History of European-American Jewish Heritage

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European-American Jews are the American citizens whose descendants migrated from Eastern Europe to America in mid-1880s. According to Dietrich, Jewish mass migration was because of escalating persecutions and economic challenges in Eastern Europe at the time. Today, there are approximately 6.7 million Jews residing in various states in America according to the department of registration. Before and after settling in America, Jews have maintained their across social-cultural heritage for centuries now. This paper focuses on the social-cultural structures and practices of the European American Jews.

Jews speak Hebrew as their native language. However, after settling in America, Jews spoke Ashkenazic and Ladino languages. Ladino Language is a combination of Hebrew and Spanish languages and it originated from Sephardic Jews. On the other hand, Ashkenazic is a combination of Hebrew and medieval German. Reis (2011) assert that Ashkenazic Jews originated from eastern and central Europe. Contrarily, American Jews of Ashkenazi origin speaks Yiddish as their primary language.

Jews were opposed to the American acculturation initially after settling in America. Consequently, the first Jews communities in America settled in small-isolated communities in American cities that hosted synagogues at the time (Loeffer, 2009). Language barrier was the main challenge Jews faced when they settled in America. Only few Jews at the time understood and spoke English. They continued speaking Yiddish language, which is a mixture of medieval German and Hebrew languages (Ashton, 2009).

Diner (2009) asserts that Jews found it difficult to fit into the new American society courtesy of language barriers. For instance, many American employers could not employ Jews out of the language barrier (Wirth-Nesher, 2009). Secondly, Jewish parents found it challenging to enrol their children in American schools. Poverty levels among the American Jews escalated decades after
settling in America (Brenner, 2010). Diner (2009) argues that Jews remained marginalized for decades due to their isolated lifestyle and language barrier. This Factor forced Jews to learn English and vernacular languages of the communities that hosted them (Wirth-Nesher, 2009). American government abolished the use of Yiddish language in all major institutions. Jews had to change their lifestyles to conform to the mainstream American culture (Brenner, 2010).

By the end of the 19th century, American Jews had appreciated the need for assimilation into the American culture. U.S. government amended constitutions to protect and accommodate the freedom of religion for all people residing in the country Dietrich (2013) argue this legislation facilitated Jews’ willingness to get assimilated into the American culture for survival (Soyer, 2013). American Jews were fully assimilated into American culture and lifestyle by the mid-20th century. Today, most of the American Jewish has adopted English as their native language (Espinosa, 2014).

Jewish heritage spans across many fields. For instance, Jews are known for Artwork among other expressive forms. Dietrich (2013) argues that visual arts are the most popular artworks among the American Jews. Common Jewish Visual arts include painting, design, filmmaking, ceramics, architecture, photography, and drawing (Wirth-Nesher, 2009). Jews also practice fashion and fine art designs like painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Some American Jews practice art media, craft, and handcrafting. Jewish heritage is preserved and communicated mainly through music (Reis, 2011). Statistics show that the Jewish community is home to hundreds of secular musician whose songs praise Jewish lifestyle and culture (Wirth-Nesher, 2009).

Espinosa (2014) argues that American Jews were conservatives. He purports that Jews observed Jewish norms, rules, and taboos for decades after settling in America. In that regard, every Jew was expected to uphold all Judaism customary believes (Alba & Nee, 2009). In addition, it was an obligation of every Jewish member to observe all Mitzvot rules. Mitzvot are the 613 sacred obligations found in the Talmud and Torah (Dietrich, 2013). Mitzvot obligations are classified into Edot, Mishpatim, and Hukim categories. Edot is a set of rules that obligate all Jews to remain faithful
to their Judaism religion. On the other hand, Mishpatim Jewish rules regulate individual behaviour in the community. Whereas, Hukim is a set of statutes divining customs and rules that human beings cannot easily comprehend (Gibbs, 2011). However, the Jewish religion is flexible in that Jews may not observe all 613 rules. Instead, one is expected to obey at least more than half of the stated regulations in the Mitzvot (Soyer, 2013).

Many psychologists agree that Jews has strong lifestyle ethics. Greene (2012) investigated the typical Jewish cultural practices. In his report, Green discovered that Jews’ babies are given two names immediately after birth in a colourful baby naming ceremony. One of the names is usually used for identification on a daily basis. The other name is for religious identification and is commonly used in synagogues (Greene, 2012). Loeffler (2009) agree that Europe American Jews practiced the naming system decades even after settling in America. Researchers assert that Jews’ ceremonies are one of the most colourful in the world. Circumcision and wedding are crucial ceremonies in Jewish heritage. In that regard, Jews circumcise baby boys on the first day after birth (Wirth-Nesher, 2009).

All Jewish wedding must have a colourful wedding canopy commonly known as the Huppah. Soyer (2013) defines Huppah as an open awning symbolizing the commitment of the bride’s family in marriage. During the wedding, the couple is blessed by both families for a successful marriage. The wedding climax is marked when the couple exchange rings on the index finger of their right hands (Ashton, 2009). Jews perceive marriage as a symbol of family unity. Therefore, the community expects every Jew to establish matrimony through church wedding. Every community has a matchmaker who facilitates finding a mate for individuals who seem reluctant to marry. However, the bride, bridegroom, and their parents have the final decision (Alba & Nee, 2009).

Family and community relationships are symbols of unity in the Jewish community. Jewish relationship pattern heritage and culture is based on robust community and family ties (Barnes, 2009). Community ties state that a good relationship among families is the primary pillar that
enhances social and peaceful community coexistence. Diner (2009) purports that Sabbath day is the main unifying factor for families residing within a certain locality. In that regard, Jews usually organize community and family meetings on the Sabbath day (Gibbs, 2011). Family members share meals as a symbol of love and unity during the Sabbath day. Later, they attend community prayers in the nearby synagogues. The Jewish community also devotes the Sabbath day for resting after a busy working week (Cohen, 2013).

The Jewish community is highly religious. In that regard, the community holds several religious rituals to celebrate religious heritage annually. Greene (2012) purports that Sabbath day celebration remains the most popular Jewish religious ritual up to date celebrated every Saturday. The day marks the biblical day of resting in the creation story. During Passover rituals, Jews celebrate the historical Jewish exodus from Egypt to Canaan. The Passover celebrations entail displaying the Seder objects and preparing a festive meal at homes (Wirth-Nesher, 2009).

New Year celebration, commonly referred to as Rosh Hashanah, is one of the popular religious festivals in the Jewish calendar. During this day, Jews wish one another a happy new year through prayers and jubilations. Usually, the ritual is commemorated by serving honey and sending cards to family members, friends, and neighbours (Alba & Nee, 2009). Finally, Jews bury the deceased any day except on the Sabbath day. Family members, the community, and friends celebrate the deceased’s life during the funeral festival (Reis, 2011).

Health and medical history constitute an integral part of a community heritage. In that regard, the Jewish community has a long history of health challenges according to Gibbs (2011). He further reports that Jews naturally suffer from an inherited pathological disorder characterized by inbreeding. According to Espinosa (2014), Jews suffered from inherited disorders more than any other immigrant community in America did. Notwithstanding, Jews registered the lowest death rate than all other immigrant communities at the time (Espinosa, 2014). Jews believe in scientific medical procedures and medication. All Jews, therefore, seek medical treatment from medical institutions in case of
ailments (Dietrich, 2013). Judaism religion maintains that scientific medical treatment is one of the man’s obligation to care for the body that God granted them (Cohen, 2013). In addition, Jews argue that believing and having faith in God as a healer facilitates the healing process. It is worth noting that some communities do not believe in scientific medication (Soyer, 2013).

In conclusion, European-American Jewish community has strong social-cultural practises. In that regard, Jews are very conservative with strong rules, norms, and taboos. Jews initially spoke Hebrew as their native language when they settled in America. Later, they started speaking in Ashkenazic and Ladino languages after many challenge due to language barrier. Jewish has rich heritage in artwork, fashion, and music. Naming children two names, circumcising boy child first day after birth, and colourful wedding are some of strong lifestyle ethics among Jews. Inherited pathological disorder is a common perennial health disorder among Jewish community. Based on above, Jewish community can be said to be very conservative.
References


