Analysis Of How Jewish Has Been Portrayed In Pop Culture Over The Decades

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Jewish Identity and Racial Ambiguity in Popular Culture

The Jews are some of the world's minorities, and in many parts, they can't be clearly defined in terms of who they are in many cultures; even those who migrated to the US were placed "between" being white and not white. This is because of their origin, practices, and way of life. The Jews, since time immemorial, have been known to be everywhere as they fled persecution from their land and from places where they had settled. Even though these Jews fled and made a new life in the diaspora, they sought to make connections to their Jewish culture and to being themselves; this, though, never culminated in a religious context but only in their way of life.

Religion was left out of their transformation process intentionally so that they could form their own worldview without religious interference, based only on their way of life and their taboos (Leonard J and Simkins). This could have worked better for them in their "in-between" character representation; this part was called Jewish secularism. This has led them to adopt new characters and assimilate with the hosts in the places they stay abroad in the social-cultural environment; this, according to many strains abroad, has led to these Jewish communities varying their practices as they are in different settings with communities that have varied practices. Though the separation occurred during the migration process, the Sephardi Jews always participate in Jewish festivals such as nature festivals; they also actively participate in political and economic activities in their various capacities. This is because the secular Jews had time for secular education and excelled as scholars in many fields.

In the past, Jews were discriminated against almost everywhere they went, and that did not just stop at their race but still culminated in participation in communal activities. Mostly, they were viewed as potential businesses; in most parts of Europe, these Jews were banned from owning land and were told to venture into other work that the locals could not pursue. This is because most of the people had invested in farming, and since the governments were Roman Catholic in nature, any mercantile activity that charged interest could not be engaged in by the citizens (locals). Hence, the Jews were not bound by the Bible verses that denied charging interest and started supplying the governments with the money they needed for development as they earned their due freely until the 19th century.

Economic Visibility and Changing Images of Jewish Communities

In recent times, the 'Jews' effect has taken over around the world, with them being on the frontline in economic participation and the upgrading of societal life. This can be witnessed in Poland, where people say that you cannot mention art in Poland without considering Jews. It's like they have become a force to reckon with through the fresh wound of serious migration from there, shrinking their population from 1M to 45,000. Nowadays, it's different, according to Jonathan Ornstein, the New York-born director of Krakow's Jewish Community Center (JCC), "There is this idea that Jews only listen to Klezmer music, and they have long beards and speak Yiddish." And we are saying, 'Look at what the Jewish world is about today; it's hip, and there is a lot of stuff going on here.' Jewish culture in Poland is evolving." (BROWNELL).

A recent movie, The Passion of the Christ (2004), is one of the most surrealistic movies of all time; this movie brings out the real Jewish stereotypes and hatred with love for mob justice. This is because the Jews came out in huge numbers to deny the messiah (Jesus Christ) and his teachings even though they were accepted by many through the council of the Sanhedrin, the Scribes, and the Pharisees. The above groupings always plotted how to kill Jesus each and every time, and every opportunity they were with him was a step towards death. The movie itself brought to light the religious adherence aspect of Jews and the idea that anyone who preached something outside their Torah was excommunicated. Their traditionalist nature is held up to the end when they demand Barabbas to be released and Christ be crucified, as that was their custom for one Jewish prisoner to be released on the day of Passover, hence the crucifixion of Jesus due to the hateful and traditionalist Jews.

That doesn't stop there in American society. Since ancient times, they have been seeking to reconcile with the Jews, but still, they stereotype them according to many conflicts from the past (Whitfield). This can be viewed in many American hip-hop music lyrics; the Jews are portrayed as being so tight with money that they can't just throw money around. This is evident in Jay-Z's song, "This Can't Be Life", where he said ", Flow tight like I was born Jewish." From this line, other rappers, including A$ap Ferg, Drake, and Kanye West, say whether a Jew is an accountant or lawyer or blindly wealthy, they are always tight with their money. Other rappers go ahead to portray Jews as scheming lawyers, and one can get away with murder if one hires one; this includes Lil Bibby on 'Thought It Was A Drought', ("Jewish lawyers, so I dodged jail"), and A$ap Ferg's 'work'- ("I be out tomorrow, my lawyer's Jewish"). This is another representation of the Jewish high life and exorbitance in the American scene.

Television, Assimilation, and the Performance of Jewish Tradition

TV series in the 1990s portrayed the Jewish as being accommodative and also easily assimilated into

the culture of where they stayed but still not forgetting what their traditions were and being able to go against them intentionally as part of blending into their new environment. In the 1990s, comedians like Dave Attell and Howard Stern, both Jewish, broke taboos on live TV without fear, but still, this is because they believed that was true and could not be avoided at all costs.

That doesn't stop there. It still culminates with Jon Stewart, a correspondent by then, opening The Daily Show by saying, "I had a discussion with a Southern gentleman today, and we were trying to find common ground… about legalizing drugs. And he said to me, 'I think ham should be legalized.' And I said, 'I think ham is legal. Now, I'm Jewish, and when I eat it, I don't feel so good about myself, but I eat it.' And it turns out, he said, 'Hemp.' But in a way that made me say, 'Ham.' ". This reveals their true nature when in the outside world as they have to make a living and also create a friendly environment for socializing and knowing their neighbours.

But still, that doesn't stop there. In most movies and TV series, there's this aspect of the Jewish mother that used to be portrayed; the Jewish mother was nagging, staunch, and overprotective of her children/family. In the series "Big Bang Theory," Mrs. Wolowitz is portrayed as having the above characteristics and keeps whining all the time; she tells her son that she can't go to the Moon for the NASA science project as she fears he might die (Howard). Actually, the Jewish mother, according to me, is good because the act of nagging is another way for them to show how much they love family, and that can be good as a unifying factor in the family set-up. The overprotective nature for some might appear as of the Stone Age era, but it still will be a pillar in teaching children more morals and acting as a figure of strength and perseverance.

The stereotyping of Jews in recent times has been declining in pop culture thanks to the awareness being created by brave and proud Jews. This is also taking place as a result of them being appreciated for the efforts they are making towards proving a change; from bearded rogues who only speak Yiddish to smart people who are accommodative and outgoing. Even the big-nose representation nowadays is notably absent, and some people are missing the Jewish mother character as nowadays it has been buried but can be found in old comics and a few anti-Semitic chants that can be expressed in signs. This has led to them being accepted to the extent that Chris Rock, in 2014 while hosting the BET awards, said that for the Americans, "Orange is the new black," and that makes them real brothers.

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