household design," in Robert W. Rydell and Nancy Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations: World's Fairs and the Modern World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 65.

[70] Edouard Roditi, "A Sephardic Family," *Commentary*, January 1, 1960, 30.

their amusement undertakings."[71] Very much a family business, Gaston assured potential investors of his concessions that with "my brother and my family to help me...we are bound to make a success."[72] Gaston's aforementioned younger brother Fernand was a concessionaire in his own right, first managing the fun house-style Temple of Mirth in St. Louis at the age of nineteen and later going on to operate similar attractions at Venice of America and Coney Island in New York.[73] So strong was the family bond that Fernand was shot and injured in a confrontation with another fair worker who had threatened and insulted his mother.[74] Business also determined who would (or could) join the family. During San Francisco's Midwinter Fair in 1894, Mathilde married Victor Roditi, a merchant who worked for French interests at the fairs. By the opening of the St. Louis fair a decade later, Mathilde was now a mother of two and while longer performing on stage, still worked selling souvenirs. The Roditi-Akoun marriage was not the only example of how the business networks of Mediterranean Jewish fair workers turned into familial ties. In 1896, Orida married fellow Algerian Jew Mordechai Zitoun, manager of the troupe's musicians. Ten years later, Zitoun's daughter from his previous marriage, Rose, married Tunisian Jewish concessionaire David Bramy in Los Angeles.[75]

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[71] "A Patch of the Orient in St. Louis: M. Akoun's Home is Quaintly Levantine," *The St. Louis Republic*, February 8, 1903.

[72] Committee on Concessions-Minutes, June 2, 1903, Box 13, Folder 6, Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company Records, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

[73] *World's Fair Manual: The Guide Book of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, ed. Alex E. Jacobs (St. Louis: Ivory City Publishing Co., 1904), 51.

[74] "Driven to Bay After Shooting a Pike Showman," *The St. Louis Republic*, November 15, 1904, 1.

[75] *Official guide to the California Midwinter Exposition in Golden Gate Park*, *San Francisco.* (San Francisco: G. Spaulding & Co., 1894), 113-5; "The Bride of the 'Streets of Cairo'," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 7, 1896, 8; "Knot is Tied in Quaint Way: Algerians Wed According to Native Custom," *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1906, II6.

The Origins of a Mediterranean-American Diaspora

For the Akoun family and many other Mediterranean Jews and Christians (less so Muslims), broader cultural and political trends enabled their participation in the fairs in the first place. Among them, the possession of European citizenship - whether as proteges or colonial subjects - was key, particularly French and British.[76] The French, British, and American presence in Algeria, Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire, respectively, provided a foundational economic network that facilitated and catalyzed Jews' and others' participation in the fairs, as nearly all "Oriental" concessions were managed by colonial proteges. North Africans, mostly Jews, tended to be French subjects and those from Egypt, British. Just as the earliest Armenian and Syrian-Lebanese migrations to the US were spurred by American missionaries, Western interests in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean had a similar effect on Jewish migration.[77] Before even crossing the Atlantic, this first Mediterranean immigrants were already enmeshed in the web of Western empire.

France's colonization of Algeria in 1830 and the granting of French citizenship to its Jews under 1870's Crémieux Decree gave the Akoun family a ready pathway to participate in 1889's Paris Exposition Universelle.[78] Their association with the colonial government was not merely legal, however. Gaston, Fernand, and Mathilde's father

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[76] Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[77] Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[78] On the Cremieux decree and the impact of French occupation on Algerian Jews, see: Joshua Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

Eugene Akoun, known at the Paris exposition as the "Giant of Sousse," was an interpreter for the French military before serving as the Algerian troupe's cashier. Similarly, Mordechai Zitoun served in the French armed forces during the Franco-Prussian War.[79] Part of the growing influence of Francophone Jewry across the Mediterranean and Middle East, native Ladino-speaking Ottoman Jews educated under the influence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, like Victor Roditi, could more easily work with French-speaking Algerian Jews like the Akouns.[80] Other Jewish and non-Jewish Francophone individuals worked with Mediterranean Jews at the fairs, too, like French astrologer Edgar Valcourt de Vermont who partnered with Albert Souhami (the son of Elia Souhami, founder of the firm that managed Chicago's Turkish Village) at the Persian Palace of the 1894 San Francisco Midwinter Exposition and Emil Lermy, an Alsatian Jew who worked with the Akoun family at the Street of All Nations at Omaha's 1898 exposition.[81]

Preceding the Akouns' involvement as lead managers and directors were Aaron Sifico and Ela Ganon, who ran the Tunisian and Algerian Villages in Chicago. Sifico, an Algerian Jew, had been active in world's fairs since the 1850s and Ganon, affectionately known as "Papa," was considered one the "celebrities of the Midway" in Chicago.[82] The

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[79] Arthur Pougin, "Le Theatre a L'exposition Universelle de 1889," *Le Menestrel* Vol. 56, no. 26, June 29, 1890, 204-5; "La Belle Fatma's Cousin," *The New York Herald, European Edition Paris* March 29, 1890, 2.

[80] Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews : The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1990).

[81] *Official Guide to the California Midwinter Exposition in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco* (United States, G. Spaulding & Company, 1894).

[82] "Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1892-1893," (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1898); Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (Bloomington: IDD Books, 1994), 11; On Sifico, see the antisemitic work of Fernand Gregoire, "L'Affaire Mantout-Sifico," *La Juif Algerienne*, (Paris?: 1889), 77-85.

Smyrna-based, Gibraltar-born British subject may also have been the Chicago fair's celebrity "Far Away Moses," based on photographs from the fair.[83] Tragically, Ganon lost a considerable amount of money from the fair and committed suicide a year later in a Paris hotel room.[84] France and its colonial holdings not only set the stage in 1889 by modeling the modern world's fair, but was also instrumental in bringing images and representatives of North Africa and the Islamic world more generally to America - particularly through Francophone Jews.

Aside from the Ferris Wheel, no single feature of Chicago's Midway was more popular or profitable than the Streets of Cairo.[85] Representations of Egypt at the fairs relied heavily on British connections, who had become the *de facto* occupiers of the Ottoman khedivate in 1882. In the wake of occupation, Greeks and other regional diasporic groups like Armenians and Jews developed significant economic footholds in Alexandria and Cairo, especially in the tobacco processing industry. The most prominent figure on the American scene to emerge from this milieu was George Pangalo. Born in Ottoman Smyrna to Greek and British parents, Pangalo attended Constantinople's Protestant Roberts College and later worked as a banker in Alexandria and Salonica. Transitioning to a successful career as a concession manager in Chicago and other fairs, contemporaries praised him as "the best man in the business."[86] Others included Pangalo's assistant Icilio Ninci, an Alexandrian-born Italian, assisted British

[83] Julia Philips Cohen, "The East as a Career: Far Away Moses & Company in the Marketplace of Empires," *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 2 (2016): 35–77.

[84] *L'Univers Israélite,* Vol. 49, no. 7, December 18, 1893, 215-16.

[85] Istvan Ormos, *Cairo in Chicago: Cairo Street at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.* (Paris: IFAO, 2021).

[86] Committee on Concessions-Minutes, December 10, 1902, Box 13, Folder 5, Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company Records, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

occupation forces and Greek Orientalist Demetrius Mosconas who ran the fair's "Egyptian Temple" and authored an Egyptian Arabic-English dictionary designed for British troops.[87]

While European colonial power was certainly on display and had been present since the earliest fairs of the nineteenth century, fairs at the turn of the century were reflective of an ascendant American imperial posturing, especially evident in various exhibits on the Philippines, recently annexed along with Puerto Rico after the Spanish American War of 1898.[88] Unlike France or Britain, the United States had no colonial holdings in the Mediterranean region, but were one of the Ottoman Empire's biggest export markets at the turn of the century. The fair was an opportunity for both Americans and Ottomans to capitalize and expand on these ventures, particularly given growing Western tastes for "Oriental" goods like tobacco and luxury carpets.[89]

Particularly instrumental in developing commerce between the two nations, and vicariously in bringing Ottoman Jews to the country, were an elite cadre of American Ashkenazi Jews. Part of a longer tradition of their roles as diplomats in the wider Muslim world, Jews occupied a special place in US-Ottoman relations. Oscar Straus, ambassador to the Ottoman Empire and American Jewish philanthropist, connected Cyrus Adler, a Semitic scholar and contributor to the Chicago fair's educational component, to the Souhami & Sadullah firm with the goal of convincing them and the

[87] Frederic Ward Putnam, *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance*, (St Louis: N. D. Thompson Publishing Co., 1894), 160; Demetrius Mosconas *English & Arabic Dictionary accompanied by Dialogues & Useful Notes for the Use of the British Army of Occupation* (Cairo: British Army Commissariat and Transport Staff, 1884).

[88] Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair.*

[89] Thomas Cridler, "Report of Commissioner for Europe of Louisiana Purchase Exposition: Letter from the Secretary of State," 58th Congress, 2nd session, Document No. 244, United States Congressional Serial Set, Vol. 4591 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904) 49-60.

Ottoman government to create a "Turkish Village" concession for the 1893 fair.[90] Managing Souhami & Sadullah's concession was Istanbul merchant and Sephardi Jew Robert Levy. Close friends with Straus and his wife (Levy named his son Oscar in honor of the ambassador), Levy exemplified the key roles played by Jews (and Christians) in Mediterranean-American trade. As the founding director of the American Chamber of Commerce for Turkey, he facilitated many of the necessary connections for the world's fairs' "Oriental" exhibits. In Constantinople, the American Protestant Roberts College similarly served as a sort of clearing house for Western-oriented diplomats and merchants, including Greeks (like Pangalo), Maltese, Armenians, and Jews, many of whom were members of the Chamber of Commerce.

Unlike the Algerian, Tunisian, Persian, or the Streets of Cairo concessions, the Turkish Village was unique for being a public-private partnership between the Ottoman government and an independent commercial firm. As the local representative of the company, Levy oversaw and managed the exhibit, including the construction of a mosque for use by the concession's Muslim employees (which once hosted a Yom Kippur service for its Jewish ones). As Julia Philips Cohen has demonstrated, Levy and his Turkish Village demonstrated a particular vision and promotion of late nineteenth century Ottomanism.[91] However, Levy and his Turkish Village appear to be exceptions to the broader story of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Jews at the fairs and in the "oriental goods" trade. More typical were private, multi-ethnic, and multinational enterprises that drew on an exaggerated exoticism that often bothered Ottoman

[90]Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Chapter 2; Cohen, "East as Career."

[91] Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans,* chapter 2.

officials. Despite (or because of) Levy's attachment to official Ottoman interests, his bids for "oriental" concessions at future fairs lost out to those of Pangalo and Akoun, thus ending a short-lived partnership between Ottoman officials and the Ottoman Jewish diaspora in the US and ensuring the continuation of more flamboyant displays of the Muslim world. Nevertheless, the Levy family's American connections outlived this rejection. Levy's son Oscar would later work for the US consulate in Istanbul into the 1950s.

American companies and interests were, ultimately, the most powerful driving force behind securing Jews' and others' participation and presence at the fairs. The fairs' executive boards and concession managers were typically made up of the White, male elites of the host city and had the authority to approve or reject concession bids. Furthermore, many of the concessions themselves - even as they purported to represent a foreign locale - were ultimately arranged and financed by Americans. Sol Bloom looms large as a catalyst in this part of the story of "oriental" concessions. Born in Illinois to Polish-Jewish parents, the future congressman was hired as the general manager of Chicago's Midway Plaisance, taking a particular interest in the Algerian and Tunisian Villages. After his visit to the Paris exposition of 1889, the 19-year old Bloom was convinced that "oriental" sword swallowers, acrobats, and dancers "expressed a culture which to me was on a higher plane than the one demonstrated by a group of earnest Swiss peasants."[92] Bloom's autobiography, alongside subsequent secondary scholarship, credit him with introducing Americans to belly-dancing and helping solidify

[92] Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948), 106-7.

their tastes in things "Oriental," but they omit the role of Mediterranean Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Unlike the Ottoman-sponsored Turkish Village, an exception among "Oriental" exhibits, Pangalo's Streets of Cairo concession was financed by the US-based Egypt-Chicago Exposition Company.[93] Similarly, the reconstructed Jerusalem at St. Louis's 1904 Exposition - where Mordecai Zitoun worked as a manager - was organized by the Jerusalem Exhibit Company. Managed by Anglo-Protestant Americans and presided over by US Senator J.R. Burton of Kansas, the organization's stated intention was to "attract the attention of all Christendom" and provide Bible students an opportunity to "visit" the holy city without having to travel to Palestine.[94] By relocating Jerusalem to America, visitors to the St. Louis fair could avoid being misled by wily "dragomen" while viewing a city "not changed since Christ's or Abraham's days." St. Louis's Jerusalem demonstrated a different kind of American interest in the "Orient" than other concessions, one ideologically and culturally tied to a broader resurgence of Protestant concern with "the Holy Land."[95]

For all the connections to French, British, or American interests abroad, the day-to-day affairs of the "oriental" concessions during the fair itself were handled by a diverse set of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern managers, merchants, and

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[93] Istvan Ormos, "The Cairo Street at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893," *L'Orientalisme Architectural Entre Imaginaires et Savoirs*, 2009, 195–214.

[94] "Jerusalem Site is Dedicated," *St. Louis Republic*, July 12, 1903, 2; *World's Fair Bulletin*, August 1903, 35.

[95] Lester I. Vogel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1993); Jeffrey Shandler and Beth Wenger, eds., *Encounters with the "Holy Land": Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture* (National Museum of American Jewish History, 1997); Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

performers. Jews, Syrian-Lebanese Christians, Greeks, and Armenians were the most active participants at the American fairs, with ethnic historians citing these entrepreneurs as pioneers of their North American diasporas.[96] In their Ottoman settings, these non-Muslim groups often shared parallel economic niches, European connections, links to global diaspora communities, and a tendency to live in larger towns and cities. In this context, then, Jews were hardly exceptional. They travelled the same migratory paths through Latin America as Syrian-Lebanese, worked in the tobacco industry with Greeks, and traded in oriental rugs with Armenians.[97]

These were not merely parallel paths, but interwoven ones. The scale of Mediterranean Jews' efforts - like amassing dozens of live animals and individuals from various parts of the globe or coordinating the shipment of tons of tobacco from the Balkans to the US - could scarcely rely on a single ethnic network. George Pangalo brought over hundreds of fellow Greeks alongside Syrian Christians, Sudanese Muslims, and Ottoman Jews as performers and merchant subcontractors for his Streets of Cairo concession. Working very closely to Pangalo was Isaac Benyakar, who controlled nearly fifty "queer shops from the east" in Chicago as well as managing the

[96] Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America*; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Adele Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, ed. Philip M. Kayal (Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies, 1995); Linda K. Jacobs, "'Playing East': Arabs Play Arabs in Nineteenth Century America," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 4 (2014): 79–110 and "Carneys: Carnival Impresarios of the Early Syrian Diaspora," *Kalimah Press*, December 4, 2020, https://kalimahpress.com/blog/carneys-carnival-impresarios-of-the-early-syrian-diaspora/. Accessed April 30, 2022.

[97] On Latin American migration, see Gualtieri, *Arab Routes* and Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports*. On tobacco, see the discussion in chapter 2 of this dissertation. On textiles, see Donald Quataert, *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), especially chapter five, Thomas James Donlon, "Getting Wise in the Rug Business" *The Saturday Evening Post,* July 31, 1915, 14, and Wesley Towner, *The Elegant Auctioneers* (Hill and Wang, 1970).

shipment of live animals.[98] A Jewish Cairene with a Sephardi background, the multilingual Benyakar worked as a dragoman for foreign visitors in Egypt, including Frederick Douglass and his wife, before reprising his role in Chicago.[99] After Chicago, Benyakar was involved with Brooklyn's Coney Island and the traveling circus company of the Beirut-born Khalil George Barkoot. Benyakar made known his admiration for his new home, naming his son McKinley (after US President William McKinley) and his daughter California (born during the 1894 Mid-Winter Fair in San Francisco).[100]

Greeks, Turkish Tobacco, and the Roots of American Sephardi Life

A common companion to the fairs' "Oriental" concessions, Turkish cigarettes and tobacco gave rise to the "most sustained campaign [in America] to capitalize on oriental motifs."[101] Brands with names like Egyptian Deities, Murad, Mogul, Fatima, Omar, or Ramses were advertised using ancient Egyptian iconography alongside Turkish and Middle Eastern imagery and provided Americans an easy (and addictive) way to consume the exotic. These products rapidly occupied a significant share of the national market, and by the first decade of the twentieth century Turkish leaf blends became the

[98] William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2017), 368; "Cairo Street Open," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 28, 1893, 1; Eric Davis, "Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs 1876-1904," in *The United States and the Middle East: Cultural Encounters*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Berhardsson (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 2002), 342–85.

[99] "Soudanese Go Sight-Seeing," *Chicago Daily Tribun*e, May 7, 1893, 2; "Talk Many Tongues." *Daily Inter Ocean,* May 17, 1893, 7.

[100] Karl Gurt zur Heide, "Cow Davenport and K. G. Barkoot," *Doctor Jazz Magazine,* Vol. 205 (June 2009), 8-15; "Isaac Benyakar," *The Billboard,* September 14, 1912, 24, 40, 51.

[101] Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 197; Allan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product That Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

fastest growing tobacco product in the US.[102] The merchants who helped introduce these products and, in the process, revolutionized America's relationship to tobacco were seldom Turks or native Egyptians, however, but Greeks, Armenians, and Sephardi Jews.[103]

No other group was more entwined with Mediterranean Jews than Greeks. Before they debuted their products to an American market at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, this Mediterranean-American economic partnership and diaspora took shape in the warehouses of late nineteenth century Alexandria. The centrally located port city recently occupied by the British quickly became the global center of a rapidly growing tobacco industry.[104] With new commercial links to the West, Greek-owned businesses expanded into America and made millionaires out of immigrant entrepreneurs like Sotirios Anagyros, Militiades Melachrinos, Nestor Gianclis, the Stephano Brothers, and Euripedes and Savo Kehaya.[105] Far from building their own Jewish tobacco niche, two important pairs of Sephardi brothers became integral parts of the Greek-dominated field: Solomon and Morris Schinasi and Maurice and Raphael Amado.

The Schinasis and Amados began as employees of the Jews and Christians who managed many of the fairs' "Oriental" concessions. For both, their successes created job opportunities for a generation of Sephardi immigrants. The Schinasis, who got their

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[102] Nan Enstad, *Cigarettes, Inc.: An Intimate History of Corporate Imperialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 24, 38.

[103] Relli Shechter, *Smoking, Culture, and Economy in the Middle East: The Egyptian Tobacco Market 1850-2000* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[104] Will Hanley, *Identifying with Nationality: Europeans, Ottomans, and Egyptians in Alexandria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

[105] Allan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century*; Manos Haritatos and Penelope Giakoumakis, *A History of the Greek Cigarette* (Athens: The Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, 1997).

start supplying cigarettes to concessions like Akoun's Mysterious Asia in St. Louis, later operated factories in Manhattan known for employing a mostly Sephardi workforce.[106] Founding member of the *Comunidad Sefardi de Los Angeles* Jack Caraco and his father, Los Angeles's first Sephardi rabbi, Abraham Caraco, worked for the Schinasis in New York before moving to California, possibly facilitating their legal immigration in the first place. Maurice Amado's philanthropic legacy, built on the wealth accrued from his tobacco interests, continues to finance major Sephardi projects from synagogue construction to academic scholarships in Los Angeles and beyond.[107]

Relationships with Greeks were central to the initial settlement and success of Sephardi immigrants in the US, from New York to Los Angeles. As merchant diasporas historically active in overlapping general geographic areas, Greeks and Sephardi Jews were already familiar with one another and brought to the US an understanding about how business was conducted between ethnic economic niches.[108] In New York, Seattle, Los Angeles and elsewhere, Greek and Sephardi Americans shared many of the same occupations: tobacco and cigarette manufacturers, fishmongers, theater owners, shipping agents, cobblers, confectioners, as well as grocers and florists.[109] In many of

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[106] Henry Souhami entered a deal to purchase hundreds of thousands of cigarettes from Philip Morris to sell at Mysterious Asia and Cairo Street. *Philip Morris and Co. vs. Maurice B. Mendham, et. al,* Vol. 1108 (NY 1906).

[107] "The Maurice Amado Foundation: Promoting Sephardic and Jewish Cultural Heritage in America - An Interview with Elaine Lindheim and Sam Tarica," in Saba Soomekh, ed., *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016).

[108] Interview with Joseph Behor Hasson March 13, 1972. Recorded by Aron Hasson; Haim Gerber, "Muslims and Zimmis in Ottoman Economy and Society: Encounters, Culture and Knowledge," in Raoul Motika, Christoph Herzog, and Michael Ursinus, eds., *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic Life* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1999), 106.

[109] Mary Antoniou, "Welfare Activities Among the Greek People in Los Angeles" (MA, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1939), 11; Theodore Saloutos, "Greeks," in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 432; Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Sephardic Community" (MA, Seattle, University of Washington, 1939), 55.

these fields they worked together as partners, with earlier arriving Greek immigrants often providing the first jobs for Sephardi arrivals around the turn of the century. Later labor shortages caused by the thousands of Greek Americans who returned to their homeland during the Balkan Wars of the 1910s were possibly filled by Jews fleeing that same conflict for the US.[110] Despite these and other observations that, across the Americas, Ottoman and Balkan Sephardi immigrants displayed a closer affinity and parallel to Greeks (and other Mediterranean/Middle Eastern Americans) than to Ashkenazi Jews, Greek-Sephardi relations in the US have hardly received any scholarly attention.[111] Yet these connections loomed large in the fate of Sephardi history in the US.

Born in Ottoman Manisa in the early 1860s, Morris Schinasi moved to Alexandria as a young man and was taken under the wing of a Greek tobacco merchant who helped arrange his travel to the 1893 Chicago fair.[112] Soon after, the Schinasi Bros. company was established in New York City, where the two immigrants began peddling hand-rolled cigarettes. A far cry from their modest beginnings, by 1919 the company claimed it was the largest operator of Turkish tobacco in the world, manufacturing two million cigarettes a day.[113] New York's Ladino press often expressed pride in the Schinasi Brothers, whose factories provided an important source of employment for a

[110] Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 114.

[111] Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 79.

[112] *La America*, January 23, 1914, 2; "The Schinasi Brothers," Box 1, Folder 5. MS-604. Albert J. Amateau Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[113] "Solomon Schinasi Dies at 60," *United States Tobacco Journal,* October 11, 1919, 7, 10.

Sephardi immigrant community who lacked the same kind of robust labor unions and networks of their Yiddish-speaking coreligionists in the garment trade.[114]

In the long run, however, it would be Izmir-born Maurice and Raphael Amado and their success in the tobacco business that would most impact Sephardi life in Los Angeles and beyond. Before Raphael moved to LA in 1924 (with Maurice following sometime in the early 1960s), the Amados served as executives at the Standard Commercial Tobacco Company (SCTC), a New York-based import and wholesale operation headed by the Anatolian Greek brothers, Ery (Euripides) and Savo Kehaya, alongside Leon Schinasi, Morris' nephew.[115] SCTC was best known for initially supplying the North Carolina-based R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company with the imported tobacco integral to their new and wildly successful brand, Camel cigarettes.[116] Their impact might go so far to credit the Amados for coming up with the Camel name, according to family legend.[117] Despite disruptions caused by decreasing consumer demand of "Turkish" tobacco products, political instability in the tobacco-growing regions of southeastern Europe, and the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and ensuing Depression, in 1936 SCTC bought and took control of Axton-Fisher, one of the nation's leading tobacco companies, with Kehaya serving as chairman and Maurice Amado as

[114] *La America*, February 17, 1911, 3.

[115] *A Souvenir of New York City, Old and New* (New York: New York Commercial, 1918), 340-341.

[116] Nannie M. Tilley, *The RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 234-5.

[117] Interview of Regina Amado Tarica, January 27, 2002, conducted by Morris Tarica. https://www.mauriceamadofoundation.org/regina-amado-tarica-interview/. Accessed May 17, 2022.

vice president.[118] By the time Amado retired a few years later, few Sephardim remained in the American tobacco industry.

The Greek-Sephardi relationship sometimes went beyond the merely commercial. A strong supporter of the American Greek community, Ery Kehaya was also comfortable among his Sephardi friends and colleagues. Having worked in partnership with Jews for decades and likely picking up some Ladino along the way, Kehaya and Raphael Amado attended a 1911 New York fundraiser for the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools, featuring Ottoman Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum as guest of honor (Nahum's brother had been involved in the tobacco trade in Alexandria). At the event, Kehaya publicly pledged two hundred dollars in praise of the AIU's role in supporting education for everyone, including Greeks, without regard to "race."[119] The success of SCTC and its Sephardi-Greek partnership catapulted the Amados into great wealth, enabling their - particularly Maurice's - significant financial support for Sephardic life in Los Angeles and beyond. The Maurice Amado Foundation, established in 1961, has continued its philanthropic activity for over six decades, including the construction of Los Angeles's Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, explored in Chapter Three. The extended Amado family have also played important roles in the community's lay leadership, who in addition to Jack and Rabbi Abraham Caraco, speaks to the necessity of understanding the interethnic Greek-Sephardi tobacco trade as having laid the economic and migratory foundations for a community in Los Angeles.

[118] "Standard Buys Axton Fisher," *The Tobacco World* 56, no.3, February 1, 1936, 6.

[119] "Un grego da 200 dolares a la aliansa," *La America*, July 1, 1921, 2. The article cites Kehaya, using the Ladino word *raza.*It is also possible he delivered his remarks in French.

Portrait Types: Self-Orientalizing and the American Encounter with the "Oriental Jew"

Irrespective of its actual origins, the exoticization of "Turkish" or "Egyptian" tobacco was key to its consumer appeal and branding. For Americans, "authenticity," or at least the appearance of it, was could be accessed at the world's fair. Speaking about the "oriental" concessions in particular, fair directors – typically White Anglo-American elites – valued "native" workers, noting how it "spoils the effect to have American people" working the various counters and booths. Despite their popularity, they also complained that "Orientals" were the most difficult concessionaires to work with, as they tended to disregard formal regulations and attract controversy.[120] Bemoaning "inexpressible and impossible" Armenians and deriding the Algerians as "the worst on earth next to an Italian," fair executives also criticized the "bad lot" of managers like Robert Levy. They extolled George Pangalo, however, emphasizing how he tended to employ few Armenians.[121]

The commercial success of racialized and exoticized displays of foreigners and marginalized peoples was a pattern long established in American culture by purveyors of anti-Black minstrelsy and Native American curios – both with their share of Jewish participants.[122] With the fairs, American consumer appetite for the exotic other rapidly

[120] *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 460.

[121] Meeting minutes, December 10, 1902, Series V, Subseries I, Box 13, Folder 5, Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company Records, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis; Zeynep Williams, "Triumph of Commercialism: The Commodification of the Middle Eastern Exotica at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893" (MA, Ankara, Bilkent University, 2008), iii.

[122] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft : Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*

expanded beyond Black and indigenous Americans and into the imagined "East." The twinned attitudes of attraction and disgust within Orientalist attitudes toward the Muslim world have been part of American history since the era of Spanish empire, but its impact and influence began spreading much more widely in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, with the world's fairs being a major turning point.[123]

Most responsible for this version of American Orientalism, at least initially, were concessions like the "Streets of Cairo," "Street in Constantinople," "Algerian Village," "Turkish Village," or "Mysterious Asia," most of which were managed by Mediterranean Christians and Jews. These visions of the "East" and the Muslim world served as reference points for modes of consumption characterized by abundance, indulgence, esotericism, and eroticism. Turkish tobacco and cigarettes, introduced to a previously Virginian tobacco and pipe-smoking American public, became immensely popular in the US and revolutionized the way Americans consumed tobacco. Belly-dancing scandalized many and inspired others including Thomas Edison, who chose a dancer as the subject of one of the earliest moving pictures. Replicas of Jerusalem, like the one built in St. Louis in 1904, brought a new wave of feeling and attachment for America's Protestant faithful who were increasingly curious about Palestine and the Holy Land.[124]

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); David S. Koffman, *The Jews' Indian: Colonialism, Pluralism, and Belonging in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

[123] Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Holly Edwards ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Of course, mine and others' analyses are indebted to the foundational work of Edward Said on the subject. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[124] Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair;* Milette Shamir, "Back to the Future: The Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 93–113; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Place in the World: Jews and the Holy Land at World's Fairs," in Jeffrey Shandler and Beth S.

After their successes at Chicago in 1893, nearly every American fair, exposition, or amusement park over the next few decades viewed "Oriental" concessions like the Streets of Cairo as essential.

Scholarly attention on the American world's fairs has focused on a wide range of issues including American empire, nationalism, anthropology, ethnography, race, exoticism, natural science, industrialization, and technology, among others.[125] In particular, racial ideology was made explicit in the fair's organization and displays of peoples and cultures from around the world, as a White, Christian America sought to assert its dominance and civility in contrast to "lesser-developed" examples. Displays of colonized, "primitive," indigenous peoples from the Americas and Pacific Isles helped reinforce racist notions and justify American supremacy and empire at a time when the United States was rapidly asserting its role as a global superpower.

While these attracted the most attention, groups from all over the world were subjects of ethnological interest, including Jews. At the forefront was Harvard ethnologist and fair organizer Frederic Ward Putnam, whose *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance* featured a series of carefully orchestrated photographs of Pacific Islanders, Asians, Indigenous Americans, European peasants, Sudanese, North Africans, Middle Easterners, and others to serve as visual representations of "ideal" racial and cultural types.[126] For its descriptions of Mediterranean and Levantine Jews,

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Wenger, eds., *Encounters with the "Holy Land": Place, Past and Future in American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, N.H., 1997).

[125] Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Timothy Mitchell, "The World as Exposition," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (April 1989), 217-36.

[126] Francis Ward Putnam, *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance*, (St Louis: N. D. Thompson Publishing Co., 1894).

the foremost Jewish object of anthropological interest at the Chicago fair, European bona fides such as possession of Spanish ancestry or knowledge of Western languages were curiously observed alongside their dissimilarity to familiar Jewish (i.e., Ashkenazi) racial types and closeness to Turkish or Arab features. While not all racial theorists of the time believed Jews to be a singular or "pure" race, those that did were bemused and challenged by the phenotypic diversity of Jews.[127]

George Pangalo's profile in Putnam's *Portrait Types* is instructive for showing how Mediterranean racial ambiguity was not only characteristic of the region's Jews, but its Christians as well. Putnam admits that "it would be difficult to say of just what race this gentleman [Pangalo] is a type," suggesting how "he is entitled to a place in a work on race types as a forerunner of that final race who are to possess the earth when all the nations of [the] globe shall be of one blood."[128] This ambiguous and near-unintelligible racial hybrid presages the various "racial prerequisite" debates brought to US naturalization courts in the first decades of the twentieth century adjudicating the Whiteness of Christian Syrian and Armenian immigrants.[129] Rather than a detriment, Mediterranean fair employees used their racial indeterminacy to their advantage.

Jews and other Mediterranean diaspora groups used this racial and cultural indeterminacy and chameleon-like adaptiveness in shaping popular American understandings of the "Orient," alongside the more commonly acknowledged roles of

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[127] John Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[128] Putnam, *Portrait Types of the Midway Plaisance*, 156.

[129] Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White.*

White, Protestant American missionaries or diplomats.[130] These constructions were partially products - albeit distorted for a Western audience - of the modern Jewish Mediterranean and Levant coming into contact with American perceptions of the "Orient." Jews drew on a constellation of cultural adaptations informed and shaped by their social environment and history, enabling them, ironically, to disappear as Jews and instead appear as Arabs, "Mohammedans," Frenchmen, Spaniards, Egyptians, or Turks.[131] Such slipperiness, both intentional and not, depended on a familiarity and finesse with both the "Eastern" content and the "Western" form, a balance enabled by Ottoman and North African Jews' (and many of their Christian neighbors') in-between positionality alongside the unintelligibility of the "Oriental" Jew" for most Americans. Even when not performing a certain role, Jews were wont to be misidentified or have their Jewishness erased by outside observers. Far from being wholly disingenuous, this flexible sense of what or who an "oriental" Jew could be is found in organizations and groups from New York to Los Angeles that included individuals and families from North Africa, West Asia, Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe, often under an "Oriental" or "Sephardic" label.[132]

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[130] Edwards ed., *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures;* Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream;* Vogel, *To See a Promised Land.*

[131] Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Haim Gerber, "Muslims and Zimmis in Ottoman Economy and Society: Encounters, Culture and Knowledge" in Raoul Motika, Christoph Herzog, and Michael Ursinus, eds., *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic Life* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1999); Cohen, "The East as a Career" and *Becoming Ottomans;* Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture.*

[132] Many leaders of the Federation of Oriental Jews established in New York City in the early 1910s were active in the world's fairs, like the Schinasi and the Benguiat families. Mordecai Zitoun, for his part, was a founding member of the *Comunidad Sefardi* in Los Angeles. See Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America,* chapter 3*;* Devin Naar, "'Sephardim since Birth': Reconfiguring Jewish Identity in America," in Saba Soomekh, ed., *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016).

Jews helped portray a distorted and exaggerated picture of life in "Orient" and often blurred their managerial and performative roles. As Julia Cohen has described, the fair was a place for Jews like the Turkish Village's Robert Levy to perform and capitalize on their ability to self-Orientalize, particularly those with connections to an Ottoman Empire that was cautiously embracing its own brand of pluralism.[133] Typically, the merchant-exhibitor-performers navigated between a Westernized, usually Francophone, identity in business and legal dealings and a generic "Oriental" one in performances and public roles. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has described one such figure, merchant-concessionaire and Izmir-native Hadji Ephraim Benguiat, as "integrating himself into the exhibition as one of the attractions" and "capitaliz[ing] both on his own exoticism as a kind of living ethnographic specimen and on his power as an astute collector and businessman."[134] Performativity could go in the other direction, too. At an event benefiting Istanbul's Jewish hospital, he dressed up as George Washington and was drawn on a carriage to present a gift to Josephine Mayer Hirsch, the wife of the (Jewish) US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Contemporary reports and records speak to the multitude of labels attributed to individuals like the Akouns, none of which were able to capture the full historical and contextual complexity of who they were.

La Belle Baya

Out of all the different aspects of "oriental" concessions at the fairs, the one most relevant to the Akoun family, Mordecai Zitoun, and the beginnings of Los Angeles'

[133] Julia Phillips Cohen, "Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style, and the Performance of Heritage," *The American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (April 2014): 364–98.

[134] Quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 109.

Sephardi community was belly-dancing, also known as the "hootchy-kootchy" or *danse du ventre*. The phenomenon tapped into American male fantasies about a sexualized, feminine, and secretive East while radically departing from "traditional" Middle Eastern dance. The performances became a lightning rod for moral guardians opposed to the immodesty and exploitation of young women, an emblem of female empowerment, an economic opportunity for immigrants, an inauthentic show-business gag, inspiration for major tropes of Orientalist stereotypes, and a catalyst for a flattening of Middle Eastern differences.[135] Word spread far enough of its popularity to upset Ottoman and Persian diplomats who expressed their concerns to American officials about such ostentatious and morally questionable displays of the Islamic world.[136] In Sol Bloom's recollection, they inspired his composition of the "faintly exotic" melody in a "minor key" that has since become a ubiquitous aural signifier of the "orient" in American culture.[137]

Like Mathilde Akoun, these young female dancers were primarily from North Africa and the Levant, although oftentimes local Americans were hired to perform. Perhaps the most famous of the dancers, Syrian Farida Mazhar was coaxed away from one of the Syrian- and Greek-run dance halls in Cairo or Alexandria to perform at the fairs. There she adopted the "Little Egypt" moniker (among several other dancers

[135] Holly Edwards, "A Million and One Nights: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930," in *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures*; Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream*; Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt.*

[136] Zeynep Çelik, "Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse at the World's Columbian Exposition" in *Noble Dreams*; Selim Deringil, "The Hamidian State and the World's Fairs: 'The Whole World is Watching!' in Motika, et. al. eds. *Studies in Ottoman Social and Economic Life,* 199; Williams, "Triumph of Commercialism."

[137] Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom,* 135. For a modern recording of the melody and subsequent song, see "The Streets of Cairo or the Poor Little Country Maid," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THcamJ5WSFQ. Accessed July 25, 2022.

claiming the title) and became the country's most well-known "belly-dancer."[138] Mazhar's marriage to Greek-American restaurateur Andrew Spyropoulos parallels Mathilde Akoun's to Ottoman Jewish merchant Victor Roditi, offering another indication of the interconnected and parallel Mediterranean world of world's fair dancers, managers, and merchants and the religious limitations of kinship ties. Few records exist that chronicle specific individual performers, but Putnam's *Portrait Types* mentions Jewish dancers like "Rebecca Meise Alithensii" from Constantinople, "Rahlo Jammele" from Jerusalem, and "Nazha Kassik" of Beirut - although there were others who were not featured in the photography collection nor identified as Jewish elsewhere.[139] One such missing performer was Mathilde Akoun, who performed as "La Belle Baya" at the Persian Palace in Chicago, a concession managed by Syrian merchant George Kabil Debbas, Persian Presbyterian missionary Mirza (or Mirja) Yacob, and Mathilde's mother and Akoun family matriarch, Orida. As assistant manager of the concession, she was one of most powerful women at the fair apart from the Board of Lady Managers.[140]

At Chicago's Persian Palace concession - Persian in name only – the risqué performances were temporarily shut down and modified after complaints from the fair's Director-General and the Board of Lady Managers.[141] Controversy over the moral

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[138] George Pangalo, "The Story of Some Old Friends: How the Streets of Cairo Came to the World's Fair," *The Cosmopolitan* Vol 23, (May-October 1897), 277-288.; Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream,* chapter 6; Donna Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt* (Bloomington: IDD Books, 1994).

[139] Putnam, *Portrait Types,* 4, 42, 51.

[140] Williams, "Triumph of Commercialism," 4 ; "Cairo-Street Gates," *The Morning Call* [San Francisco], May 15, 1894, 4.

[141] "Persian Girls Do Not Dance: Their Theater is Closed by Order of Director-General Davis," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* August 6, 1893, 2. *Views of the World's Fair Midway Plaisance* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1894), 171; John Ghazvinian, *America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 48-49; Carlton, *Looking for Little Egypt,* 49.

propriety of the female dancers also followed them to the California Midwinter International Exposition of 1894 in San Francisco, leading to a civil lawsuit pursued by the Society for the Suppression of Vice. The prosecution targeted the management in addition to the dancers, charging the former of "encourag[ing] ignorant and innocent foreigners to break our laws and offend the sensitive natures of the inhabitants of San Francisco."[142] Represented by a young Abraham Ruef, the Jewish lawyer who was soon to become the political boss of San Francisco, defendants included Mathilde Akoun and her mother Orida alongside dancers Amina Brahin, Sayeda Machachmet, Fareja Ben Salomon, Kadusha Ben Said, and conductor Haleel Nassom.[143] After Orida Akoun, a "stout woman clad in a red waist," argued that the dance styles were a typical "race characteristic" of Algiers and that the offensive act in question was incited by Berkeley college students, the dancers were acquitted. Controversy over the dancers continued but did little to dissuade the show from continuing, and it is likely that the concession managers occasionally stoked the flames themselves to boost ticket sales.[144] This was neither the first nor last time "oriental" dancers were made to demonstrate the act in question before packed courtrooms, piqued jurors, and frustrated judges. Performing the Orient was not simply a business or aesthetic choice, but one that could bypass legal and moral reprobation in the name of cultural authenticity.

Less than a month later, press coverage of Mathilde Akoun's marriage to Victor Roditi (officiated by Ruef) also provides an example of how the ambiguous identity of

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[142] *The Northwestern Law Review*, Vol 2, no. 4 (March 1894), 124.

[143] "On with the Dance: Cairo-Street Beauties in Court," *San Francisco Chronicle,* April 10, 1894; *The Morning Call* [San Francisco], April 7, 1894, 12.

[144] "Beautiful Orient," *Ins and Outs of Buffalo, The Queen City of the Lakes: A Thoroughly Authentic and Profusely Illustrated Guide,* (Buffalo: A. B. Floyd, 1899), 179-82.

the Mediterranean Jew crossed the fairground gates into the public realm. The *San Francisco Call* reported the marriage of “La Belle Baya" to the “Turkish cap”-wearing Roditi according to the religious service of the “Mohammedan church.”[145] The encompassing performativity of the “Orient” was on display once again when, in advance of the 1904 St. Louis fair, the extended Akoun family’s “transplanted Eastern home” in that city was described as “quaintly Levantine” decorated with “Arabian armament,” “Assyrian cloths,” “Moroccan scarfs,” and “Algerian rugs.”[146] Following in the steps of Robert Levy and Hadji Ephraim Benguiat, Akoun embodied the role of the Mediterranean Jewish doyen of the “orient” in America.

Adjudicating the Orient in Omaha, 1898

Despite the controversy raised by the moral propriety of the dancing, concessionaires likely viewed this as free advertising rather than a hindrance. What did incite more serious conflict was the competition between managers and directors of the different “oriental” exhibits. At the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska, the fight between Gaston Akoun’s Streets of All Nations and George Pangalo’s Streets of Cairo reached the courts and nearly caused the fair’s executive board to dissolve.

Working closely with his stepfather Mordecai Zitoun, Akoun sought to “illustrate the life and customs of the people in a number of Old-World cities” and “represent the

[145] “Bella a Bride,” *The Morning Call*], May 3, 1894, 4.

[146] “A Patch of the Orient in St. Louis: M. Akoun’s Home is Quaintly Levantine,” *The St. Louis Republic*, February 8, 1903.

actual conditions in the country depicted" in his concession. It would be "peopled by natives of those countries" who would "manufacture articles peculiar to their country, which will be sold as souvenirs."[147] Strikingly similar was "Streets of Cairo," with George Pangalo's former assistant, Icilio Ninci, taking the reins. Ninci advertised that the inhabitants of the concession "will pursue their native arts and will conduct themselves the same as at home. We will have the Egyptian theater, where the Egyptian dances and plays will be put on. There will be the camels, the donkeys, the booths and the smoking parlors. It is our purpose to make the concession an exact reproduction of one of the fashionable streets in an Egyptian city."[148]

The similarities between the concessions, immediately evident in their Ancient Egyptian-style facades, motivated a lawsuit by the Streets of Cairo's Oriental Exposition Company against the Street of All Nations, alleging Akoun's infringement on Cairo's exclusive, contractual, rights to display anything connected to Egypt or the Orient - including donkeys, camels, and Egyptians themselves.[149] A similar issue had already been raised in Chicago, whose Department of Collections discovered that what was sold as oriental goods were often "French goods of oriental design," and advised other expositions that granting such exclusive rights were hard to enforce and mostly undesirable.[150] This advice, apparently, went unheeded in Omaha. The record of these

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[147] *Omaha Bee,* March 7, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 4, p. 35, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive, Omaha Public Library and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, https://trans-mississippi.unl.edu/.

[148] *The Evening Bee* [Omaha], May 4, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 4, p. 107, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[149] "Concessionaires Go to War," *Daily Bee* [Omaha], May 18, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 4, p. 133, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[150] *Report of the President to the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition*, 467.

legal battles reveals some of the intricacies of familial, social, ethnic, and economic networks and partnerships responsible for introducing Americans to "the Orient" and the key role of Mediterranean Jews and Christians. The fact that much of what we know relies on press coverage of often dramatic courtroom debates also suggests a certain American-style faith or reliance on the power of the courtroom. Additionally, the specific nature of the argument - over what is considered "Oriental" and who has the rights to its display (and thus its financial dividends) – helps reveal the concessionaires' intentions and how they claimed authority and expertise.

Beginning in May of 1898, before the fair's June 1st opening, the matter would drag on past the fair's close into December and snowballed into a series of counter-injunctions and controversies involving the managers of the fair, the local press, and judiciary. At the outset, Judge Cunningham R. Scott of the Omaha, Nebraska District Court ruled that the Streets of Cairo indeed had exclusive rights and restrained Akoun's Street of All Nations from using "camels, donkeys, and exhibiting oriental life." Rather than a matter of contracts or poor planning, the primary question revolved around what was or was not "oriental."[151] Emil Lermy, a French-German Jew who ran the Great French Bazaar at the Street of All Nations, testified that the concession did not attempt to portray anything Egyptian, asserting his professional knowledge of oriental clothing styles and pointing out that employees were dressed in clothes of "Greece, Italy, Spain, France, and the Islands of Malta" and not Egypt or the Orient.[152] If Lermy is to be

[151] "Judges Meet on Midway Cases," *World Herald* [Omaha], June 22, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 74-75 , Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[152] "Judge Scott Proceeds with the Hearing of the Streets of All Nations Matter," *The Evening Bee* [Omaha], June 23, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 81, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

believed, his testimony corroborates the argument that Jews and others did indeed understand differences among Mediterranean cultures but did not try to translate that into their concessions or performances. Seemingly contradicting their own case, Akoun's attorney also argued that the "oriental-ness" of the Street of All Nations laborers was inalienable, saying that they "were carrying out the ideas of the countries from which the people came, and to infringe upon them would be to deprive such people of their personal liberties."[153] In language redolent of the Declaration of Independence, the employees of the Street of All Nations had the right, under American law, to be "oriental."

Akoun's defensive strategy became more complicated, however, since it was alleged that executive concession managers A. L. Reed and S. B. Wadley, alongside *Omaha Bee* and fair financier Ed Rosewater (a Bohemian-born Jew), had personally invested in the Street of All Nations and were interested in damaging Cairo's profits.[154] To make matters more contentious, Judge Scott had defeated Rosewater in an election bid for district judge and were said to be personal enemies. Exposition management, possibly in retaliation for their suit against Akoun, tried unsuccessfully to shut down the Streets of Cairo over inappropriate "muscle dances," while the *Bee's* competitor, the *Omaha World-Herald,* railed against Rosewater's defense of Akoun and the "systematic persecution" of the Streets of Cairo concession.[155] Judge Scott, upset by all involved,

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[153] "Contempt Case Not Ended, *"The Evening Bee* [Omaha], June 27, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 96, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[154] "Seek to Influence the Court," The *Evening Bee* [Omaha], June 13, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 41, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[155] "In Hands of Exposition," *World Herald* [Omaha], June 11, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 34-35 , Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive; "Reed and Others in Sheriff's Custody," *The World Herald* [Omaha], June 21, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 74, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

including other judges, commented that he would prefer dealing with "some of the donkeys" from the fair than any of the defendants.[156] Scott charged Reed, Wadley, Akoun, and Zitoun with contempt for ignoring the original restraining order, and were held in custody until released under *habeas corpus* ten days later. In a triumphant return, Akoun and Zitoun were carried on the shoulders of "husky Greeks and Turks" through the Street of All Nations, accompanied by a parade of camels and donkeys.[157]

In the months after the fair's close, further testimony of Akoun, Zitoun and other employees of the Street of All Nations revealed how they were threatened and pressured by Reed and Wadley to ignore Judge Scott's injunctions. No longer under the sway of the fair's legal team, Akoun had now given up the ruse of pretending his concession was not "oriental." Cross-examined by Carrol Montgomery, Akoun protested the use of the "vulgar" *danse du ventre* term and expressed his "intimate familiarity with all kinds of oriental dances and his competency as an expert on these performances."[158] However, Lermy confirmed that much of the "oriental goods" sold were imitations - like the French goods sold in Chicago - and neither were the shows particularly genuine.

Montgomery, who had recently defended Akoun and Zitoun, allegedly instructed the two men to falsify documents indicating that the concession's camels were the property of Isaac Benyakar (now working for his former manager's competitors), and

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[156] "Would Rather Have Donkeys," *The World Herald* [Omaha], June 25, 1898 clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 85, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[157] "End of Midway Case," *The Evening Bee* [Omaha], July 1, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 102, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[158] "He's an Expert on Dances," *The World Herald* [Omaha], November 12, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 7, p. 183, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

that Judge Scott's injunction would harm his earnings.[159] Montgomery had advised the men to flee across state lines to Iowa to avoid arrest and also threatened Akoun and Zitoun for not promptly paying his legal fees. Most damningly for the lawyer, Zitoun testified in broken English: "Montgomery he say 'go 'head, no pay attention to order, Judge Scott he no can do anything, he one fool, he got no jurisdiction; you go 'head, I fix him, he's crazy.'" [160] Exonerating Akoun and Zitoun, Judge Scott found Montgomery, Wadley, Reed, and fair director Gurdon Wattles guilty and opened disbarment proceedings for Montgomery. Having called the presiding judge crazy and a fool certainly did not help. Like the ways in which his sister's dancing was subject to investigation a few years earlier, Gaston Akoun's fate lay in how "Oriental" his concession was or was not. So valuable was the right and ability to portray the East that lengthy and bitter legal battles were fought over it.

Jerusalem on the Mississippi

In Chicago, astute observers and journalists noted how many of those employed in the "oriental" concessions, particularly the Turkish Village, were in fact Jews. However, their Jewishness was either obscured by other performative identities or deemed irrelevant to the exhibits.[161] It was only in St. Louis that Jews, "Oriental" or otherwise, were explicitly made part of a concession.[162]

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[159] "Gets a Counter Injunction," *The Omaha Daily Bee,* June 19, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 5, p. 61, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[160] "Zitoune's Camels Cut a Figure in Case," *The World Herald* [Omaha], November 13, 1898, clipping, Wakefield Scrapbook Volume 7, p. 183-84, Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition Digital Archive.

[161] Cohen, "East as Career," "Oriental by Design," *Becoming Ottomans.*

[162] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "A Place in the World," in Shandler and Wenger, eds., *Encounters with the "Holy Land."*

The Jerusalem concession was one of the largest and most visually arresting parts of the St. Louis exposition, employing hundreds of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian "natives." The eleven-acre scale reproduction of the contemporary, Ottoman city featured reconstructions of the Mosque of Omar, the Wailing Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and was operated and funded by American Protestants. Scholars have acknowledged the exhibit's significance as a ground for "staging a racialized antiquity" and its placing of Palestine and its "oriental" Jews, Christians, and Muslims under the imperialist gaze of the fair.[163] Its edifying intention as an antidote to performative sideshows endemic to concessions portraying the same region, the presence of "natives," as well as the exhibit's location between the entertainments of the Pike and the Fine Arts Building placed Jerusalem on the thin line between amusement and education – an ambiguous situation common to world fairs. For example, the concession planned to feature a "daily Jewish funeral" to showcase the "four different classes of Jews," as well as a "Company of Hebrews" for a "dramatic and musical" performance in a "Beth Deen or Judgement Hall" in Hebrew and Yiddish for the "benefit of thousands of Jewish people who will attend."[164] The role of Jews in American Protestantism's millenarian worldview, and to a lesser extent the interest of American Jewry, help explain why they were made an integral part of the concession - as

[163] Rehav Rubin, "When Jerusalem Was Built in St. Louis: A Large Scale Model of Jerusalem in the Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 132, no. 1 (2000): 59–70; Milette Shamir, "Back to the Future: The Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): 93–113.; Keith Feldman, "Seeing Is Believing: US Imperial Culture and the Jerusalem Exhibit of 1904," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 35, no. 1 (2016): 98–118.

[164] Meeting Minutes [undated], p. 162, Series V, Subseries I, Box 13, Folder 5, Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company Records, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis.

opposed to world's fairs' typical "Oriental" entertainments of which Jews were not a visible part.

The concession was directed by Alexander Konta, a Hungarian immigrant and banker, and Madame Lydia Mamreoff von Finklestein Mountford, a Christian missionary, public speaker, and journalist in America who had been born in Palestine to a Russian Jewish family.[165] Self-described as "Jewish in knowledge and custom, perfected in Christianity," Mountford had previously organized theatrical performances of Biblical and Near Eastern life for American Chautauqua Institutes in the 1890s that led her to the kind of work she would take on in St. Louis.[166] Like Syrian-Lebanese Arabs and Armenians, Mediterranean Jewish connections to American Protestant missionaries were also part of their story of migration to the US, even in this small way.

By 1904, Ottoman and Middle Eastern Jews had yet to settle in large numbers in the US, and for even the most informed fairgoer, the St. Louis fair was likely their first encounter with the "Oriental Jew" on American soil. As part of the Jerusalem concession Jews figured as anthropological objects that, alongside Muslims and Orthodox Christians, illustrated a Protestant supersessionist vision of the Holy Land.[167] These were individuals transported not only through space, but through time - as if they lived during the Biblical era. At the exhibit's groundbreaking and dedication ceremony in August 1903, the presence and role of Jews was made explicit. The gathering featured speeches and benedictions from the concession's managers, directors, and various

[165] Lenny Ben David, "Lydia Mountford and 19th Century Life in Jerusalem: Life in Palestine 1830-1880 as described by a very unusual woman, Lydia Mamreoff von Finkelstein Mountford," *Arutz Sheva,* July 6, 2014.

[166] Long, *Imagining the Holy Land.*

[167] Vogel, *To See a Promised Land*, 226.

faith leaders and was accompanied by the presence of camels, donkeys, and native people. The “cosmopolitan gathering” featured “dark-skinned,” “picturesque Jews of the Orient” with “features of a strict biblical type” and “dressed in colorful gabardines and turbans of their Eastern climes” – defined as a “costume of another and older civilization.” They were compared with the “swarthy Turks” and “lithe-limbed horsemen from Araby,” but contrasted to the “modern Yiddish orthodox Jew of America, dressed in European garb, with only the velvet cap and the prayer shawl draped over his shoulders to denote kinship with his fellow-religionist of the Orient."[168] The racial ambiguity and heterogeneity of the “Oriental” Jew, as it had in Putnam’s portraits from Chicago, was once again the subject of intense fascination.

These so-called “picturesque” Jews (perhaps the author saw Putnam’s collection) were the same Mediterranean Jews who continued to serve in managerial, performative, and mercantile roles at Jerusalem and other ”oriental” concessions, including future founders of the Los Angeles Sephardi community like the Ottoman-born Jacques Caraco, Mandolino Levy, and Ovadia Haim. Mediterranean Jews still performed their self-Orientalizing routines even if the “oriental Jew” was being introduced to the public as a human curiosity. In Gaston Akoun’s Mysterious Asia concession in St. Louis, future Los Angeles resident Nissim Sasso occupied a storefront advertising “Prof.” Sasso as “The Oriental Seer” and “Hindoo palmist and astrologer.” [169] At Jerusalem, Mordecai Zitoun held a prominent role as superintendent of the exhibit

[168] “City of Jerusalem,” *World's Fair Bulletin,* Vol. 4, no. 10 (August 1903), 34.

[169] “Dancing Girls on Camels through street in "Mysterious Asia". The World's Fair. St. Louis, Mo.,” Keystone-Mast Collection, UCR/California Museum of Photography, University of California at Riverside. http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt7199p8w9/?order=2&brand=calisphere. Accessed May 7, 2022.

and close colleague of Mountford, traveling together to Palestine to arrange and plan the fair. However, disagreements over money and employment contracts drove a wedge between the two and contributed to both eventually becoming alienated from the concession.[170] Undoubtedly, their two very different approaches to the concession contributed to their split. Mountford eventually resigned from her position because she believed that Jerusalem had become a burlesque show and strayed from her moral and edificatory goals. The turn towards the carnivalesque - likely to turn a greater profit than her more austere vision - was driven somewhat by Zitoun, who broke his contract to work for his stepson Gaston Akoun at Mysterious Asia.[171]

Conclusion

By the time they reached Abbot Kinney's Venice in 1905, the Akoun-Zitoun family had participated in the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle (Algerian and Tunisian Village), the 1893 World's Columbian Fair in Chicago (Persian Palace), 1894 Midwinter Expo in San Francisco (Oriental Village-Streets of Cairo), the 1897 Nashville Exposition (Streets of Cairo), the 1898 Omaha Exposition (Streets of All Nations), the 1899 Philadelphia Exposition (Cairo Theater), the 1901 Charleston (Streets of Cairo) and Buffalo (Beautiful Orient) fairs, the 1904 St. Louis Exposition (Mysterious Asia), and the 1905 Portland, Oregon fair (Streets of Cairo). Over the course of fifteen years of fairs, new familial bonds were made while others weakened, and branches of the expanding

[170] "Jerusalem Exhibitor Applies for a Warrant," *The St. Louis Republic*, November 11, 1903, 8.

[171] "Jerusalem Company Sued," *The St. Louis Republic,* July 28,1904, 8; "Wants Algeria Depositions," *The St. Louis Republic,* November 1, 1904, 9; Long, *Imagining the Holy Land,* 67.

family began settling in different parts of the world. After having gained considerable renown for his concession work, the declining popularity of world's fairs led Gaston Akoun to open a version of Coney Island's extremely popular Luna Park in Paris in 1909. While settled in France, business frequently took him back to the US, where he died in 1943.[172] His younger brother Fernand, after working at Coney Island in Brooklyn, brought American-style entertainment to Europe and led a touring exhibition of Native Americans as the director of the ethnological department of Paris' zoological gardens.[173]

Mordecai Zitoun, along with his daughter, son-in-law, and grandson, chose to stay in Los Angeles after the Venice amusements closed, as did other fair employees like Ottoman-born Jacques Caraco, Ovadia Haim, and Mandolino Levy. With thirty other migrants, they helped establish the *Comunidad Sefardi de Los Angeles* in February 1920. Caraco, Haim, and Levy were all active in the organized Sephardic community in the years following their arrival in LA in 1905, and Caraco's father became the community's first rabbi. Although Rose (née Zitoun) Bramy and her family soon moved to San Francisco, her niece Stella (née Bramy) Rugetti became a pillar of LA's Sephardi community from the 1950s onward. Meanwhile, former tobacco magnate brothers Maurice and Raphael Amado and their extended family have been some of the community's most important benefactors.

In his chronology of Sephardi Los Angeles, archivist, historian, and collector I. M. "Bob" Hattem's lists Zitoun as the community's first settler and its historical point of

[172] Williams, "Triumph of Commercialism," 77; "M. Gaston Akoun Re-Enters Amusement Field in France," *The Billboard*, January 8, 1921, 6.

[173] Steve Friesen and François Chladiuk, *Lakota Performers in Europe: Their Culture and the Artifacts They Left Behind.* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 44-45.

origin when he arrived to work at Abbot Kinney's "Venice of America."[174] Omitted from this origin story are Zitoun's much more famous - and infamous - stepchildren as well as the broader global itineraries, inter- and intraethnic networks, and cultural shapeshifting covered in this chapter.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the diverse and disparate roots of Los Angeles's Sephardi community and the ambiguous, flexible, and adaptive identities of some of its founding members. By tracing a rich network of performers and merchants active in the world's fairs and beyond, I made two major points that structure a history that can challenge our understandings of Jews, the Middle East, and Orientalism in America. For one, the world's fairs demonstrate how Jews were an inextricable part of a broader Mediterranean diaspora in the Americas and the United States in particular. Second, I uncover how these Jews' ambiguous racial and cultural identities could bolster their commercial and professional endeavors and shape American consumer tastes for all things "Oriental." These two themes of interethnic and relational histories alongside and in connection to the identity formations of Mediterranean Jews, exemplified by the fairs, led them to Los Angeles and established the themes that would characterize twentieth century Sephardi Jewry in the US. Chapter Two will look at how these were realized in Los Angeles, particularly in the economic and occupational realm in relation to a diverse Southern California population.

[174] M. I. "Bob" Hattem, "A History from The Earliest Beginnings," https://sephardictemple.org/our-history/. Accessed April 25, 2022.

Chapter Two: Fruit Peddlers, Wholesale Florists, and Sephardim Along Los Angeles's Racial Fault Lines

In November 1918, Jack Caraco was one of thirty-five fruit peddlers arrested in Los Angeles for violating California's State Food Sanitation Act. Alongside at least one other Sephardi immigrant were Ashkenazi, Greek, Italian, and Japanese offenders.[175] At the time, street vendors, peddlers, and small-scale fruit merchants were considered immigrant occupations and often subject to discriminatory public health and zoning restrictions.[176] In particular, LA was putting significant effort into policing, quarantining, and monitoring the health and sanitation of its Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese residents. To a certain extent, Caraco and other Jewish, European, and Mediterranean migrants were also subject to the same legal and social structures of White supremacy in the years leading up to World War II. These dynamics were essential parts of shaping the role of Sephardim within the racially stratified economy and urban environment of early twentieth century Los Angeles.

Caraco's inclusion in the multiethnic police roundup is reflective of the networks, itineraries, and relationships that helped shape and define the first several decades of Sephardi life in Los Angeles. With the rapid expansion of LA through the first half of the century, Sephardim developed economic - and occasionally social - ties with Greek, Italian, Japanese, Anglo, Spanish-speaking, and Armenian Americans which were often

[175] "Fruit Dealers Get Hearings Postponed: Many Are Charged with Violating State Food Sanitation Act," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 1918, II8.

[176] A strikingly similar parallel can be found for arrests made for illegal fishing near Seattle. See Matthew Klingle, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 176.

as deep or deeper than those with Ashkenazim. Despite the relatively small scale of their commercial activity compared to the capaciousness of the world's fairs, Sephardi success in LA still depended on close cooperation with other economic networks. This chapter focuses on the ways that different ethnic niches overlapped, clashed with, and otherwise shaped Sephardim's place in Los Angeles. Like how the previous chapter conceptualized a relational Mediterranean American diaspora inclusive of Jews, these relationships are essential to understanding the Los Angeles Sephardi experience in economic, social, racial, and spatial terms.[177]

This chapter looks at early twentieth century Los Angeles's interethnic agricultural industry broadly conceived, specifically the retail and wholesale sides of the produce and flower trades. In the process of exploring these Sephardi niches, we come to better appreciate what environmental historian Douglas Sackman calls the false binary of the urban and the agricultural.[178] Bringing this insight to Jewish studies bridges the historiographical and conceptual gap between Jews and American agriculture, a largely overlooked relationship despite the considerable symbolic and economic significance of farming in American history.[179] Doing so more firmly illustrates how, despite their overwhelmingly urban and suburban character, American Jews could be

[177] Natalia Molina, ed., *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019). Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007).

[178] Douglas Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 6.

[179] With the occasional exception of idiosyncratic farming communities. For example, see Uri D. Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880-1910* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

deeply integrated into and important to the country's lucrative agricultural sector. For the city's relatively tiny community of Sephardi Jews, relational and occupational histories of Los Angeles underscore the subtle ways in which Sephardim were shaped by the city's sweeping racial and economic structures, the ways those determined the geography and map of city, and how Sephardim transformed them in the process.

Sephardim and the Racial Fault Lines of Los Angeles

Jack Caraco was typical of early Sephardi arrivals to Los Angeles. Born in Ottoman Bursa in 1884, he arrived in the US in 1904 to sell tobacco products at the St. Louis World's fair. After moving to LA later that year, Caraco earned his pay through various enterprises selling ice cream, oriental goods, meat, or produce, usually partnering with other immigrant Sephardi Jews. He soon invited his family to join him, including his father - LA's first Sephardi rabbi, Abraham Caraco. Other members of the extended Caraco family became the first lay and religious leaders of the small but growing colony of Ottoman and Mediterranean Jews in the city. While majority male until the 1930s, like many immigrant groups in the US, the community and its handful of social and religious organizations included active sisterhood organizations led by Abraham's wife Rebecca (née Tobey) Caraco, her daughter Catherine, and her daughters-in-law Mathilda and Jeanie. The multi-generational Caraco home, initially located near downtown before moving southwest to the suburban Crenshaw/Leimert Park neighborhood, served as the first destination for many new Sephardi arrivals in LA in the 1910s and 1920s. Their home became the center of a budding Sephardi

community in LA built on social, occupational, religious, linguistic, residential, and familial relationships.[180]

Despite the US's strict immigration policies of the 1920s, virtually cutting of all arrivals from Eastern and Southern Europe, along with nearly the entire Asian continent, a steady trickle of Sephardi Jews continued to make their way to LA and the Caraco home. On the way, they passed through places like New York, Seattle, Cuba, Argentina, or Mexico from origin points across the Mediterranean, Balkans, and Middle East. Together with Jack Caraco, many of them had recently been world's fair employees such as Mordecai Zitoun, Ovadia Haim, Nissim Sasso, and Mandolino Levy. Initially attracted to the region by Abbot Kinney's new Venice of America project, those who remained formed *Ahavat Shalom* in 1912, the first organized body serving Mediterranean Jews in Los Angeles. Many of these men began selling oriental goods as they had during the fairs, but they found little opportunity in a city with different consumer tastes than their previous East Coast or San Francisco based customers, not to mention the difficulty of importing goods from France or the Ottoman Empire to the Pacific Coast.

As the population of LA's Ottoman and Mediterranean Jews grew, different occupational niches and concentrations began to emerge. The predominance of Sephardi immigrant and native-born peddlers, merchants, retailers, and wholesalers in the flower and produce trades placed them in a unique and critical position in a region and city deeply shaped by the interwoven aspects of agriculture, urban growth, and

[180] Maurice Caraco, "Early Memories of the LA Sephardic Community," Box 24, Folder 3, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel records (Collection 2340). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library. University of California, Los Angeles. [STTI Records]

White supremacy. Marked by what Tomas Almaguer calls the region's "racial fault lines," Southern California's demographic, economic, and political profile created a distinct social landscape that differed from the normative Black-White binary of other US racial contexts.[181] In the pre-World War II era, Sephardim along with Ashkenazim, Eastern and Southern Europeans, Armenians, and Syrians, among others, found themselves ambiguously situated within Southern California's shifting "racial fault lines," which in the early twentieth century pit native-born Whites at the top and Mexican, Native, Black, and Asian peoples at the bottom.[182] As the city grew, late nineteenth century boosters promoted Los Angeles as a "White spot" in the American West that was complemented by the narrative of a Spanish fantasy past that sought to align the city with a European/Mediterranean heritage as opposed to an indigenous or Mexican one.[183]

LA's unique "racial fault lines" have prompted many to observe that unlike other American cities at the time, European immigrants were not a particularly noticeable

[181] Mark Wild, *Street Meeting : Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); John H. M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5; Lewthwaite; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[182] John H.M. Laslett, "Immigration and the Rise of a Distinctive Urban Region 1900-1970," in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996); Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 198; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*.

[183] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

presence, perhaps with the exception of Jews.[184] However, the creation of Los Angeles as a "White spot" relied on the implicit and explicit categorization, segregation, and racialization of all its residents, including Europeans and the small number of newly arriving Mediterranean and Middle Eastern migrants.[185] Factors like citizenship status, language, residence, wealth, occupation, and skin tone all had potential to alter one's racial standing, as could explicit laws and court rulings.[186] In the relational approach taken here, other groups were instrumental in setting the standards of comparison for those like Sephardi Jews who occupied an ambiguous and changing position along the spectrum of racial hierarchy in the region.

Jack Caraco arrived when the broader Los Angeles area was a thinly populated, largely agricultural settlement mostly made up of transplanted White, Protestant Americans from the Midwest and East Coast alongside relatively smaller Mexican, Japanese, and Black populations. It was a far cry from the instant metropolises of the world's fairs, however much Southern California's ethnic diversity or Mediterranean climate may have reminded Jews of their former homes. By the outbreak of World War II LA remained majority White, but wartime production needs created significant demand for laborers that rapidly increased the population of foreign-born and people of color, especially Blacks and Mexicans. In the coming decades these communities would

[184] Especially Chapter One in Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis : Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 76.

[185] Douglas Sackman, "A Garden of Worldly Delights," in William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 254.

[186] Ian Haney Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

rebel against the city's racial hierarchies, particularly as it affected their inequitable experiences with housing, jobs, political representation, and policing.

Like that of the city, the history of Los Angeles's Jews in the early twentieth century is characterized by rapid population growth, regional expansion, and economic restructuring. While in 1900 there were twenty-five hundred Jews in an urban population of one hundred thousand, by 1930 seventy thousand Jews were part of the ever-growing population of 1.2 million Angelenos.[187] Still in the shadow of San Francisco, early twentieth century LA Jewry revolved around downtown's Reform B'nai B'rith Congregation (later the Wilshire Boulevard Temple) and its middle-class German-Jewish leaders. Internally diverse, Jews did not belong to or operate within only one strata of pre-war Los Angeles. Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews began to arrive in the city, largely settling in the downtown area like many immigrant arrivals. First concentrating on Temple Street in the 1910s and then on Central Avenue in the 1920s, Boyle Heights subsequently became a vibrant center of Jewish life in LA through the 1950s. Partly because of its absence of racial covenants for renting or purchasing property, this east side neighborhood became a flourishing multiethnic neighborhood of Jews, Mexicans, Japanese, Blacks, and others. It was home to a variety of religious, cultural, and political organizations, although groups tended to be socially segregated from one another.[188] Meanwhile, middle-class and white-collar Jews gravitated toward

[187] Jules Tygiel, "Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s," in Tom Sitton, ed., *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Max Vorspan and Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1970).

[188] George J. Sanchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).; Caroline Luce, "Visions of a Jewish Future: The Jewish Bakers Union and Yiddish Culture in East Los Angeles, 1908-1942" (PhD, Los Angeles, University of California, Los Angeles, 2013).

Hollywood and the Westside, with many working in film.[189] Separated by culture, language, custom, class, and occupational niches, LA's different Jewish communities were nevertheless connected in superficial and limited ways, particularly through philanthropy. And even before it became California's leading metropolis - a title still held by San Francisco - LA became the Jewish center of the American West.

Analyses of Jews and race in Los Angeles (and in the US more generally) have tended to address the topic from cultural and political perspectives.[190] For example, the Jewish Hollywood elite's relationship to race tended to mimic the White-Black binary of the US at large, both on and off screen.[191] For eastsiders, their multicultural neighborhood set the stage for intergroup political cooperation and competition with Mexicans, Blacks, Asians, and others.[192] Missing from these otherwise important perspectives is how, as Rebecca Kobrin has argued, Jews relied on specific racial dynamics to insert themselves into the workings of American capitalism.[193] The

[189] Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1988); Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); William Toll, "Pacific Jewry, 1880-194," Marc Lee Raphael, ed., *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 233; Vorspan and Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*.

[190] Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Raphael Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Max D. Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake: The Scope of Jewish Politics in Los Angeles from Watts to Rodney King, 1965-1992" (University of California, Los Angeles, Ph.D. diss., 2017); Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

[191] Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[192] Sanchez, *Boyle Heights;* Luce, "Visions of a Jewish Future."

[193] Rebecca Kobrin, ed., *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

economic and occupational turns in American Jewish studies have encouraged further study in this direction, as have pivots toward relational approaches that examine Jews alongside other ethnic and racial groups.[194] Furthermore, both of these approaches have been accompanied by a deeper examination and incorporation of Jews outside east coast metropolitan centers, particularly in the American South and West, all of which help to answer questions about the variety of immigrant Jews' occupational roles and experiences in a racially stratified American economy.[195] The predominance of Jewish middlemen, peddlers, and street merchants in America has been well documented, but most of these studies have been populated by Yiddish-speaking immigrants on the east coast who dealt in textiles and clothing.[196] A closer consideration of Sephardim turns away from the Ashkenazi-centric garment trade and towards fruit and vegetable peddling, revealing a history of proximity to and estrangement from Japanese Americans, among others.[197]

Jack Caraco's journey from produce peddler to retail grocer and from downtown renter to suburban homeowner represents some of the critical steps on the road to middle-class Los Angeles. This process was also heavily inscribed by race such that

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[194] David S. Koffman, "Review: The Occupational Turn in American Jewish History," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 35, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 82–86; Ellen Eisenberg, "State of the Field: Jews & Others," *American Jewish History* 102, no. 2 (2018): 283–301; Ellen Eisenberg, ed., *Jewish Identities in the American West: Relational Perspectives* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2022); George Sanchez, "Regionalism: The Significance of Place in American Jewish Life," American Jewish History 93, no. 2 (June 2007): 113–27.

[195] Kobrin, *Chosen Capital,* 3.

[196] Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and Peddlers Who Forged the Way,* (Yale University Press, 2015); Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Adam D. Mendelsohn, *The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in America and the British Empire*. (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

[197] Both Diner and Heinze refer to such comparisons and parallels, but they are ancillary to their main arguments.

Sephardi Jews had greater opportunities and success doing so than their Black neighbors, Japanese colleagues, fellow Spanish-speaking Mexicans, and possibly even their Ashkenazi coreligionists. By passing as Greek, Italian, or Armenian, and with names, accents, and professions different from Ashkenazim, Sephardim might have bypassed residential and other discriminatory restrictions aimed at Jews, similar to how some Mexican Americans in LA did so by identifying as "Spanish."[198] Furthermore, Sephardi concentration in occupations associated with Japanese Americans like produce and flowers could accentuate the former's comparative Whiteness, a dynamic solidified during wartime restrictions and internment. By examining Sephardi Jews' encounter with Southern California's "racial fault lines" through an occupational lens, I reveal some of the subtle workings of what Allison Varzally calls the "voluntary, multiple, and shifting version[s] of boundary making."[199]

From Immigrant *comunidad* to Los Angeles Community

The transition from a small band of former world's fair merchants hawking "oriental" goods to a community of peddlers - later retailers and wholesalers - of locally-grown produce and flowers relied on a series of global, regional, and urban migration paths that led Sephardim not only to LA or the Americas, but to colonial Africa and Western Europe as well. Their reliance on family networks, connections to other Jews,

[198] For this phenomenon in Argentina, see the Introduction in Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity, 1880-1960* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016); Jerry Gonzalez, *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 9.

[199] Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 12.

commercial relationships with non-Jews, and transnational entanglements were all staples of the early modern and modern Sephardi experience, which continued to reverberate in twentieth century Los Angeles.[200] Nevertheless, Southern California was not a mirror of Istanbul, Alexandria, Mexico City, or New York. Los Angeles's decentralized and fragmented growth, its foundations in an agricultural economy, and its racialized residential and occupational hierarchies laid out a unique context for the unfolding of the city's Sephardi history.

For many of the several dozen Sephardi Jews residing in LA in 1912, the city was just one point on a journey originating in the Mediterranean.[201] The history of Christian Syrian-Lebanese Arab American and Greek American migration provides an apt parallel to the Sephardi experience in that they were non-Muslim Ottoman/Mediterranean diasporas, engaged in similar occupations, and traveled on parallel migratory paths through Latin America and the United States.[202] This is not to say that places like Cuba, Mexico, and Argentina did not become home to thriving, settled Sephardi communities of their own.[203] Rather, temporary residence or business dealings in these and similar places across the region was characteristic of LA's first

[200] Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

[201] Eliezer Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment: The Case of Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles," (UCLA, Ph.D. diss., 1976). As Chammou notes, this was also common among postwar Jewish arrivals to LA from North Africa and the Middle East, although Israel, France, and Canada were more common in that period.

[202] Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Arab Routes: Pathways to Syrian California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 3.

[203] Diner, *Roads Taken*; Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports;* Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine.*

generation of Sephardim, including Jack Caraco, whose produce business took him to Mexico.

Economic opportunity, a familiar climate, spacious landscape, and the existing presence of Spanish-speakers made Southern California particularly appealing to new Sephardi migrants. From the one hundred and sixty Sephardim in LA in 1915 - already up from the several dozen in the city in 1912 - the population grew over the next decade as new organizations emerged to satisfy their social and religious needs and preferences.[204] By the end of the 1910s the first organized body for Mediterranean Jews in the city, *Ahavat Shalom,* could no longer accommodate clashing personalities nor could its diverse membership agree upon which regional religious custom to adopt.[205] As the number of migrants increased, so too did a growing sense of internal difference such that many Jews from the island of Rhodes split off to form *Sociedad Paz i Progreso* in 1917, while 1920 witnessed the creation of the *Comunidad Sefaradi de Los Angeles* and the *Haim vaHessed* group. The *Rhodesli* congregation, later known as the Sephardic Hebrew Center, and the *comunidad,* later known as the Sephardic Community of Los Angeles and Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel (STTI), have left behind an impressive archival trail that, in conjunction with other sources, allow us to construct a more complete picture of the community and its evolution alongside the immediate environs of Los Angeles.

[204] Estimates are from New York-based Ladino newspaper *LA America,* cited in Marc D. Angel, *La America: The Sephardic Experience in the United States, (*Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1982), 156-7; *La America*, June 4, 1912.

[205] *La America,* March 5, 1920, May 21, 1920.

While documents relating to Sephardi LA prior to 1920 are scant, estimates and impressions garnered from oral histories and census records suggest that the population of a few hundred was two-thirds male, half of which were unmarried and in their mid-20s. Three-quarters of the population were immigrants, having been in the US an average of about eight and a half years, with many (almost exclusively men) working as peddlers or bootblacks - a job which required an affordable investment in a brush and polish and minimal English-language skills. The initial announcements for the formation of the *comunidad,* posted in the "*restaurant sefardi*" on Winston Street indicates the working-class, young, male, immigrant character typical of diasporic Sephardi, as well as Greek, cafe culture.[206]

The Greek immigrant community in LA similarly established its first religious organizations in the mid-1910s and lived in the same areas of Sephardi settlement downtown and in southwest LA. Yet differences of religion and language, among others, prevented sustained social contact or intermarriage. It is hard to assay the full extent of the Greek-Sephardi relationship in Los Angeles, but it did not last beyond the first generation of young immigrant men seeking economic opportunities and social contact with others hailing from the same Eastern Mediterranean region. There are many reasons for this rapid dissolution, including the growing ability of their respective communities to provide social and economic support. In addition, US immigration restrictions in the early 1920s imposed severe quotas that virtually cut off the influx of Jews (Ashkenazi and Sephardi) and Greeks, further widening the gap. Even without

[206] Restaurants, cafes, or *kavanes* were popular meeting spots for socialization, receiving mail, and new arrivals to places across the Sephardi diaspora. Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America*, 154. "Minutes from 1/25/1920," Box 14, Folder 2. STTI Records; On Greek *kafeneion,* see: Theodore Saloutos, *The Greeks in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 78.

these quotas, war, genocide, nationalism, and population exchanges in the following decades wholly transformed many once metropolitan Balkan and Mediterranean cities, dampening opportunities for interethnic relationships.

The 1920s and 30s were transformative years for the Sephardi community of Los Angeles. A survey of census records suggests that by 1930 approximately a quarter of employed Sephardim in LA worked as grocers, retailers, or merchants in the produce business while another quarter worked in the floral trade.[207] As modest group meetings in members' homes or workplaces moved to community-built synagogue centers, the geographic locus shifted southwest and its breadwinners gave up their peddling carts for retail establishments. So too did the initial community of young men in their twenties and thirties expand to include families and individuals of all ages. And as the male-female ratio reached parity by 1930, women's semi-independent sisterhoods and auxiliaries became central pillars of community life, planning social events and organizing fundraising drives among other activities. Amidst these changes, the rapidly growing urban landscape of Los Angeles played a pivotal role in shaping the lives of Sephardi Jews in the city.

Previously meeting in homes or rented rooms, in the mid-1920s LA's Sephardim began searching for a permanent home in the city including the land and funds necessary to build a synagogue of their own. Preferences for sites west and south of downtown reflected the residential and occupational shifts that brought middle-class security to many Sephardim, as well as the increasing subdivisions and availability of land in 1920s and 30s Los Angeles. With the financial, legal, and logistical support of

[207] US Census Bureau, 1930; Joseph Behor Hasson interview, March 13, 1972. Recorded by Aron Hasson.

lay leaders like Maurice Hattem, a successful grocer, and lawyer Richard Amado (son of tobacconist Raphael Amado), the *Comunidad* was able to purchase a lot on Santa Barbara Avenue in 1928 where their Temple Tifereth Israel would be completed a few years later in 1932. Similarly, the Sephardic Brotherhood set up their Temple Israel on West Vernon in 1926 and the Rhodesli *Paz i Progreso* erected Temple Ohel Avraham at 55th and Hoover in 1934.

The broader transformation of downtown LA's residential character combined with the upward mobility of the community shifted its geography away from the relatively crowded surroundings of downtown and into the newly developed single-unit family dwellings of "suburban" Los Angeles. By 1930, most of LA's Sephardim - having arrived from elsewhere in the US within the previous several years - settled in the solidly middle-class areas of South Los Angeles and were able to purchase homes. Meanwhile, the majority of LA's Ashkenazi population began to move eastward from downtown into Boyle Heights, as well as westward into the Hollywood and Fairfax areas.[208] Population estimates suggest that while Los Angeles's population more than doubled between 1920 and 1930, the numbers of Jews tripled, and Sephardim by an even greater rate.[209] By this time, half of LA's Sephardim were immigrants having been in the US for an average of 16 years, and half of the native-born were born in California with the rest primarily from New York and Washington state. The gender parity and the

[208] Vorspan and Gartner. *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*. A few Ashkenazi congregations were also located in South LA at the time, although not as many as elsewhere in the region. Shmuel Gonzales, "The Hidden Sparks of the Jewish Soul of South Central Los Angeles," *Barrio Boychik,* September 11, 2015. https://barrioboychik.com/2015/09/11/the-hidden-sparks-of-the-jewish-soul-of-south-central-los-angeles/. Accessed May 17, 2022.

[209] Vorspan and Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles,* 261-2.

consistent youthfulness testifies to the growing predominance of a family-centered community and the dissolution of the urban, young, and single male immigrant profile dominant just a decade earlier.

Although the parts of South LA where Sephardi families lived were home to a majority native-born White, Protestant population, the memory of dense community life was such that many referred to the neighborhood as the *juderia*, a Ladino term for a city's Jewish neighborhood.[210] Unlike the *juderia* in Rhodes, Sephardi urban concentration and community in LA was partly due to a level of acculturation and assimilation into a White, middle class rather than by a history of exclusion and ghettoization. Not all Sephardim lived near the three synagogues serving them, and several families could be found in the multiethnic neighborhood of Boyle Heights to the northeast or farther north and northeast in Burbank or Glendale.

Neither were they completely isolated from other Jews in the city. Since the first years of settlement, Sephardim like Joseph Hasson, Marco Tarica, and Joseph Mayo were in touch with local Ashkenazi synagogues and organizations like B'nai B'rith (from whom the *comunidad* bought their first property in 1924) and Sinai Temple. In particular, notable figures in LA Jewry like Dr. Louis G. Reynolds actively aided Sephardim's integration into the largely Yiddish-speaking Jewish community spaces.[211] While the average Ashkenazi resident of LA was likely ignorant of their Sephardi coreligionists, local immigrant aid and social service networks were not and extended their activities

[210] Aron Hasson, William M. Kramer, ed., *Sephardic Jews in the West Coast States, Volume II: Los Angeles, The Second Wave* (Los Angeles: Western States Jewish History Association, 1996).

[211] Interview with Joseph Behor Hasson, March 13, 1972. Recorded by Aron Hasson.

into the heart of the community in South LA.[212] From the mid-1920s to 1935 a settlement house was set up in the neighborhood to serve its mostly Sephardi Jewish residents, but complaints from non-Jewish residents and the existence of independent Sephardi centers compelled the Jewish Centers Association to instead shift resources toward the more Ashkenazi neighborhood of West Adams and closed their South LA location.[213]

Together with the relatively concentrated geographic profile of the community, so too were their occupations overwhelmingly concentrated in retail and wholesale produce and flowers as alluded to previously. Unlike either their communal institutions connected to a broader Jewish Los Angeles, their social and family networks bound by Sephardi culture, or their neighborhoods shared with a virtually all White and native-born population, Sephardi LA's economic profile extended its reach beyond these religious, racial, neighborhood, and class boundaries.

"Prosperidad i Progreso": Sephardi Grocers and Florists in Prewar Los Angeles

Writing to the New York-based Ladino newspaper *La America*, Seattle residents Morris, Behor, and Shelomo Ashkenazi recorded their impressions of visiting Los Angeles during the High Holidays of 1917. In addition to recording their thanks to the many individuals who hosted them, they spoke of the city as a place where one can find

[212] "Immigrant Aid Council Makes Report," *The B'nai B'rith Messenger,* May 29, 1925, 9.

[213] Norma Levenson, "A Study of the Jewish Community Centers of Los Angeles, California" (MA, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1935). 73, 75, 77.

"health, enjoyment, and our wishes for prosperity and progress" (*salud i divertimyento* [i] *nuestros suetos de prosperidad i de progreso*).[214] California's image as a source of health and economic opportunity drew hundreds of thousands of new arrivals to Southern California, Sephardi Jews among them, in the early twentieth century. In a region defined by widely available land, relatively late industrialization, and the predominance of agriculture, the natural landscape provided both the initial economic engine for Los Angeles as well as the backdrop for its symbolic appeal.[215]

California's path to becoming the nation's agricultural powerhouse can be traced back centuries to the activities and cultures of its native inhabitants and later by its Spanish, Mexican, and American occupiers. Yet it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Southern California's natural fecundity was shaped into an engine of industrial, capitalist growth that relied on a stratified hierarchy of owners, growers, farmers, field laborers, wholesalers, retail merchants, customers, health inspectors and regulators, politicians, botanists, biologists, naturalists, and more. And like much of California's history more generally, it was an industry deeply shaped by racial and class divisions and its attitudes toward immigrant workers. For the immigrants and the gardens they cultivated at home and in the field, their labor helped anchor them to a new home and consequently revealed the tensions between power, pleasure, and profit.[216]

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[214] "Un viaje de kaliforniya," *La America,* November 23, 1917, 3.

[215] William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 9; Anthea Hartig, "'A Most Advantageous Spot on the Map': Promotion and Popular Culture," in Deverell ed., *A Companion to Los Angeles*.

[216] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Paradise Transplanted: Migration and the Making of California Gardens* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 31.

Among the key players in this industry were the farmers, gardeners, merchants, and wholesalers of produce and flowers.[217] Fruit and flowers served as catalysts for upward socioeconomic mobility and integration into the natural, economic, and racial landscape of the region for many new arrivals to the region. This included White Anglo capitalists and developers, working-class and poor "Okies" arriving from the Midwest, multigenerational Japanese families, seasonal Mexican laborers, Greek and Italian shopkeepers, and Sephardi Jews.

While boosters and real estate magnates depicted Southern California as an idyllic and exoticized Mediterranean landscape tailored for White people, it was also a region being shaped by those from the Mediterranean itself whose relationship to that racial vision was ambiguous at first.[218] This was particularly visible in the way labor, especially the agricultural workforce, was divided and in the interdependent relationship between race and class.[219] For example, Japanese tenant farmers were often hired for the same jobs as were those from Southern and Eastern Europe, alongside immigrant Syrians, Armenians, Mexicans, and Sikhs.[220]

Given the symbolic association of produce (especially oranges) and flowers with the vitality and well-being of the region, in addition to its real economic value,

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[217] On the cultural importance of fruit and flora to Southern California, see Sackman, "A Garden of Worldly Delights," in Deverell and Hise, eds., *Land of Sunshine*, 247, 253; Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 85.

[218] Mike Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop: Ford and Darwin in 1920s Los Angeles," in Tom Sitton, ed., Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 116; Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 157; Deverell and Hise, eds., *Land of Sunshine*, 256.

[219] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007).

[220] Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 12; Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Californian elites were often uneasy about the reliance of such industries on immigrant and racial outsiders and tried to moderate their influence. Such anxiety was expressed in the Alien Land Law passed in California in 1913, which primarily targeted Japanese immigrant farmers and agriculturalists, as well as the Bracero Program and "Operation Wetback" of the 1940s and 50s which sought to import and deport Mexican migrants, respectively. Recent work exploring the history of Southern California agriculture have used theories of racial formation to give voice and agency to Mexican and Asian laborers.[221] However, these important studies have tended to focus on agricultural towns and their adjacent fields and orchards than the city. Looking toward the metropolis reveals an additional class of immigrant labor in this segmented industry made up of Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and Jews who, while racially White by many metrics, occupied an ambiguous social, if not racial, position. Nevertheless, they would appear Whiter in comparison to their colleagues or employees of color.[222]

When Los Angeles came into its own as an American city by the close of the nineteenth century, Chinese farmers were the main competitors with native Anglos on the retail side of the produce and grocery business.[223] Yet both the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the exponential growth of the city created a new and greater demand for retailers and merchants of fresh food. With farms and orchards being razed to make room for an expanding Los Angeles, farmers had to travel farther to sell their products

[221] Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own*; Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[222] Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*

[223] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1997), 107, 112; Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines,* 41.

and increasingly did so through centralized wholesale markets and shopping districts downtown. Furthermore, the opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct in 1913 made water much more accessible to the parched city and its environs, stimulating agricultural production, industrial development, and population growth. By the 1920s, Italian, Greek, and especially Japanese immigrants - alongside Sephardi Jews - were essential to translating these infrastructural developments into regional economic expansion by connecting outlying farms to urban consumers, particularly after the opening of Grand Central Market in 1917 and the Union Wholesale Terminal in 1918.[224]

Change also came in other forms. As Los Angeles's streets became dominated by automobiles, street cars and peddlers were pushed out, prioritizing merchants and consumers with access to retail storefronts and automobiles.[225] As the birthplace of the modern supermarket, Los Angeles invited (or forced) street peddlers and their products indoors, sanitized and organized in air-conditioned, brightly-lit palaces for respectable middle class consumption.[226] While Anglo Angelenos like Missouri-born George Ralphs pioneered the modern supermarket model, many Jews quickly followed suit such as Theodore Commings' Long Beach-based Food Giant supermarkets or the Goldstein brothers' Boys Markets, which began as a fruit stand in East Los Angeles.[227]

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[224] Isamu Nodera, "A Survey of the Vocational Activities of the Japanese in the City of Los Angeles" (MA, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1936), 101; Noritaka Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture: A Study of Japanese Floriculture and Truck Farming in California" (PhD, Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley, 1982). 191, 224; Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 142.

[225] Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 5.

[226] Benjamin Davison, "Super City: Los Angeles and the Birth of the Supermarket, 1914–1941," *California History* 93, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 9–27.

[227] Vorspan and Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*.

Sephardim also made the transition from peddlers to retailers, with small business owners and operators representing a significant share of Sephardi LA's working population. Brothers Jack and Ralph Caraco opened their own grocery store downtown in the early 1910s, later partnering with Sephardi Jews like Alex Tobey, Asher Pizonte, and Reuben Menashe. Other Sephardi immigrants and founders of the *comunidad* operated produce stands and later opened their own stores, including Harry Alhadeff, Leon Anticoni, Raphael Behar, Eli Israel, Louie Israel, and Sam Passy. Many from the American-born generation entered the business, too, like Ralph Caraco's son Maurice. Into the 1930s and beyond, several transitioned into wholesaling and shipping as Los Angeles became a hub of global trade, like Isaac L. Caraco, Theodore Labe, Joseph Capelouto, and Peter Alhadeff.[228]

However, no other Sephardi grocer had a greater impact on the development of supermarkets, or the Sephardi community, than Isadore M. Hattem.[229] Born in Ottoman Constantinople in 1894, at the age of sixteen he left for Paris en route to Buenos Aires, eventually moving to Los Angeles in 1913 to recover from an illness. Working with his older brother Robert, Hattem began operating fruit and vegetable stands at downtown Los Angeles's Grand Central Market. By 1927, he opened his own market on Western and 43rd Street in the suburbs of south LA, expanding to a second location at Vermont and 81st Street in 1931.[230] Hattem's innovations were many. By constructing these

[228] Interview with Joseph Capeloto, April 26, 1972. Recorded by Aron Hasson; Interview with Peter Alhadeff, October 19, 1982. Recorded by Aron Hasson.

[229] Maurice I. Hattem, "I.M Hattem and His Los Angeles Supermarket," *Western States Jewish History Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1979).

[230] "Drive-in Market Planned on Vermont Avenue," *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 1930, D2.

massive projects away from established commercial centers, the new supermarkets took advantage of inexpensive land (including the increasingly necessary parking lots), decreased traffic congestion, and appealed to middle-class automobile owners reluctant to make the unpleasant trip downtown.[231] Hattem's Market on Vermont was particularly notable for its striking Art Deco architecture, featuring green and black exterior accents and a spacious interior featuring smoking rooms, a beauty and barber shop, and offices – all topped off by a giant, beacon-like "H."[232]

By catering to car-loving Los Angeles, the "drive-in" supermarket popularized by Hattem soon became the norm across the region and nation and transformed America's relationship to consumption. Furthermore, Hattem was a founding member of the *comunidad* who served as a committed lay leader and benefactor of his fellow Sephardim. In addition to hosting an occasional board meeting in his office, he helped name and locate the site of the *comunidad*'s first permanent synagogue, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel on Santa Barbara Avenue, just a few minutes from his market on Western.

While not nearly as big a business as produce in terms of raw numbers, California's leading floriculture industry had few national competitors. Since before Los Angeles's first commercial flower fields were planted in the 1890s, the middle class vision of the region prominently included gardens, both public and private.[233] Civic

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[231] Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, 69, 110.

[232] Paul K. Wilson, "Our Gay Markets: 'Drive-Ins' Colorful and Convenient," *Los Angeles Times,* April 26, 1931, J8.

[233] Hayden, *The Power of Place*; Catherine Ziegler, *Favored Flowers: Culture and Economy in a Global System* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 18.

spectacles like the annual Fiesta de las Flores and Pasadena's Rose Parade helped make flowers central to the cultural identity of the region from the beginning of the twentieth century, while the industry grew into a highly networked, hierarchical system with multiple markets, associations, and credit systems.

Like the city's agricultural workforce, LA's florists were drawn from a diverse set of immigrant and first-generation Americans, particularly Japanese, Dutch, Italian, Greek, and Sephardi Americans.[234] It was the Japanese community, however, that developed the strongest and most visible ethnic niche in the flower trade. Established in 1913, downtown LA's Southern California Flower Market was organized by Japanese immigrants (*issei)* and laid the foundation that would thereafter associate the flower trade with the Japanese community in Los Angeles.[235] Several years later, native-born and western European immigrants established the American Florists' Exchange (more popularly known as the Los Angeles Flower Market) in 1919, located directly across the street from their Japanese colleagues and competitors. Greek, Sephardi, and Filipino florists operating independently in a third market were soon absorbed by the AFE, a consolidation resulting in the *de facto* segregated character of the city's two major flower markets.

According to Michael Molho, Sephardim in general possessed a "special regard for flowers" inherited from their Spanish ancestors, while their affinity for certain types of

[234] Gary Kawaguchi, *Living with Flowers: The California Flower Market History* (San Francisco: California Flower Market, Inc., 1993).

[235] City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning Office of Historic Resources, "Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement, Context: Commercial Development, 1850-1980 Theme: Wholesale Flower Markets, 1912-1962" (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 2017); Naomi Hirahara, *A Scent of Flowers: The History of the Southern California Flower Market, 1912-2004*, (Midori Books, 2004).

plants and herbs like *ruda* (rue) served medicinal and ritual purposes for generations from the Mediterranean to the Pacific Coast.[236] Among the very first Sephardim to settle in LA were flower merchants like Bursa-born former World's Fair employee Mandolino Levy. Other early Sephardi immigrant florists include Solomon Beraha, Isaac Berro, Marcos Cordova, Albert Israel, and Mordechai Sheby - Rhodesli Jews were especially active. Into the 1950s, Sephardi names could be consistently found among new (and out-of-business) retailers listed in the Southern California Floral Association's *Bloomin' News*.[237]

While LA counted dozens of Sephardi florists over the years, a few of them rose through the ranks to become major players in the industry. Nationally recognized, Victor Levy and Jack Mayesh took up regional leadership positions in the Southern California Floral Association (a joint organization between the two LA markets), and in 1980 Levy assumed the presidency of the national flower delivery service, FTD. Many Sephardi-owned or operated retail florists were family businesses, formally and informally employing members from multiple generations and occasionally run by married couples. Through much of the twentieth century, floriculture in LA was a male-dominated space, although women like Belle Alhadeff, Mary Hasson, and Zimbul Morhaime managed their own stores. Even after most retired or sold their businesses, the Sephardi legacy in flowers continued into the twenty-first century, if only by name. Sold to the Dahlson

[236] Michael Molho, *Traditions & Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica,* trans. Alfred A. Zara, ed. Robert Bedford (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2006), 232-233; Isaac Jack Lévy and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women : Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "The Queen of Herbs: A Plant's-Eye View of the Sephardic Diaspora," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 112, no. 1, (Winter 2022): 119-138.

[237] Peggi Ridgway and Jan Works, *Sending Flowers to America: Stories of the Los Angeles Flower Market and the People Who Built an American Floral Industry* (Los Angeles: American Florists' Exchange, Ltd., 2008).

family in 1978, Mayesh's wholesale business kept its name (and good reputation) as did Rodosto-born Leon Moskatel's eponymous floral supply store after it was bought by the arts-and-crafts chain Michael's. While occupations in produce and flowers employed a substantial portion of Los Angeles's Sephardi Jews for a time, they hardly monopolized the industry. By examining the ethnic and racial makeup of these industries and its broader context of early to mid-twentieth century Los Angeles, we can better understand how Sephardim navigated their place in a constantly changing city.

From Colleagues to Enemy Aliens: Japanese Internment and Relational Whiteness

Between the rising socioeconomic fortunes during and immediately after World War Two, together with the despoilation wrought by the internment of LA's Japanese population, Sephardim secured a foothold in a White, middle-class Los Angeles. While the Sephardi experience in wartime Los Angeles shared much with other White Americans and first- and second-generation European immigrants, their proximity to - and distance from - Japanese Americans was an essential part of determining their place in the city. Sephardim in produce and flowers leveraged prevailing understandings of race, nationality, and citizenship in their progression from ethnic immigrant peddler to White American business-owner - aspects that Japanese Americans lacked. As was the case with Greek Americans, the story of Sephardi LA (and the city itself) cannot be fully understood without taking their Japanese neighbors into account.

Filling the niche carved out by their Chinese predecessors, Japanese became field laborers, farm operators, street peddlers, retail merchants, and wholesale suppliers

of the region's fruits, vegetables, and flowers in a tightly-knit ethnic network that amounted to a near monopoly on many specific products.[238] Unlike any other group, the Japanese niche in flowers was formalized and institutionalized through the founding of the Southern California Flower Market in the 1910s, which operated alongside an expansive network of retail shops in the greater Los Angeles region.[239] Nearly 70% of LA's *nisei* (second-generation, American-born Japanese) working population could be found across the produce industry in the 1930s, and a whopping 90% of locally consumed produce were sourced from Japanese farms.[240] Japanese Americans constituted nearly 40% of wholesale merchants, particularly for green vegetables and citrus.[241]

Despite the vertical integration and social networks that made these Japanese niches secure, they were not isolated from other groups active in the same fields. Greek, Italian, and Dutch Americans were already part of the floriculture business when Japanese Americans entered in significant numbers during the 1900s, but cooperation between the White/European merchants and the Japanese ones were limited. It took federal action in the 1930s to facilitate the collaboration of both markets when the New Deal's National Recovery Agency helped create the Southern California Floral

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[238] Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture," 190; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race.*

[239] Ridgway and Works, *Sending Flowers to America;* Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture," 69.

[240] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, 106; Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Nodera, "A Survey of the Vocational Activities of the Japanese in the City of Los Angeles," 190.

[241] Leonard Broom and Ruth Reimer, *Removal and Return; the Socio-Economic Effects of the War on Japanese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), 84.

Association to coordinate the industry. Violence against foreign-born farmers targeted Armenian and Japanese growers alike, and Mexicans and Japanese farm workers joined together to demand better working conditions from their bosses.[242] Proximity could sometimes breed enmity, however, like when Greek peddlers in LA were identified as the "worst offenders" in cheating Japanese farmers during the 1910s.[243]

Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Italian, and Japanese peddlers were all subjected to LA's often-discriminatory public health enforcement. However, anti-Japanese sentiment rapidly outpaced antisemitic or general anti-immigrant attitudes in Southern California and manifested itself in specific ways that targeted their role in the state's agricultural industries. The most notable example of this was California's Alien Land Law of 1913. Restricting "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning land, the legislation was intended to prevent Japanese immigrant farmers from owning land and thus expanding their outsized role in the state's agricultural industry. Inventive work-arounds and the birthright citizenship of American-born *nisei* dulled the law's impact, but its practical limitations and racist overtones sent an unwelcome message not applicable to their Sephardi colleagues. In other instances, Japanese farmers and vendors in the 1920s were targeted with extra levels of suspicion by municipal authorities in Los Angeles and in the 1930s the state's elite agriculturalists banded together to fight the power of immigrant unions.[244]

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[242] Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, Chapter Seven.

[243] Archibald McClure, *Leadership of the New America: Racial and Religious* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), 234.

[244] Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, 59; Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 97.

The produce and flower trades, formerly characterized by multiethnic working-class immigrants, soon became a racially bifurcated middle-class industry leading up to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War Two. Soon after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, authorizing the forced removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans across the West coast, most Japanese florists were out of business. Japanese American products were subject to boycotts by retailers and suppliers (some of which continued even after the war), and the few preexisting relationships of trust with White growers did little to help their businesses in an industry already suffering from lower wartime demand for flowers.[245] Furthermore, the Southern California Floral Association was active in assisting with Japanese removal.[246]

While Japanese Americans demonstrated remarkable economic recovery after their return, several factors limited their full comeback. Japanese wholesale and growing operations were gradually revived, but Japanese retail florists were hit much harder with many now entering contract gardening instead.[247] In the fields, a transition from Japanese to Mexican farm labor that had already begun in the 1930s only increased during and after the war.[248] Returnees who worked with produce faced a difficult challenge without their own wholesale market (like they had for flowers). Despite City Wholesale Market purposefully setting aside empty stalls for returning Japanese

[245] Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture," 301.

[246] Morton Grodznins, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 34.

[247] Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race*; Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture," 335.

[248] Alex Moreno Areyan, *Mexican Americans in Redondo Beach and Hermosa Beach*. (Mount Pleasant, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 77; Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Paradise Transplanted*, 80.

Americans, they never regained their former prominence and independence.[249] The fallout of anti-Japanese sentiment and internment made it clearer who was racially welcome and who was not. In addition to the upward mobility engendered by the war's home front mobilization, especially in Los Angeles, Whites - including Sephardim - working in produce and flowers generally benefited from Japanese removal because there were fewer competitors and Japanese-run operations were often entrusted or sold to them, sometimes extremely cheaply. [250]

Whether part of the produce or flower trade or not, the war years evinced little public sympathy for or comment from LA's Sephardim on the plight of their Japanese neighbors and colleagues. One of the few, rather cryptic, instances come from the minutes of an April 1942 meeting of the Sephardic Community's executive board that matter-of-factly stated: "as our gardner [sic] was a Japanese, the Temple remained without a gardner. Mrs. Regina Tobey will be in charge to see if her gardners could work for the temple."[251] Rather, the immediate impact of Executive Order 9066 on Sephardim was the uncertainty it spelled for Rhodeslis, since their birthplace had been an Italian territory since 1924 and they could potentially fall within the scope of "enemy alien" classification. At least one Rhodesli Italian national in Los Angeles, the widow and florist Adele (née Hasson) Mayo, was arrested under enemy alien laws for violating curfew or contraband laws.[252] In Los Angeles and in Seattle, both with large Rhodesli populations

[249] Broom and Reimer, *Removal and Return*, 109; Yagasaki, "Ethnic Cooperation and Immigrant Agriculture," 330, 333.

[250] Varzally, *Making a Non-White America*, 122.

[251] Meeting Minutes, April 14, 1942, Box 1, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[252] *Report to the Congress of the United States: A Review of the Restrictions on Persons of Italian Ancestry During World War II (*Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2001), Appendix F, 8.

and located within the west coast exclusion zone, congregational leaders and the Anti-Defamation League made efforts to clarify the status of Rhodeslis. Ultimately, those born before 1924 were considered Turkish, rather than Italian, nationals and those born in Italian Rhodes were relatively few given the timing of American immigration restriction.[253] Even so, the treatment of Italian nationals paled considerably in comparison to that of Japanese Americans, regardless of citizenship status.

Like most White Americans, Jews' silence about internment was motivated by numerous factors including anti-Japanese racism, their faith in President Roosevelt, paranoia of wartime, and fear of stoking domestic antisemitism, among others.[254] As Ellen Eisenberg has shown, LA's Jewish Community Committee's investigations into local Nazi sympathizers also fed into allegations against Japanese Americans - although Jews seemed to be far less concerned with the latter. Nevertheless, there was some concern about antisemitic attitudes among Japanese, particularly the *nisei* generation. These were typically based on economic competition with Jews, whose "business ethics and dishonesty" "proved more than a match for the Japanese on the managerial end." [255] On the other hand, there were also instances of Jews befriending and providing opportunities for young Japanese Angelenos quitting truck farming after the war.[256] Like other American Jews, Sephardim in LA actively supported their

[253] Meeting Minutes, March 22 and April 19, 1942, Box 5, STTI Records; Ellen Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice? Western Jews and Japanese Removal during WWII* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008), 54.

[254] Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice?,* 104.

[255] Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice?,* 131; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform,* 96; Thomas H. Yamate, in *Rafu Shimpo,* July 16, 1939, quoted in John Modell, *The Economics and Politics of Racial Accommodation: The Japanese of Los Angeles, 1900-1942* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 139.

[256] Vorspan and Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*, 242-43.

country's war efforts, purchasing government bonds and expressing pride in their congregants in uniform. They also anxiously and despairingly tried to help their families and home communities caught in the Nazi grip, especially those in Rhodes and Salonica.

Jack Mayesh, the Singing Florist

Nobody exemplified the relationship between the Sephardi community, the flower trade, interethnic relations, and the city of Los Angeles more than the Mayesh family. Soon after their arrival in LA in the early 30s, Ottoman-born brothers Jack and David Mayesh became active leaders in the Sephardi community. David was president of the Sephardic Benevolent Society, a social club established in 1961 in the backroom of his flower shop.[257] Jack's musical talent made him a popular choice for cantor during Tifereth Israel's High Holiday religious services. Aside from his commitment to the Sephardi community, Jack was also well integrated into the multiethnic fabric of prewar Los Angeles. Through his Mayesh Phonograph Record Company, he recorded over a dozen Ladino songs and a few original compositions with accompaniment on the qanun and oud by local Sephardi, Greek, and Armenian musicians. Meanwhile, he grew a flourishing wholesale flower business that would soon operate nationwide. When his Japanese American colleagues were interned during World War II, Mayesh took over some of their flower farms and wrote a Ladino-language song, "Los Japones," lamenting their absence.[258] Of Jack Mayesh and Flora Salmoni's six children, at least four went

[257] "Sephardic Benevolent Society minutes," Box 5, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[258] Unfortunately, Mayesh never recorded the song and the lyrics remain inaccessible. Joel Bressler, "Jack Mayesh," http://www.sephardicmusic.org/artists/Mayesh,Jack/Mayesh,Jack.htm. Accessed May 18, 2022.

into their father's trade. Sol and Harry Mayesh each had their own businesses in the flower industry, but it was their brother Joe who took over their father's wholesale operation after his passing in 1969. Joe acquired the Japanese-American founded Kobata Growers in 1972 before selling the Mayesh Wholesale business in 1978 to Roy Dahlson, an indicator of the relative integration of the previously segregated industry.

Japanese and Sephardi Angelenos both benefited from the expansion and success of retail and wholesale floriculture in the 1950s and 60s, which gave rise to California's leading position in national flower production.[259] A measure of the trade's importance can also be seen in its impact on LA's political scene. As part of the city's perennial struggle to shape and revitalize its downtown into a modern urban center, Mayor Tom Bradley sought to prevent the possible relocation of LA's wholesale flower and produce markets. As these plans were formulated in the 1970s, concern grew as to what the exodus of these major institutions would mean for an already declining part of the city.[260] Bradley's Flower Market Advisory Committee, made up of about a dozen leaders from the industry, including Joe Mayesh, negotiated a commitment from the markets to remain in their Wall Street locations - a boon for the mayor's larger downtown reinvestment agenda.[261]

Evidence of their important place in the urban fabric of the city, several former florists sought political power in Los Angeles. Maurice Mayesh, another one of Jack's florist sons, ran as a Democrat for California 53rd Assembly District in 1974. Supported

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[259] Ziegler, *Favored Flowers*; Amy Stewart, *Flower Confidential* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2007).

[260] Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White*, 165.

[261] Ridgway and Works, *Sending Flowers to America*.

by the up-and-coming political force of LA Democrats Howard Berman and Henry Waxman - a machine heavily associated with the city's upper-middle class Jews - Mayesh was accused of carpetbagging for having only recently moved to the district in order to run for office. The 32-year-old florist ran businesses in the district, which covered parts of southwestern LA County including Hawthorne, Lawndale, and Gardena, but Mayesh's main financial support came from outside the district. He also had to contend with a group calling themselves "Democrats for Local Representation."[262]

Mayesh's opponent, Republican Paul Takeo Bannai, was also a former florist and had recently become the first Japanese-American to serve in the California State Legislature. Having worked at Golden State Wholesale in LA's flower market after the war, Bannai was already familiar with the Mayesh family from their time downtown. While Bannai eventually won by a razor-thin margin of less than one percent, Maurice Mayesh continued his engagement in politics, serving as Howard Berman's chief of staff for the latter's failed US Senate campaign in 1980. In a testament to the close connections between local politics and wholesale florists, Berman's opponent in the 1990 race for California's 26th Congressional District was Roy Dahlson - the same man who had purchased Mayesh's business twelve years earlier.[263] If flowers and politics were not enough to root the Mayesh family in the Los Angeles environment, Jack's

[262] Mary Ann Lee, "All-Out Democrat Drive Aimed at Bannai, Rated in Trouble," *Los Angeles Times*, October 31, 1974, CS3.

[263] Ironically, Dahlson's campaign was under investigation by the FEC for misreporting financial contributions. Giving the impression that "Jack Mayesh" was a personal donor, Dahlson was in fact providing money from his own business, "Jack Mayesh Wholesale Florist, Inc." https://www.fec.gov/files/legal/murs/3228.pdf. Accessed May 19, 2022.

eldest daughter Esther became a major Hollywood TV producer. No stranger to successful and powerful families, Esther (now Shapiro) repurposed those tropes in her best-known role as co-creator of the 1980s hit soap opera, *Dynasty*.[264]

Conclusion

In the context of a city circumscribed by an entrenched racial hierarchy, one's occupation and neighborhood were often understood in racial and nativist terms. Working alongside other immigrant entrepreneurs, Sephardim in produce and flower trades developed an ethnic niche that were all the while reliant on a broader, interethnic economy – calling into question the utility of "ethnic niche" as an unqualified category of analysis. While these specific jobs were initially considered the purview of immigrants and people of color, Sephardim in LA gradually reaped the benefits of Whiteness that came from, among other reasons, their juxtaposition to people of color. They quickly moved out of a diverse yet economically declining downtown and became homeowners in and residents of mostly White neighborhoods, rising through the ranks from working class immigrant street peddlers to respectable citizens and middle-class retailers and wholesalers. The deportation and removal of both Mexican and Japanese Americans - two groups deeply associated with the agricultural industry - in the 30s and 40s deepened the racial "fault lines" of Southern California so much so that, by the end of World War II, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Greeks, and others had by and large landed on the White side. As this chapter focused on the occupational side, the following chapter

[264] Joe Klein, "The Real Star of 'Dynasty': Esther Shapiro and Her Empire," *New York Magazine*, September 2, 1985, 32-39.

more fully examines the spatial dimensions of Whiteness for Los Angeles Sephardim in the postwar years.

Chapter Three: Mapping Sephardi LA: Race and Place in Postwar Los Angeles

From a small pup tent in downtown Los Angeles's Pershing Square, David Mizrahi made waves that eventually reached the Truman White House. Born in New York to Sephardi immigrant parents from Greece, Mizrahi came to Los Angeles as a young child where he worked in the produce trade as a teenager before getting drafted to serve in World War II. Upon returning to LA in 1945, the 23-year-old recently discharged Marine reunited with his wife Sophie Matza, whose parents were also Greek Sephardi immigrants, along with their son Bobbie. Yet by November 1945, the Mizrahis, like countless others in the city, were unable to find their own place to live and the family was split between the homes of different relatives. Sophie took action, reasoning with her husband that "you fought for your country. Now you're going to have to fight for a home."[265] As a public protest, they set up a small campsite in the middle of downtown to bring attention to the lack of housing for veterans.

David clarified that he wasn't looking for charity - he would pay rent (affordable thanks to the GI Bill for returning servicemen) - and that he wanted to "do something for these other GIs who haven't been as lucky."[266] After the City Park Commission ordered the Mizrahis to leave, industrial executives responded to their plight after reading about it on the front page of the *Los Angeles Times.* Blair McPhail, executive of the Oklahoma-based Spartan Aircraft company, gifted the Mizrahis use of his upscale LA townhouse, followed by Spartan owner and philanthropist J. Paul Getty who sent the

[265] "Veteran and Family Set Up Pershing Square Tent Home," *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1945, 1.

[266] "Veteran's Tent Turns into Swank Hotel Suite," *Los Angeles Times*, November 4, 1945, 1.

family a new trailer home.[267] As Spartan made their postwar transition from making aircraft to making trailers, the Mizrahis - alongside thousands of other veterans, war workers, returning Japanese Americans, and newcomers - sought to make their own postwar transitions in Los Angeles. In addition to poor urban planning, the city's rapid population growth led to an extreme housing crisis reflected across the country, prompting President Harry Truman to create a Veterans Emergency Housing Program only a few months after Mizrahi made national news.[268]

The Mizrahis eventually found a home in the Westchester/Inglewood area of Los Angeles, west of downtown and South LA. Once a sparsely populated area surrounded by oil derricks, the area exploded with new home construction for the largely White workforce recently employed in wartime aircraft manufacturing.[269] In their public struggles, second-generation American Sephardim reflected the formative relationships Los Angeles had with space, place, and the real estate industry.

This chapter situates and contextualizes Sephardi Jews within the interdependent matrices of space and race that made modern twentieth century Los Angeles. This mutually reinforcing relationship reveals itself in many instances, whether through the histories of place promotion and boosterism extolling the region's choice landscape for White settlement, the mythicization of a "Spanish Fantasy Past," LA as a US/Mexico borderland, the ghettoization of Black Angelenos to limited parts of the city, or broader patterns of deportation, incarceration, and internment of people of color.

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[267] "Homeless Ex-Marine Awaits $12,000 Trailer," *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1945, A1.

[268] Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 76, 81-82.

[269] Starr, *Embattled Dreams*, chapter 5.

Inviting, imagining, restricting, or removing people have been the common techniques behind the creation of LA's racial landscape, accompanied by an equally long history of counter-efforts. resistance, and civil protest.[270]

In this broader context, the choices Sephardim made about where they would live, pray, and work help advance new scholarly perspectives on American Jews, Whiteness, and Los Angeles. Expanding upon Lila Corwin Berman's work on the Jews of Detroit, Sephardi Los Angeles reveals a spatial dimension to the relationship between Jews and Whiteness in addition to social, cultural, and political ones.[271] In this analysis, geography plays a determining role in racializing Jews as White through decreasing legal and social discrimination in real estate, residency and occupational choices, and in adopting and mirroring movement of other Whites. Furthermore, by answering scholars' calls for more studies of Whiteness in LA, I demonstrate that Sephardi Whiteness often relied upon their relationships with Ashkenazi Angelenos.[272] This follows from analyses of the Jewish role in shaping the city's postwar liberal politics and the relationship between space and race in Los Angeles.[273] For example, the first case I examine sees

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[270] The scholars and works contributing to this approach are many, but I will list some of the more influential ones for this work: Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990). Greg Hise, "Border City: Race and Social Distance in Los Angeles," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (September 2004): 556; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis : Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven : Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002;) Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight.*

[271] Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[272] On the call for studying Whiteness in LA, see "Whiteness and Civic Memory in Los Angeles" in "Past Due: Report and Recommendations of the Los Angeles Mayor's Office Civic Memory Working Group" (Los Angeles: Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West, 2021), 32-40. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for a discussion on racialized differentiations between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.

[273] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*; Raphael Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Max D. Baumgarten, "Searching for a

how one building block of White hegemony in LA - homeowner associations and zoning administrators - was successfully rebuffed by another, more liberal one with closer Jewish connections - city council.

As I propose in the first part of this chapter, the journey of the Sephardic Community and Brotherhood organization to LA's mostly White, upper-middle class Westwood neighborhood proceeds along a more complex path than has typically been laid out by narratives of "White flight" from increasingly Black and brown populations. Rather than a seamless transition implied by certain narratives of suburbanization, the attempt to relocate their synagogue to a mostly residential area was contested by local homeowners. Homeowners' associations, especially in Southern California, had been central to maintaining the vision of a neighborhood of White, middle-class single-family homes to which the Sephardic Community's synagogue presented a threat. In their ultimately successful battle, Sephardim secured middle-class Whiteness by, ironically, challenging one of the structural elements upholding White supremacy. They did so in part by drawing upon connections to influential Ashkenazi Jews in Los Angeles.

I then make the case that explicit or implicit Sephardi claims to Whiteness were pursued only to the extent that they could secure material benefits. Certainly, Sephardim demonstrate many similarities with the post-Civil Rights era "ethnic revival" and the qualified ethnic Whiteness claimed by European-heritage, particularly non-Protestant Americans, as will be discussed in the following chapter. However, the Spanish component of Sephardi identity afforded the possibility of adopting a "Hispanic"

Stake: The Scope of Jewish Politics in Los Angeles from Watts to Rodney King, 1965-1992" (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 2017).

label as part of the handful of officially recognized racial and ethnic categories in the United States. In contrast to many Italian, Irish, or Ashkenazi Americans, Sephardim present a more ambiguous case of racialization that can complicate our understanding of racial formation in the US.[274] By highlighting racialized components in an ambiguous Sephardi identity during an era of affirmative action and integrationist policies, one could, in an ironic twist, maintain some of the privileges of Whiteness.[275]

The second part of this chapter considers this apparent contradiction in how Los Angeles's Sephardim related to Whiteness. As efforts to racially integrate the student population of LA's public schools generated controversy and debate in the 1970s, a lesser-known program aimed at integrating the staff also faced backlash. One front of this battle involved several suburban teachers in majority-White schools who sought to align their Sephardi background with a "Hispanic" racial/ethnic designation. Believing that this could be leveraged to avoid potential mandatory transfers to "inner city" schools, school administrators ruled that Sephardi Jews were White. As in the previous chapter, the relationships among race, space, and occupation in Los Angeles are reinforced once more. Similar to how the struggle to secure the synagogue sought the benefits of Whiteness by fighting certain parts of what upheld it in the first place, some of these teachers sought to maintain their place in mostly White schools and neighborhoods by claiming a non-White identity. More than cynically self-serving, however, these claims to Hispanic-ness echo the wider ethnic "revival" in America at the

[274] For similar retreats from Whiteness among Italian and Irish Americans, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[275] For a similar dynamic in the Hasidic community, see Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper *A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021) and Nomi M. Stolzenberg and David N. Myers, *American Shtetl : The Making of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic Village in Upstate New* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

time that spurred personal and communal reclamation of cultural and ancestral identities, a phenomenon explored in greater depth in the following chapter. In this case as in that of the synagogue, location and geography were at the heart of claiming, creating, and defending one's status in a racially fractured postwar LA.

Through these two case studies, the history of Sephardi Los Angeles presents a unique narrative of race, Whiteness, and space in the city. It suggests that the Sephardi community and individuals responded to the changing relationships between space and race in postwar Los Angeles by explicitly drawing on regional associations with racially-inflected Jewish and Spanish identities. In the other direction, too, Sephardim contributed to the political, racial, and spatial profile of Los Angeles despite their small numbers. The successful battle to situate their synagogue in Westwood bolstered the power of LA's Jewish liberal political actors in their alliance with city council and their push against conservative homeowners and zoning administrators - a harbinger of Tom Bradley's mayoral administration and political coterie. From a different angle, claims of Sephardi Hispanic-ness and Whiteness figured as another front in the ultimately successful battle against mandatory integration in the LAUSD.

Sephardi Jews, "White Flight," and Watts

Individually and institutionally, Sephardim in LA sought their postwar future in the rapidly growing and mostly White Westside and San Fernando Valley, away from their erstwhile home in a South LA that was becoming less White and more Black and Mexican.[276] In many ways, Sephardim at this moment paralleled both the Ashkenazi

[276] Laura R. Barraclough, *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural Landscapes, Urban Development, and White Privilege*. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

move out of LA's east side and other Whites' move out of South LA. While the motivations behind these postwar suburban moves are many, including economic, occupational, educational, and social, this trend has commonly been called "White flight." Somewhat reductive of the complex choice over where to live, the term emphasizes the omnipresent and significant racial ramifications of this social and residential shift. Several changes ushered in this new era of postwar suburban political fragmentation and the transformation of formerly White suburbs into a non-White "inner city."[277] Southern California's promise of occupant-owned, affordable, single-family, detached homes helped propel its mid-century population explosion, bringing with it increased expectations about home and work life, housing, and transportation.[278] Buoyed by local wartime industries in manufacturing, as well as the GI Bill's housing and education benefits, middle-class White Angelenos in particular moved from the east to the west side of the city while the growing Black population was crowded in the few neighborhoods open to them, albeit slowly expanding beyond those boundaries.[279] Accompanying the social (and racial) changes reflected in suburbanization was an increase in homeownership and, crucially, an abiding concern about property and real estate value.

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[277] Tom Hogen-Esch, "Consolidation, Fragmentation, and New Fiscal Federalism," in Deverell and Hise eds., *A Companion to Los Angeles*; Laura Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (March 2000): 27.

[278] Kevin Starr, *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[279] George J. Sanchez, "Disposable People, Expendable Neighborhoods," in William Deverell and Greg Hise eds., *A Companion to Los Angeles* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.)

For decades, a mixture of politicians, industrialists, real estate interests, urban planners, and community leaders sought to make parts of Los Angeles exclusively or largely White spaces.[280] This was partly accomplished through racially restrictive covenants advocated for by real estate interests, which sought to prevent property values falling in reaction to incoming non-White residents. One of the more impactful and lasting examples of this process were the surveys conducted in the late 1930s across the country by the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), which graded neighborhoods for insurance and mortgage risks in a process that came to be known as "redlining."

HOLC surveys of the areas of Sephardi settlement in LA labeled them low to high "yellow" or C grades, referring to the spotty enforcement of racial covenants that put the mostly Christian, native-born, White, lower-middle class quality of the neighborhood at risk from a "steady influx of Jewish families" and the "infiltration of Negroes from [the] adjacent area."[281] Although fewer Sephardim lived in Boyle Heights, a center of prewar Jewish Los Angeles, HOLC surveys of the neighborhood are among the only ones to refer specifically to them (incorrectly) as "Armenian Jews."[282] The New Deal's Federal Housing Administration came to rely on these maps when administering loans and

[280] Mike Davis, "Sunshine and the Open Shop: Ford and Darwin in 1920s Los Angeles," in Tom Sitton, ed., *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). 117; Pulido, "Rethinking Environmental Racism"; Christopher G. Boone, "Zoning and Environmental Inequity" in William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds., *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 170.

[281] Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," American Panorama, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed March 9, 2022, https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=14/34.014/-118.32&city=los-angeles-ca&area=C125

[282] This is my best guess as to what surveyors meant when referring to "Armenian Jews," although it could refer (mistakenly) to Christian Armenians or Subbotniks.

determining risk, and since non-White and multiracial populations were detrimental to an area's ranking, it reinforced residential and other types of inequity faced by people of color and immigrants.[283]

In addition to these trends and policies, the suburbanizing middle class came to embrace values of retreat and privatization, trends endemic to the lucrative field of Los Angeles real estate.[284] With housing and the quality of neighborhoods becoming central concerns intersecting with issues of race and class, many suburban Whites rallied against integration, fair employment, and public housing.[285] While Jews, Sephardim included, were not at the forefront of this movement (in fact, many were actively against it), they nevertheless participated in these same trends. By the postwar era, Jews across the nation began to reap more fully the social, economic, and political benefits of suburban Whiteness.[286] Even while Jews themselves were once evidence of a declining neighborhood, as in HOLC's reports, they would soon mirror the fears of White Angelenos regarding the "infiltration" of their neighborhoods by minorities who could

[283]Greg Hise, "Industry and Imaginative Geographies," in *Metropolis in the Making*, 37; George J. Sanchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021), 113.

[284] Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950-1970* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 166; Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[285] Scott Kurashige, "Between White Spot and World City: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*.

[286] Bruce Phillips, "Not Quite White: The Emergence of Jewish 'Ethnoburbs' in Los Angeles, 1920-2010," *American Jewish History* 100, no. 1 (January 2016): 73–104. On Jews and Whiteness in postwar era see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks : And What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, *The Colors of Jews : Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). On the privileges of Whiteness see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007), Harris, "Whiteness as Property."

bring crime, disease, radicalism, and lower property values.[287] About a quarter century before the Sephardic Community completed its move from South LA to Westwood, congregant Harry Sidy in 1945 suggested selling their synagogue building before "the influx of Negroes and Mexicans into the neighborhood of the Temple" would decrease property values, while Elie Sabah considered peremptory measures such as signing a petition "for the restriction of the Negroes and Mexicans moving into this neighborhood."[288]

Urban growth, racial tensions, and socioeconomic mobility framed the decades-long process of relocating LA's two major Sephardi synagogues, the Sephardic Community's Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel (STTI) and the Sephardic Hebrew Center. Between 1945 and 1968 - when STTI ultimately secured its Westwood location - Los Angeles was a city undergoing radical transformations. Internal migration within the region as well as a steady influx of new arrivals increased demand for single family homes and spurred freeway construction.[289] Concomitant with the postwar turn toward private development and public infrastructure - which disproportionately benefited White suburbia - was the forsaking of public housing in favor of urban renewal as means for "slum clearance" in creating the postwar American city.[290] While families like the Mizrahis suffered from the housing shortage in the short term, the crisis extended far

[287] Mark Wild, Street Meeting : *Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

[288] Meeting Minutes, February 2, 1945 Box 1, Folder 2, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel records (Collection 2340). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library. University of California, Los Angeles. (STTI Records)

[289] Kurashige, "Between White Spot and World City"; Sanchez, *Boyle Heights*; Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

[290] Sanchez, *Boyle Heights,* 177.

longer for growing communities of color.[291] Despite certain gains made during the war, racial disparities and segregation in Los Angeles increased in the 50s and 60s. Part of these changes included the gradual adoption of a more inclusive conception of Whiteness that included many Jews who, recognizing their tenuous inclusion, defended their privileges by guarding the racial geographies of Los Angeles.[292]

As Deborah Dash Moore argues in her pioneering study of postwar Jewish Miami and Los Angeles, Southern California Jewry was reinventing itself through new ideas about leadership, community, and politics.[293] Indeed, much of this process involved a series of racial, economic, residential, and political shifts that aligned LA's Jews more with the region's middle class White residents than ever before. Organizationally and on the ground, this was reflected in the relocation or closure of many Jewish institutions on the eastside, heightened emphasis on the synagogue over neighborhood as the geographic center of Jewish life, and the purge of suspected Communist groups and individuals from Jewish life. These changes were part of a broader shift in American Jewry that witnessed the community's interests turn inward - civil rights activism notwithstanding - that would intensify after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.[294]

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[291] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, 40.

[292] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight,* xiii; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 7; Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 191.

[293] Moore, *To the Golden Cities.*

[294] Riv Ellen Prell, "Triumph, Accommodation, and Resistance: American Jewish Life from the End of World War II to the Six-Day War," in Marc Lee Raphael, ed., *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Berman, *Metropolitan Jews.*

For the city's Sephardi Jews, the postwar relationship to space and race in LA differed somewhat from their Ashkenazi coreligionists. Unlike the latter group's concentration in multiethnic neighborhoods like Boyle Heights or West Adams, the core of Sephardi communal life was in the predominantly White South LA.[295] Superficially, Sephardim might have appeared indistinguishable from non-Jewish Italian or Greek Americans and their distance from Eastern European-origin Jews may have served to help Sephardim pass as non-Jews, possibly avoiding antisemitic restrictions. This hypothesis assumes that because American antisemitism in the early-to-mid twentieth century typically envisioned the Jew as Eastern European, Sephardim who looked, spoke, dressed, worked, and were named differently may have escaped some of the brunt of discrimination, including housing.[296] However, further research is needed to fully justify the claim that Sephardim's marginal status within American Jewry actually spared them from certain instances of discrimination.

By the 1950s, Sephardi families were already leaving their South LA neighborhoods while newcomers to the city settled elsewhere - particularly the areas of Fairfax-La Brea, the Westside, and the San Fernando Valley.[297] In addition to the distance to the temples, "members were fearful of attending [synagogue functions] because the neighborhood was changing its ethnic composition."[298] In preliminary

[295] Eliezer Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment: The Case of Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles" (PhD Dissertation, UCLA, 1976).

[296] A similar dynamic has been observed in the Argentinian context. See Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity, 1880-1960* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016).

[297] Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment"; "April 9, 1953, meeting minutes," Box 2, Folder 1, STTI Records; "June 25, 1957, meeting minutes," Box 5, STTI Records.

[298] Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 121.

discussions, board members drew boundaries that reflected the northwesterly geographic shift away from South LA and its expanding postwar Black population.[299] However, Sephardi "White flight" did not occur overnight, or even within a few years. As Eli Lederhendler has observed of New York City, Jews were relatively late to suburbanization (compared to other White ethnics), a trend which exposed them to racially mixed - and potentially explosive - residential and commercial environments in the 50s and 60s.[300] There were also plenty of examples of Jews investing in and advocating for integrated neighborhoods and housing - some of whom nevertheless moved to White suburbs - in what became a central ideological and political conflict for American Jewish liberals.[301] For example, active members of the Sephardi community such as Victor and Kathy Cohen were involved in Crenshaw Neighbors, an organization founded in the early 1960s that brought together middle-class White, Japanese, and Black residents of the Crenshaw and Leimert Park areas of Los Angeles to stymie "White flight" and racially integrate local schools.[302] It was to those neighborhoods, already home to a middle and upper-class Black community, where the Sephardic Hebrew Center relocated in 1966 and remained until its merger with Temple Tifereth Israel in 1993.

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[299] *Sephardic Messenger*, Vol. 1, no.7, July 1960, 3, Box 18, Folder 1, STTI Records; Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 228.

[300] Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity,* 150.

[301] Cheryl Greenberg, "Liberal NIMBY: American Jews and Civil Rights," *Journal of Urban History*, vol. 38, no. 3 (May 2012): 452–466.

[302] Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 191; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008).

As Sephardim were moving or planning to do so, 1965's Watts Rebellion broke out and marked a sea change in the racial geography of Los Angeles. Decades of inequitable access to resources like affordable and safe housing, jobs, and education - in addition to persistent police brutality- catalyzed the eruption of protest and violence in August 1965 and the emerging assertiveness of Black politics.[303] Mainstream coverage paid particular attention to expressions of anti-White antagonism, some of which included antisemitic sentiment - much to the concern of Jews.[304] As James Baldwin observed in his 1967 essay "Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," many Black Americans had little patience for Jewish attempts at equating their suffering particularly when many Jewish absentee landlords and business owners were seen as exploiting Black communities.[305] Baldwin reflected on the decline (or simply the demystification) of Black-Jewish relations by alluding to how Jews kept their businesses in racially shifting neighborhoods long after their residential and communal presence had vanished. This was the case across the US in cities like New York, Detroit, Chicago, as well as Los Angeles, where resentment against Jews had built up among people of color in neighborhoods like Boyle Heights and South LA.[306] Nevertheless, locals respected certain Jewish store owners, who were often their employers, and helped protect their businesses during Watts.[307] Sephardi synagogues like STTI seem

[303] On Watts, see Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA: Da Capo Press, 1997) and Sides, *L.A. City Limits*.

[304] Horne, *Fire This Time,* 78, 104, 109.

[305] James Baldwin, "Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," *New York Times*, April 9, 1967.

[306] Sanchez, *Boyle Heights,* 138; Chapter Four in Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[307] Horne, *Fire This Time,* 110, 192, 309.

to have been untouched, one possible reason being the presence of a police station across the street on Santa Barbara Avenue. Soon after Watts the police would ask permission to use the temple's tower as a lookout point for future riots.[308] With the community agreeing to the request (although it is unclear if it was ever acted on), Mike Davis' vision of "fortress LA" had now extended into a Sephardi house of worship.[309]

In some respects, the White population most directly impacted by Watts were LA's independent Jewish business owners, who made up nearly half of South LA merchants.[310] While most of these were not Sephardi, a significant portion of LA's Sephardi-owned or operated businesses were in the area. Given the overlap between the areas of unrest and the old core of Sephardi settlement, the upheavals of August 1965 signaled the conclusion of one chapter of the community's history and the beginning of another. Long after Sephardim moved away from their old neighborhoods, traces of their presence could still be seen in the architecture of the synagogues they had sold to Black churches, where Hebrew-language inscriptions and Star of David stained glass windows remained alongside newly installed crosses and altars.

The Politics of Property and the Creation of a Sephardi Synagogue

Catherine Elias, the youngest daughter of Abraham Caraco, the *comunidad*'s first rabbi, and brother to Jack Caraco, recalled her father's dying words in 1923: "My days

[308] Meeting minutes, April 3, 1968, Box 3, Folder 2, STTI Records. The original has "in case of rioting" crossed out and replaced with "in case of need. This meeting also took place the day before the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

[309] Chapter Four in Davis, *City of Quartz*.

[310] Horne, *Fire This Time,* 310.

are numbered, and I leave you to continue my efforts and construct a congregation for our Sephardic people with the blessings of God."[311] Caraco's wishes were fulfilled when the Tifereth Israel synagogue opened its doors in 1932, just west of Exposition Park at Santa Barbara Avenue (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) and La Salle Avenue. While the earliest ideas for relocating the temple were introduced in the mid 1940s, a little over a decade since it was completed, the search did not begin in earnest until after the 1959 merger of the Sephardic Community of LA (formerly the *comunidad*) and the Sephardic Brotherhood, another congregation of Ottoman and Balkan Jews founded in the 1920s.

Motivations for relocating and constructing a new temple centered around the need to be closer to its suburbanizing congregants and attract new members, especially among the youth. On this point, Land Committee chairman Milton Amado (son of Raphael Amado) proposed sites closer to younger potential congregants and their families living on the Westside and in the San Fernando Valley.[312] According to an internal survey of Sephardi congregations conducted in 1956, synagogue life tended to attract an older crowd with smaller families. The typical male member was 49 years old and 58 for females (a likely reason for this discrepancy being that membership for women was typically restricted to widows), families had an average of fewer than two children, and only twenty percent of members' adult children were themselves members.[313]

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[311] The original Ladino reads: "Mis dias son contados y te desho de saba que continuas mis esforzos y construes une kehila para nuestro pueblo Sephardim con bendiciones de Dios." "Catherine Elias profile, "*Tifereth Israel Bulletin,* Feb. 1966, 4, Box 17, Folder 5, STTI Records.

[312] Meeting minutes, May 16, 1959, Box 2, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[313] "Communal Survey Report, Council of Sephardic Organizations, 1956," Box 14, Folder 5, STTI Records.

To help address these concerns, Milton's uncle Maurice Amado proposed a plan to finance and construct a new "temple center" for the Sephardic Community and Brotherhood. Initially proposed in late 1961, what became known as the "Amado Plan" was borne of Maurice's own late-in-life reconnection with his heritage and the establishment of a philanthropic foundation that would perpetuate and advance Sephardi communal and educational endeavors. Amado's ambitious plan for Los Angeles included building the "most attractive and important Sephardic community in the world, outside of Israel" that would help them fully integrate into the "American way of life" and bring "to the attention of all Jews in this city and everywhere else...that the Sephardim in Los Angeles are well organized, highly honored and respected." Reflecting the enthusiastic support of the temple's board for the plan, Leo Saul commented that he has "often heard, as I am sure most of you have, that the Sephardim now live in the glory of their past. The opportunity is now at hand to live gloriously for the present."[314]

More was necessary, however, than planning, fundraising, or willpower to construct one of the largest Sephardi synagogues in the United States. Many of the institutions key to upholding racial segregation in LA such as homeowner associations, real estate interests, and policymakers were the same ones that had to be fought and won over to secure the synagogue's landing on the city's Westside. This general area, which covers Santa Monica, Brentwood, Beverly Hills, and Westwood, among other neighborhoods, had long histories of racial covenants excluding non-Whites (often

[314] *Sephardic Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 6, Jan 1962, Box 18, Folder 1, STTI Records.

including Jews) from purchasing or renting property.[315] Resistance to change remained even as the country moved away from exclusionary policies, culminating in the 1948 Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kramer* which ruled racial covenants to be unenforceable. Meanwhile, Westside homeowners and clergy took part in the broader anticommunist (and occasionally antisemitic) campaign against public housing in LA when they protested plans for a nearby housing project.[316]

Shared interests in racial exclusion as a means of assuring appreciating property values facilitated the symbiotic relationship between homeowners and real estate interests in Los Angeles. While the state passed the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1963 forbidding racial discrimination in the sale and rental of property, a massive campaign backed by the California Real Estate Association helped revoke it a year later through the Proposition 14 ballot initiative. Although it was later ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the popularity of the measure reflected how racism became rationalized through calculations of property values.[317]

However, alliances shifted when the conversation about real estate transitioned to a debate between pro-growth versus anti- or slow-growth approaches. Ever-increasing demand for housing and the proliferation of massive developers clashed with homeowners' desires for quieter, less dense, and exclusively residential neighborhoods.[318] Real estate interests saw greater profit in high-density housing and

[315] There were, of course, many exceptions. Parts of Venice were home to Black communities and the Sawtelle neighborhood was home to a large Japanese American population.

[316] Sanchez, *Boyle Heights*, 86; Parson, *Making a Better World*, 58.

[317] Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 59, 70.

[318] Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White,* 192.

commercial developments than single family homes, however. Resistance to growth of this kind accompanied a broader trend of homeowner retrenchment and defensiveness in the late 60s and into the 70s, culminating in the "Taxpayer Revolt" that helped pass 1978's Proposition 13 in California, capping certain property taxes.[319] This fight was about wealth and capital growth, as well as a larger debate about whether the future of California and Los Angeles belonged to individuals or business interests. In many subtle ways, too, the discussion inherited and replicated many of the racialized parts of the earlier era of housing policies. Conflicts over public housing mirrored the debate over affordable housing development, and anti-development or slow growth proponents shared much in common with advocates of restrictive covenants. Furthermore, as national trendsetter for America's municipal zoning procedures and policies, Los Angeles adopted land use regulations as a key tool to influence racial segregation, political power, private investment, and property values.[320] This dynamic is especially relevant to the postwar history of Los Angeles's Westside neighborhoods, including Westwood and the Wilshire Boulevard corridor along which the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel would eventually be built.

The Battle of Westwood

The Sephardic Community's first abortive attempt to secure a new location provided its leaders with first-hand experience of the messy world of Los Angeles real

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[319] Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 414.

[320] Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis : Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 255-57.

estate politics. In 1965 the Building Committee ultimately chose to bid on the architecturally significant Dodge House in West Hollywood, a 1916 residence which had earned national praise for its distinctly Californian blend of Spanish Revival and Modernist styles and was a hallmark of Los Angeles's cutting-edge architecture.[321] Recently, however, the potential value of the property had drastically increased due to zoning changes allowing for high-density housing, a lucrative investment for developers who would show no reluctance in demolishing the site.[322] LA's cultural elite, in which Jews were gaining increasing prominence and clout, sought to prevent this by collaborating with the Sephardi buyers.[323] For his part, Sephardic Community president Aron Cohen pledged to "preserve the architectural integrity of the Dodge House and the beauty of its landscaping" while also hoping to build a sanctuary that will become a shrine for Sephardic Judaism in America."[324] However, the brief alliance fell apart and the property eventually found its way into the hands of a developer who had the property demolished in 1970.

For postwar Americans, especially Jews, houses of worship provided a greater source of social organization and identity than they ever had before.[325] It comes as little surprise, then, that soon after their losing fight for Dodge House the congregation

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[321] Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 220-22.

[322] John Pastier, "Dodge House Future Hangs in Balance as Threats Reach Peak," *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 31, 1969, 2; Jeffrey Head, "Dodge House's Great Void," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2011.

[323] Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 154.

[324] "Letter from Aron Cohen to Arol Burns of the LA City School District Real Estate Division," June 15, 1965, Box 6, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[325] Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 19.

quickly snapped back into action to continue the search. The Sephardic Community and Brotherhood applied the lessons they learned from their failed bid at Dodge House to secure the property they wanted and the zoning changes their plans required. More than experience carried over from the Dodge House attempt, as this new fight engaged a cast of actors that included many returning figures such as grassroots anti-development groups, zoning administrators, and city councilors. Unlike many other postwar metropolitan centers, suburbanization and Jewish movement in Los Angeles often occurred within the same county and city and retained many familiar officials, regulations, and laws. The consequences of these continuities were many, including benefiting from previously established political relationships and knowledge as well as dealing with a changing electoral base reflecting increasing populations of people of color. For Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and other White Angelenos, Los Angeles's unique suburbanization within city limits made it distinct from other similar shifts across the country.

All these forces and players came to a head in 1967 when Community president Max Candiotty began arranging the purchase of a 46,000 square foot lot on the southwest corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Warner Avenue in Westwood. From that moment followed nearly two years of debate, packed city hall meetings, protests, appeals, and lawsuits. On a superficial level, the controversy seemed to be a merely technical one about granting zoning exemptions for the synagogue's building plans. From a different perspective, however, the case represents the clash between two competing strains of "political Whiteness" in Los Angeles - homeowner rights/anti-

growth and developer/pro-growth.[326] At stake was the vision of a white-collar, middle-class lifestyle that was central to the image of Southern California. The ultimate success of the Sephardic Community reflected not only the growing political power of Los Angeles's Jews, but the greater inclusion of Sephardim into the city's Jewish community and its attendant Whiteness.

When Westwood's largest developer and property-holder, the Janss Investment Corporation, sold its remaining holdings in 1955, the quiet residential college town had already begun transforming into a small city with multiple high-rise luxury apartment buildings and a sprawling university campus.[327] The University of California's Los Angeles campus moved to Westwood in 1929 but expanded rapidly in the 50s, as did the commercial centers in Westwood Village, directly south of campus. Meanwhile, Los Angeles City Council's approval to rezone parts of Wilshire Boulevard for high-rise apartments began to bear fruit, much to the consternation of local single-family homeowners. In particular, they zealously guarded the "buffer zones" limiting the encroachment of large developments into their low-density residential environment.[328]

At the same time, LA's Westside, roughly corresponding to City Council's Fifth District, witnessed the emergence of a politically engaged and influential Jewish population characterized by liberal attitudes and relatively high income and education levels. This district, which included the Wilshire Boulevard lot where the Sephardic

[326] On political Whiteness, see HoSang, *Racial Propositions,* 20-21.

[327] Marc Wanamaker, *Westwood* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 109.

[328] Starr, *Golden Dreams,* 180.

Community sought to construct its new temple, was instrumental in building the biracial Democratic coalition of Blacks and Whites that helped bring Tom Bradley to the mayor's office in 1973 and become the most senior Black official in LA history. At the same time, the Fifth District had the highest percentage of White residents in the city. As *de jure* racial covenants were replaced by *de facto* residential segregation, the Westside was one of the main destinations for Whites, especially Jews, leaving neighborhoods from the east and south.[329]

Having been exposed to the complex machinations and bureaucratic entanglements necessary for most large-scale building projects in Los Angeles during their attempt to secure the Dodge House, lay leaders including Candiotty, Cohen, Amado, and others were now more aware that their goals required solutions from multiple sources and through personal connections. For one, the original owners and sellers of the property, the California First National Realty Construction Corporation, was led by a Jew and helped generate a "friendly feeling" toward the synagogue project.[330] The prominence of Jews in construction and development in postwar Southern California, might have played a role in fostering a level of trust between buyer and seller crucial for facing some of the challenges ahead.[331]

This proved important when, in August 1967, Los Angeles's Chief Zoning Administrator Hubert Smutz denied the zoning change request necessary for the

[329] Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White*; Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake."

[330] The board president is unnamed. meeting minutes, April 17, 1967, Box 3, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[331] Genevieve Carpio, *Collisions at the Crossroads: How Place and Mobility Make Race* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 190.

building plans, claiming that the "synagogue would be entirely incompatible and out of harmony" in an area that served as a "buffer" between the increasing number of high-rise apartment buildings along Wilshire and the single-family residences to its north and south.[332] From his perspective, granting a zone variance or conditional use permit would set a precedent for non-residential development and precipitate a decline in the neighborhood. This was despite the fact that several houses of worship already populated the area, including the Westwood United Methodist Church (established in 1951) located diagonally across from the proposed synagogue site and Sinai Temple (established in 1960) a few blocks to the east.[333]

Smutz was known for his conservatism when it came to granting zoning variances yet was instrumental in the clearance of Chavez Ravine to make room for the new Dodger Stadium.[334] This event, which involved the forced removal of many Mexican American families, became a painful symbol of the destruction wrought on communities of color by urban renewal programs like "slum clearance" and freeway construction. Whatever his personal predilections, Smutz's seeming hypocrisy in his consideration of Chavez Ravine's residents versus those of Westwood was part of broader postwar patterns that favored the "vanilla suburbs" against the "chocolate cities" in ways not overtly racist.[335] In this instance, though, the battle was between two different visions of the "vanilla suburbs" - and Jews were at the center.

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[332] "Hearing on Synagogue Scheduled Tuesday," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1967, WS3.

[333] Wanamaker, *Westwood*, 60.

[334] "Phill Silver, others, protest angrily over Chavez Ravine 'use' permit" *Wilshire Press*, Vol. 33 no. 31, July 14, 1960.

[335] Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight.*

Smutz did not represent the unanimous view of city planners, as revealed by the dissenting opinion of deputy zoning administrator Harvey Steinberg - himself active in the effort to save Dodge House just a few years prior.[336] At an appeal hearing a few weeks after the first denial, Steinberg argued that a religious facility was more compatible with the neighborhood than high rise apartments, given the limited height and infrequent traffic generated by a synagogue. As a Jew, Steinberg may have had additional sympathies for the Sephardic Temple plan and believed synagogues to benefit neighborhoods. Nevertheless, he failed to stem the tide generated by the standing room-only crowd of protestors from groups such as the Homeowners of South Westwood, Westwood Property Owners Association, and Brentwood Protective Association. The temple's appeal was denied once more.[337] Potent political forces in their own right, homeowner and neighborhood associations have been called Southern California's "most powerful social movement" and actively defended racial covenants and rallied against private and public developments like shopping malls and affordable housing.[338]

With two denials from the Board of Zoning Administrators and facing grassroots opposition, Candiotty found recourse in appealing to the higher authority of Los Angeles City Council's Planning Committee. As opposed to other official organs in the city, county, or state, Los Angeles's Jews were arguably best served and represented by the

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[336] "Hearing on Synagogue Scheduled Tuesday," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1967,WS3.

[337] "The West Side News in Brief: Synagogue Appeal Denied," *Los Angeles Times* September 21, 1967, WS1.

[338] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, 153; Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 195; HoSang, *Racial Propositions,* 89.

City Council which, in addition to Jews' relatively consistent presence among the 12-seat elected body, seated sympathetic liberal non-Jews like future mayor Tom Bradley, elected to the council in 1963 with the support of the Jewish community.[339] And without the full support of Edmund D. Edelman, the Jewish councilman for the Fifth District (which included Westwood), the Sephardic Community's appeal would have faced an uphill battle and an uninvested city council.

From the Sephardic Community's side, key to lobbying City Council was Rabbi Jacob Ott, a Chicago-born World War II chaplain of Ashkenazi background who had recently begun what would become a decades-long tenure with the Sephardic Community. Tapped into the local Jewish scene, especially Zionist organizations, Ott helped rally support from influential Jewish Angelenos like Rabbi Jacob Levine of the Glasband Mortuary, president of Pacific Coast Properties Al Glickman, and head of the local branch of the Jewish National Fund, Fred Kahan. Familiar with Edelman from his involvement in efforts to save the Dodge House, Ott also contacted the councilman almost as soon as it became clear the Sephardic Community would need a zoning change, months before the matter came across Smutz's desk.[340] He also reached out to neighborhood churches, but it was the aforementioned Jews who eventually testified before the city council's Planning Committee meeting in mid-December. For his part, Max Candiotty may have also developed relationships throughout the city through his role as an attorney. The fight for the Westwood property was not only the responsibility

[339] Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White.*

[340] Meeting minutes, January 16, 1967, Box 3, Folder 2, STTI Records.

of Rabbi Ott or the congregation's executive board. Letter-writing campaigns from congregants like Stella (née Bramy) Rugetti addressed each member of city council.

For their December 12th hearing, the Sephardic Community took a note from the opposition and arranged buses to city hall for congregants to show their support in person. Alongside the realty company's attorney, Ott, Levine, and Kahan also spoke in favor of the temple. Ott's statements seemed to echo his own philosophy of Judaism, claiming that "beyond the law is the spirit of the law."[341] The omission of any Sephardim from testifiers may reflect an understanding that they needed to present a more "American" face, at least more than Salonica-born Aron Cohen had when speaking on behalf of the Dodge House matter. With Edelman chairing the three-person committee along with councilmen John Ferraro and the pro-development Louis Nowell, the appeal was unanimously approved and sent to the entire city council for final judgment.

Although Jews were rallying around a synagogue, the controversy did not become an explicitly Jewish issue. When the city council met on January 3rd and approved the appeal in a 12-1 vote (two councilmen were absent), its other Jewish member, slow-growth proponent Marvin Braude of the Westside's 11th District, cast the sole dissenting vote.[342] Similarly, protestors like Neil Jacoby - board member of Homeowners of South Westwood and Dean of the UCLA business school - explicitly denied any anti-Jewish prejudice at play, citing a statistic that at least forty percent of the protestors were Jews. Rather, Jacoby was fighting the dangerous precedent that

[341] Ray Ripton, "Appeal Granted, Council to Act on Temple Zoning," *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1967, WS1.

[342] "Synagogue Gets OK but Court Action Looms," *Los Angeles Times*; January 4, 1968, WS1.

would “blight” the neighborhood and cause it to “go down the drain.”[343] So adamant was the homeowners' opposition that a lawsuit against the city council reached California’s Appeal Court, only to be denied once more.[344] Insisting that the main issue was the appropriateness and compatibility of a temple for the adjacent neighborhood, rather than setting a lenient precedent for zoning changes, the city council agreed with the appellants that the presence of the Sephardic Community would be preferable to high rise apartments and would not lower property values.[345]

The Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel likely raised property values in the end. The synagogue would win architectural awards and honors from the Guild of Religious Architecture, the National Conference of Jewish Architecture, the Westwood Art Association, and the Westwood Chamber of Commerce.[346] Design consultant Nubar Shahbazian, a descendant from refugees fleeing the Armenian Genocide, helped create “a feeling for the simple yet pleasing and awesome design for a house of worship and assembly befitting the origin and character of Sephardic Jews,” referring to aspects like the striking use of Jerusalem stone, the central Spanish garden courtyard, and tall arches.[347] Rabbi Ott summarized the new temple as a “synthesis of culture, period, and place… suggesting the Ottoman Empire background of most of our members.”[348] It also

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[343] Ray Ripton, “Homeowners to Sue to Prevent Temple Building,” *Los Angeles Times*; Mar 7, 1968, WS1.

[344] California Court of Appeal, Second District, Fifth Division, *Stoddard v. Edelman,* Civ. 33790, Feb. 18, 1970.

[345] “Letter from attorney Russell Pratt of MacFarlane, Schaefer and Haun to attorney Roger C. Pettit,” January 5, 1968, Box 6, Folder 6, STTI Records.

[346] “Architects Honored for New Sephardic Temple,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1974, G8.

[347] *Bulletin of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel,* September 1975, 6; “A Temple in the Sephardic Tradition,” 1973.

[348] Myra B. Taylor, “The Los Angeles Sephardic Community,” *Israel Today,* September 5-18, 1975, 23 in Box 47 Folder 2, STTI scrapbook 1950-1978, STTI Records.

deliberately avoided a modern look, unlike the nearby Percival Goodman-designed Sinai Temple. In aesthetic nods to Jerusalem, Spain, and Ottoman lands, an emblem of Sephardi culture was erected, inscribed, and planted onto Los Angeles through the temple's construction. As public historian Dolores Hayden has argued, ethnicity shapes urban place and architecture which, together with the natural environment, creates a city's cultural landscape.[349] Despite its relatively small footprint, Sephardi Jews were adamant about making their physical mark on Los Angeles

Pitting homeowners against developers, the struggle for the Sephardic Temple showcased Jews' (both Ashkenazi and Sephardi) rise within LA's power elite and prominence within the slow- and pro-growth debates. The temple's placement and design signaled an inward and private shift, mirroring the change of typical Sephardi professions away from the open-air flower and fruit markets to air-conditioned white-collar offices. Not only was the temple's appeal granted with the aid of interpersonal networks and private meetings, but Shahbazian designed the building's deep-set entrance, high outer walls, and minimal use of windows to be "inward looking, secure… perhaps something like a fortress," a phrasing eerily reminiscent of Mike Davis's dim appraisal of post-liberal "Fortress L.A."[350] Behind the outwardly ethnic qualities of the synagogue, however, lay its origins in the battle over the future of White Los Angeles.

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[349] Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1997), 35.

[350] Richard L. Stein, "Mid-Wilshire Sephardic, Midcentury Modern." 100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles, edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce, UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020, https://sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/mid-wilshire-sephardic/ ; Davis, *City of Quartz*, Chapter 4

"Sephardic Jewish persons are classified as white"[351]

The defensive, suburban, and conservative turn in Southern California, buoyed by homeowner associations and their grassroots heirs, accelerated rapidly through the 1970s as it rippled across the nation. In the aftermath of the Watts Uprising, a new era of segregation, White backlash, and Southern California conservatism began to emerge.[352] Notable signs of these shifts were the grassroots coalition against racially integrating public schools through busing programs, Proposition 13's "Taxpayer Revolt" which put a cap on property taxes, and the rising profiles of California politicians such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. At the core of many of these rightward moves was a deep commitment to the preservation and defense of property and place which, in these cases, took the form of preventing the outward flow of wealth (via taxes) and people (as students and teachers).[353] While this posture was increasingly adopted by Americans of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, its opposition typically took the shape of redistributive and affirmative action policies that sought to ameliorate racial inequality. Sephardi identity in Los Angeles shaped, and was shaped by, these trends. We see this not only in STTI's move to Westwood, which heightened the community's social and political status, but also in the use of Sephardi heritage to deflect mandatory racial integration in public schools.

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[351] A different version of this section appears in Max Modiano Daniel, "'Sephardic Jewish persons are classified as White': Education, Race, and Sephardic Jews in the 1970s," in Ellen Eisenberg, ed., *Jewish Identities in the American West: Relational Perspectives* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2022).

[352] Mara A. Marks, "Shifting Ground: The Rise and Fall of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency," *Southern California Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (Fall 2004), 268; Horne, *The Fire This Time*, 280.

[353] Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

In Los Angeles, this conflict emerged most strongly in the busing controversies of the mid to late 70s when a group of concerned parents - many of whom were Jewish - formed Bustop in an attempt to stop the mandatory integration of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).[354] While the busing of thousands of students attracted far more controversy and protest, teacher integration plans were also part of the broader effort to conform to federal civil rights legislation. Many teachers criticized the proposal as bureaucratic overreach detrimental to their role as educators, while a smaller but quite vocal number of teachers claimed non-White status in an attempt to prevent reassignment to distant, majority-minority schools. This approach was similar to the appropriation of civil rights language used by opponents of affirmative action to subvert their intentions.[355]

In this case, a group of putatively White public school teachers, including several with Sephardi backgrounds, tried to leverage and racialize part of their heritage to retain their jobs in majority White schools, mostly in the San Fernando Valley. These teachers petitioned to have their Sephardi heritage count as "Hispanic," resulting in an occasionally heated back and forth with the LAUSD's Ethnic Review Committee, which oversaw faculty applications for changing their official ethnic or racial designation. Hoping to clarify the issue and limit these claims, the school board issued a memo in 1977 on "Ethnic Designation Criteria and Change Procedures" that included the caveat that "Sephardic Jews, Brazilians, and Portuguese are White." However, this position set

[354] On Bustop and the busing controversy, see HoSang, *Racial Propositions*, chapter 4 and Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake," chapter 3.

[355] Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

off an array of contested claims about the right to and means of determining one's identity.[356]

Teachers' claims to Hispanic identity through Sephardi ancestry emerged from a diverse set of historical circumstances: growing American Jewish resistance to certain affirmative action and integration efforts, White ethnic revival, the history and activism of Los Angeles's Mexican/Chicanx population, and a resurgence of Sephardi pride and identification. These last two factors help explain why teachers bolstered their "Hispanic" background but not their Jewish, Ottoman, or Middle Eastern ones. More broadly, this reflects the widespread association of Jews with Whiteness in post-Civil Rights America as well as how Sephardi Jews complicated that assumption – a lineage that I've shown began during the turn of the century world's fairs.

As the previous discussions in this chapter have noted, geography was integral to racial formation and identity in Los Angeles. While much of the conversation thus far has concerned how Sephardi Jews encountered, leveraged, and adapted to Whiteness in LA, the history of teacher integration reveals how a non-White interpretation of Sephardi identity could be used to maintain and preserve their place of employment in majority-White schools and neighborhoods. Rather than being seen as a detriment to Sephardi status or mobility, their claims to non-Whiteness could, ironically, preserve gains accrued from Whiteness.

Even after the *Brown* decision in 1954 ruled segregated schools unconstitutional, Los Angeles's public schools were becoming increasingly racially segregated, coming to

[356] Memorandum No. 10, February 2, 1977, Box 2708, Folder 6, Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education Records (Collection 1923). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA. [LAUSD Records]

a head in 1963 when the *Crawford v. LAUSD* desegregation case brought Southern California into a twenty-year legal battle over desegregation.[357] Jews were a particularly vocal interest group involved in LA's public schools, as they were nationwide. They made up nearly fifteen percent of the LAUSD's teaching staff and Jewish organizations and individuals tended to be supportive of *Crawford* in its initial stages.[358] However, mirroring broader political changes in suburban America, Jewish opinion became increasingly divided, largely along geographic lines between those living in the San Fernando Valley and in West LA.

Often referred to as simply "the Valley," the rapidly growing area north of the Santa Monica mountains became the new frontier for single-family homeowners in the postwar era, especially for newcomers to the region, Jew and non-Jew alike.[359] Increasingly host to many Jewish families, by 1974 it was estimated that about 45% of LA's Sephardim lived there – one of the major reasons for relocating STTI.[360] Politically more conservative, the Valley was also the birthplace of the anti-busing grassroots organization Bustop, founded in 1976 and led by several Jews such as Bobbie Fiedler. Not against integration per se, but rather against the means of busing and "reverse discrimination," Bustop's rhetoric was a "defense of White innocence" that refused to

[357] Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 158.

[358] Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake," 124-127.

[359] Bruce Phillips, "Not Quite White: The Emergence of Jewish 'Ethnoburbs' in Los Angeles, 1920-2010," *American Jewish History* 100, no. 1 (January 2016): 73–104.

[360] Daniel Shapiro, "The Sephardic Jewish Community from Rhodes Living in Los Angeles," 1974. Box 60, Folder 3, Western States Jewish History Archive (Collection 1739). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

take on any burden of ensuring racial equality.[361] Like the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict that pitted Jewish teachers against Black parents over curricular and hiring issues at a public school in Brooklyn, Bustop was another example of a racialized conflict concerning public education in which Jews were heavily involved.[362] Both conflicts reflect American Jews' move away from more progressive and liberal educational programs as well as from their investment and self-confidence as major figures in the country's public education system. Rather than making a full inward retreat away from the public sphere, Jews instead tried to actively shape it.

While the racial undertones of school integration issues nationwide, especially from the Jewish perspective, tended to revolve around a Black-White binary, Los Angeles's demographics presented a more nuanced picture. By the late 1970s, LAUSD's student and faculty body reflected the city's growing Latinx and Chicano/a populations, decreasing proportion of Whites, its concentration of urban Native Americans, its many Asian American communities, and multiracial individuals. Although *Crawford* concerned Black students, "Hispanic" students (per contemporary terminology) comprised more than a third of all students by 1977 and soon became the central minority group in discussions about desegregation in LA.[363] For Mexican Americans uniting and becoming politically and culturally active as Chicanos, public

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[361] Sara Smith, "For the "Wrong" Reasons: Los Angeles Jews and Busing," in Eisenberg, ed. *Jewish Identities in the American West;* Amy Hill Shevitz, "At the Intersection of Gender, Ethnicity, and the City: Three Jewish Women in Los Angeles Politics," in Karen Wilson, ed., J*ews in the Los Angeles Mosaic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 57-74.

[362] Wendell E. Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[363] Donald G. Cooper, "The Controversy Over Desegregation in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 1962-1981," (University of Southern California, PhD Diss., 1991), 87.

education was a paramount concern. During the 1968 "blowouts," Chicano students staged a walk-out from LA public schools and demanded greater curricular representation, bilingual education, less overcrowding, and more teachers from their own communities.[364] Not a monolithic community, many vocal Mexican Americans could also be found advocating against some of these policies. Understandably, LAUSD's student and faculty integration efforts considered "Hispanics" a priority.

The Ethnic Review Committee and Sephardi Applicants

By 1975, over half of all LAUSD schools were deemed to have insufficiently integrated faculties and hiring practices that continually placed minority teachers in majority-minority schools. To remedy the situation and become eligible for federal funding, the LAUSD began to plan a program for staff integration. Indeed, Bustop initially formed in response to this issue and not student integration.[365] Implemented for the 1976-77 school year, about one thousand teachers underwent a relatively smooth relocation process despite complaints about the long commute and fears over "inner-city" schools and their "lazy" and "violent" students.[366]

Prior to such integration efforts, however, it was necessary to conduct surveys and obtain accurate data about racial demographics. The LAUSD had been doing so since 1966, but by 1974 new protocols were introduced allowing employees to change

[364] HoSang, *Racial Propositions,* 99.

[365] Baumgarten, "Searching for a Stake," 147.

[366] Jack McCurdy, "School Board Spurns Demand to Drop Teacher Integration Plan," *Los Angeles Times,* Oct. 8, 1974; Sides, *L.A. City Limits,*114; Eliot Marshall, "Race Certification" *The New Republic,* October 15, 1977, 18; Jack McCurdy, "Fear of Transfers to Inner City Haunts Teachers" *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1976; Don Speich, "L.A. Teacher Integration Plan Gets Mixed Marks," *Los Angeles Times,* Sep. 20, 1976.

their previously assigned racial and ethnic category, an option taken by one out of every twenty staff members.[367] In order to process these changes, Ethnic Review Committees (ERC) were set up in Fall 1976 to approve or deny teachers' applications, and, in February 1977, the LAUSD published a memo detailing the procedures for deciding on and classifying teachers' racial and ethnic identities. For this, school officials amended parts of the federal Office of Management and Budget's Directive #15 definitions of racial and ethnic groups to better reflect the particularities of Los Angeles.[368]

To adjudicate a request for changing classifications, an ERC would be arranged that consisted of teachers and staff from both the "target" and "source" ethnicity and whose decisions were guided by a list of six "ethnic perception factors." These included "perception of 'self,'" valid reasons why they wish to change identification, perception of the applicant "by the community at large as a member" of the group, "direct experience with the culture, language and customs" of the group, "participation in the community with groups and organizations," and the ability to "use background and culture to enhance the educational program."[369] Here the intention seems to be more about building a teaching faculty that would be responsive to a diverse student body and help foster a culturally competent learning environment than it was about confirming ancestry or record-keeping. Of course, federal funding was also on the line.

[367] History and Background of Racial and Ethnic Surveys, Box 2704, Folder 3, LAUSD Records.

[368] The OMB defines "Hispanic" as "a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race." For a discussion of Directive #15, see Victoria Hattam, "Ethnicity & the Boundaries of Race: Rereading Directive 15," *Daedalus* 134, no. 1 (2005): 61.

[369] Ethnic Review Committee worksheet, November 1977, Box 2704, Folder 3, LAUSD Records.

Teachers correctly feared that their racial-ethnic information would be used to begin a mandatory integration program akin to busing, and in 1977 a group of teachers fought the district's right to collect racial information.[370] LAUSD administrators were also concerned that given recent changes, "motivation existed for individual personnel to request changes in ethnic designations which would be most advantageous to them."[371] According to administrator Betty Gardin, "We don't feel that people ought to be able to switch their identities in order to prevent certain things from happening to them."[372] In several instances, several teachers were charged with adopting Spanish surnames—or keeping those of their divorced spouses—in order to "obtain better ratings for summer school assignments."[373] According to ERC guidelines, possession of an "ethnic surname [or] identity with a culture or language fluency are not sufficient bases for a change," a departure from the district's previous, more hands-off, approach.[374]

Given their high level of representation among LAUSD staff, as well as their unique racial histories, it is little surprise that Jews made up many of the teachers who applied for changes. Not all concerned Sephardi heritage, with some cases involving Jews with multiracial and mixed backgrounds. For example, Bronx-born Sandra Busch claimed that her great-grandparents were Ethiopian Jews and wanted to be considered "black and a Jew." Upon providing her birth certificate, one administrator expressed

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[370] Robert Rawitch, "L. A. Teacher Transfers Ruled Valid," *Los Angeles Times,* June 25, 1977.

[371] Teacher-Initiated Requests for Change in Racial or Ethnic Designation--Background Information, September 19, 1978, Box 2705, Folder 28, LAUSD Records.

[372] Marshall, "Race Certification," quoting Betty Gardin of the LAUSD, 19.

[373] Letter from Theron Arnett, April 19, 1976, Box 2706, Folder 37, LAUSD Records.

[374] Memo from Associate Superintendent Jerry Halverson, Oct. 24, 1977, Box 2704, Folder 3, LAUSD Records.

genuine astonishment, writing a note instructing to "hold this one! Look at that birth certificate. I think it says 'black Jew.' We need to find out what that means!"[375] She was ultimately denied a change due to a lack of others' perception of her as Black or as "representing" Blacks. Bilingual teacher Michelle Cantero, who had a Puerto Rican father and a Jewish mother, applied to change from "White" to "Hispanic," claiming that she was told "White was more advantageous" when she started teaching. Ultimately denied—not unanimously, though—she protested the "validity of any board deciding what anyone should be."[376] Fern Somoza's Hispanic classification was questioned by her principal when she missed school to observe Yom Kippur, revealing that she was hired on the basis of her husband's Spanish surname to "improve [the] ethnicity" of the school.[377] Being Jewish and non-White seemed to be mutually exclusive to the LAUSD, and these cases illustrate some of the limits in thinking about Jews—or anyone—in monoracial terms. Here we see how assumptions of Jews' Whiteness can highlight opportunist claims to minority status, while also erasing the experiences of Jews of Color.

The ambiguity of the "Hispanic" category generated the largest number of cases to come before the LAUSD, most having nothing to do with Jews. Among the major changes from previous classification schemes was the rejection of the previously used characteristics of "Spanish surname or culture" as establishing "criteria for designation as Hispanic." Teacher Louis Conte, previously categorized under "Spanish surname"

[375] Sandra S. Busch, Box 2706, Folder 25, LAUSD Records.

[376] Michelle Cantero, Box 2707, Folder 32, LAUSD Records.

[377] Fern Somoza, Box 2707, Folder 43, LAUSD Records.

and now classified as “White,” protested that the ERC “redefined what Hispanic is” and claimed that they were “going against the US constitution by making inquiries like this.”[378] In addition, redefinition meant the creation of a separate Filipino category (possibly since many Filipinos have Spanish surnames) and amending the “White” category to include “Sephardic Jews, Brazilians, and Portuguese” with an asterisk linking it to the “Hispanic” category.[379] The issue was treated seriously enough that the LAUSD administration sought clarification on Sephardi racial status from the federal Office of Civil Rights, since the literature was silent on the question.[380] Motivating these bureaucratic and technical conversations were the contested claims to Hispanic-ness by teachers of Sephardi background, opening up a messy discourse about the meanings of race, culture, ancestry, belonging, discrimination, and personal liberties.

The LAUSD dismissed all claims to Hispanic identity that relied on Sephardi ancestry alone. Given the intent of the integration program, denial was likely based on the assumption that American Sephardi experiences of immigration, class status, mobility, and racialization did not parallel those of the typical “Hispanic” student population. Even with Los Angeles’s large Mexican American population, meaningful inter-communal encounters were scarce. Rather, liberal and left-leaning Ashkenazi Angelenos were more likely than Sephardim to build political and communal

[378] Louis M. Conte, Box 2708, Folder 4, LAUSD Records.

[379] Memorandum No. 10, Feb 2, 1977, Box 2708, Folder 6, LAUSD Records. On earlier classification schemes, see Winnie White, “The Spanish Surname Criterion for Identifying Hispanos in the Southwestern US” *Social Forces* 38, no. 4 (1959): 363-66.

[380] Untitled document, 1976 Box 2704, Folder 4, LAUSD Records.

partnerships with Mexican Americans.[381] The primary lines of connection were vicarious, seeing how the emergent Chicano movement alongside parallel ones introduced to Sephardim the potential political and cultural uses of racial and ethnic pride, a topic explored in the following chapter.

At least nineteen teachers' petitions for a change to "Hispanic" noted Sephardic backgrounds. Unfortunately, many of these requests are scantily documented in the archives and what remains is largely from the perspective of school administrators in the form of handwritten notes and memos. While most were summarily denied, some case reviews lasted well over a year, including that of Murray Shapiro, whose months of back-and-forth appeals left a particularly vivid paper trail. And despite the official definition of Sephardim as White, a few were successful in getting classified as "Hispanic." Esther Cohen, active in the Sephardic Hebrew Center, changed from "other White" to "Hispanic culture," citing Spanish family descent dating back 500 years as well as her mother's birth in Cuba. Familiarity with the Spanish language and Latin American background could, it seems, supersede Sephardi Whiteness.[382] At least three other successful Sephardic appellees had a more uncertain path obscured by incomplete archival records. Some of them produced letters from friends and family claiming their "pure Spanish origin," pleaded that their "family's ancestral homeland is Spain," or

[381] Sanchez, *Boyle Heights*; George J. Sánchez, "'What's Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews': Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 633-61; Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform.*

[382] Ms. Clement L. Cohen, Box 2705, Folder 15, LAUSD Records.

argued that as a Sephardic Jew "born and raised by parents in a Spanish speaking Sephardic cultural home," they fit the Office of Civil Rights definition of Hispanic.[383]

Some Sephardi teachers previously self-identified or were placed in the older "Spanish surname" category, but with new changes identifying them as "White," the ambiguity of Sephardi identity was thrust into view. Perhaps aware of the official guidelines, teachers with clearly Sephardi backgrounds—identifiable via family names and roots in Turkey—omitted their Sephardi or Jewish backgrounds, instead focusing on their use of the Spanish language or ancestral connections to Spain.[384] Others, however, were either unaware of the ruling on Sephardim's Whiteness or fought against it. One teacher's attempt to classify as Hispanic included claiming descent from fifteenth century Spanish-Jewish intellectual Isaac Abarbanel.[385] In response, the LAUSD provided clarification that the issue was not an individual being "Sephardic and not Hispanic but rather 1) given that a person has said he is white, 2) the burden of proof in a request for change is on the individual, 3) if a Sephardic Jew has Spanish background (from Spain) to a full degree (100%) he is Spanish, 4) in the absence of above, perception must be used."[386] Perception was not only physical, but also included knowledge of the language and relationships with the Hispanic community, which many Sephardim lacked.

[383] Isaac Hazan, Box 2710, Folder 23; Rachelle 'Benveniste' Haky, Box 2706, Folder 2; Henry Levy, Box 2708, Folder 23, LAUSD Records.

[384] Molly Weinsheink, Box 2710, Folder 14; Theodora Barzilay Roth, Box 2708, Folder 27, LAUSD Records.

[385] Harlan Barbanell, Box 2707, Folder 4, LAUSD Records.

[386] Harlan Barbanell, Box 2707, Folder 5, LAUSD Records.

Marjorie Luxenberg, identifying as "Jewish by religion and Spanish by nationality," protested that

> due to my liberal upbringing, it is against my convictions to reveal one's religious, national, or racial origin or background in the form of documentation. As a result the office filled out the previous form for ethnicity...I am still against this 'inquisition' that you impose to categorize people. However, I at this point feel [that] not revealing my heritage would work against me. Therefore let it be known that my mother's family is of Spanish descent and another branch of the family are Peruvians.[387]

By calling the work of the ERC an "inquisition," Luxenberg brought in the specific terrors of Sephardi history to justify her anger in complying with such requests. Elsewhere, teachers and outside observers invoked other examples of historical antisemitism, like when the president of the local Anti-Defamation League chapter likened the ERC's review process to Nazi Germany's racial laws.[388]

When mandatory teacher classification began in 1976, Murray Shapiro refused to define his background citing his belief that "one's ethnicity was a private matter, and a privileged confidence protected by law and American tradition," and analogized the ERC to apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany, framing his opposition in the starkest possible terms. A teacher at El Camino Real High School, a largely-White charter school in the San Fernando Valley's Woodland Hills, his appeal lasted nearly three years, leaving a rich back-and-forth record of angry letters and tense hearings.

Shapiro and his principal seem to have previously come to a mutual agreement to consider "Shapiro" a Spanish surname in order to improve the faculty's "ethnic make-up." Subsequently, Shapiro appealed to be classified as "Hispanic." Despite little to no contemporary connection to Sephardi life, he recalled family lore telling of eastern

[387] Marjorie Luxenberg, Box 2708, Folder 29, LAUSD Records.

[388] Don Speich, "Racial Identity Rule on Teachers Draws Criticism," *Los Angeles Times,* February 26, 1977.

European forebears who had come from Spain and changed their name from the Spanish-sounding "Zafiro."[389]

Once rejected, Shapiro countered the claim that Sephardim were not Hispanic on the basis that religion has nothing to do with ethnicity—a tricky argument to sustain, especially regarding American Jews in the 1970s. However, this also implicitly challenged Jews' universal designation as White. After his second denial in January 1978, Shapiro sent a bitter letter to the Teacher Integration Unit, which oversaw the ERC, protesting "the continuing arbitrary, capricious and patently unjust actions" that would "reward those [the LAUSD] designate for preferred treatment and thus punish those from whom they withhold whatever is the current racial-ethnic-ancestral-religious dispensation." Like opponents of affirmative action, Shapiro drew on values of privacy and individuality, reasoning that these inquiries were "repugnant to everything this country stands for." Shapiro opposed race-conscious classification while also pursuing it for his own benefit.

Opposing the way "big government" decided his designation as "Other White," Shapiro stood firmly behind his Hispanic background as a "proud American" and a "proud Jew." Drawing directly on the ethnic revivalism of the moment, Shapiro claimed he "can trace his ancestry back to 1492 and before in at least as conclusive a way as [Alex] Haley does in his Roots." Just as "Haley supposes he came from a village in West Africa…[Shapiro's] supposition is a spot in Spain." Shapiro's letter then turned to hearsay and vindictiveness, relating how he "received reports of one such racial jury… [where] the black woman member begins each 'trial' (actually inquisition) with the

[389] On Ashkenazi claims to Sephardic ancestry, see John Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

injudicious query, 'Why do you hate blacks.' I think a more pertinant [sic] question might be put to this black woman member, 'Why do you hate whites?'"

Singling out a Black woman and reframing the conversation as anti-White echoes the backlash against affirmative action and civil rights advances, while betraying some of Shapiro's own identification as non-White. He continued to vent his frustration at the committee's refusal to see him in person and the seemingly arbitrary divide between Spanish and Portuguese individuals. Shapiro noted that "an Hispanic Jew, if his ancestors were foolish enough to settle in Portugal, is punitively WHITE; but if that same ancestor were to have settled in Mexico, aha, he is presently at least, declared by Board edict, HISPANIC!" The purpose of the designation - to better serve the students and diversify school faculties - was not part of his argument.

Shapiro's angry rhetoric reached a fever pitch when he described the purpose, context, and results of the ethnic designation process as "RACIST, PREJUDICIAL, UNAMERICAN AND UNGODLY. They are capricious, whimsical and arbitrary. And I shall PROTEST, PROTEST, PROTEST. ACCUSE! ACCUSE! ACCUSE! Until this dark blot of inequity is removed from the policy directives of this school district."

Unsurprisingly, the board's negative response provoked Shapiro to accuse the board of the "deliberate practice of anti-semitism and deliberate exclusion of my rights as a citizen, teacher, and employee of this district."[390] Because of, or despite, the tenor of Shapiro's letters, his case went on for at least an additional year into March 1979, when his request for change was denied once more. After that likely final decision, the archival trail runs dry. A few months later, these debates were all but moot. A newly

[390] Murray Shapiro, Box 2708, Folder 40, LAUSD Records.

elected LAUSD board, now sympathetic to Bustop's mission, voted to terminate the teacher transfer program and effectively ended the ERC.[391] That same year, California voters approved an anti-busing amendment, and a few years later in 1982 the *Crawford* integration rulings would be overturned by the Supreme Court.

Conclusion

The legacy and impact of Sephardim's place on the racial map of Los Angeles, especially in South LA, continued to be felt decades after most of the community had left. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I. M. Hattem's influential supermarkets were arguably the largest single representation of Sephardi success in LA in the early twentieth century. Yet by the century's close, Hattem's imposing Art Deco market at 81st and Vermont in South LA had long since been abandoned as a retail grocery and its striking architectural skeleton became the center of post-Rodney King debates around urban renewal, affordable housing, and communal claims on Vermont Avenue.[392] The market's empty shell served as a reminder to many of the current Black residents of how Los Angeles abandoned and divested from South LA and its Black community - a catalyst for both the 1965 Watts Uprising as well as those of 1992.[393] Its present (2022) role housing a Church of Scientology Community Center reaffirms the site's intended role as a central beacon to the neighborhood.

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[391] William Trombley, "School Board's Majority Opposes Teacher Transfers," *Los Angeles Times,* July 8, 1979.

[392] Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis,* 300, 310; Todd S. Purdum, "Where Riots Raged, a Neighborhood Emerges" *New York Times,* July 4, 1999, 53.

[393] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA: Da Capo Press, 1997).

Unlike Hattem, Morris Notrica's long-lived 32nd Street Market remained one of the last remnants of Sephardi South LA until its closure in 2005. Began by his Rhodesli immigrant father Joe in 1951, by 1979 Morris Notrica was operating "one of the largest independent markets in Los Angeles." Notrica's store was admired by local customers for stocking international foods for foreign students studying at the nearby University of Southern California, as well as its liberal credit policy, check cashing, money advances, and IOU practices. Professionally, he became a leader and well-known figure in the industry for "turning high profits in difficult demographic areas," and served as president of the LA-based Mexican American Grocers Association for eighteen years. Like his father, Notrica used his knowledge of Ladino to build stronger relationships with local Spanish-speakers, although public profiles calling him as a "second generation Greek-American " omitted a Sephardi component connecting Greekness and facility in Spanish.[394] Hattem also appears to have used his knowledge of Ladino to do business in Mexico (as did other Sephardi grocers, like Jack Caraco), where he ultimately retired and passed away.

Notrica's convivial relationship with neighborhood residents was such that during the Rodney King Uprising in 1992, when many major supermarkets were looted or boarded up, Notrica's stayed open as "three African American ministers stood guard over the store."[395] As opposed to many large chain stores, Notrica tended to hire local

[394] Loretta Kuklinsky Huerta, "The Neighborhood Grocery Changes-but Not the Grocer," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1979, D15.

[395] Paul Lieberman, "Bush Ordering Troops to L.A.: Police Struggle to Get Upper Hand in Turmoil," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1992, A1, A20; Wendy Thermos, "Store's Closure a Blow to USC Neighborhood," *Los Angeles Times,* September. 30, 2005.

youth and provided many of them with their first-ever paycheck. However, this image of friendly local grocer is complicated by Notrica's cooperation with LA's massive urban renewal plan for the Hoover Street area, which displaced thousands of residents in the late 60s and early 70s to create a commercial development more suited to benefit the USC community than locals.[396]

By demonstrating the various ways Sephardi Jews navigated the intersection of space, race, and identity in mid-twentieth century Los Angeles, this chapter has argued that the postwar relationship between Whiteness and Jews is much more complex than typically assumed, particularly as seen through a relational lens. By putting Sephardim at the center of this analysis, we see the ways a marginal identity can be flexibly shaped in response to broader and less nuanced racial structures operating in the city, particularly those dealing with Hispanic-ness, Whiteness, and Jewishness. This history also furthers the contention that place, property, and geography are central to urban histories, especially in Los Angeles. This perspective helps contextualize Sephardi Jews' place in the city, as well as illustrating how sweeping patterns of urban growth impacted individuals and communities on a much smaller scale. In the following and final chapter I will examine how Sephardi Jews sought and claimed cultural relevance in the context of national, international, and local Jewish social spheres. Unlike the cases where Jewish, White, or Hispanic identities were central, Chapter Four traces the development of an explicitly Sephardi identity politics that sought to build Sephardim's own power, and not merely navigate others'.

[396] Ray Hebert, "Shopping Center Plan for USC Area Outlined," *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1969, C.

Chapter Four: Making 'Supersfard': Sephardi Ethnic Revival and Identity Politics in the 1970s

Energized by a first-of-its-kind national convention held in Atlanta in November 1973, a group of teenagers launched *The Young Sephardic Voice*, a newsprint-sized publication touching on issues of Sephardi Jewish identity and tradition. One feature, "An Exclusive Interview with Supersfard," included a set of simple illustrations of a young man sporting a large afro topped by a small *kippah*. Wearing a T-shirt featuring the Superman "S" logo and two buttons labeled "Save Syrian Jewry" and "Let Israel Live," Supersfard is asked how he can be Jewish if he doesn't "speak Jewish?" (i.e., Yiddish) Stumped for an answer, Supersfard exclaims "Blasted Baklava!" and asks the readers to mail him helpful suggestions through the American Sephardi Federation's New York offices.[397] The popularity of Supersfard soon spread, and Sephardi youth in Los Angeles began to create, sell, and distribute real "Supersfard" T-shirts across the country.

Unpacking this curious cultural artifact raises several interrelated questions. How did Sephardim react to such interrogations of their Jewishness? What does the afro and the invisible voice of a purportedly Ashkenazi Jew say about how American Sephardim saw themselves in the 1970s? What was the context that enabled the publication and dissemination of the cartoon? How was Los Angeles's Sephardi community representative and distinct from the broader patterns reflected here? What role did issues of Syrian and Israeli Jewry - featured on his buttons - play in shaping Sephardi

[397] "An Exclusive Interview with Supersfard," *The Young Sephardic Voice,* Vol. 1, no.1 (January 1974), 3, Box 16, Folder 4, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel records (Collection 2340). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library. University of California, Los Angeles. [STTI Records]

identity? In the process of exploring these questions, I reveal how a Sephardi identity politics in the 1970s emerged in relation and reaction to other "ethnic revival" movements and, especially, to Ashkenazi Jewry.

Essential to the foundation and development of twentieth century American Sephardi Jewry was their relationship to Eastern and Central European-origin Ashkenazim, who made up most of the American Jewish population and whose culture defined popular understandings of Jewishness. Partly because of this historical foundation and partly because of the limited intelligibility "Sephardi" had in broader US society, Sephardi identity and culture held the most public salience within a specifically Jewish context. As discussed in previous chapters, corollary identities like "Oriental," Hispanic, White, or Jewish carried weight and primacy in settings where the nebulous "Sephardi" label typically did not. As the presence of Jews with North African and Middle Eastern backgrounds in America slowly rose by the 1960s, so too did their profile in the wider Jewish world. One effect was the transformation and expansion of the meanings of "Sephardi," revolutionizing the ideological, political, and cultural work Sephardi identity could do.

The history of intra-Jewish relational ethnic formation as covered in this chapter parallels the rhetorical and ideological approaches Americans of color took in relation to White society, with Sephardi Jews positioning themselves as a minority seeking recognition, justice, and equality vis-à-vis Ashkenazim. This paradigm has been noted by writer and activist Julie Iny, who observed how her Iraqi-Indian Jewish background racialized her as White in the US - but a person of color within American Jewry.[398] From

[398] Julie Iny, "Ashkenazi Eyes," in Loolwa Khazzoom, ed. *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage* (New York: Seal Press, 2003), 92.

the Sephardi perspective, mainstream Ashkenazi Jewry held a position of power and hegemony that evoked analogies to racial inequality in the US and assumed the equation of Ashkenazi and White. Reading this period of American Jewish history in a relational framework and against the grain uncovers how the structures of racial formation in the US were internalized and transformed by American Jews and how centuries of Jewish diversity were reinterpreted through a contemporary ethnoracial lens. In other words, a story about Jews and race in the US told from the Sephardi perspective looks not only at relationships to racialized groups like Blacks or to discussions about Jews' racial assignment as a distinct group - or as White. Rather, I demonstrate how the language of race and ethnicity in twentieth century America was understood and applied by and between Jews. This chapter also seeks to add a historical referent to contemporary discussions about Jews of Color.

A deep dive into congregational archives helps to more fully appreciate the evolution of how Sephardi identity and culture in Los Angeles was defined, maintained, and guarded since the 1920s. I pay particular attention to how Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and North African Jews' sense of self and community was heavily informed by the presence and power of an Ashkenazi Jewry that represented threats of assimilation and acculturation as well as opportunities for expansion, belonging, and appreciation.

Before its evolution into a full-fledged national and international movement in the 1970s, expressions of Sephardi identity and pride in its distinctiveness from mainstream Jewry were important in individual and communal life. Specifically, I look at three sites of cultural production and meaning for Sephardi Jews in Los Angeles that developed in explicit contradistinction to Ashkenazim: the synagogue, foodways, and music. The changing nature of postwar Sephardi life inhibited some of the informal, familial, and

traditional avenues of cultural expression within those aforementioned categories. As Sephardim dispersed to neighborhoods in West LA and the San Fernando Valley and became more integrated in mainstream Jewish life, many social and religious needs were increasingly filled by Ashkenazi Jews and Ashkenazi-majority organizations. Additionally, the older immigrant generations of Sephardi culture-bearers were passing away with few incoming immigrants able to replace vanishing "old world" traditions. However, Sephardim now had more leisure time and disposable income to create public, formal, and organized media and venues for cultural expression like cookbooks and films. Goals of cultural preservation, stirring nostalgia, and newfound engagement with one's heritage supplemented with goals of educating Ashkenazim. For some, however, this process only shed light on what they believed to be the imminent disappearance of a culture and community. From a moment of anxiety, discussion moves to address how and why the 1970s became a decade of Sephardi pride and "revival."

In the third and final section, I look at the invigorated Sephardi world of the 1970s through the prism of Los Angeles. Nothing exemplified this moment more than the establishment and activities of the American Sephardi Federation. Founded in 1973, the ASF galvanized a diverse set of American Jews through a new brand of panethnic identity politics. Similar in certain ways to efforts of Asian, Native, and Latin Americans across the US, the ASF's panethnic approach emerged moreso out of shared grievances and political goals within American and world Jewry than from intimate personal or communal connections. In both Israel and the US, the meanings of "Sephardi" increasingly included not just Iberian-origin Jews, but also those with roots in places like Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. Two national and international campaigns in

which the ASF took leading roles - one concerning the "social gap" affecting "Oriental" Jews in Israel and the other on the rights and safety of Jews in Syria - shows how this panethnicity was mobilized and how Sephardim in LA and elsewhere envisioned their role within the Jewish world. At the same time, these efforts were part of the broader history of a globalizing LA in which Sephardim were one participant of many.

Constructing Sephardi Identity in LA: Between *Sepharad* and *Ashkenaz*

Long before the "revival" of the 70s, explicit expressions and definitions of identity and pride were part of Sephardi life across the US and in Los Angeles, much of which drew on their connections to medieval Spain as well as their difference from Ashkenazi Jews.[399] It was this latter aspect that would foster the panethnic Sephardi movement discussed in this chapter. While the evocation of Spain declined in later decades, as early as 1920 the Ibero-centric interpretation of Sephardi identity was enshrined in the constitution of the city's oldest Sephardi organization, the *Comunidad Sefardi de Los Angeles*. Penned in English by the *comunidad*'s founding president Adolphe Danziger, a Polish-born polymath who was also known as a journalist, fiction writer, and erstwhile collaborator of H.P. Lovecraft, among other careers. Having rediscovered Sephardi roots while working as a US diplomat in Spain, Danziger came to adopt the surname de Castro. His preamble is worth quoting at length as it establishes a pillar of what being Sephardi meant for LA's Jews:

> For the reason that there are many young men, Sephardim and descendants of Sephardim, in the city of Los Angeles, who desire to form a union for mutual protection, benefit and pleasure; desiring also to give expression of their solidarity in the support of the Constitution of the United

[399] For American Sephardi engagement with Spain and Ashkenazim, see chapters Four and Five in Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

> States and the liberal institutions which, by the grace of a beneficent Providence, they are permitted to enjoy; desiring furthermore to call to mind the happy heritage of a bygone age, when their forefathers lived contentedly in Spain, and also to cultivate as much as possible the ancient rites in accordance with the Sephardic ritual, have, for the more effectual realization of these ideals and purposes, adopted the following Constitution.[400]

The non-Ottoman origin of some of the founders, including Danziger, may have made Spanish ancestry the common bond rather than a shared town or region of origin as was common for many Ashkenazi immigrants and some Sephardim, like those from the island of Rhodes. With a focus on a connection to Spain and "Sephardic ritual," neither political, denominational, nor *landsmanshaft* ties dictated the organizing principle of this unique Jewish community.

Neither did the constitution include references to Jews, Judaism, Israel, or Hebrew until a later section on education when speaking of the desire to "cultivate the Hebrew and Spanish tongues."[401] And even though many of the *comunidad*'s founders could speak English, they chose to make "Spanish" (likely meaning Judeo-Spanish/Ladino) the official language of the community. But this stipulation went beyond practical accommodation for new immigrants, touching on the meaning of a Sephardi community. Unlike their Ashkenazi coreligionists whose religious and cultural life often referenced biblical or Talmudic times or their more recent "Old World" origins, Sephardi Jews' historical imaginary also included medieval Iberia. Not as universal as ancient Israel nor as narrow as one's hometown, Spain could serve as both an exclusive and inclusive criterion as well as symbolically ambiguous enough to tie a diverse community together.

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[400] Adolphe Danziger, Constitution, "Preamble," 1920, 3, Box 14, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[401] Danziger, Constitution, 1920, 4.

Common ground and ancestral pride were based in a nebulous understanding of a shared Spanish Jewish culture and history. Lay leaders invoked abstract but powerful notions of Sephardi heritage instead of or alongside Jewish and American identities in the early years of communal life. Typical were Richard Amado's remarks upon his installation as community president in 1930:

> We as Sephardic Jews have a very proud and noble heritage. There is not a time when the name Sephardic is mentioned but that it means to one a noble, industrious and efficient Jew. It is up to us to show our fellow Jews and the world in general that we are worthy of the name Sephardic.[402]

Two years later at the groundbreaking of the Temple Tifereth Israel, Amado repeated the call for congregants to "take advantage of the opportunities that modern American civilization and freedom offers us in order to reincarnate the traditional glory, leadership, and fame of the Sephardim of Spain."[403] Founding vice president José Estrugo, frustrated by the negligence and indifference of many Sephardim, similarly tried to inspire action by reminding others of their "*hidalgos antepasados*" (brave ancestors) and "*glorioso linaje"* (glorious lineage).[404] Estrugo continued his investment in Sephardim's Spanish heritage when he left Los Angeles to travel around Spain and write a book on his travels, *El Rotorno a Sefarad: Un Siglo Después de la Inquisición* (The Return to Sefarad: A Century After the Inquisition), published in 1933.

The embrace of such a vague Sephardi identity could contain factual errors, such as in the early membership guidelines for the *comunidad* that referred to Spanish as

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[402] Minutes, February 9, 1930, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[403] *Souvenir Program of the Dedication of Temple Tifereth Israel, February 21st, 1932*, Box 25, Folder 5, STTI Records.

[404] Minutes, April 11, 1920, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records.

"the beautiful language of Cervantes, Maimonides, or Judah Ha-Levi." Maimonides and Halevi probably used little to no Spanish, writing in Arabic and Hebrew instead. The reference to Cervantes is also curious as a figure relatively foreign to Jewish and Sephardi culture (although some suppose Cervantes himself either was, or descended from, a crypto-Jew). Inclusion in the community was also open to "all Sephardi Jews without exception or regard to party, origin, or opinion," applying "equally to the descendants of Spain and Portugal and to the Jews of the Orient who still practice Judaism according to the true and original Sephardi rite."[405] What exactly the "true and original" rite consisted of was left undefined, and omitted the centuries of evolving religious customs and traditions from Spain to the Ottoman or Balkan homeland of most members. For Los Angeles's Jews, as elsewhere, Sephardi culture and identity encompassed Spanish roots, language and history, ritual and custom, philosophy, family origins, an "Oriental" environment, and - essential to this chapter - difference from Ashkenazim.

Decades later in 1970, the Maurice Amado Foundation stipulated that its contributions to the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel were dependent on the synagogue having at least three-quarters of its executive board be Sephardi and that the temple would follow "Sephardic *minhag*" (religious custom or rite). On behalf of an ambivalent board, Victor Abrevaya suggested instead that a simple majority of the congregational membership should consist of Sephardim and that a committee would be arranged to "come up with a definition of what is Sephardic minhag the way that we know it."[406]

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[405] Minutes, February 1, 1920, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records. Also reproduced and translated in "A Sephardi Community is Founded in Los Angeles [1920]", in Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 353- 354.

[406] Minutes, March 4, 1970, Box 3, Folder 2, STTI Records.

Responding to the committee's request for clarification, Rabbi Solomon Gaon - co-founder of Yeshiva University's Sephardic Studies program and a global Sephardi leader - acknowledged that "we are having much difficulty in defining who is a Jew: how much more difficult it is to define who is a Sephardi."[407] As I will demonstrate later, community and solidarity could still be built without a clear definition - and vagueness probably helped. While the results of the episode are unclear, by 1977 STTI's membership guidelines no longer included any specific requirement of being Sephardi, in addition to being open to women's full membership. This latter change also signaled women's fitful entrance into more (but not fully) equitable roles in Sephardi congregational life and represents another aspect of the expanding boundaries of Sephardi identity.

No para Ashkenazim

The original intention behind the founding of LA's *comunidad* was to create an organization that was "not only religious," but social, recreational, and literary in nature, and whose membership was open to Sephardim but "*no para Ashkenazim*" (not for Ashkenazim).[408] Existential questions on the future and nature of American Sephardi community and congregational life were virtually always framed in relation to Ashkenazi, mainstream Jewry. This dialectical relationship was primarily one-way and has much in common with histories of racial formation in the US that focus on Whiteness as the main

[407] Minutes, March 20, 1970, Box 3, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[408] Minutes, March 7, 1920, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records.

referent.[409] Although other factors like place of origin, class, and religious practice served to differentiate Sephardim from other Jews and from one another, Ashkenazim - variously understood and defined - provided the most commonly invoked and most important referent group for Sephardim *qua* Sephardim.[410] In LA and elsewhere, Sephardi ties to their homelands, to other Mediterranean immigrants, and to people of color weakened in the postwar period. Within a single generation, those connections were replaced by a social environment that was increasingly Jewish, Ashkenazi, and/or White, giving rise to a new articulation and strategy about how to maintain and express group identity.

Sometimes this juxtaposition gave rise to an apologetic rhetoric that painted a portrait of Sephardi Judaism and culture as more rational, harmonious, inclusive, flexible, colorful, flavorful, and expressive than Ashkenazi Jewry. Likewise, the Sephardi personality was marked by an integrity and fearlessness borne from a relative lack of historical antisemitism.[411] Similar to evocations of a European, Spanish Golden Age, defining and understanding Sephardi identity within a Jewish/Ashkenazi framework minimized the impact of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Spanish/Hispanic relational possibilities.[412]

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[409] Molina, ed., *Relational Formations of Race;* Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

[410] Examples include Daniel J. Elazar, *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1989); David Rabeeya, *Sephardic Myths and Realities* (Philadelphia: Nakhshon Press, 1989); H. J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences, and Problems as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

[411] Vivian Gornick, "Sephardim of the East: The Differences Run Deep" *Present Tense* (Summer 1974), 47, 48.

[412] Ben Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America,* 3; Marc Angel, "The Planting of Sephardic Culture in North America," in Joshua Stampfer, ed., *The Sephardim: A Cultural Journey from Spain to the Pacific Coast* (Portland, OR: Institute for Judaic Studies, 1987), 102.

A significant influence on the Sephardi-Ashkenazi dynamic was a common history of exclusion and defamation faced by Sephardim, especially new immigrants, from other Jews. Numerous anecdotes and recollections of immigrant Sephardim and their American-born children detail the bewilderment and disbelief they experienced from Ashkenazim. These included confrontations with intra-Jewish racism and exoticism, name-calling and stereotypes about poor hygiene, rigid gender roles, isolationism, stubbornness, and cultural and intellectual backwardness.[413] As a minority within American Jewry, Sephardim were often alienated by Jewish culture in America, limiting their full participation in communal life because of how Ashkenazi criteria has been applied to define Jewishness in general.[414] These and more mundane slights held a powerful grip on the Sephardi collective psyche in the US and throughout the world, becoming a major trope underpinning the "revival" of the 1970s.

LA's Sephardim were integrated into local Jewish life and populous enough to develop strong congregations and organizations on their own. Aware of the need and usefulness of fostering better relations with other Jews, local Sephardi communal newsletters and bulletins were partly conceived of as a public relations vehicle geared toward Ashkenazi Jews. Marco Asseo began advocating for a *comunidad* publication in 1931 by invoking the "potential prestige that the LA Sephardic Jewry will gain thereby in

[413] Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America*, Chapter Four; Devin Naar, "Our White Supremacy Problem," *Jewish Currents*, Spring 2019, https://jewishcurrents.org/our-white-supremacy-problem/; Jack Glazier, "Stigma, Identity, and Sephardi-Ashkenazic Relations in Indianapolis," in Walter P. Zenner, ed., *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience* (New York: State University of New York, 1988), 43-62; Caroline E. Light, *That Pride of Race and Character: The Roots of Jewish Benevolence in the Jim Crow South* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), Chapter 6.

[414]Marcia Aron Barryte, "Dance Among the Sephardic Jews from Rhodes Living in Los Angeles" (M.A. Dance, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 91; Jack Glazier "Stigma, Identity, and Sephardic-Ashkenazic Relations in Indianapolis," 44.

the eyes of our Ashkenazim brethern [sic]," as well as its "salutary effect upon Sefardic newcomers from the East."[415] Joe Berro of the Sephardic Hebrew Center similarly pushed for a publication on the grounds that it would improve the "culture and mastery of the English language" of Sephardim, who lagged behind Ashkenazim.[416]

While community publications had a limited readership outside their own congregants, a more effective way to reach Ashkenazim was through the world of Jewish philanthropy. Contributing to Los Angeles's United Jewish Welfare Fund was, according to one member of STTI, "our duty to make a name for the Sephardim in order to save our prestige in front of the Ashkenazim."[417] Many Jewish aid organizations accommodated Sephardi branches or auxiliaries for this reason, including the UJWF, the Duarte Sanitarium (later City of Hope), and Israel Bonds, all of which served the additional function of providing Sephardim a sense of representation, visibility, and status.

Part of this pressure was influenced by Sephardi perceptions of Ashkenazi Jews as more progressive, organized, and financially successful.[418] Jack Israel of the Sephardic Hebrew Center tellingly joked that "it may not be authentic," but if their annual Turkish Bazaar was chaired by an Ashkenazi Jew, "it'll probably make money."[420] When the Sephardic Community and Brotherhood began planning for a new building in 1962,

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[415] Minutes, January 1929, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[416] Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 82.

[417] Minutes, May 1, 1938, Box 1, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[418] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 135.

[420] Jack Israel, "Around the Board," *Sephardic Hebrew Center Monthly* Vol. 1, no. 2, March 1963, Box 17, Folder 3, STTI Records.

they explicitly modeled it after Ashkenazi synagogue centers with the goal of modernizing their congregational profile.[421] However, Sephardi-Ashkenazi cooperation was also full of challenges. For instance, the Los Angeles chapter of the American Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, led by many Sephardi immigrant alumni, tried to gain the support and membership of Ashkenazim in LA. Some were turned away during fundraising appeals to local Ashkenazim since they saw it as a strictly Sephardi issue. As Nadia Malinovich summarizes, for "appeal[s] to the larger, overwhelmingly Ashkenazic American Jewish population, the group took great pains to portray itself as a broadly Jewish rather than a narrowly Sephardic organization [and] in its appeals to the Sephardic community, it presented itself as an organization of particular importance and relevance to Sephardim."[422] While overlapping and intertwined in many ways, expressions of Sephardi culture and identity had to carefully navigate the balance between its universal Jewishness and those elements that made it distinct from Ashkenazi Jewry.

Despite their initial exclusion, Ashkenazim nevertheless became regular and active participants in LA Sephardi congregational and communal life. Ticketed events, like High Holiday services, sometimes asked higher prices of non-member Ashkenazim than it did non-member Sephardim, implicitly encouraging one group's participation and discouraging, but tolerating, the other. By 1929 membership in the *comunidad* was

[421] On the American synagogue, see David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History*. (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999); Jack Wetheimer, ed. *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

[422] Nadia Malinovich, "The American Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle: A Study in American-Jewish Intraethnic Relations, 1947–2004," *American Jewish History* 98, no. 4 (2014): 47.

extended to include any Jewish man married to a Sephardi woman, and by 1944 they allowed an unmarried Ashkenazi man to become a member but withheld his right to vote or hold office. Restrictions were increasingly relaxed after World War Two as "mixed marriages" between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews became more common and linguistic and cultural barriers faded. Tensions could erupt, however, like when Sephardi *comunidad* member Isaac Raphael accusingly asked "why should a Pollack perform such a mitzvah" when the Warsaw-born Ashkenazi Jack Kiok received the honor of opening the synagogue's Torah ark during prayer services. [423] Kiok knew Spanish from having lived in Spain before immigrating to the US, had married a Sephardic woman, Fortunee Morjoseph, and helped found the Juniors youth group at STTI. But to some, he remained a "Pollack."[424]

Such expressions of exclusivity could be embarrassing, as it was for Max Bacola and Maurice Mitrani who suggested that restricting membership was "discriminatory in this present day and age" and worried that they might "receive very many unfavorable comments from many of the Jewish organizations in Los Angeles and elsewhere." Nevertheless, Salvo Lavis (who married into the Amado family) believed that "we as Sephardim have the right to perpetuate Sephardic customs and traditions as we see fit. We have as an example Temple Shearith Israel of NY who by admitting Eskenazim [sic] today is Sephardic in name only, because most of the membership today are Eskenazim [sic]."[425] A proposed change to expand STTI's membership eligibility

[423] Minutes, October 14, 1946, Box 1, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[424] *El Shofar,* Vol 1, no. 4, April 1980, Box 19, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[425] Minutes, March 16 and April 6, 1950, Box 2, Folder 1, STTI Records.

narrowly passed after a tie-breaking vote, but anxiety about assimilation to Ashkenazi Jewry remained.

Alongside membership, one of the most important communal decisions to ensure the Sephardi nature of a congregation was hiring religious leadership. *Hazanim* (cantors) needed specific training in Sephardi-style traditions familiar to congregants. Religious songs and prayers were understood as foundational to preserving the Sephardi character of the synagogue so that changes in cantorial hires or liturgical styles were typically met with great resistance, even from a relatively secular laity. On the other hand, the background and training of rabbis under consideration was more flexible, partly out of necessity. Before the 1950s, most rabbis ministering to American Sephardi congregations came from similar backgrounds and trained in seminaries across the Eastern Mediterranean. Some of this was out of a practical need for the requisite language skills to minister to Ladino-speakers. But STTI's protracted search for a permanent rabbi, which lasted from the early 1940s until 1959, coincided with a lack of ideal candidates. World War II had not only destroyed centers of Sephardi rabbinical training - particularly the *Collegio Rabinicco Convitto* in Rhodes - but had decimated the local population. Emigration to the US, even for exempt religious leaders, was difficult or impossible.[426] Additionally, congregants now wanted a more American, English-speaking, and modern rabbi.[427]

[426] A notable exception was Rabbi Isadore Kahan, who left Mussolini's Italy for Seattle's Ezra Bessaroth congregation.

[427] Hiring Ashkenazi rabbis was a common practice for Ottoman-origin Sephardi congregations in the US, occurring in Seattle and Long Island, among other places.

Searching for a rabbi to replace the Bulgarian-born Isaac Varon, who became the congregation's Talmud Torah teacher, STTI sought someone radically different. He would be modern, "Americanized" if not American-born, fluent in English, relatively young, and properly trained (Varon was never formally ordained). But the rabbinical scene in the US was virtually devoid of Sephardi candidates. Solomon Maimon, likely the first Ottoman/Mediterranean-origin rabbi ordained in the US, was approached by STTI but he returned to his Seattle community to serve the Sephardic Bikur Holim congregation. The reality soon set in that hiring an Ashkenazi rabbi would have to suffice, but such a conclusion was divisive. Board member Milton Amado warned that by making such a decision "our culture and traditions eventually will undergo thorough unlimited changes."[428]

Amado and other demurring voices eventually compromised. Hired on a part-time basis to lead 1959's High Holiday services, Rabbi Jacob Ott wound up serving the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel until his retirement in 1993. Born in Chicago in 1919 to an Orthodox Ashkenazi family, Ott was ordained in 1942 at the Hebrew Theological Seminary in the suburb of Skokie. His career began as a military chaplain for US troops on the European front during World War II, including ministering to Muslim troops from France's 2nd Armed Division during the Battle of Paris. Ott first came to Los Angeles in 1953 to serve as a rabbi for Hollywood's Beth El synagogue and became active and well respected in the city's Jewish and broader political circles, especially regarding Zionist causes, until his death in 2005.

[428] Minutes, August 9, 1945, Box 1, Folder 2, STTI Records.

Ott had no connection to Sephardic Jewry prior to being hired by STTI. In his yeshiva days, he did not even realize that some of his peers were Sephardi.[429] Nevertheless, members were reassured that "being an Ashkenazi rabbi does not mean that he is not well informed."[430] Ott rapidly adapted and grew into his role ministering to his Sephardi congregants, including picking up conversational Ladino and teaching classes on Sephardi history and religion. "Very hesitant" to take the job at first, he "deliberately tried not to 'Ashkenize'" his congregants and instead sought to learn from them.[431] Ott was an early proponent of recording a history and maintaining an archive of the congregation, taking a genuine interest in recognizing the unique stories and perspective of Sephardi Jews.[432] Along with Daniel Elazar, he helped to revive the American Sephardi Federation at a meeting of Sephardi leaders at an American Zionist conference, as will be discussed later. Ott's commitment was reciprocated by his congregants. As a beloved figure in the Sephardic community, he was awarded STTI's annual Sephardic Heritage Award in 1970 where he was described as a "Sephardic Jewish leader…more Sephardic than the rest of us."[433] When Iranian Jews started immigrating to Los Angeles in large numbers in the late 1970s and afterwards, Ott welcomed and supported them when many made STTI their congregational home.[434]

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[429] *El Shofar,* vol. 6 no. 7, February 1985, Box 20, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[430] Minutes, January 25, 1960, Box 2, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[431] Rhoda Blecker, "Interview with Rabbi Ott," *The Jewish Calendar: The Sephardic Issue*, Vol. 5, no. 1, March 1987, 3.

[432] Minutes, April 19, 1965, Box 3, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[433] *Sephardic Heritage Award - Rabbi Jacob Ott,* 1970, Box 26, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[434] *Tribute to Rabbi Jacob Meir Ott, Senior Rabbi of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel: Thursday, July 29, 1993, Av 11, 5753*, (Los Angeles, California. Iranian Jewish Cultural Organization of California, 1993.)

He also served as a sort of spokesperson and mediator between Sephardim and the broader Jewish world, explaining their history, culture, and differences while making the case for the relevance of the Sephardi experience to all. Ott reminded audiences that Sephardi Judaism is not a "remnant from Judaism's golden age," but a "renascent movement with a rich tradition and a great deal to share," without which "Judaism would be poorer."[435] He was also attuned to the unique problems of assimilation beset by Sephardim in America - the same concerns which nearly prevented his hiring - who had "the added problem of handing down Sephardic traditions to their children when the over-all Jewish traditions in California are predominantly Ashkenazic" and for whom "a large portion of their heritage is not given to them to inherit."[436] In presenting Milton Amado with the Sephardic Heritage Award in 1968, Ott recalled how Amado

> spoke of the dignity of Sephardim, the great necessity for membership cooperation and funding and of the needs of our young people. He recalled the days when he was a young fellow in New York and heard Sephardim referred to as 'black Jews' and demeaned as 'second class' citizens. Sephardim have come a long way since those prejudicial years, but Milton tenaciously holds fast to one proposition – the viability and growth of a specifically Sephardic community not endangered by the threat of assimilation into the majority Jewish culture on the American scene.[437]

Ott also compared Sephardim's "homelessness" as a minority in the Jewish world to African American students facing limited educational access.[438] This racialized analogy, in addition to his reference to "black Jews," hints at how Sephardim and others used racial analogies to understand how they were part of, and apart from, American Jewry.

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[435] Blecker, "Interview with Rabbi Ott."

[436] David W. Epstein, "Sephardic Treasures," *The Jewish Calendar: The Sephardic Issue*, Vol. 5, no. 1, March 1987, 8-9.

[437] *Sephardic Heritage Award - Milton Amado*, 1968, Box 26, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[438] Roberta Noel Britt, "Los Angeles Sephardim: Community Relations Problems and Needs" (MA, California State University, Fullerton, 1973), 63.

The Vanishing Sephardim?

Assimilation, the ever-present anxiety of American Jewry, held a double meaning for American Sephardim. Their marginal position elicited new perspectives and added critical voices to the myriad discussions on Jewish survival and Jewish life in the US that exploded in the postwar period. Sephardi concerns more than simply paralleled these broader conversations, instead positioning Ashkenazi, mainstream Jewry as the danger. In Los Angeles, Stella Rugetti noted how the "early leaders of the Sephardic community saw the need to preserve the unique culture, traditions, minhag and liturgy of the Sephardim in an overwhelming Ashkenazi community."[439] More than anything, it was Sephardim's defensive position as an endangered and marginalized minority vis-a-vis Ashkenazim that captured the most sustained and widely-shared feeling and motivation for the soon-to-come "revival" of the 70s.

Preceding that optimistic efflorescence of cultural activity, the threat of cultural loss also inspired pessimistic reflections on the future of Sephardi life. When STTI was searching for a new rabbi, board member Nissim Saul wrote to Rabbi David de Sola Pool of New York's Shearith Israel for suggestions for candidates, triggering a series of searching questions from Saul: "I wonder if the Sephardim are in their last episode? Are we to be another lost tribe? Are we to be dispersed little by little until practically nothing is left? What is the future holding for us?"[440] Elsewhere, De Sola Pool himself worried about how Sephardim could survive as a "double minority" when living among American

[439] Stella Rugetti, "Letter to Marian Wail," October 21, 1974, Box 66, Folder 3, Western States Jewish History Archive (Collection 1739). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

[440] Nissim Saul to David de Sola Pool, April 17, 1944, Box 13, Folder 1, STTI records.

Ashkenazim.[441] Articles with titles such as "The Vanishing Sephardim" continued to appear through the 1960s, as did many intra-communal warnings of cultural extinction.[442]

As a result, some Sephardim became more vocal in their challenge to the Jewish (Ashkenazi) status quo. One of the most public voices on the subject was Rabbi Marc Angel, a Seattle native ordained at New York's modern Orthodox Yeshiva University in 1970 who would soon become a nationally-known Sephardi leader.[443] During and immediately after his time as a student at the overwhelmingly Ashkenazi YU, Angel became, as he put it, an "angry young Sefardi."[444] Throughout the 1970s, Angel wrote about how Ashkenazim had little to no understanding of Sephardim and had set up barriers to their integration into the American Jewish community.[445] While the immigrant generation, in his view, had a more secure sense of Sephardi identity, his and later generations' heritage was "deracinated" and "destroyed" by secularism and Americanization in addition to the "fact that Jewishness in America is set by an Ashkenazic standard."[446] Angel bemoaned how Sephardim were "raised without a

[441] David De Sola Pool, "The Problem of Sephardic Jewry in America," *The Clarion*, January 1945, 5, Joseph J. De Leon papers, Accession No. 3903-001, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[442] Denah Lida, "The Vanishing Sephardim," *Le Judaisme Sephardi,* July 1962; Abraham Levy, T*he Sephardim: A Problem of Survival* (London, 1972).

[443] Marc Angel, *A New World: An American Sephardic Memoir* (Boulder: Albion Andalus, 2019).

[444] Rahel Musleah, "The Sefardic Renaissance," *Hadassah Magazine*, November 1999, 14-18.

[445] Marc Angel, *Seeking Good, Seeking Peace: Collected Essays of Rabbi Marc Angel*, ed. Hayyim Angel (Hoboken: KTAV, 1994), 178.

[446] Angel, *Seeking Good, Seeking Peace*, 181, 183.

history," were depicted as "inferior" or "borderline" Jews, and how both "non-Jews tell us what Jews are and the Ashkenazim also tell us what Jews are."[447]

To fight these trends, rationale for the preservation of Sephardi culture in America often turned to general anti-assimilationist attitudes in the Jewish community. Syrian-origin Fred Dweck of Los Angeles's Magen David congregation did

> … not wish to become like the Ashkenazim. Many Ashkenazim do not want to accept us on our own terms. Just [as] Ashkenazim will not become Christians to work in America, Sephardim will not become Ashkenazim to work in the general Jewish community.[448]

In the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War that mobilized and energized American Jewry, a new mindset gripped the nation's Jews, Sephardim included, that consolidated and emphasized Jewish pride.[449] Reflecting this new confidence, as well as the nation's superficial embrace of multiculturalism and diversity, Candiotty wrote in his 1967 Rosh Hashana message that:

> There are those who have predicted that Sephardic Jewry would disappear and th[at] there is no reason for there to be a distinction between Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazi Jews. Jewish people as a whole would lose if the Sephardic culture would disappear. I contend that different cultures within a society strengthens that society. America became the great country it is because it is composed of people with various backgrounds living together while maintaining their own heritage....we as Sephardic Jews, therefore must strive to maintain and enrich the heritage which we hand down to future generations.[450]

Here as elsewhere, Sephardim took mainstream concerns and frameworks - Jewish or otherwise - and reflected them back on their relations with Ashkenazim to argue for greater inclusion in Jewish society.

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[447] Marc Angel, "Ruminations on Sephardic Identity," *Midstream*, March 1972, 64-67.

[448] Britt, "Los Angeles Sephardim: Community Relations Problems and Needs," 65.

[449] Deborah Dash Moore, ed., *American Jewish Identity Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Chapter Five in Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[450] Max Candiotty, "New Year's Greeting," *Temple Tifereth Israel Bulletin,* October 1967, The Sephardic Jewish Community and Brotherhood of Los Angeles, 7, Box 18, Folder 3, STTI Records.

Most advocates of a strong Sephardi identity were not separatists, emphatically acknowledging that all Jews made up a single people - but they did not have to nor could not all be the same.[453] Accusations and anxieties about distinct Sephardi efforts being divisive and detrimental to Jews were rebutted with appeals toward diversity and reassurances of the priority of Jewishness to Sephardim. Connecting Sephardi concerns of survival to broader Jewish ones, Rabbi Angel in 1971 suggested that losing one's Sephardi identity meant losing their Jewish one, and that therefore the "time is ripe for an upsurge in Sephardic culture."[454] Around the same time, similar arguments were being made by radical leftist, feminist, and LGBT Jewish groups to justify their existence and benefit to Jewry at large.[455]

"A Sephardic renaissance in our midst"

For all the hand-wringing and grim forecasts, many Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike eagerly and excitedly took note of a nationwide "Sephardi revival" and the "significant resurgence of interest in Sephardic life" occurring across the US in the 1970s.[456] In 1975, sociologist Abraham Lavender observed that "Sephardic Jews are questioning the predominance of Ashkenazic definitions of Jewishness" and are facing problems of cultural continuity and their recognition as a valued but distinct part of

[453] Angel, *Seeking Good, Seeking Peace*, 65, 67.

[454] Angel, *Seeking Good, Seeking Peace*, 183.

[455] Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[456] *La Boz,* Sephardic Bikur Holim, July 1981, Box 1, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation records, 1975-1983, Accession No. 2389-004, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

Jewish life.[457] Sephardim in Seattle, New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere pleaded with their co-ethnics to "not let Sephardism die" nor give in to "cultural amnesia" and to achieve a "new renaissance in the twentieth century."[458]

By labeling this moment an "ethnic revival," I situate Sephardim within the broader US context of ethnic and racial pride and power movements in the late 1960s and 70s. Exemplified by Black Power, many other racialized groups like Mexican-Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans followed suit with Brown, Yellow, and Red Power, while White, European-origin Americans also began exploring their ancestry - albeit with different political goals. [459] Sephardi Pride or Power is perhaps more accurate than "revival," although it incorrectly implies the presence of a mostly absent radical politics. Rather, this phenomenon operated within the norms and rhetoric of mainstream American Jewry and neoliberal multiculturalism, offering a contributionist argument rather than a structural critique. Far more modest than their Black Panther or Brown Beret contemporaries, Sephardim were still willing to challenge the Jewish status quo. In this latter sense, this Sephardi phenomenon may be understood as a form of identity politics with a loose ideological bent and a specific target - other Jews.

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[457] Lavender, *A Coat of Many Colours,* 4, 19.

[458] *La Boz,* Sephardic Bikur Holim, January 1975, Box 1 Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation records, 1975-1983, Accession No. 2389-004, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries; Rabbi David V. Angel, "Cultural Amnesia," *Ezra Bessaroth Clarion,* December 1981, Joseph J. De Leon papers, Accession No. 3903-001, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries; Rabbi David L. Algaze, "The Year in Review," *The Sephardic World*, World Institute for Sephardic Studies, Vol. 1 no. 1, Summer 1972/5732, 3.

[459] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Mary Waters, "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?," in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in America* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press, 1996), 444–54; Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (1979): 1–20.

LA's non-White populations - Black, Mexican, Asian, and Native Americans - all experienced their own revivals and political awakenings that reflected the demographic shifts making LA majority non-White by this time.[461] Especially for Mexican and Asian Americans in Los Angeles, waves of diverse post-1965 immigrants affected a shift toward panethnic organizations and strategies that brought together a diverse set of Spanish-speaking and East Asian-origin people.[462] These movements also inspired and motivated Sephardim, like when Isaac Maimon introduced a history of Seattle's Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation by citing Alex Haley's *Roots*, a popular book and TV series exploring several generations of his African and African-American ancestors.[463] Leni LaMarche of Ezra Bessaroth, also in Seattle, similarly wondered if "our roots [wouldn't] make an excellent book?"[464] In Los Angeles, others observed how the "groundswell of activism" came from the "newly sought right to speak out of the young generation and the women's movement."[465] As will be discussed in more detail below, youth and female leadership were heavily responsible for new directions taken by American Sephardim. Within the Jewish world, changes in the demographic makeup of global, American, and Israeli Jewry had made many realize that Sephardim were

[461] Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[462] Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[463] Isaac Maimon, *The History of Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation, 1914-1989* (Seattle: Sephardic Bikur Holim, 1989), 3.

[464] *Ezra Bessaroth Messenger,* March 1979, 4, Joseph J. De Leon papers, Accession No. 3903-001, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[465] Sophia Wyatt, "Sephardic Jews of Los Angeles: Diverse Community Steps to Lively Beat," *JFC Bulletin,* December 1, 1977, 4.

consequential to the Jewish future.[466] Combined with the ethnic revival already underway in the US, Sephardim already had a ready-made culture, attained middle class status, and benefited from an increased national attention on the Middle East (including the status of non-Ashkenazi Jews in Israel).

In Los Angeles and elsewhere, the nature of Sephardi identity went through a generational shift from an older, inherent attribute tied to religion to an elective one based on a loosely defined culture and ancestry.[467] The older immigrant generation whose Sephardi-ness was inextricable from their Jewishness struggled to fully articulate the meaning and significance of their differences from normative American Jewry. In both their homelands and in the first few decades of life in the US, Sephardim's familial, economic, linguistic, residential, and other patterns limited the environments in which these differences needed to be clarified or made explicit. As second and third generation American Ashkenazim and Sephardim became more similar and were in greater contact with one another, some among the latter believed they needed to assert their uniqueness and difference more vocally from other Jews, doing so in ethnic (as opposed to religious) terms. The convergence of trends in the late 60s were fortuitous, as nationwide ethnic awareness and "revival" coincided with younger, Americanized Sephardim taking the reins of organizational and communal life.

[466] Lavender, "The Sephardic Revival in the United States."

[467] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 45; Lorraine Arouty Gorlick, "The Los Angeles Sephardim: An Exploratory Study" (MSW, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 1972).

Canonizing American Sephardi Culture: Synagogue, Music, and Food

Terms like “revival,” “renaissance,” or “reawakening” are misleading as they suggest a kind of radical discontinuity as well as a resumption of previously ignored or forgotten customs and traditions. There is little evidence to suggest that this was the case for most American Sephardi communities. Rather, we can more accurately describe the phenomena of this period as a retooling, repackaging, or rearticulation. Sephardi food and music, for example, had been transmitted orally and interpersonally before being recorded or published. And the synagogue, while always an important site of communal life, evolved to take on an even greater role after its members dispersed across the suburbs.

Like other examples of resurgent interest in immigrant heritage, Sephardim no longer had (or desired) immediate access or exposure to older traditions. But pride and awareness of a distinct identity remained, and many wanted a readily accessible way to consume, perform, and participate in Sephardi culture. Among the forms by which the “renewal” of Sephardi culture was formalized, organized, and disseminated were the synagogue, music, and cuisine. The expanding role of women in Sephardi life was central to much of this process. Like other middle-class White women empowered by second-wave feminism, Sephardi women transformed their traditional roles as social organizers, cooks, and singers into powerful drivers of Sephardi culture in the twentieth century.

From its founding, the institutions and organizations - particularly synagogues - of Ladino-speaking, Ottoman-origin Jews in Los Angeles put Sephardi identity, pride, and uniqueness at the forefront, especially after the dispersion of families and neighborhoods from South LA in the 1950s and 60s. At the risk of losing newly-suburbanized members (or potential ones), Sephardi groups - particularly but not exclusively synagogues - invoked ethnic groupness, rather than religion or politics, as their motivating and organizing principle. That is not to say that a general sense of Jewish identity, faith, philanthropy, or activism were absent from these organizations. Rather, like Italian Catholic or Greek Orthodox churches in America, religious institutions were often the center of the community and expressions of their cultural identity, even if many members were not particularly religious.

Observers of American Sephardim have repeatedly emphasized the uniquely outsized importance of the synagogue for Sephardi ethnic identity.[470] Plans for the Sephardic Community's Westwood synagogue inspired, in the eyes of one observer, a "Sephardic renaissance in our midst." And by the opening of STTI's new temple in 1974, community member Regina Levy felt like Sephardim were rekindling the spark of the "Golden Age."[471]Rabbi Ott concurred, saying that "the synagogue cannot be as important to the Ashkenazim as it is to Sephardim" since "the Sephardic minority... will lose his specific and unique heritage in this non-synagogue environment. Only the

[470] Pool, "The Problem of Sephardic Jewry in America," 5; Glazier, "Stigma, Identity, and Sephardi-Ashkenazic Relations in Indianapolis," 60; Britt, "Los Angeles Sephardim: Community Relations Problems and Needs"; Eliezer Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment: The Case of Sephardic Jews in Los Angeles," (UCLA, Ph.D. diss., 1976).

[471] *Sephardic Messenger*, vol. 3, no. 6, January 1962, Box 18, Folder 2, STTI Records; *"*Golden Age Relived," *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* September 18, 1981.

synagogue can perpetuate the Sephardic minhag; more pointedly, only the synagogue as COMMUNITY." [472]

The synagogue not only served as a social or religious venue, but also as a stage for performing Sephardi culture. Annual and one-off dances and performances served as a dynamic and popular way through which Sephardi identity was articulated and shaped in Los Angeles. Beginning in the 1930s, the annual "Turkish Night" became one of American Sephardim's most popular affairs. Guests could enjoy the "atmosphere ... of the rare beauty of Constantinople" through an "oriental orchestra" and, often, belly-dancers.[473] Typically organized by the sisterhoods, these events might also be known as "Oriental Nights" or a "Night in Istanbul" and were part of a social calendar that also featured Hawaiian and Spanish-themed events. But these events were particularly close to the hearts (and ears, and feet) of immigrant Sephardim for whom the events offered an entertaining nostalgia trip, however distorted. The "oriental orchestra" performed familiar Sephardi, Turkish, Greek, and Balkan music (although popular/Western music was also part of the program), accompanied by communal dancing. Music was one of the few enduring signs of a multiethnic Ottoman and Mediterranean cultural legacy in the twentieth century diaspora. In Los Angeles, Armenian, Sephardi, and Greek musicians performed with one another, and members

[472] *The Sephardic Messenger,* September 1968, 3, Box 18, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[473] The Ladinos Club scrapbook, 1931-1934, Box 48 Folder 3 STTI Records; Julia Phillips Cohen, "American Days, Turkish Nights." In 100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles, edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce. Los Angeles: UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020. http://www.sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/american-days-turkish-nights/. Accessed June 9, 2022.

of each group often frequented the public celebrations, fairs, dances, and musical performances of one another. [474]

Before it entered dance halls or social dinners, music in the Sephardi community often took the form of women's household singing - not only in Ladino but in Turkish, Italian, French, Greek, and English, while men tended to be involved in more professional or performative avenues of music-making.[475] Alongside folklore and the Ladino language, Sephardi music - especially the kind performed and sung by immigrant women - had captured the interest of outside observers and scholars based in the US since the beginning of the twentieth century and the first immigrant arrivals from the Ottoman and Balkan regions.[476] But within the atmosphere of ethnic "revival" of the 1970s, interest in Sephardi music went beyond "Turkish Nights," immigrant women, or ambitious scholars. To be sure, singing still occurred at social gatherings. But as home videos taken in the 1980s suggest, they, too, were increasingly seen as endangered, filmed for documentary purposes, and partly staged.[477]

Institutionally organized formal musical performances became more common in the mid-1970s, despite the traditional popularity of Sephardi song. For example, in 1976

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[474] Marcia Aron Barryte, "Dance Among the Sephardic Jews from Rhodes Living in Los Angeles" (M.A. Dance, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 81; Simone Salmon, "Emily Sene's Sephardic Mixtape." *100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles,* edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce, UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020, https://sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/emily-senes-sephardic-mixtape/. Accessed June 9, 2022.

[475] Maureen Jackson, *Mixing Musics: Turkish Jewry and the Urban Landscape of a Sacred Song* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Carol Merrill-Mirsky, "Judeo-Spanish Song from the Island of Rhodes: A Musical Tradition in Los Angeles" (MA, UCLA, 1984).

[476] Rina Benmayor, "Judeo-Spanish Romansos in Los Angeles." 100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles, edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce, UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020, https://sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/judeo-spanish-romansos/. Accessed June 9, 2022.

[477] "Ladino Banyo de Novia (Bridal Shower) from the Island of Rhodes", filmed by Art Benveniste, 1982. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9JWFHoSerM. Accessed June 4, 2022.

STTI put on a diverse "Sephardic Concert," featuring Ladino songs alongside Moroccan songs, compositions by Felix Mendelssohn, and a rendition of "America the Beautiful."[478] As had long been the case, the music performed by or listened to by Sephardim included that of surrounding cultures and traditions as well. From this perspective, the 1976 concert's program seems less an aberration and more a new, American iteration of the Sephardi musical repertoire. A significant motivation behind different products of the Sephardi "revival" was also to raise outside awareness and appreciation of their history and culture. One such example was "The Odyssey of the Sephardim," a small musical production created by the Greek-born Yolande Alcana, Bulgarian-born cantor Isaac Behar, and US-born Stella Rugetti.[479] Performed in the late 1970s and early 80s for various Jewish organizations and congregations around the Los Angeles area, "The Odyssey" served as an educational and entertaining introduction to Sephardi history and culture for Ashkenazim.[480]

One of the most emblematic example of the transformation of Sephardi culture from informal and "amateur" to formal and professional was the 1978 musical-documentary, *Song of the Sephardi,* a joint effort between members of the Seattle and Los Angeles Sephardi communities.[481] Desire for such a project was widespread, as Joseph Cordova of LA's Sephardic Hebrew Center

[478] "Sephardic Concert," Box 28, Folder 4, STTI Records.

[479] *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel Bulletin,* August 1977, 9, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

[480] Stephen Stern, "Ethnic Identity Among the Sephardic Jews of Los Angeles." In *The Sepharadi and Oriental Jewish Heritage Studies*, ed. Issachar Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1982), 133–44; Chammou, "Migration and Adjustment," 319-320.

[481] *Song of the Sephardi*, dir. David Raphael, 1978. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEHhpkIbRiI. Accessed July 28, 2022.

expressed when, in 1972, he wondered if "the story of our people and our rich heritage cannot be put into a musical dramatization a-la Fiddler on the Roof."[482] *Song of the Sephardi* was directed by Seattle-native and LA-resident David Raphael, a doctor by profession and writer of Sephardi historical fiction, and co-produced by STTI members and lay leaders Jebb Levy and Jose Nessim. (Nessim, also a doctor, would later establish the Sephardic Educational Center.) Raphael, "struck by a lack of films dealing with Sephardim," decided to make *Song of the Sephardi*, filming staged holiday and liturgical scenes in Seattle and Israel.[483] Billed as "the first documentary film ever to be made about the Sephardim," the film aimed to be "an imaginative attempt to cinematically portray and interpret the lyrics of the traditional Judeo-Spanish folk songs that have been preserved by the Sephardim, for the last five hundred years."[484] Raphael understood that music was central to portraying the history and flavor of Sephardi Jewry, which also piqued the interest of Ashkenazim who were attracted to the marketing of such music as "exotic."[485] Like the film's musical star, Rivka Raz, other Israeli singers of Sephardi background such as Yehoram Gaon and Jo Amar were minor celebrities among Sephardim in the United States. Because of LA's centrality in the global music industry, these performers would often come to the city to record

[482]Joseph Cordova, "Sephardic Heritage Tour: A Sentimental Journey," in *Sephardic Hebrew Center Yearbook,*(Los Angeles: 1972), 13. Box 29, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[483] *La Boz,* Sephardic Bikur Holim, July 1977, Box 1, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation records, 1975-1983, Accession No. 2389-004, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[484] *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* December 1, 1978, np. STTI scrapbook 1950-1992, Box 46, Folder 6, STTI Records.

[485] Edwin Seroussi, "Third Diaspora Soundscapes: Music of the Jews of Islam in the Americas," in Amalia Ran and Moshe Moran eds., *Mazal Tov, Amigos! Jews and Popular Music in the Americas* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 228-9.

where local Sephardim like Jebb Levy and Raymond Mallel, president of the LA chapter of the American Sephardi Federation, served as record producers.[486]

Like music, food was another key locus of the Sephardi ethnic "revival." Associated with childhood memories of home and family, often in the context of special events like Jewish holidays, food drew on the senses of taste and smell to evoke a kind of ethnic reverie. Food was such a powerful force for American Sephardim that one of the few demographic studies on the group identified cuisine as the most widely valued part of the culture.[487] Food was not only central to Sephardim themselves, but for their public image in American Jewish life.

When Sephardim began immigrating to the US, the flavors and aromas of coffeehouses helped deliver solace and comfort to homesick young men.[488] As they became husbands and fathers, and as the flow of new immigrants dropped after 1924, coffeehouses went out of fashion. The home kitchen, with women its preparers and guardians, became the primary territory of Sephardi food in America. Postwar middle-class lifestyles enabled married women to forgo the workforce in favor of child-rearing and homemaking. Many in this position were also able to give their time more freely to volunteer with organizations such as synagogue sisterhoods. All the while, Sephardim were becoming keenly aware of the passing of the immigrant generation and with them, their unwritten culinary knowledge.

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[486] *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* March 23, 1979, np. STTI scrapbook 1950-1992, Box 46, Folder 6, STTI Records.

[487] Marc D. Angel, "The Sephardim of the United States: An Exploratory Study," *The American Jewish Year Book* 74, (1973): 77-138.

[488] See references to Sephardi cafe culture in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

These factors helped spur the creation of a Sephardi culinary canon, primarily through the genre of congregational sisterhood cookbooks. The story of STTI's Sisterhood cookbook, *Cooking the Sephardic Way,* is indicative of the intersections between ethnicity, femininity, and transgenerational transmission at play during this period that characterized the "ethnic revival."[489] Published in 1971, *Cooking the Sephardic Way* was one of at least a half dozen communally published American Sephardi cookbooks to emerge in the late 1960s and 1970s, most compiled by sisterhood organizations. These were some of the first and most enduring products of the Sephardi "revival" and one that marked the emergent public profile of Sephardi women.

When STTI's Sisterhood put out a call for recipe submissions in 1966, their primary goal was "to perpetuate in written form recipes that might otherwise be lost in years to come."[490] As Pearl Roseman, one of the cookbook's editors and daughter of Catherine (née Caraco) Elias, recognized, "Sephardic cookery is passed from mother to daughter and taught by the look and feel of the dish rather than by written recipes," stressing that "if you moved away from your mother, you were out of luck." The women who gathered, recorded, and published recipes that had once circulated through oral and improvised traditions believed that a "culture's cookery can become just as extinct as plants and animals if the recipes are never written down."[491]

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[489] *Cooking the Sephardic Way* (Los Angeles: Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, 1971). See also: Max Modiano Daniel, "Cooking the Sephardic Way." In *100 Years of Sephardic Los Angeles,* edited by Sarah Abrevaya Stein and Caroline Luce. Los Angeles: UCLA Leve Center for Jewish Studies, 2020. https://sephardiclosangeles.org/portfolios/cooking-the-sephardic-way/. Accessed June 9, 2022.

[490] Stephen Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 280.

[491] Barbara Hansen, "Sephardic Customs, Cuisine, History" *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1971. Pearl Roseman (nee Elias) was the granddaughter of LA's first Sephardic rabbi, Abraham Caraco, and was later editor of the highly successful *California Kosher* published in 1991.

Despite the many ways that second and third generation Americans like Roseman directed the "ethnic revival" of the late 60s and 70s, cultural transmission from community elders was still a common practice held in high regard and one that brought all generations into the "revival" process. The octogenarian women who labored to prepare thousands of pastries and baked goods for Seattle's Sephardi bazaars acknowledged that they were responsible for "teach[ing] the young people how to do things."[492] The physical cookbook itself could also serve as proxies for relatives and hometowns. *Cooking the Sephardic Way* co-editor Regie Arditti shared some of the feedback she received from the cookbook's readers: "Seeing their names [of mothers and grandmothers] and the towns they came from brought back emotional feelings," and some of them "cried when they read some of the recipes and little stories that go with them."[493]

What it meant to be a Sephardi woman was another deeply rooted aspect of foodways and its power. According to Los Angeles's Lil Benveniste, the way that her mother "instilled…[a sense] of being a Sephardic woman, mother, and housewife, [was] through food."[494] We also see this come out through the stories and descriptions attached to the recipes in *Cooking the Sephardic Way,* many of which are connected to women's life-cycle events. *Roscas* or rolls are prepared for the Sephardi bride-to-be after she goes through the *banyo de novia* ceremony and the *sharope blanco* dessert is

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[492] Wenda Reed, "1,500 Buelemas Please," *Beacon Hill News/South District Journal*, December 3, 1980, 11.

[493] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 284.

[494] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 278.

made for bridal festivities.[495] The connection between cooking and a woman's expected roles in the family were reaffirmed even in tongue-in-cheek ways. An announcement for cooking classes at STTI advertised that "Sex is not the only way to satisfy your husband," adding in parenthesis, "(or all you ever wanted to know about Sephardic cooking, but were afraid to ask!)." Classes were divided up by sexual or reproductive themes corresponding to traditional Sephardi dishes, like "Impotence - Beans & Rice & Fideos" or "Abortion - Keftes & vegetables."[496]

Younger women who pursued careers and had greater income could still participate in these aspects of Sephardi womanhood. In the absence of time-consuming and laborious interpersonal transmission of cooking techniques, frozen foods and cookbooks would suffice in a world and time no longer characterized by the intimate familial bonds and traditional gender roles of the past. Edith Mezistrano noted how "many young homemakers of the Sephardic Jewish heritage stock their freezers from this bazaar because they have not learned the traditional cookery - or don't have the time for the work."[497]

As a fundraising tool, the sisterhood's cookbooks and the food they sold at events and bazaars made up a significant part of the increasing number of ways women could hold power in the largely male realm of American Sephardi life. *Cooking the Sephardic Way* became an "enormous financial success" and went through at least ten

[495] *Cooking the Sephardic Way*, 85, 111.

[496] *El Shofar: The Voice of the Sephardic Temple Men's Association,* Los Hermanos, vol. 2, no. 1, February 1974. Box 17, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[497] Gladys Nelson "Jewish Treats with Touch of Spain" *Seattle Times*, December 1, 1965, 41.

printings by the end of 1970s.[498] Beyond the synagogue sisterhoods, the Sephardic Women's division of LA's United Jewish Welfare Fund mobilized "exotic luncheon" fundraisers, which included guest speakers like (Ashkenazi) game show host Monty Hall who praised "the kind of pride that's being exhibited here."[499]

Alongside cultural preservation and fundraising, an initial goal of STTI's Sisterhood cookbook was "to make available for all, recipes for a distinctive type of cookery that finds a wide acceptance wherever it is tried." [500] Publicizing and advertising Sephardi culture for public consumption was a rather novel phenomenon as most communal and congregational activity was directed internally. But with the changes beginning around the mid-to-late 1960s, cuisine took the lead in shaping popular perceptions of Sephardi Jewry, partly because it was the most attractive and appealing to outsiders.[501] Indeed, references to Sephardi Jews in mainstream American media are overwhelmingly about food. By and large, this coverage plays up tropes about the exotic and ancient aspects of their cuisine and culture. A 1967 article in *Gourmet* magazine on the "Sephardim of Seattle" advised readers who cooked their recipes to "serve them forth with care and ceremony, remembering the long road they took to arrive on your table and the quixotic loyalty to tradition they represent" if they wanted to dine in "true Sephardic style." Visiting a Sephardi home - perhaps joining a family of "these Latin strangers" with "magical surnames" – you would "become intoxicated with history

[498] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 283.

[499] "Sephardic Femmes' Luncheon Affair to Relish and Remember," *Jewish Community Bulletin,* May 1, 1978. Box 47, Folder 2, STTI Records.

[500] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 280.

[501] Ruth Gruber Fredman, "Cosmopolitans at Home: An Anthropological View of the Sephardic Jews of Washington, D.C." (PhD, Temple University, 1982), 258.

itself."[502] These tropes were not rejected but embraced and advanced by Sephardim themselves.[503] *Cooking the Sephardic Way* was intended for both "the American born generation Sephardi" and the "non-Sephardi who conceives of Sephardic food as exotic and unique."[504] Similarly, Atlanta's Sephardi cookbook was intended for those "who dream of faraway and exotic countries," eager to experience the "colored and more pleasant aspects of a small ethnic group, the Spanish Jews, who, while totally immersed in their present culture, still remain faithful to a centuries old culture, heritage, and tradition."[505]

Interest from the outside seemed so powerful, especially among other Jews, that in his 1977 dissertation about the Sephardim of Los Angeles, Stephen Stern claimed that the impetus for *Cooking the Sephardic Way* was the desire of Ashkenazim who wanted to learn the recipes for themselves.[507] According to Stern, "Ashkenazim contributed to the heightening of Sephardic identity by considering Sephardic cuisine as unique and exotic and thereby creating opportunities for Sephardim to enhance their identities."[508] Differences in foodways also became a key component in the relational dialectic between Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

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[502] Joan Dash, "The Sephardim of Seattle," *Gourmet*, vol. 27, no. 4 (April 1967): 20-21, 56-60.

[503] Fredman, "Cosmopolitans at Home," 37.

[504] *Cooking the Sephardic Way,* 1.

[505] *The Sephardic Cooks*, (Atlanta: Congregation OrVeshalom Sisterhood 1971), C.

[507] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles*, 280.

[508] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles*, 286.

"A Crusade of Our Own"

Whether through synagogues, musical performances, or cookbooks, Sephardi culture in twentieth century America had typically been confined to individual communities across the country with little sense of an overarching religious or political program. That changed with the emergence of a centralized national and international network in the 1970s that drew on common grievances of non-Ashkenazi Jews seeking a role in shaping the Jewish world. Through the efforts of the American Sephardi Federation and campaigns on behalf of "Oriental" Jews in Israel and Syria, an expanded, panethnic sense of Sephardi identity became an organizing principle for collective action and empowerment. Los Angeles played a large, if not central, role in these projects and helped fuel some of the most impactful and lasting moments of the Sephardi "revival."

In 1977, when Moroccan-born American Sephardi Federation president Liliane Levy Winn beckoned a "united front of Sephardim from all backgrounds" to announce that "the age of nostalgia is over," it was clear that what was happening was manifestly larger in ambition and scope than cookbooks or concerts.[511] With so many diverse individuals coming together under a single "Sephardi" umbrella, nostalgia could hardly hold this kind of panethnic community together. The formalization and organization of Sephardi life and culture as represented by the ASF occurred in the context of an evolving American Jewry, changing roles for American ethnic and racial minorities, youth, and women, Israeli social conflict, and international human rights concerns.

[511] Liliane Levy Winn, "President's Message," *Sephardi World: Special Youth Convention Souvenir Issue*, vol. 3, no. 1 (September 1977), 3.

Especially for the Ottoman-origin Jews who held the initial leadership of the ASF and similar organizations and projects, this period and context also thrust the question of Sephardi identity front-and-center. The new answers to this question popularized a panethnic definition that was partly a reflection of intra-Jewish divisions in Israeli society and partly based on shared experiences of marginalization by Ashkenazim, which reflected, reified, and capitalized on an Ashkenazi-Sephardi binary. These contexts were central in shaping how Sephardim saw themselves in America and the world and how their identities could be grounds for political action in their communities.

Zionism was the central force shaping new models of national and global Sephardi life in the 1970s. Previously, philanthropic and family ties were what had typically bound Sephardim in Los Angeles to other communities in the US and abroad, but the 1970s witnessed a radical change in how Sephardim organized nationally and internationally. At the American Zionist Federation convention held in Chicago in October 1972, a meeting of over fifty leaders from Sephardi communities around the world discussed issues relating to non-Ashkenazi Jews and concerns over their place in Israeli society. Out of this gathering the American Sephardi Federation was born, officially established the following year. Far from being a fringe or marginal movement, the ASF was borne out of the Jewish establishment, specifically its Zionist branch. In the following years the ASF would make inroads and formalize partnerships with other mainstream organizations like the United Jewish Appeal, Yeshiva University, and the American Zionist Federation (AZF) despite occasional antiestablishment rhetoric from Sephardim. Among those centrally involved in that initial 1972 gathering was STTI's Rabbi Jacob Ott (soon-to-be president of the AZF), cementing Los Angeles's central role on the national Sephardi stage. Other leaders included Daniel Elazar, a political

scientist at Temple University and the ASF's inaugural president, as well as Mati Ronen, head of the Jewish Agency's newly established Sephardi division and the ASF's first executive director. Soon after attending the founding conference in 1973 in New York, Los Angeles delegates Milton Amado, Jose Nessim, Morris Angel, and Joseph Cordova helped establish the ASF's first regional branch in Southern California.[515] In addition to its LA offices, the ASF's many programs and engagement with local Sephardim helped make the city a global center of Sephardi Jewry.

Past president of LA's Sephardic Hebrew Center and vice president of the national ASF, Cordova reflected the potential of the new organization in his optimistically-titled article, "The World Wide Renaissance and Unification of Sephardim," printed in the SHC's 1973 High Holiday yearbook. Touching on all the tropes of ethnic "revival," Cordova sent out an "SOS (Save Our Sephardim)." He reflected common worries about the survival of a group facing problems like the "erosion" of and "diminishing interest" in Sephardi affairs and their replacement by Ashkenazi organizations. At the same time, he acknowledged that a "reawakening or renaissance of interest in Sephardic history, past and present" was now placing "Sephardism ... in the limelight."[516] Portraying a sense of imminent loss alongside a latent renaissance was not necessarily a contradiction, but rather a strategy that drew on existing patterns of Sephardi self-perception and mimicked the rhetoric of other cultural and ethnic revival movements. While this latter influence remained implicit, what was explicit was how these Sephardi activists positioned themselves in relation to an Ashkenazi mainstream

[515] Minutes, February 21, 1973, Box 3, Folder 3, STTI Records.

[516] Joseph Cordova, "The World Wide Renaissance and Unification of Sephardim," *Sephardic Hebrew Center Yearbook,* (Los Angeles: Sephardic Hebrew Center, 1973), 6-8. Box 29, Folder 3, STTI Records.

Jewry in the US, Israel, and around the world. In view of this dialectic, the danger was not only an intrinsic one of assimilation or loss, but also an extrinsic one of violence, discrimination, and inequality faced by Sephardim in Israel and elsewhere.

Liliane Winn explicitly linked this dynamic to the *raison d'etre* of the ASF, exclaiming that the organization exists "to halt the assimilation of Sephardi culture" and "because decades of scorn, sarcasm, and exotica toward Sephardim have not been eliminated from the Ashkenazi mentality."[517] If these efforts succeeded, LA's Ray Mallel wrote, "our Ashkenazi brothers [would be] aware of our cultures, traditions, and present day need."[519] In Seattle, ASF delegate Victor Scharhon implored members of Sephardic Bikur Holim to stymie the "loss of ethnic heritage" by joining the "Sephardic Awareness Group" and acknowledge their unique contribution to world Jewry.[520] Contributionist logic had long been a part of Sephardic apologetics, often resting on the legacy of Spanish Jewish culture and philosophy. America's measured embrace of ethnicity and multiculturalism from the late 60s onward also offered Sephardim the grounds to promote a distinct group identity unique within (but not wholly separate from) mainstream Jewry. The ASF's membership card from the 80s featured the telling quote: "Be proud of your Sephardi heritage; it's eminently Jewish," subtly revealing some of the anxieties and desires that Sephardim felt toward fully belonging to world Jewry.[521] In

[517] Liliane Levy Winn, "President's Message," *Sephardi World* (April 1979), 2.

[519] Ray Mallel, "From the American Sephardi Federation Los Angeles," *Sephardic Hebrew Center Yearbook,* (Los Angeles: Sephardic Hebrew Center, 1980), 16. Box 30, Folder 1, STTI Records.

[520] *La Boz,* Sephardic Bikur Holim, July 1975, Box 1, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation records, 1975-1983, Accession No. 2389-004, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[521] ASF Membership card, ca. 1986. Box 5, Folder 2. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

trying to claim a space for Sephardim in Jewish life, care was always taken to affirm - but qualify - the value and desideratum of global Jewish unity.

Whether accurate or not, ASF leaders like Liliane Winn, Joseph Cordova, and Ray Mallel - Cordova's successor as LA's local representative - painted a picture of a powerful and confident Sephardi people. Winn gave lectures with titles like "The Sephardic Giant Awakens" and Mallel believed that the ASF had succeeded in "establish[ing] itself as a force on the American Jewish scene" that gave others a "taste of our rich Jewish culture and our inherent political strength."[522] Conferences and conventions were some of main sites for vocalizing Sephardi pride and communal strength, either at those hosted by the ASF throughout the US or as participants in other Jewish or Zionist gatherings.

Sephardi youth in LA and elsewhere had been gathering informally and through synagogue-sponsored groups for decades. But with the baby-boom generation and rise of youth culture in the 1960s, a vocal minority of young Sephardim - even if they were overall more likely to be critical or distant from synagogue life - were still conscious and desiring of expressing their Sephardi identity.[524] Despite the perpetual complaints made in temple boardrooms about the lack of youth engagement, lasting infrastructure was never built and throughout the 1960s Sephardi synagogue youth groups in LA tended to affiliate with non-Sephardic national Jewish youth organizations. In marked contrast to LA was Seattle and its Sephardic Adventure Camp, a (sometimes) joint effort by both Sephardi congregations in the city that provided a summer getaway for the community's

[522] *Bulletin of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel,* December 1977, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

[524] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles*, 133.

youth since the 1960s. Unlike UCLA, the University of Washington hosted an active Sephardic Students Association that put on a "Sephardic Cultural Week" in December 1975 that featured lectures, performances, exhibits, and more.[525]

However, LA took center stage in 1977 when the city was host to the ASF's second national youth convention. Highly anticipated after a well-received inaugural event in Atlanta four years earlier, LA Sephardim were eager to support one of the most successful and widely-supported projects of the national organization. The Maurice Amado Foundation helped send about thirty Los Angeles teens to the 1973 ASF youth convention in Atlanta as part of its commitment to support "young people developing an awareness of being Sephardic Jews."[526] The Atlanta conference also inspired the publication of two issues of *The Young Sephardic Voice* the following year, its first issue featuring the "Supersfard" comic. The issue of Sephardi identity was front and center for young people as demonstrated in their writings, while Angelenos like Ben Cohen went so far as to make and sell "Supersfard" t-shirts nationally.[528] Adults were equally enthusiastic. Joseph Cordova's insistence that "we must initiate a crusade of our own to draw back our people into the Sephardi-Judeo mainstream through meaningful educational, social, and religious programs" helped to create what convention chairman Ray Mallel would call the "single greatest manifestation of Sephardi revival."[529]

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[525] "Sephardic Students Association - University of Washington, 1976-1978" Box 19, Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle records, 1922-1981, Accession No. 3051-001, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[526] *Bulletin of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel,* September 1974, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

[528] *Bulletin of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel,* September 1974, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

[529] *Bulletin of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel,* December 1977, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

Held at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott hotel in May 1977, over 350 youth and nearly 800 total guests participated in the various lectures, workshops, prayer services, and concerts by Moroccan-Israeli singer Jo Amar. A National Sephardi Youth Movement was also formally established over the Memorial Day weekend gathering, granting the organization some independence from the ASF. The convention highlighted the importance of activism, for as Rene Levy put it in his keynote address, "only we, individually and collectively, can change this, not the Israeli government, not the UJA [United Jewish Appeal], not the synagogue or any other group of the 'them.'"[530] Action, engagement, and independence were similarly emphasized by Liliane Winn, herself younger than the average American Sephardi leader, who emphasized the important role played by young people:

> No American Jewish organization with national standing is willing to recognize the cultural and traditional plurality of the Jewish people. No national Jewish network serves the special needs of our young people as Sephardim. Their confusion and fears as adolescents must be serviced by a different approach….As Jews we are all requested to give and we do. But as Sephardim we have not received our share. There are world organizations to prevent the extinction of animal species, but only our Sephardi youth can see that we Sephardim will not become extinct.[531]

"The Most Cosmopolitan Sephardic Temple"

Both by choice and by circumstance, non-Ashkenazi Jews in the US were often lumped together as "Sephardim," a panethnic label that drew on some historical and religious commonalities but whose communal and political implications only became

[530] Rene Levy, "Keynote Address: National Youth Convention," *Sephardi World: Special Youth Convention Souvenir Issue*, vol. 3, no. 1 (September 1977), 7.

[531] "Sephardi Youth Form National Group to Heighten Identity," *JFC Bulletin,* June 15, 1977, STTI Scrapbook, Box 47, Folder 2, STTI Records.

realized and explicitly encouraged in the midst of the Sephardi "revival" of the 1970s. Sephardi American panethnicity came to include, in the eyes of the ASF, "all Sephardim regardless of ethnic background, language, or country of origin," including those "not directly associated or linked with the Sephardic exodus from the Iberian Peninsula."[532] Even for Syrian Jews, who had built communities in the US and the Americas beginning in the early twentieth century, their incorporation into a broader "Sephardi" network did not begin until the 70s.[533]

In Los Angeles and New York City in particular, this broad definition was encouraged by the thousands of Jews of North African and Middle Eastern origin – especially Moroccans and Iranians - who migrated to the US in the decades after World War II, often via Israel or France. Mostly unexplored in the literature on American Jewish or immigration history, this aspect of the Sephardi narrative unveils a new chapter in the relationship between Jews and immigration in the US, especially for histories of postwar migrants that have typically focused on Holocaust survivors and Soviet Jews.[535] Immigration reform legislation in 1965 also changed the demographic and ethnoracial profile of American cities in general, not least Los Angeles.[537] In addition to its heightened role in the circulation of global capital, post-1965 immigration from East and South Asia as well as Latin America indicated a new evolution of LA as a

[532] Cordova, "The World Wide Renaissance and Unification of Sephardim."

[533] Even so, many Syrian Jews still relied on their own network of organizations and institutions, primarily in Brooklyn, Long Island, and New Jersey. Joseph A. D. Sutton, *Magic Carpet: Aleppo-in-Flatbush: The Story of a Unique Ethnic Jewish Community* (New York: Thayer-Jacoby, 1979).

[535] Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921-1965* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Libby Garland, "State of the Field: New Directions for American Jewish Migration Histories," *American Jewish History* 102, no. 3 (July 2018): 423–40.

[537] Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

global city.[538] Out of increasing national and linguistic diversity, in addition to shared struggles against social and legal discrimination, emerged new brands of panethnic political activism in Los Angeles, particularly among Asian, Latinx, and Native Americans.[539] Similarly, for Jews in LA and across the country, changing demographics coincided with cultural and political activism on issues relating to non-Ashkenazi Jews. The "social gap" between Ashkenazim and "Oriental" Jews in Israel and the condition of Jews in Syria both became key campaigns of American Sephardi organizations and communities, powered by a loosely defined Sephardi panethnic identity that united various groups in concerted action.

International organizations and projects like the World Sephardi Federation, active in the US since the first part of the twentieth century, were among the first to consider Jews from the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and broader African and Asian spheres collectively as "Sephardic." This was partly a pragmatic choice to use legible terms to American audiences and avoid the negative connotations of "Oriental."[540]

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[538] On LA as a global city, see: Janet Abu-Lughod, *New York, Chicago, Los Angeles: America's Global Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Jenny Banh and Melissa King, eds., *Anthropology of Los Angeles: Place and Agency in an Urban Setting* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017); Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), Chapter Two; Louise Pubols, "Born Global: From Pueblo to Statehood," in William Deverell et al., *A Companion to Los Angeles* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010);Torin Monahan, "Los Angeles Studies: The Emergence of a Specialty Field," *City Society* 14, no. 2 (2002): 155–84.

[539] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); G. Cristina Mora, *Making Hispanics: How Activists, Bureaucrats, and Media Constructed a New American* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 14.

[540] Another part of this story is the pushback against Ottoman Jews' use of "Sephardi" from established American Jewish congregations originally founded by Western European Sephardi Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, like New York's Shearith Israel. Interestingly, many of those congregations and members in the twenty-first century refer to their traditions as "Spanish and Portuguese" instead of or in addition to "Sephardi." Devin Naar, "'Sephardim since Birth': Reconfiguring Jewish Identity in America," in Saba Soomekh, ed., *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2016). Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America*, Chapter Three.

However, such an expansive definition did not reflect the reality of non-Ashkenazi Jewry in America before the late 1960s, when Ottoman-origin Ladino speakers and Syrian Arabic-speakers were virtually isolated from one another and before Moroccan or Iranian Jews settled in large numbers. Additionally, New York's large population could support many independent congregations reflecting specific traditions and regions of origin across the Mediterranean and Middle East, whereas Seattle's reflected a more homogenous population of Ladino-speaking Ottoman and Rhodesli Jews.

However, Los Angeles lay somewhere in between and became a harbinger of the future model Sephardi panethnicity from its cosmopolitan origins. The founding members of the *Comunidad* included Algerian and Polish Jews, but from the 1920s through the 50s, diversity in Sephardi Los Angeles meant "Rhodeslis, Smyrlis, Chanakalelis, Saloniklis, and Amerikalis."[541] The three Ladino-speaking congregations had significant overlap with one another in terms of social events and membership, but at that point rarely interacted with the Baghdadi Kahal Joseph or the Syrian Magen David congregations already active in LA at the time. Things changed with new waves of post-1965 immigrants, however, and Ottoman-origin Sephardim gradually welcomed other non-Ashkenazim into their congregations, particularly Moroccans. Since some Moroccan Jews spoke Spanish or traced their ancestry to Spain, including them in the Sephardi umbrella was relatively uncontested. Nevertheless, the cultural and liturgical differences between Ottoman and Moroccan Sephardim compelled many among the latter who may have previously belonged to STTI to form their own congregation in Los

[541] Ladino terms referring to Jews from the island of Rhodes, Smyrna/Izmir, Çanakkale, Salonica, and America. *Concilio News:* Newsletter of the Council of Sephardic Organizations, Vol. 3 no. 1, July 1956, Box 14, Folder 4, STTI Records.

Angeles - Em Habanim - in the early 70s.[542] Moroccan Jews also began to take leadership in different areas of Sephardi life in the 1970s that were once occupied by Ottoman-origin Jews. While this trend was epitomized by Liliane Winn's ascent to leadership in the ASF, LA is full of other examples of this transition including Ouezzane-born youth group leader Shuky Bittan, Casablanca-born SHC cantor Daniel Waknine, and, in the mid-90s, the appointment of Moroccan-descent Daniel Bouskila as senior rabbi of STTI, succeeding Rabbi Jacob Ott.

While outside the scope of this study, the great number of Iranian (also known as Persian) Jews who came to Los Angeles in the wake of the Islamic Revolution in 1978 also helped solidify a panethnic understanding of "Sephardi." Although STTI supported some Iranian Jewish students who were unable to return to Iran, the archival record shows little attention given to the plight of Iranian Jews, especially compared to Syrian Jews. One reason may have been the trend of self-sufficiency and reliance on internal networks, and - although often overstated – their pre-existing economic resources. Even when the *STTI Bulletin* noted in fall of 1978 the attendance of "Sephardic Jews who have emigrated from Iran," understating the nature of their departure, little else on Iranian Jews emerges until the mid-to-late 1990s when they start to emerge as lay leaders in LA's Sephardi community.[543] The disconnect between Iranian Jewish involvement in STTI and their virtual absence in the record for nearly fifteen years is

[542] Aomar Boum, "The Mellahs of Los Angeles: A Moroccan Jewish Community in an American Urban Space," *AJS Perspectives*: *The Migration Issue*, Fall 2017. http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/migration-issue/the-mellahs-of-los-angeles-a-moroccan-jewish-community-in-an-american-urban-space/. Accessed June 6, 2022; David Bibas, "The Ethnicization of Immigrants: Moroccan Jews in the United States" (PhD, Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984); Em Habanim, "40th Anniversary Banquet: Then and Now," (North Hollywood, 2014.)

[543] *Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel Bulletin*, September/October 1978, Box 18, Folder 4, STTI Records.

perhaps due to the concurrence of social boundaries among the temple congregants and Rabbi Ott's generous welcome and inclusion of Persian Jews, for whom the Iranian Jewish Cultural Organization organized a tribute gala in 1993.[544] The panethnic character appears even stronger when considering that STTI's diversity grew after independent Moroccan and Iranian synagogues emerged in LA. Much like Moroccan Jews before them, Iranian Jews' ascent to leadership in organizations and institutions founded by Ottoman-origin Ladino-speakers, like STTI in the twenty-first century, showcases the adaptive meanings of Sephardi identity. Unfortunately, this dissertation is unable to fully cover the history of Iranian Jews in the United States – an incredibly critical story that has a rich archive of locally-published Farsi-language material ready for future scholars.

In addition to the relatively youthful infusion of Moroccans and Iranians, Cubans, Iraqis, Egyptians, Israelis, and others joined existing Sephardi congregations in LA and elsewhere, making STTI one of the "most cosmopolitan Sephardic temple[s]" in the country.[545] Indeed, such diversity was celebrated through a series of events held in the 1990s called "Ethnic Nights", which focused on different traditions and histories of its members, or the "Precious Legacies" historical exhibit that displayed congregants' family artifacts "reflect[ing] either Sephardic life in the old country – Turkey, Morocco, Iraq, Egypt, Rhodes, Iran, and elsewhere – or the adaptation of Sephardic culture to life in America."[546]

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[544] *Tribute to Rabbi Jacob Meir Ott, Senior Rabbi of Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel* (Los Angeles: Iranian Jewish Cultural Organization of California, 1993).

[545] Stern, *The Sephardic Jewish Community of Los Angeles,* 84.

[546] Morris Angel , Robert J. Rome, Raoul Aglion, Albert Huniu, and David Raphael, *A Guide to Sephardic Jewish Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: The American Sephardi Federation, 1991.)

“Danger, Jewish Racialism!” American Sephardi Zionism and Israel’s “Social Gap”

Panethnic Sephardi identity emerged most strongly outside of the congregational setting, however. Philanthropic efforts, like the Sephardic Division of Los Angeles’s United Jewish Welfare Fund, united the city’s non-Ashkenazi communities to fundraise together “in spite of maintaining strongly the identity of their individual origins.”[547] Buoyed by a growing community and American Jewry’s activism on behalf of Israel and Jews abroad, Sephardim were also activated by concerns about the fate and wellbeing of “Oriental” Sephardi Jews in Israel, as well as the crises facing Jews in Arab and Muslim-majority nations. In finding their unique claims on some of American Jewry’s biggest concerns at the time - Israel and oppressed Jews - individuals and communities in LA leveraged a newly empowered, collective, and panethnic Sephardi identity for increased visibility, power, and relevance.

Zionism and support for the state of Israel was, next to experiences of discrimination and marginalization from other Jews, a central and unifying element in the rhetoric of the Sephardi “revival” and panethnic identity. Although Los Angeles Sephardim were excited by visits from Israeli Sephardi leaders like Eliachar and Israeli Minister of Police Behor Shitreet in the 1950s, follow up action was limited. Things began to change in the 1960s, however, when American Jews and Sephardim were first becoming aware of what was called Israel’s “social gap” or the problem of “two Israels,” referring to discrimination and inequality between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews.

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[547] “Sephardi Work Together for Welfare Fund,” JFC Campaign Supplement, 10. N.d. STTI Scrapbook, Box 47, Folder 2, STTI Records.

Having found their way into the STTI archives, English-language publications by the Council of the Sephardi Community of Jerusalem and its president, Eliyahu Eliachar, were likely meant to attract the attention of American Jews by using language echoing Civil Rights rhetoric like "racialist attitudes," "Ashkenazi non-democracy," "cultural genocide," and "discrimination in education," segregation, and poverty.[551] Analogizing the experiences of Israeli Sephardim (Sephardi and Oriental were often used interchangeably in English-language discussions on Israeli Jews - but "Oriental" was rarely used for American Jews after the 1920s) and Black Americans were not uncommon. Sephardim were often referred to as "dark" or "Black" Jews in terms of skin tone and social position, and observers worried about "communal outbreaks here [in Israel] similar to those of the Negroes in the United States," especially after the Wadi Salib riots of 1959 that pit the Israeli police and government against a largely Moroccan Jewish underclass. [552] 1971's *Israel's Oriental Problems: The Sephardim in Israel - Problems and Achievements*, also published by the Council and edited by Eliachar, featured an essay by renowned (Ashkenazi) American Zionist Arthur Hertzberg entitled "The Cry of Israel's Poor" that made explicit parallels to civil rights struggles in the US and South Africa.[553] The analogy was common and widespread, as evident in an

[551] *Danger, Jewish Racialism! Israel's Sephardim: Integration, or Disintegration?* (Jerusalem: The Council of the Sephardi Community of Jerusalem, 1965.)

[552] Arieh Pinkus, "A Future of Communal Violence for Israel? Urgent Warning by Jewish Agency Treasurer," *Ma'ariv* October 1964, cited in *Danger, Jewish Racialism!,* 13;. Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle 1948-1966* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015).

[553] Arthur Hertzberg, "The Cry of Israel's Poor," in Eliyahu Eliachar, ed., *Israel's Oriental Problems: The Sephardim in Israel - Problems and Achievements* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Council of the Sephardi Community, 1971), 10.

anecdote that tells of the wife of an Israeli diplomat comparing "Oriental" Jews to American Blacks in conversation with Lady Bird Johnson.[554]

Although American Sephardim had faced discrimination in the US and in their home countries, making arguments that invoked Black struggles grew with the emergence of the Israeli Black Panthers in 1971.[555] Although not affiliated with the Black Panthers formed in Oakland, California in 1966, they shared a mission of economic betterment and improvement of social, residential, and educational outcomes for racially marginalized people. A group of young, mostly Moroccan-origin residents of the disenfranchised Musrara neighborhood of Jerusalem formed the core of the Panthers, leading a series of protests in 1971 that caught the attention of American Jews and inspired those like future ASF president Liliane Winn.[556] Not everyone was as enthused as Winn, however. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, the German-Jewish American journalist and feminist was "dismayed" by the Panthers but understood their anger. In a subtle critique of American Zionism, she also pointed out the contrast between young American Jews' experiences of Israel through the "show window" and the reality of "second Israel" and the living conditions of "Oriental" Jews.[557] Through their strategic choice of name the Panthers communicated their message to an American audience,

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[554] Daniel J. Elazar, *The Other Jews: The Sephardim Today* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1989), 187-88.

[555] See Oz Frankel, "The Black Panthers of Israel and the Politics of the Radical Analogy," in Nico Slate, ed. *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.)

[556] *Sephardic Highlights,* Vol. 4, no. 10, July-August 1991, Box 5, Folder 1. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[557] Trude Weiss Rosmarin, "Israel's 'Panthers, ' *Jewish Spectator*, Vol. 36, no. 6, June 1971, Box 6, Folder 2. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

albeit with limited success. Perhaps, as Eliachar worried, comparisons to the American Panthers caused some Jews to brush them off given the latter's antagonism toward radical Black activism.[558] One of the Panthers' primary goals for their eventually aborted trip to the US in September 1971 was not to meet with their Black counterparts, but rather to "go to the American Jewish community and to tell them about how their donations to Israel are being misspent."[559]

Avoiding the radical tone of the Panthers, a more conciliatory-voice among American Zionists came from the American Sephardi Federation and its representatives. ASF Vice President and Los Angeles resident Joseph Cordova urged his community to be the "strong and supportive voice" needed by "Israeli citizens of Oriental-Sephardi background who were being neglected and overlooked in areas of education, housing, employment, etc."[560] ASF's youth also voiced concern about the issue and made it part of their official platform. Their group trips to Israel - unlike those criticized by Weiss-Rosmarin - led LA's Marie Cohen to write about and empathize with the poor living conditions of Moroccan families in Jerusalem's Musrara neighborhood.[561] At their first national conference in Atlanta in 1973, LA's youth contingent even

[558] Eliachar, *Israel's Oriental Problems,* 4.

[559] "Israeli 'Black Panthers' Will Visit U.S. to Arouse Jews on Poverty Issue," *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, Vol. 38, no. 133, July 14, 1971, 1.

[560] Cordova, "The World Wide Renaissance and Unification of Sephardim."

[561] Marie S. Cohen, "A Day in My Journal," *The Young Sephardi Voice*, Vol. 2, no. 1, November 1974, 5.

"adopted" the Israeli (and primarily Sephardi) town of Kiryat Malachi, another "City of Angels."[562]

As Sephardi organizations and their public profiles grew, partly because of their connections and efforts in Israel, so did Los Angeles's role in national and international concerns. Fundraising for the Sephardic Hebrew Academy in Los Angeles brought prominent Israeli Sephardi guests to the city. In 1975, Ovadia Yosef, the Chief Sephardi Rabbi of Israel, visited several Los Angeles Jewish groups in a week of high-profile events, including a meeting with LA Mayor Tom Bradley where the two discussed the plight of Syrian Jewry. In 1976, Yitzhak Navon, soon to be Israel's first president of Sephardi heritage, visited Los Angeles and spoke at a dinner honoring Dr. Jose Nessim, the future founder of the Sephardic Educational Center. It was during these years, too, that Sephardic philanthropists such as Irving Benveniste of the Sephardic Hebrew Center gave donations upward of $100,000 specifically for Sephardi students in Israel.

American Sephardim's engagement with Israel continued to increase in the late 70s, particularly leading up to and during Menahem Begin's tenure as Prime Minister from 1977 to 1983. Begin's "revolutionary" election has been typically attributed to the support garnered by non-Ashkenazim, and once he was in office Sephardim worldwide continued to be supportive and optimistic about his government - in contrast to secular American Ashkenazi Jews' general apprehension.[563] A few months before the Israeli

[562] *The Sephardic Voice – Special Resource Issue*, 1975, Box 5. Folder 3. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[563] *Sephardic Hebrew Center Yearbook,* (Los Angeles: Sephardic Hebrew Center, 1978), 13. Box 29, Folder 4, STTI Records.

elections in 1977, the World Sephardi Federation held a global presidium in Jerusalem where delegates held a heated audience with Israeli politicians. WSF president Nessim Gaon openly blamed the Israeli government and the Zionist establishment for perpetuating the social gap, and the ASF's Liliane Winn accused Joseph Burg of the National Religious Party of soliciting Sephardi support but using funds to "transform in your yeshivot little Sephardim into little Ashkenazim" and tolerating the "prostitution of little thirteen year old Sephardi girls."[564] Winn was referencing Burg's opposition to Israel raising the country's legal marriage age as well as his comment that Ashkenazi girls "matured" more rapidly.[565]

After Begin's historic election, a Sephardi delegation - including LA's Ray Mallel - submitted a three-point program to the new Prime Minister to address the social gap in Israel and improve representation of Sephardim in government and Zionist organizations to which Begin pledged his support.[566] A testament to their growing sense of power and influence as well as the interconnections among non-Ashkenazim around the world, American Sephardi leaders now had leverage to lobby major Israeli parties and politicians. Emboldened by Begin's vocal support for Sephardim in Israel, a first, American Sephardim envisioned their role as a bridge between their American

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[564] *Sephardic World*, Vol. 2, no. 1, *Spring 1977*, 3.

[565] Orit Rozin, *A Home for All Jews Citizenship, Rights, and National Identity in the New Israeli State* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2016), 40.

[566] "Report Begin Promises Sephardic Group He Will Eliminate Social Inequities," *JTA Daily Bulletin*, Vol. 44, no. 136, July 19, 1977, 3.

Ashkenazi neighbors and Israel's marginalized Jewish community, a role that allowed them to carve a niche within the American Jewish mainstream.

In seeking this space, some American Sephardim construed the "social gap" as a greater problem in Israel than national security to inspire greater concern. In addition, increased efforts were directed toward incorporating and elevating Sephardim and their culture within American Zionist spheres. At the 1977 ASF youth convention held in Los Angeles, Rabbi Ott delivered a talk on Sephardi Zionists in history like Yehuda Alcalay, and Rabbi Robert Ichay of Atlanta's Or VeShalom argued that it was a mistake to "fashion Israel into a Western or Eastern European state" since Sephardim made Israel "a Semitic country."[567] The trope that Sephardim are uniquely - and sometimes better - equipped to understand and navigate Israeli-Arab relations dates back to Ottoman-era Palestine and was a major component of Eliyahu Eliachar's political philosophy.[568] But it also spread to American Sephardim in New York, Seattle, and Los Angeles who cited their familiarity with Muslims and the Middle East via their Sephardi background as providing a unique voice among American Zionists.

Zionism provided fertile ground for American Sephardi "revival" for several reasons. For one, it was an issue that took seriously the diversity and relationships between Jews from all around the world and from different backgrounds. By becoming active in Zionist and Israeli causes specifically about "Oriental" Jews, American

[567] Rabbi Robert S. Ichay, "To be a Sephardi Jew - Why Bother?," *Sephardic World, Special Youth Convention Souvenir Issue,* Vol. 3, no. 1, September 1977, 28-29.

[568] See Eliachar and others' writings included in Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, eds., *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1893-1958* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2013).

Sephardim could support Jews of similar backgrounds within a more universally Jewish context. By becoming active in this kind of Zionism, then, American Sephardim could stake a unique and valuable claim in what was rapidly becoming a central pillar of American (and world) Jewry and fulfill multiple and long sought-after goals of aiding Sephardim in need, raising their own visibility, and proving their worth to Ashkenazim. Support for Israel became a sacred cow for mainstream Jewry, however, so Sephardi criticism had to be couched within an acceptable framework. Except for a few isolated voices, discussions on the condition of "Oriental" Jews were rarely connected to or mentioned alongside Arabs or Palestinians. Rather, ignoring "Oriental" Jewry put Israel at greater risk of demographic and violent encroachment by their enemies.

Saving Syrian Jewry

Like their Zionist activities, Sephardim in the United States and Los Angeles also carved out unique roles in international affairs through their efforts to aid Jews living in Syria. With changing demographic and political situations, American Sephardi aid shifted from hometown remittances to broader concerns such as aiding "Sephardim in the Arab countries and in the Middle East" who were "in grave and imminent peril."[570] Until the 70s, with the possible exception of the American Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, whose local branch had its own measure of independence, Los Angeles's Sephardim did not lead national or international philanthropic efforts.[571]

[570] Untitled document, 1948, United Sephardic Emergency Council. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[571] Nadia Malinovich, "The American Friends of the Alliance Israélite Universelle: A Study in American-Jewish Intraethnic Relations, 1947–2004," *American Jewish History* 98, no. 4 (2014): 315–49.

After 1948, and especially after 1967, hopes for sustaining Jewish life in the region were all but abandoned. Instead, Sephardi American philanthropic efforts shifted to political activism on behalf of enabling Jewish emigration from Arab lands. In the early 1970s, the few thousand Jews in Syria - mostly in Damascus - under Assad's regime were by and large prohibited from leaving and lived under heavy government surveillance.[572] Although New York's Syrian Jews led the domestic effort, beginning in 1975 Los Angeles's Sephardim and its elected representatives became central actors in raising awareness and working toward remedies. As chairman of LA's Jewish Federation Council's Commission on the Middle East, Rabbi Ott led the collection of seven thousand signatures urging President Gerald Ford to act on behalf of Syria's Jews.[575] When Ovadia Yosef visited Los Angeles later that year, he made the humanitarian crisis central to his speeches and conversations with civic leaders like Mayor Tom Bradley.

Sephardi lobbying and Cold War jockeying between the US and Syria did result in some small victories. US Representatives Stephen Solarz (of a heavily Syrian Jewish district in Brooklyn) and Henry Waxman (representing parts of Los Angeles) traveled to Syria in 1976 to engage with the local authorities and members of the Jewish community first-hand. Joined by the congressmen were ASF vice-president Stephen Shalom and Waxman's wife, Janet, who arranged the proxy marriages of over a dozen Jewish women to men from the Syrian community in Brooklyn and ensured their safe

[572] Walter P. Zenner, *A Global Community: The Jews from Aleppo, Syria* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

[575] "Syria Jewry: 7000 Sign Plea to Ford," *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* May 30, 1975, 6.

emigration.[576] Janet Waxman later worked alongside Rabbi Ott on the Legal Committee for Syrian Jewry organized in 1978 by LA's Jewish Federation. Ott complained that this issue was overlooked due to the relatively small numbers involved and that there were no mass demonstrations like those for Soviet Jews because American Jews were largely ignorant of the crisis.[577] To remedy this, Ott worked with local politicians like California Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy and Judge Jack Newman, alongside Congressman Waxman, to raise awareness of the issue dwarfed by that of Soviet Jewry. Despite these efforts, it was not until the fall of the USSR and 1992 that Syria finally let Jews emigrate.

In many ways, these issues were understood as a Sephardi parallel to the much larger and concurrent movement on behalf of Soviet Jewry.[579] Generally supportive of that movement, as were most American Jews, some "developed a great cynicism about the Ashkenazic drive to Free Soviet Jewry since they in effect practice an almost identical kind of cultural genocide against Sephardim." [580] In gentler terms, the ASF bemoaned their inability to convince the Soviet Jewry movement to join with the cause of Syrian Jews.[581] Seattle Sephardim, who were not particularly engaged in the Syrian

[576] "'Proxy' Syrian Brides Meet Their Grooms in New York," *The New York Times*, August 12, 1977.

[577] "CRC Commission on Middle East Mounts Campaign on Behalf of Syrian Jews," *JFC Bulletin*, January 1, 1979, in STTI Scrapbook, Box 47, Folder 3, STTI Records; *El Shofar,* Vol. 9, no. 4, January 1988.

[579] On the American Soviet Jewry Movement, see: Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010.); Tova Benjamin, "The Soviet Jewry Movement Revisited," *Jewish Currents,* Winter/Spring 2022, 86-93.

[580] *The Sephardic World*, World Institute for Sephardic Studies, Vol. 1 no. 2 Winter 1973/5733, 7.

[581] *The Sephardic Voice – Special Resource Issue*, 1975, Box 5. Folder 3. MS-866. Joseph M. Papo Research Materials. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

cause (perhaps due to a lack of a Syrian community there), made the Soviet Jewry movement their own by "adopting" a family from the Republic of Georgia.[582]

Conclusion

Despite the optimism evinced by American Sephardim's "ethnic revival" and political ascent in the Jewish world, by the decade's end Sephardi leaders decried the "spiritual suicide" of their youth and the community's abandonment of traditional values.[583] While this was not entirely true, such a dim prognostication highlighted Sephardim's unprecedented enthusiasm and engagement during the 1970s. It was a period that bore concerted, impassioned, organized, and expansive activity among non-Ashkenazi Jews in the US. Cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission reshaped and canonized what Sephardi identity meant through the production and creation of cookbooks, concerts, and synagogues and through their own take on the "ethnic revival" moment sweeping the US. Newfound confidence enabled Sephardim to speak out as Sephardim in broader political and cultural arenas in Los Angeles, the United States, and Israel. Their reach and impact may not have extended as far as some of the more capaciously minded leaders like Liliane Winn would have liked, as attested to by the continued frustrations about Sephardi representation in Jewish life in the following decades. Nevertheless, the foundations had been built for a fuller integration of Sephardi issues into American Jewish life, particularly within the realm of

[582] Georgian Jews, with a unique history, have come to fall under the umbrella of Sephardi/Mizrahi Jewry. *La Boz*, May 1975, Sephardic Bikur Holim, Box 1, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation records, 1975-1983, Accession No. 2389-004, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

[583] "Battling 'Spiritual Suicide' Among Sephardic Youth," *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* January 5, 1979, STTI Scrapbook, Box 47, Folder 2, STTI Records.

scholarship, education, and academia. Twenty-first century developments such as the incorporation of the American Sephardi Federation into New York's Center for Jewish History and the rising number of publications on Sephardi/Mizrahi subjects indicate that the influence of the Sephardi "renaissance" of the 1970s can still be felt decades later.

Conclusion

Embarking on a 1987 goodwill tour of their former colonial holdings in Texas, New Mexico, and California, King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia sought to present a positive portrait of an emergent post-Franco Spain that was young, democratic, and tolerant.[584] For a country re-entering the international scene, particularly with many international events scheduled for 1992, its *reencuentro* (re-encounter) with the Jewish past and contemporary Jewish communities became a central component of rehabilitating Spain and shaping its new image. During their two-day stop in Los Angeles the royal couple were welcomed as honored guests at the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel, marking the first time in over five hundred years that a Spanish king stepped foot in a synagogue.[585] During the ceremony, Juan Carlos spoke of how Spain "in full conscience assumes responsibility for the negative as well as the positive aspects of its historic past."

The institutional foundations of American Sephardi life and its inroads into mainstream American Jewry in the 1970s set the stage for this event, and by 1992 Sephardim and their histories came to the public fore. This year, and those leading up to it, witnessed a plethora of events, conferences, concerts, lectures, exhibits, books, articles, and more commemorating five hundred years since Spain issued the Edict of Expulsion and, conversely, since the Ottoman Empire welcomed its resultant

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[584] Patt Morrison, "King of Spain's First Visit to Synagogue in Same Scale as His First Earthquake," *Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1987, C4; *The Royal Visit: A Historic Reencounter Between Spain and the Jewish People* (Santa Barbara: Legacy Publishing [for Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel of Los Angeles], 1992).

[585] Patt Morrison, "Royal Couple Will Spend 2 Days in L.A.: Spanish Monarchs to Visit--6 Years Late," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1987, 28.

refugees.[586] In this moment, coinciding with commemorations (and their resulting controversies) of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas, American Jews of all backgrounds alongside the modern nation-states of Spain and Turkey (and, to a lesser extent, Israel) engaged in the delicate creation and curation of usable Sephardi histories. Not only did this anniversary facilitate renewed and contested assertions by Sephardim of affinity or disdain toward their Spanish and Ottoman/Turkish pasts, but it also offers a new perspective from which to view the relational formations of Spanish, Turkish, and Ashkenazi identities through their approaches to Sephardi history.

While some American Sephardim, especially those active in the ASF and other Sephardi organizations, happily partnered with official representatives of Spain for commemorative events focusing on Iberian Jewish heritage, a smaller number, like members of the Association of American Jewish Friends of Turkey, preferred an approach that celebrated five centuries of Ottoman/Turkish hospitality towards its Jews (occasionally accompanied by Armenian Genocide denial). Additionally, events marking Columbus' arrival in the Americas spurred US Jews to rehash or debunk theories about Columbus's purported crypto-Jewish identity.[587] Intertwined in these re-encounters with

[586] On Spain's commemorations of 1992 re: Jews, see: Daniela Flesler, Tabea Alexa Linhard, and Adrian Perez Melgosa, eds., *Revisiting Jewish Spain in the Modern Era* (London: Routledge, 2013); Daniela Flesler and Adrian Perez Melgosa, *The Memory Work of Jewish Spain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Dalia Kandiyoti, *The Converso's Return: Conversion and Sephardi History in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Stacy N. Beckwith, ed., *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000). On Turkey's efforts, see: Marc Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Rifat Bali, *Model Citizens of the State: The Jews of Turkey During the Multi-Party Period*. (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 2012); Osman Cihan Sert, "Publicity, Memory and Politics: The Quincentennial Foundation Museum of Turkish Jews," (M.S. Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2018).

[587] On Columbus and Jews, see: Mayer Kayserling, *Christopher Columbus and the Participation of the Jews in the Spanish and Portuguese Discoveries*, trans. Charles Gross (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894); Moise Gadol, *Christopher Columbus was a Spanish Jew* (New York: self-published, 1941); Simon Wiesenthal *Sails of Hope; the Secret Mission of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Macmillan, 1973); .Jonathan Sarna, "The Mythical Jewish Columbus and the History of America's Jews" in Bryan Le Beau and Menachem Mor, eds., *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996).

history were the contemporary negotiations and relationships between Jews, Spain, and Turkey - in addition to Israel, the broader Muslim world, Armenians, Latin Americans, and indigenous Americans. Just as 1992 provided these axes of relational, historically-minded models of Sephardi identity, the reverse was also true. Modern Spain, Turkey, and American Jewry writ-large sought to shape their own public narratives through a specific interpretation and relationship to a Sephardi past.

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1992 represents the continuing and ever-changing story of Sephardi relational formation, one that sees Sephardim engaging with the ways their own histories were reflected by outside parties around the world. Since the late nineteenth century, Sephardi Jews in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the US have used their historical and cultural backgrounds and environments to navigate a rapidly changing twentieth century. In the process, they unravel simple assumptions about the nature of stable or singular identities and provide an in-depth examination of how LA and its national and global position can shape an individual or communal sense of self. This dissertation has sought to sort, parse, contextualize, and analyze the various relationships that shaped Sephardi Jewry in Los Angeles, as well as the United States more generally, over the twentieth century.

Whether through self-Orientalizing at world's fairs, selling produce and flowers in downtown wholesale markets, negotiating the bureaucracies of real estate, or the creation of "Supersfard" t-shirts, the actors and agents in the history related here came to use their identities in remarkably flexible and adaptive ways in pursuit of various social, political, cultural, and economic goals. They were able to do so for several reasons, among them the palimpsestic nature of what became known as "Sephardi"

identity, which could include Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, “oriental,” North African, Arab, Greek, Turkish, Spanish/Hispanic, Jewish, Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, European, White associations and connotations, depending on the context. For many - even Sephardim themselves - the uncertain and indeterminate place of non-Ashkenazi Jews within popular understandings of race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion in the United States and LA did not preclude the creation of community. But it did consistently raise questions about who or what could be considered “Sephardi” and about who a “Sephardi” could be. By being able to slip between the cracks of several different groups, they not only shaped their sense of self and opened certain pathways in life but transformed and informed the nature of more established group labels. The figures populating the preceding four chapters shaped the local, national, and international images of “orientals,” Mediterranean immigrants, Whiteness, Hispanics, and Jews. All the while the city of Los Angeles played its role as the ever-present backdrop, its natural and built landscapes - in addition to its many social worlds - providing the environment in which Sephardim understood and shaped themselves. Nor was the relationship one-way, for despite their small size Sephardi Jews contributed to what LA became in the twentieth century.

For nearly a century, the experiences of Sephardi Jews in Los Angeles have laid bare the possibilities and limitations of understanding one’s place in the modern world. This dissertation invites questions about and interrogations into the evolving meanings and relevance of categories of identity and belonging. It also showcases the kinds of connections and shared histories of Mediterranean Americans, Spanish-speakers, and non-Ashkenazi Jews that have seldom been subject to historical scholarship. While sometimes opportunistic, it was also very much the case that individuals and

communities found great personal meaning within a fungible, relational Sephardi identity as a source of connection to others and access to real, material benefits.

1992 did not mark the end of relational formations of American Sephardi identity. In addition to further research on the web of commemorations of 1492 only teased here, the frameworks and models put forward in this dissertation can serve analyses of contemporary issues concerning Sephardi Jewry in LA, the US, and beyond. For one, the legacies of Spanish and Turkish outreach continue to be felt into the twenty-first century, particularly since Spain enacted a 2015 law granting descendants of Jews expelled in 1492 a path to citizenship.[588] While the offer was taken up by relatively few in the US (compared to Latin American countries, Israel, or Turkey, for example), American Sephardim were nevertheless engaged and interested in the new law. Concurrently, Spain has also begun to "reconnect" with Jews abroad through tourism and the creation and expansion of Jewish heritage sites across the country. And while much excellent scholarship has recently been authored that looks at Spain's perspective, few have examined the Sephardi or Jewish response. Relatedly, Spain's nationality law has spurred many non-Jewish descendants of Jewish exiles to uncover family pasts, often of crypto-Jews. Like the previous example, the impact of the renewed interest in and claims of crypto-Jewish heritage (which got a boost thanks to the zeitgeist of 1992) have seldom been discussed as it pertains to Sephardi Jewry in particular - but it forms a key subject in contemporary Sephardi culture.[589]

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[588] Charles MacDonald, "Rancor: Sephardi Jews, Spanish Citizenship, and the Politics of Sentiment," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 3 (2021): 722–51. Portugal has also enacted a similar law.

[589] Dalia Kandiyoti, *The Converso's Return: Conversion and Sephardi History in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Max Modiano Daniel and Maxwell Greenberg, "Ocasio-Cortez's Jewish Heritage isn't About You," *Jewish Currents*, January 18, 2019. https://jewishcurrents.org/aocs-jewish-heritage-isnt-about-you. Accessed June 7, 2022.

Sephardi Jews are also responding in unique ways to the broader concerns facing American Jews in the twenty-first century. Elsewhere, models and histories of Sephardi relational formation - especially panethnic ones discussed in detail in chapter four - can be beneficial to understanding the meanings, applications, and limits of contemporary Jewish diversity, particularly for the growing and increasingly visible numbers of Jews of color.[590] On the American Jewish political scene, both anti- or non-Zionists and conservative, right-wing Zionists have drawn on Sephardi and Mizrahi identity and history to inform their views on Israel/Palestine.

"The Sephardi Century" portrays its subjects and the worlds in which they lived as mutually constitutive forces, both resonating with (or not) the other's racial, religious, regional, historic, or linguistic identities and attributes. It traces the legacies of a centuries-long diasporic, cosmopolitan, and multinational history on the lives of their twentieth century descendants and those who encountered them. It tells a story of how people came to understand, make use of, and explain their complex heritage and ancestry and of the resultant relationships created in that process. At its essence, however, this dissertation sought to present a narrative about individuals, communities, and their search for meaning within a web of relationships tying them to their past, present, and future.

[590] One recent study shows that some understood the "Jew of Color" label to include Sephardim. Tobin Belzer, et al. *Beyond the Count: Perspectives and Lived Experiences of Jews of Color,* Jews of Color Initiative, 2021, ii.

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