

Precarious Whiteness: Reimagining the Seattle Sephardic Origin Story

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The historical trajectory of the Jewish community of Marmara, an island near Istanbul and then part of the Ottoman Empire, radically changed during the spring of 1903 when two young Jews, Solomon Calvo and Jacob Policar, met a Greek man visiting from Seattle, Washington. This man, his name lost to time, captured Policar and Calvo's attention with talk of international adventure and a fledgling Seattle fishing industry ripe for an entrepreneur's undertaking. Entranced by the promise of a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, Policar and Calvo met with their families to discuss moving to the United States. While their families initially objected to the idea of them heading to the United States, Policar and Calvo could not be deterred from their mission. After reminding their families of their young age, bachelor status, and capacity for international travel, their families granted them permission to embark on their journey. Soon thereafter, the two began a 6,000-mile expedition that would have them sail across the Atlantic Ocean and take a trans-continental train ride across the United States. They arrived in Seattle on the eve of Shavuot, a Jewish holiday, eager to connect with the already-established Jewish community and find their niche in the Seattle fishing business. Policar and Calvo are now remembered as the first two Sephardic "pioneers" to set foot in Seattle.<sup>1</sup>

Soon after their arrival in Seattle, Policar and Calvo realized neither their entrepreneurial goals nor their goal to connect with the already-established Jewish community would be promptly achieved. Their first interaction with the already-established Ashkenazic Jewish community ended poorly because Ashkenazim doubted Policar and Calvo's very Jewishness because of their Ottoman origins. The men also spoke Ladino, the Spanish-Jewish language of Sephardic Jews, rather than Yiddish, the language spoken by the vast majority of American Jews

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Community" (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 56-57.

at that time.<sup>2</sup> The language of Sephardim resembled the duality of their identity as it incorporated elements of Sephardic life in Spain as well as Sephardic life in the Ottoman Empire. In most instances, the complexity of this identity would prove confusing and untenable to Ashkenazic Jews, many of whom had never of Sephardim, and had absorbed Orientalist ways of thinking since coming to live in the United States. Policar and Calvo's business ventures, unfortunately, also did not go as planned. While Seattle-Sephardic Jews eventually achieved success in the Pike Place Market, Policar and Calvo spent many years working as low-level fish merchants and handymen.<sup>3</sup>

The ambiguity of Policar and Calvo's racial status in America's racial hierarchies prohibited their seamless transition into the Seattle business scene and, more broadly, their transformation into whites and members of the American nation. As Ottomans, they faced denigration because their Middle Eastern identity was perceived to be the antithesis of civilized modernity, and, in the context of World War I, during which the Ottoman Empire and United States were on opposing sides, they were viewed as "enemies" by already-established Americans. As Jews, they faced discrimination because they were considered to be a racially and religiously "other;" and as Sephardim, Jews who were not initially recognized by most American Jews as Jewish, they were often marginalized and made the object of demeaning remarks and hostility. Cumulatively, Calvo and Policar's precarious whiteness afforded them fewer opportunities and much discrimination in the broader Jewish community. While they may have

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth-Century America: In Search of Unity*, (San Jose: Pele Yoetz Books, 1987), 286; Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Community" (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 56-57.

<sup>3</sup> Julius Rickles, interviewed by Richard C. Burner and Meta Kaplan, May 14, 1968; Sema Calvo, interviewed by Karyl Winn and Jeanette Schrieber, May 25, 1972.

endured similar denigration in non-Jewish circles, this essay primarily focuses on Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations in early twentieth century Seattle.

Disillusioned by the American dream, Policar and Calvo returned to the Ottoman Empire just four years after migrating to the United States. In Seattle-Sephardic narratives composed decades later, these travels are often described as short-lived, wife-seeking journeys, yet Policar remained in Ottoman Empire for five years after marrying his wife Esther.<sup>4</sup> The couple brought three children into the world before Policar eventually returned to Seattle in 1912.<sup>5</sup> While Calvo had a quick turnaround to Seattle, his wife Luna did not join him until he had the means to purchase and furnish a home. When she did reunite with Calvo, it was not of her own volition, but because her mother packed her bags and forced her onto a boat to America, declaring: “if he is going to China, you are going to China because you married him!”<sup>6</sup> Luna’s reluctance to leave Marmara sharply contrasted with Policar and Calvo’s enthusiasm, demonstrating that migration to the United States did not always elicit feelings of excitement and that one’s gender drastically shaped their experience.

Policar and Calvo are currently referred to as “pioneers” in Seattle-Sephardic narratives as though they unequivocally sought to become part of the American nation and successfully “became white.” This designation falls short as it disregards the fact that Sephardic Jews faced a variety of barriers which prevented their integration into society—and it also assumes they desired to integrate in the first place. While disassociating Sephardic Jews from the pioneer narrative of the American West may appear to distance Sephardim from their roots in early

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<sup>4</sup> Lorraine Sidell, “Sephardic Jews of Seattle” (Seattle: Washington State Jewish Historical Society, 1992), 576-577; Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 62; Sema Calvo, interviewed by Karyl Winn and Jeanette Schrieber, May 25, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Sema Calvo, interviewed by Karyl Winn and Jeanette Schrieber, May 25, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Fortuna Calvo, interviewed by Fannie Roberts, February 9, 1976.

Seattle, this move conversely permits greater historical complexity because it allows for the recognition of non-Western and non-white elements of Seattle-Sephardic identity. The accepted narrative positions Sephardim as American and white, yet these classifications do not account for the multifaceted Ottoman, Spanish, and Jewish nature of Sephardic identity, nor acknowledge Sephardic reluctance to become permanently part of the United States. Classifying Sephardim as “pioneers” erases from the historical record the many instances in which non-Jews and already-established, Ashkenazic Jews discriminated against Sephardim to ensure their own societal privilege. Analyzing the fallacies and inequities of the current narrative prompts the question: if the current origin story misrepresents the historical complexity of Sephardic migration, why has it permeated Sephardic history and memory for the past eighty years? In the context of World War II, some Sephardic leaders felt the need to recast their narrative to emphasize their belonging in the United States. Both forced to assimilate into whiteness and cognizant that whiteness served as a pathway to privilege, Seattle Sephardim sought to conceal their Ottoman past and to proclaim their European roots to demonstrate their suitability for participation in white American society; in the process, they sanitized a complex and contradictory history of race and national belonging.

### **Sephardic Migration to the United States: Discovering and Deciphering America’s Complex Racial Hierarchies**

When Policar and Calvo migrated to Seattle, Washington at the beginning of the twentieth century, both Jews and non-Jews were in a process of interrogating and rearticulating the whiteness of Jewish identity. The process of rearticulation can be majorly attributed to

increasing number of Jewish migrants to the United States. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the American Jewish population increased from 200,000 to over one million.<sup>7</sup> Since many Sephardic Jews were not processed as Jews when arriving in the United States on account of their Ottoman origin and heritage, actual numbers could be even higher. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), for example, recorded that 2,865 Sephardic Jews migrated to the United States from 1909 to 1912 while the United States government documented only 1,854.<sup>8</sup> The numbers are difficult to track, but, in 1913, historians estimated that roughly 10,000 Sephardim lived in the United States.<sup>9</sup> They constituted a small minority in the overall Jewish population. Many of these Sephardic Jewish migrants, like Policar and Calvo, moved to big cities with the intention of becoming involved in commerce and trade. Jewish connection with industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization proved worrisome to the non-Jewish community who viewed modernization with uncertainty. Those in favor of rejecting modernity viewed Jews as “a symbol of the process transforming the nation.”<sup>10</sup> This, in conjunction with the emerging popularity of racial pseudoscience that declared Jews racially inferior, prompted non-Jews to cease classifying Jews as white and start classifying them as racially inferior “Hebrews.”<sup>11</sup>

The interrogation and repositioning of Jewish race resulted in Jews being viewed as a “racial conundrum” in early twentieth century racial discourse.<sup>12</sup> During this time, America deciphered and categorized race according to a black-white dichotomy. The utilization of this

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 35-36.

<sup>8</sup> Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 35-36.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 1.

system first began in the late eighteenth century with the Naturalization Act of 1790. The Act established the first rules in the United States regarding how national citizenship would be granted, effectively codifying into law the idea that to be American, a person had to be white. According to the Act, “any Alien being a free white person” could apply for naturalization as long as they had resided in the United States for one year, adhered to the principles of the Constitution, and possessed “good character”.<sup>13</sup> Notably, per this Act, anyone classified as non-white could not exercise the same rights nor be protected by the same laws as a white Americans. The Dred Scott case of 1856 reaffirmed the principles of the Naturalization Act of 1790 with the declaration that blacks could not then nor ever become American citizens.<sup>14</sup>

Although the precedent set by the Dred Scott case was revoked just 11 years later by the Naturalization Act of 1870 which extended naturalization to people of “African nativity” and to persons of “African descent,” each of these precedents demonstrated the extent to which America sought to operate under a racialized system that classified an individual’s race as either white or black.<sup>15</sup> Dominant white culture considered shifting between one of these two positions untenable because the maintenance of the black-white dichotomy was integral to the preservation of white supremacy.<sup>16</sup> Understanding the racist nature of the established sociopolitical system, representatives of many groups that did not immediately fall within either category as white or black— including those of Armenian, Turkish, and Syrian background—regularly went to court

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<sup>13</sup> U. S. Laws, Statutes, Etc. *A bill to establish an uniform rule of naturalization, and to enable aliens to hold lands under certain restrictions. New-York, Printed by Thomas Greenleaf.* New York, 1790. Pdf. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.21301100/>. (Accessed March 14, 2018.)

<sup>14</sup> Stephen G. Breyer, “A Look Back at the Dred Scott Decision” *Journal of Supreme Court History* 35 (2010): 110-121, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/doi/10.1111/j.1540-5818.2010.01236.x/epdf>.

<sup>15</sup> U. S. Laws, Statutes, Etc. *A bill to establish an uniform rule of naturalization, and to enable aliens to hold lands under certain restrictions. New-York, Printed by Thomas Greenleaf.* New York, 1790. Pdf. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.21301100/>. (Accessed March 14, 2018.)

<sup>16</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro and Moon-Ho Jung, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014), 45.

to try to prove their whiteness to demonstrate eligibility for citizenship.<sup>17</sup> With the rise of racial pseudoscience that declared Jews racially inferior, Jews also came to be viewed as precariously white and were classified as “Hebrews” according to race until 1943.<sup>18</sup> Sephardic Jews, being both Jewish and Ottoman, further challenged the black-white dichotomy, their unconfirmed whiteness the point of preoccupation for non-Jews and Jews alike.

Many already-established, Ashkenazic Jews found the idea of a Jewish Ottoman or a Jewish Turk inconceivable, often viewing Sephardic Jews as solely Ottoman or Turkish or denying their Jewishness altogether. In one instance in New York, Ashkenazic Jews, believing Sephardic Jews to be Turks, sent a request to the mayor, pleading the removal of the “Turks in our midst” who were allegedly “disturbing” the neighborhood. After learning the “Turks” were also Jews, they rescinded their request.<sup>19</sup> A Seattle-specific example illustrates a common alternative: Ashkenazic denial of Sephardic Jewishness. Sema Calvo, daughter of Jacob Policar, recalls her father’s Jewish identity being negated by Central and Eastern European Jews because they could not conceptualize the existence of an Ottoman, Spanish-speaking Jew who did not know Yiddish. Even after Policar and Calvo read from the Torah to prove their Jewish identity, Seattle Ashkenazim wrote to a Rabbi in New York because they remained convinced that the men, on account of their Ottoman heritage and Judeo-Spanish language, were Turkish imposters.<sup>20</sup> Ashkenazic denial of Sephardic Jewishness cannot be described similarly to the

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<sup>17</sup>Ian Haney López, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 35-54.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 192.

<sup>19</sup> Devin E. Naar, “Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015), 191.

<sup>20</sup> The Archivist, “Song of the Sephardi,” YouTube Video, 31:00, posted February 3, 2015, <https://youtu.be/dEHhpkIbRiI?t=31m1s>.

tense relations between Eastern and Central European Jews — as “social snobbery” — because Ashkenazic Jews never actually denied the Jewishness of one another.<sup>21</sup>

Considering Sephardic Jews were often perceived as just Ottoman or Turkish, it is essential to analyze how Turks were racially categorized during the period in which Policar and Calvo migrated to the United States. Notably, the Ottoman Empire had recently experienced sharp decline due to territorial wars, rising nationalism movements, and conflict with the West—especially in the context of World War I when the Ottoman Empire was considered the “enemy.” All of these events accompanied decades of Western-led colonization of the Middle East. Cumulatively, this chain of events prompted Westerners to begin utilizing homogenizing images to assert their own racial, social, and civilization predominance. Take, for example, the stereotypes of the “terrible Turk,” the “scourge of Europe,” and later, “the sick man of Europe.” On a basic level, these stereotypes positioned Turkish people as civilizationally inferior and as a threat to the American public. Yet, popular conceptions were also deeply racialized as they not only referred to what were thought to be temporary conditions, but what were believed to be permanent and inferior dispositions of a purportedly inferior Eastern civilization.<sup>22</sup> While the idea of “the Terrible Turk” suggested Ottomans to be a violent, threatening people, the idea of “the sick man of Europe” supported the discriminatory “backwards East and progressive West” paradigm.

While Ottomans were often viewed as racially inferior, the U.S. legal system, at times, tenuously classified Ottomans as white provided that they disassociate from the Sultan and their

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<sup>21</sup> Aviva Ben-Ur, “Funny, You Don’t Look Jewish!: ‘Passing’ and the Elasticity of Ethnic Identity among Levantine Sephardic Immigrants in Early Twentieth Century America,” (Amherst: University Of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>22</sup> Murat Ergin, “‘Is the Turk a White Man?’ Towards a Theoretical Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness,” (London: Middle Eastern Studies, 2008), 836.

Ottoman heritage. In landmark 1909 court case *In re Najour*, naturalization applicant Costa George Najour petitioned for United States citizenship on the basis that he was a “free white person” on account of his Syrian identity. Curiously, the Assistant United States attorney, representing the government, objected to the district judge’s ruling. He asserted that since “[Najour] was born within the dominions of Turkey, and was heretofore a subject of the Sultan of Turkey,” he did not qualify as a “free white person.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the Assistant United States attorney’s insistence that Najour was not white on account of his Turkish birth, the court ruled that his birthplace was irrelevant and that “if it did [count], the extension of the Turkish Empire over people unquestionably of the white race would deprive them of the privilege of naturalization.”<sup>24</sup> While actively living under the Sultan and identifying as Turkish could classify a Ottoman—and by extension a Sephardic Jew— as nonwhite, distancing oneself from Turkey allowed for a precarious claim to whiteness.

Sephardic Jews’ claim to whiteness, already tenuous in light of the societal and legal denigration of their Ottoman identity, drastically shifted after the 1913 Leo Frank case which racialized Jews as both white and nonwhite. The Frank Case began in April 1913 when Newt Lee, a night watchman, discovered the deceased body of Mary Phagan who had been raped and murdered. Police arrested several men during the investigation including Newt Lee, a Black watchman, Leo Frank, an Ashkenazic Jewish factory superintendent, and Jim Conley, a Black janitor. Frank’s defense team genuinely believed in the guilt of Conley, but sought to demonstrate Frank’s innocence by proving his whiteness in respect to Conley’s blackness, not through material evidence alone. Frank and his lawyers racialized the inclination to rape and murder as a “black action,” seeking to appeal to a racist America court system which privileged

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 172.

white people. Despite these attempts, Frank was convicted. Soon after the trial concluded, an Antisemitic mob seized and lynched Frank.<sup>25</sup> His death by lynching is notable as typically only blacks were lynched. Frank, racialized as white by his defense team and racialized as non-white by the general public, elucidated the shifting racialized lens through which Jews were viewed, both by the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

The Immigration Act of 1924 further validated racial and civilizational discrimination against Jews and Turks, severely limiting the number of Sephardic Jews who could migrate to the United States in the process. The Act permitted the establishment of new immigration quotas based on 2 percent of the foreign population in 1890.<sup>26</sup> The legal precedent privileged the immigration of Western and Northern European groups that the United States government perceived as racially and civilizationally superior.<sup>27</sup> After 1924, only 226 Turkish people in total could immigrate to the United States in a calendar year.<sup>28</sup> Sephardic immigration to Seattle subsequently declined with the introduction of this Act. In the World War II era, the ban had drastic consequences for Sephardic Jews on an international scale. Seattle's Sephardic Barkey family, for example, could not migrate to the United States on the verge of World War II because of anti-Jewish immigration laws. The family fled Nazi-occupied Europe to Tangier, Morocco, as it was one of the few neutral zones that welcomed Jewish refugees during World War II.<sup>29</sup> Eventually, the Barkey family came to Seattle after years of petitioning and paying a considerable sum to the United States government. While their story is one of successful escape,

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<sup>25</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 52-86; Jeffrey Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 88-108.

<sup>26</sup> Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: The Making of Modern America* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 23.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 21-24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Claire Barkey Flash and Cynthia Flash Hemphill, *A Hug from Afar: One Family's Dramatic Journey through Three Continents to Escape the Holocaust* (Bellevue: Flash Media Services, 2016), 95.

the vast majority of attempts to flee Nazi-occupied territories were doomed; millions of refugees perished in death camps because of the racist and Antisemitic policy of the United States government.

At times, Ashkenazic Jews supported the racialization of Turks and Sephardic Jews because it provided them an opportunity to reassert their own respective whiteness. Since whiteness is a social construct, Ashkenazic Jews had the ability to downplay the whiteness of Sephardic Jews to strengthen their own claim to it. While the Seattle-Sephardic case of Policar and Calvo's Jewishness being denied offers compelling evidence of intra-Jewish, race-based denigration, a case study in New York that compared Sephardim to Black Americans is perhaps most striking. In a 1926, a well-known social scientist, Louis M. Hacker, who later became the founding dean of the school of General Studies at Columbia University, asserted: "In New York City's population of some 1,500,000 Jews, there are 40,000 [Sephardic] souls who are almost as alien to their [Ashkenazic] kinsmen as are the negroes to the average white Southerner."<sup>30</sup> By equating Sephardim to Blacks and Ashkenazim to Southern Whites, Hacker utilized racialized classifications to distance Sephardic Jews from the wider Jewish community and demonstrate a Black-Sephardic equivalency, ultimately placing Ashkenazim on the white spectrum of the black-white dichotomy and Sephardim on the black spectrum. While the Hacker example does not itself pertain to Seattle-Sephardim, it reveals the racialized lens through which Ashkenazic Jews viewed Sephardic identity.

Notably, even in light of the Leo Frank and Hacker cases, some Seattle Sephardic Jews apologetically embraced being classified as non-white on account of their Jewish and so-called "Oriental" identity. Consider a 1928 article published the Seattle Jewish transcript:

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Hacker, "The Communal Life of the Sephardic Jews in New York City," (New York: National Conference of Jewish Social Service, 1926), 32.

Though some may not know it, we Jews were originally all half-niggers-- scientists refer to our race as the 'dark branch of the white race.' Its only in comparatively recent times that we've become Nordics, Deutschen, Russians, Yankees, and everything else under the sun but what we originally were-- Orientals... [yet] we [have still] remained passionate, liberty, and justice and beauty-loving Orientals.<sup>31</sup>

Asserting that all Jews are not white, but black or part black, the author reclaimed blackness and Orientalness as a means of defending the Sephardic community from racist defamation. He described Jews as “half-niggers” that were “passionate, liberty, justice and beauty-loving” to dismantle the black-white dichotomy which stated America was only for white people.<sup>32</sup> “Liberty” and “justice,” commonly-touted principles of the American nation, were also presented as Jewish and Oriental values.<sup>33</sup> Later in the article, the author further attempted to reframe Sephardic heritage to demonstrate the admirable nature of Jews’ Middle Eastern roots. He insisted Spain, a place typically viewed as Western, “was for a long time more of an Oriental than Occidental country;” the author alluded to the centuries of Muslim rule on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>34</sup>

### **World War II: The Role of Nazism, Antisemitism, and Xenophobia in Shaping Sephardic Self-Conceptualization**

While some Sephardim took pride in identifying as Ottoman and Jewish in the years leading up to the Second World, the rise of Nazism, Antisemitism, and xenophobia made the performance of Jewish and Ottoman identity more perilous than before. To demonstrate compatibility with the American nation during this era of uncertainty, Sephardim reimagined the

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<sup>31</sup> “Seattle Sephardim and the Ladino Language,” Seattle Jewish Transcript (Seattle, WA), March 23, 1928.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

hardships they faced upon first migrating to the United States to reposition themselves as firmly white instead of precariously white, ceasing to align with the black and Turkish communities in many instances. The physical manifestations which motivated Sephardim to recast their narrative—racial restrictive covenants— first emerged in Seattle during the mid 1920s and gained heightened popularity during World War II. These covenants barred Blacks, Asians, and Jews—referred to as “Hebrews”— from settling in most neighborhoods outside of Seattle’s Central District, the poorest neighborhood in Seattle and the place where Seattle’s Jews initially resided.<sup>35</sup> While Sephardim could feasibly escape some of these restrictions on account of their Spanish-sounding names, most chose to remain in the Central District because that is where the majority of Seattle Jews lived and where the most synagogues and Jewish community centers resided (see appendix 1).

Around the same time racial restrictive covenants emerged, the Washington Silver Shirts, an Antisemitic organization, garnered a strong presence in Seattle. Local Seattle journalist Dan Swett went on an undercover mission to investigate the Seattle chapter of this organization. He published an article in the *Seattle Sentinel* to document the existence of Antisemitism in Seattle, ultimately attempting to raise awareness and fight against the denigration of Jews. While undercover, Swett learned that many local Seattleites believed in the existence a secret Jewish Empire supposedly bent on taking over the world. Internalizing the absurd and baseless nature of these discussions, Swett noted those around him to be “of the most ignorant class of laborers.”<sup>36</sup> Notably, the Seattle Silver Shirts did not just ideologically consider themselves different than Jews, they felt ready to enact massive violence on Jews and anyone who defended them. Swett

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<sup>35</sup> Catherine Silva, “Racial Restrictive Covenants: Enforcing Neighborhood Segregation in Seattle,” *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project*, accessed November 12, 2017, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants\\_report.htm#\\_ednref5](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm#_ednref5)

<sup>36</sup> Dan Swett, “I Joined the Christian Party,” *The Sentinel* (Seattle, WA), July 30, 1936.

documents receiving a pamphlet ominously warned that “all Jews and ‘Jew-lovers’...are soon to be exterminated.”<sup>37</sup> He also received a death threat shortly after publishing his story.<sup>38</sup> While Seattle Sephardim did not match the Jewish stereotype of an Ashkenazic, Yiddish-speaking Jew, and could feasibly evade some forms of persecution, they still lived and operated in an Antisemitic environment, aware of the ways Antisemitism affected Jews around them.

During this period of rising Antisemitism and xenophobia, Albert Adatto constructed the first Seattle-Sephardic narrative to earn a master’s degree at the University of Washington. The memorialization of the first Seattle-Sephardic “pioneers” remained close his heart, himself being a first-generation migrant to Seattle from Istanbul, then part of the Ottoman Empire. His thesis discussed many aspects of Seattle-Sephardic life, chronicling everything from marriage customs to folklore to religious divisions and social harmony. Notably, when describing Sephardic relations with the non-Jewish community, Adatto lamented the pervasive effects of Western-held biases against the Middle East: “Until very recently and perhaps even today, westerners think of Abdul Hamid of Turkey in the light of the ‘sick man of Europe,’ secret dens of oriental splendor, harems, hand-woven rugs, and ‘blend’ for cigarettes... [these] popular conceptions concerning Turkey are grossly exaggerated and in many instances false.”<sup>39</sup> Adatto sought to address and dispel common Western-held belief systems—such as the aforementioned “terrible turk” and “sick man of Europe stereotypes— that denigrated people from the Middle East. His devotion to dismantling Orientalist thinking, importantly, was matched by his internalization of the Middle East as supposedly inferior; he stated: “it is true that the Near East was backward in comparison

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> W.N.S., “Jewish Editor Threatened by Silver Shirts,” *Bnai Brith Messenger* (Seattle, WA), July 31, 1936.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 44.

to the new discoveries and progress that developed in Europe.”<sup>40</sup> Privileging Western European culture, Adatto supported the racist idea of “feeble-minded Orientals” which viewed Jews of the Levant as racially and civilizationally inferior. While the biased nature of his comments cannot be excused, his characterization of Sephardic-Ottoman identity reflects the contradictory nature of his efforts to grapple with the place of his community in the racial and civilizational hierarchies in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, particularly around World War II.

To position Sephardic Jews more favorably in America’s racial hierarchies, Adatto capitalized on the Spanish and Western European nature of Sephardic identity. This, perhaps, is most evident in the very introduction of his thesis: “Sephardic Jewry’s greatest contribution to world Jewry as well as to western civilization rests in its creative development in Spain.”<sup>41</sup> By rearticulating Sephardim as primarily Spanish and describing Sephardic achievements in Spain as the greatest accolades of Sephardic history and memory, Adatto sought to resituate Sephardim in a broader Western American narrative that privileged people of Northern and Western European heritage. When introducing the Seattle-Sephardic narrative, Adatto asserted:

[Sephardic] history in Seattle must be accompanied with the thought of the great transition that has taken place. That is, a shift from a semi-medieval religious Moslem environment to a budding American city in the twentieth century. Like the first frontier, Seattle, “The Last Frontier,” has also been affected by the Spanish influence.<sup>42</sup>

Claiming that Sephardic Jews helped to modernize both the Ottoman Empire—the “first frontier”— and Seattle—“the last frontier”— Adatto simultaneously reinforced the purported backwardness of the Levant and positioned Sephardim favorably in the western expansionist Narrative of Seattle.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid 42-43

Suggesting that first generation Sephardic migrants sought assimilation and unequivocally became part of the American Nation, Adatto even referred to Policar and Calvo as “pioneers” in his writing. When introducing the first Seattle Sephardim, Adatto interlaced Sephardic reasons for migration with classical elements of Seattle culture to demonstrate Sephardic belonging in the West: “pioneer Sephardim were enamoured with Seattle and its environs. They were accustomed to a salt water atmosphere and this was an important factor in attracting Sephardim to Seattle.”<sup>43</sup> While Policar and Calvo initially came to Seattle to gain a foothold in the fishing industry, the explication that they came to Seattle primarily for Seattle’s “environs”—the majority of which had been unbeknownst to them in Marmara—obfuscates the challenges first Sephardic migrants faced when first transitioning into American life.

While Sephardic migrants might fit the modern connotations of “pioneers” because they were the first two Sephardic Jews to migrate to Seattle, a Seattleite had to be white to earn the status of “pioneer” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is essential to recognize that Policar, Calvo, and other first-generation migrants never belonged to the pioneering social class on account of their Jewish and Ottoman identities. According to Quintard Taylor, specialist of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Seattle history, this designation uniquely applied to “permanent residents” who “dominated Seattle’s economy and government despite their small numbers.”<sup>44</sup> Permanent residents who possessed political power disproportionately originated from Northern and Western European countries. Blacks, Ottomans, Jews, and others who did not fit the idealized notion of whiteness were denied entry to the “pioneer” social class on account of the black-white racial dichotomy

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<sup>43</sup> Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 60.

<sup>44</sup> Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), page ?

which slated anyone not from Northern and Western European countries as racially and civilizationally inferior.

Adatto's thesis demonstrates that Seattle Sephardic migrants went to great lengths to emphasize the European nature of their identity to gain admission into white America. Despite Sephardic attempts to position themselves as European, however, many did not desire to become American citizens right away. Calvo, for example, did not apply for naturalization until 1938 when he was 61 years old.<sup>45</sup> Policar applied in 1940 at age 63.<sup>46</sup> According to Marc Angel, a prominent Seattle-born Sephardic rabbi and historian, Policar and Calvo's reluctance to seek naturalization as American citizens is emblematic of a broader trend of hesitancy: "Sephardim in Seattle seem to have been slow in opting for American citizenship. By the end of 1912, it was reported that only one of the 600 Turkish Jews in Seattle had become an American citizen."<sup>47</sup> Shimon Nessim captured this ambivalence in 1928, several years after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, in the magazine of the Sephardic Brotherhood of America of New York: "Having lost our old homeland, has the Sephardi Jew adopted another one? No. We are a race without a homeland."<sup>48</sup> Recently transplanted into American life after being uprooted from the Ottoman Empire, Sephardim like Nessim considered themselves a distinct "race" and remained apprehensive about fully embracing America and becoming American citizens—even if they would be eligible if they could demonstrate their status as whites.

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<sup>45</sup> The National Archives at Seattle; Seattle, Washington; ARC Title: *Petitions for Naturalization, 1890 - 1991*; NAI Number: 592779; Record Group Title: *Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685 - 2009*; Record Group Number: 21.

<sup>46</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Washington, D.C.; *Naturalization Records of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington, 1890-1957*; Microfilm Roll: 113; Microfilm Serial: M1542.

<sup>47</sup> Marc Angel, "Notes on the Early History of Seattle's Sephardic Community" (California: Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1974), 28.

<sup>48</sup> Devin E. Naar, "Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924," in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2015), 205.

While Sephardic Jews situationally desired to position themselves as white or perform their white identity, they were also pushed to this end by the United States government. The U.S. believed reclassifying Jews as white would resolve conflict among white-passing ethnics and allow more “white” Americans to contribute to the war effort against Nazi Germany and its allies.<sup>49</sup> Jewish scholar Eric Goldstein further articulates the complex reasoning of the United States government: “Success in the war demanded unity, and Roosevelt and his administration resolved to fight against intergroup hostilities that might threaten the cohesion of American fighting forces or jeopardize efforts on the home front.”<sup>50</sup> The U.S. Government, continuing to operate through a black-white dichotomy, perceived Jews, Italians, and Irish as more apt to fit in with Northern and Western European groups that had already acculturated, primarily on account of their stereotypically white skin. Significantly, during this period, the U.S. Government made efforts to reduce the defamation of Jewish people specifically. For the first time in decades, the United States ceased classifying Jews as “Hebrews” on immigrant ships’ manifests, instead electing to utilize the designation “white.” They asserted the decades-old policy had been instituted arbitrarily and without foundation in American law, seeking to deny that racism has been the backbone of U.S. legal system since its inception.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 191-193.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 191.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 192.

## **Shifting Post-War Postulations: Rearticulating Whiteness, Spanish Identity, and Migration Difficulties**

In the years following World War II, both the Jewish and non-Jewish community describe Jewishness in racial and ethnic terms more frequently, seeking to distance themselves from the racialized vocabulary utilized by the Nazi regime.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the post-war era also witnessed America's broader adoption of new criteria for racial classification. While the United States ultimately still operated under a black-white dichotomy which severely discriminated against anyone deemed nonwhite, it became increasingly common to distinguish race according to not two, but three distinct categories: black, white, and yellow—alternatively, Caucasian, Negro, and Mongolian.<sup>53</sup> The growing American consensus to classify race according to color appealed to Jews who sought to position themselves as racially white and ethnically Jewish, or, perhaps, simply as religiously Jewish. Seattle Sephardim, seeking to distance themselves from race-based denigration that had characterized Sephardic Jewish life since the emergence of the eugenics movement and Orientalism, increasingly identified themselves as ethnically and religiously Jewish and, nationally, as Spanish.

The refashioning of Jewish racial identity influenced Sephardim to contemplate their history in new and revolutionary ways; significantly, Ottoman and Turkish heritage became increasingly subdued in Seattle-Sephardic narratives as Sephardim believed it disadvantageous to remind Sephardim, the wider Jewish community, and the non-Jewish community of Sephardic's Jews relatively recent arrival from the Muslim world. Instead of situationally emphasizing their Ottoman and Turkish heritage, Seattle Sephardim increasingly sought to portray themselves as a

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 192, 203.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, 204

purely Spanish and ethnically or religiously Jewish people. Consider University of Washington student David Romey's 1950 master's thesis on Seattle-Sephardic romances, refrains, and storied folklore: "Spain was truly the second promised land for the Sephardic Jew. Into Spanish soil he sunk his roots with a love and devotion that were equaled in no other land since the great Diaspora of the year 70 C.E. There on the Spanish peninsula he felt at home. Spanish climate, the hills, the olive groves, and the vineyards reminded him of Palestine."<sup>54</sup> By directly comparing Spain to Palestine, Romey claimed Spain had just as much significance to Jewish identity as Palestine, the most holy place in Jewish history and memory. Romey's exaltation of Spain as a Western country sharply contrasted with the 1928 Jewish Transcript article that positioned Sephardim as black and "Oriental," demonstrating that the Second World War and assimilation influenced Seattle Sephardim to rearticulate their history and identity as European as a means of self-protection.<sup>55</sup>

Roberta Noel Britt's 1981 dissertation "The Role of Rhodes and Turkish Women in the Seattle Sephardic Community," reproduced a similar narrative arc by highlighting Sephardic accolades in Spain and diminishing Sephardic intellectual and cultural development in the Ottoman Empire. Privileging Spanish history and culture, Britt contextualized her study of the history Turkish and Rhodes Sephardic women by declaring: "the Golden Age allowed Sephardic expression to reach a height of cultural awareness that had not been previously reached by Sephardim and that has never completely occurred since."<sup>56</sup> More than discrediting the intellectual and cultural accolades of Ottoman Sephardic Jews, Britt took part in reimagining and

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<sup>54</sup> David Romey, "A Study of Spanish Tradition in Isolation as Found in the Romances, Refranes, and Storied Folklore of the Seattle Sephardic community," (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1950), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Hacker, "The Communal Life of the Sephardic Jews in New York City," (New York: National Conference of Jewish Social Service, 1926), 32.

<sup>56</sup> Roberta Noel Britt, "The Role of Turkish and Rhodes Sephardic Women in the Seattle Sephardic Community," (Ann Arbor: The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, 1981), 219.

reshaping Sephardic identity as primarily Spanish. While Britt offered an unrepresentative account of Sephardic identity, the aspects of her dissertation which document and assess the role of Turkish and Rhodes women in the Seattle Sephardic community provide much insight into the gendered differences of Sephardic experiences, both with short and long-term transition into the American nation. Female Seattle Sephardim, per her research, faced discrimination on par with the citified persecution experienced by Russian Jews, albeit in nearly an opposite manner. While non-Jews persecuted female Russian Jews because their traditions and customs matched the “Jewish stereotype” of a Yiddish-speaking, Eastern European Jew, the traditions and customs of Sephardic women remained unknown to the non-Jewish and already established Jewish community. This meant Ashkenazic women endured Antisemitism for their appearing overtly Jewish and Sephardic women endured the grueling humiliation of having their language, culture, and customs, deemed illegitimate.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps even more significantly, Britt’s narrative highlighted that Sephardic women conceived of Jewish identity in a distinct way in the Post-War period. Britt interviewed Ann Hirschhorn, a second generation Sephardic Jew, whose responses elucidate the ways Seattle attitudes about Jewish identity shifted in the post-World War II period: “I would never have married outside of the Jewish faith...It would be too much of a difficulty to marry a Christian, because the background is too different from ours. I would not want to have the responsibility of educating a Christian man, and I would not want to give up my identity.”<sup>58</sup> Hirschhorn felt disinclined to marry outside of the Jewish “faith,” because educating a “Christian” would mean invariably involve religious and cultural reeducation. She did not conceive Jews and Christians

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 107.

differed racially, as “Hebrews” and whites, for example, but that the difference was religious and cultural.

Post-War narratives have not only obfuscated the complexity of Seattle-Sephardic identity, but blurred challenges faced by Sephardic Jews when they transitioned into the American nation. Compare Adatto’s 1939 description of jobs held by first generation Sephardic migrants to that of Lorraine Siddell in 1992. Adatto recalls that the first Sephardic Jews to arrive in Seattle held meager positions: “most of the men were engaged in selling fruit and fish and earned from five to twelve dollars a week. All of them were exceedingly frugal and very carefully saved from fifty to eighty per cent of their hard-earned money. Some worked twelve and fourteen hours a day.”<sup>59</sup> First migrants worked exceedingly long hours at blue collar jobs, earning just enough money to provide for themselves and their families. Sephardim did not migrate to the United States and immediately find themselves successful entrepreneurs. They began by working the lowest paying jobs and gradually worked their way up the career ladder in the face of Orientalism and Antisemitism. Siddell successfully acknowledges that: “[in] those early years in Seattle, everyone was struggling to get a foothold in the new land and no one had much money,” but later subdues immigration difficulties faced by Sephardim with the assertion: “while those who came to this country did not have a formal education, they knew how to read and write and how to develop and operate a business.”<sup>60</sup> Sidell then explains that Sephardic Jews held prominent positions in a variety of fields, including fishing, butchery, grocery, and candy making.<sup>61</sup> While Sephardim eventually became major stakeholders of the Pike Place market and

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<sup>59</sup> Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 61.

<sup>60</sup> Lorraine Sidell, “Sephardic Jews of Seattle,” in *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 24 (Santa Monica, Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1992), 205.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 205.

rose to prominence in a variety of other fields, this sort of business acumen did not come quickly nor easily because of the barriers Sephardim faced on account of their shifting place in America's racial hierarchies.

The 2002 film *The Sephardic Jews and the Pike Place Market* continued a pattern of migration and identity recalculation, most notably by placing a disproportionate focus on Sephardic business success and framing Sephardic Jews as predominantly Spanish. This film begins by explaining how Sephardim came to live in Seattle, describing a series of dislocations from Spain to the Ottoman Empire to Seattle. When detailing Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire, filmmakers emphasize the Spanish character of the Sephardic Jews: "For over 400 years...[Sephardim] adapted to life under the rule of various conquering nations all the while the Sephardim held onto the old aristocratic Spanish infusing it with words from their new homelands, creating their own unique language, Ladino."<sup>62</sup> Anachronistically referring to the Ottoman Empire as "various conquering nations" when nationalism movements did not begin in the Ottoman Empire until the nineteenth century, filmmakers create the illusion that Jews endured constant instability while living in Muslim lands.<sup>63</sup>

In regard to Sephardic business success in the Pike Place Market, the film critically documented sacrifices given by Sephardic Jews as they helped to establish a major Seattle landmark, but overemphasized the ease with which Sephardic Jews achieved business success in a society that was biased against Jews and Ottomans. On account of their migrant status and America's racist sociopolitical views, Sephardim migrated to Seattle unaware of how American business scene functioned, and faced even greater obstacles adjusting to this system on account

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<sup>62</sup> Sadis, Stephen, dir. *The Sephardic Jews and the Pike Place Market*. 2001; Seattle, WA: Perpetual Motion Pictures, 2001. DVD.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

of their decreased socioeconomic opportunities. The Waterfront Fish and Oyster Company, Palace Fish, Pinky's Place, and other Sephardic businesses eventually became focal points of Seattle culture and lore, but only a minority of Sephardic Jews owned and worked in these industries.<sup>64</sup> The film diminishes hardships faced by Seattle Sephardim to demonstrate Sephardic belonging in formative Seattle history, creating an overly optimistic narrative that, unfortunately, does not capture representative lived experiences. Seattle Sephardic labor history more aptly coincide with the ruminations of a 1913 Sephardic Jew who wrote for La Vara newspaper: “[Sephardim] I see you labor night and day and the first of the month comes all too soon, the landlord demanding rent. Immigrants [in America] arrive and find themselves in the same economic position. Jews in Turkey think that money grows on trees here, but the truth is that this country yields not only dollars (dolares) but also pain (dolores).”<sup>65</sup> Seattle Sephardim surmounted many sociopolitical barriers through their eventual success at the Pike Place Market, but their successes required sacrifices that spanned the course of generations.

The testimony of Marc Angel, a Sephardic Jew born and raised in the Seattle in the years after World War II, further demonstrates the extent to which Sephardim struggled to navigate life in the United States, unrooted to either the Jewish or non-Jewish community on account of their shifting whiteness. In “A Personal and Scholarly Account: Early Sephardim in Seattle,” Angel recalled the frustration of trying to decipher his own identity as a second-generation American Jew who was not Ashkenazic: “There is a problem being a minority within a minority. One confuses what he is with what people tell him he is. One is told by outsiders what his culture and background is. The non-Jews tell us what Jews are and the Ashkenazim also tell us what Jews

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 27.

are.”<sup>66</sup> Growing up Sephardic presented unique challenges as both the non-Jewish community and broader Jewish community sought to undermine Sephardic self-definition. Importantly, Angel related that he did not just experience forthright external discrimination, but that the broader Jewish education system coached him into believing in the supposed inferiority of his own community:

The Ashkenazim would challenge us: "What have the Sephardim done since 1492? Whom have you produced? In all honesty, can your culture compare in any way with Vilna or Lodz or some other place?" And I had no answers. Unfortunately, few of our elders in the Sephardic community knew enough of their own history to enlighten the younger generation. And so, I and my entire Sephardic generation were raised without a history. We never knew who we were or where we had come from. We only sensed from what teachers and fellow students told us that we were somehow inferior as Jews, somehow only borderline Jews.<sup>67</sup>

Convinced to believe Sephardic history and memory could never match that of Ashkenazic Jews, Angel began to regard his own culture as socially, historically, and intellectually inferior. To make matters worse, Seattle’s Hebrew schools had little stability and organization in their most formative years.

The first official Sephardic Talmud Torah, or Hebrew school for Sephardic Jews, opened its doors in 1915.<sup>68</sup> Located inside synagogue Sephardic Bikur Holim, the school sought to teach Sephardic Jews the Hebrew language as well as Jewish culture and history. Divisiveness among the Sephardic Jewish community soon resulted in creation of three separate Sephardic Talmud Torahs. Each synagogue felt reluctant to support the establishment of a single Talmud Torah for all Sephardic Jews, believing that regional differences would not be adequately represented in such a place. Unfortunately, education inside each of these Talmud Torahs still left Seattle

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<sup>66</sup> Marc Angel, “A Personal and Scholarly Account: Early Sephardim in Seattle,” in *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 29 (Santa Monica, Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1996), 562.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* 563.

<sup>68</sup> Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 73.

Sephardim without the most basic knowledge on their culture. In his thesis, Adatto characterizes these places of instruction by their “incompetent teachers, [use of] unscientific punishment, and arbitrary classroom procedure.”<sup>69</sup> Eventually, Sephardic Jews transitioned into Ashkenazic Talmud Torahs to gain better access to better education. Angel lamented the slighted education he received in one of these institutions:

I attended the Ashkenazi Seattle Hebrew Day School until grade eight. A lot of Sephardic children did. During all those eight years I never found out what being a Sephardic Jew meant. I never learned a bit about the history and culture of my particular people, certainly not after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. On the contrary, all Jewish customs and all Jewish history from that time on seemed to be only Ashkenazic. The teachers told us that on Hanukkah Jews ate "latkes." But at home we ate ‘bourmuellos’ ... Subtly and without me or anyone else realizing it, my Sephardic identity was being relegated to the periphery of my existence.<sup>70</sup>

The general Sephardic transition from Sephardic-led Talmud Torahs to Ashkenazic-led Talmud Torahs allowed Sephardim an improved chance to learn Hebrew, yet, simultaneously, resulted in Sephardim being robbed of the opportunity to learn more about Sephardic-specific history and culture, especially that which dealt with Sephardic ancestry and roots in the Ottoman Empire.

The Ashkenazic denigration of Sephardic identity, history, and memory described in Angel’s exposition is subdued in Molly Cone, Howard Droker and Jacqueline William’s 2003 book, *Family of Strangers: Building a Jewish Community in Washington State*. Their narration of Sephardic history, imbued by their lived experiences and diverse work in a variety of fields outside of academia, succeeded in documenting the many differences in religion, language, and culture between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Yet, it overemphasized the extent to which unity characterized Seattle’s intra-Jewish relations. The framing of Sephardic and Ashkenazic relations becomes tenuous with the utilization of a quote by Russian Jew Esther Borish Friedman: “they’re

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>70</sup> Marc Angel, “Notes on the Early History of Seattle’s Sephardic Community” (California: Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1974), 563.

[Sephardic] Jews and we're [Ashkenazic] Jews, we just didn't get along."<sup>71</sup> While Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazic Jews both struggled to understand one another on behalf of their different ways of life, portraying Sephardim and Ashkenazim as mutually dismissive of one another conceals the extent to which Ashkenazim "othered" Sephardim to reassert their own superiority in Seattle.

Cone, Droker, and Williams disregard the power differential which characterized Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations by disproportionately documenting and emphasizing the instances in which Ashkenazim helped Sephardim. Stories are told of Ashkenazim showing Sephardim how to use an American bank or Ashkenazim helping Sephardim fund various places of religious worship, but few sources document the contributions Sephardim made to the broader Jewish community. Near the end of the section on "Unity, Division, and Friction," Cone, Droker, and Williams utilize a quote by a Sephardic Jew Albert Franco to further conflate the supposed harmony that characterized Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations: "Socially and economically they [Ashkenazim] were so far above us [Sephardim], yet they helped, and they helped generously."<sup>72</sup> The authors reframe Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations as paternalistic to tell a story of unity that is unrepresentative of the discord that generally characterized intra-Jewish relations in early Seattle.

Perhaps more problematic than the assertion that Sephardim and Ashkenazim had cordial relations is the reductive explication that Sephardim and Ashkenazim must invariably reconcile their differences on account of their shared Jewishness. The last section in Cone, Droker, and William's chapter about Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations begins by explaining that all difficult relations between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, past and present, can ultimately be subsumed by

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<sup>71</sup> Molly Cone, Howard Droker, and Jacqueline Williams, *Family of Strangers: Building a Jewish Community in Washington State* (Seattle and London: Washington State Jewish Historical Society and University of Washington Press, 2003), 73.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

an intangible, invisible bond: “Despite the marked differences between the two mainstream Jewish cultures and the separations within both the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim, the tradition of ‘Klal Yisrael’ (peoplehood), the spiritual connection of every Jew to every other Jew, created an invisible bond that could not be ignored.”<sup>73</sup> While Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews fostered unity and community in a variety of instances, the assertion that an “invisible bond” of unity between the two groups overcame all other types of adversity does not give justice to the complexity of the historical situation. Sephardim and Ashkenazim, undeniably, are both Jewish, but capitalizing their shared Jewishness to obfuscate tense relations serves to invalidate the many hardships Sephardim experienced, especially those hardships endured at the hands of Ashkenazim.

While a 2003 repositioning of Sephardic-Ashkenazic relations served to delegitimize the social and racial denigration Sephardim experienced upon migrating to the United States, Spain’s 2015 decision to offer Spanish citizenship to those Jews it expelled in 1492 perhaps created the most divisiveness among the Seattle Sephardic community in recent years. Spain framed their Sephardic citizenship campaign as an earnest attempt at reconciliation, but many Sephardic activists and scholars argued that Spain’s gesture does not come from a place of sincerity. Angel viewed the Sephardic citizenship campaign as: “a pragmatic move by Spain to attract Jewish business, investment as tourism.”<sup>74</sup> The Spanish government requires Sephardic Jews to pass a variety of tests and obstacles to earn citizenship, proof of ancestry and a Spanish language test being two of the main prerequisites. Some note that Spain does not want all Jews back, just Jews the Spanish Government deems will become useful, money-making citizens. This train of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Nina Shapiro, “Seattle Jews weigh becoming Spanish citizens, more than 500 years after expulsion,” Seattle Times (Seattle, WA), August 9, 2015; Marc Angel, “Spanish Passports for Sephardic Jews?” Ideals Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2015.

thought has led many Jews to believe the Spanish government's decision to invite Jews back to Spain might be proof of Spain's continued ascription to anti-Jewish and Antisemitic stereotypes which position Jews as exorbitantly rich, and thus valuable to Spain during its economic downturn.

Those who believe the Spanish government is motivated by the stereotype of the "rich Jews" point to the fact that "rich Jew" stereotype has been an integral feature of Spanish legal doctrine at least since the 1492 Alhambra decree—the legislation which expelled Jews from Spain. The Alhambra decree, permitted Jews to bring their belongings with them if they decided to maintain their Jewish faith and leave Spain, excluding "gold or silver or minted money or other things prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms." Spanish Monarchs believed Jews held an enormous quantity of riches and wanted to deprive them of these supposed funds if Jews decided to leave the country. Perhaps, Spanish Monarchs even counted on the fact that most Jews would reject conversion and issued the Alhambra Decree because they thought it would undoubtedly result in profit. Those who ascribe to this view assert that Sephardim have not been invited back to Spain out of an attempt at reconciliation, but because the Spanish Government believes Jews will bring riches into Spain and thus restore the Spanish economy.

Seattle author Stuart Eshkenazi and artist Emily Alhadeff constructed a comic to encourage local Seattle Sephardim to embrace this offer of citizenship, highlighting Sephardic connection to Spain and subduing Sephardic connection to the Ottoman Empire in the process (see appendix 2). Their cartoon consists of 7 illustrated panels which trace Sephardim's life in Spain, expulsion to the Ottoman Empire, migration to Seattle, Sephardic life in Seattle, and, finally, a happy Sephardic man who has chosen to embrace his Spanish heritage. The first panel features Sephardic Jews in Spain and is captioned with the phrase "quien no sabe de mar, no sabe

de mal” or “he who knows nothing of the sea knows nothing of suffering.”<sup>75</sup> Ironically, both the Jews who left Spain for the Ottoman Empire *and* the Jews who left the Ottoman Empire for Seattle traveled to a new homeland via the sea, yet only the exodus from Spain is depicted as displacement in the cartoon. The hand of a figure clothed in royal garb, presumably King Ferdinand II of Aragon, directs Jews to leave Spain. Meanwhile, a Sephardic Jew excitedly rushes from the Ottoman Empire to America, his movement captioned: “ticket to America!”<sup>76</sup> While some elements of the two historical situations differ—Jews were forced from Spain and had the option to remain in the Ottoman Empire—the artist’s proclamation that Jews who have to leave their homes know suffering suggests that Sephardic Jews traveling to Seattle should also have experienced feelings of displacement. Yet, the cartoon illustrates Sephardim disassociating from the Ottoman Empire with ease and excitement.

The cartoon continues to reimagine the past by misconstruing the nature of first interactions between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. A later panel illustrates the arrival of the first Sephardic Jews in Seattle. These men are clothed in European-style pantsuits, not in Ottoman-style dress, and exclaim “Yehudi!” or “Jew!” in an attempt to find the already-established Jewish community. An Ashkenazic rabbi stands next to the men, a surprised expression on his face. A caption next the three men reads: “An Ashkenazi rabbi helped them out.”<sup>77</sup> While the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities eventually established cordial relations, the already-established community doubted the very Jewishness of Sephardim when the first Jews migrated to Seattle. Furthermore, it was not even a rabbi who first helped out Policar and Calvo, but a

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<sup>75</sup> Stuart Eshkenazi and Emily Alhadeff, “Sephardic Comic” *Jews in Seattle* (Seattle, WA 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

non-Jewish Greek man.<sup>78</sup> The Greek man took the Sephardic migrants to an Ashkenazic man named Mr. Rickles, who was not a rabbi as this cartoon suggests, but an average businessman. Mr. Rickles thoroughly questioned the Jewishness of both Policar and Calvo, eventually writing to a rabbi in New York to verify the Jewishness of the two Sephardic men, not believing their identity even after Policar and Calvo brought out their prayer books.<sup>79</sup> Eshkenazi and Alhadeff emphasized a sense of Jewish unity that did not characterize first interactions, subduing Ashkenazic denigration of Sephardic identity in their new narration.

The cartoon ends by presenting an image of a young Sephardic man in a hammock, smiling as he dreams of paella, sangria, and a flamenco dancer.<sup>80</sup> As paella, sangria, and flamenco did not characterize life in medieval Spain, nor characterize Sephardic culture in present times, these elements are meant to demonstrate that by applying for Spanish citizenship, Sephardic Jews can Europeanize their identity. While the rhetorical purpose of the cartoon is to encourage Sephardic Jews to apply for Spanish citizenship, the underlying assumption is that Sephardic Jews want to return to Spain and consider Spain to be their ancestral homeland. The Ottoman Empire, in contrast, remains the most tangible Sephardic homeland in recent memory. Second generation Sephardic Americans have attested to the peculiarity of calling Spain their homeland in an article published in the *Seattle Times*. Marlene Souriano-Vinikoor recalled her parents were born in Turkey, not Spain. She distanced herself from Spanish customs by declaring that her family did not eat the Spanish dish paella, but Yaprakes, a Turkish stuffed grape leaves dish. Another local Sephardic Jew, Isaac Azose, asserted “I feel very strongly that I am Turkish”

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<sup>78</sup> Albert Adatto, “Sephardim and the Seattle Community” (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1939), 56.

<sup>79</sup> Sema Calvo, interviewed by Karyl Winn and Jeanette Schrieber, May 25, 1972; Fortuna Calvo, interviewed by Fannie Roberts, February 9, 1976.

<sup>80</sup> Stuart Eshkenazi and Emily Alhadeff, “Sephardic Comic” *Jews in Seattle* (Seattle, WA 2015).

when asked his thoughts on applying for Spanish citizenship.<sup>81</sup> Ironically, the generation of Sephardic Jews that attempted to Europeanize Seattle-Sephardic history are now requesting to be identified as Turkish, not Spanish.

### **Looking Forward: Changing Performance of Spanish and Ottoman Identity**

When the first Sephardic Jews arrived in Seattle in the early twentieth century, they, like Marlene Souriano-Vinikoor and Isaac Azose, strongly identified with the Ottoman aspects of their identity. Only after being denigrated by the already-established, Ashkenazic Jewish community and the non-Jewish community on account of their shifting place in America's shifting racial hierarchies did they recast their origin story to demonstrate Sephardic whiteness and belonging in the American Nation. A new rendition of the Seattle Sephardic origin story emerged in the years preceding World War II that subdued Sephardic immigration difficulties, concealed conflicts with the already-established Ashkenazic community, and obscured the institutional barriers which afforded Sephardic Jews fewer opportunities and much discrimination. In the post-War era, Sephardim articulated Jewishness as a racial and ethnic identity rather than a racial one to further strengthen their claim to whiteness. Perhaps, most significantly, throughout both the pre and post-World War II era, Seattle Sephardim came to identify primarily as Spanish, not Ottoman, to demonstrate belonging in a country which privileged Western and Northern European nationals. While Souriano-Vinikoor's and Azose's viewpoints demonstrate that a new wave of Sephardic identity rearticulation might be taking place in modern times, the publication of Eshkenazi and Alhadef's cartoon in a major Seattle

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<sup>81</sup> Nina Shapiro, "Seattle Jews weigh becoming Spanish citizens, more than 500 years after expulsion," Seattle Times (Seattle, WA), August 9, 2015.

magazine reveals that many Sephardim still self-conceptualize as European and position Sephardic history as a subcategory of Western history.

Yet, Souriano-Vinikoor and Azose's decision to classify their Sephardic identity as predominantly Ottoman is significant in that it signals a new type of precarious Sephardic whiteness in the twenty-first century. Souriano-Vinikoor, Azose, and other Sephardim likely feel comfortable claiming Turkish identity on account of their combined historical and physical distance from the Ottoman Empire. Being American-born, middle class, English speakers who do not have a "foreign" accent, they are able to perform the Middle Eastern nature of their identity with fewer repercussions than Policar, Calvo, and other first-generation Sephardim who operated in an environment more critically characterized by its Orientalist nature. Cumulatively, in modern day Seattle, claiming Turkishness does not necessarily prevent a Sephardic Jew from also claiming whiteness. This, importantly, is not to suggest that Sephardic Jews have successfully "become white" in recent decades. One only needs to be reminded of the recent Charlottesville Marches where white supremacists chanted "Jews will not replace us," to disavow any notion that Jews are perceived as unquestionably white in current societal discourse. Under differing sociopolitical frames which draw upon discriminatory stereotypes both old and new, the whiteness of Sephardic Jewish identity continues to remain precarious.

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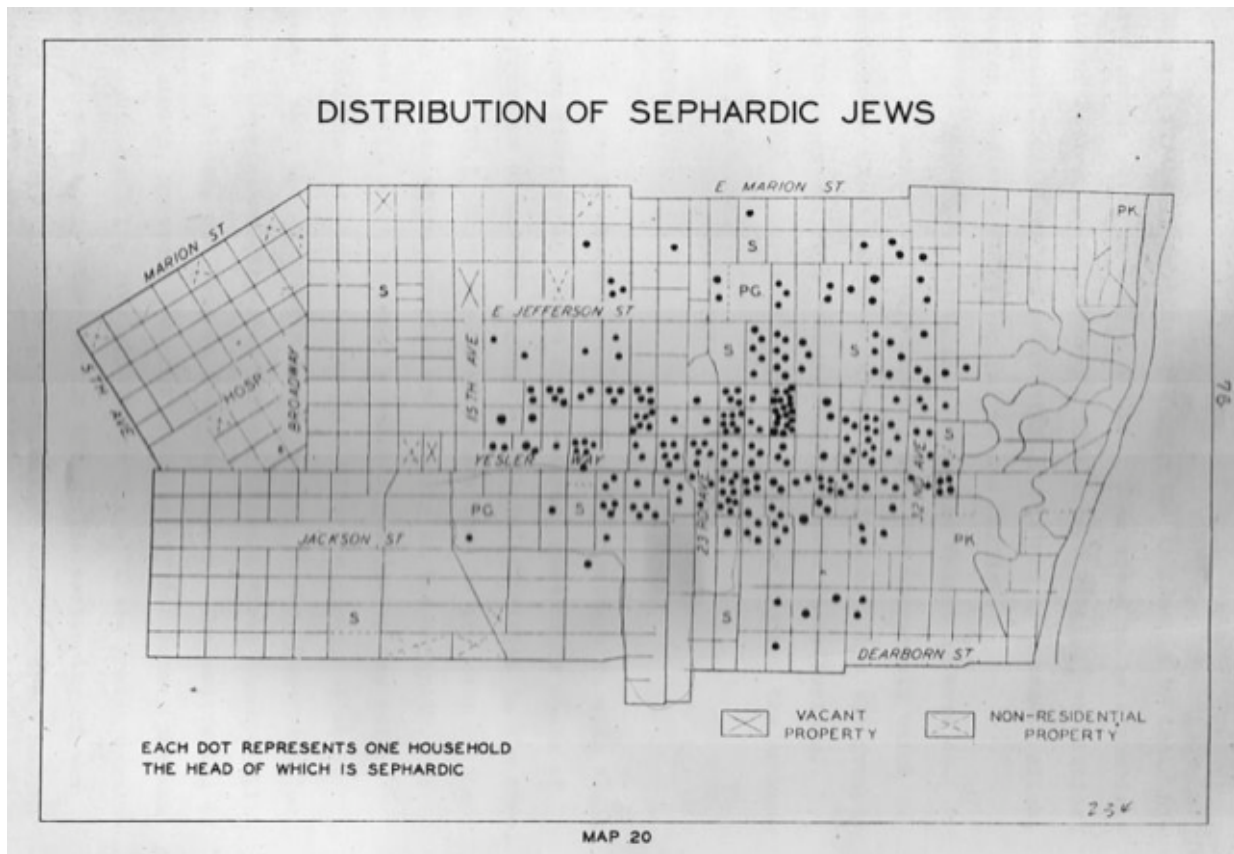
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Appendix 1



Appendix 2



"onde iras, amigos toparas."  
Wherever you go, may you find friends.



They Spoke Ladino with their friends. They practiced their religion freely. They drank raki and ate biscuchos.

Most of the Spanish Jews landed in the Ottoman Empire for the next 400 years. Life was pretty good!



But then... the Ottoman Empire started to fall apart. Life wasn't so good anymore. The Jews who had been happily settled in Turkey and Rhodes heard about a new land far away that would remind them of home: Seattle!

The first two Sephardic Jews settled in Seattle in 1902. They spoke no English and no Yiddish, and according to one legend they stood on a street corner and called out -



Until an Ashkenazi rabbi helped them out.

Seattle welcomed the Sephardic Community!



They contributed to the founding of Pike Place Market and built two Sephardic Synagogues - one for Jews from Rhodes, one for Jews from Turkey.

Life is good!

But now Spain has come to terms with an evil from its past. In October, Spain begins accepting applications for citizenship from Sephardic Jews around the world.



for more information about Spanish citizenship for Sephardic Jews, visit [SeattleSephardicnetwork.org](http://SeattleSephardicnetwork.org)