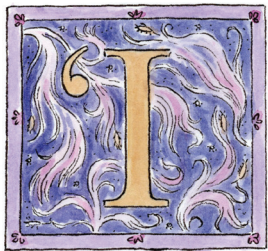


Publisher's Note



'M DREAMING of a white Christmas.”

I'm writing this on a chilly Manhattan morning on December 20, from an office overlooking the gleaming windows of Macy's department store decked out in its holiday finest. My kids have long mocked my love of Christmas carols, which they had to endure every time they got in the car from Thanksgiving to New Year's. "They aren't our songs," they would protest. "They literally are," I would counter. All our (my) favorites were composed by Jews. But that's not really aberrant.

So much of American culture, especially throughout the 20th century, has powerful Jewish origins and influences. Dave Chappelle is right that "the Jews"—emphasis on the definite article—don't run Hollywood. But there have been a lot of Jews in that industry from its start. America was a place where dreams could be realized for Jews who had spent too much time not daring to dream. And if it didn't quite live up to their expectations, they would shape it into something that would.

"The Jews could simply create a new country—an empire of their own, so to speak... an America where... families (were) stable, people

attractive, resilient, resourceful, and decent," wrote the cultural historian Neal Gabler. Nor has the influence of Jews been restricted to Hollywood or holiday standards. It can be felt in theater, comedy, music, literature, the arts and more. While America has been very good for the Jews, the Jews have been very good for America.

Jews still have a disproportionate influence on American culture. But is that influence particularly Jewish? Irving Berlin's father was a cantor who gave Hebrew lessons to support his family when they moved to New York after fleeing the pogroms of Russia. Louis B. Mayer was raised in a Yiddish-speaking household. Philip Roth was, well, Philip Roth. Their worldview was shaped by a thick Jewish experience, lexicon, and values—no matter whether they were inspired by them or rebelling against them. We see a different version of this in Israel today, where young filmmakers are reclaiming biblical narratives and pop stars are quoting psalms in their works.

While there are some deeply Jewish purveyors of culture in America, I don't think that can be characterized as the norm. When does culture influenced by Jews who are bereft of Jewish literacy cease being Jewish culture, or even Jewish-influenced culture? Does American culture suffer as a consequence? Or does it simply find an alternative voice, better suited to a new century?

We hope these and other questions will appeal to our readers, those who have been with us from the start as well as new ones. And we hope you can enjoy them by the fire, along with the smell of roasting chestnuts. After all, it is the most wonderful time of the year—a song written in 1963 by Edward Pola, born Sidney Pollacsek, and George Wyle, born Bernard Weissman. In case you didn't know. *