Foreword

The late American Jewish journalist and humorist Harry Golden entitled one of his last books, published in 1970, So Long As You're Healthy (Abee Gezundt). He knew that the Yiddish phrase, usually transliterated as abi gezunt, resonated with Jews and, for a time, with the larger American community beyond. On the Lower East Side of New York, he recalled, "if the livelihood was not so good, and even if the shopkeeper went bankrupt, his relatives and friends" would say, consolingly, abi gezunt, "so long as you're healthy."

Back in 1938, Molly Picon's signature song in the Yiddish film *Mamele* ("Little Mama") did much to popularize the expression *abi gezunt*. The song's Depression-era message—"*abi gezunt ken men gliklekh zayn,*" (so long as you're healthy you can be happy)—offered a timely rebuke to those who linked happiness to the pursuit of power and money. What was truly important, the song insisted, was good health, the basis for everything else.²

A year later, Cab Calloway, the great African American jazz singer and band leader, likewise penned a song entitled "Abi Gezunt" ("If You've Got Your Health, You Can Be Happy"). Drawing upon his acquaintance with his Jewish manager, Irving Mills, and clearly influenced by the lyrics of Molly Picon's popular Yiddish song, he mischievously combined African American ("Hepster") slang with the funny-sounding Yiddish phrase, and crooned, "I'm hip de dip, a

¹ Harry Golden, So Long as You're Healthy (Abee Gezundt) (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), 19–20; see Kimberly Marlowe Hartnett, Carolina Israelite: How Harry Golden Made Us Care About Jews, the South, and Civil Rights (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), esp. 257.

² Neil Levin, "Abi Gezunt," The Milken Archive of Jewish Music, accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.milkenarchive.org/works/view/547#/works/view/547/full. Molly Picon wrote the lyrics; Abraham Ellstein composed the music.

solid sender, a very close friend to Mrs. Bender, Bender, shmender, abi gezunt, I'm the cat that's in the know!" As Hankus Netsky has observed, Calloway "knew one of the sweetest secrets of life: that a 'cat' that knows the meaning of Abi Gezunt is a cat that's in the know."3

Dr. Jacob Jay Lindenthal has spent a lifetime exploring this same secret of life. As an accomplished sociologist and highly respected health educator, Dr. Lindenthal has dedicated a lifetime to exploring social relationships. Indeed, he has personally worked to restore countless people to health and happiness, and he has trained legions of medical students to do the same.

His interest in abi gezunt, however, goes far beyond his own medical practice. In this book, he seeks to understand how health shaped the destiny of the American Jewish community as a whole. American Jews' rapid socioeconomic rise, he argues, is connected to their abiding concern with health. Knowledge of risk and protective factors—some mandated by Jewish law, others learned from books, still others passed down mimetically from parents to children—resulted in healthful behaviors. In particular, the high value that Jews placed upon "health, education, cohesive family life and communal social support," he shows, "played a particularly important role in helping immunize the Jews against . . . the deterioration of their health status." Better health, in turn, led to the formation of capital and ultimately to the community's overall socioeconomic rise.

Dr. Lindenthal's study rests upon a mountain of medical evidence, much of it buried in obscure medical journals rarely consulted by historians. The footnotes and bibliography alone open up a world of long-forgotten articles detailing diverse aspects of immigrant Jewish health. Invaluable data are also found in the appendices. Nobody, to my knowledge, knows this medical literature better than Dr. Lindenthal.⁴ Fortunately, he has now created a database and index to this literature—what he calls The Lindex, the "first ethnic database of disease"—so that others may follow in his tracks and build upon his extraordinary contribution. Hundreds of studies relating to the diseases and

³ His rendition of the song, translated as "A Bee Gezindt," can be viewed on https://www. youtube.com/watch?v= -ca4HbD7hY; see Hankus Netsky, "Cab Calloway: On the Yiddish Side of the Street," JBooks.com, accessed January 24, 2016, http://www.jbooks.com/ secularculture/Netsky.htm#.

⁴ For an important earlier survey, see Deborah Dwork, "Health Conditions of Immigrant Jews on the Lower East Side of New York: 1800–1914," Medical History 25 (1981): 1–40.

health conditions of Jews (1874-2000) are found in The Lindex. Historians of medicine will forever be grateful for his assiduous collection of this primary material.

The question that lies at the heart of this book—how American Jews rose from rags to riches—has long captivated scholars and policy-makers alike. Some, influenced by Max Weber's The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, point to Jewish values and culture, particularly the Jewish proclivity for education, as the engine of their success. Others credit America, observing that Jews did not enjoy the same rapid rise in less hospitable countries. Still others point to freedom and free-market capitalism, which Jews were able to exploit more than some of their peers. Luck, timing, history, even Jews' sexual habits have likewise been adduced to explain their rise. Nor has the last word on this subject likely been written.⁷

Thanks to this book, historians will henceforward also need to consider the vital importance of health in explaining American Jewish success. Knowledge about health, healthy behaviors ("protective factors"), and the avoidance of unhealthy, risky habits and ways have, readers will see, prolonged Jewish lives and increased Jewish wealth.

Abi gezunt encapsulates one of the sweetest secrets of American Jewish life.

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⁵ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2001 [orig. 1903]).

⁶ For a recent controversial discussion of "How Education Shaped Jewish History," see Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, The Chosen Few (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), and the critique by Shaul Stampfer in Jewish History 29 (December 2015): 373-379.

⁷ See Nathan Glazer's pioneering discussion in "Social Characteristics of American Jews, 1654–1954," American Jewish Year Book 56 (1955): 3-41. Recent discussions may be found in Jerry Z. Muller, Capitalism and the Jews (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Rebecca Kobrin (ed.), Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2012); Adam D. Mendelsohn, The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in America and the British Empire (New York: New York University Press, 2015); and Rebecca Kobrin and Adam Teller, eds., Purchasing Power: The Economics of Modern Jewish History (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2015).