Ess

An Exploration of American Jewish Food and Identity

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I was raised in a home where food was a form of communication and an expression of love, where food was a way to share experiences, where food was something to be treated with respect. I have fond memories of being a little girl, hovering at the kitchen counter while my dad was elbow deep in a bowl of matzah meal and my mom was checking off tasks on their extensive holiday cooking schedule.

As I became an adult and now had the responsibility of feeding myself on a regular basis, I started to throw things together in the kitchen and most of the time, it didn't taste half bad. I began to enjoy cooking and my fascination with food, food science and food culture grew. Documentaries, TV shows, memoirs, articles online; I was a sponge for understanding how food works and why it works, both from a gastronomical and a sociological perspective.

When the time came to start developing a rabbinic thesis topic, I asked myself what I wanted to invest all of this time and energy into; food felt like a clear choice. The opportunity to concretize the relationship between my Jewish identity and my food identity has been welcomed both personally and professionally. When someone asks "what are you writing your thesis on" and I see their eyes widen and their interest peak with my answer, it is deeply satisfying and truly a joy to share more with them. I look forward to continuing this Jewish food journey.

I'd like to recognize those who helped me reach this finished project. To my fiancé Matthew who never fails to support and encourage me. To my parents, for every phone call to talk through an idea and every edit written in pen in the margins. To Rabbi Rick Kellner and the Congregation Beth Tikvah community for believing in and trusting me enough to bring this material to the congregation and to teach and eat with you. And to my thesis advisor, Dr. Rechnitzer for giving me the space to think outside the box and guiding me through writing a thesis that I was truly passionate about.

Though this thesis is a formal academic project, my hope is that those who read it do so with a cup of good tea and a well-baked cookie as they project their own memories and experiences onto this framework and begin to think about how the relationship between their Judaism and food can tell them more about who they are.

Introduction
You Are What Your Ess[1]

Pull up a chair. Take a taste. Come join us. Life is so endlessly delicious

– Ruth Reichl[2]

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, born in the Bresse region of France in 1755, wrote the world's first book on gastronomy, *Physiologie du Goût*, typically translated in English as The Physiology of Taste."[3] Though trained as a lawyer, he found himself engrossed in the subjects of food and taste;[4] he could be considered the father of the study of the relationship between food and identity. Brillat-Savarin is perhaps most well-known for saying, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." These words are the origin[5] of the common phrase "you are what you eat." The intention of this thesis is to explore the core of Brillat-Savarins idea as it plays out in American Jewish life; based on what Jews are eating in various stages, we can understand where they stand with their identity.

In addition to Brillat-Savarins, Jewish food historian Gil Marks and his ideology are foundational to the conceptual framework of this thesis. Marks writes in the introduction to his Encyclopedia of Jewish Food:

> To any individual or community, food is more than merely the fuel sustaining life and more than a matter of sensory stimulation. Culinary habits are an expression of

[1] Ess is the Yiddish word for "eat."
[2] The exact origin of this quote is unclear, but it is widely attributed to Ruth Reichl, an American Jew who is an acclaimed food writer.
[3] "Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarion (1755-1826)", Cook's Info Biographies, accessed January 18, 2019, https://www.cooksinfo.com/jean-anthelme-brillat-savarin
[4] "Brillat-Savarin, Jean Anthelme." Encyclopedia.com, accessed January 18, 2019, https://www.encyclopedia.com/food/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/brillat-savarin-jean-anthelme
[5] This is considered by some to be an inaccurate paraphrasing of Brillat-Savarin's original words.

> a community's history and culture, an accumulation and expression of its environmental influences, experiences, conventions, beliefs, aspirations, and behavior. Food is an enduring element of individual and collective memory. Like its history and culture, each community's food is distinctive. It is a part of and a window to who a community is, how that community came to be, how it exists at a particular moment in time, and what it values in the present and hopes for in the future.. to know a community is to know its food.[6]

Marks' words encompass much of the foundational belief for this thesis as well as the overarching goal being sought after.

In embarking on this endeavor, there were a number of challenges about scope and definition. For one, it is incredibly difficult to define, to draw a distinct boundary around Jewish food. In an article on the social history of Jewish food in America in the essay collection *Food and Judaism*, Joan Nathan writes:

> Throughout their wandering history, Jews have adapted their lifestyles to local culture. Food is no exception. But because they have lived in so many places, there is no single "Jewish" food, other than matzo, haroset [the Passover spread], and cholent and chamin [the Sabbath stews that surface in different forms in every land where Jews have lived]. Instead, Jews have relied on local ingredient, developing regional dishes in accordance with their dietary laws.[7]

Based on Nathan's writing as well as other ideas and challenges in this endeavor of definition, in this work Jewish food is defined less firmly by the content (actual food, recipes, ingredients) and more by practice and the food that is being eaten by Jews, food that is cooked and eaten in direct connection to Jewish expression and/or practice.

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[6] Gil Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), vi.
[7] Joan Nathan, "A Social History of Jewish Food in America" in *Food and Judaism*, ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon, Ronald A. Simkins and Gerald Shapiro (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2005), 1.

With regard to scope, the decision has been made to focus on Eastern European/Ashkenazi food as the root of American Jewish food. This is not to suggest that all Jews or even all American Jews are of Ashkenazi descent or that Jews from other parts of the world do not have meaningful food traditions; this decision was made by looking at statistics and the expansiveness of cultural impact.

According to studies by Hebrew University in Jerusalem 80% of world Jewry is of Ashkenazi/Eastern European origin.[8] Statistics on the percentage of American Jews who are Ashkenazi are not conclusive though it is suggested that the percentage of Jews with Eastern-European origin is higher in America than the rest of the world. Based on this data as well as the strength of Ashkenazi culture in America, this thesis will focus on Eastern European food and food culture and its influence of American Jewish food and identity.

We will begin this exploration of the relationship between American Jewish food and identity with an examination of the evolution of kashrut, understanding how the changes in dietary observances over time have influenced Jewish eating. In the following chapter will be a foundational exploration of how Jews ate and regarded food in Eastern Europe in an effort to understand the practices and traditions that new immigrants to America carried with them. From Eastern Europe to America, we will continue the exploration with an understanding of how Jewish food evolved in America in tandem with Jewish immigrants and American Jews finding new identities. In the closing chapter, we

[8] "Ashkenazi Jews," HUGR Hebrew University, accessed January 18, 2018, http://hugr.huji.ac.il/AshkenaziJews.aspx

will fast-forward to today's Jewish food renaissance, examining how today's Jewish food culture is reflective of modern identities and trends.

Chapter 1
No Pork, Yes Oyster: The Evolution of Kashrut

When I started to consider kashrut, I asked everyone I knew who kept kosher why they did so. Most answered, "Because it's tradition." This didn't work for me. The tradition I grew up in placed no value on dietary restrictions; boneless spare ribs were a favorite Shabbat meal. A batch of cookies changed my mind. I realized that my kashrut-observant friends couldn't eat the hamantaschen I'd prepared in my non-kosher kitchen. I began to move towards keeping kosher so that all Jews could eat in my home.

– Rabbi Leah Berkowitz[9]

Ikey, Mikey, Jake, and Sam,

We're the boys who eat no ham,

We keep matzohs in our locker,

Aye, aye, aye, Weequahic High.

– from Portnoy's Complaint by Phillip Roth[10]

Introduction

In beginning any conversation about the relationship between Judaism and food, we must give attention to the issues of kashrut. As Sue Fishkoff writes in her book, *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America's Food Answers to a Higher Authority*:

> Jews aren't the only people with a tradition of sacred eating, although our laws are the oldest to have survived the modern world. How we sow, how we harvest, how we slaughter, how we prepare our food, how and when we eat it – Jews are hardwired to link our food choices to moral and political beliefs… what we put in our bodies has a lot to say about who we are and what we value.[11]

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[9] Leah Berkowitz, "Voices: Small Bites," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic*, ed. Mary Zamore (New York: CCAR Press, 2011), 57-58.
[10] Phillip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Random House, 1969), 56.
[11] Sue Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation: Why More and More of America's Food Answers to a Higher Authority* (New York: Schocken Books, 2010), x.

Jewish laws pertaining to foods have governed centuries of Jewish life and living and as Fishkoff writes, what a people eats can explain a great deal about their culture, history, society and values.

Author Michael Wex offers a critical and modern reflection on kashrut. Departing from traditional ideas about what it means for food to be kosher, specifically in relationship to one's own identity, Wex writes:

> Kosher food is the food of people who can insist upon their choices and control their own supply. Kosher means fit or proper, and kosher food, the healthy choices in a junk food world, is food that is fit for a Jew to eat. It is also the food of people who can feel guilty or belligerent or proudly indifferent when they fail to make the healthy choice. It is hardly surprising, then, that adherence to such rules should become a conspicuous pillar of identity, an unambiguous public affirmation of Judaism.[12]

As Wex outlines, kashrut observance is intimately related to the concepts of autonomy, self-worth and identity. Kashrut can determine who you can and cannot eat with, where you can and cannot eat; these choices about personal practice have the ability to impact many arenas of an individual's life. Throughout many personal accounts and testimonies of Jews on why they do or do not keep kosher, they speak to who they are, who their parents and grandparents are/were, how integrated to the Jewish community they feel; kashrut practices have become inextricably linked with identity. By examining the evolving relationship between Jews and kashrut, we can more clearly see how food and identity have progressed in tandem in the American Jewish context.

[12] Michael Wex, *Rhapsody in Schmaltz: Yiddish Food and Why We Can't Stop Eating It* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 30.

In the American Judaism of today, "keeping kosher" means different things to different people. For some, it is a traditional observance including abstaining from eating pork, shellfish or mixing milk and meat, maintaining a degree of separation of kitchen items and only eating foods/eating in places with certain kashrut certification. Others may maintain some of these practices while letting go of others. Some individuals keep none of these and do not consider themselves as keeping kosher in any way and some do not keep any of these traditional elements; yet they identify as keeping kosher based on new iterations and interpretations, such as eco-Kashrut, ethical/spiritual eating practices, vegetarianism or veganism. In these expressions of a Jewish dietary tradition, individuals find ways for their Judaism to be a part of their identity in a new way, reconceptualizing the relationships of the past between Jews and kashrut.

Separation: The Impact of Kashrut

An implication of sacred eating, found to be particularly impactful for Jews observing kashrut, pertains to relations with others, both externally and internally; kashrut observance has historically impacted Jewish relationships, both with non-Jewish neighbors and within the Jewish community. Kashrut in its early iterations created great separation between Pagans and Jews, a phenomenon seen as favorable by the rabbinic sages of the time. Throughout Jewish history, throughout biblical, post-biblical, rabbinic, Talmudic, medieval and modern periods, the precedent has been continually re-established that eating according to Jewish practices separates oneself from the rest of the non-Jewish

world.[13] In antiquity, there was a concern that if Jews were to eat with Pagans, they may lose sight of their own identity and become Pagans themselves. This standard was upheld by the rabbis of late antiquity, who "were a small and, to a large extent, elitist group whose ideas and practices were hardly shared by Jews at large."[14] As the generations of scholars continued with the Talmudic and medieval rabbis, these interpretations of kashrut became increasingly complicated as their insular world was challenged, yet the standards of kashrut observance held strong. In modernity, the concern emerged for some Jews about the potentially isolating and distancing effects of keeping kosher on the relationships with those of other faith traditions. Recent times have also brought the issue of kashrut-induced separation internally within the Jewish world. For example, if a Jew who does not keep kosher is attending a potluck in a kosher space, are they to participate and bring a dish? If they are told no, do they now feel alienated from their Jewish community? If they are told yes, do other attendees feel uncomfortable about their ability to maintain their own Jewish practices? These situations can quickly become complicated and debates about kosher kitchens, hekshers, eating practices in Jewish buildings etc., have been the source of conflict in communities.

Kashrut observance is an outward expression of identity; what one will or will not eat directly signifies who they are and perhaps even more poignantly, who they are not. When set in the context of the full range of eating practices, there is an othering effect that takes place as these dietary standards and their ensuing identity implications come in

[13] David Kraemer, *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 123.
[14] Ibid, 7.

contact, often with a clash. Separation from the community, whether that is defined as the Jewish community or the community at large, can be seen in some layers of Jewish history as a determining factor of kashrut observance and Jewish dietary choices.

From Europe to America

Understanding kashrut observance in Eastern Europe, the homeland of most American Jews, is relatively simple. There were few grey areas or reconceptualizations of kashrut (such as modern practices of observing kosher style); one either observed or did not. Kashrut was the backbone onto which the muscles of European Jewish food clung. Jewish life and specifically Jewish culinary life in Europe was regimented with a focus on the practical and what was allowed as opposed to prioritizing whimsy or even taste. However, as these Jews migrated to America, much of their identity was called into question, and much of their practices were changing. Records of immigrants of the last 19th century through the post World War II period indicate an increased laxity with regard to religious practices, including kashrut observances. As Dr. Jonathan Sarna notes, immigrant testimonies "have been interpreted to show that the process of immigration itself loosed East European Jews from their religious moorings, or, alternatively, that the immigrant stream included a disproportionate number of those who had abandoned their faith years earlier. Both propositions are likely correct."[15]

[15] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 157.

As Hasia Diner writes, "except for a handful of traditionalists who lamented the embrace of America, a 'treyf' land, most greeted American possibilities as positive… America meant freedom and food."[16] This freedom manifested itself within kashrut observances in many ways. For some, the freedom of America liberated them from kashrut and they left behind these dietary laws that felt like shackles. For others, this freedom of food was embraced in other ways and they maintained their kashrut observance. Alternative forms of kashrut observance such as "kosher style" emerged as these new Americans tried to determine how their food and their Judaism related; "they held on to their affinity for gefilte fish, brisket and blintzes, chipping away at the identification between 'Jewish' and 'kosher' in the process."[17] While there is a not a large body of statistical analysis to substantiate or shed light on the evolution of American kashrut observance, it was recorded that between 1914 and 1924, there was a 25-30 percent decrease in the consumption of kosher meat in the Greater New York area, a trend that was consistent in other regions of the country.[18]

While kashrut observance steadily declined[19], those who believed in maintaining this dietary tradition sought to justify the practice through science, particularly anthropology and zoology. These findings were targeted towards women who were emerging in society as the keepers of the kitchen. Literature was being created to speak to women's interests and the idea of a "kitchen Judaism" emerged.

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[16] Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 180.
[17] Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 173.
[18] Ibid, 176.
[19] This decline continues through to today. As of the 2013 Pew Study, 22% of American Jews kept kosher in their homes.

> Through the 'humble literature' of cookbooks, women emerged as cultural authorities in their right, personifications of Jewish knowledge and tradition… [some Jewish cookbook authors] likened themselves to the baleboste, the traditional Jewish housewife, and derived their authority from her expertise, social significance, and 'inherited routine.' Under the baleboste's tutelage, American Jews were encouraged to regard the consumption of kosher food as a way of affirming and celebrating tradition, Jewish identity, and cultural continuity. [20]

Many American Jewish women found both their role in society and within Judaism through the maintenance of a kosher home. This dietary expression became intimately linked to self-worth and identity; keeping a kosher home meant more than adhering to Jewish dietary laws, it represented who these women were and their prowess as wives and mothers.

As kashrut observances have evolved, it is interesting to note that for many generations, a distinction has been made between the "treif-ness" of pork and shellfish. For many, pork is seen as a greater violation of kashrut. Rabbi Morley T. Feinstein, senior rabbi of the Reform congregation, University Synagogue in Los Angeles, recalls,

> My father z"l, always used to say that seafood is treif, but pork is anti-Semitic. No Jew was ever tied up and forced to eat lobster thermidor; only pork was used to hurt or taunt us. He recalled that the Maccabees cleansed and rededicated the Temple after the Romans desecrated it with pigs. He never ate pork and none entered our home. In our modern age we choose what to eat, not as a matter of convention, but mostly for reasons of health, taste and ethics. Perhaps, we should add to that list the voice that inspires us stemming from the history of our people.[21]

As modern Jewish cookbooks and restaurants have introduced non-Kosher dishes to their menus, there is a higher incidence of cooking shellfish than pork. Pork has maintained a greater taboo status than other non-kosher foods. As Sue Fishkoff writes, "Pig was always

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[20] Ibid, 184.
[21] Morley T. Feinstein, "Voices: Small Bites," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic,* ed. Mary Zamore (New York: CCAR Press, 2011), xxxiii.

different… Shrimp salad and lobster bisque might be waved along with a friendly wink, but roast ham was a real statement."[22]

The caveat to this trend is that it can differ regionally; for example, as a result of the influence of Southern culture, Southern Jews were more likely than Jews in New York to adopt pork into their diet. Furthermore, for many Southern communities, foods that would have been considered ritually-taboo became part of Jewish life and cooking with congregations hosting crawfish boils or serving shrimp at festive meals.[23] Many Southern Jews integrated themselves into the local culture and the societal norms through food[24] and for some, that involved leaving behind the constraints of kashrut. This conflict and separation between shellfish and pork is represented by the selective kashrut phenomenon, encapsulated by the simple stance: "no pork, yes oyster." [25] This viewpoint was justified in a number of ways, including from the perspectives of health and methods of slaughter. [26] This arguably arbitrary drawing of red lines in one's kashrut observance can be seen as an effort to both hold on and let go at the same time; as Jews were adapting to American culture, whether viewed as assimilating or acculturating, they sought to find a balance between their Jewish identity and their newly emerging American identity.

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[22] Fishkoff, *Kosher Nation*, 233.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 2005).
[25] Lance Sussman, "The Myth of the Treifa Banquet," in *The Sacred Table: Creating a Jewish Food Ethic, ed. Mary Zamore* (New York: CCAR Press, 2011), 30i.
[26] Pork was considered to be worse for one's overall health than shellfish and the methods of pork slaughter were thought to be more antithetical to kashrut practices than the methods for shellfish.

Changing Perspectives

In looking at the evolution of American conceptions of kashrut, it is relevant to look at the four major platform perspectives published by various iterations of the Reform movement from 1885 to 1999. Though American Judaism is by no means solely represented by Reform Judaism, understanding the evolution of kashrut practice through the Reform lens can help to foster an understanding of how perspectives on Kashrut were changing during these formative years of American Jewish development, particularly as the Reform Movement and its history is considered as tracking closely with the overall progression of the Americanization of Jews.

In the first of these declarations of principles, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, their stance on kashrut was clear and without room for debate (as was true with many of their positions taken):

> We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas entirely foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.[27]

These early reformers sitting in Pittsburgh, PA did not feel bound by kashrut; they did not believe that kashrut held relevance or significance in a modern Judaism and furthermore, that it was not only not productive towards the goal of heightened spirituality but actually, an obstacle to finding this holiness. Subsequent platforms, though each more verbose and expansive than the one before, do not explicitly mention kashrut and the issue of ritual

[27] "The Pittsburgh Platform," Central Conference of American Rabbis, accessed September 25, 2018, https://www.ccarnet.org/rabbinic-voice/platforms/article-declaration-principles/

dietary observances is notably absent from all inquiries to the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.[28] However, Kashrut observance could be considered as included under the umbrella category of "Torah." On the whole, the Columbus Platform of 1937 and the Centenary Perspective adopted in San Francisco in 1976, reflect a progression away from the total rejection of Torah law and classic observances towards language that was more inclusive and allowed more room for creativity and personal choice within a wide range of accepted belief. Nonetheless, for many progressive/liberal to secular Jews, Kashrut observance became a part of history and not a modern reality.

In 1998, Rabbi Richard Levy, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, proposed the Ten Principles For Reform which he hoped would be considered as a foundation for the new Reform platform to be created in May of 1999. In these principles, he noted that some Reform Jews might find meaning and a call to observe kashrut, either traditionally or through more modern interpretation.[29] This suggestion which was perceived as a return to the traditional, even outdated or archaic, was not well received. The reaction of some was so strong that the term the "Cheeseburger Rebellion" was created to refer to the uproar.[30]

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[28] Sussman, *The Sacred Table*, 41.
[29] Martin Weiner, "Keeping Kosher – Leviticus and the Current Debate," ReformJudaism.org, accessed September 26, 2018, https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/shmini/keeping-kosher-leviticus-and-current-debate
[30] John Rivera, "Reform Jews turn to ritual," Baltimore Sun, May 24, 1999, accessed September 25, 2018, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1999-05-24/news/9905240172_1_reform-jews-reform-judaism-reform-rabbis

Within the American Jewish context, from early waves of immigration to today, there is no one consensus on the observance of kashrut. While responses varied, what is consistent is that with a greater freedom with regard to food and dietary law, kashrut became a discussion, more of a choice and less of a given. Rabbi Rami Shapiro, a current, progressive, American rabbi writes:

> My grandparents kept kosher because God demanded it. My parents kept kosher because Judaism demanded it. I keep kosher because life depends upon it. For me kashrut is about ethical consumption. It is about living in a way that enhances life… because I keep kosher I don't eat meat… because I keep kosher I don't drive a gas-guzzling car… because I keep kosher I don't buy products produced in sweatshops… kashrut helps me live my life in service to life.[31]

In today's world, one can no longer make the assumption that their Jewish neighbor keeps kosher and even if they do, their kashrut is not likely to look like that of their grandparents, neither in practice nor ideology.

[31] Rami Shapiro, "A Letter to a New Reform Rabbi," in *Keeping Faith in Rabbis: A Community Conversation on Rabbinical Education,* ed. Hayim Herring and Ellie Roscher (Minneapolis: Avenida Books, 2014), 50.

Chapter 2
Sacred and Scarce: Jewish Eating in Eastern Europe

A woman could make a whole banquet from a herring. When purchasing a herring, you always asked for a male. After washing the herring and opening it up, Mother would remove the milt or milekh, a long sack of semen. She would open the milt and scrape the semen away from the membrane, which she threw away. To the semen, the zumekhts, she added minced onion and a little vinegar and sugar to taste to make a sauce, a zuze—it was called a kratsborsht, or scratch borsht, because the milt had been scraped. Everyone got a little piece of herring, a small piece of bread to dip in the kratsborsht, and maybe also a boiled potato… A few boiled potatoes, bread, and a piece of the herring made an excellent meal for a poor family.

– a food memory from Opatow, Poland[32]

Introduction

In "The Earth is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe," Abraham Joshua Heschel writes:

> The Jews in Eastern Europe lived more in time than in space. It was as if their soul was always on the way, as if the secret of their heart had no affinity with things… he was a unique type of man, the Jew in Eastern Europe, one whose habits and taste did not conform to classical standards of beauty… joy, when felt, was always for a serious reason, the trimming for a happy occasion, justified like a logical conclusion… sorrow was their second soul, and the vocabulary of their heart consisted of one sound: 'Oy!'[33]

[32] Mayer Kirshenblatt and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimble, *They Called Me Mayer July Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland before the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7.
[33] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 15-16.

In seeking to understand the societal, historical and identity contexts for Eastern European Jewish food and eating, Heschel's description serves as foundational. Eastern European Jewish life was not about frivolity or whimsy; life for these Jews was structured and regimented with a focus on the practicality and logistics. Food for Eastern European Jews was about obligation; obligation to dietary laws, obligation to feed the poor, obligation to mark sacred times. As Hasia Diner writes, "Eastern European Jews lived in a world where food was sacred for all, but in which scarcities loomed for most."[34] This tension between sacred and scarce categorizes much of the relationship between Eastern Europe Jews and food pre-World War II.

Using the evolution of kashrut practice as a background, an understanding of Eastern European Jewish food practices can offer the first layer of the chronological evolution of the relationship between Jewish food and identity. As many (though not all) of American Jewish immigrants came from Eastern Europe, their experiences and that of the generations before them are crucial to understanding how American Jewish food evolved and where it stands today.

Financial Constraints

The Jews of Eastern Europe in the mid to late 19th century were, on the whole, plagued with financial struggles.[35] The food that they ate reflected this; much of what we

[34] Diner, *Hungering for America*, 147.
[35] Heiko Haumann, *A History of East European Jews* (Herndon: Central European University Press, 2013).

recognize in modern times as Ashkenazi Jewish food is food that was easy to find, cheap to buy and able to be stretched to feed more mouths over longer periods of time. Much of this food was pickled, salted or preserved in some way. There was very little dairy as it was expensive and required consistent access to refrigeration. As with many cultures in which food scarcity was a reality, their food was centered around an efficient distribution of calories, putting enough fuel into a person to propel them through their work. For Shabbat, there were many attempts to create something that looked and felt lavish or extravagant but did not have the price tag to match. An example of this is babka; Jews adapted a version of the Polish dish to be able to use a loaf pan instead of an expensive specialized "Turk's head pan," and used scraps from challah and fillings that were easily accessible to create a sweet treat that felt special and looked regal with folds and twists but did not come at a high cost.[36]

The implications of socio-economic status influenced the actual food that these Jews ate, but it also impacted the culture around eating. Poet Yehuda Leib Gordon wrote about an encounter between a poor Jewish woman and her rabbi intended to highlight some of the issues of Jewish food practices and inequities as it relates to food. A poor Jewish woman went to the rabbi to ask if she can feed the two slaughtered geese she has just purchased to her family for Passover. She had concerns about the kashrut and acceptability but she could not afford anything else so she brought them to the rabbi. The rabbi told her that the geese were in fact blemished (and therefore not kosher) so they could not be eaten. The woman

[36] Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, 32.

began to weep and in consolation, the rabbi told her "you should not despair, poor woman! Jews are charitable! You can support yourself by begging!"[37]

This story served as a critique on many elements of the Jewish food culture of the time, such as the unbreakable ties between luxurious food and sacred time, the financial implications of observing Jewish law. Though we could draw many conclusions about society from this story (the dependency of women on men, the centrality of the rabbi in the community, the financial issues that would lead this woman to beg for food in the first place) for the purpose of this discussion, the idea that the story resolves with a poor Jew being taken care of by others speaks to the societal norm of the time that Jews who had means were responsible for those who were without.

This responsibility with regard to food was its strongest at times of celebration such as Shabbat and holy days. One account of this time and dynamic reads:

> Even in the poorest of homes a small hallah would be baked. Woe to the family that did not even have ten or fifteen kopeks needed to buy flour and yeast! For such a family, the community would have to step in. the family might do without food during the week; this was scarcely a novelty, and did not particularly move the neighbors. They could not, however, permit a Jewish family to go hungry on the Sabbath.[38]

The phenomenon of sacred eating was strong in this culture; as Hasia Diner writes, "Food for Jews meant more than calories for survival."[39] The need to provide food for poor Jewish families was not to "fill bellies" during the week or to assure food security on a day to day

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[37] Diner, *Hungering for America,* 146.
[38] Hirsz Abramowicz, *Profiles of a Lost World: Memoirs of East European Jewish Life before World War II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press in cooperation with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1999), 107.
[39] Diner, *Hungering for America*, 150.

basis; this was an effort to allow other Jews to mark time, to celebrate the Jewish calendar as opposed to providing nutritional content. This is reflective of the unique and elevated role of food and eating for Jews in pre-war Eastern Europe.

Peddlers and Practicality

Much of Jewish food in Europe was driven by and structured around practicality. This practicality responded to many categories of limitations including those previously mentioned (such as dietary laws and financial constraints) as well as limited access to resources/ingredients and the lack of refrigeration. These limitations shaped the kitchen repertoire of the Eastern European Jews, popularizing the techniques such as pickling, fermenting and curing to stretch the life of food they had and creating a culture of slow-cooked food such as cholent for Shabbat and holidays when it was forbidden to light a flame.[40] Additionally, the constraints of kashrut did not allow for spontaneity in eating, and it limited interactions with the outside world.

From the end of the eighteenth century through the early twentieth century, there was a massive migration of Jews from their long-time homelands to new places that represented many hopes in the harsh times in which they lived. In the nineteenth century

[40] "Food and Drink," The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jewish in Eastern Europe, accessed November 30 2018, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Food_and_Drink

alone over four million Jews took part in this mass migration which was significantly influenced by peddlers and their practices.[41] As Hasia Diner writes:

> The history of Jewish migration cannot be disassociated from the history of peddling, and the history of Jewish peddling cannot be understood without the matter of food. Peddlers, these Jewish men who in the main hailed from traditional backgrounds, had to negotiate food as they set off on their roads, and as a concern it shaped how they related to their customers and also how it bound them to the Jews who already lived in these places and provided the new peddler with good and credits.[42]

Though not unique to Europe, peddler culture in Europe particularly influenced Jewish eating practices and the relationships between Jews and non-Jews forged over food. As Jewish peddlers left their insular communities, they came in contact with non-Jews who had long been their un-acknowledged, un-confronted neighbors. Jewish peddlers began to find inns or private homes where they could stay along their journeys, typically owned by Christians. These Christians began to learn about Judaism and the customs that the visiting peddlers brought with them. In order to maintain their kashrut observances, peddlers needed to plan; as previously mentioned, the limitations of Jewish dietary practices eliminated the opportunities for spontaneity and flexibility. As a result of these newly forged relationships and understandings, these Christian innkeepers and homemakers began to allow Jews to store a pot, pan and cooking utensils marked as kosher in their kitchens where they were kept safe and untouched until the next Jewish peddler came through. There are many accounts of Jewish peddlers who benefited from these fledgling

[41] Hasia Diner, "Global Jewish Peddling and the Matter of Food," in *Tastes of Faith: Jewish Eating in the United States*, ed. Leah Hochman (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press for the USC Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life, 2017), 28.
[42] Ibid, 29.

kosher sections of Christian kitchens as it made the logistics of eating less complicated for them.[43]

Additionally, the intersections of peddlers and food led to an expansion of the conversation about Judaism. "'Why, the customers ask, can you not eat the same foods we are eating? Why can you, the peddler, not share from the pot, the dishes of the cutlery that the family is using?"[44] In response to these queries, peddlers would tell their story, they would explain Judaism and its laws and practices. These peddlers were integral in expanding interfaith relations as Jews and their neighbors began to come in contact and seek to understand one another.

Through the experience of peddlers, food began to become a bridge between Jews and other peoples. The necessities of the peddlers in keeping kashrut and their uniqueness, foreignness and even oddness created opportunities (perhaps one could say they even offered an excuse) for Jews to interact with the Christians and others around them and for those peoples to understand further who these Jews were. The food one eats is a marker of identity which can certainly distinguish peoples from one another, but as the Eastern European Jews began to find, food was an entry point to something beyond themselves and their community.

[43] Diner, *Hungering for America*.
[44] Ibid, 39.

Sacred Eating

The European Jew that Heschel described experiences joy for a serious reason, expressed as "trimming for a happy occasion."[45] Often, this trimming, this expression of joy rooted in reason, was edible. While food was not about extravagance or frivolity, "Eastern European Jews lived in a world shaped by love of food."[46] Hasia Diner speaks to the tradition of welcoming young boys to Jewish learning by giving them a slate of Hebrew letters written in honey (or alternatively, a book with a dot of honey on the cover), designed to "[bring] to life the connection between good tastes and holy moments."[47] The seriousness and the tendency toward sorrow of the European Jew was not expressed in asceticism but actually quite the opposite: "Jews did not correlate spirituality with a lack of interest in food, Hassidic rabbis and their followers emphasized food eating in the context of communal celebration."[48] Eating for Eastern European Jews was a kind of religious expression. Though not dictated in any formal context of Jewish law or custom, every holiday and every Jewish moment had its corresponding food; the Jewish calendar was marked by lekakh[49] for Rosh Hashanah and prune filled hamantaschen for Purim. If, as Heschel says, the Jews of Eastern Europe lived more in time than in place, the food was what marked, elevated and sanctified that time.

[45] Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's,* 16.
[46] Diner, *Hungering for America*, 154.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Lekakh is a honey cake.

Shabbat in Eastern European Jewish culture was an opportunity to eat a hearty, heavy, "fill your belly" kind of meal. Even those in poor economic standing celebrated Shabbat with a meal at the top of their means:

> The Sabbath required one to make special preparations. Not infrequently, this was extremely onerous for the poor Jew lacking the necessary ruble on the eve of the Sabbath. Even with a single ruble it was possible to 'make a Sabbath' for a household. On Friday evening and the Sabbath day, meat was usually eaten, All week long one settled for 'almost anything' but it would not do to 'disgrace' the Sabbath.[50]

The quantity and quality of Shabbat food depended heavily on the financial status of the family, but the spirit and intention behind the meal was universal. As Hasia Diner writes, "the Sabbath emerged as the most powerful sacred food experience for Jews."[51]

Much of what is concerned Eastern European, Ashkenazi Jewish food is what they ate on Shabbat and holidays; the day to day dietary practices of these Jews did not differ significantly from their neighbors, their culinary uniqueness was in the food eaten as sacred moments. Author Michael Wex writes, "The proof, like so much else, is in the cholent: Saturday is the most important ingredient in Ashkenazi cuisine. If not for the Sabbath, we'd have little more than matzoh, bitter herds, and whole roasted sheep to call our own."[52]

Shabbat and holidays, while observed with prayers and religious rituals, were truly made holy by the food. Eastern European Jews scraped together everything they had to put something special on the table, something markedly different from other days and nights.

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[50] Abramowicz, *Profiles of a Lost World*, 107.
[51] Ibid, 155.
[52] Wex, *Rhapsody in Schmaltz*, 149.

For these Jews, marking Jewish time with food was not about meeting one's caloric needs or quelling roaring stomachs, it was a statement of identity and an expression of the sacred. As these Jews begin to migrate to America, we will see a shift away from this heavy emphasis on the sacredness of food as a reflection of economic changes and assimilation

Chapter 3
A Bagel and Shmear: Jewish Eating in America

After my mother got sick, we began spending weekends with our great aunt Bertha and her husband in their house in Brookline [MA]. We'd run around in her big backyard, play Chinese checkers and fooled around with her plastic nut dispenser that had a squirrel on its back. Also we'd get immersed in Jewishness. There'd be a big pot of matzoh ball soup on the stove, and Aunt Bertha saw we finished every drop.

Four of five times a year, Aunt Bertha and her husband would take us to the Union Oyster House in Boston for lobster. She made us finish the lobster too. My older brother threw up a couple of times from getting so stuffed.

It was "eat, eat." Matzoh ball soup for the Jewish thing, and the lobster for the New England thing. She wanted us to be Jewish Yankees.

– Joshua Winer[53]

Introduction

When one migrates from their country of origin, their homeland, to a new nation, whether in pursuit of greater opportunity, fleeing persecution or other reasons, they are often tight on space. There is only so much space to pack a life, to pack valuables and heirlooms. There are undoubtedly things, objects that are left behind, a reality that, while painful, also makes the intangible far more significant. Memories, for example, can move with you; they don't take any space and you store them on your person and they allow you to think of home, to connect to your prior life. While food would typically be categorized as

[53] Myrna Katz Frommer and Harvey Frommer, *Growing Up Jewish in America: An Oral History* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 26.

a physical object, this is not its only iteration. Food is the most tangible intangible for an immigrant; your food, your recipes, your techniques can come with you and allow you to create what you know, what brings you comfort in your new land. In this way, Eastern European Jews present much like any immigrant groups as they brought their foodways with them to be expressed in their new land. With one foot in a European past and one in an American future, Ashkenazi Jewish food began to evolve in America. In these changes, we can see how the collective identity of these new American Jews was shifting as they held the tensions of their multiple identities, and what today we might call intersectionality, in their hands. Much of this dance between food and identity in new Jewish immigrants to America can be seen in the stories of the bagel and Crisco which will be explored in this chapter.

In the migration of Eastern European Jews to America, there was a shift in identity; these newly-American Jews had high economic aspirations and a new sense of freedom both in their lives at large and with regard to their food. Hasia Diner writes:

> In the world they left behind, the 2.5 million east European Jews who came to American considered themselves entitled to eat well… in America, once hungry Jews sufficiently empowered to challenge the idea that only the rich could eat well all the time… they saw the meals on their tables as America's gift and the fruit of their own aggressive efforts to get what they wanted… Access to food outside the family broadened preferences, raised standards, and complicated the meaning of food to people who had once lived with hunger. It confirmed their sense of entitlement to good and plentiful food.[54]

The Eastern European Jew was being exposed to this new world of opportunity and they felt it was their turn to both literally and figuratively take a bite.

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[54] Diner, *Hungering for America*, 178-179.

As previously discussed in chapter two, at this time Kashrut became less of a given and more of a conversation which resulted both in rifts within the Jewish community and a new sense of adventure and exploration with food. The food of Eastern European Jews was about to undergo significant transition as their poverty-driven cuisine began an evolution. Doors had been opened to new possibilities and though some stood outside hesitantly, many walked through with confidence.

The Bagel

The bagel has a significant history, dating back to at least the 1600s. While there are clear similarities to other round breads in other areas of the world (round shapes are associated with good fortune in many cultures), particularly the Italian ciambella,[55] the beginnings of the relationship between Jews and round bread begins in Poland[56]. In records of the Polish Jewish community in 1610, there is a reference to the "beigel,"[57] the appropriate gift for pregnant women and midwives.[58] By the seventeenth century, bagels were commonly eaten by Jews in Poland and the Baltics and by the early 1900s, every peddler's cart on every Polish street corner had bagels for sale. Journalist and bagel historian Maria Balinska writes:

> Easy to carry, easy to eat, the bagel had become the market snack par excellence. Descriptions of market days in the villages and towns of the nineteenth century

[55] Marina Balinska, *The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 14.
[56] It is, however, possible that Jews from Central Asia may have brought this bread concept to Europe. It also could have come from the Sephardim and their *escaladadas* bread.
[57] There are many possible etymological explanation of the term "bagel."
[58] Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food,* 35.

> Eastern Europe always include the sight and sound of the itinerant Jewish sellers – usually young boys and older women – circling the stalls crying 'Bagels! Lemonade! Bagels! Corn on the cob!' As for their customers, many of them would have been non-Jews: the local priest (there was always at least one), as well as the sheriff and the gentile servant girl of one of the better-off Jewish families. Above all there were the peasants who, having spent the night in their wagons in order to sell their vegetables, fowl and firewood first thing in the morning, would have gobbled down a few bagels before spending the rest of their money in Jewish-owned stores on more necessary staples such as salt, shoes and scythes.[59]

The bagel became a Jewish contribution to Polish life, eaten by rich and poor, Jews and Christians; the bagel was loved across boundaries that divided people into separate sectors of society. Additionally, the bagel became an entry point for Jews to become a part of the community at large.

The Polish bagel was a ring-shaped bread that was wider than what is common in modern America; the bagel was a larger, thinner ring with a more pronounced hole. The larger hole allowed for easier carrying by hand as well as more efficient storage by stacking bagels on the poles of peddler carts. The texture of this bread was chewy on the inside with a hard crust on the outside created by the boiling process. The Polish bagel is often compared to a soft pretzel, both in texture, color and eating practice; just as a large soft pretzel may be dipped in mustard or cheese today, the bagel was either eaten plain or dipped in schmaltz or butter.[60]

As Eastern European immigrants began to come to America in mass, they brought their beloved bagel with them; by 1907 there were three hundred bagel bakers in New

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[59] Balinska, *The Bagel*, 57.
[60] Jeffrey A. Marx, "Eating Up: The Origins of Bagels and Lox," in *Tastes of Faith: Jewish Eating in the United States*, ed. Leah Hochman (West Lafeyette: Purdue University Press, 2017), 81.

York City.[61] In the early waves of Eastern European Jewish immigrations, bagels were a guaranteed cheap way to fill your stomach.[62] The bagel industry became a force on the Lower East Side of Manhattan with the establishment of unions and a culture of excellence in bagel making with guarded recipes and techniques. Eventually, as these immigrants gained both status and economic stability in America, the bagel was not a part of their daily diet and became more of an occasion-centric eat and often, a special treat on Sunday mornings.[63]

As in Poland, bagels became a part of the culture, a Jewish contribution. However, this was not the same bagel that had been sold from peddler carts on European street corners. In America, the bagel went through an evolution and while the bagel still held to its round shape and chewy texture, much of the rest of what made a bagel a bagel changed in America. One significant change was in the appearance of the bagel. Where the Polish bagel had been dark in color, the American bagel became progressively lighter. As these immigrant Jews sought to become a part of mainstream culture, they found themselves needing to cross societal, categorical boundaries. At this time in American culture, one was either white or black, there was less nuance in the conversation of race and identity. Eastern European Jews whose experience thus far had been as the perennial "other" desperately wanted to be a part of the majority, of the mainstream and thus, sought to be "white." Food historian Jeffrey A. Marx writes:

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[61] While there were bagel bakers in many US cities with significant Jewish populations, there were no statistics found for areas outside of New York.
[62] Balinska, *The Bagel*, 99.
[63] Marks, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, 36.

> By the turn of the twentieth century, social pressures pushed toward the consumption of softer (and whiter) foods... the Jewish embrace of white breads may be due not only to the allure of becoming acculturated Americans but, more specifically, the desire to be identified as *white* Americans. If [sic] second generation Jewish immigrants by the 1920s were increasingly conscious of and concerned about their racial status in an America that defined people as "black" or "white," I suggest – given the (largely unconscious) symbolic function that food often plays – that the rejection of dark bread in favor of white may have favored these concerns as well.[64]

In short, Jews wanted to be white and white people ate white bread. As Professor Aaron Bobrow-Strain writes, "white bread has long stood as a symbol of wealth and status – and in America, racial purity… to eat white bread was to participate in the process of building a better nation."[65] The fear of yet again being labeled an outsider drove much of Jewish culture and society in this time period (such as an opposition to a Zionist state) and food was not immune to this influence.

Another change to the bagel was in its structure. Though it remained round and in an unending loop, its hole shrunk significantly. Whereas the European bagel had been dipped into a topping, a smaller hole allowed for the more civilized and fancier presentation of a topping on the bagel itself. A small hole allowed for the bagel to be dressed without a topping falling through. With this change, the bagel also became a vehicle for wealth. As these Jewish immigrant families began to gain some economic stability and the second generation found themselves in higher socio-economic standing, they could afford a higher level of luxury[66] which they did not hide.[67] Lox and cream cheese,

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[64] Marx, "Eating Up: The Origins of Bagels and Lox", 83.
[65] Aaron Bobrow-Strain, *White Bread: A Social History of the Store-Bought Loaf* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 64.
[66] Marx, "Eating Up: The Origins of Bagels and Lox", 90.
[67] We can see this assertion of economic status in relation to food in other settings as well. For example, in butchery and market culture of the Lower East Side and other Jewish areas, the culture was to yell out your

what became the quintessential bagel dressing, reflected wealth.; layering your white bread with dairy and fish was a statement. Dairy was not a staple of Eastern European life as it was not only expensive but required consistent access to refrigeration. While some Jews in this area did have dairy, particularly, in Lithuania, "milk seems to have been a relatively scarce item for the masses of poverty-stricken Jews in the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries."[68] Salmon was expensive and could be difficult to acquire in America at this time so while the cheaper, more accessible whitefish was more widely consumed, lox was a delicacy typically purchased in small quantities[69] and only by those who had truly made something of themselves in their new American life.

While shmearing cream cheese and layering lox on a bagel was a status symbol, emblematic of Jewish economic success in America after so many years of European poverty, it also reflected a Jewish, kosher adaptation of the American Sunday brunch staple, Eggs Benedict. With the bagel as an English muffin, the cream cheese mirroring the hollandaise sauce and the lox taking the place of sliced ham, the bagel and its accoutrements became a Jewish attempt to be a part of American food culture. This was a unique opportunity for Jews to truly have it all, to move up the ladder of society, to be part of the larger culture, while still keeping within the boundaries of kashrut.

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order to the clerk which was not only how you got what you needed, but was an announcement of your wealth as everyone else in the shop could hear what you ordered and therefore, had a sense of what you could afford.

[68] Ibid, 86.

[69] Ibid, 87.

As in the markets of Poland, in America the bagel yet again became an opportunity for Jews to find their place within larger society. In the mid 1900s, American culture was ripe and ready to welcome a food like the bagel:

> The market for bagels was expanding at a time when the cultural mood of the country was changing. It was not just that anti-Semitism had ceased to be respectable, or that the Jewish community was growing in confidence. There was also, more generally, a shift away from the homogeneity and standardization promoted in American popular culture in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the 1970s Americans were more interested in celebrating ethnic difference, the melting pot metaphor was being replaced with that of the cultural mosaic or, in culinary terms, the tossed salad… to be ethnic, or at least a little ethnic, was no longer a handicap; it could in fact be an advantage. The bagel, a product that was idiosyncratic but not too esoteric or too hard to pronounce, fit well into this category.[70]

The bagel fell into this niche, offering the new American Jew a unique opportunity to be a part of the mainstream without completely abandoning their origins.

Much has been interpreted and theorized about the shape of the bagel, both its round, unending circle and its signature hole; the bagel and its crazed fandom became such an important metaphor in the American Jewish culture that it even appeared in High Holy Day sermons. In a 1999 Rosh Hashanah sermon, Rabbi Joshua Hammerman of Temple Beth El in Stamford, CT asked "why does the bagel stand out, at least among Ashkenazi Jews, as the quintessential Jewish food?" Over the course of four sermons, Hammerman determined that the answer is in the hole and the roundness of the bagel. On Yom Kippur, he spoke about roundness, a symbol of inclusion and "the Jewish ideal of the synthesis of alone and together." Rabbi Hammerman concluded his sermon: "round foods, that's our response to blood and swastikas. A delicious honey dipped challah. And a bagel with a hole."

[70] Balinska, *The Bagel*, 165-166.

Crisco

Schmaltz was the staple of any European Jewish kitchen. Though the Yiddish term does not specify a type of fat, schmaltz was traditionally poultry fat that was at the heart of any meat (non-dairy) dish. In *Rhapsody in Schmaltz*, a love song to Yiddish food and its star performer, schmaltz, Michael Wex writes:

> As a staple of the Jewish diet, schmaltz could appear almost anywhere, any time. The breakfasts that my father remembered best from his childhood in Poland in the 1920s – the *good* ones that is – consisted of either a radish ('Not the kind you get here, but the big ones, black'); a piece of bread; or, when neither of these was available, an onion dipped in schmaltz. Lacking any of these, they'd eat their schmaltz off a clove of garlic.[71]

Shmaltz was ubiquitous, in part from a standpoint of practicality, but it also became known as a source of comfort and a flavor synonymous with being Jewish. The great failing of schmaltz was in its limitation: because schmaltz came from meat (typically chicken), it was not pareve and therefore could not be used in any dairy dishes. As necessity is the mother of all inventions, it was this shortcoming that opened the door for the creation of something new in America, a new option for cooking fat.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Proctor & Gamble, the creators of Crisco, had been pushed out of the lard business by meatpacking companies who were also beginning to take control of the cottonseed oil market. Cottonseed oil was the crucial ingredient in Proctor & Gamble's core product, Ivory soap. In both an act of retaliation and self protection, Proctor & Gamble opened their own cottonseed oil company and a few years later, applied for a patent on "a food product consisting of a vegetable oil, preferably

[71] Wex, *Rhapsody in Schmaltz*, 80.

cottonseed oil, partially hydrogenized, and hardened to a homogenous white or yellowish semi-solid closely resembling lard. The special object of the invention is to provide a new food product for a shortening in cooking."[72] In 1911, Crisco hit the shelves of grocery stores and corner markets. Though created for the masses, it quickly became clear that Crisco was a product to be marketed to the Yiddish-speaking, Jewish immigrant housewife; Proctor & Gamble had created a pareve schmaltz. The marketing potential in the Jewish community was so strong that Proctor & Gamble changed the name of the product from the originally proposed "Cryst" to "Crisco" (a combination of "Cryst" and second-choice name "Krispo" in fear that a name too similar in look and pronunciation to "Christ" would turn away Jewish customers.[73]

In 1935, Proctor & Gamble published a 77 page cookbook: "*Ḳrisḳo resepies far der idisher balebosṭe*: *Crisco Recipes for the Jewish Housewife*". Printed in side-by-side Yiddish and English, the cookbook[74] reflects the seriousness of Proctor & Gamble's efforts to market this product to the Jewish

Figure 1: Cover of Crisco Cookbook for Jewish Housewives

[72] Ibid, 89.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Photo citation: Dorot Jewish Division, The New York Public Library. "Crisco recipes for the Jewish housewife" New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed December 3, 2018, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/c6acf07a-d17f-e5af-e040-e00a18062572

community.[75] With a bilingual cookbook, Proctor & Gamble offered the narrative that you could, at once, maintain your heritage and identity while becoming part of America by using American products and participating in American culture; you could, at once, be Jewish and American.

Proctor & Gamble was not the only company to realize the potential of creating products for the Jewish community and marketing to them directly. Stella D'Oro Bakery, a family business in the Bronx, looked around their neighborhood and recognized that a critical mass of the population was Jewish.[76] They recognized that the "milk and cookie" culture of America was not what Eastern European Jews were accustomed to; they were looking for a less-sweet cookie to be eaten with coffee or tea and that did not have dairy in them (making them pareve). The cookie took off and Stella D'Oro Bakery grew out of their Bronx based location into a large, multi-location, multi-million-dollar company. As Ian Frazier, staff writer at The New Yorker, writes: "The Stella D'oro Swiss Fudge Cookie—about the size of a silver dollar, with a floral shape and a dark chocolate center whose color resembled the center of a sunflower—became the most Jewish cookie ever made."[77][78]

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[75] Shira Feder, "How Crisco Overtook Schmaltz In American Jewish Cooking," Forward, August 10, 2018, accessed November 8, 2018, https://forward.com/food/407855/how-crisco-overtook-schmaltz-in-american-jewish-cooking/

[76] 49% of the total population of the Bronx was Jewish as of 1930. In certain areas of the Bronx, the Jewish percentage of the population was significantly higher.

[77] Ian Frazier, "Stella D'Oro Swiss Fudge Cookies," Tablet Magazine's 100 Most Jewish Foods, accessed November 22, 2018, https://100jewishfoods.tabletmag.com/stella-doro-swiss-fudge-cookies/

[78] Though not directly pertinent to this discussion, it is important to note that much has been written and studied about the relationship between corporate America and the Jewish community; many companies have leveraged the purchasing power of kosher Jews with their desire to be a part of the mainstream culture and public sphere to maximize revenue possibilities. More can be read on this topic in Sue Kishkoff's *Kosher Nation*.

American Jews and Food

Food in America was increasingly becoming about balance, a balance of identities. A person could be Jewish, hold on to their religion and to an extent, hold on to who they had been in a previous world and time, while also embracing what stood before them in this new land of freedom and choices. While Shabbat was celebrated, there was no longer the sharp contrast between Shabbat food and that which was eaten the rest of the week; in America, they could eat Shabbat food all week long.

Mark Russ Federman, grandson of Joel Russ and the third generation owner of New York institution Russ & Daughters appetizing shop, reminisces on the customers he inherited when he had earned the right to buy the business from the preceding generation. Federman writes:

> I'm retired now, but I can still hear them placing their orders from across the counter:
>
> > 'I need a whitefish… It should be a nice one… My son, the doctor, is coming over for dinner… We want to introduce him to a nice girl…. Her family is very well situated, thank you… Her father's a big shot… Maybe this will work out, please God, and I'll soon be a grandmother… No don't give me that one from the top. What do I look like? A greenhorn? I want from underneath. No, not that one. The one next to it. No, that one's too dried out. You probably had that one leftover from before the Flood… Why don't you go to the back and get me a fresh one?
>
> In these short exchanges, there was always a life story: they had made it in America; their son was a doctor; it was time for him to get married and give them grandchildren; of course they would be involved in choosing his mate: she would be from a good family, a family at least as respectable as they were; the girl's father should be a 'big shot.' But make no mistake, although these customers might include me in discussions of family matters, they were still, first and foremost, seasoned shoppers. They had spent lifetimes struggling to succeed, and they were determined to make sure that no one took any of that they had achieved away from them. Now they would have only 'the best.'[79]

[79] Mark Russ Federman, *Russ and Daughters: Reflections and Recipes from the House That Herring Built* (New York: Schocken Books, 2013), 87.

New American Jews had made it out of a world that tried to demolish them, a reality they were not quick to forget. They had survived, they had earned something better and now, they would not settle for anything less than the best, anything less than the freshest whitefish from the back of the shop.

Chapter 4
Scallion Pancake Challah: Today and the Future

Jewish food is not a trend, it's just having a shining moment

– Jeffrey Finkelstein[80]

When I finally found my way to the stove as a senior in college, I started cooking macaroni and cheese, stir-fries, and oatmeal raisin cookies – foods more reflective of my American upbringing than my Jewish one. Then Rosh Hashanah rolled around. And Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover after that. On my own for these holidays for the first time, I found myself wishing I had the recipes for the dishes I grew up eating fixed in my culinary muscle memory. Instead, I was standing at the bottom of what felt like a mountain of history, tradition, and knowledge, looking up at an intimidating climb.

– Leah Koenig[81]

Introduction

In a 2013 study of the American Jewish community conducted by the Pew Research Center, an emphasis was placed on understanding and exploring Jewish identity. Those surveyed were asked the basic question "what does it mean to be Jewish?" and responses were recorded and published by the percent of respondents who said that something was an "essential part of what being Jewish means to them." On this list were things like remembering the Holocaust, caring about Israel, being intellectually curious and having a

[80] Alison Robins, "Jewish Food Renaissance", WRG Magazine, accessed January 14, 2019, http://wrgmag.com/2015/01/food/jewish-food-renaissance/
[81] Leah Koenig, *Modern Jewish Cooking: Recipes & Customs for Today's Kitchen* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, LLC, 2015), 12.

good sense of humor. The last characteristic listed was "eating traditional Jewish foods" which was identified as essential to being Jewish by 14% of respondents.[82] While this is not an overwhelming percent, it is still statistically significant, not to mention that had the question been framed differently, I question if the results may have been greater. For example, had the survey asked if these things were simply *a* part of what being Jewish means to them as opposed to an *essential* part, making the question slightly more open and less commital, I believe this 14% figure may have been higher. Perhaps even more significantly, a question could be asked about the word "traditional." Traditional Jewish food, even in the few years since the 2013 Pew study, is being re-envisioned, reconceptualized and reimagined; your Bubbie's Jewish food, while important foundationally and carrying with it fond memories, is not what is being served up today in the Jewish food renaissance. There is a demand for food that feels Jewish, that offers that Jewish connection but that is also reflective of the palettes, aesthetics and overall sensibilities of a new generation and a new time.

The Jewish food renaissance is a here-and-now movement, we are living in it in this very moment. As a result, we do not yet have hard data though we do have some concrete indications of this revival including an increase in publications and various forms of media about Jewish food. With regard to this subject, some resources from even just five years ago are already outdated. Gabriella Gershenson, Food Features Editor at *Everyday with Rachel Ray* magazine, writes in her foreword to Leah Koenig's Modern Jewish Cooking:

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[82] "A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Overview." Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C., October 1, 2013, http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2013/10/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey-overview.pdf.

> Now may be the best moment in history to rediscover Jewish food. This is a boom time for the cuisine, filled with hip, urban entrepreneurs rolling up their sleeves and making everything from artisanal gefilte fish to raw sesame halvah and hand-rolled bagels. Ethnic foods use to be something that our parents and grandparents hid in hopes of assimilating and thriving in society. Now, it's the thing that sets us apart and makes our contribution unique.[83]

Gershenson highlights both the stark contrast in American perspectives on Jewish food of a century earlier as well as the primacy and ripeness of this specific moment in Jewish food history. In particular, in a Jewish communal landscape that is asking big questions about the engagement of the next generation, combatting apathy and finding meaningful ways for young Jews to connect to their heritage, community and religion, it could be that food is an entryway.

Cookbooks

In the age of the internet where recipes are just a Google-search away, cookbooks have had to find a new identity. Modern cookbooks, for one, have become works of photography. As Henry Notaker, literary historian with a focus on food culture and history, writes:

> When the great French poet Baudelaire complained about the lack of good restaurants in Belgium, he found comfort in reading a cookbook. That kind of pleasure is even more obvious today with the introduction of modern food design in the illustrations of beautiful editions of cookbooks in coffee-table format. The recipes in these books are meant to be leafed through and read sitting in a sofa or an easy chair rather than followed step by step over the kitchen stove… many cookbooks are conceived and written within the framework of a lifestyle ideology, representing new (and old) moral attitudes and practices. They are part of a self-help and self-development literature, to be studied mainly outside of the kitchen.[84]

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[83] Koenig, *Modern Jewish Cooking*, 11.
[84] Henry Notaker, *A History of Cookbooks: From Kitchen to Page Over Seven Centuries* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 301.

While Notaker's is only one perspective and not representative of all cookbook readers and users, he identifies a new role that cookbooks are taking on in modern times. One element he does not address, however, is the way in which cookbooks are becoming story books. Gone are the days of an "all business" cookbook, intended to be purely instructional and to help a home cook get from point A to point B. Today's cookbooks tell a story; they share vignettes of food memories, they open a door into the author's culinary world.

This "new cookbook" represents a marriage of two deeply Jewish parties: food and stories. Perhaps this has been a contributing factor to the vast number of modern-style Jewish cookbooks published in the last decade, many of them written by members of the Millennial and Gen-X generations. These cookbooks, written by American Jews, can be seen as performing three overarching functions: recalling Jewish food memories, modernizing classic Ashkenazi food and exploring intersectionality and non-mainstream Jewish food.[85]

With cookbooks seeking not only to explore food but to tell stories, many of these new authors are rooting their relationships with Jewish food in memories. These memories may be collective (recalling historical, communal experiences), familial (thinking about grandparents and the generations of one's own family) or personal (recalling individual, sometimes more recent experiences). The collection of memory-based introductions and stories from modern cookbooks is expansive, however below is a selection that expresses these different forms of food memories.

[85] Many of these cookbooks are also exploring and sometimes reinventing kashrut such as The New Kosher and I Heart Kosher by Kim Kushner and Millennial Kosher by Chanie Apfelbaum,

From a recipe for beef kreplach:

> Kreplach are juicy, pillowy Jewish dumplings traditionally stuffed with meat, which too often play second fiddle to the matzo ball when it comes to Jewish soup. What a shame. In Eastern Europe, a Jewish woman proved her cooking chops by rolling her dough paper-thin and stuffing her kreplach without a puncture. Kreplach are high art in the Ashkenazi kitchen, and they deserve to return to prominence.[86]

From a recipe for salata de icre, a Romanian fish egg spread:

> My grandfather Phillip has cause to celebrate if there was an egg sac in the fresh whole fish my grandmother brought home form the store. He'd scrape the crunchy eggs into a deep bowl and slowly whip them with oil to a pale pink briny spread that retained some of the snap of the roe. He'd swirl it like hummus onto a plate and serve it up with slabs of black bread for his four daughters. For his own sandwich, my grandfather always first rubbed a clove of garlic over the shiny bread crust.[87]

From the introduction to the cookbook *Bubbe and Me in the Kitchen*:

> Though I was blessed to have her [my grandmother] in my life for just 10 years, there were incredibly formative ones. At the table in her kosher kitchen, she introduced me to new foods, shared wisdom about the ingredients she loved, and let me 'help,' even when mess-making was my forte. She imparted lessons about manners (licking the iced tea spoon did not constitute cleaning it), nutrition (fish was 'brain food'), and cultural awareness (people around the world had their own distinctive food traditions)…Her cooking followed the rhythms of the seasons, and of the Jewish calendar… My grandmother's recipes, and the new ones they've inspired, are a thread between past and future, and a part of the tapestry we continue to weave as a family.[88]

From a recipe for chopped chicken liver:

> I first tried chopped chicken liver at a synagogue dinner my family attended. I was about nine years old and still a fairly picky eater, so I am not sure what compelled me to be so adventurous that evening. I remember thinking the earthy-tasting mixture spooned on my piece of challah was fine – not bad, but not something I cared to eat again soon. Sure enough, nearly two decades passed before I tried the Ashkenazi Jewish spread again. This time the liver was prepared by my friend Naf, a

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[86] Jeffrey Yoskowitz and Liz Alpern, *The Gefilte Manifesto: New Recipes for Old World Jewish Foods* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2016), 135.
[87] Amelia Saltsman, *The Seasonal Jewish Kitchen: A Fresh Take on Tradition* (New York: Sterling Epicure, 2015), 83.
[88] Miri Rotkovitz, *Bubbe and Me in the Kitchen: A Kosher Cookbook of Beloved Recipes and Modern Twists* (Berkeley: Sonoma Press, 2016), 11-13.

> true meat connoisseur. His version was creamy, full flavored, and so much better than 'just fine.'[89]

These vignettes of memory reflect not only the new style of cookbooks but they are also windows into Jewish identity. All of these selections, most of which are from cookbooks written by Jews under forty years old, offer insights into the ways in which today's Jews are connecting their food and their Judaism.

In 2011, Jeffrey Yoskowitz, Liz Alpern and Jackie Lilinshtein founded The Gefilteria, a self-described "cutting-edge food venture at the forefront of the Jewish Food Renaissance"[90] that sought to reimagine rather than reproduce Old World Jewish foods. Five years later, Yoskowitz and Alpern compiled their food ideas into a modern cookbook, *The Gefilte Manifesto*. In the introduction of that cookbook, Yoskowitz and Alpern tell their stories, explaining how they came to be experts on Jewish food and to dedicate their lives to reimagining Ashkenazi food. Yoskowitz writes about moving to New York City in his mid-twenties, recalling that "my Jewish identity and the food that reinforced it were now in my own hands."[91] As he worked to navigate this new dynamic, he began to notice that delis and appetizing shops were closing around him which lit a fire within him. He writes:

> I started to panic. I sensed that I wasn't the only one. I confided in Liz, who clearly shared my passion for Jewish food, describing my fears of a world without the smells of chicken soup and apple strudel in a Yiddish kitchen. She had the same fears. After much discussion, we decided that we had to do something about it… Since that very first klezmer kitchen dance session, Liz and I have shared a commitment to digging deep into our personal food traditions, connecting with seasoned chefs and pouring over timeworn cookbooks. We've come to see that the wisdom of Jewish cooks from the Old World, and the knowledge they brought with

[89] Koenig, *Modern Jewish Cooking*, 76.
[90] "The Gefilteria," The Gefilteria, accessed January 15, 2019, https://gefilteria.com
[91] Yoskowitz and Alpern, *The Gefilte Manifesto*, 2.

> them and applied to their kitchens in North America, offers incredible insights that should inform how we all cook today.[92]

Fueled by a personal desire and as well as a fear of a tradition being lost, Yoskowitz and Alpern felt compelled to journey into Jewish, specifically Ashkenazi, food. In their cookbook, their "manifesto," Yoskowitz and Alpern offer modern takes on old dishes, including sweet lokshen kugel with plums, root vegetable latkes, black and white cookie sticks, fried sour pickles with garlic aioli and even kimchi stuffed cabbage.

In a session at the URJ Biennial in 2017, Yoskowitz and Alpern emphasized that their goal is not preserving Jewish food, putting it on a shelf exactly as it was and collecting dust,"[93] but rather to reinvest in this cuisine, helping it to evolve. They argue that the common semi-joke offered at Jewish holidays, "they tried to kill us, we survived, lets eat," trivializes Jewish food, pushing it to the periphery. Through their work and their cookbook, they hope to bring Jewish food back to the center, converting Jews from passive consumers to active participants in their religiously-based gastronomic experiences. Yoskowitz and Alpern also take pride and perhaps even comfort in sharing the lists of other cookbook authors, restaurants and general Jewish food innovators who are taking part in this space and in what could be considered a holy, sacred endeavor.

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[92] Ibid, 2-3.
[93] Liz Alpern and Jeffrey Yoskowitz, "The Gefilte Manifesto: A New Wave of Jewish Cuisine" (lecture, URJ Biennial, Boston, December 9, 2017).

King Solomon's Table[94], *Jewish Soul Food*[95], *Balaboosta*[96] and more: cookbook authors are becoming increasingly aware of both Jewish food that is not Ashkenazi and how Jewish food traditions and culture can intersect with other elements of an individual's identity. As a basic understanding of how this integration is sought after, Shannon Sarna writes in the introduction to her Tomato Basil Challah recipe: "I am always looking for ways to infuse some Italian-ness into my Jewish cooking, and a tomato basil challah is an obvious choice and a delicious pairing."[97] Many times in her cookbook *Modern Jewish Baker*, Sharna references making connections between her Italian and Jewish identities[98] through her baking.

Michael Twitty, an African-American, Jewish chef, speaks to exploring intersectionality through food and using food culture as a means through which to find harmony among his multiple identities. His book, *The Cooking Gene*, though not a cookbook, does include a number of recipes and is a literary exploration of food identities. Twitty writes:

> In Jewish culture, much like continental African and African Diaspora cultures, food is a mnemonic device. Whether its matzo or hoecake, our civilizations value symbolic food, and passing down foods and food memories from generation to generation, and with them stories as history, pushes us across the globe… what I'm speaking of is recovering the narratives across time, connecting all of us into one

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[94] Joan Nathan, *King Solomon's Table: A Culinary Exploration of Jewish Cooking from Around the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).
[95] Jana Gur, *Jewish Soul Food: From Minsk to Marrakesh, More Than 100 Unforgettable Dishes Updated for Today's Kitchen* (New York: Schocken Books, 2014).
[96] Einat Admony, *Balaboosta: Bold Mediterranean Recipes to Feed the People You Love* (New York: Artisan, 2013).
[97] Shannon Sarna, *Modern Jewish Baker: Challah, Babka, Bagels & More* (New York: The Countryman Press, 2017), 59.
[98] Sarna was raised by an Italian-Catholic mother and a Jewish father.

> idea – that our food has not just been fodder for our journeys, but embodies the journey themselves.[99]

Furthering his point, Twitty's chapter on his Jewish food experience ends with a recipe for "West African Brisket".

Another example of young Jews exploring intersectionality through food is Molly Yeh. Yeh is a food blogger and cookbook author turned Food Network TV star who incorporates into her food her maternal Jewish heritage, her father's Chinese lineage and her current life with her husband on a sugar beet farm in Grand Forks, North Dakota.[100] With scallion pancake challah, za'atar monkey bread, pimento cheese babka, samosa knishes, Asian scotch eggs and rosemary sufganiyot with tomato jam[101], Yeh celebrates the multiple facets of her identity. In the age of "intersectionality" as a buzzword, Molly Yeh is allowing her identities to play together on her plate, expressing her Jewishness through food in a way that leaves space for and even welcomes the other pieces of herself that make her who she is. In this way, Jewish food is becoming less of a firm category and more of an invitation to creativity as well as an outlet for multiple forms of self-expression.

Media

In our social media age, there are few aspects of social interaction that have gone unchanged, including how we relate to food. Much has been written about the changing

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[99] Michael Twitty, *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2017), 72.
[100] Sarah Weinberg, "Blogger Molly Yeh is About to Become Food Network's Biggest New Star," Delish, June 25, 2018, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.delish.com/restaurants/g21931204/molly-yeh-facts/
[101] Molly Yeh, *Molly on the Range: Recipes and Stories from an Unlikely Life on a Farm* (New York: Rodale Inc., 2016).

role of food as well as restaurant marketing as a result of social media. In the context of Jewish food, there are a number of individuals and small organizations who have built social media followings by exploring Jewish food in new and accessible ways, including The Jewish Food Society (@jewishfoodsociety)[102], Amy Kritzer (@whatjewwannaeat), Jewish Food Hero Blog (@jewishfoodhero), Jewish Food Experience (@jewishfoodexp), Jake Cohen (@jakecohen) and Jamie Geller (@jewlishbyJamie), not to mention other bloggers, chefs and Jewishly related restaurants with a social media presence and following. These accounts and their posts offer ways to connect to Jewish life and culture through food with particularly low barriers for entry and a non-threatening delivery.

The Nosher, a project of My Jewish Learning, began nearly a decade ago with editor Shannon Sarna at the helm. The Nosher is the Jewish food blog of MyJewishLearning.com that offers Jewishly-rooted recipes, articles on Jewish food, news on Jewish restaurants and other Jewish food-related musings. Working from their main website platform, The Nosher has also integrated into social media with 10,000 followers on Twitter, 67,000 monthly viewers on Pinterest and 22,700 followers on Instagram.[103] In addition to specifically food-related platforms like The Nosher, other major Jewish news and content providers (The Forward, The Times of Israel, The Jewish Telegraphic Agency etc.) have begun publishing more and more food content, from recipes to discussions of Jewish food trends and Jewish restaurants.[104] This increase in content is all reflective of the growing place food occupies

[102] All handles (@_____) are for Instagram
[103] As of January 2019.
[104] Some of this content is cross posted from The Nosher by other news outlets and some is uniquely generated by each platform.

in the American Jewish conversation, and its transition from something frivolous into a real, engaging topic worth earnest exploration.

Tablet Magazine, another popular online Jewish content provider, created a separate webpage dedicated to "100 Most Jewish Foods." As the writers offer on the "about" page:

> This is not a list of good food. It's not a list of the most popular Jewish foods, or the tastiest, or the most enduring. In fact, a number of the dishes on this list are no longer cooked or served with any regularity—at least not in the home kitchens or communal spaces where they originated—and the edibility of many others is... well, let's say it's up for debate. The point, instead, was to think about which foods contain the deepest Jewish significance—the ones that, through the history of our people (however you date it), have been most profoundly inspired by the rhythms of the Jewish calendar and the contingencies of the Jewish experience. That many of them are also delicious is obvious, and Darwinian: It's how they survived as long as they did.[105]

The creators of this project chose not to create a numbered list of these foods but rather, to present them "as we believe they exist in reality: all on the same table." The website homepage has an interactive image of a table full of different "Jewish" foods. Users are able to spin the table and to click on any of the items for more information. Some of the chosen foods are fairly predictable: bagels, charoset, gefilte fish and kugel. Others however are more unexpected, perhaps more surprising choices: Concord grape juice, kosher sushi, Sweet'n Low, the used tea bag, sugar cereals for Shabbos morning and even… bacon, with short essays from a range of writers, Jewish educators, chefs and other contributors that correspond with each of the one hundred food items. This project is truly reflective of both the ever-changing nature of Jewish food as well as its amorphous, sometimes ambiguous

[105] "About," Tablet Magazine's 100 Most Jewish Foods, accessed January 10, 2019, https://100jewishfoods.tabletmag.com/about/

identity. While one could argue that without a firm boundary around what is and therefore what is not Jewish food, we are left with a category that has no definition. This flexibility also allows for evolution, growth and an ability to welcome a range of Jewish expressions and experiences.

The Deli

As previously mentioned, the Jewish food renaissance is hitting so hard and so quickly that many ideas and predictions written within the last decade are already out of date. One such example can be seen in *Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli*. Following an excellent history of the Jewish deli, author Ted Merwin offers his conclusion, "The Contemporary Jewish Deli – Whistling Past the Graveyard." Merwin paints a rather bleak picture of the current state of the deli and what may be in the future. He refers to the deli as both "postgastronomic" and "postcommunal" in that deli food is no longer central in American Jewish life and that it is no longer a central gathering place for the Jewish community.[106] *Pastrami on Rye*, written in 2015, can be seen as already somewhat outdated as the deli has in recent years begun its phoenix-like revival. Merwin does, however, offer a prediction that may be becoming reality; he closes his chapter with a slight nod to hope, writing, "As long as both Jews and non-Jews want to eat 'traditional' Jewish food, delis will always exist in our culture. If they die out, they will be resurrected and reinvented in some form in the future."[107] Though written with an air of pessimism, I

[106] Ted Merwin, *Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 169.
[107] Ibid, 189.

believe that we are living in a time where both of these statements are true: the deli of 2019 is both an opportunity for Jews and non-Jews to eat "traditional" Jewish food.

What have been the determining factors in the success or failure of a Jewish deli in today's world? David Sax muses on this question in his book, *Save the Deli*. Of those who have tried and fallen short, Sax writes:

> Many have attempted to fix it, change it, or reinvent it in one way or another. They've brought in foods from different cultures, expanded menus greatly, and changed the taste of the classics depending on trends. Others have poured their money into the decoration, trying to make the deli look more fancy or more fun. None have had the desired effect: to save the Jewish delicatessen by rescuing its relevance…[108]

Of those who succeeded, Sax notes:

> No one started with a concept or a business plan. They all originated with a brisket, some spices, and a firm desire to put out their own version of a classic. Each of these were begun by cooks and chefs who had gourmet skills, but who craved comfort food most of all.[109]

Based on Sax's understanding, modern deli success is rooted in authenticity and simplicity, an inclination towards *haimishness* and away from pretention. These trends are consistent with much of the food culture and perspectives of Eastern European Jews discussed in the second chapter.

While there are more and more delis closing every year,[110] there are also new delis opening and old delis that have chosen to evolve and reinvent. Mamaleh's Delicatessen and

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[108] David Sax, *Save the Deli: In Search of Perfect Pastrami, Crusty Rye, and the Heart of the Jewish Delicatessen* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2010), 292.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Shannon Sarna, "The Jewish Delis that Closed in 2018," The Nosher, December 27, 2018, accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/the-jewish-delis-that-closed-in-2018/

Restaurant in Kendall Square Cambridge, Massachusetts; Call Your Mother: A Jew-ish Deli in Washington, D.C.; Caplansky's Deli and Caplansky Deli Food Truck nicknamed "The Bubby Doris" in Toronto, Ontario and the longstanding but re-imagined Russ and Daughters in New York City; these and many more restaurants are thriving with menus rooted in traditional deli fare but with modern adaptations and with branding that feels modern and is appealing to a millennial audience but in ways that stay true to the food and the culture; this success represents a delicate balance. These delis advertise a welcoming environment for those who are deeply connected Jewishly, for non-Jews and for anyone and everyone who finds them somewhere in between. Delis are closing, but on the whole the deli culture can be considered as growing.

Conclusions: The Future of Jewish Food and Identity

In this exploration of American Jewish food and identity over the last two to three centuries, I believe that in essence, "we are what we [are] eat[ing]": we can track where Jewish society collectively stands with its own identity based on what they are eating and the role that food plays in Jewish life and Jewish lives. Based on this premise, today's Jewish food culture is both something to be studied and watched as we try to understand where Jewish individuals and communities stand as well as a tool to engage both Jews who are already integrated into organized and communities and those who are not.

If what we are eating reflects how we are identifying, I think that many Jews, particularly younger Jews, are searching for meaningful connections without pigeon-holing

themselves into one specific identity categorization. I believe that Jewish food will continue to be a way for young Jews to incorporate and honor their multiple identities at once. Additionally, this way of thinking about Jewish food is an opportunity to engage individuals both from interfaith backgrounds and those in interfaith relationships through programming in any range of settings such as synagogues, community centers, non-profit events as well as engaging individuals in their own homes.

For some, this may be about intersectionality and integrating the full spectrum of their ethnicities and heritages, for others it may be about other identities. For example, with increasing awareness of ecological and ethical issues with regard to food sourcing and consumption practices, there are many who are incorporating their food ethics and Jewish morals into their food. For example, in an article featured in the New Jersey Jewish News one journalist writes:

> The new Jewish food movement has a "back to the land" ethos that began as a marriage of kashrut with sustainable farming and food justice. Its early voice was the Jewish environmental organization Hazon, which first articulated its vision through the blog "The Jew and the Carrot," launched in November 2006… Of course, the new Jewish food movement mirrored contemporaneous secular movements fueled by books like Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and the rising popularity of Community Supported Agriculture co-ops.[111]

In this way, Jewish food allows young Jews passionate about environmental concerns to unite their ecological and Jewish morals through conscious eating and Jewish food that is sustainably and ethically sourced. Ashkenazi Jewish cooking has traditionally been a no to low waste form of cooking, seeking to use as many parts of an ingredient as possible. While

[111] Johanna R. Ginsberg, "Meet Shannon Sarna, 'Modern Jewish Baker'," New Jersey Jewish News, August 30, 2017, accessed January 16, 2019, https://njjewishnews.timesofisrael.com/meet-shannon-sarna-modern-jewish-baker/

these practices were largely born out of financial constraints, they can be translated into modern contexts.

Looking more practically, the relationship between food and identity offers engagement possibilities. With the questions of how to engage Jews, particularly millennials and baby boomers, looming heavily on Jewish communities, perhaps food could be an answer. Food-based programming; cooking classes, lectures, communal dinners, chefs-in-residence in congregations and more; can offer congregations and Jewish communal organizations opportunities to speak to people's Jewish souls and identities. It could be that food is the untapped frontier of Jewish engagement and that we as a Jewish community can grow and evolve in meaningful ways through food.

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