Jewish Americans and Asian Americans as 'the Model Minority': A Literary Perspective

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Jewish Americans and Asian Americans as 'the Model Minority': A Literary Perspective

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1. Introduction

The idea of a model minority has been present in the United States since the publication of William Petersen's "Success Story: Japanese American Style" in 1966 whereby he showcased the status of Japanese Americans, and thus invented a discourse of the model minority. The discourse explains how Asian Americans, once deemed unassimilable and referred to as the "yellow peril," have become the "model minority" for others to follow. They are described as "peoples distinct from the white majority but lauded as well-assimilated, upwardly mobile, and exemplars of traditional family values—in the middle decades of the twentieth century" (Wu iv). However, earlier immigration of Eastern Europeans in the late nineteenth century showcased as well a minority that, according to Robert Ezra Park, possessed an ability that separated them from all the rest, namely, Jewish Americans ("Old World Traits Transplanted" 238). The idea is that Jewish Americans have kept their traditional and familial values, their rootedness in Jewish culture enabling them faster and more successful assimilation into U.S. society. On the other hand, their rather ambivalent racial categorization produced both impediment and later on the rationale for their upward mobility and entrance into the mainstream of society. A similar trajectory might be observed in the case of Asian Americans in the second half of the 20th century.

This essay will present a comparative ethnic study of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans as the model minorities. The study is specific since the majority of the previous studies have examined the position of Jewish Americans compared to African Americans (e.g. Eric Sundquist's *Strangers in the Land*) as well as Asian Americans in relation to African Americans (e.g. Helen Heran Jun's *Race for Citizenship*). The comparison of Jewish and Asian Americans to African Americans while stressing the polarity of their position within U.S. society conveys the parallels in their struggle for inclusion into the U.S. cultural, social,

and economic sphere. Meanwhile, the comparison between the Jewish and Asian experiences has received peculiarly little attention. Their climb to the status of the model minority draws a number of parallels. Albeit at different times, the waves of both Jewish and Asian immigrants have succeeded in the assimilation into U.S. society faster than the rest of the minorities and they have demonstrated skills and interest that made them desirable and successful in the workforce, which inevitably resulted in anti-Semitism and anti-Orientalism followed by legal immigration and naturalization bans.

Both Jewish and Asian immigration, naturalization, and arrested upward mobility were continued after World War II when the image of the United States as a democracy of equal rights and possibilities became an asset. Jewish American exclusion was no longer tenable after the Holocaust while Asian incorporation began with Chinese Americans as allies after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although there has been much polemic regarding the origin of the model minority, it seems that both Jewish Americans and Asian Americans were singled out as the most successful minorities, and assisted by the government in their socioeconomic rise from the "unassimilable to exceptional" (Lee and Zhou).

This essay will attempt to outline the parallels in the experience of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans that indicate their model minority status through the works of Philip Roth and Gish Jen. The first chapter will present the introduction to the concept of the model minority and the rise of Jewish Americans to that position. Although Jewish Americans have not been identified as the model minority per se, their experience is analogous to that of Asian Americans. Therefore, an outline of the parallels of Jewish and Asian rise to the status of the modal minority will be presented in this section. The second chapter will portray a familiarization with Asian Americans as the model minority, along with the positive and negative aspects of such a stereotype. It will briefly introduce the adversities of the Asian Americans, their Orientalization, systematic exclusion, and the repeal of immigration acts that

had secured their incorporation into society, culminating in the presentation of Asian Americans as the model minority.

The following five chapters will convey the literary analysis of Philip Roth's *American Trilogy*, and Gish Jen's *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land* in respect to the presentation of the Jewish and Asian rise to the status of the model minority. The first section will present the first novel of the *American Trilogy*, *American Pastoral,* set in the 1960s, where Roth presents the third generation, a completely assimilated Jewish American, Swede Levov, and his entrance into the WASP society. We are introduced to his naïve pastoral America dream, overturned by his counterpastoral daughter, amid the cultural turmoil of Kennedy's assassination and the Vietnam War. The second section introduces the second novel of the trilogy, I *Married A Communist*. The novel is set in the 1950s amidst McCarthyism and the communist infiltration threat presents the second generation of Jewish Americans and their unstable, and not completely assimilated identities. The third section presents the last novel of the trilogy, *The Human Stain*; an ironic twist on the Jewish identity in the 1990s, where Roth introduces Coleman Silk, a light-skinned African American professor of classics, his passing[1] as Jewish, and his on-campus affair with a much younger, working class woman. Coleman Silk's affair is synchronic to the historical background which invokes the Clinton-Lewinsky affair.

The two final sections will present the Asian American rise to the status of the model minority through the works of Gish Jen, whereby the first section portrays her first novel, *Typical American*, and focuses on the immigration of the Chang family, and their reluctant

[1] "Passing", according to Aileen Moreton-Robinson "has been represented as a betrayal, and the inevitable downfall of the race traitor is a motif in many works of literature and film" (165) and it usually implies an African American passing as white.

assimilation into the U.S. society. Although the Chang family members emigrated from China for fear of communism, they did not intend to stay in America. Hence, they were reluctant to accept the typical American way of life and failed to notice that over time they had become the typical Americans that they used to mock. With the help of government-stipulated loans, the Changs entered into the suburbs and gained the status of the model minority. The final section will deal with the sequel *Mona in the Promised Land*. The novel most clearly supports my argument of both Jewish American and Asian American model minority status. This section will focus on the Changs' daughter Mona, the American-born, second-generation Asian American who is completely assimilated, and who chose to convert to Judaism at the age of sixteen. Mona's decision to become Jewish was influenced by her predominantly Jewish, upper-middle-class neighborhood, which has acquired the status of the WASPs. Therefore, Mona's choice reflects her Americanization, and the very possibility of a choice indicates the position of the model minority which has completely assimilated and gained the opportunities accorded to middle-class whites.

This essay aims to broaden the view of the model minority that is based on the constructed image of Asian Americans by incorporating in it the appreciation of the Jewish American ethnicity, who had created a path for Asian Americans by becoming virtually indistinguishable from the WASPs. This comparative ethnic study of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans as the model minorities through the works of Philip Roth and Gish Jen outlines the similarities in their successful upward mobility.

2. Jewish Americans

The idea of the model minority has been present since the 1960s and the publication of William Petersen's "Success Story: Japanese American Style," which presented Japanese Americans as the model minority. According to Galen and Bodenhousen, "the term 'model minority' refers to minority groups that have ostensibly achieved a high level of success in contemporary U.S. society. The term has been used more often to describe Asian Americans, a group seen as having attained educational and financial success relative to other immigrant groups" (1). It became an integral element of the Asian American minority discourse, and it will correspondingly be employed throughout the essay. Although, chronologically Jewish Americans preceded Asian Americans in the status of the model minority.

In the following pages, I will attempt to demonstrate the Jewish rise to the status of the model minority and how they have been succeeded by Asian Americans, who have taken over the status of the model minority while Jewish Americans have blended into middle-class whiteness. The discussion in this section will present the historical aspect of Jewish immigration and their assimilation into the mainstream culture while giving prominence to the points of comparison of Jewish American and Asian American experience.

Jewish Americans have obtained a high degree of success in assimilation into American culture before Asian Americans took their place. In fact, Asians were referred to as the 'New Jews' once they have climbed the social ladder. And the Jews have reached the elite WASP status:

> At the front end of the American meritocratic machine, Asians are replacing Jews as the No. 1 group. They are winning the science prizes and scholarships. Jews, meanwhile, at our moment of maximum triumph at the back end of the meritocracy . . . are discovering sports and the virtues of being well-rounded. Which is cause and

> which is effect is an open question. But as Asians become America's new Jews, Jews are becoming . . . Episcopalians. (Lemann, "Jews in Second Place")

With astonishing social mobility and rapid integration into the American way of life and high levels of education, they are the ones that first epitomized the image of the exemplary minority. However, their race status has often been ambivalent, and therefore a subject of many discussions.

The idea of Jewish association to something akin to the model minority dates back to the 1920s when the sociologist Robert Ezra Park with his associates examined the immigration and assimilation of different ethnic groups into the U.S. society. Park studied Jewish immigrants whose "areas of first settlement" (203) at the time were ethnic ghettos, where their "settler psychology" (234) became evident. It enabled them to "transplant" (203) their European way of life without many alterations. Park praised their community organization which conducted various problem-solving experiments which he realizes as pertinent not only for a minority group's success but the success of the country as well: "In the case of the Jewish people, we find spontaneous, intelligent, and highly organized experiments in democratic control which may assume the character of permanent contributions to the organization of the American state" (238). At the very beginning of the Jewish accommodation to American society, Park has recognized their ability to thrive even in harsh living conditions.

When compared, Asian and Jewish minorities indeed have a lot in common concerning their rise to an enviable social status in the U.S. Jonathan Karp in his presentation *Overrepresented Minorities?* outlines the parallels between the Asians and Jews in the United States, as the two very visible minorities, whose comparison as such has received little attention.

Regardless of the abundant parallels in Jewish and Asian minority experience in the U.S., their immigration process is not comparable; actually "nothing can be more dissimilar" (Karp 13:44-13:52) than their immigration experience in the 19th century. Jewish immigrants in the U.S. did not share the hardships of Asian Americans, and although anti-Semitic caricatures were present in the press of the time[2], no legal persecution occurred. Karp in his lecture explains that the Jewish immigrants were a relatively small group that unlike Asians and other European immigrants did not attract attention:

> By and large Jews seem to have been accepted without serious challenge. Jews were far less numerous and significantly less controversial than Irish Catholics, whose growing presence led to the creation of the political parties singularly dedicated to their exclusion. Even in the South, Jews were accepted as *sufficiently white* (...) and were largely welcomed as long as they did not challenge the white supremacy order. (15:54- 16:28; my emphasis)

The "sufficient whiteness" conveys the privileged position Jews occupied in comparison to Asians upon the immigration into the United States. Their appearance differed only slightly from the Anglo-Saxon majority and they were thus considered as less intimidating and problematic and were more easily accepted. They "melted into the unambiguous whiteness" (Wu 4) of the American society and were not ostracized as other minority groups. However, their racial status in the U.S. has always been ambivalent and it presented a difficulty both for the Jewish community and for the U.S. bureaucracy.

Goldstein in his study of Jewish racial classification explains that the American "preoccupation with black-white dichotomy during much of the nineteenth century

[2] The satirical caricatures were widely spread in the American society in the late 19th century. They portrayed all immigrant nationalities. "The Jewish character of their jokes and cartoons, perennially concerned with money, bargains and fraud - especially arson to collect insurance on unprofitable stores - created in the American popular imagination the picture of Jews as unscrupulous, dishonest, cheating, unworthy citizens, an image perfected and duplicated by twentieth-century anti-Semitism" (Appel 104).

overshadowed their concern with the Jews, who were few in numbers and seemed easily assimilable in comparison to African Americans" (82). Even though they were considered racially different, "that difference was not seen as a significant barrier to their inclusion in the larger category of American 'whites'" (83). And although Jews considered themselves different from the Protestant majority, they still could affiliate with the American ideal: "Jews were attracted to the notion that, as whites, they could become part of the American nation in a way that German Jews would never be German and French Jews would never be French" (84). However, they retained the lingering feeling of otherness due to their Jewish identity (Ibid.).

More often than not, the general social attitude drew them closer to the category of the "other," notably, the African American, Goldstein explains (82). In an attempt not to be classified as such, the Jewish community pleaded for different categorization, but they faced the same difficulties once they attempted to name their distinction from the others. Although many Jews refer to a distinct Jewish race, a classification of such could have quickly led to restrictions of immigration and naturalization. Especially after Syrians were classified as Mongolians in 1909, and thus prevented from entering the country due to the restrictions imposed upon Asiatic immigration, American Jews were concerned that their association to Mongolian race would lead to the immigration and naturalization restrictions (84-87). Therefore, an attempt to gather the Jewish population under "Hebrew" by the Immigration Bureau had been sustained in 1910, regardless of the strong opposition of the Jewish population, claiming that Jews are the only ones registered as "religious sect" (89). The struggle for Jewish recognition continued over the next decades and was settled only in the aftermath of World War II when "… Jews and others of Southern and Eastern European descent were routinely counted as undifferentiated whites in the government's racial schema" (95).

Even though the 'sufficient whiteness,' at the beginning of the century had enabled Jews to live comfortably in the U.S. society, there was a dormant anti-Semitism in the air that came to the fore in the lynching of Leo Frank in 1913.[3] The lynching of the innocent, and wrongly accused Southern Jew "proved a wakeup call to Jews who had taken for granted their secure position within the American racial hierarchy" (Karp 24:07-23:14). Karp notes that the time of the Leo Frank's trial corresponds to the growing anti-Asian sentiments, anti-Japanese in particular (23:23 - 24:26).

In this section, I will briefly touch upon the restrictions of Jewish immigration. While Asian Americans were faced with heavier legal restrictions, as will be shown in the next chapter, and it seems as though "before 1917 the brunt of the attacks fell on Asians " (Karp 29:01 – 29:04), a shift in the focus occurred with the onset of World War I, turning focus on the eastern European immigrants instead. The U.S. as the nation of immigration was faced with tremendous difficulties at the outbreak of World War I, “When Europe went to war in 1914, fully one-third of the people living in the United States were either foreign-born or had a parent born overseas” (Laskin et al.). The U.S. responded by implementing rigorous changes in assimilation and immigration policies. Even though the majority of the immigrants supported their new country, the U.S. managed to gain ‘control’ by imposing “some of the most harshly repressive measures in American history” (Laskin et al.).

The severe restriction of immigration policies was furthermore a consequence of the first wave of the Red Scare when the fear of communism brought about severe anti-Semitism. Jewish immigrants were quickly associated with the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 which only intensified the fear of immigration of Jewish revolutionaries and criminals (Foglesong 5, 41).

[3] The "Leo Frank Case" known as the "most infamous outbursts of anti-Semitic feeling in the United States occurred in Georgia in the years 1913, 1914, and 1915" (Dinnerstein 15). It followed the trial and lynching of a Jewish industrialist Leo Frank, who was wrongly accused of rape and murder of a young 13-year-old girl, Mary Phagan, employed at the factory that he supervised. As the Georgia governor commuted his death sentence to life in jail, an enraged mob kidnapped Frank and lynched him in Mary Phagan's hometown (Karp 23:50 – 24:15) Dinnerstein claims that "Leo Frank was chosen to stand trial for the tribulations of a changing society" (17).

The already extant anti-Semitism was even more inflamed by the publication of "the notorious forgery" "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"[4] (Diner 209). Their rapid upward mobility was checked by the imposition of Jewish quotas in the elite circles that became known as the "Jewish problem," the major barrier to the Jewish community at the time, which had been resolved only after WWII.

It was these fears, uncertainties, and turmoil that set the stage for the *Immigration Law of 1924*, the *Johnson-Reed Act*. It marked a turning point in the U.S. history that restricted not only the Jewish and, even further, Asian immigration into the U.S. for at least two decades, but Southern and Eastern European as well. It also marks the baseline of my analysis of Jewish and Asian Americans seeing that: "The American immigration history of the two groups, that until recently have seemed entirely disparate, whose statuses had, in fact appeared virtually opposite, now consequentially and tragically converged" (Karp 31:10 - 31:22). The struggles of immigration to and naturalization in the U.S. became a converging point for Asian Americans and Jewish Americans.

Both minorities had their points of crisis. Karp identifies the "nadir" of Japanese Americans "if not Asian American more generally" (31:29 - 31:30) in their incarceration into the internment camps during the WWII on the U.S. soil, whereas the Jewish American "nadir" is the Holocaust (32:09). And the abiding feeling of anti-Semitism only subsided in the aftermath of the War when "awareness and shock set in, about what had happened to Jews" (32:53 – 32:56), and it was only following WWII and the Holocaust that the Jews were no longer considered as a threat to the U.S. (32:00-33:05).

Chronologically the Jewish problem occurred in the second half of the 19th century, "at the first half of the century we had the Irish problem, and a German problem, and we had

[4] The protocols originated from Russia, and were printed in the U.S. in 1920 by Henry Ford, who owned *The Dearborn Independent* newspaper. The protocols were published as a part of the series of „The International Jew: the World's Foremost Problem", that continued the Ford's campaign against the Jews (Diner 209).

even a political party the Know-Nothings, stirred into existence by hatred of Irish and German immigration. No sensibilities were focused on the Jew" (Johnson 399) at the time even though they were socially discriminated. However, Alvin Johnson presents an exploration of the Jewish problem in 1947, in which he conveys the existing double standard of the upwardly mobile society, wherein the Gentiles and the Jews had their own set of ladders, the Jews were excluded from those of Gentiles, and had "their own ladder to occupy" (401). Questioning the order and the foundations of American society, Johnson summarizes the Jewish problem:

> But there was the borderline case of the Jew who took his religion no more seriously than the Gentiles of his class took their religion. He resented exclusion from hotels and clubs. He resented the handicaps his sons and daughters might be subject to, in the choice of a college. He resented the exclusion of brilliant Jewish scholars from the faculties. Was he not as good an American as any? Were not equal privilege, equal opportunity, fundamental principles of American democracy? They were; but not of the American middle-class society "on the make". (401)

Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan in their inquiry into the U.S. minorities claim: "East European Jews showed almost from the beginning of their arrival in this country a passion for education that was unique in the American history. City College was largely Jewish at the turn of the century, which was as soon as there were enough Jews of college-age to fill it; and Jews overflowed into the other colleges of the Northeast" (156). In their study of the Jewish community living in New York up to the 1960s, they find that: "for the time being the college-educated proportion is perhaps three times as large among Jews as in the rest of the population. In New York City, Jews constitute half of the college-educated" (156). Their study was concentrated on the city of New York as it was the cultural capital and "one-quarter Jewish, one-sixth Italian, and one-seventh Negro" (6).

The ‘phenomenon’ of Jewish education created a sense of overrepresentation for Jewish Americans, but it is hard to overlook the parallel later in the course of the 20th century with the over efficient Asian minority, who excelled at universities, to the extent that they have “‘overgrown’ the need for affirmative action protection” (Lee 142). Ever since the 1980s, Asian Americans are no longer considered as a ‘minority’ in the context of higher education (129).

Likewise, education is only one of many spheres in which Jewish Americans have thrived: “… by the late 1950s growing segments of Jews were becoming increasingly accepted, or at least as junior partners in American's professional and business elites” (Karp 33:43 - 33:57). The fetters of the “Jewish problem” fell off and the upward mobility of the Jewish minority continued: “Nor do they any longer meet the discrimination in skilled trades or in white-collar and clerical employment, a situation that affected them very deeply in the 1920s and 1930s when they desperately needed such jobs” (Glazer and Moynihan 147).

Even though the popular stereotype presents the Jews as the wealthy and influential minority, Glazer and Moynihan claim that Jewish incomes were not higher than those of other people and that what secured their success was the rise from the working class “at a surprising rate” (143). They claim that in the 1960s “there is still a sizable Jewish working class in New York City, but very few Jews are casual laborers, service workers, or semiskilled factory workers” (144) and that the “Jewish working class is rapidly disappearing” (147). The new, educated generations of Jewish Americans are in search of better positions and income rates. Glazer and Moynihan conclude that Jews have acquired wealth by “very sizable numbers of Jewish businessmen and professionals, but status may be the driving force of the third generation, as financial success was of the second” (152).

Lastly, the Jewish situation was helped by the U.S. government during the depression era. By enabling them to use the New Deal programs "as a vehicle to forge stronger institutional bonds," the American Jews "articulated a definition of Americanism that combined the universalist imperatives of the Great Depression with the particularist needs of the Jewish minority" (12). This era of Jewish flourishing is known as an example of assimilation, that is Americanization, but under Jewish terms and conditions. The Jews "negotiated the variety of social factors that informed their sense of themselves as Jews and as citizens of the United States" (Dollinger 10). They thus enabled their own ethnicity to prosper in the United States and set an example to the rest of the minorities.

Apart from these more tangible aspects of the two minorities, what remains elusive is the very core of both the Asian and Jewish identities. It was Park who tried to elucidate this rather mysterious connection that these two groups have retained with their respective identity, culture, and history. In his exploration of immigrant communities Park notes of these groups:

> [The Jew] brings his family and all the household and tribal gods with him. Nevertheless there are no people, with the exception of the Chinese and the Japanese, who bring to this country a more distinctive culture than the Jews, or who have been better able to adapt their culture to America and still preserve it against the disintegrating effects of the American environment. ("Society" 155)

Park suggests that those immigrant communities in the U.S. with as rich a culture as that of the Jews, the Chinese, and the Japanese, and moreover that have recreated that culture within their Americanized milieu, are the ones best equipped for assimilation and success.

Park's analysis of Jewish and Asian experiences conveys how strong ties to their culture enabled them to prosper in American society regardless of the numerous restrictions

and hardships imposed on them. Both Jewish Americans and Asian Americans emanate from traditional cultures that have unique customs, religion, and upbringing, and they are intertwined in the story of their Americanization, in the process of which, as the novels will show, it is not merely the individuals that change, but America as well.

3. Asian Americans

As mentioned previously, the Asian American minority in contemporary American discourse is generally perceived through a prevalent frame of the model minority. In the following pages, I will simultaneously point out its positive and negative impact on the "stereotyped" Asian American minority, and the ways it diverges from their reality. Further on, I will also discuss the origin and the application of the term as well as the factors reinforcing its use in various ways.

The mentioned publication of Petersen's article "Success Story: Japanese American Style" published in *The New York Times* in 1966, marked the beginning of the discourse of the model minority. Petersen had singled out the Japanese American minority for the fact that they have competently risen above the prejudice and discrimination aimed at them and reached a "measure of success" (1) in the U. S. As Petersen points out,

> Like the Negroes, the Japanese have been the object of color prejudice. Like the Jews, they have been feared and hated as hyper efficient competitors. And more than any other group they have been seen as the agents of an overseas enemy. Conservatives, liberals and radicals, local sheriffs, the Federal Government and the Supreme Court have cooperated in denying them their elementary rights - most notoriously in their World War II evacuation to internment camps. (21)

Petersen carefully devises his argument in favor of the Japanese American minority; he takes into account all the racial prejudice and acknowledges the severity of the "uprootedness" (22) from the American life that Japanese Americans had been subjected to during the Second World War. The case in point is *Executive Order 9066*, the “nadir” (Karp 31:29) of Asian Americans, that was placed to form military zones of incarceration for the people of Japanese descent into internment camps (“Our Documents – Executive Order 9066”). The incarceration itself was brutal, needless, and based on racial affiliation only, with the official explanation that "‘the evacuation was impelled by military necessity’ for fear of a fifth column" (Petersen 22).

Petersen explains how such an experience had devastating consequences on the whole community creating a "problem minority" (1), and that the Japanese Americans regardless of the adversities that followed as a part of "the reality of slum life" (1) of the U.S. society, managed to pull through and to prosper. "The Japanese, ... could climb over the highest barriers our racists were able to fashion in part because of their meaningful links with an alien culture. Pride in their heritage and shame for any reduction in its only partly legendary glory - these were sufficient to carry the group through its travail" (42).

In accordance with Park’s analysis of Jewish and Asian experiences, Petersen based the Japanese success story on their Confucian upbringing and on the values that have been implanted in them; the culture, the work ethic, the familial values, low crime rates, education, and, crucially, their relations to their homeland. All these elements that according to Petersen molded them into the model minority were also the backbone to the rise of the stereotype that is still to this day associated with Asian Americans, and that denotes Asian Americans as the smart, competent, overachieving people. Thereby, the success that they have achieved in U.S. society did not shelter them from being subjected to frequently harmful stereotyping and racial discrimination. As it appears, the very construction of the term, the *model minority*, has

had its advantages and drawbacks: "Whites have initiated hate crimes against Asian Americans because of a belief that Asian Americans were achieving too much and taking resources, such as jobs, away from the Whites" (Cheryan and Bodenhousen 175). Even though the Asian stereotype might seem as benign, or rather an instance of admiration, Asian minorities are often subjected to prejudice, avoidance, excommunication and hate crimes exclusively on the basis of their racial affiliation.

Nevertheless, the assumptions that Petersen has made of the model minority, according to Ellen D. Wu, advertise the image that the United States wanted to transmit to the world after the Second World War as a land of the culturally diverse democracy (*The Color of Success* 4). According to Cheryan and Bodenhousen's point of view and the extensive study of the topic conducted by Ellen D. Wu, what Petersen's elaboration apparently fails to mention is the government's role in the creation of the "model minority". The government-influenced history that has lead to the rise of the model minority is in no way unproblematic. The model minority's history in fact began with Anti-Asian movements that were a direct result of Asian laborers' influx into the U.S. And that inevitably resulted in legislation that aimed to decrease the influx of Asian laborers as well as their opportunities as "aliens ineligible to citizenship" in the U.S. (Wu 15).

Since the history of Asian Americans is inextricably linked with immigration, in this section I will briefly reference some of its salient points. The first ones to be denied rights were the Chinese. Ever since the Chinese immigrant workers began to grow successful and become entrepreneurs on their own, the anti-Chinese sentiments began growing as well. The Congress responded with legislation that would limit the future immigration of Chinese workers and in the period of 1850 to 1870 it put into effect a number of restrictions aimed at the Chinese residents of the U.S. In order to maintain good diplomatic relationships with China, a complete ban on Chinese immigrants was unattainable, and the Congress had to look

for other ways to limit the influx of the Chinese workers in an arrangement with China. Thus, in 1882 the *Chinese Exclusion Act* was passed which "suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers (skilled or unskilled) for ten years" ("Chinese Immigration"). This was the first law in U.S. history to limit immigration. Simultaneously, the anti-Japanese sentiments appeared culminating in 1905 and the Anti-Japanese movements (Japanese-American History 103).

Although much needed, the Asian laborers' influx was interpreted as an intrusion upon the U.S. workforce to the extent that the *Asiatic Exclusion League* was formed after the incidents in the 1905, mostly consisting of labor organizations that objected to "…'unfair competition' allegedly imposed by the Japanese immigrants, their 'low standard of living,' their inability or unwillingness to become American (the coined term 'unassimilable' was often used to describe them) their lack of hygiene and other similar traits that they were supposed to have" (Niiya 103). These sentiments, following the World War I fed into the notion of "Yellow Peril." Just like the model minority is a prevalent stereotype nowadays, so was the Yellow Peril at the turn of the twentieth century.

The pernicious image of the "Orientals" was particularly spread by the press of the time in the form of cartoons that presented the "Yellow Peril" as "the new monster instantly recognizable in a thousand cartoons. These showed cadaverous evil apparition extending a grasping claw dripping with blood, sometimes plucking up little white figures of both sexes and all ages" (Dormandy 155). It is important to note that the "Yellow Peril" originated as a prevention against racial mixing, and as a means to preserve the white supremacy not just on the American continent, but in all places of "English-speaking peoples" (Lee 554). The riots that led to the 1905 Anti-Japanese movements in the U.S. echoed throughout the world, and culminated in "unity of action" in 1908, amongst the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia that campaigned for the "White Pacific" (Ibid.). U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt declared: "There should be no immigration in mass of Orientals to the countries where the

English-speaking peoples now form and will form the population of the future," while Lee notes that there was no formal action done succeeding this event, but that the "U.S. Navy's famous sixteen-battleship Pacific tour" was organized to "demonstrate Anglo-American unity against the 'Yellow Peril' that Japanese immigration presented" (Ibid.). This event was referred to as "the Greatest Show on Earth" by Margaret Werry, who considered it as a spectacle "of national and racial solidarity on the one hand, and imperial advancement on the other" (364).

A major change in the status of some Asian American groups for the better happened as a result of World War II. The restrictions upon Chinese and other people of Asian descent were repealed in 1943, "only in the interest of aiding the morale of a wartime ally during World War II" ("Chinese Immigration").

The Chinese had prospered in the U.S. on the grounds of the alliance with the United States during the Pacific War. "Historians have celebrated World War II as nothing less than a defining instance for ethnic Chinese in the United States, the point at which they '[fell] in step . . . with fellow Americans,' and 'received a newfound acceptance and stature'" (Wu 14). They have gained trust and opportunities in the U.S. and were considered the "friends" of Americans unlike the Japanese who were incarcerated due to the fear of the 'fifth column' for the reason of their enemy status in the war (Wu 69).

Additionally, in congruence with the Jewish American prosperity Asian American rise also was influenced by the government. Wu argues that in the case of the Japanese, the *War Relocation Authority*[5] promoted their restoration to citizenship by resettlement programs and admission to military service (as proof of U.S. patriotism). All this had a direct influence

[5] "The WRA collected personal descriptive information on all individuals who were evacuated from their homes and relocated to one of ten relocation centers during the World War II" ("Search the Database of Japanese American Evacuees"). And the "Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act of July 2, 1948, provided compensation for Japanese American citizens removed from the West Coast during the World War II for losses of real and personal property" ("Search the Compensation and Reparations for the Evacuation").

on the preferable position that the Japanese Americans had later found themselves in, as opposed to other minorities (Wu 13).

Similarly, Cheryan and Bodenhousen place emphasis on the *Immigration Act* of 1965 that had been devised as a means to amend the injustice that the restrictive immigration policies have done and to lift restriction for the immigration from Asia, except that it allowed "only those with certain backgrounds to enter the United States" (173). They argue that the Immigration Act has intentionally created the image of the model minority by allowing, primarily, the family members of those already in the U.S. and, secondly, professionals and scientists (173).

The fact remains that the U.S. government prevented the Asian influx in the early stages, and that later it had attempted to amend the injustice by measures that assisted their progress in the U.S. society. When their stigma was lifted, Chinese Americans as legitimate citizens suddenly enjoyed the privileges they were deprived of before, as they gained the right to benefit from “previously forbidden areas of employment, neighborhoods, and association activities” (Wu 4), which enabled them to prosper and leave Chinatown.

Finally, there is another important point that calls for elaboration, and that is the claims made by some scholars suggesting that the Asian minority was the chosen minority by the U.S. government to set an example for the rest:

> International imperatives of the 1940s and 1950s anchored the nation's recasting of Asian Americans into assimilating Others - persons acknowledged as capable of acting like white Americans while remaining racially distinct from them. ... Japanese and Chinese did not disappear into whiteness after the end of Exclusion. Instead, state authorities, academicians, cultural producers, and common folk renovated Asian

America's perceived differences from liability to asset to benefit US expansionism. (Wu 4)

Wu indicates that the aftermath of the World War II brought about the "advent of racial liberalism: the growing belief in political and intellectual circles that the country's racial diversity could be most ably managed through assimilation and integration of non whites" (4). Wu argues that the situation was resolved by the creation of the "new stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority - a racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening, and definitely not-black" (2).

4. Analyses of the Novels

4.1. *American Pastoral* (1997)

In this section, I will demonstrate the assimilation and the rise of Jewish and Asian American groups to the status of the model minorities in U.S. society using Philip Roth's *American trilogy* and Gish Jen's *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land*. The analysis will present the reciprocal rise through a generational continuum that demonstrates the levels of assimilation of four generations of Jewish Americans and two generations of Asian Americans.

I will begin with Philip Roth's thematic *American Trilogy*, published from 1997 to 2000, which includes *American Pastoral*, *I Married a Communist*, and *The Human Stain*. These novels, according to Derek Parker Royal, mark a departure in Roth's work because his work had never before so clearly portrayed the effect of history on an individual's self-creation (209). All three novels are marked by prominent post-Second World War events

while exploring the nature of the American character and "the ambiguous, and at times highly problematic, nature of the American Dream" (Royal 6).

As in the majority of Roth's works, the action is situated in his hometown of Newark, and the protagonists are the Newark Jews, who consider themselves Americans, and reluctantly identify themselves as Jewish; however, the exploration of the national character in the aftermath of the Second World War inevitably portrays the status of the Jewish American minority in U.S. society.

The first novel of the trilogy, *American Pastoral*, plays upon the notion of the pastoral ideal and ethnic ethos of the 1960s through two storylines. The plot on the surface deals with the figure of Seymour Irving Levov, the Swede, and his quest for the pastoral ideal while the underlying plot reveals "the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination and the cultural turmoil of the 1960s" (Royal 187).

The primary storyline is framed through the narrative window of Roth's famous alter ego Nathan Zuckerman[6], who introduces us to the story of an idealized Jewish figure of the Swede. It is perhaps ironic that he got his nickname after his Nordic facial features and is described as "a boy close to a goy[7] as we were going to get" (Roth 9). He is presented as a character that is determined in the pursuit of his version of the American dream based upon the image of American pastoral.

The origin of the pastoral ideal can be found in the eighteenth-century writings of Theocritus and Virgil, who praised the rural life, detached from civilization and urbanism, where animal husbandry was the most admired occupation. This European pastoral tradition

[6] Nathan Zuckerman is one of Roth's most famous literary alter egos, he even refers to him as his "alter brain" ("Zuckerman's Alter Brain"), who in this case narrates and mediates the story. Zuckerman presents a "mediating intelligence" (Ibid.) whose presence is frequent in Roth's novels, whether as a narrator or as a character. His initial appearance was recorded in *The Ghost Writer*, published in 1979, and he has since been pertinent for Roth's storytelling.

[7] Goy- (Yiddish) a non-Jewish person, a gentile (Marriam-Webster dictionary)

differs from the American, mainly due to the fact that animal husbandry "was not indigenous to America" (Sayre 1). American pastoral was associated with the vast land and freedom and countless possibilities, which came to represent the mythical ideal of the nation for the newcomers. It was further explored in Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) that strongly opposed the technological disruption of the pastoral landscape and presented pastoralism as the foundation for the American experience. Marx noted that "the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy" (3) became the utopian presentation of the Western society as "a sight of a new beginning" (3).

The term pastoralism will henceforward refer to the American mythical element essential to the American dream that defines the immigrant experience, for it promises a vast land where everyone is entitled to a segment of it, and where everyone can succeed by working hard. The further discussion will convey how Roth has employed it as a dream of belonging for the Swede that secured him a position in the "great country" (*American Pastoral* [AP] 598) and how it met a tragic end. "Three generations. All of them growing. The working. The saving. The success. Three generations in raptures over America. Three generations of becoming one with a people. And now with the fourth it had all come to nothing. The total vandalization of their world" (AP 236).

The Swede's dream of pastoral life as a nucleus of the American way is contested by his "counterpastoral" (AP 49) daughter, who had grown enraged with her perfection-seeking, wealthy parents and acquired hate towards America, "the very country where her family had triumphantly rooted itself in every possible way…" (262). Under the influence of a group of radicals, the Swede's daughter Merry bombed the post office at Old Rimrock, killing a local doctor, and destroying the general store, together with the life of her virtuous father. This tragic event marked the beginning of Levov's struggle and the end of his pastoral ideal.

The terrorist plot signifies the breakdown of the American Dream. In the aftermath of the turbulent 1960s, Roth like many others attempted to conceive what happened to American society after J.F. Kennedy's assassination, the Vietnam War, and the race riots (Royal 195). MacArthur clarifies: “The chaos of the lives and plots that comprise these novels /including American Trilogy/ is a direct representation of the collective trauma of losing faith in the promise of America and in losing a president that embodied many of these ideals” (15). The instability of the 1960s caused a crisis, especially regarding the assassination of J.F. Kennedy which, according to MacArthur, “is the event that symbolically, if not literally, demarcates the loss of faith in the American dream” (15). And this is vividly presented in *American Pastoral*, with the shattering of the Swede’s pastoral dream by the radical anti-Vietnam politics of his daughter and by the defilement of every segment of that dream.

To understand the upward social mobility of the Jewish Americans in *American Pastoral*, it is important to realize the scope of the Jewish immigration that Roth encompassed in the novel. It begins with the 1890s when the Swede’s grandfather immigrated to Newark, the first generation of the Levovs in the U.S., and ends with the turbulent 1960s and the radical Merry, the fourth generation of the Levovs. It is through Zuckerman’s narration that Roth presents their gradual rise in U.S. society: “As a family they still flew the flight of the immigrant rocket, the upward, unbroken immigrant trajectory from slave-driven great-grandfather to slave-driven grandfather to self-confident , accomplished, independent father to the highest high filer of them all, the fourth-generation child for whom America was to be the heaven itself” (AP 121).” Zuckerman here summarizes the Levovs’ entire history in the U.S., who “run out of ancestors in about two minutes,” as opposed to those of the WASPs “who could spin out ancestors forever” (AP 306). Nevertheless, this did not prevent the Levovs from attaining the status of the WASPs, and to provide their fourth generation with equal privileges and opportunities as the WASPs.

In order to get the complete image, we are presented with the struggle and the harsh conditions of the first two generations of the Levovs. It begins with the Swede's grandfather who immigrated to the U.S. without knowing a word of English, and who "found work fleshing sheepskins fresh from the lime vat, the lone Jew alongside the roughest of Newark's Slav, Irish, and Italian immigrants in the Nuttman Street tannery" (AP 10) and who thought his son Lou, the Swede's father, the trade. To help support the family his father started working in the tannery from a very young age.

The following paragraph exposes the working conditions in the tanneries:

> The tannery that stank of both the slaughterhouse and the chemical plant from the soaking of flesh and the cooking of flesh and the dehairing and pickling and degreasing of hides, where round the clock in the summertime the blowers drying the thousands and thousands of hanging skins raised the temperature in the low-ceilinged dry room to a hundred and twenty degrees, where the vast vat rooms were dark as caves and flooded with swill, where brutish workingmen … were driven like animals through the laborious storm that was a twelve-hour shift--a filthy, stinking place awash … with hunks of skin all over the floor, everywhere pits of grease, hills of salt, barrels of solvent--this was Lou Levov's high school and college. What was amazing was not how tough he turned out. What was amazing was how civil he could sometimes still manage to be. (AP 10-11)

Such grueling working conditions depict the thorny path Jewish immigrants had to thread to secure better opportunities, not for themselves, but for the next generations. It also portrays the experience that formed Lou Levov, introduced as a person "whose rough-hewn, undereducated perspective goaded a whole generation of striving, college-educated Jewish sons" and who got rich manufacturing ladies' gloves. Struggling to survive and learning the

skin manufacturing trade at an early age enabled him to earn a college degree and set out to work on his own, selling the leather goods from "door-to-door at night" (AP 11). By the time the war broke out he had already established a small business which blossomed in 1942, due to "*the bonanza*[8]: a black, lined sheepskin dress glove, ordered by the Women's Army Corps" (Ibid; my emphasis). It got to be so that "By the end of the war, Newark Maid had established itself- in no small part because of Swede Levov's athletic achievement –as one of most respected names in ladies' gloves south of Gloversville, New York, the center of the glove trade" (AP 13). Lou Levov remarkably surpassed his father's low level immigrant position in the U.S., and he managed the life of his son, the legendary Swede, who sacrificed his athletic carrier so that he could take over the family business.

Having a background like this was not very common for the Newark Jews. Zuckerman (himself a son of a chiropodist), explains that the Levovs lived in Keer Avenue, "where the rich Jews lived," "with their furnished basements, their-screened in porches, their flagstone front steps, seemed to be at the forefront, laying claim like the audacious pioneers to the normalizing American amenities. And at the vanguard of the vanguard were the Levovs (AP 9)". In other words, "The first postimmigrant generation of Newark's Jews" (Ibid.) that settled into Keer Avenue, were the successful ones that set an example for the rest, they were a generation which "had regrouped into a community that took its inspiration more from the mainstream of American life than form the Polish shtetl their Yiddish-speaking parents had re-created around Prince Street in the impoverished Third Ward" (Ibid.). The second generation is always more attuned to the American lifestyle than to the traditional one of their parents, but in this case, there is something more than the break off with the tradition that enabled their success, and that is the war. The mobilization of the U.S. manufacturers for the

[8] Bonanza stands for "something that suddenly produces large profits or great opportunities" (Cambridge Dictionary), and what is interesting is that the Levovs bonanza was the war, they had consequently profited from the war trade.

war, in the case of Mr. Levov, proved to be a stepping-stone in the right direction, which secured more profit and more opportunities for his family.

Whereas Lou Levov's bonanza was the war, his son's bonanza was the postwar era in which "Anti-Semitism declines to unprecedented low levels … [and] the assimilating desire among American Jews to achieve the oneness and sameness in social assimilation is greatly encouraged" (Ting 4). The war assisted the American Jews in their upward mobility, and they did not have to wait long for it to continue after the termination of the war: "We had new means and new ends, new allegiances and new aims, new innards- a new ease, somewhat less agitation in facing down the exclusions that the goyim still wished to preserve" (AP 44).

This new, negotiated position can be seen in the life of the Swede, so that if we momentarily leave his tragic downfall out of the picture and focus on his successes and American dream features, we can perceive three major phases or founding blocks that constitute his American pastoral dream, and are therefore the indicators of his achieved model minority success. We are familiarized with the first one from the very beginning of the novel; it is his personal and professional success. We are presented with an exceptionally successful and well-known athlete, and we are introduced to the great success story of his family business, which had continued to do exceptionally well once he took over. He continued his family's "immigrant rocket" trajectory and fulfilled the immigrant dream of reaching the comfortable WASP status, thus realizing his pastoral dreams through economic success.

The second foundation stone was his marriage to Dawn Dwyer, a shiksa,[9] who competed at the Miss America pageant and won the title of Miss New Jersey. Dawn's origin as a Catholic Irish American prompts Gao Ting to explain how this "transgression" in marriage "would suggest the one important achievement of his American dream - to melt

[9]"A non-Jewish girl or woman"- Marriam Webster Dictionary.

down the ethnic difference" (4). A marriage[10] to an Irish Catholic for the Swede signified what was the core of being American, and that is diversity, which allows subjugation of the ethnic hyphen in favor of the American core. With such a marriage he has surpassed his parents' position which does not condone intermarriage for religious reasons and he has entered into the "de-ethnicized pot of the larger American society" (Royal 189), the final stage in the Americanization process. Shostak even goes so far to claim that in marrying Dawn, the Swede married America itself (103).

The third foundation stone of the Swede's upward trajectory was the purchase of his dream stone house: "The stone house was not only … a beautiful shelter—but it looked indestructible, an impregnable house that could never burn to the ground and that had probably been standing there since the country began" (AP 190). The acquisition of a house is an important segment of the American Dream in general, for it implies independence, success, and wealth, and the purchase of a house that the Swede bought, the old stone house with a hundred acres of land and a farm is an indicator of prosperity. Even the suburb where they relocated, the Old Rimrock, signifies prosperousness. His father objected to the relocation arguing that it was the place "where the haters live, out here" (AP 308) and where the Ku Klux Klan[11] operated. It was a place where the white people kept to themselves, who did not like "these new Americans" (Ibid.), in particular a family of the new WASPs, the affluent Jews. It was a dream come true for the Swede: "We own a piece of America, Dawn. I couldn't be happier if I tried. I did it, darling, I did it- I did what I set out to do!" (AP 123), it was a place where he could live modeled on the idea of pastoral life. It was a place where he imagined himself to be the likeness of John Appleseed, a man who: "Wasn't a Jew, wasn't an

[10] Marriage as a means of assimilation has been a subject of study since 1908 Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot*. And more information on specifically the Jewish experience of assimilation through marriage can be found in Lila Corwin Berman's "Sociology, Jews, and Intermarriage."

[11] "The Ku Klux Klan, with its long history of violence, is the oldest and the most infamous of American hate groups. Although Black Americans have typically been the Klan's primary target, it also has attacked Jews, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community and, until recently, Catholics" (Ku Klux Klan).

Irish Catholic, wasn't a Protestant, Christian - nope, John Appleseed was just a happy American" (AP 315).

However, the Swede's dream was annulled by his counterpastoral daughter. Laura Tanenbaum perceives his tragedy as a "folly of his assimilationist ambitions" (49) whereby the novel brought forward the effects of the progressive lifestyle without taking into account the embedded traditions, such as religion, origin, prejudices, and divisions. By creating the "American berserk" (86) out of the Swede's pastoral desires, Roth seems to "present the deleterious consequences of forsaking one's Jewish origin" (Parrish 87) and condemns the naïve John Appleseed view of America particularly in the 1960s.

4.2. *I Married a Communist* (1998)

The second sequel of the *American Trilogy*, the novel *I Married a Communist*, follows the same pattern as *American Pastoral* and joins two plots: the primary reveals the life of Ira Ringold, known as Iron Rinn, a famous radio star, while the subplot reveals the turmoil of McCarthyism and the 1950s Communist infiltration threat. Although this novel did not receive as much attention as the first and the last novel of the trilogy, its value is no lesser than the other two novels. Like others it portrays the national character in the turbulent 1950s; however, unlike the other two novels, it does not portray the generational continuum of American Jewish immigrants, rather it focuses on the second generation.

In the same manner as the previous novel, *I Married a Communist* as well presents how a historical period, that interrupts the background of the novel, influences and determines the lives of the characters. It, on the one hand, elucidates the assimilation of Jewish Americans by presenting characters whose mandatory melting down of their religious

character earned them the entrance into the upper-class society and thus completed their assimilation, and on the other hand, it portrays how their lives were determined by the historical period, the era of McCarthyism and the Red Scare.

The faster integration of Jewish Americans into U.S. society was enabled by severe secularization and Americanization. Roth in an interview with Terry Gross for the Fresh Air mentions that as a child he had never seen a single Jew wear a skullcap, even though he lived in a Jewish neighborhood ("You Begin Every Book As An Amateur"). This fierce Americanization of his generation and his parents' generation enabled them to rise to the status of the model minority. Roth employs this in all the novels of the trilogy, by presenting the characters that partake in the national character, rather than in their ethnic character, due to which they achieve success, but in the end, their choice to renounce their ethnic identity is condemned by utilizing the political turmoil of the time. Goldblatt, in his examination of Jewish whitening, explains that Roth had presented the price of renunciation of one's ethnicity, in this case Jewishness, for the benefits of other, here whiteness; and suggests that rather a balance between the two should have been made (94).

Since that was not the case, Ira Ringold's downfall was devised as a consequence of the Cold War paranoia, which had revealed the latent anti-Semitism. The Jewish American upward trajectory and Americanization was welcomed on the grounds of their sufficient whiteness and willingness to tone down their religious differences, but anti-Semitism was not eliminated, and it surfaced in the fear of the communist infiltration. However, Roth made clear that anti-Semitism was not tolerated, even by the Americanized Jews who identify themselves as Americans, nor Jewish American, as is in the case of Ira, who was politically against religion, "But American anti-Semitism? That made *all* the difference" (*I Married a Communist* [IMC] 323).

Although Ira was a fierce supporter of the communist ideology, much of his life "was so intimately circumscribed by so much American history" (IMC 402), his strong belief in the communist ideology stood in opposition to his American dream life and marriage, and his attitude to both reflected the national attitude of betrayal and of contradictions that were brought upon by McCarthyism. His belief in a communist way for the little man contradicted his luxurious lifestyle, and the collision of these ideologies precipitated his tragic end.

The novel starts with an excerpt from Russian folksong "Dubinuska" foreshadowing the subject of the novel. It is again through Nathan Zuckerman's narration that we are introduced to the story of Ira Ringold, as told to Zuckerman by his brother Murray Ringold, thirty years after Ira passed away. Murray was Nathan's English teacher, and both he and his brother Ira were Nathan's childhood idols. Murray taught Nathan that "thinking's the greatest transgression of all" (IMC 10), whereas Ira, with his resemblance to Lincoln and his burning desire for racial equality and the creation of favorable working conditions for the 'little man' greatly influenced Nathan's beliefs and political thinking.

Murray, a ninety-year-old man determined to unravel Ira's story before he dies, tirelessly retells the story of his life to Nathan in a six-day session. He reveals that Ira had reconstructed himself into Iron Rinn once he became a famous radio star. We learn that his life was turned upside down by his wife, the one-time famous silent film and radio actress, Eve Frame née Chava Fromkin, who published a book titled *I Married a Communist*, thus subjecting him to the "public machine" (IMC 652) in the frenetic era of McCarthyism. However, "The public machine … takes its own direction … . It has to. This is America" (IMC 652). Eve Frame was likewise subjected to the same public scrutiny which destroyed her life.

Both Eve's and Ira's lives had been destroyed by the public scrutiny during McCarthyism. Eve might have done Ira wrong, unknowingly, hurt by Ira's infidelity and under the influence of the omnipresent Grants, Eve's friend, who in fact, "dreamed it [the book] all up for Bryden to rise his way into the House on the issue of Communism in broadcasting" (IMC 582). Ira, likewise initiating the "public machine," destroyed Eve knowingly, "I never saw Ira enjoy anything more than her death" even though it took more than he wanted, and "this time he didn't get to do it himself" (IMC 667).

The novel's subplot portrays McCarthyism and the fear of Communist infiltration during the Cold War from the 1940s to the 1960s. Chronologically this is the first novel of the trilogy, where we see the fear of the Communist infiltration and the witch-hunt that was steered by Joseph McCarthy and the House of Un-American Activities Committee: "I think of the McCarthy era as inaugurating the postwar triumph of gossip as the unifying credo of the world's oldest democratic republic. In Gossip We Trust. Gossip as gospel, the national faith" (IMC 604). The fear of the Cold War enabled McCarthy to create an air of frenzy and to use gossip and false accusations as a means against the alleged Communists in the government. Roth argues that McCarthyism was not only "the beginning … of serious politics but of serious *everything* as entertainment to amuse the mass audience. McCarthyism as the first postwar flowering of the American unthinking that is now everywhere" (IMC 604). This postwar American unthinking was defined by acts of personal betrayal: "To me it seems likely that more acts of personal betrayal were tellingly perpetrated in America in the decade after the war - say, between '46 and '56-than in any other period in our history" (IMC 562). Eve's betrayal of Ira fell in line with what was being done at that time: "Her indictment of Ira was of the sort that could win a large public hearing in the fifties" it was what the people wanted to hear, and it was an "accessible transgression, the *permissible* transgression that any American could commit" (IMC 562).

I Married a Communist did not expose only Ira, since "it didn't hurt to name all other Jewish Bolsheviks affiliated with Ira's show" (IMC 585) because "in New York as in Hollywood, in radio as in movies, the Communist under every rock was, nine times out of ten, a Jew to boot" (IMC 585). Telling Ira's story thirty years after his death Murray reveals the actual Ira, not the Iron Rinn disguise which he invented for himself, nor the voice of Abraham Lincoln, but the real man haunted by the murder he had committed, and who was actually "perpetually hungering after his life. That's what enraged him and confused him and that's what ruined him: he could never construct one that fit" (IMC 682). Throughout the novel, we see Ira's attempts to recreate himself, to construct a life that would fit; we see the various paths that he took: from ditch digging, waiting in a restaurant, mining, serving in the army, all the way to politics and radio entertainment. He went from one love to another, all of them intense and going from one extreme to another in search of the thing that will subdue him. Once he met the "most genteel woman in the world" (IMC 637), he thought that he found his oasis, which took him "out of the Newark ditch and into the world of light" (IMC 262) thus assisting in his assimilation.

Prior to his marriage to Eve, he had risen from ditch digging to the world of fame. Nathan idolized him because he "had never before known anyone whose life was so intimately circumscribed by so much American history, who was personally familiar with so much American geography, who had confronted, face to face, so much American lowlife" (IMC 401). Reaching comfortable life, fame, and wealth, Ira presumably succeeded in assimilating into American society, while his marriage to Eve only confirmed his entry into the "comfortable bourgeoisie" (466). As with the Swede, however, the cost of their overreach begins to show and to strain the idea of the American way.

However, his rise in his social and economic status was not in line with his Communist beliefs of a workingman. His political agenda, his struggle for the rights of the

workingmen, and his Lincoln impersonations were contradictory to the lifestyle and status he newly enjoyed. Lixia Wang argues: “A stable and prestigious job has helped Ira realize both economic and social upward mobility which makes him struggle between his political beliefs and family life” (134). Ira’s bourgeois lifestyle betrays the communist beliefs he had been advocating since the war, and he betrays Eve and their marriage by consecutive affairs with other women. However, Wang argues that “Ira’s personal contradictions reflect the national contradictions between freedom of political beliefs and the witch-hunt McCarthyism which robs people of that freedom as well as the contradiction between racial equality and whiteness” (134). In the same manner that Eve’s betrayal of Ira fell in line with the atmosphere of that time, so Ira’s contradictions created an unstable new white identity. This flimsy identity was easily shattered by the publication of Eve’s *I Married a Communist* subjecting him to the persecution of the House Un-American Activities Committee, which had him blacklisted and eventually committed to a mental institution.

Similar to Ira's constant attempts to create a life “that (would) fit” (IMC 682), Eve from a very young age strived to do the same. Initially, she renounces her Jewish origins, together with her first husband establishes an acting career and then, continuing through several marriages, she molds herself to fit into the Gentile society: "All she's trying to do is get away from where she began, and that is no crime. To launch yourself undisturbed by the past into America—that's your choice" (IMC 337). Having a clean start in the pursuit of one’s dreams is an aspiration of many American minorities, and according to Royal, it is an “American ideal” (201) many try to achieve, striving for social climbing. Thus, we see the successful obliteration of Chava Fromkin and the rise of Eve Frame into the WASP high society. She succeeded in passing[12] as WASP, infiltrated into their society, and completely renounced her Jewish identity to assume a new identity. Eve was successful in her

[12] Passing will be further discussed in the following novel of the trilogy, *The Human Stain*.

appropriation of Gentile manners and the ways of the WASPs. She became known not only for her acting in silent movies and radio shows but for her bearing and tactfulness, for being the "most genteel woman in the world" (IMC 637). She completed her assimilation and was accepted into the WASP society.

However, her Achilles' heel was her prominent anti-Semitism, which was rooted in self-hatred. Eve Fame's glamorous and dramatic lifestyle effectively concealed her real identity: "Was she a Jew? She was," said Murray, "a pathologically embarrassed Jew… Embarrassed that she looked like a Jew … embarrassed that her daughter looked like a Jew" (IMC 322). It seemed that her acquired genteelness and an exclusive lifestyle allowed her to conceal it even more and camouflage her true identity.

Nonetheless, she had committed a fatal mistake at a very young age, that directly influenced her downfall, and that is the choice of her second husband Pennington as a role model to learn the way of the Gentiles: "To take for your model, for your Gentile mentor, another outsider guarantees that the impersonation will not work. Because Pennington is not just an aristocrat. He's also homosexual. He's also anti-Semitic" (IMC 337). Naively taking Pennington as an example, and imitating his behavior, believing that displays of anti-Semitism are the key diversion from the question of her own Jewish identity, instead proved to be "overdoing the role. It's no less a deformity than the deformity she was trying to obliterate" (IMC 355). And it was her anti-Semitism finally that led to her exposure as "a closet Jew" (IMC 654), ended her career and eventually her life as well: "Whatever shamming origins she had spent her life escaping had resulted in this: someone from whom life itself had escaped" (IMC 537).

Thus, *I Married a Communist* portrays the dark underside of the successful assimilation of Jews in the U.S. society: "Social and economic upward mobility has helped

Jews assimilate into America, but their American citizenship is not stable at all, and Eve Frame, a Jew who passes for a WASP, proves this, when she is excluded by WASPs as soon as her Jewish identity is revealed" (Wang 135). The same is the case for Ira "whose life was so intimately circumscribed by so much American history" (IMC 401). His beginnings in the slums and the rise to radio entertainment and fame make him the character who achieved the American dream. His tragedy, however, was that his dream was not the entrance into the WASP society, but a communist utopia, a dream of a perfect state with equality for the little man. So there is a tragic dissonance between his own ambition and the conditions of "American history," as pointed out by Roth.

It is curious for us to note who the little men are for whom Ira was fighting:

> The little guy! The common man! The Poles! The Swedes! The Irish! The Croatians! The Italians! The Slovenes!" The man who jeopardized their lives making steel, risked being burned or crushed or blown apart, and all for the profit of the ruling class … The mass of the American masses! … The noise of them was like the noise of a crowd in an arena before a fight. And the fight? The fight of the American equality. (IMC 500)

In other words, these were the American minorities who had yet to follow in the footsteps of Jewish Americans, who were showing the way of climbing up the ladder.

Still, the novel shows that there is a significant distinction between Ira, as a representative of the Jewish Americans and his comfortable bourgeois life, and these little men, who were seen as "the crude mass of them" (IMC 500); it was not possible to discern them individually. This passage stands as a commentary on other minorities in the 1950s and 1960s, their marginality in American society, and, in contrast to them, on the model minority position of Jewish Americans.

Thus, Goldblatt notes that after the midcentury the Eastern European Jews had been "sufficiently whitened," moving out of the ghettos as "almost" fully assimilated Americans (89). Evident throughout the novel is Roth's indications of the middle-class position of Jewish Americans, "In a sort of trance state Ira drove us through the quiet Maplewood streets, past all the pleasant one-family houses where there lived the ex-Newark Jews who'd lately acquired their first homes and their first lawns and their first country club affiliations" (IMC 211). The homes, the lawns, and the country club affiliations indicate their successful assimilation, considering the restrictions that the Jews faced before the war: "Set in suburban Woodenton, where Jews have been able to buy property only since the war" (Goldblatt 90). Before the war Jews were not considered fully equal citizens due to the "cultural and religious differences and limited class mobility" (Wang 134), so that only with the resolution of the war they managed to continue their upward mobility and gain access to equal opportunities to the WASPs.

The white identities that Ira and Eve had constructed proved not to be stable due to the renunciation of the vital part of their identity, which supports Petersen's argumentation that ethnic minorities who hold ties with their origins are more successful in the U.S. society than those who completely assimilate, losing their ethnic identity in the process. Roth seems to condemn the complete assimilation of his characters in all the novels of the American trilogy.

4.3. *The Human Stain* (2000)

The third novel of the trilogy, *The Human Stain*, is probably the most famous one. It follows the form of the prior two novels, in that it also has a subplot, which as well as in the prior two novels portrays an important historical event in the background. The historical event

is the 1998 impeachment of President Bill Clinton and his relationship to the White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

Bill Clinton's impeachment reverberates throughout the novel in that the main character has been accused of the same 'transgression'. "Here in America either it's Faunia Farley or it's Monica Lewinsky! The luxury of these lives disquieted so by the inappropriate comportment of Clinton and Silk! This, in 1998, is the wickedness they have to put up with. This, in 1998, is their torture, their torment, and their spiritual death" (*The Human Stain* [HS] 266). Roth begins the novel with the deeds of Coleman Silk and Bill Clinton presenting, unlike in the previous novel a Communist hysteria, a hysteria focused on the "America's oldest communal passion … the ecstasy of sanctimony" (8) and marks the atmosphere using Nathaniel Hawthorne's identification of the persecuting spirit to describe the contemporary flurry of blaming and condemning. The invocation of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) indicates, on the one hand, the stain of a sinful act committed by Clinton and Coleman and, on the other, the judgment and the persecution of the public. "This is Hawthorne country, where every community has a volunteer accusation department the way other have volunteer fire departments" (Parrish and Schechner 153). Bill Clinton's affair had prompted the public's self-righteous condemnation that had ruined Coleman's life and according to Shechner marked him with several scarlet letters of his own[13].

Compared to the other novels of the trilogy *The Human Stain* does not follow the generational continuum of Jewish Americans, nor does it follow a life of a Jewish American person per se, but it portrays a life of an African American who passes for a Jew. This is the main reason why this novel is more straightforward in its appropriation of Jewishness than the other two novels. The identity of the Jewish American in *The Human Stain* is consciously

[13] Schechner argues that Coleman was marked with a scarlet letter "R" for racist, when he referred to his African American students as "spooks", with an "E" for exploiter of a poor illiterate woman, and with a "J" for Jewish that had caused his death (152, 153).

elected among other nominally white identities, whereas in the *American Pastoral* and *I Married a Communist* the Jewish identity of the main characters is repudiated. The distinctive passing into the Jewish American identity is the focus of this discussion, considering that it brings to the fore the complex relations of African Americans and Jewish Americans during the twentieth century and their respective positions within American society.

In a similar fashion to the other two novels of the trilogy, we are introduced to the story through the framing device of Nathan Zuckerman, who through flashbacks retells the life of Coleman Silk, at the time the deceased Athena University dean, whose career was destroyed by an accusation of racism that was based on only one word he used in class. Having come upon two names that he only saw on the attendance sheet and had never seen or met the persons in a class, he said: "Do they exist or are they spooks?" (HS 16). His utterance of the word "spooks" identified him as a racist, even though he used the word in the most common usage, as a "ghost**"** (Ibid.). Subsequently, the two singled out African American students with the guidance of professor Delphine Roux claimed the word denoted their African descent and therefore was an act of racial discrimination.

The irony and absurdity of the false accusation are only to be seen at the very end of the novel when Nathan learns the secret at Coleman's funeral. Coleman's sister told him that Coleman was blessed with the palest skin tone in the family and that he has "[l]ost himself to his own people" (HS 550-551), whereby he completely renounced his African American identity in order to create one not simply as a white man but as an American Jew. I will further analyze the saliency of this connection.

She told him of their childhood and explained how Coleman wanted to relinquish his African descent ever since he was a boy, who was "seriously disinclined even to take the breast" (HS 243) of his African American mother. And it was his brother and his father who

were in his way of "vanish[ing]" (HS 251) from his people. His father was a proud African American, an educated and well-spoken chiropodist, who taught his children the importance of eloquence and knowledge so that their skin color would not lead to their subordination to others.

All of Coleman's siblings were college-educated, and he, as not only the brightest in color but also in intellect, fulfilled his father's wish to attend Howard, "a historically black college along with the privileged children of the black professional elite" (HS 174). However, this was the place where his determination to renounce the 'Negro' part of his identity was even more solidified. His determination was led by a realization that in Washington he was just another "nigger" and "Negro" as well (HS 189). This pull into the Negro identity of the Howard university placed him into a cluster that he sought his whole life to escape from: "Overnight the raw I was part of a we with all of the we's overbearing solidity, and he didn't want anything to do with it or with the next oppressive we that came along either" (HS 189). As soon as his father passed away, and his older brother was deployed to Europe, Coleman left Howard to join the Navy, as a Jewish American. With both of them gone, he felt free to appropriate the color he wanted to, becoming "Free on a scale unimaginable to his father. As free as his father had been unfree" (HS 190**)**. He escaped the insufferable plurality that goes in line with the association to African Americans, and he was now able to search for a life his father and his family could never have done. With this act, he broke off the shackles of his African American identity, leaving his prior life and family behind to enjoy the possibilities of affiliation to Jewishness.

The choice of passing as Jewish was in fact not made by Coleman, but he was presumed to be a Jew since high school when he was entering boxing competitions under the guidance of Doc Chizner, a Jewish dentist who taught Jewish children the basics of boxing. The boxing competitions in his high school days have led to his first attempt to disown his

origins. Upon entering a competition that could grant him a scholarship for a white university, he was instructed not to disclose his African American origin. "'If nothing comes up,' Doc said, 'you don't bring it up. You're neither one thing nor the other. You're Silky Silk. That's enough'" (HS 173). It was at this point that he realized that he had the opportunity to live a different kind of life. This successful entrance into the boxing world of whites, at a very young age, opened up the world of possibilities for him. Even though he had to hide it from his family, Coleman saw a way out for himself from the impoverished surroundings of the predominantly black East Orange, New Jersey, by passing as Jewish.

This first attempt in passing is extremely important for Coleman and his future endeavors. The key event occurred when he decided not to follow the instruction of his promoter to put on a show for the people, and when he won the fight in the first round because, as he said, "I don't' carry no nigger" (HS 204). With this match against a colored opponent Roth demonstrates "how much he meant business" (HR 204-205), how determined Coleman was to bury the African American part of his identity. Rebeccah Amendola states that what Coleman declared with this retort is a manifestation of "his triumph over his African American status" (31). She claims that by "knocking out his black competition, Silky Silk knocks out Coleman Silk, the black burden he will no longer carry" (31). This realization that Coleman views his origins as a "black burden" corresponds to his mother's observation of him: "You think like a prisoner. You do, Coleman Brutus. You're white as snow and you think like a slave" (HS 243). The distinctive passing by a black man for "the most unalike of America's historic undesirables" (HS 230) is highly telling of the social status that the postwar Jewish Americans enjoyed. They "were like Indian scouts, shrewd people showing the outsider the way in, showing the social possibility, showing an intelligent colored family how it might be done" (HS 171). Solotaroff and Rapoport explain how "Jews today [at that time], rightly or wrongly, are perceived to be part of the white mainstream" (24). Their

assimilation was formalized after the war and they had entered into the normative white American culture, leaving others behind, and offering them an example on how to 'succeed' in American society.

For Coleman a passage through an established minority into the white mainstream culture was "easier," according to Jennifer Glaser (1470), because the Jews were "an intermediary race, a way station of sorts on the road from black to white" (Ibid.). The literary tradition of passing into Jewishness disrupted the black and white racial binary of the passing narratives and implemented a third possibility which "challenge[s] existing theories of mixed race identity that rely on binary configurations" (Walker 22) by introducing the segment of ethnic diversity. Daniel Itzkovitz's explanation of Jewish duality, their racial distinctness and inconsistent identity, i.e. their "chameleonic blood" [14] (Itzkovitz 42) explains the complex position of mixed-race identities which consequently challenges the black and white binary. The "slipperiness of Jewish difference" was disturbing for the majority in favor of white supremacy, and Itzkovitz states this as the very reason for the incorporation of Jewishness into the corpus of passing narratives. The "elusive" (47) difference of the Jewish empowered by their post-war social mobility brought American identity into a "crisis of definition" (44).

According to Matthew Wilson's reading of *The Human Stain* through the genre of the passing novel, Roth's utilization of this genre at the turn of the twentieth century "attempts to dismantle [the] racial binary" (139). Wilson suggests that by presenting a successful passage of Coleman Silk, Roth attempted "to create a Utopian space where he is neither white nor black" (140), which corresponds to the tradition of American individualism.

[14] According to Daniel Itzkovitz, the term "chameleonic blood" is associated with the Jewish people, and it denotes: "an absolute fluidity that somehow maintains its mark of difference" (50). It presents the Jewish people as the most adaptable to their surrounding culture, while still maintaining their difference. This is pertinent for the discussion of the disruption of the black and white binary since this characteristic is responsible for bringing into question the notion of American identity which is based on both the "social mobility and rhetoric of race" (50).

However, there are other interpretations of the significance of passing into Jewishness, as Jennifer Glaser's reading of the novel acknowledges the multiculturalists aspect of the passing instance but claims that Roth rather forces a question of cosmopolitanism as opposed to multiculturalism. She sees Jewishness as a means of passing by Coleman Silk as completely irrelevant and claims: "it is remarkably unimportant whether Coleman is white or black, Jewish or Christian, in the Rothian universe of the novel" (1472). Glaser as well reminds us that it is not only about race, but also about "the literary history and the 'Jewish' academic in the multicultural academy" (1472) which is according to her often overlooked in critical analysis.

In any respect, Roth's presentation of a successful passage into Jewishness is highly relevant for the period, since it, on the one hand, reveals the acquired comfortable position of the Jewish Americans, and on the other, the unfavorable position of African Americans. In an interview with Charles McGrath for the *New York Times* Roth explained that Coleman's passing into Jewishness had nothing to do with Judaism, but with possibilities that the Jewish association had in the U.S. in the 1990s, when it was used "As a means of deception, as a social disguise, as a pretext for his appearance" (McGrath). He also explains, "It has nothing to do with wanting to belong to another 'we.' It's a cunning choice that successfully furnishes him with a disguise in the flight from his own 'we'" (McGrath). The Jewish position in the postwar American society was naturally far more favorable than the position of African Americans. While African Americans were still being seen and treated as the other, the Jews were no longer so. They were accepted as part of the white American normative culture, hence they acquired the opportunity to reinvent themselves, and to choose which side of their hyphenated identity they wanted to identify with, and more importantly, they were granted rights to partake in the quest of the American Dream.

Roth's juxtaposition of these two minorities is significant in that they were once temporarily united in their struggle to gain rights as equal citizens. The Jewish Americans who joined the civil rights movement across the U.S. in the 1960s were the ones to reap the benefits. Therefore, "… in the guise of telling a Jewish story, Roth also tells an African American one," Derek P. Royal notes (211). As noted earlier, passing as a Jew was not a purposeful choice by Coleman, instead he: "had been *allowing* that he was Jewish for several years now—or letting people think so if they chose to—since … many people he knew seemed to have been assuming he was a Jew all along" (HS 131**,** my emphasis). Coleman was "allowing" people to think what they wanted to think, as he did not want to be black, white or Jewish, he only wanted to be himself. He had no desire in participating in any kind of a racial construct, "he wants out of race altogether" (Wilson 144):

> Not the tyranny of we and its we-talk and everything that we wants to pile on your head. Never for him the tyranny of the we that is dying to suck you in, the coercive, inclusive, historical, inescapable moral we with its insidious E pluribus unum… Instead the raw I with all its agility. Self-discovery— that was the punch to the labonz. Singularity. The passionate struggle for singularity … Free. (HS 190)

Coleman desired to be free of the racial construct that is pertinent for a minority, he wanted to have the opportunity of self-discovery, of creating an identity free of his past and free of the social norms and limitations that are related to minorities and especially to the African Americans. Essentially what he wanted was to have the right to make it on his own, without being pulled into "the tyranny of the we" (HS 190), of the African American struggle. And his freedom search had led him to the association with another "we," with the Jewish "we." However, the association with the Jewish "we" had a set of completely different connotations.

On that account, Coleman's participation in the Jewish "we" allowed him the entrance into the academic world and, more importantly, enabled him to marry a Jewish wife. His efforts to belong to the Jewish "we" enabled him a life that would otherwise be unavailable for a person of African descent. Royal reminds that Coleman's success corresponded with the rapid rise of the second and the third post-war generation of Jewish Americans, considering that he was the first Jew to become the dean of the Athena College.

His amenability to pass as Jewish entailed utter determination, renunciation of his prior identity together with his family, and even a choice of a wife that would fit into the image he was constructing. His wife, Iris had "that sinuous thicket of hair that was far more Negroid than Coleman's" (HS 367) and it would explain at least that one segment of his hidden identity.

Even though Coleman escaped the oppressive position of the African Americans, and enjoyed the upward mobility of the Jewish Americans in the U.S., the identification with another minority could not go without hindrances. The privileged and affluent position of Jewish Americans in the U.S. did not mean that anti-Semitism ceased to be present, and it caused Coleman's death.

Roth further entangled the story by introducing Les Farley, Faunia's ex-husband, a Vietnam veteran who had blamed Faunia for the death of their two children and was set out to seek revenge. Their children died in a fire caused by a space heater while Faunia was outside providing fellatio (Roth's ironic reference to Clinton's affair). Even prior to this tragic event, their relationship had been turbulent, due to Les's PTSD and frequent flashbacks that took him back into the traumatic moments, confusing the present with the past. After the death of their children, he openly threatened to take Faunia's life, and once her relationship with Coleman was public, his envy had grown into resentment which grew into a more serious

psychological problem "Crazier, suddenly, because she is sucking off that Jew than because she killed the kids …" (HS 157). During one of his blurring episodes, he caused their death, by forcing them off the road into the river. Despite the intentional murder of "the Jew" (HS 551), Les returned home semiconscious of his deed.

By introducing a Vietnam veteran suffering from PTSD, Roth utilized another historical segment. Les Farley's identity was as Coleman's heavily influenced by historical occurrences. Having returned from Vietnam after several deployments, he was unable to move on with his life, to separate what he went through in the past, and what was happening in the present, as "another victim of fate" (Emerick 76). His inability to separate the past form the present caused severe racism and had resulted in the murder of both his ex-wife and her older lover. "Buried as a Jew .. and … killed as a Jew. Another of the problems of impersonification" (HS 553). The passing into Jewishness thus enabled his freedom from the burden of being the 'other' and paradoxically caused his death. The hatred of 'the Jew' was not only a race problem but a class problem as well, taking into consideration the Jewish position in the society and the fact that Coleman was a respected intellectual. It is thus no surprise that Les resented Coleman's social status.

4.4. *Typical American* (1991)

Tracing the footsteps of Jewish Americans, Asian immigrants became Americanized after the Second World War and the 1960s. In the following pages, I will present their assimilation and their rise to the status of the model minority through the novels by Lillian Jen, known by her pen name Gish Jen. She was born in New York to Chinese immigrants in 1955, and she has become one of the most praised Asian American writers, who challenged

the traditional views of the confining definitions of ethnic, immigrant, Asian American, and Chinese American literature. This section will present her début novel *Typical American,* published in 1991, and its sequel *Mona in the Promised Land*, published in 1996 which introduce the plot of immigration and assimilation of the Chang family.

Jen opens *Typical American* with "This is an American story" (TA 12), thus suggesting that the novel will present a story of typical Americans. Although it centers on Asian immigrants into the U.S., Jen desires to portray a story that will be taken as American. At the time Gish Jen started writing "multiculturalism was around the corner" (Jen qtd. in Lee 218) and she had "seen so much social change in such a short amount of time, it seems miraculous" (Ibid.). In a short period, Asians went from "Unassimilable to Exceptional" (Lee and Zhou 7), their position changed drastically, and this is what Gish Jen captures in her novel, the idea that the change influenced by multiculturalism resulted in the reconceptualization of what is considered typically American: "I was redefining an American tradition" (Lee 11).

The story begins with the depiction of Ralph Chang and his voyage from China to the U.S. in search of a Ph.D. in engineering while escaping the communist threat in China. From the very beginning, a strong determination to keep to his values and tradition is quite evident, since he came to the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. so that he could bring honor to his family and was in the U.S. solely for educational purposes, and therefore, his stay was meant to be only temporary. Unfortunately, his education did not run the course he had imagined, and as the political situation in China worsened; his stay in the U.S. was prolonged. He quickly fell for the American way of life, due to negligence and change in character he had forgotten to extend his student visa, thus lost his legal status in the U.S. and had spent his days relocating and evading the authorities. This difficult period in Ralph's life ended when he was at his lowest, when by sheer chance his older sister Theresa found him sleeping in a park. His sister

accompanied by her friend Helen also escaped the communist threat into the U.S. and was studying medicine. This chance encounter changed all their lives.

They rented an apartment together in a dilapidated building, with cracks in the walls, filled with all things they cherished from China. They kept to their Chinese customs and values while waiting for the political situation in China to return to normal. Helen did not even want to tread heavily on the floor because she only had one pair of Chinese shoes and she did not want to wear them out. She refused to eat anything that is not Chinese. And being a sickly daughter of an affluent family in China, she had never worked, not even "drawn her own bath" (TA 85) but still she learned to prepare Chinese meals so that she could eat Chinese food until it was time for her to return home. However, time went by and the situation in China only got worse, they lost all connection to their families and kept on hoping it would cease at some point while adjusting to their lives in "exile" (TA 72).

Ralph married Helen and went back to studying when all Chinese students in the U.S. were exempt from the foreign students' procedures due to the communist takeover of China. He proceeded with his studies but still "He refused to be made an American citizen. He thumbed his nose at the relief act meant to help him, as though to claim his home was China was to make China indeed his home. And wasn't it still?" (TA 32). With a strong dislike for all typical American things, they carried on with their lives, adjusting both to life in the U.S. and their togetherness.

At the beginning, they disapproved and mocked all that is not Chinese-like, the American manners, referring to them as "typical American". "Typical American no-good", "typical American don't-know-how-to-get-along", "typical American just-want-to-be-at-the-center-of-things", "typical American no-morals", "typical American use-brute-force", "typical American just-dumb" (TA 76). Jennifer Ann Ho suggests that this mockery of the American

way was a survival tactic, a way for them to feel superior in the host society (17). However, as their stay in the country was prolonged they gradually adjusted to their new life and became less and less discernible form those they designated as "typical American." In the interview with Martia Salz Jen explains that the Changs ironically and "despite themselves" became what they mocked. "*We're wrong to say* typical American" (TA 82) Theresa explained, being the first one to realize that those they mocked were no different from them, "that Pete was just a person" (TA 82-83) she noted, just like them. According to Ho, the remainder of the novel shows exactly how typically American the three Chinese immigrants will become (17).

When compared to the prior three novels, the Americanization of the Changs is quite evident since they are the first generation of immigrants to the U.S. Due to their exposure to the possibilities of prosperity in the U.S., they Americanize. Intending to return to China, they struggled to remain unchanged by the U.S In the process of their adjustment, they exchanged the Confucian value system for American individualism, and each one underwent a personal change which Jen portrayed in an ironic mode. Helen, for one, took a liking to American music and lifestyle magazines from which she learned the latest trends. She was especially fond of advertising which indulged her imagination, and according to which she dreamed up their future. This entered into the story as their status improved, and Helen's ideas gathered from the advertisements were employed when they moved into a better apartment, and later into a house. Her indulgence in consumerism combined with the family's purchasing power to follow the latest trends displays their assimilation and rise to the status of the model minority.

Helen evolved from a delicate, sickly, and dependent Chinese woman to an efficient and fulfilled housewife: "The same girl who had never so much as drawn her own bath was now sprouting mug beans in jars with holes punched in their screw lids. It was as if, once she resigned herself to her new world, something had taken her over-a drive to make it hers" (TA 85). Jennifer Ann Ho notes that "Helen's real transformation occurs not through marriage but

through labor" (16). Considering that she was never exposed to work, she found it exciting and fulfilling.

She was proud of the person she was becoming, "Too proud, really-she tried to bind that feeling up-recognizing still, though, that in her own way she was becoming private strength itself. She was the hidden double stitching that kept armholes from tearing out. And all because she discovered, by herself, a secret-that working is enjoyable. "Effort, result" (TA 85). By becoming an efficient housewife that appreciates the value of labor, Helen had become a typical American, and this is due to the fact that the very foundation of the American identity and the way of life is deeply rooted in the ethos of hard work that secures prosperity and thus the ability of upward mobility. By mastering this typical American trait Helen became the anchor of their family, who took care of the household while Ralph and Theresa were studying. She did things that the two of them did not dare to do; besides mastering the household chores and cooking, she ventured even to climb up the roof, and even fixed the building's boiler in the scary basement. Her practical intelligence was her true gift that also pertains to the American value system which celebrates resourcefulness as a necessary means of prosperity. Helen ventured on her own to master the thing that she never thought she could do, and she did it with grace, pretending that all that she did was not a big deal, while in fact, it was huge for her: "And that mattered, the way it mattered that she be busy but not busy at the same time-that, while competent, she be a Chinese girl" (TA 86). She was thrilled with her newly gained abilities, but still, she paid extra care to have soft hands, and to spend the afternoon not doing anything, like "a proper Shanghainese-girl" (TA 87). She retained that element of their culture but has otherwise completely assimilated.

Helen's change is most evident in her affair with Grover Ding, her farthest departure from Chinese culture, where women are raised according to "three obediences and four virtues" (Hui 238), according to which woman's life is centered on their marriage and their

subordination to the men in their lives, fathers, husbands and, in widowhood, sons. The fact that Helen had earlier accepted Theresa's relationship with a married man, had insinuated her adjustment to such behavior: "But then *xi guan le*-she'd adjusted. The strange became familiar. The utterly inconceivable lost its massive inconceivableness" (TA 225). It was the isolation of the housewife living in the U.S., Ralph's concentration on reducing the taxes, and more importantly, her exposure to the lifestyle magazines that led her to Grover's arms. Helen had transformed from an obedient and fragile Chinese women into a typical American suburban housewife who engages in flirtation. And it portrays how Helen's Chinese dream of marriage had transformed into an American dream of independence.

Ralph's upward trajectory was prompted by Helen's pregnancy, upon which he left his dreams aside "like a real father, who needed to make a real living" (TA 123) and went on to finish his Ph.D. And eventually, with the help of his sister, he earned tenure at a University. His path was in no way straightforward, not only did he have difficulties with studying and earning a degree and tenure as well, he was troubled with internal conflicts that made decision making for him extremely difficult. Upon his arrival to the U.S., he held the Chinese vision of success, which was the pursuit of a Ph. D. and tenure, whereas the exposure to the post-war affluent American life made him realize that he could as well pursue the American dream, the American vision of success, which meant getting rich. Ralph became enamored with a book he received as a present form his professor *The Power of Positive Thinking* written by N. V. Peale, which is to this day one of the most famous self-help books, and with the presence of Grover Ding, an American born Chinese American, a "self-made millionaire" (TA 13). By introducing, the typical American element of the self-made man and the self-help books Jen once again ironizes their efforts to become typically American. She portrays Ralph's transformation from an engineer to an "imagineer" (TA 12), by cultivating the habit of positive thinking. Following the example of the "typified" (Paul 370) American self-made

man, Benjamin Franklin[15], Ralph surrounded himself with this day and age equivalents of Franklin's maxims[16]: "All riches begin with an idea. What you can conceive, you can achieve. Don't wait for your ship to come in, swim out to it. Follow the heard, you end up a cow" (TA 207). These quotes stand in sharp contrast to the list of aims he held when he came to the U.S.:

1. I will cultivate virtue. (A true scholar being a true scholar; as the saying went, there was no carving rotten wood.)
2. will bring honor to the family

   What else?

3. I will do five minutes of calisthenics daily.
4. I will eat only what I like, instead of eating everything.
5. I will on no account keep eating after everyone else has stopped.
6. I will on no account have anything to do with the girls. (TA 15-16)

The list of Chinese virtues and Ralph's intent to live by it are reminiscent of Franklin's way of life, since he too had a list of thirteen virtues[17] to live by in order to achieve success. However, Ralph's intention to keep to his list did not last long since he broke the sixth rule, which he considered the most important one, as he fell in love with the secretary of the Foreign Student Affairs office. It did not take him long to substitute these aims for Franklin's motivational quotes which guaranteed success in the U.S. Franklin's quotes and books were

[15] As one of the central figures in American history, and a Founding Father of the United States, Benjamin Franklin was known for numerous successful ventures. And due to his "rags to riches" story, he is credited as a symbol of a self-made man, the "*homo americanus* par excellence"(Paul 370).
[16] Benjamin Franklin is additionally widely known for the maxims he published in the „Poor Richard's Almanack" from 1732 to 1758 that have since been ingrained into the American culture.
[17]Franklin disclosed the list of the thirteen virtues he strived to live by in his autobiography.

employed as a “canonical material and can be considered advice literature providing guidance on how to rise from ‘Obscurity’ to ‘some Degree of Reputation in the World’ (Franklin, qtd. in Paul 371). Influenced by such dogma, Ralph neglected his engineering degree and a tenure that would secure him a comfortable life and he decided to partake in the American postwar dream of a self-made man. It must be noted that the idea of the American dream in the postwar era had changed; it was no longer seen as the promise of upward mobility achieved by hard work but the promise of fast acquisition of wealth, in which Franklin’s example of the self-made man played the central role. In step with the times, Ralph bought a restaurant from Grover, named it “Ralph’s Chicken Palace” (TA 245) and started working on his dream. From Grover, he learned how to cheat the system by paying fewer taxes and thus earn even more, and was soon enthralled by the income they earned. Influenced by Grover’s opinion that without money he is nothing but a “singing Chinaman” (TA 106) Ralph became concentrated only on earning money even if it meant cheating the system, “They weren’t rich, but by paying less taxes they became respectable” (TA 211).

As Ralph carelessly marched forward in the acquisition of his version of the American dream, or rather the disillusion of the American dream, this led him into debt and torment. His 'beginner's luck' had quickly faded, and he was once again at the beginning. The restaurant he bought from Grover was sinking to the ground and shortly after they found it out, the cracks in the walls increased, and it became unsafe for them and the customers, resembling the proverbial house built on sand.

Ralph's failure in becoming a self-made man made him question his worth and values. When he arrived in the U.S. he knew exactly who he was and what he wanted out of his life, however, as his stay was prolonged he lost sight of his aims and ambitions. So he embarked on a quest to find out, to construct himself once again influenced by the image of a self-made man. This constant search for one's identity is a recurring theme in Jen as she considers it to

be at the core of American values. In the interview conducted by Matsukawa Jen noted that: “The Changs, … wander about their identity: they ask themselves who they are, who they’re becoming. And therefore, they are American” (115). For Ralph indeed "found that in America, in practical, can-do, down-to-earth America, he had much company in this activity-that a lot of people wondered who they were quite seriously, some of them for a living. It was an industry" (TA 186).

Once the Changs relocated to the suburbs they realized that they had not known the country at all, "We thought we knew. But we didn’t know. We thought we lived here. But actually knew nothing. Almost nothing. Completely nothing!” (TA 167). They were completely taken aback by the U.S. the life in the suburbs had changed their whole view of the country: “It was as if the land they had been living in had turned out to be no land at all, but a mere offshore island, a futures mound of muddy scrub and barnacle … whereas this New World-now this was a continent. A paradise they agreed” (167). The acquisition of a house with a lawn in the suburbs marked a turning point in their Americanization, it signals their upward trajectory, their access to the model minority status.

In *Typical American*, Jen has presented the process of Americanization by which immigrants assimilate and adjust to the American way of life. Covering a period that Beauregard termed the "short American Century” (1), a period of America’s postwar economic prosperity, Jen presented how Chinese Americans were pushed to the position of the model minority. This period was marked by a massive inhabitation of the suburbs. The relocation to the suburbs, as presented in the novel was a governmental initiative, whereupon the Federal Housing Administration secured a mortgage program, a "special kind of loan" (TA 163), to encourage homeownership (Beauregard 1). Young couples, such as the Changs, left the crowded cities in favor of suburban property.

The purchase of a house signifies not only their Americanization but also their position as the model minority. They were the first non-white minority that entered into the suburbs, and therefore into the 'comfortable bourgeoisie'. As Chinese Americans, they were accepted and welcomed into the upper middle class society. "How lucky they were! How many people came to his country and bought a house just like that?" (TA 165). As was the case with the other minority considered here, their entrance into the suburbs and the normative American culture was not hindered by their race. The Asians were the first ones of the 'others' to gain access to the mainstream in the post-1960s period. The reason for this may be found in the cold war politics and in the advertising of the American democracy, which was supposedly segregation free. In such a context, an all-inclusive suburban life was presented as the realization of the post war American dream. In 1959 the vice president Nixon celebrated American democracy and presented the suburbanization as a "melting pot" process, whereby the immigrants become Americanized (Cheng 1071). The inclusion of the Chinese into the all-white suburbs presented the American democracy "superiority … over communism" (1068) in Asian countries, based on its all-inclusive suburbia, where the Chinese Americans were presented as "a marker of racial difference" (1068). They were the "acceptable" (1068) others, whereas the African Americans and some others were still unquestionably inadmissible.

4.5. *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996)

Gish Jen's second novel, *Mona in the Promised Land* (1996), provides further illustration of my thesis. It clearly portrays the model minority status of both the Jewish and Asian Americans. The novel continues with the Chang family and the focus is placed on the second generation, primarily on their younger daughter, Mona. Unlike the first novel, it does

not center on the immigration of the Chinese in the U.S.; rather it is "an end of the century status report on the Jewish immigrant experience" (Furman 212). The reason why a novel about a Chinese family seems to focus on Jewish immigration experience lies in their completed assimilation into the U.S. society, to the extent that the children of the Chinese immigrants have gained the ability to choose one's identity, and in this case, their sixteen-year-old daughter Mona chooses to identify as Jewish.

The previous novel illustrates the survival dreams and efforts of the first generation and their attempts to assimilate into the U.S. by suppressing or compromising their origin and identity. Meanwhile, the second generation, born American, struggles to find its identity and attempts to return to its origins. This irony is what distinguishes their Americanization, for in order for the second generation to have the ability to be American enough to be able to choose an identity, the first generation must lose sight of their ethnic identity, as we have seen in *Typical American*. Nevertheless, their daughters find the Changs too Chinese, since they have a different concept of familial ties, while, in fact, they have done everything they could do to suppress their Chinese origin and to assimilate.

We have seen in the previous novel the immigration of the Changs, their assimilation, and their entrance into the middle-class society by their relocation into the suburbs. At the very beginning of this novel, we are presented with another relocation of the Chang family into the suburbs, only this time they moved into the affluent Jewish neighborhood of Scarshill in one of New York State counties. There, Mona found herself immersed into the Jewish culture to the degree that: "she's been on so many bar and bas mitzvahs, she can almost say herself whether the kid chants like an angel or like a train conductor" (*Mona in the Promised Land* [MPL] 6). According to Andrew Furman, the "Pervasive Jewishness" (213) of the Scarshill easily influenced Mona's choice to "switch" (MPL 14) to Judaism. She rapidly became familiar with the culture, tradition, and religion, and came to appreciate it, mostly

because it was different from what she learned at her home: “I like that you tell everyone ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey” (MPL 34). In her house, she has to listen to her parents, and do her part of the chores, whereas in the temple they are all encouraged to contemplate and to ask questions. She felt free to “make a pain in the neck of [herself]” (MPL 34).

Using conversion to Judaism, Mona wanted to fit into her new surroundings, but before she decided to do so, she used being the only Chinese American in her school to her advantage. She told her peers that she knew karate, and how to speak Chinese, she even instructed her peer’s parents on Chinese dishes, even though she did not really know about those aspects of Chinese culture. At one point in the novel, Helen even admits that she and her husband have forgotten China and Chinese customs and that therefore they usually improvise, for example in cooking: “Peking duck, Westchester style, whose secret is soaking it overnight in Pepsi-Cola” (MPL 186). The remains of their Chinese identity which only superficially differentiate them from the American families, and which tie them to China is principally a shared immigrant consciousness that “one generation is supposed to build on the last” (MPL 100).

The model minority ethos stresses that the upbringing of the next generation is important for Chinese Americans, and in the novel, we can see how it is different from ‘typical’ American. Ralph and Helen believe that their family forms a single “accountable unit” (MPL 121), not every family member individually, which means that Mona and Callie are given tasks and duties, and that they work in their family restaurant, and are not being paid for it as their friends are. The Chinese usually have a nuclear household, meaning that it is a two-parent household and usually more generations live under the same roof, which is why the children are thought to care for their parents once they age. This segment of Chinese culture has remained with the Changs, although they have otherwise assimilated.

Mona in the Promised Land is situated at a time when "… the blushing dawn of ethnic awareness has yet to pink up [the family's] inky suburban night" (MPL 3). It was a time when, to borrow Byers phrase, "ethnicity was commodified" (103). Mona's choice to "switch" (MPL 14) to Judaism is a reflection of that same multiculturalism when ethnic identity was "a disposable, displaceable object in the relations of exchange" (Wang 142). Now Chinese Americans, equal to other Americans, have gained the privilege to question who they are, to assume multiple identities in order to identify their calling and purpose. Influenced by the same dogma, Mona learned that being American means having the ability to choose what you want to be: "American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish" (MPL 49). An identity that can be chosen and consumed is consistent with the modern view of American identity that is based on consent.[18] For, all Mona desired is to fit in and not to feel "like permanent exchange student" (MPL 6). Mona spent most of her time in the Temple Youth Group with the rest of her friends so much that it became her "home away from home" (MPL 33). Therefore it seemed only natural for Mona to opt to become Jewish, especially since she was certain that it was easy to become something else, it is just a "switch" (MPL 14), as she explained to her childhood friend Sherman:

> "You could become American." But he says no, he could never. "Sure you could," Mona says. "You only have to learn some rules and some speeches."
>
> "But I Japanese."
>
> "You could become American anyway," Mona says. "Like I could become Jewish, if I wanted to. I'd just have to switch, that's all." (MPL 14)

The choice of identity was easy, just a decision to be made. However, her choice to convert to Judaism only made her more different as she became "Changowitz" (MPL 90), the "official

[18] According to Sollors, it is "a relation, of law or marriage" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 5)

mascot" (MPL 32), "a kind of Jewish Yoko Ono" (MPL 63). What Mona did not understand before her conversion is that: "the more Jewish you become, the more Chinese you'll be" (MPL 66). The more she thought about Jewish culture, religion, and customs the more she was interested in her origins. In the same manner, the more a minority strives to be accepted by the American mainstream society, the more they are going to look inwards, and realize the richness of their own culture. Mona's quest pattern corresponds to that of her friend Sherman Matsumoto, who discovered "what it means to be American… by thinking what it means to be Japanese" (MPL 235). Likewise, Mona discovered what it means to be Chinese by discovering what it means to be Jewish. For her sister, Callie, Naomi is the person that (re)introduces her to her origins. Even though she is of African-American descent, she nevertheless helps Callie reconnect with her heritage. Their parents, on the other hand, "succumb[ed] to the assimilationist impulse" (Furman 214) and do not understand why their children want to get in touch with their ethnic identity.

The second generation is the one that is lost and is looking for its identity, while the first one struggled to become Americanized; however, as mentioned earlier, they cannot let go of every aspect of their identity. Upon an occasion, we can see how Mona feels that her parents are too Chinese: "Everywhere else is America, but in this house, it's China!" to which her mother replied, "That's right! No America here! In this house, children listen to parent!" (MPL 130). Although Helen wanted to raise her children to be American, she also did not want them to be too American. In an examination of family confrontation in the novel, Cheang suggests that Helen wanted to be a part of the "model maternity" (234) order, a term devised by the Julia H. Lee.[19] In order to become a model of motherhood, an immigrant mother must secure the success of the next generation, which is usually achieved through education and marriage.

[19] Published in "Model Maternity: Amy Chua and Asian American Motherhood."

Throughout the novel, we see how Callie is an excellent student who "got into every college she applied to and then some" (MPL 99) while Mona was "the mouth" (MPL 100) of the family, who was constantly under pressure to be like Callie. Ralph and Helen wanted her to go to Harvard, "… She [Mona] tells him [Sherman] about her family. The fights. And Harvard, Harvard, Harvard! Of course, Barbara Gugelstein's parents want her to go to Harvard too. 'But for my parents, it's the whole point of life,' she says. 'Jews believe in the here and now; Catholics believe in heaven; the Chinese believe in the next generation'" (231). The value they place on the following generation is not solely for the image of the model mother, but for the status as well, especially taking into consideration Duncan and Trejo's historical observation that the socioeconomic success of an immigrant group occurs "across rather than within generations" (603). For the earlier waves of immigrants completed assimilation and socioeconomic success took several generations to unfold, hence, prosperity was secured only for their descendants. This is especially relevant for the Chinese Americans since their socioeconomic upward trajectory is based on their continuous academic excellence, and it is, therefore, the basis of their model minority status. The Chinese family's pressure on their children has even been referred to as the "pressure cooker" (Zhou 29), and it is evident throughout the novel in Helen and Mona's disagreements. Zhou explains how the academic success of Chinese American children is a matter of "face-saving" (30). Therefore, Mona's disobedience and betrayal of the family, in addition to her intimate relationship with a Jewish American, lead to her being the failure of the family and compels Helen to disown her.

Helen's adulation of the nuclear family and the burden she places on the shoulders of her daughters suggest that she is in favor of the idea of descent,[20] while Mona with her stubbornness and independent spirit is in favor of the idea of consent, for which she is thrown out of the house. Helen was furious that Mona betrayed her father's business and, more

[20] According to Sollors, it defines "a relation of substance (by blood or nature)" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 5).

importantly, her family by telling their African American cook that he was not promoted because her parents favored the Chinese cook so that he, as a result sued her family for racism. In reality, the reason for his dismissal lay elsewhere. Here, we can see that Helen is aware of their social standing: “Our trouble is that we are in the middle… Alfred is mad; he would like to sue your friend Barbara’s (wealthy, Jewish) family. But he cannot sue them, so he sues us” (MPL 239). Helen suggests that they are in the position of a “middle man”, an “ideal scapegoat in racial conflicts” (Gonzalez, 233). Although the Changs have succeeded in their social climbing, they are nevertheless faced with interracial conflict due to their position; they serve as a buffer between those at the top and those at the bottom.

We have seen several occasions where Ralph and Helen thought lesser of the African Americans, and they did not want to be associated with them, as ‘the others’: “Can you believe that woman? (...) She want to lump us with the black people! (…) You people! You people! (...) She is talking to us as if we were black! She is talking to us as if we are Negroes! (…) And make no mistake. We are not Negroes. You hear me? Why should we work so hard- so people can talk to us about birth control for free? " (MPL 119). Helen was furious when she was addressed as the other, as "You people" (Ibid.), and it was here that her dislike of the African Americans was most visible. It is both interesting and ironic that Helen’s conciliation with Mona’s Jewishness comes on the heels of connecting Chinese with Jews in terms of their shared cultural values, even if they come at the expense of other groups in the melting pot: "How are classes at the temple? She asked Mona for a change. What is she studying there? … and is it true that Jewish mothers are just like Chinese mothers, they know how to make their children eat?” (MPL 110).

Indeed, Chinese Americans and Jewish Americans in the U.S. context have a lot in common, for, as I have tried to show, it is due to their shared values that they, albeit in different periods of American cultural history, became the model minorities. For the Chinese,

“they’re the New Jews, after all, a model minority and Great American Success. They know they belong in the promised land" (MPL 3), whereas the Jews remain "The Jews" (Ibid.). Their upward trajectory started in the nineteen-fifties, and by the end of the nineteen-sixties they had reached the position of the WASPs in the society, while the Asian Americans, with the Chinese at the forefront, slid in to occupy the former position of the Jews, as the next model minority.

5. Conclusion

By presenting their entrance into the comfortable middle class, both Philip Roth and Gish Jen have portrayed the successful Americanization of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans. Although the idea of the model minority became prevalent subsequently to the Jewish blending in with the normative white American identity, their success, and contribution to the concept of the model minority should not be neglected.

Jewish Americans and Asian Americans have trodden a difficult path from those deemed unassimilable to those defined as exceptional. From the very outset of their immigration, their journey was fettered with legal restrictions and even public manipulation by means of stereotypes that served as public intimidation in favor of racial hierarchy. Eventually, both Jewish and Asian Americans were selected and assisted by the same government (that had earlier denied their immigration and legal rights) in their path to the model minority status. They were acceptable enough, or white enough (in the black and white dichotomy) to be presented on one side as exemplary citizens for 'the other' minorities, and on the other, they were diverse enough to present the U.S. as free democratic land to the rest of the world.

Regardless of the government's role in the conception of the model minority, which has been present since the 1960s, Jewish Americans alongside Asian Americans have displayed the same valuable traits of prosperity not only for their own minority but for the nation as well. These shared cultural traits, the starting point of correlation of Jewish and Asian minority experience, were detected back in 1920 by Robert Ezra Park, who outlined rootedness in their cultures as the single most substantial element for their successful assimilation and prosperity within the U.S.

While it would be assumed that the most successful minority in the U.S. would be the one that completely renounces their identity in favor of Americanization, the upward trajectory of Jewish and Asian Americans indicates quite the contrary. The cultural traits of Jewish and Asians that place value on family, education, hard work, and devotion proved to be the essential elements of successful and faster integration into the normative American culture.

Specifically, Philip Roth's *American Trilogy* has portrayed the cost of the renunciation of the identity that has, according to Park, enabled their blending in with the WASP society, and it has shown the cost of such renunciation. The novels of Gish Jen have clearly outlined the Asian immigrant rise to the status of the model minority as they displayed the trail that the Jewish Americans have left for the Asian Americans to follow.

Therefore, this comparative ethnic study of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans displays the parallels in their experience, regardless of the difference in time frames, and thus enables a broader view of the constructed image of the model minority.

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7. Abstract

This essay aims to repair the omission of the Jewish American experience in the creation of the image of the model minority, which was promulgated in the 1960s and predominantly based on the Asian American experience. The essay contains an introduction to the historical background of both Jewish and Asian immigration into the United States with a short outline of the difficulties in their assimilation, followed by the analysis of Philip Roth's and Gish Jen's novels. Philip Roth's *American Trilogy* portrays the Jewish generational rise to the American normative culture, while Gish Jen's novels *Typical American* and *Mona in the Promised Land* convey the Asian immigration into the United States and their rise to the status of the model minority following in the Jewish American footsteps. Using their novels as illustrative examples, the essay presents a comparative ethnic study of the parallels in the rise of Jewish Americans and Asian Americans to the status of the model minority.

Key words: the model minority, assimilation, Jewish Americans, Asian Americans