Americanization and Cultural Preservation in Seattle's Settlement House: A Jewish Adaptation of the Anglo-American Model of Settlement Work

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Americanization and Cultural Preservation in Seattle's Settlement House: A Jewish Adaptation of the Anglo-American Model of Settlement Work

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This article examines the dual agendas of Americanization and preservation of Ashkenazic Jewish culture through an historical analysis of the work of Seattle's Settlement House, a social service center founded in 1906 by elite, Americanized Jews to serve poorer, immigrant Jews of Ashkenazic and Sephardic origin. Such analysis is set against the ideological backdrop of Anglo-Americanism which pervaded the field of social work in its early efforts at self-definition and professionalization. Particular attention is paid to the role of the arts at Settlement House, with comparisons to Chicago's Hull-House, the prototypical American settlement operating at the turn of the century. This case study analyzes a German Jewish adaptation of an Anglo-American, Christian model of social work.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, settlement work figured as a central component to the newly developing field of social work. Today, a multitude of paths constitute the practice and conceptualization of social work, and their forerunners in the settlement movement extend beyond the work of Hull-House and Henry Street Settlement and their intelligent, articulate founders, Jane Addams and Lillian Wald. As current discussions range across the field regarding what constitutes an effective multicultural practice of social work, it is important to pause and examine past practice in all its forms to understand how this issue was conceptualized in an earlier era.

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Prior to 1890, only four settlements operated in the United States—Neighborhood Guild and College Settlement in New York City, Hull-House in Chicago, and Andover House in Boston (Carson, 1990). By 1910, the settlement movement blossomed to include roughly four hundred centers operating across the United States (Trattner, 1994). Although settlement houses were established in cities of all sizes, most historical analyses of early settlement work have focused on an elite vanguard of workers operating in the largest cities of the United States. More rarely are voices from smaller, “second tier” (Crocker, 1992, p. 6) settlements made a priority for analysis. This study makes use of archival material from the University of Washington and secondary sources regarding the settlement movement in general and settlement work by and for Jews in particular to bring forth a different, lesser known voice of early social work, that of Seattle’s Settlement House.

The dual agendas of Americanization and preservation of Ashkenazic culture operating at Settlement House are examined and set against the ideological backdrop of Christian-influenced Anglo-Americanism which dominated the burgeoning field of social work in its early efforts at self-definition and professionalization. Settlement House’s practices are compared to those of Hull-House, both because Hull-House figured as a practice model for the founders of Settlement House (Andrews, 1984; Devine 1976) and because as an example of a settlement founded by Anglo-Americans to serve newly arriving immigrants, it offers a prototypical model of settlement work to compare with that of Settlement House.

Like most settlements, Seattle’s Settlement House was a place for immigrants to socialize, receive medical care and education, and to adjust to life in their adopted homeland. Founded in 1906 by elite, German Jews who had lived in the city since the 1860s, Settlement House served the needs of the poorer and more recently transplanted East European and Sephardic Jews. By choosing to focus on the needs of Jews over those of other community members, Settlement House founders departed from the (supposedly) non-sectarian model of Anglo-American settlement work. Settlement House workers’ interest in Americanizing immigrants paralleled, however, the mission of Anglo-American workers.
At the turn of the century, Seattle was a small, frontier town, far from the American Jewish epicenters of Chicago and New York City. Although the city’s Jewish population was quite small and assimilation threatened to further decrease its numbers, Jews divided themselves along the same ethnic and cultural lines as those living in larger numbers elsewhere. Ashkenazim and Sephardim maintained their distinctions, as did Germans and East Europeans. Sephardim also separated themselves along geographic lines of origin. Settlement House workers’ preference in preserving Ashkenazic over Sephardic culture helped to maintain such distinctions. In addition, Settlement House workers promoted a non-traditional Judaism that was alien to both East European Jews and Sephardim. Workers favored the use of English over Yiddish and Ladino, and they promoted secularity over orthodoxy. These emphases ultimately contributed to the development of a new identity for Jews living in the United States, that of the American Jew.

Also examined in this article is the role that artistic activity, particularly theater, played at Settlement House in facilitating the dual missions of Americanization and preservation of Ashkenazic culture. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the arts were considered an essential element of social work (Patterson, 1997). Both Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, co-founders of Hull-House, were passionate advocates of the arts and crafts movement promoted by English pre-Raphaelites William Morris and John Ruskin (Patterson, 1997). Morris and Ruskin argued that industrialism negatively affected individuality and caused an artificial schism to develop between work and expression, resulting in alienation and a loss of traditional skills. Jane Addams advocated the use of theater in settlement work, praising art for counteracting the “uncouth stranger, Modern Industry” (Addams, 1932, p. 382). A report from Seattle’s Settlement House parallels Addams’ sentiments: “Nothing is more valuable for character building than the giving of plays” (1923/24 Report, CJW Archives).

Although some of Settlement House’s theatrical activity drew upon East European traditions, Sephardic cultural productions never appeared on its stage. To understand the ethnic tensions that precluded such activity from occurring at Settlement House,
one must understand the cultural and religious differences among German, East European, and Sephardic Jews. What follows is an introduction to the various Jewish ethnic groups whose members immigrated to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

DIFFERENCES AMONG GERMAN, EAST EUROPEAN AND SEPHARDIC JEWS.

The two major Jewish cultural groups living in the United States are Ashkenazim, Jews of central and east European descent, and Sephardim, Jews of Spanish descent. Prior to the Spanish Inquisition of 1492, Sephardim represented the majority of world Jewry; however, since their dispersion, their representation has decreased until they have since accounted for only 5–10% of world Jewry (Adatto, 1939; Roth, 1971). The United States’ first wave of Ashkenazic immigration comprised 200,000 German Jews fleeing nationalistic, anti-Semitic laws between the years 1820 and 1880. From 1880 to 1924, East European Jews immigrated in a second wave of 2.5 million (Lowenstein, 1967; Toll, 1982). Although Sephardim have a history of migration to the United States that stretches back to a small, first wave emigrating from England and the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, their numbers in the United States are significantly lower than those of Ashkenazim (Adatto, 1939; Benardete, 1982). Between the years 1899 and 1913, several thousand Sephardim from the Mediterranean region arrived in a second wave to the United States, bringing their total number to roughly 15,000 (Adatto, 1939).

Having not encountered one another until they arrived in the United States, varying degrees of discord developed among Jews from different geographic origins. Tensions ran particularly high between German and East European Jews. Americanized, German Jews feared that their social status would fall through their association, in the minds of non-Jews, with their newly arriving, East European counterparts. Although they looked alike, their practices and values differed significantly. German Jews had a history of assimilation that stretched back to the late seventeenth century (Cohen, 1984), and unlike the orthodox, culturally separatist
Jews of Eastern Europe, they did not practice a particularly observant form of Judaism, or speak a language, Yiddish, which separated them from the general population. East European Jews, for their part, did not understand why the "decorum loving" (Lowenstein, 1967, p. 79) German Jews carried themselves as gentiles. Having lived primarily in shtetls—small, pre-industrial towns—East European Jews fled anti-Semitic pogroms and dire poverty for the United States, only to discover that their social, cultural, and religious practices conflicted with American ones as well as those of German Jews.

As with East Europeans, Sephardim maintained a cultural separation from their host countries and lead rural and isolated lives centered on religion (Cohen, 1984). Nationalism and industrialism, rather than anti-Semitism, were the driving forces behind Sephardim leaving their homes. Many Jews left the Mediterranean when faced with forced conscription in the Turkish army after the 1909 overthrow of the Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid (Benardete, 1982). Upon arrival in the United States, Sephardim maintained distinctions among themselves in reference to geographic origin. In an early account of Sephardim living in the Mediterranean, Hacker (1926) writes:

> The men of Castoria, in their synagogues, employed a slightly different cantilation that was unpleasing to the men of the island of Chios. . . . Because of a localism that was the development of centuries, men from towns only thirty miles apart were prone to regard one another with distrust. (As quoted in Benardete, 1982, p. 172)

All Sephardim, however, shared a similar culture and language, Ladino, which dated back to their common history in Spain.

In the United States, Sephardic culture and practices were foreign to Ashkenazim and not well tolerated by them. Speaking different languages and practicing Judaism differently, Ashkenazim and Sephardim maintained separate social, educational, and religious institutions. Racism was also a factor, with Ashkenazim disparaging Sephardim for their darker skins. One Sephardi reports at the beginning of the twentieth century: "the Levantine Jews feel more discrimination from the other wings of the Jews than they do from non-Jews" (Adatto, 1939, p. 28).
The first Jews arrived in Seattle in 1860 from Germany. Selling clothing, food, and tools, they "mine[d] the miners" (Droker, 1983, p. 6) of the Californian and Alaskan gold rushes. First settled by white people in 1852, Seattle in the 1860s was a frontier outpost of roughly one thousand people and home to three Jewish families, the Schwabachers, Frauenthals, and Kaufmans (Cohn, 1982). German Jews participated in the city's civic and social life, and they attained financial success rather quickly. In 1884, Babette Schwabacher Gatzert helped found Seattle Children's Home, Seattle's first charitable organization. Bailey Gatzert, her husband, served as mayor of the city in 1876, and he also sat on the Chamber of Commerce as their first president (Avner & Buttnick 1995; Droker, 1983).

At the same time that German Jews were enjoying a certain amount of material and social success in Seattle, they ran up against anti-Semitic attitudes which excluded them from elite, Anglo-American organizations. In response, they established separate civic and social organizations for themselves. In 1883, German Jews founded a local chapter of the B'nai B'rith, a national fraternal organization aiding in members' health and death expenses. In 1892, German Jewish women—excluded from suffrage clubs, the Women's Century Club, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (Blair, 1988)—founded the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, an organization serving the newly arriving East European Jews (The Jewish Experience in Washington State, 1990).

For East European Jews arriving in Seattle in the 1880s, participation in the city's social and civic life was less important than the maintenance of their culture, and the first organizations they established for themselves were religious congregations. The same holds true for Sephardim who arrived from Turkey and Rhodes two decades later. Having never encountered one another until their arrival in the United States, the two Sephardic groups established separate religious and social organizations, although they occasionally united for larger cultural events.

As a coastal city, Seattle beckoned as an attractive site for Sephardic immigration, which began in 1903 (Droker, 1983). By
1910, Sephardim comprised 600 of the 4,500 Jews living in Seattle, the largest Sephardic population outside of New York City (Adatto, 1939; Droker, 1983). By the First World War, the number of Sephardim had climbed to 1,500. With 10,000 Jews living in Seattle, the number of Sephardim and their proportion to Ashkenazim were significantly higher than the national average (Adatto, 1939).

Ashkenazim did not initially acknowledge as Jews the first Sephardim arriving in Seattle. One Ashkenazi wrote what was apparently considered at the time to be a sympathetic portrayal of Sephardim: “We Jews were originally all half-niggers” (Jewish Transcript, March, 1928 as quoted in Adatto, 1939, p. 132). Sephardim maintained a correspondingly low opinion of Ashkenazim. They disparaged German Jews as “Protestantes” and “hatless Jews” (Adatto, 1939, pp. 118, 119) because of their reform practices, and they called East European Jews “schmaltz” (Droker, 1983, p. 9), Yiddish for the chicken fat used in their cooking.

At the turn of the century, most of Seattle’s Jews, regardless of origin, lived in an ethnically mixed, primarily Jewish neighborhood called the Central District (Droker, 1983). Many families lived without hot water, electricity or baths and were in need of services to aid them in their adjustment to life in the United States (Devine, 1976). Settlement activities in Portland, Oregon’s Jewish community prefigured those in Seattle by a year and were instrumental in the founding of Seattle’s Settlement House (Toll, 1982). In 1905, Portland’s Council of Jewish Women (CJW), a national social and charitable organization founded by German Jewish women in Chicago, coordinated their piecemeal services for immigrant Jews and established Neighborhood House. A year later, a member of Portland’s CJW visited the Seattle CJW and “chastis[e]d them . . . for a lack of an initiative” (Toll, 1990, p. 76). At that time, Seattle’s CJW activities were limited to hospital visitations, care-taking of graves, and sewing classes. After the embarrassing visit, Seattle’s CJW founded Settlement House, basing it on eastern models of social work, particularly that of Chicago’s Hull-House (Andrews, 1984; Devine 1976).

Originally housed in the bottom floor of a privately owned home, Settlement House moved three times in its first decade
of operation. Initial offerings of sewing and religion classes expanded to include free baths, medical care, Americanization classes, and Ashkenazic cultural activities. In 1916, Settlement House established a permanent locale in its own three-story brick building, changing its name in 1917 to the Educational Center, to better reflect its mission of Americanizing immigrants (Devine, 1976). Throughout this article, Settlement House will be referred to as "Settlement House" when discussing events prior to 1917 and as the "Educational Center" in reference to events during and after 1917.

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT AND AMERICANIZATION AT HULL-HOUSE

While some historians (Davis, 1967; Rose, 1994; Trolander, 1987) may argue that Seattle's Settlement House, with its sectarian focus, did not cultivate a true practice of settlement work, this "heroic version" (Crocker, 1992, p. 6) of the movement as non-religious disregards its Christian roots. The development in England of Christian Socialism, a religious movement focused on tackling social problems through the practical application of Christian values, was central to the development of settlement work. Christian Socialism transplanted in the United States became known as the Social Gospel movement, and it informed the practice of many American workers, including Jane Addams. Addams wrote that the movement had a "bent to express in social service and in terms of action the spirit of Christ," and that Christian humanitarianism should be applied to settlement work (Addams, 1910, p. 124 as quoted in Garland, 1994, p. 81).

With the huge flux of immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the question of how to incorporate new immigrants into American culture was a topic of debate among Americans and immigrants alike, and the Social Gospel movement influenced settlement workers' thoughts and practices. Three conceptualizations of Americanization predominated: pluralism, cosmopolitanism, and Anglo-Americanism (Lissak, 1989). Proponents of pluralism advocated that ethnic groups maintain separate identities while enjoying equal access to political and economic opportunities.
Cosmopolitans, adopting the melting pot as their symbol, advocated a melding together of various cultures to form a new hybrid. Advocates of Anglo-Americanism called for "compulsory acculturation" (Lissak, p. 179) in which immigrants would be forced to abandon allegiance to their countries of origin and give up their mother tongue before acquiring United States citizenship.

The Social Gospel movement, with its pluralistic stance towards the various Christian denominations "laid the groundwork for the advocacy of cultural pluralism that became a hallmark of the American settlement movement" (Carson, 1990, pp. 57-58). While settlement work thus associated itself with the ideology of pluralism, Hull-House workers actually worked more from the values of cosmopolitanism and Anglo-Americanism. Blood (1993) writes:

Addams envisioned a mixture [of American society] in which the bourgeois, "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" values of early America would remain dominant, and education and political autonomy would be maintained by an educated, moneyed elite, who in turn had a kind of patrician responsibility to serve the good of all Americans. (p. 73)

While not forcing acculturation, Hull-House workers advocated a gradual assimilation into Anglo-American culture. Addams developed a three-part plan for acculturating immigrants which consisted of first respecting and promoting a particular group's traditions and contributions to American society, then encouraging such a group to take on more Anglo-American values, and finally mixing different immigrant groups together for the purpose of Americanization (Blood, 1993; Lissak, 1989). Lissak comments:

The contribution idea served therefore as a psychological device designed to make newcomers feel that their cultures were respected and found worthy of inclusion in the American common fund, when they were actually engaged in a process of transition from their particularistic cultures to the American so-called universal, cosmopolitan civilization. (p. 161)

Cultural tolerance, then, was put into service for the creation of an American society based on the "genteel tradition" (Lissak, 1989, p. 158), an amalgamation of cultures ranging from the ancient
Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman civilizations; to those of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Enlightenment; and culminating in the culture of Progressive nineteenth-century Europe and America. Ironically, the culture of modern-day Hebrews, that of Jews, was presumed to be outside of this tradition.

AMERICANIZATION AT SETTLEMENT HOUSE

Anglo-American cultural discrimination against Jews, then, was also aimed at Settlement House's German Jewish founders. The settlement movement functioned as an early liberation movement for upper and middle-class, educated women (Patterson, 1997). In the late nineteenth century, these women were socialized to administer to family and friends within the confines of their homes. Due to the immense social and economic problems caused by industrialism, such women began to engage in public work. The founders of Seattle's Settlement House, elite German Jewish women, were subject to the same social forces as their Anglo-American counterparts (Toll, 1982). Ironically, as Jewish women were liberated from the confines of their homes, they were oppressed by their exclusion from joining Anglo-American women's social and charitable organizations (Blair, 1988). Even while Jewish women's marginal status as Americans precluded them from joining such circles, Settlement House's founders committed themselves to the Americanization of East European and Sephardic Jews, whom they considered lacking in gentility. An excerpt from a yearbook makes manifest their mission:

A SETTLEMENT is not a sentiment—it is a social necessity. The dependence of all classes, one upon the other, must be satisfactorily adjusted; and this can only be done by the SOCIAL ELBOWING of life. If we are going to share with our less fortunate brethren, let us also share our PRESENCE. If we are truly our “Brother’s keeper,” it is for us who are fortunate in the possession of education—of leisure—of wealth—and of talent—to make ourselves permanently useful to our less fortunate brethren. [Bold and capitalizations are in the original document.] (1921/22 Yearbook, CJW Archives)

Overt Americanization activities included celebrating Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, leading children in "patriotic exercises" of saluting the American flag and singing songs, and involving immigrants in "patriotic work" during the First World
War (CJW Archives). Beginning in 1915, Settlement House offered citizenship and English classes. As immigration declined after the First World War and public schools began to offer these classes, such services waned. Throughout these years, however, many clubs—notably the Mothers Club—offered informal opportunities for immigrants to learn and practice English. A report from the 1921/22 CJW Yearbook emphasizes the importance of such clubs in the Americanization process:

Miss Cone [resident worker] has so given of herself to these mothers, —that they feel inspired to read, write, and TALK the English language. . . . Two representatives of the Public Schools complained bitterly of the fact that the children are not encouraged to use the English language in the homes of many of the foreigners,—and, in many cases, forget their pronunciation from Friday to Monday. The mothers, in turn, have complained that their children were forgetting their language,—and so, the situation could only be met by getting the mothers interested in learning the language themselves. (CJW Archives)

Settlement House’s Americanization process consisted of twin goals, that of introducing the genteel tradition to immigrant Jews and of helping to transform orthodox, East European Jews into secular, American Jews. According to the founders of Settlement House, the ideal American spoke English, was involved in patriotic activities, and embraced Anglo-American values. The ideal American Jew was both an ideal American and an ideal Jew, practicing an Ashkenazic Judaism stripped of its ethnic and orthodox overtones.

Settlement House workers utilized Jewish holidays to socialize East European immigrants in an American Jewish culture, one which involved a smoothing out of differences among the Jewish ethnicities and a secularization of religious activities. Chanukah festivals at Settlement House included vaudeville performances in a “Hebrew [Yiddish] dialect” (Elliot, 1944, p. 52), classical dance and music recitals, and plays in English performed by social clubs. Sara Efron, an East European Jew who made use of the House as a child, recalls:

Now, thinking back on it, it amazes me that my parents being so orthodox would have permitted me to go there, but it was innocuous. The stories were [from the] Bible, and I believe they
felt that they should in every way try to become Americanized and take on American ways. . . . This was one of the ways that we [were] given a glimpse of how things were being done in America in comparison to the way we lived in our own homes. (Interview, CJW Archives)

While Hull-House workers tolerated the cultural contributions of immigrants to the extent to which the process served the ultimate objective of creating a cosmopolitan Anglo-American society, Settlement House workers tolerated only certain forms of Jewish practice in the service of creating the American Jew. Sephardic culture, unwelcome and alien to Settlement House’s German founders, was almost entirely disregarded in such work. Sephardim, therefore, most often made use of Settlement House to participate in overt American, rather than Jewish, activities. Gordon De Leon, a Sephardic Jew who attended the Educational Center as a youth, describes Sephardim’s encounter with the Center: “She [Mrs. Alexander, the residential worker in the 1920s] pushed us to have social affairs, Mother’s Day celebrations. . . . We had Sunday afternoon dances. We never knew about going to public dances and stuff like that” (Interview, CJW Archives).

ARTS AND AMERICANIZATION AT HULL-HOUSE

In Jane Addams’ memoirs of Hull-House, she writes: “One of the most conspicuous features in our neighborhood, as of all industrial quarters, is the persistency with which the entire population attends the theater” (Addams, 1932, p. 383). Addams is referring to melodrama, a wildly popular form of entertainment at the turn of the century. With its sensational plots and exaggerated heroes and villains, melodramatic theater gave its audience a temporary escape from their problems. Cheap and easy to produce, melodrama was democratic in nature (Gerould, 1983). Addams did not approve of the genre, however, crediting it as an immoral influence on its audiences, including immigrant children:

The young men told us their ambitions in the phrases of stage heroes, and the girls, so far as their romantic dreams could be shyly put into words, possessed no other but those soiled by long use in the melodrama. (Addams, 1932, p. 384)
While disapproving of the genre, Addams recognized the power of the stage to influence people’s thoughts and behaviors. She developed an alternate vision of the theater as a “reconstructing and reorganizing agent of accepted moral truths” (Addams, 1932, p. 391). From its earliest years, theater was thus put to use at Hull-House to socialize and Americanize immigrants. Hull-House offered classes in Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, ethnically mixed children’s clubs performed plays in English, and an amateur adult company staged several plays (Hecht, 1983).

At the same time Addams was developing her vision of the social use for theater, a new theatrical form was emerging that challenged the big, commercial stock theaters operating across the country. The “little theater” movement, devoted to artistic experimentation and social realism, developed at the turn of the century and offered an elite, socially conscious alternative to melodrama (Macgowan, 1929; Mackay, 1917). In 1905, Hull-House formed a little theater troupe, the Hull-House Players, whose roots stretched back to the formation in 1893 of the Dramatic Section of Hull-House’s Student Association (Hecht, 1982).

The Hull-House Players staged social realist works, some of them local or national premieres, by Shaw, Ibsen, Yeats, Galsworthy, and Hauptmann. Such works did not appeal to immigrants living in the surrounding neighborhood, and in an effort to simultaneously gain an audience and to demonstrate “the great human potential the working class, immigrant population possessed” (Hecht, 1982, p. 175), the Players toured their productions to the wealthy suburbs of Chicago. Ironically, the Hull-House Players never received professional recognition as a pioneer in little theater, for their productions were too closely associated with Addams’ ideology of placing a higher value on the social, rather than artistic usefulness of theater (Cheney, 1917; Hecht, 1982). Instead, professional credit for the development of American little theater is generally given to Maurice Browne’s Little Theatre, established in Chicago in 1912. Browne, however, credited the Hull-House Players as a prime influence in his work (Hecht, 1982).

Occasionally a group of immigrants would stage a production at Hull-House in their native language, but this was a fairly rare event (Hecht, 1983). A few times, East European groups unaffiliated with Hull-House mounted a work in Yiddish, but
the only Jewish productions ever sponsored by Hull-House were
two plays given in 1906-07 by members of a Jewish boys club (Ad-
dams, 1932; Lissak, 1989). The plays, *Joseph and his Brethren* and
*Queen Esther*, were performed in English and tolerated as stories
from the *Bible*, thus fitting into the workers' conceptualization of
the genteel tradition (Patterson, 1997).

**ARTS, AMERICANIZATION, AND CULTURAL
PRESERVATION AT SETTLEMENT HOUSE**

Consistent with the ideology of Anglo-American settlement
workers, Settlement House workers believed that recreational
and cultural activities were not intrinsically important. Rather,
such offerings served the purpose of inculcating children with
genteel values and keeping them off the street and under the
"maternal surveillance" (Toll, 1990, p. 76) of settlement workers.
A CJW report from 1918/19 reads:

> Two new activities have been added to our curriculum, Folk Danc-
ing and Story Telling. . . . While healthy exercise, and training in
manners, culture and imagination are to be gained from these, the
real underlying idea in establishing them is to get the children to
come to the House as often as possible—every day and all day—
thus bringing them under proper guidance and keeping them well
occupied. By so doing it is our hope to have them grow up with
us, to have them feel at home in our home and thus feel that
the Educational Center is theirs. We do not wish to lose our hold
over them but by surrounding them with the proper influence and
guidance have them with us as they develop and arrive at the critical
period of their lives, just when entering young manhood and young
womanhood. (CJW Archives)

Folk-dancing was first offered at Settlement House in 1913.
Proving to be enormously popular, participation was restricted
to children taking part in at least one other activity at the House.
In 1918, Nellie Cornish, founder of the contemporary Cornish
College of the Arts, established a branch of her children's art
school at Settlement House. She supplied the school with two
dance teachers and two accompanists. Although no further detail
is available in any CJW reports regarding the curriculum, the fact
that teachers were supplied from outside of the Jewish commu-
nity implies that the classes had little to do with the preservation
of any form of Jewish culture and more with introducing children to popular, American dances.

As with other settlements, the Educational Center sponsored the formation of a little theater company, the Neighborhood Players. Maurice Browne's influence in the little theater movement stretched from Chicago to the Pacific and touched the Players. In 1918, he and his wife, Ellen Van Volkenburg, were invited by Nellie Cornish to found a drama department at the Cornish School. In 1921, the couple founded the first little theater in Seattle, immodestly naming it the Maurice Browne and Ellen Van Volkenburg Repertory Company (Cornish, 1964). It soon became known as the Cornish Little Theater. The Educational Center's Neighborhood Players were active in the mid-1920s and were directed by a Mr. Marceau, who also directed productions for the Cornish Little Theater. The Players' productions included Madame Butterfly, Lord Dunsany's The Gods of the Mountain (1925), and Brooks' Whappin' Wharf (1926) (CJW Archives). These works, English and American social realist dramas, were not relevant to Jewish immigrant life, and by attending and participating in such productions, Jewish immigrants were exposed to the cultural values of the American elite.

Due to federal restrictions instituted in 1924, Jewish immigration reduced to a trickle in the 1920s (Schwartz, 1966; Simon, 1992). The potential loss of Jewish cultures loomed threateningly before first-generation Jews, and the Educational Center's mission shifted to include a more authentic preservation of Jewish culture, albeit only in its East European form. Until then, East European Jewish culture had been Americanized, as in the case of a production of the Fidelia Club, a girls' club which gave plays once a year. Paralleling the Hull-House productions in English of Jewish stories from the Bible, the Fidelia Club performed in 1916 a Chanukah story titled What's Tonight? (CJW Archives; Devine 1976). Although workers did not provide instruction in immigrant arts, in the 1920s they allowed their space to be used by a number of groups committed to the preservation of Yiddish and Russian cultures. These groups also entered the cultural mainstream of Seattle, performing for non-Jews. Sephardic cultural production remained anathema, however, to the Center's workers and to Seattle's overall population.
Hazomir, a group dedicated to performing Yiddish folk songs, gave several concerts at the Educational Center. A review notes that once their work had crossed over and had gained acceptance by non-Jews, German Jews allowed themselves to profess their interest in Yiddish culture as well:

A lot of Jews who secretly enjoy these Yiddish melodies have until recently been ashamed to admit it publicly—what would the good Nordics think of them? But of late years the goyim themselves have begun to appreciate them immensely—look what a fuss they’ve been making over “Eli, Eli!”—so we suppose it’s quite all-right now for Jews—or shall we rather say Jewesses?—who want to make the grade socially to admit that they like that sort of stuff. (Jewish Transcript, May 4, 1928, p. 4)

Other East European groups met similar acceptance by German Jews and the larger public. The Yiddish Dramatic Society staged at least two productions at the Educational Center, The Landsleit (1925) and Hear O Israel (1926). In 1928, the Yiddish Art Society performed The Dybbuk and Dem Taifel’s Shabbos at Temple De Hirsch, a reform synagogue originally founded by Yiddish-snubbing German Jews. In the same year, the Russian Dramatic Literary Society, a Jewish organization committed to the promotion of Russian culture, performed at the Women’s University Club, one of Seattle’s elite, Anglo-American women’s organizations.

In the 1920s, first-generation East European Jews, born and bred in the United States, were more acculturated than their parents to Anglo-American values and practices. They were therefore more highly regarded, both by Educational Center workers and by the larger American populace. Referring to members of the Russian Dramatic Literary Society, an Educational Center’s president wrote: “Some of the people attending this club’s activities, though poor, are very highly cultured, in fact consider themselves much better educated than the average American college bred men and women” (CJW Archives). This settlement leader’s high regard for East European Jews demonstrates markedly more respect than a worker’s patronizing attitude from two decades earlier, as recalled by Sara Efron: “She [the first residential worker, Hannah Schwartz] gave us girls lessons in deportment, in how
to properly sit and how to properly speak” (Interview, CJW Archives).

While the culture of East European Jews was embraced by a wide audience in Seattle, both Ashkenazim and the general populace disregarded Sephardic culture. Although they were ignored by others, the two groups of Seattle’s Sephardim, those from Turkey and those from Rhodes, successfully worked together for the first time in the 1920s. In 1921, they joined together to form the Seattle Progressive Fraternity, a club that made use of the Educational Center to celebrate American holidays, including Mothers’ Day and Halloween (Jewish Transcript). The Fraternity “interested their new members in becoming citizens of the United States” (Adatto, 1939, p. 99), opening and closing each meeting with patriotic songs. Sephardic cultural events, however, only took place in Sephardic facilities, often synagogues. Plays in Ladino, for instance, were performed in various Sephardic congregations, and although they were not attended by Ashkenazim, they were enjoyed by both groups of Sephardim (Angel, 1973).

During the lean years of the Depression, the Neighborhood Players disbanded, and East European groups ceased staging productions at the Educational Center. Teachers funded by the Federal Emergency Relief Act and the Works Progress Administration gave instruction in visual arts, children’s activities, and theater. They directed two plays in 1936, The Valiant and Station YYY, neither of which are relevant to the little theater movement or to Judaism. These are the Educational Center’s last theater productions recorded in the CJW Archives, and reports for the Center’s remaining years of operation mention little artistic activity.

While East European Jews were denied national citizenship in their countries of origin, in the United States they developed a “dual identity” as Americans and as Jews (Linzer, Schnall, & Chanes, 1998, p. 5). Following the Second World War, as they increasingly spoke English and tasted economic success, East European Jews moved from poor, Jewish neighborhoods and dispersed to wealthier areas (Linzer, et al.). As immigrant Jews acculturated to the United States, the challenge of fully incorporating them into American culture was eclipsed by the African-American civil rights movement. White people defined who was American largely by race, rather than by ethnicity. East European
Jews, perceived by white people to be white, were considered by them to be American (Biale, Galchinsky, & Heschel, 1998).

Sephardim, with their smaller numbers and disunity among themselves, intermarried during this period at a rate four times higher than that of Ashkenazim (Donnell, 1987). For every Sephardic-Ashkenazic marriage, there were four Sephardic-non-Jewish marriages (Adatto, 1939). Subsequent generations of Sephardim, having mixed with Ashkenazim and other groups, were perceived by white people to be white and therefore American. As Sephardim transformed into American Jews, they lost much of what was distinctive to their culture. Marcus (1995) writes: “In the United States, Jews, once a hodgepodge of warring ethnics, emerged from the crucible of that postwar decade as American Jews” (p. 330).

At the same time that Jews in Seattle Americanized and moved out of the Central District, increasing numbers of African-Americans moved into the neighborhood. By 1947, Jewish families were in the minority (Devine, 1976), and in 1948 the Educational Center changed the composition of its leadership to reflect the changing demographics of the community and renamed itself Neighborhood House. In 1953, Neighborhood House established itself as an independent organization, and three years later the CJW sold the building to a bakery. This sale gave rise to misunderstanding and resentment by Neighborhood House staff and community members. Having thought that they would inherit the building, they now found themselves forced to seek new facilities. Such an abdication of responsibility by the CJW reflected the broader trend of established, white social service agencies fleeing neighborhoods as they became increasingly African-American (Trolander, 1987). Neighborhood House found facilities in the nearby Yesler Terrace Housing Development and later developed branches in four other public housing communities (LaFond, 1968; Langbecker, 1955).

IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY CENTER OR JEWISH HULL HOUSE?

The settlement movement is unique in its focus on the “social reorganization” (Lissak, 1989) of immigrants. What distinguishes
settlements from immigrant-founded community centers is such an emphasis over that of ethnic preservation. Lissak writes of the difference between Hull-House and immigrant community centers:

The ultimate objective of the Hull-House club policy was the dissolution of the ethnic group through the integration of individuals into the cosmopolitan or ethnically mixed general community; while the ultimate objective of the club policy of immigrant community centers and immigrant settlements was the preservation of ethnicity through the social ethnic segregation of newcomers. (p. 131)

Was Settlement House, then, a "Jewish Hull-House" (Rose, 1994) or a community center run by and for immigrants? Although Seattle's Settlement House was ostensibly open to all community members, workers kept track of the number of Jews involved in its activities and attempted to keep the organization primarily serving Jews (Toll, 1990). Whereas the agenda at Hull-House was one of social reorganization, Settlement House workers allowed their space to be used by various groups, including Zionists, Sephardim, and Yiddish-speaking (but not socialist) groups. Jewish organizations rarely rented Hull-House's spaces (Lissak, 1989), but many made use of Settlement House's facilities. At Hull-House, Jewish religious and national holidays were never celebrated, even when the Italian Mardi Gras and Irish St. Patrick's Day were (Lissak, 1989). Settlement House, however, sponsored annual Purim and Chanukah celebrations, albeit in non-traditional forms.

While Hull-House's mission in regards to its immigrant users was primarily to Anglo-Americanize them, Settlement House was founded with the dual purposes of Americanizing immigrants and transforming East Europeans into American Jews. Given that Settlement House never took leadership, however, in the preservation of traditional Jewish cultures, Settlement House is a suspect member of the immigrant community center movement. It was a place where German Jewish women could promote Americanization even while experiencing exclusion from elite women's organizations. It was a place where East European culture was validated, albeit in a hegemonic form that blended with Anglo-American culture. It was a place where up to 90% of the
immediate neighborhood was Sephardic for much of its operating years, and yet only Yiddish literature could be found in its library (LaFond, 1968). Settlement House, then, with its underlying agenda of smoothing out the differences among Ashkenazic Jews and of Americanizing all Jews had practices more in common with the settlement movement than that of immigrant community centers.

**CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE WITH IMMIGRANT GROUPS**

As discussed, in the early days of social work, an ideology of Anglo-Americanism predominated, and correspondingly, settlement workers did not value the preservation of immigrant culture. Seattle’s Settlement House workers, partly due to their marginalization as Jews, stressed the importance of both Anglo-Americanization and preservation of immigrant culture. While they favored Ashkenazic tradition over Sephardic, their dual agenda for immigrants is relatively modern for its time and anticipates contemporary social work practice with immigrants.

Settlement House’s use of Jewish workers to advance both culturally-specific programming and a basic level of Americanization (e.g. an understanding of English) predates contemporary practice. It does so both in its use of workers that reflect the population they serve and in its focus on these twin concerns. Settlement House’s emphasis on Anglo-Americanism and favoritism towards one cultural group over another, however, would be considered poor practice by today’s standards.

It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that widespread and profound social changes made Anglo-Americanism untenable. Today, multiculturalism, or the equal value and appreciation for all cultures, is now one of the key components of mainstream social work practice. All social workers, regardless of background, can learn from past practice and understand the importance of maintaining an awareness of power dynamics among different immigrant groups in multi-group settings. Not only did Settlement House’s German Jews prefer to work with East European Jews, the East Europeans influenced Settlement House’s agenda by allying with the German Jews against Sephardim.
Social workers must also be aware of their own favoritism towards certain groups and work towards equalizing their services. While workers who share a cultural background with their clients certainly aid in articulating their needs, such workers can learn from past practice and counter any bias they may have against sub-groups within the larger group that they belong. In addition, contemporary social work education, with its stress on multiculturalism, has helped to produce a body of social workers sensitized to both the cultural and Americanization needs of all immigrants. In our increasingly multiracial, multiethnic society, it is becoming less possible to cleanly divide people, including workers and clients, according to race, ethnicity, language, and class. Cultural preservation has become Americanization.

REFERENCES

Primary Resources

2. Interviews with users of Settlement House: Gordon De Leon (Interviewed by Howard Drooker, 1982), Sara Efron (Interviewed by Meta Kaplan, 1975), University of Washington Archives, Seattle.
3. Review of local newspapers from the period under study: Jewish Voice, Jewish Transcript.

Secondary Resources


