



# In Their Own Image

New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture

by Ted Merwin

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## DESCRIPTION

The Jazz Age of the 1920s is an era remembered for illegal liquor, innovative music and dance styles, and burgeoning ideas of social equality. It was also the period during which second-generation Jews began to emerge as a significant demographic in New York City. *In Their Own Image* examines the growing cultural visibility of Jewish life amid this vibrant scene.

From the vaudeville routines of Fanny Brice, Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, and Sophie Tucker, to the slew of Broadway comedies about Jewish life and the silent films that showed immigrant families struggling to leave the ghetto, images and representations of Jews became staples of interwar popular culture. Through the performing arts, Jews expressed highly ambivalent feelings about their identification with Jewish and American cultures. Ted Merwin shows how they became American by producing and consuming not images of another group, but images of themselves. As a result, they humanized Jewish stereotypes, softened anti-Semitic attitudes, and laid the groundwork for today's Jewish comedians.

An entertaining look at the role popular culture plays in promoting the acculturation of an ethnic group, *In Their Own Image* enhances our understanding of American Jewish history and provides a model for the study of other groups and their integration into mainstream society.

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## AUTHOR/EDITOR BIOGRAPHY

TED MERWIN is an assistant professor of religion and Judaic studies at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

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