
Jewish Street Merchants and Mass Consumption in New York City, 1880 – 1914

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Rootless and vulnerable, canvassing the rural areas of Poland and America, surviving by means of quick wits, verbal finesse, and sheer stamina, the peddler had been for centuries a symbol of Jewish life in the Diaspora. By the early twentieth century, the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews into New York City had created the basis for a new kind of peddler, one who functioned as part of a sizable commercial network within a well-defined urban area. Yet, subtle changes in the economic character of peddling were masked by the symbolic appeal of these lone and humble merchants.

Traditional Views of the Street Peddler

To contemporaries who observed the strains and humiliations characterizing the life of peddlers, the curbside merchant seemed to embody the rootlessness and desolation of modern life. In a 1902 poem, Morris Rosenfeld, the celebrated Yiddish poet of Jewish life in the American city, eulogized “The Greenhorn Peddler.” The man who had been the intellectual light of his peers in the old country was compelled by conditions in America to live out an undistinguished life at the helm of a pushcart. “Oy, how pitifully he goes around, knocking on strange doors!” Rosenfeld wrote, “such is the way a beautiful flower withers, that would have adorned a people.”¹

Reinforcing the literary image of the Jewish street peddler, the *Yiddishes Tageblatt*, the popular daily newspaper which published “The Greenhorn Peddler,” printed the melancholy description of streetside trade written in 1903 by Rose Pastor, a young Polish Jew who was the paper’s assistant editor. Pastor focused on a poor, elderly woman, a

relatively recent arrival in America, who scraped together a living by selling Sabbath candles. Her features paled by exhaustion and her body covered by a coarse jacket and shawl, the woman momentarily set her basket down in front of a store in order to make change for one of her few customers. Immediately, the storekeeper came out and kicked the basket into the street. Distraught, the old woman could do nothing but give thanks to God that the road was dry and that the candles were not ruined. Concluding her careful description of this downtrodden peddler, Pastor commented on the sadness of a world in which "so much pain and sorrow, so much poverty and suffering" was heaped upon those who were "God's best beloved."²

The Commercial Importance of Street Peddlers

Provoked by what they considered to be the pathetic condition of pushcart peddlers, Rosenfeld and Pastor discovered a vehicle for exposing the trauma of immigration and the purported evils of capitalism. Yet, enhanced over subsequent decades by feelings of nostalgia for a time when commerce was conducted in foreign languages over the tops of wagons, the image of the street markets as the domain of old-fashioned women and bedraggled vendors has obscured the commercial significance of Jewish peddlers from Eastern Europe. While the whirl of life on the city streets seemed to suggest nothing but confusion, the collective effort of these anonymous immigrants ended up broadening the scope of urban consumption. Turning a primitive form of retailing into an urban institution, they introduced a wide range of affordable luxuries and a degree of service that had formerly been alien to outdoor marketing. As a result of this entrepreneurial innovation, Jewish newcomers from the impoverished shtetls and cities of Eastern Europe bolstered the power and the prestige of ordinary consumers, aiding many newcomers in their search for an American lifestyle.

Given the image of the Lower East Side of New York as a turn-of-the-century monument to poverty, it is not surprising that the nature of Jewish peddling has been incompletely understood. Overlooking evidence of a boom in consumer spending during the decades of heavy immigration, scholars have perceived the dense Jewish section of lower Manhattan as a prototype of urban poverty in the United States, and the Jewish population that lived there continues to be broadly

described as impoverished.³ This view has been sustained by the argument that the urban “ghettos” emerging in the late nineteenth century were locales in which consumers were burdened with inferior merchandise and inflated prices.⁴ In actuality, the Eastern European Jewish immigration to New York City generated a high level of demand for new luxuries, which intensified retail commerce.

The ethnic districts of the United States prior to 1914 offered newcomers a range of products that would have been inconceivable in the depressed rural areas inhabited by the European peasantry as well as in the ramshackle shtetlach and urban ghettos of the Eastern European Jews. The poorest Jewish section of New York’s City’s Lower East Side, observed a visiting French clergyman in 1905, “in no way reminds one of the leprous-looking ghetto familiar in Europe.”⁵ A few years later, Walter Weyl, the Progressive writer who considered the expanded role of the American consumer to be a basis for social reform, made a similar comparison between the Italian district of New York and the cities of southern Italy. Taking note of the relative scarcity of beggars, the ample and stylish dress of the people, and the array of products sold in the neighborhood, Weyl contrasted these conditions to “the abysmal wretchedness of Naples and Palermo,” and he concluded that “the poor Italian has money, and he buys.”⁶

The Jewish streets of downtown New York inspired Henry James to speak of the “new style of poverty” in the American city, a social phenomenon of the first order that eluded most observers who were preoccupied with the environmental problems of the Lower East Side. As the great novelist walked through the area in 1904, after a twenty-two-year sojourn in Europe, he was surprised and impressed by “the blaze of the shops addressed to the New Jerusalem wants and the splendor with which these were taken for granted.” Not oblivious to the sordid aspects of the crowded Jewish neighborhoods, James nonetheless considered the massive striving of the people for a more refined existence to be “the larger harmony” that united the energies of immigrants who had become urban consumers in America.⁷

Consumption as Americanization

Jews found in the new arena of urban consumption not simply an escape from the inveterate scarcity of the Old World but the most immediately accessible way to identify themselves as Americans. In

1902, the *Yiddishes Tageblatt* alluded to the fundamental relationship between sophistication in consumption and change in cultural identity. Purporting to give—as the subtitle of a feature article declared—“Clear Evidence How Jews Green Themselves Out Very Quickly in This Land,” the newspaper described the rise of material aspirations and living standards among Jewish newcomers during the 1890s.

In clothing the East Side beats all other worker neighborhoods and it does not stand behind the most beautiful business areas. The Jewish quarter is the best customer for silk and velvet, and also for gold and diamonds. . . . Furniture stores have multiplied and grown big and beautiful. The most beautiful furniture is sold on the East Side, and pianos have become a fashion in Jewish homes.⁸

Jews had found that the first step in becoming Americans, and the most visible sign of a new identity, was the adoption of an American standard of living.

The maturation of street marketing at the turn of the century depended on the determination of immigrants, as consumers, to increase their purchasing power. Emerging as a conspicuous part of city life during the massive Irish and German immigration of the 1840s and 1850s, street marketing in New York City appears to have originated in the need of poor people for inexpensive produce.⁹ Until the arrival of the eastern and southern Europeans, however, this form of selling was a slow-moving tributary of the city’s rapidly flowing trade. In 1870, the streetside vendor of Manhattan was observed to have “much leisure to spend in cloudy revery, in tranquil chat with a neighbor, in poring over a book or paper, in smoking a pipe, or in dozing,” his existence appearing to be a “monotonous and uneventful round.”¹⁰

The Function and Scope of Street Peddling

During the last decades of the century, the growth of the urban population and of the marketing system produced a congestion in the retail trade of New York City that a new ethnic army of street merchants would help to relieve. After the Civil War, when railroads came to dominate the transport of foodstuffs, shippers and buyers tended more than ever to concentrate their business in the downtown markets that had formerly thrived on water-borne commerce. The presence of a centralized market enabled distant shippers to increase the likeli-

hood that their goods would find buyers, and it gave buyers the opportunity to inspect the quality and quantity of incoming foods with a minimum of effort.

The bulk of the produce arriving in the metropolitan area was collected at the Washington Market, a depot that eventually occupied nearly fifty-six acres on the Lower West Side between West and Hudson streets below Fulton Street. The primary point of distribution for the city's unusual variety of fish, which came not only from fisheries in the Northeast but also from California and England, was the Fulton Market on the Lower East Side, situated several blocks below the Brooklyn Bridge. In the early 1880s, when the Fulton Fish Market, equipped with enormous refrigeration units, was handling well over fifty million pounds of fish each year, the downtown wholesale centers of Manhattan had already attained a phenomenal scale of business. By 1914, over six billion pounds of fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and fish entered the city through these areas.¹¹

The distance of the downtown wholesale markets from the northeastward center of the city's population, in addition to the frequency of gluts accompanying the concentration of trade, posed a distinct problem for consumers interested in obtaining perishable items as quickly as possible. In this commercial situation, newcomers to New York City, particularly Jews, Italians, and Greeks, recognized an opportunity to make a living by means of the pushcart. This type of selling was well suited to the city's need for a more extensive network of merchants, and it was tailor-made for poor immigrants. With operating expenses limited to ten cents a day for the rental of a wagon and a few dollars per year for a license—an expense that many peddlers probably avoided—street merchants efficiently met the needs of immigrants like themselves, who sought low prices and accepted imperfect goods.

The density of the city's Jewish and Italian neighborhoods supported the transition of street marketing from an occupation restricted to a small number of itinerant peddlers to an established retail institution. During the middle and late 1880s, pushcart peddlers began to station themselves on certain streets of the Lower East Side, where they developed a steady clientele of housewives. Within the next two decades, Hester Street, Grand Street, Orchard Street, and Rivington Street, along with most of the other streets of the Jewish quarter, had virtually become marketplaces. Throughout the day and well into the evening,

these streets were filled on both sides with continuous lines of pushcarts that extended from block to block. In the Italian areas surrounding Mulberry, Elizabeth, and Mott streets to the west of the Bowery, in Italian Harlem, situated roughly along First Avenue between 106th and 116th streets and along Third Avenue between 116th and 125th streets, and in several other parts of the city, large clusters of street merchants also appeared.

Peddling as a Means of Upward Mobility

After 1899, as immigration from Jewish Eastern Europe accelerated, the influence of immigrants over street marketing came to a peak. In 1906, a municipal commission conservatively estimated the number of pushcart peddlers in Manhattan to be about five thousand, of whom 97 percent were reportedly foreigners. Fourteen percent were Greek, 22 percent were Italian, and 61 percent were Jewish.¹² The body of customers served by the pushcarts grew proportionately. In 1923, an official survey reckoned that one and a half million New Yorkers patronized the street merchants. The majority of these consumers appeared to be Jews and Italians.¹³

Contrary to the image of the street peddler as a rootless, elderly, downtrodden outcast, peddling had quickly developed into a legitimate occupation. Most vendors were between twenty and sixty years old, in the prime of their working lives, and their income in 1906 reportedly averaged between \$15 and \$18 per week, a figure that compared well to the wages and salaries obtained in many other occupations. Far from being inescapably bound to the pushcart by poverty, Jews tended to treat peddling as a stepping stone to a more substantial business. They usually spent about five or six years on the streets and then invested their savings in an enterprise of their own.¹⁴ In 1913, a municipal commission on the state of the pushcart industry in New York gave a fair portrayal of the business when it described the peddlers as “self-respecting merchants.”¹⁵

Prices and Range of Goods

As a source of inexpensive yet good-quality foods for a large number of city people, street marketing had evolved into a vital retail institu-

tion. By virtue of the location of New York's primary wholesale markets for produce and fish on the Lower West Side and the Lower East Side, residents of the lower portion of the city were able to buy food at prices considerably lower than those available to shoppers in other districts. In the early 1880s, before pushcart peddlers had begun to congregate on particular streets, many residents of lower Manhattan used to buy produce at special outdoor markets that operated on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. By dusk on Saturday, the streets that bordered these markets would be piled high with all sorts of fruits and vegetables, and the air would ring with the shouts of hawkers. Here, at the "the great green grocer's shop of economical buyers," as a reporter for the *New York Times* referred to one of the sites, shoppers could "get more for their money" than they could anywhere else in town.¹⁶

The advent of large-scale street marketing made these advantages available on a daily basis. In the summer of 1893, a survey of produce prices at the street markets of lower Manhattan was reported by Maria Parloa, a well-known lecturer on cooking and home economics. Parloa stated that items of similar quality were less expensive on the pushcarts than they were in local stores.¹⁷ Abetted by the negligible costs of operating a pushcart, street merchants specialized in a single type of commodity, which enabled them both to know the market more thoroughly than a general merchant and to gain economies of scale denied to small shopkeepers. "Perhaps no other class of buyers . . . comb the market as do the push cart vendors in search of bargains," stated the most authoritative government report on this type of retailing, published in 1925; "nothing in the way of produce capable of a quick turnover, at prices reasonable to insure a profit, escapes their observation."¹⁸

Prior to the 1920s, street marketing offered consumers bargains unsurpassed by other forms of retailing. The chain store also originated in New York City, when the Great American Tea Company, which evolved into the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A & P), was founded on Vesey Street in 1859. The grocery chain had set up nearly five hundred units by 1912, when it launched the concept of the large-volume, rapid-turnover, cash-and-carry "economy store." Yet, for at least another decade, the prices of the A & P stores seem to have been, at best, slightly lower than those of smaller grocery shops. The great-

est bargains were found on the streets, and, consequently, people who lived near the principal pushcart markets were found to spend much less of their income for the staples of daily life than did shoppers who depended upon stores.¹⁹

As a source of inexpensive food, large-scale street marketing was a vital economic resource, but the outstanding social consequence of the institution came with the expansion of the curbside inventories into other types of merchandise. The flowering of products and of retail techniques on the streets of New York City was a boon to consumers of modest means. By reducing the prices of a seemingly unlimited variety of products and by refining the image of shopping on the streets, peddlers mimicked some of the essential features of the department store and raised the prestige of ordinary shoppers. The transformation of street marketing into a socially valuable institution was directed by Eastern European Jews.

The Predominance of Jews in the Field

The influx of Eastern and Southern Europeans after the 1870s virtually produced an ethnic division of labor in the industry of street marketing. Italians and, to a lesser extent, Greeks played a large role in the expansion of the fruit and vegetable selection available to street shoppers. In addition to carrying the products of the region, such as cabbages, turnips, cauliflowers, squash, corn, lettuce, tomatoes, apples, pears, and peaches, they peddled bananas, pineapples, coconuts, grapes, oranges, lemons, limes, dates, figs, and mangoes, foods that most Eastern Europeans regarded as true luxuries.²⁰

Jews, who constituted a majority of the peddlers in Manhattan, also participated in the food trade. Yet they practically monopolized the sale of clothing and fabrics, furs, shoes, hats, jewelry, eyeglasses, cosmetics, bedding, curtains, stationery and books, crockery, glassware, kitchen utensils and hardware, toys, and miscellaneous items. In 1906, an observer of the bustling curbside commerce of Manhattan recognized the impact of ethnicity upon the business. "The Americans sell lunches, the Greeks fruit and ice cream, almost exclusively, while the Italians widen the list by adding vegetables," he stated, "but the Jewish peddlers sell practically every conceivable thing."²¹ The general impression that Jews were broadening the horizon of street marketing

was confirmed a decade and a half later by a statistical survey of peddling in New York City. Of over seven hundred vendors selling merchandise other than food, 95 percent were Jews.²²

Lower Manhattan was not only the distribution point for food, but it also accommodated many small factories producing dry goods, clothing, cosmetic items, and household furnishings. By the end of the 1880s, Jewish peddlers had begun to tap these nearby sources of merchandise. Their enterprise was manifested in the startling variety of products for sale on the Lower East Side, where the streets were steadily turning into an emporium for shoppers. Arriving in New York from Hungary in 1889, Louis Borgenicht was startled by the booming trade that was conducted out of doors. He had rarely seen a peddler in his homeland, where, except for the days of the annual trading fair, retail trade had been slow. Yet "in one single street" of New York City, Borgenicht observed "more people offering wares than in the largest Jahrmaket, and more different items than in a hundred Jahrmakets."²³ By the late 1890s, the refinement of street marketing had progressed so steadily that a woman who had tried in vain to match her draperies at the finest uptown stores was able to do so at the pushcart of a peddler on Hester Street. The woman's story, told in the *New York Tribune* in 1898, was accompanied by the statement of an alleged authority that "what cannot be bought in the pushcart market cannot easily be bought in New York."²⁴

In the city, Eastern Europeans sustained a tradition in which Jewish peddlers performed the important function of catering to consumers who had been excluded from the burgeoning retail trade of America. During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, prior to the rise of the railroads, thousands of German Jews spanned the country peddling urban products to consumers whose migration had carried them beyond the centers of trade. In 1860, when there were probably around twenty thousand peddlers in the United States, a large proportion of these petty retailers appear to have been Jews.²⁵ By the close of the nineteenth century, the focus of American economic growth had shifted. The bulk of consumer demand rested not in the west-bound settlements, but in the burgeoning population of city people. Accordingly, the chief challenge facing itinerant entrepreneurs was no longer how to link remote consumers to the urban source of luxuries but, instead, how to sell these items at more affordable prices.

As the pioneers of the department store had done in the 1860s and 1870s, Jewish street merchants set to the task of furnishing the public with good-quality merchandise at lower prices than were usually found in retail stores. Into the domain of street selling, the Eastern Europeans infused traditional Jewish concepts of quality and price. Acknowledging the importance of commerce in Jewish life, the Talmud had set forth a series of injunctions to maintain a high standard of conduct while allowing for competition in retail trade. Drawing on passages in Leviticus (19:35, 25:14) and Deuteronomy (25:13–15), the revered texts of Jewish law insisted on honest representation of merchandise and on generosity toward consumers. In addition, merchants were specifically permitted to sell goods below the market price in order to attract customers.²⁶

Like all precepts, these points of commerce would not be unanimously upheld, but they shaped the method of Jewish merchants in both Europe and America. Inordinately dependent upon the ability to succeed in trade, Jews had been compelled by circumstances to attract consumers by retailing products at competitive prices. In the Russian Pale, the success of Jewish commerce was based on the tendency to sell for cash at a low margin of profit in order to achieve a rapid turnover of merchandise. Russian merchants, by contrast, were attached to the time-honored principle of maintaining prices and granting long credits.²⁷ The transplantation of the Jewish style of selling to the fertile territory of the American city prompted economist Isaac M. Rubinow to declare, in 1907, that “nowhere in the United States are the prices of general merchandise, whether it be dry goods, clothing, or groceries of well-known make and supposedly fixed prices, so low in price as they are on the east side of New York City.”²⁸

The Effect of Peddlers on Local Businesses

The ability to sell at a competitive price enabled Jewish retailers to usurp the position of American department and dry-goods stores on the Lower East Side during the 1880s. According to a chronicle of the development of the Lower East Side between 1885 and 1910, Eastern European Jews had outpaced the three large department stores that had been previously established on Grand Street, by upholding the policy of giving “more ‘money’s worth’.”²⁹ By 1906, the Jewish dis-

trict of the Lower East Side was reported to have at least fifty large dry-goods stores whose stocks of silks, woolens, and other fine fabrics offered competition to the city's major retail firms. On account of the low profit margins they operated with, these stores sold merchandise at prices that attracted women from uptown as well as from outlying areas of New York City.³⁰

The competitive approach of Jewish vendors accentuated the endemic tendency of street marketing toward lower prices, attracted large clienteles, and stimulated retail business in general. As the president of the New York City Board of Police noted in 1897, the coming of the pushcart markets in the 1880s had initiated vast improvements in the social milieu of Jewish streets, some of which, like Hester Street, had formerly been a refuge for criminals.³¹ By virtue of their competitive advantages, street merchants quickly came to be identified as a magnet of commerce to which shopkeepers were strongly attracted. The arrival of a cluster of peddlers on a street was reputed to cause a boom in business and in the value of real estate on the block. Streets outside the perimeter of the outdoor marketplaces were often strikingly slow in business compared to those within, and the course of trade on one side of a street often appeared to be linked to the presence or absence of a line of pushcarts.³²

The positive effect of street merchants on surrounding businesses was discussed by a Jewish peddler called to testify in 1906 before a mayoral commission on pushcarts in New York City. The witness explained how the owner of a men's clothing store on Fulton Street had asked a number of peddlers to locate on his side of the street. After the shift took place, he said, the proprietor claimed to be making much more money on account of the crowds of shoppers who were now entering his sphere.³³

Merchandising Techniques

The key to the popularity of the pushcarts was not only the competitive sale of desirable products but also the effective use of the latest techniques of display. By concentrating on the aesthetic presentation of specialized lines of merchandise, street merchants distinguished themselves entirely from the pack peddlers of the recent past. Although some vendors continued to pile wares carelessly on their carts,

many made sure that their mobile stores were “so beautifully arranged” as to “attract and hold the attention” of shoppers.³⁴ Foods were segregated and mounted in neat stacks, which were sometimes interspersed with fresh greenery. Dishes and utensils were compartmentalized. Fabrics and oil cloths were juxtaposed according to color and pattern. A visitor to the street markets of “Little Italy” on the Upper East Side of the city in the spring of 1914 saw fit to comment on a pushcart that contained roughly sixty rolls of oil cloths, commonly used as table covers, which displayed a “multitude of different patterns [that] resulted in good business for the owner.”³⁵

The refinement of display enriched the atmosphere of street shopping. The large-wheeled wooden carts that were housed each night in stables throughout the city were transformed by day into attractive couriers that literally put merchandise at the fingertips of urban consumers. Some merchants built auxiliary compartments onto their wagons in order to show off surplus wares, increasing the image of abundance to which the city’s newcomers were exposed. Through the discrete use of modern techniques of specialization and decoration, peddlers created the illusion of streets paved, not with gold, but with a panorama of luxuries.

At Christmas time, the momentum of outdoor marketing reached a peak. Jewish wholesalers stocked up on holiday candies and Christmas tree decorations that would effectively reach Italian neighborhoods by the pushcart.³⁶ Competition for space became so intense that peddlers camped out overnight in their favorite spots, establishing “a sort of squatter sovereignty on the premises.”³⁷ During the holidays, conventional effects like glass showcases and oil cloth canopies were augmented, as pushcarts were adorned with bunting, edged with colored paper, and furnished with sprays of holly and Christmas bells. A Serbian Jew who grew up on the Upper East Side fondly reminisced about the eye-catching rows of pushcarts on First Avenue after the turn of the century. “The pushcarts held the most marvelous, exciting promise of things to buy,” she stressed, adding that “for us a need was filled at Christmas time by the gaily decorated wares spread out by the street merchants.”³⁸

As skillful displays introduced an aesthetic into the world of street marketing, retail devices for the pleasure of customers injected an ele-

ment of convenience and service that had not previously belonged to outdoor shopping. Peddlers of clothing and shoes made use of mannequins, folding chairs, carpets, and mirrors, so that customers could survey the items for sale, sit down to try on shoes and garments, take a walk to test for comfort, and make a final judgment of how the new things looked. A successful shoe salesman in Little Italy, whose stand was well stocked with shoes, rubbers, and slippers in a large variety of sizes, astonished a reporter with his ability to serve customers despite the apparent difficulty of finding a good fit on the street. In order to guarantee reliable service to his customers during busy times, the merchant kept a messenger to replenish the stock as it diminished during the day.³⁹ The effort to serve the public, rather than simply to sell, represented an important innovation in street marketing. Through service, merchants refined the character of outdoor selling and elevated the dignity of the street shopper, who received respectable products in a respectable manner.

The sophistication of urban peddling allowed city people of modest means to strike a balance between need and desire. The families of immigrants that comprised the majority of street shoppers discovered just beyond their doorsteps a method of obtaining all types of products at affordable prices. They found also a degree of refinement that had not traditionally been part of the peddler's repertoire of tactics. The activity of street merchants, dominated by Eastern European Jews, helped consumers to harmonize the press of finances with the flight of expectations.

In the modern city, entrepreneurial opportunities were pervasive, appearing on the dusty streets as well as in the marble palaces of high-class retailers. On Grand Street, the retail center of the Lower East Side, the jutting rows of richly endowed pushcarts formed a sinuous wooden monument to the special accomplishments of Jewish street peddlers. In December of 1903, a columnist for a popular Yiddish newspaper observed the extent to which the inventories and the retail techniques of the vendors on Grand Street approached the standards of modern selling. Cognizant of the fine furs that were sprinkled among the wares to be had in the outdoor emporium, the writer keenly remarked that Grand Street looked like "a great department store on wheels."⁴⁰

American Jewish Archives
Peddling and Jewish Entrepreneurship

The transforming effect of Jewish peddlers upon the commerce of New York City fit into the larger pattern of Jewish economic activity in modern times. Trying to assess the economic contribution of Jews to Western civilization since the late nineteenth century, historian Cecil Roth suggested that the group had assisted in bringing about the "great peaceful revolution" of the age, the delivery of luxuries to the multitude of people who had been used to a meager standard of living. The seemingly immutable separation of the haves from the have-nots, Roth argued, was the social fact that defined "the real importance" of the Jews in the economy of the West.⁴¹ Jewish entrepreneurial talent broadened many avenues of mass consumption in America, strongly influencing the establishment of department stores, the development of the clothing and fashion business, and the birth and destiny of the modern cinema, radio, and television. Although the activity of pushcart peddlers lacks the historical luster emanating from the Jewish entrepreneurs who operated great firms like Altman's, Hart, Schaffner and Marx, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and NBC, it nonetheless contained the buoyant spirit of an old commercial tradition transplanted in a society of consumers with high expectations.

As street merchants, Eastern European Jews moved with the tide of trade in the city. They sensed and seized the momentum toward social democracy in the urban marketplace, where city people restlessly looked for luxuries that would once have seemed out of place on the rough pavement of the tenement districts. The defining urge of the consumer-minded entrepreneur, that of finding novel ways to bring products to market, was expressed in an elemental form by Jewish peddlers who saw in the most common of settings, the city street, an appropriate outlet for refined merchandise and retail techniques. Taken as a whole, the practices of thousands of street merchants gave the first indication of how the Jewish commercial tradition might expedite the adoption of an American lifestyle and enrich the quality of urban consumption in the United States.

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Notes

1. *Yiddishes Tageblatt* (New York), January 9, 1902.
2. *Ibid.*, March 23 and 24, 1903.
3. The Lower East Side as a prototype of urban poverty appears in Anthony Sutcliffe, ed., *Metropolis, 1890-1940* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 24, which draws on the depiction of Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976), p. 88. The almost chronic tendency to preface the phrase "Jewish immigrants" with the adjective "poor" can be observed in the symposium "A Re-examination of a Classic Work in American Jewish History: Moses Rischin's *The Promised City*, Twenty Years Later," *American Jewish History* 73 (December 1983): 141. Moses Rischin, however, originally noticed the marked improvement in standards of consumption on the Lower East Side, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), p. 92—the book was first published in 1962.
4. Thomas Sowell, *Markets and Minorities* (New York, 1981), p. 81.
5. Felix Klein, *In the Land of the Strenuous Life* (Chicago, 1905), p. 3.
6. Walter Weyl, "The Italian Who Lived on 26 Cents a Day," *Outlook* 93 (December 1909): 970.
7. Henry James, *The American Scene* (London, 1907), pp. 135-136.
8. *Yiddishes Tageblatt*, July 4, 1902.
9. New York City Pushcart Commission, *Report of the Mayor's Pushcart Commission* (New York, 1906), p. 54.
10. E. E. Sterns, "The Street Vendors of New York," *Scribner's Monthly* 1 (December 1870): 115.
11. *New York Times*, October 8, 1882, May 10, 1883, July 25, 1883; William H. Riding, "How New York Is Fed," *Scribner's Monthly* 14 (October 1877), 738-739; George Filipetti, "The Wholesale Markets," in *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs*, 8 vols. (New York, 1924-28), vol. 1B, pp. 31, 36-37.
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13. U. S., Agricultural Economics Bureau, *Push Cart Markets in New York City* (Washington, D.C., 1925), p. 2.
14. New York City Pushcart Commission, *Report of the Mayor's Pushcart Commission*, pp. 39, 85; Agricultural Economics Bureau, *Push Cart Markets*, pp. 35-36.
15. New York City Pushcarts and Markets Committee (Gaynor Commission), "Report and Recommendations," *City Record* 41 (April 1913): 3763.
16. *New York Times*, October 5, 1884.
17. Maria Parloa, "A Practical Family Provider, Chapter 7: A Morning Visit to the Market Stalls," *Good Housekeeping* 17 (July 1893): 1.
18. Agricultural Economics Bureau, *Push Cart Markets*, p. 42.
19. Godfrey M. Lebhar, *Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962* (New York, 1963), p. 31; Einar Bjorklund and James L. Palmer, *A Study of the Prices of Chain and Independent Grocers in Chicago*, University of Chicago Studies in Business Administration, vol. 1, no. 4 (Chicago, 1930), pp. vi, 54-55; Clyde Lyndon King, "Can the Cost of Distributing Food Products Be Reduced?" *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 48 (July 1913): 210; Community Service Society Papers, Columbia University Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collections, "The Food Investigation: Some Reasons and Results" (October 1913), pp. 4-9; Agricultural Economics Bureau, *Push Cart Markets*, p. 12.

20. *New York Tribune*, August 5, 1900.
21. Archibald A. Hill, "The Pushcart Peddlers of New York," *Independent* 61 (October 18, 1906): 920–921.
22. Agricultural Economics Bureau, *Push Cart Markets*, pp. 35–36.
23. Louis Borgenicht, *The Happiest Man* (New York, 1942), p. 197.
24. *New York Tribune*, September 15, 1898, reprinted in Allon Schoener, ed., *Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870–1925* (New York, 1967), pp. 58–59.
25. Rudolph Glanz, *Studies in Judaica Americana* (New York, 1970), pp. 105, 120–121.
26. See chapter 62, "Concerning Commerce," in Rabbi Solomon Ganzfried, ed., *Code of Jewish Law* (New York, 1963), pt. 2, pp. 36–37.
27. Joseph, *Jewish Immigration*, pp. 45–46; Leo Errera, *The Russian Jews: Extermination or Emancipation?* (London, 1894), p. 173.
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29. *Yiddishes Tageblatt*, March 20, 1910.
30. *Forverts* (New York), March 2, 1906, September 9, 1909.
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