

The Face of the American Jew

Who is a Jew? What is a Jew? Students of American Jewish history are frequently confronted with these questions: Does the term "Jew" designate a member of a race, of a state, of a people, a culture, a religion? Does Jewishness bespeak a combination of peoplehood, culture, and religion? Is Jewishness an accident of birth, or is it devotion to a historical ideal and a way of life?

Jews constitute no "race," but are found in a wide variety of "racial" groups. Jews are apparently more than a people. They have no common language and manifest no common political or national allegiance; yet the kinship uniting them, all over the world, is infinitely stronger, infinitely deeper than the ties between fellow-members of a state or a people. Not even religion would seem to define them. Can a man be an atheist, denying God and Judaism, and yet be a fervent and accepted member of Jewry by virtue of his "Jewish nationalism"? Were non-religionists like Brandeis and Einstein Jews? There are Caucasians of Jewish birth, whose contributions to any Jewish philanthropy are nil and who refuse to attend any religious service; are they Jews? There are Negroes who have embraced Judaism, go to the synagogue at least on the High Holidays, and give liberally of their talents to Jewish causes; are they not Jews? Must one *look* like a Jew to be a Jew? And, in any case, what does it mean to look like a Jew?

The editors of this magazine have selected at random photographs of eight Americans whom they consider to be Jews. Readers may or may not agree with us. After looking at these pictures, you may still ask us: Who is a Jew? What is a Jew? Our answer is: Anyone is a Jew who claims to be and is accepted as such by the body of Jewry. Turn the page, and you will see the face of the American Jew.



Courtesy, The Cincinnati Enquirer

Roberta Peters
Singer



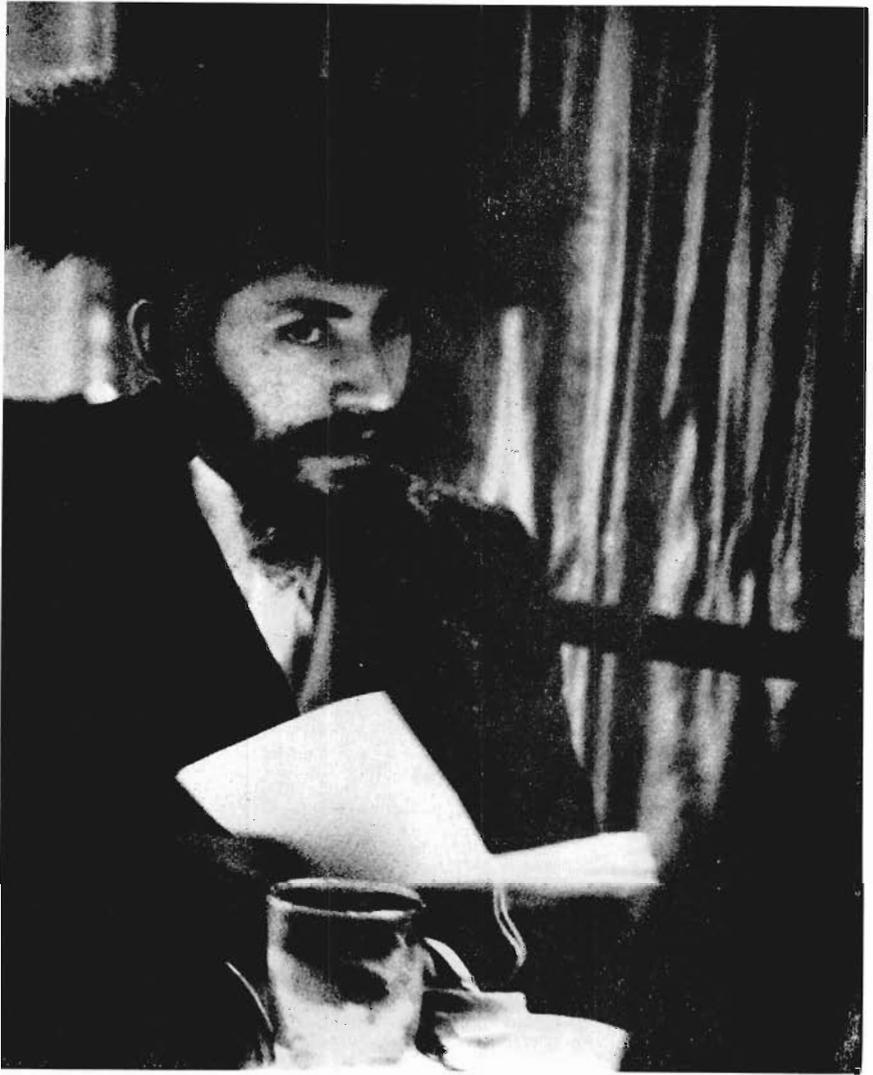
Courtesy, The American Jewish Committee, New York

Jacob Blaustein
Communal worker, philanthropist, and industrialist



Courtesy, University of Cincinnati Medical School

Dr. Albert Sabin
Virologist



Courtesy, Gert Berliner, New York

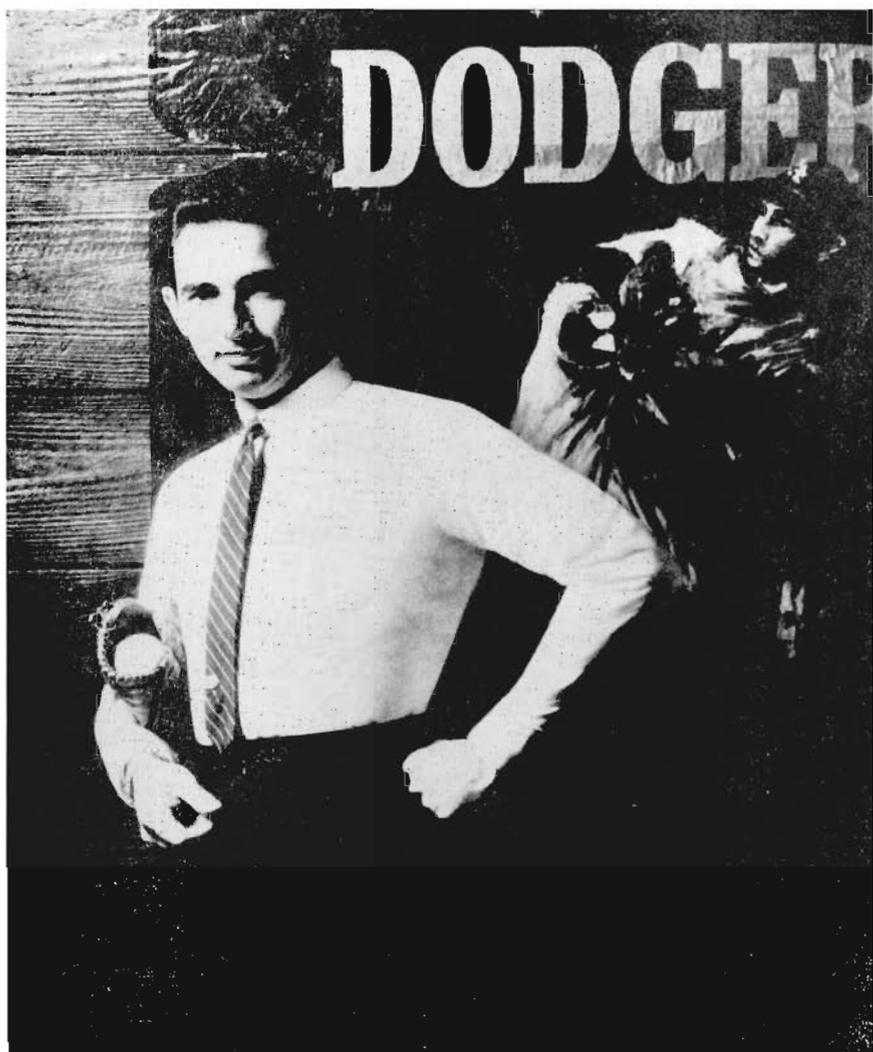
A Hasidic Jew of Brooklyn



Marie Syrkin
Littérateur



Ben Shahn, Artist



Courtesy, Manhattan Shirt Co., New York

Sandy Koufax
Ballplayer



Courtesy, Cincinnati Post and Times-Star

Sammy Davis, Jr.
Actor

A Description of America, 1785

CECIL ROTH

The letter published below associates the names of two of eighteenth-century Anglo-Jewry's most remarkable personalities, both of them important also in the life of the general community. The recipient was Emanuel Mendes da Costa (1717-1791), a scion of one of the oldest and most distinguished families of London's Spanish and Portuguese synagogue. Breaking with the hardheaded business tradition of his family and forebears, Emanuel made his reputation as a scientist and scholar. One of the most eminent British naturalists of his generation, specializing in conchology and mineralogy, he was at the same time intelligently interested in archaeology and became an antiquary of some distinction. A number of works which he published on his chosen subjects were regarded as fundamental in his day, and some of them were translated, moreover, into foreign languages. He was a candidate for the Librarianship of the newly-founded British Museum in 1754, and a member of several learned societies in England and abroad. In 1747, he was a Fellow and subsequently, in 1763, Clerk of the Royal Society, the oldest and greatest of English associations of the type. But his moral fibre was weak; his passion for collecting — coupled, it was said, with his wife's personal extravagance — overwhelmed his slender inherited resources, and ultimately he was dismissed from his office, and from the Society, for dishonesty.

Nevertheless, he continued to be in touch with scholars throughout Europe — though, of course, especially in England — and he had the habit, of inestimable importance to posterity, of keeping all the letters that he received. These are now preserved in a series of impressive volumes in the British Museum (Add. Mss. 28534-28544). A number of them were used to good effect by the early nineteenth-century literary historian, John Nichols, former owner of the collection, in his *Literary Anecdotes* and other works, and I

Dr. Cecil Roth, from 1939 until recently Reader in Jewish Studies at England's Oxford University, is among the most distinguished of Jewish scholars. His most recent work, *Essays and Portraits in Anglo-Jewish History*, appeared in March, 1963. In 1964 he settled in Israel.