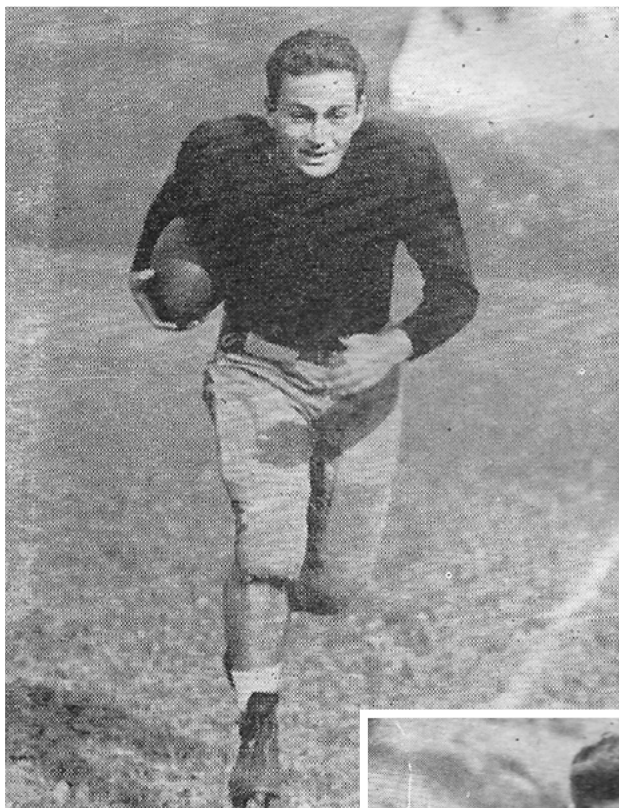




Marty Glickman (above) and his Madison High School teammate Al Handler (right) in a 1937 Syracuse University football program.

(Courtesy Fargenblue via eBay)



## *Aspirations and Strategies of Jewish Students in a Brooklyn High School, 1935*

JEFFREY S. GUROCK

My friend and esteemed colleague, Lance Sussman, an academic leader in our field of American Jewish history, has always valued the use of archival materials to document and present important sagas of our people's life in the United States. In honoring Professor Sussman in this deserved festschrift, I have delved into an unusual repository of sources: a Brooklyn, New York high school archive, which yielded materials that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the life stories of young Jewish men and women who sought college education amid the Great Depression. It was one of the challenges that confronted second-generation Jews as they aspired to advance in this country.

During the 1930s, amid the Great Depression, enormous pressure was placed on Jewish young people in New York to go off to work after secondary schooling to supplement sagging family incomes. Many youngsters went so far as to leave high school without their diplomas if households were in dire straits. Given these difficult economic conditions, college attendance was a luxury that most families could not afford. Most Jewish youngsters did not aspire to earn their degree. For many, full-time occupation as a civil servant with an assured salary (like working in the post office) was the best job they could hope for—that is, if they passed the competitive examination that challenged even the most gifted student who settled for sorting or delivering the mail. Even to sit for that exam an applicant had to have a high school diploma.

As one historian has cogently argued, the 1930s were much more than just a brief halt in the saga of twentieth-century Jewish success and mobility from immigrant to subsequent American-born generations. They were a “precarious” time when “Jews worried about their financial

stability “and even questioned the “usefulness of their educational endeavor” as they thought about the future.<sup>1</sup>

Given these vexing circumstances, if a Jewish family was determined, against the odds, to have their youngsters attend college, distinct gender-based decisions were made favoring sons over daughters. Very often when it came to sacrificing, young women were directed to go out and find jobs to buttress family finances, while the young men continued their educations. Maybe the fellows chipped in through part-time work after school or summer employment. Part of the difference was cultural. There was historically a greater premium on or even pride in sons rather than daughters advancing academically. As one disappointed girl who went to work while her brother went on in school explained: “a college education” for a boy “was a matter of life position.” Perhaps more important from a purely practical perspective, there were positions for women in roles like stenographer, bookkeeper, or typist in which they could readily use skills that they acquired in high school.<sup>2</sup>

With a student population that was overwhelmingly Jewish, the educational goals and destinations of pupils at James Madison High School in Flatbush, Brooklyn, deviated in significant ways from most of those who attended other secondary schools in New York City.<sup>3</sup> To begin with,

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1 On the problems wrought for Jews during the Great Depression, see Beth S. Wenger, *New York Jews and the Great Depression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

2 On the proclivity of Jewish women being directed to go to work while their brothers went to college see Wenger, *New York Jews*, 62–63; Nettie Pauline McGill, “Some Characteristics of Jewish Youth in New York City,” *Jewish Social Service Quarterly* (1938): 256–258; Leonard Dinnerstein, “Education and the Advancement of American Jews,” in *American Education and the European Immigrant 1840–1940*, ed. Bernard J. Weiss (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 47. On the post office as an alternative to college, see Betty Rizzo and Barry Wallenstein, eds., *City in the Center: A Collection of Writings by CCNY Alumni and Faculty* (New York: City College of New York, 1983), 67.

3 The projection of what Madison students of the class of 1935 desired to do upon graduation from high school is derived from an analysis of their brief bios in *The Log*. Not all the desired information is available—for example, the exact proportion of Jewish students, male and female, attending college. James Madison school records do not indicate the religion of students. The determination of the high proportion of Jews at the school was based on the Jewish-sounding names (e.g., Cohen or Goldberg) as opposed to non-Jewish names (e.g., Connelly or O’Brien) derived from the school yearbooks, called

almost all Madison Jewish high schoolers—men and women—desired to attend college. Even more remarkable, so many of them sought to earn their sheepskins at institutions of higher learning that harbored strict quotas limiting Jewish presence on their campuses. The fortunate ones gained admission because they were exceptionally talented in the classroom. Since these Ivies pledged allegiance to academic excellence, these brightest of Jews seemingly could not be kept out. Or these aspirants found ways of entering privileged schools through back doors such as Columbia's Extension School or its avant-garde New College as well as its long-standing Teachers College. In these outlets, which were favorable to Jews, the university's exclusionary policies were partially mitigated. Finally, these New York Jews found welcoming educational homes both in one of Gotham's Irish-Catholic colleges and in areas of the country where schools prided themselves on exclusion of minorities—not Jews but African Americans. Interestingly, when they enrolled in Southern schools, like Louisiana State University or the University of Alabama, they found out that local Jews were less than thrilled that their Northern coreligionists were visible as they studied at their region's colleges. The academic and social aspirations of these Jewish Brooklyn high school students deepen the narrative of interwar Jewish college realities and is worthy of comparison with other schools in New York and other places.

Predictably, the most popular choice was either City College of New York (CCNY) or its younger sister school, Brooklyn College, presuming—in both cases—that they had the grades to gain acceptance. And the James Madison records show that the students in its 1935 senior class “earned the highest scholastic average in the city.” If they were able to matriculate at CCNY, they would be exposed to a very high-quality education and perhaps just as important, it was free of charge. Moreover, they would be comfortable studying among their own kind, much like they had in the halls of Madison. At that point in the 1930s, it was estimated that 80–90% of that college's students were Jewish. Some of their professors sought to break them from their ancestral backgrounds

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*The Log* (1932–1935), and from memoirs of students. On the estimated proportion of Jews at CCNY and Hunter in the 1930s, see Dinnerstein, “Education,” 50 and Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot* (Berkeley, CA: Carnegie Foundation, 1974), 9.

and ways of speech and did not especially like any outward assertions of ethnicity. But most students ignored these assaults on their identities. They were not out to become more committed Jews. Rather, they wanted to advance their future careers once the troubling economic crisis passed. Logistically, in the case of the local free-of-charge school, Brooklyn College, it was convenient to attend a school situated not far from where they grew up. The college was located just two long blocks on Bedford Avenue over Avenue P from James Madison High School.<sup>4</sup>

For those young men who did not quite have the grades for CCNY but whose families had some tuition funds available, the Washington Square campus of New York University (NYU) beckoned. It was situated only a short subway ride from Flatbush past the Lower East Side. It has been estimated that the annual tuition at that school in the 1930s was \$360. NYU, too, had a robust academic reputation and was a predominantly “Jewish” school, with Jews approximated at 63% of the student body in 1931. The hopeful word in the James Madison hallways as the class of 1935 contemplated its future was that just a year earlier four of the school’s best students—named August, Gittelson, Klein, and Meyer—had earned scholarships to NYU as the private college looked for candidates who were “likely” to post “an honorable college record.”<sup>5</sup>

Within their own graduating class of 1935, some three dozen James Madison students were granted tuition scholarships by New York State to “any approved college in the state” that would accept them. NYU was a logical option for these achievers who had to have compiled at least a ninety-three average in their studies to qualify for their grant. One such awardee, Clemens Prokeach was the winner of a chemistry contest that Long Island University sponsored when he identified “32 out 35 chemicals substances.”<sup>6</sup>

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4 On the school’s high ranking, see Beth Sherman, “Class of ’35 Recalls Glory Days at James Madison,” *New York Times* (14 October 1985): B5. On CCNY faculty disdain for the ethnic background and heritage of Jewish students, see Sherry Gorelick, *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880–1924* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).

5 “30 Scholarships Awarded by N.Y.U.,” *New York Times* (28 June 1934): 18.

6 “34 at Madison High Win Scholarships,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (26 November 1935): 11.

There was another NYU in town, but it was not welcoming to Jews. As early as 1894, the university also had an uptown campus in bucolic University Heights in the Bronx, miles away from Brooklyn and, more significantly, out of reach when it came to admissions policies for Jews. This branch was characterized as a “men’s country college, with the good old American collegiate spirit.” Jewish men were not welcomed there into what was called in the 1930s “the last stand of the old Guard” and “the darling hope and pride of the administration” and Jewish women were not admitted to the uptown branch until after World War II.<sup>7</sup>

It was of little moment to those young men and women who were accepted for admission at the downtown branch of NYU that its detractors referred to it as “New York Jew.” Scholarship winners August Gittelson, Klein, and Meyer—who had been aggressively pursued to enroll—could have cared less about that canard from restrictionists in the Bronx. Incidentally, those who did not like CCNY referred to it derogatorily as the College of Circumcised New Yorkers.

Meanwhile, positioned in the middle of the pack in class rankings but attuned to the atmosphere of academic achievement was another young man who was hopeful that his career aspirations would eventually lead to his becoming a physician. Marty Glickman did not become a doctor but would be remembered from his success as an athlete and then as a New York sports broadcaster—one of James Madison’s most famous alumni. Indeed, fifty years after graduation, in 1985, when his high school classmates recalled “glory days at James Madison,” Glickman along with Bernard Saul, “a retired Air Force Brigadier General...and Martin Abramson, an author and former war correspondent” were singled out by a reporter as alumni who had “achieved distinction.” It is

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An examination of the names of award winners suggests that, of the thirty-four granted scholarships, thirty-one were awarded to Jewish recipients. On Prokeach, see “Chemical Prizes Awarded at LIU,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (12 March 1935): 10.

7 On Jewish presence at NYU and the negativity ascribed to that school and CCNY by detractors, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City* (New York: NYU Press, 2012): 47–48. On perceptions of the uptown campus, see also Heywood Broun and George Britt, *Christians Only: A Study in Prejudice* (New York: Vanguard, 1931), 106–107.

not known what grade point averages Saul and Abramson earned, but Abramson did graduate from CCNY in 1939. Saul was an outlier, as he earned his college sheepskin not immediately after high school but after his service in World War II.<sup>8</sup>

Fortuitously for Glickman, with the help of some Jewish Syracuse University alumni, he secured enrollment and financial aid to attend their alma mater.<sup>9</sup> These Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity brothers' quixotic belief was that if Glickman became an Orangeman and triumphed for the university, his success would lead to greater tolerance toward Jews at a time when Syracuse was tightening its Jewish admissions quotas.

Glickman did very well as a football player and track man. When it came to varsity sports Syracuse was a meritocracy. His celebrity did not lead to the university admitting more Jewish students to Syracuse, however. In fact, during his matriculation, the percentage of Jews at the school declined. At the time Glickman enrolled at Syracuse that school had abandoned its earlier tolerant attitude toward Jews and was emulating the well-known restrictive policies of Ivy League schools. By the numbers, between 1918 and 1923, the percentage of Jewish students had increased from 6 to 15%. Many of these Jewish undergraduates hailed from New York City. In the mid-1920s, as the admissions officers shifted their recruitment efforts away from large Jewish population areas, the percentage of Jews on campus went down to 12% and the leadership's unannounced but planned goal was to get the Jewish presence under 10% to ensure that Syracuse educates "the type of student we desire." During

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8 Sherman, "Class of '35," B5. On Saul's career, see *General Officers of the Army and Air National Guard* (Washington, DC: National Guard Bureau, 1977). See also John Hess, "Madison High Alumni Mark 50 Golden Years, *New York Times* (6 January 1974): 41.

9 On Glickman's academic record and aspirations at Madison, his enrollment at Syracuse, and his career-training decision as a freshman at Syracuse, see his autobiography, Marty Glickman with Stan Isaacs, *The Fastest Kid on the Block: The Marty Glickman Story* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), esp. 42–49. On his contemporaries' prediction while still in high school that Glickman was destined to be a physician, see the brochure *The Milestone* (New York: n.p., 1935) and *The Log* (1935): 91, 93, 106. For a comprehensive treatment of the entirety of Glickman's life, including a full discussion of the events surrounding his sidelining in Berlin, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Marty Glickman: The Life of an American Jewish Sports Legend* (New York: NYU Press, 2023).

Glickman's years at the school, 1935–1939, “the percentage of Jews admitted to Syracuse ranged from seven percent to nine and a half percent.” The situation would not change for the better until 1942. Then, despite some enduring unhappiness among Christian alumni and students to the school's opening policies, between 1939 and 1945 the Jewish percentage rose from 7.5 to 18%.<sup>10</sup> As circumstances would have it, Glickman had to deal with his own encounter with pernicious antisemitism that would darken his youthful dreams. As a Syracuse freshman, Glickman made the U.S. Olympic team and was scheduled to compete in a signature event at the Berlin games only to have American team officials remove him and another Jewish runner, Sam Stoller, from the squad a day before the big race. These Nazi sympathizing sports leaders did not want to embarrass Hitler and his entourage, who would be attending at the stadium, by having Jews stand victorious on the gold medal platform.<sup>11</sup>

There was another local college alternative—St. John's College, then still in Brooklyn—that was open to Jewish male aspirants just as it was popular among James Madison's Christian classmates who were also uncommonly interested in higher education. This Catholic college, with its low tuition, also welcomed Jews in the interwar period and was particularly attractive to those undergraduates who wished to eventually attend St. John's School of Law that was opened in 1925. In fact, St. John's showed an uncommon sensitivity to the religious values of its minority of Jewish students, ironically much more than CCNY or Brooklyn College. The annual catalogs at St. John's clearly stated that its mission was to raise “cultured *Catholic* gentlem[en]” who would be “good citizens of the state and a source of pride to the Church.” Toward that end, “moral training and religious instruction” was deemed “a reason for the existence of the *Catholic* college.”

Favorably for Jews who gained admittance, the school's administration, without explicitly noting possible Jewish concerns, made clear

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10 Harvey Strum “Discrimination at Syracuse University,” *History of Higher Education Annual* (1984): 104, 106–107, 113. See also Strum, “Anti-Semitism at Syracuse University,” *American Jewish Archives* 35, 2 (April 1983): 4.

11 On Glickman's exclusion from the Olympic race, see Glickman with Isaacs, *Fastest Kid*, 17–24.

that those students of a different faith would not have to be subjected to Catholic religious indoctrination. It prescribed a subtle, yet powerful accommodation that obviated the theology courses question. Year after year in the 1920s through the mid-1930s, the college catalog decreed: "religion is a required subject *for all Catholic* students." Moreover, the school ordained "no year's work is complete...until the student, *if Catholic*, has passed his examination in the prescribed religion course, unless the student has already obtained the required eight semesters." In other words, while Catholics were burdened, Jews, and seemingly also the minority of Protestants at the college, were exempt. There also is every indication that the Jewish minority was socially accepted both inside and outside the classroom. They were admitted to fraternities, were on the staffs of the college newspaper and yearbook and were cheerleaders at football and basketball games; a group of outstanding Jewish basketball players, called the "Wonder Five," even suited up and won a remarkable string of games for their alma mater. They were the pride of the school. Incidentally, in the mid-1930s, St. John's even announced that it was home to a branch of Avukah, the American Student Zionist Federation. The catalogs also noted a very different but highly positive aspect of a St. John's undergraduate education that proved attractive to Jewish students. The rule was that students who by their junior year had "shown marked ability in the course of their studies" were allowed, with the deans' permission, to "enter the School of Law" that opened in 1925. After one year of "satisfactory" study in that professional school, they would be awarded their baccalaureate degrees. Assuming they stuck to their books, they would finish their education with two degrees. It has been estimated that, as of 1930, five years after St. John's School of Law opened, approximately 60% of the students were Jews.<sup>12</sup>

However, James Madison graduates of that era were not particularly concerned with burnishing their Jewish identities, be they enrolled at the culturally dismissive CCNY or Brooklyn College or, for that matter, at

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12 On St. John's openness to Jewish students in the 1920s–1930s, see Jeffrey S. Gurock, "A Tradition of Acceptance: Jews and Their Basketball Players at an Irish Catholic College," in *American Ways: Irish and Jewish Encounters*, ed. Hasia Diner and Miriam Nyhan Grey (New York: NYU Press, 2023), 184–201.

welcoming St. John's. They were simply unabashed careerists. Indeed, as they readied for college, there was very little interest among their ranks at the Bedford Avenue school for a formal expression of group identification. For most of them, the streets of their Brooklyn neighborhoods where they gathered with their own kind informally on a day-by-day basis was enough Jewish ethnicity. While there was a Junior Menorah Club at the high school, it had few members. Meanwhile, the club's leader sought to introduce Hebrew into the curriculum through a petition campaign among their fellow students in 1935 as a sign of pride in their heritage, and as a recognized New York State Regents-approved foreign language, important for college admission, but the attempt went nowhere.<sup>13</sup>

The initiator of this unsuccessful curriculum move was Oscar Fleishaker, founder and president of the Junior Menorah Club and another of the fellows at James Madison who, like Saul, was an outlier. Like Glickman, Fleishaker was college bound and hoped to eventually become a physician. But, evidently a Zionist, he planned to receive his training in Jerusalem at Palestine's Hebrew University. There, of course, he also would not have to deal with the exclusionary antisemitism that would undermine so many Jewish students who hoped to be admitted to medical school. Ultimately, however, Fleishaker ended up staying stateside and received his undergraduate degree from Yeshiva College, then a small start-up Orthodox Jewish school in Upper Manhattan; he subsequently earned ordination from its rabbinical school. He would then serve for decades as a rabbi in the Midwest, New Hampshire, and Canada.<sup>14</sup>

James Madison's Jewish alumnae approached higher education almost as readily as did their male classmates. In so doing, they broke with the low-level career destination that stymied most other young women of

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13 On the nature of informal Jewish identity in neighborhoods of that era that were majority Jewish, see Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). On the introduction of Hebrew into public schools but not at Madison, see Judah Lapson, "A Decade of Hebrew in the High Schools of New York City," *Jewish Education* XIII, 1 (April 1941): 34–45. See also "May Teach Hebrew at Madison High," *Brooklyn Eagle* (25 March 1935): 5.

14 Interview with Donald Fleishaker, 24 January 2020.

that era. According to student profiles in the yearbook of 1935, only rarely did a distaff Jewish student indicate that she did not seek advanced educational training. Those who did so said—as expected—that they were prepared to go into “business,” presumably working in a family store or in secretarial work, perhaps to help their brothers attend college.

Of course, as was the case for their brothers, Brooklyn College made abundant sense, being not only a tuition free and local school, but also co-educational, as was Hunter College in Manhattan, the renowned and more prestigious all-female school. But it was an annoying commute away. Indeed, a college report of 1938 estimated that a student who resided in Brooklyn put in forty minutes in trains, buses, and trolleys for every sixty minutes she attended classes. Joyce Gale was one such commuting student standout, whose reputation for classroom excellence at Madison followed her to Hunter College. As a freshman, she made her high school science instructors feel very proud when the local daily, the *Brooklyn Eagle* praised her for continuing at college her “blood research;” a project she began on Bedford Avenue.<sup>15</sup>

Then there were the Jewish youngsters—both men and women—who sought to venture away from the ethnic cocoons of neighborhood, high school, and welcoming colleges to seek enrollment at campuses located in towns well beyond their home borough and city, where there were few Jews in the area—demographically so different from Brooklyn. Breaking with the old neighborhoods was not the most common practice but many made that move. To some degree being part of a much larger American world was an exciting prospect. Although he would maintain strong residual ties to his family and boyhood friends back home, Glickman would recall that Syracuse “was away...it was out of the city. It was what I thought college should be and I’d never had been there until I matriculated.”<sup>16</sup>

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15 On the traveling woes of Jewish students at Hunter College, see Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 50. See also “Girl Scientist Will Experiment at Home,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (10 February 1935): 56.

16 On Glickman wanting to attend an out-of-town school, see his oral history interview conducted in 1979 with the William L. Wiener Oral History Library, American Jewish Committee, p. 83, New York Public Library.

Others who looked to what we would call today “out-of-town” schools perhaps approached these schools because they did not have the grades to enroll at CCNY, Brooklyn, or Hunter but were seemingly among the minority of Jews in the Flatbush neighborhood who, despite Depression struggles and worries, had sufficient family monies to afford tuitions for their children. Away from their home state, they would not be able to take advantage of New York scholarship largesse. One study of Jewish college choices completed in 1937 suggested that “perhaps...studying elsewhere [was] due to the limited number of educational institutions in New York City and their frequent overcrowding” as well as “the quotas which exist” in some of the best schools “which led Jews in that great Jewish center to seek opportunities elsewhere.” The fact is that students from New York City appear in large numbers in every part of the country, in sections as far removed from Gotham as the University of Alabama, Ohio State University, and the University of Wisconsin. In smaller numbers, they are even found on the Pacific Coast and in Canada.”<sup>17</sup>

Such was the situation with those of the Madison class of 1935 who sought out such schools as the College of William and Mary in Virginia, North Carolina College, the University of Missouri, the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, the University of Wisconsin, Northwestern University, the University of Southern California, Penn State University, and Ohio University. A goodly number also enrolled at schools closer to home in Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore. These aspirants were pleased, but not very surprised, when that fat acceptance letter arrived in their Brooklyn home mailboxes. If James Madison High School had college guidance counselors, they might have told them that “non-elite universities situated away from urban centers or in the Midwest” had a reputation for admitting high-achieving Jewish students. A Jewish newspaper service had publicized that tolerant policy just a few years earlier. Still, these applicants had pause to ponder whether they would be happy on these far-away campuses.<sup>18</sup>

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17 On the college choices of out-of-town Jewish students, see Lee J. Levinger, *The Jewish Student in America: A Study Made by the Research Bureau of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation* (Cincinnati, OH: B'nai B'rith, 1937), 20.

18 On the admissions policies of so-called non-elite colleges, see Henry L. Feingold,

Troubling social issues that could have made their tenures as undergraduates uninviting stemmed from two very different sources. First, in 1931, a widely read journalistic expose of social antisemitism revealed that Christian fellow students at many schools that did admit Jews to their institutions treated their minority classmates very poorly. The report that Heywood Broun and George Britt proudly “published for the first time” was heralded as “the most comprehensive of all studies of race prejudice in education... [It] divided institutions into four classes depending upon the degree of anti-Jewish feeling.” The research based on questionnaires filled out by Jewish students on campuses looked at “social aloofness” and ostracism from fraternities and sororities, not to mention “offensive jokes in student publications” and “general unfriendliness.”

Predictably, CCNY and Hunter—the local meccas—displayed “no anti-Jewish feeling,” as did North Carolina which was on the list of out-of-town schools that Madison graduates sought. These young Jews seemingly also would find a good degree of social acceptance at universities in Missouri and Wisconsin, but they would face “moderate” prejudice at the University of Michigan. However, Northwestern and Johns Hopkins were downed in the survey as harboring “pronounced anti-Jewish behaviors.”<sup>19</sup>

If social problems with Christian classmates were not bad enough, in many instances Jewish fellow undergraduates who were indigenous to far smaller Jewish communities in the South, Midwest, and far West were not exactly thrilled to have “New York Jews” around. The Brooklyn girls—and especially boys—were frequently stereotyped as obstreperous and ill-mannered and possibly as trouble-making radicals, even if most of these students minded their Ps and Qs.<sup>20</sup> It is not known how

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*A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920–1945* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 15–16. The listing of desired colleges articulated in the high school yearbook reflects the noted aspirations, anticipations, and hopes of seniors. It is possible that a proportion of these students did not achieve that goal.

19 Broun and Britt, *Christians Only*, 88–93.

20 On the undesirability of New York students at out-of-town universities, see Marianne Sanua, “‘We Hate New York’: Negative Images of the Promised City as a Source for

Franklin Dobison socially navigated a unique scholarship offer that was tendered to him to attend Johns Hopkins, given its campus's negative attitude toward Jews. He received an unusual financial assistance grant from New York State that consisted of monies to pay tuition out of state in Baltimore, Maryland. This Arista member may have found a degree of acceptance since he was also quite the all-around fellow, having been president of his class for two terms and competed on the varsity swim team. But, if he was ostracized at the school, perhaps he found friends and social solace within the off-campus and robust Baltimore Jewish community.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, some Jewish members within the school's Arista—the academic pride of James Madison—made a small dent in the paper ceilings of those most restrictive colleges and universities both within and outside of New York City. They had to have known by the time they graduated that Ivy League and other elite institutions had “adopted policies designed to reduce their Jewish enrollment” for almost a generation. The argument was made against the unwanted that while Jews had the intellectual acumen to succeed in the classroom and laboratory, they did not possess the refined social skills to be warranted members of campus society. Discrimination was masked somewhat when admissions directors spoke about seeking out a “geographically diverse student body”—which meant, of course, avoiding welcoming “too many Jews” from the large urban centers. In the 1930s, Syracuse was following suit in its admissions policies, but it was not the most egregious offender.

Dartmouth College, as a prime example, situated in bucolic Hanover, New Hampshire, had a long history of exclusion dating back to the turn of the twentieth century when only 4% of its students were Jews. Thirty or more years later, the situation had not changed much when its director of admissions asserted that, if more than 5% or 6% of the student body was Jewish, the institution would be “overrun racially.”

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Jewish Fraternity and Sorority Members, 1920–1940,” in *An Inventory of Promises: Essays on American Jewish History in Honor of Moses Rischin*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock and Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Carlson, 1995), 237.

21 “Honored by State,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (4 August 1935): B11.

The few Jews that did get in faced a hostile educational environment. The status of Jewish young men and young women at Cornell—the co-ed Ivy—in Ithaca, New York, also hours away from Brooklyn, was not much better. In 1920, it was estimated that Jews constituted 9% of the student population, and the numbers and percentages decreased in the decade to come. Although President Livingston Farrand asserted in 1933 that while “we have not formulated an ultimate solution on admissions” he was “sure that a university like Cornell cannot permit itself to be so flooded with Jewish students as to kill non-Jewish attendance.” Similarly, at Yale, Jewish presence was effectively capped at less than 10% as of the early 1920s to address what its admissions people deemed their “Jewish Problem.”<sup>22</sup>

Even in the most Jewish American city of New York, at Columbia University, the percentage of Jews enrolled dropped from approximately 40% before World War I to the neighborhood of 22% a decade later. In 1929, for example, of the five hundred freshmen on campus, ninety-two were Jews. Its numbers and policies were much like NYU uptown. That year, no more than 20% of the students at its sister school, Barnard College, were Jews. When that study of Jewish college choices was completed in 1937, it suggested that “perhaps...studying elsewhere” was due to “the quotas which exist” in New York City. Most likely the survey was referring to Columbia, the uptown branch of NYU, and Barnard. Yet, despite these paltry, discouraging, and decreasing numbers, many Jews at James Madison aspired to be admitted and were willing to deal with enduring social discrimination on campus. In every class there were a few who successfully ascended Ivy-covered walls, and their achievements did not go unnoticed.<sup>23</sup>

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22 Steinberg, *Academic Melting Pot*, 5, 15–16; Broun and Britt, *Christians Only*, 73,75; Feingold, *Time*, 15–17; William H. Honan, “Dartmouth Reveals Anti-Semitic Past,” *New York Times* (11 November 1997): 16; Tamar Buchsbaum, “A Note on Antisemitism in Admissions at Dartmouth,” *Jewish Social Studies* 49, 2 (Winter 1987): 79–84; Elaine D. Engst, *Jewish Life at Cornell, 1865–2005* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Library, 2005), 13–14, 32; Dan A. Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 49–56.

23 Broun and Britt, *Christians Only*, 74.

Such was the case with some of the best students at James Madison in 1932, when the members of the class of 1935 were just starting out as high school freshmen. For example, the almost legendary senior valedictorian and Arista president Seymour Nadler was admitted to Columbia after his classmates voted him “best boy student.” The “class history” in that grade’s yearbook gushed that “never before has Madison turned out a phenomenon like Seymour Nadler.

He is the only boy in the history of Madison who has held the three highest offices that the school possesses: Boy Leader of the Arista, President of the General Organization, and editor in chief of the school newspaper, the *Madison Highway*. When this is added to the fact that he is the highest average in the graduating class, we may boast that we possess very distinct differences from the classes of yore.

A follow-up piece in that journal predicted that fifteen years after he left Bedford Avenue, Dr. Nadler would become a millionaire due to his wisdom in investing in that new invention called television. Far from the retiring type, Nadler was the author of that prediction. As it turned out, Nadler did well at Columbia, graduating in 1936 with a degree in education from its Teachers College program. He also seems to have been accepted socially outside of class even if his diploma was not from Columbia College, the most elite wing of the university. A man about campus, he twice was chosen as scriptwriter for Columbia’s Varsity Show. Nadler’s counterpart “Girl president” of the Arista, Harriet Ulman, made it to Barnard after serving as associate editor and after being voted “best girl student.” She was, not incidentally, the author of the “Class History” that showered much abundant praise on Nadler.<sup>24</sup>

The matriculations of Nadler and Ulman constitute evidence that not every Jew in the class of 1935 who applied to these discriminatory schools was turned away and that those who made it did not always face problems of social prejudice on campus. Leo J. Koven was another one of the winners from the Brooklyn schools. Initially, he made it known

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24 On Nadler and Ulman, see *The Log* (June 19): 33, 51, 60. See also “Columbia Show Script,” *New York Times* (11 December 1936): 34. On Columbia College being the elite branch of the university, see Broun and Britt, *Christians Only*, 74.

that he was off to Cornell only to eventually turn up at Yale where he graduated in 1939 before earning that coveted medical degree at NYU's College of Medicine.<sup>25</sup>

Irwin Naitove was a third noteworthy success story. An Arista member and an editor of both the yearbook and student newspaper, Naitove gained admission to Dartmouth and did very well there, earning placement on the college's honor roll after his freshman year. He was but one of sixty-six newcomers (10% of the incoming class) so honored and, seemingly, he was the only Jew on the list. Naitove graduated in 1939 and pursued a career as a banker while being a loyal alumnus of Dartmouth, evident, for example, in the fact that he wrote for the alumni newsletter.<sup>26</sup>

Then there was the remarkable and soft-spoken Norman Wild—Madison 1935, Columbia BA 1939 and MA 1941—an academic genius who clearly could not be kept out of Morningside Heights. In fact, he was vigorously recruited. While still in high school, Wild became intrigued by the study of foreign languages and took all the Spanish and French classes offered. Columbia officials were so impressed with his acumen that he was designated a “Pulitzer Columbia Scholar” and entered the school free of charge. At the university, he majored in Chinese and Japanese and soon put his expert training to good use on behalf of his country as a codebreaker, initially during World War II and then in the Korean War. Eventually, he translated, edited, and corrected “thousands of vocabulary entries” that formed the basis for the “most widely used Chinese-English dictionary” that aided America's intelligence community in its work. In 2002, he was honored by the National Security Agency for his decades of work as a “silent sentinel.”<sup>27</sup>

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25 On Koven, see his brief bio in a marriage notice, “Joan Cummings Fiancee,” *New York Times* (24 April 1949): 73. It is again noteworthy that Koven is reported in the yearbook as off to Cornell when this Ivy Leaguer ultimately enrolled at Yale.

26 On Naitove, see references to his high school activities in the Madison yearbook, his obituary *New York Times* (10 July 2007): online edition; “Dartmouth Honors Won by 405 Students,” *New York Times* (23 August 1936): N8; and *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (June 1958): online edition, where Naitove enumerated the successes of his fellow graduates.

27 “City's Brightest Boy Awarded Pulitzer Columbia Scholarship,” *Brooklyn Eagle* (12 September 1935): 32. Indicative of the incomplete registrar files, Wild is not listed

Others within the Madison graduating class of 1935, also possessed of very fine academic records and impressive extracurricular credentials, believed that even in an era of quotas they, too, could overcome barriers. That year twenty-four young men had enrollment at Columbia foremost on their minds. An additional dozen men and women looked seriously at Cornell, while two fellows sought out Yale and Dartmouth.<sup>28</sup> And at least when it came to getting into Columbia there were two well-known back-door options toward eventual enrollment at the Manhattan school that were in their neighborhood. Although it is not possible to determine precisely how many Jewish Madison men took these strategic routes, members of the class of 1935 graduated just in time to begin attending Seth Low Junior College, which operated from 1928 to 1937 out of rented space in the upper floors of the Brooklyn Law School on Pearl Street in Brooklyn Heights. After two years at this prep school, which did not discriminate against Jews—in fact 80% of the enrollees were Jews—a student might qualify to finish degree work at Columbia as a “university undergraduate.” In 1937, after Low College closed due to financial difficulties, remaining students were absorbed into the aforementioned Extension School. Similarly, from 1932 to 1939, until its funds ran dry, Columbia’s Teachers College operated what was called the New College. It proffered an innovative and progressive curriculum, was open to all qualified students and made academic scholarships generously available. A full one-third of the New College entering class in 1932—some twenty-one students—were openly identified as “Hebrews.” By comparison in 1934, only 17% of Columbia’s regular entering class was Jewish. Of course, like the long-standing Teachers

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as a Columbia graduate. See also Ariel Sabar, “NSA Belatedly Recognizes Six ‘Silent Sentinels,’” *Baltimore Sun* (14 June 2002); online edition and “Norman Wild: 2002 Hall of Fame Inductee,” National Security Agency/Central Security Service, <https://www.nsa.gov/History/Cryptologic-History/Historical-Figures/Historical-Figures-View/Article/1643902/norman-wild/>.

28 The listing of desired colleges in the high school yearbooks does not correspond to registrar records at these elite institutions, which suggests that these designations are what applicants from James Madison hoped for, aspired to, or anticipated attending and not whether they gained admission.

College that had graduated Nadler, neither the Extension School nor the New College was the elite Columbia College. But an otherwise disappointed James Madison alumnus could still say, with his diploma in hand, that he was a graduate of New York's Ivy League school.<sup>29</sup>

In the early postwar period, Jewish students at James Madison High School with plans to attend the nation's most prestigious universities would not be as troubled by discriminatory policies. It was a time, amid the beginnings of the Cold War, when American leaders and educational institutions came to believe that, to defeat the Communist Russians, their country had to train its best and brightest with much less regard to candidates' ancestral backgrounds. Although some old-time alumni complained that their alma maters were becoming "brain plants," the need to beat the Soviets in the laboratories prevailed. And the best Jewish students at James Madison continued to do well on tests in school, not to mention the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Moreover, when a male Jewish candidate who had been a military veteran of World War II gained admission, they had their tuition paid by a grateful government through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill. Saul could attest to the bounties of that benevolent policy. Young women and young men who had not served in the military may have benefitted from the family's rising incomes within an American economy decidedly on the upswing, which would make it possible for them to pursue higher education without second thoughts. Now, when Jewish students arrived on out-of-town campuses, they increasingly integrated well with fellow young men and young women of varying backgrounds on teams, in fraternities and sororities, and within other extracurricular activities. Among the Madison luminaries of that next, more favorable era, was future US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Madison 1950) who as an undergraduate went out of town to Cornell, and attended Harvard Law School before earning her degree at Columbia. Future

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29 Claudia Gohn, "Nearly a Century Ago, Columbia's Jewish Applicants Were Sent to Brooklyn," *Columbia Spectator* (13 April 2019): online edition. See also George W. Lucero, "New College, Teachers College, Columbia University: A Demonstration Experimental Teachers College (1932–1939)" (unpublished Doctor of Education thesis, Illinois State University, 2009), 147–148.

Senator Chuck Schumer (Madison 1967) followed suit to Cambridge as both as a student at Harvard College before studying at the university's law school. However, future Senator Bernie Sanders (Madison 1967) first stayed at home at Brooklyn College—its free tuition as always, was an enduring attraction—before enrolling at the University of Chicago.<sup>30</sup>

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30 On the new era of declining antisemitism in admissions and social life on college campuses, see Edward S. Shapiro, *A Time for Healing: American Jewry since World War II* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 39, 44, 94–96, 99.