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The Children of the Concrete:
Jewish Immigrants in the New York Public School System
at the Turn of the 20th Century

Richard Ariel Weiss

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Educational Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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Abstract

The Children of the Concrete: Jewish Immigrants in the New York Public School System at the Turn of the 20th Century

Richard Ariel Weiss

This thesis attempts to illustrate the relatively successful adaptation by Jewish immigrants to American life by focusing on the experiences of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who moved to New York City between 1881-1914. It examines, in particular, the role of the public education system in this process. Jews used the public education system for their socialization and advancement in New York society by introducing community participation through innovation, adult education programs and transition curricula for teaching language and good citizenship notions. In the final analysis, initiatives by the Jewish community, broke the total hegemonic control described in most revisionist historians' writings. The concept of "voluntary and involuntary minorities" developed by Ogbu is helpful in explaining the Jewish case as an exception from the revisionist interpretation of the role of schooling in America at the turn of the century.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Charts.....	iii
List of Illustrations.....	iv
Credits.....	v
Poem.....	vi
Map of New York City.....	vii

Introduction.....	1
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction.....	5
The Revisionists.....	7
Social Class.....	7
Michael Katz and Bureaucracy in Education.....	9
Joel Spring: Values for Industrialized Education.....	12
Colin Greer and the Great School Legend.....	15
Revisionists and Immigrants in the United States.....	19
The Assimilation of Immigrants.....	19

CHAPTER 2

Jewish Immigrants of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.....	23
Background Information.....	24
Jewish Life in the Old World.....	24
Exodus.....	27
The Permanence Of Jewish Immigration.....	28
The Occupations of Jewish Immigrants.....	29
Literacy Levels of Jewish Immigrants.....	31

CHAPTER 3

The Education of Jewish Immigrants of the Lower East Side.....	32
Attitudes and Values of Jewish Immigrants Towards Education.....	32
The Role of the Established German Jews.....	36
Going to School.....	37

The Primary School Curriculum of the Board of Education	39
Hygiene And Moral Education.....	41
Teachers' Perception of the Children.....	42
Innovation and Innovators.....	44
Adult Education and the Jews of the Lower East Side: A Collaborative Effort.....	44
The Educational Alliance.....	45
Paul Abelson.....	46
Henry M. Leipziger.....	48
Felix Warburg.....	51
The Lectures.....	52
"Universities of the Ghetto".....	54
Concluding Remarks.....	55
Jewish Women of the Lower East Side.....	56
Jewish Women's Role in Eastern Europe.....	56
The Jewish Girl's Curriculum in New York's Public Schools.....	59
Changes to Young Jewish Women.....	62
The 'Promise' Of An Education.....	64
Concluding Remarks.....	66
<u>CHAPTER 4</u>	
A Critique of the Revisionists.....	68
Were the Schools a "Weapon of Social Control and Indoctrination" or the Path Towards Social Progress"?	69
Social Mobility.....	73
Compulsory Schooling.....	76
Assimilation and Americanization: Did the Schools Change the Students for Better or Worse?	79
"Looking Through a Lens".....	82
One Explanation for Revisionists' Shortcomings.....	84
Some Final Comments.....	89
Bibliography.....	92

List of Tables and Charts

New York City Board of Education's Curriculum (1904).....	41
Lectures Given in Yiddish, 1903-1904, Adult Free Lectures Program, Board of Education of New York City.....	49
Age of Jewish Immigrants, 1899-1910.....	106
European Immigrants Aliens Admitted/Departed Ratio 1908-1910.....	106
Foreign Born by Nationalities, Census of 1890.....	107
General Nativity.....	108
Illiteracy of European Immigrants, 1899-1910.....	109
Jewish Immigration at the Ports of New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, 1886- 1898.....	110
Jewish Immigration at the Port of New York, July 1885, to June 1886, by Month and Country of Birth.....	110
Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881 to 1919, by Decade and Country of Birth.....	111
Jewish Immigration from Russia, 1881-1910.....	112
Sex of Total and Jewish Immigrants (%), 1899-1910.....	113
Number of Students Enrolled in Day Schools.....	114
Number of Elementary Schools.....	115
Participation of Jews in Occupations in the Russian Empire, 1897.....	116
Jewish Population of the United States.....	117
Jewish Immigrants Reporting Occupations, 1899-1910.....	118
Jewish Immigration to the United States.....	119
Immigration and Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881-1910.....	120
Number of Teachers in the Day Schools.....	121
Number of Kindergarten Classes.....	121
Total Immigration, Total Jewish Immigration from Romania, 1899-1910.....	123
Total Immigration, Total Jewish Immigration from Austria-Hungary, 1899- 1910.....	124
Number of Children in High Schools.....	125

List of Illustrations

Map of the Lower East Side and Manhattan.....	VII
Educational Alliance Classroom.....	126
Home Economics Class, 1890.....	126
Typical Classroom.....	126
Synagogue on the Lower East Side.....	127
Shopping on the Lower East Side.....	127
Cemetery.....	128
Latin American Butcher.....	128
Little Italy at Dusk.....	129
Fujinese Church.....	129
Brazilian Barber.....	130
Synagogue on the Lower East.....	130
Former Synagogue now Houses Church.....	131
Delancey Street.....	131
Cooper Union.....	132
Roof Playground.....	132

Credits

page vii-Map adapted from Rand McNally's Map of New York (1989)

All data for charts except pp.114-115 from Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881*, pp. 159-195.

Illustrations: pp. 127-132 Photos taken by Richard Ariel Weiss
pp. 126 and 132 taken from Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*.

CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE

Dorothy Law Nolte

If a child lives with criticism,
he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility,
he learns to fight.

If a child lives with fear,
he learns to be apprehensive.

If a child lives with pity,
he learns to feel sorry for himself.

If a child lives with ridicule,
he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with jealousy,
he learns what envy is.

If a child lives with shame,
he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with encouragement,
he learns to be confident.

If a child lives with tolerance,
he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with praise,
he learns to be appreciative.

If a child lives with acceptance,
he learns to love.

If a child lives with approval,
he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with recognition,
he learns that it is good to have a goal.

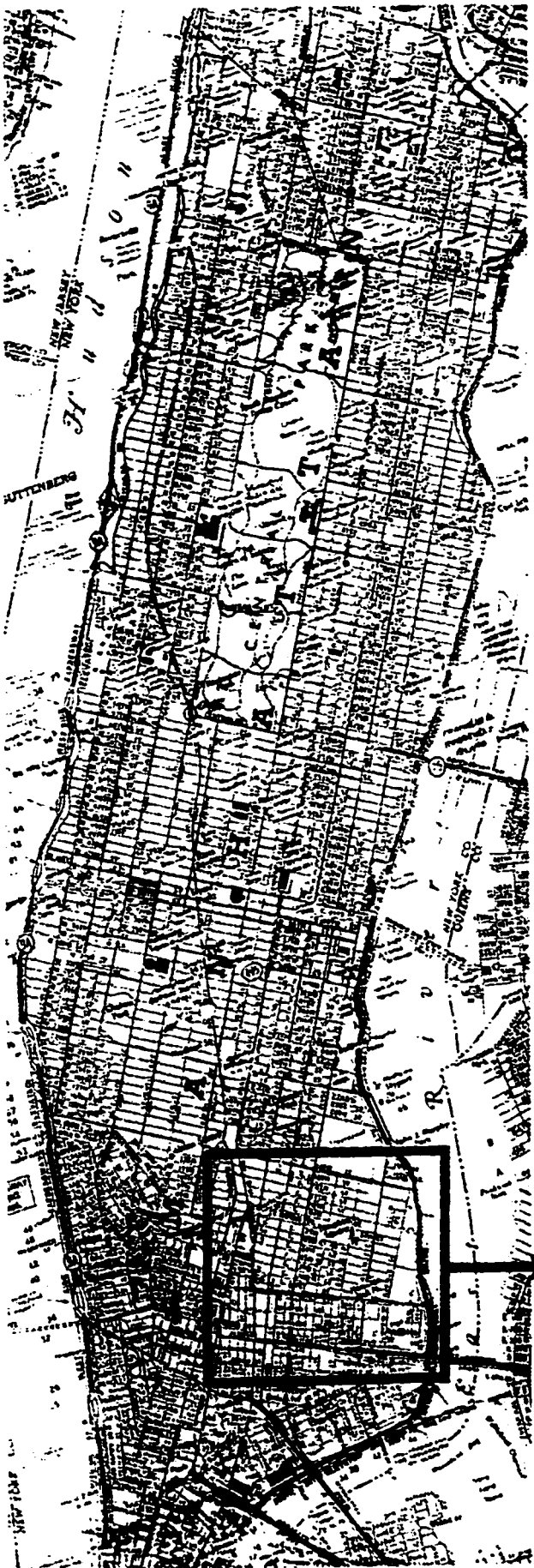
If a child lives with sharing,
he learns about generosity.

If a child lives with honesty and fairness,
he learns what truth and justice are.

If a child lives with security,
he learns to have faith in himself and in those about him

If a child lives with friendliness,
he learns that the world is a nice place in which to live.

If you live with serenity,
your child will live with peace of mind.



LEFT:
THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN

BELOW:
THE LOWER EAST SIDE



Introduction

Regardless of whether our families came to North America rich or poor, educated or ignorant, the prevailing motivation for coming to these shores was seeking asylum from wars, persecution, economic and social disadvantage, discrimination and hope that their lives would be enriched. Central to this hope was the belief that in North America, education was the gateway to opportunity. Armed with an education, children of the poor can climb the social class ladders that lead to success.

Traditional historians at the turn of the century such as Elwood Cubberley portrayed the American educational system as one where the public schools were agents of progress. Cubberley's *Public Education in the United States* was an amalgamation of American ideological thought over the previous half century. Writing at the turn of the century, when patriotic emotions were high, he portrayed the rise of the American public school as the definitive victory of the forces of progress over the forces of reaction. The new profession was an honorable one, and the work of the public schools was the finest achievement of American society. The common schools increased opportunity, taught morality, leadership and citizenship, and maintained social mobility. The

school's job was to stabilize a new nation, respecting the integrity of ethnic groups' structures and identity, while leaving the individual unencumbered to explore and progress in society regardless of class or religion.

This notion of education as the tonic for curing poverty, hopelessness and despair has come under attack. Revisionist historians have reinterpreted history in order to understand the problems of the present; they believe that schooling in America was by no means the glorious example of democracy that has been portrayed in history books. Rather than viewing education as the great agent of democracy, they challenged this traditional view in order to better understand the current state of affairs in North American society. This essay will attempt to show that the Revisionists' analysis cannot explain the success of Jews and the role education played in their ascension. By focusing on the experiences of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who moved to New York City between 1881 and 1914, I reexamine some Revisionist perceptions and generalizations.

In this first chapter of this thesis, I will present a brief discussion of some Revisionist theories, perceptions and critiques of those who made and wrote earlier American educational history. Michael Katz, Colin Greer, Joel Spring, Clarence Karier, Samuel Bowles, and David Gintis represent the principal

Revisionists covered in section one.

Chapter two will look at Jewish immigrants before and after their arrival in America. I have chosen the years between 1881 and 1914 for this discussion. This period is characterized by a tremendous influx of Jewish immigrants from Russia, Poland, Romania, and Austro-Hungary. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 signified the end of a brief period of toleration of Jews in Russia, and the onset of World War I in 1914 marked the end of a great wave of immigration as the world stood on the brink of profound change. This section will recount the nature and character of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, including such aspects as literacy levels, attitudes towards education, occupations, and other key elements of their cultural makeup.

Stephan F. Brumberg's *Going to America, Going to School* provides a detailed account of the educational experiences of Jewish immigrants. He conducted 26 interviews with former students and teachers in the New York public school system at the turn of the century. Brumberg's use of interviews provided a check against contemporary historians' perceptions of the events of the time. His works have proved invaluable to anyone studying urban education at the turn of the century.

Chapter three will discuss the educational experiences of Jewish immigrants and some of the leaders who were prominent in assimilating and educating them on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. While arguing that school was the main factor responsible for Jewish success, the vital role played by these leaders will be acknowledged.

Chapter four will focus on some of the shortcomings of the Revisionists' arguments as applied to the case of Jewish immigrants. I am not convinced that the Revisionists' arguments can be applied universally and I shall advance some arguments to this end.

In summary, this thesis will attempt to illustrate the relatively successful adaptation by Jewish immigrants between 1881-1914 to the public educational system. By introducing community participation through innovation, adult education programs and transition curricula for teaching language and good citizenship notions, Jews used the public education system for their socialization and advancement in New York society. In the final analysis, the control exercised by the public education system was mediated by innovative initiatives by the Jewish community, breaking the total hegemonic control described in most revisionists' writings.

Chapter 1-

Introduction

Revisionist historians describe the primary function of education as the support and transmission of the values and practices of the dominant group of society. Diane Ravitch summarizes the gulf between Revisionists and Liberal historians succinctly: Where Liberals had argued that the spread of public schooling was social progress, radicals saw the public school as a weapon of social control and indoctrination. Liberals maintained that reforms such as compulsory education freed children from oppressive workplaces and “liberated” people from their social origins. Radicals saw compulsory schooling as an expansion of the coercive power of the state and schools as a social sorting device that supports and perpetuates an unjust class system. Where liberals worked to insure that individual merit would be awarded without regard to race and religion, radicals described the outcome of this effort as meritocracy, hierarchy and bureaucracy.¹

The key reason for progressive reform was to ensure that the system would work efficiently and effectively. Liberal reformers would use their power to

¹ Diane Ravitch, *The Revisionists Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools* (New York, Basic Books, 1978) pp. 3-19.

ensure that this would be achieved. As Clarence Karier put it:

“The roots of the current crisis in American culture lie deep in both the social and intellectual history of the past one hundred years. Actually, the crisis is the result of both success and the failure of the philosophy of enlightened progress. The collective side of that philosophy, with its scientifically organized technology and computer-managed bureaucracy, has become a reality; on the other side, however, individual freedom, dignity, and well-being have not fared so well.”²

In 1968, the publication of Michael Katz's *The Irony of Early School Reform* represented the inception of radical Revisionist history of education. This was followed by books by authors such as Clarence Karier, Joel Spring, Colin Greer, Samuel Bowles, and Herbert Gintis. These scholars were proponents of diverse ideological points of view. Joel Spring advanced the anarchist perspective, while Bowles and Gintis were Marxist in their orientation.

² Clarence Karier, “Liberal Ideology and the Quest for Orderly Change”. *Roots of Crisis* (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1973) pp. 85-86.

The Revisionists

Social Class

Social class is believed to determine every aspect of life. We usually base most of our assumptions about people and institutions based on social class. Samuel Bowles and David Gintis are most prominent in this discussion. They are Neo-Marxist economists, not historians. Their analysis is, nonetheless, pertinent to our discussion. Bowles and Gintis' views of the history of education can be summarized by the following points:

“The educational system does not add to or subtract from the overall degree of inequality and repressive personal development. Rather, it is understood as an institution which serves to perpetuate the social relationships of economic life through which these patterns are set, by facilitating a smooth integration of youth into the labour force. Schools foster legitimate inequality through the ostensibly meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students, and allocate them to distinct positions in the occupational hierarchy. Schools foster types of personal development compatible with the relationships of dominance and subordinacy in the economic sphere.”

“The educational system operates in this manner through a close correspondence between the social relationships which govern personal interaction in the work place and the social relationships of the educational system. The relationships between of authority and control between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students and their work replicate the hierarchical division of labour which dominates the work place. Power is organized along vertical lines of authority from administration to faculty to student body.”³

³ Samuel Bowles, David Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York, Basic Books, 1976) pp. 10-12.

Inequality in capitalist societies manifests itself in two ways: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative inequality refers to the length of time a child attends school. Children from the upper strata of society usually attend school for a longer time than children from working class background.

Qualitative inequality focuses on the difference in the type of education a child from each class will receive. The upper class child will receive an education with a greater focus on academics, while a child from the lower strata may usually be 'guided' towards vocational training.

The educational expectations of students differ greatly between the social classes. School authorities (teachers, administrators, guidance counsellors) unconsciously ensure that class-based inequalities persist. The perception of whether a student should go to college or enter the work force is related to the child's social status. Tracking, a means of sorting the "desirable" from the "undesirable" for a certain class membership, is one tool used for ensuring that inequalities will endure.

The system of grading students is used to justify and legitimize the class-based inequalities. This has the effect of preserving the class-based system and allowing the larger social system to operate with a minimal amount of

disturbance.

Michael Katz and Bureaucracy in Education

Revisionists have analyzed the relationship between the structure and purpose of institutions. Michael Katz asserts that bureaucracy was chosen in order to institutionalize racism and social class bias in educational systems; that there is a great disparity between the ideals of education made by earlier reformers and the reality of the state of education in America; that the American educational system has remained unchanged in the last one hundred years, and it is universal, tax-supported, free, compulsory, bureaucratic, racist, and class-biased.⁴

The purpose of schooling over the last hundred years, according to Katz, has been:

"The inculcation of attitudes that reflect dominant social and industrial values; the structure has been bureaucracy."⁵

⁴ Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America*. (New York, Praeger, 1975) page xviii.

Change

⁵ Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, page xvi.

The result is that the schools treat children in an inhumanely impersonal way and are directed in a way that will, with few exceptions, lead the student to inherit his parents' status.

The introduction of bureaucracy as the preeminent organizational form of education was no accident nor was it inevitable. It was the result of a combination of purpose and structure. Other possible alternatives were ignored by reformers because bureaucracy fit the purpose of preparing children for the industrial world. The introduction of certain innovations over the years such as kindergarten, vocational schools, testing, and vocational guidance have made a difference over the last century. Although they have not changed the basic structural features of American education.

Katz asserts that the main goal of schools is to make children orderly, industrious, law-abiding, and respectful of authority.⁶ The propaganda disclosed by its supporters exulted the schools of providing the tools necessary for success. However, the schools were designed in a manner that mirrored the social structure that created them; the poor child becomes the poor adult. The higher positions in the occupational structure are reserved for those at the

⁶ Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, page xvi.

higher end of the social class structure.

“Despite the existence of free, universal and compulsory schooling, most poor children become poor adults. Schools are not democratic engines for identifying talent and matching it with opportunity. The children of the affluent by and large take the best marks and the best jobs. The reason can be found in ...the combination of purpose and structure that has characterized American education for the last one hundred years.”⁷

Katz believes that there is a functional relationship between the way schools are organized and what they are supposed to do. This relationship existed a century ago, and still exists today. To Katz, the elements of social class and bureaucracy are key if one wishes to understand the history of American public education:

“Today’s educational structures are historical products; they represent patterns that have become deeply embedded in American society and enormously resistant to change. The techniques with which the system maintains its equilibrium have themselves become traditions.”⁸

One of the most important aspects of the Liberals’ “reform” was the effort to improve the bureaucratic structures and features of schools in a manner that would make them more efficient.

⁷ Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, page xvi.

⁸ Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, page xvi.

The New York Public School Society represented what Katz called “paternalistic voluntarism” in educational organization. Established in 1805, its goal was to provide basic skills such as reading and ‘morals’ to working-class children. The Society was run by a group of unpaid elitists from New York. While it may have been coined the term “free school”, there is no doubt that it represented a class-based system of education. It provided the ruling class a means of “civilizing” the working class to ensure an orderly, safe society that would remain undisturbed. As Katz summarized it:

“Aside from its minuscule per pupil cost, this mechanistic form of pedagogy, which reduced education to a drill, seemed appropriate because the schools served lower-class children who were likened to unfinished products needing efficient inculcation with norms of docility, cleanliness, sobriety, and obedience. The zealous amateurs of the New York Public School Society did not design their system for their own children or for the children of friends. Rather, they attempted to ensure social order through socialization of the poor in cheap, mass schooling factories.”⁹

Joel Spring: Values for Industrialized Education.

The advent of Kindergarten was yet another example of the elite class forcing their values on the lower classes of society. The first kindergarten opened in 1873 in St-Louis. Its stated purpose was to deal with urban poverty. The superintendent of the city’s schools believed that the only way to save the

⁹ Michael Katz, *Education in American History* (New York, Praeger, 1973), page 39.

children of the inner city ghettos was to get them into the school system as soon as possible. The superintendent claimed that the traditional socializing agencies such as the family and the church had evaporated. Therefore, schooling was to pick up the slack from the decaying traditional sources of values. Kindergarten would teach those values, and manners that were considered important to live in a civilized society.¹⁰

Joel Spring provides an interesting analysis of the effects of vocational education both in the realm of theory and practice. The emergence of vocational education has played a key role in evaluating human capital, determining the future role of children in a growing industrial society.

Vocational education advocates argue that the traditional curriculum did not prepare students to enter the work force.

In 1905, the Committee on Industrial Education reported that, in their view, two types of capital existed in the world. The first type included land, machinery, and money, and the second type was human capital which included the character, brains and muscle of the people. According to the Committee, this second type had not been properly developed and this failure

¹⁰ Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1990: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development*. (New York, Longman, 1990) pp. 164-65.

was leading to great industrial waste. The committee feared that America was losing its competitive edge in the world and that vocational education would reduce the discontent of workers: “Industrial and social unrest is due in large measure to a lack of a system of practical education fitting workers for their calling.”

The 1914 Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education concluded that this form of education would meet the individual needs of students. The report redefined the meaning of equality of opportunity:

“Vocational Training is needed to democratize the education of the country, by recognizing different tastes and abilities and by giving an equal opportunity for all to prepare for their life work.”¹¹

This marked a drastic shift in focus. In the nineteenth century, equality of opportunity meant that everyone would receive the same education in order to compete in the labour market. However, this report, according to Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, resulted in “strengthening and legitimizing the evolving dual system of education”. With Federal Government funding and support, this meant that a dual system of education with clearly different motives and objectives, separating vocational from academic training, was

¹¹ Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1990*, pp. 212-3.

now entrenched in American society.¹²

Colin Greer and the Great School Legend

Colin Greer challenges the traditional, liberal views of the history of education in America, calling it the “Great School Legend”. He attacks a number of traditional views:

- *The public school system built American democracy.*
- *The public school system took the backward and poor, the ragged, ill-prepared ethnic minorities who crowded into the cities, educated and Americanized them, and molded them into the homogenous productive middle class that is America's strength and pride.¹³*

Greer challenges these widely held views. He believes that the “Great School Legend” is responsible for the present resistance to change.

The persistence of this legend has had a tremendously negative effect on the poor’s living conditions in urban areas. Amplifying Katz, Greer believes that with regard to assumptions and practice, the schools have changed very little

¹² Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642-1990*, page 214.

¹³ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*. (New York, Basic Books, 1972) pp. 3-4.

over the last century, and the poor have suffered the consequences.

Greer includes the Abolitionist movement in his discussion. He feels that many prominent figures in that movement were also important figures in school reform. While the traditional perception of Abolitionists is one of “great reformers”, or “fighters of truth and justice”, it is misleading. Greer believes that much can be learned about liberal reform when looking at the two movements together. Slavery was contrary to the development of a consumer labour force for industrial society. In order to consume these goods, workers must receive monetary compensation. School changes were related to the emergence of a multitude of unskilled immigrant workers who threatened the status quo. This group had to be controlled and socialized in an appropriate manner. The new industrial society emerging in America needed a new type of “white collar” worker that possessed clerical skills.¹⁴

Traditional historians have overlooked the problems and mistakes made in the past by early "reformers" and labelled them as 'errors' made with good intentions by well-meaning people. Like other Revisionists, Greer tries to discredit traditional historians and the conventional wisdom that comes with

¹⁴ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*, page 61.

them, labeling their views as nothing more than self-serving rhetoric, propaganda and lies. The interests of those higher up on the social ladder have always taken precedence over the reformer and his “good intentions”.

Revisionists criticize the early school reform movement as being little more than a pawn of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominance. By the 1930's, Protestant control of the school board withered. Replacing them were Jews, Irishmen, and Italians. With this retreat, the old elite retreated to what Greer calls 'extra-school' agencies such as the Public Education Association, the National Education Association (NEA), and the University Schools of Education. The elite were able to exercise power on a system from which their very places in the establishment precluded them.¹⁵ Greer states: The elite's control of the school boards dissipated with time. Yet they remained highly visible.

*“The reform platform they adopted expressed both their concern for the circumstances of urban poverty as well as their concern over their increasing distance from the institutional centers of urban electoral power.”*¹⁶

Textbooks used during this period were culturally insensitive and propagated

¹⁵ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*, pp. 81-2.

¹⁶ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*, page 82.

prejudices and negative stereotypes. Negative perceptions concerning the newcomers were prevalent in the curriculum. Greer, in his study of textbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century found that all minority groups, with the exception of Northern Europeans, were portrayed in a negative manner. Jews, Italians, Chinese, and blacks were mean, criminal, immoral, drunken, sly, and stupid.¹⁷

¹⁷ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*, page 89.

Revisionists and Immigrants in the United States

As the 19th century came to a close, the volume and nature of immigration in the United States changed dramatically. Before 1880, most immigrants came from northern or western Europe. For a variety of factors, a new wave of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived on American soil in massive numbers. The total immigrant population from southern Europe increased from 18% between 1880 and 1890, to 71% by 1910.

This new wave of immigration posed problems for those who benefitted from the established social order. The immigrant was perceived as a threat to social order. As xenophobia grew at the end of the 19th century, calls for 'Americanization' of immigrants became predominant.

The Assimilation of Immigrants

The view of Revisionist historians about the immigrants' experience in America is very different from that of the traditional historians. The consensus that Revisionist historians take towards immigrants is that the schools did not properly assimilate them. The key for the ruling elite when faced with the onslaught of immigrants (in the second half of the 19th and

first quarter or so the 20th centuries) was the 'Americanization' of the 'foreigners'.

The immigrant was often viewed as a threat to the established social order. In order to preserve the "American way", the Americanization of the new arrivals was of paramount importance. The immigrant needed to be educated for his own good. What defined good? Goodness was defined as the values of the new Liberal reformer with a strong, pious, Protestant missionary desire to convert the heathens among them. Many educators called for compulsory

Americanization. One educator stated that:

"When the people established this government they had a certain standard of intelligence and morality. Once Americans could assume that an intelligent and moral people will conform to the requirements of good citizenship."

By the end of the 19th century this was no longer a given:

"People have come here who are not entitled to freedom in the same sense as those who established this government. It was unthinkable to lower this idea of intelligence and morality to the standard of the newcomers.¹⁸

The NEA leadership made these comments during a time when many tried to distinguish between the more desirable northern European immigrants (who assimilated easily), with eastern and southern Europeans (who, along with

¹⁸ NEA Addresses and Proceedings, 1891, pp. 395, 398, 393-403 in David Tyack, *Constructing Difference*, page 14.

their different customs, also brought with them different languages). The NEA voiced a position, widely held at that time, that foreign colonies were forming. The newcomers were inferior in intelligence and morality to those who preceded them. Therefore, their children were compelled to attend school, learn English, and be deliberately inculcated with American political and cultural values. Some politicians of the day insisted that the nation could be saved only by excluding, or severely limiting, immigration from the offending nations. ¹⁹

Immigrant assimilation and mobility are summed up quite neatly by Colin Greer:

“Where immigrant traditions matched dominant American values, needs and expectations, assimilation defined by mobility took place; where matching was less sure, so was progress, it seems.”²⁰

Unlike the feeling one may get from reading traditional and patriotic accounts of American educational history, the immigrant's road to assimilation was long and painful.

¹⁹ David Tyack, *Constructing Difference*, page 14.

²⁰ Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend*, page 100.

The next chapter will focus on the educational experiences of Jewish immigrants in the New York public school system. I will also discuss some of the leaders who were prominent in assimilating and educating Jews on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Chapter 2.

JEWISH IMMIGRANTS OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE OF MANHATTAN

Between 1881 and 1914, the United States witnessed a massive influx of new immigrants. This new wave of immigrants was mostly from Southern and Eastern Europe. Unlike earlier streams of new immigrants, who were mostly from Western and Northern Europe, this new wave was viewed as undesirable by established Americans. Contempt for unfamiliar speech, dress food and values fueled a xenophobic attitude among established Americans.

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe made up the largest group from this new wave. Fleeing persecution in Russia, Romania, Lithuania, and Hungary, Jews were very willing to abandon their lives of the old world and start over in America.

Background Information

This section will focus on the attitudes of Eastern European Jewish immigrants toward the promise of education as they settled in their new homeland. Some background information, describing the reasons for immigration, literacy levels, and occupational background of the new arrivals will prove invaluable for this discussion.

Jewish Life in the Old World

For Russian Jews, it is difficult to find a period in time where they were “comfortable”. The monarchs who ruled Russia believed that tolerating other religions would pose a great threat to Christianity. Some of the most severe measures included the conversion of Jews through coercive measures. When faced with conversion, most chose to die rather than yield to their oppressors’ desires. Jews were not viewed as citizens; rather, they were perceived as threats. The spectrum of persecution ranged from economic oppression, to outright murder in the form of pogroms. ²¹

²¹ Irving Howe, *The Immigrants Jews of New York, 1881 to the Present*. (New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) page 12.

From 1825 to 1855, the reign of Nicholas I proved to be disastrous for Russian Jews. Hundreds of anti-Jewish laws were enacted. These decrees included expulsion from villages, censorship of Jewish books, interference with the curriculum of Jewish schools, and conscription that would take away to the army Jewish children as young as twelve for periods of up to twenty-five years.²² A portrayal of a group of conscripted Jewish children was given by Alexander Herzen:

"You see, they have collected a crowd of cursed little Jewish boys of eight or nine years old" [a Russian officer tells Herzen in a village in the province of Vyatka]. "... They just die off like flies. A Jew boy, you know, is such a frail, weakly creature...he is not used to tramping in the mud for ten hours a day and eating biscuit...being among strangers, no father nor mother nor petting; well, they cough and cough until they cough themselves into their graves."

"Pale, exhausted, with frightened faces, they stood in thick, clumsy, soldiers' overcoats with stand-up collars, fixing helpless, pitiful eyes on the garrison soldiers who were roughly getting them into ranks...And these sick children, without care or kindness, exposed to the icy wind that blows unobstructed from the Arctic Ocean, were going to their graves."²³

The destruction of Russian Jewry was an obvious goal for Nicholas I. Another one of his secret decrees stated:

²² Irving Howe, *The Immigrant Jews of New York*, page 6.

²³ Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the Eastern European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made*. (New York, Schocken, 1989) pp. 6-7.

*“The purpose in educating Jews is to bring about their gradual merging with the Christian nationalities and to uproot those superstitious and harmful prejudices which are instilled by the teachings of the Talmud.”*²⁴

March 1st, 1881 marks a very important date in Jewish history. Alexander II, Tsar of Russia, was assassinated by terrorists. His assassination marked the end of a period of mild tolerance towards Jews in Russia. His reign represented a period of acceptance of Jewish students in Russia’s universities, relatively free travel throughout previously barred areas of Russia for Jewish businessmen, and a reduction in the number of years required for military service to five years. Within a matter of weeks following Alexander II’s death, a tidal wave of government-sponsored pogroms and persecution swept across Russia.

Economic pressure was applied with the establishment of the May Laws of 1882. This legislation severely restricted the rights of Jews to settle in cities, eliminated their religious rights, and expunged most professional, industrial and agricultural pursuits.²⁵ While Jews never enjoyed economic prosperity, the enactment of the May Laws eliminated all opportunities for economic

²⁴ Irving Howe, *The Immigrant Jews of New York*, page 7.

²⁵ Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in NYC 1880-1915*. (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977) page 18.

activity.

Alexander III's reign represented a return to many of the harsh anti-semitic decrees that plagued Russian Jewry. It became obvious that for a Jew, there was no hope for stability, tolerance and the chance to pursue economic and religious practices.

Exodus²⁶

The exodus from Russia, Poland, Romania and Austro-Hungary proceeded along four main routes:

1. Jews coming from the Ukraine and Southern Russia would usually cross the Austro-Hungarian border illegally, travel by train to Vienna or Berlin, and regroup themselves for the journey to one of the major ports of embarkation: Hamburg and Bremen in Germany, Rotterdam in Holland, and Antwerp in Belgium.
2. Jews emigrating from Western or Northwestern Russia would surreptitiously cross the German border and proceed to Berlin and then to northern ports.
3. Jews from the Austro-Hungarian empire would legally cross the German border, journey to Berlin, and there join with the mass of Jews from Russia to proceed to ports.

²⁶ For statistics on Jewish immigration patterns, please see pp. 106, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 120, 123, and 124.

4. Jews from Romania, whose mass migration began in 1899, travelled mostly through Vienna, Frankfurt am Main, and then the Holland ports, though a few took the sea voyage from Trieste or Fiume.²⁷

The Permanence Of Jewish Immigration

While some immigrant groups suffered from the "Bird of Passage" syndrome, the Jews knew their future was in America.²⁸ There was no turning back. One distinction between Jewish immigrants and other immigrant groups is that, unlike their Italian counterparts, Jewish newcomers had nothing to go back to. Many Italians left their familiar territories for America as economic refugees, hoping that they could make a small fortune and return home. While there is no doubt Jews hoped that the New World would bring economic prosperity, freedom from persecution played a dominant role concerning their motives. We can see a divergence in motives just by looking at the difference in migration patterns between the two groups. Italian immigrants generally came to America alone. Jewish immigrants, on the other hand, brought their families, revealing their desire and commitment to make their home in America. Unlike other immigrant groups, the Jews did not harbor any

²⁷ Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, page 28.

²⁸ please see table on page 106 entitled "European Immigrants Aliens Admitted/Departed Ratio, 1908-1910".

nostalgic feelings towards their mother countries. Between 1892 and 1896, for every 100 Italians moving to the United States, 43 returned home to Italy. Between 1907 and 1911, 73 out of 100 Italian immigrants returned home. Between 1908 and 1912, the overall repatriation rate for immigrants stood at 42%. For Jews, the rate stood at 7%.²⁹ Jews were in America to stay.

The Occupations of Jewish Immigrants³⁰

The skills and occupations of newly arrived immigrants shed light into their probable future occupations in the host country. Between 1899 and 1910, the largest group (45%) of Jewish immigrants belonged to the “no occupation” category. One reason for this high percentage is the great number of women and children among the group. Skilled laborers accounted for 37% of the total. This included tailors, dressmakers, seamstresses, hat and cap makers and miscellaneous garment workers.³¹ Unskilled workers among Jewish immigrants were virtually nonexistent; less than 1%, compared to 53% for

²⁹ Immigration. Commission. XII, 40, 42 Immigration. Commission., I, 16 in Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door*, pp. 29-30. And Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881-1910*. (New York, AMS Press, 1967) pp. 133- 139.

³⁰ please see tables on pp. 116 and 118.

³¹ Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881-1910*, pp. 140-145.

Italians.³²

Jewish men and women had a considerable amount of needlework experience. Approximately one-third of Jewish labour was employed in the garment industry. When Jews arrived in New York, the garment center of the world, they found employment within days, if not hours, after their arrival at Ellis Island.

For most new arrivals, the sweatshops and factories of New York City would be their destiny. Many looked forward to the day when they could walk out of the factory and move on to bigger and better occupations. However, most would not realize this dream.

³² Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door*, page 61.

Literacy Levels of Jewish Immigrants³³

Of the Jewish immigrants between 1899 and 1910, 26% were unable to read or write. For Italians, the rate was 47%. The illiteracy gap between men and women was highest among Jews from Eastern Europe, 20% for males and close to 37% for females.³⁴ The reason for this gap is gender-related role differences encoded in traditional Jewish religious practices. Males had to learn to read Hebrew, study the Torah and Talmud, and recite prayers or they would be unable to practice the religion properly.³⁵

³³ please see table on page 109.

³⁴ Samuel Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881-1910*, pp. 140- 145.

³⁵ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School: The Jewish Immigrant Public School Encounter in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*. (New York, Praeger Special Studies, 1986) page 26.

CHAPTER 3

THE EDUCATION OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS OF THE LOWER EAST SIDE

Attitudes and Values of Jewish Immigrants Towards Education

Among Jews of Eastern Europe, there was little merit and acceptance for a secular education. However, these attitudes rapidly changed in America. Once parents realized the opportunities for the children and their future role in society, their attitudes towards a secular curriculum changed as well. When did this change take place? Almost immediately after their arrival at Ellis Island. Jewish children of all ages were hungry for the type of knowledge that was offered in the public schools.

Jewish immigrants viewed education as their ticket to prosperity. The most important reason for their optimistic attitudes towards education was related to their experiences in Eastern Europe. The persecution they were subjected to in the old country made them more motivated to succeed. Upon their arrival in the United States, they understood the permanence of their move, and grasped any opportunity that was presented to them. Mary Antin, born in Russia in 1881, and immigrated to America in 1894, writes of her

first impressions of the thrill of an education:

“Education was free.” “...the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune and poverty. It was the one sure thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter.” “A little girl from across came and offered to conduct us to school. This child, who had never seen us till yesterday, who could not pronounce our names, who was not much better dressed than we, was able to offer us the freedom of the school of Boston! No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions, no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. The smallest child could show us the way.”³⁶

If Jewish immigrants were to succeed in the United States, they had to put aside the painful experiences of Eastern Europe. This did not necessarily mean that they wished to forget the past. Rather, Jews understood that a fresh start meant just that: starting anew. This fresh start meant "shedding" some of the ghosts of the past. This included language, religion and other cultural traits that shielded them during that difficult period of time in Eastern Europe. In America, it may have hurt or at least hindered progress. In Eastern Europe their culture was their salvation and a refuge from persecution and poverty. However, in America, they no longer needed religion and their customs to seek refuge. Their salvation could be found in their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for a brighter future.

³⁶ Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*. (New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912) page 186.

In Eastern Europe, Jews were docile, introverted, and were forced to accept and acquiesce to their subordinate social status. In America, because they could aspire to something greater, they could thrust ahead with vigor.

Regardless of others' perceptions, they forged ahead with zeal in a manner that liberated them from years of darkness, hopelessness and despair.

When Jewish immigrants were presented with two conflicting values, in this case the choice between a traditional education rooted in the Torah, and the secular curriculum of the public schools, many chose the latter. Jewish immigrants chose the prosperity of the next generation as being their paramount concern. They understood that this choice would sacrifice their traditional way of life to some degree. Jewish immigrants consciously made this choice, with some mild persuasion from established Jews; coercion played no role in their decision.

Attitudes serve a number of functions. The utilitarian aspect of attitudes served Jewish immigrants well. Jews were quite aware of the rewards ahead if they chose to accept and embrace the American school curriculum and its way of life.

After years of economic hardship, Jews equated economic liberation with

political liberation. If they were to enjoy their freedom in the new world, economic prosperity must be attained. Education was the only means to achieve this prosperity, Jewish immigrants made a conscious choice: Education was the key to the prosperity of future generations.

Education was held in higher esteem by Jewish immigrants more than other immigrant groups, such as Italians. For them, the primary goal for the family was to raise enough money to buy a house. As the family would prosper, the children would eventually reap those rewards. However, this usually came at the expense of their children's education. For Jews, owning property was not their primary concern. Jews in Europe were rarely allowed to own land.

Property was not the ultimate security. Rather, education was seen as the best road for success. Therefore, the male child's desire for an education was never challenged unless the family was in dire economic circumstances, or if the child could enter the family business. Kate Holladay Claghorn observed these ambitious newcomers:

“The poorest among them will make all possible sacrifices to keep his children in school, and one of the most striking social phenomena in New York City today is the way in which the Jews have taken possession of the public schools, in the highest as well as the lowest grades.”³⁷

³⁷ Kate Holladay Claghorn, *Reports of the Industrial Commission*, Volume XV, page 20.

The Role of the Established German Jews

When Eastern European Jewish immigrants started arriving, established and wealthy German Jews assumed that the new immigrants would naturally enroll in public schools.³⁸ To German Jews, the concept of religious schooling was completely foreign. These established Jews encouraged the new wave of immigrants to attend public schools in order to Americanize them. German Jews had little in common with the new arrivals. Their customs and languages were completely different. Yet, out of a sense of responsibility, they helped the new arrivals. Their advice: assimilate and Americanize. The German Jews thought that the best way to assimilate the new wave of immigrants was to strip them of their language and customs.³⁹ However, the German Jews' attempts at Americanization were criticized in some circles:

“Well-meant and prompted by generous motives as these attempts no doubt were, they probably did more harm than good. For instead of trying to preserve all that was valuable in the mental make-up of the Russian Jew-and much of it was of high and lasting value, even in the new environment-and, instead of adapting it

³⁸ German Jews began to arrive in great numbers to America in the 1820's. This trend continued in the 1830's, 40's, 50's, and 60's. For an excellent account of German-Jewish Immigration to America, please see Avrahan Barkai, *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914*. New York, Holmes & Meier, 1994.

³⁹ Boris D. Bogen. “Born a Jew”, *Autobiographies of American Jews*, page 399.

*gently and cautiously to their new conditions, these attempts, rudely ignoring the peculiar individuality of the Russian Jew, proceeded to hammer it by force into the mould of American life.” “As a consequence, the Russian Jews as a whole learned to look askance at all these attempts at Americanization, much as the favoured Americanization itself, and they refused to accept even those modifications of Jewish life which might have proved beneficial for the preservation of Judaism in this country.”*⁴⁰

Going to School⁴¹

In 1874, compulsory attendance and education laws were enacted, affecting all of New York’s schools. Appalled by the working conditions of children in the factories and tenements, compulsory attendance laws would ensure that children would not be forced into the labour market. The required curriculum, which was secular, meant that traditional education (often in Yiddish) no longer met the requirements of state law. This forced those who taught, and those students who wanted a more conventional, historic or religious curriculum, to receive it after school hours. Traditionally ignored, young women attended schools alongside their male counterparts for the first time.

⁴⁰ Israel Friedlander, “The Problem of Jewish Education in America and the Bureau of Education of the Jewish Community of New York City”. *Report of the Commissioner of Education*. Chapter XVI, Vol. 1, 1913, page 375.

⁴¹ for more information on enrollment patterns, please see tables on pp. 114, 115, 121.

With the establishment of the law of 1874, public schools became acceptable to most Jews. What choice did they have? The new conditions of compulsory education were met with approval by many contemporary Jewish leaders. The content of the curriculum increased the distance from the old world and encouraged alternate practices, both cultural and religious.

The children of immigrants took full advantage of their educational opportunities. They began school almost immediately after their arrival in America. However it was not only the children that took full advantage of free schooling. Many adults attended evening classes in settlement houses to learn English and other non-traditional subjects such as civics and manners, that would prove invaluable in their new homeland.⁴²

Limited incomes and large families forced children to become wage earners earlier than they may have wished. Some children were not perceived as gifted as others. Therefore, the investment in education for them was not seen as worthwhile. These were not easy decisions. However, for the survival of the family, sacrifices had to be made. On the other hand, for the gifted child, there was somehow always a way to finance and support education.

⁴²Abraham Karp, *Golden Door to America*. (New York, Viking Press, 1976) pp. 183- 184.

The first two decades of this century saw a tremendous increase in the student population. Higher elementary school enrollment led to pressure for increased places in high schools and college. With some ambition and motivation, children could seize the opportunities available to them. By 1908, the student population at City College was more than half Jewish.⁴³ In 1910, there were many Jews who were still considered working class. Nevertheless, almost all the children were enrolled in school until they reached the legal working age.

The Primary School Curriculum of the Board of Education

In 1901, the first order of business for the new Board of Education was the development of a uniform curriculum for New York City's elementary schools.

Superintendent William H. Maxwell outlined the new proposed curriculum:

“the predominance of the study of English, a most necessary provision in a city whose population is so largely foreign; the inculcation of a love of good literature; the elimination of unnecessary details...; the requirement of handwork...in all grades-constructive work of many kinds for the younger children, and sewing and cooking for girls and carpenter work for boys; history, not as a mere chronicle of events, but as an introduction to our “heritage” of institutions and as a reservoir of moral worth; the singing of high class music, as an elevating and inspiring

⁴³ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 183.

influence; and physical training and athletics...to inculcate the virtues of self-reliance and unselfish cooperation."⁴⁴

New York City Board Of Education's Curriculum (1904)

Subject	Course of Study	Date Revised
1) Course of Study for the Elementary. School (Summary Document): English, Nature Study, Physical Training & Hygiene, Math, Drawing & Constructive Work, Sewing, Music, geography (4A-7B), History (5A-5B), History & Civics (6A-8B), Shop (7A-8B), Cooking (7A-8B), electives-French, German, Latin, or Stenography Latin & Steno. Eliminated, 1905	5/27/03	6/21/05
2) Ethics and English	5/27/03	6/21/05
3) Mathematics	5/27/03	6/21/05
4) Kindergarten, Music, Physical Training & Hygiene	5/27/03	6/21/05
5) Nature Study, Elementary Science & Geography	5/27/03	
6) Drawing, Constructive Work, Sewing & Cooking	5/27/03	
7) Moral Eduction (appended to Ethics & English)	5/27/03	

Many middle-class women found themselves teaching the newcomers and facing the enormous task of bridging the cultural gap between student and teacher. Many were rigid and prejudiced. Most did not even try to bridge this gap, relying on discipline and drill to get them through the day.⁴⁵ Reading

⁴⁴ Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 73.

⁴⁵ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*. (New York, Arno Press, 1978) page 125.

poetry, and conducting nature studies proved futile. The children could not understand the complexities of the poems and the Lower East Side was hardly in Mother Nature's domain. The inability to bridge a wide cultural gap, and to relate the material to children's lives outside the school tended to alienate all of the participants. The prim and proper middle-class teachers could not understand the immigrants' fears and attitudes, while the children could not understand or see the importance of some of the teacher's ideas.⁴⁶

Hygiene And Moral Education

The prevalence of Moral Education and Hygiene in the curriculum demonstrated the Board of Education's perception of the children. The Board believed that these children were deficient of high ideals and moral standards and it was the schools' responsibility to ensure that hygiene and a strong moral and ethical theme was implanted in the child's daily lessons. The clothes children wore, the pictures they drew, the stories they wrote, the books they chose, all represented tests of good taste.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*, pp. 127.

⁴⁷ Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 77.

The focus on hygiene in the curriculum created many difficulties for the young students. The children assumed the school's single function was to ensure they were clean and well-groomed. Lectures were given daily on nail brushes, hair ribbons, shoe polish, pins, and buttons.⁴⁸ In many tenements, water was a six-floor walk downstairs. Many mothers of the students found it almost impossible to ensure that their children were groomed up to the standards of the teachers.

Teachers' Perception of the Children

The concentration on cleanliness could be a manifestation of the hostility the teachers felt towards the "little aliens".⁴⁹ It is important to note that at the turn of the century, anti-immigration sentiment was on the rise. At PS #20 on Broome Street, the teachers remarked that the students were "clannish" and resistant to Americanization:

"Not that all immigrants are ignorant, or that they all find it difficult to grasp the American idea of self-government, but...a certain class of foreigners have settled in the neighbourhood of this school and, by flocking together, have become stubborn in their ignorance. Many immigrants take a pride in acquiring American ways, and endeavor to mingle among the native citizens, but those

⁴⁸ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*, page 127.

⁴⁹ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*, page 128.

living in this part of Broome Street have formed a little colony of themselves...The population here is made up of Hebrews of the poorest class. The children are sent to the public school with an honest desire to learn English and something about American ways, but the process of teaching them is an unusually tedious one...Most of the children attending P.S. # 20...come from families in which English is seldom spoken at all, and where good manners and cleanliness are decidedly at a discount".⁵⁰

However, Kate Holladay Claghorn's findings contradict the teachers negative perceptions of the students:

"In the lower schools Jewish children are the delight of their teachers for cleverness as their books, obedience, and general good conduct; and the vacation schools, night schools, social settlements, libraries, bathing places, parks, and playgrounds of the East Side are fairly besieged with Jewish children eager to take advantage of the opportunities they offer."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars, NYC 1805-1973; A History of the Public School as a Battlefield for Social Change*. (New York, Basic Books, 1974) page 177.

⁵¹ Kate Holladay Claghorn, *Reports of the Industrial Commission*, Volume XV, page 20.

Innovation and Innovators

Among the educational innovators of that period, I have chosen to illustrate the work of Paul Abelson, Henry M. Leipziger, and Felix Warburg. These three men contributed a tremendous amount to the education of Jewish immigrants. In this section I will also present some examples of programs and lectures that were offered to the new arrivals.

Adult Education and the Jews of the Lower East Side: A Collaborative Effort

There was a great deal of collaboration between New York's Board of Education and some of the more established Jewish community groups, such as the Educational Alliance.⁵² One example of this collaboration was the Educational Alliance providing rooms for adult day and evening classes, kindergarten, vocational training for girls, and summer vacation activities.⁵³

⁵² The Educational Alliance was probably the most influential and powerful educational and social service organization that served the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

⁵³ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America. Going to School*, page 86.

The Educational Alliance

The Educational Alliance was organized in 1889 by a consortium of organizations such as the Hebrew Free School Association, The Young Men's Hebrew Association and the Aguilar Free Library Society. A wide spectrum of facilities such as classrooms, an auditorium, library, gymnasium, showers, and a roof garden were available to all. Vocational classes, American History, English Literature were but a few of the courses offered. The Educational Alliance soon became a unifying force on the Lower East Side, having a profound effect on the children, but the predominance of English may have alienated some of the adults. At the Alliance's synagogue, religious services were conducted in Hebrew and German.⁵⁴

One of the most important areas of the influence of Jewish organizations on public school curriculum can be found in the English courses given to adults whose first language was not English.

⁵⁴ Moses Rischin, Rischin, Moses. *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1970-1914*. (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1962) page 101.

Paul Abelson

The Educational Alliance held citizenship education in high regard. This concern led to the establishment of a Department of Adult Immigrants.⁵⁵ This organization was headed by Paul Abelson, who was a history teacher at Dewitt Clinton High School, the first public high school in Manhattan. Abelson's reasons for creating this program were twofold. First, he was concerned that Jewish immigrants should learn about the laws and institutions of the United States. Second, Abelson feared that the streets of New York and the local Yiddish newspapers would provide this group with the wrong kind of information about America. He charged that editors of these newspapers were not Americans, and they could easily lead immigrants in the wrong direction.⁵⁶

Because the majority of Jewish immigrants suffered from horrible conditions in Eastern Europe, the political views of some were radical. Possible new recruits could be found in the streets, cafes, and parks on the Lower East Side. Those concerned with a large radical contingent among this group of

⁵⁵ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America. Going to School*, page 87.

⁵⁶ Paul Abelson, "Lecture on Duty of Foreigners to his New Country", June 18, 1902. Paul Abelson Papers, American Jewish Archives.

immigrants thought that learning English could alleviate the problem. The message of the radicals would be diluted if the target audience spoke English. The emotional aspect of the radicals' arguments were more powerful in Yiddish:

"We have urged often that the much deplored tendency of the immigrant to identify himself with various "-isms" and "ologys" is due to a laudable, ambitious desire to become part of what he believes to be civic life, a privilege denied him in his old home, but here grasped with the utmost avidity. Much of the literature available in Yiddish is of a character generally classified as radical. Swayed by doctrines which he believes sound and true, but generally promulgated by adherents of a cause rather than those interested in the welfare of the immigrant, he attaches undue weight and importance to that which is presented to him in his native tongue. We therefore endeavor in these Yiddish lectures to present in a simple and attractive manner the history and development of our country, the true significance of its institutions and the American interpretation of democracy and liberty." 57

The best case scenario for Abelson was for the public schools to take on the responsibility of educating the adult immigrant. Evening schools for immigrants offered English language courses, American history, Yiddish lectures on Americanization, an Information Bureau that dealt with farming and settling in smaller areas of the United States, lectures to mothers (in Yiddish), and citizenship or civics lectures.⁵⁸ This pioneer program of placing students with similar cultural characteristics (i.e. language or religion) or

⁵⁷ The Educational Alliance, *Anniversary Report 1916*, page 40.

⁵⁸ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America. Going to School*, page 88.

academic backgrounds became models that were subsequently followed by the New York Board of Education.

The Educational Alliance also accommodated those who worked at night. As soon as the word spread that day classes were offered, many applications from bakers, theatre employees and watchmen poured in.⁵⁹

Henry M. Leipziger

Henry Leipziger is another important figure in this discussion of adult education. He was born in England in 1853 and immigrated to New York with his parents in 1865. He was closely affiliated with a number of Jewish philanthropists in establishing the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA). He established a large library with the YMHA on the Lower East Side, and was instrumental in establishing the Educational Alliance, which was an amalgamation of the YMHA library, the Hebrew Free School, and the downtown local YMHA.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ The Educational Alliance, *Anniversary Report 1916*, page 39.

⁶⁰ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, pp. 149- 50.

Leipziger's vision was that the schools should become social settlements within their communities, open day and night, weekdays and weekends.⁶¹ He embraced the reform movement of Judaism and sided with other contemporaries who believed that the education of the massive wave of immigrants was crucial. His strong belief in the power and potential of education, and his acceptance with both reason and faith, carried over into developing the Adult Free Lectures.⁶² The following table is a listing of some of the lectures given in a typical year. It is interesting to note the recurring themes in these lectures: patriotism, citizenship, health and hygiene, modern science, the "great novels", and American history.

⁶¹ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 155.

⁶² Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 155.

Lectures Given in Yiddish, 1903-1904,

Adult Free Lecture Program, Board of Education of New York City.⁶³

Lecture	Lecturer
Our New Country	Dr. David Blaustein
The Meaning of America	Mr. Paul Abelson
America, Our New Land	Dr. Moses Mintz
The Growth of America	Mr. Paul Abelson
The Duties of a Foreigner in his New Country	Mr. Paul Abelson
The War of Independence	Mr. Nathan Blechman
Moulding the Nation	Mr. Nathan Blechman
Our State and City Government	Mr. Nathan Blechman
The Constitution of the United States and of New York State	Mr. Alexander Harkavy
Rights and Duties of American Citizenship	Mr. Israel Ziony
The Republic of the United States	Mr. Samuel J. Marcus
The Laws of the United States	Dr. Henry Waton
Why Is Our Country So Great?	Dr. Moses Mintz
Benjamin Franklin	Mr. Joseph Eron
George Washington	Mr. Paul Abelson
Abraham Lincoln	Mr. Joseph Eron
America's Greatest Literary Lights	Mr. Joseph Eron
Emerson	Mr. Joseph Eron
How to Study English	Mr. Alexander Harkavy
Comparison of Life and Customs in Russia and America	Mr. Paul Abelson
The Holy Land	Dr. Moses Mintz
Prevention of Consumption	Dr. Max Girdansky
Contagious Diseases	Dr. Maurice Fishberg
Hygiene of the Lungs	Dr. Maurice Fishberg
The Food We Eat	Dr. Maurice Fishberg
The Air We Breathe	Dr. Maurice Fishberg
Care of the Skin	Dr. Maurice Fishberg
Digestion and Indigestion	Dr. Maurice Fishberg

⁶³*Annual Report of Public Lectures, 1903-04*, Board of Education of the City of New York, 1904.

Felix Warburg

Felix Warburg, a wealthy banker and Jewish immigrant from Germany who arrived in America before the influx of Eastern Europeans, played a prominent role in the collaborative efforts between the Board of Education and the Jewish Community. Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were financially unable to fund educational projects alone. Warburg recognized this. He was a member of New York's Board of Education two different times at the turn of this century. To his credit, Warburg was enough of a pragmatist and visionary to realize that the absorption of Jewish immigrants was part of the larger issue of managing immigration in the United States in general. He held a firm belief that private organizations could serve as the breeding ground for new and innovative programs that could later be adopted by public institutions. While Warburg believed that many of the following innovations were not necessarily introduced by Jewish programs, they did make important contributions and their influence cannot be denied:

- *instruction of English to foreigners.*
- *the spread of playgrounds, including school use of public playgrounds and the construction of school playgrounds.*

- *school buildings kept open year-round for day school, lectures to adults, and recreation for young and old. elimination of part-time classes.*
- *use of school buildings for the pleasure and recreation of the neighbourhood.*
- *utilization of school roofs as breathing spaces during the summer.*
- *free lectures to adults. Board of Health nurses working with public educational authorities.*
- *school-home visitors (visiting teachers).*
- *district visitors of the Nurses' Settlement. Evening courses at the City College.⁶⁴*

This was an impressive list. Regardless of who claimed credit, there is no doubt that these innovators in education played a substantial role in shaping education in North America.

The Lectures

An abundance of lectures were sponsored by the Educational Alliance, the People's Institute at Cooper Union⁶⁵, and New York State's "People's

⁶⁴ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America. Going to School*, page 90.

⁶⁵ Cooper Union still exists today. It is in the heart of the East Village and has a tremendous reputation. From what I have heard, it is now an engineering school. The school is very selective and turns away many applicants. For those lucky enough to get in, tuition is free.

University” and were accessible to all on the Lower East Side.⁶⁶ Many took advantage of these lectures. Dr. Harry Leipziger's Yiddish lectures for the Board of Education attracted approximately 75,000 people a year.⁶⁷ Other lectures were sponsored by specific immigrant institutions, unions, socialists, and Zionists. These fascinating discussions, involving a wide range of subject matters, coloured the rich history and culture of the period. The following is a selection of lectures that show the diversity of subject matter, orientations, and political affiliations of those involved in the "lecture circuit" of the time:

NOVEMBER 1897: The William Morris Club sponsors a lecture on astronomy.

JANUARY 1898: Dr. Ingerman offers a series of lectures on "The History of Ancient Greece".

SEPTEMBER 1905: The Anarchist Progressive Library features Hillel Zolataoff as its main speaker, flanked by Max Kornin reading Sholom Aleichem, "Comrade Gorodetsky playing violin", and Sarah Edelstadt, sister of the late poet David Edelstadt, reading from his work- "admission 15¢, proceeds to help a sick comrade".

1906: Large turnout for Dr. Issac Daniely, delegate from the Russian Socialist Territorialist party, speak on the post revolutionary situation of his country.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ These lectures offered talks on a variety of topics such as "The Times of the Roman Emperors," "How to Breath," "Pictures from Hindu Life," and "Practical Electricity."

⁶⁷ Irving Howe, *The Immigrant Jews of New York*, page 238.

⁶⁸ Irving Howe, *The Immigrant Jews of New York*, page 238.

For many these lectures were the only forms of recreation they could afford.

Many of the lectures would be followed by refreshments and dancing.

"Universities of the Ghetto"

The cafes of the Lower East Side provided another source of knowledge.

Sometimes coined the "universities of the ghetto", many members of the intelligentsia would gather and discuss different issues in these cafes. The cafes played a dual role as a social setting and a place to debate issues for students and laborers. One prominent issue of the time was Socialism. Poets, playwrights, actors, socialists, anarchists, zionists, and artists all had their own cafes which they claimed to be the center of Yiddish intellect. Ida M. Van Etten provides us with a glimpse into this world:

*"The Jews are a temperate people, and the saloon is not likely to become an element in their social or political life. Instead, they drink enormous quantities of tea and coffee. The frequenters of these dingy coffee-houses are men rough and uncouth in appearance, poorly dressed, but a lady or a scholar would find nothing offensive in their conversation. They discuss trade matters, political economy, philosophy, the works of Karl Marx, Krapotkine, Tolstoi, Tchernychevsky, and Zola. Almost any jewish workingman you might chance to meet in these circles would be able to discuss intelligently these authors and their works. The recreations of a people are commonly the truest indication of their real character."*⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ida M. Van Etten, "Russian Jews as Desirable Immigrants", Forum. 15, (1893): page 176.

Concluding Remarks

Jews perceived education as an opportunity to advance and succeed in their new world. Some of the lectures were of more importance and perhaps more useful than others. However, it is interesting to see how these lectures were used for social purposes as well. Some lectures were followed by refreshments and dancing, creating a strong sense of community which is a very important component of the educational process.

The innovators discussed in this section are to be praised for their dedication, if nothing else. Many of the philanthropists of the time felt compelled to help the situation and plight of Jewish immigrants. Some acted for truly altruistic reasons; others had different motives. There is no doubt that some established Jews were embarrassed by the newcomers; they were very different in their customs, styles of dress, language, and mannerisms. Some may have helped to "save" the image of the Jew that they wanted to portray to the Goyim⁷⁰. Regardless of their motives, they were visionaries and pragmatists and contributed greatly to Jewish life on the Lower East Side.

⁷⁰ Goyim = gentiles.

Jewish Women of the Lower East Side

This section will highlight the experiences of young women in the New York public school system. I will briefly describe the traditional role expected of women in the old world, and how that changed upon their arrival in America. I will also discuss the curriculum to which female students were exposed, and the Jewish community's perception of the role that education would play for them. This essay will also address the gender-related differences in parental expectations for their children in school.

Jewish Women's Role in Eastern Europe

Traditionally, the education of females was limited because of the gender-related role differences encoded in the Jewish religion. Few women learned the Hebrew alphabet and a few prayers. Some women learned to read and write Yiddish. Most women never had the opportunity to study the Talmud.

As soon as young women could hold a needle, they were taught how to use it. The garments they made would be sold or traded to other members of the community. The type of work a young woman would have to do depended greatly on the job market and the family's financial status. A family that had

some money could afford to pay for an apprenticeship for their young daughter. However, for a poor family, unskilled domestic work would be the young girl's destiny.

Most mothers hoped that their daughters would marry someone wealthy. If a young woman was that fortunate, she would not have to work her whole life. However, marrying into a wealthy family was not a simple task. Therefore, mothers would prepare their daughters by teaching them "marketable" skills.⁷¹

Larger towns provided more opportunities for young women. However, even in a town with no industry, young women could devise some very creative ways of making a modest living.⁷² This, however, was the exception to the rule. Most women were not able to make a decent living. Despite the central role of women contributing to the family's economic well-being, women had no accepted public role outside the home besides collecting for charity and caring for the sick. The role of the woman in Europe was quite simple: Keep a proper

⁷¹ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press, 1988).page 8.

⁷² In one small town in Russia, there was a matchmaker. Folk-doctor, bathhouse attendant, an advisor to those cursed with the evil eye, girdle-maker, pickle vendor and "The Holy One" (a woman selling crosses and prayer beads to the peasants.

Jewish home, raise the family, and earn some type of income. The prestigious endeavors of the village (study of religion, etc.) were left to the men.

Daughters married at a young age, and their parents saw little need for them to be educated for a prolonged period. However, because education was so highly regarded, many young women stayed in school for as long as their parents could afford to send them. Yet, typically, older siblings (both male and female) would be forced to go to work, allowing their younger siblings to stay in school.

If the financial situation of the family improved, and the children did not have to go to work prematurely, the sex of the child did not matter regarding the length of time the child stayed in school. The younger children of both sexes benefitted the most if the family's financial circumstances were stable. In a survey of students born in Europe before 1905 and who came to America in their teen years, the average years of schooling for the male child was 8.1 years; for females, it was 5.1 years. Among their younger siblings, twice as many boys and three times as many young women graduated from high school. While males were initially favoured if the family could only permit one child to attend school, younger children of both genders had greater access to education than their older siblings once the family's financial stability was

achieved.⁷³

The Jewish Girl's Curriculum in New York's Public Schools

To behave like Americans, young women needed to understand what their role was in American society. In 1910, the role of the woman was quite limited, according to a course of study in Home Economics and Sewing. The mission of the women was as follows: "...the ideal woman is to make the whole world homelike...every young woman is destined at some time in her career to contribute in some measure to the making of the home. The primary focus of the woman should be the preservation of the family."⁷⁴ Some schools built small apartments in the schools to instruct young women in the proper care of the home.

For families with limited incomes, it was essential for young women to learn the importance of economy. Most of the young girls were taught some basic sewing techniques. For the older girls, even those employed in the needle trade, retraining of some basic sewing techniques was required. This was due

⁷³ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, pp. 171-175

⁷⁴ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 129.

to the highly specialized conditions of these industries, where a girl would “specialize” in making only one small part of a garment.⁷⁵

The syllabus in Home Economics included information on how to purchase and prepare pork products, and in many cases, recipes given to young women involved mixing of dairy and meat products. The School Board neglected important dietary prohibitions in the Jewish religion. The result of such ignorance on the part of the School Board resulted in conflicts between teachers and students, and in turn, the student with their parents.⁷⁶

The culinary arts did not escape the theme of “good taste”. Cooking, for example, combined economy with good manners and taste. The syllabus stated: “good cooking means...the economy of your great-grandmothers, and the science of modern chemists; it means much tasting and no wasting; it means thoroughness and French art and Arabian hospitality; it means, in fine, that you are perfectly and always ladies.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The Educational Alliance, *Anniversary Report 1916*, page 42.

⁷⁶ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, pp. 129-130.

⁷⁷ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 77.

Another important point stressed in home economic classes was to teach young women “what strength giving foods can be obtained and palatably prepared at outlays within the earning power.” The perception among many of the young women was that if a product costs more, it must be of higher quality and has more nutritional value. The young women were discouraged from following this myth.⁷⁸

Apart from culinary skills, young women also received training in housekeeping. This included making and caring for a kitchen fire; managing a gas range; the sink, waste pipe and trap; the garbage pail; and dish-washing and "laundry work".⁷⁹

By the time young women reached Grade 8, they were instructed in the delicate and refined tasks that made a good homemaker. This included instruction in proper table-setting, decorations, serving, manners, personal appearance and home nursing.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Educational Alliance, *Anniversary Report 1916*, pp. 42-43.

⁷⁹ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 78.

⁸⁰ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 78.

Summer camps for girls such as Edalia House in New Jersey provided them with a brief escape from the harsh tenement life of the Lower East Side. Some girls, because of their emaciation or anaemia, were sent to Edalia House, where their health improved immeasurably.⁸¹

Changes to Young Jewish Women

Upon its arrival in America, the Jewish tradition of the women playing the dual role of the socially inferior mother and wage earner was challenged. However, during early stages of the mass exodus, few women rebelled for fear of being “unladylike”. It would take some time for women to assert their rights in America. Nonetheless, as time passed, many women became restless and inspired by American ideas for greater things.

However, for many women, there was no time to dream of a better life. Exhausted from factory work, they had no time to think of the future. They were lonely, full of despair and could only be “rescued” through marriage or possibly through political involvement.⁸² For women, young and old who came

⁸¹ The Educational Alliance, *Anniversary Report 1916*, page 55.

⁸² Irving Howe, *The Immigrant Jews of New York*, pp. 265-267.

to New York, jobs as machine shop operators and other types of low status jobs were their destiny. For younger women, some schooling in America allowed them to take higher prestige jobs as typists or sales clerks. Although these jobs did not pay that much more than factory jobs, it helped them get husbands and meet a higher class of people. While this may sound distasteful and insulting by today's sensibilities, at that time, it was the only hope a woman had to escape the dreadful life of the factory worker.⁸³

Several technical schools were established at the turn of the century . One such school was Washington Irving High School, with a student population of approximately 6,000 young women.⁸⁴ Most of these students came from the tenements of the Lower East Side. Only one in six was prepared to attend college. The majority was trained to enter the business or industrial world of New York City. The trades taught were influenced by the economic necessities of turn of the century New York: millinery, dressmaking, and costume design. Washington Irving contained a small apartment to aid in training young women for housekeeping duties. The school attempted to meet the needs of

⁸³According to the Bureau of Statistics findings: "Hebrew Women almost invariably stop work when they marry." Only 1% of Jewish wives took jobs outside the home in 1905. Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door*, page 76.

⁸⁴ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*, page 139.

adolescent women; to equip them for jobs, marriage, and life in an urban setting, while raising their standards and aspirations.⁸⁵ The school was very successful. Only the financial constraints of the family limited the amount of time a young woman could attend Washington Irving.

The 'Promise' Of An Education

The Jewish immigrants of New York City who arrived in America in the middle 1910's came at a time when the possibility of getting a high school education was better than ever. When young women realized that going to school was not strictly a privilege for boys, they embraced the opportunity to get an education.

Unfortunately, most women were unable to further their education past the age of fifteen or sixteen. Their families were often very poor; economic necessity forced many of them (as young as ten and eleven in some cases!) into dreadful factories. In 1913, only a third of all children entering public school in

⁸⁵ Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School, New York City, 1898-1914*, pp. 139-141.

New York City stayed past the eighth grade.⁸⁶ The State Factory

Investigating Commission found that 75% of women working in factories had left school before even completing the eighth grade.⁸⁷

Young adult women tried to get an education after work. In 1908, there were approximately 100,000 immigrants enrolled in school at night. Forty percent of this total were Jewish women and two-thirds of this total were enrolled in English classes.⁸⁸ However, this proved to be a difficult task for most. Armed with the ability to read and write, they were very eager to learn.

The promise of education made them hungry for knowledge. Their greatest desire was to get an education, something that was unheard of in Europe. Some even aspired to go to college, many evening college preparatory schools were established on the Lower East Side to accommodate them. The students in these classes had to learn English, as well as algebra, economics, physics and Latin. There were a number of success stories. However, poverty, exhaustion and a lack of proficiency in English made this an insurmountable

⁸⁶ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, page 170.

⁸⁷ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, page 170.

⁸⁸ Sydney Stahl Weinberg, *The World of Our Mothers*, page 171.

task for some.

The long hours of factory work exhausted these aspiring students, resulting in many classes suffering high absenteeism. The typical day was to work in the factory from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. To attend classes, many had to skip dinner, attend classes from 7:30 until 11 p.m, study their lessons and wake up the next day to do it all over. In consequence, many were forced to quit school. Some exceptional young women somehow persevered and did attend college. Sadly, they were the exception to the rule. Most Jewish women would have to wait at least one more generation before a college education could be anything more than a dream.

Concluding Remarks

Among the Eastern European Jews, the desire for advancement through education often clashed with traditional gender roles of European Jews. The idea of education for women was unheard of in Europe. Parents were not always very sympathetic to hear the cries of their young daughter's desire to be educated. The women's role in the house had been traditionally defined as one where education played almost no role in their life. Theirs was that of the dutiful housewife, mother and part-time laborer. Upon their arrival in

America, the winds of opportunity swept many off their feet, landing some in a classroom. The reality for most Jewish women was unskilled or semiskilled jobs in business and industrial sectors. The strain of trying to get an education was compounded by exhaustion, poverty, and language. A few overcame these enormous obstacles; most did not.

It was the younger siblings of the financially stable Jewish family who spent the most time in school. Financial circumstances, not gender, determined how long younger children could attend school. Older siblings were not as lucky. Due to dire economic circumstances, both male and female elder siblings were forced to support the family and sacrifice their future for the sake of the younger children. This was especially true for the older siblings who were forced into the labor market at a very young stage of adulthood.

Chapter 4

A Critique of the Revisionists

This chapter will explore some of the Revisionists' theories and apply them to the case of Jewish immigrants who first started to arrive on America's shores in 1881. Can the Revisionist interpretation of American educational history stand up when applied to the case of Jewish immigrants? Where does Revisionist history fall short in explaining the educational experiences of Jews? Did the schools assimilate Jews, or were there other factors involved? If so, what impact did the schools have on changing attitudes? Were these changes positive or negative? Schools have been critiqued by Revisionists as doing little more than inculcating students with values of the dominant society, and erasing their connections with the past. Was this the case with Jews? What effect did this have on their academic performance and family life?

The schools' role in shaping the lives of Jewish children was all-encompassing. On the Lower East Side, the schools represented more than just a place to send a child for ten months a year; they represented the community's centers of activity and were open in the summertime and were used as playgrounds. The public school played a large role in the life of a Jewish child:

“The Schoolhouse itself was generally the most massive and magnificent structure in the neighbourhood, as well as the most orderly and most “American” place the child entered. For the school year, and for many children during summer vacation as well, its bells framed and regulated the day.”⁸⁹

Were the Schools a “Weapon of Social Control and Indoctrination” or the Path Towards Social Progress”?

For Jewish parents from the Lower East Side, schools offered opportunities for their children that would never have been possible in the Old World. Jews were faced with a terrible dilemma. They knew that the price for success involved forsaking some of their cultural heritage in order to assimilate and lead successful lives in America. A trade-off was necessary. Jewish parents felt that the key to the children’s success would be education. They would have to contend with problems arising from the schools’ conflicting values with Judaism. However, most parents accepted the need for change. The dreams of their children aspiring to greater occupations, which were beyond reach in Europe, were now well within their grasp.

Competing values and attitudes lead to trade-off reasoning. Jews were faced with the choice of adhering to all that was treasured in the Old World

⁸⁹ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 190.

(religion, language, traditions, etc.), at the cost of their child's future in America. Parents understood that, in America children could pursue professions that were prohibited in Eastern Europe. Jews saw the cultural and language differences as barriers that must be overcome in order to achieve previously unattainable goals, and the public schools helped them overcome these differences.

However, this did come at a price. Children had to abandon many of the key aspects of their culture in order to fit into society's mainstream.

Unfortunately, many had to relinquish certain ingredients of their cultural make-up. In a perfect world, new members of a society should be able to maintain their traditions without the fear of being left behind. However, North American society has never really tolerated this dualism completely. To a certain extent, foreign cultures are tolerated in our society. Whenever that foreign culture challenges the dominant culture, it is usually the latter that triumphs.

The Revisionist's argument in this domain is not wrong. Jewish students were often perceived in an unfavourable manner. Teachers were often disgusted by the children's lack of proper hygiene. Children often arrived at school unwashed and dressed in rags. Unfortunately, extreme poverty prevented

many of them from grooming themselves to the teacher's high expectations. For the child living in the tenement house of the Lower East Side, showers or baths were not easily accessible. The teachers' insensitivity to the child's extreme poverty was compounded by their insensitivity towards their religious customs.⁹⁰ However, faced with a totally new type of pupil, some of the teacher's actions can be understood.

The primary cultural dissimilarities of Jewish immigrants caused problems in their relationships with teachers and in the process of learning, However these problems are the result of differences in cultural assumptions and, they in turn, dissipated over time. It is also important to note that as badly as these children may have been treated by some teachers, their situation was still much better than in Eastern Europe. Jews were very aware of this fact.

One of the weakest aspects of the Revisionists' arguments is that the subordinate group is always a passive actor; it does not have any chance of improving their circumstances and is completely at the mercy of the dominant members of society. They portray the actors, in this case Jews, as being powerless, having little say in their future. However, Jews were capable of

⁹⁰ For instance, the mixing of dairy and meat dishes together in Home Economics classes.

expressing their anger at the system. When parents tried to register their children for school, many were turned away each year because of overcrowding. In one instance, Jewish parents almost started rioting in the streets when a few schools ran out of room for their children. This contradicts and discredits Revisionist historians' stereotyping of minorities as being helpless and oppressed.

Each ethnic minority group has different perceptions, values, attitudes, and goals regarding education. Even within each group, there are differences. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the educational experiences of Jewish women differed greatly from the experiences of Jewish men.

Discrimination rarely discouraged Jews from excelling in school. They rationalized discrimination by maintaining that, as newcomers to the country, they must tolerate these acts of stupidity and not allow them to delineate from the task at hand.⁹¹

When Jewish immigrants were presented with two conflicting values, such as the choice between a traditional education rooted in the Torah, and the

⁹¹ Examples of this can be found in Stephen Brumberg's *Going to America, Going to School*.

secular curriculum of the public schools, many chose the latter. Jewish immigrants chose the prosperity of the next generation as their paramount concern. They understood that this choice would sacrifice to some degree their traditional way of life. It is my firm belief that Jewish immigrants consciously made this choice, with the help and mediating mechanisms provided by already established Jews.

Social Mobility

The ultimate goal of education is to provide opportunities for social mobility. Revisionists claim that schools mostly reproduced social structures and therefore maintained the status quo in general. While I agree that the educational system has not improved the fortunes of many different cultural groups in North American society, it did so for Jews.

Studies of Jewish mobility rates clearly show that within one or two generations, members of many families, originally plagued with extreme poverty, were now entering professional occupations such as teachers, doctors, and lawyers. By 1905, Italians were displacing the Jews and the Irish in the needle trade, while approximately 45% of Jewish immigrants claimed white-collar positions, including manufacturers, retailers, investors, and office

workers.⁹² Further evidence of Jewish social mobility shows that:

“Both Italians and Jews found the New York economy fluid and open, but Jews moved upwards more quickly and more often. This is apparent by comparing length of residence in the United States. Italians and Jews showed enhanced occupation profiles as the number of years spent in the country increased. Taking the longest residing cohort of significant size, those who had lived in the country between 15 and 25 years, 24% of the Italians achieved white-collar status, with only 2% in the upper white-collar sector. Among the Jews, 54% wore white collars and a significant 15% reached the upper white-collar stratum. While Italian progress proceeded along one line, shopkeeping and self-employed artisanship, the Jews took more opportunities to move into both upper and lower white-collar positions.”⁹³

One study shows that Jewish students thrived in educational systems of America. David Cohen’s research showed that in Hartford in 1920, 80% of Jewish freshmen were still in school in their junior year. Other groups did not fare as well: 64% for White Americans, 48% for Scandinavians, 44% for Germans, English and Scottish students, 34% for Irish born students, 28% for Italians, and 24% for Polish students.⁹⁴

High levels of literacy, a strong emphasis on education, the size and nature of

⁹² Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door*, page 168.

⁹³ Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door*, pp. 168-69.

⁹⁴ David K. Cohen, “Immigrants and the Schools”. *Review of Educational Research*. Vol. 40, No. 1, page 22.

Jewish families, and the memory of lack of freedoms endured by Jews in Eastern Europe all contributed to higher rates of Jewish mobility. Education was no doubt an important factor in Jewish social mobility rates, even though it was not the only factor.

Higher elementary school enrollment led to increased places in high schools and college. With some ambition and motivation, children would be able to seize the opportunities available. By 1908, the student population at City College was more than half Jewish.⁹⁵ This trend continued well into the next few decades, as Jewish enrollment (male and female) at institutions such as Baruch College, City College, New York University continued to rise.

Those who attended college were labelled socially awkward, because of their accents, style of dress, and manners. Established students were turned off by these ambitious students, labeling them as "pushy" and "showoffs".⁹⁶ This was exacerbated by the Jewish student's perceived "social incompetence".⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Stephen F. Brumberg, *Going to America. Going to School*, page 183.

⁹⁶ For an interesting account of how Jews encountered anti-Semitism in the post-secondary institutions, please see Robert Shaffer. "Jews, Reds, and Violets: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Radicalism at New York University, 1916-1929. *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 15:2, pp. 47-83.

⁹⁷ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going To America, Going to School*, pp. 186-187

Yet the Jewish students knew that high school and college must serve a more practical function: to achieve higher status and wealth. Higher status would not be reached by virtue of birth or connections; it had to be achieved. As the 20th century progressed, the higher echelons of society were becoming more attainable for college educated Jews.

Compulsory Schooling

Revisionist historians state that compulsory schooling was another means of extending the coercive arm of the state. What would have happened to Jewish children if compulsory schooling laws had not been enacted? There are two possible scenarios. If children were not compelled to attend schools until a certain age, many of these children would have become child laborers. Without any government interference, children would be forced to work alongside their parents. The second scenario is that regardless of regulation, Jewish children would have stayed in school as long as the family could have afforded the child's education. Which scenario is more likely in the absence of compulsory schooling legislation?

The argument can be made that in many cases, the first scenario would have prevailed. With no laws to protect the children, many of them would have been

forced to work in the factories with their parents. Long hours and terrible conditions characterized the workers' plight in these factories, and children would have started working in the factories before they reached their teens. If the child refused to work, perhaps he would have been forced onto the mean streets of the big city. Trouble would have found him sooner than later. The future of any street child would have been bleak, with little in the way of opportunity to improve his situation.

With the absence of legislation banning child labour and compulsory schooling, the factory worker's offspring would most certainly inherit their parent's status. It is therefore ironic that Revisionists criticize compulsory schooling laws. This legislation must certainly have saved many children from a fate that can hardly be imagined by today's standards.

The second possible scenario in the absence of compulsory schooling laws is that regardless of the lack of compulsion to send their children to school, Jews would have done so. With a historically high regard for education, Jewish parents would probably have sent their children to school to ensure that they would be assured a better life. The problem that this scenario would pose is that, with the state's absence from obliging students to attend school, it is reasonable to assume that the state would not have felt compelled to provide

the resources necessary for the children who wanted to attend school. Without the state's involvement, teachers, books, and buildings would have to be provided from another source. If there was no other source, what would become of the children who desire an education?

Reformers at the turn of the century were concerned with the plight of the child. Regardless of their sometimes condescending manner, reformers were shocked with what they witnessed. Poor children had no place to go, and often grew up on the streets. New York was the core of the garment industry. Large factories with hundreds of workers was commonplace. The captains of industry exploited these workers; conditions in the factories were abysmal. Before compulsory laws were enacted, children as young as eight were working sixteen to eighteen hour days in the factory. Other children were working at home under similar conditions. Therefore, regardless of reformers' "hidden intentions", compulsory schooling laws were pivotal in saving children from the darkness of ignorance.

**Assimilation and Americanization:
Did the Schools Change the Students for Better or Worse?**

At the turn of the century, xenophobia and calls for curtailment of immigrants were widespread in America, and were the topic of much discussion among the elite. With every passing year, massive waves of new immigrants arrived in America. The schools bore the brunt of educating the new arrivals. Regardless of which version of history one reads, there is no doubt that Americanizing the children was one of the key goals of educational reformers. Revisionists criticize reformers for “the inculcation of attitudes and values that reflect dominant society”. However, Jewish students were fully cognizant of their Americanization. There is no doubt that Jewish children were taught America’s version of history and culture, such as the Pledge of Allegiance, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, while their culture was ignored in the curriculum.

By today’s standards, such omissions would be shocking. However, educators of the time were given a clear mandate to instruct the children in this manner, but not merely to brainwash the children and turn them into patriotic zealots, who rarely challenge the canons and American “apple pie”. Rather, they tried to reinforce some of the positive aspects of American life, such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Most of us in North America takes this for

granted. However, for Jews who came from Russia, these ideas were completely novel. Where schools were looked upon as institutions of repression in Eastern Europe, they were perceived as places of wonder in America. Therefore, a complete discussion of American ideas, culture, and laws were necessary for Jewish students in order to place all their new rights and responsibilities in some context.

Armed with the knowledge of their basic rights, an affinity for some towards Socialism, and having witnessed the horrible conditions of the workers in the factories, some of these children would later become active in Labour Unions. While I do not want to defend some aspects of the curriculum that Jewish students were exposed to, I believe that a fair amount of the Anglo-Saxon, American propaganda served some of the students well in the adaptation process.

Americanization came at a price. Many Jewish children became alienated from their parents and their "Old World customs". The language gap between the parents and the children became more pronounced. Some parents never took advantage of the English classes offered by the various philanthropic organizations on the Lower East Side. The children, having been in New York City's school system for a period of time, communicated in English. The

children abandoned Yiddish, with the exception of communicating with their parents. Even then, children had a difficult time explaining certain aspects of the curriculum, certain things were not easily translatable, especially with the child's eroding skills in Yiddish.

The language barrier played another important role in the teacher-student-parent triad. Jewish parents who spoke little or no English rarely visited the school, while parents from other cultural groups visited schools quite frequently. The lack of direct parental involvement seems quite alarming, knowing that parental involvement in a child's education is a key component for a child's success.

However, I believe that Jewish parents felt powerless as their children were transforming themselves into "Little Yankees". There was a large gulf developing between parents and children, primarily based on language. When a child would come home from school, his or her parents could not offer them help with homework or offer advice on school-related matters. The children regarded their parents knowledge base largely irrelevant. Most children would discuss very little about the daily activities at school, and they would surely never discuss any negative experiences that may anger their parents or

force them to get involved.⁹⁸

“Looking Through a Lens”

Joan N. Burstyn provides an interesting analysis of how historians select and interpret material based on their own convictions. This occurs overtly or covertly. Therefore, history is constructed reality. If we look at differing political ideologies, whether Marxist, Conservative, Liberal, Anarchist or Fascist, different ideas about the role and functions of the school become evident and distinct.

Burstyn states that historians rarely question why a particular issue is investigated and how often new ideas are introduced and then incorporated into interpretation of the past. She uses the metaphor of photography. Historians point the camera at the subject, choose the type of film, filter and lens to be used, and focus in on and blur out certain portions of the image. The image created is one that the photographer wishes to show himself and his audience.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Stephan F. Brumberg, *Going to America, Going to School*, page 136.

⁹⁹ Joan N. Burstyn, “History as Image: Changing the Lens”. *History of Education Quarterly*. Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer 1987, page 167.

Revisionist photographers have created an image of the history of education. The Marxist lens used to create this image was rarely used in American scholarship until the 1960's. While the portrait is not applicable to the case of Jewish immigrants, this does not mean that the Revisionist portrait is a totally inaccurate one. Yet, for a variety of reasons, it just does not hold up well for Jewish immigrants.

One Explanation for Revisionists' Shortcomings

This final section will look at a possible reason why Revisionist history is not applicable to every subordinate group. I do not believe that the Revisionists interpretation of American educational history is applicable to Jewish immigrants who came to America between 1881 and 1914.

Are there instances where the Bowles and Gintis' social class analysis stands up? Have Revisionist historians created an accurate picture of the plight of a particular group in North American society? There is no doubt there is some merit in their analysis. Certain groups in our society have been the victims of a system that has led to alienation. As we approach the 21st century, North America still has large segments of society that continue to be marginalized. This final section of the paper will look at a possible explanation as to why the Revisionist argument holds up when applying it to certain members of our society, and yet not others.

Minorities are denied equal access to educational opportunities. John Ogbu, a cultural anthropologist, points to African Americans, who have been denied the same quality of education that Whites have historically enjoyed. This

denial of equal access took the form institutional segregation in the South, while in the North these discriminatory practices were of a covert nature. Poorly trained teachers, inadequate books and supplies, inferior facilities, badly designed curricula characterized the second rate education African Americans have suffered. Poorly educated children ensure that mobility rates for these minorities do not change.

Ogbu describes two types of minority groups in North American society. The first, *voluntary minorities* have moved to their present societies on a voluntary basis. Their motives and expectations are for greater economic opportunities and for greater political freedom. These expectations influence the way they perceive and respond to treatment by the dominant members of society and by the institutions controlled by members of the dominant group. They selectively learn and incorporate certain features of their new host culture. The development of a new social identity does not lead to a rejection of the old one. Voluntary minorities interpret economic, political and social barriers against them as temporary problems, and with the passage of time, these barriers can be overcome. Voluntary minorities bear an optimistic dual frame of reference (comparing life in their new land) which allows them to be positive about the future. They attribute the barriers presented to them to the fact that they are “foreigners”, not speaking the native language or because

they were educated elsewhere. What arises from these perceptions is what Ogbu believes is a folk theory of getting ahead, through local educational structures playing a key role.¹⁰⁰ Jewish immigrants from the turn of the century, Southeast Asians, and South Asians may be considered voluntary minorities. These groups of minorities are characterized by *primary cultural differences* in relation to the dominant group of society.¹⁰¹ Primary cultural differences are differences that existed before the two groups came in contact.

The other group of minorities in North American society are *involuntary minorities*. Involuntary minorities include African-Americans, and Native Groups. They are groups brought into their present society through slavery, conquest or colonization. They resent their lost freedoms. The social, economic, and political barriers are perceived differently by these cultural groups. They compare their status with that of members of the dominant groups of society. Involuntary minorities feel that they are in a subordinate status as a result of their membership in a particular group. They do not see their position in society as temporary, rather they perceive discrimination as

100 John U. Ogbu. "Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities in Comparative Perspective". *Minority Status and Schooling*. (New York, Garland Publishing, 1991) pp. 8-13.

101 John Ogbu, "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation". *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 1987, page 320.

eternal and institutionalized. Involuntary minorities do not interpret cultural differences as barriers that they must conquer. They interpret these differences as symbols of identity that must be preserved. With involuntary minorities, *secondary cultural differences* are differences that develop after two groups have come into contact. These cultural differences are developed as a response to contact with the dominant group.¹⁰² African Americans have developed an alternative way of coping and perceiving their relationship with White America. Unlike voluntary minorities, they cannot return to their “homeland”. Involuntary minorities distrust members of the dominant classes and the institutions that the latter controls.¹⁰³ Some involuntary groups develop *cultural inversion* strategies, which is a response to certain forms of behaviour of the dominant group which is not perceived as appropriate to members of the minority group. Some behaviour that is deemed appropriate by minority groups is in direct contrast with the perceptions and values of the dominant group. Whereas immigrants perceive that acquisition of academic learning and skills in the majority culture as an additional set of skills to be drawn upon as relevant and appropriate, while

¹⁰² John Ogbu, “Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation”. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18, 1987, page 322.

¹⁰³ John U. Ogbu. “Immigrant and Involuntary Minorities in Comparative Perspective”. *Minority Status and Schooling*. pp. 8-17.

involuntary minorities see school learning as replacing their traditional culture.

I find this distinction to be quite helpful. It allows us to examine and scrutinize the shortcomings of Revisionist history when applied to the case of Jewish immigrants and other voluntary minorities. However, Revisionist history holds its own when we apply their interpretation of American educational history to involuntary minorities.

Some Final Comments

I have attempted to shed some light concerning the inconsistencies of Revisionist historians' perception towards schooling in America as applied to the case of Jewish immigrants. Their analysis perhaps helps our understanding the plight of minorities in our urban areas today. However, I feel that in general, the Revisionist Historians of Education treatment of the role of public schooling is excessively deterministic. They are guilty of some of the same things they charge traditional historians: looking at history through their own self-serving, ideological lens.

I have tried to show that while there is some merit to Revisionists' arguments, their theories and interpretations of American educational history fall short of explaining why some groups did thrive and prosper through the American educational system.

Inequality is prevalent in North American society. The schools have not made the situation worse, they have made it better. The early reformers of the 19th and 20th century should be praised for the visionary and innovative changes they created. It is very difficult to judge the motives of early reformers without concrete evidence. It is irresponsible to criticize them based on speculation

that may be tainted by ideology. Reformers, faced with an enormous wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, did a tremendous job in ensuring that every child would be able to receive some sort of education. For it was not just Jewish children that were forced to accommodate to changing times; reformers had to reevaluate their beliefs and convictions when faced with the influx of immigrants.

I do not think that the Jewish experience in America, and in the schools, fits the general tenets of the Revisionist historians. There is no doubt that the schools have been, at times, repressive agencies of the elite. Nor is there any doubt that a case can be made that policy-makers did make many mistakes. It should be remembered that they were faced with the tremendous onslaught of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, representing diverse cultures, customs, languages and religions.

The Jews were subjected to horrific conditions in Eastern Europe. Persecution, pogroms, social and economic isolation in the Old World had a profound effect concerning their perceptions of the New World. Unlike other immigrant groups from Europe, who were primarily economic refugees, Jews knew that for better or worse, America was now their home. There was no turning back. Living in filthy, bleak tenements of Hester and Ludlow streets on the Lower

East Side was a drastic improvement over the persecution endured in the Old World.

Revisionist history, fashionable in the 1960's and 1970's, in general, paints a dark, portrait of the role of education in the adaptation of immigrants in America. This portrait obscures the fact that there were some successes. The Revisionists tend to ignore the environment, events and setting of the period they are analyzing. Much of their work was written in the 1960 and 1970; a time when many scholars were swept away with the romanticism of Neo-Marxism; as America was experiencing a social revolution.

Jewish immigrants realized they would have to make some major sacrifices in order to survive and prosper in America. No doubt with some reluctance, Jews knew that their customs and culture would be threatened and would undergo a severe change. The introduction of a secular curriculum to their children was perceived as a necessary evil in exchange for social mobility. While the financial means were severely limited, there is no doubt that Jewish immigrants held education in high esteem. It proved to be warranted. Their new lives in America were not easy. However, for many, America represented an opportunity that was not available to them in the Old World.

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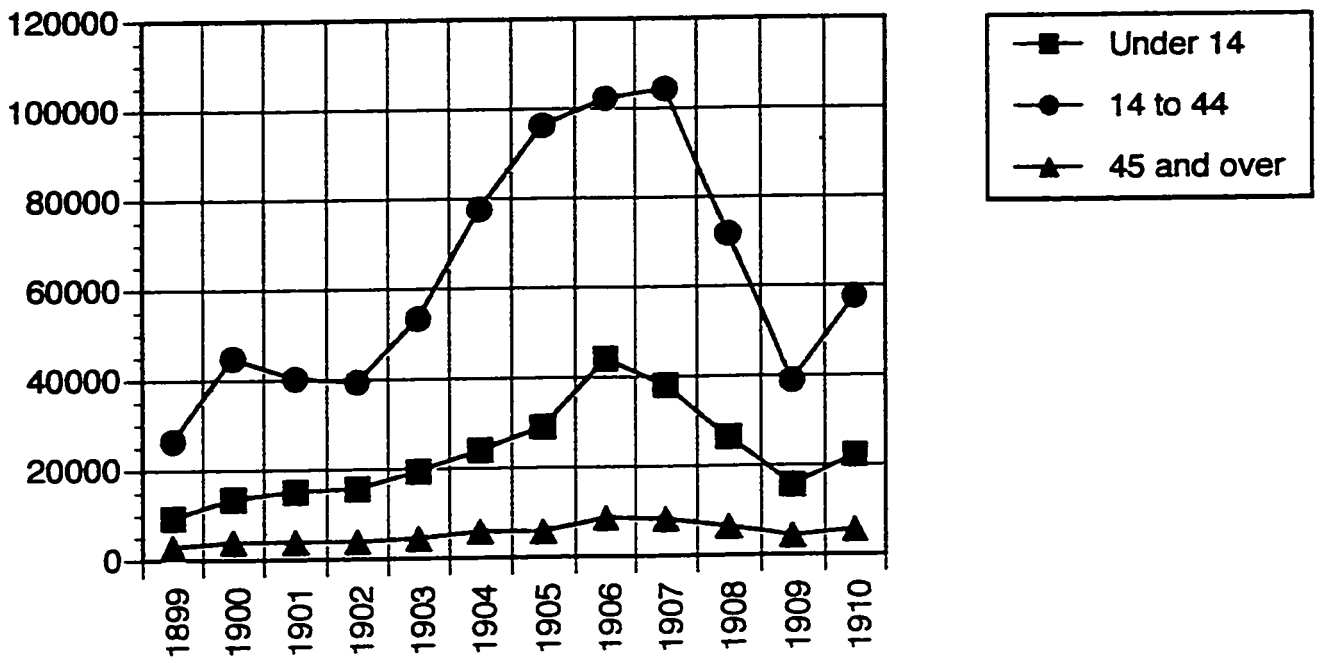
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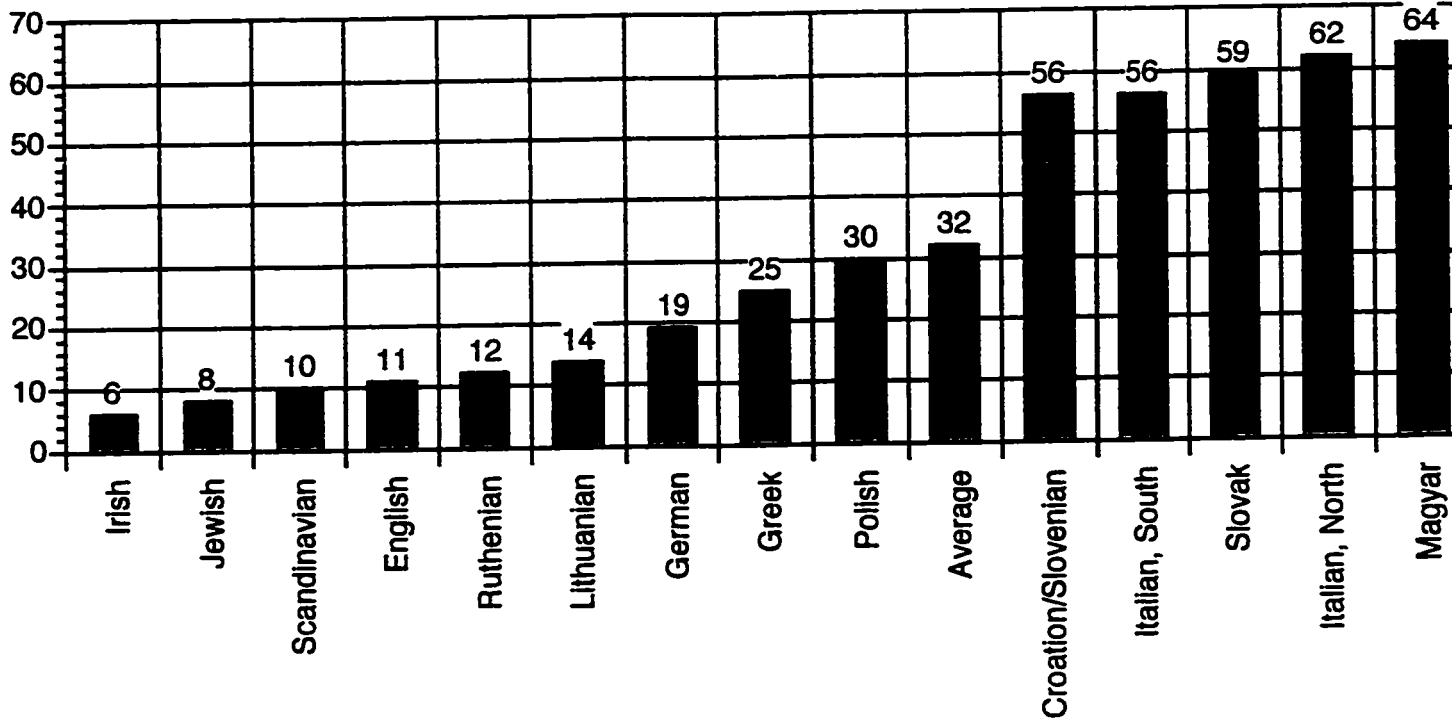
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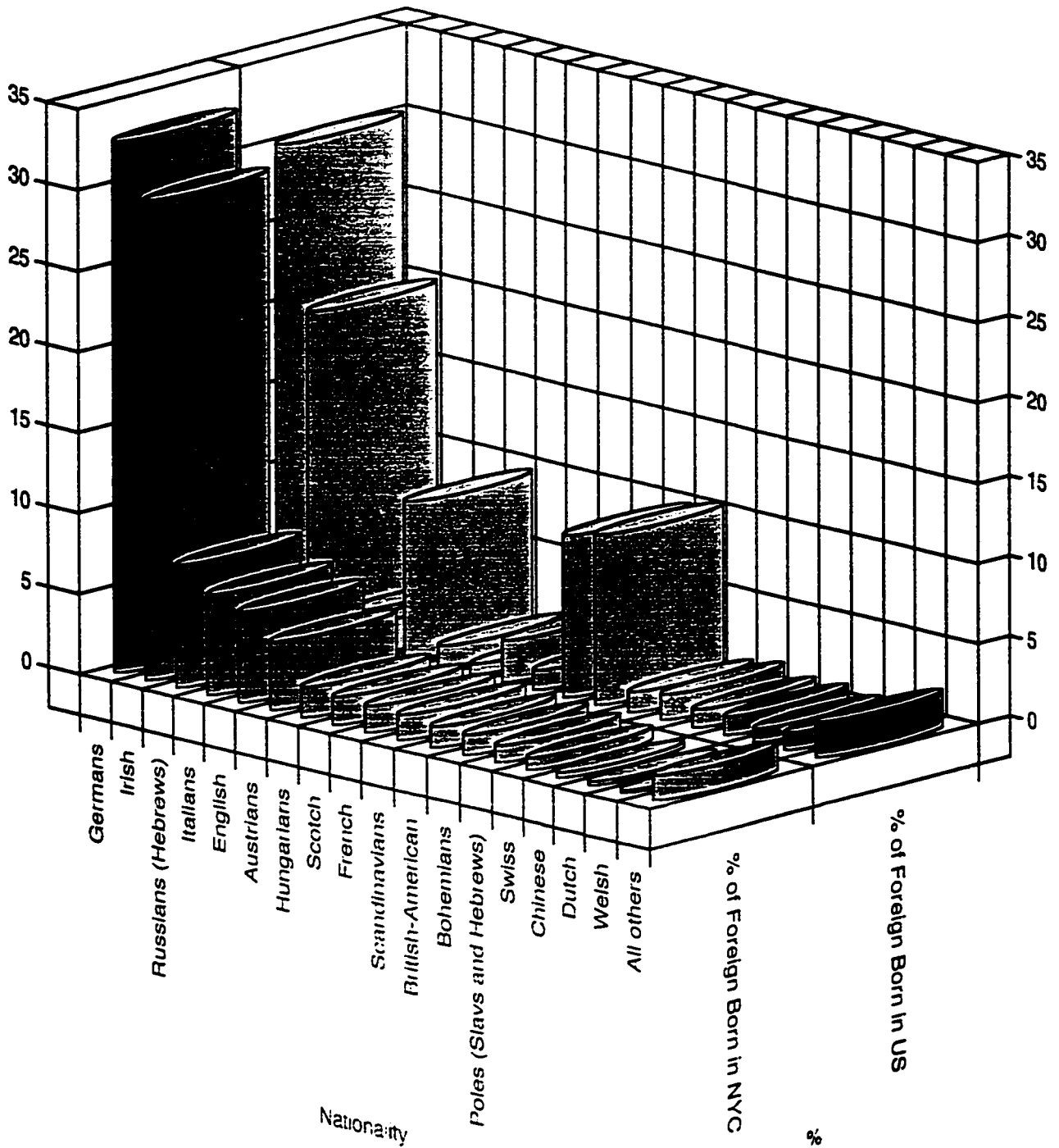
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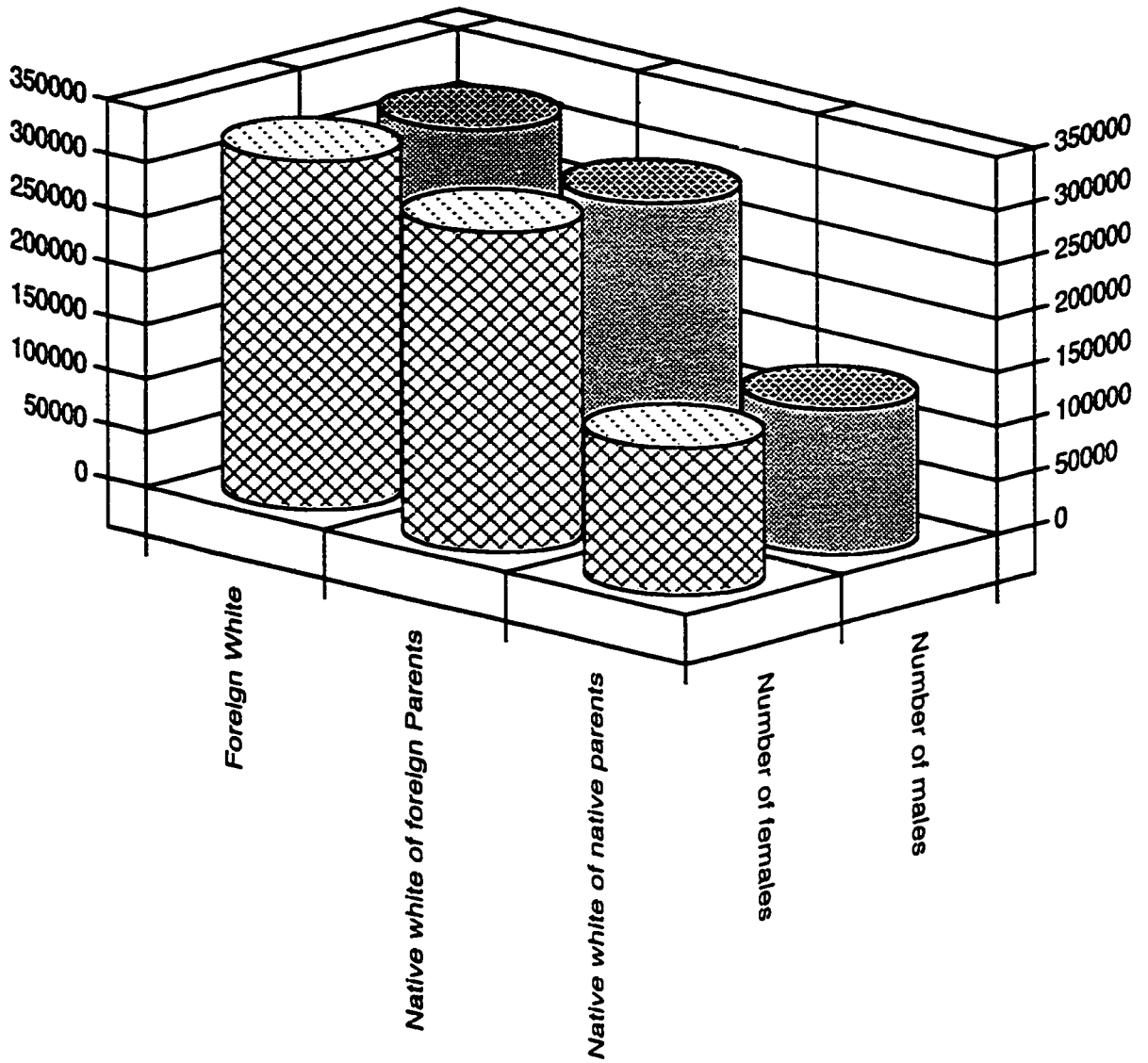
European Immigrants Aliens admitted/Departed Ratio 1908-1910



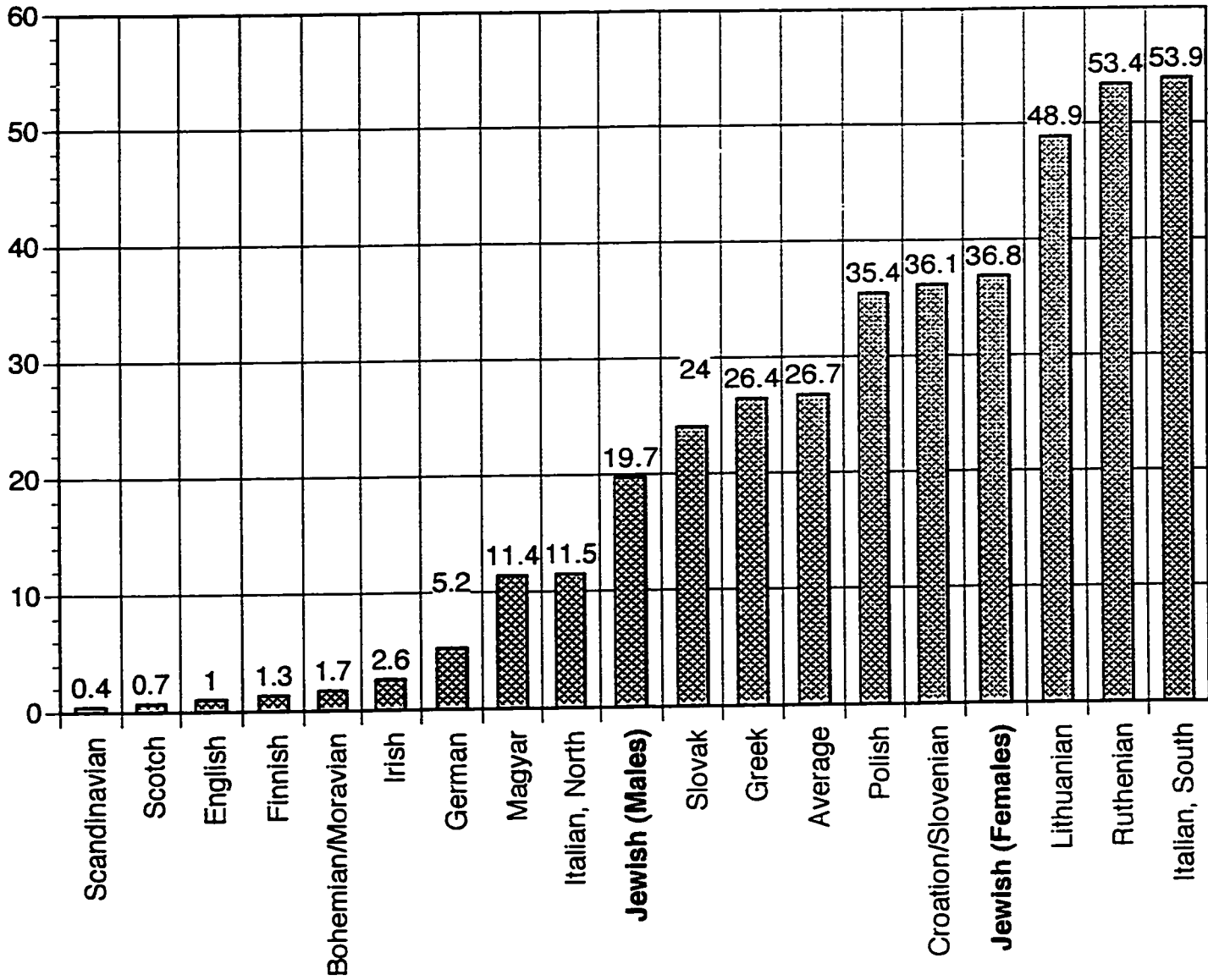
Foreign born, by nationalities, census of 1890

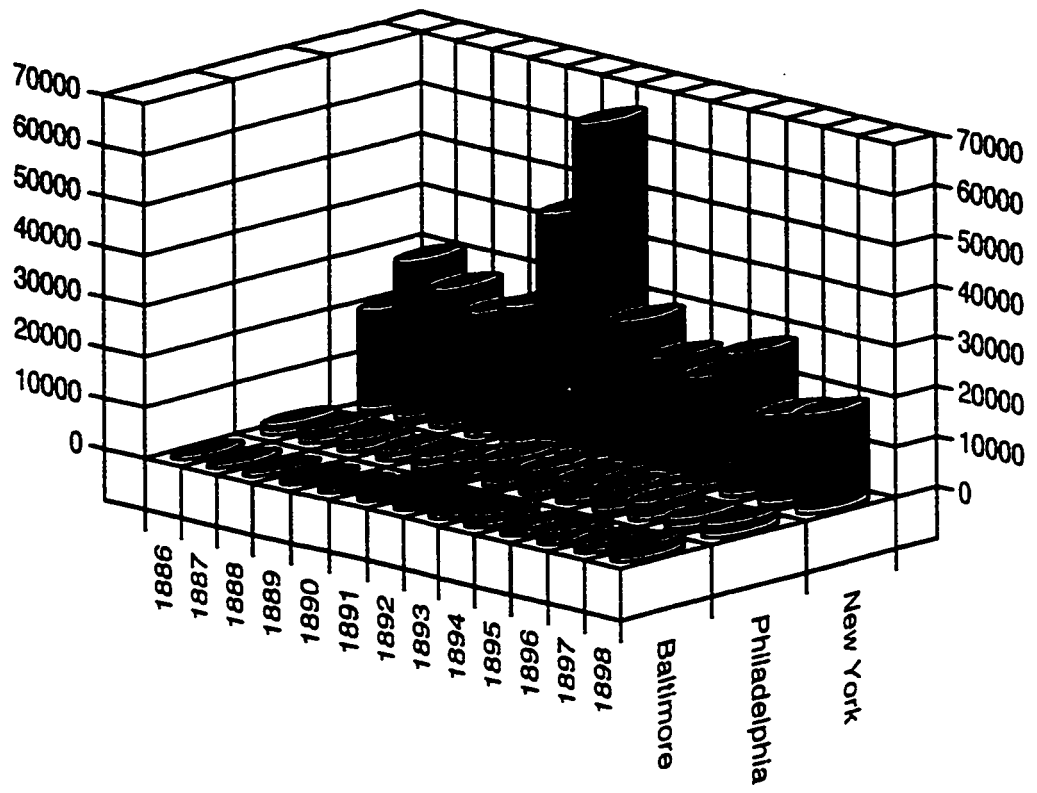


General Nativity

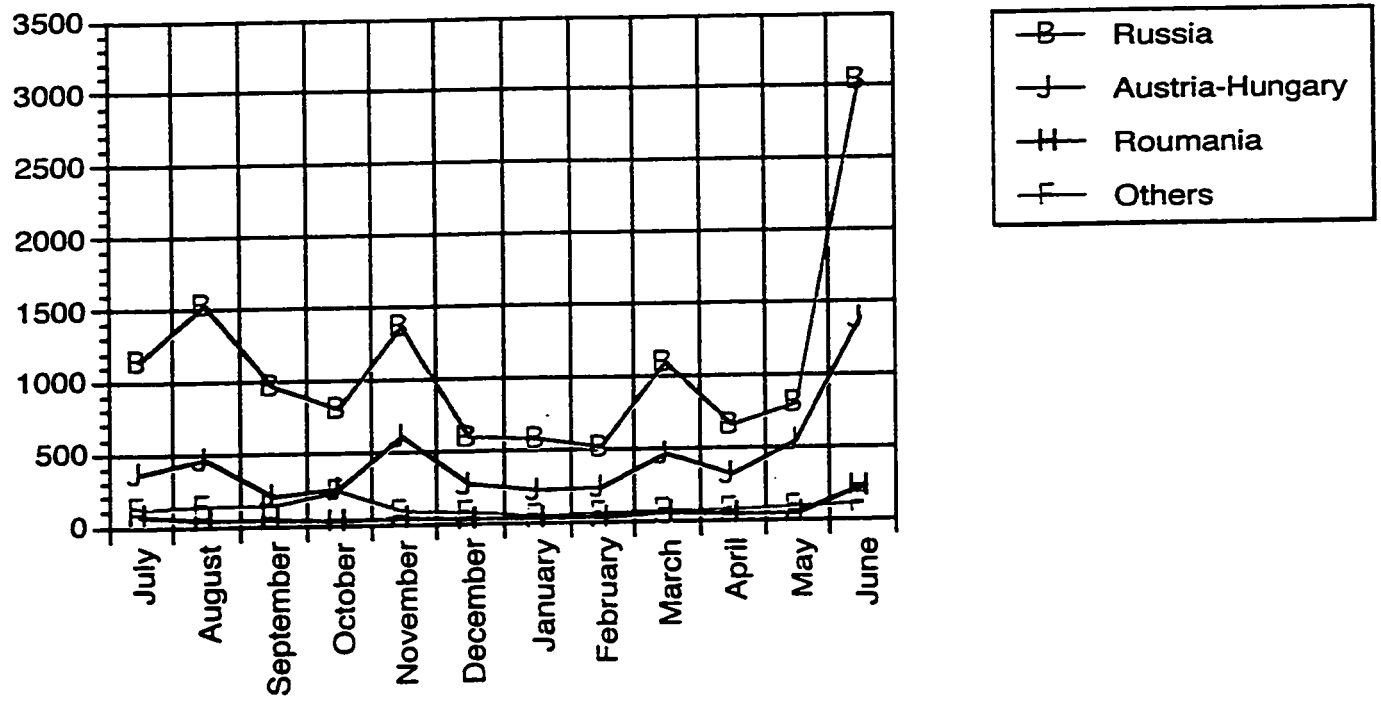


Illiteracy of European Immigrants. 1899-1910

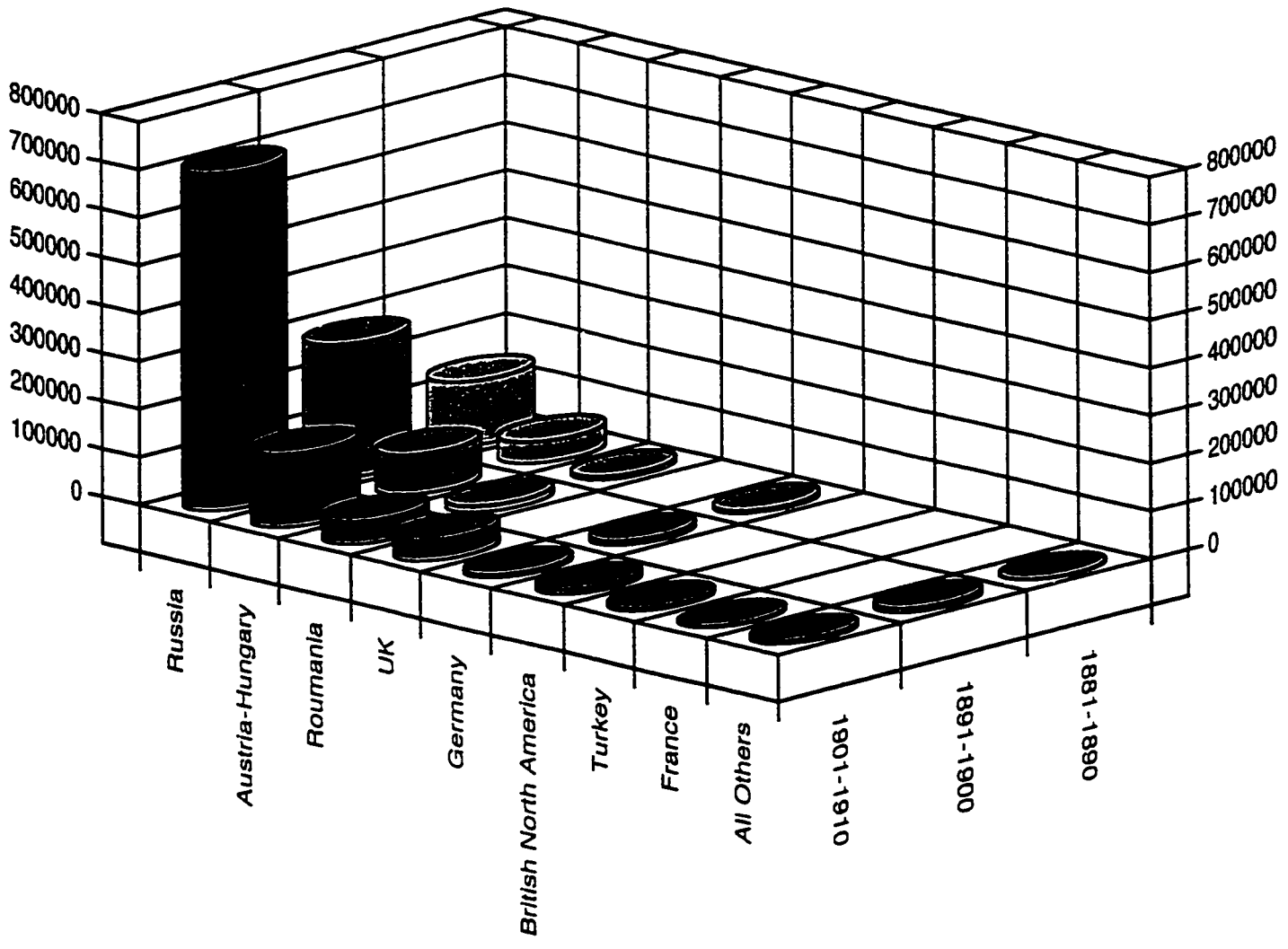


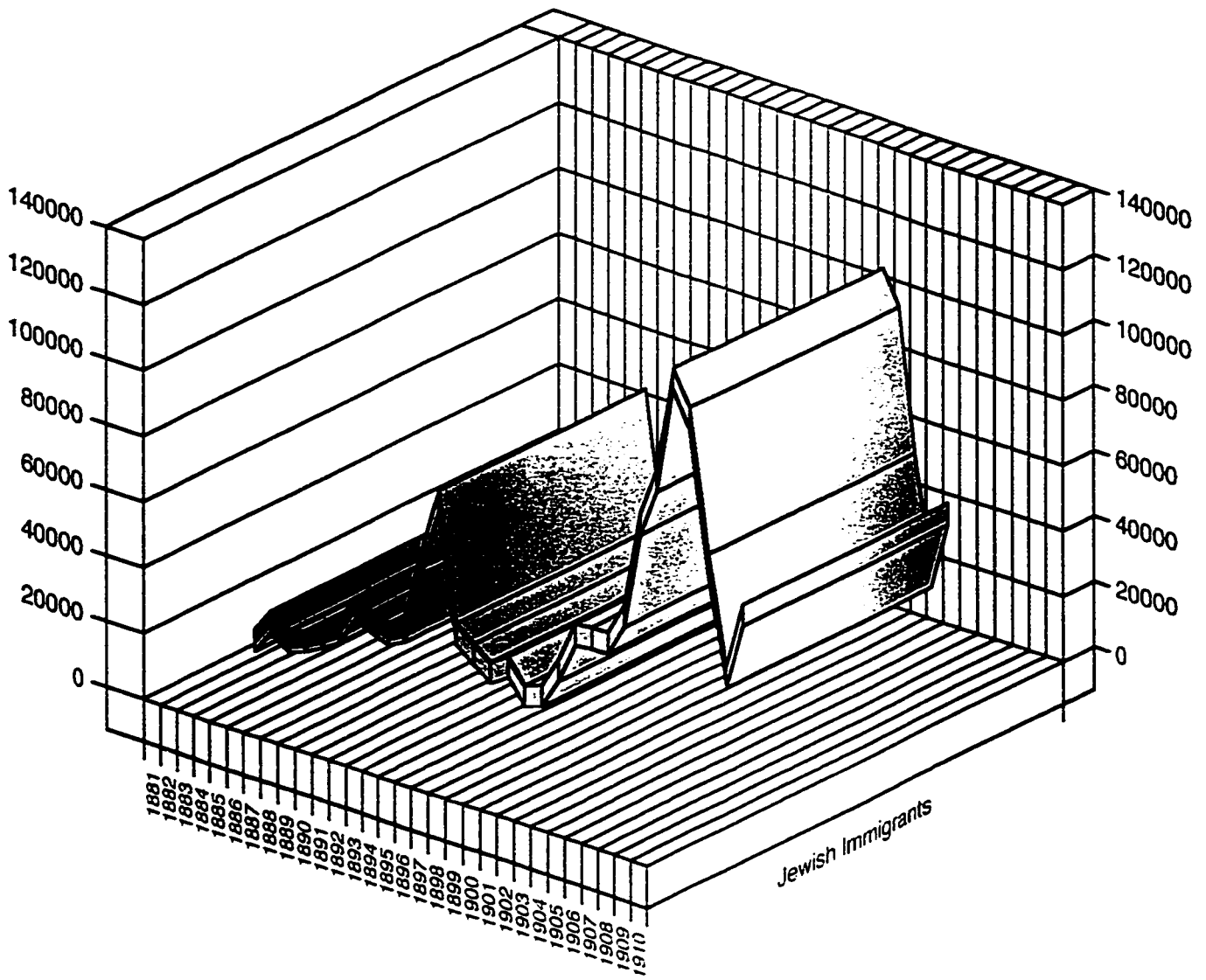


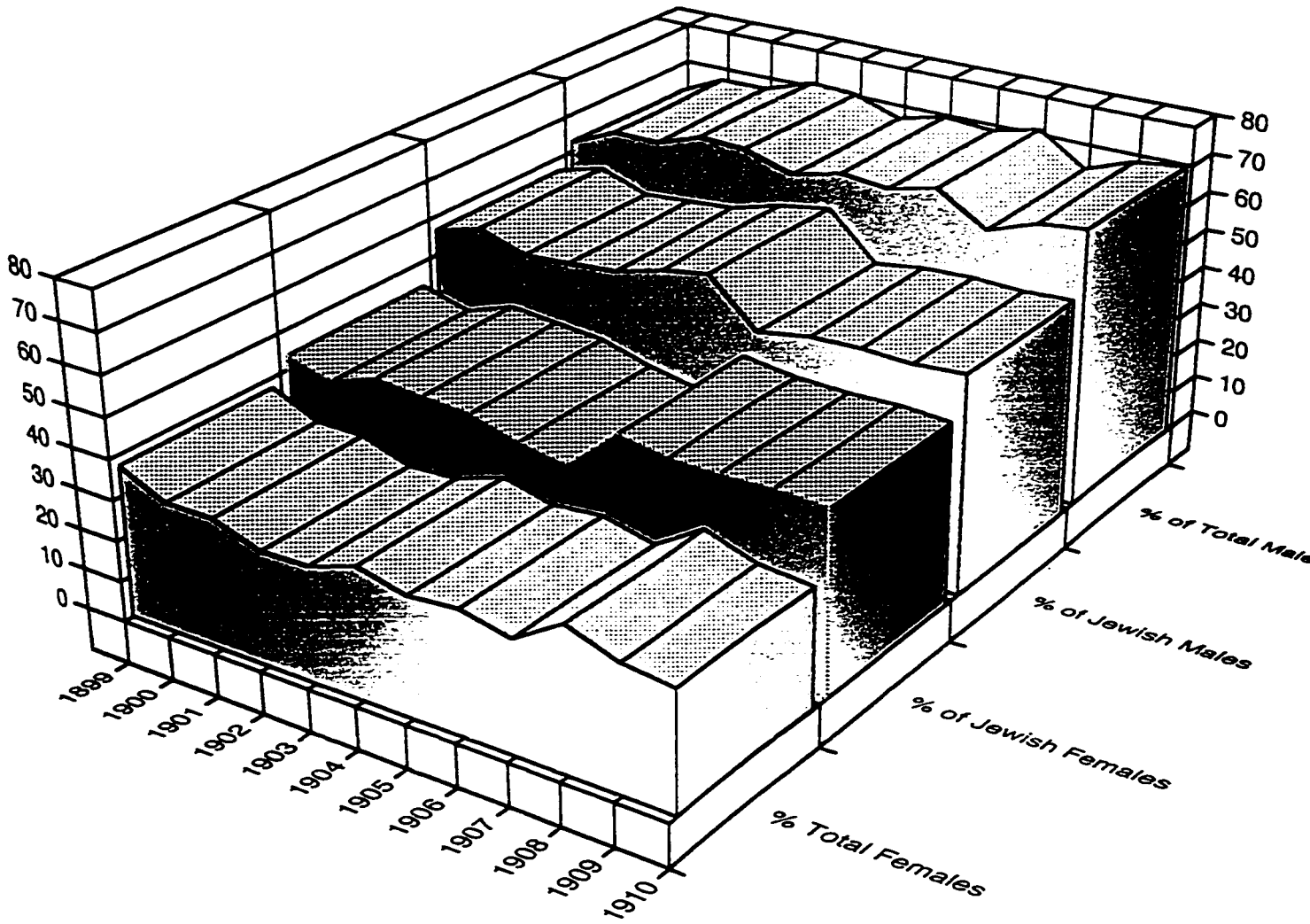
Jewish Immigration at the Port of New York, July 1885, to June, 1886, by Month and Country of Birth.



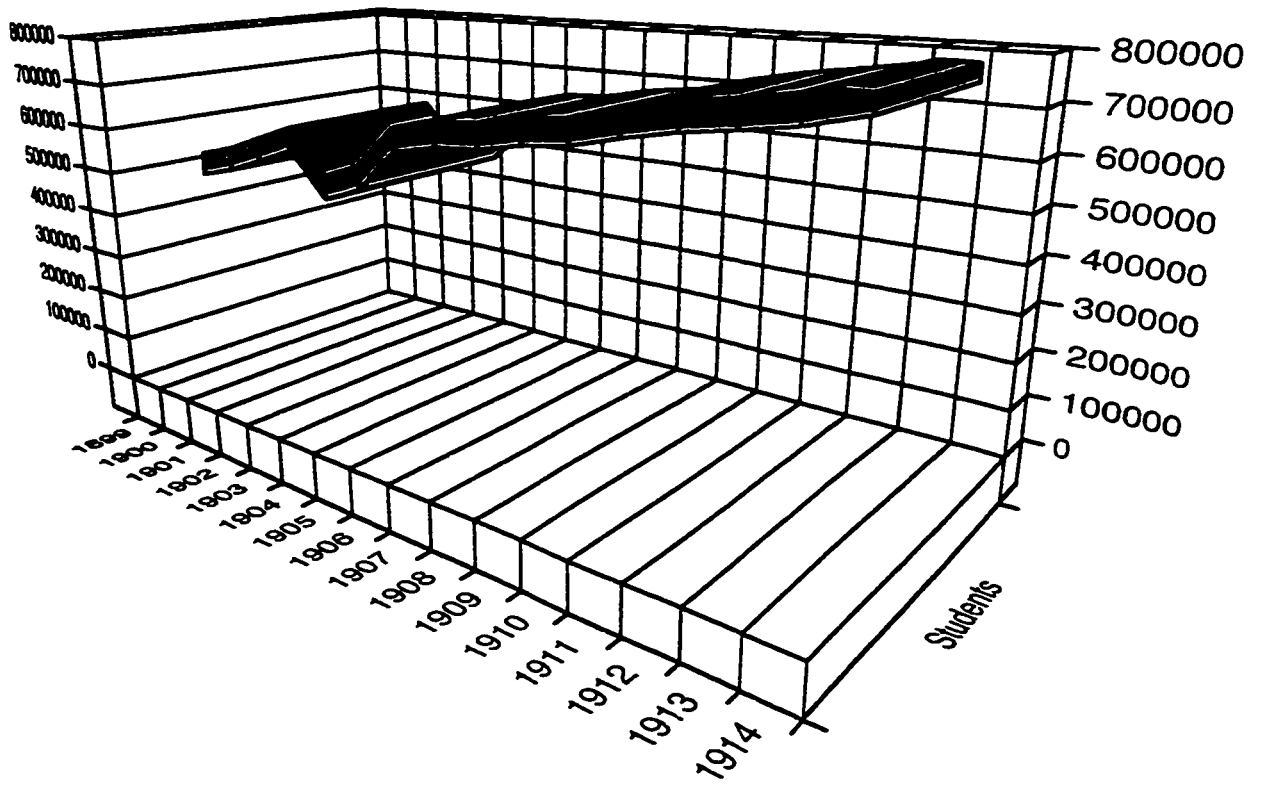
Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881 to 1919, by Decade and Country of Birth



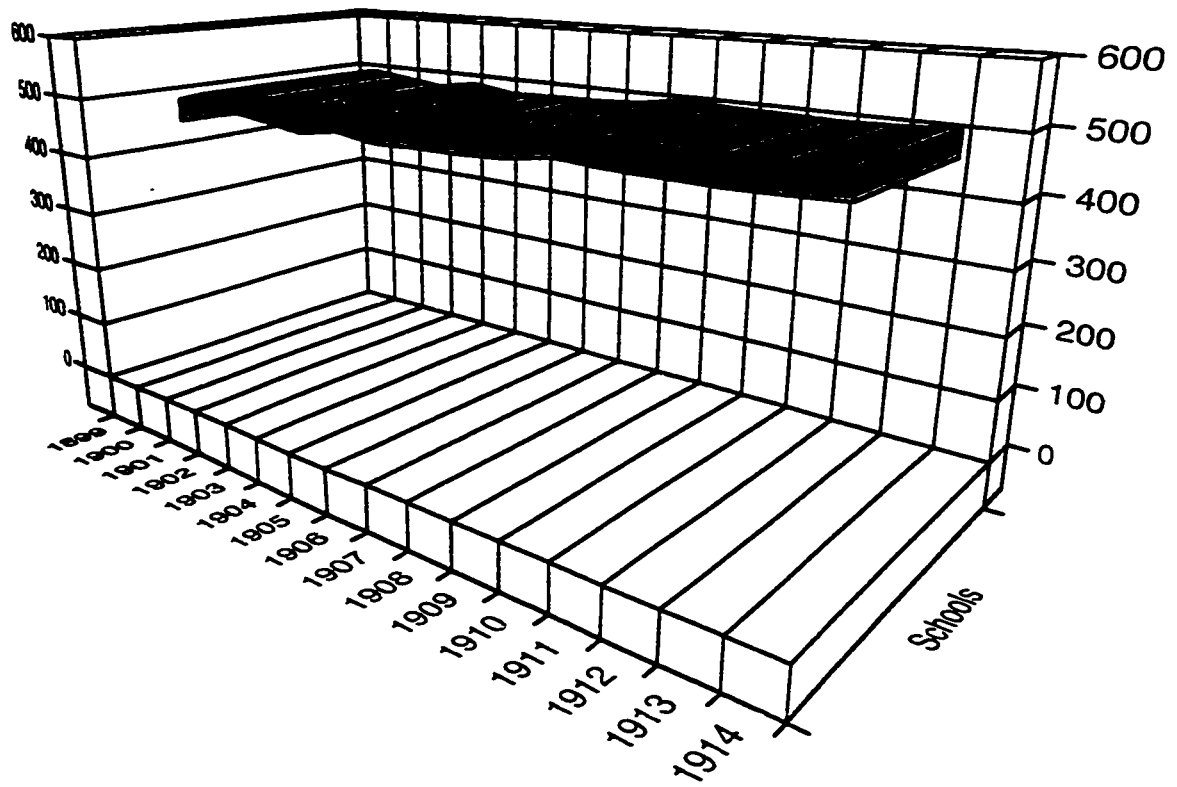




NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN DAY SCHOOLS



NUMBER OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. *

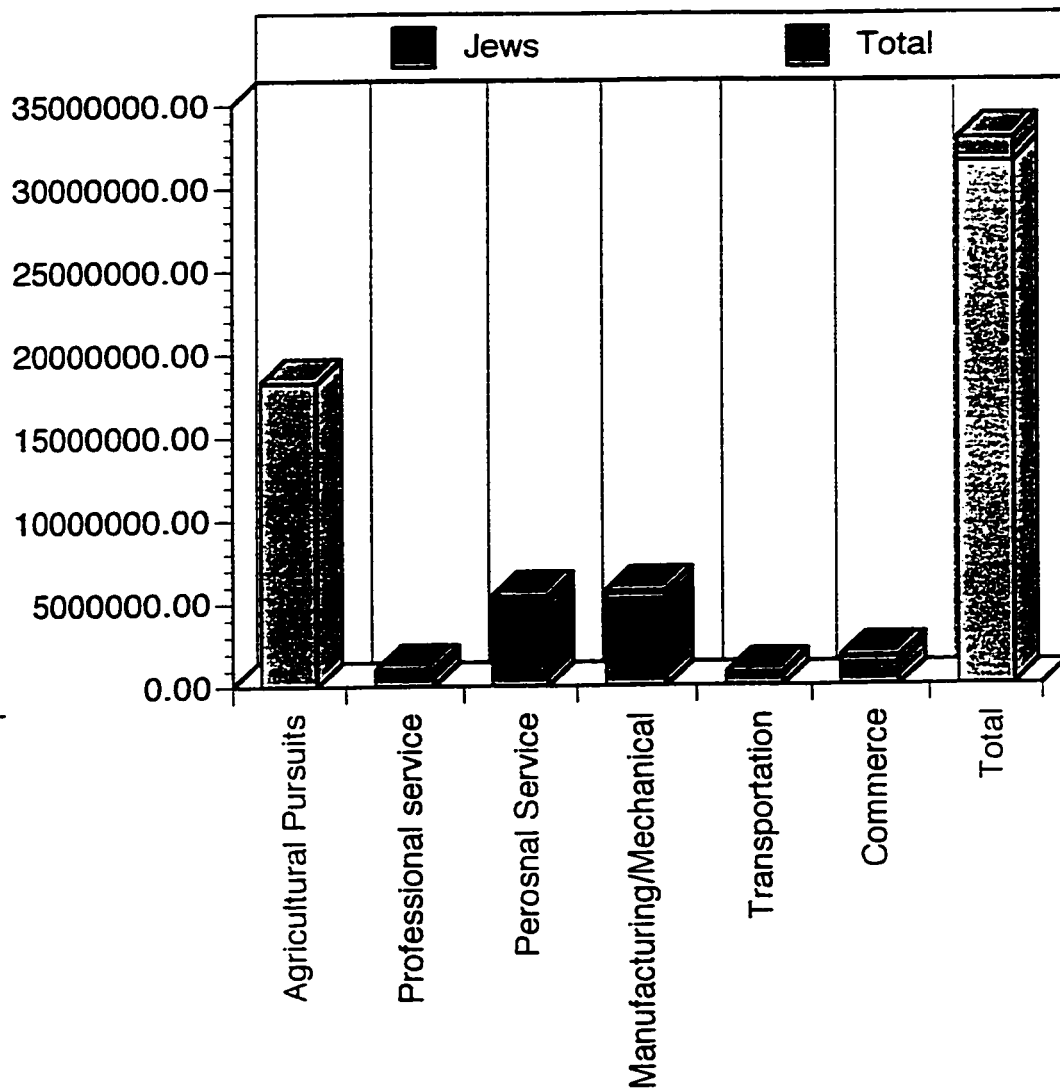


*The apparent lack of growth in certain years is accounted for by the fact that the Superintendent was attempting to consolidate the **organization**; elementary, primary, and grammar schools, when located under one **roof**, were now to be one school, with one principal. Also, when an old building was replaced, it was always with a larger school, thus increasing the number of seats, although in the roster of the schools, this did not show.

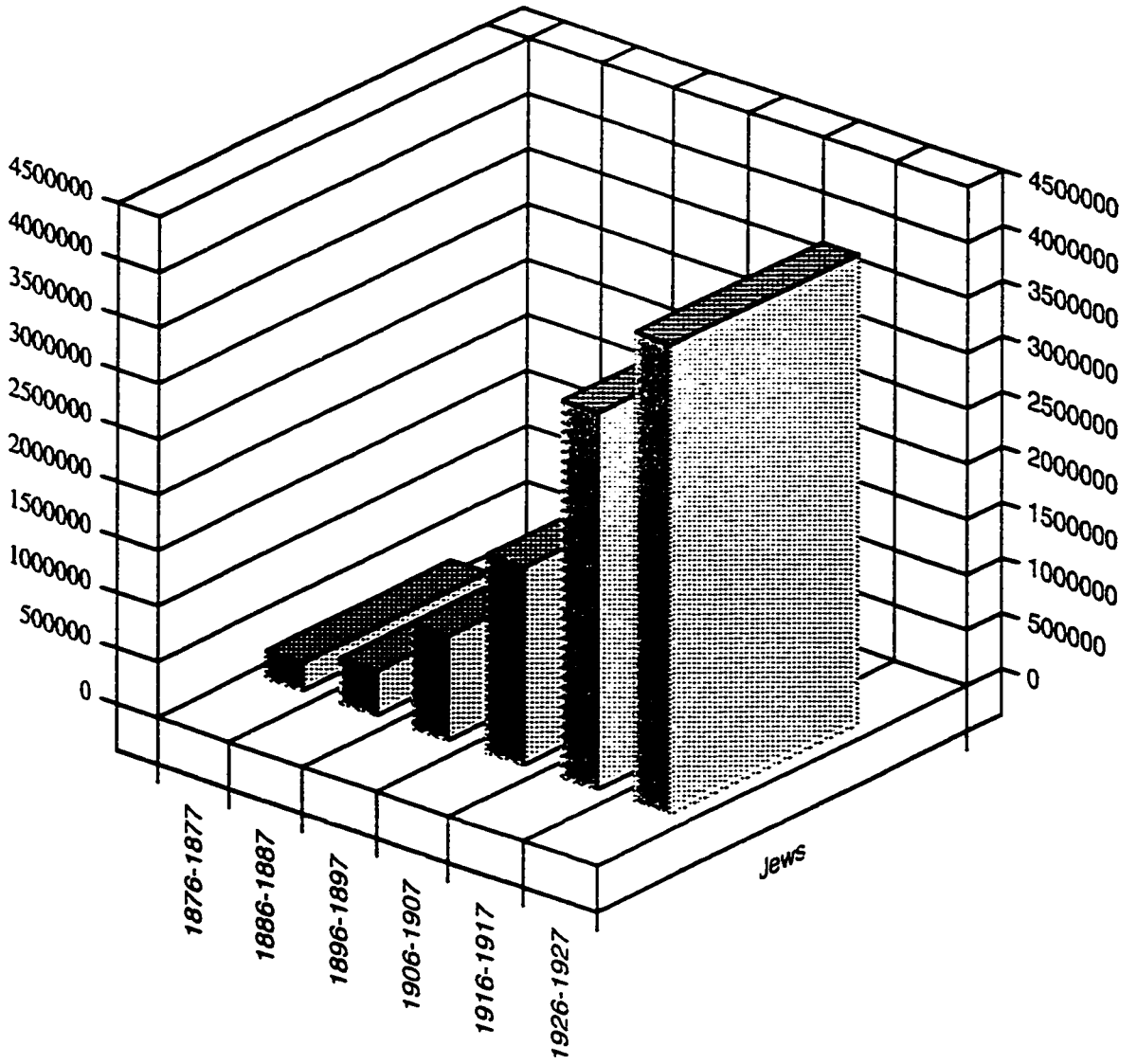
Source for Tables are the First through Sixteenth Annual Reports of the City Superintendent of Schools, 1899-1914.

Selma Cantor Berrol, *Immigrants at School*, New York City, 1898-1914, pp.144-145.

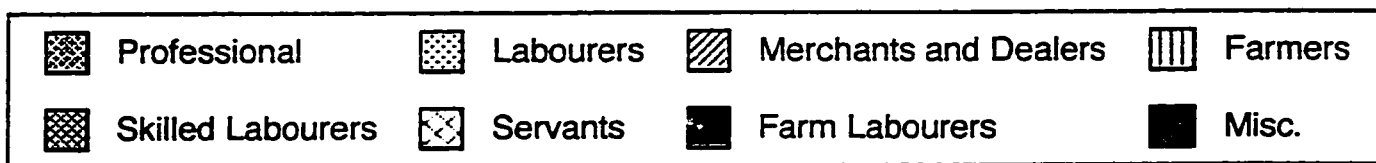
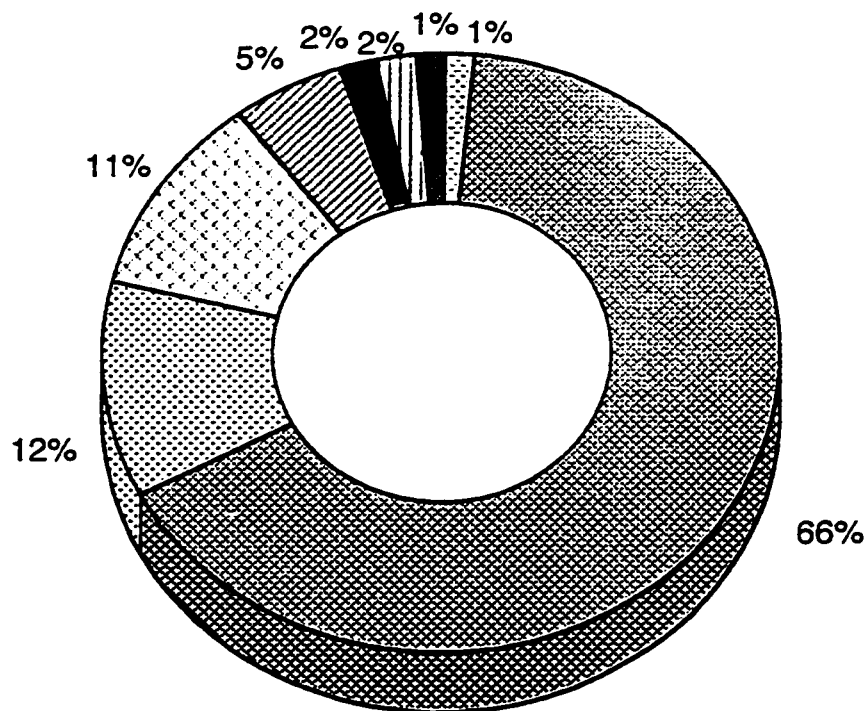
Participation of Jews in Occupations in the Russian Empire, 1897



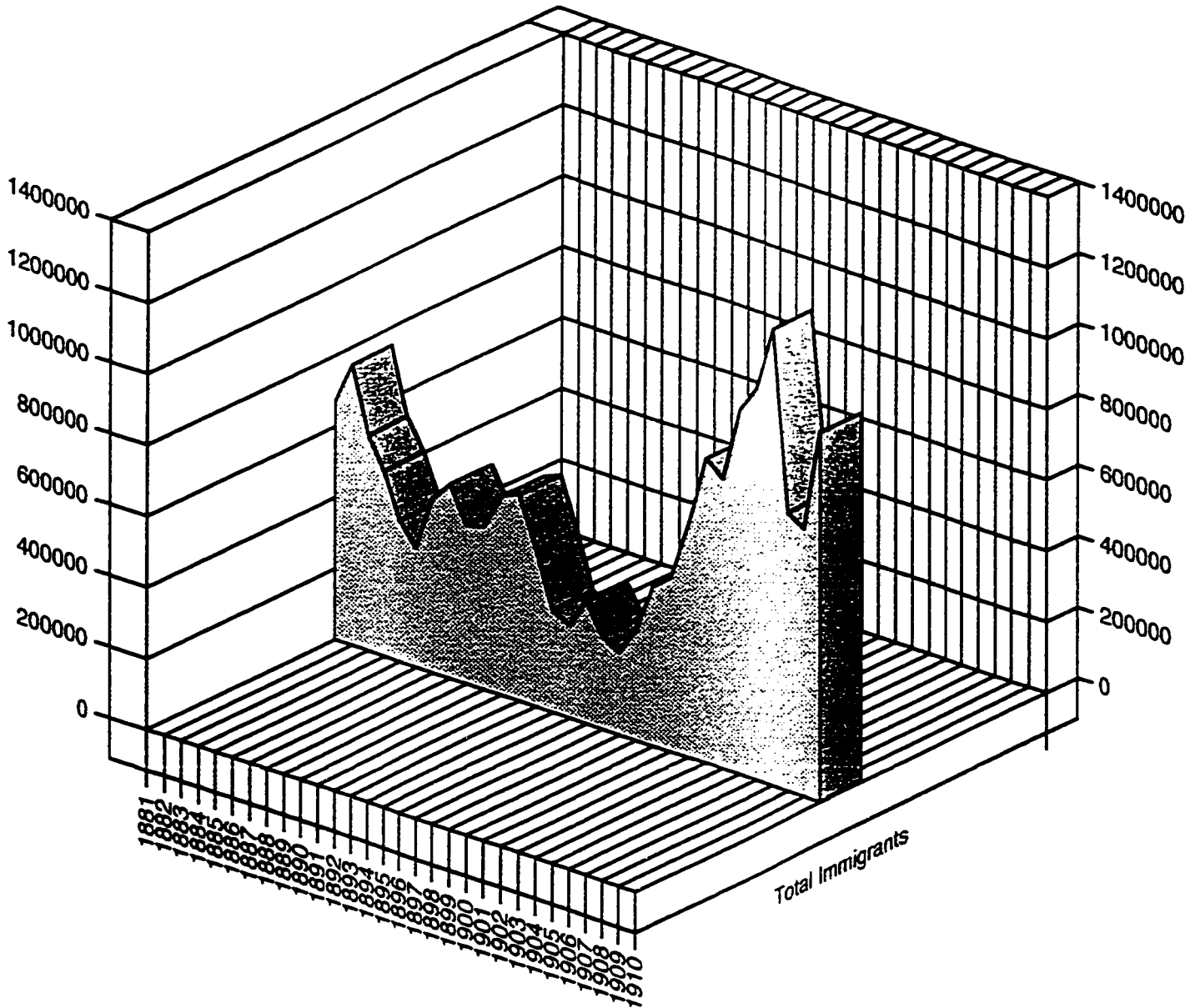
Jewish Population in the United States



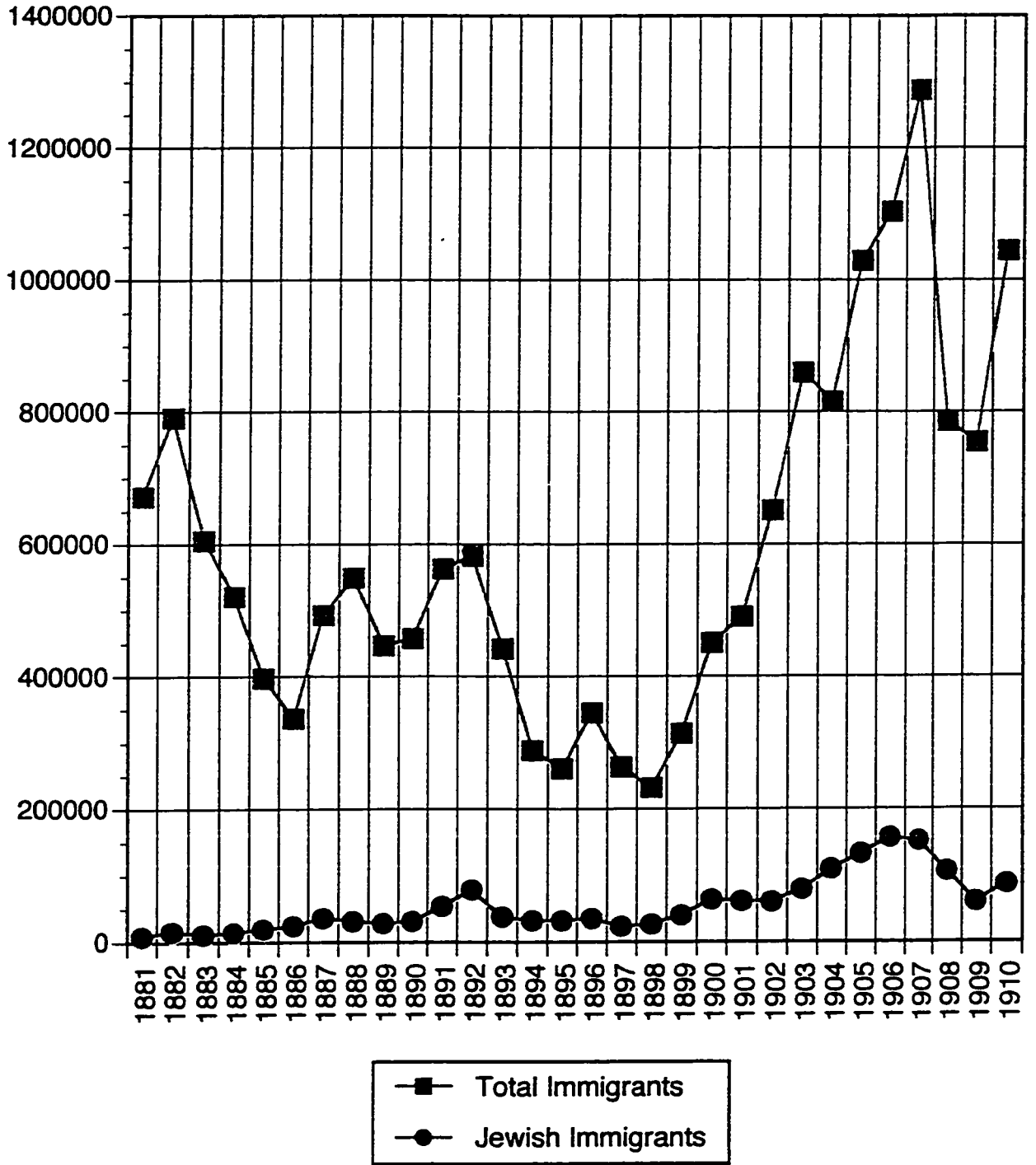
Jewish Immigrants Reporting Occupations, 1899-1910



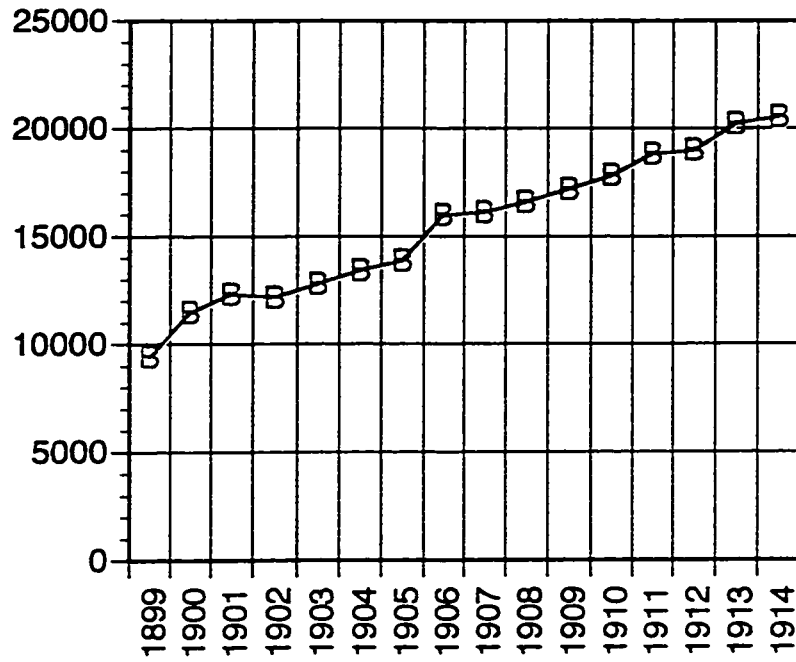
Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881-1910



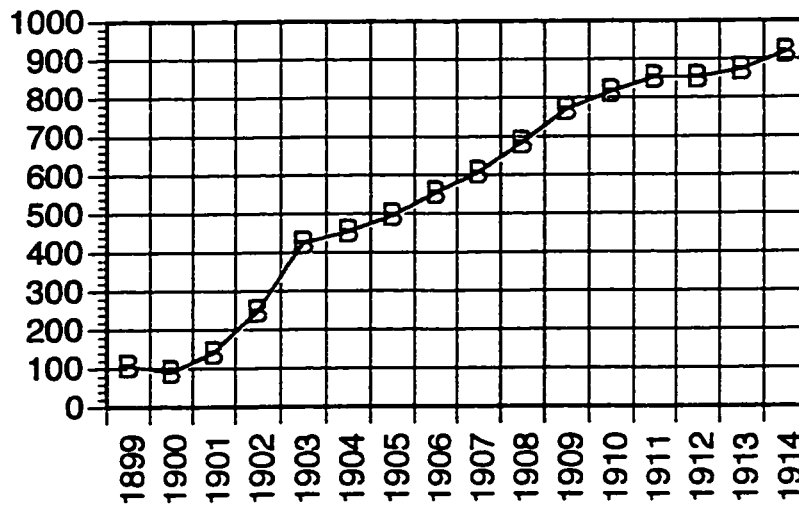
Immigration and Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1881-1910



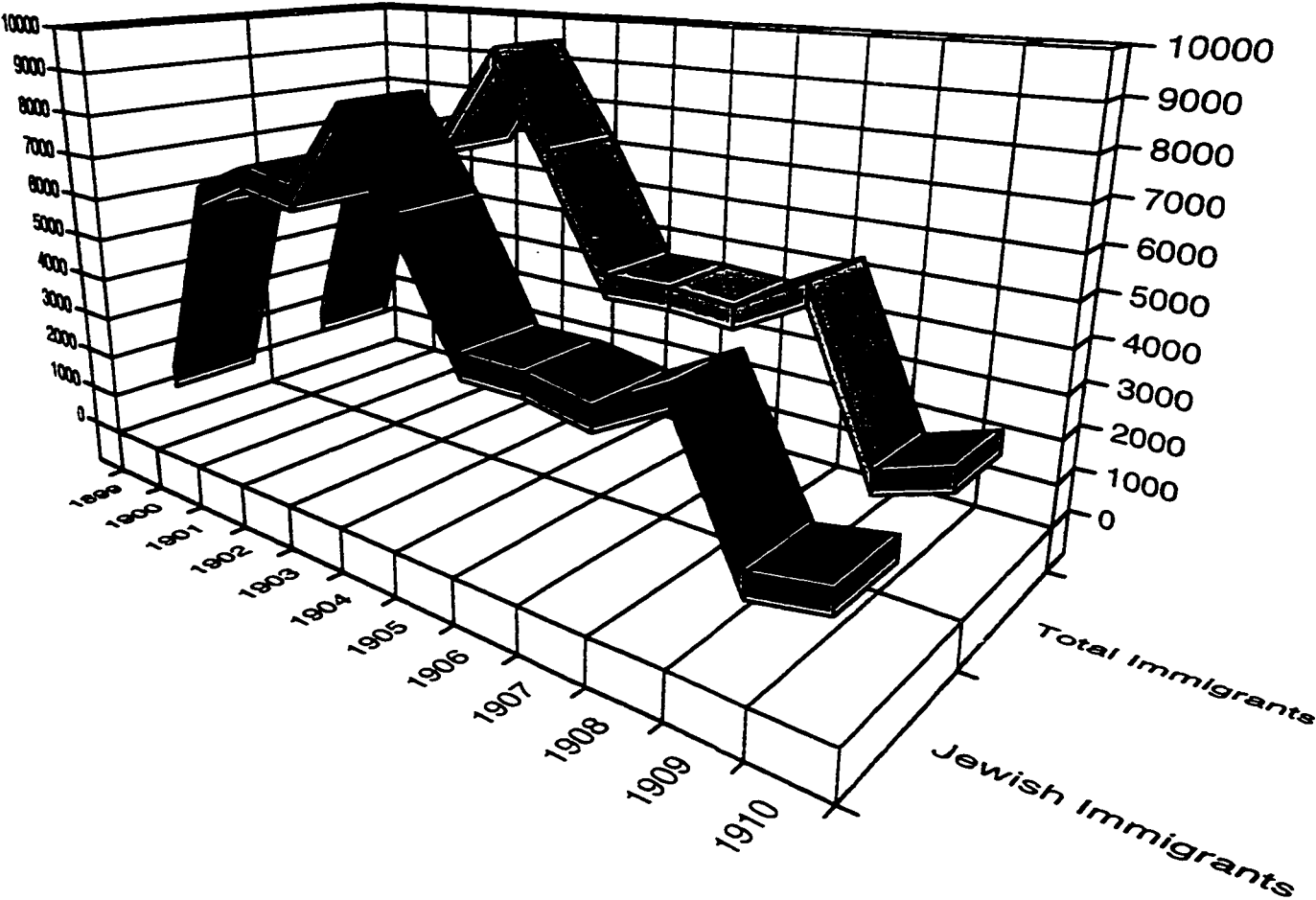
NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN THE DAY SCHOOLS



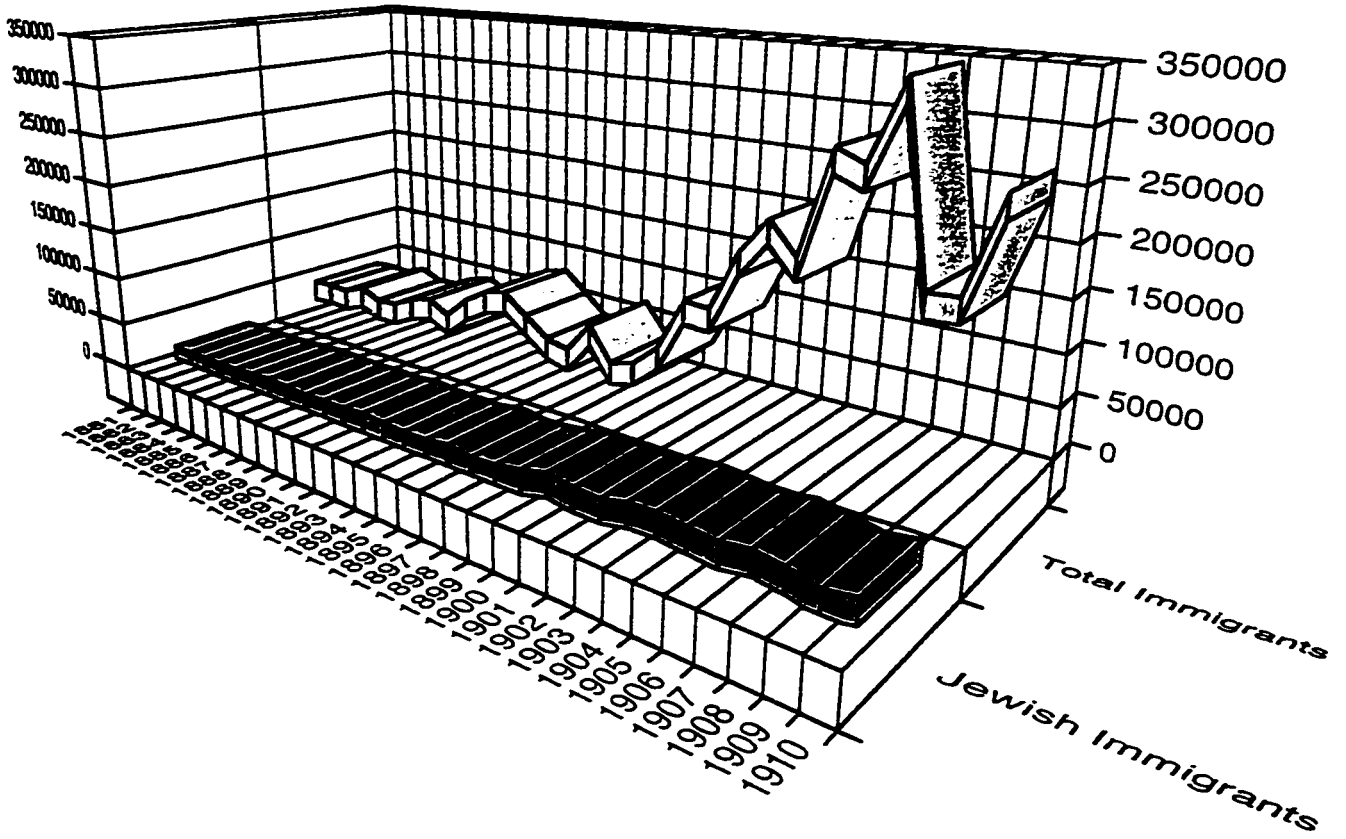
NUMBER OF KINDERGARTEN CLASSES



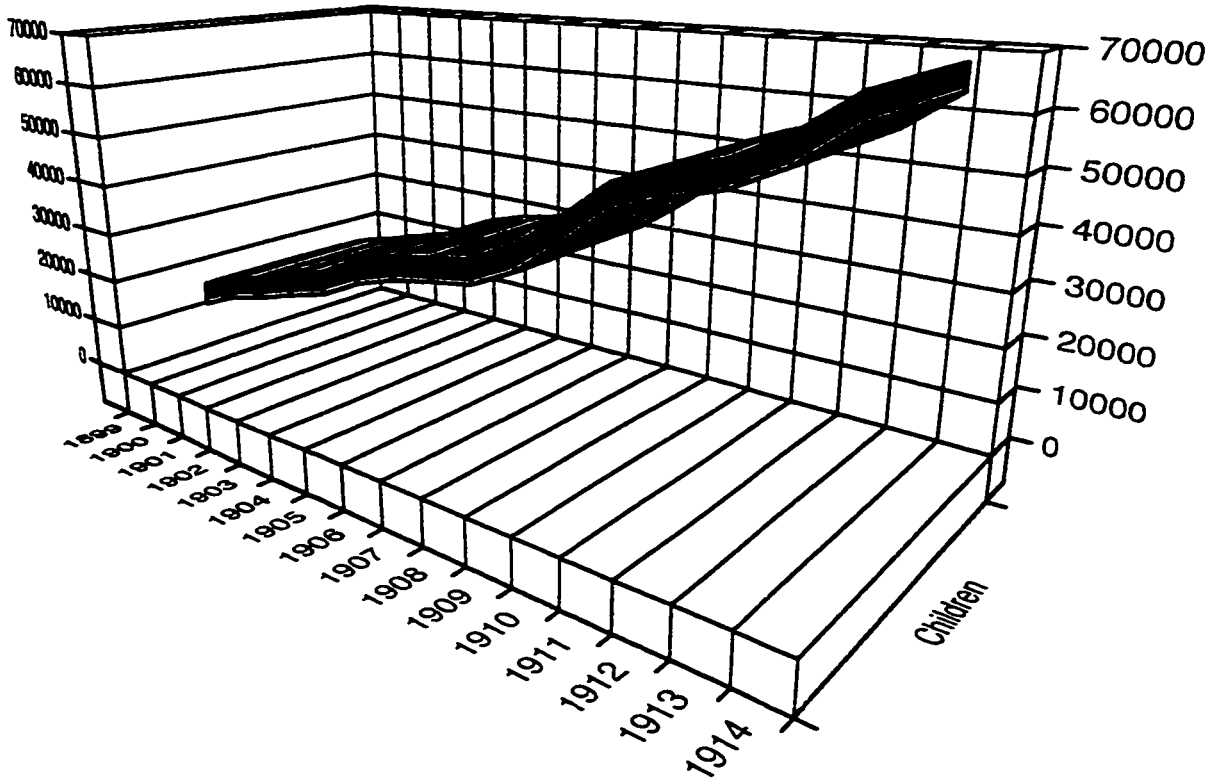
Total Immigration, Total Jewish Immigration from Roumania, 1899-1910.



Total Immigration and Jewish Immigration from Austria-Hungary, 1881 to 1910

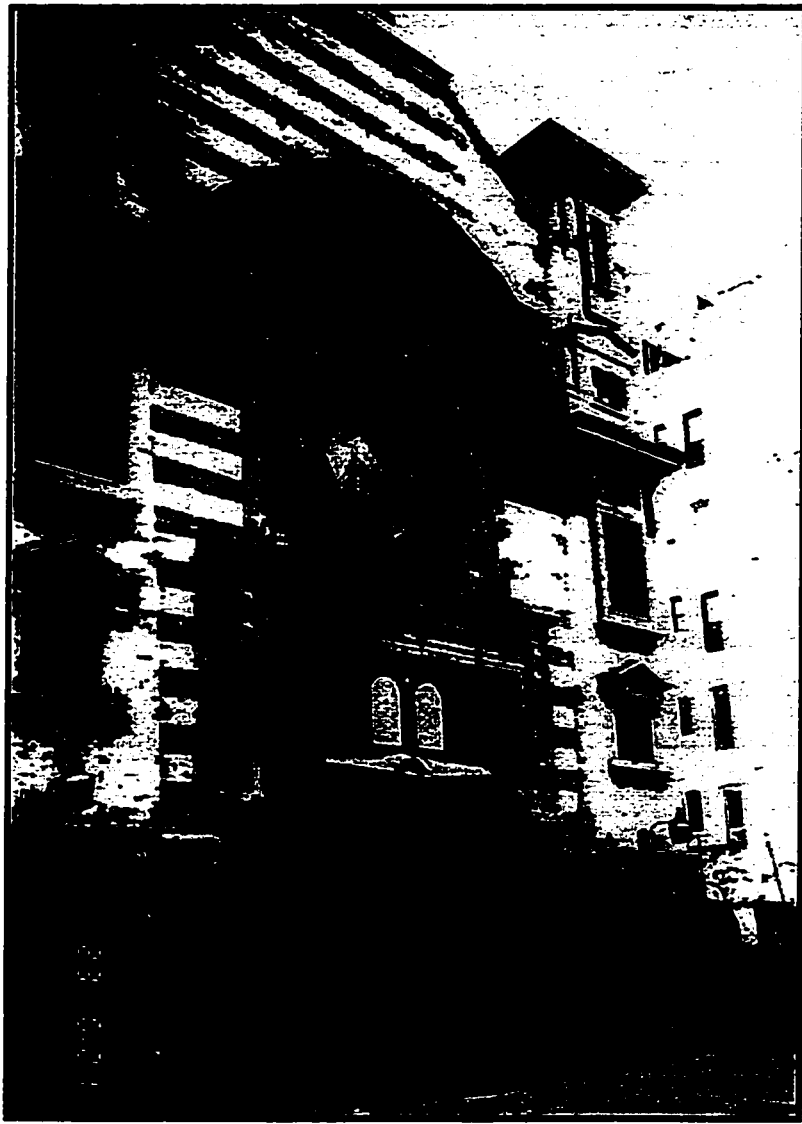


NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN HIGH SCHOOLS





Typical Classroom



Synagogue on the Lower East Side



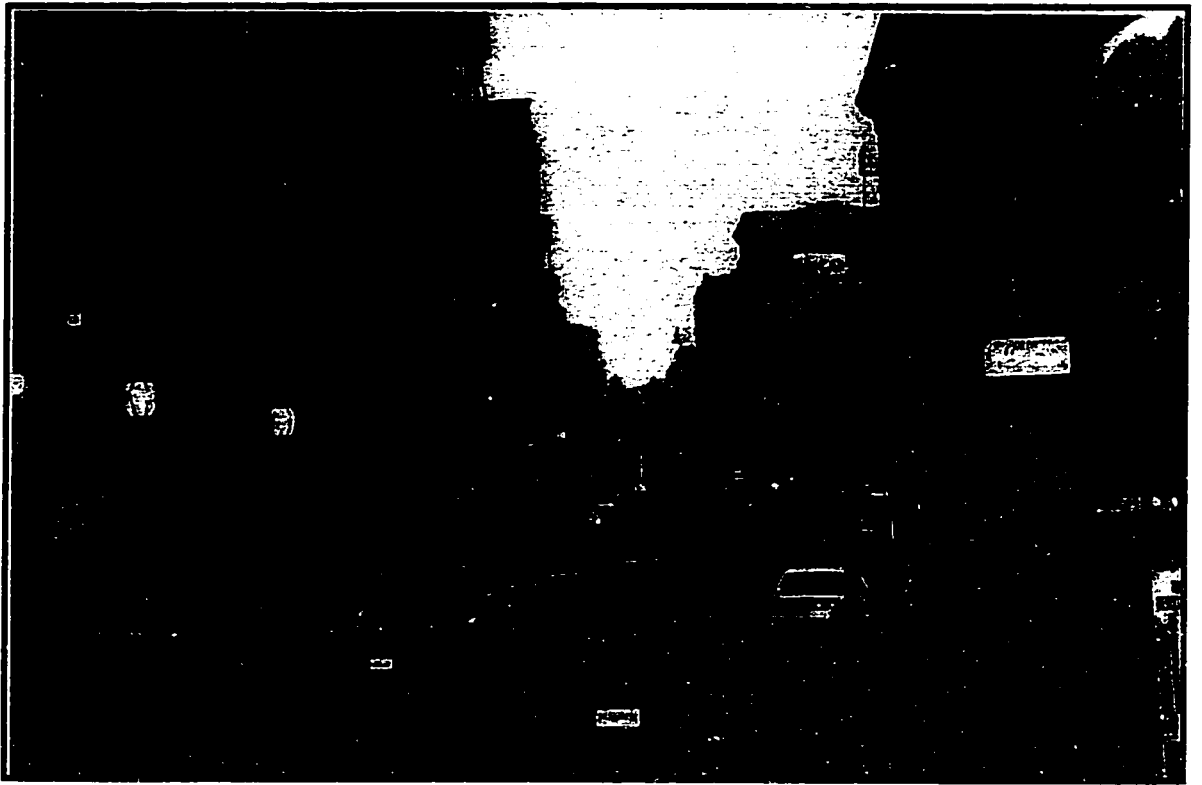
Shopping on the Lower East Side

THE FIRST CEMETERY
OF THE
SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE SYNAGOGUE
SHEARITH ISRAEL
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
1656 - 1833

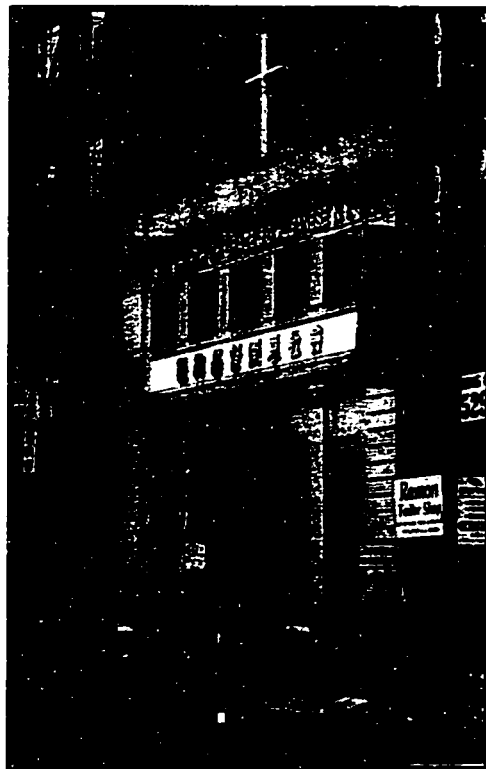
This cemetery is located near Chinatown



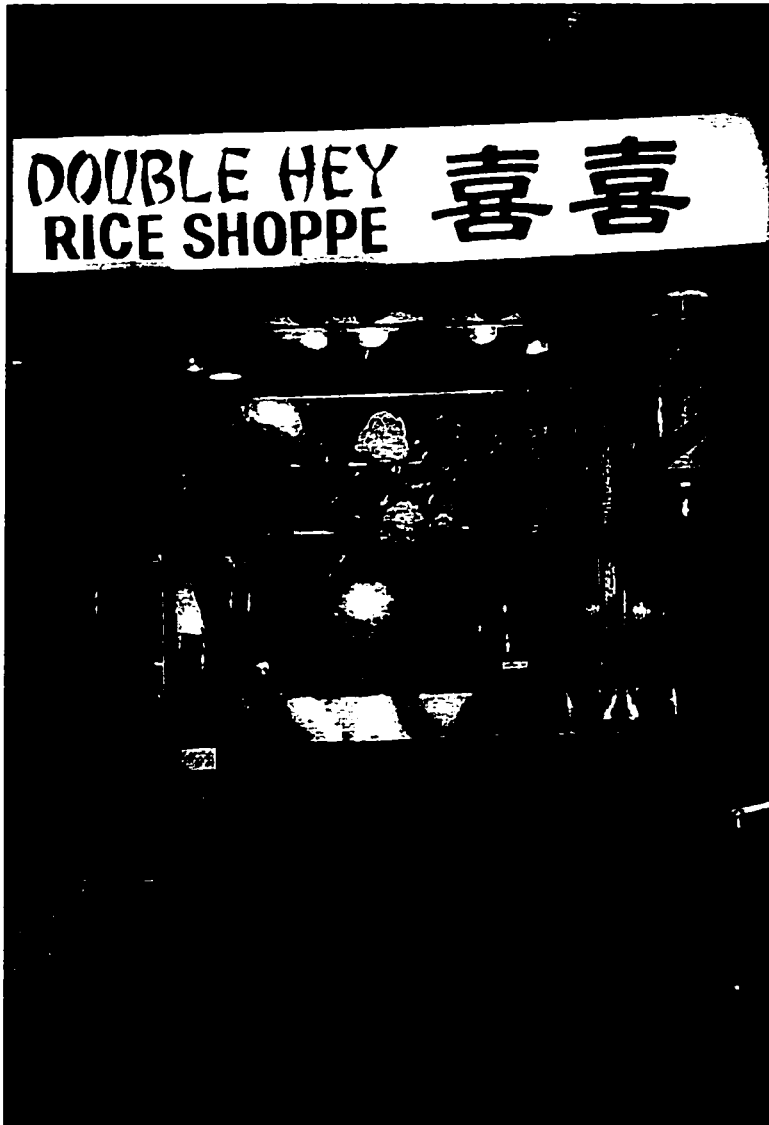
Latin American Butcher



Little Italy at Dusk



Fujinese Church



Brazilian Barber Shop under Chinese Store



Synagogue on the Lower East Side



Former Synagogue now houses Church



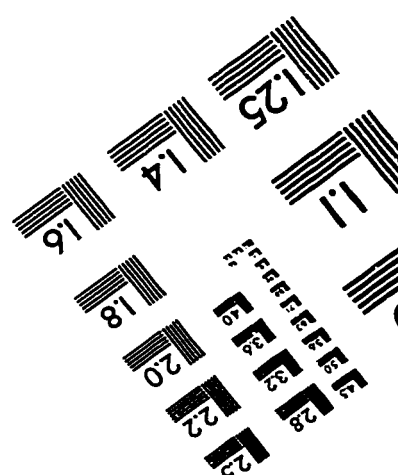
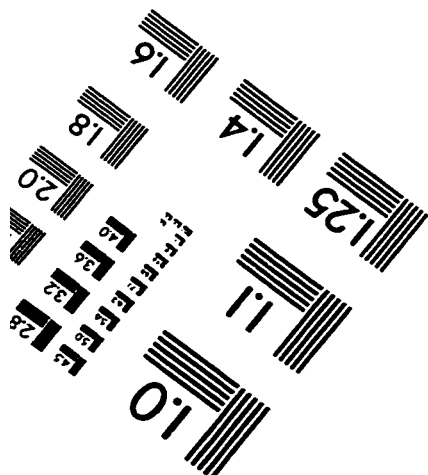
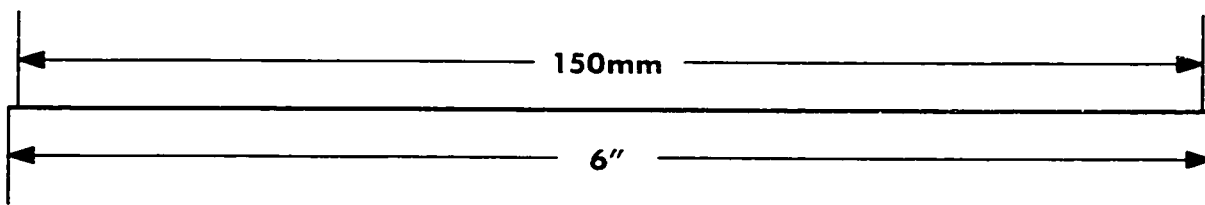
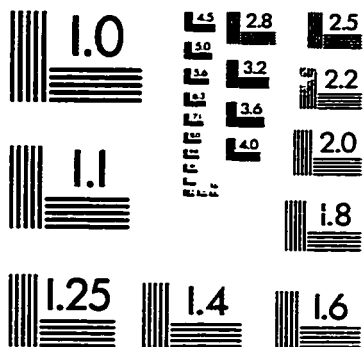
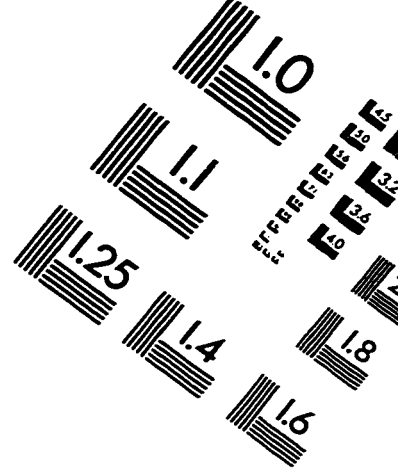
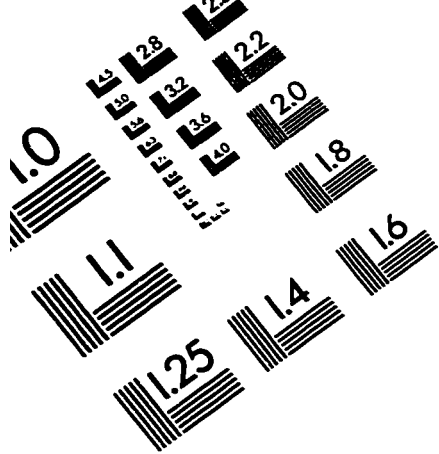
Delancey Street



Cooper Union



TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
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